

This week at the Pioneer Museum

Alferd Packer, Cannibal Jewelry Maker?

Submitted by Larry McDonald



Alferd Packer, the Colorado Cannibal, left behind quite a legacy, including a few mementos you can find right here in our own Pioneer Museum. Alferd spent some time in our local jail during his second trial in 1886, for presumably devouring his five companions during their ill-fated journey near Lake City 12 years prior. Although his story is well told through many books, magazine articles, movies, documentaries, and even the Lovely Ballad of Alferd Packer by Phil Ochs, his skill as a jewelry maker are not as well known.

On the second floor of the museum's main building is an exhibit of early Gunnison law enforcement officials and related artifacts. Included in the display are items Mr. Packer made during his considerable time behind bars. There is the beautiful cane he made from animal horns, a watch fob he made from human hair, along with a stick pin and watch chain. Also displayed are the leg shackles he wore while in court, and a gruesome sketch and article from an edition of the Harpers Weekly magazine. It was Harpers Weekly illustrator, John A. Randolph, who had stumbled upon the victims' remains above Lake City in August 1874, and brought their plight to the attention of the nation in the October 17 edition a few months later.

The main entrance building at the museum houses an incredible collection of artifacts that can seriously hinder a visitors' attempt to see the exhibits in the other 30+ buildings on site. How about a rifle a local rancher used to teach Ute Chief Ouray to shoot? Or the extraordinary century plus old wedding dress that would be the envy of most young brides today? Wonderful displays of fashionable women's wear and children's dolls are also housed on the second floor.

The display of tin-type photographs and antique cameras is amazing, as is the collection of musical instruments and early phonographs. Thousands of Indian arrow heads from our region and around the country are also on display in the main building.

Does anyone remember the beautiful LaVeta Hotel? My memories from the late '70s, are of locals and fellow Western students living in what remained of what was once the grandest hotel in the western United States, a very unsightly ground floor only. Although little remains of the LaVeta today, the Museum has a nice exhibit including room furnishings, photos and other items.

Look for this weekly article highlighting exhibits in the 30+ buildings on the Museum property and stories of historical interest and follow us on Facebook for updates and information. Our Pioneer Museum is truly one of a kind, preserving the incredible history of the Gunnison Valley and its' exciting early days since opening in 1964. Interesting historical items are being donated nearly every day, and C.J. and his staff make sure they get displayed amazingly quick.

Oh, and by the way, legend has it that our cannibal, Alferd Packer, died a vegetarian! Hope to see you at the Museum soon!

call (970) 641-4530

location 803 E. Tomichi Ave., Gunnison

or visit us on the web at

www.PioneerTrainMuseum.org



ADMISSION:

\$10.00 Adults

\$3.00 Children (6-12)