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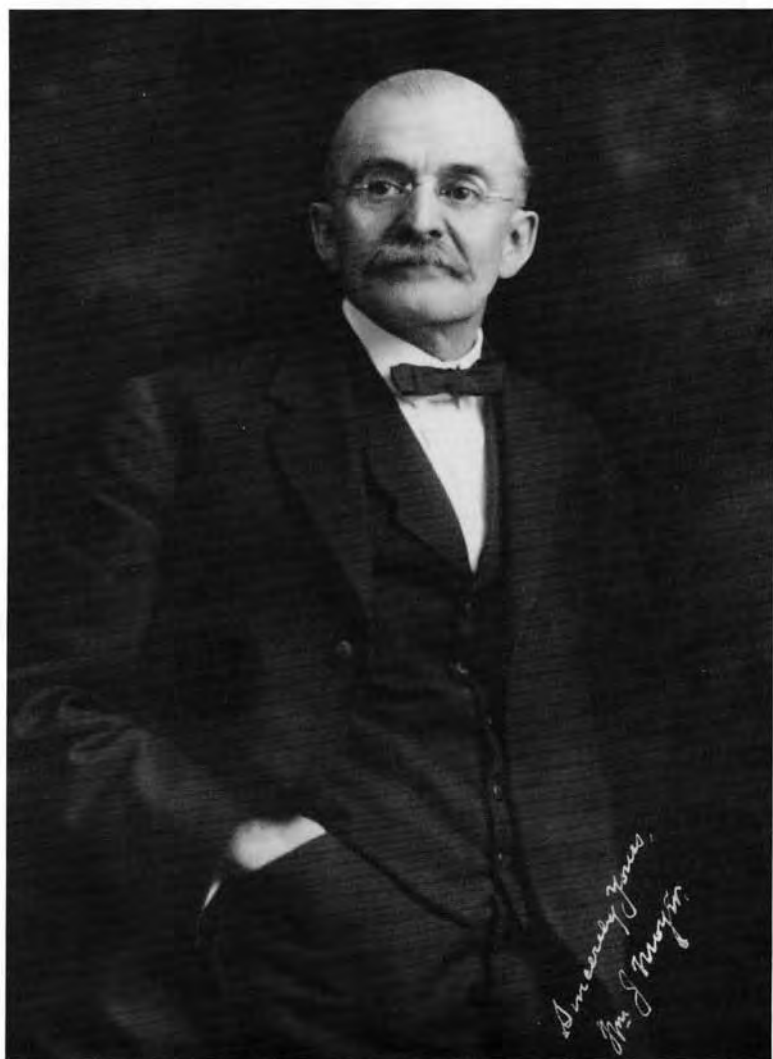


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THE COVER: The drawing of William Moyer is by Charles Hardy, Professor of  
Art at Mesa State College.

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(Photo courtesy William McGuire Collection, F79, Research Center & Special Library,  
Museum of Western Colorado)

*William J. Moyer.*

**William J. Moyer: The Rise and Fall of a Small-Town  
Progressive in Western Colorado**  
by David Golden

On June 8, 1922, a crowd numbering in the thousands—the largest crowd ever gathered in the city at that time—witnessed the dedication of the Moyer Natatorium in Lincoln Park, Grand Junction, Colorado. The Governor of the state presided, the leading citizens of the community were present, and virtually the entire city turned out to participate in the grand opening of what was more commonly known as “Moyer Pool,” and to honor the man who had made the event possible. A year before, William J. Moyer, a prominent local businessman, and his wife, Ida, had pledged \$25,000 to the construction of the pool, as a means of giving something back to the community in which they had prospered, and most especially to those the Moyers considered to be its most important citizens—the children. Speakers praised Moyer’s generosity and civic-mindedness, of which the gift of the pool was only one example. Moyer made a characteristically short and self-effacing speech, and the pool was opened to the city’s children amidst great applause.<sup>1</sup>

The scene represented the apex of Moyer’s public life, a life characterized by philanthropic thought and action. But in just over a decade from the dedication of the Natatorium, where he received the thanks and accolades of his adopted city, where he stood in the role of a prominent, well-to-do philanthropist, William Moyer would be financially destitute, eventually reduced to living on the charity of others, and the days of his generous gift-giving would be only memories.<sup>2</sup> Self-made, Moyer would be unmade by circumstances. His story is that of a rise to considerable height and a fall to

rather tragic depth—a fall made all the more tragic because of the sense of community responsibility the man had demonstrated throughout his life. Moyer's story is, of course, that of a single individual, but it reflects many larger issues. The opportunities he had to initially prosper in business, as well as his eventual ruin, offers a telling portrayal of the socioeconomic circumstances of the early twentieth century. More importantly, however, the principles that guided Moyer in his relations in business, charity, and community—principles which saliently defined the man and his philosophy—are representative of the Progressive Movement, so prominent a social force in Moyer's time. Reflecting many of the tenets of progressivism, Moyer's life can be seen as a microcosm of progressive thought and action as they were defined in the early part of the century.

Though progressivism was a broad, diverse movement, incorporating many elements and ideals, most historians can agree upon some of its basic concerns and characteristics. Historian Robert H. Wiebe, in *Businessmen and Reform*, states:

With many voices the progressives concerned themselves with three general issues: regulation of the economy to harness its leaders and to distribute more widely its benefits; modifications in government to make elected representatives more responsive to the wishes of the voters; and assistance for the dispossessed to open before them a richer life in America.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to these broad, tangible goals, progressivism was characterized by some general philosophical tenets. A humanitarian attitude distinguished much of the movement. Such humanitarian progressives felt that better educated, more privileged citizens had an obligation to address the plight of their less fortunate brethren, to provide a more humane and equitable society. Among business progressives particularly there was a concern for "moral capitalism," which called for the business community to take a strong leadership role in reform, using its skills and assets for the betterment of society.<sup>4</sup>

It is precisely in this area of humanitarianism and community service that William Moyer best represented progressivism. His many community-oriented contributions were all aimed at improving his immediate society and bettering the lives of those with whom he came in contact. Moyer's actions put into real effect many of the abstract ideals of the Progressive Movement.

Moyer was born on a farm near Reading, Pennsylvania, on August 21, 1859.<sup>5</sup> He lived eighty-three years and in that time experienced a number of significant historical trends in America, taking part in and being affected by



many of them. The Gilded Age industrialization of the country led to the mercantile boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which gave Moyer his opportunities to succeed in business. In his early twenties he joined the huge number of people heading West, lured by the opportunities which they perceived existed in the region. He participated, in his own way, in the "building" of the West, its settlement and development. Moyer benefited from the economic good times of the early decades of the century, building a successful business and career; but when the nation's prosperity faltered so did Moyer's, and he, along with countless others, was ultimately ruined by the hard times of the Depression. Throughout its duration, Moyer's life in many ways paralleled larger significant trends, just as his personal philosophy reflected the greater intellectual movement of progressivism.

Growing up in Pennsylvania, Moyer was involved in mercantile endeavors from an early age. When he was ten years old, he went to work in a country store, working as a clerk and handy boy. Moyer must have viewed this experience as a kind of apprenticeship as he went on to spend the rest of his life in the mercantile business. Already working at such a young age, Moyer had little opportunity for education of formal schooling. He recognized the value of education, though, for later in life much of his philanthropic activity would center on children, particularly on providing education. Moyer continued to work and rise in the retail business for the next decade. Civic consciousness must have manifested itself early as one of the man's defining characteristics at this time; he was inducted into the Masonic order in Huguenot Lodge Number 377 in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, sometime in the 1880s.<sup>6</sup>

Moyer left Pennsylvania when he was twenty-one, heading West. He worked for a number of years in his field in Midwestern states, settling for a time in Atchison, Kansas. This was apparently a time of exploration and learning for Moyer, as he investigated the West as a traveling salesman. He first arrived in Colorado in 1888 and worked as a store manager in Coal Creek. Two years later he finally settled down in Grand Junction with the intention of making a permanent home and going into business for himself.<sup>7</sup>

Grand Junction, when Moyer arrived, was still a relatively young frontier town. The Utes had ceded their territory in western Colorado only a decade before, and the town of Grand Junction was founded immediately after the Indians' evacuation in 1881. Settlement of the area proceeded fairly rapidly, and by 1890 most of Mesa County was "lightly inhabited."<sup>8</sup> The new town prospered quickly; as early as 1884 there were no less than sixty-eight retail businesses, a fact that must have appealed to Moyer as he considered relocating to Grand Junction a few years later. When Moyer came to the Grand Valley, he

found a small town which was already developing well: it had relatively stable industries in agriculture and livestock, and the railroads—the harbingers of true success for a frontier town—had reached the area from both the south and east.<sup>9</sup> There existed a ready clientele, as well as an atmosphere of prosperity, for Moyer and his new business. Exactly how Moyer initially heard of the new town is a matter of speculation, but town founders did actively promote Grand Junction around the time at which he arrived. Author Emma McCreanor states, “Settlement of this section of Colorado was well advertised and rapid, due in part to the advancing Denver and Rio Grande and Colorado Midland Railroads.”<sup>10</sup> She adds later:

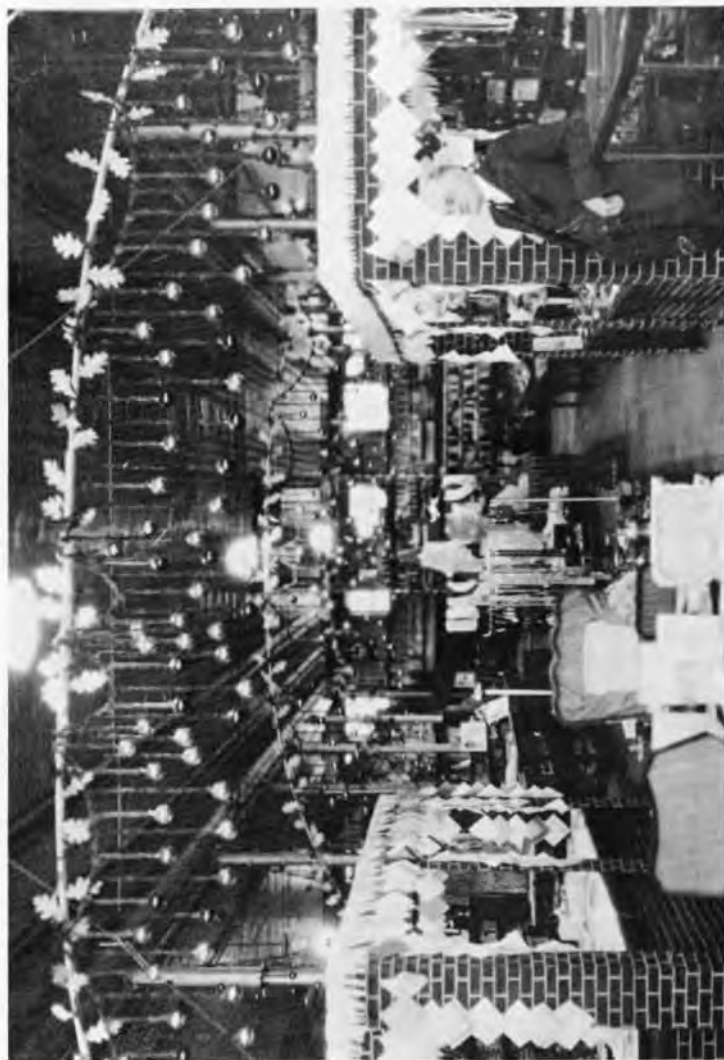
Many pamphlets, articles and speeches encouraged immigration, with the railroads taking an active part in promotion efforts. The Midland Railroad, which arrived in 1890 [the same year Moyer arrived], ran excursions bringing Denver journalists to marvel at the Palisade area in the spring, and at Fruita when the apples were ripe.<sup>11</sup>

It is likely that such active campaigning for settlement in the Grand Valley reached Moyer in Coal Creek. Regardless of how he became aware of the new boomtown of the Western Slope, Moyer made the decision to try his luck there.

Moyer brought little with him, materially speaking, when he came to Grand Junction, but by 1890 he did have nearly twenty years experience in the retail business. He opened The Fair Store in a fourteen by twenty-five foot building with about \$600 in stock invoicing. Moyer himself was the sole salesman. Interested in efficient, time-saving management, he instituted self-serve shopping; the common practice was for patrons to ask the clerk to fetch desired items.

Railroad men, cattlemen, miners, and later, fruit-growers, along with their families, made up the bulk of The Fair’s clientele. Both the new business and the new town were apparently good to Moyer. The Fair moved through a succession of bigger buildings, employees were added, and the indications are that Moyer prospered quickly. Looking back on his early years in Grand Junction, Moyer later made a statement that not only explained his business success but encapsulates some of the progressive attitudes—including a bent for modernization and a people-oriented philosophy—that he repeatedly demonstrated throughout his life:

Confidence in the Grand Valley kept these old timers here and confidence in the valley and the loyalty and patronage of our good people made The Fair of today possible. It has been our aim always to keep abreast of the times, adding as



(Photo courtesy William McGuire Collection, 1979.85 #18, Research Center & Special Library, Museum of Western Colorado)  
*Interior of The Fair with William Moyer at counter.*

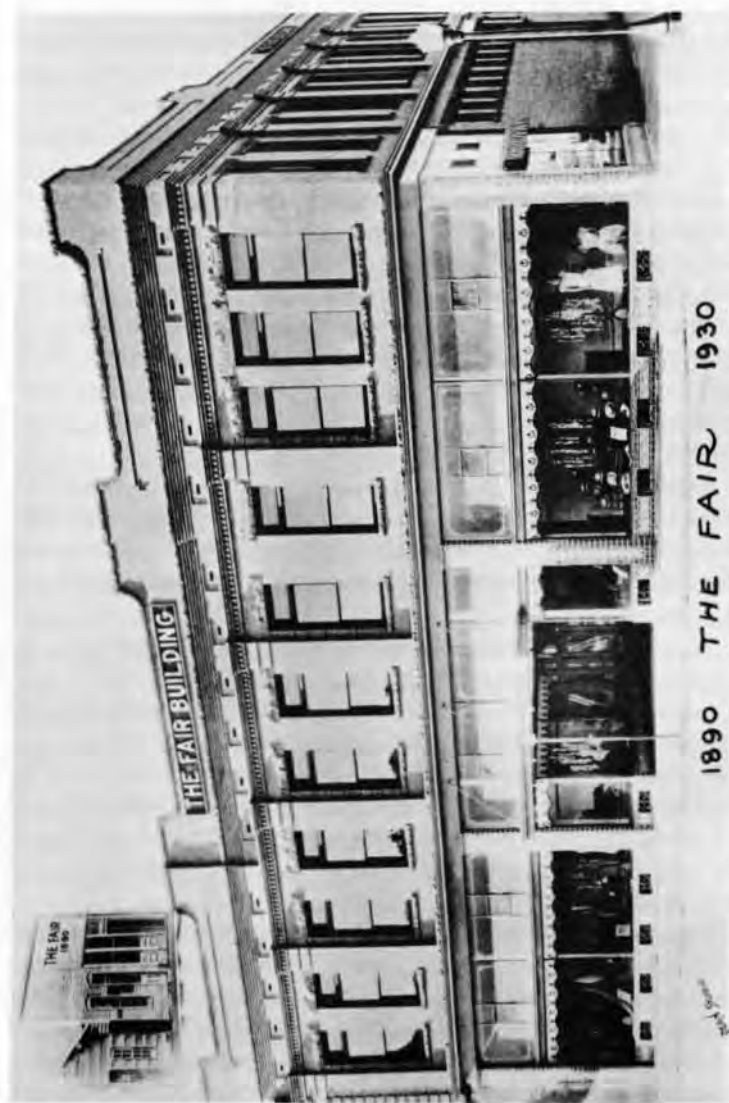
rapidly as possible new and modern features in merchandising. Twenty-five years ago confidence in the future of this country was our only asset. Today the confidence and loyalty of the good people of Grand Junction is our greatest asset, and as in the past our aim will be to hold and deserve the trust of our patrons.<sup>12</sup>

The remarks, occasioned by an anniversary celebration of the founding of The Fair, are even more telling of Moyer's character considering they were made in the middle of the Depression, when the man's fortunes were on the decline and he had every reason to lose the optimism which had characterized the earlier Progressive Movement.

But confidence seems always to have been a hallmark of Moyer's character, and with good reason. Grand Junction and his early experience in business there had been kind to him. Within four years of opening The Fair, Moyer was optimistic enough about his future to finally marry. In February of 1894 he returned to Atchison, Kansas, where he had lived and worked years before, and married Ida Shantz, whom he had presumably met during his earlier days spent in that city.<sup>13</sup> The following year, 1895, The Fair was listed in a local business directory for the first time, it having apparently become a notable mercantile force in Grand Junction.<sup>14</sup> Significant financial success continued for Moyer, and in 1897 he entered banking. The Colorado State Bank of Grand Junction was incorporated in October, and Moyer was listed as a stockholder.<sup>15</sup>

Banking soon proved as successful a field of endeavor as sales for Moyer. By 1902, the business directory was listing him as both the proprietor of The Fair and vice-president of Grand Valley National Bank.<sup>16</sup> Moyer's name later appeared on the charter for the First National Bank in nearby Palisade, as well.<sup>17</sup> By 1905, Moyer had become prominent enough to be profiled in *Progressive Men of Western Colorado*, a social registry of important progressive movers and shakers in the region. The publication gave a brief biographical sketch of Moyer and lauded his business acumen and management practices. Something of the progressive character emerges in the description of Moyer's business success, management techniques, and politics:

Under his [Moyer's] vigorous and judicious management the business [The Fair] has grown greatly and now occupies three rooms, seventy-five by one hundred and fifteen feet each, with a general stock of goods of all kinds. Fourteen persons are employed in conducting it and they are among the best paid employes [sic] of their kind in Grand Junction, it having been Mr. Moyer's policy from the start to secure



1890 THE FAIR 1930

(Photo courtesy of General Collection, F392, Research Center & Special Library, Museum of Western Colorado)  
*The Fair, circa 1930.*

good help and pay good wages, and he now attributes a large measure of his success to the loyalty of his employees to his interests and the excellent assistance they have rendered in promoting them. He was one of the organizers of the Grand Valley National Bank and is vice-president of that institution, which is one of unusually good management and successful operation. In politics Mr. Moyer is a Democrat, but he is not an active partisan, although firmly attached to the principles of his party.<sup>18</sup>

The increased dimensions of his business alone offer a fairly accurate measure of Moyer's prosperity. Experiencing such success, he was finally in a position to follow his principles and really contribute to his community. Already the picture of the progress-minded, liberal, conscientious businessman and community leader which Moyer was to prove himself to be was forming. With his own circumstances apparently secure, and guided by his progressive instincts, Moyer was at last able to turn his attention to improving the state of his community and to bettering the lot of his fellow citizens.

With Moyer, charity began at home, and it started in the area which became one of his primary philanthropic emphases, the helping of children. The report of the dedication of the Moyer Natatorium contained the following anecdote, which helps to explain Moyer's motivation in providing assistance to his community's young people:

As he [Moyer] left his home town, his fatherless nephew clung to him, and would not let go. Even for the boy's pleading, however, the young man could not stay, and he did not have money enough at that time to bring the child with him. He could only unloose the clinging hands and continue on his way, with the determination firmly fixed in his mind that in time to come he must make it possible to do something worth while for the little boy and for all other children as well.<sup>19</sup>

Moyer made good on his resolve. On the occasion of the dedication of the pool, one of the keynote speakers was William Weiser, Grand Junction attorney and the very nephew referred to in the story. Though childless themselves, William and Ida Moyer had raised and educated Weiser, as well as having helped through childhood his four brothers and sisters. The Moyers had done well by Weiser, who, at the time he presented his uncle's gift to the city, was president of both the Chamber of Commerce and Grand Valley National Bank; he was also a candidate for the Democratic nomination for governor. In



his own short speech at the ceremony, Moyer spoke of his love, which his experiences with his nieces and nephews had given him, for all children, and he expressed his belief that much of his business success had been achieved through making provisions for the needs of children and families. It was a great satisfaction, he said, to be able to give something back to his city as a proof of his interest in and love for children. One of the stipulations attached to Moyer's present was that, on two days each week, children would have free access to the pool.<sup>20</sup> The practice is still in effect at the present time.

Moyer's concern for children was an obviously progressive trait. It evidenced a concern for the future and for social reform. In Moyer's case, that interest went beyond his immediate family, as well as beyond the building of civic structures; he was concerned for the future, and that concern translated to a belief in the need for education. Education, historian John Whitclay Chambers II notes, was a major area of concern for progressives. Progressivism revolutionized education in the early part of the twentieth century. The philosophical approach to the curriculum taught, and the large increase in the number of educational institutions all reflected a new, progressive emphasis on the importance of educating the nation's population. Colleges and universities, particularly, expanded, as campuses grew and enrollment swelled during the first two decades of the century.<sup>21</sup>

Chamber states, "Progressive education aimed at relevant education which would awaken children to human values and capabilities and instill good moral habits which would serve both them and a changing society."<sup>22</sup> This focus on usefulness, morality, efficiency, and responsibility reflected Moyer's own personal philosophy. Accordingly, it is no surprise that he took an active part in providing for the education of his community's young people. In addition to the various contributions to local schools which were typical of the gifts and support provided by most socially-minded individuals and groups, Moyer made other sacrifices as well. He personally provided for the college education of no less than eighteen young people, for whom, without Moyer's assistance, such an opportunity would not have been possible. It is not insignificant that two of the youths Moyer sponsored were Chinese and two were Mexican.<sup>23</sup>

The latter fact is highly relevant considering the widespread racism and anti-immigration sentiment which were so prevalent at the time. Chambers notes the rise of nativism, due to increased immigration and exacerbating social factors, during the early part of the century. A resurgence in white supremacy resulted in the repression of ethnic minorities. Dislocation of Mexicans, and a resulting increase in immigration, aggravated White-Hispanic relations in the

Southwest, and an anti-Chinese sentiment had always characterized the West<sup>24</sup> Geographically, Grand Junction would not have been immune to either of these two cases of racial dynamics. By sponsoring minority youths, and thus implicitly endorsing their presence, Moyer was bucking a considerable national trend.

"Americanization," a movement to acculturate immigrants, was one progressive response to the problem of ethnic minorities.<sup>25</sup> Much of Americanism focused on the education of minorities. The emphasis on education may explain Moyer's sending the four youths to college. As a progressive, he would have desired to include minorities in the greater American mainstream by taking responsibility for them then instructing them so they might efficiently take part in society, eventually making their own contributions to it. Regardless of whether his motivations were intellectual or sentimental, Moyer put his principles into action on the issues of education and provision for children's well-being in general.

In addition to his focus on children and their affairs, Moyer participated in a number of typically progressive community-building endeavors. For example, at a time before state and federal funds were allotted for the purposes of road construction, Moyer raised the money to build the Douglass Pass and Unaweep Canyon Roads. This act helped to provide efficient transportation in the region, thus improving the quality of life for those in the surrounding area. Moyer was not only a driving force in the organization of such projects, but was himself a generous contributor to the financial demands of such work.<sup>26</sup> He helped to construct the local YMCA, as well.<sup>27</sup> On a less grand and public scale, Moyer was known to have given freely his time, money, and expertise to a number of business endeavors, charitable institutions, and individuals in need of help or guidance. Indeed, so omnipresent was Moyer's involvement in community affairs that it was noted that, "every worthy project for the up-building of the city and valley was given not only his endorsement but financial aid as well."<sup>28</sup>

Walter Walker, a prominent local leader and publisher of Grand Junction's *The Daily Sentinel*, once wrote an editorial about Moyer along the same lines:

It would be difficult, indeed, to measure the benefits to the life, development and advancement of Grand Junction and Mesa County to be credited to Mr. Moyer. Directly and indirectly thru [sic] forty years and more, and over that period stretching between the village status to a city's dimension, W. J. Moyer has had more influence in the encouragement of new business enterprises, financial developments and civic expansion than any one citizen who





(Photo courtesy General Collection, F209, Research Center & Special Library, Museum of Western Colorado)  
*The Fair Store clerks, circa 1895. From left to right: Lizzie Moeser, Sarah Bracken, Fern Smith, Madara Anderson, Vera Wilson, unknown.*

for a like period has been active in the work of building this thriving western town.<sup>29</sup>

Such was the high praise heaped on a man who had become something of a local icon. The stories later told about Moyer took on the quality of a minor legend. One *Sentinel* retrospective, published forty years after his death, demonstrates the light in which the man was viewed by his adopted town. The account notes Moyer's well-known assistance to widows and orphans, his practice of sending mended toys to sick children, and it describes a time, in 1907, when early snows had destroyed crops and cattle, and Moyer—anonously, of course—helped to tide some families over and even provided gifts for their children.<sup>30</sup> One story illustrates how Moyer's progressive penchant for modernization (The Fair had the first elevator in Grand Junction) came into conflict with his compassion for people. A worker reportedly found an employee time clock secreted away in the basement storeroom of The Fair. Asking Mr. Moyer about the device, she was told that a salesman had convinced him to purchase the clock, but he had never had it installed for fear of hurting his employees' feelings.<sup>31</sup>

The same kind of elegiac nostalgia for Moyer maintains that his generosity contributed to his eventual downfall. He has been accused of choosing his employees based on their needs rather than their abilities. Too, his open-handedness extended into a time in which he could no longer afford to be so free with his finances. Moyer had invested heavily in Copeco, a pear orchard operation backed by his friend and assistant manager at The Fair, a Mr. Craven.<sup>32</sup> The Grand Valley fruit industry was devastated by irrigation problems and codling moth in the 1920s, and Moyer lost all he had put into the scheme.<sup>33</sup> Livestock prices, too, plummeted in the mid-twenties.<sup>34</sup> Moyer had backed a number of ranchers, and their losses were his losses.<sup>35</sup> The general economic downturn hurt Moyer's retail business as well; The Fair had always been the heart of his financial success. In the midst of these hard times, Ida Moyer died in 1926.<sup>36</sup>

The final blow to Moyer's good fortune came during the Bank Holiday of the Great Depression when, along with countless others, he was ruined completely. Much of Moyer's money, including substantial assets from The Fair, was tied up in the Grand Valley National Bank. The bank was forced to close on March 3, 1933, as part of a nationwide banking moratorium.<sup>37</sup> Grand Valley National eventually went into receivership, and Moyer was forced to liquidate the assets of The Fair; he was financially destitute. He would live out the remainder of his life on the charity of those who had not forgotten his earlier generosity.

Dalton Trumbo, a local author who would go on to become a highly successful Hollywood screenwriter, and who was one of the young men Moyer had put through college, elegeized Moyer through a character in Trumbo's 1935 novel, *Eclipse*. The novel was not a commercial success, but it did succeed in turning Trumbo into a pariah as it painted a thinly-veiled, rather seedy picture of Grand Junction and its citizenry. Trumbo reportedly did justice to Moyer's generosity but portrayed him as being coldly abandoned by his fellow townspeople after his financial ruin.<sup>38</sup>

Such was not actually the case. Moyer's obituary states that he lived for years in the St. Regis Hotel in Grand Junction. A later account holds that he did so as a non-paying guest, courtesy of the hotel's owner.<sup>39</sup> In 1941, Moyer suffered a hip injury, became an invalid, and could no longer care for himself. He lived in a series of convalescent homes, and the city made arrangements whereby he was "hired," at seventy-five dollars per month, to "manage" the pool he had bequeathed to the town two decades before.<sup>40</sup> After his injury, Moyer's health failed rapidly, and he died on May 24, 1943.

Chambers has summed up the ultimate contribution of the progressives in the following statement:

Within a span of only a few years, progressives helped make the United States a better country. One of the most important messages of the Progressive Era is that in the right circumstances, with faith in themselves and their destiny, the American people can dramatically improve the quality of their lives and their society.<sup>41</sup>

That is exactly the kind of contribution to his world that William Moyer exemplified. With faith in himself, his circumstances, and his fellow citizens, he worked to make his society a better place and to improve the lives of those around him. Throughout his productive life, Moyer not only espoused the ideals of progressivism, he lived them.



*Opening of Moyer Natatorium, June 8, 1922. Mrs. O'Malley is in the right foreground, wearing a flowered hat.*



(Photo courtesy General Collection, Research Center & Special Library,  
Museum of Western Colorado)

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>*The Daily Sentinel* (Grand Junction, Colorado), 8 June 1922.
- <sup>2</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 11 June 1972.
- <sup>3</sup>Robert H. Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reformers* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1962), 6.
- <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 7-9.
- <sup>5</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 25 May 1943.
- <sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup>Emma McCreanor, *Mesa County, Colorado: A 100 Year History* (Grand Junction, Colorado: The Museum of Western Colorado Press, 1986), 1-2.
- <sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 3, 14-15, 21.
- <sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>12</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 28 June 1934.
- <sup>13</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 25 May 1943.
- <sup>14</sup>Grand Junction entries in the *Colorado State Business Directories* (Denver: Colorado Directory Publishing) pg. 355, document #1993.114, Kathleen Hill Underwood Collection, Museum of Western Colorado, Grand Junction, Colorado.
- <sup>15</sup>*Financial Institutions in Mesa County: 1882 to 1977*, pg. 5, document #198584, Pat Gormley Collection, Special Library, Museum of Western Colorado.
- <sup>16</sup>*Colorado State Business Directories*, 375.
- <sup>17</sup>*Financial Institutions in Mesa County*, 5.
- <sup>18</sup>*Progressive Men of Western Colorado* (Chicago: A.W. Brown & Company, 1905), 144-5.
- <sup>19</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 8 June 1922.
- <sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup>John Whiteclay Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1900-1917* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1980), 88.
- <sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 88.
- <sup>23</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 25 May 1943.
- <sup>24</sup>Chambers, *Tyranny of Change*, 77-9.
- <sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.
- <sup>26</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 25 May 1943.
- <sup>27</sup>Photocopy of document labeled only "museum 1633," William J. Moyer Biographical File, Museum of Western Colorado.
- <sup>28</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 25 May 1943.
- <sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 17 July 1983.
- <sup>31</sup>*The Daily Sentinel* 11 June 1972.
- <sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>McCreanor, *Mesa County*, 14.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>35</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 11 June 1972.

<sup>36</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 17 July 1983.

<sup>37</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 3 March 1933.

<sup>38</sup>McCreanor, *Mesa County*, 46; and *The Daily Sentinel*, 11 June 1972.

<sup>39</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 25 May 1943, and 11 June 1972.

<sup>40</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 17 July 1983.

<sup>41</sup>Chambers, *Tyranny of Change*, 250.



(Photo courtesy Joanne Wickman and Molly Stucker)

*Sabina Veronica Lally O'Malley.*



**The Life of Humanitarian Sabina Veronica Lally  
O'Malley  
by Vivian Passer**

“No task was too large, no need too great to enlist Mrs. O'Malley's interest. And she set about moving others, overcoming obstacles, ignoring brick walls of opposition to accomplish what needed to be done for the poor and underprivileged, for her church and what was, in essence, also her hospital.”<sup>1</sup> Sabina O'Malley, a woman of exceptional courage and faith, chose to turn tragedy into triumph. She used her faith in God and her church as a vehicle, to reach out to help others. As a consequence, she helped thousands, including herself.

No one, not even those involved, can know the impact that Mrs. O'Malley had on the areas in which she worked. She was a vigorous, tireless woman, whose sixty years of service to Grand Junction, to Colorado, and to the nation were unmarred by selfishness or pettiness. They were marked by battles and indefatigable efforts for others, in contests waged by a woman who asked no quarter and gave none, whose only reward was frequently nothing more than the recognition of a job well done.<sup>2</sup>

A life of this type, being alert to the needs of the world and undaunted in the face of obstacles, was not common. This was particularly true for a woman who began her career at a time when “a woman's place” was different than it is in today's world. Mrs. O'Malley was the type of woman who had much to do with the changing of that world.

Sabina O'Malley was born Sabina Veronica Lally on July 27, 1884, to Irish parents Anthony and Catherine Walsh Lally, in Wheeling, West Virginia<sup>3</sup> She grew up and was educated in parochial schools in the South. Little is known of her life before she moved to Denver in 1905, at the age of twenty-one, for health reasons. She was the first PBX (Public Branch Exchange) operator in Colorado.<sup>4</sup>

Within a year of her arrival in Denver she married John F. O'Malley, a civil engineer, who had also traveled West for his health.<sup>5</sup> During the turn of the century hundreds of health seekers, mostly consumptives, had been lured to Colorado for therapeutic reasons. Doctors had encouraged their patients to seek the dry, light air of the Colorado mountains.<sup>6</sup>

The couple moved to Colorado Springs, a prominent health mecca, where Mr. O'Malley was superintendent of schools.<sup>7</sup> In 1906 they moved to Grand Junction, Colorado, where he was appointed city engineer.<sup>8</sup> The Western Slope was one of America's last frontier areas. It was just twenty-five years after the white settlers had first rushed to settle what had been the Ute Indian Reservation. After the Meeker Massacre in 1879, the Utes had been banished to a new reservation in northwestern Utah Territory. On September 4, 1881, the Grand Junction area had opened for settlement.<sup>9</sup> Word about the salubrious climate in the Grand Valley had quickly spread across the nation. Mr. O'Malley hoped it would be beneficial to his health.

During his tenure as city engineer the original bridge spanning the Colorado River at Fifth Street was constructed. A ferry was used to cross the river prior to the construction of the bridge.<sup>10</sup> He also engineered the construction of the first road to what is now the Colorado National Monument, on the Grand Junction side.<sup>11</sup>

The O'Malleys lived at 1170 Colorado Avenue<sup>12</sup> and St. Mary's Hospital was across the street. It had just opened in 1896, and was still a fledging institution, operated by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kansas. The original hospital was a three-story frame structure, which had two wards and four private rooms.<sup>13</sup> The Sisters owned the entire block between Colorado and Ute Avenues and Eleventh and Twelfth Streets. The south side of the block had a large garden, cows and chickens.<sup>14</sup> As a young wife, Mrs. O'Malley, a member of St. Joseph's Catholic Church, volunteered her services to the Sisters. She served as their shopper for supplies and assisted them in community oriented errands and affairs.

On October 18, 1907, the O'Malleys became parents of a baby girl. The following year tragedy struck. Baby Frances Mary fell victim to scarlet fever and within two weeks died from complications.<sup>15</sup> Not long after their child's

death, the O'Malleys moved to Raton, New Mexico, for Mr. O'Malley's health. He died there on March 31, 1910.<sup>16</sup> The young widow returned to Grand Junction, Colorado with her husband's remains. Faced with being alone, her family gone, she rose to the crisis. Her faith and her belief in the principles of Christianity gave her a strong sense of personal worth, and it did not fail her in her time of need.<sup>17</sup>

It was the year of Halley's Comet, which seemed to represent the changing times in America. America had gone through the depression of 1893-1897 and there were leaders who realized that government welfare and social programs were needed. Reform was a common word, and those advocating change were called progressives.<sup>18</sup> It was a period of progressivism for both men and women. However, some women had already begun their liberation and were crusading against traditional roles for women in several states. Colorado was among those states that had already begun legislation for women's suffrage.<sup>19</sup>

After securing a room at the Turner sisters' residence—one block from her church—she opened her own business, a knit shop at 440 Main Street. She operated the shop until a business friend advised her that, with the impending war, she may have difficulty getting wool.<sup>20</sup> The twenty-six year old business woman resumed her volunteer work with the Sisters at St. Mary's Hospital. A new addition was completed in 1912, and Mrs. O'Malley assisted with decorating and furnishing the new wing. She continued helping with community oriented errands and shopping.

Even though many Catholics had settled in and around the Grand Junction area, there was still an element of anti-Catholicism evident. Hatred of the Catholics had been promoted by the Ku Klux Klan, some Protestant sects, and the Freemasons in the 1920s and later. Reverend Thomas J. Hickey, in his book, *Catholics On The Western Slope*, related a conversation with the late Sister Mary Aurelia. While they were reminiscing the early days in Grand Junction, she spoke of a prejudice, especially among city officials, and recalled:

The story is passed down to us that when the Sisters wanted to raise funds to build the hospital, they were told by members of the Chamber of Commerce that they didn't want a hospital run by nuns, and if there was any fund-raising to be done it would be to get train fares and send the Sisters out of the town.<sup>21</sup>

An integral part of Mrs. O'Malley's service to the Sisters was in the area of public relations—she served as a one woman public relations liaison between them and the business community until her death in 1969.<sup>22</sup> Her aggressiveness



St. Mary's Hospital on Colorado Avenue.

(Photo courtesy St. Mary's Hospital)

may have upset the Victorian values of the turn of the century Americans, but she was a charismatic woman, and no one took offense.<sup>23</sup> She had the ability to draw others to her and involve them in her activities.<sup>24</sup> Different types of people were engaged by her to assist in various ways. In response to the question, "Why did you help her?" The answer was always various modifications of, "We just loved her, and would do anything for her,"<sup>25</sup> or "We always knew it would be for a good cause,"<sup>26</sup> or as one devotee said, "She was such a good woman."<sup>27</sup>

She accepted a position as clerk at the United States Post Office in Grand Junction. The Postmaster was a friend and fellow Democrat, Robert C. Walker. His son was Walter Walker, publisher of the *Daily Sentinel*. She served in that position until her retirement in 1946.<sup>28</sup> At her retirement dinner, as recorded in *Postmasters: Past and Present Grand Junction, Co. 1881-1991*, she revealed a side of her character when she said, "In my book of memories... I have placed the Big Boss first. There were two subjects on which we would talk during stolen minutes at the (General Delivery) window.... Politics: we spoke the same language, Democratic. Each being an old-timer, we could say 'I knew him when.'" Her boss at the time was C.D. Moslander, who later became chairman of the Mesa Democratic Central Committee.<sup>29</sup>

During her years at the post office, she continued to volunteer her services to St. Mary's Hospital and the community. Just south of the hospital stood the Western Sugar and Land Company, a sugar beet factory. The workers lived in adobe company quarters. Her concern for the poor took her into their shacks and hovels. She encouraged them to take advantage of the tuberculosis chest x-ray program and other health improving facilities.<sup>30</sup> She took baskets of food, clothing, and medicines to them long before there was any organized welfare program.<sup>31</sup> Her distress at the deplorable living conditions was reflected by a petition to the State Legislature on which early housing legislation was based. At the invitation of the Governor, she attended two White House Conferences for child welfare at the gubernatorial offices in Denver.<sup>32</sup> She was persistent and took her message to her church organization—Catholic Daughters of the Americas—in a speech: "...We need homes under this new federal set-up—a housing program. The people live in squalor down in the adobes near the sugar factory. Some are in two room shacks...six and eight to a room, two families to a house...the children are underfed and undernourished..."<sup>33</sup>

She was deeply concerned about promoting their spiritual welfare, and bringing them closer to their faith. She called for help in another speech before the Catholic Daughters of the Americas: "I am placing before you the great need for Mexican welfare on this Western Slope. Right at our door are

proselytizing agencies at work...we need a chapel where some 400 souls will have a priest who speaks their language...".<sup>35</sup> A politically astute woman, she preached the same message all her active life, "...take an active interest in local, state, and federal government. Don't wait until a bill is passed before you talk about it..."<sup>35</sup> Mrs. O'Malley believed women as well as men had an obligation to the present and to the future generations.

It is not known where or when she met Mother Cabrini, who was the nineteenth century founder of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, and founder of the Queen of Heaven Orphanage in Denver. Mother Cabrini and the Sisters came to the Western Slope to gather apples and winter vegetables for charitable institutions in Denver and Pueblo. Mrs. O'Malley worked side-by-side with them.<sup>35</sup> Food was gathered by horse and buggy. They did not have funds to send the produce to the orphanages, so the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad donated a refrigerated box car. It was placed on the Independent Lumber Company's track for one week. For sixty years hundreds of volunteer workers were mobilized and directed by Mrs. O'Malley.<sup>36</sup>

Their requests for charitable contributions went beyond the borders of Mesa County. It took them to the orchards and sheds in Delta, Bridgeport, Hotchkiss, Paonia, and Cedaredge. Father Al Bertrand remembered, from his childhood, going with his father to deliver a wagon load of potatoes to the train depot in Delta. The produce was then sent by steam locomotive to Mrs. O'Malley in Grand Junction.<sup>37</sup>

In 1925 her church chartered a new organization, Court Mount of the Holy Cross No. 941 Catholic daughters of the Americas in Grand Junction. Her priest gave his consent for the food drive to be undertaken as one of their charitable projects.<sup>38</sup> The project mushroomed with Mrs. O'Malley remaining at the helm. Many of her volunteers were recruited through the Church and St. Mary's Hospital. Baskets, sacks and trucks for hauling fruit from the orchards and sheds to the site of transport were donated.<sup>39</sup>

In 1943 Charley King began volunteering his time to the fruit drive. He remembered that the railroad switched from donating boxcars to donating their trucks in 1946. This allowed more time for gathering the food. King said, "Malley would start in July then and continue until the end of the harvest." He said that this called for more volunteers, but she found them. She would ride up front in the truck with the driver as they made the rounds of the orchards. She had the arrangements made—all the volunteers were responsible for was to load up the fruit and vegetables and haul them to the truck lines. Another truck line, Ephraim Freight Inc., had donated their services to haul the food to Denver and Pueblo. They would also return the empty baskets free of charge.<sup>40</sup>



A typical day would net thirty to forty bushels. The driver would take the load to the freight lines and write out the paper work sending them to Sacred Heart Orphanage in Pueblo, as well as to St. Vincent's Home for boys, St. Clara's Orphanage for boys and girls, Queen of Heaven Orphanage for boys and girls, Christian Brother's High School for homeless boys, and the Carmelite Convent, all in Denver.<sup>41</sup>

A Catholic Daughters of the Americas report said:

Mrs. O'Malley at the beginning of the harvest seemed a bit tired, and she remarked, "I remember how Mother Cabrini loved these pears, so I'll just send the first bushel over to her and she'll see that I get the rest of the fruit shipped out"... one could just see "Malley", as she is affectionately known, get new strength for each day's work, through her devotion to St. Frances Cabrini and her great personal love for all children.<sup>42</sup>

That year 690 bushels of peaches and pears and 1146 bushels of apples were shipped, according to O'Malley's 1958 peach report to the Church. Within a decade, however, religious houses were closing for various reasons. Times were changing and the directors of the dwindling orphanages preferred cash donations.<sup>43</sup>

Mrs. O'Malley's interest and devotion to St. Mary's Hospital continued. She helped with decoration and furnishings during the hospital's expansion in 1923. During the Great Depression, the sisters had little money or resources to keep the hospital in operation. She organized volunteers as housekeepers and aides, but the hospital gift shop was her special interest. The revenues from the shop went to the hospital.<sup>44</sup> She organized a group of women to make Raggedy Ann dolls for the gift shop. Her personal touch was a red embroidered heart on the body of each doll's chest.<sup>45</sup>

When St. Mary's Hospital outgrew the Colorado Avenue location, Mrs. O'Malley was instrumental in selecting the new site at Seventh Street and Patterson Road. In the new building she served as personnel director, and later as supervisor of the storeroom. She was also personnel consultant to St. Joseph's Hospital in Denver.<sup>46</sup>

A tireless reformer, she warned the women of her church in a speech delivered to Catholic Daughters of the Americas: "...the threat of the human family is a present danger more fearsome than the atomic bomb.... We as mothers, for love of those given into our keeping or in memory of those taken in infancy, owe a duty to these neglected children of today..." She encouraged women to watch their legislators and see to it that Catholic principles be made known



(Photo courtesy St. Mary's Hospital)

*Mrs. O'Malley in the St. Mary's gift shop.*



and followed where Catholics are concerned.<sup>47</sup>

In 1951, Pope Pius XII bestowed on her the papal Medal Pro Benemerenti for her many years of work with the underprivileged, and her zeal for the good of religion. It is documented that she "was unsparing of herself in soliciting funds to make possible the erection of a suitable place of worship for them..."<sup>47</sup> She expressed her concern and devotion for children in these words: "God took my child and gave me hundreds in return."<sup>48</sup>

In 1958 Catholic Daughters of the Americas awarded her the Medal of the Order of Mary Immaculate. The medal is given to one member in the United States every two years.<sup>49</sup> Mrs. O'Malley had served as State Secretary, State Treasurer, and representative of the State Council at national councils on several occasions. She served as president of the National Council of Catholic Women in 1963. In 1960 she was named the Outstanding Woman of the Year by the Grand Junction chamber of Commerce, and in 1967 she received the Colorado Woman of Achievement Award.<sup>50</sup>

When it became difficult for her to climb the long straight stairs at the La Court Hotel, where she had lived since the early 1930s, she was given accommodations at St. Mary's Hospital. When she died on May 5, 1969, at the age of eighty-four, her body was layed in state in the hospital chapel. Bishop Charles A. Buswell came from Pueblo to officiate at her Requiem Mass in St. Joseph's church. Her remains were interred in Calvary cemetery in Grand Junction, Colorado.<sup>51</sup>

Reverend Thomas J. Hickey reflected, "She was a woman of great spiritual stature, revered by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. She brought enduring credit and prestige to the Church on the Western Slope, as one can be envinced by the eulogy printed by the Grand Junction *Daily Sentinel* in the occasion of her death."<sup>52</sup>

Just as the memory of the Raggedy Ann dolls lives on in the hearts of the thousands who received one, so too, as the Bishop Buswell said, "The memory of Sabina O'Malley lives on in the hearts of many."<sup>53</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*The Daily Sentinel* (Grand Junction, Colorado) 5 May 1969.

<sup>2</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 27 March 1967.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Health, *State of Colorado Certificate of Death 1969*. Grand Junction Mesa County, 1995. Local File Number 211.

<sup>4</sup>Reverend Thomas J. Hickey, *Catholics In The Western Slope* (Fresno, California: Mid-Cal Publishers, 1978), 230-234.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>6</sup>Helen Clapesattle, *Dr. Webb of Colorado Springs* (Boulder, Colorado: Colorado Associated University Press, 1984), 28-54.

<sup>7</sup>Florence Kiefer of Grand Junction, interviewed by author, 16 November 1995, Grand Junction, Co., notes in possession author, Grand Junction, Co.

<sup>8</sup>Hickey, *Catholics on the Western Slope*, 231.

<sup>9</sup>J.R. Kirkpatrick, *Postmasters: Past to Present*. Grand Junction, Co. (Grand Junction: Privately printed, 1991), 1-2.

<sup>10</sup>Department of Public Works, *City of Grand Junction*. Engineering Division. Grand Junction Mesa County, 1995.

<sup>11</sup>William Callahan of Grand Junction, interviewed by author, 3 November 1995, Grand Junction, notes in possession of author, Grand Junction, Co.

<sup>12</sup>R.L. Polk & Co., *Grand Junction City Directory* (Salt Lake City, Utah: By the Author, Mesa County Public Library Collection. 1910), 175.

<sup>13</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 12 May 1959.

<sup>14</sup>Hickey, *Catholics On The Western Slope*, 195. At that time there were no city ordinances about keeping animals in one's back yard.

<sup>15</sup>Calvary cemetery, Grand Junction, Colorado, Tomb stone

<sup>16</sup>*Daily Sentinel*, 4 April 1910.

<sup>17</sup>Hickey, *Catholics On The Western Slope*, 234.

<sup>18</sup>Glenda Riley, *Inventing The American Woman: A Perspective On Women's History 1865 to the Present* (Arlington Heights: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1938), 37-39.

<sup>19</sup>Michael P. Malone and Richard W. Etulain. *The American West: A Twentieth-Century History* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 63.

<sup>20</sup>Julia Harris of Grand Junction, interviewed by author, 27 October 1995, Grand Junction, Co., notes in possession of author, Grand Junction, Co. Harris homesteaded near Collbran, Colorado and O'Malley was a regular Sunday guest at her ranch. Harris was one of the women who made the Raggedy Ann dolls.

<sup>21</sup>Hickey, *Catholics On The Western Slope*, 195-196.

<sup>22</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 12 May 1959.

<sup>23</sup>Reverend Joseph Bertrand of Grand Junction, interviewed by author, 18 September 1995, Grand Junction, Co., notes in possession of author, Grand Junction, Co. Father Bertrand is a relative of Father Al Bertrand mentioned in article.

<sup>24</sup>Sterling Smith of Grand Junction, retired owner of C..D. Smith Company, interviewed by author 30 October 1995, Grand Junction, Co., notes in possession of author, Grand Junction, Co. O'Malley visited his company often seeking items for the poor, he was always delighted to see her—he said he will never forget her.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Clinton Biggs of Grand Junction, retired owner Biggs Kurtz Co., interviewed by author, 1 November 1995, Grand Junction, Co. Biggs fondly recalls her visits to his company. He said she would come in and say, "I need a mixer or other items and I don't have any money". Whatever she would ask for I would give to her- I knew it would go to a needy family, and I was always glad to do it.

<sup>27</sup>Charley King of Grand Junction, retired Denver & Rio Grande Railroad engineer, interviewed by author, 6 November 1995, Grand Junction, Co., notes in possession of author, 6 November 1995, Grand Junction, Co. King donated his days off the road every week for this project from 1943 until O'Malley stopped in 1968.

<sup>28</sup>Kirkpatrick, *Postmasters: Past and Present*, 12-16.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>30</sup>Florence Kiefer of Grand Junction, Kiefer was Grand Regent of Catholic Daughters of the Americas 1958, her collection of records documents Mrs. O'Malley's activities 1910 -1968.

<sup>31</sup>Mrs. William Calahan of Grand Junction, interviewed by author, 3 November 1995, Grand Junction, Co., notes in possession of author, Grand Junction, Co. Callahan, a young laboratory technician at St. Mary's Hospital in the 1930s, was engaged by Mrs. O'Malley to drive her to the adobes at the sugar beet factory. Mrs. O'Malley never owned a car or learned to drive.

<sup>32</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 23 April 1953, 11

<sup>33</sup>Speech written in pencil by Sabina O'Malley at Grand Junction. Delivered to Catholic Daughters of the Americas at 1950 Convention, Grand Junction, collection of author, Grand Junction, Co.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Florence Kiefer of Grand Junction.

<sup>37</sup>Hickey, *Catholics on the Western Slope*, 321.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 232.

<sup>39</sup>Florence Kiefer of Grand Junction.

<sup>40</sup>Charley King of Grand Junction.

<sup>41</sup>Florence Kiefer of Grand Junction.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid. Mother Cabrini was canonized a saint—St. Frances Xavier in 1946. She died in 1917.

<sup>43</sup>Hickey, *Catholics on the Western Slope*, 232.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Julia Harris of Grand Junction.

<sup>46</sup>Florence Kiefer of Grand Junction.

<sup>47</sup>Speech written in pencil by Sabina O'Malley, collection of author. (Donated to author

by Charley King)

<sup>48</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 1951, date and page unknown.

<sup>49</sup>*Southern Colorado Register*, (Pueblo, Colorado), 6 May 1958.

<sup>50</sup>*The Daily Sentinel*, 27 March 1967, Editorial.

<sup>51</sup>Hickey, *Catholics on the Western Slope*, 234.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, (Death notice *Daily Sentinel* 5 May 1969, Front page.)

<sup>53</sup>Former Bishop Charles A. Buswell to Vivian E. Passer, 10 October 1995, Letter in the possession of Vivian E. Passer, Personal collections, Grand Junction, Co.

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Katherine B. Roe, Colorado Springs  
Dr. & Mrs. Geno Saccamanno, Grand Junction  
T. R. Sadler, Grand Junction  
Robert & Janet Scheevel, Grand Junction  
Steve & Tracy Schulte, Grand Junction  
Ruth P. Smith, Grand Junction  
Mrs. John W. Sneed, Grand Junction  
James E. Stafford, Grand Junction  
Mr. & Mrs. Robert V. Sternberg, Cincinnati, OH  
Mr. & Mrs. John Tomlinson, Westminster  
Mr. & Mrs. Dwight H. Tope, Albuquerque, NM  
Marjorie F. Tope, Maitland, FL  
West Slope Environmental, Grand Junction  
John Wolcott and Roxana Hickman, Grand Junction  
Pat & Zang Wood, Flora Vista, NM