



## *Parked in the Past*

*November 1963 - John F. Kennedy assassination affects Park County*

Other news: dial-up phones, broad daylight theft, SPHS homecoming, school enrollment

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Park County and the nation were getting ready for Thanksgiving and Christmas 50 years ago when the news of President John F. Kennedy's assassination reached every corner of the country and most parts of the world.

Kennedy was shot at about 12:30 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 22, 1963, as he rode in a motorcade through downtown Dallas.

This year the calendar dates match those of 1963. The president died on a Friday, six days before the Nov. 28 Thanksgiving holiday.

In local news at the time: Phones were updated to dial-up service, theft of copper wire happened practically under the nose of Sheriff Joe Hurst, South Park lost its homecoming game, and school enrollment figures were reported.

### **Kennedy**

In Park County, news of the president's death was received just as the students at South Park High School were served

lunch. The Flume of Nov. 28 reported that few students were interested in eating after hearing the news.

Meetings were canceled or postponed, and most businesses were closed, including schools; county, state and federal offices; and the bank.

When President Lyndon Johnson declared a day of mourning on Monday, Nov. 25, the day of Kennedy's funeral in Washington and burial at Arlington National Cemetery, Park County churches held memorial services, including the South Park Community Church in Fairplay and the Platte Canyon Community Church in Bailey, where about 100 people attended. During the Bailey service, the congregation sang "America" and "America the Beautiful."

A Requiem Mass (mass for someone who has died) was held at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Fairplay, where Father McInerney's sermon was "How to be a Good American." Most of the county

reporters mentioned the assassination in their Nov. 28, 1963, columns. The columnist for Bailey and Platte Canyon, Alice Wonder, was expressive in her opinion:

“Never in all the years have I been called upon to tell of so sad and tragic an act as it is [my] unhappy duty to tell of this week. The world will long remember the fiendish, dastardly assassination of our young President Kennedy in Dallas, Texas, by a creature who can not be classed as a human being [Lee Harvey] (Oswald) who was in turn slain by another assassin [Jack Ruby]. It is useless to try to tell of the shock, sorrow and grief that has encompassed our nation ...”

The Republican and Democratic women’s clubs canceled meetings in early December.

The Republican Women of Park County canceled a Christmas party and postponed a meeting in observance of a 30-day moratorium on public meetings, speeches and political activity called for by the Republican National Committee, said the Dec. 5, 1963, Flume.

The Park County Jane Jefferson Club [a nationwide club established in 1902 for women who wanted to be more involved in the Democratic Party, named after Thomas Jefferson’s mother] had a Christmas party scheduled for Dec. 11. The party was canceled, and instead the club held a memorial service on that date.

### **Assassination**

Kennedy, elected in 1960, had not announced his candidacy for the 1964 election, but he was preparing to run, according to information from the Boston-based John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

On Nov. 21, 1963, the president and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy left for a two-day, five-city tour of Texas. Kennedy had campaigned in 11 states since September, but it was Mrs. Kennedy’s first extended public appearance since the couple’s two-day-old son, Patrick Bouvier Kennedy, died in August of infant respiratory distress syndrome.

After visiting San Antonio and Houston on Nov. 21, the presidential entourage continued to Fort Worth on Nov. 22, where the president spoke at a chamber of commerce breakfast. Afterward the entourage took a 13-minute flight to Dallas, where Kennedy was scheduled to speak at a luncheon at the Trade Mart.

At 12:30 p.m., as the Kennedys rode in an open convertible limousine from the airport through downtown Dallas, gunfire erupted from the Texas School Book Depository. The president was struck in the neck and head and he slumped, bleeding, over his wife.

The limousine sped to Parkland Memorial Hospital, only minutes away, but nothing could be done to save the president. A Catholic priest was summoned, Kennedy was given last rites and was pronounced dead at 1 p.m.

In 1963, The Flume’s columns continued to report on cancellations and memorial services three weeks after the assassination; but other events made the news as well. Dial-up

In telephone technology, the county was 40 years behind Denver, where dial-up phones were in use in the 1920s, and nine years behind Boulder’s dial-up service, which began in 1954.

But at midnight on Saturday, Dec. 14, 1963, Park County was ready for the change. Mountain States Telephone &

Telegraph, or MST&T, flipped a switch, and the county moved from two-digit phone numbers connected with the assistance of an operator to the still-used seven-digit 836 (South Park) and 838 (Platte Canyon) exchanges.

In August 1963, prior to the switch, MST&T began upgrading businesses telephones for dial-up service. After all business phones were converted, MST&T upgraded residential phones, so all phones were ready for the December change.

And seemingly overnight the "Hello Girls" were gone.

### **Hello Girls**

"Hello Girls," (as they were called in the Dec. 12, 1963, Flume) was the common term used for women who said "hello" when one rang the switchboard in the days before direct telephone dialing. The term was first used to describe women switchboard operators in the U.S. Army Signal Corps during World War I, according to [www.worldwar1.com](http://www.worldwar1.com).

No longer could area residents "contact some person merely by asking the operator to call the nearest home," said the Dec. 12, 1963, Flume. And if one wanted "information of any kind," the story said, "those Denver operators just aren't going to be of much help to you."

In a final word about the "Hello Girls," The Flume of Dec. 12, 1963, said it wanted to speak for the community and "express sincere appreciation to the [departing Park County] telephone operators ... we are sure that this friendly service will not soon be forgotten by the great majority."

### **Instructions**

An instruction guide put out by MST&T told customers how to dial: "Turn the dial

around until your finger strikes the finger stop."

The guide also informed users of the sounds one would hear on the new phones: a busy signal, "repeated buzz, buzz, buzz;" dial tone, "steady humming sound;" and ringing signal, "burr-rr-ing."

### **Crime solved**

One week after the telephone change, crime made the front page of the Dec. 19, 1963, edition of The Flume.

It was a story about the theft of copper wire from the South Platte Dredging Company near Fairplay. Sheriff Hurst had his officers watching the site each night "with no sign ever of the thieves," the story said.

The theft was solved when two deputies and the sheriff were visiting with some local residents in the Sheriff's Office. A man named Jim Settele came in to see the sheriff, and soon after another person came into the office.

While making small talk, the second visitor asked how the case of the copper theft was coming along. Hurst answered that there were not any good leads, at which time Settele inquired who it was that "was rolling up copper just then at the dredging property."

The officers left the office immediately and caught three Denver men loading copper into a car. The men were arrested and taken to court for arraignment on Dec. 12. None could post the \$10,000 bond set for each, and all three were taken to the Chaffee County Jail.

The Flume story said that after catching the thieves in daylight, Hurst and his deputies "are now wondering if the thefts have been taking place in daylight all of the time, as the property has been

watched very closely at night for a long time.”

### **Homecoming**

South Park High School played its homecoming football game on Saturday, Oct. 19, 1963, and, according to the Oct. 24, 1963, Flume, “events went off smoothly except for the football score.”

But it wasn't so bad. “The team came closest to winning of any game this year,” The Flume story said. The final was Westcliffe 13, South Park 6.

The festivities began on Friday night, when students met at the school at 7 p.m. and “snake danced” over to the 4-H barn for a bonfire and pep rally.

On Saturday morning, the elementary and high schools bands, accompanied by twirlers for “color and interest,” marched through downtown Fairplay.

In the week before the big game, the football team voted by secret ballot for homecoming queen and two princesses. At halftime on the field Charlotte Ansley, a senior, was crowned queen by the football team captain, Doug Leaf. Elected princesses were senior Barbara Kintz and junior Melissa McFarland, who were escorted by football players John Dickerson and Mike McNamara.

### **School enrollment**

In 1963 the total enrollment in Park County schools was 295 students; of those, 52 percent, or 155, attended schools in the South Park district and 47 percent, or 140, attended schools in the Platte Canyon district, according to the Sept. 5, 1963, Flume.

Enrollment figures today have increased by 550 percent since 1963 – to 1,621 combined in the two school districts. The majority of students – 1,031 –

representing 64 percent of the county's student population – attend Platte Canyon schools. The 590 South Park students, which include Lake George and Guffey enrollment, represent 36 percent of the total number of Park County students. (See the Nov. 22, 2013, Flume.)

See next page for images.



## Breakfast

This shows the head table at the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce breakfast at the Hotel Texas, Fort Worth, Nov. 22, 1963. After breakfast, the dignitaries took a 13-minute flight to Dallas. From left to right are, Lady Bird Johnson, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy and President John F. Kennedy. An unidentified man is in the background. (Photo by Cecil Stoughton, White House Photographs, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston)



## Oath

Judge Sarah T. Hughes administers the presidential oath of office to Lyndon Baines Johnson aboard Air Force One at Love Field in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, 99 minutes after John F. Kennedy's death. Jacqueline Kennedy, Lady Bird Johnson and others are witnesses. (Photo by Cecil Stoughton, White House Photographs, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston)



## Former Flume reporter

Alice Wonder, Flume correspondent/reporter in 1963, celebrates her 80th birthday in 1958. She wrote a strong opinion of the Kennedy assassination for the Nov. 28, 1963, Flume. (Photo courtesy Park County Local History Archives, Park County Historical Society)



## Dredge

An undated photo shows the South Platte Dredge near Fairplay. In December 1963, three Denver men were arrested by Sheriff Joe Hurst after they were caught stealing copper wire from this dredge. (Photo courtesy Park County Local History Archives, Sanborn post card, source: South Park Historical Foundation)



## Rotary dial-up

Rotary phones were new technology for Park County in 1963, when they were installed in businesses and residences. The county was 40 years behind Denver and nine years behind Boulder in upgrading to dial-up telephones. (Photo courtesy Wikipedia Free Software)



## Motorcade

Shown is the view President Kennedy had from his motorcade driving through downtown Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. (Photo by Cecil Stoughton, White House Photographs, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston)