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REFURBISHED INDUSTRIAL MINE CAMP HOUSE ADORNS HISTORIC ORIGINAL SUPERIOR

Have you driven along Marshall Road or Coal Creek Drive west of McCaslin Boulevard and wondered what that small, ragged looking house was doing in the old ball field site? Well, the ugly duckling has been transformed into a beautiful swan over the past few months as the park development project was completed, including the rehabilitation of the house there. A long time goal of the Superior Historical Commission, the Town of Superior, and all its citizens was achieved on November 15, 2008, at a landmark ribbon cutting ceremony to officially dedicate Asti Park at 2nd Avenue and Coal Creek Drive in original Superior. The ceremony marked the culmination of a three-year process of improving the park, rehabilitating a house that was once a part of the Industrial Mine camp (which was located just south of Original Town) and inaugurating the building's new life as an interpretive center and museum for Superior.

Devotees of Superior's history have long wished for a building to serve as a museum to help preserve the Town's past, and now the wish has come true as the little four-room house has been gussied up and made ready for its new life. Hundreds of hours of hard work and tender loving care



On the left is the photo of the home of Charles and Bertie Acklin in the Industrial Mine camp in the late 1930's. The right photo is of the mine camp house in Asti Park, its make over painstakingly patterned after the Acklin's.



-Photo on left courtesy Denzil Acklin; right, Larry Dorsey

by volunteers, design professionals, staff, and innovative contractors have produced a building our community can be proud of.

The house was originally built by the Northern Colorado Coal and Coke Company around 1910. The exact date of construction is lost, but research shows it was built by that company before Colorado's "Long Strike" of 1910 to 1914. When that arduous strike ended, the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company took over ownership of the Industrial Mine and its surrounding camp.

The Industrial Mine started production in 1895 and produced 4 million tons of coal up to its closing in 1945. The mine camp consisted of 23 houses, a few "terrace houses" used by families until one of the four-room houses came available, a boarding house for unmarried miners, a casino for social activities, a bath house and a few other structures. Two of the camp houses burned down, leaving 21 for most of the history of the camp. The houses were built by local contractors from a variety of floor plan templates devised by the Company. The Company then rented them to the miners, who had only a short walk to their work site at the mine.

Over the passage of time, the demand for coal waned and some of the houses stood unoccupied. The Rocky Mountain Fuel Company started selling the houses, often at auction, and the buyer then moved the buildings out of the camp. This process was repeated throughout the Colorado coal fields as mining activity decreased.



This view is of the Industrial Mine camp looking south. The mine was to the left or east and the railroad tracks in the foreground. The large building was the boarding house. The 23 camp houses dot the background. The restored camp house in Asti Park is one of them.

- Photo courtesy Louisville Historical Museum

The new owners put them to various uses. Many became farm houses or out-buildings on farms.

Superior's mine camp house followed this pattern. It was moved to a farm at what became 144th Avenue and Zuni Street in Broomfield. Decades later it lay in the path of residential development. After being alerted to the existence of this house by a resident of original Superior, the Town approached the family that owned it about the possibility of donating the building to Superior, which they did. After some delay, the structure was moved to the old ball field site west of McCaslin.

Then came the challenge of securing funding for the rehabilitation of the house and the development of the park. The Town successfully applied for a grant from the Colorado Historical Society's State Historical Fund to help offset the cost of the rehabilitation work. Between this funding, the application of a donation from the Kaiser-Hill Corporation, (the company that de-activated the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons plant), and the Town's Capital Improvement Program budget, the project was fully funded and approved by the Town Board.

After successfully bidding the project, the Town Board selected Milo Construction as the general contractor to complete the rehabilitation. Volunteers set out to find artifacts that fit the motif of the house and, presto!, the result is an Industrial Mine Camp house as it most likely looked in the late 1930's. As of this writing, the house is furnished with a pot-belly stove, a kitchen cook stove, a kitchen sink and cabinets made from old wooden powder boxes discarded from the mine, a treadle sewing machine and a Victrola record player.

Although not a part of the original construction, the house now sits on a basement. The downstairs area serves as a storage area for



This view of the mine camp and its houses looks north toward original Superior, seen in the background. It appears they were in need of a coat of paint. -Photo courtesy Town of Superior

artifacts and other relevant materials and as a place for volunteers to work at museum related activities.

The exterior of the house is patterned after a photograph of the home of Charles Acklin and his family. This house won a contest in the 1930's held by the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company, designating it as the most beautiful house in the camp. The family received the photo as a prize for their victory. Today's house resembles the Acklin home quite closely.

How You Can Help

The Historical Commission always welcomes volunteers who can help with this project.

We also would be pleased to accept donations of items that would have been found in a home of the 1930's. Our highest priorities at this time are a couch, living room chair, bed frames, dressers, kitchen table and chairs, a Hoosier cabinet and other similar home furnishings of the day.

Please contact Larry Dorsey at 303-499-1969 or Martin Toth at 303-554-9005

Renovating the interior of the house was approached like an archeology project. Investigation of the walls revealed lath and plaster construction, bead board wainscoting in the kitchen, and uncovered original floor boards under the old linoleum. A surprising discovery was that this was perhaps the only mine camp house with a closet and pantry. The house, while still located in the camp, was the residence of Ed Symanski and his

family and the room layout was confirmed by Ed's son Art. All the rest of the camp houses simply had four rooms.

The rehabilitation involved work of many artisans, including painters and plasterers. The painting contractor and an architectural historian traced the layers found in a small paint chip and matched the interior colors with the oldest layer, thus determining the original color. The plasterer, as would have been done a century ago, applied by hand three-coat plaster to the lath in order to replicate the original wall. In the process, he applied tons of the material to the walls.

The mine camp house is part of Asti Park, named for Ted T. Asti who served as Superior's mayor for 32 years. The park has been landscaped with historic native plants, shrubs and trees. Visitors to the park follow crushed gravel pathways to discover the planter beds and a restored coal mine car from the Gorham mine. The setting of the house is also embellished with plants replicating the appearance of the Acklin house in the late 1930's.

Now that the work is done and the ribbon cut, the Historical Commission and friends will continue the makeover of the house. The plan is for three of the rooms to be furnished to help interpret that time period showing how a coal mining family most likely lived. One room is to be a museum room containing artifacts and rotating exhibits.

Special thanks go to the Town of Superior, the Superior Board of Trustees for their support; Kathryn Barth for her dedication to historical accuracy, Denzil Acklin and Bob Morgan for their terrific memories of life in the mine camp, and Martin Toth for his tenacious attention to detail as the project manager.

Written by Larry Dorsey, Chair of the Superior Historical Commission.

Sources: Superior Historical Commission, Lost Superior; Interviews with Denzil Acklin, Bob Morgan, and Kathryn Barth; Denver Public Library materials from Rocky Mountain Fuel Company records.