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Photo by Sally Fant

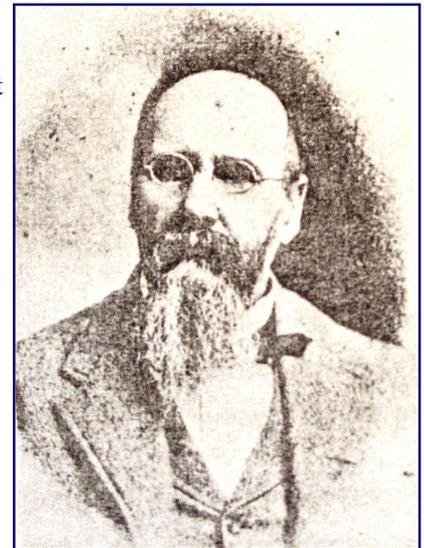
Crystola - "a Mecca of Spiritualism"

"The City Beautiful – an Air Castle in the Rocky Mountains." That was the description of Crystola in a 20-page pamphlet circulated in 1915 as the successors to Henry Clay Childs tried to create a "great industrial enterprise in Colorado" and a utopian center for socialism and psychic research. In an earlier 2008 article, I wrote about Crystola and its historic founder, Henry Clay Childs. But that article was really only a small part of the story. From 1872 until 1930 Crystola was the location of what could be called a Mecca of Spiritualism.

Spiritualism, a belief in communication between the living and the dead, developed and reached the peak of its popularity from 1840 through 1920, particularly in English-speaking countries. By 1897 there were rumored to be over eight million followers in the United States, Britain and Europe, mostly drawn from the middle and upper classes. Followers believed that the spirits of the dead, residing in the *spirit world*, were able to deliver messages to the living. The standard way of receiving these messages was through formal sessions called *séances* where a medium, a person acting as a spiritual intercessory, would translate information from any spirits contacted – messages about everyday life and the afterlife.

Many prominent figures of the time were spiritualists, including Arthur Conan Doyle (the author of the Sherlock Holmes detective novels) and Mary Todd Lincoln who organized a séance in the White House while grieving over the death of her son. That séance was also attended by her husband, President Abraham Lincoln.

Despite being fraught with numerous instances of fraud and outright chicanery, the surge of interest and curiosity in Spiritualism increased during and after the Civil War due to the massive number of casualties. That curiosity developed locally in a small series of canyons along Ute Pass in central Colorado, an area that would



Henry Clay Childs, founder of Crystola
Ute Pass A Quick History

become a haven for spiritualist ideals and result in a whole series of colorful episodes for nearly 50 years – a few of which I relate here.

When Henry Clay Childs and his wife, Catherine, came to Colorado in 1872, after his toy manufacturing business was wiped out in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, he built a house in an area called Trout Park. Childs ran some cattle and sheep and started a lumber business. The couple often entertained visiting psychics and held regular séances for their friends and neighbors in their house. It was during one of those séances, while gazing into their crystal ball, that a spirit supposedly told Childs that there was gold in the area.



The house that Henry C. Child's built in Crystola in 1872. Ute Pass - A Quick History

A visiting psychic, Professor L. J. Kimball, reinforced that message by claiming to be able to "witch" gold with his willow stick. Stories tell that Kimball divined and located a number of metallic deposits up and down Ute Pass. It was Kimball who persuaded Childs and several of his spiritualist friends to form the Brotherhood Gold Mining and Milling Company in 1897, sparking nearly a decade of searching, speculation and investment schemes. A town was incorporated two years later and, as the legends goes, named Crystola in honor of Child's passion for crystal ball gazing – the method by which he learned of the promise of gold.

Childs and his friends were great promoters. In response to wide-spread pamphlet distribution, dollars poured into the town and company from hopeful investors. As many as 150 spiritualists at one time came to live in or visit the newly created town, many from Boston. But local folks in Woodland Park and Green Mountain Falls, as well, got caught up in the gold fever while eyeing the millions being made in the Cripple Creek and Victor district just across

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the mountain. What followed was one of the most notorious stock selling schemes in Colorado history, where more money was invested with no return than in anywhere in the region. One promotional pamphlet went so far as to promise that “in some cases the prospector [investor] is saved the trouble of locating a mine by an accommodating wizard who, instead of locating [by ‘witching’] the future bonanza for himself, will locate it for anybody who will put up a sufficiency of cash in advance.”

No gold of any consequence was ever found in Crystola. The *Mountain Echo* wrote that “by 1903 it was realized that the spirits had indeed been mistaken in their predictions of gold.” But there was a lot of money spent searching for it.

The antics in Crystola were well known. After Child’s death, a 1911 newspaper article in the *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph* summed up the activity, saying “ghosts, goblins and spirits from the unknown world are presumed to walk the hills of the neighborhood of Crystola. Mr. Henry Childs is reported to have done considerable mining work as directed by his friends in the spirit world.”

Even though the gold fever died out, Spiritualism remained very much alive, spawning several stories of hoodwinking schemes from visiting (so-called) psychics. One such incident was recalled by Edwin S. Bower, a former resident, who wrote in a letter to a friend that “Crystola was a catch-all for all kinds of suckers and their prey.” He described a troupe of two men and three women, professing to “have communication with the spirit world” who swindled a number of neighbors. “Mrs. Inez (by name) posed as a Trumpet Medium and we, the poor dupes, did not know the difference. [They charged] only 50 cents admission fee. Mr. & Mrs. Bledsoe and Mr. & Mrs. Brown were accomplices. Brown was the ventriloquist, impersonating Wagner’s spirit guide with his Irish Brogue.”

After Child’s death in 1910, he willed 2000 acres (worth \$25,000 at the time) in the Crystola area to be used to build a school of Spiritualism – the “first of its kind in the world.” The Reverend Hiram Vrooman, a psycho-scientist, author of “Religion Rationalized” and head of the Liberal Congregation of Denver and the Correspondence School of Rational Religion in Portland, Oregon, attempted to establish a psychic research school at Crystola in accordance with Childs’ wishes. The *Gazette* reported that “a psychic research school may be built in Crystola. It will be headed by Hiram Vrumann(sp), famous New York psychic-scientist and writer on Spiritualism and psychological questions. . . . The plan is to make this school a cooperative one, endowed for research in the realm of the supernatural. Mr. Vrumann(sp) has spent millions in an effort to prove that all phenomena are explainable.”

There is no record that a school was ever established.

However, it does appear that for more than fifteen years Reverend Vrooman sponsored summer lectures in Crystola by visiting spiritualists and national leaders, promoted the area as a tourist destination (Plan B after finding no gold), sold lots, rented camping spots and hotel rooms (in the Hotel Abbot and later the Crystola Inn) and offered shares in the Crystola Cooperative Association. The “industrial cooperative” was billed as “The City Beautiful – an Air Castle in the Rocky Mountains.”

The last spiritualist left Crystola around 1930, the Langs. Mrs. Lang was a medium and Mr. Lang had served as the postmaster. The beauty of nature has since reclaimed just about everything else in Crystola, except for a few houses and the Crystola Bar, which replaced the Crystola Inn when it burnt down. And while Spiritualism is still an active belief in our culture today, its influence is mostly under society’s radar. In Crystola “the rest is left to the spirits.”

Sources: Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph; Letter of Edwin S. Bower, September 30, 1958; Mountain Echo; Ute Pass - A Quick History; Ute Pass Courier; Ute Pass Historical Society; Wikipedia.



Reverend Hiram Vrooman. Vrooman’s brother was Secretary of the Interior in Theodore Roosevelt’s cabinet.

Ute Pass A Quick History



Henry Clay Child’s Death; The Crystal Ball

When Childs died, he was cremated in Denver (*at his request - in the cheapest way possible*). His obituary, which was published in the *Denver Republican* in February of 1910, stated that his only known living relative was a sister, Mrs. Ella Parmalee Biddle of Florida. But, “*his last words were a command that she not be notified of his death.*” Supposedly, his ashes and his crystal ball were buried beneath a tree near the house in Crystola that he built in 1872.

In 1921, eleven years after Child’s death, Joseph Thibodeau, a French Canadian and spiritualist friend of Childs, and one of the original directors of the Brotherhood Gold Mining and Milling Company, appeared one day at the home of six-year old Robert Freeland, whose family lived in Child’s old white frame house. The Freeland’s ran a dairy on the property and regularly delivered fresh milk to Green Mountain Falls.

Robert recalls old man Thibodeau saying to his father: “*It’s time to dig up Childs’ ashes and I’m supposed to scatter ‘em in front of the white house on the garden.*” Robert remembered standing by an old tree watching his father and Thibodeau dig up a can of ashes and spread them along the potato rows.

They never found the crystal ball.

Dave's Buyers' Guide

Cabins, second-homes and land specials from Coldwell Banker 1st Choice Realty →

Prices and status effective as of August 31, 2011



\$360,000

238 Shadow Lake Dr., Divide
Owner-built! 3BR/3BA/1GAR, 2476 S.F. on 2.55 acres. Wonderful raised ranch with lots of wood and a spacious great room and kitchen. The large country kitchen has rustic pecan cabinets throughout. Downstairs is 14 x 45 foot family room. Outside a welcoming flagstone patio sports a custom iron grill. A regulation horseshoe pit and detached "recreational house" are perfect for entertaining. See spectacular views of Pikes Peak from the 320 sq. ft. deck. It's time to buy! #641935



\$474,500

470 Pembroke Dr., Woodland Park
Exquisite Custom Home! Built on 0.66 acres in 2005 in the Reserve at Tamarac, this home has 3514 S.F. and features 4BR/4BA/3GAR. Enter at the great room to see a cultured stone FP, the living & dining/kitchen area and 12 14 foot ceilings. Main-level living. The master BR has a FB, sitting room and 12' ceilings, luxurious double vanity bath with tiled shower and jacuzzi tub. Landscaped and oversize garage for that workshop. There more here than can be described; so come see! #734444

"Don't buy the house; buy the neighborhood!"

Proverb



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(Marshall-Martinek Team listings are BOXED)



\$449,900

841 CR 112, Lake George
Fisherman's Dream! On the South Platte River and backs to Nat'l Forest. 4BR/3BA/1GAR and 2049 S.F. Fully furnished; large deck. 2.5 acres. Breath-taking views. Don't miss it! #718120



\$349,850

3707 Omer Rd, Divide
Pride! 3BR/3BA/2Gar, 3568 S.F. on 2.0 acres. It has an elevator! Up graded kitchen w/ breakfast nook and garden window. Master has 5-piece bath and jetted jacuzzi. Workshop. Immaculate! #782111



\$279,900

1100 Ponderosa, Woodland Pk
Passive Solar! 3BR/3BA/2GAR and 2444 S.F. Cedar-sided w/ a Pikes Peak view! Large garage & attached greenhouse. Huge family room w/ wood FP. A master BR to die for. Location! #671364



\$239,750

472 Rhyolite Ln, Florissant
Immaculate! Custom-built on 1.24 acres; 4BR/3BA/2GAR and 2940 S.F. Main-level living w/ 3 BRs laundry and 2 bath on one level. Fantastic kitchen w/ oak cabinets. The walkout lower level has large family room. Must see! #770078



\$219,850

710 W. Northwoods, Woodland Pk
Family-friendly! 4BR/3BA/2GAR, 1940 S.F. Excellent condition; walk out lower level. New carpeting and roof. Main level laundry; lots of storage. Huge deck w/ great views. Large yard is completely fenced. Great neighborhood! #792374



\$149,900

127 West Street, Cripple Creek
Step back in Time. 1909 renovated log home in Knob Hill area. 2BR/1BA/1GAR, 1268 S.F. on 0.22 acres. Natural wood beams, T&G ceiling, loft bedrooms, modern country kitchen. Family room added recently. Beautiful! #723177



\$33,900

127 Carlton Cir, Florissant
Building Plans! This 2.04 acre lot is ready to go. Perc test done, fire mitigation trees cut, building plans available. A well permit is waiting. This is a beautiful parcel overlooking the CME valley. A dream lot for a dream home. #465075



\$19,900

2847 N. Mountain Est. Florissant
Two Lots! Two adjacent lots on a corner that total 1.18 acres. Several building sites are among the many Ponderosa and Fir trees. A selective build produces a great view of Pikes Peak. #675664



\$16,000

1001 S. Mtn Est. Rd, Florissant
Meadow! Two acres of meadow and trees and some nice building sites in beautiful Colorado Mountain Estates, south of Florissant. Easy access to nearby Fossil Beds and Cripple Creek. #530773



\$16,000

2856 Blue Mesa Dr., Divide
Fronts Water! This heavily treed lot in Highland Lakes (1.67 acres) slopes down to Beaver Lake No. 2. Strategic tree cuts will make room for a driveway and a building site. See this beautiful lot. #457747

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