

How we became the Florence Historical Archive, Inc.

In August of 2014, Carol Fox wrote a document giving guardianship of her historical collection of books, mostly Xeroxed papers, news articles and pictures to Mildred Wintz, Martie LaCass, Dorothy Cool, and Melvena Benham who came to be known as the guardians of the collection. Carol's collection had been stored in her basement and in an area of her home called the "garage", which was an enclosed room of the house. A short time later, Bob Wood gave the guardians his collection of the Florence Citizen Newspaper going back to 1940. In receiving these collections, the guardians were able to retain control of the collections and keep them intact with the unspoken understanding that the collections were to remain in Florence, since contents of the collections pertained to Florence.

The archival process started on Carol's collection in 2012, when Mildred was able to convince Carol that a numbering system would make it easier to file and find the historical information. Martie and Dorothy joined Mildred in the archival process sitting at a table in the basement of Carol's home, going through the collection piece by piece. Carol had already sorted her collection into boxes with category names. Melvena did not join the ladies in the basement until 2014 after moving into a house across the street from Carol.

As an archive is organized by its collections, Florence Historical Archive, Inc. is organized on the open-ended (still active) Fox Collection. The Collection's intent, purpose and maintenance structure remain intact.

In 1960, The Collection was first organized and maintained by Carol Fox as an individual.

In 2014, The Collection was legally turned over to a group, designated by Carol Fox as The Guardians of the Fox Archive, for purpose of its maintenance and continuation. In addition to Carol, there were 4 other members. It was under this name that the first legal contract was made (one year's rental lease).

In 2016, The Collection obligations of those same appointees remained in effect with the incorporation (Florence Historical Archive, Inc.) of the group to meet legal rental requirements.

In 2022, those appointees still function, with five others, as the Board of the legal entity, The Florence Historical Archive, Inc., with all historical obligations, intents, and purposes of The Collection intact as an open ended, discreet and identifiable collection in itself.

The Rialto Collection, The Chamber of Commerce Collection and The Stones and Bones Collections have been added to the archive over the years.

Early in 2015, these ladies briefly met at Melvena's house to work on the collection but were soon back in Carol's basement. After guardianship was transferred to these ladies there was a question of where to house the collection, since as Carol and her husband John aged, it was less convenient for them to have visitors coming to their home. Through Paul Villagrana and Gayle MacKinnon, we heard of space

available in the Florence City Building. We met with the 2015 City Manager and worked out a deal where we would pay \$10.00 per month for rent of 1200 square feet of floor space in the City Building. Believing that Carol Fox would retain some control over her collection, the City Manager and Mildred Wintz, Martie LaCass, Dorothy Cool and Melvena Benham all met at Carol's home for the official signing of the rent agreement. Carol signed the rent agreement and Mildred wrote the check for \$120 that paid the rent for the first year.

By December of 2015, with Carol no longer wanting the archive stored in her basement, a date and time was arranged to move the boxes of historical material to the new location in the City Building. On that date Mildred and Margaret Storm arrive early to make sure that all the paper material were in boxes with lids on them that would be safe to move in pickup trucks. Carol's sons arrive prior to the designated time and start moving boxes out of the "garage". By the designated time all boxes, shelves, tables, and chairs had been loaded into the pickups and hauled to the City Building. Those of us expecting to arrive at the designated time got there in time to help unload the pickups.

Just a few days prior to the move, Mildred, Martie, Dorothy, and Melvena met at the Two Sisters restaurant for our first organizational meeting. After the first of January, we met every week to get organized and decide things such as what name should the organization be called, should we be a LLC or a 501c3 corporation, what office should each of us hold, and how should we write our bylaws. We managed to file Corporation papers with the State of Colorado, write our bylaws and file our paperwork for the 501c3. The Fremont County Historical Society agreed to sponsor us until our 501c3 was approved. However, we did not need to use their assistance since the 501c3 was approved in record time.

Our space here in the City Building had been part of the old St Joseph's hospital emergency room. Electrical wires hung out of holes in the walls, green metal cabinets lined the research rooms, X-ray viewing screens were still in place; along with dark room facilities water pipes sticking out of the walls. We had use of one half of an electrical outlet that we shared with the police department. Council member, Larry Baker kindly volunteered his time and expertise to come in and fill holes in the walls, build covers for plumbing that could not be removed and to paint the main research room.

We got a grant from the Newmont Gold Mine for \$2,000 which covered the cost of getting electrical outlets and light fixtures working. We also received a miracle grant from Caroline's Kids for \$11,000. We had not applied for a grant from them, nor did we know how they found us or what prompted their grant. This God-sent grant provided us with operating capital for the first 3 years, the purchasing of archival boxes, shelves and a desk and desperately needed insurance.

One of our first volunteers was Carol McNew. She came on board as an advisor and helper always giving us great advice and helping us through some of the rough spots along the way. She enjoyed doing PowerPoint and became our leading organizer and operator for our historical presentations at

the Bell Tower and at Mini-College. Over the years she had amassed a large collection of historical documents, which now reside at the Archive. Her influence at the Archive has been very beneficial and with her death in 2021, we greatly feel her absence.

As we grew into our role of the Florence Archive, we looked for ways to reach out to our community. In 2018, we did our first Senior Mini-College class at the Pueblo Community College in Canon City. That first class was on the McCandless family. Our class was full and had a waiting list. We also made the McCandless quilt which represented the different branches of the McCandless family that lived in Florence. The McCandless family had a powerful impact on Florence history. Later that year we did a tour of McCandless' buildings in Florence.

We also participated in the Florence Barn Dance at the Park by having a root beer stand and selling a home-made pie as part of their pie auction.

In 2019, we did a presentation on railroads of Florence and Fremont County. This presentation was given at both at the Senior Mini-College and at the Bell Tower. We were proud to ask the ladies of Pioneer Museum in Florence to participate in these presentations. As part of our presentation, we built a diorama of the railroads in this area which remained on display at the Fremont County Administration Building in Canon City for several months.

We worked with the sixth-grade class from the Florence Elementary School as they did research on the history of their school. The City of Florence held a Big Band Dance at which the Archive had a booth of World War II pictures and information. At a presentation for the Fremont County Historical Society at the Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church we met Reta Brunner, who has become one of our volunteers.

Since 2020 was the centennial of Women's Suffrage, we chose that as our theme. We had a wonderful Kiosk representing different aspects of Suffrage. Then the Pandemic came, closing Mini College and preventing us from doing all of our scheduled presentations at the Bell Tower. We did get to do a presentation for the New Neighbors Club regarding the ladies in New York who walked through a snow blizzard to present suffrage information to the new incoming governor. Our scheduled presentation to the Territorial Daughters State meeting was also cancelled due to the Pandemic.

Through the Southern Colorado Chapter of the Territorial Daughters, we have become members of The Coalition of Pikes Peak Historic Museums. Its new name The Pikes Peak Historic Coalition, Inc. will be going into effect soon. This is a group of historical organizations whose goal is to promote the activities of historic organizations in the area.

The Archive has become the home of the Territorial Daughters Historical collection as part of our Archive Assist program.

Voices from the Archive became our 2021 presentation. The information for this presentation came from books, newspaper articles, letters written by early settlers, and personal interviews of families of these settlers of Florence. This presentation was inspired by a grant proposal by of the City of Florence. During one of the interviews, a 1913 map of Florence that has been in the Lobach family for generations was donated to the archive. From this map we were able to produce a map puzzle of the city of Florence which is now hanging in the display window of the Fremont County Administration Building. Again, the Pandemic interfered, and Mini-College was cancelled. However, we were able to present the Bell Tower Lecture series, to do a presentation for the 150 Birthday of Fremont County at the Fremont County Administration Building and for The Florence Preservation Commission.

We had the privilege of presenting Florence historical information to the fifth and sixth graders from the Florence Elementary School during their Spring Semester of 2021. This historical information covered the topics of: Early Schools, Railroads, Economics Then and Now, Timeline of the Development of Florence, and Developers and Natural Resources of Florence.

Our volunteers have become valued members of our group. Some became familiar with us by coming in to do historical research, some through the donation of their collection to the Archive, and some because they are friends of one or more of our other volunteers. Each volunteer has brought in unique and valuable skills that help us make history available to everyone in Florence.

Compiled by: Dr. Mildred Wintz, Dorothy Cool and Melvena Benham