WELCOME TO OUR NEW CHAPTER MEMBERS

- Wayne Gutowsky – Fort Collins, Colorado
- Amy Johnson – Evergreen, Colorado
- Bill Martin – Georgetown, Texas

GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT
By Berl Meyer

I wish each of you a most joyous holiday season and hope that 2016 will be the same. I’ve had the pleasure of being your President for the past two years. My term is now ending and I wish Mark Voth well when he takes over on January 1. I will continue to serve as webmaster.

Congratulations to Bruce Watson for receiving the national organization’s Distinguished Volunteer Award at the OCTA convention in September.

I am planning a one-day chapter trip in July from Pueblo to Westcliffe, Colorado. This trip will take us through the Hardscrabble Canyon area. John C. Fremont explored this area in 1848 searching for a route for a transcontinental railroad. Information about the history of the area is on the website of the Wetmore-Hardscrabble Genealogical and Historical Society.

The Friends of the Cherokee Trail group in Kansas has been in touch with me regarding the possibility of a joint carpool tour of the trail in Southeast Kansas. The tour would begin and end in Galva, Kansas. The tentative dates are April 22-24, 2016. I will have further information on their plans early next year. Please contact me at this time if you might be interested in participating: webmaster@octa-colorado.org. Pat and I will be there and we hope that you will be able to join us.
MARK VOTH ELECTED PRESIDENT

Mark Voth became President-elect of the Colorado-Cherokee Trail Chapter at the meeting held on November 14. Mark and his wife, Lynn, are life members of our chapter. Mark’s bio:

I was born in Springfield, Illinois (starting point for the Donner party), and also lived in Iowa and Michigan while growing up. I graduated from Michigan State University in 1979 with a BS in Construction Management. Lynn and I got married in 1980 when she graduated from MSU, and we moved to Chicago. While living in Chicago, we always vacationed in Colorado and we moved to Lakewood in 1984. I continued my construction career holding positions as field engineer, cost engineer, superintendent, and project manager.

Once here, we quickly became interested in finding and exploring the old mines and town sites in our Jeep. Author Robert L. Brown captured my interest with his wonderful books on Colorado ghost towns and I was lucky enough to take a one semester history class from him through DU.

Both our children have grown up with an appreciation of history and we have spent many weekends and vacations exploring the west. We took two vacations in the late 1990s to visit all of the Laura Ingalls Wilder home sites which really set the history hook for us.

In the early 2000s, we found a book by Gregory M. Franzwa about the Oregon Trail and were fascinated. We spent the next three summer vacations following the Oregon Trail from Independence, Missouri to Oregon City. The children were quite young at the time, but were enthusiastic to see the old forts and points of interest along the way. With our children now grown up, and me being retired, I am able to pursue my interests in traveling, camping, fishing, hiking, mountain biking, and Jeeping. Lynn and I have a great time exploring historic trails and sites, and camping along the way.
BRUCE WATSON WINS NATIONAL AWARD

Bruce Watson received the national organization’s Elaine McNabney Distinguished Volunteer Award at the convention held in September at Lake Tahoe, Nevada. The award was presented “in recognition of his years of outstanding volunteer service with the Colorado-Cherokee Trail Chapter, chairing the Preservation Committee, being on OCTA’s Mapping and Marking Committee and active in many preservation projects.”

Bruce Watson (left) receives award from national President, John Winner (right). Photo by Roger Blair.

IN MEMORIAM
By Camille Bradford

Suzanne Hornbuckle passed away on September 9 at her home in Olympia, Washington. Suzanne and her husband, Chuck, were the first life members of this chapter in 2007. Seventeen of her ancestors were pioneers on the Oregon Trail between 1846 and 1860, and Suzanne was very active in historical organizations preserving her ancestral heritage.

In addition to OCTA, she was active in the Tumwater Historical Association, Daughters of the American Revolution, Daughters of the Pioneers of Washington, Sons and Daughters of Oregon Pioneers, and a number of other state and local historical societies and heritage groups. She received many awards during her years of work for these organizations.

Chuck and Suzanne also shared a great interest in the Cherokee Trail. Chuck is a descendant of Lewis Ralston, who made the first documented discovery of gold in Colorado in 1850. An article about Ralston, written by Chuck in connection with OCTA’s 2009 convention in Loveland, appears on page 4.

Suzanne Hornbuckle placing a marker on the Free Emigrant Road in Oregon that was followed by her Hanks Neville Hill family ancestors in 1853.
Gold Strike Park in Arvada was the location of the first documented gold discovery in what became Colorado. The park was dedicated on June 22, 2004 exactly 154 years later. The location was at the confluence of two creeks that became Clear Creek and Ralston Creek. Eight years later in 1858 the bonanza occurred just a few miles from this historic site. Why the name Ralston and who was this Ralston person?

Following the 1848 discovery of gold in California many adventurers went west. Among the gold seekers were two Cherokee wagon trains, one in 1849 and another in 1850. Traveling with the 1850 train was an Irishman named Lewis Ralston whose wife, Elizabeth Kell, had Cherokee ancestry. Ralston and his brother-in-law Samuel Simons left Georgia in early 1850 hoping to gain wealth in the west.

Arriving in northeastern Indian Territory they joined a Cherokee wagon train headed for the gold fields. About May 22nd they left the Grand Saline with Cherokee John Lowery Brown keeping a diary of their journey. Several days later they came to the Santa Fe Trail and turned west along the Arkansas River. Passing the remains of Bent’s Fort the train continued west to Pueblo where they traveled north along the east range of the Rocky Mountains.

Near present day Denver the 1849 Cherokee train continued northerly along the east bank of the South Platte River. However, the 1850 group chose a more direct route which crossed the Platte and headed northwest. On June 21st they stopped at the confluence of two unnamed streams to rest. There Brown wrote in his journal, “finished crossing at 2 oclock left the Platt and traveled 6 miles to Creek Good water grass & timber Camp 44”.

The next morning Lewis Ralston arose from his sleep and, hustled to the stream, shoveled gravel into his gold pan. Within a few minutes he shouted “Gold!” Others joined him but only a few flakes of the treasured gold were found. In his journal Brown wrote, “June 22 Lay Bye. Found Gold” and in the margin of his leather bound book he noted “We call this Ralstons Creek because a man of that name found gold here.” They concluded the almost certainty of riches in California was more compelling and continued west.

Gold Strike Park was the culmination of many years of research by Lois Lindstrom Kennedy, an Arvada historian. Local and state dignitaries participated in the park dedication. I was one of the speakers at this event as well.

“WE CALL THIS RALSTONS CREEK”
By Chuck Hornbuckle
MARIANO MEDINA FAMILY CEMETERY UPDATE

Bill Meirath from the Loveland Historical Society sent the enclosed photos and message on the Mariano Medina Family Cemetery project, to which our chapter had donated a Cherokee Trail interpretive plaque in 2013:

Last year we set the Mariano Medina headstone and this year we set the seven remaining family headstones. Those who helped set the headstones included Medina Cemetery Committee members Sandy Hodges, Pam Sheeler, Mike and Sharon Perry, Sharon Danhauer, Bill Meirath, and Sharon Danhauer’s granddaughter Haleigh.

During October and November Pam Sheeler worked on the projects for the City of Loveland Matching Challenge Grant and the platting of the cemetery property. Pam was able to reach the $3,000 Matching Challenge thru the generosity of LHS Members and local city businesses.

The money she has raised will be used to install an iron fence around the area of the headstones and around the rock wall. Pam has also made great progress on the plat, working with Intermill Land Surveying and the City of Loveland.

Lee Billmire has made four information signs mounted on stainless steel posts that will add greatly to the interest of the cemetery. Lee donated the signs because of his interest in preservation of Loveland history.

I really do not know how to thank everyone who has contributed to the success of this project.

Bill Meirath
STARVATION AT DEVIL’S GATE
By Lee Underbrink

Editor’s note: Lee Underbrink, a life-long trail enthusiast and historian, passed away Nov. 12 in Casper. Our heartfelt thanks to Lee for his often playful but always accurate columns, which we plan to continue running until they are all published. Our thoughts and prayers are with Lee and his family.

The story of the suffering Martin Handcart Company in our county is well known by most readers. With 144 persons perishing in this ordeal, many do not know that two Mormon wagon trains were traveling near them. One was Captain W. B. Hodgett’s 33 wagon train carrying 185 passengers with 187 oxen, cows and beef cattle. The second train captained by John Hunt had 50 wagons with 297 oxen, beef cattle and cows, and 200 passengers. Both of these wagon trains caught up with the handcart company at Devil’s Gate.

Mormon Charles Decker, a mail rider, stated that, “He had traveled this road over 49 times and had never before seen this much snow on the Sweetwater at any season of the year.” So with these two trains starting with 484 cattle, why were they stranded with very little food at Devil’s Gate? The answer is that most of these animals perished along the trail and especially when the snows began. What few that did make it to the gate were nearly wasted and poor since they could not forage in the snow. Almost 200 of the cattle died at Devil’s Gate, many by wolves. Most of the rest, about 50, were evidentially slaughtered for meat. This amount of meat did not last long, for with the handcarters, the two wagon trains and the rescue party, there were almost 1,000 persons at the Gate. At this time, there were still houses at Devil’s Gate built by Basil Lajuenesse, known as Seminoe. These structures were abandoned by Seminoe in the spring of 1856 and were still usable to store the Hunt-Hodgett wagon train goods. It took three days to unload and mark each owner’s goods in storage.

The empty wagons were now loaded with the suffering, starving and sick to continue the journey. The group arrived in Salt Lake in November 1876. Nineteen men, under command of Daniel Jones, were left at the buildings to guard the unloaded freight. A few of the cattle, poor as they were, were left to sustain these men until rescue occurred. The problem was that rescue did not happen until early spring, and the cattle were used in the first month.
It was assumed that this group of men could hunt and find meat to live on, but game was almost impossible to find. A lone Shoshone Indian arrived in the camp, and had the knowledge of where three bison could be found. The Indian guided men to the site, 12 miles away, and one bison was killed. The group was worn out towing the bison in the snow back to camp. Much of the freight from the wagons was opened in hopes of finding food, but too little avail. Hides from the used cattle were used to keep out the cold in the weathered fort. These hides were later used to boil and give a little something to digest, which made many of them sick. Experimenting with cooking the hides they were almost exclusively eaten for six weeks.

At this time, all these emigrants had passed Reshaw’s Bridge where you would think they could resupply. Again, the problem was even those at Reshaw’s were low on supplies and suffering the same winter. Daniel Jones decided to walk through the snow to Reshaw’s Bridge to get food for the men. He didn’t get far when he met some men bringing some needed beef to the starving.

They had struggled three days to get the goods to the hungry guards. The men at Reshaw’s had been informed by an Indian about the starving at Devil’s Gate. Finally, in spring help came from Salt Lake City to save the guards of their Gate of Hell.

Source: “Handcarts to Zion,” LeRoy & Ann Hafen, 1976  
“Forty Years Among the Indians,” Daniel Jones, 1890  
“History of Natrona County,” Alfred Mokler, 1923  
“Reshaw,” Jefferson Glass, 2014

NEW EXHIBIT AT UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO  
Unearthed: Ancient Life in the Boulder Valley

Many thanks to Kent Van Wyk for his message concerning this new exhibit at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History in Boulder. As described on the Museum’s website:

This new exhibit features a collection of 80+ stone tools known as The Mahaffy Cache that was found in a Boulder backyard in 2007. The artifacts were studied by CU Boulder Professor of Archaeology Doug Bamforth, Ph.D. He dates the tools to 13,000 years ago at the end of the last ice age.

The discovery of stone tools from the late Pleistocene within the city limits of Boulder is a rare event in archaeology. This is the first time the tools will be on display for the public. The exhibit includes interactive elements and video, as well as replicas of the tools that visitors can pick up and hold.

A very interesting article about the exhibit recently appeared in the Chaffee County Times.
AT WITS END: Traveling U.S. 50 across Nevada to and from OCTA’S 2015 Convention in Stateline, Nevada
By Berl Meyer

Entering Nevada from Utah. This area is great for wind farms. Alluvial fan deposit at the base of a range.

One of many Playas (dry lake beds) found near the base of a range. A “mountain” pass around 7,000 feet. The haze is due to fires in California. A sand dune field near the Sand Springs station of the Pony Express.

Generally speaking, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line except when one travels from Cotopaxi, Colorado to Stateline, Nevada. I’m publishing here a few photos along the “The Loneliest Road in America” according to Life Magazine, July 1986. I even had nightmares of the return trip over the same route returning to my home at Songdog West (in Cotopaxi). My geologist background kicked in, however, and it wasn’t as bad the “second” time around.

This section of U.S. 50 passes though the Basin and Range Province of the United States, a vast physiographic region defined by a unique topographic expression. Basin and Range topography is characterized by abrupt changes in elevation, alternating between narrow faulted mountain chains and flat arid valleys or basins. The region covers much of the western United States, extends into northwestern Mexico and is mostly desert, with numerous ecoregions. The physiography of the province is the result of tectonic extension that began around 17 Ma (million years ago) in Early Miocene time.* U.S. 50 was constructed over a historic corridor, first used for the Pony Express and Central Overland Route and later for the Lincoln Highway.

I did get a survival certificate from the Governor of Nevada, Brian Edward Sandoval, for accomplishing this feat. If you ever plan on travelling this route you will need to know that there are only three, semi-major towns along the way for gas. Those being Ely, Eureka and Austin before entering civilization, so to speak, at Fallon, Nevada.