

SMOKY HILL EXPRESS

Elbert County Historical Society & Museum Newsletter

SPRING 2026

IN THIS ISSUE

- 26th Annual Pioneer Fourth3
- Cake Bakers3
- Centennial Ranches Banquet3
- Gold Fever4
- Legendary Ladies Return5
- Memberships/Sponsorships2
- Museum Sponsors6
- Share the Museum4
- Who Am I2

**THE MUSEUM IS OPEN
THURSDAY THRU SUNDAY
1:00 TO 4:00PM EVERY WEEK
DURING THE SUMMER!**

UPCOMING EVENTS

Museum Host Orientation
Saturday, May 16, 9:00 am
Elbert County Museum Assembly Room

**Elbert County Museum
2026 Opening Day**
Sunday, May 24, 1:00 - 4:00 pm

Pioneer Fourth Celebration 2026
Saturday, July 4, 10:00 am - 3:00 pm
Elbert County Museum Grounds

Elbert County Centennial Banquet
Saturday, July 25, 6:00 pm
Elbert County Fairgrounds Exhibit Hall

Annual Membership Meeting 2026
Saturday, September 12, 9:00 am
Elbert County Museum Office

**DONATE NOW
THROUGH
COLORADOGIVES.ORG**



CELEBRATING AMERICA'S 250TH ANNIVERSARY

MOMENTS THAT MADE US EXHIBIT

The Elbert County Historical Society & Museum is proud to present *Moments That Made US*, a special exhibit during the America 250 commemoration that explores how generations of Americans have given meaning to the ideals set out in the Declaration of Independence.

Looking back across centuries, the exhibit highlights both challenging and celebratory times from the colonial era to more recent generations and explores five themes drawn directly from the Declaration of Independence: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness; Consent of the Governed; Created Equal; We Mutually Pledge; and Free and Independent States. The featured moments from American history inspire curiosity about the events that shaped the nation. They remind us that our story was never inevitable, we shaped it at every turn.

This retrospective display was developed through a multi-state collaboration to ensure that Americans throughout the nation would have the opportunity to meaningfully engage in the nation's 250th anniversary. It adapts the acclaimed *Moments That Made US* exhibit created by History Colorado and currently on view at the History Colorado Center in Denver into a format that allows host venues to customize it for their audiences and connect local history to the nation's story. The Elbert County Museum opens Sunday, May 24, 2026, for its thirty-third season and is open through the summer.

PRESERVING ELBERT COUNTY'S HERITAGE:

THE ELBERT COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY TURNS 70 THIS YEAR!



Join us as we celebrate seventy years of collecting treasured county artifacts, preserving family stories, and the dedicated volunteers who built a lasting legacy of local history stewardship. ECHS members have safeguarded photographs, documents, heirlooms, and memories that might otherwise have been lost. Each contribution, whether large or small, strengthens our understanding of the people and events that shaped this region. As we honor the past, we also look forward to continuing the work of protecting, sharing, and celebrating the history that defines Elbert County for generations to come.



ELBERT COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

JOE MARTELL
President

DEBBIE SCOGGIN
Secretary

PATSY NORTH
Board Member at Large

CARLA MARTELL
Past President

SARAH MALERICH
Vice President

HANK SMITH
Treasurer

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Board Member at Large

ELBERT COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

515 Comanche Street • PO Box 43
Kiowa, Colorado 80117

ElbertCountyMuseum.org

The Elbert County Museum is owned and operated by the Elbert County Historical Society, a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization.

MISSION STATEMENT

To record and maintain the history of Elbert County, Colorado from the earliest settlement.

To work for the establishment of appropriate vaults and archives for the preservation of original manuscripts, documents, photographs and artifacts which may come into the possession of the Society.

To maintain, preserve and house the above stated articles in the Elbert County Museum.

WHO AM I?

1. I had a _____ written about me?

- a) Book
- b) Movie
- c) Song

2. What was the name of my ranch?

- a) XK Ranch
- b) XOXO Ranch
- c) XYZ Ranch

3. I was a member of what organization?

- a) Knight Templar
- b) Masonic Lodge
- c) Mystic Shrine



Answers on page 5

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

Individual -\$15

Student/Senior -\$8

Family -\$20

Volunteer -Donation of six (6) hours of volunteer time or participate in two (2) functions and/or events.

SEASON SPONSORSHIPS

Museum Season Sponsorships are collected annually and expire at the end of each calendar year. Sponsorships support the general operating fund, new and permanent exhibits, development of educational initiatives and public programs, and the historic museum building and its infrastructure.

Season sponsorships are available at four different levels and are identified by icons of early Elbert County industry

LOCOMOTIVE-

Contributions of \$200 cash/merchandise or more will receive:

- acknowledgment as a Season Sponsor on all exhibit and event flyers (including Pioneer Fourth)
- recognition on signage inside the museum and at the Pioneer Fourth
- inclusion in the newsletter(s) and
- on our website



PONDEROSA PINE-

Contributions of \$100 cash/merchandise or more will receive:

- recognition on signage inside the museum
- inclusion in the newsletter(s) and
- on our website



WINDMILL-

Contributions over \$25 cash/merchandise will receive:

- recognition on signage inside the museum
- inclusion in the newsletter(s)



CULTIVATOR-

Contributions of \$250 cash or more through the **East Central Enterprise Zone**** will receive:

- acknowledgment as a Season Sponsor on all exhibit and event flyers (including Pioneer Fourth)
- recognition on signage inside the museum and at the Pioneer Fourth
- inclusion in the newsletter(s) and
- on our website



**East Central Enterprise Zone

By making a \$250 or more cash donation, **contributors receive 25% of that amount as a credit against their state tax liability (i.e.: \$250 donation = \$62.50 credit).** The contribution also may be itemized on their federal tax return.

For additional details on the different levels of **membership** or **sponsorship**, forms can be picked up at the museum's visitors desk or printed off our website at ElbertCountyMuseum.org.

MUSEUM HOST ORIENTATION

Saturday, May 16, 9:00 am
Elbert County Museum Assembly Room

If you have been a museum volunteer in the past, or would like to become one, or just curious about what is involved, please join us! During orientation, you'll learn visitor service basics, exhibit guidelines, safety procedures, and how to handle questions with accuracy and care. We'll review opening and closing routines, communication practices, and expectations for professionalism. You'll also meet other volunteers and explore exhibit areas. Our goal is to ensure you feel prepared, supported, and confident as an ambassador for the museum and its stories. Everyone is welcome!

PIONEER FOURTH PLANNING MEETING

Saturday, May 16, 10:00 am
Elbert County Museum Assembly Room

Immediately following host orientation there will be a planning meeting to discuss and plan this year's event.

CAKE BAKERS NEEDED

Calling all bakers. The Pioneer Fourth Cakewalk needs your creativity and delicious talent. Each donated cake (or other baked good) helps fuel one of the day's most beloved activities, drawing families, friends, and neighbors together. Whether you're known for classic recipes or bold new flavors, your contribution keeps the tradition alive and makes the celebration sweeter for everyone.

Cake pans can be picked up at the museum Thursday, Friday, Saturday or Sunday afternoon from 1 to 4 pm, leading up to Independence Day. Baked goods can be dropped off at the museum on July 4th, anytime between 7:30 to 10 am.

26TH ANNUAL PIONEER FOURTH CELEBRATION

Saturday, July 4 from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm
Elbert County Museum Grounds

Celebrate big at the 26th Annual Pioneer Fourth Celebration, where tradition meets excitement in a full day of family friendly fun. Enjoy live entertainment, delicious food, games for all ages, museum open house, silent auction, cakewalk, and the always popular pie auction. Each year, our community gathers to honor local history while creating new memories. Whether you're cheering, participating, or volunteering, your presence adds to the energy that makes this celebration unforgettable. Come enjoy the laughter, music, and shared pride that make the Pioneer Fourth a highlight of summer.

Entries for the homemade pie baking contest are welcomed and encouraged, with a \$50 first place prize for adults (21 and older) and \$25 first place prize for kids (20 and younger). Pies must be entered by 11:30 am (no cream pies please). Judging starts at noon and the auction follows at 1 pm with the proceeds going to the museum. For complete pie contest guidelines visit: ElbertCountyMuseum.org/pioneer-fourth.

CENTENNIAL FARMS & RANCHES BANQUET

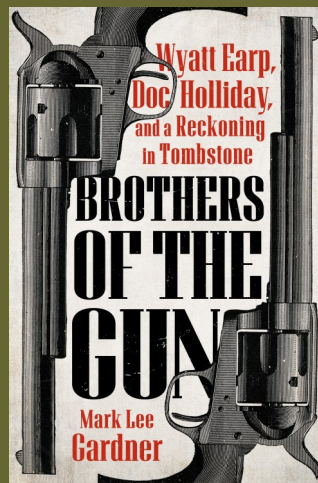
Saturday, July 25, 6:00 pm
Elbert County Fairgrounds Exhibit Hall

Spring has sprung and that means summer is just around the corner! Some say the best days of summer are those spent at the annual Elbert County Fair! This year the Elbert County Fair and Elbert County Historical Society in partnership with the Elbert County Fair Foundation are excited to announce the third annual *Centennial Farms & Ranches Banquet*, an evening honoring our Western Heritage.

This special evening will celebrate the three newest Elbert County family farms and ranches to have been designated through History Colorado's Centennial Farm & Ranch Program and will include a delicious beef entrée dinner and program that is sure to entertain, as well as educate. Doors open at 6:00 PM and dinner served at 6:30 PM by Elbert County 4-H program members.



ABOVE: MARK LEE GARDNER
(BILL PATTERSON, PHOTOGRAPHER)
BELOW: MARK'S LATEST BOOK



The evening will feature **Mark Lee Gardner**, a dynamic musician, acclaimed author, and passionate historian, who brings the American West to life. Blending rich storytelling with authentic musical tradition, he captivates audiences through his award-winning books, compelling performances, and deep expertise in frontier history. Discover the West through his unforgettable voice. Mark's most recent book *Brothers of the Gun: Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, and the Reckoning in Tombstone*, a dual biography on Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday, as well as his other books will be available for purchase.

This "must not miss" event is open to the public with pre-purchased tickets, and anyone who would like to celebrate the contributions of Elbert County's historic farming and ranching families is invited to attend. Plan to make an evening out of it and get your tickets today before they are gone. *Tickets are limited and will not be*

available at the door.

For more information or to purchase tickets, visit www.ElbertCountyFair.com.

GOLD FEVER

An event that occurred in 1858 that changed the face of what would become the State of Colorado, the discovery of GOLD. It was reported to be everywhere and was available free to pick up. Many people, when they heard these reports, became infected with “Gold Fever.” In 1859 a mad rush of people started with tens of thousands of people trying to get to the gold fields as fast as possible.

Three routes were available for the trip to the gold fields. A northern route using the existing Oregon-California-Mormon Trail along the Platte River from Omaha to the junction of the North Platte and South Platte Rivers near North Platte, Nebraska where they followed the South Platte River to the newly formed communities of Auraria and Denver City at the confluence of Cherry Creek and the South Platte River. The majority of the gold rushers used this route.

The southern route traveled up the Arkansas River along the Santa Fe Trail from Saint Joseph, Missouri to a point east of Pueblo then turned north up the Cherokee Trail along the Front Range to Auraria and Denver City.

The third route was the Smoky Hill Trail, which was a new stage road created as the shortest and most direct route to the gold fields. While the Smoky Hill Trail was about 120 miles shorter than the northern route, it was also the most difficult to negotiate. The trail started in Kansas and followed the Smoky Hill River into what is now eastern Colorado. When the water in the Smoky Hill River ran out, the trail started cutting across drainages as it headed to Denver City. The final leg of the trail passed through present-day Elbert County and was the most difficult part of the trip due to the lack of water, firewood, and game, and of course the Colorado weather. Because of the hardships encountered along this “Middle Branch” of the Smoky Hill Trail, it was also called the “Starvation Branch.”

Regardless of the route taken, several tens of thousands traveled to Colorado in 1859 to 1861 to try their luck at getting rich, most in the gold fields but others as merchants. According to the published results of the 1860 US Census the population of Denver and the mining areas northwest and west of Denver City to the South Park area to be 34,277 people of which 32,691 were male and 1,586 were female. Also, 2,666 of the total residents were reported to be from foreign countries. Denver’s population was 4,140 males and 609 females. The Central City and surrounding area had 4,364 men and 582 women. The Clear Creek including Idaho Springs to Georgetown was 5,888 males with 78 females. And the South Park area 11,506 men and 104 women. The occupation with the most individuals reported in the census was “Miners” at 22,086. The next three occupations with the most people were “Carpenters” at 542, “Teamsters” at 437 and “Traders” at 435. No one knows how many miners were out prospecting in some remote area and missed being counted in the census.

When gold was discovered in the Platte River near Auraria there were only a handful of people in the area and maybe a couple of trappers. From the time the “Pikes Peak or Bust Gold Rush” started in the spring of 1859 to June 1, 1860, when the 1860 Census was taken, over 35,000 people traveled on the three routes to the gold fields drastically changing the area forever. Lifestyles changed from the nomadic of the Indian and the trappers to the establishments of towns and cities. Piles of tailings began to appear on the hillsides where miners were digging for gold, and the clear water of the streams became muddy as miners pan for gold. Conflict with the native Indians began to increase as wagon after wagon traverse the prairie carrying miners or the supplies for the merchants that were establishing stores in quickly built stores or in tents. A dozen years after gold was discovered the railroads entered the state from the north and east in 1870. Settlers were beginning to farm and ranch on the plains, encroaching even more into Indian lands. The quietness and peacefulness of the preceding centuries was gone forever; being replaced by the change of progress.



EXPLORE THE MUSEUM GIFT SHOP

The museum gift shop invites visitors to explore a charming mix of treasures. Shelves feature a wide variety of local and regional history books that bring the area’s stories to life. Alongside them is an assortment of old-time toys and classic puzzles, offering nostalgic hands-on fun for all ages and interests.

SHARE THE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE

Sharing the museum with others helps keep local history vibrant and meaningful. When you invite friends, family, or neighbors to visit, you open the door for them to discover exhibits, explore stories, and connect with the past in memorable ways. Each shared visit strengthens community pride, sparks curiosity, and supports the museum’s mission to preserve local heritage. By encouraging others to experience the museum, you help ensure these histories continue to be celebrated, understood, and passed on to future generations.

Who am I?

Continued from page 2

Answers: a) Book; a) XK Ranch; a, b and c) Knight Templar, Masonic Lodge and Mystic Shrine

Charles Edmund Kuhn was the third son of Joseph J. and Jane R. (McCabe) Kuhn, born November 16, 1836, in East Berlin, Adams County, Pennsylvania, about twelve miles from Gettysburg. Charles' father was a drummer boy in the War of 1812, and during the Civil War a colonel of the state militia.



Charles received his education in the public schools of his native state and still further supplemented it by a course in Calvert College, Carroll County, Maryland, finishing at the age of nineteen. He then went to Mexico, where he and a brother bought horses, selling them in Missouri. After that he was engaged in driving cattle across the plains until 1872, when he came from Missouri with a yoke of oxen, some cattle and horses, and took up his residence in Elbert County. Here he established one of the largest ranches in this part of the state, the XK Ranch at Kuhn's Crossing, covering an area of ten square miles. His land was devoted principally to grazing and he ran 500 head of cattle but specialized in raising horses, keeping 250 head.

In 1862 Mr. Kuhn married Miss Jennie Myers, a native of his own county in Pennsylvania. Charles and Jennie had one daughter, Cora, who died at the age of 33 in 1898.

Charles was elected County Treasurer on the Democratic ticket, and was a member of the Masonic Lodge, a Knight Templar and member of the Mystic Shrine.

The Kuhn's Crossing Post Office was established on the XK Ranch in April 10, 1879, with Mr. Kuhn being named the first postmaster. The post office closed January 31, 1920, when service was discontinued and mail directed through Simla.

Charles and Jennie sold the ranch to Bartlett and Clarice Richards in 1900 and moved to Denver due to Jennie's poor health. Mr. Kuhn died on November 23, 1909; Mrs. Kuhn passed away on March 31, 1921. Burial at Fairmount Cemetery in Denver.

The ranch is described in Mrs. Clarice Richard's book, *The Tenderfoot Bride*. Charles Kuhn's true character is sadly distorted by the author, declared Lem Gammon and Perry Davis. He was no such villain as the woman depicted. William Reilly, who was in the general merchandise business in Kiowa for many years said that Mr. Kuhn was one of the best county treasurers the county ever had.

*Portrait and Biographical Record of Denver and Vicinity, 1898
Elbert County Banner 1900, 1909 / Western Pioneer Days, 1974 /
JCM, 2021*

LEGENDARY LADIES RETURN TO KIOWA WITH SIX REMARKABLE WOMEN OF THE WEST

On Saturday, March 7, 2026, the Elbert County Historical Society welcomed around 100 guests to the Fellowship Hall of Kiowa Creek Community Church for another memorable afternoon with the Legendary Ladies.

Founded in 1992, the Legendary Ladies bring the stories of dozens of the West's most extraordinary women to life through dramatic, research-based performances. This year's program featured six women who challenged expectations, overcame hardship, and forged extraordinary lives in the American West despite the limitations placed upon them.

The afternoon featured Olga Little, a German immigrant who hauled supplies by burro to remote mining camps near Durango and became known for her grit and determination in Colorado's high country; Elizabeth "Baby Doe" Tabor, whose rise and fall mirrored Colorado's silver boom and bust and whose life became one of the state's most enduring, albeit scandalous, legends; and Katherine "Rattlesnake Kate" Slaughterback, who famously killed 140 rattlesnakes while protecting her son near Hudson, Colorado, later turning the story into legend with a dress made from their skins.

Guests also met Bertha Spears, a Harvey Girl who found independence and opportunity working along the Santa Fe Railroad in Pueblo during the Great Depression; Mary Rippon, the University of Colorado's first female professor and a pioneering academic whose professional success and closely guarded private life, including a secret marriage and daughter, made her one of Colorado's most fascinating women; and Nellie Tayloe Ross, who became the first woman elected governor in the United States when she was elected governor of Wyoming in 1925 before later serving as the first female director of the U.S. Mint.

Each performance offered a vivid portrait of women who defied stereotypes and forged new paths in education, politics, labor, and frontier life. Their stories of grit, resilience, and determination continue to resonate today.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Legendary Ladies, Kiowa Creek Community Church, and all who attended for making this another memorable afternoon of history and community. Events like this help preserve and celebrate the remarkable women who helped shape Colorado and the American West.



"RATTLESNAKE KATE"



ELBERT COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

PO Box 43 • KIOWA, COLORADO 80117

ELBERT COUNTY MUSEUM SPONSORS

While the museum receives funds through monetary donations given at the museum and with annual historical society memberships; Season Sponsorships and the Pioneer Fourth celebration are the main areas of income which allow the Elbert County Historical Society to develop exhibits and educational opportunities and to improve and maintain the museum building.

Thank you for your commitment to the educational and historical importance of the Elbert County Museum!

LOCOMOTIVE

A Cowgirl's Heart
Boutique & Gallery
Anonymous Donor
Carol Anderson
Bino's Pizza
Laurel Brown
Mark & Lynn Conroe
CORE Electric Cooperative
Douglas County Septic
Ben & Laurie Duke
Elizabeth Locker Plant
Farmers State Bank -Kiowa
Front Range Kubota
Gigi's Pet
Grooming & Supplies
Bob & Eileen Gresham
High Plains Food Store
High Prairie Survey Co.
Lucy Hoffhines
Pat Huddleston
IC Threads, Inc.
JR's Village Repair
Kiowa Car Wash
Kiowa Outdoor Adventures
Legacy Plow & Trailer
Jeff & Connie Lehman
Lifetime Properties Inc.
Lowe's -Castle Rock

(LOCOMOTIVE CONT.)

Jim & Carla Martell
Tom & Marge Mottinger
Mountain View
Electric Assn (MVEA)
Napa -Elizabeth
Napa -Castle Rock
Patty Ann's Café
Tom Peterson
Prism Builds, LLC
Tom & Debbie Scoggin
Sun Valley
Contractors, LLC
Timberline
Family Dentistry, LLC
Town of Elizabeth
-Historic Advisory Board
Town of Kiowa
True Value -Elizabeth
John & Alanna Woner

PONDEROSA PINE

360 Diesel & Auto Repair
Bender Menders
Mark Easton
Elizabeth Auto Repair
Gayle & John Gardner
Hamacher Well Works, Inc.
Tammy Hart

(PONDEROSA CONT.)

Hertneky Farms, LLC
HOO Motors
Vikki Johnson
Lowe's - Parker
Diane McMahan
-Medicare Enthusiast
Murdoch's Ranch &
Home Supply -Parker
Patsy & Jason North
Parker Port-A-Potty
Rock Bottom Propane
Cissy Simms
Betty Taylor
Texas Roadhouse -Parker
The Prickly Pear
William Thomas
Walmart -Elizabeth
Mindy Webb

WINDMILL

1897 House "The Nest"
Adriana's
Mexican Restaurant
Barr Bear Country Cuts
Tammy Bentrott
Brews & Blooms
Carriage Shoppes Vendors
Sarah Coignard
Dusty Plains
Veterinary Service
Freddy's -Castle Rock
Betty Haulman
Home Depot -Castle Rock
Home Depot -Parker
Innovative Eyecare
Integrated
Electrical Contractors
KW Home Accents
-Karin Royston
Lisa & Dennis Lawrence

(WINDMILL CONT.)

Mountain Man Fruit &
Nut Co. -Elizabeth
Murdoch's Ranch & Home
Supply -Castle Rock
Mark Oeser
Outback Liquor
Randy's
Antiques and Art, LLC
Running Creek
Chapter DAR
Wayne Russert
Sprouts Farmers Market
-Castle Rock
Sprouts Farmers Market
-Parker
Taco Bell -Elizabeth

CULTIVATOR

Advanced Quality
Auto Repair
Catalina's Diner
David & Linda Ehmann
Glaser Gas &
Equipment Co. -Kiowa
Katee & Rick Kolm
JC Martell
Raylene Owen
Smith Ranches
Unbridled Contractors, LLC