

Volume XIV Number 3
December 2020 through March 2021
Website: www.palmerdividehistory.org
Email: plhs@palmerdividehistory.org
Museum: 719-559-0837



Palmer Lake Historical Society

2020 Board of Directors

President – Su Ketchmark
Vice President – Wayne Russert
Secretary – Patricia Atkins
Treasurer – Maggie Williamson
Museum Director - Rogers Davis

2020 Directors-at-Large

Susan Kuehster
Barbara Morehead

Two open at-large director positions

COVID-19 UPDATE:

PALMER LAKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY PROGRAMS AND EVENTS HAVE BEEN ON HOLD SINCE THE COVID-19 GUIDELINES WERE PUT IN PLACE AND HAVE NOW BEEN CANCELLED FOR THE REMAINDER OF 2020.

WE HOPE TO RE-OPEN AND RE-SCHEDULE IN 2021 AS CIRCUMSTANCES PERMIT.

*History should be
more than a memory!*

Contributing to this issue:

Jack Anthony Su Ketchmark
Mike & Sigi Walker

Thanks to all who reviewed and commented!

A Newsletter of the Palmer Lake Historical Society and the *Lucretia Vaile Museum*

The Air Force Academy's Ski Tow History Mystery

by Jack Anthony

In 1999 I started a new hobby of doing local history research, writing, and presenting. My focus area would be the US Air Force Academy and its 18,000 acres and also the New Santa Fe Regional Trail. With regard to the Air Force Academy, I would often go running on USAFA trails and find all sorts of foundations or hints of long-ago pioneers hidden away, so I started to research and ask questions. I also had the chance to meet many local historians including Palmer Lake's Rogers Davis, who helped me get off to a great start in my exploring, writing, and presenting. I've written more than 25 articles and have given many presentations to a variety of organizations.

One of the most interesting history sites I researched and wrote about was a real mystery. Documented on a Department of Defense topographic map of the AF Academy reservation was a site simply noted as "Ski Tow." I am a 1978 graduate of the AF Academy. I remember getting a topographic map of the 18,000-acre reservation and noted the "Ski Tow" site shown in a remote part of the academy. I hiked a lot as a cadet, mostly in the mountains west of the academy and never went over to see what this "Ski Tow" site was. In 2011, I dusted off the topo map and also spoke with Dr. Aaron Byerley of the Aeronautics Department. Aaron was my basic cadet roommate in summer of 1974, and we have remained friends since then. He had hiked to the site and encouraged me to go see it and to also "dig into it" and learn the rest of the story. I did, and this article is a story of research, exploration, a lot of wonderful luck that leads to what I think is an amazing story.

My wonder was: "Is this ski tow pre-USAFA or was it built when the AFA came to be in the late 1950's." I started my exploration with a hike to the site and saw four 12-inch telephone pole pillars anchored into the ground on top of a ridge. There was a platform with very thick planks as cross members and hints of an interesting pattern of holes and hardware. Seemed there was an engine mounting on this invincible structure that was deteriorating and victim of mother nature and perhaps mischief. I looked around the top of the ridge and found sheets of weathered plywood, some hardware and wiring. I wondered if this was a ski tow, and, if so, where was it to pull the would-be skier up from?

I decided to go to the great folks at the USAFA Library Special Collections where Ms. Trudy Pollok was phenomenal in her finding historical photos of the academy. She's helped me with so many sites I've researched. Trudy pulled through again and found aerial photos of that area from the mid 1960's. By golly, from those photos I could see what appeared to be some areas where trees were cleared. Could that be the ski tow rope line? Could it have been an attempt at some ski runs? I returned and took a close look, especially where it appeared trees were cleared. In that second exploration, I discovered all sorts of debris, electrical switches, wiring, some battery cases, and an odd array of rocks with 1-inch diameter holes drilled in them. These were all scattered about what I felt was a possible the rope tow line, or maybe a way to get signal and power up to this ridge-top contraption. Had I discovered the rope tow line skiers would be towed up to the top of the ridge with or was this a pathway for an electrical switch to turn on the ski tow and get it running? I was not sure.

I researched ski rope tows, especially photos, and found quite an array of photos dating back to the 1940's. My theory was that perhaps a car engine was mounted on a platform and run to operate a rope tow that a skier would hold onto and be pulled to the top of the hill. I also saw a system of poles and brackets that would perhaps support the rope tow. So, I was now believing this was a ski tow and must have had a rope tow system. I went to the Association of Graduates and found AFA yearbooks from 1959 on and I examined the Ski Club photos hoping to see this rope tow in action, but I did not find any photos of that. I even called some of the early graduates who were on the ski team, and they too were unaware of this hidden skier's gem which for me remained a mystery, one that I wanted to solve.



(continued on page 2)



President's Message

Greetings from the Twilight Zone! Or at least it feels like we've been living in a never-ending episode of the iconic TV show since March! We held one program in February (Wayne Russert's Vintage Radios) then made the difficult decision to cancel the remainder as the pandemic worsened. We hope to reschedule most, if not all, of them for next year. Of course, only time will tell. The museum also has been closed, however, we've been working on two new exhibits: Women's Suffrage and Vintage Radios. They are close to completion and we look forward to showing them off when we're able to open again.

Behind the scenes your board of directors has been meeting monthly: outdoors or on Zoom. We continue to work on various projects, including the restoration of a ballot box used in Palmer Lake in 1914 that will become part of the Suffrage exhibit. Our new website is also an ongoing project, but it's getting close! We'll let you know when it's ready to go live.

Our 2021 calendar will be coming out soon. Because so many of our local businesses were suffering this year, we decided to give a one-time discount on calendar ads. We had an enthusiastic response from our advertisers, so the tradition continues!

I want to thank the PLHS board for their amazing contributions this year. It's been a tough one, and they've really helped make us a thriving organization. Of course, we're all volunteers, and we could always use additional help. Please contact me at PLHSPresident@gmail.com if you could give us some of your time. We're looking for two people to serve on the board of directors, as well as someone to work with publicity and social media. Thank you!

I also want to thank Sigi Walker, our newsletter editor extraordinaire, for the wonderful newsletters she's written for us over the years. You are the best, and we don't thank you enough!

The holidays are fast approaching, and while they may look different this year, we wish you joy. Please stay safe and healthy, and I hope to see you next year!

Su Ketchmark, President

Below: Palmer Lake Star, listed on the Colorado State Register of Historic Properties



Vaile Museum collection

The Air Force Academy's Ski Tow History Mystery *(continued from page 1)*

My first breakthrough in unraveling this mystery was at a Gleneagle Women's Club history presentation in 2013. What a wonderful group who enjoyed my "trip back in time" examining the long-ago communities and people of the USAFA area. At the end of the presentation I showed a photo of the Ski Tow structure atop the ridge and said: "Here's a mysterious structure that I believe is a Ski Tow, a rope tow system. It's a mystery. Do any of you know about this?" An 89-year old lady raised her hand and said with a kind, confident voice, "I do." I spoke with Betty and she shared that her now deceased husband helped build it. Eureka, I found someone who can share some insight into this mystery. She said her husband and several others had the idea of a powered rope tow to get skiers, sled riders and toboggan teams up top. They worked diligently in 1962 to get permission and even some non-appropriated funds to buy what was needed to make their motorized system operational. She shared that they faced many challenges in building it and getting it to work. Furthermore, mother nature was not helping with a lack of snow. I was happy that now I had confirmation that the mysterious contraption on the ridge and the scattered debris was an ill-fated community project of the early 1960's that didn't get completed. But, I was not done in unravelling even more about the USAFA ski tow.

(continued on page 4)

THEN AND NOW: The USAFA Ski Tow History Mystery



Tow rope line up the hill



Holes drilled in rocks along tow rope line

On 15 February 2013, Jack Anthony spoke with Betty M., the first person he met who knew about the Ski Tow. She had lived in Douglass Valley from 1959-66, and her husband had helped build the Ski Tow! Other evidence found was a 1972 DoD-prepared map of the USAFA with the ski tow noted (above left). Jack researched why the map showed a "Ski tow" but was unsuccessful in finding anyone who knew. Then a USAFA Library intern named Travis Pollock found a folder with some notes that revealed the clues that were needed to solve the mystery.

Note: PLHS Programs and Events through 2020 have been cancelled.

2020: Celebrating the 200th Anniversary of the Long Expedition and the 100th Anniversary of Women's Right to Vote

Women in Railroading: 100 Years Ago the Seeds for the NARBW Were Sown *Today, the National Association of Railway Business Women has hundreds of women members*

Women have long played a role in the construction and maintenance of American railroads, yet stories of their past contributions to the railroads remain hidden. In the late 1800s, if they weren't secretaries or held other assistant-like positions in the organizational structure, women were not on the payroll for their work on the rails. Women doing the job of tending to injuries and providing food and lodging would not have considered themselves railroad workers; they were just doing the right thing.

In December of 1919, division heads of the Women's Service Sections on railroads under Federal control met in Chicago to discuss informally their experiences in dealing with problems that resulted from the employment of women. Fifteen representatives of railroads were present to discuss the study, including Southern Pacific, Oregon-Washington RR & Navigation Co., the Chesapeake & Ohio RR, Pennsylvania RR, the Santa Fe RR, the Erie RR, Chicago & Northwestern, Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, Union Pacific, Baltimore & Ohio, Toledo & Ohio Central, Chicago & Alton, and the Rock Island RR. The conference showed the present status of women's service and the problems yet unsolved. Discussions covered the most practical methods of providing proper working conditions and necessary comfort and health provisions. One of the issues: the retention of women employees in railroad work whose numbers had shrunk after the return of men from WWI military service.

In 1920, a woman named Hazel Cornell from the Twin Cities, who worked for the great Northern Railway, had spent Christmas holidays with friends in Chicago. When returning to the Twin Cities she found herself in the Union Depot crowded with holiday travelers. Hazel finally found a seat away from the main concourse. Looking around, she noticed a door across the walkway that said, "FOR RAILROAD MEN ONLY." Naturally curious, she watched as one man after another came and went through that door. She heard the sound of voices and laughing and of men greeting each other and longed to join in the fun. All the way back to St. Paul the sight of that doorway, "FOR RAILROAD MEN ONLY," burned in Hazel's mind. As the wheels clicked along the tracks she kept thinking: "I'm a Railroad Woman-I'm a Railroad Woman-I'm a Railroad Woman," until the thought was so etched into her Irish heart that she knew she had to do something about it.

Part of Hazel's railroad duties were to telephone other area railroads regarding car records. One of her regular calls was to Sarah Miles, who worked at the Consolidated Ticket Office in Minneapolis. After telling Sarah about her experience at the Chicago Depot, they decided they had to do something for railroad women.

In January of 1921, Hazel's friend Sarah organized a dinner party to which all her telephone acquaintances who worked at various railroad offices were invited. The monthly meetings continued and constantly grew in membership, with Sarah Miles elected as founder president. In March 1925, the women requested and received a State of Minnesota Charter and became the Railway Business Women's Association. A second charter was issued in November 1925, and Chapter 2 was formed in Chicago. In 1926 Cleveland became Chapter No. 3, followed by Cincinnati, Detroit, Buffalo, Kansas City, etc.

Chapters and memberships continued to grow. At a Christmas party in 1939, Twin Cities Chapter President Nellie Karst invited all members of the various chapters to come to her guest ranch in Montana for a summer get-together. In July 1940, trains carried over 75 women from various chapters to the Karst Ranch. There they formed a national organization, with Hazel Cornell of the Twin Cities elected the first national president. Under the signature of twelve Railway Business Women and the Seal from the State of Minnesota, a certificate of incorporation was issued. On Feb. 14, 1941, they became the National Association of Railway Business Women.

The purpose of the NARBW was and is: 1) To stimulate interest in the railroad industry; 2) To foster cooperation and better understanding within the industry and its affiliates; 3) To create good public relations for the railroad industry; 4) to further educational, social and professional interests of its members; and 5) to undertake charitable, benevolent, and social welfare projects. Today, there are 16 chapters across America and hundreds of women who are the membership of NARBW. Melanie McKim — Amtrak's regional coordinator for production systems — says the fact that she's surrounded by 15 men in her office could leave her feeling a bit isolated. But through her involvement in the NARBW, McKim has come to learn she's not alone.

The support that women gave the railroad industry evolved further during World War II. A shortage of male workers opened up more substantial jobs in skill-based positions like conductors and engineers, despite a very male-oriented work environment.

Another organization, the League of Railway Women, founded in 1997, assists women under-represented in skilled trades and railroad field operations. The LRW's mission is to advance the representation, recognition, and opportunities for women. Marti Lenz is LRW Public Relations and Outreach Committee chair and LRW's 2018 Member of the Year.

Pictured right: Marti Lenz, Progress Rail chief locomotive engineer. Progress Rail photo

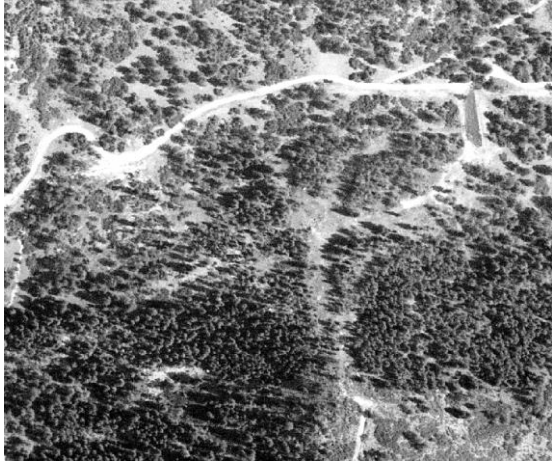


Today, women continue to make strides by achieving leadership roles at North American railroads and the rail industry. Recent examples include Isabelle Courville's appointment as Canadian Pacific's first woman chair; Cathrin Banks named president of the Maryland and Delaware Railroad Co., becoming one of the youngest women to lead a U.S. railroad; Lorie Tekorius's promotion to The Greenbrier Cos. president and chief operating officer; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) naming three women — Lisa Woodruff, Shanita Bowman and Laura Mason — to lead rail operations. And on January 1, 2021, Katie Farmer will become the BNSF's first female president and chief executive officer, *the first female to ever lead a Class I railroad!*

To discover how women in railroading helped build our nation, see "Iron Ladies of the American Railroad" in the August 2017 issue of *True West* magazine, p. 72ff.

The Air Force Academy's Ski Tow History Mystery

(continued from page 2)



In late 2013 I was contacted by the Special Collections folks, and they said that Travis Pollok, a library intern and the nephew of the ever so helpful archivist Trudy Pollok, had found some important information in a folder he found during his intern work that was labeled "Ski Tow." I excitedly headed to the library's 6th floor where these amazingly helpful folks work and met Travis. The folder contained paperwork in the form of notes, letters and proposals for a "Neighborhood Ski Slope" located in Area 6100 of the USAFA; this is the far southwest corner and where Douglass and Pine Valley terminate and blend into the hills in the southwest part of the USAFA. This documentation was from the September 1961 to December 1962 timeframe. Notes and letters described a well-intentioned self-help effort by some residents of Douglass Valley. It appears the effort to clear slopes did not result in adequate clearing for the runs. Furthermore, there were many memos showing that this improvised ski rope tow never really operated reliably and was always in some form of fixing or maintenance. They sure tried, but in the end, they gave up on the project. Included in the folder was a proposed set of rules for use of the ski tow, including a \$3 annual fee. They were optimistic.

I even examined a letter where some USAFA employees visited the ridge top system and had taken care of some of the problems the residents were facing. Travis earned high accolades for finding this and remembering his Aunt Trudy talking about my research and this being a mystery. He helped me gain insight into the ski tow that would make me refer to it as the once mysterious ski tow.

There you have it, a peek into my local history hobby. I've learned so much about the long-ago communities and people who came here to settle in the 1860's and 70's. I've learned of the railroads, the entrepreneurs, the ranches and so much more. There are highlights attached to all I've done, and I have not stopped exploring and questioning. But, the most rewarding adventure was learning about the mysterious ski tow on the USAFA and having Betty and Travis help me in unraveling the mystery. Maybe more folks will learn of my interest and someday soon say "I can tell you even more about the ski tow." I do look forward to that happening. ☹



Jack Anthony, a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, has served in various military, intelligence, and NASA roles as an engineer, educator, leader, and operator. Jack successfully spear-headed the effort to list the Palmer Lake Star as well as the Palmer Lake Town Hall on the State Register of Historic Properties.

Lucretia Vaile Museum Hours:

The museum is closed until further notice due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and installation of a new handicapped access ramp for the Palmer Lake library.

 Like us on Facebook

Visit the PLHS website by scanning our QR code with your smart phone.



Palmer Lake Historical Society
publishes this newsletter at
PO Box 662
66 Lower Glenway
Palmer Lake CO 80133-0662

Layout and Editing: Sigi Walker

Note: All submissions may be edited for content, grammar, and space allocations, and become the property of the Palmer Lake Historical Society unless other arrangements have been made. Digital word submissions in .doc or .docx, photos in .jpg format, please. Submit pieces and photos to Editor at mikensigi@comcast.net

Merry
Christmas
to all PLHS
members and
supporters



Palmer Lake Historical Society 2021 Membership/Renewal Form

Annual membership in the Palmer Lake Historical Society is available in the following categories:

- Individual \$ 20.00
- Family \$ 30.00
- Student \$ 10.00
- Supporting \$ 30.00
- Benefactor \$ 50.00
- Curator \$ 75.00

YES, I would like to support the PLHS. My payment of \$ _____ is enclosed. ___ New ___ Renewing

Method of payment:

Cash \$ _____

Check No. _____

Name as you wish it to appear in our membership files (please PRINT):

Name _____

Mailing address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____

Contact Phone _____

E-mail _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Please return this completed form with your payment to:

Palmer Lake Historical Society
PO Box 662
Palmer Lake CO 80133-0662