

THE HISTORIC STRATER HOTEL PRESENTS

ROOM 403: THE ZINK FAMILY

The Zink Family Story

INTRODUCTION TO THE ZINKS

The traits and values that the Zink family has in common, those that seem to flow down through the generations, are like a long thread of community involvement which winds through the family, binding them together and to the fabric of life in La Plata County as well. The Zinks are leaders, hard working, innovative and inventive in everything they do. They enjoy moving on to “the next new thing.” They volunteer. They are fearless, love the outdoors and are athletic. In fact, within the generations there have been wrestlers, track stars, tennis players, skiers, and baseball players. They have been ranchers, florists, teachers, nurses, midwives, entrepreneurs, outfitters, realtors, engineers, psychotherapists. They have always valued the positive side of growth while recognizing that it must be done conscientiously. They have conceived of and implemented many programs to protect the area’s water and natural beauty. These efforts have positively affected and driven growth in La Plata County while enhancing the county’s social and economic growth.



Sarah J. & James W. Zink with Martha, John J.,
Marion and Clarence

THE FIRST ZINK

In the beginning, the Zink family came to America from Germany’s “Palatinate” region, following in the footsteps of other German immigrant farmers who came before them in the early 1700s when England began promising immigrants free land in their then -American colonies.

John James Zink, tall, blue-eyed patriarch of the Zink family, was a descendent of one of those immigrants. Born in Iowa in 1876, he married Ida May Dickerson in 1902. In 1909 he traveled to Durango alone to see if it was a salubrious place to live, staying at the Palace Hotel. It was, and in 1910 he brought Ida May and their children to Durango. Later that year he brought his mother

Sarah, possibly a cousin of President Grant, to live with them.

John J. sold real estate and invested in property which he parlayed into a sizeable fortune. He purchased the family’s home in Animas City at 3057 Main Avenue, several properties in Ignacio, and over 800 acres in the Animas Valley. While living in Animas City he was elected Mayor and passed a law protecting irrigation water and a racy 15 mph speed limit.

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JOHN WILSON ZINK

One of John James' and Ida's sons was John Wilson Zink. At the Durango High School he set track records that lasted 25 years. He married Ruby Nelson Zink in 1938 and they raised five children. John W. loved the land and was one of La Plata County's first "Friends of Open Space." In 1968 he and Ruby donated a conservation easement to the Open Space program, protecting the scenic waterfall behind their home. Later he and his family placed easement restrictions on two more properties, one on the Animas Valley floor and one on the ridge above to preserve a beautiful part of the Valley. He believed with all his heart in the spirit of community and volunteerism. This included: 4-H, La Plata County Cattleman's Association, Open Space program, Snowdown, Durango Education Fund, Animas Valley Grange, Elks Lodge #507, La Plata County Fairgrounds Commission (where he organized the annual county fair and raised money for the 4-H), Durango Industrial Development Foundation (charter member), La Plata County Extension Advisory Board, Durango Area Chamber Resort Association, Agricultural Stabilization Council, Federal Housing Authority Board, and the Soil Conservation Board. He belonged to the United Methodist Church, Basin Coop (charter member), and helped establish the "Taste of Durango" festival. All this while operating several ranches in the area, raising everything from potatoes to flowers, trees, sheep, cattle, hay and grains. No one could say the Zinks were lazy, but their LAZY JZ Quarter Circle brand was a familiar sight in the Animas Valley.

John W. and his family were major potato producers in the Animas Valley for over 20 years and their annual potato harvests were an important source of employment. His potatoes, known as "Waterfall Ranch Potatoes," were known and valued all over the state.



John James & Ida Dickerson Zink

Ruby was active in 4-H and the Grange. She volunteered over 4000 hours at the Methodist Thrift Shop, initiated the Main Avenue Tree Planting Project (and bought the first tree). She volunteered at the Durango Senior Center and was a charter member of the Animas Valley Garden Club, while being a wife, mother, grandmother, and rancher.

At the age of 70 John W. was named "Citizen of the Year" by the Durango Area Chamber and Resort Association. But he wasn't able to accept the award in person because he and Ruby were floating down the Amazon while travelling around the world. He was also honored by the Durango Industrial Development Foundation, but rather than accepting a plaque or having a street named after him as they suggested, he donated money instead to the Durango Foundation for Educational Excellence. Later, John W's brother Howard established the John & Ruby Zink Memorial Endowment Fund

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THE GENERATIONS THAT FOLLOWED

Many of John and Ruby's children have carried on their family's connection to agriculture and food production, and to the family's tradition of activism within the community. Anne Zink ran the Rainbow Springs Trout Ranch south of Durango. Ed Zink owns Mountain Bike Specialists (formerly known as The Outdoorsman). He founded the Wetlands Preservation project at Waterfall Ranch and also started the Iron Horse Bicycle Classic. He is also active in Durango Search & Rescue operations. Jerry Zink founded StoneAge Engineering and still designs tools for industrial cleaning that are sold worldwide. Jerry notably holds several patents for his innovative tools.

Holly Zink continues the family's innovative and respectful approach to local food production at the Sunnyside Farms Market which she owns. Jerry Zink operates the only USDA-inspected meat packing plant in La Plata County giving a local option to ranchers to process their meat which helps both ranchers and Durango's tourist industry. Meats from the plant can be found in such popular local restaurants as Seasons, Steamworks, and the Strater Hotel.

Ida Zink volunteered at Alternative Horizons, an organization that supports survivors of domestic violence. Brian Zink is CFO of the Southern Ute Tribe, and his brother Tim Zink is Operations Manager of the Southern Ute Growth Fund. Brian, Tim and their sister Kristi enjoy performing in the Snowdown Follies.



John W. & Ruby Nelson Zink



Sarah Jane, mother of John J. Zink



Ida Dickerson's parents & John, George, Eddie, Charlie & Will

Photos: Anne Zink Putnam; John W. and Ruby Zink, (courtesy Heidi Zink)