

Roosevelt's Longmont whistlestop: Why he is remembered here

'What a passionate person he was'

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Years before Dan Snarr sculpted two statues of President Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt now standing in Longmont — the second one unveiled Thursday — he rode bulls to buy groceries for his wife and three kids when his construction job paycheck stretched thin.

Snarr, now 51, won some jackpots and usually enjoyed moonlighting at rodeos.

But his brother, Scott Snarr, photographed him in September 1989 limping back to the chutes through a dusty Oakley, Utah, arena after a bull named Wild and Wooley tossed him around like a ragdoll when his hand got hung up in the rope.

He later framed that photo for his bullriding brother with a Roosevelt quote:



Teddy Roosevelt impersonator Don Moon poses for photos with Longmont's newest Theodore Roosevelt sculpture Thursday evening. (*Lewis Geyer / Longmont Times-Call*)

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

Then and now, Dan Snarr keeps the gift in plain view.

He hopes his sculptures installed on commercial properties flanking Roosevelt Park — the first one commissioned in 2003 by the same Niwot-based developer, Burden Inc., that commissioned the second one in March — make a visual epitaph here to the 26th president credited with establishing the national parks system and busting monopolies.

"What a passionate person he was," Dan Snarr, a Tooele, Utah, resident, said after Thursday's unveiling at the grand opening event of Roosevelt Park Apartments, 600 Longs Peak Ave.

"He reminded me so much of my (paternal) grandpa as I worked. They were both so barrel-chested and strong."

Judging by reactions from the crowd gathered there on the 114th anniversary to the day of Roosevelt's Longmont whistlestop on Sept. 25, 1900, locals still celebrate that strength.

When Roosevelt impersonator Don Moon — a Colorado Springs resident visiting his daughter in Longmont -- took the microphone to recount that historic railcar appearance near First Avenue and Main Street, the group easily fell into character with him.

"Some took umbrage at what I am doing. But if we do not manage the water well, this country is doomed!" Moon said, referencing Roosevelt's conservationist leanings.

The remark stirred an unscripted "Heae! Hear!" amid hearty applause.

Rewinding to the whistlestop

Roosevelt in 1900 won votes in Longmont — then a town of about 3,000 — with his progressive Republican politics, Erik Mason, Longmont Museum's curator of research, said.

But perhaps the city of Longmont renamed its downtown green space from Longmont Driving Park to Roosevelt Park afterward because the politician, a New York-born blue blood, won hearts with everyman appeal.



Theodore Roosevelt, then governor of New York and the vice presidential candidate on the ticket with incumbent President William McKinley, speaks to a crowd in Longmont near First Avenue and Main Street on Sept. 25, 1900. (*Longmont Museum and Cultural Center / Courtesy photo*)

"I had always heard that Teddy was sickly as a child and then became so robust as an adult," Mason said, referring to Roosevelt's asthma. ". . . So, I liked the speech his father gave him, that no one can make you what you want to be. No one else can do it. It was a very powerful message and very 19th century by way of self-reliance."

Vice presidential candidate Roosevelt — then governor of New York — rode 20,000 miles of rail stumping for himself and incumbent President William McKinley up to two weeks before Election Day, Moon said.

Though self-described as "strong as a bull moose," Roosevelt's demanding travel schedule nevertheless fatigued him — something the Longmont Ledger reported: ". . .Roosevelt impressed us as a thinker rather than an orator, though it is not fair to judge a man who is on a constant strain day after day, and a dozen times a day too. He looked careworn, nervous and tired, though he warmed up to his subject. . . ."

A photo shot that day depicts townies in formalwear and straw hats who tied their horses and parked their buggies nearby. Children perched on Roosevelt's railcar deck and climbed telephone poles to better hear his high-pitched voice.

The cheering afterward was "loud and earnest," and folks reached for the McKinley/Roosevelt buttons on hand after the train pulled away, according to the Ledger report.

But Moon, a decorated Vietnam veteran who retired in 2000 as an electrical field engineer to research Roosevelt's life and deliver living history performances, gave the Roosevelt Park Apartments audience a bigger picture of the man's Colorado reception.

From behind his Roosevelt-like rimless glasses and walrus moustache, Moon stood dressed in a black top hat and matching suit with tails to explain over the din of passing RTD busses how miners downstate "booed" him that season.

Gold miners in the now-ghost town of Victor and other towns along Colorado's goldfields southwest of Pike's Peak pelted him with rotten tomatoes and eggs, Moon said.

Roosevelt and McKinley's proposal to value gold at 16 ounces of silver to 1 ounce of gold angered gold miners who worried the standard could debase gold prices.

However, less than a year after the Republicans won the election and dropped the suggested standard, those gold mining communities welcomed Roosevelt back with fanfare.

Goldfield met him with bouquets and garlands; Cripple Creek hosted a buffet that stretched three blocks long for him and the miners; and Victor presented him with a solid gold key to the town, Moon said.

A life revisited

Last weekend, Dan Snarr, his son, and some workmen unloaded the new 1,400-pound bronze Roosevelt statue. It sits on the sidewalk and attaches to the brick wall under Louise and Herb Crede's second floor unit — one of 115 units now 96 percent occupied at the three-story Roosevelt Park Apartments.

Like many Americans, the couple watched the September airing on PBS of Ken Burns' seven-part series, "The Roosevelts: An Intimate History," and took fresh interest in the installation.

"We saw him before they put the canvass back on for a week," Louise Crede, 77, said.

Now, anyone can see him and even climb aboard the interactive statue's stainless steel railcar deck with the black patina.

Dan Snarr admitted the life-sized dimensions are slightly off.

He built the deck undersize, and Roosevelt — who stood 5 feet 9 inches tall — now stands 6 feet tall.

In a sense, though, the rendering fits the man who led Rough Riders up San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American War, weathered the deaths of both his mother and first wife on Valentine's Day 1864, and worked through his subsequent depression for the next two years in the saddle — as a rancher in the North Dakota Badlands where he herded cattle, ate beans, and slept on the ground upon occasion like a regular cowboy, Moon noted.

He quit ranching when the winter of 1886-1887 caused 60 percent of his herd to starve to death, according to the National Park Service website.

Knowing some of Roosevelt's story and relating to parts of it, especially his bull riding days, inspired Dan Snarr to sculpt Roosevelt pressing into the rail.

Americans elected him as vice president in 1900 — an office that led to his assumption of the presidency in 1901, at age 42, after McKinley's assassination. He served as president until 1909.

"A lot of the photos I looked at in my research, he came across as a very intense speaker," Dan Snarr said. "But I wanted him to look as he was — strong, not angry. I wanted him to make eye contact with people as they walked up the street."

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Teddy Roosevelt impersonator Don Moon wipes the sweat from his brow after the dedication of the Roosevelt Park Apartments and Longmont's newest Theodore Roosevelt sculpture. (Lewis Geyer / Longmont Times-Call)