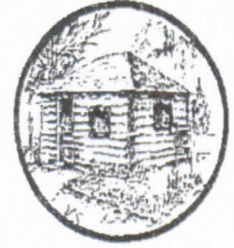




UTE PASS HISTORICAL SOCIETY & Pikes Peak Museum

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THE PIKES PEAK GRANITE COMPANY

by Steve Plutt
April 16, 2021

In August of 1952 the Pikes Peak Granite Company was established in Woodland Park, Colorado. Located on the south side of Midland Avenue at West Street, it was a very long building with tar shingled siding and had lots of windows. On its interior, it had a very high ceiling with exposed large wood beams and was a fixture in Woodland for many years. It was owned and operated by Lawrence Noga (1904-1984), who worked for over 30 years as a quarryman in the St. Cloud area of Minnesota.

Before Noga located in Woodland Park, he is said to have tramped over hundreds of thousands of acres looking for a commercial source of ruby red granite, which at the time was the kind of stone most in demand for headstones. He finally found what he wanted in Park County out towards Guffey where he described the flawless Pikes Peak Granite rock there "as good of granite as there is in the country." So that is where he quarried his headstones.



Left: The high speed cutting machine that would pull the special wire round and round, cutting the block with the pasty water and carborundum mixture.



The 20 ton block and tackle outfit that off loaded the blocks of granite.

At the quarry, workers would drill "lead" holes and "tap" holes into the rock ledges and break off large blocks of granite weighing several tons, measuring 10' long by 4' wide and thick. They would load the blocks onto trucks and then haul them to Woodland Park. On two different occasions I helped local contractor Red Woods (1927-2005) load the stone at the quarry and onto his old truck and then it was a long, slow trip back to Woodland. Once there, the rock would be off-loaded using the 95 foot tall, 20 ton derrick that was permanently located on the south side of the building. The stone was placed on a railroad like cart with tracks that led right into the building's "cutting pit".

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Once the cart and stone were inside the shop, the cutting process began. An abrasive powder called carborundum was the cutting agent and was used along with water and with downward pressure, sluiced over the top of the rock by a circular wire saw. That three stranded wire cable was 200 feet long and was twisted in opposite directions every three feet and spun at about 60 miles an hour. It circled around and around, constantly dragging the plaster-like carborundum mix through the grooves it created. Carborundum has a crystal composition like that of diamond and is almost as hard. Even so, it took quite a number of hours and revolutions to cut through these big blocks. The end result was thinner granite slabs that measured one foot thick by 4 feet wide by 10 feet long. Another saw with a diamond tipped blade cut the stone into smaller pieces. That 200 foot long piece of special cutting wire was replaced after every large block was cut into slabs. I can clearly remember carborundum powder hidden in every nook and cranny of the large building. I can only imagine how much of that substance went into the lungs of the workers.

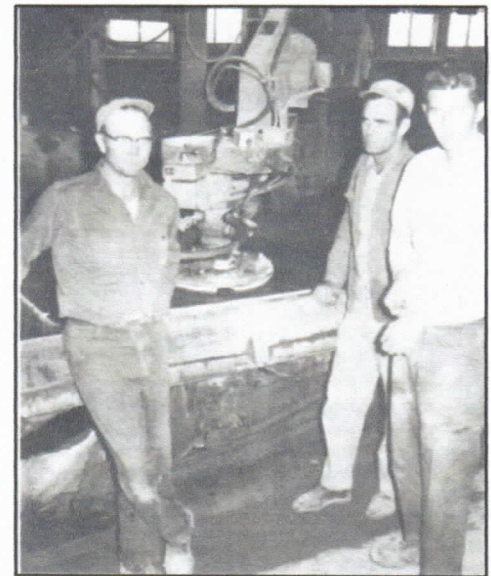
After the large blocks were cut to smaller sizes, they were moved to other areas of the shop. This Pikes Peak granite weighed just about 175 pound per cubic foot, so moving the heavy stones from station to station inside the shop was done with a large overhead trolley system mounted on steel "I Beams" and equipped with an heavy overhead winch. The winch cable stretched from there down to the floor. The trolley would move from side to side inside the shop and could also move the entire distance of the shop and extended outside the west doors to the loading area.

At those different stations, the talented men with their hammers and special chisels would spend hours working the rock into the shapes of headstones. Next in the process was the leveling and polishing. A 60 grit carborundum was sprinkled on the stone as the polishing machine with water rotated round and round as maneuvered by the workmen. As the polishing progressed, a finer 500 grit powder was used. The last thing to do was to use a tin oxide as a face powder that put the final shine on the stone.

Pikes Peak Granite headstones made in Woodland Park were shipped to the four corners of the United States and provided good jobs here and was one of the leading employers in town. I remember how cold and drafty it was in that building in the wintertime. That cold, combined with all the splashing and spraying water that was used to polish the stones, made it a very wet, cold and at times miserable job. This Woodland Park landmark was one of only two in the state of Colorado that provided polished granite stone.



After its life as the granite works, the building was An auction house. This photo gives an idea of the dimensions of the building, along with all of its windows.



On the left in front of the polishing machine is the Duke. On the right is his son Mark Williamson and behind him is Jim Morris.

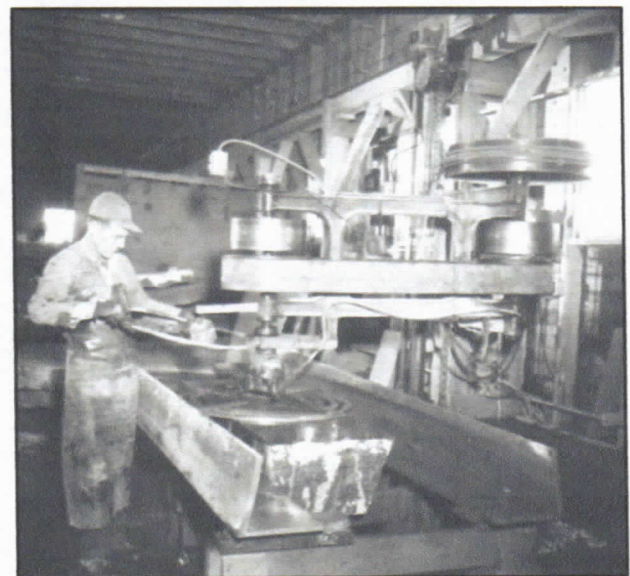
Some of us that are left in Woodland Park will remember Owen "Duke" Williamson (1917-1993). He had been in the granite business since 1935 and bought the Woodland Park shop in September of 1964. Williamson was also the last owner of the shop that actually produced memorials. Some of the locals that worked there were longtime residents with well-known names, such as Pickett, Morris, Warrick, Kabina and others. A lot of paychecks were generated from that long ago business and it put lots of food on many tables here in Woodland Park.

I helped every now and then in the shop on Saturday nights, cutting the big blocks of stone. Duke's son Mark and I would have to stay awake all night long making sure the water kept flowing or the expensive cutting wire would break. I'll always remember Duke, too. On a daily basis, he was a regular patron of the Ute Inn as most blue collar workers were back when Bert Bergstrom owned the place. But the thing I particularly remember was that he always referred to himself in the third person when he talked and it was funny listening to him. He was a good, hard working guy, as were the rest of the men who worked there.

I've sometimes imagined what that building would be today if it were still standing. Through its many windows, it had an unobstructed view of Pikes Peak. With its high open ceiling with large bare beams, I think it would have been the perfect setting for a brewery and restaurant, "The Pikes Peak Granite Company Brewery and Café".



Owner Larry Noga is standing and watching his brother Tom Noga as he is tapping a carboloid chisel putting the finishing touches on a polished headstone. Like Larry, Tom had over 30 years experience in the granite business.



This is Monte Barnes operating the polishing machine just before Christmas, 1952.

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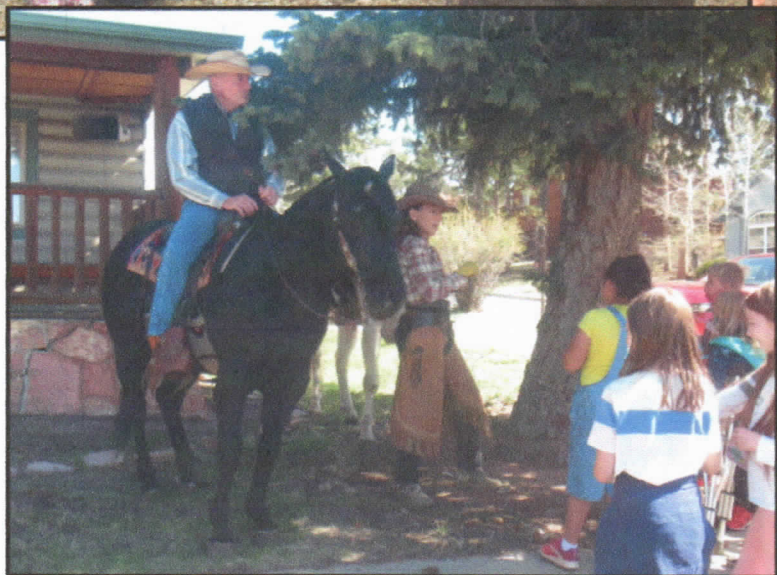
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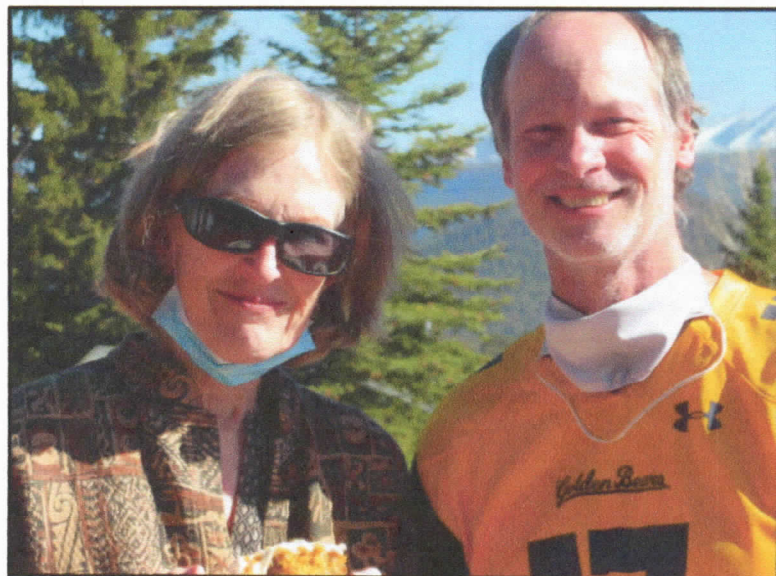
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Above: "Sheriff" Dennis Zerull

Volunteers, upper left: Jean Rodeck, Pat Hyslop, Renee Rowcliffe, Ginger Patrick, Gunnar Williams, Donna Finicle, Gerry Reffel, Maria Stepich



UPHS Says "So Long" to Long Time Volunteer Treasurer

Jon Woods, dedicated treasurer for the Ute Pass Historical Society since 2008, has stepped down from his position to pursue other volunteer opportunities.

Jon will be sorely missed by the organization, but are thankful that volunteer Sue Greene has stepped up to join the Board as treasurer.

Good luck Jon! And please-keep in touch! 5

Ute Pass Historical Society
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