

July 2, 2014
You Are There
George Crawford's Tomb

In 2006 I started researching George A. Crawford and Richard D. Mobley, co-founders of Grand Junction. I found that George died in 1891 and for approximately six years he was buried in a temporary location while his tomb was completed at the spot he and Richard first viewed the valley on September 22, 1881, before crossing the river to claim the area they called Grand Junction.

During my research I was shocked to see the condition of Crawford's tomb and took pictures to document its sad condition. Since then I have written stories about Crawford and Mobley and at every opportunity spoken with and showed the pictures to anyone, including elected officials, fellow researchers, and history writers to bring awareness to the situation and hoping that one day the tomb would be restored.

I was delighted when a "Crawford Mausoleum Restoration" committee was formed; donations were received; and while the gate has not been installed, a tremendous amount of work has been accomplished; and it appears the end of the restoration is near. The committee has done an outstanding job.

Walter Cronkite, once hosted of a T.V. Series called "You Are There". The series placed him as a reporter to national and world historical events and at the end of each show he would say. *"What sort of day was it? A day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our times... all things are as they were then, and you were there"*.

Sometimes things fall into line and on July 2, 2014 while traveling from my home on Orchard Mesa I had one of those "you are there" moments that needs to be shared with all in our community.

On July 2nd I spotted a crane with a statue on the hill where the tomb is located and having my camera with me I drove up the road to document the process of setting the Crawford statue. I passed the restoration manager as he waved to me on his way down the hill. I found the home owner who lives next to the tomb site filming the process.

As workman hired by the restoration committee were about to set the base I remembered Crawford had been a friend of Stephen Douglas who ran against Abraham Lincoln for president and lost, and how at Douglas' behest Crawford became a Lincoln supporter. I pulled change from my pocket and as luck would have it there was a new 2014 Lincoln penny. I ask the workman and was allowed to place it in the middle of the base before the statue was installed. Somehow it just seemed fitting that now Lincoln was helping to support George A. Crawford.

It was just a few days shy of 116 years when on July 9, 1898, Crawford's remains were moved from its temporary grave to the completed tomb to this sunny July 2nd when the Crawford statute was moved from City Hall and installed next to the tomb.

As the statute was being cleaned off by the workers, and I was visiting with the neighboring homeowner, two workmen went to the front of the tomb and with a power saw proceeded to cut the cement seal of the stone name plate. In a few moments the two men looked inside the tomb which had not seen the light of day in all those years and in a loud voice said to us, "It's a coffin, come look."

At that moment I thought of what Alexander the Great must have experienced when Achilles' tomb at Troy was opened. Accounts indicate Alexander felt he was fortunate to be there to honor and proclaim Achilles name once more to the people and preserve his memory.

Being at Crawford's tomb as one of two bystanders at that moment was beyond words. After eight years of research I truly felt humbled and close to tears. I didn't mind being the third person in 116 years stand at the doorway and view the coffin of George Crawford, the man who started our county. It was a small coffin by today's standards; black in color, with the cloth tassels still hanging for the poles the pall bearers used to place him there. By the style of the coffin I would say his feet are by the door plate, so his coffin was placed in the tomb head first. There is a large cross on the top and a name plate with writing I could not make out. The only other things in that small space were dust and cobwebs. Here is the place where he first saw the valley and where he now rests until judgment day.

It was only a few minutes while the stone name plate was measured by the crew so a new one could be made and then the old plate was replaced and tightened by temporary wood shims.

Rumors over the years said the tomb had been broken into and Crawford's body taken... From my view the coffin appeared to be undisturbed so let's put that rumor to rest.

I returned on July 10th and the wood shims were tightly in place and by the next day the new stone name plate had been installed and George Crawford was resealed in his tomb, buttoned up against the forces of nature and the works of man.

He continues to rest in peace over the valley he loved so much.

On July 2, 2014, about 10:30 a.m. on Crawford's Hill we were eye witnesses to Mesa County history and "You Were There."

Garry Brewer

Story Teller of the Tribe, Finder of Odd Knowledge, Uninteresting Items, A Bore to his Grandchildren, a Pain to his wife on spelling, but a Locater of golden nuggets & truths and pearls of wisdom.

Photos and information: Museum of Western Colorado, Loyd Files Research Room, Michael Menard and David Bailey: Marie Tipping: Grand Junction News: Daily Sentinel: Marilyn Fillmore files: