

Recollections of days gone by

Sisters Barb Pilcher and Bonnie Logan reminisce about Bailey's colorful past By Kelly Kirkpatrick Staff writer

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This was one of the two full-service gas stations that used to reside in downtown Bailey. This one was right next to the Knotty Pine. (Photo courtesy of Barb Pilcher and Bonnie Logan)

It would be difficult to spend considerable time in Bailey without getting to know sisters Barb Pilcher and Bonnie Logan. Conversely, it would be difficult to know Barb and Bonnie without also learning considerably more about Bailey.

The two sisters have always been associated with the Knotty Pine, a popular and longstanding gift shop and ice cream shop in the heart of downtown Bailey.

Parents Bill and Beth Peterson became owners of the Knotty Pine in 1960. Youngest daughter Barb purchased the

store from her parents in 1993, and remains the store's owner today.



The old fire station building in the Bailey area experienced the same fate as a number of other businesses that have been situated at the bottom of Crow Hill. A truck missed the turn, crossed the highway and ran into the building. An explosion and fire destroyed the building. (Photo courtesy of Barb Pilcher and Bonnie Logan)

Both Barb and Bonnie exhibit matter-of-fact, down-to-earth dispositions, and both seem to share an affinity for local history. They also have a knack for storytelling without embellishment, making them a virtual treasure trove of local knowledge and colorful Park County history.

"I'm not sure where you are going with this story," Barb said politely. "So I'll start

wherever you want and answer what questions you have."

"I grew up in this store," Barb said. "I literally started working here at the age of six. I started kindergarten in the Platte Canyon High School building that contained K-12, all under the same roof," Barb recalled. "There were about ten students in my grade at that time."

To hear Barb discuss local culture during her childhood and teen years is to understand how much, and how little, Bailey has changed over time.

For example, fire prevention and firefighting have always played a critical role in the Bailey way of life. Thankfully, however, firefighting resources have evolved, and firefighting methods have improved dramatically.

“Let me show you the red phone,” Barb said excitedly.

Mounted on an east-facing wall inside the Knotty Pine is a red phone that serves as a reminder of days gone by. Barb insists it has been left there because of its historical value. In the 1970s, the phone served as one of about four such phones in Bailey that acted as a vital tool in keeping the community safe from the threat of fires.

“My dad was a volunteer firefighter, as were many of the men in town when I was a kid,” Barb explained. “There were about four phones like this in town. When they rang, it was really important that nobody answer until after the third ring. That way, it gave everyone time to answer and then each party could communicate from party lines.

“There was only one un-manned fire station back then, so these phones were the equivalent of fire department lines. Women, usually wives, almost always answered when the phones rang while their husbands hustled to get their fire gear together and get out the door.”

When volunteers took off to fight the reported fires, each vehicle carried a stack of fluorescent orange bricks. The first vehicle en route tossed a brick out into the middle of the street periodically

so that the remaining responders would know the way to the fire.

“We also always started a sandwich assembly line right here on this countertop, and the men would rush through for sandwiches and giant containers of coffee to take to the lines,” recalled older sister Bonnie.

Barb also recounted how the town’s retired fire station was demolished when a truck on U.S. Highway 285 lost control and smashed head-on into the small structure at a high rate of speed.

Paints and other canned chemicals were stored in the basement of the building, resulting in an explosive storm of flames and debris.

“I believe Fred Wegener was making his first run for Sheriff at that time, and was actually putting a campaign flyer up on the building when it happened,” Barb added.

Another central theme within Bailey culture has always been tourism and recreation. According to Bonnie, summers in Bailey used to attract hordes of interesting characters from far-away places.

“We used to have tons of people from out of town coming to visit here, or work here, in the summers. Summers in Bailey were very, very busy.”

Both sisters recalled how popular Glen-Isle and the now Bailey Lodge in Mooredale were during the summer months when they were in their teens, and how people from all parts of the country flocked to the area to rent cabins, hike, ride horses and fish in and around Bailey.

“Glen-Isle was the jewel of the community for quite a while,” Bonnie said. “Bailey

was a real destination back then. Both Glen-Isle and the Bailey Lodge were packed with tourists during the summers. They were like communities within our community.”

Gordon Tripp, owner of Glen-Isle, went to the bus station in Denver to recruit help for the summer months, according to Barb.

“Gordon would go down to Denver and recruit people he thought would be good help during the summer months,” she said.

“So those people he brought here also became part of the community for a large part of each year. Some moved on, but others came back year after year.

“There was a time when Teddy Roosevelt came to fish near Glen-Isle quite a bit,” Barb noted. “This was supposedly his favorite place to fish.”

Bonnie noted that the Forest Service Office, located where the Bailey Community Center sits today, also attracted interesting new faces each summer.

“The Forest Service Office on Main Street was also a ranger station, and in the summer there were a good number of young, good-looking forest rangers who would come into the store from over there,” Bonnie said. “They were sort of stars around town, and pretty popular with the girls.”

Bonnie also recalled that available transportation and access to Denver made life for teenagers somewhat challenging at times.

“There was really not very much to do in Bailey for teenagers,” she said. “There was a laundromat near the Rustic Station, and it had popcorn and sodas.

So a lot of dates ended up there, at the laundromat”

Denver, in fact, was a different trip altogether than it is today, for a variety of reasons.

“Highway 285 was just much different back then,” Barb recalled. “A lot of people took Continental Trailways buses to and from Denver, and the highway itself wasn’t nearly as busy or congested with traffic as it is today.”

Bonnie said the trip to Denver was especially different during late night and early morning hours than it is today.

“There were fewer houses around the highway, so you couldn’t see the lights you see now when you make the drive at night,” she said.

“And it wasn’t unusual late at night to drive all the way to or from Denver and not pass a single vehicle along the way. The drive was just darker and felt much more desolate than it does these days. Of course, it was all single-lane back then.”

Many of Bailey’s most prominent structures today were also a part of the landscape during Barb and Bonnie’s youth. But as Barb explained, the vast majority of those buildings have changed stripes many times over through the years.

The Rustic Inn stood for a period of time, replaced by a new building, the Rustic Station.

The Canyon Inn sat where the Riverbend Eatery is located today, and the Platte Canyon Motel stood where China Village is currently located.

The Bailey Country Store building evolved into today’s Sasquatch Outpost. At the intersection of Main Street and Highway 285, the Bailey Self Serve Gas

Station sat in a single-wide trailer with several gas pumps outside.

The station was a popular destination because it also sold sodas, candy and cigarettes in the mid 1970s. At that time, there were two full- service gas stations in town that also performed major mechanical jobs when needed.

“The Bailey Post Office is where The Flume newspaper office is today,” Barb said. “Were you aware of that?”

When asked what is better, or worse, about Bailey today, as compared to when they were kids, Bonnie and Barb both paused.

“Well emergency services are definitely better today,” Bonnie said. “Now we have four fire stations as opposed to one, and fire personnel also sort of had to perform the same role then as ambulance personnel or medical first responders serve today.”

“By the way, did I mention that we also had Girl Scout meetings in the basement of the old fire house,” Bonnie asked?

Both sisters contributed to the observation that Bailey is still a small, tight-knit community today, but that it seemed more so in the past.

“It used to be that if you went to school, everyone around town knew you because schools did so many events within the community, and the community was so involved with the schools.” Barb said.

“People were also drawn together by firefighting efforts and volunteer efforts that brought us all into contact with one another on a regular basis. And party lines ... everyone knew everyone’s business because of them.”

Bonnie observed that communication used to take place around town, in face-to-face fashion.

“Now so many of our conversations take place in chat rooms,” she said with a chuckle.

“We have to run or we’ll be late,” Barb said apologetically. “But we hope you got some good stuff for what ever your story is about.”

Good stuff indeed, courtesy of Barb and Bonnie.