

Palmer Lake Historical Society, April 21

The bad old days of Colorado

By Sharon Williams

Award-winning author Randi Samuelson-Brown vividly brought to life the realities of lesser-known Colorado pioneering experiences—sometimes humorous and quirky, sometimes deadly, with twists and turns of the bad old days of the Wild West era. She gave the presentation to the Palmer Lake Historical Society on April 21.

A passion for Colorado history was instilled from childhood by her father. His Denver engineering firm required frequent travel to service the mining operations in remote mountain towns. Randi became his traveling companion, and he would talk about the first-hand accounts of miners and those who made up the rowdy, rough communities. To this day, she feels haunted by the West's little-known histories and their long reach into the present.

Life during the 1800s was tough, and mining settlers were lucky to get out alive, much less rich, as the territory was invaded and claimed by gold and silver seekers.

One of the unflinching narratives of reckless rollicking ways was that of the popular Morrison Saloon. Full kegs of whiskey were brought by wagon only during the good weather months between April and November. Once delivered to the saloon, the whiskey was served by the bartender for 25 cents a shot. Whiskey was often made from raw alcohol and further diluted or laced with



Above: Presenter and author Randi Samuelson-Brown provides untold stories of the Wild West days in Colorado. Photo and caption by Sharon Williams.

tobacco juice, gunpowder, molasses, turpentine, creosote, strychnine, prune juice, and tree bark to name a few. "Scamper Juice" and "Forty Rod" were monikers for some of these toxic versions.

If you missed this enthusiastically paced, intriguing

program, or for those who want to know more about Colorado's Cemetery Scandal, Mining the Miners—Colorado's Good Time Girls, The Hard Men—Gunslingers and Outlaws, and Retribution in Northwestern Colorado, among other eclectic, but true topics, you can check out this author's first non-fiction book, titled *The Bad Old Days of Colorado: Untold Stories of the Wild West*.

Originally from Golden, Samuelson-Brown now lives in Denver. A fifth-generation Coloradan, she has written several books springing from the obscure and strange historical facts uncovered by her research of the early years of Colorado. When not writing, Randi can be found riding horses and traveling Colorado and the West, finding inspiration from people, places, and whispers from the past.

The Palmer Lake Historical Society Lucretia Vaile Museum, 28 Valley Crescent St., Palmer Lake, is open Wednesdays from 1 to 4 p.m., the first Thursday of the month from 10 a.m. to noon, and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Special tours by appointment. Call 719-559-0847 and leave message. Current exhibits: *Vintage Radios* and *Women's Suffrage*. For information, call 719-599-0837 or click on www.palmerdividehistory.org.

Sharon Williams can be reached at sharonwilliams@ocn.me.

Palmer Lake Historical Society, May 19

Helen Hunt Jackson—the Colorado years

By Natalie Barszcz

Palmer Lake Historical Society presenter Doris McGraw enthralled her audience on May 19 at the recently renovated Palmer Lake Town Hall. McGraw gave a detailed account, with an inspired "expert" insight into the life of poet and travel writer Helen Hunt Jackson, addressing the questions surrounding why Jackson's literary life blossomed out West and discussing the many well-known works written during her time in Colorado Springs.

Born in 1830 as Helen Marie Fiske Banfield in Amherst, Mass., much of her childhood and early adult years influenced her future. By age 18, Helen and her younger sister Anne had lost two brothers and their parents, and by late 1865, she had lost her two children and her first husband.

Fraught with despair, Helen secluded herself in her aunt's attic in Newport, R.I., and began to write poetry, drawing solace and strength through writing. Her first works were published in early 1866, just two months after the death of her 9-year-old son.

Well-travelled and already known internationally for her publications by 1873, Helen arrived in Colorado Springs seeking a drier climate for health reasons. The weather was cold and rainy on the day she arrived, but she decided to stay.

Helen grew to love the physical beauty of the region, especially Cheyenne Canyon, and took her faith from nature. Through the turns in her life story, she found renewed inspiration, new interests, friends, and a second marriage in 1875 to quaker banker William Sharpless Jackson.

An incredible observer of her surroundings, Helen wrote in a letter: "On the 4th of June, 1876, Pikes Peak was white with snow, and glittered in the sun as if the snow were solid ice, half a dozen little fleecy clouds flittered around its summit, like various rapid swans skating back and forth on the shiny surface, nowhere else in the radiantly dome-less sky could a cloud be seen."

Helen Jackson became an activist for the Native

American cause until her death, writing *A Century of Dishonor* and the novel *Ramona* to raise awareness of the plight and the injustice shown toward Native American people. Helen in her lifetime thought *Ramona* a failure for having missed the goal of raising awareness with the public, but the novel remains in print and resides in the public domain, having been reprinted about 300 times since its first publication in 1884. *Ramona* is considered an essential book along with *Nelly's Silver Mine*, a children's book centered on the environment around Rosita.

Helen passed away on Aug. 12, 1885 at age 55 from stomach cancer in San Francisco. William had her body exhumed and buried on Inspiration Point at the top of Seven Falls, Cheyenne Canyon, Colorado Springs, but due to the popularity of the site and the risk of vandalism, her body was exhumed again and laid to rest in Evergreen Cemetery, Colorado Springs. Her poem titled *Emigravit* is inscribed on her gravestone in accordance with her wishes. The marker in Cheyenne Canyon remains in place, and her writing desk along with room replicas from the Jackson residence on Weber Street can be viewed at the Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum. Her papers and a recently added photograph collection, courtesy of the Banfield family, are kept at Colorado College.

Doris McGraw is a local author, public speaker, historian, and actor, specializing in Colorado and Women's History, well-known as an authority on the life of Helen Hunt Jackson. McGraw has also written several historical romance novels for the popular *Locketts and Lace* series, under her pen name, Angela Raines.

Palmer Lake Historical Society monthly programs are presented at 7 p.m. every third Thursday of the month at Palmer Lake Town Hall, 42 Valley Crescent St., Palmer Lake. The June 16 program, *The Night of a Thousand Heroes*, will be presented by Tracy Beach based on her book (this event is rescheduled from March due to a snow cancellation). The program will consist of a short



Above: Doris McGraw holds a vintage edition of Helen Jackson's poems at the Palmer Lake Town Hall on May 19. Photo by Natalie Barszcz.

historical lecture on the disastrous June 1921 Pueblo flood and include a display of flood artifacts.

Natalie Barszcz can be reached at nataliebarszcz@ocn.me.

High Altitude Nature and Gardening (HANG)

Eco-smart gardening for people, pets, and wildlife

By Janet Sellers

"Follow nature—it knows a thing or two about how to grow things."—*The Empress of Dirt, aka Melissa Will.*

Sunflowers for summer

I used to think that we would just let the sunflower grow and it would have one beautiful bloom. We can deadhead for more blooms, likely getting more heads on the stalk. Seeds planted in the garden and protected by a castor oil in kitty clay treatment can grow 8 to 12 feet tall, and in a pot they will indeed grow and flower, but they will be much smaller. In a planter box that's 6 inches deep in December last year, a sunflower seed accidentally got in the pot and grew to 2 feet during the winter in the window box! It sprouted, had leaves and then it grew a pretty, yellow flower. I didn't know to deadhead it, but I

think it could have kept going awhile like my geraniums did all winter.

In the *Bunny Garden* online blog, the author says, "Sunflowers are native to North America. In the wild they usually have multiple heads—up to 20 heads per flower is the norm. These wild seeds make up the genetic basis for the domesticated and hybrid seeds we see today. If you get multiple heads on your sunflower, it could be cross-pollinating with nearby wild sunflowers."

Diatomaceous earth eliminates garden pests

Diatomaceous earth is a safe method used by farmers and gardeners alike for pest control inside and outside the body. In the garden, it eliminates soft-bodied pests like slugs, snails, aphids, ants, and others. Oregon State



University reports, "Diatomaceous earth products are registered for use against bed bugs, cockroaches, crickets, fleas, ticks, spiders, and many other pests." On pets and livestock fur, used carefully, farmers and pet owners eliminate fleas, ticks, and more. In livestock, cat, and dog feed, it eliminates worms. It is a safe, earth-friendly and wildlife safe alternative to toxic products. And it is quick and simple to use.