

THE HISTORIC STRATER HOTEL PRESENTS

ROOM 411: P.C. SCHOOLS

A POWERFUL LOOK AT WATER

He hangs nonchalantly from a steel cable, gazing at the camera, his spectacles reflecting the icy Animas River below. He is Philip "P.C." Schools and although his job as Chief Engineer with the Western Colorado Power Company paid the bills, it is his intriguing turn-of-the-last century photographs documenting the coming of electricity to this area of Colorado from which his legacy glows.

Schools was born in 1881 in Crow River, MN. At the age of nine Schools's parents sent him to work in the mines, but they made him attend school every morning before work so he wouldn't be a "numskull." At the age of 16 he ran away from home and found a job delivering groceries in a horse-drawn wagon. At night, he slept among the store's boxes and packing crates. He worked hard, saved his money and when he was 18 he finished high school. And bought his first camera.

"ELECTRICITY IS THE COMING THING"

Schools went on to get two college degrees in 1905; one in mechanical engineering and one in the new field of electrical engineering, believing that electricity was the "coming thing."

The Tomboy Mine in Telluride, CO, hired him as an engineer and he did so well there that in 1913 the newly formed Western Colorado Power Company hired him as a general superintendent just as the era of practical electricity was emerging. He was in charge of the crews who

built the first power lines over the mountains to power plants including Ilium, Telluride, Tacoma and Ouray. He was a hands-on boss, horseback riding or snowshoeing into the high country to camp out with his crew as they brought electricity to the homes, ranches and businesses in this area.

He always had his camera with him, believing it was important to document every step of the new power process. His photographs of powerful-looking industrial generators, gears and complex machinery are beautiful. "He never left the house without his camera," remembers his daughter Phyllis in an interview with former Center of Southwest Studies archivist, Todd Ellison. Most of the photos in the book "Tough Men in Hard Places," by Esther Greenfield, are his.



P.C. SCHOOLS

Photo Courtesy of Center of Southwest Studies, Fort Lewis College

His pictures of men raising power lines and building water flumes have an unexpected

quality like one he took of shadowy men taking a smoke break while crouching inside a partially built water flume. You can almost smell the tarry aroma of creosote sealing the water flume when you look at his photo.