“ONE JUST CAN’T FORGET!”:

WILDLAND FIRE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN THE COLORADO FRONT RANGE

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ABSTRACT:

The town of Gold Hill, Colorado has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1989. This designation is based on the town's built historical resources, which are altogether excellent examples of the communities that sprang up around Colorado's precious metal mining industries in the mid-nineteenth century. In 2010, the town was nearly destroyed by the Fourmile Canyon Fire. This thesis investigates the reactions to that fire in the context of the community's sense of history. It argues that wildland fire is a long-ignored historical actor, influencing the town's physical appearance and binding the community together against a common foe, therefore strengthening the community and reinforcing its ties to local history. Furthermore, it analyzes the main modes of public history practice and recommends ways to incorporate wildland fire into those practices.

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CHAPTER I

"THE FIRE"

I had heard of "The Fire" all through my childhood. It was incorporated into stories of Gold Hill in passing, as in, "And then, of course there was 'The Fire,' which nearly wiped out the town." Any time someone relayed the town's history, they used this phrase. Children in the two-room schoolhouse, visitors to the small museum, or friends sitting in the the living room of one of the town's log cabins heard about "The Fire." It referenced an event that took place over a century ago, a wildland fire that never even touched the town proper, but was an indelible piece of the Gold Hill narrative. Then, 105 years and 10 months later, the phrase changed over the course of a few hours, and suddenly referenced something modern and immediate.

Up until 10 a.m. on September 6, 2010, "The Fire" alluded to a wildland fire in 1894. It had come from the northwest and swept up the hillside from Left Hand Canyon, taking out ranches and livestock, and licking the edges of Gold Hill before the weather turned and it was blown back from the town and then dampened by snowfall. But on Labor Day 2010, the forgotten embers in a backyard fire pit ignited what became the Fourmile Canyon Fire, at the time the most destructive fire in Colorado history. It ultimately burned 169 homes and over 6,400 acres and required over 10 days to contain. It would profoundly affect the lives of everyone in the vicinity, especially the mountain communities. Within a day, "The Fire" no longer existed in history; it became a part of everyone's present.

During the summer of 2010, the Maria Rogers Oral History Program, which collects interviews about the city and county of Boulder on behalf of the Boulder Public Library,

conducted a series of oral histories with members of the Gold Hill community in an attempt to understand their sense of history. With David Glassberg's 2001 book, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life*,[1] on my mind, I was eager to explore how individuals who lived in a National Register Historic District felt about their home. I wanted to know how they interpreted their identity in such a rich historical environment, and whether they felt some deeper connection to the past than those of us who lived in cities or suburban sprawl, where history wasn't so overt or threatened.

For the whole day of September 6th, I thought that my project was finished, along with the town. As the smoke plume grew larger over the foothills and the pleas and updates on Facebook grew to a fever pitch, I was convinced that Gold Hill was gone. I resigned myself to using the information that I had gathered to eulogize an irreplaceable resource. And then it was announced on The Gold Hill Inn's Facebook page: "We made it through the night, our hearts are with our friends and family member that have lost thier homes [sic]."[2] Relief was an uneasy feeling in the face of the ever-burning fire, which went on to destroy over 77 more buildings.

In the wake of the Fourmile Canyon Fire, I attempted to continue my research as planned. But it was impossible to talk about Gold Hill without "The Fire." And with the excitement of it all, I found myself attracted to fire as a subject. The people I interviewed remembered the Fourmile Canyon Fire with such clarity, energy, and emotion that shying away from the subject never crossed my mind. More and more, I found connections between wildland fire and the sense of history that I had been researching initially. It seemed that the fire connected the present to the past in ways that buildings, mine shafts, or dirt roads could not.

This thesis delves into the relationship between wildland fire and one town's sense of history. With Gold Hill at the core, it views fire as a historical actor, shaping a town and its

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[1] David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 7.

[2] Gold Hill Inn, https://www.facebook.com/pages/Gold-Hill-Inn/56840454789?fref=ts, September 7, 2010. Accessed October 29, 2012.

history. Taking cues from William Cronon and Andrew Isenburg, and especially from the prolific historian of fire, Stephen Pyne, it argues that when historians isolate human history from natural history, they are unable to grasp a full-bodied understanding of the past. Taking a step into the practice of history, it urges public historians to expand their understanding of history to include the environmental, as well as human, actors. Additionally, preservationists must question their base assumptions about historic resources. In a town whose sense of history is intrinsically connected to a physical threat, how does a historian protect the resources from the very threat that helps define them? And what is the best way to incorporate wildland fire history into the town's public history practices?

Fig. 1: Map of Gold Hill, 2009. *(Courtesy Google Maps)*

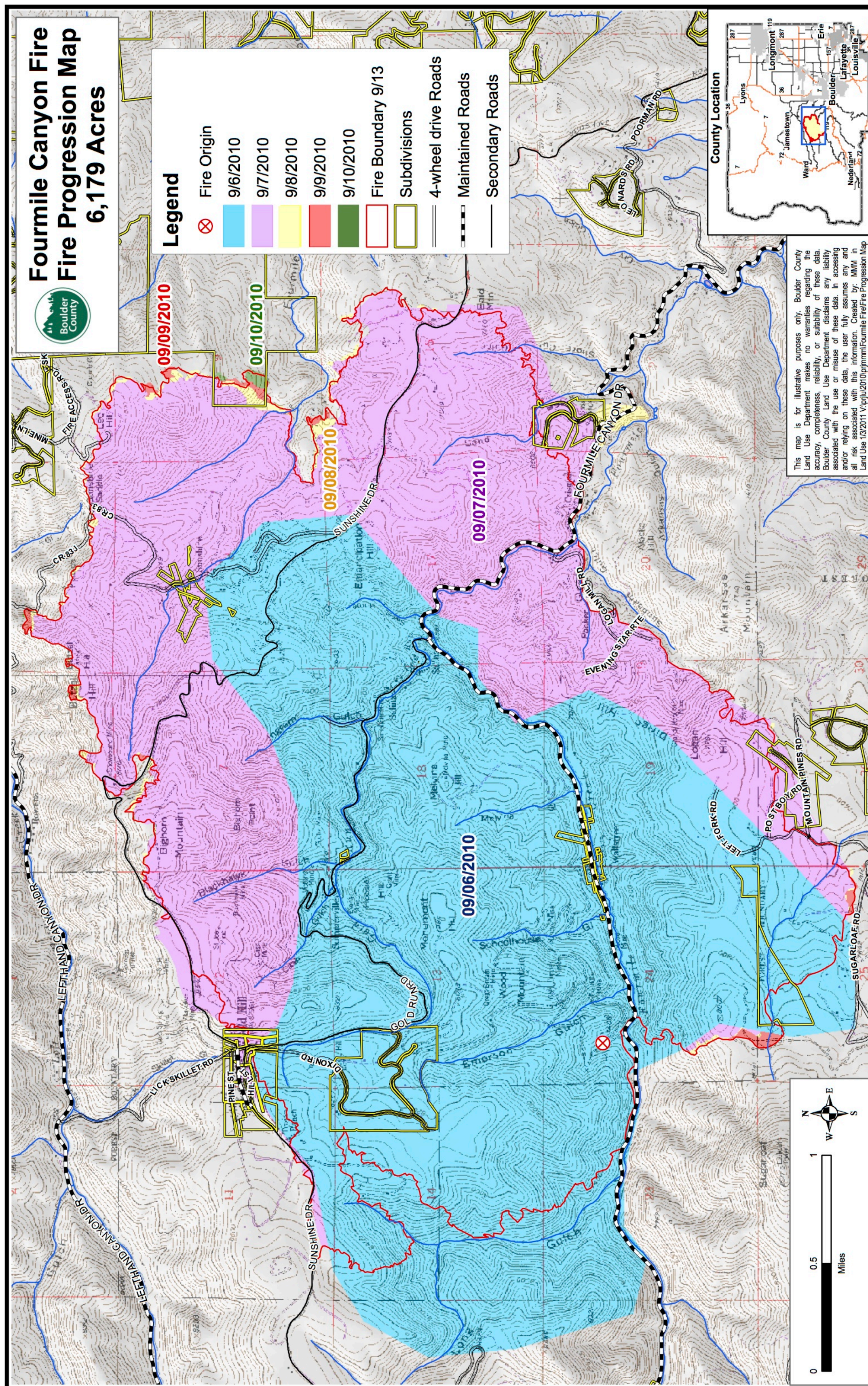

Fig. 2: Progression Map of the
Fourmile Canyon Fire, 2010.
(Courtesy Boulder County, Colorado)

CHAPTER II

FIRE IN THE MOUNTAINS

"FIRE IN THE MOUNTAINS," read the headline in the *Boulder Daily Camera* on Thursday, November 15, 1894. "In a whirlwind, Live Stock, Ranches and Forests are swept Away. Gold Hill Threatened. And a Conflict of Reports that Suggests Untold Misery and Devastation – Many Horses and Cattle Perish and Destruction Hovers Over the Homes of Hundreds of Families in Boulder County."[1] Later that day, the *Leadville Daily and Evening Chronicle* published an even more inflammatory—and false—headline, "Gold Camp Wiped Out. Forest Fires Near Boulder Sweeping Over Gold Hill and Other Towns. Men Flee for their Lives. A terrible Conflagration that has Destroyed Valuable Mining Property and Threatens the Town."[2]

A few days earlier, in the foothills to the west of Boulder, a group of campers passed through Lefthand Canyon, where they built a fire in a bog. The fire was was not put out properly, and wind ignited its embers in the early hours of Wednesday, November 14. The fire traveled up the steep ravines on the south side of the canyon, toward the ranches and mining shafts that populated the ridge above. Journalists at the *Daily Camera* could only grasp for information as the smoke billowed ominously over the mountains and news of the conflagration trickled into town with the few refugees.

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[1] Anonymous, "Fire in the Mountains," *Boulder Daily Camera*, November 15, 1894.

[2] Anonymous, "Gold Camp Wiped Out," *Leadville Daily and Evening Chronicle*, November 15, 1894.

In Gold Hill, the small mining town 12 miles west of the Boulder city limits, the residents awoke to the school bells ringing in the middle of the night. Mabel Montgomery's *Story of Gold Hill, Colorado,* describes the actions of the townspeople:

> It was at 3:00 a.m. that they went from house to house arousing the inmates. When people stirred to the call, they found the whole west one great sheet of red in the intense blackness of the night. The town danger signal has always been the ringing of the school bell. That night the teacher ran to the building and rang it long and loud. Each family quickly gathered together its most valued possessions, leaving town by whatever means possible, with horses or on foot, all congregated in the Horsfal shafthouse to await further developments.[3]

A mining community, Gold Hill was surrounded by rolling hills and deep gullies, pockmarked with mine shafts and piles of sandy tailings. Though the shaft house itself was made of wood, the area around it was cleared of timber, so it was a far safer location for residents to gather in than in one of the buildings in town. They waited in the safety of the shaft house until the morning, and once they confirmed that the fire had not yet reached the town, they returned to their homes. From there, "after having good breakfasts, the men went out to fight the fire," while the women and children "busied themselves packing up their possessions, some carrying what they could to the old mining tunnels, others burying them in the ground in the gulch. . . or in garden spots."[4] With what seems like delight in the drama of it all, Montgomery flourished: "What was buried? Everything —even a piano, at least one organ, books, furniture—everything. One man in the stress emptied the coal oil out of his large cans and buried the cans."[5]

According to a *Daily Camera* article from November 17th, the fight against the fire was short lived. By 4 p.m. that day, "the citizens gave up and the town was left to the flames."[6] But as the townsfolk abandoned their properties, the weather took a turn. The wind changed, pushing the

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[3] Mabel Montgomery, *A Story of Gold Hill* (Boulder, CO: The Book Lode, 1930), 28-30.

[4] *Ibid.,*28-30.

[5] *Ibid.,* 28-30.

[6] Anonymous, "Story of the Fire," *Boulder Daily Camera,* Nov 17, 1894.

flames away from the town. This was followed by a snowstorm that quelled the forest fire for good.

By Friday, an investigation into the cause and the damage was under way. The assessor, Fred P. Johnson, confirmed that campers were the source of ignition, and conservatively estimated the loss to be $200,000.[7] A number of families to the northwest of Gold Hill lost their homes, barns, and livestock. Yet the only human casualties were Fred Ehler, a rancher whose barn roof collapsed on him, and his wife who pulled him from the building and dragged him to a small lake, burning herself in the process.[8] The town of Gold Hill—Dr. Vaughn's saloon, The Billiard Hall and Sample Room, the interdenominational church, and the Grand Mountain Hotel—all survived, as did its many two-room shotgun log cabins and few barns. But it took a number of days before the citizens were able to pry the extent of their belongings from the frozen earth.

This was not the first fire to threaten the small mining community. Nor was it the last, nor even the most impressive in size or destruction. But this fire, like the others, was integral to the history of the town. Gold Hill's built and cultural history was shaped by fire, just as it was shaped by the geography of its high mountain locale, the ore deposits in its hills, the theories of town planning brought west by white settlers, and the individuals who contributed to its community. Wildland fire was a pervasive and perplexing threat to the town, which grew increasingly bonded to its history as it struggled to navigate its relationship with the element.

Mining District No. 1

First iterated by Amos Bixby in an interview with Captain Thomas A. Aikins in the *Boulder County News* in 1873, Gold Hill can trace its founding to 1858, when Aikins, a Missouri farmer, heard rumors that gold had been found in the areas of Auraria and Cherry Creek, Colorado. He came west with an emigrant train headed for Pikes Peak, and then broke off from the convoy and

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[7] Anonymous, "Story of the Fire."

[8] Blanch Hastings and Elmer Swallow, "The Gold Hill Forest Fire of 1894," Gold Hill Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado, Box 1, Fol. 2, 1.

brought a party of men to Boulder Valley, where they camped at the mouth of Boulder Canyon in a place they named "Red Rock" in October 1858. The men spent some time in the company of the Southern Arapahoe, during which time Chief Left Hand allegedly attempted to drive the white men out, commanding, "Go away; you come to kill our game, to burn our wood, and to destroy our grass."[9]

The winter of 1858-59 was extremely mild, which enabled the group of argonauts to investigate the region west of Red Rock. According to Bixby, on January 15, 1859, Aikens, Colonel I.S. Bull, Charles Clouser, William Huey, W.W. Jones, and David Wooley hiked west along the ridge of Sunshine Canyon and the next day struck gold at the site of what would become Gold Hill. The miners named their find "Gold Run." Today, the Gold Run Creek flows through the south side of town.

The first lode in Gold Hill was discovered in 1859 by J. D. Scott, and David Horsfal discovered another later that spring. Within a few months word spread, and men flooded into the mining camp. The camp was in Nebraska Territory, and a government had not yet been instituted for the region. In order to handle mining claims and legal proceedings, the miners established Gold Hill Mining District No. 1 on March 7, 1859. The district was the first in what would become modern Colorado. In its first year, the camp's population swelled to over 1,000 residents who pitched tents and built houses on Horsfal Flats, the area just east of the modern town. The district occupied a "nearly perfect square two miles in each direction from Scott's lode except to

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[9] Bixby, "History of Boulder County," in *History of Clear Creak and Boulder Valleys* (Chicago: O.L. Baskin & Co.), 379.
Though Bixby likely fabricated Chief Left Hand's stern greeting of the argonauts, the admonition underscores the nature of settlers' motivations. Resources—food, shelter, land, and precious metals—were the basis of the nineteenth century overland migration. Additionally, in the two decades that had passed between the Chief's alleged warning and Bixby's publication, many of these predictions had come to fruition. The influx into Boulder Valley had resulted in immense cultural, environmental, and agricultural change. Just 14 years after Aikins and his fellows arrived at Red Rock, John H. Tice, a traveller from Missouri, noted that the "country between [South Boulder Creek] and the mountains is all under cultivation, covered with farmhouses surrounded by the finest farms."The community had already built an Agricultural Fairgrounds, set aside acreage for the University of Colorado, and established infrastructure to connect it to the railroad in Denver and to the varied mining towns that dotted the Front Range. Tice's observation can be found in his book: John Tice, *Over the Plains, On the Mountains: Agriculturally, Mineralogically, and Aesthetically Described* (St. Louis, MO: Industrial Age Printing CO.), 12.

the east," where it ran into the Boulder district.[10] By October 1859, the mines—also called the "Twelve Mile Diggings"—hosted multiple mining companies. One visitor concluded that one claim's "average yield of gold. . . per day after deducting expenses is $55.50."[11] The same visitor estimated that the town held 15 houses. Within a year, these buildings, along with the rest of the camp, were leveled by the first fire to imperil Gold Hill.

Fig. 3: The Grand Mountain Hotel, constructed by Charles Wentworth. This photo was taken July 4, 1886 by J.B. Sturtevant. *(Courtesy of the Carnegie Library for Local History—Boulder, Colorado)*.

Apart from various discoveries of gold, the 1860 wildfire was the defining event in early Gold Hill history. Bixby's two-page account of the town devotes a large segment of his exposition to its occurrence:

> A memorable event on Gold Hill was the forest fire in the fall of 1860. The flames ran along in the pitchy sprigs of the green tree-tops, which, in a dry time, burn like tinder, and so rapid was the advance that the inhabitants only saved their lives, and a part of their scant effects, by diving into the prospect-holes, which the search for gold had made numerous, and useful on that occasion. There were many to witness that scene, and none of them forgot the grandeur of the advancing line of flame, or the terror inspired by its fierce onset.[12]

Bixby's account is notable for its description of the fire. With a literary flourish, he imparted a mythos to Gold Hill, one that measured the town's authenticity in the miners' "scant effects" and their quick thinking in a time of crisis. Given that the history was written just four years after

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[10] Percy Stanley Fritz, *The Mining Districts of Boulder County, Colorado* (Boulder, Colorado: University of Colorado Department of History), 38.

[11] Anonymous, "October 27, 1859," Letter, Mabel Guise Montgomery scrapbook. Boulder Historical Society, Carnegie Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado.

[12] Bixby, 426.

Colorado achieved statehood and just 20 years after the fire occurred, Bixby engraved into the annals a harrowing event that gave credibility to the town's short history.

The fire destroyed most of the tents and buildings, though a few cabins survived.[13] In the years that followed, the town site was moved west of Horsfal. In a slight valley in the high slopes, it nestled in the saddle between two canyons and two hills: Left Hand Canyon to the north, Fourmile Canyon to the south, Horsfal Hill to the east, and a gradual upslope towards Sawmill Hill to the west. With the exception of a large field leading down to Fourmile Canyon, the town was surrounded by lodgepole and ponderosa pine forest.

After the wildfire of 1860, the camp diminished in size and grew little during the following decade. Between 1861 and 1871, only six discoveries were made in the Gold Hill district.[14] Then, in 1872, miners in Gold Hill discovered tellurium, a rare metalloid, which reinvigorated the waning community. The number of discoveries increased during the next two years, peaking at forty-eight in 1874.

The prosperity of the mines catalyzed construction in the village. Charles Wentworth built the most prominent building—The Grand Mountain Hotel—in 1873 (Fig. 3). A *Rocky Mountain News* article from that year extolled the hotel's virtues: "the building is of the most substantial style, constructed of hewed logs, clapboarded outside, lathed and plastered on the interior, and furnished as well as any hotel in Colorado. . . those who visit Gold Hill may be certain of metropolitan accommodations almost at the summit of the Rocky Mountains."[15] By 1880, the town was doing well enough that Bixby wrote "[the mines] are making the place more busy and prosperous than at any previous time in its history, and must eventually lead to the

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[13] Montgomery, 11.

[14] Fritz, 284.

[15] Anonymous, "Mountains of Gold," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado) November 11, 1873.

realization of all the golden wealth the founder imagined existed there."[16] Despite the early setback from the fire, mining and tourism flourished in the 1870s.

The *Rocky Mountain News* estimated that in 1873 the town was made up of "thirty odd buildings, stores, shops and houses," and believed the population to be approximately 250.[17] Tellurium brought prosperity to and renewed interest in the hamlet. One resident later commented, "We had tellurium for breakfast, tellurium for dinner, and only for a change we would have tellurium for supper."[18] But Gold Hill's prosperity did not last long. By the end of 1876, its residents were no longer striking pay dirt at such a rapid rate. A *Colorado Banner* article from December of 1876 put it humorously: "Our merchants, our shoemaker, our landlord, all are crying, hard times. . . Four long years we have been living like the Irishman's cow, on faith and hope."[19] Two weeks later the same author was more blatant: "Tellurium was all the rage in 1873 and 1874. . . But the district soon found out that it could not live on tellurium alone, and it desired a change. It got it."[20] From the record high of forty-eight discoveries in 1874, the number declined to fifteen by 1876, then ten in 1878, and fell to seven by 1884. There was a jump in discoveries in 1887, but the town had already begun losing its trade and its inhabitants.[21]

The silver bust in the 1890s stimulated a slight tellurium boom, but the upturn in mining was short-lived. In spring 1894, a flood compounded the decline. It washed away mills, houses, and railroad lines. Then came the November wildland fire.

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[16] Bixby, 426.

[17] Anonymous, "Mountains of Gold."

[18] Sam Medary, "Gold Hill. Oldest Mining Camp in the State. First Discovery of Gold. Population and Desertion of the Place," in *The Colorado Banner* (Boulder, Colorado) December 28, 1876.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] Sam Medary, "Gold Hill. Oldest Mining Camp in the State."

[21] Sam Medary, "Gold Hill. Matters Newsy, Gossipy and Humorous," *Colorado Banner* (Boulder, Colorado) December 14, 1876.

Fire in the Front Range

Fire in the Northern Front Range of the Rocky Mountains was considered to be both an enemy and a friend, a tool and a nuisance, a spectacle and a blight. The miners and settlers who arrived in Colorado during second half of the nineteenth century built complex and at times confusing relationships with the fire ecologies they encountered. This was partly because the environment itself was complex. The lodgepole, ponderosa, and mixed conifer forest in the mountains periodically burned in fires that varied in severity depending on weather, fuel, and topography.[22] But the complicated relationship was also a product of the greater intellectual and physical struggle with fire that was—and continues to be—fought across the United States.

From the tall grass prairies to the east to the coniferous forests of the Rockies and Sierras, the shrubby plateaus in the southwest to the vast deserts in the Great Basin and Mohave, fire is indigenous to the American West. These ecosystems are not just prone to wildfire, they also depend on it. As a mechanism for degradation, fire takes on varied forms based on the fuel complex available, feeding off of biomass and reconstituting it into elements that are recycled back into the ecosystem.[23] In temperate climates such as that of North America, fire is necessary to release nutrients that are held in plant litter—the dead material like leaves, twigs, and bark that have fallen from the tree to the ground. The ecologies of the American West rely on the cycle of fire to reproduce and survive.

When explorers and settlers moved westward during the nineteenth century, they encountered fire—man-made and otherwise— throughout their journeys. In mid-August 1804, Lewis and Clark came across a fire "which threw up an immense smoke from the prairies on the N.E. side of the river, and at no great distance from camp."[24] Their Sioux interpreter informed

[22] Merrill R. Kaufmann, Thomas T. Veblen, and William H. Romme, "Historical Fire Regimes in Ponderosa Pine Forests of the Colorado Front Range, and Recommendations for Ecological Restoration and Fuels Management," (Fort Collins, Colorado: Colorado Forest Restoration Institute: Nature Conservancy: Colorado State University, 2007), 3.

[23] Stephen Pyne, *Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire* (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 35.

[24] Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, *The Journals of Lewis and Clark* (Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 17.

them that "the fire arose from some trees which had been left burning by a small party of Sioux who had passed [by that place] several days."[25] Twenty-eight years later, George Catlin described the various incarnations of prairie fires in a letter sent from Fort Leavenworth, "the extreme outpost on the Western Frontier."[26] There were those "where the grass is thin and short, [where] the fire creeps with a feeble flame, which one can easily step over," and then there were the ferocious "war, or hell of fires! where the grass is seven or eight feet high. . . and the flames are driven forward by hurricanes, which often sweep over the vast prairies of this denuded country."[27]

Of course, fires were not contained to grasses of the Great American Desert; they burned the brush and forests of the Mountain West as well. In 1874, the topographer Franklin Rhoda, a member of the Hayden Survey, wrote to the leader of his project about an immense fire that swept through southwestern Colorado:

> For the first week in this part of the country we were troubled by the smoke from several great fires. One in particular was raging down in a deep canyon as we passed along the [new highway]. The smoke extended clear across San Luis Valley. . . As we came along the smoke came out in awful volumes almost thick enough to cut. Now and then a break in the great clouds would give us a glimpse into the great furnace and reminded us muchly of the warm place that all good topographers go to when they die."[28]

A few years later, John Wesley Powell wrote that the fires were so prevalent that they outshone human-powered destruction, stating that "throughout the timber regions of all the arid lands fires annually destroy larger or smaller districts of timber, now here, now there, and this destruction is on a scale so vast that the amount taken from the lands for industrial purposes sinks by comparison into insignificance."[29]

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[25] *Ibid.*, 17.

[26] George Catlin, "Letter No. 33," *North American Indians* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1903), 19.

[27] *Ibid.,* 19.

[28] National Archives, R.G. 57, Hayden Survey, General Letters Received, Rhoda to Hayden, July 13, 1875. In Bartlett, Richard A. *Great Surveys of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), 88.

[29] John Wesley Powell, *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States* (Washington, DC., Government Printing Office, 1878), 25-26.

The fires across the American West were often started by lightning, but the majority were—and still are—anthropogenic, set alight by humans to warm, destroy, cook, clear, hunt, or even to entertain. Native Americans had long used fire for domestic, religious, and agricultural purposes. Smoke from fire could communicate across long distances, war tactics often involved fire, and of course it was used to cook food and keep warm. Setting fire to large swathes of prairie cleared tall grasses for supple, nutrient-rich new growth, which enticed herds of buffalo and deer. Setting fire to a forest allowed for an easier harvest of firewood, and many tribes set the land alight in order to implore their gods for rain.[30] Additionally, fires cleansed the forest of shrubbery and underbrush, which allowed for easier and quieter movement through it in search of prey. Native Americans were so dependent on fire that their burns would often replace forest with meadow, a trend that was only reversed with permanent settlement.[31]

As Europeans came into contact with Native Americans, they were influenced by the latter's means of controlling fire. Transients—trappers, explorers, enlisted men, and hunters—were the first of the Europeans who found that the fire techniques of the Plains tribes were well suited for their lifestyles in a historic fire regime.[32] As settlers encroached, they, too, used native practices for fire, though they utilized those of protection more often than ignition. In the onset of a fire, settlers would stamp out the flames using wet sacks. Backburning, the process of setting a fire around the area that one was attempting to protect in order to burn towards a major fire and therefore deplete the fuels before the larger conflagration could descend on a settlement, was another tool. Both had been used by plains tribes to combat the flames of wildland fire and are still used today.[33]

However, settled people were far more combative towards fires than the nomadic inhabitants, so as settlements grew larger and more agricultural, fire was excluded more and more

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[30] Pyne, 71-72.

[31] *Ibid.*, 89.

[32] *Ibid.*, 90.

[33] *Ibid.*, 91.

from its historic environments. These attempts took form in culture as well as more overt laws and penalties. Farmers preferred domesticated grasses, which are far less susceptible to burning than their predecessors, the ancient tallgrass prairies. Agriculture was based close to homesteads, rendering what might be a tame fire a threat. Additionally, European settlers brought with them a deeply rooted aesthetic of forests. Later, the federal government mandated preservation of the wilderness and its ample supplies of timber.

Across the United States, from Ohio to Texas to Oregon, settlement brought reforestation.[34] Historic prairies that had once been cyclically burned no longer experienced frequent fires that kept larger plants from growing, and the influx of trees was widely understood to be a product of fire exclusion. In 1871, John Tice, a traveller from Missouri who documented his travels west in his book *Over The Plains and On the Mountains,* commented on the new forests in Kansas:

> Where not occupied by farms, [the hills] have a dense growth of young oak, hickory, walnut, and other trees indigenous to the West. How the seeds from which they sprung got there, puzzles the citizens; for when the settlers first came these hills were covered with prairie grass with no sign of any other growth. I confess I cannot account for it, but it is an occurrence that happens everywhere; not only in Kansas, but in the West, wherever the fire is kept out of the prairies contiguous to timber, a young forest growth immediately springs up.[35]

As settlements brought forests into historically grassy areas, they changed the fire ecology of that environment, ironically making it more susceptible to a devastating conflagration.

In his epic *Fire in America*, Stephen Pyne pointed out that the effort to exclude and control fire was a product of industrial forestry, and rested primarily in the ability to control the source of fires. Because the majority of fires are started by humans, the actions to exclude fire manifested themselves in stopping or overseeing ignition. In Texas, ranchers whose stock grazed

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[34] Pyne, 96.

[35] John Tice, *Over the Plains, On the Mountains: Agriculturally, Mineralogically, and Aesthetically Described* (St. Louis, MO: Industrial Age Printing Co.), 12.

in the wide ranges of the dry plains were so susceptible to catastrophic loss that they threatened their employees with termination if ranch hands did not suppress fires that had already started.[36] In Yellowstone, the Army forbade camping outside of established campgrounds in order to concentrate the threat in specific areas.[37] Timber companies were at the forefront of fire exclusion education, and groups like the Western Forestry and Conservation Association disseminated posters, brochures, pamphlets, and other promotional material across the Pacific and Northwestern states. Boulder County's laws included "severe fines" against anyone found guilty of "firing the woods," and in 1871, fifty-one individuals were indicted for setting fires.[38]

The move towards fire exclusion was not uniform, however. Many settlers found use in fire where others saw devastation and folly. Tice's catalog of events was especially indicative of the difference in opinion. When visiting the Front Range outside of Boulder, Tice observed the aftermath of a recent conflagration:

> A few days before we passed there, a fire swept up the mountain side amongst these felled trees leaving nothing but their blackened trunks, and doing immense damage to the beautiful forest."[39]

As he approached Cardinal City, he noted that the settlement was "a hamlet of some dozen of houses, mostly built since the fire of the blackened trunks of trees, some of them covered with nothing but spruce branches."[40] Tice wrote nothing of the people of the town, or even whether Cardinal City had been leveled by the fire and afterward rebuilt. He did, however, extol the promising lodes of silver and gold there. Given his enthusiasm for the wealth of the area, it is not hard to imagine that perhaps the fire was more of a boon than a blight. The miners in the area took advantage of the building materials that the fire left behind. A photograph from that time

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[36] J. Evetts Haley, *The XIT Ranch of Texas and the Early Days of the Llano Estacado* (1929; reprint. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 170-180.

[37] Pyne, 162.

[38] Tice, 123.

[39] *Ibid.,*109.

[40] Tice, 209.

period shows a town built among tree stumps and cut timber, surrounded by a dense wall of coniferous forest (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: View of Cardinal, Colorado c. 1870-1880. (*Courtesy of the Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado)*.

Perhaps the most appalling sight for Tice was when industry and fire collided in what he considered to be egregious destruction. Using fire as their tool, miners set the forest alight in order to clear the ground of brush and enable them to see outcroppings of rock better:

> Between here and the Middle Boulder the fire was still raging as on the previous day in the tall spruce forest ..It was a sad sight to look at. Here were forests destroyed and wasted, that for several generations would have furnished ample supplies of lumber for building purposes and for fuel for smelting the ores, and all for what? Merely to clear away the fallen leaves so as to expose the naked rocks to the observation of the prospector. This wantonness has no parallel except the folly of killing the goose that laid the golden egg.[41]

In a fit, Tice pitted the conservation of America's lumber sources against the local and immediate utility of fire. Though the miners' true motivations are lost, it was at least apparent that they prioritized clearing the ground above preserving timber or personal safety. Tice, however, was horrified by the deliberate fire. His opinion was shared with the later Progressive politicians using similar logic to preserve the nation's forests through the U.S. Forest Service.

By the end of the nineteenth century, many were calling for a suppressionist policy. On August 1, 1894, an editorial appeared on the front page of the *Colorado Transcript*, decrying the inaction of the government during what was a flaming summer:

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[41] Tice, 123.

> Since June 1, 1894, forest fires in the United States have assumed gigantic proportions: not a week passes but that clouds of smoke from burning forests can be seen in our Rocky Mountain system from the north to the south boundary of Colorado. In Arizona, California, Washington, Montana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and even in Texas and Alabama, the fires rage, and millions of valuable timber is destroyed, and yet not a hand is raised by our representatives to stay this hideous conditions, this utter abandonment of the care of the pubic forests on United States lands.[42]

It came in the midst of one of the driest summers on record in America. Kansas recorded only 0.15 inches of precipitation in August, while St. Paul's rainfall fell to 84% lower than average.[43] The drought dried out the underbrush and trees across the western United States, enabling horrific fire conditions. In September, Minnesota was engulfed in one of the worst fires in its history, when the towns of Pokegama, Mission Creek, Sandstone, Miller, Partridge, and Hinckley were wiped out and over 413 people were killed.[44]

In light of destruction in the midwest, the 1894 fire in Gold Hill was minor. However, like other conflagrations, the fire, and the community's reaction to it, were products of the larger American relationship with wildland fire. Moreover, the 1894 fire significantly affected Gold Hill's understanding of its own historical narrative and influenced the town's growth.

"One Just Can't Forget!"

Recalling her escape from the 1894 fire, Blanche Hastings Swallow wrote, "Oh, that wind and smoke and flying, flaming branches was awful. Just how can one forget such a terrifying experience? One just can't forget!"[45] The trauma of the 1894 fire bonded the mountain residents of Gold Hill. It also profoundly influenced the story of town, transforming it into a survival tale that would be recounted over and over and woven into the town's character. As the 1894 fire ran

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[42] Anonymous, "Great Forest Fires," *Colorado Transcript,* August 1, 1894, 4.

[43] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Climatic Data Center, http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/drought/2011/8 accessed on October 23, 2012; Lawrence Larsen, *Wall of Flames: The Minnesota Forest Fire of 1894* (Fargo: The North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1984), 8.

[44] Larsen, 155.

[45] Swallow, Box 1, Fol. 2, 1.

towards Gold Hill, the community rallied together to help one another, find shelter, and combat the flames. After the fire, its story was repeated to underscore the miracle of the town's survival and to drum up support for the Volunteer Fire Department. Additionally, it affected the bonds between citizens and their history, forcing them to reassess their own past as well as that of the town.

In the early hours of November 14, the fire swept southeast from its ignition point in Lefthand Canyon and bore down on the ranches on Sawmill Hill. Neighbors rushed to one another's aid to warn and evacuate. Swallow recalls three men (amusingly named Hans and Nels Hanson and Hans Nelson) who "took us to their place and put saddles on the horses for us, as ours had to be left in the fire."[46] As the men helped her mother and siblings evacuate, "Papa and one of the men went ahead to wake up the Chris Nelson and the Frank Johnson families who lived about a half mile from town, and also to awaken the people in town. As soon as some of them were up, they went with papa to help awaken the rest of the folks and some one went to ring the school house bell."[47] The town was alive with commotion as people attempted to save themselves and their belongings.

In the face of the firestorm, the townspeople took advantage of the built mining history, sheltering in the mine shafts and outhouses close by. Blanche Swallow recalled that "some dug holes in their yards and buried what things they could, others put what they could in some of the tunnels on the hill side. Many of the folks went on Horsfal Hill and on to the Horsfal mine and stayed in the shaft-house to wait and see what happened."[48] Elmer Curtis Swallow, Blanche's husband, whose family also evacuated their ranch, remembered that he, his father, and his brother

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[46] Swallow, Box 1, Fol. 2, 2.

[47] *Ibid.,* 2.

[48] *Ibid.,* 2.

buried dishes, books, cooking utensils, and clothing. They then hid their furniture, bedding, and organ in a blacksmith shop connected to the Wedge mine.[49]

The community bonded in its reaction to the crisis. The townspeople coordinated to warn one another of the danger, they attempted to save their belongings by following the trend of burying their possessions or hiding them in the mines, they sheltered together, and they fought the fire together as well. Curtis Swallow relayed that his father and the men went with shovels and axes to check the "worst part," while "not to be left out, [his] brother and [he] with some of the other boys in town, got [them] some shovels and went to put out 'that there fire'."[50] The experience was incredibly important to both Swallows, who devoted six pages of their 23-page narrative to the event.[51]

The 1894 fire was rolled into the history of the town, usually with comments about the miraculousness of its survival. Interviewed in July 2010, Chellee Goudge Courtney was asked what stories she thought were most important to the Gold Hill's history. She recounted first the 1894 and then the 1860 fires. Commenting on the former, she mused, "it's amazing that Gold Hill still is standing. . . if conditions wouldn't of [sic] changed, Gold Hill would have been wiped out, totally wiped out."[52] Referring to the Swallows' narrative as a "very sacred document," Courtney expressed a common theme in the oral histories: a deep respect for the local past, especially the lived experiences of the community members and their forefathers, and an appreciation of the historic resources' endurance in the face of threat.[53]

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[49] Swallow, Box 1, Fol. 2,, 3.

[50] *Ibid.*, 5.

[51] *Ibid., 5.*

[52] Chellee Courtney, interviewed by Caitlin McKenna, July 10, 2010, interview OH 1664v, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, CO, 42:00.

[53] Courtney, 42:00.

Interestingly, the false reporting of the fire also influenced the Gold Hill survival narrative. Newspapers like the *Leadville Daily and Evening Chronicle* published headlines that incorrectly ascribed destruction to Gold Hill: "Gold Camp Wiped Out. Forest Fires Near Boulder Sweeping Over Gold Hill and Other Towns. Men Flee for their Lives. A terrible Conflagration that has Destroyed Valuable Mining Property and Threatens the Town."[54] The papers were influenced by conjecture, along with a hefty dose of the dramatic. Curtis Swallow recounted how the rumor influenced authors to the point that books were published with misinformation. Amused, he claimed that "in the bookstores today is a book called the *Ghost Towns of Colorado* in which it tells about Gold Hill being destroyed by the 1894 forest fire, and how the people climbed up on Horsfal hill; '. . . in the bitter cold to watch their town being ravaged by the flames.'"[55]

Fighting Fire in the Twentieth Century

The 1894 fire both drove down the population of the area and concentrated settlement within the town boundaries, as some families whose homes in outlying areas were lost moved into Gold Hill.[56] Through the turn of the twentieth century Gold Hill steadily declined in business and population. Miners and other residents moved on to rockier diggings, leaving behind their cabins and houses. In 1900 Charles Wentworth sold his hotel to a local family for $1,000. In 1918 only 75 people and three businesses remained in town. Two years later, the U.S. Postal Service closed the Gold Hill Post Office.[57]

The twentieth century brought a tide of ups and downs to the Gold Hill population. From the 1920s to the1950s it was primarily a tourist destination for single women from Chicago who

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[54] Anonymous, "Gold Camp Wiped Out."

[55] Swallow, Box 1, Fol. 2, 2.

[56] *Ibid.,* 3.

[57] Chellee Courtney, Lynne Walter, and Rebecca Waugh, *Early Beginnings: Gold Hill, Colorado 1859-1952* (Boulder, CO: Historic Boulder, 1999), 17-21; Mabel Montgomery, *A Story of Gold Hill (*Boulder, CO: The Book Lode, 1930), 21, 28-30; Chellee Courtney and Lynn Walter, "The Goudge Family of Gold Hill," in *The Glory Days of Gold Hill* (Carnegie Library for Local History—Boulder, Colorado).

vacationed every summer in the old Grand Mountain Hotel. The few year-round residents were either descendants of miners or people who came to experience a backcountry lifestyle. This trend continued through the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, with the town changing very little in demography, and families rarely moving away. As a result, the locals developed a deep connection to the history of the town because it was woven into individuals' personal and genealogical histories. The size of the community and the distance from Boulder resulted in folks relying on their neighbors in times of crisis, which "makes everybody tighter," said Chris Finn, the chief of the volunteer fire department, in 2011. "It makes for a more caring community, because they're the ones—you know, it's not like some guys down at the station who's there—hired by you. You're it." [58]

The small community had to make do with the human resources available when there was an emergency. The volunteer fire department was therefore formed out of necessity. For the majority of the twentieth century, it worked on an ad hoc basis, coordinating their emergency response when someone was hurt, a house caught fire, or there was a car accident. In the same fashion as the 1894 firefight, an emergency catalyzed the response, with each community member pitching in. In 2011, Chris Finn, then the fire chief, explained that he became involved in fire fighting when he was "younger than a teenager," though there was no official capacity for him to volunteer, because "everybody helped out when there was a problem. Basically, the older folks put the fire out, and then we all got to drag the furniture out and deal with the soot and everything." [59] Between 1894 and 1989, the only fires that the department had to fight were structure fires and small campfires. The volunteers were not trained to deal with a large-scale fire and relied on the Forest Service to quell any fires in nearby Roosevelt National Forest.

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[58] Christopher Finn, interviewed by Caitlin McKenna, May 31, 2011, interview OH 1729v, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, CO., 55:58.

[59] Christopher Finn*,* 04:37.

The Gold Hill Fire Department's first taste of wildland fire fighting came when the Black Tiger Fire erupted in July 1989. In terms of property loss, the Black Tiger Fire was the worst at that point in history, burning 44 buildings, 2,100 acres, and amassing over $10 million in damages.[60] Local fire resources were not yet built up to fight such a large-scale fire, and even completely untrained and unprepared individuals were pulled in to help. Chris O'Brien recalled that Chris Finn, then his boss at The Gold Hill Inn, "walked in and said, 'You're about the same size as my brother Brian. Put these on.' And he handed me some wildland firefighting Nomex.[61] And he said, 'This is a fire shelter, hook your heels in the bottom and throw your hands through the top, and say goodbye! Any questions?' And we went to work." [62] The volunteers were exposed to fire fighting techniques that they had not even known existed before that point. Finn's account of Black Tiger was indicative of the lack of preparedness among their department:

> Starting at our first shift that we went over there was probably the strangest firefighting that I've ever done, because we were given a package of fusees [flares] and told to walk from the point of origin, up Boulder Canyon, and light the other side of the road, so that in the morning when the fire heated back up, it couldn't go back across the creek. But, we had never—I had never—in Gold Hill, fought fire with fire, before that. It was just —strange. . . The Forest Service had been doing it for years. We just didn't know about it. We had never had a big forest fire up here. Well, yes we had—but, that was before the Forest Service was around.[63]

After the Black Tiger Fire, the Gold Hill Volunteer Fire Department trained with new equipment and techniques, but were mostly self taught, coordinating with neighboring volunteer fire departments to hold classes. The fire department grew far better organized and educated over

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[60] National Fire Protection Association, "Black Tiger Fire Case Study," (Quincy, Massachusetts: National Fire Protection Association, 1989), 3.

[61] Nomex is a brand, manufactured by Dupont, of flame resistant fabric used for fire fighting gear.

[62] Christopher O'Brien, interviewed by Caitlin McKenna, June 4, 2011, OH 1730v, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, CO, 01:24.

[63] Christopher Finn, 04:50.

the two decades since the Black Tiger Fire, but even so, the new systems of fire fighting were not always implemented immediately. Finn explained that during the Fourmile Canyon Fire, the first responders did not have time to use some of the new innovations in fire-fighting foams since "every time they come up with a new system then you have to learn how to use it. But, I mean, we haven't really gotten a chance to use [the new foams]. This last fire came through a little too fast for us to do that." [64]

Gold Hill fostered a culture of support around the local fire department, providing it with human resources and funding. Maintaining the department was important to protecting the community, which every resident acknowledged. In 2011, Chellee Goudge Courtney stated that the fire department was a nexus of community involvement:

> Supporting the fire department—that's a biggie—because, I mean, fire is a tremendous danger up here. Just to have the volunteers that come and be part of the Fire Department; it amazes me how many locals are on the Volunteer Fire Department. They give of their time in and of themselves, and they're so willing to help the community.[65]

Fundraising for the firefighters also provided a social outlet. The best example of this was the annual Fourth of July Pancake Breakfast, which one volunteer fire fighter described as "way beyond a fundraising event." [66] Held annually at the Gold Hill School, the firefighters flipped pancakes and served bacon, while visitors could buy historic calendars and t-shirts to support the department and the local museum. Dwelling on the event, Shivaun Finn, a firefighter and daughter of the fire chief, explained that

> It's a big time when everybody can gather. People bring up their friends and family from out of town to show the town off. . . everybody is patriotic, but they're also really passionate about Gold Hill. So it's like that pride in Gold Hill that comes out at

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[64] Christopher Finn, 07:12.

[65] Chellee Courtney, 50: 27.

[66] Shivaun Finn, interviewed by Caitlin McKenna, June 13, 2010, interview OH 1662v, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, CO, 08:03.

> those times. . . bringing people up here to houses that were built —like my house was built in 1864. Just being able to show people what the mining towns looked like, because it really hasn't changed that much—like, the outward appearance hasn't.[67]

The Pancake Breakfast promoted the fire department as well as Gold Hill's sense of history, and its proceeds went towards buying new equipment and providing trainings for the volunteers.

Tying the history of the town to the fundraiser was inevitable. The community promoted itself through its sense of history, and so it was necessarily tied into every aspect of communal activity. The volunteer fire department was therefore significantly influenced by the town's historic preservation, just as each of the local firefighters, who were tapped to help defend the community in times of emergency, could not ignore the overwhelming appreciation of the local past.

Conclusion

Gold Hill's history was greatly influenced by wildland fire, both directly and indirectly. The fire of 1860 caused the town's physical placement and appearance to change, and both the 1860 and 1894 fires influenced the population of the town. The town's survival techniques and fire-fighting mythos are representative of the broader American approach to wildland fire, the hallmark of which was a piecemeal effort of suppression. The settlement of the area contributed to reforestation, while the establishment of exclusionary fire practices resulted in a denser forest and more combustible fire ecology.

Most importantly for public historians, the threat of fire had far-reaching affects on the culture of Gold Hill. Communal trauma bound people together, while the town's size and distance from urban centers prompted neighbors to rely on one another in times of crisis. Moreover, the fires focused the community on the things that they had to lose: their lives, buildings, and possessions. As the town grew more attached to its sense of history during the twentieth and

[67] Shivaun Finn, 08:15.

twenty-first centuries, wildland fire threatened more than just material goods; it threatened the town's legacy and its very definition as a historic resource.

CHAPTER III

THE FOURMILE CANYON FIRE

The scene at The Gold Hill Inn on the evening of October 1, 2010 looked like any other night. Diners who had driven up from the lower regions of Colorado's Front Range sat in the rustic dining room and locals filled the bar. Around 7:30 p.m., a group of innocuous-looking men walked into the restaurant. One of the owners, Brian Finn, sat them. Normally, Finn would present the men with wine menus and usher over a server, but tonight was different. He took a wine glass and tapped it loudly with a knife. The crowd of patrons fell silent, and Finn proudly introduced the group as the slurry bomber crew that saved Gold Hill.

The inn erupted in sobs and applause. For the remainder of the night, the owners of the restaurant and the townspeople treated the group of men to a six-course meal and rounds of drinks. All the while, Gold Hill residents trickled in to stand at the head of the table and thank the crew for their efforts. More than one greeted the firefighters with tears.

Outside of the building, it was easy to see why. The Fourmile Canyon Fire left a huge swath of burned forest behind the inn; it scorched the hillside within 200 yards of the back door. Two photographs on September 6, 2010 by Gold Hill resident Kurtis Leverentz, reveal the imminent danger the wildfire posed. In the first picture, two volunteer firefighters watch helplessly from the parking lot of The Gold Hill Inn and Bluebird Lodge as flames burst from the pine trees on the hillside southwest of them (Fig. 5). The second, which was taken from a vantage point just west of the first, shows the slurry bomber laying the line of slurry that would keep the wildland fire at bay (Fig. 6). Combined with a change in the wind, that slurry line saved the town,

including the 38 contributing resources of the Gold Hill National Historic District. Eight days after the fire subsided, a *Daily Camera* reporter asked resident Lynn Walter how she felt. "'It means everything,' she said of firefighters' efforts to save the historic downtown. 'It's a miracle.'"[1]

Fig. 5: Taken from Main St. Gold Hill, Colorado on September 6, 2010. The building on the right is the Bluebird Lodge.

In Gold Hill, the primary vehicle for establishing a sense of history is the built and natural environment. In 1989, the National Register of Historic Places recognized the town's importance and classified it a historic district. The nomination form stated that the town "is the best intact representation of the early mountain communities that developed as a result of the precious metal mining in Boulder County."[2] As well as the town's architecture and

Fig. 6: Behind the telephone pole in the center of the photo the slurry bomber drops a line of slurry south of town. The building to the left is the Gold Hill Inn. (*Courtesy of Kurtis Leverentz)*

[1] John Aguilar, "Fourmile Fire: Gold Hill's history—and lifeblood—saved," *Boulder Daily Camera* (Boulder, CO: Boulder County): September 14, 2010.

[2] National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Gold Hill Historic District 5BL.769, Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center, History Colorado: Denver, Colorado, sec. 7, 1.

age, Gold Hill's "intact rural mountain setting contributes to the district's integrity of historic setting, feeling, and association."[3] This "rural mountain setting" was prone to wildfire, and indeed, wildfire is integral to the built and cultural history of the town.

This chapter investigates the history of historic preservation in Gold Hill and the effect of wildland fire on the community's sense of history. Using oral histories from members of the community of Gold Hill, Colorado, as well as interviews with fire fighters in the months after the September 2010 Fourmile Canyon Fire, it argues that despite wildland fire's potential for destruction, the residents of Gold Hill are bound more tightly as a community because of the persistent threat of wildland fire. Also, in a community that is so concerned with its sense of history, wildland fire bolsters the community ties to one another and to its built historic resources.

A wide array of resources from 1859 to the present interprets the town's history. The majority of primary sources are oral histories, self-published papers, newspaper articles, hand-written papers, and websites. The bulk of these sources can be found at the Carnegie Library for Local History in Boulder, Colorado. These sources deal with the lived experience of the authors or interviewees, but they also relate histories of Gold Hill. "Histories" is used instead of "history" to indicate the range of stories about the town. As Richard White explains in *It's Your Misfortune and None of my Own*, "residents of the West itself have constructed various local versions of a collective past."[4] This is not to say that these sources are devoid of reality or should not be valued. On the contrary, they are proof of the community's sense of history. However, their discussions of the history of the town should not be taken at face value, and must be read along with other primary and secondary sources in order to determine their validity.

This examination of Gold Hill draws on the notion of a "sense of history," which historian David Glassberg explained in his 2001 book, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life.* "Sense of history is akin to what environmental psychologists describe as sense of place—not quite territoriality. . . but a sense of locatedness and belonging. Sensing history, we

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[3] National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Gold Hill Historic District, sec. 7, 1.

[4] Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

explore fundamental questions concerning personal and group identity and our relationship to the environment."[5] Gold Hill residents and visitors experience both a sense of history as well as a sense of place; the two cannot be separated. The dirt roads and log buildings, the mine tailings, the heavily wooded forest surrounding the town—the place manifests its history. The ties between residents and their town, the town and its history run deep. These ties are strengthened by the threat of fiery annihilation.

Fig. 7: A view of Gold Hill from Horsfal Road looking west down Main Street. The first building on the left is the Bluebird Lodge.
(Courtesy Hustveldt, Wikipedia)

Preservation Efforts

Strolling through Gold Hill, it is impossible not to dwell on the past. The streets are unpaved and the buildings are constructed out of hewn lodge-pole pine (Fig. 7). Two large buildings, the Bluebird Lodge and The Gold Hill Inn, dominate the south side of Main Street. A long wooden deck connects the two. On warm summer nights, people crowd the porch, fingering sweaty glasses and laughing. They smoke and flick their cigarette butts into a large cast-iron pot by the door. Bluegrass music wafts through the evening air. The whole town has an air of rural informality. Dogs roam off-leash. Just a block from the inn, horses stand in a field, flicking their tails at flies. Following Main Street west, a visitor walks by log cabins with low-pitched roofs and side gables, vernacular Victorian abodes, and small weathered outbuildings. A few hundred feet from the inn, the Gold Hill Store sits on the south side of the street. With its two-story false front

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[5] David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 7.

and gnarled exterior, the building looks like it might sell the basic necessities for mountain life rather than its contemporary wares—lattes and homemade pastries.

Residents of Gold Hill hold its history close; visitors find themselves awed by the town's heritage and environment. Within only thirty years of the town's founding, it was regarded as a historic locale. *The Colorado Banner*'s Sam Medary published an article in December 1876 that detailed the mining camp's early years. It was titled "Gold Hill. Oldest Mining Camp in the State. First Discovery of Gold. Population and Desertion of the Place."[6] Four months later, in April 1877, another newspaper article conflated the tragedy of the town's mining history with the romance of its natural surroundings: "Through all the early years the Gold Hill mining had its 'ups and downs'; mostly 'downs. . .' Then, when hope grew faint and fainter, and disallusionment [sic] overwhelmed, the everlasting beauty and grandeur of the hills were a solace."[7] According to this anonymous author, in the wake of the mining bust the town's only redemption lay in its location.

During the first half of the twentieth century, a group of city girls took advantage of the remote mountain locale, and transformed Gold Hill into a historically-minded tourist destination. The Holiday House Association, a Chicago social club that grew out of the Chautauqua movement, purchased a cottage in Boulder in 1911. For $10, a young single business woman from "the windy city" could purchase a lifetime membership, which granted her two week's vacation in the cottage every summer. The vacation included trips around the Front Range and cultural events in Denver and Boulder. The club, nicknamed "the Bluebirds," grew in popularity, and by 1920 its leadership sought to expand its real estate holdings to accommodate more women. Some members had already taken trips to Gold Hill, and it seemed an attractive mountain haven. So, the Holiday House Association purchased the Grand Mountain Hotel for $350. They renamed it the Bluebird Lodge.[8]

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[6] Sam Medary, "Gold Hill. Oldest Mining Camp in the State. First Discovery of Gold. Population and Desertion of the Place," *The Colorado Banner* (Boulder, Colorado), December 28, 1876.

[7] Mabel Montgomery, *The Story of Gold Hill* (Boulder, Colorado: The Book Lode, 1930), 35.

[8] Mona Lambrecht, *Boulder, 1859-1919* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 74.

The lodge was in a state of disrepair, and the Bluebirds restored it. Their effort was the first in a long line of Gold Hill preservation projects. A 1941 guide to Colorado lauded their accomplishments: "many of the original furnishings and decorations have been preserved; the weather boarding that once sheathed the building has been removed to expose the log walls."[9] After renovating the hotel, the group purchased the vacant lot adjacent to their accommodations and built a dining hall in the same style as the lodge (Fig. 8). As their ranks swelled and women fell in love with Gold Hill, individual Bluebirds purchased some of the abandoned miners' houses. Because the women only resided in Gold Hill during the summers, they made few changes to the historic buildings.

Fig. 8: A group of women, probably Bluebirds, horseback riding in front of the Bluebird Lodge (in the background) and the Bluebird dining hall (in the foreground). The latter would later be renamed the Gold Hill Inn. Collected by Forrest E. Jones c. 1930.
(Courtesy of the Carnegie Library for Local History—Boulder, Colorado)

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Bluebirds kept Gold Hill alive. The Post Office reopened in 1923, and various businesses sprang up to cater to the Chicago ladies' shopping, entertainment, and transportation needs. Writing in 1930, Mabel Montgomery noted happily, "again the town has taken on a prosperous air."[10] Joseph Stepanek, a resident who moved to the area in 1935, put the Bluebird's influence in far less happy terms: "there were very few people in

[9] Colorado Writers Project, *Colorado: A Guide to the Highest State* (New York: Hastings House, 1941), 270.

[10] Montgomery, 36.

the town. It was in deep decline. The Bluebirds were the only live part of Gold Hill at that time."[11]

By the 1930s, promotors of Gold Hill emphasized its distinctly western heritage as well as its gorgeous environment. In 1930, Mabel Montgomery published the first history of the town in her booklet *A Story of Gold Hill Colorado: Seventy-Odd Years in the Heart of the Rockies.*[12] Her record chronicles the early days of mining as well as some of her childhood recollections. The history ends with an account of "Tourists and the Scenery."[13] Montgomery wrote that "from the earliest days Gold Hill has been a tourist town."[14] Tourists, in particular the Bluebirds, brought much-needed revenue to the town in the summer. Montgomery contended that it was "the scenic beauty," "recreation, health and rest" that visitors sought in Gold Hill. These tourists also came for the town's history and its environs.[15]

Recognizing the draw of the town's location and its heritage, the Bluebirds joined forces with the Chicago Burlington Quincy Railroad to beckon business women from Chicago to the hamlet. In the mid-1930s the railroad published a brochure written by a Bluebird representative that extolled Gold Hill as "a diminutive place, small as only a camp of yesteryear can be. It lies. . . among the nest of old gold-towns in and around the famous gulches and mountain streams where many of the most romantic chapters of frontier history were written."[16] The brochure fashioned the town into a hideaway from the modern world. It encouraged tourists to experience

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[11] Joseph Stepanek, interviewed by Pat Cypher, September 26, 2997, interview OH 1474A-B, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, CO. 19:43.

[12] Montgomery.

[13] *Ibid.,* 32.

[14] *Ibid.,* 32.

[15] *Ibid.,* 32.

[16] Josephine Loonem, "Bluebird Cottage and Bluebird Lodge, Burlington Route," (Chicago Burlington & Quincy Railroad, 1934), 7.

"the unfettered freedom of the great open spaces at Gold Hill where mountain magnificence on a grand scale is yours to see and enjoy every hour of the day."[17]

Indeed, the Bluebirds and the railroad maintained that the mining town could provide an escape from modern capitalism, seemingly unaware of the historical irony. The brochure alleged that "the proprietors [of Bluebird Lodge] neither expect nor want to make much if anything from their vacation guests beyond actual operating expenses. Such a business policy may seem absurd, but just make a mental note that there really *are* people who find happiness in helping others to be happy."[18] In the railroad's marketing, Gold Hill was the antithesis to the "big city." The town was locked in a time of romance and olden-day virtue, the surroundings were pure and women could feel safe and liberated.

The brochure began to hint at what is now described as heritage tourism. For instance, the ladies' stay could be augmented by horseback rides or hikes along "numerous trails [that] lead to the old gold-mining locations which made Colorado history in the rip-roaring 1850s."[19] The Bluebirds and the railroad did not solely use the town's history to attract visitors, but did rely on that history to promote the simple life that accompanied a Gold Hill vacation. Combining the pull of the town's historic feel and the backcountry that surrounded it, the Bluebirds and the railroad sold a trip back in time as well as a trip to Colorado. Indeed, they intimated that the two were one and the same.

Although the social club did not revive the economy in perpetuity, its affect on the culture lasted. Modern historians of Gold Hill wrote, "[The Bluebirds'] philosophy reigned: the flavor of the old mining town's architecture must be preserved, while enhancing the town's culture with summer resort activities."[20] The two aims went hand in hand. The women's summer activities

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[17] Loonem*,* 8.

[18] *Ibid.,* 3.

[19] *Ibid.,* 11.

[20] Chellee Courtney, Lynne Walter, and Rebecca Waugh, *Early Beginnings: Gold Hill, Colorado 1859-1952* (Boulder, CO: Historic Boulder, 1999), 24.

included historic restoration, which in turn attracted more women to the "flavorful" hamlet.[21] Through the first half of the twentieth century, the Bluebirds invested their attention, money, and time in conserving the sense of history in Gold Hill. However, by the 1950s, the group's numbers waned and the town was depressed once again. Like mining, tourism proved a fickle mistress.

In 1962, the Bluebirds sold the lodge and the adjacent dining hall for $12,000 to Frank and Barbara Finn, a young couple from the East Coast. Thirty years later, the Finns recalled that they purchased the property after hearing plans from other potential buyers to demolish or alter the buildings; Barbara said of the proposals, "everything was a sacrilege."[22] The decision to buy the property was out of love for the architecture and feel of the place. Frank reflected on their purchase: "We were proud owners of two huge buildings that we better do something with."[23] They decided to open a restaurant and called it The Gold Hill Inn.

After fashioning a concept for the restaurant, the couple found a poem by Eugene Field, a Denver writer and frequent visitor to Gold Hill during the 1880s and 1890s. Field based "Casey's Table d'Hote" on the Grand Mountain Hotel in Gold Hill, which he renamed "Red Hoss Mountain:"

> Oh, them days on Red Hoss Mountain, when
> the skis wuz fair 'nd blue,
> When the money flowed like likker, 'nd the folks
> was brave 'nd true!
> When the nights wuz crisp 'nd balmy, 'nd the camp
> wuz all astir,
> With the joints all throwed wide open 'nd no sheriff
> do demur!
> Oh, them times on Red Hoss Mountain in the
> Rockies fur away,—
> There's no sich place nor times like them as I kin
> find to-day!
> What though the camp hez busted? I seem to see
> it still
> A-lyin', like I love it, on that big 'nd warty hill;
> And I eel a sort of yearnin' 'nd a chokin' in my

[21] Courtney et. al., *Early Beginnings,* 23-16.

[22] Frank and Barbara Finn, interviewed by Melanie Barnes Maish, 1993, interview OH 0643, audio and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, CO, 09:00.

[23] *Ibid.,* 12:45.

throat
When I think of Red Hoss Mountain 'nd of Casey's
tabble dote!
. . .
A tabble dote is different from orderin' aller cart:
In one case you git all there is, in t'other, only part!
And Casey's tabble dote began in French,
—as all begin,—
And Casey's ended with the same, which is to say,
with "vin;"
But in between wuz every kind of reptile, bird, 'nd
beast,
The same like you can git in high-toned restauraws
down east;
'Nd winding' up wuz cake or pie, with coffee demy
tass,
Or, sometimes, floatin' Ireland in a soothin' kind of
sass
That left a sort of pleasant ticklin' in a feller's
throat,
'Nd made him hanker after more of Casey's tabble
dote.[24]

The couple wove Fields' lines and the feel of Casey's restaurant into the fabric of their new business. Both Field's poem and The Gold Hill Inn were created in the spirit of nostalgia. Field yearned for the early days of the mining camp, while the Finns sought a selling point for their restaurant that fit with their love of the historic architecture. The latter's decision to buy the historic buildings and conceive of their business around a piece of Gold Hill heritage cemented the town's historic feel.

Though the Bluebirds sold their property in 1962, their love of the town's heritage had a lasting effect on future residents. Their attention to the town's history and their preservation efforts left the Gold Hill community with a profound respect for its roots. In some cases, new residents grew to value the town's history after moving in. In 1992, Frank and Barbara Finn recounted their experience relocating to the mountain hamlet:

> We came to Gold Hill in 1959. . . we ended up with the little red store on the corner. It was fantastic because I had known the fellow that had owned it and I asked him about renting it and he said "Sure, why not?" And I said, "Well, how much?". . . He said "$290." I said, "$290 a *month*?" And he said, "Oh, no, no. 290 a

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[24] Eugene Field, "Casey's Table d'Hote" in *A Little Book of Western Verse* (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son University Press, 1889), 1-7.

> year. . . " So we figured we could handle that. Of course there was no running water, no indoor plumbing at all. Outhouse. We hauled all of our water. . . It was interesting, it was fun.[25]

If low real estate prices enticed the Finns to move to Gold Hill, they stayed because of the historic feel of the town. The Finns went on to head up preservation and archival efforts in the 1980s and demonstrated their commitment to maintaining the town's historic character. But at first, their attraction to history was basic—living in a historic cabin was fun.

Over thirty years later, the feelings of new community members were similar. John Sand, who currently lives on Main Street in Gold Hill, explained that he moved to the town in 1995 because he "had this idea that [he] wanted to live in the woods in a cabin."[26] He was struck by the "laid-back, funky, neat, historical mountain community."[27] He went on to explain how proud he was of the character of the town:

> What I like about Gold Hill is that it is one of the only gold mining—early gold mining—towns. . . that has never totally commercialized. I like to tell friends that if you take the cars out of the streets and look at Gold Hill, it could be a hundred years ago. We have dirt streets, no street lights, rail fences, log houses, Victorian houses, so it retains the visual character and the historical character of an old mining town.[28]

At the time of his interview, Sand was president of the Gold Hill Club, a social group that concentrates on preserving the town's history. He was also chairman of the Gold Hill Committee, which put on a sesquicentennial celebration in the summer months of 2009, and he was a member of Historic Gold Hill, Inc., which preserves the town's history and raises funds for the upkeep of the Gold Hill Museum and the town cemetery. Though he moved to the town because one of the houses fulfilled his idea of a cabin in the woods, he subsequently became engaged in the history and preservation efforts of the community.

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[25] Frank and Barbara Finn, 07:45.

[26] John Sand, interviewed by Caitlin McKenna, June 14, 2010, interview OH 1661v, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, CO, 03:54.

[27] *Ibid.,* 04:28.

[28] *Ibid.,* 09:36.

The second half of the twentieth century saw preservation efforts continue in a steadier and more conscientious fashion than before. Community members like Curtis and Blanch Swallow, who were born in Gold Hill in the 1880s, endeavored to preserve written histories during the 1960s, while others concentrated on saving the physical resources.[29] The Gold Hill Club took care of the cemetery and preserved artifacts and memoirs that related to the town. Boulder County designated historic zoning for Gold Hill in 1972. In 1988, the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office added Gold Hill to the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination form stated that the district was significant because of its architecture as well as its association with mining and exploration. Furthermore, the district possessed historic integrity and was "virtually unchanged from its early appearance."[30] Historic Gold Hill, Inc. began to "collect and preserve the history of Gold Hill through photographs, oral histories, artifacts, and newspaper articles" as well as "recording present day life in Gold Hill, which will in turn become part of the historical record for future generations."[31] In 1997, Historic Gold Hill, Inc. founded the Gold Hill Museum with a grant from the Colorado Historical Society. In 2009, the town celebrated its sesquicentennial.

The sense of history felt in Gold Hill was often described by community members as "the character of the town," "the timeless quality," the "mountain character," and "the historic feel." The architecture, the rural landscape, pockmarked with mine shafts and littered with tailings, and the community's disconnection from Boulder, 3,000 feet below, worked together to distance the community from the present. The frontier aesthetic also had the effect of actually detaching Gold Hill from more modern life. The dirt roads prevented any thoroughfare through the town, which in turn dampened economic growth and preserved that same historic mountain character that residents held so dear. Moreover, the detachment solidified the need for self-sufficiency. Though

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[29] Blanch Hastings and Elmer Swallow, "The Gold Hill Forest Fire of 1894," Gold Hill Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado, Box 1, Fol. 2.

[30] National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Gold Hill Historic District, sec. 8, 1; sec. 7, 2.

[31] Historic Gold Hill, Inc. *Gold Hill Calendar 2011*.

the town was still bound to the supply-chain of food and goods from the plains, it housed its own school, church, restaurant, bar, coffee shop, and of course, its volunteer fire department.

These preservation efforts, as well as the interest generated by The Gold Hill Inn, drew popular appreciation for the town's historic feel. One journalist described it thus: "The town. . . might be part of a movie set, arranged with elaborate casualness to depict a scene from the Old West of a century ago."[32] A *Rocky Mountain News* article from 1985 put the sentiment another way: "Gold Hill looks the way Western mining towns should look and seldom do. It's genuine."[33] In 2009, a restaurant reviewer from Boulder's *Daily Camera* wrote that The Gold Hill Inn "looks like an ancient ramshackle community hall in an old mining town. . . This outpost is as authentic as the aspen stands that surround it."[34] Visitors were unable to come to the town without feeling the influence of its history.

In the half-century following the opening of The Gold Hill Inn, the town's trajectory steadied. Today, the town boasts approximately 200 residents, 4 businesses—The Gold Hill Inn and Bluebird Lodge, an antiques store, the Gold Hill Store, and a summer camp—, the Gold Hill School, a museum, and the volunteer fire department. As recently as 2007, a Canadian mining company mined the area's ore deposits, but their interest was brief and currently no mines are being worked. Though the town's vascillations could be viewed negatively, they had a positive effect on its preservation. The constant fluctuations in population and limited economic success kept much of the town's architecture intact. Long periods of dormancy between mining booms, and later between summers, saved many of the buildings from major alterations. Additionally, the area surrounding the town was not developed, so the old buildings were not hemmed in by new constructions. Gold Hill's architectural history was preserved in a piecemeal fashion, through economic stagnation as well as individual and group efforts. By the end of the twentieth century,

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[32] Bull, Ellen, "Gold Hill retains Old Time Appeal," included in Lynn Walter and Chellee Goudge Courtney, *The Glory Days of Gold Hill*.

[33] Margorie Barrett, "Gold Hill Crush," *Rocky Mountain News (*Denver, Colorado), October 12, 1985, 65.

[34] Rachel Odell Walker, "Restaurant Review: Gold Hill Inn," *Daily Camera* (Boulder, Colorado), Friday Magazine, June 19, 2009.

the town was zoned in order to maintain its historic appearance and was recognized as a national historic resource. From the late 1800s onwards, residents and visitors were affected by the look and feel of the town. Their sense of history was tied to their sense of place—the buildings and Gold Hill's natural surroundings. But because of the physical nature of the town's sense of history, it was far more vulnerable to threats. The 2010 Fourmile Canyon Fire was thus a distinct though unsurprising foe; it threatened residents' historical legacy as well as their property.

Fire and History

Histories of Gold Hill also emphasized the town's experience with wildland fire. Beginning with Montomery's 1930 booklet, nearly every written and oral history recorded about the town mentioned either one or both of the 1860 and the 1894 wildfires; undoubtedly, future histories will incorporate the 2010 Fourmile Canyon blaze. Though the most recent fire did not burn the National Register Historic District of Gold Hill, it did destroy other parts of the extended community. For a town whose sense of history is so intricately tied to its contents (the historic wooden buildings lining its streets) and its location (amongst a forest of lodgepole and ponderosa pine), wildland fire reaffirmed Gold Hill's historic narrative while threatening the physical resources at the foundation of the community's sense of history.

Little is known about the details of the 1860 fire, though much was made of its power. The fire wiped out the entire settlement, and in doing so wiped out traces of those early months of mining activity. The 1988 National Register nomination form mourned the loss: "Unfortunately, no buildings remain from this early period due to a 1860 fire in Gold Hill and the temporary nature of the structures erected initially in the mining camps."[35] In a camp made up of around 1,000 men of differing backgrounds, multiple mining companies, and few families to bind the community together, the 1860 fire was the first traumatic communal experience. Though it destroyed the early settlement, residents incorporated it into the town's history. The fire was a formative experience; it literally changed the face of the town, which moved from its original

[35] National Register of Historic Place Nomination Form, Gold Hill District, section 8, 1.

location to its present seat. Later, the early fire reminded residents of the significant and persistent threat of conflagration.

The November 1894 wildland fire was more widely recorded, even though its flames never touched the town. Nevertheless, contemporary reports chronicled the extent of Gold Hill residents' fear. A *Daily Camera* article from November 15, 1894 quoted five people who had fled the mountain town and believed that "Gold Hill was sure to go."[36] A certain Mr. Carter said that "smoke in huge volumes could be seen from Sunshine. . . and there was no hope for the dozens of ranches lying between Sugar Loaf and Gold Hill. He looked at the fate of the latter camp as sealed."[37] The McMaster family arrived in Boulder with a wagon of their possessions, and reported that "all the citizens of Gold Hill had moved their household goods to Horsfal hill," the original site of the mining camp.[38] By the end of day, the *Camera* reporter was unsure of the town's fate. The article ended ominously: "The smoke over the city is something dusky as the Camera goes to press."

Two days later the *Camera* published a more in-depth account of the fire. Allegedly, a group of men started the inferno when they built a campfire upon a bog in Lefthand Canyon, just north of Gold Hill. Their fire took hold of the roots of the trees around the bog, and when a high wind blew up and it ignited the forest. In Gold Hill, the fire spurred the community to action:

> The town was awakened about 2:30 by the ringing of the bell on the school house. The whole town was awakened and the greatest excitement prevailed all day. All the furniture of the town was moved out and at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, after a hard fight, the citizens gave up and the town was left to the flames, but just then the wind changed and the town was saved.[39]

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[36] Anonymous, "Fire in the Mountains," *Boulder Daily Camera*, November 15, 1894.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] Anonymous, "Story of the Fire," *Boulder Daily Camera*, November 17, 1894.

Despite the happy ending, the fire had a profound affect on the Gold Hill residents' collective memory, and tales of the 1894 fire persist in written and oral histories taken through the present day.[40]

The bulk of historic preservation in Gold Hill coincided with a century of federally-mandated fire suppression. The result of this was denser forests in the areas around historic resources. Unsurprisingly, the group that was best at assessing the risk of wildland fire and incorporating it into the history of Gold Hill was the volunteer fire department. Their 2006 Community Wildfire Protection Plan provided a succinct overview of the uneasy relationship betweeen the mountain town and the existence of wildland fire:

> Wildland fire in Colorado has been occurring for millennia. It brings nutrients to the soil and diversity to vegetation and wildlife, thereby benefiting the humans who later live in its path. However, wildfire can also destroy homes and communities and cause injury and loss of life. Ironically, the success of Colorado's fire suppression and forest management activities in the twentieth century has made fire management more complicated, because many forest stands are denser than ever and present heightened risks.[41]

Prior to the Fourmile Canyon Fire, residents were aware of the devastation that a wildland fire could wreak on the town. Stories of the 1860 and 1894 fires testified to Gold Hill's susceptibility to wildfire, while large-scale local infernos like the Black Tiger Fire in 1989 reminded residents of the constant danger they were in. Shivaun Finn, interviewed in June 2010, stated, "everybody knows that [Gold Hill] burned down a long time ago."[42] Knowledge of the 1894 fire was more common than that of the 1860 fire. Interviewed in 1963, Wilbur Goudge recounted the story:

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[40] Montgomery, *The Story of Gold Hill*, 29-30; Richard Regnier, interviewed by Pat Cypher, August 3, 2009, interview OH 1604, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado.

[41] Gold Hill Fire Protection District, *Community Wildfire Protection Plan* (http://csfs.colostate.edu/pages/documents/GoldHillCWPP06final.pdf), accessed December 1, 2012, vii.

[42] Shivaun Finn, interviewed by Caitlin McKenna, June 13, 2010, interview OH 1604, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado, 29:56.

> "That [forest fire] came from the west, and it started out on Sawmill Hill by some campers. It spread, and it came on in—they thought it was going to reach Gold Hill, and a matter of fact, a lot of the residents, they buried their furniture. Took pianos and furniture and put in old tunnels up there. But it was in November, I think—the fall of the year—and they got a snow storm or something, and I'm just thankful that the fire was put out, that they got it under control."[43]

Nearly 70 years after the fire, and 33 years after Montgomery published her account of the history of the town, Goudge recalled the major distinctions of the fire, including where it was started, how far it came, how the community reacted, and how it was stopped. In 2010, when his granddaughter, Chellee Goudge Courtney, was interviewed for the same oral history program, her account matched this story.[44]

Members of the community were keenly aware of the methods being used to combat a catastrophic fire, as well as likelihood of forest fires. Chris O'Brien, who worked at The Gold Hill Inn in the 1980s and was pulled in by Gold Hill Fire Chief Chris Finn to fight the Black Tiger Fire in 1989, stated that "wildland fire is a fact of life in Colorado and the western states, and its part of the natural ecosystem. It's part of our ecocycle out here to have wildland fire, to use wildland fire when it's appropriate, and when it's not appropriate to try and stop it."[45] When Richard Regnier was interviewed by the Maria Rogers Oral History Program in 2009, he explained that the Gold Hill Fire Department was "thinning out the forests here because if the fire starts you'd never stop it."[46] Shivaun Finn, who was inducted into the Gold Hill Volunteer Fire Department when she was 18, explained her sense of duty: "when the pager goes off at four in the morning that says, 'There's a wildland fire west of town.' I don't want to get out of bed. But you

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[43] Wilber Goudge and James Birmingham, interviewed by Forest Crossen, September 4 and 22, 1963, interview OH 0741, audio and summary, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado, 22:00.

[44] Chellee Courtney, interviewed by Caitlin McKenna, July 10, 2010, OH 1664v, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado, 40:46.

[45] Christopher O'Brien, interviewed by Caitlin McKenna, June 4, 2011, OH 1730v, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado, 05:40.

[46] Richard Regnier, 25:00.

do. . . Because if you hadn’t, [the fire] would have kept going.”[47] Even with over 150 years of warnings and a keen sense of Gold Hill’s sensitivity to fire, residents were not prepared for the toll that the events of September 6, 2010, would take on them.

“Please, let’s save that structure.”

Labor Day 2010 was windy from the start. At 10:01 a.m., George Fairer, a firefighter with the Gold Hill volunteer Fire Department, called 911. His frantic voice was recorded by Boulder Communications: “I have a fire at 100 Emerson Gulch. Trees are beginning to burn.”[48] Dispatch called local volunteer fire departments as well as Boulder and Forest Service teams to the scene. The wind picked up. Dispatch upgraded the situation: “At this time we have a recreational vehicle fully involved. . . Immediately threatening 1,000 gallon propane tank.”" The firefighters were helpless. The inferno quickly spread to the tree tops and was out of control.

Within two hours, the fire traveled over a mile away from its source. Gold Hill residents received reverse 911 calls to evacuate. Many gathered their most important possessions and fled; others stayed to defend their homes. Until the evening of the sixth, it was unclear whether the town still stood. Utilizing online methods of communication, one of the first messages about the state of the town came from The Gold Hill Inn’s Facebook page on September 7. It read, “We made it through the night.”[49] Other historic landmarks were not as lucky.

A homestead cabin dating to the 1860s south of town burned down, as did the Snowbound Mine shaft house, which had been listed on the National Register since 1989. But even as these resources were lost, many stories of historic safekeeping came out of the fire.

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[47] Shivaun Finn, 45:00.

[48] “Fourmile Canyon 911 call transcript,” *The Denver Post* (Denver, Colorado): September 9, 2010.

[57] *Ibid.*

[49] Gold Hill Inn. Status Update, September 7, 2010, URL: http://www.facebook.com/pages/Boulder-CO/Gold-Hill-Inn/56840454789#!/permalink.php?story_fbid=128992130482262id=56840454789, accessed October 12, 2012.

The initial fight was handled by the volunteer units from the Protection Districts of Fourmile Canyon, Sunshine Canyon, Indian Peaks, Gold Hill, and Sugarloaf, along with professional firefighters from Boulder. These locals were key to saving nearly all the historic resources that were threatened. The interviews conducted after the fire revealed how valuable the built historical resources were to the men and women who initially fought the fire.

Chris O'Brien, Captain of the Boulder Rural Fire Department, who once worked at The Gold Hill Inn and lived in Jamestown, another neighboring mountain community with a history in mining, described his decision to save a historic resource instead of the adjacent fire station:

> When the Salina Station caught fire in the Fourmile district I was there. I requested one of my type IIIs to come up to me, and they came to me and they did what any firefighter would do—they started stretching their hoses directly at the burning firehouse, and I said, "You know what, guys? It's up in the roof of the fire house. The fire house is lost. But that school house? That one-room schoolhouse that's a wood-clapboard schoolhouse right next door? That's a historic structure. Our job now is save that. Please, let's save that structure." And we successfully saved the church, the schoolhouse, a number of the historic structures there. In fact, even the first night of the fire we were able to save the Summerville Inn, and we were very pleased to have saved so many of the historic structures up there, and very sad to have lost the homes that we had to lose.[50]

Chris Finn, Gold Hill's fire chief and son of the Gold Hill Inn's original restauranteurs, Barbara and Frank Finn, made similar decisions. In an interview with the *Boulder Weekly* four months after the Fourmile Canyon Fire had initially threatened his community, he explained his frame of mind when fighting the *fire* at the Colorado Mountain Ranch, a summer camp just west of town on Sawmill Hill:

> "You get in a situation like that and you have to make choices," Finn says. "You look at this big, beautiful, 100-year-old building and you say, 'We're going to save that.'"[51]

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[50] Christopher O'Brien, 15:25.

[51] Christopher Finn, quoted by Jefferson Dodge in "People of the Year: Boulder County's Wildland Firefighters," *Boulder Weekly,* Dec. 30-Jan.5, 2011.

In some cases, the firefighters could no longer stay to defend historic resources. When it came to Gold Hill, the volunteers made the decision to leave the town to the flames. Finn later explained on video just how the town outlived the threat:

> "We had the fire coming over this ridge, right here," he said, and gestured towards the hill to the south of town, "like, 20-foot flame lengths. We started evacuating down the hill. Just as we went the wind changed. It came from this way," he motioned with his left hand, indicating that the wind blew from the northeast, "blew it back and that bomber was able to put a red line right down the road."
> "Gold Hill lives," offered the reporter.
> "Yes," replied Finn, "Gold Hill survives."[52]

Gold Hill was saved not only by a change in the wind, but also by the fast-acting members of the mountain volunteer fire departments. In an oral history interview conducted in 2011, Finn described what happened when he and his crew made their way back up into Gold Hill after the slurry bomber passed over. He approximated that 10-15 trucks and 50-60 firefighters from the neighboring fire protection districts of Timberline, Ward, Nederland, and Coal Creek went around town, "knocking out things as fast as they could, trying to save Gold Hill."[53] The departments had arrived on the heels of the slurry bomber because they had all disobeyed orders, what Finn called "self-dispatching." Instead of driving to the staging area in Boulder and waiting to be dispatched, local fire departments made the decision to drive towards the flames. Accenting how close-knit the mountain communities become in times of crisis, Finn said, "when your neighbor needs help, your neighbor needs help. It really doesn't—you don't need the sheriff to call you up and say that your neighbor needs help if they need help."[54] As the Fourmile Fire burned, it united the mountain communities as they supported one another and reinforced their ties to a collective history.

In a lot of ways, the Fourmile Canyon Fire resembled the 1894 wildfire. The chaos and hasty evacuation, the lack of solid information about the town's fate, and the sudden change in

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[52] "Gold Hill Survives Due to Courageous Firefighting," Video, *Daily Camera*, www.dailycamera.com, accessed October 27, 2010, 00:00-00:45.

[53] Christopher Finn, 18:20.

[54] *Ibid.,* 20:22.

wind all harkened back to the event 116 years before. Indeed, even the source was similar. The 1894 *Camera* article alleged that a group of campers ignited the forest with their campfire; the present-day version of the same newspaper reported that the source of the 2010 fire was the fire pit in the backyard of the man who made the initial 911 call—who was also a volunteer fire fighter with the Fourmile Fire Department.[55]

Fig. 9: Aerial view of Gold Hill and the burned area to the south. *(Courtesy Paul Aiken and Daily Camera—Boulder, Colorado)*

An aerial photo of the town taken soon after the fire revealed the great danger the town of Gold Hill had faced (Fig. 9). The remains of the burn stretched from the left side of the frame (the south west), nearly reaching the back porches of the houses on Hill Street. To the right side of the photo, the northeast side of the burn, is the bulk of historic downtown Gold Hill. All but three of the 38 contributing resources to the National Register Historic District were visible, with the burn sniffing at the boundaries. The Fourmile Canyon fire nearly wiped out the town's built history.

Once Gold Hill was secure and the fire tamed, local newspapers published a number of articles that focused on the reactions of the town's residents. The *Daily Camera* titled one article "Fourmile Fire: Gold Hill's history—and lifeblood—saved." It quoted Lynn Walter, whose grandfather assisted the Bluebirds and helped construct their dining hall—The Gold Hill Inn—in

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[55] John Aguilar, "Fourmile Fire fully contained; volunteer firefighter at focus of investigation," *Daily Camera* (Boulder, Colorado): September 13, 2010.

the 1920s. Walter said, "while Gold Hill may take decades to recover, the heart of the town and its sense of history largely escaped the flames of the Fourmile Fire."[56]

Amazingly, out of the 169 homes and 6,181 acres that the Fourmile Canyon Fire destroyed, the flames did not touch the 45 buildings that make up the immediate Gold Hill town site. Nevertheless, it strongly affected the community. The fire focused people's attention on what they had to lose. In the case of Gold Hill, the potential loss was the built environment, in which residents lived, stored their belongings, and constructed memory. Moreover, the built environment was where the town's sense of history, and thus its self-defined identity, resided.[57] The value placed on built history was evidenced by the local firefighters' decisions to save historic structures. Ironically, the historic nature of the mountain communities contributed to the devastation the fire wrought. Eric Phillips, Boulder County's wildfire mitigation coordinator, stated on September 11, 2010, "These old mining claims are on hillsides with roads that were designed for donkeys and horse carts. They are very steep, very windy, very hard to navigate, especially for fire trucks. This is the legacy of what we're dealing with in that area."[58] The historic setting and character of the mountain locale was a factor in its vulnerability to fire.

In the wake of the Fourmile Fire, the Gold Hill community came together numerous times to mourn the loss of homes, to support one another's financial, residential, and emotional needs, and to rebuild. They also appealed to the broader Boulder County community using their distinguishing characteristic, history. A September 16, 2010, article in the *Boulder Weekly* pleaded,

> The Fourmile Canyon fire distressed more than just homes and businesses in Gold Hill—the Gold Hill Elementary School is also in jeopardy. Although the historic two-room schoolhouse did not suffer visible fire damage, its program continuance is at risk to its traditional local financial support. With the destruction of its homes and businesses, the Gold Hill community's ability to

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[56] John Aguilar, "Fourmile Fire; Gold Hill's history—and lifeblood—saved," *Boulder Daily Camera*, September 14, 2010.

[57] John Aguilar, "Fourmile Fire fully contained; volunteer firefighter at focus of investigation."

[58] Laura Snider, "Dense development, rough terrain: Fourmile Canyon was prone to a catastrophic fire," *Daily Camera* (Boulder, Colorado): September 11, 2010.

> provide funding for the oldest continuously operating public school in Colorado has been severely diminished.[59]

Two years later, the school was still in operation.

Like the 1860 and 1894 fires, the 2010 Labor Day wildland fire brought the town together through a shared traumatic experience. Though the town was spared, the fire reaffirmed the importance of the town's built history to its local inhabitants and to the larger Front Range community. One local captured the sentiments of the community. Grieving the demise of the Snowbound mine he said, "To me, the loss of anything that old is huge. That's our heritage."[60]

Conclusion

Gold Hill is unique among Colorado mining towns. Unlike cities such as Aspen and Leadville, mining did not yield enough revenue for the town to develop; nor did Gold Hill suffer the fate of ghost towns like Waldorf and Copper Rock. A combination of economic depression, group efforts, and individual initiatives preserved the town's built history. Early fits of economic boom and bust encouraged slight growth. Prolonged periods of economic stagnation in the twentieth century conserved the town's nineteenth century appearance. The Bluebirds catalyzed historic preservation effort when they purchased and restored the Grand Mountain Lodge. The group's attention to history profoundly affected the way others perceived the town. Instead of an isolated, run-down mountain hamlet, advertisers encouraged tourists to recognize the town's romantic history and its alluring natural environment. By the mid-twentieth century individual residents of Gold Hill continued to preserve the town's buildings and its history. They founded groups like Historic Gold Hill, Inc., that are currently the caretakers of the town's history.[61]

Residents in 2010 already held Gold Hill history close, but the Fourmile Canyon Fire reasserted the ties between community identity and the town's built history. The fire nearly

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[59] Heather May Koski, "Gold Hill Elementary needs help to survive fire," *Boulder Weekly,* Sept. 16-22, 2010, 16.

[60] Lynn Walter, quoted by John Aguilar, "Fourmile Fire: Gold Hill's History -- and lifeblood -- saved."

[61] Nation Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Gold Hill District, sec. 7, 3.

destroyed a National Register Historic District, and did destroy 169 buildings within two and a half miles of the town, all of which were historic resources at some level. The event reminded residents that they face a perpetual danger. The enduring threat of a fiery holocaust is integral to the town's sense of history. As the National Register nomination explained, the authenticity of Gold Hill is as much a product of the town's historic preservation efforts as its mountain setting.[62] That setting is characterized by dense lodgepole and ponderosa pine forests, fields of high grass, winding dirt roads, and steep, rocky terrain. It is an environment that is predisposed to wildland fire, and one in which fire is hard to combat. Indeed, the 2010 fire connected Gold Hill residents with the past even more than many of them realize. The basic facts of the Fourmile Fire were strinkingly similar to those of the 1984 fire. The similarity suggests that despite the advances in technology, forestry, and firefighting techniques, fire is as wondrous and frightening a foe as ever.

This conclusion, however, is paradoxical for public historians. For if a historic resource cannot be divorced from its natural surroundings, and indeed gains far more power from viewing it within its larger environment, then one must account for the environment's threats. Fire is a historical actor, shaping and affecting humans' lives and creating change in the physical and cultural realms. Fires shaped Gold Hill's history, which in turn shaped the values of firefighters and affected their decisions when fighting fire. But how can environmental history be incorporated into something that is by definition a man-made historical resource? And what does a historian counsel when such an ancient and impressive historical actor comes knocking?

[62] Nation Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Gold Hill District, sec. 7, p. 1.

CHAPTER IV

WILDLAND FIRE AND PUBLIC HISTORY

Gold Hill is a community of local historians. Folks who grew up there tell tales of their childhood, discovering abandonded mineshafts, running in and out of the historic cabins, and scaring themselves with ghost stories about miners and Bluebirds. They can list the years their parents or grandparents moved to the area, which buildings belonged to a family member, what years those structures were built, and by whom! Sixth grade students arrive at middle school in Boulder bragging that they attended the oldest continuously running elementary school in Colorado. Groups of locals will feed off of one anothers' stories over dinner, recalling weddings, concerts, celebrations, and deaths. Historic Gold Hill, Inc. annually produces a calendar with historical pictures, poems, and vignettes, with quizzes about the couples who were married at The Gold Hill Inn and still reside in town. Everyone is a geneologist, teacher, and protector of the town's history.

The practice of history in Gold Hill is primarily communal. Preserving the town, volunteering for Historic Gold Hill, Inc., and running the museum are all communal activities. The groups come together in order to protect the town's history, and that action simultaneously affirms their own place within the community. Even the individual oral history interviews, which are usually one-on-one affairs, were communal. The histories were always conducted by one member of the community with another member, be they friend, neighbor, boss, or acquaintance. The interviewee would have relationships with the other individuals who had been tapped for an oral history, and would reference community events, histories, and other people within their

interview, tying their experiences back to the community. Every act of preservation and interpretation of the town's past bound the community together and bolstered Gold Hill's sense of history.

This feeling of a shared history was an overt characteristic of the town. In 2010, *The Daily Camera* quoted Lynn Walter, who said that "The tiny town is soaked in history. . . and it's that sense of bonding through the past that has kept the community so intact and tightly woven over the years."[1] The appreciation and preservation of the town's history reinforced emotional, geneological, and physical ties to the rest of the community. The history of Gold Hill was never experienced alone, but rather within a social context.

Although the natural history of Gold Hill was appreciated, its preservation paled in comparison with that of the social and cultural histories. It was brought in when necessary, assisting histories of mining or the types of trees whose lumber built the town. Even fire—the one major environmental actor in the town's 153-year narrative—was not viewed as a historic event in its own right. The histories of the 1860, 1894, or 2010 fires were not about the occurrence of fire—they were about individuals' reactions to it, and its influence on the social and cultural histories of the town. The history, therefore, lacked important environmental facets that were fundamental to the town's character.

So how should historians weave wildland fire into the public history of Gold Hill? What resources are already engaged to tell the interlocking stories, and how might they be taken advantage of to tell a fuller and more truthful tale?

The following chapter assesses these questions in the context of the public history practices in Gold Hill. Delving into preservation, oral history, museum exhibits, and the overall sense of history, I argue that fire ought to be incorporated holistically into the town's conception of its past. Like the major social figures—David Horsfall, Blanche and Elmer Swallow, and Frank and Barb Finn—fire has had a powerful influence on the town, just as Gold Hill has had a

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[1] Lynn Walter, quoted by John Aguilar, "Fourmile Fire: Gold Hill's History -- and lifeblood -- saved," *Boulder Daily Camera*, September 14, 2010.

powerful shaping influence on its surrounding fire ecology. Telling the local story of fire and humans‘ interactions with it is essential to understanding the history of Gold Hill.

Historic Preservation: The Snowbound Shaft House

Three months before the Fourmile Canyon Fire, the Maria Rogers Oral History Program interviewed John Sand, a Gold Hill resident since 1985. A local historian, Sand is extremely active in the historic preservation of the town and sits on boards of the Gold Hill Club, Historic Gold Hill, Inc., and is a member of the Calendar Committee, which raises money for the museum by putting out calendars about the town's history. When asked about the boundaries of the Gold Hill community, Sand replied that he considered the Snowbound Mine to be the easternmost point of the town:

> As you come up to Gold Hill from Boulder, you will pass through an old mine called the Snowbound Mine. It's one of the early mines. It's a mine that is probably more intact than almost any other mine. I have not been in the mine buildings, but I am told that when you go in, clothes and overalls are hanging on pegs on the wall and helmets are laying around. It's as though they went home for lunch and just didn't come home—I mean, didn't come back to work.[2]

Like Sand, Gold Hill Resident David Brigham described the historic property, which was added in its own right to the National Register of Historic Places in 1989, as a distinguished part of the community. In the aftermath of the Fourmile Fire, he told the *Daily Camera* that he was "particularly upset about the demise of the Snowbound Mine, which has been preserved to look like it did when it was a working mine. It was a landmark on the side of the road that told him he was almost home."[3]

The Snowbound Mine shaft house burned in the first days of the fire, and it now lies in ruins, with just the metal parts of its equipment—barrels, the boiler, and nails—lying around its old foundation. The eradication of a historic resource is nothing new to historic preservationists,

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[2] John Sand, interviewed by Caitlin McKenna, June 14, 2010, interview OH 1661v, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado, 34:50.

[3] David Brigham, quoted by John Aguilar, "Fourmile Fire: Gold Hill's history -- and lifeblood-- saved."

because the preservationist movement is built upon loss. It gains momentum as historical buildings are threatened, and preservationists rally to protect them. However, the mine's destruction raises a number of issues about historic preservation in areas inevitably facing environmental threat. What should preservationists do when no amount of fundraising or lobbying can save a building, because its destructor only responds to temperature, fuel, wind, and humidity? Should the ruins of the Snowbound Mine be preserved, even though it is no longer a built resource? What can the site teach us , now that its physical history is so altered?

The Snowbound Mine was discovered in 1877 by Henry Coffey during the second boom in Gold Hill mining, but the shaft house was not built until 1917. It had five rooms: a main room, where the mine shaft, boiler, compresser, pump, hoist, and air tank were stored; a coal room; a blacksmith room; an assay-ore sorting office; and an auxillary room that some historians have identified as a changing room.[4] It operated through 1947, and produced gold and silver from its two veins.

The structure was regularly open to the public, and one of the owners, Phil Hannum, would tell visitors that "entering the shaft house is like going into a time capsule."[5] Hannum's business partner, John Meeker, was similarly descriptive: "As I walked into the mine building. . . it was like walking into another world in another time."[6] Until it burned, the building was furnished with the original mining equipment. Miners' boots and clothes hung on the walls with horseshoes, posters, and calendars. Birdhouses were installed on the outside of the building, along with tracks that led from the inside of the shaft house to the ore dump. The building was extremely well preserved since its abandonment, and Meeker and Hannum planned to turn the

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[4] Judy Brown, *Snowbound Mine: From its Discovery in 1877 to its Demise by Fire in 2010,* (Boulder, Co: Smilebooks, 2011), 12.

[5] Silvia Pettem, "Snowbound shaft house can never be replaced," *Boulder Daily Camera,* September 19, 2010.

[6] Brown, 16.

property into a museum where they might recommence mining operations "as a window to the past."[7]

The owners of the shaft house and the Gold Hill community did prepare for the threat of wildland fire. In 1996, Phil Hannum, together with the Boulder County Metal Mining Association, took steps to mitigate the threat of fire, and applied to the Colorado Historical Society for a grant for "preservation and protection measures, including treatment with a fire retardent."[8] The grant was not approved. The Gold Hill Fire Protection District included the property in its 2006 Fire Protection Plan, listing the property at "High Risk," and noting that "because of the wood construction of the mine and many cabins around it, ther is a great deal of potential damage."[9]

The Snowbound Mine was the only historic resource listed on the National Register of Historic Places to burn in the 2010 Fourmile Fire, and it is mourned by locals as well as historians. Since the fire, the history of the Snowbound mine was written down in memorium by Judy Brown, who self-published a 58-page book on the topic in April 2011. The shaft house was eulogized by local historian Silvia Pettem in the *Daily Camera* within two weeks of the fire in her article, "Snowbound shaft house can never be replaced."[10]

Pettem was right. The original shaft house was irreplaceable. And even though some historic artifacts were spared, they now lie uncovered, gathering rust on the side of the road. Moreover, the few extant pieces of equipment exist without their full historic context. When visitors now stop to look at the site, their purpose is not to dwell on mining history or step back in time so much as to photograph the ruins and look out over the burned, rusted equipment towards the blackened trees that the fire left behind.

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[7] Brown, 1.

[8] *Ibid.,* 7.

[9] Gold Hill Fire Protection District, "Community Wildfire Protection Plan," Gold Hill, Colorado, http://csfs.colostate.edu/pages/documents/GoldHillCWPP06final.pdf, accessed on December 1, 2012, 38.

[10] Pettem, "Snowbound shaft house can never be replaced."

Integrating wildland fire with historic preservation is a daunting topic, because it is necessarily paradoxical. Wildland fire can not be excluded from the area, and the best option for mitigatation is periodically setting smaller, prescribed burns. But all of the local historic resources are made of wood, so setting these fires is dangerous, and the responsibility of controlling them is extreme. Additionally, there is little research on the subject. When it comes to disaster recovery, organizations like the National Trust for Historic Preservation are interested in structure fires rather than forest fires. The majority of fire safety and historic building studies have focused on resources in urban areas, and the primary concern has been to ensure that the buildings have adequate fire safety features like sprinklers, fire extinguishers, and smoke alarms. Though these types of recommendations are extremely valuable when minimizing the risk of internal fires to a historic structure, they do not account for the threat of a forest fire engulfing the resource from beyond its walls.

However, some interests have assessed the threat of wildland fire to historic structures. The National Park Service has done studies, most notably in Yellowstone, of the preferred method of mitigating the threat to historic cabins. Their report indicated that they prefer a combination of thinning the forest within "a 400-foot perimeter from the edge of the outside buildings of each development," using "non- motorized, traditional or primitive tools," and prescribed burns farther from that perimeter.[11] A similar approach could be applied to historic properties in the Front Range.

The Gold Hill Fire Protection District rated the risk of fire and mitigation to local historic and cultural sites in their most recent Fire Protection Plan, which was released in 2006. The list contains 21 resources, including the Town of Gold Hill, the Bluebird Lodge, the Gold Hill School, the Gold Hill Museum, the Gold Hill Inn, the Gold Hill General Story, the various mines, including the Snowbound Mine, the Colorado Mountain Ranch, and a number of other buildings and sites.[12] The protection plan does not outline any actions to be taken to protect these resources

[11] National Park Service, "Wildland-Urban Interface Fuels Management FONSI" http://www.nps.gov/yell/parkmgmt/firefonsi.htm, accessed October 23, 2012.

[12] Gold Hill Fire Protection District, 37-40.

in the event of a wildland fire, but its purpose is to assess how the district's mitigation efforts might affect the resources. Working from this list, the Gold Hill Volunteer Fire Department completed some mitigation prior to the Fourmile Fire.[13]

In a rural district like Gold Hill, historic preservation must be administered to the surrounding natural environment as well as the built resources. In order to ensure that the environment is historically accurate and healthy, and that the threat of fire is mitigated, the historian must stretch his/her concept of historical accuracy beyond the window treatments and side-boards of the town's log structures to the forest and fields beyond, to a time for which we do not have a written historical record. To do this, historic preservationists must rely on scientists to paint pictures of the past. Geographers like Thomas Veblen at the University of Colorado Boulder and ecologist William Romme at Colorado State University have conducted multiple studies on historic fire regimes in Colorado, researching the types of trees that grow in certain areas and at certain altitudes, the frequency and severity of fires in those places, and the effect of fire suppression on different stands of trees.[14] Consulting these types of studies and collaborating with professionals in geography, ecology, biology, forestry, among others, would be extremely beneficial to historic preservationists. Forestry data provides a clearer understanding what species of trees in what abundance were historically present, while research about fire regimes indicates the severity and frequency of historic fires. Integrating these findings into historic preservation would provide a deeper, more authentic historical experience for visitors, who would have a clearer vision of what the land looked like during the late nineteenth century. Additionally, it would educate historians about the likelihood of a severe fire and furnish them with information that they might use to mitigate the threat.

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[13] Gold Hill Fire Protection District, 37.

[14] Thomas T. Veblen, Thomas Kitzberger, and Joseph Donnegan. 2000, "Climatic and Human Influences on Fire Regimes in Ponderosa Pine Forests in the Colorado Front Range. Ecological Applications," http://dx.doi.org/10.1890/1051-0761(2000)010[1178:CAHIOF]2.0.CO;2, accessed October 29, 2010. Merrill R. Kaufmann, Thomas T. Veblen, William H. Romme, "Historical Fire Regimes in Ponderosa Pine Forests of the Colorado Front Range, and Recommendations for Ecological Restoration and Fuels Management," Fort Collins, Colorado: Colorado Forest Restoration Institute, 2006.

But this does not solve the problem of what to do in the aftermath of the fire, with a historic resource destroyed. With the shaft house gone and the remaining artifacts degraded by exposure to the elements, should the property be preserved, and if so, how? In addition, how should the preservation project be framed in order for people to learn from it?

It is hard to determine how to prioritize the historic lessons of the Snowbound Mine. There are still artifacts there from its mining days, and, of course, there is still the mine shaft itself, now with less to announce its presence. Although the large boiler, some pulleys, a flue cleaner, and, ironically, a fire extinguisher all survived, they lack the historic framework that the shaft house provided. The few visitors no longer "step back in time" when they engage with the resource. They are not transported anywhere. Instead, they experience what is more similar to an archaelogical site. Presented with objects from the past, they are left to piece together history for themselves, imagining the purpose of each artifact without the color and depth of its physical context. There are certainly lessons that the site can still teach visitors about mining, but it will be difficult to engage visitors in the same way that the resource used to, before the fire.

This does not mean that the mine has lost all significance from a historic perspective. In addition to mining history, its ruins are a testament to the history and destructive power of wildland fire. Built out of the same materials as the other early twentieth century historic buildings in the Front Range, the remains of the shaft house and the area surrounding it could be preserved to show the disastrous abilities of wildland fire. Preservationists might make up for the erosion of historic resources by placing signage around the extant objects as well as the burned trees and providing information about the historic building that was lost, and the environmental and human actors that contributed to both its construction and destruction. As time passes, these signs could be updated to explore the growth in the forest, the changes in wildland firefighting practices, and new historical findings about the area.

Of course, it's possible that little to no preservation will take place in the wake of the fire. Perhaps the few surviving artifacts may be donated to a local museum or stored in a basement; perhaps it will all be cleared away and thrown in the trash; perhaps a small memorial stone will

be erected; or, perhaps it will all be left to the elements. No matter the outcome, it is certain that the loss of the resource affected the psyche of the present Gold Hill community. The Snowbound Mine is a testament to the community's sense of history, reminding those who pass it of impermanence. Its destruction underlines the vulnerability of the historic, vernacular structures, and in doing so, increases the value of those that remain.

Oral History

Oral history has the potential to unlock a wealth of primary information as people are approached to tell their story. Traditionally, historians relied on written primary sources. Books, laws, diaries, treatises, and memoirs have been the stuff of history. But oral histories add fresh accounts to history's coffers. They put the researcher in a unique position of identifying individuals who have something to add to the historical record and then navigating those people's memories. They often tap someone who might not have written their own account of an event or an era to the historical record, and then give credence to a person's experience, allowing them to add their emotions and opinions—their existence—to the annals.

Since the Fourmile Canyon Fire, the Maria Rogers Oral History Program conducted 14 interviews and set up a special collection about the fire. Two documentary films, Michelle Bauer Carpenter's "Above the Ashes" and Mary Ann Williamson and Angie Burnham's "Packed," were based on interviews with residents who had evacuated, many of whom were from outside of Gold Hill, and returned to wreckage instead of their home.[15] These oral histories are easily designated into two categories: those of evacuees and those of firefighters. Both contributed exceptionally rich and detailed accounts of their experiences and emotions during the weeks following September 6, 2010.

Of all the public history practices used in Gold Hill, oral history integrated fire most often and most effectively. Interviewers began conducting oral histories within three months of the fire,

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[15] Michelle Bauer Carpenter, "Above the Ashes," directed by Michelle Bauer Carpenter, vimeo, 2011, http://vimeo.com/29320828, accessed August 20, 2012; Mary Ann Williamson and Angie Burnham, "Packed," directed by Mary Ann Williamson, not released, 2011, screened at the Oral History Association Annual Conference, October 12, 2011.

and continue even now. These primary sources reveal strong community ties, a fundamental understanding of the fire-fighting techniques used by local departments, a deep sense of appreciation for personal and local history, and a fascination with the beauty and destructive power of wildland fire.

The more people oral historians interviewed, the more the story of the fire emerged. With each conversation, firefighters recalled when they became aware of the situation, and homeowners recounted when they realized that they would need to evacuate. The histories included the decisions of what to pack into the car and who to call for a place to stay, and those stories uncovered the priorities of the evacuees and their social networks. Dee Spencer, whose house burned down, remembered the telephone conversations she had with two of her neighbors:

> My neighbor, Alana, across the way, said she didn't get the 911 call, and what should she take?
> And I said, "Well, you know, I'm looking for photo books and instruments."
> And she said, "Oh, yeah. Yeah."
> And then Janice said the same thing. She was like, "What're you —What are you thinking of taking?"[16]

The small anecdote reveals the reliance and trust that neighbors had for one another as well as their surprise at having to make such tough decisions. Their evacuation choices were indicative of their values. They took the irreplaceable objects—printed photographs and instruments and artwork, then computers and essential paperwork, pets—and then the mundane essentials—a change of clothes and their toothbrushes.

For those who lost their houses, oral history provided a means to explain how their values and perceptions changed. Dee Spencer recalled the moment she fully grasped her loss:

> It really hit me just on a body level, cellular level, that sense of —when you want to go home and you don't have your home. There's lots of places that can act as home and they're comfortable and cozy, but I felt that home is the place where you get deeply rested. So, you really have a deep sense of rest in your body. It's a comfortable place. It's not just [that] your things are there, and everything. But you have this base to sort of fall apart

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[16] Dee Spencer, interviewed by Martha Dick, January 29, 2011, interview OH 17906v, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado, 11:10.

> in or [laughs] get re-energized in. It's very different than when you don't have it and making all these other places your home.[17]

Others contemplated how the fire made them reevaluate what was important to them. Stephanie Lynch, whose house burned, ruminated on the artifacts she and her husband found in the rubble of their house: his class ring, spoons, and a plate. "It was a very odd fire," she said into the camera, "Of all of the things that we would have wanted to get, I don't think that those were it. We do have something, something that we brought with us when we moved here, and something that was in the house with us."[18] The destruction caused the family to place value on the few possessions that symbolized the past, no matter their intended uses.

The oral histories uncovered stories that might not have been told otherwise. At the core of most of them was a narrative which started on the morning of September 6, when the subject first saw the smoke or got a call. But often the interviewee would take small side-trips into their memories. In the middle of describing his recollection of events in an extremely matter-of-fact manner, Doug Young, a long-time volunteer firefighter who had been at the forefront of the initial response, began to talk about his kids' reactions to evacuating:

> My son, Alex, who fourteen, and he's a freshman at Boulder High School—he was still concerned about his homework, because he had a really, really tough class that semester. He was really, really trying to work hard for his teacher, and he was really concerned about his homework for this one class. . . As the as the ash was starting to fall around our house—our daughter, Ellen, actually thought of the city of Pompeii. She actually started to think about that, and even though it wasn't a volcano—it was a fire—she was starting to think about the ash falling.[19]

Using oral history, it is often far easier to uncover the complex ways that fire affects individuals. Here, the history of the fire uncovered a boy's work ethic and girl's sense of history, the calm of two children in light of a natural disaster, and a father's pride. Such density is often lost in

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[17] Dee Spencer, 34:50.

[18] Stephanie Lynch, interviewed by Mary Ann Williamson and Angie Burnham, December 4, 2010, interview Oh 1759v, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado, 15:33.

[19] Douglas Young, interviewed by Martha Dick, March 5, 2011, interview OH 1717v, audio, video, and and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado, 49:10-49:50.

writing, when the task of telling the story is far more time-consuming and strenuous, and the author picks and chooses the importance of events based on the audience.

While researchers used oral histories of the evacuees and home owners to discern social and emotional history, interviews with firefighters uncovered tactical decisions, the complexity of jurisdiction during a disaster, and the relationships between firefighters and the communities they defended. Apart from relaying their orders, firefighters went into depth about how they made their decisions, which virtually all demonstrated their committment to protecting human life beyond everything else. Chris O'Brien illustrated this devotion to safety when he explained how hard it was to balance the need for manpower in the face of such a large, powerful fire with the reality that not everyone available was trained to the necessary level:

> In the initial phases of [the Fourmile Canyon Fire] we were using everything that we could. The difficult piece of that, of course, is the level of training. We need to use as many resources as we have on hand, but we also need trained resources. We can't have resources putting themselves in a position where they endanger themselves or they endanger other crews because they've put themselves in a position and they need help. So it becomes very difficult to have to look at somebody who lives in that area and say, "No, you can't be here because of these things." It's very very hard. It's very hard when they don't understand. They don't look at it that way.[20]

These insights are extremely important when assessing the history of the Fourmile Canyon Fire because of the one quality of the event that countless media outlets focused on: there were no casualties. Given the ferocity of the fire, and the volunteer status of the first responders, the professionals were expecting "bodies all over the place."[21] The response to the Fourmile Canyon Fire was an excellent example of training and leadership.

The interviews also uncovered the positive reactions to the ordeal. Chris Finn ruminated on "the good impacts—it has brought the community a lot closer together. . . on the humanity

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[20] Christopher O'Brien, 26:15.

[21] Christopher Finn, 49:02.

side, I think that the majority of people, it brought a lot of people together."[22] George Woodward was ebullient about his experience:

> Saved a bunch of houses. That was wonderful. I felt really good. I felt really more a part of the community after that than I had ever felt. And I love where I live! And I love my community! But I think everybody went through that—just the trauma of it. But for me I got a chance to work on people's houses and make an impact—have an impact. And it was great! It was a wonderful experience.[23]

Every interview brought up the effect of the shared trauma on the mountain communities. Each examined how folks reached out and supported one another during the fire and afterward in the recovery period.

The interviews were predominantly conducted by locals of their neighbors, coworkers, and friends, and therefore strengthened bonds between those who were affected by the fire. At the same time, the social familiarity affected the conversations. Interviewees referenced events and people in passing without explaining what or who they were talking about. Interviewers, who had usually spoken at length with the subjects before the oral history was recorded, would prompt the subject about stories that they had heard before. Additionally, coversations with others in their social circle, who had similar experiences, suffused the oral histories with a sense of shared mourning and empathy, which undoubtedly influenced memories as well as the comfort and accptance that the interviewees felt.

Wildland fire has been integrated into every oral history conducted with a resident of Gold Hill and the surrounding area since the Fourmile Fire took place. It can be used as a lens to illuminate aspects of social history, such as Dee Spencer's social network and the commodities she valued, that might have been ignored otherwise. It reveals the priorities of firefighters and the effectiveness of their training, such as Chris O'Brien's decisions, which always included human safety to be paramount. In some cases, like that of George Woodward, fighting the fire was an

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[22] Christopher Finn*.,* 44:24.

[23] George Woodward, interviewed by Martha Dick, June 5, 2011, interview OH 1728v, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado, 56:43.

opportunity to give back to the community he loved so much. In all cases, the closeknittedness of the mountain communities shone through the oral histories. The act of conducting them further bonded the people together, and integrated trauma with reflection, fire with life.

Museum Exhibits

Until the Fourmile Fire, three spaces housed exhibits about town history. The Gold Hill Museum was official curator of the town's past, while The Gold Hill Inn and Snowbound Mine contributed unofficial exhibits. The only mention of fire throughout these three displays was in the town narrative, displayed in the museum. The 2010 fire changed the makeup of the exhibit spaces when it wiped out the Snowbound shaft house, and although the inn added pictures of the fire, the town's current exhibits are still woefully deficient of fire history. Incorporating the fire into the exhibits must be done appropriately, adding in fire's affect on different aspects of the town's history in the exhibits that relate to those topics.

The Gold Hill Museum is housed in a building that was once the St. James Church, a small two-room building on the north side of town. It is only open to the public from Memorial Day through Labor Day, and houses an exhibit presenting the narrative of Gold Hill, and odds and ends that have historical relevance to the townspeople. In one corner stands an organ, donated by a local family, and on a wall in the middle of the front room there are photographs of a women's baseball team, groups of people riding in a Studebaker bus, and a mining shaft. The display is stagnant from year to year, and, apart from mentioning the geology of the area and including the 1860 and 1894 fires in a timeline of town events, ignores environmental history. Instead, it is a vehicle for nostalgia and antiquarianism.

The museum is not the only exhibit space in Gold Hill. The Gold Hill Inn acts as a casual exhibition space, with photographs, artifacts, plaques, and newspaper articles about Gold Hill history on the walls of its bar. The inn dedicates one wall to pictures of the Fourmile Fire's flames and the slurry bomber that quelled them. But nowhere in this exhibit is wildland fire integrated with the history of the town. In the inn, the purpose of the pictures of the fire is to celebrate the

survival of the building and to commemorate the firefight, which was led by the inn's owner and town fire chief, Chris Finn.

The third museum space no longer exists. John Meeker dreamed of creating a museum from the Snowbound shaft house, but those plans were dashed by the fire. However, he does intend to erect a structure in order to protect the equipment that survived the fire, surely a bitter consolation. Perhaps the new building can still act as a museum. The major artifacts of the mining operation remain, as does its core: the mine shafts. Reconstructing a new building in the fashion of the old could also be a historic lesson in itself, if contributers were tapped to source the wood locally, using the same methods of logging and construction as the original builders used.

Exhibits are not the only ways that these organizations convey history. The Gold Hill Museum also uses an annual calendar to disseminate local history. The calendar's images change from year to year, but the purpose is the same: to raise money by capitalizing on Gold Hill's history and community. The 2011 calendar's front page was a 1950 map of the Gold Hill Mining District, while the 2013 front page is a picture of the Cold Spring, Gold Ring, Altorrow, and Alamakee mines, circa 1880. Underneath the photo, the explanation reads, "The Gold Hill Mining District produced over $12 million in precious metals from 1869-1909."[24] The second page of every calendar is a list of birthdays for every resident. Also included are pictures drawn by local students, historic photographs of the Bluebirds, and descriptions of the names and building dates of local cabins. Like the museum, the calendar follows the Gold Hill narrative of a mining town turned into the Bluebirds' getaway, and finally settling into a close-knit community of history minded folks. The imagery evokes a feeling of a quaint village in which history is immutable.

The calendar and the exhibits do a fine job in dwelling on the local narrative, but none of these initiatives attempt to tie the local history into a larger story. Though Gold Hill's history illuminates aspects of other histories, local historians keep it vaccuum-packed. This approach ignores the interconnectedness of the world, what H. P. R. Finberg described as "a series of

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[24] Historic Gold Hill, Inc., *Gold Hill Calendar*, 2013, in author's possession.

concentric circles." With personal and familial history at the center, histories ripple out and influence one another.[25] Instead of critically examining the effects of Gold Hill's past on larger histories, or incorporating larger-scale histories into the story of Gold Hill, the local exhibits focused only on local memory and antiquarianism. To promote a better understanding of history, other histories, especially that of wildland fire, ought to be included.

Among the two existing exhibit spaces and the third potential location for a museum, the integration of fire into Gold Hill's history could be split. Fire's physical effect is most appropriately exhibited in the Snowbound site, while its emotional and social influence is easily incorporated into The Gold Hill Inn's display. The Snowbound Mine's ruins, combined with the surrounding forest, are powerful artifacts for display. The Snowbound site could preserve its destruction, and use signs to present the story of the Fourmile Fire as well as the construction and use of the mine itself. The Gold Hill Inn would be a more appropriate venue for the story of fighting fire. Because it is a commercial venture, it is less likely to display history that depresses its patrons, but it could certainly incorporate the history of the volunteer fire department and the story of how Gold Hill was saved. Meanwhile, The museum, assuming it does not drastically change its approach to exhibits, could extend its timeline to include the Fourmile Canyon Fire. The collection of artifacts could be enlarged to include the different types of firefighting tools, incorporating miners' tools as well as the staples of modern firefighting: chainsaws, Nomex, and packs of firefighting foam. The pictoral collection could be expanded to include pictures of the town in 1894, comparative photos of the surrounding forest, fire trucks from the volunteer fire department, slurry bombers, and ruins of houses from the Fourmile Fire. The exhibit spaces, thereby expanded, would remind viewers that fire is an essential and inescapable part of Gold Hill history.

Fire does not need to be incorporated completely into any one of these exhibits, nor could it. Because of the limits of space, a full account in every location would push out other imporant

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[25] David Kyvig and Myron Marty, *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You* (Maryland: AltaMira Press, 2010), 8.

aspects of Gold Hill history. Instead, it ought to be included in part so that visitors engage with the topic regularly and include it in their broader understanding of the town's history.

Conclusion: A Sense of History

Although wildland fire is incorporated into every written and oral history of the town, its affect on the sense of history is less overt. Although the burn on the south side of town is a menacing reminder of the Fourmile Canyon Fire, visitors habitually divorce the built from the natural history and ascribe fire to the forest and history to the town. Yet, the sense of history in Gold Hill is deeply connected to sense of place, which is rural, forested, and set within a fire ecology. The town is constructed of locally-sourced timber and its historic cabins are heated by wood stoves. Its inhabitants conceptualize the threat of wildland fire in their day-to-day lives, either walking by the volunteer fire department on the west side of town, viewing photographs of the Fourmile Fire's flames on the walls of The Gold Hill Inn, or driving into town through the blackened forest that surrounds it.

Since 2010, the Gold Hill community grew even more attached to the past. While traditional keepers of history such as the Historic Gold Hill, Inc. and the Gold Hill Club were little changed, the amount of oral histories conducted in town by community members grew considerably. The impetus for this increase was the Fourmile Canyon Fire. Each interview necessitated reflection and caused the interviewee to construct a personal narrative that fit within the larger history of the fire. Additionally, because of the close relationships between each interviewer and interviewee, the community bonded further over a shared sense of trauma, loss, and relief.

The practice of all types of public history contribute to the town's overall sense of history. The preservation of built resources maintains the physical appearance of history, the museum exhibits contribute to the depth of historical understanding, and the oral histories demonstrate the committment to preserving experiences for future generations. Integrating wildland fire into each practice will generate a more comprehensive understanding of the town, and will therefore

influence the sense of history in a more thorough manner. Once wildland fire is integrated into the conception of the town, a walk through Gold Hill will no longer merely incite the imagination to step back in time, it may also ignite a visitor's interest in the profound and complex truth that humans can never extricate themselves from nature.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Chris Finn sat in the drawing room of his house, one block north of the Gold Hill fire station, on a sunny May day in 2011. It was nearly 9 months since he had responded to the call for the Fourmile Canyon Fire, and he was still tense when he recalled the circumstances of September 6, 2010 in an interview for the Maria Rogers Oral History Program. He had not thought much of the fire when it was first reported at 10 a.m. and continued preparing for the annual Labor Day barbecue that the Gold Hill Inn held on its lawn. Then, an hour later, he looked at the plume of smoke again and was instantly reminded of the first time he saw the Black Tiger Fire, over twenty years earlier. He immediately shut down the event and gathered his staff, all of whom were locals, and sent them home, recommending to "several of the people who live[d] down in [Fourmile Canyon] that they should go down and get stuff out now, while they could." [1]

From the inn, Finn went to the fire station, where he gathered the few firefighters who had not left town for the holiday. There, the group joined up with volunteer fire fighters from the neighboring town of Ward, and "went out to Dixon Road to look at a nightmare." [2]The fire moved so fast that the firefighters had little time to clear a line around the houses, and Finn could no longer keep track of time. "I don't know whether it was twenty minutes, or an hour, or two

[1] Christopher Finn, 10:03.

[2] *Ibid.,* 11:02.

hours between that—when we started and when we got run off there, because it was just—it kind of stood still as the fire came at us."[3] It became clear to the fire fighters that they had to retreat to Gold Hill, where the group split in half. One assembly of fire fighters stayed in the center of Gold Hill, while another drove to the Colorado Mountain Ranch, a summer camp on the west edge of town. There, they back-burned around the ranch until the fire began to close in on them, when they once again had to retreat to Gold Hill. But the town wasn't doing much better. Finn recalled,

> From down on Main Street, it was starting to get hot. You look up on the mountain, and you could not see the top of the flames—between the black and the red, it all melded into the sky, and—there were probably 60-, 100-foot flames coming at us. And, that was when we also thought about the fact that out of the four escape routes that we originally had from Gold Hill, we had one left, and it was time to take it.[4]

The firefighters drove down Lickskillet, the steep, unpaved county road that led to Lefthand Canyon, and all believed that had seen Gold Hill for the last time. "We all assumed that Gold Hill was gone," said Finn, grasping for words. "You know, it was like, okay, it's done. And it was really sad. I mean this is—I'm the type of person, I live in Gold Hill, I leave Gold Hill once a week, normally, to get groceries and that's it. I don't really like going to the city, so, that was really hard."[5]

Chris Finn was not just the Gold Hill fire chief. He also owned The Gold Hill Inn and the Bluebird Lodge, and had lived in Gold Hill since his parents moved there in 1959, when he was four years old. His mother founded Historic Gold Hill, Inc., and sponsored the application to the National Register of Historic Places. Chris Finn was not only a quintessential local of Gold Hill, but his personal history was tied to both the town's historic preservation and its fight against

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[3] Christopher Finn, interviewed by Caitlin McKenna, May 31, 2011, interview OH 1729, audio, video, and transcript, Maria Rogers Oral History Program Collection, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado, 13:56.

[4] *Ibid.,*15:18.

[5] *Ibid.,* 37:16.

wildland fire. And yet, nine months after the Fourmile Canyon Fire, he had not yet sorted out his feelings:

> It's really hard to drive to Boulder, driving through all that burn. I don't know, everything's, it's—I can't explain it, it's different, you know, I'm a different person for going through that, and I still haven't figured all that out, myself. So. . . [6]

Finn's reaction epitomized the complexity of wildland fire in the Front Range, and Gold Hill in particular. The area has only been settled by European-Americans for a century and a half, and during that time, the people who moved in altered historic fire ecologies by setting and suppressing fires. They rooted their sense of history and their culture in that same environment, which resulted in a paradox. The very characteristics that defined the town—its detachment from modernity, its place among woods and mine tailings, and its wooden buildings—were intrinsically susceptible to the threat of wildland fire. That threat is a hallmark of both the town's survivalist narrative and its community, which rallies around the fire department and grows closer through shared trauma.

The town can not detach itself from its surroundings without fundamentally altering its character, and even then, it would never be able to fully insulate itself from the environment. The threat of wildland fire is omnipresent. Despite advances in fire fighting research and techniques, which have mitigated threats and provided more effective fire fighting equipment, wildland fire is still a formidable foe. The best way to combat it is to contextualize wildland fire using the current practices of public history—historic preservation, oral history, and museum exhibits. These are the primary ways that residents and visitors connect to the past, and the best way for them to emotionally and intellectually register the realistic threat of wildland fire.

Integrating wildland fire completely into the history of the town is essential for the town's survival. Without grasping that fire is not only inevitable, but necessary for the environment, citizens may not realize that fire should not be thought of as a foe, but as an essential, if

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[6] Christopher Finn, 54:40.

dangerous, environmental actor. Without understanding that the town has been saved by a combination of stubborn, community-minded volunteers as well as sheer luck, they may not fully appreciate the need for supporting the fire department, nor the real peril that fire will put their homes and community in. Without hearing the stories of those who lost all of their belongings, but were able to find new meanings in their lives because of it, they may not imagine that they could weather such a storm. Weaving together the man-made and the natural, the ancient with the modern, the event with the effect, would communicate a much deeper, fuller, more truthful history. That, in turn, would inform future residents of what to expect and how to protect their home, town, and community when “The Fire” returns again.

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