



Parked in the Past

Fairplay history unfolds at 5th and Main since 1873

Earliest hotels were Valiton, McLean, Bergh, Vestel, Windsor

Laura Van Dusen, Correspondent

April 30, 2013

The historic Fairplay-Valiton Hotel at 5th and Main streets had an ownership change recently when the hotel was sold to the Poage brothers of Littleton, Colo. (See the Aug. 16 Flume.)

The changes the new owners will make to the hotel is a story for a later edition, but the sale makes one wonder about earlier hotels that occupied the same site, and the people who built and ran those hotels in Fairplay's pioneer days.

The first lodging house on the site of 5th and Main streets in Fairplay was the Valiton. Later hotels were the McLean House, the Bergh House, the Vestel House, a second round as the Bergh House, and last, the Hotel Windsor.

The structure burned to the ground in 1921, and the building currently occupying the site, now called the Fairplay-Valiton, was completed in 1922.

Everyone has a story to tell, and the historic owners of the Fairplay lodging houses are no exception. Following are the tales of two early owners, with a short history of the location in the accompanying side article.

VALITON

As an adult, Louis Frederick Valiton was tall, lanky, blue-eyed and bearded, according to an aged 1873 photograph and family information on ancestry.com. The family believes he suffered from epilepsy; possibly that condition contributed to his early death.

An 1873 photo of Valiton's wife, Catherine Valiton, shows her to be about 5 feet 7 inches with a small waist and long dark hair worn in ringlets.

Louis Valiton was born in France in June 1835. At age 17, in 1852, he immigrated to New Orleans, and from there he was traced to Dubuque, Iowa. He married Mary (or Marie) Catherine Ferney, another immigrant from France, in Dubuque in 1858; he was the first of her four husbands.

Move West

In 1859, the couple lived in Missouri where their first son, Charles, was born. On May 1, 1861, the young family began their journey west, leaving from St. Joseph, Mo. They traveled in "a covered wagon drawn by two spans of mules,"

said an article written by Charles Valiton in 1925 titled "Forty-Five Years in Colorado."

A copy of the article made from an unknown publication is stored at the Park County Local History Archives.

The Valitons were following the "Pikes Peak Gold Excitement," said Charles Valiton. They arrived in Denver on June 15, 1861, with help along the way from "the Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians, [who] were friendly to the whites and kept the emigrants well supplied with fresh buffalo and venison in exchange for flour, sugar, tobacco and coffee."

Park County

In 1862, Louis Valiton was a justice of the peace in "Georgia Gulch, Summit County, CT (Colorado Territory)" (April 23, 1862, Rocky Mountain News), and in 1864 he was secretary of the Montgomery Mining District, Park County, CT (Jan. 12, 1865, Daily Mining Journal, Black Hawk, Gilpin County, Colo.).

The family was living in Montgomery, Colo., four miles due north of Alma, until about 1867. Louis Valiton was postmaster there. The town site is now buried under the waters of Montgomery Reservoir.

In the 1860s, two more children were born into the family, a son, Delore, in 1864, and a daughter, Lenora (or Leontine) in 1869.

In 1870, the family was living in Fairplay, according to the U.S. Census. There, Louis Valiton was the stage agent for the U.S. M & Ex. Line run by the Wildeboor Brothers (Sept. 30, 1869, Colorado Weekly Chieftain, Pueblo County, Colo.).

He also owned and operated Valiton's Drug Store.

The store was in business as early as September 1868, when its first advertisement was found (Sept. 28, 1868, Rocky Mountain News Weekly).

It was a large store that sold not only "every variety of drugs and medicines," with "prescriptions carefully prepared," but "a general assortment of merchandise, fancy articles, wines, liquors, etc.," the ad said.

The couple's oldest son, Charles Valiton, was a printer and journalist who wrote for several Colorado newspapers in the early part of the 1900s. He occasionally left that profession and mined, but he always came back to writing. In the 1920s, he was a police officer in Seattle, yet he still sent Colorado news tips to his colleagues in the state.

In the Dec. 9, 1910, Flume, he authored a story about his father's drug store in Fairplay.

He said Chief Saguache of the Ute tribe, a large man, 5 feet 10 inches and about 240 pounds, made a point to visit Valiton's Drug Store. Charles Valiton remembered the whole tribe visiting when he was a small boy and, he said, he made a long friendship with the chief "by giving candy and nuts to his squaws and young papooses."

In Charles Valiton's words, "The Indians traded buckskins, buffalo robes and beaver, bear and mountain lion skins for flour, coffee, sugar and canned goods, also for flashy colored calicos for their squaws." He said the tribe camped near Fairplay for "several days at a stretch."

In 1873, Louis Valiton built the first hotel at what is now the corner of 5th and Main streets in Fairplay.

Sale of hotel

In May 1874, Mary C. Valiton placed advertisements in the Rocky Mountain News every week, offering the hotel for sale or rent.

“A new hotel on Front street (sic), opposite the Court House square, Fairplay, Colorado,” the ad said. The main building was two stories high, with 20 rooms with a seven-room, one-story addition.

The hotel was probably for sale due to Louis Valiton’s health. He died in 1875, at the age of 39, leaving his wife, age 43, to raise the children; Charles, 15, Delore, 11, and Lenora, 6.

The property was sold in 1874 or 1875.

A mention in the Feb. 25, 1898, Flume tells of a visit to Fairplay by Elizabeth McLean. The Flume said, “It has been many years since she was here but she will be remembered by some as the first landlady of the McLean House, later known as the Bergh House.” From this one can determine that McLean owned the hotel between ownership by Valiton and Bergh.

Three more marriages

After her husband’s death, Mary Catherine Valiton moved to Animas City, Colo., a historic town that is now absorbed within the city limits of Durango.

In 1880, she married Frank DesChamps. They apparently divorced. Information on ancestry.com shows that by 1890 he was married to another woman and living in New Mexico. He died there in 1910.

Mary Catherine DesChamps was living in Durango in 1882 when she and Nicholas Bergstrand were married. He went to Arizona to mine in April 1884, and she never heard from him again.

Back in Animas City, Mary Catherine Bergstrand married for a fourth time in 1901 to Mathew Salmhofer. He preceded her in death by a few months in 1910 when she was 78 years old.

Bergh

Abraham Bergh was born in Milwaukee, Wis., in 1835. He came to Colorado in 1859 when he was 24, and he married Lena Evans there in 1862. They had eight children; three died in childhood.

In 1870, the Bergh family was living in Fairplay. Abraham (or Abram) was a 34-year-old miner. He lived there with his wife, Lena, 31, daughters Lucy, 6, and Mary, 4, and his son Burton, 1.

On Jan. 9, 1872, he was appointed the postmaster of Buckskin, Colo., located about two miles west of Alma.

In November 1874, the Masons established Fairplay’s Doric Lodge No. 25 (still existing today), and Abraham Bergh was its first Worshipful Master (W.M.), or Master of the Lodge.

The term “Worshipful Master” is one of respect, used in the same way one would address a judge as “Your Honor,” according to www.masonicinfo.com. He completed four terms as W.M. and died during his fifth term in 1892.

Abraham Bergh bought the hotel in late 1876 and renamed it the Bergh House. One of the first ads Bergh placed for his hotel was simple and to the point: “The Bergh house at Fairplay, Colorado, is the only first-class house in the place. A. Bergh, Proprietor.” It appeared in the Dec. 6, 1876, Colorado Mountaineer, published in Colorado Springs.

In 1879, Bergh was the president of the Fairplay town board. He served with other

town notables, such as John Hoover, Joe Summer and John Ifinger.

Success

The year 1879 was a productive one for Bergh. The hotel was doing so well that in April an addition of 30 rooms was added, and in May a self-supporting circular staircase became part of the décor.

And the hotel welcomed notable guests such as Horace Tabor, Ulysses S. Grant Jr. – the former president’s son – and John L. Routt.

At the time, Routt was Colorado’s governor. He was the first to hold the position, having served from the beginning of statehood for four years, 1876 to 1879. He also served from 1891 to 1893 as the state’s seventh governor and was the mayor of Denver from 1883 to 1885.

For unknown reasons, the Bergh House was sold in August 1879, and the family moved to Denver. It was bought by E. N. Marsh, and he called it the Vestel House.

Heartbreak

Later that year the Berghs suffered the worst blow that any parent can imagine. Four of their children became ill with typhoid fever.

Mary Josephine Bergh, called Mamie, died on Nov. 28, 1879. She was described in the Dec. 4, 1879, *Flume* as a “bright, loveable girl of fourteen summers, whose gentle manners and disposition had endeared her to all.”

Burton Bergh was 11 years old when he died on Dec. 9, 1879. While Mamie died in her sleep, *The Flume* reported that Burton “suffered very much.” His funeral was held at St. John’s church in Denver. The story in the Dec. 9, 1879, *Flume* said

that Burton’s sister, Etta, then 8, was improving. She survived.

The age of the Berghs’ fourth child to develop typhoid fever was not reported in *The Flume* of Dec. 25, 1879. Abbie Bergh never appeared on a U.S. census, which is taken every 10 years. She would have been younger than Burton by at least a year and could have been an infant. The little girl died in December 1879 when the family was traveling through Kansas City on the way to Abraham Bergh’s birthplace, Milwaukee.

Healing

In June 1880, the Berghs were still living in Denver with their two surviving children, Lucy, 16, and Etta, 9.

But by June 1885, the Colorado state census for that year shows that the family had moved from its downtown Denver mansion back to Fairplay and that the parents had two more children – John, 4, and Elizabeth, 2. That year Lucy was 21 and Etta was 14.

Abraham Bergh repurchased the hotel at 5th and Main, then called the Vestel House, in July 1880 and changed the name back to the Bergh House. It was still a first-class hotel, but it also became a place for those injured in mines or fires to convalesce.

Life for the Berghs was improving. Abraham Bergh was elected mayor of Fairplay on Aug. 31, 1880, the family welcomed a newborn 11-pound son on Nov. 12, 1880, and 200-plus guests enjoyed the Masonic Ball at the Bergh House on Dec. 27, 1880.

Bergh’s political aspirations grew past the town of Fairplay. By January 1881, he was a member of the Colorado House of Representatives. While he was there, he introduced a bill to “prevent fraud upon

hotel and boarding house keepers,” said the Jan. 20, 1881, Flume.

Yet for all of his accomplishments, an obituary could not be found for Abraham Bergh.

He died in 1892, at the age of 57, sometime before a Nov. 17, 1892, Flume story complained that expected business was not being accomplished because of “the sickness and death of Mr. Bergh.”

Images on the following page



Hotel Windsor

Without looking at the sign, one notices very few differences between the Bergh House and the Hotel Windsor. The Hotel Windsor operated at 5th and Main streets from 1897 to 1921, when it burned. It was replaced by the building currently housing the Fairplay-Valiton Hotel. (Photo courtesy of the Park County Local History Archives, South Park Historical Foundation.)



Bergh House

This hotel was operated by Abraham Bergh and his descendants as the Bergh House from 1876 to 1879 and again from 1880 to 1897 on the corner of 5th and Main streets in Fairplay. (Photo courtesy of the Park County Local History Archives, T. C. Miller photo, Ed & Nancy Bathke collection)



Louis F. Valiton

This photo of Louis F. Valiton, stamped on the back, "J. T. Hendrick, Photographer," was taken in 1873, probably in Fairplay. Valiton is described by his family as tall and blue-eyed. Information on ancestry.com indicates the family believes he suffered from epilepsy. (Photo courtesy of the Park County Local History Archives)