

November 9, 2016

Monte Stevenson, Director  
Parks, Open Space and Golf  
City of Lafayette  
787 N. 95th St.  
Lafayette, CO 80026

Dear Monte:

While I appreciate the effort the Peaks at Old Laramie Trail made in placing a bronze interpretive sign commemorating the Vulcan mine on Coal Creek trail right-of-way about 1/2 mile west of S. Public Road, alas, the sign has several factual errors:

- The photo on the plaque is not the Lafayette Vulcan mine. The Vulcan mine in Lafayette used the shaft method of mining, which is a large A-frame tibble structure topped by a pulley wheel and situated over a deep vertical shaft. The photo used on the bronze sign depicts a group of miners in front of a hillside slope mine — the main pulley and cabling are at ground level and run horizontally in relation to the mine tunnel dug into the hillside. Two coal mines in Lafayette's city limits used the slope method, the Cambro/Pluto and the Paramount. The photo on the plaque came from Louisville Historical Museum files and is mislabeled. My guess is that the photo represents the Gorham mine in Marshall.
- John J. Roche didn't found Rocky Mountain Fuel Company. The company's history has many branches, but Edgar Edmund Shumway is generally attributed (particularly in his obituary) with making the company a dominant coal producer. He opened Shumway & Company in Denver in 1892, then acquired Stewart Coal & Lime Co. in 1893 — which was renamed Rocky Mountain Fuel Company in 1895. John Roche's 1927 death notice, published in the Rocky Mountain News and Denver Post (and attached), states that John Roche was in Omaha, Neb. during the formative period of RM Fuel, and didn't move his family from Neb. to Denver until 1907. Historical evidence shows that Roche interviewed at RM Fuel in 1906 and joined the company in 1907. He became a major shareholder in about 1915, and wasn't appointed general manager of the company until 1922, after the death of company general manager D.W. Brown, who succeeded E.E. Shumway in 1914. Josephine Roche acquired RM Fuel Co. shares (in addition to her late father's shares), and gained control of the company in March, 1928.
- In later years, Rocky Mountain Fuel Company did supply sugar beet factories, but the company was founded to supply heating coal and steam coal to Denver homes and factories. The balance was used by the railroads.
- The Vulcan mine wasn't the state's second largest producer of coal during the 1930s. During its history, 1903-1937, the mine barely broke into the top dozen coal producers in the Northern Field, and as attached Colorado state mining records show, was well behind the larger local mines such as the Columbine and Hi-Way. The Lafayette Vulcan mine is often confused with the Coryell Vulcan mine, also owned by RM Fuel Co., but the Coryell coal mine was located in New Castle and closed in 1918.

A lot of money went into making the Vulcan bronze interpretive sign, but the misinformation it now memorializes brings up the need for proper vetting and standardization of permanent signage, particularly adjacent to and on the Coal Creek and Rock Creek trails.

An extensive discussion of appropriate interpretive signage along local trails dates back a couple decades to the original Coal Creek/Rock Creek Trails Master Plan, authored by a group of East County community members, including me, who participated in a Boulder County task force chaired by Caroline Hoyt, then co-owner of McStain.

Some of the discussion involved interpretive sign standardization, which was a tough task given the multiple municipalities involved. But a lot of the discussion involved appropriateness of interpretive signage. County planners familiar with archeological, historical and natural interpretive signage argued that placement of such signage by private companies on or adjacent to right-of-way should be discouraged.

The main reason, they said, is the inadvertent facilitation of corporate mea culpa — described as land developers who eliminate any trace of local or natural history, then erect spiffy signs stating that something interesting formerly occupied the site.

What a great educational opportunity it would have been to leave some of the undisturbed mine tailings from the Vulcan (formerly located where the bronze sign now sits) and then provide trailside narrative related to the last visible evidence of the coal mining process in Lafayette's city limits. Appropriate signage could have explained that the mine tailings were used in early Lafayette for everything from top coating for dirt streets to fill dirt for Old Town residential lots.

I like Meridian's facility, very much appreciate their investment in Lafayette and know of their desire to be good neighbors. But the Peaks' bronze interpretive sign doesn't belong anywhere near the Coal Creek trail.

Sincerely,

Doug Conarroe  
513 E. Elm Street  
Lafayette

Cc:  
Matthew Wistreich  
Peaks at Old Laramie Trail  
660 Old Laramie Trail  
Lafayette, CO 80026

Dave Belin, Chairperson  
Open Space Advisory Committee  
700 Pascal Drive  
Lafayette, CO 80026

Rebecca Schwendler, Chairperson  
Historic Preservation Board  
201 E. Cleveland  
Lafayette, CO 80026

David Ronck, President  
Meridian RA  
3811 Turtle Creek Blvd., Ste. 1050  
Dallas, Texas 75219