

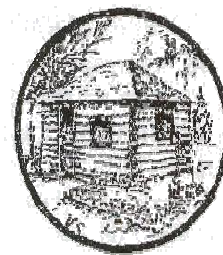


## UTE PASS HISTORICAL SOCIETY & Pikes Peak Museum

P. O. Box 6875 / 231 East Henrietta Avenue

Woodland Park, CO 80866

(719) 686-7512 • [uphs@peakinter.net](mailto:uphs@peakinter.net)



### James Pierson Beckwourth

Mountain Man, Fur Trader, Pioneer

1798 to 1866

By Judy Perkins



BECKWOURTH AS AN INDIAN WARRIOR.

Illustration from the first edition of his life story,  
as told to Thomas D. Bonner in 1856

*Artist Unknown*

James Beckwourth was an African American born into slavery in Virginia in 1798. His father was Sir Jennings Beckwith, a descendant of Irish and English nobility, by whom his mother was enslaved. He was said to be the third of her thirteen children. He changed the spelling of his name in later years.

Although Sir Beckwith reared the boy as his own son, he legally held him as master until releasing him from slavery by deed of emancipation. While Beckwourth was still a teenager, the family moved to St. Louis, Missouri, which at that time was the limit of American civilization.

James Pierson Beckwourth was the only African-American pioneer known to record his exploits in the early days of the western frontier. He dictated his autobiography to Thomas D. Bonner from 1854 to 1855. *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth, Mountaineer, Scout, and Pioneer, and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians* was published by Harper and Brothers in 1856. Because of Beckwourth's reputation as an exaggerator and storyteller, his role in American history was often dismissed by historians of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They originally considered the book little more than campfire lore. It has since been reassessed as a valuable source of social history, although not all its details are considered reliable or accurate.

In 1824, Beckwourth joined General William Ashley's fur trapping company. It is thought that the general

*Continued on page 4*

## Record Turnout for 2013 Potato Soup Supper and Program



Larry Black

This year’s Annual Potato Soup Supper and fundraising event was attended by over 100 people. Many familiar and new faces attended the supper, which included soup, salad, dessert, and a drink—all for a \$5 donation. The program was presented by long-time Woodland Park resident and UPHS volunteer, Larry Black. His lively presentation was very interesting, and had its humorous moments, too. Mr. Black included the audience with historical questions, and many were awarded with a Phantom Canyon car tour CD.

Larry’s program is based on a video turned DVD, *Pikes Peak’s Shadow*, a history of Teller County, from its early ranching and lumbering days through the discovery of gold in Cripple Creek, and the railroad era. The DVD and Phantom Canyon Driving CD are available at the UPHS Gift Shop.



### Annual Patron Luncheon will be held Sunday, January 26, 2014



One of the last runs of the Midland Terminal, 1949  
*Heltemes Photo*

The Ute Pass Historical Society Board of Directors cordially invites our current, new and renewing patrons to the Annual Patron Luncheon on Sunday, January 26, 2014 at the Ute Pass Cultural Center.

Doors open at 12:30 pm with a buffet lunch at 1 pm. A program will follow at 1:45 pm, which is open to the public.

Mel McFarland, popular local historian and author, presents *Colorado Midland: A Train Ride*.

Patrons, R.S.V.P. to 719.686.7512 by January 17th for the lunch.

Select items from the Gift Shop are available for purchase at the Luncheon; cash or check only, please!

**It's that time again...**

If you haven't already, please complete and send the enclosed 2014 Patronage Invitation form to UPHS. Be sure to check the boxes on the Application if you want to receive newsletters by e mail only, and to volunteer.

Send to: UPHS  
P.O. Box 6875  
Woodland Park, CO 80866

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**Thanks to our Amazing Volunteers!**

Larry Black \* Marilyn Blackwell \* Dee Breitenfeld  
Bill Camp \* Jack and Mary Ann Davis  
Nancy and Paul Desilets \* Jim and Claudia Eley  
Donna Finicle \* Marcia Ford  
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\* Jason Pearce \* Dale and Judy Perkins \* Jan Pettit  
Mel and Sally Riley \* Jean Rodeck  
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Marion Vance \* Nancy Weeks \* Jon Woods

**Thank you to ...**

**Our new and renewing Family and Associate Patrons of 2014**

Thomas and Bonnie Acton \* Joan Buechler  
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Nancy Brittain  
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**Special thanks to our Historical Club Patrons**

Jayson Baker/Peak Internet

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\*\*\*\*\*

***If you love history, meeting people,  
and having fun....***

***VOLUNTEER!***

*For more info, contact UPHS at  
719.686.7512  
or check the box on your  
Patronage Invitation.*

***New Exhibit Coming Soon to the  
Woodland Park Public Library***

The Ute Pass Historical Society, in conjunction with the Woodland Park Public Library, presents *Winter in Ute Pass*, featuring various forms of entertainment used by the original folk of Woodland Park and Ute Pass.



The exhibit includes vintage ice skates, snow shoes, photos, and examples of indoor fun.

The display will be in place through February, and is located on the Library's second floor, near the Colorado Room. The Woodland Park Public Library is located at 218 E. Midland. For more information, contact UPHS at 719.686.7512. Regular Gift Shop/Office hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 10 am to 3 pm.



*Continued from page 1*

hired him because of his blacksmithing skills, for which he apprenticed while living in St. Louis. In the following years, he became known as a prominent trapper and mountain man. He was a sharpshooter and was equally adept with a Bowie knife and a tomahawk. He met and worked with such well-known frontiersmen as Jim Bridger and Jedediah Smith.

Beckwourth participated in the first mountain man rendezvous at Henry's Fork on the Green River in 1825. The location of the rendezvous changed every year and became the social and business gathering for the mountain men. It was here that James got his name as a storyteller. Beckwourth relished telling heroic tales with himself as the protagonist.

Exaggerated storytelling was a valued skill at the rendezvous, and many nicknamed him the "gaudy liar," which was considered a compliment. James also looked and dressed the part: six feet tall, dark hair to his waist, ribbons, earrings, gold chains, and Crow leggings.

After talking with trappers who attended, George Frederick Ruxton wrote, "The rendezvous is one continued scene of drunkenness, gambling, brawling and fighting, as long as the money and credit of the trappers lasts." He tells of the gambling—one trapper even bet his scalp—and how a man might lose his year's work in a couple of hours. "These annual gatherings are often the scene of bloody duels, for over their cups and cards no men are more quarrelsome than your mountaineers. Rifles at twenty paces settle all differences." The rendezvous ended when the trapper had once more spent his year's earnings on diluted, overpriced whiskey, and a few items of clothing and equipment. His woman, if he had one, was outfitted with new clothing and trinkets.

Trapping in the Powder River country of Wyoming, Beckwourth began to forge a close relationship with the Crow Indians. He was welcomed into their society and learned the Crow language, customs, and way of living. Beckwourth married the daughter of a chief and may have had multiple wives. He also fathered several children. Marriages between Native Americans and fur trappers were common for the valuable alliances they provided both parties.

For the next eight to nine years, Beckwourth lived with a Crow band. He became a war chief and participated in many battles. He was very proud of his title and probably embellished his stories of heroism. Many historians and others say that "chief" was an unofficial, common title and have questioned whether this was another one of his exaggerations.

In the mid-1830s, Beckwourth left his adopted home, abandoning his families, and joined the Missouri volunteer military force as a scout. He saw action in the Seminole war in Florida, fighting under General Zachary Taylor. He left the army in 1840 and spent the next decade wandering around the West, sometimes making quick cash by stealing horses. Eventually settling near Denver, Beckwourth continued to work occasionally as a civilian scout for military parties. Beckwourth had a role in the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864, but it is not known in what capacity or how he was involved.

Not long after the Sand Creek Massacre, Beckwourth again abandoned city life and returned to the Crow tribe. The details of his death have long been disputed. One account states that "on his way back from guiding a military column to a Crow band in Montana, he complained of severe headaches and suffered nosebleeds. Beckwourth returned to the Crow village, where he died on October 29, 1866 with unstoppable nosebleeds. They then laid him to rest in Crow fashion on a tree platform." Others claim he died in Denver.

In spite of his tendency to exaggerate, many of Beckwourth's tales have been confirmed from other sources. If nothing else, he probably did witness many of the incidents he described.



James P. Beckwourth, around 1860 in Denver, Colorado



**Ute Pass Historical Society & Pikes Peak Museum  
2014 Calendar of Events**

**Special Events**

January 26	<b>Patron's Luncheon</b> – Ute Pass Cultural Center – 12:30 pm
May	<b>Columbine Elementary</b> Field Trip-3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade
July 4	Traveling Gift Shop at <b>Old Fashioned 4<sup>th</sup></b> , Memorial Park
July 4	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Woodland Park Cemetery Crawl</b>
August 2	<b>Bronc Day</b> , Green Mountain Falls
August 2 & 3	<b>Mountain Arts Festival Food Kitchen</b> , Woodland Park
October 24	<b>Potato Soup Supper</b> , Divide, 5:00 pm
November 14 & 15	Traveling Gift Shop at <b>Chipita Park Annual Arts and Crafts Fair</b> , Marcroft Hall, Chipita Park
November 22	<b>UPHS Gift Shop Open House</b> , 10 am to 3 pm

**History Park Tours**

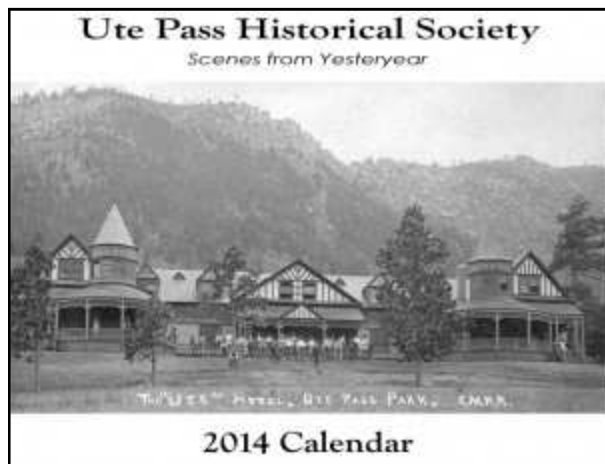
Free tours of History Park are held every **Second Saturday** from June to September  
10 am to 1 pm; 231 E. Henrietta Avenue in Woodland Park

**Woodland Park Historic Walking Tour** meets at 10:30 am

June 14	August 9
July 12	September 13

**Please note: All dates and times are tentative, and may change.**

For more information, please call us at: 719.686.7512 or check our website:  
[utepasshistoricalsociety.org](http://utepasshistoricalsociety.org).



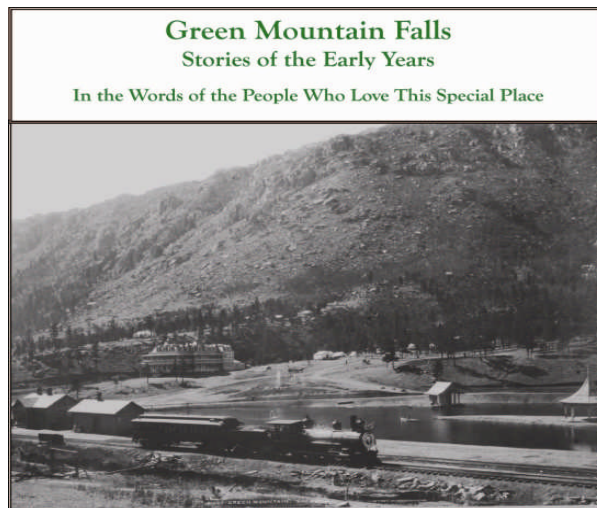
Now available on-line and in the UPHS Gift Shop!  
The Ute Pass Historical Society's 2014 Calendar.

This calendar is chock full of historical photos from our archives, which are also available for reprint orders.  
\$15 + tax in the Gift Shop, and \$15 + shipping when ordering on-line.

Don't forget-UPHS Patrons get 10% discount!

*Gift Shop hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 10 am to 3 pm*

Also available on-line and in the UPHS Gift Shop!  
Second Edition of  
*Green Mountain Falls Stories of the Early Years*  
\$20 + tax in the Gift Shop, and  
\$20 + shipping when ordering on-line



*The Gem of the Rockies*

Ute Pass Historical Society &  
Pikes Peak Museum  
P.O. Box 6875  
Woodland Park, CO 80866-6875



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**Website: [utepasshistoricalsociety.org](http://utepasshistoricalsociety.org)**

***UPHS is a 501 (C) (3) non-profit organization***

### ***THANK YOU!***

*The Ute Pass Historical Society's Board of Directors is grateful to our loyal patrons and enthusiastic volunteers. Without your generous financial contributions and dedicated volunteer service, we would not exist. Thanks to all of you for supporting our mission to preserve and share the history of the families and communities of the Ute Pass area of Colorado. It is an honor to serve you!*