

Way We Were
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Park City's iconic aerial tramway speaks
David Nicholas and Steve Leatham, researchers

I am 118 years old, as are my remaining thirty-five siblings. Originally we numbered thirty-nine, a very close knit family literally tied together. I am Silver King Aerial Tramway Tower 39.

In my family I am the tallest, standing eighty-five feet high not including the ten foot base upon which I am constructed. At one time I was one of the three tallest structures in Park City. The other two included the Silver King Coalition Terminal Building (eighty-five feet) and the Ontario Mill smokestack (seventy feet). Both were victims of foul play: the Terminal Building cremated by arson in 1981 and the iconic brick and mortar smokestack dynamited to oblivion by miscreants in 1951.

From my lofty perspective I have witnessed the ebb and flow of Park City's fortunes, from good times, to bad times and back again. Let me describe the birth of my family.

In 1889, two close friends and business partners, David Keith and Thomas Kearns, formed the Silver King Mining Company. It quickly became one of the "Big Four" in the Park City Mining District and remained a venerable institution spanning three generations.

The partners' shared vision was to utilize advanced technology to create a standard for efficient mining operations, including transportation of ore. With financing secured, they hired a brilliant yet eccentric young millwright to deliver on their vision: John Breckenridge Fleming, or JB to friends. Over time, JB acquired another and well-deserved nickname: "Flawless Fleming."

JB's performance exceeded even the lofty expectations of his employers. From commencement to completion, he delivered early and under budget. He is the one who constructed the gravity-operated aerial tramway made up of wire rope and buckets supported by thirty-nine towers. Yes, my family! When it began operation on June 6, 1901, the tramway was considered the world's most advanced.

Though the tramway ceased operations in 1951, as a testament to JB's "flawless" design, we've weathered the test of time. We needed some assistance several years ago when aspens and brush threatened our structural integrity. The Park City Historical Society & Museum with the generous help of LowStump Tree Service saved the day and removed the trees.

Please keep us in mind as you head to the polls this November to decide on the future of Treasure Hill. Preserving this large tract of land will also preserve the historic integrity of my family. McPolin Farm, Round Valley, and Bonanza Flats offer some excellent examples of land conservation. Can you imagine our community had those areas been "sprawled and malled"?

My family and I wish we could vote on the Treasure Hill Bond. Since that's impossible - after all, we are steel towers - we encourage those who read this article to do so and make your voice heard.



Image ID: 1990.31.21

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

Caption: My siblings and I are hard at work in this photo circa 1920s, with ore buckets hanging on the wire rope strung between us, on their way to and from the Silver King Mine.