

T H E
U N I O N H A L L .
S U P E R I O R , W Y O M I N G .

by
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History of Wyoming
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As I look out the window, watching the snow fall once again; I have reflections of a past that is almost forgotten. For an instance, I have dim memories of other places and people. I wonder how much the rest of the world has changed, and if it is still best to be away from it. Sometimes, I forget the reasons why I came here. Confinement has taken me away from everything I need to know. Isolation and Insulation are conversation pieces, and there is a struggle to overcome them.

There are two things I will not forget when I leave: my memories will carry with me the most heavenly skies. And the winds, characteristics of the area, will be remembered as a personified witness of my outdoor experiences.

In a consistent scenery of bare lands, a weakly looking, giant metal structure stands out from the monotony of the desert. Copenhagen Mine reflects a past that had a progress. Surrounding grounds are covered with ruins of dwellings, abandoned by those that were driven to other places.

Bricks, glass, wood, all left in pieces with no relation to the next. There is no coordination of events of weather, time, and intruders.

Deterioration from desertion.

Depression from success.

The area has attracted those looking for new ways of life, maybe better or just different from other places. They have come searching for treasures and success. They have come to influence others, or to run away from world events.

From what is leftover, you can see there was a time of glamour, pros-

perity, and vitality.

There is enchantment in the old buildings of the town, and warmth from the people that have settled.

It was 1903, when the coal mines opened. At first, the town was called Reliance; but later the name was changed to Superior.

In 1906, coal mines "A" and "B" were opened. "C" and "D" mines were put into operation at a later time. Houses and businesses were later built, and a town was established.

Between 1915 and 1920, three other mines were opened. They were The Premier Coal Company, The Superior Rock Springs Coal Company, and The Rock Springs Fuel Company. At this time, the town attracted people from many places, including from Europe and Asia.

Today, most of these people have left; and the survivors of the exodus have settled here in what they consider their home.

During this period, two people came to Superior looking for fortune. They have both shared with me what the area held for them. A building, a town, and its people symbolized a life of hard work and good times.

Mary Knezovich

She is a hospitably lady, that prefers to be called Mary. She is courteous and likes to offer her simple idea of a good life. At the same time, she is energetic and involved with community activities.

Mary was born on September 10th., 1911 in Gary, a small town then, in the northwestern corner of Indiana. Today, Gary is a big city, and a suburb of Chicago.

Mary came to Wyoming in 1918, when she was seven years old. At that time, she was living in Minnesota with her mother and brothers, and sisters. Her father was living in Washington state and came to Rock Springs to visit some friends. He decided to stay and work in the coal mines.

Mary lived and went to school in Rock Springs.

When she was an adolescent, her parents moved to Winton, Wyoming, a small town located between Superior and Reliance. Today, Winton is a ghost town.

Mary met her husband at a dance; and they got married on February 16th., 1930. She was eighteen years old.

After their wedding, Mary and her husband Marion moved to Superior. Then, times were hard. It was the beginning of the depression, and housing was scarce. So, they were forced to share living expenses with another young couple. Mary's husband was only able to work one day a week for \$ 6.42 a day. After a few months, They moved into a Union Pacific Company house and payed \$ 5.50 a month for rent.

After the Knezoviches settled in Superior, they adquired a boarding house with living quarters. Mary was always ambitious and good worker. While she raised her children, she cooked meals for residents. Mary was always thinking of ways to make money, while her husband earned a living by working for the railroad.

After a year of hard work, they bought a home, in which Mary is presently living. "This house was a shell when we bought it", she says. They remodeled the inside in order to make it livable.

In 1925, Mary's father had an accident in the mine, and he was out of work for some time.

In the 1930"s, the coal mines started to close down because there was no demand for coal.

In 1938, they bought another boarding house, and Mary continued cooking and taking care of people.

When the Second World War broke out, Mary took a job as a truck driver in the coal mines. She did not need a job, but she had a chance to make

some extra money. Mary worked with a dump truck, and five people worked under her supervision. At that time, her children went to school, and her youngest child was two years old. Mary had always relatives to babysit him, while she worked.

When her oldest son was eight years old, he picked vegetables grown in his grandmother's garden. He carried the vegetables in a toy wagon and sold them. His grandmother raised six pound turnips, and up to three pound carrots. I asked Mary what her mother in law used for fertilizer. "Cow manure was the best, even much better than horse manure", she says.

Mary spent her pastime reading and cooking with her children. Her children always helped around the house; and there was always enough work to keep everybody busy. Mary believes that people were considerate of each other then, more than today.

As her children were growing up, they brought their friends home, and they all played and had parties indoors.

After the Second World War ended, the coal mines were modernized, and consequently, more productive. This change led to over production for the existing demands of coal in the 1950's. Then, the Union Pacific Railroad changed the uses of coal for diesel; and in 1962, the coal mines closed down.

Mary's husband died in 1961 from illness. After his death, she bought another house in South Superior and opened a souvenir store in the garage of that house. Mary also opened a museum and cafe in downtown South Superior.

Later, Mary acquired property from back taxes, and the old Union Hall building was one of her possessions. She invested in housing for little money and waited for the town to grow.

The town died, but not completely. The population decreased from three

thousand to fifty people. Those who stayed, did for many reasons.

Most of them did not have a place to go. Others knew that the town would grow back again. "Gas, Oil, Coal, and the largest Lucite reserves in the world are here", Mary says, "The town has to grow back".

While I talked to Mary, she relaxed sitting in her lazy rocking chair. Today, she looks rested and satisfied about her past. Her children, she is proud of; and she seems recompensed for her hard work and good judgment.

Mary Knezovich is an example woman that have worked for the things she always wanted. "In order to say I can not do someting, I have to and find out first if I can't do it", she says.

Mary likes to help people in any way she can, and she finds a lot of satisfaction in it. She considers herself a very ambitious person, but not greedy. If she has a chance in her life, she is willing to share anything she has.

Mary thinks today's woman has a lot of ambition. "This is a good point as long they don't neglect their children", she says, "Family should always be first. Responsability, love, and affection are fundamental for the good life".

Leo Bertagnolli

Leo Bertagnolli is popular known in town as Leo; and he has been the store owner of the town for over fifty years.

Leo was born in Tret, Austria in 1896. Tret was a farm town of about three hundred people. Today, Tret is a town part of Italy.

Before Leo came to the United States, he was a mailman. He traveled five miles to the nearest town every day. It would take him half a day to travel round trip by horse. In the afternoons, he delivered the mail to the houses in Tret.

He went to school in Tret to the eighth grade. Then, that was all the education you needed.

Leo grew up on a small farm. His father raised a variety of animals for their own consumption. They had about ten cows, and several chicken and pigs. They also had a garden, where they raised their table vegetables.

When they needed some meat to eat, his father killed a calf, three or four weeks old. The meat was butchered, and then kept with big chunks of ice. A whole calf lasted three or four weeks.

One of the characteristics of Leo's hometown was that the majority of the people were named Bertagnolli. His name and his wife's maiden name were Bertagnolli, but there was no family relation. His father's name and his mother's maiden name were also Bertagnolli. Because of so many people from that part of Europe emmigrated to Superior, the town had many Bertagnolli names, but few people were family related.

From 1915 to 1918, Leo Bertagnolli belonged to the Army of Austria; and he served as a soldier in the Red Cross. He treated the injured during the First World War.

During 1920, Leo saved money to come to the United States. He arrived in Superior, Wyoming in December 1920. His plans were to save money here and send a ticket to his bride back in Tret. Anna Bertagnolli arrived in Rock Springs in November 1921; and on December 14th, they got married. They celebrated their wedding in the catholic church Our Lady of Sorrows. Then, it was a vey small wooden church.

Leo and Anna had two children: Arthur and Frita Bertagnolli. Leo tells me of an ironic incident. When his son Arthur was in the Air Force during the Second World War, he was assigned to go to Europe and bomb down the town of Tret.

Leo and his brother Joe worked in the Union Mercantile Store. This store

was known as the company store, where their miners purchased all their needs. The miners were allowed to pay with credit, or their debts were assessed from their paychecks.

Leo worked for the store for twelve years and earned \$ 125,00 a month. At the end of the twelve years, he was earning \$ 175,00 a month. They were the highest wages Leo earned in the United States.

He quit his job to run his own business.

In 1925, Leo built a house through a contractor. The house was stone built with two bedrooms. It costed him \$ 2,500,00. He lived in it for seventeen years.

In 1932, he bought a store building and a house next door in the business district of South Superior. He sold groceries and baking goods. Leo and his wife Anna worked to late hours of the night baking bread, doughnuts, pies, cakes, and rolls. The baking oven was installed in the basement of the store; and it used wood and coal for fuel. He paid \$ 15,00 a month for coal.

The baking oven was also the heating source for the store and the home upstairs. His home had heating units that carried water. The water was carried through pipes that surrounded the oven downstairs. The store was heated simply by heat lifting from downstairs.

Leo loaded his wagon car with bread and delivered them to four hundred houses every morning.

At that time, there were two thousand miners living in Superior. There were fifty seven different nationalities in town. "Every town in Europe lived here", Leo says. "There were also of Japanese, Chinese, German, Irish, Russian, and more. They had their nationality groups and clubs; but they also interchanged relations with other groups. There were no racial con-

flicts between groups".

There were five different italian clubs, and Leo belonged to all of them. One of the clubs was Andrea Hoffer Lodge, in which he was a member for forty years. This was an Associate Benefit Lodge. The members payed an average of \$ 3,00 a month; and the quota contributed to pay to ill members. There were three hundred members in the lodge at the beginning; and the club closed with twenty five members.

Other clubs Leo belonged to, were the Fratelance (brotherhood), Cilio-pelica, and Cachotenica. There were about two hundred italians living in Superior then.

Leo served as councilman for the town for twelve years, from 1948 to 1960, and he was temporary mayor of the town.

On sundays, Leo spent his pastime with relatives. They chatted about business and family affairs, while his wife made a big dinner. Leo played the phonograph, or played violin or mandolin for entertaintment.

Leo visited other places in the United States like San Francisco, Omaha, New York and has been in Utah, Nevada, and Colorado.

Leo is very convinced his home is Superior, and he will never want to leave this town.

Leo's wife Anna died in 1977 when she was eighty years old. He misses her very much and accepts the fact with sorrow.

Although he does not work with the same ambition he used to have, he works to take care of his active and social needs. They help him to sustain his independence.

He advises anybody to do what you have to do in life, and give it all your best.

The Union Hall

The Union Hall was built in 1921 and completed in fall 1922. The building costed around \$ 100.000,00, and it was paid by its initiators, the United Miners Workers of Superior.

The Union Hall celebrated its inauguration in December 1922; and it attracted people from all over the state. It is said that there were three thousand people attending that day.

Miners of Superior paid \$ 2,00 a month to cover the cost and maintenance of the building.

The Union Hall is a three story structure built of solid brick. The front side of the building stands on Main Street of South Superior. Its appearance has some decorative features that resemble the time when it was built.

On the highest and center front of the building, there is an emblem that has the letters U.M.W.A. (United Miners Workers of America). Long windows cover the front wall of the second floor. And a big elegant arch stands on the level floor as an entrance to the upstairs.

The building was meant to serve the community in many ways. The upstairs was a big room with a stage, and it was used for dances and union affairs.

Every saturday, the union held meetings in the mornings and dances in the evenings.

The Union meetings were very organized. If a member missed a regular meeting, he had to have a good excuse, or he was forced to pay a fine.

The dances were held in the evenings from 9:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. Terry Garcia time bands were one of the famous bands that played in the Union Hall. There was a big variety of music played. Some of the dances played were the Charleston, the big apple, pop hub, waltz, and polka.

The stage carried an organ, mandolin, and accordion, called also "Push-a-Pull".

The hall held an average of three hundred people during the dances. People dressed and behaved formally. There were occasions when a young man went home three times during the dance to change clothes. Being clean and neat was important in those days.

Labor Day, 4th. of July, and April 1st. were important celebration dates. When the Second World War ended and soldiers came back, there was money collected around town. They accumulated \$ 3,000,00, and people organized the biggest celebration that the Union Hall and town had seen.

The front side of the second floor was sub-divided into two offices. The left side was a dentist office, and the right side was used for a private office.

The left side of the first floor was designed for a hospital. Before the Union Hall was built, mine accidents had to be taken by train to Rock Springs. Sometimes, the injured miner had to wait in Superior's depo overnight before being taken by train to Rock Springs.

The Union fee for medical expenses were an average of \$ 5,00 a month, and they covered hospitalization and prescription drugs costs.

The right side of the first floor was a grocery store.

The basement was used as parking lot that held from fifteen to twenty cars. There was a fee of \$ 10,00 a month for parking space, and cars were kept overnight. The garage was used by businessman from town, and by visitors from out of town. The garage was guarded and heated, and there were mechanic services offered.

During the early 1950's, the Union Hall was remodeled. Changes were made to the hospital, and it became an out patient clinic together with a suite for doctors' offices. The basement was converted into a bowling

ally.. The reconstruction costed \$ 27.000,oo.

In 1962, the mines closed down, and the Union Hall died with the town.

In 1963, Mary Knezovich and Olga Knezovich bought the building from back taxes. The clinic had been replaced with a night club.

Olga Knezovich opened a cafe in the right side of the building where the grocery store was. Olga and Mary did not make much money, so they only kept the cafe open on sundays to attract people from out of town. They also had dances with an old western atmosphere.

Because of lack of money to do things that were needed, they had to cancel all services operated in the building.

Since the building was abandoned, the Union Hall has been deteriorating. After twenty years of desertion, the structure still stands. Studies have been made recently by state officials; and it is considered the possibility of reconstruction. The operation has to be done soon.

There is hope the Union Hall can be opened again, and with it, the town can wake up from desolation.

An errogant building can make a town to prosper.

Through the Union Hall, we can see a new future for Superior, and maybe for other neighbor towns.

Diversions will replace viciousness. Integration will replace Isolation.

MARY KNEZOVICH

SIDE ONE	PG.	TRACK#	PHRASE
	3	101	... AND A BOARDINGHOUSE
	3	108	THEN I HAD, ... I USED TO GO
	4	130	RUNNING THE CHURCH...
	4	145	DID YOU HAVE A ... BAND
	8	283	THEY HAD A ... IN THERE
	9	320	MARY - MUFFLED - MUMBLE
	10	390	... THE COAL, BECAUSE
(2 HRS.)			
SIDE TWO	14	61	PEOPLE HAVE ... ANYTHING LIKE THAT
	19	284	DID ... FEEL LIKE
	19	295	WAS THE ... KID
(2 1/2 HRS)	19	209	YOUNG ... BOY