

THE HISTORIC STRATER HOTEL PRESENTS

ROOM 117: DENNIS W. VILES

BORN MARCH 11, 1892 IN GOODSON, MISSOURI
DIED MARCH 18, 1978 IN DURANGO, COLORADO

LEADING MINING CONSULTANT AND PRESIDENT OF
VANADIUM CORPORATION OF AMERICA

MOVE WEST PROVED KEY TO FUTURE SUCCESS

As a youngster growing up in Polk County near Springfield, Missouri, young Denny Viles always had an interest in mining. His first full time job was as a surveyor in California where he moved after graduating high school in Missouri. For a short time he worked for Limoneira Company in Santa Paula, California, where his job consisted of forced coloring of fruit. Coloring fruit did not inspire Viles but the mining boom in Nevada did. He moved to Goldfield, and found his first big chance learning, working with, and being trained by the old timers in the mining field.

In 1916, he came to Colorado as an employee of Primus Company, a large vanadium mine near Telluride. Vanadium was used to strengthen steel and the metal was often found with uranium, which at that time was worthless. With all of his experience and knowledge, Viles knew where

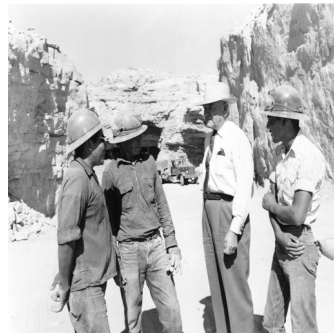
all the uranium lay which later would be useful to the U.S. government with the development of the atomic bomb.

Viles met his wife, Claire, when she was working as a bookkeeper for a mining company in Vanadium, Colorado, ten miles south of Telluride. They were married December 31, 1920, in Telluride. Their 50 years of marriage sadly ended when Clair passed away in November, 1971. Denny continued to live in Durango until his passing on March 18, 1978. He had been in ill health for several years and that day told his physician and long-time friend, Dr. Leo Lloyd, "I am going to die today". He died peacefully in the late afternoon that day and was buried next to his beloved Clair in Arizona. They had no children.

Denny Viles knowledge of the mining industry earned him world-wide respect and admiration. His sense of humor

and kind nature earned him a place friendship and trust wherever he ventured. He was a rugged individualist who cared about his employees and would often get up in the middle of the night to help an employee in need. He was a friend to many in Durango and his presence here was an important asset to the growing mountain region of Southwest Colorado.

This friend of the Strater Hotel would be very proud to have room 117 dedicated in his honor—the very room where he lived for more than the last year of his life.



SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- VILES WAS A MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN MINING CONGRESS, THE COLORADO MINING ASSOCIATION AND A LIFE MEMBER OF THE TELLURIDE ELKS CLUB.
- HE SERVED ON THE COLORADO METAL MINING BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF MINING AND METALLURGICAL ENGINEERS BOARD.
- VILES EXPERTISE IN METALS TOOK HIM ALL OVER THE WORLD INCLUDING PERU, SPAIN, EGYPT, AND THE AFRICAN CONTINENT.
- DENNY OFTEN DEMONSTRATED HIS PHYSICAL STRENGTH BY PUTTING HIS FEET ON ONE CHAIR AND HIS HEAD ON ANOTHER AND HAVING A MAN STAND ON HIS ABDOMEN. HIS CHARACTER WAS AS STRONG AS HIS PHYSICAL ABILITIES.
- VILES PARK IN DURANGO IS NAMED IN HONOR OF CLAIR VILES BECAUSE OF HER CONTRIBUTION TO THE BEAUTIFICATION OF DURANGO.

DURANGO AND THE MANHATTAN PROJECT

In 1938 the Vanadium Corporation of America leased the Durango smelter which had originally been a gold mill. The company owned the biggest uranium mine in the world in Monument Valley, Utah. The discovery was made when a Navajo brought samples of the ore to Viles, who had always been a friend to the Native Americans. VCA leased the land from the tribe after the discovery and

before anyone else found out about it. Thus began the extraction of uranium in the Four Corners region to be supplied to the top secret development of nuclear weapons, later known as the Manhattan Project.

This massive top-secret wartime effort was credited with creating the weapon that ended WWII, and the development of several

national laboratories across the country, part of the Atomic Energy Commission, now the U.S. Department of Energy.

Its name came from the temporary office located for its proximity to the US Army Corp of Engineers North Atlantic Division, Columbia University, and the principal project contractor, Stone and Webster, on Broadway in NYC.