

New book looks at founder's history

Nick Creede did more than discover silver vein in cliffs

By THOMAS PHILLIPS

CREEDE—A town is named after him, but Mary Schroder's new book attempts to discover the man behind the name and the town.

Nicholas Creede, Indian agent, prospector and silver baron, helped put the town of Creede in the world spotlight. He discovered silver in the Amethyst vein, north of Creede, in the late 1800s and soon became a wealthy, if not troubled, man.

"Nicholas Creede and the Amethyst Vein" details the tragedies and successes of that man.

Author Schroder put ten years of her life into the 52-page book, which she described as an historical narrative rather than a biography. She said she wrote the book to fill in the gaps of Mr. Creede's perceived history and to add to the town's history. Other books, she said, offer brief accounts of Mr. Creede and the town, but no single work explores him in any depth.

"They sensationalize all the bars and rowdiness, but nobody's ever looked at the life of Creede," Schroder said in a recent interview at the Creede Historical Society's log-cabin library in Basham-Memorial Park.

Her research over the last decade took her between Creede, Colorado Springs and Denver, visiting often the libraries of the Creede and state historical societies. She cross-

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referenced her material with Cy Warman's "The Prospector: Story of the Life of Nicholas Creede," an 1894 biography. What she found: a man with two pasts, a man whose lives became a commentary on mankind.

"It's an amazing story and that's why I couldn't let it go undiscovered," Schroder said.

William Harvey, the dirt-poor son of an Indiana farmer, headed west in the days before the Civil War. He served as an agent for Pawnee Indians on the Great Plains immediately after the war. Schroder says he moved to Colorado and became a prospector to escape his past, changing his name to Nicholas Creede somewhere along the way.

After discovering small pockets of silver around the state, he moved to the San Juan Mountains in what would become Mineral County, then a part of Saguache County. Charles Nelson first found silver here and opened the Holy Moses Mine. Creede's Amethyst came next. He was not a good miner, though, but a good prospector, Schroder said; he could find silver but feared being underground, not good for a miner.

He died divorced and estranged from an adopted daughter and was probably a drug addict, Schroder said. She said he fell victim to scheming and others' unscrupulousness, his wife, his addictions and his business partners.

"Human nature is still the same, and we all have to have patience with each other," Schroder said.

The book impacted her in that respect, too. She said she's become

more aware of what happens around her and how people manipulate each other, "and that it's not a new thing."

Writing the book turned into a dedication to persistence. After working on the Centennial Books series to commemorate the town of Creede's 100th anniversary, Mr. Creede intrigued her. She started the research with her husband, who died before the book's publication, but completion came slowly. The work was nonetheless enjoyable, however.

"It was a feeling like I was trying to, how shall I say, make a ghost come alive," she said. "I think his life is really worth inspection, and there're so many lessons to learn."

A first draft of the book weighed in at 125 pages. But publishers were not interested. One said that only 350 people - the population of the town of Creede - would read it. One didn't like Schroder's abundance of adjectives in the text. Still another told her, "No one reads in southern Colorado," she said.

"That was so insulting," Schroder said.

Put off by rejection, she decided to publish it herself. Working with a Colorado Springs printer and cover designer, she's put the book on shelves. She's sold about 150 copies and only has \$400 worth more to sell to break even.

"I think I'll recoup our (investment) in one summer," she said.

("I did a good job of marketing, which is a great deal of fun," she later added.)

The work has proved valuable for history buffs also.



Mary Schroder flips the pages of her new book, "Nicholas Creede and the Amethyst Vein," sitting in the Creede Historical Society's library. The book is available for purchase.

Ed Hargraves, the director of the Creede Historical Society, said the book fills in the empty spaces of who and what are the man and the town.

"It's just another link in the history chain of Creede," Hargraves said.

Surprising to him was the story on Creede's wife and adopted daughter. The two died in the 1903 San Francisco earthquake.

"I think she's done a lot more research than anyone else I know," Hargraves said.

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