



This photo of S&M Supply was taken from the corner of Seventh Street and Four Avenue in the early 1950s. Photo from Allen Munro collection.

S&M Supply

By Kathy Jordan

The building at 735 Fourth Avenue, which a fire recently demolished, was once the home of S&M Supply. In its time, it was one of the largest mining supply businesses in the United States, started in 1938 by John R. Munro and Dorsey G. Son.

Fred Munro moved from New York State to Telluride in the 1890's and began mining. In 1898 Fred moved to Antlers, about 20 miles east of Rifle, where he built a stone house and store. Both structures were destroyed soon after by flood waters.

Fred then moved into Rifle where he and Mr. Clarkson, a saloon keeper, went into business together and opened the Munro Mercantile Company, Fred bought out Clarkson in 1905. In 1908 Fred built a new store, which is now an office building for Garfield County.

John R. Munro worked for his father at the main store in Rifle and a branch in Rulison. In 1928 he, with a couple of partners, opened a bank in Rifle. By the mid 1930s the bank closed, and John spent the next five years paying off the failed bank's debts.

After the bank closed, John became postmaster at Rifle and for a time worked for the Deering Harvester Company. When US Vanadium, which later became Union Carbide, came to Rifle, John went to work as Western United States Chief Purchasing agent for the metals division based in Grand Junction.

In 1939 Son (known as “Sonny” to his friends), a former superintendent with the National Park Service and engineer on the Colorado National Monument road, approached John with the idea of buying out old mining companies, cleaning up the equipment and selling it as used mining machinery.

A lot of the old mines were stooped with dangerous aging timbers. John suggested hiring his son, Jack, who was then working as an engineer with the Bureau of Reclamation, to join the company to run the field office to clean up the mines. S&M Supply had now become a company with the slogan “We Buy Junk and sell used machinery.

After Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941, all U.S. manufacturing production went into the war effort building military equipment, not mining equipment, and the Vanadium mining industry boomed. So did S&M Supply, which was sitting on one of the largest inventory of used mining equipment in the western U.S. and S&M was able to supply the much needed equipment to the mining operations around Durango, Naturita, Uravan and Monticello, Utah. The vanadium was not only the element needed to harden the steel for the production of military equipment: the U.S. Army was also secretly extracting the uranium from the mill tailings, some of which was said to have gone into the making of the Atomic Bomb.

By 1943, S&M Supply was located at 721 S. Seventh Street. In the early 1950s John purchased 735 Fourth Ave. at a tax sale, cleaned up the property, and moved S&M Supply from the South Seventh location. Recycled ammunition boxes had been used as building material in portions of the Fourth Avenue building. During World War II, ammunition was shipped to troops in wooden boxes, which would be filled with any number of things and shipped back to the United States. These used boxes became surplus and were re-used for various other things, including construction.

S&M, one of the largest employers in area, continued to grow until the uranium bust in the late 1950s. The Munro family sold their stock in S&M Supply to Son in 1958. Son continued to do business until 1963.

During the uranium mining heyday, S&M was the largest distributor nationwide for Leroy portable air compressors and the first to bring Butler steel buildings to Grand Junction.

Although the Munro family continues to do business in Western Colorado and around the globe, through Munro Companies, today all that remains of the once fast-paced mining supply company is the shell exposing the recycled ammo boxes of times gone by.

