What's being said about

The Telluride Blanket

"The Telluride Blanket is a national treasure." Carl Patterson, Chief Conservator, Denver Art Museum.

"No other complete specimen exists. There are only two other patterned prehistoric blankets that match this when it comes to its undamaged state." Kate Peck Kent, textile expert.

"The concept of reverse archaeology — rediscovery of a museum artifact's original provenience and culture — is no better exemplified than through the Telluride Blanket." Fred Blackburn, Winston Hurst.

"Stewards of the Blanket"
is a group of individuals dedicated to continuing research and preservation of the Telluride Blanket. For information on supporting these efforts, please contact:

Telluride
Historical
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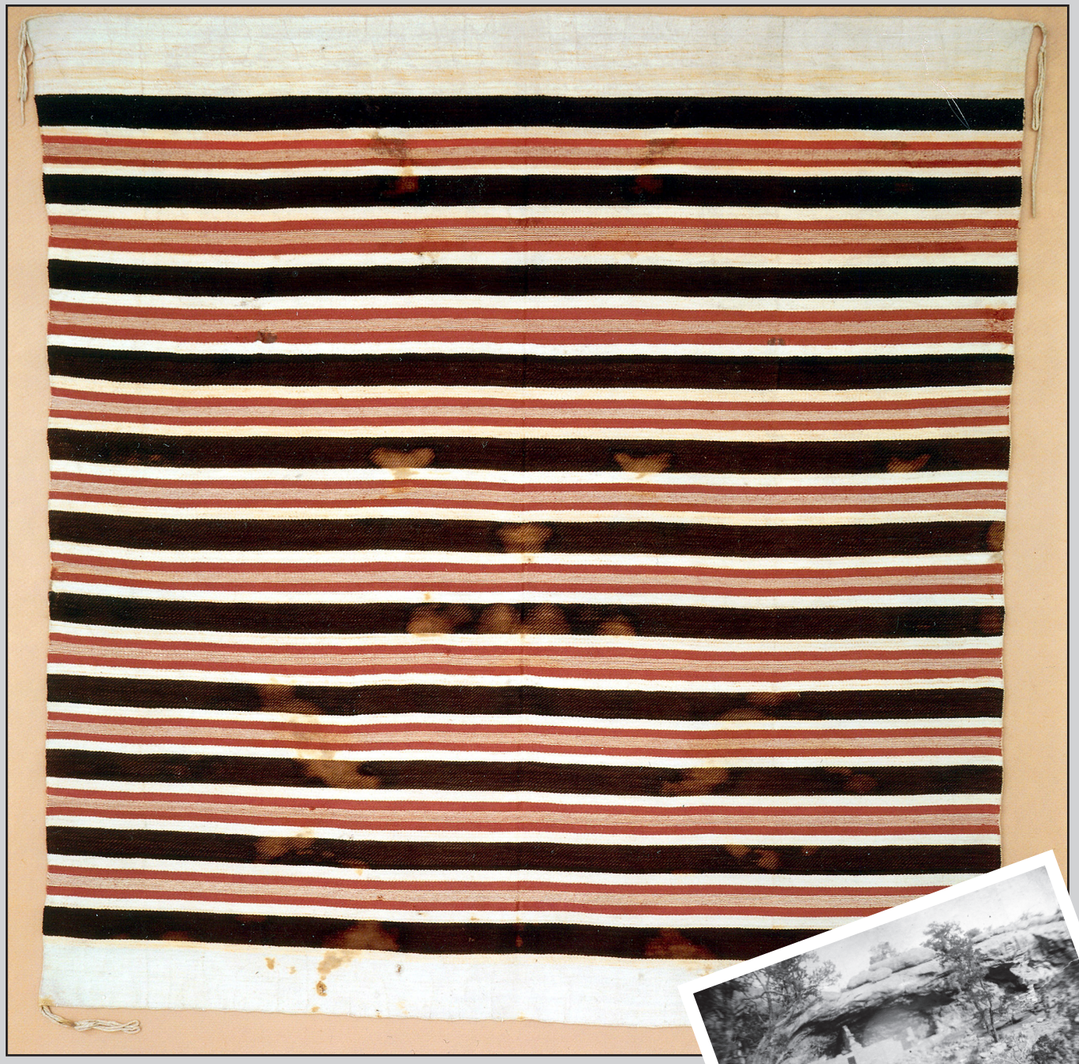
Discover our colorful past

Unraveling the Mysteries of

The Telluride Blanket



Unraveling the Mysteries of

The Telluride Blanket

Compiled and Written for

The Telluride Blanket Project

By Beth and Bill Sagstetter

By Elizabeth M. Sagstetter and William E. Sagstetter

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Courtesy of The Telluride Historical Museum
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The Century Magazine, Vol. XXV, No.47,
February 1883. Sagstetter collection.

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Those historically responsible for finding and original ownership:
Melvin R. Turner
Albert "Ed" Turner
Antoinette Wheeler
Eino Pekkarine

The Telluride Historical Museum Staff past and present with particular mention of:
Andrea Benda
Lauren Bloemsma
Sharon Clark
Keith LaQuey
Eileen McGinley
Shannon Prewitt
Arlene Reid

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Joe Pachak for the Archaeological Site and Historic signature documentation

Editors:
Lee Bennett
Fred Blackburn
Lauren Bloemsma
Winston Hurst

Zuni man spinning, 1883

Bill Sagstetter Photograph

The cave they discovered that day in 1896.

This document contains many individual stories – threads, really – relating to the Telluride Blanket. For the first time in a hundred years, these threads have been woven together into this document and are being presented to the public. There have been many instances where these threads could have been broken — near misses when the stories might have been lost for all time. Our knowledge of this "national treasure" and its history would have been left frayed and full of holes. But for the steady, guiding hands of Fred Blackburn and Winston Hurst who have labored over the mysteries of the Telluride Blanket for decades now, the story that we present here might never have been known. We applaud their vision and their unflagging efforts.

But the story of the Telluride Blanket is not complete — it is not yet a whole cloth. There is still much to be done.

The Discovery

It was 1896 and Mel Turner and his nephew, Ed, were riding the range looking for stray cattle. High on a mesa something caught their eyes and they stopped to investigate, as they often did. Scrambling up several sandstone ledges, they kept ascending up and up, until finally a large alcove cave yawned before them. They realized upon entering the sandstone alcove that it had seen much use since ancient times: The ceiling was blackened from countless fires.

In a Telluride, Colorado, *Daily Journal* article dated August 14, 1896, Ed described the cave as being forty feet long and twenty feet wide with a roof of ten feet or more in height. In the fireplace they spotted "A white fleecy substance protruding from the fine ashes. It was pulled out and was found to resemble a mass of woolen[sic] strings. It had been used as a stopper to a large earthen vessel perfect in condition and of native workmanship. Scraping aside the ashes, the vessel was lifted out and its contents deposited on the floor of the cavern." The olla — an ancient water jug — contained a magnificent blanket such as they had never seen before: It was white with red and brown and black stripes and tassels at the four corners. It measured about 57 inches by 59 inches.

The blanket had been carefully folded before being put in the olla, and as they unfolded it, they could see between the folds "a bone awl and a string of beads 16 feet long, containing about 7000 beads. The beads were … very small, black and red, brittle as glass and shiny as ebony."

In the cave they also found "corn husks, stalks, a few beans, pottery …. Sandals were found … A basket was also found."

As they continued to explore the area, they discovered two other ruins, cliff dwellings built in a generic Pueblo III (A.D. 1150-1300) style, with variably dressed, blocky stones laid in irregular courses with adobe mud as the mortar.

It is important to note that in 1896 it was not illegal to dig in the ruins. The first Antiquities Act did not pass until 1906. At that point it was not known how ancient the ruins were that peppered the American Southwest. For all people like Mel knew, the ruins might have been fairly recent, or as many at the time believed, relics of the Aztecs.

The Blanket

The blanket Mel and his nephew Ed found that day in 1896 was probably an exceptionally nice example of a "wearing blanket." A wearing blanket was handy to have around: Of course you could wear it wrapped around yourself when it was cold, and at night you slept in it. If you had a heavy load, the load could be packed in the blanket and it could be used to haul the load. It could be spread out on the ground for sitting. A baby could be wrapped in it and the ends of the blanket brought around you and tied, leaving your hands free to do another job. At times the dead might be buried in such a blanket. It was certainly true; a wearing blanket was a handy thing to have around. When the Spanish arrived in the northern southwest in A.D. 1540, the style had changed.The Hopi people at that time preferred blankets that were white with blue and black stripes.

Kate Peck Kent

The blanket now known as the "Telluride Blanket" was woven of cotton on a loom with what is called a twill weave, according to textile expert Kate Peck Kent. Twill is the weave used

From Frank Cushing's "My Adventures in Zuni." The Century Magazine, *Vol. XXV, No. 4, February 1883. Sagstetter Collection.*

to create blue jeans today. Twill is a sophisticated and difficult weave to master, so it is assumed the blanket was woven by an expert weaver, a person who really knew what he was doing. Kate Peck Kent in her evaluation of the blanket for the museum notes: **"***No other complete specimen exists. There are only two other patterned prehistoric blankets that match this when it comes to its undamaged state."*

The blanket is thought by textile expert Laurie Webster to be a superb example of Pueblo III workmanship and design. And that it would date from 1200 to 1300 A.D.

Winston Hurst states the area where the blanket was found is too high and northerly for successful cotton production, which requires warmer growing conditions than this area can provide. This means that the blanket, or at least the cotton from which it was woven, must have come from the lower elevation areas of the lower San Juan River, Glen Canyon or someplace farther south.

In the book *Sun Chief*: The autobiography of a Hopi Indian, Don Talayesva related when he was a child he loved hanging out in his father's kiva. The men would be busy weaving, which is traditionally the domain of men in Puebloan cultures. As their fingers worked they told their ancient stories and young Don was enthralled. As a matter of fact, archaeologists often find loom anchors in the floors of ancient kivas. Perhaps the Telluride Blanket was created in such a way, by the ancient Puebloan men with their ancient stories on their lips.

Mel Turner's Story

Melvin R. Turner was born in Maine in 1851, according to Utah historian and researcher Lee Bennett. The census also reports that Mel's father was also born in Maine, and his mother in Massachusetts.

Mel may have settled in southeast Utah as early as 1880. At first he actually lived in a cave. Lee Bennett thinks he might have moved from his cave about 1886.

His ranch was so remote that the Territory of Utah sent a troop of cavalry men to help Turner when he was having problems with some "renegade Utes" who had eluded confinement on the reservation. Cavalry Captain Gibbs described the trail to Mel's ranch as "fearful" and "beyond white men" or their trails.

Ed Turner was Mel's nephew and frequently worked for his uncle. At one time he was actually living in a tent, according to Lee Bennett.

So who was Mel the man? An article in the *Daily Journal*, San Miguel County, July 12, 1901, described Mel Turner as a "model of industry, thrift and integrity, honored and respected by all who know him." He was also probably a curious man; our records show that Mel was a frequent visitor to numerous other cliff ruins within many miles of his ranch. His contemporaries described him as a "whole-souled person". He was as strong as a draft horse and was described as easily carrying two hundred pounds of supplies over the bridge at Dolores, Colorado.

In July of 1901 Mel married Maggie Dresser, a widow and sister to Mrs. Charles F. Painter. The Painter family owned the Telluride Newspaper, which is probably why he was featured so often in newspaper reports. Later Mel and Maggie had a son, Willard.

The summer of 1902, Mel led his new in-laws, the Charles Painter family of Telluride, on an excursion to visit the place where he had found the ancient blanket in 1896. They explored the

On the left is Mel Turner, On the right is Ed Turner. Courtesy of the Turner Estate. Photographer unknown. Undated.

region and shot many photographs on their Kodak camera. Later, recounting the trip in a newspaper article, they stated that some of the resulting photographs were "quite good."

While on this trip, they all stayed at Mel's cabin. They called it a "good cabin." Remnants of this cabin survive today. Visible today are the log remains of a two-room cabin. The most recent room was constructed with horizontal logs, and was more than likely used as a living room/ bedroom. The logs were likely freighted for some distance, since none of the trees in the immediate area are that large in size. The earliest room of the cabin is of vertical logs and was later used as the kitchen. One end of the original room is graced by a stone fireplace; there is no sign of an iron stove as one would expect to see at a "good cabin." Separating this cabin from a more primitive cowboy line shack is a glass window and a root cellar, which is collapsing because of the sandy soils.

The Painter family also reported "cool water from a nearby spring." And indeed, a deeply-worn and stone cribbed path leads from the house to a small, hidden sandstone alcove with a spring seep in it, complete with a carved basin. The ancient Puebloans knew about this spring because there are prehistoric handprints surrounding it.

Lee Bennett found that Mel sustained serious head injuries from a terrible horse accident in 1908. The *Daily Journal* of Telluride in January 21, 1908, reported he was recovering nicely, that he could sleep naturally now, "without the use of opiates," and that he could sit up some each day.

That same year Mel bought the Huff ranch in Paradox, Colorado, reputed to be one of the finest ranches in the valley. Here he lived with his wife and son. Soon after it is reported he started a grocery store. It appears Mel's life changed after his head injury. We suspect this could be a direct result of the horse accident.

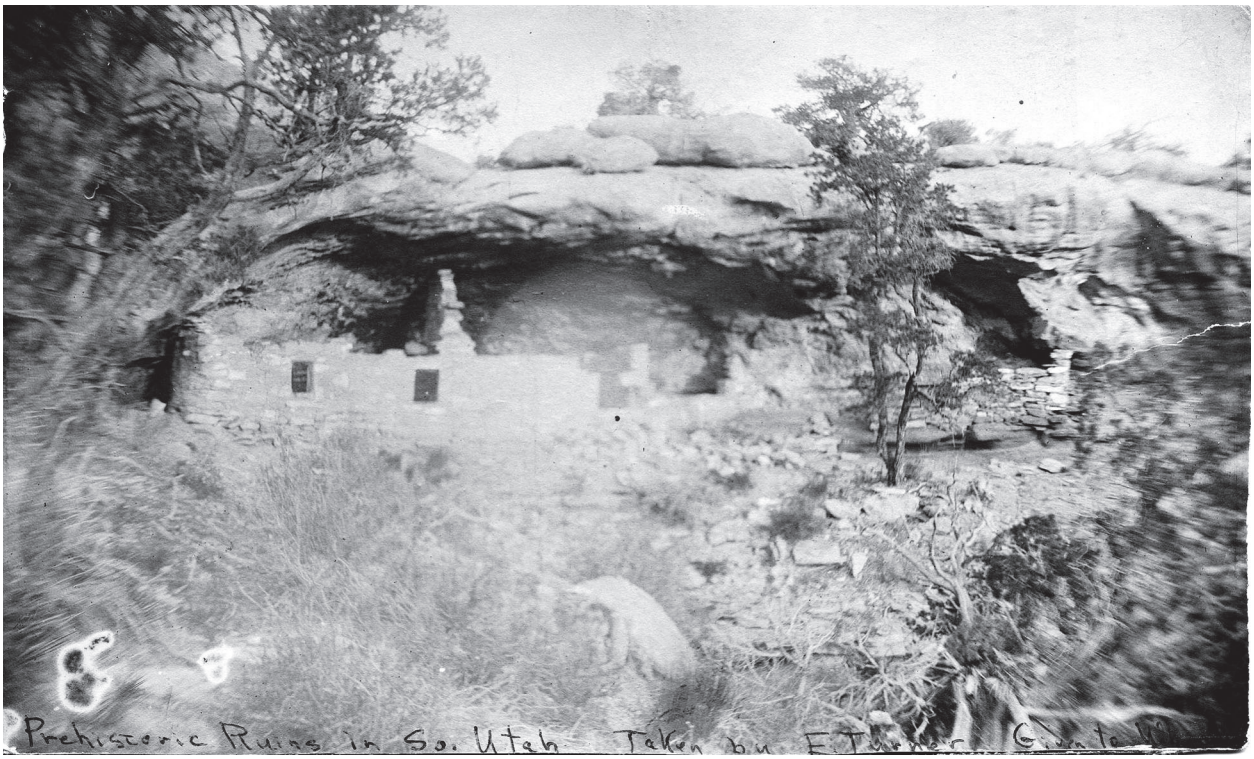
Then in August 24, 1932, the Telluride Newspaper ran this headline: "Paradox Old Timer Taken to Montrose."

Mel Turner was seventy-nine years old and had been living alone for at least a decade on his ranch in Paradox, Colorado. Because of strange behavior a guard had been hired to keep an eye on him. But he had managed to elude the guard and showed up at the Paradox general store demanding a rope with which to hang himself. The frightened customers and store owner managed to lock the doors, locking themselves inside and Mel outside. The sheriff was dispatched. The under-sheriff drove the old man to the hospital in Montrose for treatment. On the way there Mel commented, "When I came here there were nothing but Indians."

Lee Bennett discovered the obituary documenting Mel Turner's death on September 8, 1932, in Pueblo, Colorado. At seventy-nine Mel was a powerful enough man to scare people, and yet within fifteen days he was dead.

The Wheeler Story

Sometime after 1896 W. E. Wheeler came into possession of the blanket and a blurry black and white photograph of a cliff dwelling. At the bottom of the photograph someone had written: "Prehistoric Ruins in So. Utah Taken by E. Turner Given to W.E. Wheeler." Fortunately, the photograph would remain with the blanket through the decades that followed.



The old photograph taken by Ed Turner. Courtesy of The Telluride Historical Museum.

The Wheelers were known to possess other Native American artifacts; perhaps the Wheelers had begun a collection. A common practice in this day was to fashion "Indian Rooms" in many households throughout the West. The Wheelers could certainly afford this type of extravagance. Mr. Wheeler was a Telluride, Colorado, banker. He might also have used the blanket as security on a loan to Ed. Or perhaps Ed simply gave the blanket to him.

> Research by Fred Blackburn uncovered that years later, near the time of the construction of the first museum in Mesa Verde National Park, Jessie Nusbaum, the first superintendent to live within the park, must have learned of W.E. Wheeler and the famous Telluride Blanket. Nusbaum, who actively pursued interesting artifacts for the new museum, received a handshake or verbal promise from banker Wheeler that at some point the blanket and its accompanying artifacts would become the property of Mesa Verde National Park. No documents were ever drawn and no legal claim to the blanket was ever established.

Mr. Wheeler's bank closed in the crash of 1929, as did so many other banks with the onset of the Great Depression. When Mr. Wheeler died in 1935, the blanket remained in the possession of his wife, Antoinette. Wheeler left his wife a considerable estate.

Alta Cassietto, Telluride historian, postmistress and newspaper columnist, in her oral history narrative of her recollections of early Telluride, described Antoinette as short and heavy in her later years, with a penchant for wearing hats and dark clothing.

Upon her husband's death, Antoinette Wheeler decided to leave Telluride. She filled barrels, crates and suitcases with possessions not necessary or too delicate for her trip, and took them to Eino

Antoinette Wheeler in her younger days. Courtesy of The Telluride Historical Museum.

Pekkarine's store for storage. She traveled abroad for several years and finally settled down at the elegant Brown Palace Hotel in Denver, Colorado. Later she wrote Eino Pekkarine and told him he could keep the boxes and crates etc., since she had never paid any storage for them. Antoinette, now aging, had little if any interest in any of the contents of the trunks. Eino accepted the boxes and their contents in payment for the years of storage.

The story of the Telluride Blanket could very well have ended right here had Mrs. Wheeler sold the blanket to a private collector or if the photograph had been separated from the blanket. Instead, there were more twists and turns – like warps and wefts of weaving – in store for the blanket.

Eino Pekkarine's Story

Eino Pekkarine was born in 1911 at Pekkarine's dry goods store, which furnished goods to the populace of the town of Telluride. He obtained a degree in Liberal Arts and in pharmacy. He had wanted to go to medical school because he thought he might have been able to help his brother, David, who died tragically at the age of twelve in 1922. Eino was rejected for medical school.

Harriette Billings moved to Telluride in 1970 and befriended Eino. She related her story in a narrative recorded in 2005. The store was no longer operating in 1970 when Harriette, known as "Hattie," arrived, but Eino was living on the premises. His aunt Aino Solenhimo also lived there with him in the store until she died in 1965. According to Hattie, the rooms of the old dry goods store were crammed floor to ceiling with treasures.

Hattie described Eino as a small, cherub-like man who played the piano and was often referred to as the "town intellectual." His moods went from jolly to crying. Hattie would spend several hours a day visiting and helping Eino. Sometimes they ate together. She had a little office in the store where she tried to help him with the collection of outstanding accounts receivables; some bills were twenty-five years old. She also offered to go through all of his possessions and have a garage sale.

One day she asked, "What is in that room?" Eino answered, "Oh, that is Mrs. Wheeler's stuff and she gave her belongings to me." Eino said he never looked in the boxes and suitcases and trunks. He said he did not know what was in them and had no interest in them and he gave Hattie permission to go through the Wheeler collection.

Like the other rooms, the Wheeler room was chock-full of crates, barrels and trunks. With difficulty she opened barrels which were nailed shut. In them she discovered rare china and crystal. Over time she went through all the containers but for one – a tan suitcase. She described it as a "suitcase" and insisted it was *not* a trunk. This suitcase was locked and no known key existed for the lock. She never saw the contents of this case. Later, she surmised this was where the blanket must have been, since it was the *only* thing that belonged to the Wheelers that she could not open.

On December 19th, 1973, Eino had been drinking and as he was walking home he stepped out from between two cars. The car driven by Fred Libby accidentally hit him and Eino was taken to St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Junction with injuries to his arm and shoulder.The injuries were not life threatening, however, he developed a blood clot and died on December 22nd, 1973. He left his store building to the Telluride School District and his belongings to the Telluride Museum.

The tan suitcase was turned over to the museum.

The Telluride Museum's Story

The San Miguel County Historical Museum, later the Telluride Historical Museum, was opened in 1966 by a group of enthusiastic volunteers. When they received Eino's bequest in 1974, they referred to Wheeler's collection as being in a trunk or trunks, and so has everyone else from this point forward. Hattie, however, insists it was a suitcase, not a trunk. The museum apparently recognized that the "trunk" might be valuable, as they did not simply break the lock. The *Telluride Times* of December 5, 1974, "Eino's Trunk was no Pandora's Box" states:

> When the Telluride Historical Society [sic]received two trunks from the estate of Eino Pekkarine last winter, they had no idea what the cases contained. And there were no keys to the trunk. So until the contents were opened this fall, the contents remained a mystery….Locksmiths were called from as far away a Texas to work the old locks ….It wasn't until this fall that the trunks were opened. Inside the container was piece after piece of fine, hand-cut lead crystal, an entire set of silver table ware, and an Indian blanket with a ball of gnarled cotton, arrow heads and jewelry. There was a photograph of the place the blanket was found and by putting two and two together the society realized this was the same blanket discovered in 1896 in a Utah ruin by Telluride resident Ed Turner…. The blanket in

the Telluride Museum is in perfect condition. Although the skein of yarn was found in the Wheeler trunk, the string of beads was not.

No one has been found who actually witnessed the trunks being opened on that day. It appears that the pot, awl and string of beads were not with the blanket in 1974.

Arlene Reid's Story

Arlene Reid was the first and long-time Curator of the Telluride Museum. People described her as very likable and agree there would not have been a museum without her efforts. Fred Blackburn in his narrative recorded in 2006 described Homer Reid, Arlene's husband, as a gunsmith and talented photographer. He was responsible for obtaining many of the early miner photographs for the museum. Fred described the early museum as a mom-and-pop operation. He credited Arlene for accomplishing a lot with very few resources.

In the early 1970s Fred worked with Arlene as a volunteer at the museum. She trusted Fred and gave him access to the records. He learned about the exhibits and spent a lot of time researching in the museum files. During this time there was no talk of the blanket. Fred stated that he thought Arlene might have kept the blanket under her bed to protect it from theft. She would never have tried to keep it for herself.

Sharon Clark, Collections Manager at the Telluride Museum, related in an article in the *Denver Post*, August 8, 1991, "Anasazi Weaving Endures 800 Years:"

> Arlene Reid either did not know or let on that the artifact was so rare. It sat for years, unlabeled next to a couple of Navajo rugs. When a University of Denver anthropologist [Kate Peck Kent, 1977] wanted to include the weaving in a book about Anasazi artifacts [*Prehistoric Textiles of the Southwest*] Reid gave permission – but only if the photograph was labeled "private collection." 'She was shrewd,' added Clark, who believed Reid kept the whereabouts secret so the small-town museum would not be victimized by art thieves.
>
> It is also believed that Arlene kept the prehistoric blanket with the historic blanket to protect it from art thieves – only an expert could tell the different blankets apart.

In the mid 1980s the museum fell on hard times and the building and the collection started to deteriorate. The blanket was at risk. In 1986 Arlene Reid retired from the museum, and she passed away in 1988.

The Blanket is at Risk

The small town Telluride Historical Museum suddenly found itself with a world-class art object – one that was worthy of display at any of the large, world-famous museums and little money for its special care. Their building was falling into disrepair and they had virtually no security in place to protect it from art thieves. All they had were a group of dedicated, enthusiastic volunteers, none of whom had any special training in the curation or conservation of delicate antique textiles.

In the spring of 1988 Keith LaQuey became Curator of the museum. In his narrative dated 2005, Keith LaQuey related he had moved to Telluride in the early 1970s. He is a western historian and a blacksmith. He received a Masters Degree in Victorian Literature from the University of Denver and had some training in museum curation.

During his first walk-through with the Board of Directors, Keith found everything in a degraded condition. Textiles and photographs were nailed to the wall. Coal dust was everywhere from the furnace. He was shown an old jewelry case, full of dust, with several Indian blankets and rugs all wadded and mixed together. There was no security at this time. Worst of all, he noted that the back wall of the museum against the mountain – where the blanket was stored – was starting to crumble. Keith said in 2005, "No one at the time knew which one of the blankets was the Telluride Blanket. This really concerned me."

The museum had a very long way to go to reinvent themselves into a place worthy of a world-class art object. But help was on the way.

Victoria Atkins' and Fred Blackburn's Story

Fred Blackburn was born in Telluride in the same hospital building that serves as the Telluride Historical Museum today. For him, the blanket project is not just an interesting aside, it is a *passion*.

Fred's wife, Victoria Atkins, archaeologist for the Anasazi Heritage Center in Dolores, Colorado, recounted:

"We were visiting Fred's Aunt Katherine Reece and walked up to the museum unannounced. We saw the blanket and knew it was cotton. The photo was right with it. We introduced ourselves to LaQuey and suggested he contact the Anasazi Heritage Center for curatorial and conservation advice." Fred Blackburn added: "It was also Victoria who suggested that LaQuey contact Carl Patterson [Chief Conservator, Denver Art Museum] as she had just been working with him on other textiles. Keith LaQuey in his narrative of 2005 remembered Fred saying, "Get it out of here!"

The blanket was removed for safe keeping. LaQuey and others thought that the blanket might be worth a lot of money. He thought they could sell the blanket to raise money and save the museum and its collections. Discussions continued on and off for years regarading the dispositioin of the blanket. Some felt that the blanket had no relation to Telluride history and should be sold.

Fred Blackburn strongly disagreed. He felt that the archaeology belonged to southeast Utah but that the blanket's preservation and history were definitely a Telluride story. Fred and Victoria began to follow the blanket year after year to ensure nothing happened to it, to seek proper curation and try to keep it in Telluride.

The new research seems to prove that Fred was right.

The Blanket is Secured

In 1988 Sharon Clark wrapped the blanket in acid-free paper and hid it in her house for another year before sending it to the Anasazi Heritage Center in Dolores, Colorado, for safekeeping. It stayed there until 1991 when it came home to a custom-built case of glass and polished wood, with a sign on the front reading, "Warning: Do Not touch, alarm will sound." Local developer Dirk DePagter generously donated his time and materials for the case. It included a motion detector. The exhibit case was used for several years before the museum closed for restoration.

The Search for the Site Location Begins, 1991

Sharon Clark is quoted from the *Denver Post*, August 8, 1991, article: "In a wall next to the display case is a fuzzy, black and white photo of the cliff dwelling …. The site has been lost, and a local group [Fred Blackburn and Winston Hurst] is mounting a search for it. All that is known is that it lies somewhere near southern Utah's Blue Mountains … Finding the dwelling would complete the weaving's story. The artifact is representative of a culture that is long gone … It is a survivor."

In 1994 archaeologist Winston Hurst wrote what remains as one of the most definitive pieces on the subject containing all that was known about the blanket and its discovery at that time. His article, including a reproduction of the Turner ruin photograph, appeared in *The Blue Mountain Shadows:* The Magazine of San Juan County History (vol. 13/1994, "The Mysterious Telluride Blanket.") At the time, Blackburn, Hurst and others had just completed a successful Reverse Archaeological project on the Wetherill Grand Gulch Project. Fred Blackburn coined the term *Reverse Archaeology* and together Hurst and Blackburn developed its principles. The article explains:

> "Reverse Archaeology" is a process by which artifacts in museums or private collections are reconnected to their original discovery sites, based on various clues from old letters, field records, photographs, rock inscriptions and so forth. Since tens of thousands of the best preserved and most informative artifacts have been removed from southeast Utah without benefit of proper archaeological documentation, reverse archaeology is extremely important to our understanding of our archaeological record…The picture of the blanket and the photograph of the ruin reproduced in the article are the focus of one of our most persistent and interesting problems in reverse archaeology. We publish this article in the hope that one of our readers will be able to provide further information to aid in the identification of the site in which the artifact was found…The photograph shows a ruin constructed in the "Mesa Verde" architectural style, which is typical of Pueblo III period (A.D. 1150-1300) Anasazi structures north of the San Juan River…Those of us who are interested in San Juan County archaeology and history, as well as the staff of the Telluride Museum, would like very much to identify the site from whence the blanket was taken. We urge readers of this article to study the photograph and help us locate the ruin.

1994-2004: Museum is Rebuilt

Lauren Bloemsma, Executive director of the Telluride Historic Museum, tells us the museum's story:

> The Hadley Hospital building, now the Telluride Historical Museum, is a town treasure, and community support of the Museum is strong. When the museum unexpectedly closed in 1995 due to the collapse of an exterior masonry wall, Telluride voters approved a bond of $1,140,000 which covered eighty percent of the cost of a complete restoration.
>
> The museum reopened to the public late in 2000. The Board of Directors, staff, and exhibit consultants including Fred Blackburn, used the five year closure to envision a series of new permanent exhibits using the Museum's collection of diverse artifacts, photographs, scrapbooks and other items to interpret Telluride's regional history. Beyond displaying artifacts, exhibits bring the many stories of Telluride alive and create an appreciation of how the people, events and history of Telluride reflect the innovations, tenacity and enduring human spirit in us all. Efforts to create an appropriate environment for the Telluride Blanket began shortly after the third phase of the permanent exhibits was installed in September, 2005.
>
> The museum strives to serve as a cultural and historical anchor for the town, providing a sense of community in the face of the town's unprecedented growth and change.

2004: The Location is Found

The following is from the Bill Sagstetter narrative written in 2004:

> In June 2004, Beth and I had just paid for several books at Edge of the Cedars Museum in Blanding, Utah. On the way out the door I picked up a copy of *The Blue Mountain Shadows* Magazine and saw an article by Winston Hurst, (whom we had known since 1987) but since we had just paid for a stack of books, I set it down and walked out. But something made me go back in and buy the magazine.
>
> Driving to Bluff, Beth was reading aloud Winston's article on "The Mysterious Telluride Blanket." I glanced over to see a photograph that almost caused me to lose control of the vehicle. Pictured here was the very first cliff dwelling I had ever found! I was immediately transported back to 1968. I remember looking for cliff dwellings using William H. Jackson's Hayden Survey Report. I was very discouraged because for several years I could not find a single cliff dwelling. Being young and inexperienced and being in a very remote area, I got lost reading the maps incorrectly. Running low on gas and water, I suddenly thought I glimpsed a window about a quarter of a mile away. This had actually happened frequently, and had never panned out. But still I hiked to it, losing it in the trees on the way, and then spotting it again. Then finally, there it was – my first cliff dwelling! I couldn't fathom at the time that 36 years later this cliff dwelling would be so important. I photographed it extensively. As it turns out, this was one of the most incredible and humbling experiences of my life.

Bill Sagstetter Photograph

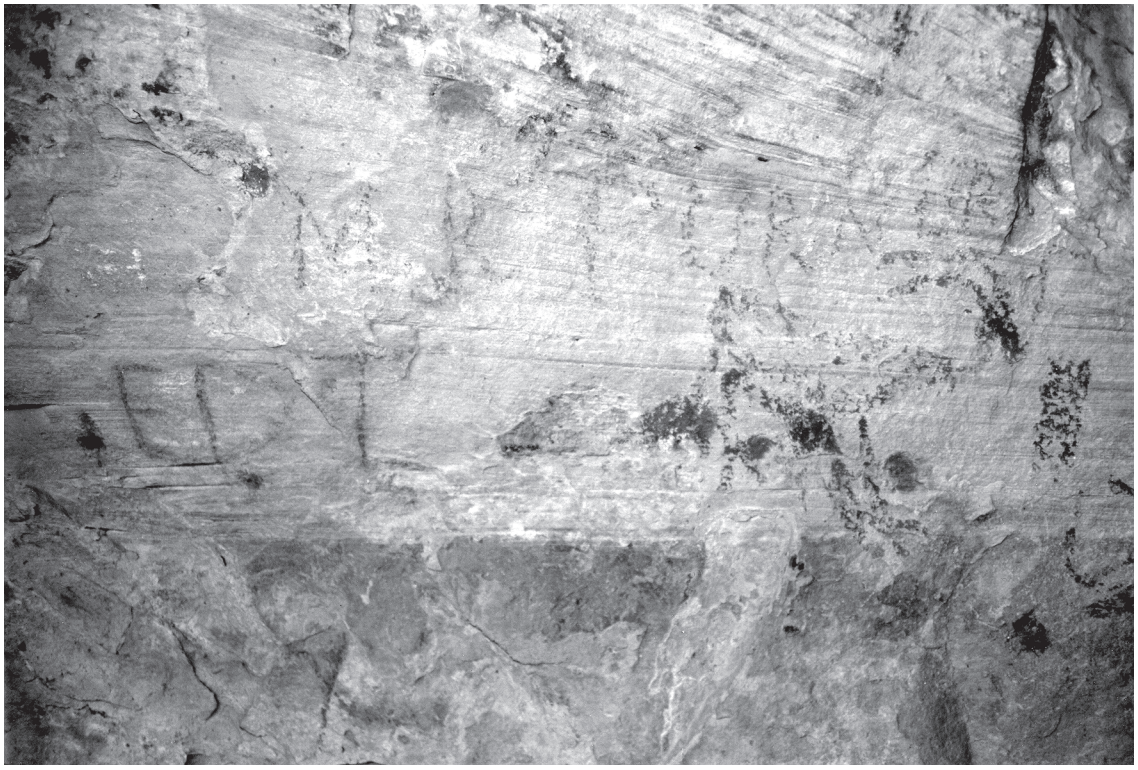
The very first cliff dwelling Bill Sagstetter ever discovered, in 1968. Pictured here is his friend Jim Hoskins.

On the way home we discovered the magazine was ten years old (1994). Disappointed, we did not call Winston because we thought that the BLM, a rancher, or backcountry traveler would have found the site in this time. We did go through all our old pictures and found the original photographs from 1968. Several weeks later I called Winston to see who did find the site. He answered that the site had not been identified. I emailed him my photographs from 1968, so Winston could compare them to the 1895 photograph. He emailed me back: "This is indeed a perfect match. I'm pretty stoked about getting out there with you in September. I've notified Fred…"

September 2004: Trip to the Site

On Friday, September 17, Winston Hurst, Fred Blackburn, Joe Pachak, Terry and Susan Tice, John and Susie Mansfield, Bill and Beth Sagstetter all left from Winston's house in Blanding, Utah. After many tedious hours of riding over rough, confusing dusty roads, Bill Sagstetter pointed out the cliff dwelling, still hidden from view. Winston and Joe began to map and survey the ruin. Fred worked on finding and recording inscriptions. Bill shot photographs for the report.

It was then that Winston discovered a problem in the research. It had been stated in the early newspaper articles that the pot containing the blanket and other artifacts had been buried about five feet deep, under a firepit. Winston pointed out that this cliff dwelling rested on bedrock, with minimal fill. The pot could not have been buried here, there was nothing to bury it in! Also the site



Bill Sagstetter Photograph

Fred Blackburn confirmed the inscription was authentic.

was too moist. Nothing could have survived for long under these conditions. He strongly felt that the blanket and pot had to have come from somewhere else.

Terry Tice and John Mansfield had been studying the 1896 newspaper article. The article described a cave about 300 feet above the cliff dwelling ruin. John and Terry scrambled up the cliff. About an hour later they returned asking if a cave with an inscription dated 1896 and if the names of Ed T and M R Turner would be of interest? Fred said: "Are you jerking my chain?"

They replied: "No! The signatures are there and written in red!"

After studying the inscription, Fred verified its authenticity. Now we had confirmation that we were indeed on the trail of the Telluride Blanket's resting place for so many centuries. When Winston and the rest of us retraced Tice's and Mansfield's steps, we found a dark alcove with deep dust and dirt on the floor. Winston's instincts had been correct, this was a much more likely resting place for the pot.

The next day Jim Carter, BLM archaeologist joined us at the cave. Winston, Joe and Jim proceeded to map and survey the site. Fred was kept very busy documenting all of the inscriptions. Bill shot photographs and assisted as needed.

2004 October: Post-Trip Meeting

On October 28, 2004, at the Telluride Historical Museum the Telluride Blanket Project was formed. The participants were:

Fred Blackburn – Historical researcher and Project Leader

Winston Hurst – Archaeologist and Project Leader

Andrea Benda – former Executive Director, Telluride Historical Museum, now retired, has been replaced by Lauren Bloemsma – current Executive Director, Telluride Historical Museum.

Richard Betts – Board of Directors, Emeritus, Telluride Historical Museum

Steve Larivee – President, Board of Directors, Telluride Historical Museum, retired.

Bill and Beth Sagstetter – Photographer and author and Project Coordinators

John and Susie Mansfield – Located the cave

Terry and Susan Tice – Located the cave

James Carter – BLM Monticello Field Office Archaeologist

Matt Redd – Rpresentative of the Dug-Out Ranch

Shannon Prewitt – Former Assistant to the Director, Telluride Historical Museum

The group agreed upon the following items in order of importance:

1. The site location would not be disclosed to protect its scientific value. There is still much that may be learned from a proper excavation.

2. Apparently the photograph of the blanket that appeared in Kate Peck Kent's book had been lost. There were no other known professional photographs at this time. If something happened to the blanket, we would not have phototgraphs of it, nor was it insurable without the photos. The Sagstetters agreed to have professional photographs made as soon as possible.

3. One reason that a new cabinet for the blanket had not been built, is that the museum received several quotes in the $30,000–45,000 range. The museum could not afford this expense. Bill Sagsettter agreed to work on this problem with the Telluride Historical Museum.

4. We did not know anything about Ed Turner and M. R. Turner. Some research on this had been done by Lee Bennett, archaeologist. All of us would work on the research.

5. Bill and Beth Sagstetter agreed to get digital narrative recordings of interviews from everyone alive involved with the blanket, both in and out-of-state.

6. Bill and Beth Sagstetter agreed to coordinate all of the research under the supervision of Winston and Fred, and deliver it in archival file boxes. They would produce at least two sets of files. One set for the Telluride Historical Museum in Telluride, Colorado, and the other for the Edge of the Cedars Museum in Blanding, Utah.

The high point of the day was when the museum staff brought out the blanket for the first time in years so we could view it. We noticed there were depressions showing exactly how the blanket had been folded so long ago. In addition, Fred noticed a depression showing where the beads might have been. Finally, we noticed a stain that had created a repeating pattern when it had been folded originally. Apparently the stain was still wet when the blanket was folded so long ago. The blanket was then removed to a secure place.

2005 December: The Blanket is Professionally Photographed

On December 9, 2005, Jonas Grushkin, Durango photographer, was paid by the Sagstetters to photograph the blanket. Jeanne Brako, Interim Director and Curator for the Center for Southwest Studies at Fort Lewis College, generously agreed to supervise the blanket photography at the Center. Steve Larivee, President of the Board of Directors for theTelluride Historical Museum, hand-delivered the blanket. Jeanne and her staff set aside the whole day to insure that the photographes were shot with conservation and scientific needs in mind. The result is full documentation of the blanket in 4x5, 2 1/4 and digital-format photographs. As a bonus, Jeanne Brako and Steve Larivee permitted a small sample of the stain to be retained for future testing.

Photographer Jonas Grushkin shoots photographs of the Telluride Blanket under the supervision of Jeanne Brako, left, textile expert, and her assistant, Laura Elliff, center.

Bill Sagstetter Photograph

Jeanne Brako, an expert in Native American textiles, has our grateful appreciation for her generous efforts.

2005 December: Blanket Showing and Lecture

We met the new Executive Director of the Telluride Historical Museum, Lauren Bloemsma. The museum is truly fortunate to have her as director. Through her leadership and enthusiasm she has kept the project alive and focused. Lauren arranged a one-time blanket showing and lecture for December 15th. Jeanne Brako loaned and delivered a temporary case for the blanket from the Center for Southwest Studies for that evening. Fred Blackburn and Bill Sagstetter gave a lecture on the blanket history including details of the field trip. The event raised about $60,000 for the museum and the blanket, including sponsorship of the Origins Room by Kent Erickson. The blanket was returned to its secure storage until the permanent cabinet could be made.

2006 April: The New Cabinet is Delivered

In September 2005, Carl Patterson, Chief Conservator for the Denver Art Museum, agreed to work with Bill Sagstetter to help Lauren Bloemsma, Executive Director of the Telluride Historical Museum, to design a cabinet for the blanket. Carl Patterson called the blanket "a national treasure."

Carl recommended we use the specifications he set up for the new Denver Art Museum. He introduced Bill to his cabinet maker, Steve Brown, of Denver Fine Cabinetry. Steve was swamped with all of the new cabinets for the Denver Art Museum, but he finally agreed to build the new one for the Telluride Historical Museum. Jeanne Brako, Curator and Director for the Center for Southwest Studies also agreed to work with all of us to assure the proper curation standards for the blanket.

Finally, Carl also asked Anthony Fortunato CPP/CSS, Director of Protective and Facility Services for the Denver Art Museum, to meet with Bill. Tony then assigned Alan Mindell, Security Technician, to help Lauren and the Telluride Historical Museum in any way needed, including any trips to Telluride.

The net result of everyone's efforts was that in April, 2006, the new blanket cabinet meeting Denver Art Museum and Telluride Historical Museum specifications was delivered to the Telluride Historical Museum. Thanks to everyone's efforts, the cost of the new cabinet was a fraction of the original bids for this special cabinet. It should be noted that the Denver Art Museum found time to work with all of us, despite the fact they were under the gun to finish the new Art Museum. We are very appreciative of their efforts.

Summer and Fall 2007: Additional Environmental Efforts

Lauren Bloemsma relates:

> In addition to the new exhibit case developed for the blanket, the mueum staff undertook a number of projects within the museum to ensure the proper care of the blanket.

Thanks to the Town of Telluride who owns the historic miners hospital building, an air conditioning system was installed in September, 2007, to ensure a more constant temperature within the building. The humidification system was overhauled and an additional first-floor unit added to the existing system. Light level controls and additional interior and exterior security with 24 hour monitoring have also been undertaken. Interior alterations include the installation of steel securitiy window frames and doors to secure the room where the blanket is displayed. These doors were designed using artwork found on a kiva in the Four Corners area, and the doors and windows were generously sponsored by Rudie and Andie Davison.

What Remains to be Done

Winston Hurst has recommended that the following tests be completed:

1. An AMS (Accelerator Mass Spectrometer) would yield a radiocarbon date for the blanket, that would help clarify its actual age.
2. An electron microprobe analysis of an ancient stain on the blanket might yield some interesting insights into its history.
3. Trace element analysis of the cotton, and of curated cotton samples from Glenn Canyon, Poncho House and maybe other places would be interesting. Winston informed us there is no evidence that cotton could be grown where the blanket was discovered, and more than likely it came from some other place. Trace elements captured in the cotton should reflect the soils in which it was grown and we would know where the cotton in the blanket came from.

Using the principles of Reverse Archaeology, we seek the following information:
Still missing is an original of copy of the August 14, 1896, *Daily Journal* article on Mel and Ed Turners' discovery. We have some tantalizing excerpts at this point, but not the article in its entirety.

Regarding the photographs shot by the Charles Painter family in 1902 with their Kodak camera, could these photographs still exist? If we could locate their descendants, and if they still have those original photographs, we might be able to piece more information together from those photographs.

A newspaper story mentions in passing that Mel's artifacts were sent to Salt Lake City for display. Then they were sent back East. It would be very helpful to know more about this event. Could it have been written up in the Salt Lake City newspaper at the time? Who did the artifacts eventually go to – a museum? A private collector? This information might help us determine the contents of his original finds, as well as their whereabouts today.

Puebloan people as well as many other weavers teach us that artifacts often have a "life" of their own. No better illustration of this belief can be found than through unraveling the story of the Telluride Blanket; it has taken on a spirit of its own. Many individuals have contributed to date to furthering the understanding and preservation of this most unique piece of cultural heritage. We wish to emphasize that the story is not finished, the weaving is not complete. That each of our roles is only a single knot in the telling of the story.

We need your help! New research and information continue to roll in, even as we finish this report. If you would like to be a part of this exciting project, please contact:

Stewards of the Blanket
Telluride Historical Museum
Post Office Box 1597
Telluride, CO 81435

Phone: 970-728-3344

www.telluridemuseum.org

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2005	May	Alta Casseitto (Deceased), Montrose, CO
2005	July	John Mansfield, Norwood, CO
2005	July	Terry Tice, Telluride, CO
2005	July	Keith LaQuey, Norwood, CO
2005	December	Jeanne Brako, Durango, CO
2006	August	Harriette Billings, Carbondale, CO
2007	December	Fred Blackburn (Requested to be last),Cortez,CO

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