

The Way We Were
Sally Elliott, Historian
The unfortunate fate of the Kearns-Keith Mill
March 5, 2014

In September of 1998, word spread through the community that the historic 1903 Kearns-Keith Mill, which was located on United Park City Mines property, had been torn down. Lovers of Park City history were aghast to hike up Walker & Webster Gulch and see a smooth hill where the dilapidated old mine had been. Granted, the picturesque ruin was crumbling and dangerous, but Park City people still loved it. It's hard to say good-bye to any of them.

Some of the earliest Park City mines were located from Blue Slip Bowl to the bottom of the Pioneer Lift, including the Sampson, Walker-Webster, Rebellion, Alliance, and Roaring Lion. E. P. Ferry had purchased most of these claims and consolidated them as the Crescent Mining company in 1882, but after the crash of '93 silver devalued and Ferry's health failed, so he sold out to David Keith and Thomas Kearns who were owners of the Silver King Mine just south in Woodside Gulch. Using the 2000 foot Hanauer Tunnel which opened just above the base of Pioneer Lift at Park City Mountain Resort (PCMR), Kearns and Keith erected the mill which was an exact duplicate of half of the Silver King Mill.

At that time, the land was not in the corporate limits of Park City, so it fell under Summit County's jurisdiction to permit demolition of historic structures. However, as the community researched the demolition they were unable to find any paperwork or a permit filed with the county.

Representatives from the mining company, City Council, County Commission, Chamber of Commerce and Historical Society held a community meeting at Deer Valley to figure out how to prevent such destruction in the future. United Park City Mines pledged \$38,000 to a fund that would be used to produce historic markers for all the historic mining structures. Restaurant sales tax matched that amount and within a year, PCMR and Deer Valley constructed steel frames and erected the signs we enjoy today.

Today the remaining mining structures need care and conservation. The counterweight for the King Con Tram at the side of First Time Run needs to be stabilized before it becomes a hazard. California-Comstock Mill could also use some shoring up and the conveyor structure at Thaynes crumbles a little bit every season. The boarding house collapsed several years ago and is lying in pieces on the ground beside the shaft house. These structures are some of the last remaining symbols of Park City's mining heritage and their preservation is vital to keeping the town's history alive.

The Park City Historical Society & Museum is celebrating 30 years of preserving, protecting, and promoting Park City's history and heritage.



Image# 1999.17.169

Credit: Park City Historical Society & Museum, Fraser Buck Collection

Caption: Kearns-Keith Mill as it might have appeared in 1904.