



THE QUILL

CHERRY CREEK VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Founded in 1975

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New State Historian

Noted CU historian Patty Nelson Limerick is our new state historian, and she wants your help in devising future exhibits for the Colorado History Center (the state history museum at 12th and Broadway). Please share your ideas with her at <http://www.historycolorado.org/colorados-story-form> or e-mail these ideas to the deputy state historian Jason Hanson at jason.hanson@state.co.us.

NEXT MEETING: To be Determined

We held the 2016 annual meeting of CCVHS on January 23 at the Aurora History Museum. We were treated to a program on Science Fiction Land, the huge science-fiction amusement park that was proposed for Aurora in the 1970s but which never happened. The program was given by Jennifer Cronk, the museum's Curator of Collections, and we thank her for an informative and entertaining presentation. The story of Science Fiction Land appears later in this Quill. Special thanks go to all who brought such a delicious array of treats for this occasion.

At this meeting we held our elections for secretary and treasurer. Vonnie C'deBaca was reelected as our secretary and Ruth Fountain was elected treasurer. Congratulations, Vonnie and Ruth, and thank you for your willingness to serve.

In a separate message you will be notified about our next meeting/program, which is scheduled for April.

CCVHS is most grateful to Kevin Sear for serving as our treasurer for the past eight years. Kevin was not only an outstanding treasurer but also volunteered much of his time performing other duties that were not in his "job description," such as processing our membership renewals, updating our member directories, and mass e-mailing. In addition, he devoted many hours in editing and improving the layout of the Quill. Many thanks, Kevin.

Previous Meeting: Science Fiction Land!

The story of this ill-fated venture involves a huge theme park slated for the east edge of Aurora, an amusing (almost comical) cast of characters, and connections to the 1979 Iran hostage crisis and the 2012 movie *Argo*.

In 1979 Science Fiction Land was touted by its promoters to be the largest theme park in the world (1000 acres, or three times the size of Disneyland). It was to be built just east of Buckley air base, bounded by Colfax, 6th Avenue, and Picadilly and Gun Club Roads. The park was to cost at least \$400 million and promised to be the gaudiest, most extravagant amusement park anywhere. Planned for the futuristic park were at least one large hotel, a 38-story Ferris wheel, security guards flying around with jetpacks, a pool hall where visitors could play against robots, a fishing stream and holographic zoo, a thousand-lane bowling alley (with robots as the pin spotters), 14 dinner theaters, and boats that could hover like helicopters. The park was to have been modeled on a motion picture which (at \$50 million) was to be the highest-budget blockbuster ever. To be titled *Lord of Light*, the "space fantasy" film was to be based on Roger Zelazny's 1967 award-winning best-seller of the same name. The producers had acquired the movie rights to the *Lord of Light* book and envisioned that the sci-fi movie set would be built on the grounds of the park and be left in place as the basis for the theme park. (Continued on Page 2!)

Previous Meeting: Science Fiction Land!(Cont)

The principal organizer of the endeavor was Barry Ira Geller, a virtually unknown filmmaker and screenwriter who (it was later learned) had recently lived in a "dilapidated, cockroach-infested basement apartment in downtown Hollywood." Geller's spokesman and "right-hand man" was Jerry Schafer, a little known producer in Las Vegas and former stunt man. Geller and Schafer were no doubt influenced by the phenomenal success of Star Wars in 1977. One would think that the obscure reputations of these men would be enough to raise eyebrows from the start, but they were able to get some big names to be associated with the project. For instance, Jack Kirby agreed to draft most of the concept drawings for the movie and theme park; Kirby was a well-known cartoonist who had illustrated comic books such as Spider Man and Captain America. John Chambers, the make-up artist who won an Academy Award for Planet of the Apes, signed on to work on special effects. Oscar-winner John DeCuir agreed to be a set designer. And Roosevelt "Rosie" Grier, the football player turned actor, was hired to be in the film. But probably the most high-profile persons to lend their names to the enterprise were Buckminster Fuller, futuristic architect and lifelong nonconformist, and Ray Bradbury, recognized as one of the best sci-fi writers in the world.

The public first read about this idea in an October 1979 Denver Post story; immediately prices for land in the area of the proposed park went through the roof. Geller claimed that an official letter committed Aurora to pay for the park's water and sewage systems, but there were different interpretations of the letter. The Aurora mayor's office pointed out that the city was committed to pay for these utilities only if the city first annexed the park's land and that it would need several months to conduct a feasibility study before annexation could be decided. The city manager's office claimed that, if the land were annexed, Aurora would provide police and fire protection to the park but that Geller himself would have to pay for the installation of water and sewer lines. Many potential investors doubted Geller's assertions that the theme park would bring in at least ten million visitors in its first year of operation and that the tax windfall would make Aurora one of the wealthiest cities in the nation. And since the park was also touted as a year-round facility, many wondered how it would operate in colder months. An Aurora Sentinel headline at the time read "City Frustrated over Sci-Fi Land."

To answer questions and ease the city's concerns, Jerry Schafer held a glitzy press conference on November 28, 1979. Representatives from local governments and all local newspapers and TV stations were in attendance, as were Jack Kirby, Rosie Grier, and two people dressed as "futuristic clowns." Schafer stated that Barry Ira Geller Productions had received a \$400 million letter of credit

from the Royal Bank of Canada. He said that the Lord of Light movie would begin filming in April 1980, although no director or principal actors had yet been hired. He also said that an immense assembly of heated geodesic domes (designed by Buckminster Fuller) would cover the park to allow for year-round operation. When asked how many jobs would be created by the venture, he could only answer that it would lead to "thousands and thousands" of new jobs. Here Schafer also announced that a 10,000-acre industrial park was planned adjacent to Science Fiction Land (to the east and north of the theme park). To be called Science City, it was supposed to be an industrial park superior to any in the world. The sale of lots in this industrial park would ostensibly pay for much of the initial construction of the theme park.

Things quickly began to sour as questions arose as to how much money was really committed to the project, where the money came from, and possible conflicts of interest over the use of official status for financial gain. From the time of the public's first hearing of the scheme to the realization that it was all a big lie, only a little more than two months had elapsed. A 2012 Westword headline said it best: "Science Fiction Land could have been Aurora's biggest tourist trap, if its backers weren't crooks."

The District Attorney formed a team to investigate whether current and previous Aurora officials had violated laws. A November 29th Denver Post article reported that some city councilmen and planning commissioners had used their advance notice of the theme park to purchase low-cost land options near the sci-fi park before the public was informed of the plan.

On December 4th the Rocky Mountain News reported that the Royal Bank of Canada strongly denied that it had issued a \$400 million letter of credit to the developers. (Schafer attributed this to errors in the press release and that he had been misquoted.) Also on December 4th the Post claimed to have a copy of the September 28th letter from Mayor Fred Hood to Barry Ira Geller Productions promising water, sewer, fire, and police services for the theme park. The next day the Sentinel complained that the developers' plans for the park kept changing. And soon the News reported that Geller's and Schafer's operating cash had come from "an immigrant" whom they had coaxed into lending them his \$50,000 life savings. By the second week of December 1979 Geller and Schafer were not returning phone calls and were not available for comment. The local newspapers were reporting on discrepancies and outright lies in their claims. And public studies were released showing that the theme park would not be as profitable as the developers said and that it was much too large for Colorado. (Continued on Page 3!)

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Previous Meeting: Science Fiction Land!(Cont)

On December 13th Schafer was arrested for securities fraud and embezzlement. Geller was also named in the arrest warrants, but he was out of the country at the time. By the end of December 1979, both men were formally charged with multiple criminal activities but were free on bond. Former Mayor Hood, the mayor pro-tem, and two planning commissioners were arrested in April 1980 and charged with three felonies each.

In the end, however, this entire matter was over almost as fast as it began. All charges eventually were dropped, and no one spent any time in prison.

POSTSCRIPT: The Iran hostage crisis began while the dealings over Science Fiction Land were taking place. On November 4, 1979, the US embassy in Tehran was overrun by student protesters who took 52 Americans hostage. However, six Americans managed to avoid capture and find refuge in the residences of the Canadian ambassador and another Canadian diplomat. A CIA agent named Tony Mendez, whose expertise was false identities, came up with a plan to pose as a movie producer and set up the elaborate cover story that these six were Canadians working in Iran for a make-believe film company. Mendez enlisted the help of John Chambers, the make-up artist

who was to have done special effects for Science Fiction Land. Chambers was also a CIA collaborator, and he and a few of his colleagues agreed to take part in Mendez's scheme to rescue the six Americans. The US government gave its go-ahead.

The hoax involved establishing a fake office in Hollywood for "Studio Six Productions." The office was complete with its own telephone lines, business cards, computers, film posters, and a sign on the door. Even legitimate filmmakers thought the operation was real. Since Chambers still had the script and concept drawings for Geller's old Lord of Light movie, that screenplay (renamed Argo) became the film that the "production company" was working on. As planned, the six Americans posed as Canadians who were ostensibly scouting locations in Iran for the movie. The ordeal ended when the Americans (with fake passports) were finally flown out of Tehran on a commercial flight after an agonizing wait at the airport.

Three decades later, the plot to get the six Americans out of Iran was depicted in the movie Argo starring Ben Affleck. This movie won the Academy Award for Best Picture of 2012.^a [Back to Contents](#)

^aThe following sources were used in writing this story: John Ashton, "Look out, Disneyland - Science City is coming," Rocky Mountain News, November 30, 1979; Bob Weiss, "Promoters hit with 11 felonies," Rocky Mountain News, December 28, 1979; Joshua Bearman, "How the CIA used a fake sci-fi flick to rescue Americans from Tehran," Wired, April 2007; Melanie Asmar, "Science Fiction Land could have been Aurora's biggest tourist trap, if its backers weren't crooks," Westword, April 9, 2012; and Melanie Asmar, "Argo's fake movie started out real, and was supposed to include a theme park in ... Aurora?", Westword, November 1, 2012.

Melvin School News

Our winter schedule is being a bit sporadic, but several members continue to work on the Library at Melvin School. Peter Faris and Sherrie Wolf, using their previous library knowledge and experience, have accepted the job of making decisions related to accepting new books, the repair of damaged books, deaccessioning books that are not deemed appropriate to our library/CCVHS, transfer of books to 17 Mile House, and other archival decisions. Our maps are nearly all out of storage, wrapped in acid-free wrap and mounted in the map rack. We continue to work

to make sure that every item in the building is accounted for, and we plan to have this information available on an on-site computer in the not-so-distant future. A big thank-you goes to Gary and Sherrie Wolf for the computer and to Kevin Sear for the help to get it to do what we need it to do!! And we thank Karen Sear, Shirley Miller, and Anne Schuman for their continued hard work on the Melvin/CCVHS archives. We hope to be back to having our open houses and bake sales before the school year ends. [Back to Contents](#)

17 Mile House News

The 17 Mile House Volunteers finished the year 2015 with a total of 43 volunteers giving 1,031 hours of time! CCVHS and Arapahoe County Open Spaces thank each volunteer very much for your time and dedication at this special heritage property. Several school groups have scheduled to visit this summer. The volunteers will be busy this summer creating new displays for the recently acquired glass cases in the house, barn, and milk shed. We will be having open houses on March 19th, April 16th, May 7th, June 11th, July 16th, August 13th, September 17th,

October 15th, November 12th, and December 3rd – please stop by to visit and mark Saturday, October 15th on your calendar for the Fall Festival! We have also purchased "past times" outdoor toys including favorites like trundling hoops, quoits, graces, and dutch jump ropes. The volunteers look forward to this year at the farm! If you are interested in volunteering or have any questions, please contact Karen Sear at 303-514-2094 or seark@msn.com. [Back to Contents](#)

Happenings at the Aurora History Museum

Please check out the Growing Home display in the Aurora History Museum's Ferguson Gallery. This permanent exhibit beautifully depicts the history of Aurora. And, next-door to the Ferguson, you can board the restored 1913 trolley trailer. This trolley trailer is in the new Ruth Fountain Gallery, named after CCVHS's new treasurer Ruth Fountain.

Through March 13 the museum is showing *People's Lives: A Photographic Celebration of the Human Spirit*, a collection of photos by Bill Wright who traveled around the world to record people living "off the beaten path." This remarkable exhibit was produced by the Texas affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

And through April 17 the museum is showing "Don't Touch that Dial!", in which you can see how radios have changed over time and what a radio repairmen of years ago needed in his workshop. According to the museum's ad, "Before live streaming and podcasts, the radio connected people from across the country to national news and entertain-

ment. Learn about the Golden Age of Radio, including how the radio influenced life in Aurora."

The Aurora History Museum is located at 15051 E. Alameda Pkwy, Aurora 80012 (in the Aurora municipal complex). Hours are Tuesday-Friday 9am-4pm and Saturday-Sunday 11am-4pm. Admission is always free!

You can have your antiques and collectibles evaluated by local appraisers at the annual Antique Appraisal Fair. This year's fair will be held Saturday, April 23 from 9am to 3pm in the Community Room of the Aurora Central Library, 14949 E. Alameda Pkwy. The cost is \$5 per item to be appraised with a limit of five items per person. (Aurora Museum Foundation members each receive one free appraisal; all proceeds benefit the Aurora History Museum.) Note that there are no walk-ins; you must call 303-739-6705 after March 1 to reserve an entrance time. For information call 303-739-6660 or visit auroragov.org.

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Potential Upcoming CCVHS Activities

Below are the major CCVHS activities projected for the rest of this year. We are going to try to increase turnout by shooting for a major activity and/or field trip almost every month (not including open houses and school visits). Some of these are "repeat visits", meaning that many members did not get to do them or that some members

would like to do them again. We'll send out notices about two weeks prior to each activity; we'll then schedule the event if we get enough response. Please call Garry O'Hara with your questions or suggestions (303-751-3140).

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Potential Upcoming CCVHS Activities

April:	Rocky Mountain Arsenal Bus Tour [Repeat Visit] Melvin-Lewis Cemetery Plaque Dedication Quill and Meeting Program
May:	Sentinel Rock/Inscription Cave at Perry Park [Repeat Visit]
June:	Elbert County Museum and Limon Museum
July:	Telecommunications Museum [Repeat Visit] Quill
August:	Adams County Museum [Repeat Visit]
September:	High Line Canal [Repeat Visit]
October:	1874 Cherry Creek School Arapahoe County Fall Festival Quill and Meeting Program
November:	Navarre Museum
December:	Christmas party at 17 Mile House

Treasurer's Report

Comparative Statement of Activities Years ended December 31, 2015 and December 31, 2014

	Year Ended December, 31 2015	Year Ended December, 31 2014	Percentage Change
Revenue			
Memberships	\$ 1,493	\$ 895	66.8%
Donations	220	122	80.3%
Grants/Awards	250	250	0.0%
Sales	928	814	14.0%
Friends of 17MH	-	4,542	-100.0%
Total Revenue	2,891	6,623	-56.3%
Expenses			
Quill -& Printing	471	203	131.7%
Postage	165	243	-32.2%
Speaker Fees	40	25	60.0%
Safe deposit box fee	50	50	0.0%
Supplies	98	147	-33.2%
Memberships	75	140	-46.4%
State Filing fees	60	10	500.0%
17 Mile House Expense	303	912	-66.8%
DAR Grant	507	-	100.0%
Donations	-	100	-100.0%
Website	44	44	0.1%
Archives	408	123	232.5%
Meeting expense-Regular	383	-	100.0%
Total Expense	2,604	1,997	-11.3%
<i>Increase (decrease) in net assets</i>	287	4,626	-160.0%
Net Assets - beginning of year	8,508	3,882	-12.3%
Net Assets - end of year	\$ 8,795	\$ 8,508	119.1%

Comparative Statement of Net Assets
December 31, 2015 and December 31, 2014

	December, 31 2015	December, 31 2014	Increase/ (Decrease)
Assets			
Petty Cash	\$ -	\$ 50	\$ (50)
Cash in Bank	8,616	8,414	202
Inventory	178	-	178
Prepaid Expense	-	44	(44)
Total Assets	\$ 8,795	\$ 8,508	\$ 319

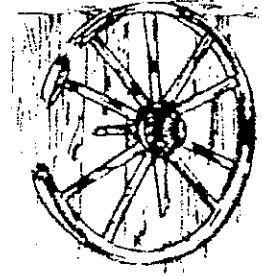
Net Assets			
Clarice Crowe Fund	-	216	(216)
17 Mile House Fund	709	176	533
Friends of 17 Mile House	4,517	4,517	-
Melvin School Fund	385	123	262
Unrestricted	3,184	3,476	(292)
Total Net Assets	\$ 8,795	\$ 8,508	\$ 287

Inventory Detail - 12-31-15

Cherokee Trail	\$ 80
17 MH Cards	28
Story Jars	70
Total	\$ 178

CCVHS Fund Activity for Fiscal Year 2015

Revenue Source	CCVHS General Fund	17 Mile House Fund	Friends of 17 Mile House	Melvin School Fund	DAR Grant	Clarice Crowle Fund	<i>Total all Funds</i>
<i>Beginning Balance</i>	\$ 3,476	\$ 176	\$ 4,517	\$ 123	\$ -	\$ 216	\$ 8,508
Revenue Source							
	\$						
Member Dues	1,493	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,493
Donations	50	150	-	20	-	-	220
Grants/Awards	-	-	-	-	250	-	250
Sales	-	686	-	242	-	-	928
Friends of 17MH	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Total Revenue</i>	\$ 1,543	\$ 836	\$ -	\$ 262	\$ 250	\$ -	\$ 2,890
Expenditures							
	\$						
Quill - Printing	471	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 471
CCVHS Printing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Postage	165	-	-	-	-	-	165
Speaker Fees	40	-	-	-	-	-	40
Safe deposit box fee	50	-	-	-	-	-	50
DAR Grant	41	-	-	-	250	216	507
17MH Supplies	-	240	-	-	-	-	240
17MH COGS	-	64	-	-	-	-	64
Supplies	98	-	-	-	-	-	98
Fees	60	-	-	-	-	-	60
Memberships	75	-	-	-	-	-	75
Meeting expense	383	-	-	-	-	-	383
Website Expense	44	-	-	-	-	-	44
Archives	408	-	-	-	-	-	\$ 408
<i>Total Expenditures</i>	\$ 1,835	\$ 303	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 250	\$ 216	\$ 2,604
<i>Ending Balance</i>	\$ 3,184	\$ 709	\$ 4,517	\$ 385	\$ -	\$ 0	\$ 8,794



Address Correction Requested

Cherry Creek Valley Historical Society
16100 East Smoky Hill Road
Aurora, Colorado 80015

A BRIEF CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THE MELVIN SCHOOL

1922 - The Melvin School was built in the NW1/4 of Section 13, T5S, R67W, Arapahoe County, Colorado on land donated by Hans Dransfeldt. The DeBoer brothers built the school for \$4,450. The original site was at the junction of Belleview Avenue and the old Sullivan Road (now Jordan Road) in Cherry Creek State Park. The school opened in September of 1922.

1949 - Families in the community of Melvin received condemnation papers telling them to move from the area in preparation for the building of the dam. The school was included in this area, and it closed its doors in June of 1949. The building was sold to J. Edwin Stout for \$1,500. He sold it to William Minshall who had it moved to the southwest corner of the intersection of Parker Road and Quincy Avenue (Section 12, T5S, R67W).

1953 - After extensive remodeling, the former schoolhouse opened as the Emerald Isle Tavern on Saint Patrick's Day. Glenn Barrier managed it as Glenn's Emerald Isle Tavern until 1970.

1975 - Five area residents who were interested in local history and in saving the old Melvin School incorporated and became the first Board of Directors of the Cherry Creek Valley Historical Society, Inc. They persuaded Mr. Silverberg to donate the building to the Society in trade for their moving it elsewhere and leveling the site after the moving of the building. The Society's purpose was to restore the old Melvin School and to use it as a classroom-museum-library for the study and collection of local historical information.

1976 - Cherry Creek School District offered a site on the campus of Smoky Hill High School. It was moved on December 14, 1976.

1977-1981 - With the help of the community, the school district, and the historical society, the Melvin School was restored. The exterior was authentically restored as was one classroom. The second classroom, the one which originally had a stage, was adaptively restored into a museum and a library. A plaque which honors those who helped in the restoration has been engraved with the slogan: "Restored by the Community - For the Community."

1984 - The Melvin School was put on the National Register of Historic Places.

1988 - The City of Aurora honored the Melvin School as Aurora Historic Landmark #1.

The Quill is the quarterly newsletter of the Cherry Creek Valley Historical Society (CCVHS). The purposes of the Society are to study, record, preserve, and display the history of the Cherry Creek Valley and surrounding areas. Membership is open to anyone interested in this history. Quarterly general meetings are usually held at the Melvin Schoolhouse, 4950 S. Laredo St. (between Smoky Hill High School and Laredo Middle School) in Aurora, Colo. Correspondence concerning *The Quill* should be directed to Garry O'Hara, editor, at (303) 751-3140.

YOU CAN HELP MAKE HISTORY

Collect the past

Preserve the present

Plan for the future