



Yampa Cemetery

“Time Writes All History”

by Duncan Craighead and Allen Kittle

Even though we may not think so, we are making history as we live our day to day lives, and a person can't live a lifetime without making his own history, too.

The past can be recorded in many different ways, be it by telling stories, capturing it on a photograph, or just by reminiscing of fond memories.

One of the most reliable but most little thought of places for people to find other's history is a graveyard. Though we may connect them with evil spirits, or moonless nights, they are really just a library of memories from the past. That's what we began to realize as we started on our trip to visit the graveyard attendant, Lewis Phillips, of the Yampa cemetery.

Mr. Phillips' father, John Phillips, came to this country from Germany in 1882 and settled at Chimney Rock. One year later, another family, the Laughlins, built their first homestead right below where the Yampa cemetery is today. And as Lewis Phillips vividly recalled, "They had a baby who passed away, and they took it up the hill to a little gulch and buried it. And as other people passed away, they just buried them there in the same row. That's what started the cemetery. It was a single open sagebrush gulch, but, of course, there were no cemeteries in those days, people were usually buried where they

died. Later, these people who met a tragic death were not usually taken to the cemetery."

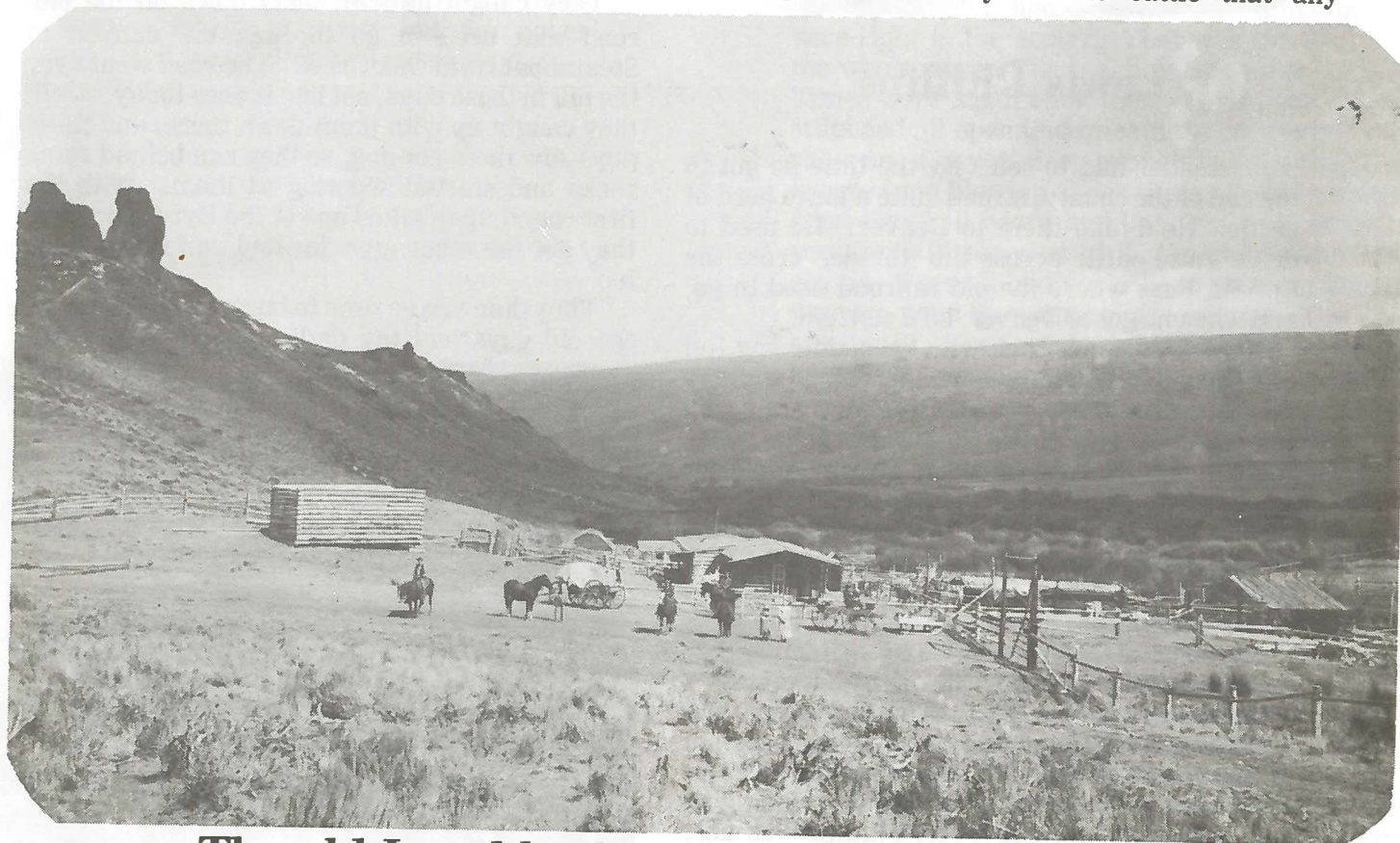
Like so many other graveyards across the country, the Yampa cemetery has a number of unmarked graves of people who were buried in the earlier days, maybe because of lack of funds to mark the spot, or maybe because they wanted the person's name left anonymous.

But of course, the graves had to be marked in some way or another. As in the case of the Yampa cemetery, a twelve by fourteen inch stone served the purpose.

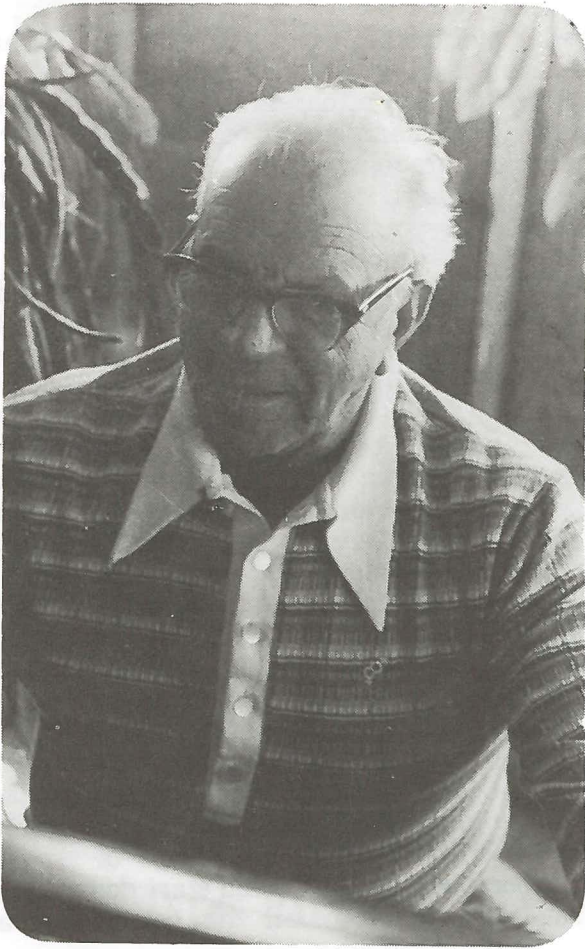
Some of the more recent graves were marked merely with fences. Some of them were iron, some wood, and some stone. The wooden ones eventually deteriorated, leaving no marker. Other markers were larger and made of marble or more exotic stones.

The cost of a monument in the late 1800's that was hand engraved, would cost less than fifty dollars. Today you couldn't replace the same type of stone for five or six hundred dollars. This was the case of a man named Tom Watson...

"We have a fellow buried down there by the name of Tom Watson," Mr. Phillips explained, "and he used to go through this country in the early days, before the days of modern transportation, and he would start down around Craig and he'd buy all the cattle that any



The old Laughlin homestead below the cemetery.



Lewis Phillips

homesteader had to sell. By the time he got to the end of the county, he had quite a large herd of cattle. He'd take them to Denver. He used to drive these cattle across the divide, 'cross the Corona Pass where the old railroad used to go, and when he got to Denver, he'd sell 'em.

"He would come back with his saddle bag full of money and go along down the valley and pay all these guys. They were glad to have some way to get rid of their cattle, and a few dollars was mighty nice to have in those days. And poor Tom, he was sick for quite a while before he died, and he died penniless. But the good people in the county gave him a funeral, and they put up a nice gravestone."

Like many other old timers, Lewis Phillips is a storebox of information and incidents that otherwise have been lost through the years.

Though we may not think of cattle rustlers and outlaws as being common today, they were not uncommon in the days of John Phillips, who we mentioned before was Lewis' father. Having an unusually vivid memory, Mr. Phillips was able to share some of his stories with us.

"The second year that my dad and my uncles were in this country, they came here with the intention of settling down below the town. Here they built a cabin. There was a big white house

off of the side of the old road there, and that's what they called the Byrd place. The 'Grandpa Byrd Place.' Old Grandpa Byrd's original cabin is settin' up there on a hill by a dirt road, it's about to fall in, but it's still settin'.

"Anyway, they had made a little cabin there, and they had all their stuff in it, their grub and things. And this prairie below Yampa was all willows. Didn't look like it does now a days, it was just a big willow patch. But it had lots of this native hay that grows wild all over the country, and they were down there in the willows cuttin' this hay to feed their horses in the winter. A couple of guys came along with some pack mules, just wandering through the country. They stopped out at their cabin and loaded up all of their stuff. Well, the nearest place for replacement of supplies was Leadville, and Leadville was quite a little jaunt on horseback, it's nothing if you have a good car. You can drive to Leadville in two to three hours, but on horseback it's quite a little ways. So, there was nothing they could do but take off after them. The two men hadn't come until evening. They didn't have any relatives to give them clothes or anything. The Byrds didn't have much to go on, so they just had to go after these guys and get their stuff back.

"They caught up with them down on the old road that used to go through the canyon to Steamboat from Oak Creek. The road went over the hill in those days, not like it does today. Well, they caught up with them down there, and those guys saw them coming, so they ran behind some rocks and started shooting at them. With the first round, they killed one of the Byrd boys, and they got the other guys located and killed them, too.

"They didn't have time to bury them but one of the old guys had my dad's boots on. My dad



The flower bed

wouldn't wear his boots down in the swamp to cut hay, he just wrapped some gunny sacks around his feet, he wanted to save his boots. They were valuable in those days. But anyway, he took the boots off the old guy and they just left him laying there. Mr. Crawford and Mr. Brooks, the man who used to be the mail carrier in those days, told them about these guys, and they came up from Steamboat to bury them. But those outlaws, they wouldn't bury them.

Of course, this kind of thing was not an everyday occurrence, but it was definitely evident in the days of the early west. People in those days did not take it as we would today. There were very few courts, and when they were around, they were very widespread. So, few people were ever taken to trial.

But accidents were not restricted to outlaws alone. Construction was also a heavy influence on this area. New country was being opened up, roads and railroads were being built, and an occasional accident always occurred.

"We have a couple of fellows who are buried down at the cemetery, from when they were building the Moffat road. This area was built mostly by hand you might say. They had thousands of Japanese and Chinese workers up there. And these two fellows, they were what they used to call the powder men, they would put explosives in to loosen up the dirt and the rocks. Well, one day, they realized that the shots never went off, and they had seen the working crew going out to start. So, they ran ahead of the crew and jumped on the shots to keep the men from getting killed. Of course, they were both killed, and they are buried out at the cemetery. This gang that they saved; they put up two nice tombstones down there for them. One of the fellows, I don't know which one, has a foreign inscription on his marker. It is the only stone we have that has a foreign language on it. I don't know what the language is, and I have asked several different people, and they don't know what it is either."

After talking with Lewis Phillips, we had a different view of what started out to be an unpleasant topic. By talking with this man, we realized that there was fascinating history in Routt County that hardly anyone recalled.

Hahn's Peak - Bob Hurd

Hahn's Peak Village was a booming mining town during the 1800's. Located at the base of Hahn's Peak, and bordering Steamboat Lake, the little ghost town is located about thirty miles from Steamboat.

This was our next stop. In contrast to the more modern Yampa cemetery, the graveyard at Hahn's Peak was older, and more rugged. Being located in a forest all its own, it offered a

beautiful view of the lake and various mountain ranges.

Our interview was with Bob Hurd, a resident of the village for over fifty years and one of the directors for the cemetery for ten of those years. It was an interesting interview, as we learned the truth about the real gravesite of Joseph Hahn. Some stories reveal that Hahn is buried at the town cemetery, located approximately five hundred feet to the east of it.



"Time erases a lot."

Bob quickly contradicted our belief of this by stating, "Joseph Hahn died over on the banks of the Muddy River on the other side of the divide going towards Kremmling. The winter that they stayed in here, he and one of his partners, a man named Samuel Weigh, stayed in the village, and the other partner, Doyle, went out and was supposed to come back with supplies. He said he was going to come back in two weeks. But for some reason or another, he never came back. He lived on the front range down by Empire for many years.

"Anyway, in March, Hahn and Weigh started out on snowshoes, I suppose that they were suffering quite a bit from malnutrition. Hahn couldn't go any farther, and Weigh left him there on the banks of the Muddy. He took care of him as best as he could, then he went for help. He couldn't find any ranch in the radius of where he ranged. So he came back, but Hahn was dead. He left him there, and his bones were lying there for many years before someone buried him. I don't know of the spot where he is buried at, there were two fellows who knew of it though, two old timers. One of them wasn't very cooperative, and the other one was going to show me, but he passed away before we got there."

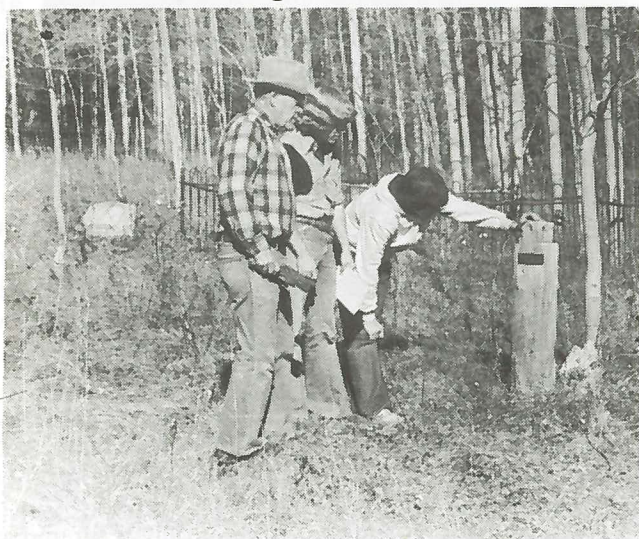
As we mentioned earlier, Hahn's Peak was a mining town and mining towns were tough places in those days. The winters were cold, and the luxuries were few. Including women...

"There was a man who was found shot in the street down here and a lady shot him. They say that they couldn't find enough evidence, and they couldn't find the gun. But after the trial the gun was found in a barrel of ashes that had been emptied behind a building. They never pursued it because it concerned a woman, and women at that time were kind of scarce. They would try to find them 'not guilty' in most cases, even in murder. Sometimes, they went scot free."

There were other hazards, too, such as road gangs and bandits.

"A lot of times, men would leave here with a lot of stake (money) and they would get knocked off by this wild gang that used to be around here. They called themselves the Wild Bunch and it was headed by a man named Warner. Well, Warner came into Hahn's Peak one time and he was known to have a pretty good reputation. But sometimes men would leave here and they would never come back.

"So, a man named MacIntosh, he was an old construction worker from Chicago who built the McNickers Theater, the Atlantic Hotel, and several other landmarks of which may not still be around or not. Anyway, MacIntosh, he leased a placer one year and two men, Hinman and Cody, had the placer at that time. Mac, he cleaned up about \$35,000 which was a lot of money in those days. Of course these days, people talk more in terms of millions than thousands. Well, MacIntosh left here in the middle of the night and he had to take his money clear up to Rawlins, Wyoming. And, it had to be done under cover. I guess he made it."



Much of the history is lost

Much of the history concerning the cemetery and the people buried there has been erased over the years, thus making it hard to continue this part of our story. It can be said, though, that the Hahn's Peak cemetery is one of the oldest and one of the most interesting records of the past.

Joe Blandford



"If there are any diseases around the grave yard they've got old and died now."

The last person that we interviewed was Joe Blandford, a rancher and probably one of the most knowledgeable people on the Elk Mountain cemetery, located right below Elk Mountain (better known as Sleeping Giant Mountain). It has spectacular views of Hahn's Peak, Mt. Werner ski area and the Flattop Range in the distance. The story of the graveyard cannot reflect on any famous people who have been buried there, because as Joe Blandford says, "They're just ordinary people."

The little graveyard is something personal...

"It's a neighborhood project," Joe explains, "and we never charge anyone for being buried there. That's because a graveyard is something that you don't have to pay taxes on. The man who has the property where the graveyard is now located once asked me, 'How come I don't have to pay taxes on that graveyard that you guys got?'"

"I said, 'You never had to and you never will.'"

"I've helped to dig graves there since 1915. So, since 1915 I have a pretty good knowledge of who is buried there. There are three or four graves there of some children who died of smallpox. It happened to the Trull children, and there were three or four of them. One of them died first and they went up to bury him. When they came back, the other two were dead. That's the only

epidemic that I think we've ever had. We did have the flu in the thirties, though, some of my own kinfolk died in that one.

"My father is buried in that cemetery, and he died of miner's consumption, he got that from working in the metal mines, not the coal mines. Miners' consumption affects the lung very severely. I have a lot of relatives who died of it working in the mines. It affected a lot of people. There is no way that you can operate on it. If you take too much of the lung out, you usually die anyway.

"I know that when my little girl died in 1965, we were at the Children's Hospital in Denver, and the neighbors called up and wanted to know where I wanted her put. They went over and dug it and when I came back, the grave was dug, and everything was ready in order for a funeral. Everyone just wanted to do something. Good neighbors make good neighbors.

"I never took no money for the work that I done. Because when someone would die in the neighborhood, the rest of us would set a day and go down to dig the hole. All the neighbors turned out and you don't see much of that these days. But we lived for each other."

Nothing modern was used to dig with in those days. All you had was a pick, a shovel and a lot of determination.

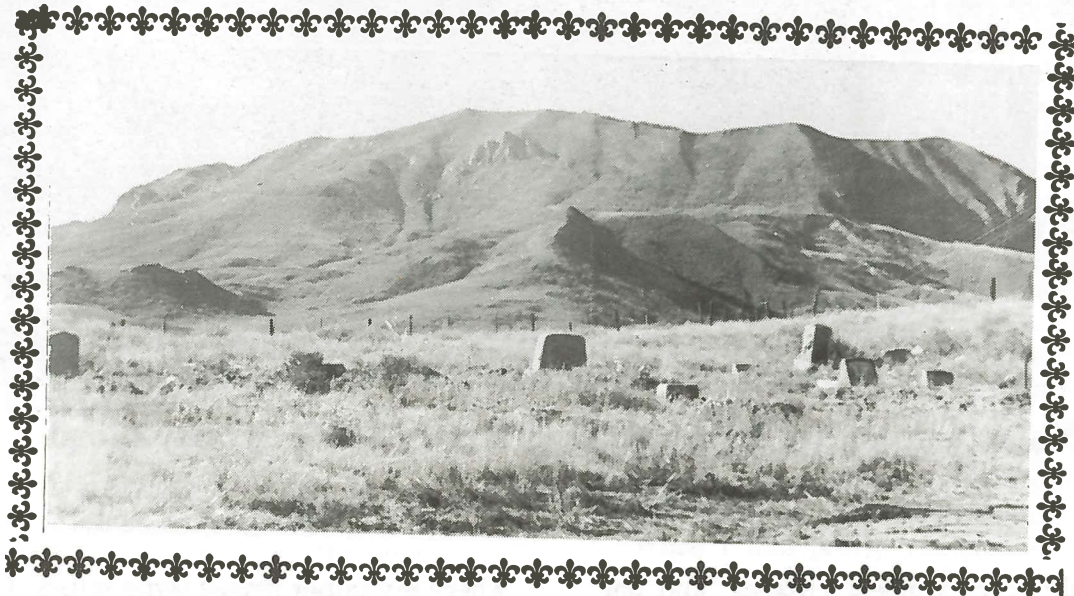
"If you have six feet of snow and six feet of dirt to dig through, you are a long way from the top."

Not much more needs to be said, and as we left that peaceful setting, Joe Blandford's words still lingered in our ears...

"Time erases a lot, and you can't be anywhere forever. After all, a man buried in a \$40,000 coffin is the same as a man buried in a forty dollar box."



"They was just ordinary humans"



"To the end of the future, or as long as its needed"