

## Way We Were

### Living with Avalanches

Kate Mapp, Museum Intern

Avalanches were and still are a common occurrence in the Wasatch Mountains. When winter storms grace our mountains they usually bring the threat of avalanches. Today, due to extensive research, avalanche forecasters have a deeper understanding of how and why avalanches occur. During the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, citizens of Park City learned about avalanches on their own. When an avalanche did occur, the discovery was usually accidental and resulted in many close calls or sometimes even death.

Park City's landscape looked very different in the early 1900s due to extensive logging. Trees acted as a natural barrier, but with the loss of vegetation, Park City became more susceptible to avalanches. In 1884, the first locally recorded deadly avalanche occurred in Ontario Canyon<sup>1</sup>. The avalanche swept down the barren mountain during the middle of the night crashing into Mr. Riech and Mr. Harris's homes. Riech's three daughters and Mr. Harris's wife were killed in the avalanche. Thankfully today the vegetation is restored and avalanches in town are less likely.

Unlike nowadays, where most reports of people being caught in slides are outdoor recreationalists, at the turn of the century many avalanche victims were miners. While traveling to and from the mines near Park City, miners had to travel across avalanche prone terrain. In 1916 on Christmas Eve, Francis Tyrall and Joseph Brown were finishing up work at the Daly West Mine when an avalanche swept across the hillside burying both men and four horses. Brown was able to extricate himself who then summoned miners nearby to help search for Tyrall. By the time they were able to locate Tyrall, he had already succumbed to asphyxiation<sup>2</sup>.

In the early 1900s, Park City did not have an organized search and rescue team like we do now, and when an avalanche burial occurred the town relied on the citizens to conduct searches. In the report "The Deadly Avalanche" of 1903, where six miners were rescued and three killed, the alarm in town was sounded and over 300 men came to the rescue<sup>3</sup>. Currently in Park City, we have over 200 avalanche professionals who are skilled in responding to avalanche accidents. The dangers and potential consequences of avalanches warrant deep respect and

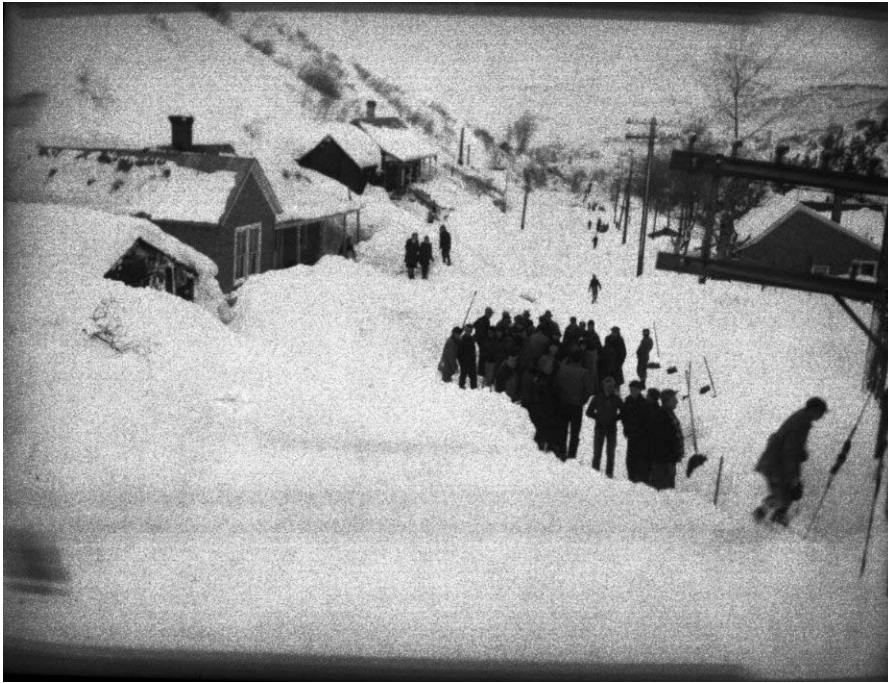
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<sup>1</sup> Park Record, The Avalanche, February 23, 1884

<sup>2</sup> Park Record, Francis Tyrall Killed in Snowslide December 29, 1916

<sup>3</sup> Park Record, The Deadly Avalanche, January 31, 1903

understanding while allowing us to reflect on the men and women our community has lost over the past 130 years to avalanches.



In 1949, an avalanche swept through town and several locals came out to help search for victims caught in the snow.

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