

Western State’s Abbott Fay, historian and storyteller, dies

By **RON BAIN**
Watchdog Editor

Scholars, academicians, journalists, authors, historians and fans of good storytelling, along with many others, bowed their heads in silence when they heard of the March 12 death of Professor Abbott Fay, chronicler of Western Slope history for decades.

Prof. Fay retired from Western State College in Gunnison as an associate professor emeritus of history and philosophy in 1982, but continued teaching and lecturing at Western State and other regional colleges as an adjunct professor in more recent years.

Prior to teaching at Western State, Prof. Fay instructed history at Mesa College, now known as Mesa State College.

He was also a regular speaker at the Museum of Western Colorado in Grand Junction and at library branches across the Western Slope.

Fay died at St. Mary’s Hospital in Grand Junction three days after suffering a stroke, according to his son, Randy Fay.

“He never wanted to get es-



The late Abbott Fay

tablished in the medical system (he'd never had another medical emergency in his life) and he wanted to avoid outliving his ability to be comfortable with his body and his mind,” Randy Fay posted on a memorial web site. “We will miss him as you will, and we respect him as you do.”

Donations, in lieu of flowers, may be made to the Hotchkiss-Crawford Historical Museum or Friends of the Paonia Library, according to the professor’s son.

Prof. Fay resided in Paonia between teaching in Gunnison and taking up residence in Grand Junction.

He wrote “*Grand Mesa Country: Stories from Mesa and Delta Counties in Col-*

orado” in 2005.

Other books written by Prof. Fay include: “*Mountain Academia: A History of Western State College of Colorado*” (1968); “*Ski Tracks in the Rockies: A Century of Colorado Skiing*” (1984); “*Famous Coloradans: 124 People Who Have Gained Nationwide Fame*” (1990); “*To Think That This Happened in Grand Country*” (1999); “*I Never Knew That About Colorado - A Quaint Volume of Forgotten Lore*” and “*More That I Never Knew About Colorado*” (2001); “*The Story of Colorado Wines*” (2002); and, “*Beyond The Great Divide*” (2005).

Abbott Eastman Fay was born July 19, 1926 in a college town, Scottsbluff, Neb.

He served in the Army Infantry during World War II and the subsequent occupation of Europe.

He took a teaching degree at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, and then joined the Leadville Public Schools as a teacher and principal.

From 1954 to 1964, he taught at Mesa College. His tenure at Western State College spanned 1964 to 1982.

Several former students of

Fay’s posted memorial comments on the web site created by the professor’s family.


“I guess I represent the middle period from 1968-74,” wrote Charles Vogel. “The history department at Western was still intact and the creative juices were flowing within the department.

“I remember Fridays were office ‘rat’ days. Those students, who used office hours to advance their interests, would hang out at the end of the day and the profs that were still there would raffle off the ‘freebees’ they would get from publishers with the requirement that we read the tome if it was duly given you.”

Max Stites, a retired District 51 schoolteacher, wrote:

“I arrived at Mesa as a clueless freshman not knowing what I wanted to do in life. It is no exaggeration to say that after only a few days in his classroom and that of his colleague, Don MacKendrick, I knew I wanted to major in history and be a teacher. I know of countless others he inspired in the same way.”

Prof. Fay is survived by his wife, Joan, and three children, Randy, Collin and Dede. No memorial service is planned.



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