

Platteville's Pioneer Museum preserves past

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PLATTEVILLE – The town of Platteville is much more than a place to get a great steak. Founded in 1871, it is one of the oldest communities in Weld County. Some families have ancestors who arrived even earlier, abandoning the Gold Rush in favor of settling in the area as farmers and ranchers.

The town's Pioneer Museum celebrates that legacy. Staffed by members of the Platteville Historical Society, the museum is filled with artifacts and memorabilia that commemorate the history of the town. The society members have painstakingly filled notebooks with oral histories of town residents, as well as histories of tombstones in Mizpah Cemetery and information about area businesses.

"We are really proud of our notebooks, and we still work on them," said Dorothy Brotemarkle, a member of the Platteville His-



The Soar/Stevens cabin, built in 1868, graces the property in front of the Pioneer Museum.

Photo by Jen Reeder

torical Society.

Near the shelves of notebooks, there are aged photographs of veterans, and uniforms worn by servicemen in most recent wars.

"We have every uniform from World War I until Iraq," she said.

A centerpiece of the exhibit is the bedroom set that belonged to Baby Doe Tabor. Tabor froze to death in a cabin outside the Matchless mine in Leadville because the last thing her husband, "Silver King" Horace Tabor, said before he died was "Hang on to the Matchless." Her bedroom set is exquisitely hand-carved, and was one of her possessions before the couple lost their fortune when the government switched from silver to gold as the monetary standard in 1893.

The set is on loan from Americana Antique Galleries. Before going on display at the museum, it had grown dusty from storage.

"We cleaned it with Q-tips, so we know it

very well," Brotemarkle said.

The Pioneer Museum is also home to a replica of a red 1903 Ford Model A, which was built by an area high school student in 1974 and subsequently donated. Another impressive vehicle housed at the museum is the first Platteville fire truck.

"One part of it's a 1948 and one part of it's a 1949," Brotemarkle said. "It comes out for parades."

Music buffs will enjoy the jukebox from 1935, a Wurlitzer-Simplex donated by former mayor Dan Coulter. There are also collections of items like vintage stamps and buttons, paper dolls from 1906, typewriters, dresses, hats and quilts, as well as a section with a tipi and arrowheads to pay homage to the American Indians who inhabited Platteville before it was Platteville.

On the grounds in front of the museum there is a Ponderosa pine cabin that was built in 1868 on the banks of the South Platte River. The Soar family, immigrants from England, passed it on to their daughter Nina Soar, who lived in it with her husband

Charles Stevens until she died in the 1950s. It was donated to the museum by the Ward family, and was moved log by log to the museum's property.

It's popular with students who visit on field trips, Brotemarkle said – particularly fourth graders.

"They're into 'Little House on the Prairie' at that age," she said with a smile.

Nick Meier, town manager of Platteville, said the Pioneer Museum "is both a valuable resource and asset to our community."

"The members of the Platteville Historical Society take their job as stewards of our community's history very seriously, and it shows," he said.

The Pioneer Museum is located at 502 Marion in Platteville, and open Wednesdays from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. and on the fourth Saturday of every month from 1 p.m.-4 p.m. For more information, call 970-785-6285.



Photo by Jen Reeder

A centerpiece of the Pioneer Museum's exhibit is the bedroom set of miners' sweetheart Baby Doe Tabor.



Photo by Robin Dadisman

Former mayor Dan Coulter donated a 1935 Wurlitzer-Simplex jukebox to the museum.



Photo by Jen Reeder

Many of the volunteers and members of the Platteville Historical Society attended Platteville High School before it closed in 1960.



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A replica of a 1903 Ford Model A is just one of the attractions at the Pioneer Museum in Platteville.