

Way We Were

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Thanksgiving compliments of Wells Fargo

Mahala Ruddell, Research coordinator

In the classic musical, *The Music Man*, the residents of River City rush the streets with shouts and smiles when, “the Wells Fargo wagon is a’comin down the street.” The particular delivery they were excited enough to sing about was of musical instruments ordered by con-man, but later redeemed town hero, Harold Hill for the newly formed marching band. But in Park City one chilly late November day in 1901, Freeman A. McCarty and Fred Backus got their own Wells Fargo surprise worthy of song when the company delivered a box to each containing, “a large, fat turkey, mince meat, apples, cranberries, celery, oysters, etc.” The men and their families were set for their Thanksgiving celebrations.

Thanksgiving as an official holiday was only about 40 years old at the turn of the century. Though it had been celebrated in North America since European colonization, festivities were usually muted and very often singularly focused on religious activities. Abraham Lincoln was the first president to decree a national day of Thanksgiving set aside in November to promote family values, a sense of unity, and, to a degree, the idea of American exceptionalism.

Miners in Park City usually still had to work on Thanksgiving Day, though stores and other businesses in town would often close. Traditional turkey dinners were served later in the evening. Dances were commonly held at Society Hall or other meeting places on Thanksgiving night and attracted large crowds of Parkites looking for an excuse to join in the fun with friends, family, and neighbors. Summarizing all of the reasons that Park City had to be thankful, the *Park Record* noted in 1891 that “the people...have enjoyed a reasonably prosperous year and thanksgiving turkey was partaken of in the full knowledge that the prosperity is still rolling onward with an ever increasing volume.”

In 1901, Fred Backus and F.A. McCarty certainly had plenty to be thankful for when the wagon arrived with deliveries of turkey dinners for both. The two men worked as agents for the Wells Fargo Express Company, which had long been a presence here in Park City. The gifts for Backus and McCarty were from the company in appreciation for the work they had done.

F.A. McCarty was also a well-known jeweler and member of the Masons. Backus, an employee of McCarty’s, was a member of the Knights of Pythias. Both men were “among [Park City’s] most respected citizens.” McCarty ran his jewelry store until 1905. By 1912, he had moved away, though he continued to own property in town, renting out a building on Main Street to the Wells Fargo Company and others. Backus left town around the same time McCarty retired and moved to Nevada, where he lived for the rest of his life.

Happy Thanksgiving to all from the Park City Museum!



Image ID: 1984.1.31

Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Bea Kummer Collection

Caption: This horse and wagon team is parked on the 300-block on Main Street, directly in front of the Wells Fargo & Co. Express offices where Backus and McCarty served as agents. Image ca. early 1900s.