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Man Who Kept Spark Alive Lauded At Monument Rites

Tribute was paid Sunday to the remarkable John Otto and his relentless drive that resulted in the creation of Colorado National Monument.

The occasion was the dedication of the Monument's visitor center, and the tribute came from John A. Carver Jr., assistant secretary of interior.

Carver, who dug through Interior Department files covering the years when the Monument idea still awaited government approval, concluded from the documents he found that "there is no question but that the idea for the Colorado National Monument was single-handedly conceived and single-mindedly pursued by the colorful John Otto."

Carver outlined the determined drive that was responsible for final approval of the area as a national park 53 years ago on May 11, 1911. President William H. Taft signed the proclamation.

There were others, of course, who had a hand in the effort: Judge Walter Sullivan, the late Rep. Edward T. Taylor, chambers of commerce from Grand Junction and Fruita, and many dozens of area residents who signed petitions favoring creation of the Monument.

But it was Otto, Carver said, who kept the Monument idea

alive and furnished the enthusiasm that eventually made it a reality.

Sharing the speaker's box with Carver were Rep. Wayne Aspinall; Fred Bussey, Monument superintendent; Lorin McCarty, president of the Grand Junction Chamber; Clarence Corder, president of the Fruita Chamber; Howard Probst, Gov. John Love's representative; and Lemuel Garrison, regional national park service director from Omaha, Neb.

Skies were dotted with clouds, and the sun was bright and hot. Many women among the 200 visitors who attended the dedication and ribbon-cutting converted their paper programs into makeshift sunbonnets. The drinking fountain did a steady business, and seats in the shade of the visitor center's overhanging roof were grabbed up first.

Rep. Wayne Aspinall, speaking from the canopied podium, told the crowd that "being a politician, I am aware that we in the shade here should not speak too long to you in the sun out there." And he didn't.