

Resting place restored

Community effort funds work at mausoleum of city founder



Bruce Hill, of Grand Junction, stands with the restored mausoleum of George Crawford, which is on a hill above the Orchard Mesa Cemetery. Hill, a former mayor, helped get funding and donations to restore the site. Crawford founded the cities of Grand Junction and Delta and three cities in Kansas.

By Emily Shockley

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The off-white stone mausoleum that sits atop a hill overlooking the wide expanse of Grand Junction finally looks like a suitable resting place for the city's founder, George Crawford.

Following more than a century's worth of wear and tear, the structure has been restored to its former glory thanks to an informal collective of local residents. Former Grand Junction Mayor Bruce Hill headed up the group, spending nearly the last year and a half collecting \$23,000 in private donations and summoning \$11,000 worth of volunteer craftsmanship to spruce up the mausoleum. Work was completed this spring and summer.

"It's moving," Hill said of seeing the site restored. "It's amazing that we could bring it back."

Over the years, vandals pried raised letters that spelled Geo. A. Crawford from the mausoleum entrance. Two stone spheres were removed from the top of the building. A plaque that bore Crawford's birth and death dates wore away, a gate was removed and an unwelcoming metal fence was placed around the site.

The fence is now gone.

A new gate has been crafted and placed at the mausoleum entrance by Toys for the Fun of It owner Mike Allen. The city of Grand Junction laid rock landscaping around the mausoleum and made the road to the site more traffic-friendly. The missing spheres, raised lettering above the entrance and the plaque inside the mausoleum were replaced by Dan Carlson, owner of Carlson Memorials.

Grasso Masonry cleaned and re-mortared the aging building. Vince Grasso, owner of Grasso Masonry, said he had to be very careful cleaning the mausoleum and replacing the mortar to strengthen the building, considering its advanced age.

"There was a lot of moss on it and 100 years of weathering," he said. "Whenever you're working on something that old, you're not sure what you're going to get. We had to be extremely careful and not use harsh abrasives."

Allen, who does blacksmithing as a hobby, estimated he spent 45 hours total forging and fitting the gate. He wanted to make it as historically accurate as possible and used a zoomed-in photo of the original gate from 1898 and the measurements for the mausoleum entryway as his guides for a near-replica product.

"It was a little longer than the original, to more completely cover the entry so people couldn't crawl under it," he said.



Photos by GRETEL DAUGHERTY/The Daily Sentinel—Bruce Hill points out the raised lettering that has been restored above the new gate on the George Crawford mausoleum, two of several aspects of the structure and surrounding area that have

been repaired and rebuilt.

Carlson said the work he performed was similar to what he already does crafting memorials, although creating raised lettering isn't common practice anymore. He said he was happy to lend his skills to a worthy project.

"It's an important part of the valley," he said. "It's a good project and a long time coming."

Crawford's body was placed in the mausoleum above Orchard Mesa Cemetery 116 years ago after he spent nearly eight years buried in a temporary plot in the municipal cemetery. Supposedly, Crawford requested his body be buried on the hill because it is where he first glimpsed a dusty Grand Valley with just a few riverside trees breaking up the desert landscape and envisioned the city it would become, according to Museum of the West Curator of History Dave Bailey.

Crawford's view and the mausoleum both went through significant changes in the 20th century. Bailey said restoring the grave site is good for the community.

"Everybody got concerned because it got run down," Bailey said. "It's neat that it could be restored, because it is significant."

The significance of the project hit Hill when he learned more about Crawford while Hill served on the Grand Junction City Council. As a Grand Junction native, he wanted to honor the vision Crawford had when he came here and saw it as a place to settle down, just as Hill's parents did years ago. He wants to thank the citizens who helped make the project possible and welcome all Grand Junction residents to see the site as a point of pride and something to protect from falling into disrepair again.

"It's part of us," Hill said.

