

Park County Historical Society Presentation

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Santa Maria: A labor of love by Mary Dower

Article by Jim Glenn/Park County Historical Society volunteer

Presentation to Park County Historical Society By Dave Gruber



Christ of the Rockies from Santa Maria collection

The 33 foot tall statue of Christ of the Rockies stands high on the hill overseeing Santa Maria near Grant, Colorado. Jesus' outstretched right arm blesses this camp that we call Camp Santa Maria of the Rockies. The formal name is Villa Santa Maria del Monte. This camp is the labor of love of Mrs. Mary M. Dower who together with her husband, Mr. John L. Dower, purchased the property in 1930. Previously called the Cassells Hotel and Resort, the property was homesteaded in 1872 by David Cassell. David's resort hotel opened in 1885 but the hotel itself was rebuilt in 1906 after a fire.

Mary and John Dower began running Santa Maria as a summer camp for underprivileged kids during the height of the Depression Mary's original Mission Statement was:

"No child who attends may pay. No child who can pay may attend."

Children whose fathers had a job during the depression typically were too rich to attend. Years later it was opened to more kids by converting the cost to a sliding scale based on income. For several weeks every summer up to 150 poor children f

rom Denver were treated to bunk beds in the camp houses, three meals a day, fishing, swimming and days full of camp programs. The meals included beef and vegetables raised right there at Santa Maria. Nowadays, kids have to give up their cell phones, iPods and TVs

during their time at the camp. While Mary and John

Dower owned the camp and paid most of the bills, the summer camp programs were run by the Catholic Charities which was an organization of the Archdiocese of Denver. Mary Dower created a charitable foundation prior to her death in 1952 and that foundation still owns the camp today. Interesting is the fact that this camp is not the property of the Catholic Church but totally started as a dream of one of our mountain residents - Mary Dower.



Dee Brown introducing Dave Gruber.

Dee schedules speakers for the Park County Historical Society Dinners. (Photo by Art Hall)

Mary was a daughter of J. K. Mullen, after which Mullen High School is named. Upon Mary's death, her son, Frank Tetterer, headed the charitable foundation till his death in 1981. Now Frank's two daughters and two of their daughters are on the foundation board. The Boulder Valley YMCA has been running the summer camp since 2007.

The thirty-three foot statue of Christ was also part of Mary's dream. It was built on a twenty-two-foot pedestal created on-site by building up one-foot sections one at a time. In the pedestal there is a grotto open from the back with a life-size statue of the reclining Christ's body after death surrounded by 2 angels. The statue itself was carved from clay at Northwest Terra Cotta Company. The ivory coloring of the robe creates a striking contrast to the white color of Christ's skin. The statue reminds us of Mary Dower's service to children and the dream of one of our neighbors.

While the property is not open to the public, the Park County Historical Society is hoping to get permission for a tour later this year.



Presentation by Dave Gruber.

Dave started working at Santa Maria in 1984 and is now the Property Manager. (Photo by Art Hall)