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Coalby Store breaks the ice for Pioneer Town

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Nearly 40 years ago, the Pioneer Town museum gained its first complete building: the Coalby Store. It was moved to the ground on which it sits now, where it joined the three silos from the Bar-I Ranch in town, according to Jerry McHugh, vice president of the Surface Creek Valley Historical Society.

"This store, originally called the Fickes Store, was donated to the historical society in 1981, by Henry Skutchan of Aurora," McHugh said. "Volunteers braced the building, loaded it onto a trailer, and moved it to Pioneer Town."

Though it is smaller than the Stolte packing shed, the process of moving the cabin from its original location about 3.5 miles northwest of Cedaredge, where it had been built in 1906. It gets its name from the area, titled Coalby at the time (now it's Colby), which was later absorbed by the Town of Cedaredge.

By the first week of January 1907, the store was open and the owner, Frank Fickes, was quoted in the Surface Creek Champion as having said that the store was

conducting "good business," McHugh said.

Ultimately, according to McHugh, Fickes' store became the most popular building in the Coalby community, as provided a meeting hall, a central location for local residents to gather and it also had a post office, where the mail was delivered twice a week originally.

"Getting from [Coalby] to Cedaredge was a big trip in 1907," McHugh said, "especially in winter or wet weather, and going further might require an overnight stay." All the smaller communities were the same way at the time, with Eckert and Cory being no exception. Towns like these tended to have a single schoolhouse and church.

The Coalby area was known for its coal at the time, which played into the name of the community. Coalby was also noted for its agriculture, but it was the coal that was taken from the local mine, which went from being named the "Watson Mine," to the "Coalby Mine," to the "Black Diamond Mine."

Haulers would weigh their loads and make the purchase of the coal on-site, the busi-

ness of which added to the community's solidarity.

McHugh brought up an old, undated article from the Delta County Independent that was written by Hazel Austin. In this, Austin quotes Fickes' daughters Dorthea Shoup and Helen Mitchel stating the Fickes store carried dry goods, yard goods, shoes, notions, thread, jewelry, children's clothing, long underwear, corsets, school supplies and hardware on one side.

On the other side, it housed the post office and general groceries. "There probably isn't anyone around now that can recall the pickle barrels or the Arbuckle coffee beans that came in large gunny sacks," McHugh said.

The store allegedly ran strong, but it didn't run particularly long, as Fickes closed the store's doors in 1912, following the 1911 death of his wife, Minnie.

"Fickes returned to Coalby in 1922 when his son, James, was killed in an accident in a coal mine on his father's property," McHugh said, stating that this information came from SCVHS records. James was allegedly 32 when he died.

Upon his return, Fickes



Lucas Vader/ Delta County Independent

The old Coalby store now sits in the Pioneer Town Museum, restored to its old-fashioned glory days.

transformed his old store into a home for himself and lived there until his death in 1938, 16 years later.

According to McHugh, Fickes was very involved in the development of the Granby Ditch and Reservoir system during his time in the area.

From the late 1940s to sometime in the 1960s, the old Coalby store building remained in its original location, where it was used by

the Coalby Club as a meeting place. Several community events were held there during that time.

Eventually, however, 1981 rolled around and the store was moved to the area where it sits today, behind the visitor's center of the Pioneer Town, where it has sat longer than any other building in the museum. It was restored into the old-time store that it was originally.