

THE FLUME

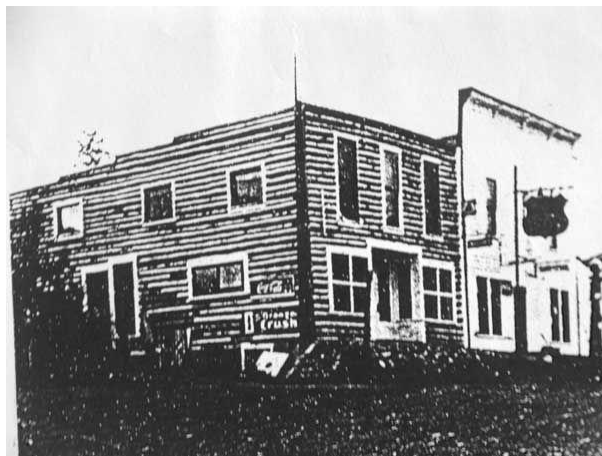
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Park County History

The evolution of the Guffey General Store

By Flip Boettcher Correspondent

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The Guffey General Store in 1929. Located on the northwest corner of Fourth and Main Streets at the stop sign. Agnes and George Miller bought the store in 1928. You can see the Phillip's 66 sign and gas pump on the right. The upstairs was a boarding house.. (Courtesy photo)

The general store in Guffey has a long history. Gustav (Gus) Cohen seems to have had the first mercantile store in Guffey in 1896.

It was presumably located on the northwest corner of Fourth and Main Streets, and most likely also housed the Post Office. Cohen was postmaster off-and-on between 1896 and 1922.

A Park County Bulletin article dated March 10, 1899, under the "Freshwater" section says, "The post office/store is the place to buy your tobacco, cigars and

stationary." John W. Tremayne in "Guffey: One Hundred Years of Memories" said, "Mr. Cohen had a mercantile store, and believe me, he sold everything. A great store for a little town."

There is a mention of a John H. Jackson buying the old post office on Main Street and opening a store in 1911, but Cohen possibly still had the mercantile until 1923, when Mr. Collins ran the store with the post office.

His wife, Elsie, was postmaster from 1923-28. The store had gas pumps, as well as the first radio for miles around. According to Franklin Nash, people went over there to listen to the radio and did hear a voice, but mostly they heard static.

In 1928, Agnes and George Miller bought the store. They had the post office, filling station and poolroom. Upstairs was a boarding house, and the Millers built two cabins across the street, northeast corner of Fourth and Main.

George died in 1933, and Agnes married Andrew Jack and kept the store. Early area resident Ardath Bumgarner said that people living in Guffey during World War II were lucky to have Agnes and her

store. Agnes had many commodities not found elsewhere.

Andrew died in 1946, and Agnes married Ira Day and kept the store. In 1948, the store burned down, but it moved across the street into the two cabins that the townspeople helped remodel into a store. This store also had gas pumps.

Finally, in 1953, Agnes sold the store to Jean and Jeannie Nunn. The Nunns sold the store to Melvin and Velma Ina Long in 1958 and, sadly, it burned down in 1959. Since the old school house had been closed, Melvin Long moved the store after it burned to the vacant school. There were no gas pumps there.

In 1960, early area residents Frank and Pat Ownbey opened up a small store with only soda pop, beer and candy, said Pat Ownbey. It was located in the old, two-room Guffey jailhouse that was located between the school and 110 Main Street at the time.

By 1961, the Ownbeys had built a log cabin and had a regular general store. It was called Frank's Service, said Pat Ownbey, and was located at 130 Main Street, between the bakery and 110 Main Street (which the Ownbeys also owned). It is a private residence now. Skoglund's Oil Company (Phillips 66 today) in Canon City supplied the gas, and the Ownbeys supplied the surrounding area.

The store did not have garage service, but they did fix tires, said Pat. They even fixed those big truck tires and she remembers having to watch out for those big metal truck rims: they could kill you. Pat didn't stay in the store all day, but had a bell that rang at the house when someone came, and she would then go over to wait on the customer.

The Ownbeys sold the store in 1970, and longtime local resident Bill Soux owned the store in the 1970s and is most likely the one to have named it the Guffey General Store.

In 1977, when Judy Robbins and Susan Vines bought the store, it came with the name Guffey General Store, said Vines. A September 1980 Gazette Telegraph article on Guffey says the store seems to have been the cornerstone of the community. Housed in a log cabin, the stock on the inside shelves seems to have had something of just about everything.

At that time, Guffey had ten residents with maybe 250 people in a 20-mile radius, and by the spring, Vines and Robbins were always ready to see some new faces.

In 1985, Jo Beckwith and Betty Royse bought the store and had it until 1988. An October 1987 Ute Pass Week newspaper says that there were 19 town residents, but only 100 in the surrounding area. The store, though, was still a favorite gathering spot, especially in the winter around the wood stove.

The store had a four-party telephone line, which was popular for those without a phone. Royse said that people would use the phone, record the number called and at the end of the month the store would post the amount people owed. No one skipped on paying their phone bill, Royse added.

The idea of having a cat as a town mayor was born at the store, said Royse and Beckwith. Guffey was being ignored by the county, so a group sitting around the store woodstove, decided a cat could "pussyfoot around with the best of the

government officials.” So they elected Paisley, the store cat, as mayor, said Royse.

The story was picked up by the national and international press, she added, and Paisley had her 15 minutes of fame.

A daily event at the general store was the sharing of a strawberry ice cream cone between Paisley and longtime Guffey resident Henry Reed. Reed lived at the corner of Main and Eighth in a one-room log cabin from 1945 until he died in 1992. Reed would walk up to the general store every day, rain or shine, for his shared treat, said Beckwith.

The store had a map on the wall, said Royse, with pins for visiting tourists. Every state in the Union and numerous countries were marked. Once the famous Von Trapp family, of The Sound of Music fame, visited the store and they even put on a quick show of their yodeling, said Royse.

After Royse and Beckwith sold the store in 1988, ownership changed quite frequently until 1994, when Bruce Buffington bought the business and moved the store to an old hardware store at its present location, where The Corona’s at Freshwater is now. Buffington really wanted to own a bar, so he gradually stocked less and less of the store items, and the store became the Freshwater Saloon.

This year will see the revival of the store, reincarnated as the MountainAries Market at Colorado Highway 9 and the Guffey turnoff. Grand opening will be mid-to-end of February. (See article in the Feb. 8 issue of The Flume.)