

# COLORADO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES NOMINATION FORM

**SECTION I**

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**Name of Property**

Historic Name Driggs Mansion

Other Names Chateau Thimble Rock; The Stone House

**Address of Property**

[ ] address not for publication

Street Address 24505 State Highway 141

City Gateway vicinity County Mesa Zip 81522

**Present Owner of Property**

(for multiple ownership, list the names and addresses of each owner on one or more continuation sheets)

Name John Bratton, Gateway Construction

Address P.O. Box 369 Phone (970) 254-0242

City Gateway State Colorado Zip 81522

**Owner Consent for Nomination**

(attach signed consent from each owner of property - see attached form)

**Preparer of Nomination**

Name Kristen Ashbeck & Judy Prosser-Armstrong Date May 11, 2005

Organization Unaweeep/ Tabeguache Scenic Byway (c/o Jon Schler)

Address 222 S. 6<sup>th</sup> Street Phone (970) 248-7312

City Grand Junction State Colorado Zip 81501

**FOR OFFICIAL USE:**

Site Number 5ME.765

5/11/2005 Nomination Received

Senate # \_\_\_\_\_ House # \_\_\_\_\_

8/12/2005 Review Board Recommendation  
Listing

9/14/2005 CHS Board State Register

Approval  Denial

Approved  Denied

**Certification of Listing:** President, Colorado Historical Society

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES**

Property Name Driggs Mansion

**SECTION II**

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**Local Historic Designation**

Has the property received local historic designation?

no

yes ---  individually designated  designated as part of a historic district

Date designated \_\_\_\_\_

Designated by \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of municipality or county)

**Use of Property**

Historic Single Dwelling

Current Vacant

**Original Owner** Colonel Lawrence La Tourette Driggs

Source of Information Mesa County Assessor; Clerk & Recorder

\_\_\_\_\_

**Year of Construction** 1918

Source of Information Driggs Timeline, Museum of Western Colorado, August 2004

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect, Builder, Engineer, Artist or Designer** Grasso, Nunzio (master stone mason)

\_\_\_\_\_

Source of Information "The Driggs Mansion- Unawweep Canyon," paper by Tim Grett, 1997

**Locational Status**

Original location of structure(s)

Structure(s) moved to current location

Date of move \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION III**

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**Description and Alterations**

(describe the current and original appearance of the property and any alterations on one or more continuation sheets)

**COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES**

Property Name Driggs Mansion

**SECTION IV**

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**Significance of Property**

**Nomination Criteria**

- A** - property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to history
- B** - property is connected with persons significant in history
- C** - property has distinctive characteristics of a type, period, method of construction or artisan
- D** - property is of geographic importance
- E** - property contains the possibility of important discoveries related to prehistory or history

**Areas of Significance**

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Economics                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Education                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology – prehistoric          | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Law                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology – historic             | <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment/ Recreation                | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic Heritage                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Military             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Exploration/ Settlement                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Performing Arts      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications                     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Geography/ Community Identity | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics/ Government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Planning and Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Health/Medicine                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Science              |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Social History       |
|   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation       |

**Significance Statement**

(explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

**Bibliography**

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

**SECTION V**

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**Locational Information**

Lot(s) N/A Block N/A Addition N/A

USGS Topographic Quad Map Snyder Flats

**Verbal Boundary Description of Nominated Property**

(describe the boundaries of the nominated property on a continuation sheet)

**COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES**

Property Name Driggs Mansion

**SECTION VI**

**Photograph Log for Black and White Photographs**

(prepare a photograph log on one or more continuation sheets)

**SECTION VII**

**ADDITIONAL MATERIALS TO ACCOMPANY NOMINATION**

**Owner Consent Form**

**Black and White Photographs**

**Color Slides**

**Sketch Map(s)**

**Photocopy of USGS Map Section**

**Optional Materials**

**For Office Use Only**

Property Type:  building(s)  district  site  structure  object  area

Architectural Style/Engineering Type: No style

Period of Significance: 1946

Level of Significance:  Local  State  National

Acreage 4.0

P.M. 6th Township 15S Range 102W Section 1 Quarter Sections SE, SE, SE

UTM Reference: Zone 12 Easting 636946 Northing 4293645

Site Elevation: 6818 feet

Property Name Driggs Mansion

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## DESCRIPTION and ALTERATIONS

### Setting

The Driggs Mansion is on a 4-acre parcel of privately owned property along State Highway 141 in Unaweep Canyon in southwestern Mesa County. In 1991, State Highway 141 was designated as a segment of the Unaweep-Tabeguache National Scenic and Historic Byway by the Department of the Interior. The Driggs property is at mile marker 129.6 along the route, just west of the Unaweep Divide. The 4-acre parcel is the remnant of a 320-acre ranch originally homesteaded by Lawrence La Tourette Driggs. The Mansion property is surrounded by large acreages of ranch land, with a stunning backdrop of public lands to the southeast. There is a line of four tree clumps in the western corner of the property and a single tree near the foundation of the southeast corner of the back wing. The Mansion and its setting near the prominent Thimble Rock are familiar landmarks within the Canyon.

### Current Appearance

Today, the Driggs Mansion is more an archaeological site than a building. Due to the removal of the roof in the early 1940s and the taking away of stones in the 1950s, it is mostly rubble with a few stone walls remaining intact. The northwest-facing façade is the most intact, but only due to intervention about six years ago by the Scenic Byway Committee to shore up the arch over the alcove and one of the southwest-facing windows with steel supports. Evidence of most of the walls/foundations is fairly apparent and two concrete slab terraces are still intact although all that is left of the stone walls surrounding the patios are the foundations.

### Original Appearance

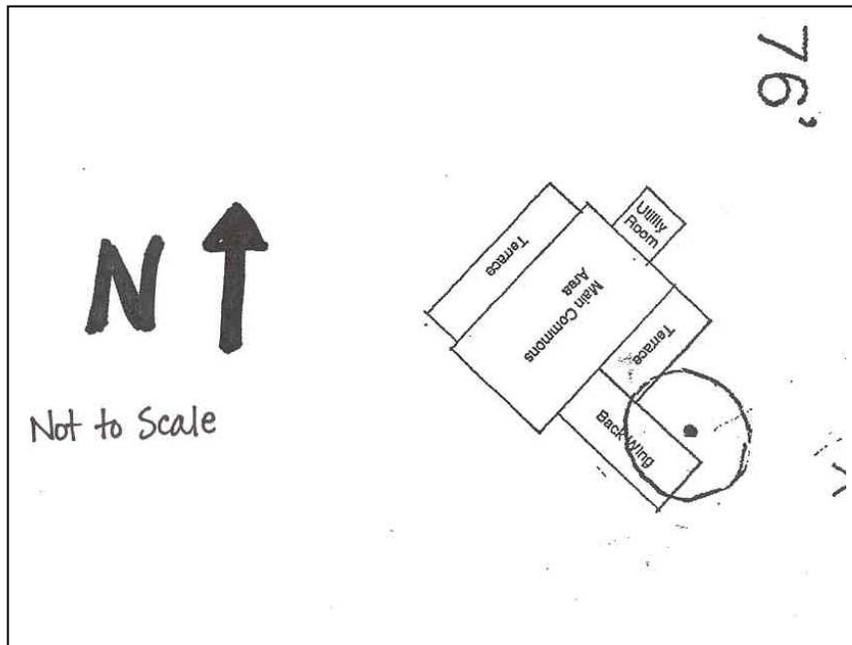
The Driggs Mansion was constructed as a one story, stone building from 1914 to 1918. Nunzio Grasso and family were the stone masons who constructed the building. Grasso was from Riccia, Italy, where he learned the masonry trade; he may have also designed the house as it is similar to an Italian farm building. The rectangular plan, long sloping roof, stone construction and arched entry are akin to rural Italian style. Lawrence Driggs was familiar with Italy, and would have had an appreciation for its rustic rural architecture. According to the book, *Unaweep to Uravan*, Driggs' intention was to build a 40-room hunting lodge. However, there is no evidence to support this suggestion. The home, in its final construction, had approximately six rooms that included two bedrooms, one large commons area, a kitchen, and small utility room.

The stone used for the house was from the nearby Mayflower Canyon (the Canyon that the home faces). The brown stone was laid in random ashlar, with quarry face. As an aside, the Grasso family home at 838 North 1<sup>st</sup> Street in Grand Junction has similar stonework. An unusual design on the exterior of the building was created with a raised bead of mortar between the ashlar stones (also known as a grapevine joint). The original roof material appears to have been rolled tarpaper.

The main part of the house had a rectangular plan oriented northeast-southwest, covered by a front gable roof. There was a small wing on the northeast elevation, and a large wing at the rear. A central chimney existed on the southwest-facing slope of the main portion of the house with a fireplace in the central part of the main commons area. A second chimney protruded from the northeast slope of the roof. A large alcove sheltered the front door in the center of the northwest façade. The top of the alcove, still extant, is a semi-circular Roman arch with radiating voussoirs of irregular stones. On each side of the main entry on the symmetrical façade was a window. These windows and others around the house had stone lintels and sills. When the windows were intact, they were double-hung wood-sash windows, mostly six over six. At the apex of the gable on the façade was a large octagonal window,

Property Name Driggs Mansion

Footprint



which appears to have had a single pane of glass in it. Flanking the alcove are two small sockets near the springing of the arch. Evidently they secured the bases of electric lights. A generator, powered by a gasoline engine, supplied electricity for the house. A concrete terrace, at grade with a low stone wall with various openings, surrounded the house. The stone of the wall matched that of the house.

The small wing on the northeast wall had matching stone masonry and a front gabled roof. The wing appears to have been used as a utility room with windows on the sidewalls and a door on the northeast wall. A small chimney with a stovepipe was located at the juncture of the roof of the wing and the main part of the house.

The long, narrow wing off the back of the house was also of matching stone masonry with a front gabled roof. This portion of the building included at least two bedrooms with four evenly spaced windows along the southwest wall. Another stone chimney stood centrally located on the southwest slope of the roof. It is not known what the northeast wall of this wing looked like, but there was another concrete terrace at grade between the long, narrow wing and the northeast end of the main part of the house. Like the terrace on the front, the rear terrace also had a low stone masonry wall around it.

On the inside, the floor was concrete over a basement cellar area that was reportedly used for storing ice. A plaster finish coated the interior walls. Long-time prominent rancher and one-time Mansion owner Jerome Craig remembered **Driggs-1918** lettered on an archway at the entrance.

Property Name Driggs Mansion

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## **SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT**

The Driggs Mansion is eligible for listing in the Colorado State Register of Historic Properties under Criterion D, for its Geographic Importance. Originally completed in 1918, the mansion was well known as one of the only stone houses in the ranching area around Gateway. The stone mansion stood for approximately 30 years, before being reduced to its current state around 1951. While presently a ruin, enough of the building remains intact that its unusual application of indigenous materials is still visible. Perhaps better known as a ruin to people of the area, the Driggs Mansion is a visual landmark with which the local community as well as passersby on the Unaweep-Tabeguache Scenic and Historic Byway relate to and remember. With the spectacular natural setting, the remains of the mansion provide a tangible link to the early history of the Unaweep Canyon area.

### **Historic Background**

The Driggs Mansion is located in Unaweep Canyon in the southwest corner of Mesa County. The canyon area is one of the last remote vestiges of our western heritage, which was also home to the Ute Indians. The Canyon cuts through the red sandstone of the Uncompahgre Plateau all the way to layers of Precambrian times. Ancient rivers eroded the rock away, exposing hundreds of millions of years of the geologic record including fossils of dinosaurs and early amphibians. The resulting natural setting of the canyon is spectacular with 1,200-foot granite walls rising from the green fields of the valley floor, exposed red rock cliffs and slickrock canyons sculpted by erosion, and high desert landscapes – all of this is the striking backdrop of the Driggs Mansion site.

The history of the Canyon was primarily impacted by the mining booms experienced there and in nearby areas, and by settlement for farming and ranching. The Driggs Mansion and its setting primarily embody the latter, although general interest in the area and development of it were affected simultaneously by both.

In the 1870s, gold was discovered in the gravels of the Dolores and San Miguel rivers. Small, sporadic placer mining operations continue to this day, however the majority closed down in the 1920s. In 1875, one of the Hayden Survey geologists noted copper in the eastern part of Unaweep Canyon. Miners quickly took advantage of these mineral deposits. In the 1890s, Pearl and Copper City sprang up and the Pyramid Mining Company built the first roads in the Canyon to its copper mines. By 1914 most copper mining had ceased and the communities were abandoned.

Discovered in 1881 at the head of Roc Creek, carnotite is a source mineral for radium, vanadium and uranium. Until the 1920s it was mined for producing radium for the treatment of cancer and other medical purposes. In the 1930s the mines were reopened to extract vanadium for use in hardening steel. Mills and townsites were built at Uravan and Vancorum. A small mill was also located in Gateway, eighteen miles from the Driggs Mansion property. As part of the Manhattan Project, the Army reprocessed mill tailings during World War II to produce uranium used in the first atomic bombs. The government's demand of uranium for atomic weapons declined in the early 1960s; operations almost ceased until late in the 1970s when uranium was again needed as fuel for nuclear power plants. This boom ended in the early 1980s.

In addition to its mining history the Unaweep Canyon area has a rich agricultural and ranching background, represented by the remnants of the Driggs Mansion as well as by ongoing ranching operations. In 1881, following a treaty that removed the Ute Indians from the area, a "land rush" of

**Property Name** Driggs Mansion

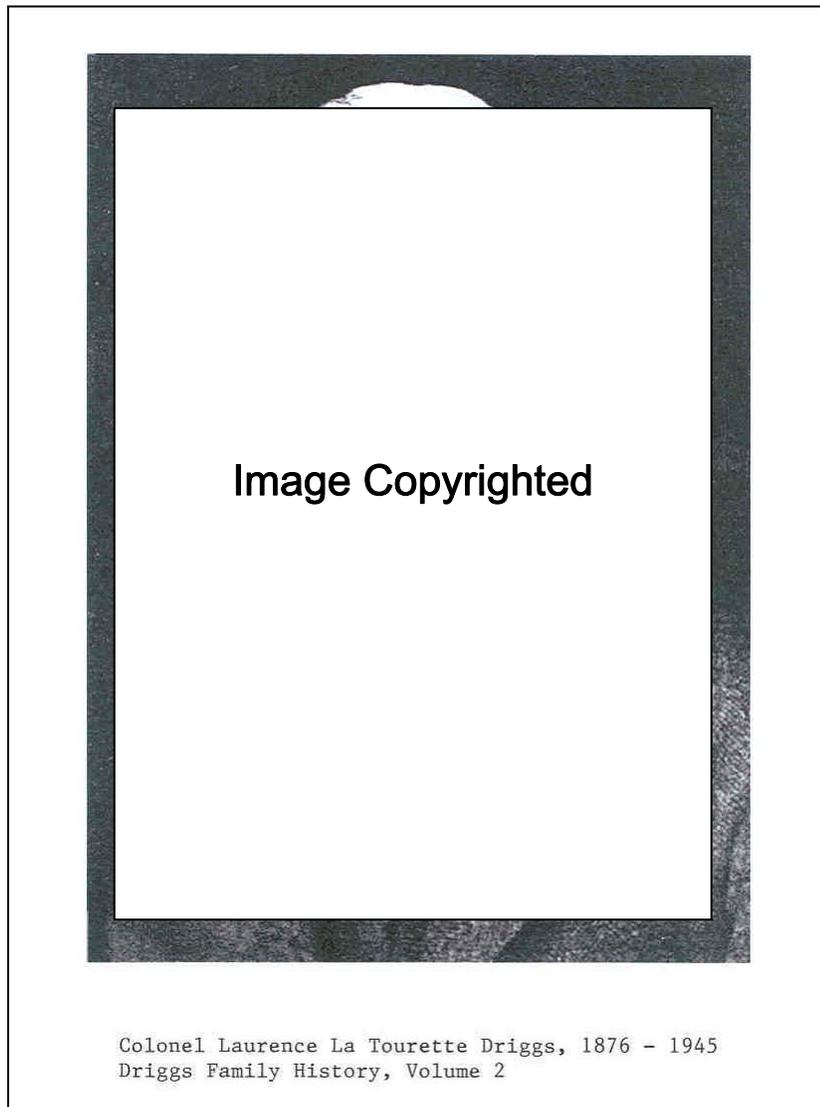
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sorts occurred and ranches were settled up and down the canyons. Many of the original homestead cabins from patented cattle ranches were built as early as the 1880s in and around Gateway and are still standing today.

Colonel Laurence LaTourette Driggs filed claims to a total of 320 acres in the shadow of the immense formation known as Thimble Rock through the Desert Entry Act in 1917 and 1918. Under this act, prospective landowners petitioned the government with an extensive plan to develop and cultivate desert land. These potential landowners were required to prove they could establish water rights, irrigate the land, and utilize the property for agricultural production. An annual report had to be submitted showing the progress of the development. Petitioners had up to four years to complete development before the government would patent the land over to the petitioner.

Already familiar with the ranching industry having been an owner of a ranch in Texas, Driggs apparently established his claims by ranching cattle. The home was completed in 1918, constructed out of materials from the Canyon itself, with sandstone blocks cut from Mayflower Canyon (the side canyon that the home faces). Notable Grand Junction stone mason Nunzio Grasso was hired to build the Driggs Mansion. At the time Driggs sold the property in 1923, it was leased for cattle grazing rights. The property continued to be utilized as part of a ranching operation until the current four-acre site was separated from the larger ranch a year later.

**Undated Historic Image**



**Property Name** Driggs Mansion

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Part of the old west that still exists today in Unaweep Canyon is the abundance of wildlife in the Canyon area. The Colorado Division of Wildlife reports that some 200 species of wildlife inhabit the area. The species range from big game such as deer and elk, to smaller animals such as rabbits and various rodents and several species of birds and reptiles. Sightings of mountain lion and bear have been reported on the higher plateau areas. Hunting has been popular in the area for many decades with its popularity continuing today.

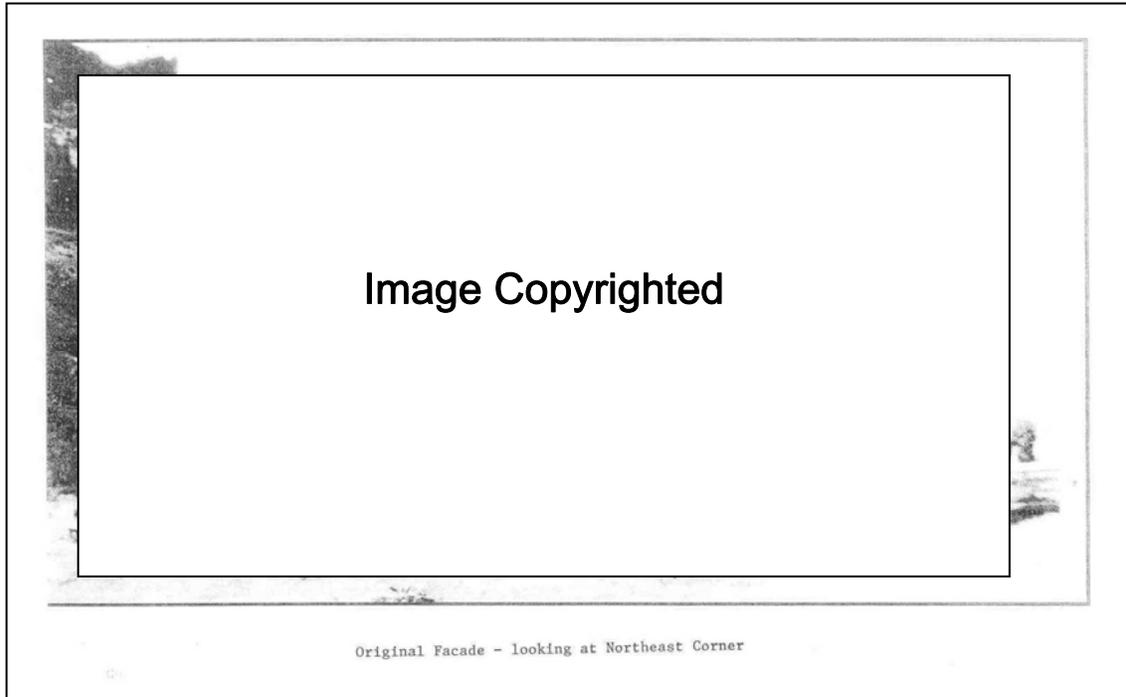
The Driggs Mansion has played a part in this aspect of the Canyon's history as well. When Driggs first built the home, it was thought that the six-room house was the beginning of a much larger plan with the intention that he would add on to it and turn it into a forty-room hunting lodge. While there is no evidence that supports this claim, those who purchased the home from Driggs did use it for that very purpose. George E. Turpin, a prominent resident of Grand Junction, bought the property along with partners Guy Sternberg, a Grand Junction attorney, and Arthur T. Gormley, a prominent businessman, in 1923. The trio used the six-room house as a hunting retreat and fishing camp into the 1930s and referred to the home as Chateau Thimble Rock.

After that, it was occupied as a residence by the Sturm family, who rented it from 1938-1941. Jerome Craig, a local rancher, acquired the property and stone house in 1941 and his family owned it until 2005, when the current owner, John Bratton, purchased it. Herschel Hendrickson, Jerome Craig's son-in-law, remembers the roof being off the building when he went to work at the ranch in 1946. According to Hendrickson, Craig had removed the unstable roof and rotting support beams soon after he bought the property in 1941. Kids had recently been living in the house and he was afraid the roof would fall in and injure other children. Soon after, stone began disappearing from "Driggs Mansion." One of the best documented instances was in 1951 when Craig traded one of the three original fireplaces to "Sie" Lyman Hubbard. Since then, the ruins have continued to experience damage due to natural weathering as well as some ongoing vandalism. Despite its current state of disrepair, the Driggs Mansion is still a recognizable and familiar visual landmark in the Canyon. It continues to take its place in the history of the area, representing early homesteading and the agricultural development of this remote western Colorado region known as Unaweep Canyon. Those who pass by, and the many that stop, whether they are locals or visitors, are still intrigued by its presence and are compelled to hear the story.

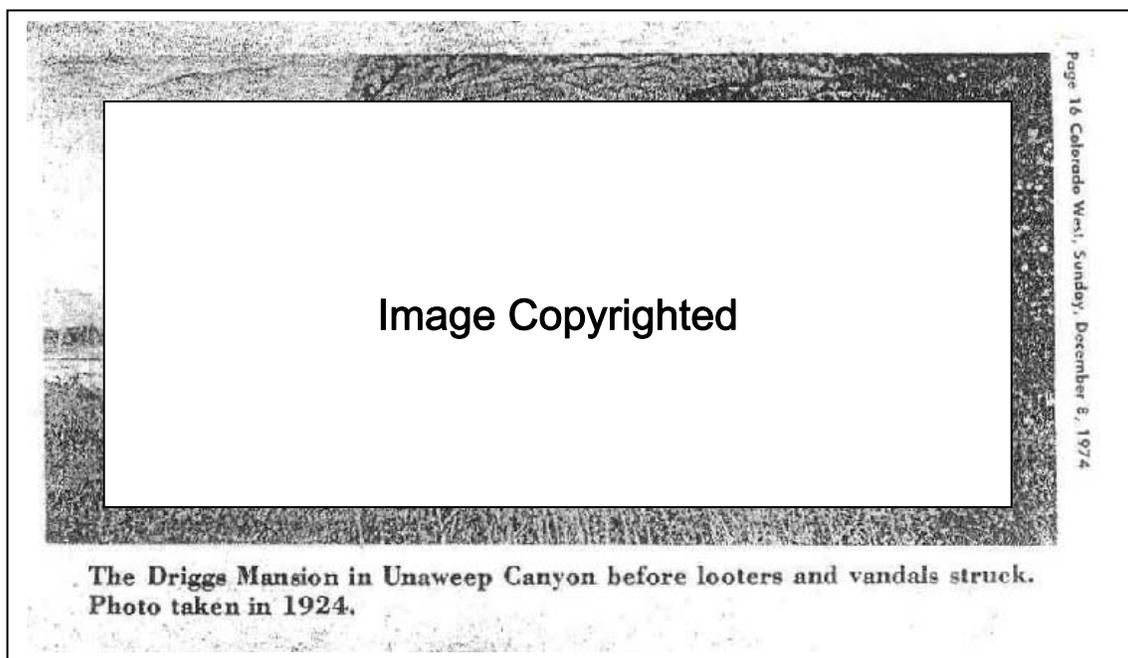
Property Name Driggs Mansion

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Historic Images courtesy of the Unaweep/Tabogauche Scenic Byway



Date unknown ↑



1924 ↑

Property Name Driggs Mansion

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Colorado Department of Transportation. Unaweeep-Tabegauche Scenic Byway Brochure.

Grett, Tim. *The Driggs Mansion – Unaweeep Canyon*. Paper for Mesa State College History Class. December 1997.

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Keener, C. and J. Keener. *Unaweeep to Uravan*. Louisville, CO: Grand River Publishing, 1988.

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Mesa County Planning Department. File 2004-223 PA1. Bratton-Craig Property Line Adjustment Application. Approved December 3, 2004.

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Prosser-Armstrong, Judy. *The Driggs in "Driggs" Mansion / Driggs Mansion*. Paper for nomination to Colorado's Most Endangered Places List. August 17, 2004.

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Warranty Deed: December 6, 194. Book 400. Mesa County Records Office, Grand Junction, Colorado.

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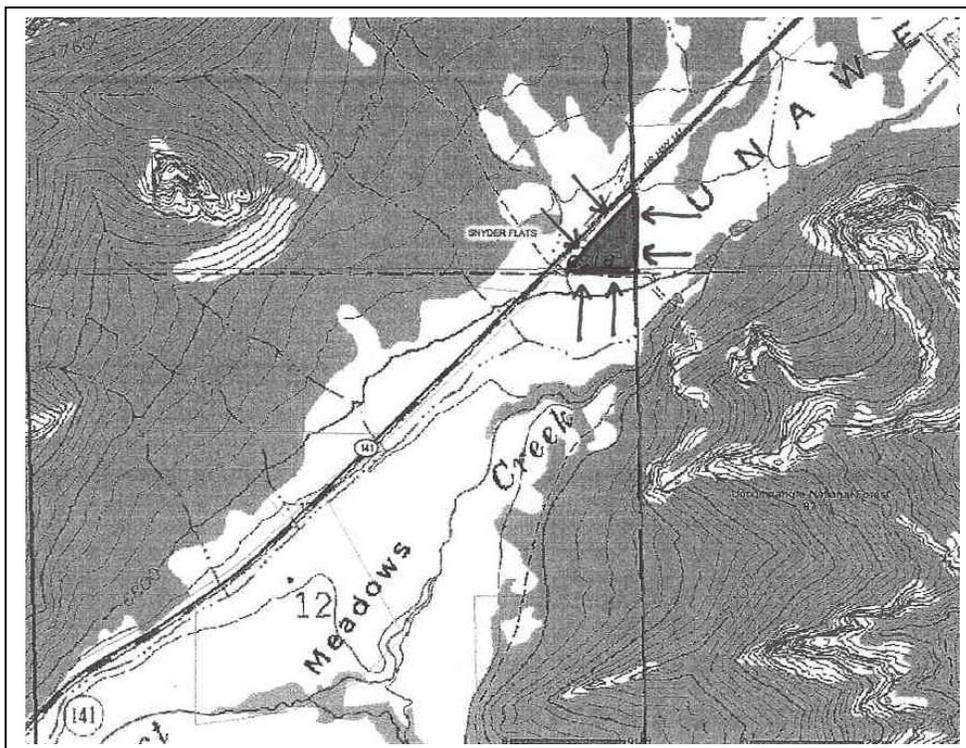
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**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The nominated parcel includes the shaded portion (indicated by the arrows) noted in the scale map below and found in the SE1/4, SE1/4, SE1/4 of Section 1 Township 15 South, Range 102 West of the Sixth PM, lying South and East of Colorado State Highway 141, Mesa County, Colorado. The nominated parcel totals 4 acres.

**Boundary Map**



Property Name Driggs Mansion

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### PHOTOGRAPH LOG

The following information pertains to photograph numbers 1-10 except as noted:

Name of Property: Driggs Mansion  
Location: Mesa County/ Colorado  
Photographer: Jon Schler  
Date of Photographs: August 27, 2004  
Negatives: None- Digital, CD on file at OAHP

Photo No.                      Photographic Information

- 1 View to southeast from Highway 141.
- 2 View to east, Thimble Rock in background.
- 3 View to southeast, northwest façade.
- 4 Front entry view, arch with steel structural supports.
- 5 Close-up of southwest side window.
- 6 Main section interior view with plaster finish evidence.
- 7 View to southwest, inside of exterior wall of back wing.
- 8 View to west, main section and small northeast wing.
- 9 View to west, front wall and concrete terrace.
- 10 View to west, down the valley and adjacent ranch land.

Property Name Driggs Mansion

**USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP**  
Snyder Flats Quadrangle, Colorado  
7.5 Minute Series

