

Gunnison Country Times

## Abbott Fay

Former Western State College professor and Colorado historian Abbott Fay died March 12 of a stroke in Grand Junction, his retirement home. He was 82.



Fay taught history at Western from 1964 to 1982. He practiced what he preached while here, writing "Mountain Academia," a history of the college up to 1960. Fay came to Western from a teaching stint at what was then Mesa Junior College in Grand Junction. In 1982 he returned to Grand Junction, where he taught at Mesa State College for several more years before retiring to the North Fork valley to write and run a small rare-books operation. He continued to lecture on history at libraries and museums around the West Slope until recently.

He authored 10 books after "Mountain Academia" — all about Colorado history and all published by Mountain

Reflections Press in the Uncompahgre Valley. Among the most popular were "A History of Skiing in Colorado" (1999) and his last book, "I Never Knew That About Colorado: A Quaint Volume of Forgotten Lore" (2001).

At Western he was highly regarded by students for the quality and interest of his lectures, for the level of engagement he demanded in discussion and assignments, and for his engagement in campus life outside the classroom. He was instigator and faculty advisor for the Quigley Club, a service club for students that — in addition to campus improvement efforts — launched a small army of shovelers during snowstorms to help senior citizens get their walks and driveways clear. Closely related to Quigley Club was a self-discipline program he set up, which one student recalled as "one of the best things I ever did as a student."

He believed that his responsibility for preparing students for the future did not end at the classroom door, and engaged in at least one major "co-curricular" venture that was 30 years ahead of its time. In the 1977-78 school year, following the first "Energy Crisis" in the mid-1970s, he worked with a group of students to launch a "National Energy Conservation Challenge," whereby Western challenged every college and university in the United States

to try to reduce its energy consumption more than Western would that year (see related story on C1). Nothing done at the college before or since gained Western as much positive national attention as NECC did that year.

Abbott Fay's philosophy of education was expressed in a 1977 "Top O' the World" interview about the National Energy Conservation Challenge: "I want the students to be able to use this when they leave the college. Instead of talking about what they are going to do, I want them to have done something."

A native of Nebraska, Abbott Fay came to Colorado after serving in the European theater in World War II. He spent the rest of his life here, on the West Slope. He is survived by his wife, Joan, and their three offspring, Randy, Collin and Dede.

No memorial service has been planned but the family might hold a celebration of his life this summer. Those interested in knowing about that, or more about Abbott Fay and his work, can check [www.abbottfay.com](http://www.abbottfay.com), which also has information about memorial gifts.

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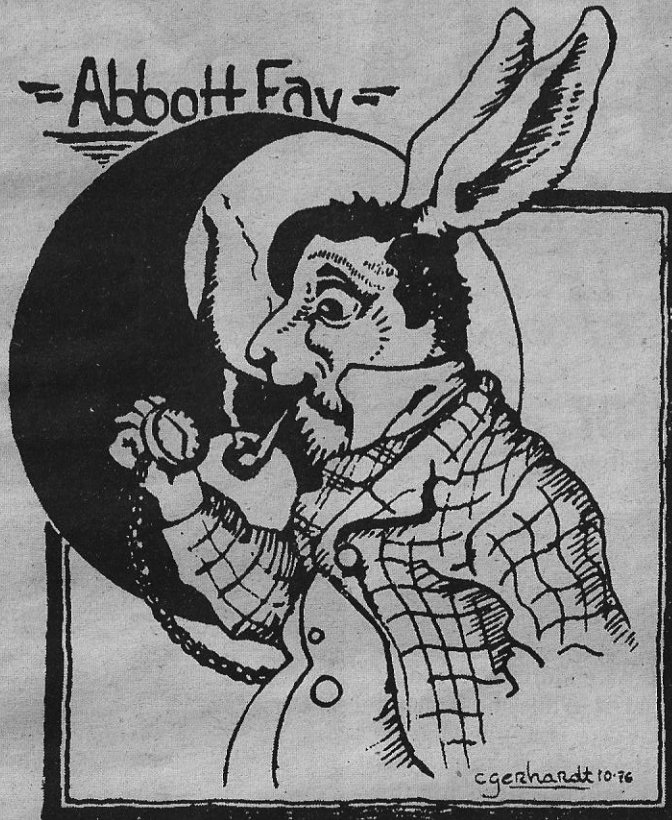
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These teens know how  
to horse around.  
See C4.



# ROUND



Popular professor Abbott Fay often had students pondering Alice in Wonderland-type realities, as hinted at in this cartoon, which was published in the campus newspaper, *Top o' the World*.

"Oh my ears and whiskers, how late it's getting!"  
— Lewis Carroll

## Remembering Abbott Fay

## Caring in Cambodia

Crested Butte dentist ready for annual service trip to impoverished country

Dawn DelVecchio

*Special to the Times*

"It makes me feel good to give back."

That's how Michael Faktor, DMD (doctor of medical dentistry) and owner of Elk Avenue



Dr. Faktor

Family Dentistry in Crested



Abbott Fay



Popular professor Abbott Fay often had students pondering Alice in Wonderland-type realities, as hinted at in this cartoon, which was published in the campus newspaper, *Top o' the World*.

"Oh my ears and whiskers, how late it's getting!"  
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## Remembering Abbott Fay (and the energy 'awakening' he inspired)

Essay by George Sibley

The recent death of former Western State College history professor Abbott Fay reminded me again that Americans have known our world has some energy issues long before Al Gore and thousands of scientists began warning us as such. In fact, Western students, with guidance from professor Fay, made a valiant effort in the late '70s to awaken not just the valley, but the whole nation to the emerging energy crisis.

It was deemed Western's National Energy Conservation Challenge (NECC). A handful of Western students — from the college in the place often "celebrated" as coldest on the continent — challenged every college and university in the United States to try to conserve more energy than Western could during the 1977-78 school year. Through the fall and winter of that year, 181 institutions — from the universities of Wisconsin and New Hampshire to the universities of Southern Mississippi and Southern Louisiana — embraced the challenge to one degree or another. And probably none of them had more plain fun doing it than the participating students at Western.

Context is important: In the mid-1970s, America's oil production peaked and went into its ongoing, irreversible decline (even if we do ANWR, offshore drilling and oil shale), the oil-producing countries of the



Professor Abbott Fay, at home in the classroom.

Middle East and elsewhere formed OPEC, and the price of gasoline doubled and redoubled several times.

For Fay, it was what educators call a "teaching moment." He said then that "what was to happen in the next half century would be the true measure" of Western and its "wisdom or folly." He believed that jumping on the emerging energy situation was a positive way for the college to take a leadership role in helping the nation move in an important new direction.

But he was a teacher first, and approached the task by raising student awareness and inspiration. He told a *Top O' the World* reporter in April 1977 that he wanted the students to use what they learn when they leave college.

"Instead of talking about what they are

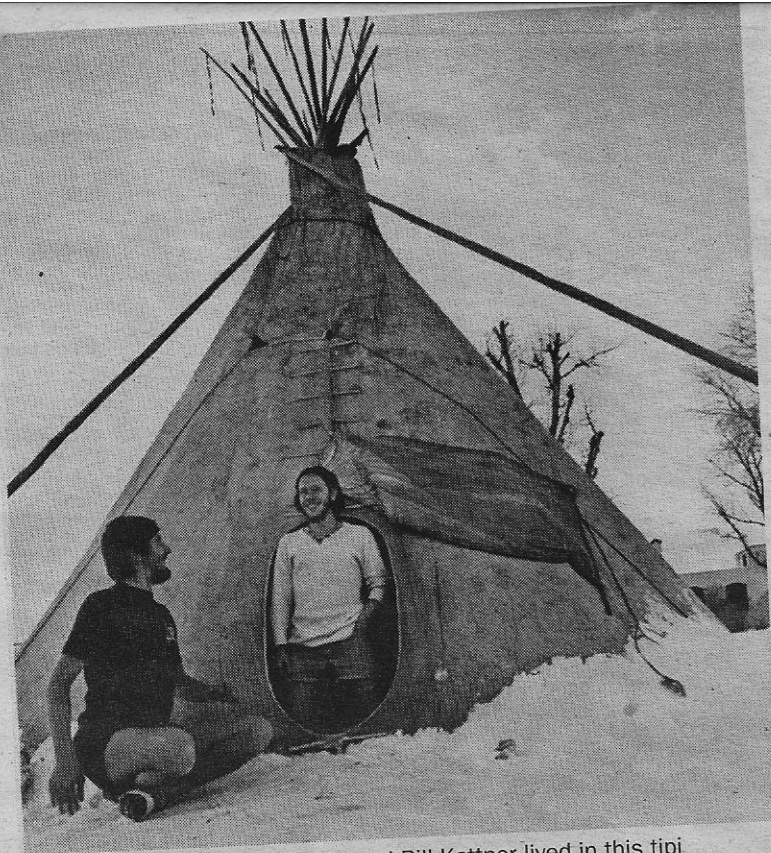
going to do, I want them to have done something," he said.

This is an "experiential learning" model more at home in today's Environmental Studies program at Western than it was in the 1970s, when the college was still playing "in loco parentis" and having bed check for coeds.

NECC emerged in the fall semester of '77 as a creative mix of the sensible, outrageous and downright silly. The students got Governor Richard Lamm to speak at their opening rally. They organized an energy seminar that brought notable speakers — including population growth analyst Albert Bartlett from the University of Colorado; a Mobil Oil executive who said (in 1978!) that, much as he loved oil, solar energy was going to be the way of the future; Dr. Jerry Kowal, still at Western, on ways to get real about energy efficiency at home; and a lawyer and a legislator from Colorado, advocating a General Assembly bill affirming an individual's property right to access sunlight.

But NECC also had an "Absurdity Committee" that probably did more to get the college on the national map than anything before or since. Underwear — long underwear — were frequently featured in the *Top* that year. NECC hosted a "Human Powered Dance" in February 1978 that fea-





Students George Thalman, left, and Bill Kattner lived in this tipi throughout the 1977-78 school year as part of the student-led energy conservation effort at WSC.

*Courtesy Photo*

## Fay

continued from page C1

tured a "Long Johns and Sweaters Fashion Show" and creative attempts to produce enough electricity to power a rock band. (A playground merry-go-round that required six pushers was hitched to a generator that was supposed to crank out the kilowatt of electricity the band needed, while another six people rode bicycles in shifts to power the lights for the dance. The bicycles worked; the merry-go-round didn't and the band had to plug in. But the fashion show was a success.)

Two NECC students tried to address the affordable-energy-and-housing problem by wintering in a tipi pitched in front of Quigley Hall, through what turned out to be a typically rough Gunnison winter. They prevailed, although they lamented "the long dash to the Quigley bathrooms."

Predictably, these shenanigans got state and even national (CBS) television coverage, while the serious events didn't. Even radio commentator Paul Harvey picked up on a NECC idea involving roosters for alarm clocks, and something about "Buckminster Beaver" that never did get properly explained in the *Top*.

Did NECC achieve its goal? The short answer is "no." Western got off to a good start in 1977, reduc-

ing campus energy consumption from the previous year by 20 percent in August and September. But after that they were hampered by the fact that it was a much rougher winter than '76-77 had been, and it ended up the school year pretty much a wash — probably a modest victory, considering the weather.

Worse, probably no more than 10 percent of the student body had really gotten involved in the process of consciousness-raising; most remained typically impervious to the challenge. A *Top* story checking in with some of the major universities that had accepted the challenge found similar problems with involvement.

Basically, NECC — along with President Jimmy Carter, and professor Abbott Fay — was ahead of the times. It's time we get back to these types of creative investments in the future.

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(Abbott Fay died March 12 in Grand Junction, following a stroke. He taught history at Western from 1964 through 1982, and went on to teach part-time at Mesa State College in Grand Junction, his retirement home. Additional information about Professor Fay and his work — including an essay on "What is a Student?" — can be found at [www.abbottfay.com](http://www.abbottfay.com). See page A3 in this week's Times for a full obituary.)

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