

## The Blue Bird Mine: A Chronology

The following time line lists individuals and national, regional and local events that influenced mining in Boulder County in general and the Blue Bird Mine in particular.

- **1848-1849** – The California gold rush ignites a frenzy of fortune seekers.
- **July, 1858** - William Green Russell and brothers Oliver and Levi discover gold at the mouth of Dry Creek in the Pike's Peak region of the Kansas Territory.
- **October, 1858** - Alfred A. Brookfield and Captain Thomas Aikins, gold seekers from Nebraska City, Nebraska, join Chief Niwot (Left Hand) and a small band of Southern Arapaho at their winter camp at Red Rocks near the mouth of Boulder Canyon.
- *"Does white man remember many, many moons ago, of the great light in the west when the stars fell? The Great Spirit told us then that white man would soon be as numerous as the falling stars."* Chief Niwot.
- **January 16, 1859** – The Brookfield/Aikins party discovers placer gold at the base of Gold Hill in Gold Run Creek.
- **February 10, 1859** – The Boulder City Town Company is incorporated.
- **March 16, 1861** – The Grand Island Mining District is formed in southwest Boulder County by a group of miners that include Charles Wannamaker, B. F. Wickham, W. H. Sibley and W. J. Perkins. Believed present at the organizational meeting are the Delonde family (Delonde Homestead, Delonde Creek), Moses and Henry Como (Como Creek, Como Ditch) and Samuel Conger (*Silver, Gold and Black Iron*, Kemp, Donald C., Sage Books, Denver, Colorado, 1960).
- **Note:** The "Grand Island" was a mountain peak surrounded by a stream channel that rose like a "big grand island" according to one of the prospectors. In theory, the "island" is located "near the west end of the ranch formerly owned by L. W. Van Vliet (Vleet)", Kemp, 1960.
- **February 28, 1861** – U. S. President James Buchanan signs legislation establishing the Territory of Colorado. William Gilpin is appointed Governor.
- **September 9, 1861** – The first Territorial Legislative Assembly is convened and Boulder County becomes one of seventeen original counties established within present day boundaries and with Boulder City as its County Seat.

- **July, 1864** – Samuel Conger records the first gold lode claim in the Grand Island Mining District. The claim is located south and east of Arapaho Peak on the south side of what would later become Caribou Hill.
- **August 31, 1869** – Sam Conger, George Lytle, Billy Martin (Billy Martin's Hayslope Farm became Martin Acres Subdivision), Hugh McCammon, Samuel Mishler and John Pickel (later wounded at Sand Creek where Chief Niwot was killed) locate two rich silver lode claims on Caribou Hill, the Caribou and the Poorman. Lytle, recently returned from a mining excursion in the Cariboo Mountains of British Columbia, is credited with the choice of the name "Caribou". The Caribou Mine is the first patented mining claim in Boulder County.
- **1871** – According to the *Rocky Mountain Directory and Colorado Gazetteer*, 1871, the Caribou region of the Grand Island Mining District, Boulder County, is "the richest silver mining district in Colorado or the world".
- **May 17, 1871** – George Wheetman, A. L. Jones and Samuel Conklin discover an outcropping of silver bearing ore on the east side of White Cloud Mountain, 5 miles northeast of Caribou. The presence of the copper carbonates azurite and malachite in the silver ore give the discovery its name ... "Blue Bird".
- **1872-1874** – Seven adjoining lode claims are discovered: Slope Lode, March 3, 1872; Mountain and Bravo Lodes, May 18, 1874; Western Slope Lode, July 29, 1874; California, Mexico and Santa La Saria Lodes, October 29, 1874. The complex becomes the Blue Bird Mining Group.
- **April, 1873** – The Caribou Mine and mill are purchased by the Mining Company Nederland of the Hague, Holland for \$3,000,000.
- **1874** – The price per fine ounce silver peaks at \$1.27.
- **1874-1875** – New York merchant Levi Bates constructs a ten stamp mill, the Batesville Mill (also known as the North Boulder Mill) a short distance down the road, south of Blue Bird. During the early years of operation, ore from the Blue Bird Mining Group is processed at the Batesville Mill. Operational problems close the mill by the end of 1876.

**Note:** A stamp mill functions by dropping heavy weights which are raised by mechanical means (water or horse power early on, steam engines later) and dropped to crush the ore and prepare it for amalgamation. The amalgamation process fires the pulverized ore in a furnace with salt added to desulphurize and chlorodize the pulp. The pulp is then mixed with mercury in amalgamating pans where the silver chloride combines with the mercury. The silver-mercury is then heated to separate the two, leaving the silver to be poured into bars weighing about 70 pounds. The use of highly toxic

mercury, the only metal to remain liquid at room temperature, and copious amounts of salt create a huge potential for environmental degradation.

- **1875 & 1879** – Delonde Land Patents granted (Homestead Act of 1862 and Timber Culture Law of 1873).
- **December, 1875** – Mismanagement and crippling debt place the Caribou Mine in foreclosure.
- **August 1, 1876** – Colorado is granted Statehood. John L. Routt is Governor during the transition from territory to state.
- **January, 1877** – The Santa La Saria Mining Company is incorporated by Albro and Curtis Parsons and several close friends.
- **February, 1877** – The Santa La Saria Mining Company purchases the Blue Bird Mining Group for \$300,000.
- **January, 1880** – The Santa La Saria Mining Company constructs and operates its own ten stamp amalgamation mill on site. The mill is variously known as the Mexico Mill, the Santa La Saria Mill and the Blue Bird Mill.
- **June, 1882** – The Santa La Saria Mining Company employs 40 workers and produces 10 tons of ore daily. Five additional stamps are added to increase capacity to 15 tons a day. The *Rocky Mountain News* reports that Blue Bird ore assays at \$200 to over \$800 per ton (175 ounces to over 702 ounces based on the current price per fine ounce silver of \$1.14).
- **1883** – Recession grips the country and many mines in the area cease operations. Throughout the remainder of the decade of the 80's silver prices remain low and hopes for recovery fade.
- **1890** – Sporadic activity at Blue Bird is indicated by discovery of the Robin's Nest Lode on May 5, 1890.
- **July 14, 1890** – Congress passes the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, requiring the U.S. Government to purchase 4.5 million ounces of silver each month at market rates, a desperate measure to keep prices artificially high. Prices spike briefly and then plummet due to increased supply and losses in the international market when the British Government closes mints in India. To reduce costs, mine operators cut miner's wages which leads to labor unrest and sporadic violence.
- **June, 1893** – President Grover Cleveland pushes repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act through Congress.

- **1894** – Silver prices drop to 63 cents an ounce.
- **1900** – Passage of the Gold Standard Act depresses silver prices further, closing the few remaining silver mines. Blue Bird changes hands multiple times and in 1896 the owner of record is the Munsey Gold Mining Company.
- **1905** – The Colorado and Northwestern Railway Company (later known as the Denver, Boulder and Western Railroad Company) opens the Eldora Line of the Switzerland Trail of America which runs between Sunset and Eldora to transport ore from Eldora to the Wallstreet Mill.
- **April 30, 1905** – The Colorado and Northwestern runs its first excursion trip between Sunset and Eldora. Blue Bird is a flag stop.
- **1910** – Fred White (Grandfather of C. F. Alan Cass), manager of the Blue Bird Mining Group, recognizes the opportunity the excursion trips represent and transforms the boarding house (present day collapsed log structure) into accommodations that provide meals and lodging to tourists and vacationers. The White family operates Blue Bird as a tourist destination for eight years.
- **1917** – Mining operations at Blue Bird resume under a lease agreement with the Buckeye Mining and Milling Company. Regular shipments of ore are made until the great influenza pandemic shut down operations on November 1, 1918.
- **July 31, 1919** – A flood roars down Four Mile and Boulder Canyon, damaging bridges and washing out 700 feet of track. The Switzerland Trail is never again operated as a commercial line and excursions to Blue Bird come to an end.
- **1919-1921** – Blue Bird is operated by North Boulder Creek Mining Company out of Nederland.
- **December, 1923** – Fred White offers the Blue Bird Group of Mines for sale for \$20,000. No buyer is found.
- **1925** – Fred White leases Blue Bird to J. H. Murrow of Nederland.
- **July, 1926** – Blue Bird is leased by John Roberts for one year.
- **October, 1928** – J. G. Clark agrees to purchase Blue Bird from Fred White for \$1,500, but the sale is not completed.
- **1928-1940** – Blue Bird sits idle.

- **1941** – Great Western Gold & Silver Mines enters into a leasing agreement with Fred White. Company president, Walter A. Moore, constructs the stone and brick caretaker's house on the hill above the mine where he lives with wife, Mary, and daughter, Connie.
- **July 14, 1944** – Fred White dies and his widow Edith continues to lease the property to Great Western Gold and Silver Mines, Inc.
- **October, 1946** – Great Western Gold and Silver Mines, Inc. is unable to make its lease payment and the leasing agreement is terminated.
- **December, 1946** – Edith White sells Blue Bird to Charles W. Savery, owner of Savery's Savory Mushroom Company and former treasurer of Great Western Gold and Silver Mines, Inc., for \$12,000. Savery plans to grow mushrooms in the tunnels, but the plan doesn't materialize.
- **1947-1956** – Once again, Blue Bird sits idle.
- **1957-1959** – Blue Bird is leased by George W. Ross, Jr. of Nederland.
- **1960-1962** – Ruehlman Mining and Land Company, owned by Dan Ruehlman of Boulder, leases Blue Bird. Employees open a 150 foot tunnel south of the caretaker's house and construct a wood entrance enclosure. Eight pound rails are installed by employee Mike Smith to haul ore from the tunnel to a wood platform at the edge of the mine dump. Smith continues to mine after the Ruehlman lease expires, but abandons Blue Bird in 1965.
- **1965** – Blue Bird closes for the last time.
- **Summer, 1965** – 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox films a remake of John Ford's 1939 classic *Stagecoach* in western Boulder County. Opening credits roll against aerial shots of the City of Boulder Watershed, Caribou and Fourth of July Canyon. The Blue Bird bunkhouse and Delonde Homestead are featured as stagecoach stops. Directed by Gordon Douglas, the film stars Alex Cord, Ann Margret, Red Buttons, Mike Connors, Bing Crosby, Stefanie Powers, Van Heflin, Keenan Wynn, Bob Cummings and Slim Pickens.
- **Fall, 1965** – Kin-Ark Oil Company of Tulsa, Oklahoma acquires the 2,600 acre Caribou Ranch which now surrounds Blue Bird. An ambitious plan to develop the ranch into a year-round recreation destination doesn't materialize.
- **1968** – Blue Bird and Caribou Ranch are sold to record producer James W. Guercio of New York. When Guercio takes possession of the ranch the notorious hippie group known as the STP family is illegally "squatting" at Blue Bird and the Delonde Homestead. The "family" is evicted and Guercio

becomes the steward of Blue Bird for the next 29 years. Though the elements take their toll, isolation and restricted access help to preserve buildings, mining machinery and mine dumps from the exploitation typical of most mines of the period.

- **2000** – Guercio sells Blue Bird to the City of Boulder and Boulder County as part of the 2,640 acre Caribou Ranch open space purchase.

Compiled by Sue and Alan Cass  
1524 Henry Court, Longmont, CO 80501  
(720) 684-6922  
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