

# Picnic brings Dawson Mine families together



Comet photo by Kimberly Adams

**A man looks at a bulletin board of photographs of Dawson in its heyday during the Dawson Association's Annual Reunion Sunday. "You have this sense of community of people that still come back and gather and reminisce," said Dawson native John Bizyak, who now lives in Kingamn, Arizona.**

Posted: Wednesday, September 3, 2014 12:03 pm

By Kimberly Adams Staff writer |

DAWSON— The mines at Dawson have been shut for decades now. Memories of the ghost town's schools, homes and saloons live on in the memories of people like Perfecto Pacheco. Pacheco, whose niece Kymbra Pacheco lives in Raton, was a student in Dawson High School's final graduating class before the town's iconic coal mines shut down for good in 1950.

The Pacheco family, along with dozens of other families from Colfax County and throughout the country came together Sunday (Aug. 31) for the annual Dawson Association Reunion. Families of the original Dawson residents have gathered together for their reunion every Labor Day weekend for over 60 years. This year, the Dawson Reunion Association hosted a picnic on the original town site located 10 miles back along a dirt road off U.S. Route 64 between Cimarron and Raton. The association received special permission to use the original town site from the property's current owners.

The town of Dawson was named for two brothers, J.B. and L.S. Dawson who settled along the Vermejo River in 1867 within the Maxwell Land Grant. The town began to develop after the Phelps Dodge Corp. bought the property in 1906. Phelps Dodge closed the mines in May 1950 and then leveled the town site, which is normally fenced off to the public. Most of the town site property is today leased out for cattle grazing.

The people buried in the old Dawson cemetery left behind the legacy of a once thriving multicultural community of people from all parts of the world in pursuit of one common dream: to make a living off the booming coal mining industry of the Old West.

This is the first year that Gloria Chavez-Sampson of Las Vegas, N.M attended the reunion. Her grandfather, Joe Chavez, worked for the railroad that once serviced Dawson. Gloria was joined by her husband, Raton native Sam Sampson.

“I loved looking at all the names of the people who came here for the mines, and who also died here because of them,” Gloria said.

Raton resident Ben Palomino’s father migrated from Mexico to Dawson. As a child, Ben remembers “walking a lot,” to and from his home, then across the Vermejo River, and uphill to the high school. Every day, Ben would walk home for lunch, back to school, and again back home to change into his football uniform to play.

“They never closed the school for snow,” Ben said.

Felix Ortiz’s father and grandfather both worked in Dawson’s mines. Felix’s father lived in a company owned boarding house.

“It so happened that my mom was a maid in the boarding house,” the Colorado Springs resident said.

His parents got married when Felix’s mother was 16.

Kingman, Arizona resident John Bizyak, one of the last children born in Dawson’s hospital, said the reunions provide a special opportunity to rekindle old relationships.

“You have this sense of community of people that still come back and gather and reminisce,” he said.

**Source: Sangre de Cristo Chronicle; September 3, 2014**