

October 25, 2013

**JOHN REDMOND PERFORMS AS FATHER DYER** - Story of "The Snowshoe Itinerant" told on Oct. 12 at society dinner

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Forty-five people gathered Saturday evening, Oct. 12, to hear John Redmond as Father John Dyer in his first presentation before a group.



**Father Dyer, Breckenridge Chapel**

John Redmond portrays "The Snowshoe Itinerant," Father John Dyer, at the Oct. 12 Park County Historical Society dinner and history presentation at Shepherd of the Rockies Lutheran Church while a photo of Father Dyer's Breckenridge chapel is seen on the screen. (Photo by Douglas Stephens/The Flume)

Redmond, who has portrayed Father Dyer in South Park City in Fairplay, performed in conjunction with a chili dinner at the Shepherd of the Rockies Lutheran Church in Bailey, sponsored by the Park County Historical Society.



**45 at Historical Society gathering**

The Park County Historical Society hosted 45 people for the Oct. 12 chili dinner and history presentation by John Redmond as Father John Dyer. The next dinner presentation will be Nov. 9 and feature Rex Rideout. (Photo by Douglas Stephens/The Flume)

**Birth and early years**

John L. Dyer was born in Franklin County, Ohio, in 1812. He was the oldest of eight children. By age 8 he was old enough to reach the handles of a plow and begin farming, Redmond, as Dyer, said.

"My father told me if a farmer hadn't plowed two rows by sunup, he was lazy," said Redmond as Dyer.

This work ethic carried through for Dyer's entire life.

Dyer and his brother, Robert, would hunt raccoons at night. Robert would tree the raccoon, and John would climb the tree and make the raccoon fall out. Raccoon skins brought the sum of 25 cents apiece. Dyer became a good shot and hunter. School for young Dyer was only three months a year, as farming took the rest of the time.

On Dec. 4, 1833, Dyer married a woman named Harriett. Dyer had moved to Illinois. Later tragedy struck; in 1847 Harriett died.

Two months later Dyer's 18-month-old daughter, also named Harriet, died. Tragedy

would befall two of Dyer's sons as well. One died when a Union ship was bringing him home from a Confederate prison. Another was shot in Granite, Colo., when he made an unpopular ruling as a judge.

In 1850 Dyer received his license to preach in the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1855 he was ordained and began a life as a circuit riding preacher. Dyer was paid \$100 a year. This was barely enough to support him and his children.

When he traveled, Dyer carried his belongings in one satchel. Among Dyer's belongings were three essential items: the Methodist hymnal; the Bible; and the Methodist rules, which were the rules of Methodism set down by the bishop of the church.

### **To Colorado**

In 1859 Dyer's eyesight was failing. He wanted to see Pikes Peak, so he sold what he had and procured a horse and saddle. He rode to Newton, Iowa, where he stabled his horse for the night. The livery agent moved Dyer's horse because a brood hen was in the same stall. The agent put Dyer's horse in with a bunch of grain. By morning the horse had foundered and Dyer had to walk from Iowa to Denver. Dyer contracted with a wagon train to carry his bag. Near Julesburg, Colo., the train stopped for the night, and Dyer gave a fire and brimstone sermon to the amusement of the gathered. Only later did Dyer find out that the stopping place was a house of ill repute.

In Denver Dyer traded his gold watch for supplies to complete the trip to the mining town of Buckskin Joe. When he got there, in 1861, he was welcomed by the miners, in part, because he was dressed as they were and not in new fancy preacher's clothes. That was because he had walked from Iowa to Denver to Buckskin Joe in the same clothes and looked as ragged as the miners.

He was also in good physical shape. The closer to the mountains he got, the better his eyesight became, according to his autobiography, "The Snow-Shoe Itinerant."

In the rough and tumble towns of Buckskin Joe, Alma and Fairplay, Dyer preached against the evils of liquor and dancing. He also traveled extensively in Colorado. He built churches, including one in Breckenridge.

To sustain himself he panned for gold during the summer. The winter was harder. He was approached to carry mail over Mosquito Trail, now Mosquito Pass, on snowshoes between Buckskin Joe and Oro City, now called Leadville. Dyer continued preaching the rest of his life. In 1885, the Colorado Senate welcomed him as the first Senate chaplain.

### **Cabin in Bailey**

In 1864 Dyer welcomed to Colorado his sisters, who came from Minnesota. His sister Ann and her husband came to Denver. Dyer told them of a place he knew halfway between Denver and Fairplay that would be good for a travelers' stop. Dyer knew sister Ann could cook. Ann and her husband, William Bailey, and his sister Elizabeth Entriken began a farm on what is now the Farmer's Union property in Bailey.

Dyer bought six cows for them with his mail-carrying money, and he helped build a cabin for his sister Elizabeth. That cabin is now on display in Bailey's McGraw Memorial Park.

On Nov. 7, 1870, Dyer married Lucinda Lord. They rode the circuit together and resided in Breckenridge and Denver. The Dyers built a church in Breckenridge, and after preaching in Breckenridge, he preached in Cañon City, where he finally retired at age 78.

On June 16, 1901, Dyer died in Bailey at 89. However, before he died he was able to travel to Denver to see his portrait in stained glass in the Colorado state capitol rotunda. He is buried next to his wife, Lucinda, and their son, Joshua, in the Castle Rock cemetery.

For more on Dyer, the history of the Mosquito Mining District and Bailey, there are several local and state resources, including the Park County Historical Society, Park County Local History Archives, The Colorado Historical Society and the Denver Public Library's Western History collection.