**Puebloans confounded by ancient ‘man’**

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Posted May 23, 2010 at 12:01 AM

A local “missing link” enjoys a place of honor in the hall of fabulous fakes and flimflam men.

The 7 1/2-foot sculpture, excavated on the Beulah Road in 1877 and shown to crowds at a livery stable in Pueblo, had overly long arms and a short tail, both claimed as evidence of distant ape-to-human lineage. The man appeared to be petrified but in fact recently had been shaped from pulverized rock and bone, plaster, blood and meat, and baked for two weeks in a kiln. Puebloans thought it resembled an ancient Egyptian, an American Indian, an “Asiatic type,” but it actually hailed from Elkland, Pa., and was shipped here by train and then buried in an area that had yielded fossils. The creation had an older brother of sorts, the Cardiff Giant, which was an earlier hoax executed by the clever but unscrupulous George Hull.

The Colorado Giant, or Solid Muldoon as it was christened soon after discovery, appeared to mixed reviews. Some thought it smelled fishy and others were sure it was real. The Pueblo Chieftain stated there was “considerable excitement” in the stable where it was displayed and that viewers wanted the opinion of a scientist on “the curious work of art.” The Chieftain suggested that master showman P.T. Barnum, who was in Denver at the time, come to Pueblo and render an opinion.

“There can be no question about the genuineness of this piece of statuary,” read a Chieftain article of Sept. 19, 1877. “The stone shows the effects of time and the circumstances of discovery are such as to preclude anything like a repetition of the Cardiff Giant fraud.”

A few days later, on Sept. 22, the Chieftain called the sculpture “a wonder of the world” while noting confusion in viewers’ minds as to whether the “apparent petrification . . . is a preAdamite or one of the more recent stages of antiquity.”

The Beulah Historical Society’s “From Mace’s Hole, The Way It Was, To Beulah, The Way It Is” offers a detailed account of the Solid Muldoon, in a chapter researched and written by Walter Wyant. After Hull’s Cardiff Giant was exposed as a fraud in New York, he decided to create another hoax, this one based on his interpretation of the evolutionary “missing link.“Hull worked for three years on the project and when he ran short of funds, contacted Barnum, whom he knew from Cardiff Giant days. Barnum advanced Hull money for expenses and gained control of the giant’s management, though Hull would be allowed to travel with it. A former Barnum employee, W.A. Conant of Colorado Springs, was charged with burying the giant. He later “found” it on Sept. 16, 1877, about 25 miles west of Pueblo on the road to Beulah and, with help, transported it to Pueblo.

Word of the amazing discovery was spread far and wide by Conant’s son, part-owner of a Colorado Springs newspaper. After it left Pueblo, the Muldoon was shown to crowds in Colorado Springs, Denver, Cheyenne, Wyo., and points eastward, and reached New York City by early November 1877.

Proof that the Muldoon was a fake came when one of Hull’s early partners realized he’d probably never see any of the money he’d been promised for the scheme, or even have his debts paid, and spilled the story to a New York newspaper reporter. The story was reprinted across the country and, though it surprised many people, it provoked little hostility, according to Wyant’s account.

“It was as if the circus had come to town and passed on. The public regarded a humbug as entertainment and seemed to enjoy the whole event,” Wyant wrote.

Madupe Labode, in the September 2003 edition of Colorado History Now, wrote about the Solid Muldoon: “Viewing the unusual and bizarre was a common pastime for nineteenth-century Americans, and the veracity of the object was almost beside the point. Pueblo’s bars served Muldoon punch and would-be poets wrote doggerel imploring the giant to reveal its secrets. The spectacle was a diversion from weightier events . . .”

The Solid Muldoon, according to Wyant, disappeared without a trace. However, a century later, the Colorado State Fair commissioned Pueblo artist Joel Carpenter to recreate the Muldoon. His replica was made from iron beams, molded stucco wire and plaster and he worked from photos of the original. Carpenter’s model wasn’t shown at the Fair but was displayed at El Pueblo Museum before being given a proper burial in the late 1980s by the Beulah Historical Society. The Muldoon was waked with Irish music and laid to rest near the site of the original discovery.

At least that’s how the story goes . . .

-- Sources include Pueblo Chieftain articles; September 2003 edition of Colorado History Now; and “Muldoon,” chapter 7 in “From Mace’s Hole, The Way It Was, to Beulah, The Way It Is,” by Walter Wyant.

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