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**MISSION STATEMENT:** The Ouray County Historical Society (OCHS) is dedicated to preserve, protect, procure, exhibit, and interpret whatever relates to the natural, social, and cultural history of Ouray County and the adjacent San Juan Mountain Region of Colorado.

WINTER ~ SPRING 2014-15

## Avalanche at the Camp Bird Mine 1936

At 9:43 am on February 25, 1936 a cracking sound hit the Camp Bird mine complex as a million tons of snow rushed down the western rim of Imogene Basin. That day, after a 48 hour wet snowstorm, the Chicago, Gertrude and Hidden Treasure slides ran clearing a two mile strip bringing death and destruction.

It wasn't the first time the Camp Bird mine had been hit with snow slides. Six miles southwest of Ouray at an elevation of 11,320 feet, the mine is still located in the Sneffles mining district, a prime avalanche area. The winter of 1906 was a bad one. On March 17, 1906 an avalanche slammed into the Camp Bird's mill. Three days later a fire started in the mill's damaged boiler room and completely destroyed what was left of the structure. In 1909, four men and twenty-seven freight animals perished as the Waterhole Slide (located one half mile below the Camp Bird) blockaded the road to the mine. All in all, twenty-two men died that year in the Sneffles district.

The San Juan Mountains are notorious for avalanche making. The Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research (INSTAAR) at the University of Colorado researched why. Snow in the San Juans has less cohesion between its layers than



▲ Location where Ruthford Dunn was buried for three hours in the snow.

other avalanche prone areas. The high altitude sunshine causes snow to thaw and then cold night time temperatures freeze the wet snow into ice creating the perfect surface for slippage. The steep slopes increase the danger. It doesn't take much to start a snow slide - a rock cascading down a slope, high winds, even a loud noise can trigger a slide. No one who has ever seen or been in an avalanche ever forgets it.

(Thomas M.Griffith, San Juan Country, Pruett Publishing Company, Boulder Colorado,1984, p. 47).

In August of 1934, Charles N. Bell, General Manager of the Camp Bird,

By Gail Zanett Saunders

hired twenty- seven year old Ruthford Dunn as the new mine foreman. He took the nickname "Ruff" because no one in his high school could pronounce his given name. Ruff had a background in geology from his studies at the School of Mines in Butte, Montana, and he'd worked as a miner. As a boy, a snow slide buried him near his father's ranch in Wyoming; his older brother Bill uncovered his head and managed to free him. Ruff knew that his family worried about avalanche danger in the Imogene Basin. In a letter he reassured his mother:

The camp is in a very safe place, having been built with snowslides in mind. There are covered passways -snowsheds-from the boarding and bunkhouse to the stable and blacksmith shop and from there to the mill and portal of the tunnel so one never has to go outside to get from one place to another...Yes, it is made safe now.

Eight weeks after Ruff started his job, the boarding house caught fire in the attic and burned. Ruff, whose room was on the third floor, rushed up and down the halls making sure everyone was safe. Seventy days later, the crews moved into their new boarding-

house. After the fire, life and work at the Camp Bird slipped into a routine.

The winter of 1936 was atypically hard. Blizzards came one after another piling snow on the steep western slopes. On March 23, Chap Woods, the mill superintendant, told Ruff he didn't like working near the transformer house because of the hanging snow above it. On the dark, uneasy morning of the 24th, Ralph Klinger, the blacksmith, went up to his shed to sharpen his tools. The cook, Rose Isreal, busied herself in the mine's kitchen on the lower floor of the bunkhouse, making preparations for the noon meal. A mule skinner, Evan Roberts, walked into the kitchen to



▲ Bottom story of boarding house completely buried by snow slide.

warm his hands by the stove.

Mrs. Isreal heard the slide, the loud roar coming off the mountain. She stepped outside; the rushing snow buried her alive. The snow flooded into the kitchen, A waitress, Pearl Huffman, saved herself by diving under a table. Snow buried Evan Roberts up to his waist and pinned him against the cookstove. A miner pulled him out of the snow, leaving his shoes and socks behind. The men in the upper stories of the boarding house immediately ran down stairs and began to dig.

The mill took the brunt of the avalanche and was partially destroyed. Fortunately, the one man working inside survived. Ralph Klinger, the blacksmith, died in his shop hidden beneath his work bench. The rescue crew found Chap Woods lying underneath water in the pump house. He'd drowned. The twenty-five men trapped underground inside the mine were safe but had to dig out. Mules were still in the stable; not one perished.

Bill Funk crawled out from under a piece of dislocated roof. He called out to the men that he'd last seen Ruff running down the snowshed toward the mill. The men began digging with picks, shoves, and axes where the snowshed had collapsed. Three hours later one of the men carved out a hole in the snow. He recognized Ruff's corduroy trousers. Digging with their bare hands, they uncovered his body. Unconscious and blue Ruff's breathing was labored,

but he was alive. A pocket of air underneath the floor of the shed saved his life. The men rolled him in blankets, carried him to the boarding house, and rubbed his skin with snow to bring up his body temperature.

A rescue party left from Ouray; their hazardous trip took until four o'clock in the afternoon and they traversed much of the journey on snowshoes. Within forty eight hours, they recovered the bodies of those who had died and took them by sled down to Ouray.

Ruff, named resident manager after the slide, helped supervise the rebuilding. Altogether, he worked at the Camp Bird for a total of fourteen years. He married Evelyn Stark, a Ouray native. Old timers reported that they quit asking Ruff about the avalanche; they didn't like seeing his hands shake and his face turn white.

(This article was taken from an unpublished manuscript "Gold, Disaster, and the Great Depression" written by Ruff Dunn's sister, Frances Judge. It is available for reading at the OCHS research center.)



▲ Rescue party transports victims.

# OURAY ELKS LODGE #492

421 Main Street

By Jim Pettengill

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks was founded on February 16, 1868 in New York City. It was originally a social organization of theatrical performers, but was soon opened to others. The unexpected and untimely death of a founding member stirred the other members to expand the group's purpose to emphasize community service and support. The Order grew quickly, with many local chapters forming around the country. Today the B.P.O.E. has more than 2000 lodges nationwide, with almost a million members.

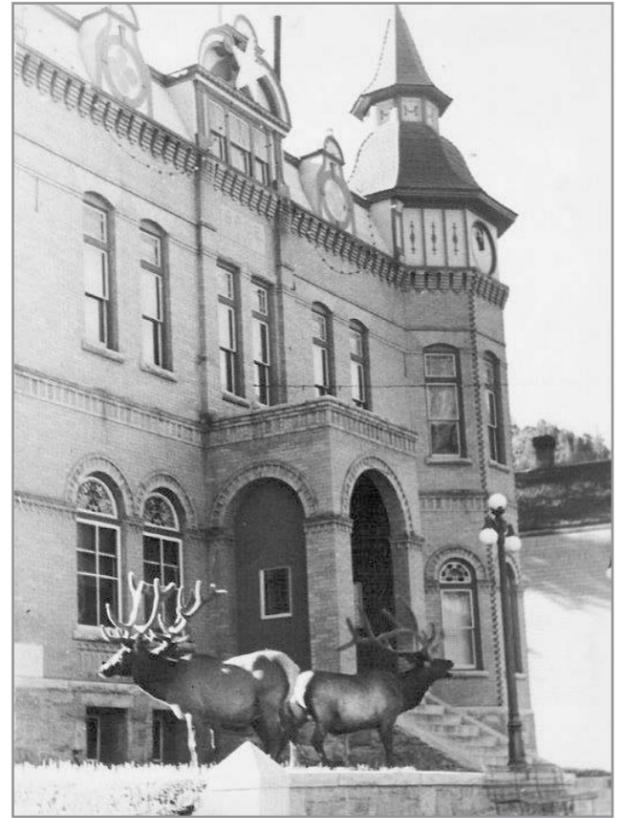
Ouray Elks lodge #492 was officially organ-

ized on June 6, 1899. It was the first lodge on the Western Slope. Dr. W. W. Rowan served as the first Exalted Ruler. The Ouray lodge grew quickly, and soon outgrew its rented facilities.

On July 15, 1902 the lodge purchased the land for its planned "home". The building was designed by E. H. Powell, a local grocer, lodge member, and amateur architect. His design is a combination of French, Queen Anne, and Romanesque styles. On June 3, 1904 a contract was let to begin construction.

In her book *History of Ouray*, Dr. Doris Gregory describes the cornerstone ceremony: "At 10:30 a.m. a special train pulled into the depot. On board there were 150 Elks from Montrose who were met by the local order of Ouray Elks and also by the Ouray Concert Band.

"The ceremonies were conducted according to the ritualistic service prescribed by the order of Elks. Six hundred to 800 people had gathered, and Rev. George M. Darley invoked divine blessings upon the procedure. At 3:15 p.m. Exalted Ruler Mittendorf declared the cornerstone laid. Inside the cornerstone were placed the lodge jewel, constitution and by-laws, the roster of the lodge, an American flag, current issues of the two local newspapers, a number of rare coins, the lodge card, one business card and one box. Mr. John T. Barnett delivered the address of the day and the program was interspersed with music. Reverend Darley concluded the program with a



benediction."

Construction continued until late spring of 1905. Most of the exterior brick came from Ouray's brick factory at the location of today's hot springs pool, with the building's front finished with fired brick brought in by train.

The building opened for the first time on May 9, 1905. Dr. Gregory describes the scene: "Between 600 and 700 persons attended [the grand ball and banquet] and fully fifty percent of those had never seen the interior. The lodge room which was utilized for dancing was 32 feet by 60 feet in size [with an 18-foot ceiling]. The room was lighted by ninety incandescent lights, sixty of which were attached to the prongs of five elk heads around the room and others from chandeliers in the ceiling.

"Dancing started promptly at 9:00 p.m. with a waltz and continued without interruption until "Home Sweet Home" brought down the curtain at 3:30 o'clock in the morning. The bowling alleys, card room, billiard and pool room came in for their full quota of popularity. Each guest was given a souvenir of a purple ribbon on which was inscribed the nature of the occasion and the date and to which was attached a celluloid button on which was photographed a picture of the building [OCHS has one of these on display]. Tables were laid for ninety-four at each sitting and they needed to be spread five different times before all the guests were served."

Formal dedication of the Ouray lodge building took place on June 20, 1905. The building has many distinctive features. Most impressive is the lodge room, described wonderfully in the above description of the grand ball. The dining room and kitchen were reconditioned in 2004, two upstairs rest rooms have been added and the remainder of the upstairs was painted in 2014. On the main floor is the bowling alley that is still used for league competition, a parlor (formerly the card room), pool room, gentlemen's and ladies' rest rooms, and the club room. The club room features a beautiful bar/back bar set that was built in Denver in the late 1890s, shipped to a saloon on Red Mountain (probably in the Ironton ghost town) and was later used in a private Ouray club called the "Silver Slugs" that consisted of the Ouray Fire Department. The set was sold to the Ouray Elks lodge by the Ouray Woman's Club in 1947 along with two beautiful (inoperative) antique slot machines.

The Ouray Elks lodge 492 celebrated its centennial in 1999 with the dedication of Elks Centennial Park, located adjacent to the lodge building. This property was acquired by the lodge in 1911 after the neighboring Delmonico Hotel was destroyed by fire, and has been used as a park since then. The Ouray Elks remains one of the city's most active community organizations, presenting many events open to the whole community, including the July 4th barbecue, Easter Egg Hunt, and in-home visits from Santa on Christmas Eve, a tradition since 1928.



## Neosho Mine Blacksmith Shop Restored

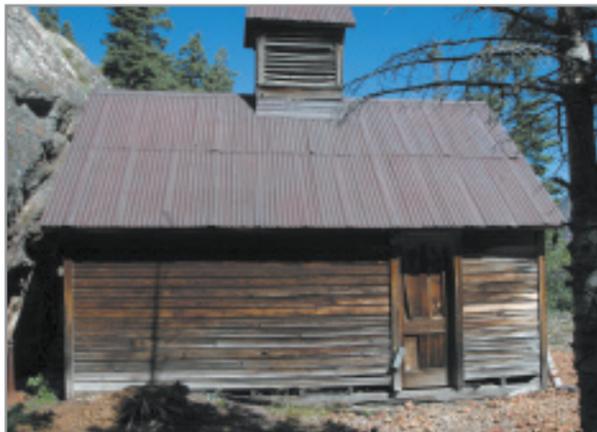
By Don Paulson  
OCHS Curator

The Neosho Mine is located directly across the Uncompahgre Canyon and slightly south of the Bear Creek Falls Bridge on Highway 550 about 3 miles south of the City of Ouray. The mine was opened by the E. F. Terry and Frederick Tench as the Neosho Mine in 1905, and was later worked for many years by Margaret and Edward Weatherly as the Cumbright Mine.

The Neosho Mine has a connection to the famous Irish ballad *Danny Boy*. Margaret Weatherly, sister-in-law of *Danny Boy* composer Fred Weatherly, was an Irish immigrant who sailed to America with Fred's brother in search of silver in Colorado. They eventually settled in Ouray. It was on a trip back to England in 1912 that Margaret Weatherly introduced Fred Weatherly to the ancient Irish melody, *The Londonderry Aire*. Fred fused that haunting melody with his heavy-hearted words and something magical happened. *Danny Boy* became a hit.

The Neosho mine site consists of a mine portal, blacksmith shop and bunkhouse along with several other sheds. It is spectacularly situated on a rock canyon wall above the Uncompahgre River overlooking the Million Dollar Highway (Hwy 550). The boarding house is a 3-room building (30' x 20') and the blacksmith shop is a 20' x 15' building with a cupola roof vent, forge and workbench. The adit, or mine tunnel, is at least 500 hundred feet long. The blacksmith shop has a large "Antiques for Sale" sign and a laundry line that have been maintained by area residents since the early 1970s. The laundry line and sign are so much a part of Ouray County history that the Board of County Commissioners insisted any grants for the site needed to stipulate that neither the sign nor the laundry could be removed!

About six years ago the north side of the roof of the blacksmith shop was damaged by a rock fall. In 2011 OCHS received two grants, one



▲ The Neosaha Mine Blacksmith Shop before (above) and after repair.

from The Colorado Historical Society, now History Colorado for \$10,000, and one from the U.S. National Forest Service for \$15,000. These grants provided for both assessment of the site and repair of the blacksmith shop. Both grants were recently completed and the blacksmith shop now has the foundation repaired, new siding, several rafters replaced, and a new roof. The attached photos show the blacksmith shop before and after repair.

# Museum Visitor Reveals Story Behind Evalyn Walsh McLean Portrait

By Kate Kellogg

Of all the historic images in the museum, the portrait of Evalyn Walsh McLean and her two sons is most likely to stop visitors in their tracks. The arresting, eight-by-five foot oil painting, which dominates the Walsh Room, captures the mining heiress and Washington D.C. society queen in her prime.

How did a small museum in a remote mining town acquire this work of Philip de Laszlo, the celebrated Hungarian painter known for his portraits of European royalty? Last September a museum visitor shed light on the complex history of the painting and revealed his family's connection to it.

Joe Arnold, along with his wife, sister, and brother-in-law, took a detour to Ouray while on a road trip through the west. Arnold, a land-



▲ Joe Arnold and his family visited the museum this past September especially to see this portrait of Evalyn Walsh McLean. Joe's grandmother donated the painting to the OCHS in 1971. Left to right, standing: Stephen Leger, Joe Arnold's brother-in-law, and Joe Arnold. Left to right, seated: Felicia Leger, Joe's sister, and Alison Arnold, Joe's wife.

scape painter, lives in Laramie, Wyoming. He learned that a de Laszlo painting, which once belonged to his late grandmother, has hung in the Ouray County Historical Museum for 43 years. He knew that the subject was the daughter of Ouray's Thomas Walsh, discover and owner of the Camp Bird Gold Mine.

"I had read about this painting in an article and got cranked up about seeing it. I wasn't disappointed, he said. "I had never seen it in my grandmother's house and now I know why---it's eight feet tall and she would have had no room to hang it."

Judging from photographs, the 1925 painting is a fairly realistic, albeit flattering, likeness of Evalyn at age 39. She stands between her two young sons, Jack and Neddie McLean. (Her first-born son, Vinson, was killed in an automobile accident at age nine.) Evalyn, in a diaphanous lavender dress and satin slippers, is "dressed down" for the occasion, wearing a single long strand of pearls in lieu of her customary diamonds. The mantel in the background suggests the painting was done at the McLeans' mansion, "Friendship," in Washington D.C.

The story of Arnold's family connection to the portrait goes back to Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency and the elite enclaves of Washington D.C. society. Joe's grandfather was Thurman Arnold, a prominent New Deal, anti-trust lawyer and assistant attorney general in FDR's administration. He and Joe's grandmother, Francis Arnold, were such trusted friends of Evalyn Walsh McLean that she named Thurman an executor of her estate.

That estate had greatly diminished at the time of Evalyn's death in 1947. She was an eccentric philanthropist whose life played out in reckless consumption and ended in tragedy. As a young woman, she acquired the legendary Hope Diamond, which supposedly brings bad luck to its owners. By the time she died, Evalyn had lost much of her fortune, two of her children and her once-wealthy husband, Edward McLean. His newspaper, the Washington Post, went bankrupt and he died in a mental institution.

## SWEET DEAL ON A TREASURE

Following Evalyn's death, the de Laszlo portrait became just one more valuable offered to bidders at public estate auctions. Eventually it landed in a Washington D.C. auction gallery where a Boston antique dealer bid on it. In 1971, Francis Arnold---by then widowed---located the dealer and bought it from him for \$800. The portrait was originally commissioned for \$30,000!

"In 1925, that relative value may have been close to half a million, which

probably came from Ouray gold. My grandmother definitely got a bargain," said Joe Arnold. "I've learned that de Laszlo was a highly acclaimed society painter of dukes and duchesses and kings and queens [including a 1933 portrait of Queen Elizabeth II as a child]. The hand-carved gilded gold frame alone was probably worth \$1,000."

Francis Arnold attempted to donate the portrait to the Smithsonian Institution but the accession committee, for unknown reasons, declined to accept it. She then wrote to the director of the Ouray Arts Council, saying it would please her "to realize that Mrs. McLean was back in her native state of Colorado and home town of Ouray....It would give me infinite pleasure to have the portrait returned to the scene of her childhood."

The Arts Council members decided to offer the painting to the recently established Ouray County Historical Society and Francis Arnold agreed it should hang in the new museum. She even paid the crating and shipping charges.

As reported in an April 20, 1971 issue of the Ouray Plaindealer, seven nervous OCHS volunteers uncrated the portrait. "Tensions built. Would the painting be in good condition, and not some kind of monstrosity that would be an embarrassment to hang? It surpassed everyone's expectations and will undoubtedly be a major focal point of the Museum's exhibits this season."

Francis was delighted that the portrait of her friend had finally found a home. Soon after donating the piece, she moved from Alexandria, Virginia to Laramie. Joe doubts that she was ever able to travel to Ouray to see it in the museum.

"I'm glad we made a special point to include Ouray in our trip," he said. "We had a blast there and I finally got to see the portrait that meant so much to my grandmother."

Before leaving the museum, Joe bought a copy of *Father Struck it Rich*, Evalyn Walsh McLean's memoir, and took several pictures of the portrait. He sent a digital photo to the de Laszlo Archive Trust, which maintains an online archive of de Laszlo paintings.

Arnold received a note of thanks from Katherine Field, British and North American Editor of the catalogue. "Your information about your grandmother's gift to the museum is invaluable and allows us to record the picture's provenance correctly," she wrote.

Thanks to Joe Arnold's curiosity about his grandmother's donation, an image of the museum's most prized piece of artwork may one day appear in the Catalogue Raisonne of Works by Philip de Laszlo.

## Please consider being a member of the OCHS! Help preserve the history of Ouray County

Your membership is vital so that the Society can maintain not only our historic Museum building but our new Research Center and Archive. All membership levels include Free admission to the Museum, a 10% discount on items for sale in the gift shop and Museum bookstore, free admission to the OCHS Evenings of History series, and receive newsletters and special announcements.

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## WILD TIMES IN WASHINGTON

According to Carol Ann Rapp's epilogue to *Queen of Diamonds*, only close friends---no family members---attended Evalyn's deathbed when she died of pneumonia at age 61. Among them were Thurman and Francis Arnold, Frank Murphy, Associate Supreme Court Justice, and Joe Arnold's maternal great-grandmother, Cissy Patterson, who then owned the Washington Times Herald.

As a teenager, Joe loved to hear his grandmother's stories about Cissy's and Evalyn's escapades among the A-listers of Washington D.C. society. Patterson, one of the first women to lead a major newspaper, was known for savaging both friends and enemies in print.

"It says a lot for Evalyn that she remained Cissy's fighting friend to the end," he said. "My grandmother and great-grandmother, along with Evalyn, were high society dames. In good times, they would swap weekends back and forth in Florida or on Long Island."

Francis Arnold's version of events that transpired the night Evalyn died agreed with

one account in *Queen of Diamonds*. Thurman Arnold and Frank Waldrop, managing editor of the Times Herald, were tasked with the responsibility of securing Evalyn's jewels, including the Hope Diamond. (In Rapp's account, Evalyn was wearing the Hope Diamond at the time of her death.)

"My grandma said Evalyn was very casual with her valuables. Some were hidden in the back of a table-top radio. The rest were scattered about the house," Joe said. "The men went on a treasure hunt, gathered all the jewels they could find, put them in a shoe box, and then went knocking on jewelers' doors in search of a vault."

Of course, all the safe-deposit boxes in Washington were locked for the night and no jeweler would take the trove. As a last resort, Thurman Arnold wielded his influence with the Capitol's top agency heads. The men took the shoe box to the office of J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI. Hoover directed his officials to lock the jewels in the agency's vault until further notice from Evalyn's executors.

# Kitty Heit: unparalleled success

By Glenda Moore

Among the businesswomen in early Ouray, Katherine O'Brien Porter Heit was the most memorable. For twenty-five years she developed the two major enterprises that she left as her legacy: the Bon Ton Restaurant and the St. Elmo Hotel. Today both of those businesses are thriving on Main Street. The story of her success is unparalleled in a town that would experience the ups and downs of an economy associated with mining and tourism.

At the age of twenty-seven, Kitty or Kate was listed on the 1880 census as living in the household of her sister Adelia McLean in Independence, Kansas, probably assisting with the boarding house that Adelia and her husband Hugh were running. At that time she was divorced from Henry Porter whom she had married in 1871. They had one son, Frederick. Unfortunately, with the destruction of the 1890 census, Kitty's arrival in Colorado cannot be documented. However, by 1889 she had married Joe Heit in Ouray and was thought to be working in the Bon Ton Restaurant. At some point in the growth of Ouray, the Bon Ton was also the name of a house of ill repute or a pleasure

palace on Second Street. It's doubtful that any of the arriving miners ever confused the two establishments.

Joe was an electrician, but he was also into mining so he probably had adequate finances. In February of 1890, he purchased the Bon Ton Restaurant property from the Marsh estate, and Kitty and her sister Adelia began managing the restaurant. Adelia had been running the Ogden House on Second Street, in the respectful part of that infamous area. When her husband Hugh died, she sold her inventory to Joe Heit, and Kitty probably used the beds and such for the boarding rooms over the restaurant.



▲ Circle Route TNM Stagecoach in front of St. Elmo Hotel



▲ St. Elmo Hotel, ca. 1900.



▲ Bon Ton Restaurant, adjacent to St. Elmo Hotel.

Under Kitty's control the Bon Ton acquired a glowing reputation as a first class establishment. The local paper described the ambience, white tablecloths, crystal, china, fine food, and pleasant service. Then she began to cater some of the more important events in the town, and the quality of her food received raves. Socially, she was invited to parties and elected to offices in several organizations. Besides her sister Adelia, the McLean nieces and nephews were a part of Kitty's life in Ouray. Her son Frederick was hanging out in the Red Light District and eventually move over to Telluride to gamble and enjoy the sporting life there. At some point, she adopted Francis who proved to be of a stronger moral character than Frederick.

In 1896 one of the local newspapers indicated that Kitty was planning to add to the Bon Ton, but then in 1897 she applied to the city council for permission to build a veneered brick building. Her request was denied as "being contrary to the ordinance relative thereto." Some adjustments must have been made to her plans as she began building that same year. No grand opening of the St. Elmo is found in the local papers, and the first mention of an event being held there was March 1898 with a supper being served at the St. Elmo for the Miners' Union. Perhaps at some time the citizens just referred to the two businesses as the St. Elmo rather than distinguishing the restaurant separately. In the June 10, 1898, issue the Silverite-Plainealer mentions that the finishing touches are being added to the new St. Elmo with a description of its attributes: eighteen lodging rooms, steam heat, the parlor, the dining area, and the flower garden south of the building. With the completion of her building, Kitty provided a prime location for special social events and in conjunction with her fine food, launched her catering service at other locations. In 1900 she received permission to build a bow window

extension on the hotel, built the extension, and then had to remove it as it protruded too far over the sidewalk. It took a second, firmly worded letter from the city council before she took it down. Perhaps her strong will was part of her success.

Another aspect of Kitty's life was her association with the miners in Ouray. She and her husband Joe were sympathetic to the illnesses and the financial struggles of the miners. Many times she would let a miner stay in the rooms above the Bon Ton or the St. Elmo when he was broke or sick. Quite often the newspapers would mention that someone was staying at the St. Elmo where they were ill or that a miner had died there. The miners called her "Aunt" Kitty because of her compassion in recognizing their needs and lending aid. An article from the local paper indicated this relationship.

"Mrs. Kitty Heit, of the St. Elmo Hotel in this city, has thrown open her house to the deported miners from Telluride. She did the same thing to miners thrown out of employment by the panic of 1893, and her house has always been a home for the miners since."

While Kitty was successful in business, her marriage to Joe did not continue smoothly. They separated, Kitty filed for divorce, but contrary to popular belief, she had the case dismissed, according to a District Court record of 1908. Joe had bought a ranch and left Ouray County although he returned occasionally to visit friends. Kitty's business continued successfully until her death from pneumonia in May of 1915. Her services were held at St. Joseph Catholic Church with burial in Cedar Hill Cemetery. The number of attendees and the floral arrangements present at the service suggested the depth of the respect for this legendary businesswoman.