

Way We Were

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Wild birds, coyotes, and bears, oh my!

Chelsea Banks, Park City Museum Collections Intern

Forget your cats, dogs, and guinea pigs. How about a black bear or a coyote? While today people frown on keeping wild animals as pets, laws weren't always strict about such things, and it was not unusual to see pets made of wild birds, rodents, coyotes, or even bears. This was especially true in a mining town like Park City, where coyotes, bears and other predators were regularly seen and hunted. Hunters would sometimes capture young cubs and pups, to be kept or given away as pets.

Pet bears were seen around Park City from its early days. In 1909, saloon owner George Wanning survived a bear attack after it was shot dead by his companions Henry Spriggs and Jinks Nelson. They captured the bear's three cubs, of which one was taken to Park City and kept for a short time at Wanning's saloon. The cub became very popular with the locals, proving to be fond of both candy and biting, before being sent on to a Mr. Lemp in Milwaukee.

And it wasn't just in Park City, as pet bears, many likely captured in the mountains around Park City, became something of a trend. The Rio Grande Western Depot in Salt Lake City was at one point home to a young bear mascot, Danny, known for wrestling with the railway workers. And on State Street, saloonkeeper Louis Hobein owned a black bear named Dewey. Dewey eventually escaped his yard, creating a temporary panic on the street. Dewey's rampage ended, however, with his being shot by sausage-maker Otto Heller (who apparently made sausages from his meat).

By 1930, bears were harder to come by in Utah, but coyotes were still plentiful. At least one coyote made a home in Park City, as a pet or mascot for the Silver King Coalition Mine. And, as before, he was just one of many in the state. A decade earlier, a pet coyote in Ogden made the news when it was killed by a police officer after escaping. A few years later, a coyote pup was stolen from its home on Wall Street.

In 1942, Fort Douglas acquired its own coyote, Satan, inducted as official mascot for the military police after being captured in a Salt Lake City driveway. Unfortunately for Fort Douglas, though fortunately for the coyote, Satan soon escaped back into the mountains after chewing through his rope.

It is unknown how long the Silver King's coyote remained as a Park City pet, but its existence has been memorialized in this photograph from the Park City Museum's extensive historic image collection.



Image ID: 2000.8.6

Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Bob Sawyer Collection

Caption: The Silver King Coalition Mines Company kept a pet coyote in the 1930s, pictured.

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Sources:

“A Close Call” Park Record 1909-07-03 Page 3

“Park Float” Park Record 1909-07-10 Page 3

“Danny Took the Hat” Salt Lake Tribune 1894-08-18 page 6

“Pet Bear Runs to His Death’ Salt Lake Tribune 1900-04-12 pg 5

“Pet Coyote Escapes and Is Killed by Officer Chambers” Ogden Daily Standard, 1919-05-21, pg 6

“Loses Beehive, Now Pet Coyote Is Purloined” Salt Lake Tribune 1923-10-07, pg 2

“Coyote Mascot at Fort Douglas Goes AWOL and Takes to Hills” Salt Lake Telegram 1942-07-24 pg 17