

Way We Were

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ONCE UPON A MIDNIGHT CLEAR

Margaret Hilliard, Park City Museum supporter

It was winter 1990-91. White Pine Canyon was owned in large part by two families. There were far-off plans to build a housing development, but at that moment, the canyon looked remarkably like the Ardennes Forest in France. The view of the valley below was interrupted only by an occasional hot air balloon, and the one structure in sight - the "Blue Roof Market."

"A Midnight Clear," a film written and directed by Keith Gordon and adapted from the novel by William Wharton, tells the story of six bright, incredibly young American GIs sent to the Ardennes on advance reconnaissance to pave the way for Allied Forces moving toward the Battle of the Bulge and the end of World War II.

The young soldiers chance upon a grand old chateau, long-abandoned by its owners and close to German lines. They hole up there to report their findings back to command. The situation quickly unravels.

Having chosen it as their shooting location, a remarkable crew of talented Utah film technicians began to transform White Pine Canyon into the perfect WWII location. They constructed the exterior of a sixteenth-century chateau with its attendant grand gates and outbuildings, planted forests and even built a road through the property. But the question remained as to where to create the interior of this impressive building.

Our current wonderful Park City Library, aka the historic Park City High School, at the time empty and owned by the city, was soon to be sold to developers planning to construct a 4-storey hotel and cultural center on the site of the existing building and adjoining Library Field.

Thanks to both the Park City Council and the School District, the old school as well as the district's derelict bus barn across the street on Woodside Avenue (now beautifully restored as "The Shop") became the film company's "studio." The spaces were used as the interiors of the chateau and other ancillary sets, as well as a construction workshop where the exterior walls of the chateau were built, plastered and painted before being transported to their canyon location.

Both buildings were the coldest places on earth, neither having been used for more than seven years. The weather was frigid, but the irony of the temperature meant extremely low snowfall, bringing with it the need to truck in snow from the Uintas to "dress" the set daily. Hand shovels. Backhoes. Nighttime nightmares. The cast and crew endured harsh conditions but came through brilliantly, all the while as life-long friendships were being formed.

As fate would have it, once filming wrapped up, all traces of the sets were removed, and the land and buildings were being restored to their original condition, irony struck again. It snowed for days.

The Park City Film Series and Park City Museum have partnered to host a free screening of "A Midnight Clear" at the Jim Santy Auditorium on Monday, on Veterans Day (observed), November 12, 2018 at 7pm. Please join us.



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Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Park Record Collection

Caption: No longer in use by 1990, the old Park City High School building (pictured) was dilapidated and scheduled for demolition when rented as filming space for *A Midnight Clear*.