

Transcript of Episode 3: Northeastern Nevada Museum

Ayla Anderson 0:10

Hello, everybody, welcome. So today I have with me D'ette Mawson. Okay, right from the Northeastern Nevada Museum, and we're here in Elko, Nevada. And it's a little dear to my heart because I'm actually from Carlin, Nevada and I went against a lot of Elko and Spring Creek people in track and usually they kicked my butt. So we're here at the museum today. And we've got a lot of really cool things to learn about that I had no idea about the history of this place as well. So yeah, take it off.

D'ette Mawson 0:41

Well, so we're called the Northeastern Nevada Museum, which means that we cover all of Northeastern Nevada. So that means that we talk about things that happen in Carlin, Elko, there are some small mining camps in Jarbidge and Tuscarora. They're now considered ghost towns. But both of those we tell stories from both of those places. We go as far south as white pine county to Ely, which is kind of crazy.

Ayla Anderson 1:08

Many people from the east might not realize, but Nevada is a gigantic place.

D'ette Mawson 1:11

It's huge. So, for a little bit of perspective, Elko is in the northeastern corner. We are four hours west of Salt Lake City, we are about five hours east of Reno and Carson City. And eight hours north of Las Vegas. Yeah, and that's driving a car on Interstate. So that's So, kind of a little bit of perspective. Elko is like the center spot of all of that. Elko County is the fourth largest county in the nation by square mileage, which is totally crazy. We are beat out by Nye County is the third. Nye county is in Nevada as well. It's a little further south than us. And then there's a county in California and a county in Arizona that are number one and number two, so we're the fourth largest county by square miles.

Ayla Anderson 1:59

And the museum covers all of that.

Ayla Anderson 2:00

And we talk about all of that within this museum. The northeastern Nevada Historical Society was founded in 1958. And 10 years later, they were able to open this museum right here in the city park. They were given the land by the city with the stipulation that they begin building on it within a year. And so, they built a basement, which started to house all of the artifacts and everything that they had been

collecting. Because prior to that the members of the historical society had been collecting things in their garages and their basements and attics.

Ayla Anderson 2:36

Not the best place for artifacts.

D'ette Mawson 2:38

Yes, exactly. In some cases, not the best place. They were able to get Howard Hickson from the Nevada State Museum in Carson City to come out here. And he built many of our first exhibits that we had, and he became one of our first directors, and he actually served as director here for, I think, it was 30 years. So, I could be off in that timeframe.

Ayla Anderson 3:03

So first they built the basement. And that was just to house everything?

D'ette Mawson 3:07

That was just to house everything. And to show that they were taking steps to building Okay. And then they wrote several grants, the Fleishman Foundation granted them money at that time to continue the building, and they received funding from the county. Our bylaws actually state that on our board of directors, we have to have a county representative. So, we're really lucky in our board of directors, we have an amazing board of directors. And that County Representative still sits with our board today. And he's awesome. We absolutely love him. So that's part of our bylaws because the county funds part of us. We get that county funding, but it's not totally everything that funds us. So, we are still a private nonprofit. And we do a lot of fundraising. A lot of people around here have heard of the great hub duck race. Yes, we drop rubber duckies in the Humboldt River and they float down the river and see who wins, who comes across the river first. People spend all summer adopting their rubber ducks and they can come out to watch the race and the winner will get 1500 dollars.

Ayla Anderson 3:33

And never fear all the ducks are always collected!

Ayla Anderson 4:16

They're always collected. Yes, we have never sent anyone down any of them down the river to Carlin. We've had a few that have tried to make a break for it a couple times. But we have chased them. But the

great humble duck race is something that's looked forward to every year and we have a blast with it. It's so much fun. And then our other fundraiser that we do is the Halleck Bar Party. And so, the Halleck Bar which we've walked past it when you came into the museum, the Halleck Bar came from Halleck Nevada. It sat in the saloon there and was restored by the Glacier family and Choch Evans. And they when they restored it and brought it back to us. They said we want the museum to have this but we have a stipulation. You have to pass a shot of Beefeater Gin over the bar every year. So, we have the bar, we have the back bar, the mirror and the place where they would hold the booze and everything. We have all of that. And it is the center focal point of our Halleck Bar Gallery, which is an art gallery that rotates art. And the bar itself functions as an active bar at least twice a year.

[Ayla Anderson](#) 5:23

I mean, you're in Nevada, so... there has to be a bar.

[D'ette Mawson](#) 5:24

Exactly. Even the museums have bars. The Pioneer here, actually, down in the Western Folklife Center, they have one of the most famous bars as well. So, we have the Halleck Bar Party, because we have to pass the shot of gin over the bar every year. So why not have a blowout party. So, we have a huge Party, it's open bar, you pay \$20 at the door to come in, and its open bar for the rest of the night. There's dancing, and we've had, we had live piano music one here, which was really fun. We had a local pianist come in, and she played some of the really fun old bar tunes and stuff, which was really, really fun.

[Ayla Anderson](#) 5:27

You know, obviously working here, you've seen so much different history that we have here. And I say we because I definitely feel a little bit a part of it.

[D'ette Mawson](#) 6:14

You're a hometown girl.

[Ayla Anderson](#) 6:15

I know! And I know you say Nevada, but for all the people listening to this podcast now, just so you know, if you want to sound like a Nevadan, and it's definitely Nevad(ah), Nev(o)da. So, I'm just throwing that out there. Yes. So, you do a lot of work with the public education side. And one of the really cool programs that you guys did here was about a very special eagle that has a dear place in Elko's heart.

[D'ette Mawson](#) 6:42

Yes, his name is Silver, he is a bald eagle. And so, for Mawson 6:42 those of you that know, our country's emblem is the bald eagle. And it is unlawful to hunt them, it is unlawful to have them taxidermied. They are protected 100% by the United States.

Ayla Anderson 7:02

Yeah, you I don't even think that you can be in possession of any eggs, hatched or not, or any feathers or anything like that, even if it's collected from an already dead animal.

D'ette Mawson 7:11

And I would imagine that you would probably be fined for messing even with them with their nests.

Ayla Anderson 7:16

I know that there is a certain stipulation for Native Americans. I know they have something separate, but for right now, like general population rules.

D'ette Mawson 7:23

And the Native Americans actually played a role in Silver as well in his story. And so, Silver was as a young bird, he was shot in the wing in Alaska. And his medical rehabilitation took him from Alaska to San Francisco to the San Francisco Zoo. And there, he underwent some rehabilitation and the intention there was that he and a female bird that was also being rehabilitated there. The intention was that the two of them would be released back into the wild, with 100% conservation in mind, at the time in 1974. The time that they first tried to release them into Mount Lassen, it was halted because of an early snowfall. And then the two of them, there had only been maybe 500 nesting pairs of eagles, and eagles, if you know anything about eagles, they mate for life. They are together for life, and they very much grieve which was something that we learned last summer as well. And these two were to be released into Mount Lassen. And it was stopped because of an early snowfall. And it took another couple of years before, so I think it was actually 1973.

Ayla Anderson 8:39

So, we stopped for the early snowfall, because they're concerned that if they release them..

D'ette Mawson 8:43

Exactly, they wouldn't be able to survive because of the snow. And after being in San Francisco in a zoo, I mean that was that was very tricky. And so, then they timed things a little bit differently. And they

ended up releasing the two of them into the Ruby Lake Wildlife Refuge here in Elko County. And as they released them, some of the famous words said by his handler, Lair Coughlin, Lair is a great friend of the museum, his amazing, amazing guy, very talented and very passionate about the conservation efforts that have gone on. He was the person who released silver and as he released him up into the air and his arm went up, we have this really great picture of his arm in the air and Silver flying off of his arm. And his last words to Silver were "Silver fly free". And that kind of became a big theme for us last year. So, we celebrated the summer of Silver, Silver got an all-new exhibit. He had been in an exhibit that was a wooden case with glass on both sides so that you could walk around him and see him. There was a TV screen that showed a slide show of a 10-minute slideshow of his story and it was narrated by local radio personalities Stu Writer, at the time. It was recorded and it was put into the slideshow. And all of this was part of the exhibit. And the exhibit moved around. Like when I was little, I remember it being right by the front doors of the museum. And we used to drive down the road. And I'd be like, "Can we go see Silver today". And so, we would come in and we would stop and sometimes we'd say hi to Silver, and other times we would watch the slideshow. I talked to my cousin the other day; she lives in Reno now. But she grew up here as well. And she remembered having the lady behind the desk, come out and push rewind on the video cassette so that she could watch it. So, this has been a big part of everybody's lives.

[Ayla Anderson](#) 10:37

I mean, from what you were telling me earlier, he was basically like the community's pet. Unfortunately, as happens sometimes with rehabilitation efforts, they become a little bit habituated to humans. And so, he kind of hung around the area and became a really popular bird.

[D'ette Mawson](#) 10:51

He did. So, when they were actually released, Jane Athena, the female eagle that was released with him, she took off, flew over the hills and was never seen again. She was done. She was just out of there. She was ready to be free. And she was done. Silver actually hung around and they reported that he would come back to the Forest Service building. And he would take the fish that they would keep there in a trough that they used in case, you know, when pickings were slim for the birds, they could come back and they knew they could get food there. But he was well known for talking anglers out of their trout. Or sometimes he would just steal it straight out of their baskets.

[Ayla Anderson](#) 10:53

When talking didn't work.

[D'ette Mawson](#) 10:59

Yeah, he would, he would just go and steal it straight from their baskets as they were sitting out there on the lake fishing. And in our efforts last summer, as we were rebuilding this exhibit, the original exhibit

was a huge community program. And Silver was shot 10 months after being released and killed. And the man who killed him was a retired police officer out of California, which makes it even more sad.

Ayla Anderson 12:01

Because he definitely should have known that that's poaching.

D'ette Mawson 12:04

Yes. Well, and he was actually out there. He was legally hunting out there. But what he said was that he saw something white moving in the bush and he shot.

Ayla Anderson 12:16

I mean, the attitude is, of course very different in a lot of places. And that's okay, we're definitely not trying to say that anyone should be a hunter. But we're just saying that in Nevada that's very popular. It's definitely a way of life here.

D'ette Mawson 12:27

It's something that we grew up with. Yeah.

Ayla Anderson 12:29

And so, saying that you just shot at something in the bushes. Eh.. Eh..

D'ette Mawson 12:34

Yeah. And he was discovered because he then broke the law a little bit further, and took him to a local taxidermist and the taxidermist recognized Silver because he had seen him himself. And he turned him in. And people were extremely upset in the community because A. this this legend had been killed and B. the hunter was only fined \$550. He was sentenced to six months in prison, and that was commuted to time served because of an illness that he had. And so, it's very sad and the people were extremely upset and Mawson 12:34 rightfully angry over this. And so, the community, Howard Hickson and Lair Coughlin Silver's handler, they went through all their channels, they started petitioning the government, the Federal government, President Nixon sent a letter and a coin of approval from President Nixon, that we have, giving us his permission for us to have Silver preserved and put-on exhibit here. Because that is something that is still nationally illegal to have them even in an exhibit. So, we got all the permissions from the government, we had to go through the Native American tribes, the Shoshone and the Paiute tribes here in Elko, and have their permission and blessings to have this exhibit created. And Silver was

then taken back to California. He was preserved and then flown back to Elko for his exhibit installation in 1976. And it was kind of timely because 1976 was the bicentennial of the United States. But also, it was a little bittersweet for us to have that exhibit brought here. And so, as it was installed, that year the community raised funds, they collected 77,000 aluminum cans to have recycled and raise funds for the exhibit. The local Lions Club and Rotary Clubs of the community, various other service clubs of the community donated back to this exhibit. And so, there was a lot, there was a huge community effort put into installing this exhibit in 1976. And they held a champagne toast in reception to open the exhibit then. And Lair Coghlan, he came and he dedicated that first exhibit with Howard Hickson as a co speaker. And so, this exhibit over the years, it had moved from being in the front and center of the museum, by the front doors to being put back in a corner, and kind of forgotten a little bit. And my coworkers here at the museum, we grew up coming here. This was one of our favorite places. Silver is a huge part of our memories, just as an exhibit. So, we felt that this was a great injustice. And we wanted Silver to have a new and amazing exhibit. So, we reinvented his exhibit for him. He now has an interactive touch screen television that will show you a map of the Ruby Wildlife Refuge. You can go through different facts about eagles and learn things about how they live and where they live and things like that. And you can learn about their size. You can measure your wingspan based on a wingspan, a drawing that our So, registrar, Robin Nunez created. She drew a comparison of an eagle, a California condor, a red tail hawk and a barn owl, I think. You just stretch your arms out, I know Hogle Zoo in Salt Lake City has one for Hoglet gorillas, you just stretch your arms out and lay your arms against the wall to see how far your arms spread is, like your wingspan, you know, compared to the wingspan of these birds. So that's really, really fun. Like you can just stand up against that. And then you can maneuver through the touchscreen. And you can watch Silver story. There are two different versions of the story on there. There's one that is 30 minutes and goes into a lot of detail. And there's one that's 10 minutes. And it's brief and kind of the Reader's Digest version, but still gets the point out. And all of it is in the name of bald eagle conservation efforts. And so, we started creating this and we went through what we called last summer, the summer of Silver. Everything that we did last summer was all about Silver. I started in April of last year just after the school district spring break. And I visited all of the schools in Elko and a couple out of Elko as well. And I went to them and I said, "Can we get the story out, we want all of the kids to know the story. We want them to learn about silver. And we are collecting aluminum cans to recreate the aluminum can drive that they had in 1976".

[Ayla Anderson](#) 17:52

And many of their parents will actually still remember silver from this area.

[D'ette Mawson](#) 17:54

They did. And actually, it was really kind of funny, because the story. I get teary talking about it all the time, like I actually, tear up... And by the fourth or fifth time that I had gone into a principal's office to talk about it, I kind of stopped getting quite as teary. And then I went to the Elko high school and I talked to Tim Wickersham. And Mr. Wickersham is amazing. But as I'm talking to him and telling him what we were doing. He was like, "I remember Silver, he landed on the street right in front of me". It turned out to be the coolest thing ever because he was very passionate about involving the school. He sent me

three of his students, three of his Junior athletes. They came over and met with me one day and they said, "Well, this is what our plan is". They held a spare change drive throughout the school. They put water jugs in every classroom. And they said that the first jug that they put down and they talked about it, they had their teachers talking about it, their teachers all knew everything. You know, I'd given them a flash drive of the video that they passed around. They actually like the teacher started talking about it. And he said that as soon as they put those jugs out, they had people emptying their pockets. They actually brought in \$500 just those three high school boys brought us \$500 for the exhibit, which was the coolest thing. Those kids worked so hard. And it was amazing to have that community involvement.

Ayla Anderson 19:23

When all along Silver story, every step of the way has been really strong community involvement.

D'ette Mawson 19:28

It really has and that was what our goal was last summer was to just involve the community. I mean, we figured there's no way that saving aluminum cans today would raise that much money. But we figured that if every little kid brought in a bag of aluminum cans and set these are for Silver, they would at least know who Silver was. And then we held a very family friendly reception in August of last year to commemorate the 45th anniversary of his original exhibit being opened. We had an entire week of events starting with our Second Saturday Activity for Kids and their families. The kids came in, they learned about Silver, they got to see the exhibit before it was officially opened. And they made their own bald eagle masks that some of them even wore to the reception, which was really kind of cool. We had a guest lecture that that day. Lair Coghlan came in and he Mawson 19:28 spoke and he had his daughter speak, who actually works for the zoo system in San Francisco. And so, they both spoke on conservation. And we learned that bald eagles are no longer on the endangered species list. Because of the conservation efforts that they made in the 70's. They've been removed from the endangered species list, which is super awesome. And then we ended the whole week with our champagne toast and reception. And it was an incredible community involvement. It was just amazing. And the whole exhibit is wonderful. We still send people up there and tell them you've got to go see Silver. But Silver the bald eagle is a story that is not told anywhere else.

D'ette Mawson 21:06

No, it's very unique to this area. And so, one thing that is also pretty cool is I had no idea about this and I'm a railroading town. That's where I grew up. But as you were just saying everyone has railroad stories, you know, because it was such a big deal. But you guys have something very specific here that wasn't supposed to be part of Elko's history but became a really important part of its history.

D'ette Mawson 21:29

It was the city of San Francisco train crash. So, in 1939 on August 12, 1939 there was a train crash that happened about 26 miles West of Carlin, near what's called the Harney Station and also the Bell Ranch. And the Bell Ranch, actually I don't think it's called the Bell Ranch anymore, but it's still there. And it's still a ranch in Carlin.

Ayla Anderson 21:54

So, we're in Elko right now and Carlin is about 20 miles to the west of us. And I mean, it's pretty closely tied to Elko. I mean they're kind of like sister towns, almost

D'ette Mawson 22:04

Yeah, they really kind of is. And it's not a big deal for someone in Carlin to drive into Elko every day for work. Yeah. So that 20 miles really isn't that big of a deal unless it's snowing. And we're connected by interstate 80, which is kind of a big deal as well. That's another whole other part of Elko history. But interstate 80 goes right through Elko and Carlin both.

Ayla Anderson 22:28

Yeah. So, like when we bring up that this happened at Carlin, it was also pretty much happening in Elko.

D'ette Mawson 22:33

Exactly, yes. And so, this train crash, when it came through it initially came through Elko. And we actually have interviews that Howard Hickson had conducted with various people who had been involved in the crash at the time. And he interviewed a surgeon that we had here in Elko, his name was Thomas Hood. And he, at the time that this happened, was just a recent high school graduate. They were going into the theater and the train tracks were directly in front of the theater so and they said that they stopped and they watched the city of San Francisco train, come through town, and he remembered thinking that there probably wasn't a single person in Elko that had ever been on that train, because it cost an extra \$5 just to get a ticket.

Ayla Anderson 23:23

This was very much a luxury train?

D'ette Mawson 23:25

It really was. In fact, our exhibit is titled The City of San Francisco, the Titanic of Trains. Because as far as Titanic was built for being luxurious and the height of you know, travel, the best way to travel, the City

of San Francisco is the same thing. Only in train form. And it had roomette cars, there were like full apartments, like bed and apartment cars. There's, pamphlet pictures that show women looking in mirrors and curling their hair in one of these apartment cars. There was a full bar, there were several dining cars, there was an actual full restaurant car, and then a slightly less, fast food type car, you know, like you would think of it as like being the difference between the high dining and then like McDonald's, you know that kind of comparison of today. But that was kind of how it was. And then there were club cars and everything had these plush luxurious seats and there was a full barber. They had a medical car for anybody who became sick. They could go to this car and there was a stewardess who was a nurse and she would tend to them and take care of them until the next stop. This train was a quarter of a mile long and only for passengers. It didn't carry cargo or anything like that, it was a passenger train. And you could move from car to car. You could go from your room car out to one of the club cars. And some of the stories that we've read are of people that were playing cards right before it crashed.

Ayla Anderson 25:12

Well and part of the reason why none of the people from Elko would be on that is because, Elko was more of a... I don't want to say poor person town, but it was more of a poor person town....

D'ette Mawson 25:23

That kind of was and at the same time, it never even stopped in Elko. It stopped in Carlin and changed drivers. And so, most of the time they were literally going from Omaha, Nebraska. And it made the trip from Omaha to Oakland, California, in just under 48 hours.

Ayla Anderson 25:46

Which now seems like an eternity but back in the day, that was a big deal.

D'ette Mawson 25:52

It was a very fast-moving train. And for it to be so luxurious and everything, you know, it was a very big deal. There is one account that we have of a man who started his journey in New York City and had planned to end in San Francisco. And he actually paid an extra \$11, which I mean, today that doesn't seem like a lot. But in 1939, that was a lot. Just so that he could get to San Francisco that much earlier. And so, he got on a train in New York City, changed onto the City of San Francisco in Omaha. And then his journey ended in the Carlin Canyon with the train crash. They changed drivers in Carlin. And the driver there noted that they were 26 minutes late. He then said that he could throttle up across the flats of Nevada and pick up that speed. And they would still would still make Oakland on time.

Ayla Anderson 26:51

This is sounding a little bit reminiscent of Titanic, right? This isn't going to end well.

D'ette Mawson 26:56

Right? Like this whole comparison is a very good comparison there. So, as he got on the train, and they went through, they made it, I think they made it about 20 miles to the west of Carlin into the canyon. And looking at pictures of that canyon. And for those of you in the east, mountains are different there, which we had talked about before starting this. Mountains are very different in the east, but this canyon that they were in, there was a mountain on one side, train tracks and then a mountain on the other side, and the tracks literally hugged the mountain. And they went in a tight curve right around the mountain.

Ayla Anderson 26:56

Which is always really hard for something traveling at high speeds anyway.

D'ette Mawson 27:09

Yes, exactly. And he was not supposed to be traveling faster than 50 miles per hour.

Ayla Anderson 27:44

But as you said earlier, he said he could make up that time they had lost.

D'ette Mawson 27:49

Yes, he could make up that time. So eventually, there was a court of inquiry held after the crash. He hit this curve; the engine stayed on the tracks. But further back the cars became tangled with a bridge that was going over the Humboldt River. And it's tangled with bridge trussing and it was a mess of metal and just broken pieces, broken train parts, broken track and all of it was in the river.

Ayla Anderson 28:20

So, it was really a derailment from like the third train car back.

D'ette Mawson 28:23

It was, yeah. And even the third car was slightly off the track, like you could see we have pictures of it where the wheels are kind of lifted off the track and tilted to the side. And the engineer actually ran a mile and a half down the tracks to the Harney Station, where he called for help and was able to get help. And Joe Bell was 11 years old. But he was one of the ones that Howard Hickson interviewed. And he

remembered his dad and his brother and he all got into the truck and they took the engineer back. They got into their truck and took him back to the crash site. And they were among the first to arrive there to start helping people. And he said that all they could hear were just screams of people, the dead in the dying. The gentleman that I told you about that started in New York City, he actually had been in the club car with four other people. And they had been playing cards and were all four of them were thrown from the car out to the ground. And he said that he remembered laying in a pile of rock. There were rocks under his back. So, he had memories of that. And he said that he remembered being in great pain and talking to people around him, the people around him and over the course of the night, the three that were around him... like they didn't want to move him because they didn't want to injure him further. And so, they were very much waiting for doctors to come.

Ayla Anderson 29:54

How many people were on the train?

D'ette Mawson 29:57

There were 220 total. So that includes the 171 people who were passengers. And then the rest were stewards. And your engineers, staff people who worked on the train itself. And he described as he was laying there, he said that the three people around him, he was talking with them. And then before too long, one by one, they just stopped talking. And he was the only person who survived out of that car. In the end, there was 24 total dead, 17 were discovered at the crash site at the site there, the others made it to the hospital but succumbed to their injuries in the days following it. The cool part about Elko and this history is that our doctors went out there. Our doctor Tom hood, he was the one that I mentioned was going into the movie theater, he and his friend got out of the movie theater and immediately heard about it and went out to the crash site.

Ayla Anderson 31:00

That's how come this is so embedded in this history is not because the crash happened, but it's more of the entire community effort. Everybody went out there in the middle of the night and tried to help and do it.

D'ette Mawson 31:11

They all were out there. This happened at 9:30 at night. And so, it's getting dark. It was August. So, you know, the sun was still up for a little while, but it was getting dark. People lined the roadways above the site. They lined the road with lights so that they could see what was going on down there. There was a lot of stumbling around in the dark, some of the passengers had lit a fire. There are so many different stories. And at the time, you had asked me about radio communication. So, Elko did not have a radio station until 1954. So, the only communication that they had was via Telegraph, and the Elko Daily Free Press. And the Free Press was the only open line of communication because as soon as the railroad

officials got there, they took over the telegraph. So, people So, coming out of the train and everything, they couldn't even send a telegraph to their families to tell them that they were all right.

Ayla Anderson 32:02

They wanted everything to be quiet.

D'ette Mawson 32:05

They wanted everything to be quiet until they could figure out what had happened. And so, they took over the Telegraph, so people couldn't even get word out. The Elko Daily Free Press was fielding phone calls from every major newspaper across the country from New York, San Francisco, Chicago. Every newspaper, this was big, big news. It was huge. And the Free Press was the only way of getting news out there. And so, they reported on the crash for two weeks following everything. You know, they reported on the board of inquiry that followed. The crash site was ruled sabotage. Railroad officials determined that someone had pulled spikes from the railroad and sabotaged the tracks and that is what had caused the derailment.

Ayla Anderson 32:54

But there's a lot of controversy about that, so bring on the theories!

D'ette Mawson 32:55

So, there is a lot of controversy actually about that because the board of inquiry was closed to the public. It was closed to news sources. So, the newspaper wasn't even welcome in their courtroom. They were not allowed to report on anything that was occurring in there. Elko's Mayor, David Dotta was a part of the inquiry. He listened to testimony. They spoke with the engineer, they determined that he was not at fault. And that his speed was within regulation and that it was nothing that he did, there was nothing that he did to cause this. In fact, there is a little article on probably page two of the newspaper about three weeks after the crash that he returned, returned to work. But all of that was kept very hush-hush. And once the FBI arrived to help investigate, they close down the site. The public was not allowed to go in there. But I mean, this makes sense because evidence was being destroyed.

Ayla Anderson 33:03

Because didn't you said something, it took like three days to clean the wreckage and there were just all kinds of people walking all over.

D'ette Mawson 34:17

And volunteers going in there. Yes. And actually, there were even people who were stuck in train cars that had obviously died. And it took them three days to get them out. It was just mass carnage. It really was. I mean, and for 220 people and there only being 24 that died. That is probably a miracle. Because of this wreckage, to see the pictures of it, when I see it's a mess of metal and twisted entanglement. It's really bad and some of those images, we have a million pictures, more than what are in our exhibit. And they're just the things the images that you see there. It's impossible to imagine.

[Ayla Anderson](#) 35:03

And the images that are here, that the exhibit it has. You can see all these different photos on there. It's like a nice little backlit exhibit. And that's where you can actually see some of the train crash and some of the cleanup crews after and everything.

[D'ette Mawson](#) 35:16

Yes, and they had to bring in other trains on the on the eastbound tracks. And they moved people back and forth. The mortuary provided the ambulance service, which is really kind of a funny story, because the ambulance was also a hearse. And Leo Puchinelli was a local district attorney here in his adult life, but he was just a young high school graduate at the time. And he was working for the mortuary and they told him go get the hearse and, and drive it out. You're going to have to bring these victims back from Carlin to the hospital here. So, he took the hearse out there. He said that one of the first people that he put on there, she recognized it for what it was and thought that this was the end.

[Ayla Anderson](#) 36:01

Poor thing! I mean, yeah, what else would you picture when you wake up from a wreck and you're in a hearse, you know.

[D'ette Mawson](#) 36:05

Yeah, that's kind of its kind of disconcerting. And she was just like, what's happening here, you know, and they had our hospital was very small at the time. Elko General Hospital played a huge part in it though, all of the victims were brought back to Elko Hospital and checked out, many of those that were not injured were released immediately. Others remained in the hospital until transportation could be arranged for them. Some of them went on to California, others were taken to Salt Lake or to Reno to a larger hospital. Our hospital at the time only had 52 beds. And there was 220 people on that train. So, we had people lining the hallways of the hospital. And we had doctors, all of the Elko doctors were on call that night. We were actually short by a couple of doctors that had gone, they were out of town. And we had one doctor that was from San Francisco that was visiting in Elko and he showed up at the hospital and said I'm volunteering my skills.

Ayla Anderson 37:09

I can tell, that's what the whole community did. And like even from just the farmers, they went down there and we're carrying bodies out.

D'ette Mawson 37:17

Yes, and Tom hood, he said that once they got out there, he and his friend were told "grab the corner of a mattress". And so, they had four people on a mattress, everybody grabbed a corner, and they started carrying people out on mattresses out of the train. And the placement, you mentioned our exhibit, the placement of our exhibit here. We so, intentionally chose it because it is going in next to a new exhibit that is still under construction at the moment about our hospital and the history of the Elko General Hospital. And so, the passengers had been taken to the Elko General Hospital so it would go logically next to the hospital exhibit. Both exhibits are across the way from an exhibit of the Elko Daily Free Press, which we have a printing press from the Free Press, which is really kind of a cool little bit of history itself because the Free Press is one of the oldest papers in Elko County. And so, it's right across from there because the Free Press were the ones who were the only source of news at the time. And then right next to the Free Press is an exhibit about the Reinhardt's Department Store. Reinhardt's was a store that was here for 90 years, it was owned by a German family. They actually started their journey in Canada, came down through California, got on the railroad, got on the train, and started traveling to the east from California, as the central Pacific Railroad was being built. And they ended in Elko. They were like this is a great place to set up shop. So, they built the store and they became an iconic part of Elko history. And during the crash, the days after the crash, they went through their department stores, the women's and the men's departments, and collected clothing, hats, gloves, pants, dresses, shoes, they took all of it to the hospital, and provided that clothing for any of the victims that were coming out of the hospital, because people lost, they lost everything that they were traveling with. They had nothing to come from the hospital. And of course, the railroad paid for it and reimbursed them but it's still kind of a really cool part of Elko's history that there really was full community involved. Everyone got involved. Everyone did.

Ayla Anderson 39:30

And so, kind of going back a little bit to the conspiracy theory, I guess they had originally determined that it was sabotage. Someone was pulling railroad ties out and had purposely caused it. But what are some of the alternative theories?

D'ette Mawson 39:43

So, the railroad tie theory with the sabotage and everything, they Mawson 39:43 kind of cemented that theory because they actually launched a manhunt. There is still outstanding a \$10,000 reward offered by the Southern Pacific Railroad to anyone with information about the saboteurs. And they actually arrested several men, none of them, they all alibied out of it, you know, they were all released.

Ayla Anderson 40:15

And plus, the investigation started three days after.

D'ette Mawson 40:19

Yeah, like an official really started after everyone had already been in there. And so, you know, whoever it was, they were definitely long gone. I have spoken with someone locally who did a lot of research, she researched the nurse and has kind of performed as the nurse from the train in our downtown ghost walk. And so, they have different people who dress up as different people from Elko history. And they tell their story in ghost, like as their ghost. They tell the story from first person perspective. So, she researched, she did a lot of research. And she actually read an account of two people in a bar, just south of Carlin that were bragging about having messed with the railroad. And these people were never caught. And nobody can ever identify them or anything like that. And then there were other theories were that the railroad was hiding something, they were covering it up. Claiming sabotage, but covering up the fact that their tracks were in disrepair. And I'm personally inclined to lean toward a combination of the two. Personally, I think that the engineer did get a little overexcited, because coming around that curve, it does open out into flat ground. And I think that perhaps he had started throttling up just a little too early. And I do think that somebody pulled spikes, because they had proof that someone pulled some spikes out of the railroad. But I don't think that there's any way they could have known what train would loosen them, what train would actually come across there and be wrecked. They had no way of targeting the City of San Francisco. So, I think the railroad company and the tracks were the target in the sabotage, not the train itself. And the train just had the bad luck of hitting that iceberg. There are a lot of people, we have some photos that were written, they had been inscribed on the back by the photographer saying, you know, "Don't let this out of your hands because we're all waiting to see what the railroad will do". The railroad company was very much taking, confiscating anybody's pictures. Chris Sheeran of the newspaper, I think, was Chris Sheeran. But his camera was confiscated. And his photos were taken by the railroad and I think some of them were later returned to him. But they were they were used in the court of inquiry. And they were taking anything that could potentially, like they were saying it was evidence, but a lot of people felt like they were taking anything that could show negligence, or that it was a cover up. There were a lot of people. And there were a lot of locals, like if you can find anybody around today that remembers that. Or if they ever heard stories from their uncle or their grandparents or somebody that was out there, they will tell you that a lot of people thought that it was a railroad cover up. And that it was just negligence on the railroad part. So, there's that controversy, and it's So, pretty cemented in local lore, you know, like, it's handed down in families and everything. But the official report says sabotage, they never caught the people who did it. And like I said, there's still a \$10,000 reward out there. For anybody who knows something about the sabotage.

Ayla Anderson 43:51

And anyone who knows something. If you're hearing it from this podcast, I think it's only fair that I get at least 50% of that. I'm just saying for future for future possibilities.

D'ette Mawson 44:02

You could always make a donation back to the museum as well. We will happily take donations!

Ayla Anderson 44:05

Ugh fine! I guess that's better than just putting it in my pocket!

Ayla Anderson 44:11

Well, this has been really wonderful.

D'ette Mawson 44:13

Thank you!

Ayla Anderson 44:13

Yeah, we're going to come back later, actually, and take another tour around and look through the museum. But I've definitely enjoyed this and it's been really cool to kind of get back to my roots. Learn some more. Well, thank you so much, D'ette. This has been really wonderful.

D'ette Mawson 44:26

Thank you!