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performing arts company

Season XXXI

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Information

DOCUMENTATION

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Ghost Town Project!
Mercur 1910*



*City of Mercur -
Tooele County, Utah*
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Spotlight



Mercur

By Babs Delay and Bella Hall

Mercur, Utah

This newsletter edition features the Ghost Town project of Babs Delay & Bella Hall:

Just south of Tooele, then Stockton, watch for the one sign that points east to Mercur and turn right. The view west is to the Rush Valley from the parking lot at the bottom of the hill in Mercur. Rabbit Brush is as prolific as Sagebrush in the area. Utah natives have reported that it is a healing plant and that the seeds and leaves are edible. There is the only marker at the Cemetery. It was put up by the mining company who owns the land just above the graveyard. They appear to maintain the parking lot and the graveyard by picking up trash and maintaining the picket fences around most of the graves.

Juniper trees abound in the hills around Mercur. They are also known as cedar trees. They are a native plant and are the most predominate single species of trees in Utah. The blue hard 'berries' are eaten by jackrabbits and deer eat the foliage if they have no other feed. There is no better campfire than that made of Juniper wood-the fragrance is amazing. The wood is also used for fence posts out west because the plant wood is highly decay resistant. Lichen are found all over the rocks leading to the gravesites and on the rocks of the graves themselves at Mercer. The colorful 'crust-like' things look like scabs or plants, but they aren't either. Lichen are a partnership between a fungus and an algae.

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Babs and Bella Visiting Annie's Grave

By Makayla Barrandy

They come in many colors and can be used as natural dyes. They are bitter to eat and some are toxic to humans but can be used in perfumes, cosmetics, sunscreens and even as a replacement for hops in brewing beer. They are very sensitive to air pollution and don't grow too close to humans.

Mercur became famous in 1891 for being the site of the first successful use of cyanide to extract gold and is still the most successful way to get gold out of hard rock around the world. It's poisonous and is banned in many countries. To the untrained eye, it's all just rocks. Someone went through the graveyard recently and put a silk flower on all the visible graves. This person or persons weren't Jewish because flowers in the Jewish tradition on graves means nothing to the dead. Instead you place a small stone that costs nothing and place it on a grave to let the one that's passed know that they've made an impact on you. Spend the money you would have spent on flowers and give it to charity in the memory of the deceased. At least half of the graves at the Mercur cemetery are surrounded by picket fences. It is said that until the introduction of advertising on fences in the 1980's all cricket fields were surrounded by picket fences. This gave rise to the expression 'rattling the pickets' for a ball hit firmly into the fence.

Visitors come to the graveyard at all times of the year. Here there was Christmas tinsel that had been tied up along the pickets surround Annie's grave. The biggest holiday in Mercur was Columbus Day because many of the miners who had come to work the gold were from Italy. Mercur even had its own band that performed for the Columbus Day parade down the main street and for special occasions. Maybe the band played funeral dirges, too? The early graves were/are marked with lichen covered rocks. The fencing has been added at a later time by keepers of the cemetery. The silk flowers were probably added by visitors in the last year since we've visited the site. Most of the graves in Mercur are not marked with headstones. It's likely there were never engraved stones used as markers because there were no stone masons who had the tools to carve the names of the dead onto rock. Or, the markers were all wooden and decayed in the last 100 plus years from the individual graves. One is not supposed to walk on top of the graves of others as it is disrespectful to the dead.

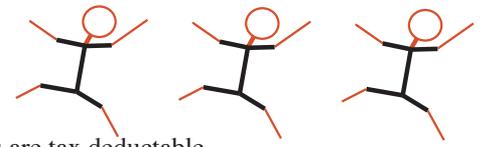
It's hard to know how many men, women and children are actually buried in Mercur. Folks over the years have kept the rocks around what is thought to be the original graves. These rocks are all remnants of the mud left under the great waters of pre-historic Lake Bonneville that once covered the whole area and now is simply the Great Salt Lake further north. There is the graveyard and also a town called Mercur. The town itself is up the canyon and is fenced off from the public. The first town there burned to the ground in 1903 but was rebuilt and in its heyday had 5,000 residents living in wooden homes and cabins, and tents. The gold rush has come in waves since the 1800's and Mercur is a great example of the boom and bust seen in so many Western towns.

Because Mercur is reportedly a place for talking to ghosts, many people come at night to try and commune with the dead. There is evidence in many places of campfires that have burned at night surrounding the graveyard. There are coins all over grave stones at Mercur. Soldiers leave coins on graves to give a message to fellow soldiers that 'they'll buy them a round when they see them in heaven' and to help pay for upkeep of the graveyard. The Greeks of ancient times told the story of Charon, the ferryman of Hades. He required one coin to ferry your loved one's soul across the river Styx. Back then people would put a coin on the eyes or in the mouth of the dead person to 'pay the ferryman'. If you don't pay, you wander the shores of the river Styx for 100 years. There are coins left on Annie's grave. The marker has all but been destroyed except for the 'B' that can be seen here. It's believed Annie C. Jones was born in 1887 and died in 1898. Every time we visit her grave we leave gifts and every time there are new toys and different coins present.

By Babs Delay



Newsletter



Another Language is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, donations are tax deductible.

About Babs De Lay & Bella Hall:



Babs De Lay & Bella Hall Photo: Makayla Barrayndy

Babs De Lay and Bella Hall have been legally married in Utah since that fateful decision day of December 20th, 2013. Bella is from the Pacific Northwest and moved to Utah after doing that long distance relationship thing for many years.

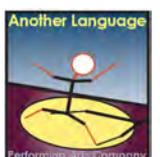
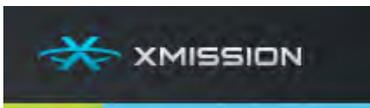
Bella didn't have any experience with ghost towns until she moved to Utah, but she does believe in ghosts. Babs not only believes in them but has seen a few in her lifetime. One lives in their condo downtown and makes it clear that they can't stand live plants in their corner of the unit. Any potted plant placed there will literally FLY off its perch within a few days. The ghost hasn't materialized in form but is very present, not bad or good, just picky about its personal space.

Before moving to Utah in 1970 Babs lived in Arizona and spent virtually every weekend with her family exploring Anasazi and Native American ruins around Sedona and Flagstaff, burial sites on the family ranch in Tucson and abandoned mining towns up and down Highway 89.

The Mercur (pronounced 'Merr-kurr') graveyard is one of the closest and most haunted remnants of an 1800's town west of Salt Lake City. Babs and Bella enjoy visiting little Annie's grave out there and bringing her gifts. Her grave is often a foot deep in sun bleached plush toys or barren except for a dolls head and ball at the side of the marker. The site is one of the most popular places near the big city to visit and is well taken care of we think by the company that owns the closed mining operation at the end of the canyon. The graves sit at the mouth of the canyon on a little hill.

Participate in the Ghost Town Project

Another Language is encouraging investigations of Utah ghost towns. Original photographs, movies, animations, visual art, music soundscapes, poetry and text compositions submitted by participating artists will be uploaded to anotherlanguage.org. Correlations between historical ghost towns and modern conceptual ghost towns are encouraged. What is your personal ghost town? What do you see, think, and feel when experiencing a place that was once thriving? Go to www.anotherlanguage.org for further information. Make sure to register to reserve your site! If you have questions please email info@anotherlanguage.org or call (801) 707-9930.



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