

# HISTORICALLY JEFFCO



**Reflections  
of a  
Depression  
Era  
Teenager**  
Page 11

**Golden's New Fossil Trace  
Golf Course** Page 1

# CONTENTS

Published by The Jefferson County  
Historical Commission (JCHC)  
Volume 14, Issue 23, 2002  
ISSN 1532-6047



**Fossil Trace:  
Tracks Make a Big Impression  
on New Golden links** 1

**Glimpses of History:  
Jefferson County's  
Places from the Past** 6

**Reflections of a  
Depression-Era Teenager** 12

**Jolly Rancher:  
Sweetness in Flux** 16

**Southwest Jeffco Trails  
and Toll Roads** 20

**The National Historic Register**  
*The Barnes-Peery House* 25

**Jefferson County  
Historic Hall of Fame**  
*Robert Williamson Steele*  
*Robert W. "Bob" Richardson* 26

**Pleasant Park:  
In the Beginning** 28

**Ralston Remains** 35

**Starting from Scratch,  
Chicken Scratch** 40

**JCHC  
News & Members** 46

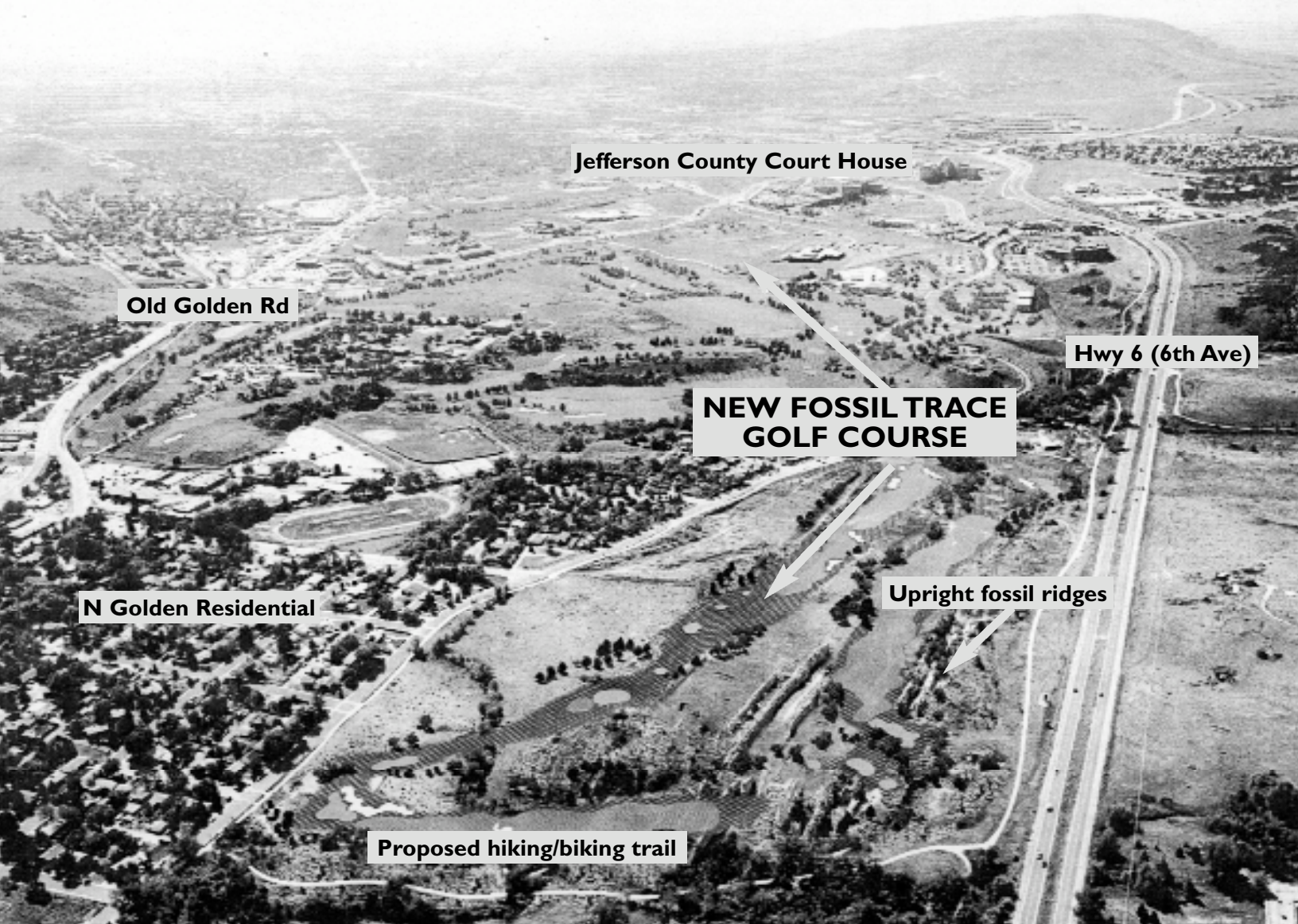
**JCHC Publications Committee**

*Erlene Hulsey-Lutz, Chair,  
Jerry Grunski, Editor of Historically Jeffco, Lorre Gibson,  
Lee Heideman, Lawrence Lotito and Milly Roeder*

**Design & Layout**  
FinePrint, Golden, CO







# Tracks Make a Big Impression on New Golden Links

By Jerry Grunski

It's possible to stroll up Dinosaur Ridge, a couple of miles north of Morrison and west of C470, and actually move back figuratively through millions of years of geologic time. At the base of the hogback an extension of Alameda Parkway angles sideways up the ridge, passing along dinosaur tracks - right next to the road - mangrove fossils, and "frozen" water ripples, encased in rock.

Tropical mangroves? Ocean sands, tilted 40 degrees upwards? That's not the only irony. These traces of fetid swamp life overlooking the city of Denver stretched out

**Above:** Digital rendering of Fossil Trace Golf Course  
**Right:** Triceratops track







These are thought to be impressions made by raindrops about 70 million years ago.

*the tilt, so to speak.*

The tilted layers of sediment are starkly exposed in the I-70 cut through the hogback.

On the west side of Dinosaur Ridge lies the unmistakable evidence that dinosaurs stomped along rivers before the uplift, leaving their bones strewn

below are from the Cretaceous period of geologic history, some 100 million years ago. Moving over the “hump” and down the west side of this ridge takes the visitor back 150 million year ago, with fossilized dinosaur bones sticking right out of the rock. The nimble walk over this ridge represents a monumental shift in the earth’s history. The viewer has a right to be awed.

If these samples of early life on the planet had been known before the late 1800s, Jefferson County could easily have been called Jurassic Park, the real one, not the fantasy.

This is how “a day at the beach” became nearly vertical beds of sandstone peering out over the rangeland long before people came on the scene. Much of this is hard to imagine. It’s hard to imagine a million years, let alone 150 million of them. It’s hard to imagine a stupendous sea, shallow (several hundred

feet deep) but extending thousands of miles from the Arctic to the Gulf of Mexico, right through the middle of the continent.

The next phase of land building is also hard to comprehend. Layers of sediment, silt dropping for millions of years, hardening into rock, albeit sand-like rock, not granite or marble congealed by ferocious heat. Then, tectonic plates sliding miles below the earth’s surface, forcing up the Rocky Mountains, and in the course of this uplift, the hogback west of Denver is pried upward, toward the east, like giant slabs of wallboard. Only the beach and some near shore deposits in the sea rise above ground on the east side of the Ridge. The bulk of the sedimentary rock is forced downward, at a 30-40 degree slant, and now rests two miles below Denver. The hogback, stretching hundreds of miles from Wyoming to New Mexico, is just the *tip of*

along those streams and their footprints embedded in the silt. Bones found now - there have been ten quarries in the Morrison vicinity - are *fossilized* remains. This means that like petrified wood, minerals have seeped into the bone structure, replacing marrow and calcium with silicates so that what is stuck in the embalming sediment are mineralized replicas of the original bony matter. These bones, some of them tons in weight, to be extracted need to be chipped out of the rock that encases them. But they are right there for everybody to see at the side of Highway 26, the 1937 road that drops down the west side of the hogback. This was the original Highway 40 up into Mt. Vernon Canyon.

What kind of dinosaurs? Stegosaurus, Allosaurus, Iguanodon, Apatosaurus (a.k.a. Brontosaurus), and Diplodocus, to name a few. Stegosaurus is the giant with

triangular plates on its back, while Brontosaurus is the 40 foot monster lizard that is the “mascot” frequently seen at Sinclair service stations.

### **A new discovery of old phenomena**

For a perspective on the Jefferson County site, it can be pointed out that the very *notion* of dinosaurs is only 150 years old. Carcasses of hairy bison and wooly mammoths had been found intact in some places, in America, Europe, and Asia (along Federal Boulevard locally!), but those specimens were only 10 or 15 thousand years old. That is like *yesterday* in dinosaur time.

The Dinosaur Ridge prints and fossilized dinosaur bones north of Morrison constitute the *first* major discovery of dinosaur bones in western North America, in 1877. A School of Mines college professor, Arthur Lakes, happened across them and alerted paleontologists out East, in Philadelphia and at Yale University. Lakes extracted some bones and shipped them by rail to a Yale scientist named Othniel C. Marsh. Before long other paleontologists came to Colorado to inspect the finds, and the Ridge became “a kind of Mother Lode for people from all over the world,” according to Joe Tempel, Director of Friends of Dinosaur Ridge. It still is a powerful magnet attracting hundreds of scientists regularly.

Surprisingly, though, after the initial flurry of excavating in the late 1800s, plus an almost simultaneous discovery north of Canon City (also in 1877) and a 1900 find near Grand Junction, in addition to the huge site at Dinosaur National Monument

in the north-west corner of the state (1909), little work was done to uncover further evidence of Cretaceous life until the 1930s. Highway construction uncovered more evidence: the mangrove imprints, sand ripples from wave action, and huge foot-prints themselves.

The ready accessibility of pre-historic evidence, however, is what makes this exposure precarious. The entire array is subject to damage by people who have been in Colorado less than 200 years. Such is also the case with fossil dinosaur footprints and plant fossils a few miles north of Dinosaur Ridge, where fossiliferous beds have dived under U.S. Highways 40 and 6 and where clay mining has gradually uncovered them near the Jefferson County Courthouse in Golden.

A series of parallel and vertical sandstone beds stick out of the



Palm frond impression approximately 13 feet long.

surface, right next to Highway 6, narrow buttes that are packed with palm frond impressions in stone, leaf molds, and dinosaur tracks, from the Cretaceous period, just before whatever cataclysm blew the animals away forever. Because these fossils are younger than those at Dinosaur Ridge, they consist of entirely different species.





The "wall" in the foreground contains palm fronds and Triceratops tracks (see previous page). All of the golf course is on the opposite side of the wall, plus a little to the left of the end of the wall. Thus, there will be no interference between golfers and people viewing the fossils.

W.T. Caneer, an affable retired geologist who acts as unofficial guardian of this treasure (he has had an emu-like dinosaur named for him, *Magnoavipes caneeri*), believes it was a meteor hitting near the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico that darkened the skies and destroyed vegetation. The resultant pall over the earth for several years, while blotting the sun and killing the plants, also killed those animals who were herbivores and therefore deprived the meat eaters of sustenance also. "Only a few shrews and gnats survived," Caneer said, "Maybe some worms, things that could make it eating dead matter." [Worm trails are indeed visible in the sandstone buttes.]

### Fairway dangers

But a pall hangs over the possibilities of preservation too. The city of Golden is turning this tract north of the county courthouse and east of Highway 6 into an 18-hole golf course called Fossil Trace. Much of the land was previously mined for brick-making clay by the Parfet family, three generations of them. T. Caneer – he prefers *T* – although light-spirited and charming, is also feisty and persuasive. He has convinced the Golden City Council and the construction company to spare the wedges looming up two stories or so. At one time there was a proposal to *bury* some of the animal tracks. The 13<sup>th</sup> fairway will skirt the formations, on the opposite side of the palm frond impres-

sions and dinosaur footprints.

"Golfers won't disturb them, but the elements might," Caneer says. The rock formations are vertical, clay having been extracted between them. Thus the sandstone traces, exposed to dripping moisture and frost, and possible vandalism, remain truly vulnerable. "Besides," he says, "We have to figure a way for the public to appreciate them." To that end the 380 member organization, called Friends of Dinosaur Ridge, that oversees the museum at the corner of Alameda and Rooney Road has proposed a plan of fronting the most fragile remains with Plexiglas, constructing walkways to the site, without encroaching on the golf course, and providing inter-



The track above the hammer was probably made by an ornithomimid dinosaur (plant eater). The track (partially exposed) below the hammer handle appears to have claws, and it was most likely made by a carnivorous theropod. Hammer is 12 in. long.

pretive panels in front of the images, much like the present displays on Dinosaur Ridge itself.

This effort to protect and reveal has not been formalized yet, and both Caneer and Joe Tempel know that they still have a mission to complete. It'll take imagination, fund-raising initiatives, and all the persuasive powers the jaunty Caneer can muster.

In between the Cretaceous outcroppings off 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue (extended) and Dinosaur Ridge are Heritage Square and a gravel quarry. Colfax Avenue swings south toward Interstate 70. High on the hogback across from the gravel diggings is a ridge topped with large plate-like boulders resembling

the back of the state's official dinosaur, Stegosaurus. The imagination can transform this into a symbol of Jefferson County's own heritage.

Anthropologist David Attenborough in *Life on Earth* contrived another form of transformation (slightly modified), compressing the entire continuum of time into a single year for comparative reflection. If the age of our solar system, with its planets and all, were squeezed into

a single twelve-month period, the first three-quarters of the year would be devoid of life. The earth would just be a roiling ball of volcanic extrusions, with almost continual rain and the forming of continents, tectonic plates shifting about.

Rudimentary forms of life would first appear around the latter part of September, molecules able to replicate themselves (initial DNA), algae and single cell protozoans, amoebas and such. October would bring on higher forms of life, creatures easing out of the sea, then lumbering animals, but by November they'd be gone, only their

records secured in rock. Humans wouldn't come on the scene until late in the day, December 31<sup>st</sup>, 15 seconds before the New Year. The invention of golf would probably occur a split second before the singing of *Auld Lang Syne*.

## Sources

Attenborough, David, *Life on Earth, A Natural History*, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1979

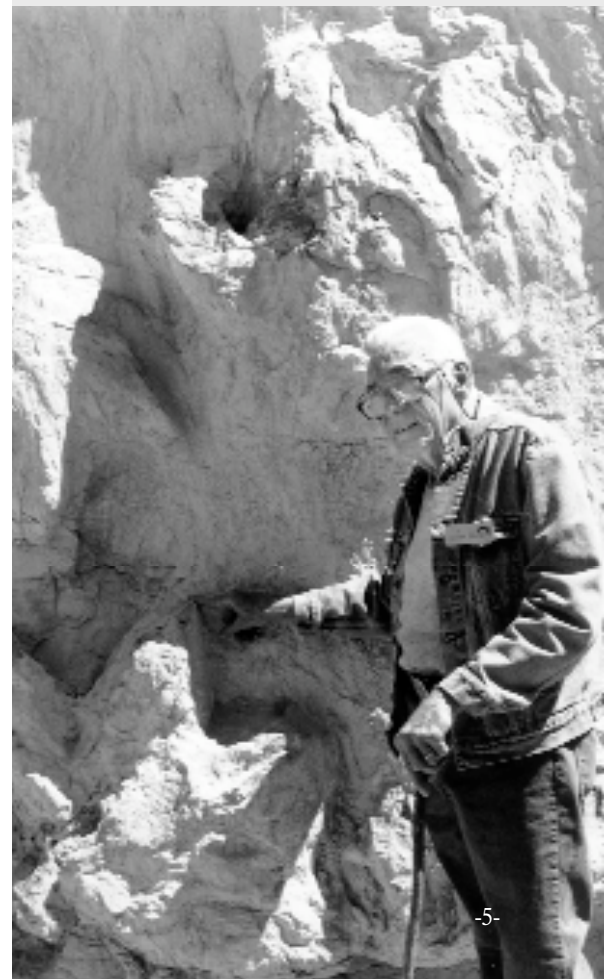
Hunt, Adrian, and Lockley, White, et al, *Historic Quarries of the Dinosaur Ridge Area*, Friends of Dinosaur Ridge, Denver, 2002

Lockley, Martin, *A Field Guide to Dinosaur Ridge*, Friends of Dinosaur Ridge, Denver, 2001

Jenkins, John T., Jr., and Jannice L., *Colorado's Dinosaurs*, Colorado Geological Survey, Denver, 1993

Ward, Nancy, "Dinosaur Ridge," pp. 18-23, *Jefferson, The Magazine*, Golden, November, 1999-January, 2000

## T. Caneer







# Glimpses of History

## Jefferson County's Places from the Past

By Kathleen Norman

Historic buildings scattered throughout Jefferson County are reminders of early residents. The plains and foothills began as a conduit with prospectors and pioneers traveling into the mountain mining districts to the west during Colorado's initial gold rush. Soon, newcomers settled in the county, finding fertile soil for crops and forage for livestock ranching. Scenic beauty attracted visitors too, who arrived by stagecoach, railroad, then automobile. Development of hotels, resorts, parks, and summer cabin subdivisions attracted people into the mountains. Taking a closer look at historic places can reveal how the county began and how it grew. This article describes four properties that help tell the story of early Jefferson County.

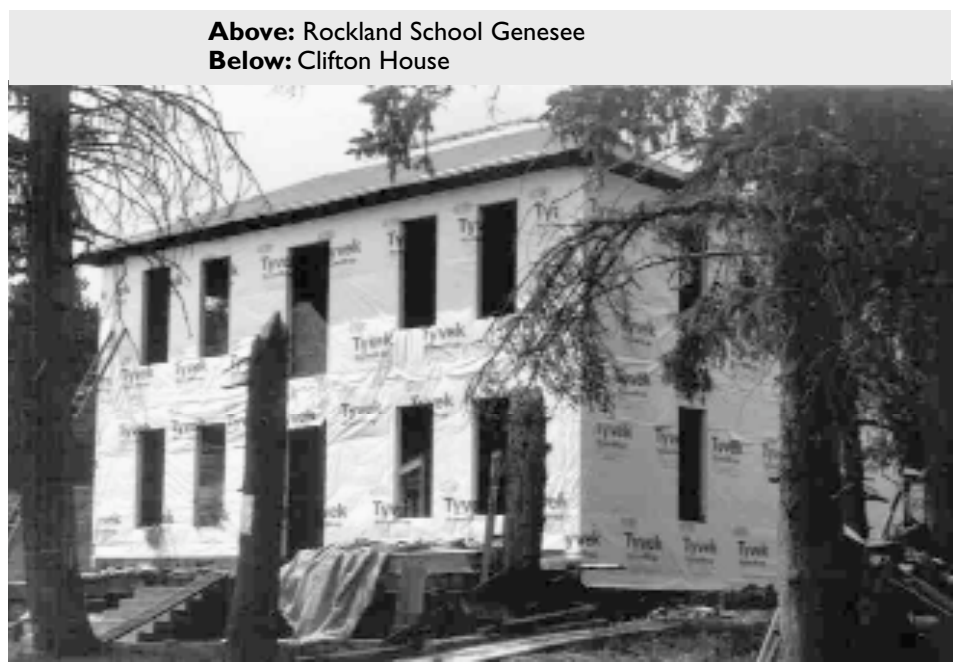
### Rockland School

Rural Jefferson County was once scattered with small schoolhouses, built

by ranch families to provide education for their children. A few one-room schoolhouses remain, carefully preserved, while many others have been moved, demolished, or converted to other uses. Rockland School at 24100 U.S. 40, south of the junction with Lookout Mountain Road, is a reminder that Mount Vernon Canyon was still a rural, sparsely populated location when the schoolhouse was

built in 1939.

Mount Vernon Canyon — now traversed by I-70 and traveled daily by thousands of tourists, truckers, and commuters — once contained a ranching community. Nicknamed “Rockland” on account of the stony soil, the area supported a dozen or so ranch families. During the 1870s those families built a one-room school schoolhouse and a gabled



**Above:** Rockland School Genesee

**Below:** Clifton House



wood frame church and to serve the community. During the initial gold rush Mount Vernon Canyon was a stage and wagon route to the gold fields, but by 1880 it featured a rugged road used mainly by local travelers. Washouts plagued the rudimentary wagon trail, and in 1913 the canyon was bypassed as an auto route into the mountains when the Lariat Loop road was built up Lookout Mountain instead.

Mount Vernon Canyon became more accessible in 1937, when U.S. 40 was dynamited through the canyon. This coast-to-coast highway brought a steady stream of motorists and also encouraged people to move into the foothills. The expanding community outgrew the original 1874 Rockland schoolhouse (torn down during the 1969 construction of I-70). Local voters approved a \$8,500 bond issue to construct another schoolhouse of beige brick designed by well-known Denver architect Eugene G. Groves. The handsome building opened its doors in fall 1939 for first through fifth graders. Older students were driven to classes in Golden.

After World War II, the Lookout Mountain vicinity continued expanding, and soon a larger school was needed. The third Rockland School opened in 1955 and the original beige brick schoolhouse became the meeting hall for the Genesee Grange #219. Founded in 1917 and becoming defunct in 1936, the Genesee Grange re-activated in 1951 as a community organization for rural residents. Membership grew to 200 members, and the Grange Hall became the heart of the mountain community, with potluck suppers,



Clifton House Barn

square dance contests, group sings, and talent shows. The Rockland School-Genesee Grange today hosts community meetings, art classes, and the Grange's annual pig roast. The little brick schoolhouse also contains the Rockland Piano School.

### Clifton House

In the 1860s, thousands of gold prospectors rushed through Jefferson County on their way to gold strikes at Central City, Idaho Springs, Fairplay, and Leadville. Gold seekers traveled along crude roads dug by hand through the county's narrow canyons — toll roads built and operated for a profit. Teams of straining mules hauled freight wagons into the mountains, and passengers journeyed in stagecoaches pulled by four pairs of horses. Along the way, settlers opened stage stops, way stations, and roadside inns to provide food and shelter for weary travelers and rest for footsore livestock.

Transportation became a major early industry, as local ranchers harvested hay and raised horses, mules,

and oxen that were then sold to freighters and stagecoach companies.

Most signs of this animal-powered travel have vanished — the barns, stables, stock corrals, and roadside inns. But three stage inns still stand as links to Jefferson County's pioneer past — the stone Centennial House midway up Golden Gate Canyon, the yellow Midway House on U.S. 285 east of Aspen Park, and the Clifton House on U.S. 285 west of Conifer.

Owner Benjie Pitsker, who is presently restoring the building as a bed and breakfast, rescued the Clifton House at 12414 U.S. Hwy. 285 (off Foxton Road) from deterioration. The house was built by Rudi Pollitz, who homesteaded on Elk Creek in 1870 raising livestock, hay, and potatoes. Pollitz built a small house that he expanded into a 14-room inn in the 1880s. He also erected an enormous barn to store hay harvested from the meadows to the south. Travelers and tourists frequented the Clifton House, and it also housed the area's first telephone exchange and switchboard from 1888 to 1921. The



Skankee-Nelson-Gruchy Ranch

stylish two-story inn had clapboard siding and had a two-story porch with stunning views to the southeast. In 1916, Pollitz's stepson Charles Long opened the first auto garage on U.S. 285 beside the stagecoach road. Long's sons, Harlan and Rudy, ran the business as Long Brother's Garage, which is still operated by members of the Long family near the Kings Valley subdivision.

In the 1990s, Benjie Pitsker acquired the Clifton House property from the Long family. The stagecoach inn had become a crumbling relic, but Pitsker is renovating it. He also rents the huge old hay barn for weddings, dances, and other events.

### **Skankee-Nelson-Gruchy Ranch**

Most of Jefferson County was first settled by farmers and ranchers. Settlers homesteaded on the county's eastern plains and creek valleys, where irrigation ditches and canals watered cattle herds, fruit orchards, and crops of vegetables and grains. People homesteaded in the mountains too — as late as 1940. However, the long winters, frigid temperatures, and rocky terrain made it difficult to cultivate

anything other than potatoes or lettuce, and it took forty acres of sparse grass to raise a single cow.

The 14,000-acre area now occupied by Golden Gate Canyon State Park north of Golden is a patchwork quilt of sixty or so former homestead properties. These high country ranchers raised beef, dairy products, and root vegetables sold to the hungry miners in Black Hawk and Central City. Today most of the homestead cabins, claim shacks, ranch houses, and barns in the park have been lost to deterioration or demolition.

Just north of Golden Gate Canyon State Park along the Jefferson-Gilpin County line, the Skankee-Nelson Ranch remains to tell the story of ranching in the rugged mountains. Martin Skankee homesteaded 160 acres, moving his family into a log cabin made from trees felled on the property. The Skankees put up pole fences and milled lumber from native wood to build a large hay barn and a cattle barn. Mr. Skankee was a cobbler and spent each week in Central City repairing shoes while his wife and children ran the ranch. The homestead cabin burned in 1900,

but the Skankees quickly replaced it with a modest wood frame ranch house.

In 1943 Chloe, Harold, and Florence Nelson bought the Skankee Ranch at 34787 Gap Road. Because the three siblings were serving in the military, their parents, Carrie and Ture Nelson plus grandfather Edward Powers ran the ranch. For several decades the Nelson family raised cattle and grew a few vegetables. Today, Florence Nelson Gruchy and her husband David Gruchy own the ranch property. The 1900 ranch house and the collection of

barns, stables, and outbuildings illustrate how ranching took place in the early days. The Skankee-Nelson-Gruchy Ranch is one of the most intact ranch properties remaining in Jefferson County. It is also a favorite place for the Coal Creek Canyon Seniors' group, which gathers there each summer for their annual picnic.

### **Justus Roehling House**

By the 1920s, the west Jefferson County mountains had become Denver's playgrounds. The City of Denver developed a network of landscaped parks linked by scenic auto roads, and it advertised them to visitors, tourists, and local residents. Villages and mountain subdivisions sprang up as developers urged auto tourists to "own your own mountain home." Charles and Anna Kittredge laid out the town site of Kittredge along Bear Creek in 1923 and promoted the former cattle ranch as a trout fishing resort. Charles Kittredge had developed several Denver subdivisions east of Capitol Hill and erected the gray granite commercial building that bears his name at 16th Street and Welton in the city. Charles and Anna then retired to Kittredge and devoted



themselves to developing the town.

Kittredge met a youthful German carpenter in Evergreen, Justus Roehling, who was summering in a mountain meadow cabin seeking the outdoor cure for his tuberculosis. Roehling had gained carpentry skills in Germany as a wagon maker's apprentice, a "spokes shave" who hand crafted wagon wheels. Kittredge hired the young carpenter, after which Roehling became the builder of Kittredge. Roehling constructed the town's first new house (other than a circa 1875 ranch house remaining from the Luther Ranch) at the northwest corner of Avenue F and Columbine Street, as a model home to entice potential property owners. During the late 1920s and the 1930s, Roehling built many Craftsman style bungalows in Kittredge. To showcase his skills, the carpenter-contractor constructed a more elaborate house for himself just west of the model home. This wood-shingled beauty features decorative stone details, whimsical curving gables, and a balcony overlooking Bear Creek.

During his sixty-year career, the prolific German builder constructed

scores of houses, from cabins to mansions, in the Kittredge and Evergreen area. He also built several stone churches. The Justus Roehling residence is now owned by the builder's son, John Justus Roehling, and is still situated west of the entrance off Avenue F in Kittredge.

The stories of these four properties were uncovered as part of a three-year project focusing on the historic places in Jefferson County. The Cultural Resource Survey examined over 4,000 historic (pre-1950) cabins, lodges, ranches, farms, and commercial buildings in unincorporated Jefferson County. The project identified around 800 intact properties that represent some aspect of county history or serve as examples of distinctive architectural design. These four properties are among sixty that were researched in detail, photographed, and documented as part of the survey project. The Survey Reports will be available soon in Jefferson County libraries. The Jefferson County



Justus Roehling House

Historic Commission sponsored the project with funding from State Historic fund grants, a Scientific and Cultural Facilities grant, and from Jefferson County. The author has been the project historian.

### Addresses

**Florence and David Gruchy**  
34787 Gap Road Golden, CO

**John Roehling**  
2753 South Depew Street Denver, CO

**Benjie Pitsker**  
P. O. Box 141 Conifer, CO

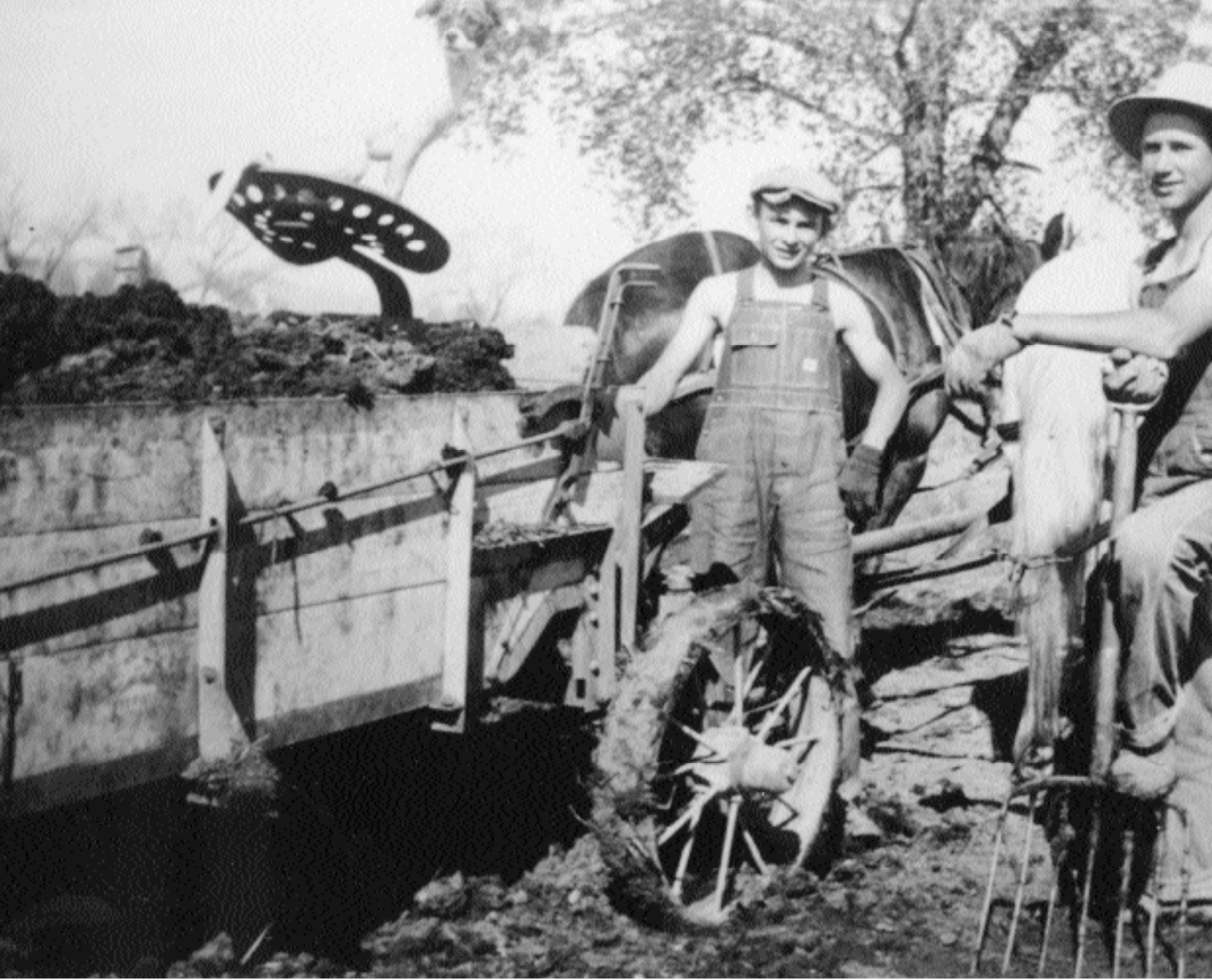
**Genesee-Lookout Mountain Foundation**  
4750 South Dudley Street, Unit 8  
Littleton, CO



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Historian and author Cathleen Norman has worked on cultural resource surveys for Lakewood, Lafayette, Victor, Longmont, Nederland, Canon City, and Manitou Springs. She holds a Bachelor's degree in English and a Master's Degree in U.S. History, with a minor in historic preservation, from the University of Colorado at Denver. Ms. Norman has written three books. *Golden Old and New – A Walking Tour Guide*, depicts the history of Golden told through its

historic places. *In and Around Colorado City – A Walking Tour Guide* describes the pioneer settlement that grew into a suburb located between Manitou Springs and Colorado Springs. *The Penroses, Tutts and El Pomar – A Pikes Peak Partnership*, co-authored with Dr. Thomas J. Noel, narrates the history of Spencer Penrose, who built Colorado Springs' Broadmoor Hotel and the auto highway up Pikes Peak. She also writes feature articles on history and historic places for numerous publications. Cathleen has lived in Jefferson County for 22 years.



# Reflections of a Depression Era

By Jerry Grunski,  
with Lawrence Lotito

If it weren't for the Italian Mafia, Larry Lotito probably wouldn't have been a U.S. citizen. Wait, that may be a bit strong. The fact that his grandfather killed a Mafia bully resulted in Lotito's being born in Colorado. Does that sound better?

Here's the story. Larry's grandfather Vincenzo was the

overseer on a farm in Potenza, Italy, southeast of Naples. The year was 1886, and the grandmother was pregnant with Larry's father Rocco. A Mafia guy came calling on a shakedown mission, demanding protection money, and the grandfather shot him. Because this was tantamount to his own death warrant, Vincenzo fled to the United States, leaving his family behind. He ended up in Idaho, working for the railroad

at a dollar a day. After Rocco Lotito was born in 1887, Larry's grandfather had enough saved to send for his family, and they settled in Denver, where the elder Lotito became a fruit and vegetable peddler.

Young Rocco, apprenticed as a saddle and harness maker, took over the route when Vincenzo died in 1909. The next year an arranged marriage took place in May with Concetta Ruoti from the same





# a Teenager

village in Italy where Rocco was born. Four children came along, including Lawrence in 1921. Larry reminisced recently about growing up in the Depression. Lotito's dad Rocco, recognizing that chain grocery combines such as Piggly Wiggly would displace individual peddlers, rented a five acre farm in Wheat Ridge to see if he and the older sons could make a living growing their own fruits and vegetables.

This farm proving too small, in 1932 Rocco bought a 30 acre parcel at the southeast corner of Howell Avenue (present Kipling) and Ridge Road in Arvada, south of the Coors railroad tracks. Eventually he had chickens and pigs, several cows for milk, three horses for plowing, and a variety of fruits and vegetables to sell to the groceries.

First, though, he had to dig a well, build a home, and bring in power and telephone hook-ups. By 1940 the horses were replaced by tractors.

The household needed water, as did the crops, and to counteract the drought Larry's father had to have the well. "In those days there were 'diviners'," Lotito said, "People with magnetic power to locate underground sources. They held a forked willow branch, one section in each hand and with the single stick outstretched, walking carefully over the terrain. When they were over a hidden stream, some force would tilt the willow downward. Then they walked over the area from another angle to pinpoint the likely spot for a well."

How to dig a well? No high-powered drills in those days. A hand auger would only delve a few feet. Larry described the process: "Two well diggers scooped a six foot square hole down 20 feet. Then, putting in 4-foot pre-cast concrete rings to prevent a cave-in, they went down another 12 feet. [That is three stories deep!] That's when their feet were in water... The well never has failed. It's in use today."

"Several years of drought accompanied those harsh times when I was about eleven," he said, "Those dust storms blew in from

the southeast, a solid bank of dark brown clouds. We closed all the windows, but the dust penetrated and covered all the furniture. Kansas and Oklahoma devastation is well known, prompting 'blown-out' folks to head for California, but many dispossessed people came to Colorado where conditions were only marginally better.

"We had Okies as hired hands," Lotito recalled. "Good workers and grateful for the opportunity, usually one or two at a time. Pay was supposed to be 25 cents an hour — government stipulation — but all dad could afford was a

**Left:** The cow manure from the dairy was piled on the fields until the time came for plowing (fall or spring), and then loaded in the horse drawn manure spreader that scattered the manure over the land. It had to be hand loaded, as shown, with Lawrence Lotito and Joe Conte doing the job. Spot, the terrier, looks on from the seat of the spreader.

**Below:** Ronnie Lotito, grandson of Rocco, standing in a field of papered pascal celery. Celery was prepared for the October-November market, and the famous trenched celery was basically for the Thanksgiving and Christmas periods. A sheet of the *Denver Post* was wrapped around the celery plant, tied top and bottom with twine, and then the soil was heaped around the bottom. With the light excluded, the celery "blanched."



dollar a day. I fried up some potatoes and eggs for lunch. As long as we had chickens and hogs we had eggs and meat. We grew everything we consumed.” Lotito’s mother had passed away in 1933, after dwindling in health following a bout of Spanish flu, contacted during WWI. Larry was the chef and housekeeper before he was a teenager.

So many things we take for granted at present, such as anti-freeze in the car radiator and fuel for heating and cooking. “Our 1921 Dodge touring car didn’t have any windows, just open spaces. In winter we had to bundle

up in sheepskins to keep warm, heavy fabric coats with wool collars. We had to put water in the radiator for a trip and then drain it when we reached our destination so it wouldn’t freeze. We had to pour water in it again when we headed back,” Lotito explained.

He remembered the necessity to scavenge coal. “The only source of heat was a fireplace in the living room and a stove in the kitchen. We had to cut 40 large cottonwoods that grew along Swadley Ditch that ran through our property. But wood didn’t give off enough heat, and besides we’d be running out. Consequently, we

picked up coal along the railroad tracks, putting it in buckets. Firemen on trains spilled coal while heaving it from the coal cars to the fire pit under the engine boiler.” The cost of coal was prohibitive, seven dollars a ton from the Leyden mines.

“Christmas trees had little four inch wax candles,” Lotito went on. “They fit in a little cup with a spring that was clipped to the branches. The candles were lit when we brought out the presents. One year the tree caught fire, and while everyone yelled, my godfather Joe Trancredo’s son Jerry rushed to the kitchen and

Rocco Lotito planting raspberry canes in the mid thirties. Background: far left, stack of alfalfa that had been cut and dried for cattle food; barn, with corral extending to a little structure – a WPA two-holer constructed for \$15, subsidized by the government to give people work in the Great Depression. “Although we had indoor facilities, this was useful for the hired help,” says Lotito.





came back with a big pan of water that he dumped on the flaming tree. While hauling the burnt tree out to the yard we learned that Jerry had pulled the pan off the stove. It had been placed there to make the spaghetti.”

Larry Lotito recalled school days and schoolteachers with fondness. He reported, “I was a freshman at Arvada High in 1935.

With \$10 at ‘Monkey Wards’ (Montgomery Ward) my dad would outfit me with a pair of shoes, corduroy trousers, a couple of shirts, and a finger-length lined ‘lumber jacket.’

“I learned the ‘Palmer Method’ of penmanship from Miss Ellen Hambly, who, incidentally, invented the Smokey Bear symbol; and I learned a ton of practical things from our Agriculture teacher Mr. Thomas D. Vanderhoof, such as how to solder, how to dehorn calves, and how to castrate pigs — all of which I did on the farm. Vanderhoof has an elementary school named for him at 64<sup>th</sup> and Ward. Mr. Joe Weber, junior high coach, dealt with us surly and rambunctious boys this way. At the beginning of the school year he passed a large paddle around the room, letting each person feel it. He never said he’d use it, and as far as I know he never did. But getting the heft of it was enough. We were a pretty docile bunch after that.”

Other teachers Lotito recalled, some of whom also have schools named for them, are Superintendent Homer Peck,

Principal Ray Fitzmaurice, and teacher Marjorie Katz. Teacher salaries were approximately \$1,000 a year in the thirties, and the individuals were fortunate if they got anything at all as an increase.

“My favorite present as a youngster was a .22 rifle,” Lotito testified. “My brothers and I went out to a place northeast of Keenesburg and bagged as many as 35 jackrabbits at a time. They were pests, you know. I could sometimes hit one while it was bounding furiously.”

It may be hard for current readers to fathom, but one must remember that putting in fields of celery, carrots, radishes, asparagus, raspberries, tomatoes, peppers, and squash (not to mention pansies!)

would be the same as providing a paradise for rabbits where before they could only hop around the sage brush and yucca. Threats to livelihoods were dealt with in straightforward fashion.

Delicate sensibilities weren’t prevalent at the time. “Up near Hudson there were neighborhood drives,” said Lotito. “‘Chasers’ formed circles and clubbed the rabbits as they skittered about, then gave them to poor people to skin and eat.” Getting on during those rough days 70 years ago wasn’t for the squeamish.



Hunting jackrabbits near Roggen, Northeast Colorado. Jack Lewis, left, and Lawrence Lotito, about 1939. Three or four hunters could bag 30 or 40 rabbits in a day. November was the best month.

A moment of relaxation. Lawrence Lotito, 12, and sister Lucille, 9, on Beauty, a lovely, intelligent Percheron mare that was with the family for many years.





John F. Kennedy visits Denver during his election campaign. He is warmly greeted by Dorothy and Bill Harmsen with gifts of cowboy hat, candy, and boots. Kennedy's plane, "The Caroline," is in the background.

# THE JOLLY RANCHER

## *Sweetness in Flux*

By Jerry Grunski

In Meredith Willson's musical "The Music Man" an anvil salesman is portrayed as an object of derision, because his sample case has considerable heft. The notion that anvils aren't exactly quick selling items is also part of the gag.

When 33 year-old Bill Harmsen gave up flying in 1949, he found himself selling safes to make ends meet, and his satchel must have been pretty burdensome too, with little room for mirth. He was on the road one day in Wyoming when his wife

called and said she had just bought an ice cream store on Washington Street in Golden. "You'd better come home. We've got a business to run," she said.

Future President John F. Kennedy came to Denver on his campaign trail in 1960 where he was greeted as he came off the plane by Dorothy and Bill Harmsen. They handed him a cowboy hat, cowboy boots, and a box of candy. The candy was the Harmsen's "brand," Jolly Rancher melt-in-the-mouth sweets, and the boots had the firm's hand-tooled logo embossed on the shanks.

That's how a local business gained

international renown: by showy promotion of regional gear and by handing out gobs of addictive confections with their tongue-smarting flavor.

Just like any other enterprise that grew to significant proportions, Jolly Rancher started small, in a ranch house kitchen, to be exact. "They packed the candy in my bedroom," son Bill, Jr. said of his mother and father's early cookery. "I woke up every morning to the smell of candy and these huge candy boxes all over the bedroom. Now I'm not so fond of candy."



At its peak, before being bought out by Beatrice Foods in 1967, the Jolly Rancher plant on Ward Road in Wheat Ridge (just north of I-70) worked two daily shifts, had 250 employees, and produced up to 125,000 pounds of candy a day - that's over 65 tons. They had fleets of trucks distributing candy all over the country, plus supplying international customers in Europe, Australia, and China.

As business pioneers - the Harmsens later called themselves "Twentieth Century 49ers" - Dorothy and Bill moved in fits and starts. They lived in Minneapolis in the early 40s where Bill was a pilot for Continental Airlines. But they dreamed of moving West "to snap up a portion of paradise." Although they had no idea how to operate a truck farm when they bought the Johnston

Ranch ten miles west of Denver in 1942, they began growing raspberries and strawberries, plus 250,000 gladiolas. They were determined to be in business as a team.

In Colorado Bill continued flying for a while and then grounded himself and sold the "heavy stuff, safes." But when the berry and flower enterprise failed to produce a sufficient profit, he transformed the hayloft in the barn into a woodshop where he made doll beds and shipped them all over the country. Material shortages forced the couple to abandon this venture and lay off the eight employees they had accumulated.

Then the naive Harmsens shortly discovered that ice cream was only a seasonal treat for Coloradans. So they took on a line of chocolates, made by a supplier in Denver. In

addition to their store at the base of the welcoming arch in Golden, they set up franchises in Cheyenne, Denver, and Pueblo. Bill was nothing if not creative, and doggedly determined. He began experimenting with taffy, cooking up batches in the barn loft, adding generous portions of Colorado beet sugar ("That was the secret ingredient," he later said), and sprinkling in heavy doses of cinnamon.

They called the candy "Fire Stix," and they named their firm the Jolly Rancher. "The name was borrowed from the Jolly Miller Hotel in Minneapolis," a town well known for processing grain. Someone said the stinging candy "tasted like a mouthful of branding iron."

Aggressive promoting was the mainspring for success. Several thousand school children have

Box line for candy Stix, boxed according to flavor.





**Above:** Business being ahead of production, Kiss machines were flown in from Europe in 1963. Forgrove high speed Kiss machines flew high until landing, when they broke their moorings and tilted the nose of the DC6 in the air.  
**Below:** Denver Western Stock Show. Probably in the 1950s.

inched through the plant each year, leaving with handfuls of wrapped candy. Five citrus flavors were introduced, later expanded to “Smoke Stix” (licorice), Jell-O, lollipops, and saltwater taffy. In the 50s Governor Dan Thornton was persuaded to send candy boxes to the governors of every state as Christmas presents. Harmsen also sponsored rodeos and drag racing cars. Politicians of every stripe were

given bundles of candy to pass out.

The Harmsens made sure that Halloween was a sugar-and-corn-syrup bonanza for all youngsters in the surrounding area, handing out thousands of bags of the nickel sticks gratis. The prominent truck in the movie “Smokey and the Bandit” is a Jolly Rancher semi (carrying Coors beer). The 13 flavor sticks now retail for 50 cents apiece, and they include butterscotch, green

apple, and water melon flavors. Nothing heavy for salesmen there.

For fourteen years after its founding the plant on Ward Avenue, called Sugar Bar Ranch after it was refurbished from truck farm headquarters into a candy-making facility, operated assembly-line style with hand cutters and people wrappers. Then in 1963, with orders coming in faster than they could be filled, the Harmsens contracted with engineers from England, Germany, and Italy to build machines for automation. When the bulky devices were flown to Denver, they shifted in the plane upon landing, the cargo sliding down to the tail of the craft. This load shift lifted the wings and front wheels off the ground, nose pointing skyward, so that the plane froze in a take-off posture. But automation and IBM computers for tallying payroll, billing, and delivery turned the Jolly Rancher operation into a thoroughly high-powered modern company.

When hard candy sales overtook their line of fine-dipped chocolates in the mid-sixties, the Harmsens shifted exclusively to the “hard stuff,” and got out of the “Willy Wonka” business.

Bill Harmsen’s son Bob took over as president when conglomerate Beatrice Foods bought the company in 1967. Bob said, “I was on a mountain hiking trail in Peru. I looked down and saw a Jolly Rancher wrapper on the ground. That’s when I knew for sure that we were an international presence.”

This past summer Michelle Zupan, curator of the Golden Pioneer Museum at 923 10<sup>th</sup> Street, said, “Colorado is losing a piece of its industrial heritage,” in lamenting Jolly Rancher’s impending move out of state. Hershey Foods purchased the business in 1997, and Bob Harmsen stepped aside as president. Father Bill passed away at age 89 in 2001, and that autumn Hershey announced the transfer of Jolly Rancher production either to Illinois, Pennsylvania, or Canada. But the







Caption of original photograph, published in the 1950s by Jolly Rancher: The Jolly Rancher Family of Fine Employees, top row – children, too – Bill, Jr., Mike, Bob, Bill, Sr., and Candy Cowboys. Left below – Dorothy Harmsen and attractively uniformed Candy Cowgirls. Sabre, the guard dog. 1954

move hasn't been finalized because Hershey itself may merge with a candy maker from Europe. Nestle has been identified as a possible suitor. (Two hundred forty workers were dismissed, and Hershey Foods closed the Jolly Rancher plant on October 18, 2002.)

The Harmsen family donated pictures, original implements, and early production apparatus such as cooking drums to the Pioneer Museum, where curator Zupan has set up a full-room display of memorabilia. "I even went over to the factory and peeled off a chip of red paint so that I could match

it for the backdrop," Michelle said proudly. Ms. Zupan has titled her exhibit "The Pot of Gold at the End of the Rainbow," referring to the spectrum of citrus and other fruit flavorings of the savory products.

Zupan also said that the reason the hard candy rose so rapidly in popularity in the fifties is that the product was a true novelty. "Nobody else in America was making anything like it," she said. She said too that Bill and Dorothy were literally obsessed with developing intense flavors. "Bill

went to his 'lab' upstairs every night after delivering candy to franchise stores and kept adding more cinnamon to achieve the ultimate 'zing'," Michelle added. "It's probably the second most successful business to start in Golden, next to the brewery." Michelle Zupan also mused, "When the wind is right, wafting over from Wheat Ridge, the aroma from the candy-making process at Jolly Rancher mingles with the smell of the Coors complex. The fragrance is unusual to say the least, the combination of candy and hops."

# Southwest Jeffco Trails and Toll Roads



Overview of the Pleasant Park area from the top of Legault Mountain.

By Lee Heideman

In 1859 the cry of “Gold, discovered at Tarryall,” started a large scale migration to South Park and the mountains. Potential prospectors, sometimes accompanied by their families, trundled up gulches and drainages to gold diggings. Some were actually on their way to the distant California Gold Mines, and some were headed to Leadville, Colorado.

They came in covered wagons drawn by oxen, on horseback, and a few walked, following trails left by wagons or by the Indians on their way to their hunting grounds. Many, however, became so intrigued by the beauty of ascending the first few miles that they just stopped and settled before getting too far into the high country.

Joseph Legault was one such man. In 1869 he came from Montreal, Canada to seek his fortune. He took a stage coach to Denver City, and

walked up Turkey Creek Canyon (past present Tiny Town) on his way to the gold fields. But he stopped at McIntyre’s sawmill (now Meyer Ranch) to make a little money before continuing on. Hiking over the hill across the road from McIntyre’s place, he found a beautiful area. Reportedly, it was so attractive that he decided it would be a “pleasant place to park.” Then he sent for his family, homesteaded a parcel, and settled in that locale. The Legault family was largely responsible for settling the Aspen Park and Pleasant Park areas.

But travel was slow and cumbersome, and the need for a road to replace the worn tracks being used for that purpose became apparent to a Denver businessman. Entrepreneur Robert B. Bradford petitioned the Territorial Government for a charter to build a toll road from Auraria (across the creek from Denver) to the mountains.

Even at that time, politics played

a very important part in contract awards. Because Bradford had received a military commission as Brigadier General and was appointed staff aide to the Honorable Robert W. Steele, of the Assembly of Jefferson Territory in December of 1859, Steele awarded a grant to Bradford to establish the toll road, allowing him to take in as many partners as necessary.

At about the same time Steele also created twelve counties for the territory and three judicial districts, incorporated Denver City, and passed many laws including a one-dollar poll tax to help finance the government. The miners refused to accept this “unauthorized government” and created their own, rendering the Jefferson Territorial government powerless.

Bradford’s road ran southwest toward the Dakota Hogback near present C470. Parts of it, faint but with some rock base still visible, can be seen along the east side of the



hogback south of Morrison. This skimpy trail, hardly more than a two-rutted byway, entered what is now Ken Caryl Ranch and eased up over the rugged hills to the west of the Bradford Mansion. It probably came out on what is now South Turkey Creek Road in the vicinity of the West Ken Caryl gated entrance.

A company named Meyers, Bradford and Williams was established and granted a charter to build this road to the mountains. It angled from the Platte Valley past Mississippi and Sheridan and on up to Morrison, then over to what is now the Ken Caryl Ranch. This was the Denver, Auraria and South Park Wagon road, south and east of current Highway 285, probably running through Homewood Park, Phillipsburg, and Fender's, ending where the Intercanyon Fire Department is now. Bradford established a town named Bradford City there. The terrain on this road was so steep and the road so narrow and in such poor condition that wagons had a terrible time crossing the foothills on it.

To illustrate the difficulties encountered on this road, Dan Berrian, a freighter, told this story. "On the Mt. Carbon road the teamsters would go together, so as to double each other out of a hole. One of the boys in a wagon had only a single team, and he was pretty well behind. I was ahead with four horses and two wagons. You had to load them light, so they wouldn't sink. One wagon wouldn't take all you could



Settlers coming to the mountains.

put on it at that time. If you put all on one wagon you never would get to town. This fellow with a single team was stuck. Couldn't go no place. We put on four horses and we couldn't pull it. We put on twelve head and we couldn't pull it. We put on four head more and pulled the wagon in two. The hind end stayed there and we had to dig with pick and shovel to get it out of that old muck and stuff. Yesiree, we had to do it! We unloaded all his lumber and then couldn't get the gears out. It just cemented around them wheels, you know. We pulled the thing out and got it propped up, and put his lumber on for him. We all got to Midway that

of Bradford, Jefferson County, neared the upper Platte bridge, Mr. Earle kept driving across the road in front of the Major's team, and the Major took it as an insult. Wanting him to quit, the Major tried to pull Earle out of his wagon. Earle naturally resisted but almost had his clothing torn off. The Major drew his revolver and shot Earle through the abdomen. Seeing a shotgun standing by a stump near the road, Earle jumped out of his wagon and got it, and then shot the Major through the arm and leg." It seems mighty convenient that a gun was just "standing by a stump," but the summary in the newspaper was even more peculiar: "Neither are seriously

hurt. Mr. Earle went on home and the Major, at the time of writing this, is at the Planter's House." Either guns did not have quite the fire power that they do now, or else the shots were merely surface wounds.

Travel was not all sweet harmony on those roads either. The *Golden Transcript* published this story on September 23, 1868: "As Mr. Earle and Major Bradford, both

Alden & Betty Legault home, homestead of Joseph Legault. Original outside log walls are still visible.



hurt. Mr. Earle went on home and the Major, at the time of writing this, is at the Planter's House." Either guns did not have quite the fire power that they do now, or else the shots were merely surface wounds.

In 1859 to 1860, another toll road was built from Mount Vernon, which was called the Denver City Mt Vernon

and Gregory Toll Road, sometimes called the Mt Vernon Road, and it ran over the hogback nearly parallel with current I-70. This road went to "Bergen's House." It ran to approximately where El Rancho is now, through Bergen Park and down to Post (Evergreen). That road followed what old timers referred to as the Ute Trail. It was believed that the Ute Indians under Chief Colorow used that trail to get to their hunting grounds. Later it was extended to what is now the Conifer area "on the road to Tarryall,"

present Highway 73.

In 1860 Bradford again petitioned the territorial government for a charter to build the Denver, Bradford and Blue River Road. This was granted and the road was built to continue from Bradford City, to join the Mt. Vernon road, creating a junction, (Barkley road and Highway 73). Then Bradford bought 320 acres at that site, improved the land and named it Bradford Junction, modern day Conifer.

Bradford further capitalized on his ventures by building a hotel and "saloon." This soon became a stage stop, and he put in a restaurant of sorts and grocery store. In 1862,

Bradford dug a well in the center of the two roads to "water both men and animals." The road was moved slightly in 1937 and the well now stands close to the yellow barn on what was Bradford's property.

In 1865 another charter was

the one granted a charter from the territorial legislature on February 1, 1866, to build the Turkey Creek Wagon Road from Denver up Turkey Creek Canyon.

On that charter this road was called Denver, Turkey Creek and South Park Road, but it is now just called Turkey Creek Canyon Road. The grades were milder, since this road followed the base of the mountains along Turkey Creek, rather than trying to cross over the top of formidable hills. Because of the convenience, traffic shifted once again



Mountain Stage Coach

granted to build a new toll road from Denver through Morrison, over less rugged terrain, to be completed in one year, at the risk of defaulting on the plan. John D. Parmalee agreed to work on this Bradford-sponsored road in exchange for a percentage of the toll collections. But the road was not completed in the allotted time, putting Parmalee in a prime position to take over the project himself.

Once again politics became important. Because John Parmalee had been elected to the Jefferson County Republican Central Committee and had become a resident of Mount Vernon, he was

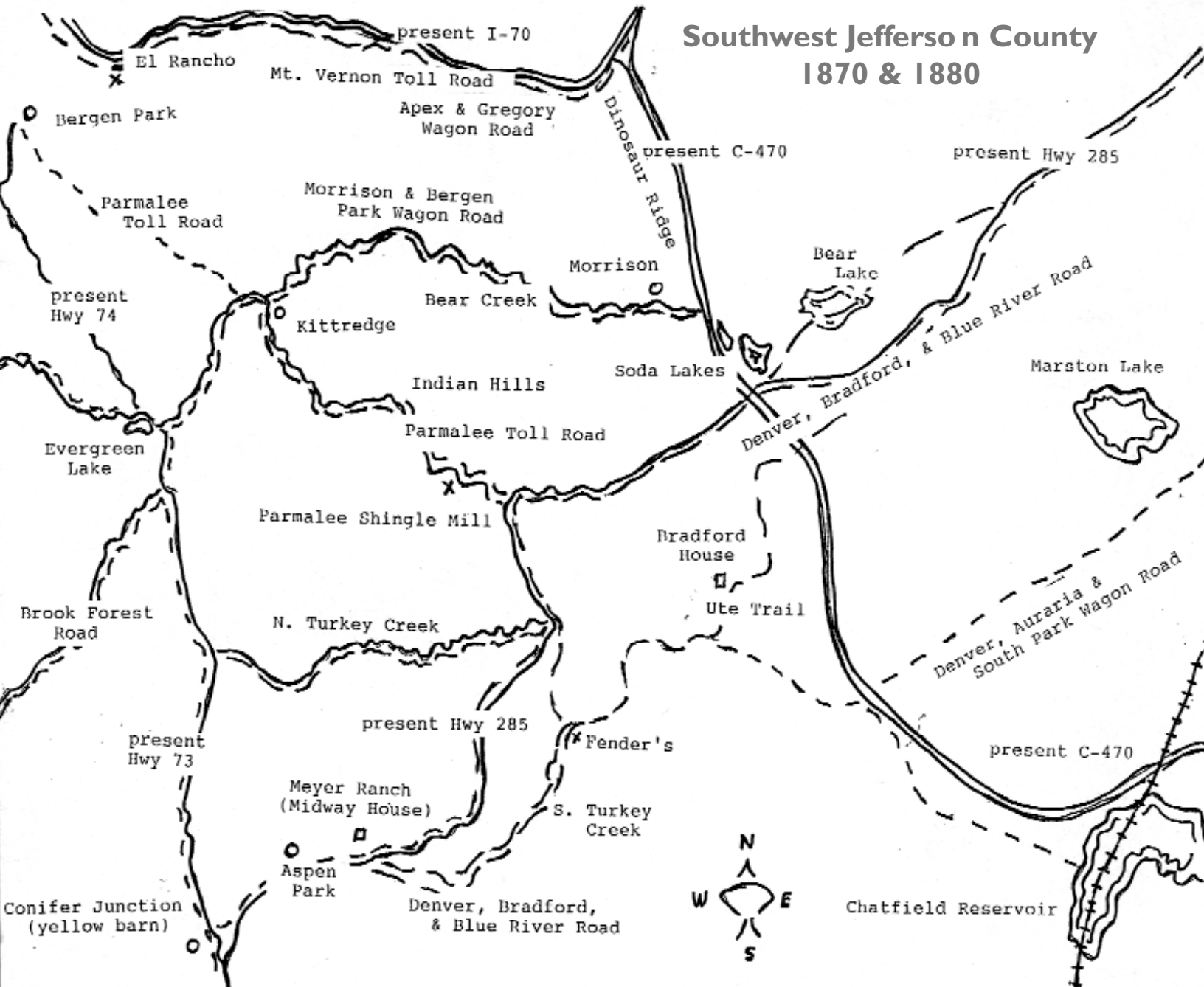
to this new road.

Then in 1869 Parmalee and several other men petitioned Jefferson County to connect the Turkey Creek Road to Bergen's House in what is now Bergen Park, and that rudimentary trail through Kittridge and up Troublesome Creek continued on to Idaho Springs. This permit was granted and the road built, which is still known as Parmalee Gulch Road.

The charter for the Denver, South Park Wagon road was granted in 1872 and the road was constructed from Bradford Junction to Urmstrom, (now Shaffer's Crossing). Ostensibly, this road was to continue on to Tarryall and



## Southwest Jefferson County 1870 & 1880



Leadville, but that is another story.

In 1873, the ambitious Bradford and his uncle, William Bradford Waddell (who organized the Pony Express) and Alexander Majors started a freighting business. Bradford then sold his interest in his property at Bradford Junction to a Col. James Nassar. But on September 27, 1878, the Denver Daily Times, reported that the hotel burned down. According to that article, it had been used as a "stage station and watering place and a

convenient stopping place for travelers. The fire started in the laundry and because of high winds, it burned quickly. Only the bar fixtures, two sacks of flour and a barrel of sugar were saved."

Many places became stage stops at that time. Several two-story buildings were built and used as hotels. Generally, a place was needed for the horses to be watered and cared for, as well as to have passengers fed and bedded down.

The Trading Post in Shawnee

(Park County), the Clifton House (across from Long's Garage), the Ellis Hotel (Elk Creek Road), Conifer Hotel (built by the Kennedys of Beaver Ranch prominence in 1860 across from Foxton Road), the Midway House, (Meyer Ranch, Aspen Park), Twelve-Mile House (Bradford City, Intercanyon Fire Department locale) and Bradford Junction (Barkley Road and Highway 73), were some of the popular stage stops.

Riding in a stagecoach in those

# HINTS FOR PLAINS TRAVELERS

In 1877, the Omaha Herald published *Hints for Plains Travelers*.

"The best seat inside a stagecoach is the one next to the driver... with back to the horses, which with some people, produces... seasickness, but in a long journey this will wear off, and you will get...less than half the bumps and jars than on any other seat. When any old 'sly Eph,' who traveled thousands of miles on coaches offers through sympathy to exchange his back or middle seat with you, don't do it.

"Never ride in cold weather with tight boots or shoes, nor close-fitting gloves. Bathe your feet before starting in cold water and wear loose overshoes and gloves two or three sizes too large.

"When the driver asks you to get off and walk, do it without grumbling. He will not request it unless absolutely necessary. If a team runs away, sit still

and take your chances; if you jump, nine times out of ten you will be hurt.

In very cold weather, abstain entirely from liquor while on the road; a man will freeze twice as quick while under its influence.

"Don't growl at food stations; stage companies generally provide the best they can get. Don't keep the stage waiting; many a virtuous man has lost his character by so doing.

"Don't smoke a strong pipe inside especially early in the morning. Spit on the leeward side of the coach. If you have anything to take in a bottle, pass it around; a man who drinks by himself in such a case is lost to all human feeling. Provide stimulants before starting; ranch whiskey is not always nectar.

"Don't swear, nor lop over on your neighbor when sleeping. Don't ask how far it is until the next station until you get there.

"Never attempt to fire a gun or pistol while on the road, it may frighten the team; and the careless handling and cocking of the weapon makes people nervous. Don't discuss politics or religion, nor point out places on the road where horrible murders have been committed.

"Don't linger too long at the pewter wash basin at the station. Don't grease your hair before starting out or dust will stick there in sufficient quantities to make a respectable 'tater' patch. Tie a silk handkerchief around your neck to keep out dust and prevent sunburns... A little glycerine is good in case of chapped hands.

"Don't imagine for a moment you are going to a picnic; expect annoyance, discomfort, and some hardships. If you are disappointed, thank heaven."

days must have been quite an adventure. In addition to dealing with deep mud and snow, these stage riders and drivers had to fend

off the Indians, while bumping along on hard wooden seats.

## Sources:

Bentley, M. *Upper Side of the Pie Crust*, Jefferson County Historical Society, Evergreen, CO, pp. 10-22.

Berrian, Dan, Interview, Oral History Tapes, Jefferson County Historical Society.

*Denver Daily Times*, September 27, 1878.

Heideman, Lee "Bradford Junction," *Mountain Connection*, Conifer, CO, September 2001.

Lomond, Carole, *City and Mountain Views*, spring 2001.

Warren, Harold, *Bits and Pieces of History*, KR Publications, Bailey, Co, 1994, p. 8.

Pleasant Park School, now a Grange Hall, as it looks today. Also used by the Pleasant Park Neighborhood Association.

Photo by Karen Land Cranford



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lee Heideman is a member of the Jefferson County

Historical Commission and writes a history column for the *Mountain Connection*. Retired from the National Park Service, where she was a writer/editor, she has also taught history, language arts, and Spanish in secondary schools. At the adult level she has taught classes in creative and memoir writing. She has a book in progress, scheduled for publication in 2003.



# THE NATIONAL HISTORIC REGISTER

## *The Barnes-Peery House*

By Charles Hanson

The Barnes-Peery House is one of the earliest extant dwellings in Golden, dating to 1865. Possibly the first two-story brick house in Golden using a coherent architectural style, newspaper reports of the day considered the house one of the finest residences in the town. The house is a notable example of a local interpretation of Italianate styling in Golden. It has survived remarkably well with the prominent original features and the streetscape relatively unchanged and the two generic additions discretely

placed at the rear of the building.

In the mid-1860s, the town of Golden witnessed a transition from a transportation hub servicing the Clear Creek gold towns to a settled community with its own agricultural and industrial economy. Wealthy merchants like David Barnes contributed to the growth of this community by investing in their residences and businesses. Barnes was the owner of a large flour mill, the Golden Mill, located just one block away at Ford Street. A

Pennsylvania native, Barnes came to Colorado's Russell Gulch in 1861. In 1864, he relocated to Golden, where he built his large mill on the banks of Clear Creek. At least two other flour mills were established in Golden by the

As a recent immigrant to Colorado from the East coast, Barnes may have wanted to introduce an Eastern sense of culture and sophistication to the West, using his mansion as a tangible statement of his own good taste.

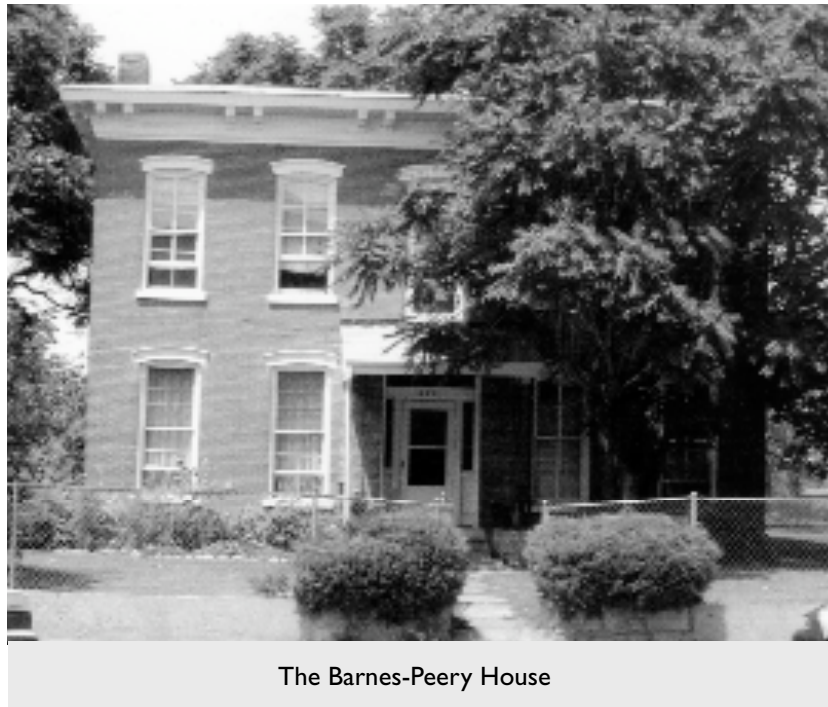
Not to be upstaged by a neighbor's building a nearby house in 1867, Barnes began constructing the north addition in August of that year. This statement of confidence in the town probably was an important gesture to the community because Golden had recently lost its claim as territorial capital to upstart Denver.

David Barnes's house was a standard bearer for a growing

merchant class that built landmark structures, widely imitated, contributing a sense of Eastern cultural refinement and permanence to the community.

The Peery family occupied the house during much of the twentieth century.

In 1993, the Golden Historic Preservation Board approved the Barnes Mansion at 622 Water Street as a Golden landmark and historic site.



The Barnes-Peery House

1880s, but the Golden Mill was the first one.

In 1865 Barnes constructed his mansion at 622 Water Street as a symbol of his growing prosperity. Barnes chose to build using European elements common in the more developed parts of the country but possibly unseen in a frontier town such as Golden in the mid 1860s. His construction of this large home used a coherent architectural style and likely was a statement of his presence and permanence in this community.

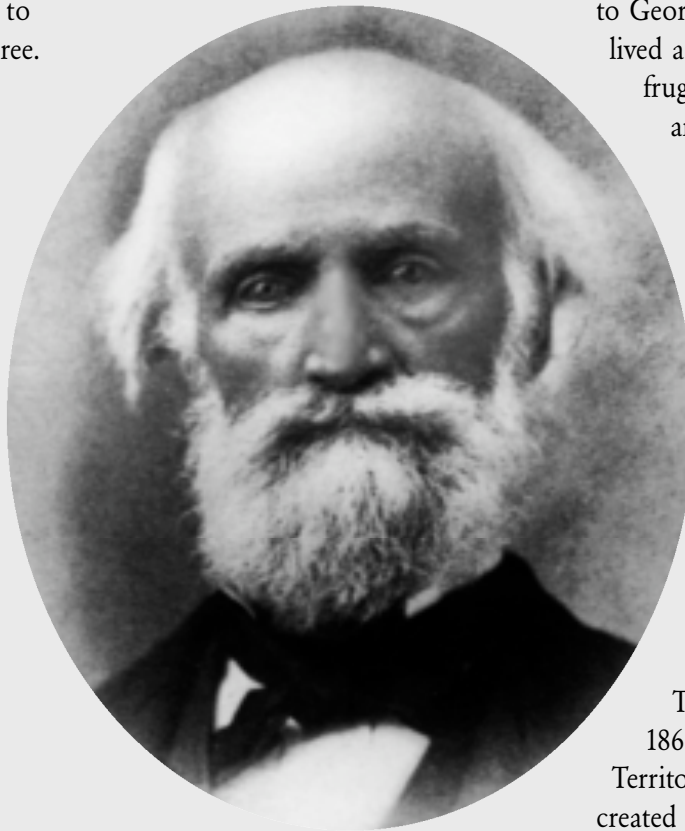
# JEFFERSON COUNTY

## Robert Williamson Steele

### *Jefferson Territory Governor*

Robert Williamson Steele was born January 14, 1820, on a farm near Chillicothe, Ohio. He attended district schools, later taught in a rural school and saved money to begin his studies for a law degree. He married Susan Nevin on September 6, 1848. After his graduation from the Cincinnati Law School, they settled in Warren County, Iowa. In 1855 they moved to Omaha, Nebraska where he entered into the real estate business. He was elected to the Nebraska legislature and served from 1858-59. Attracted by the news of the discovery of gold in this region, Steele brought his family to settle at Mount Vernon, and was elected Governor of a provisional government in October 1859. Steele was the first and only governor of Jefferson Territory, which formed several counties, including Jefferson County and stretching from Henderson to Central City.

He was re-elected and served as governor until the Jefferson Territory was replaced when



Robert Williamson Steele

the Colorado Territory was formed in June of 1861.

Although he "ruled" for less

than two years, those who followed Steele were influenced by his dignity, scholarly dedication and integrity. Steele moved his family to Georgetown in 1865 where he lived a relatively uneventful and frugal life prospecting for gold and practicing law until he died in 1901. According to Volume I of the "History of Nebraska" by Morton, Steele is the "Father of Colorado."

In 1926 the Daughters of Colorado, placed a granite marker surrounded by an iron fence at Mount Vernon. The marker states: "Homesite of R.W. Steele - Governor of the Provisional Territory of Jefferson 1859-1860 - From which the Territory of Colorado was created February 26, 1861."

Robert Williamson Steele was elected to the Jefferson County Historical Commission Hall of Fame in 2002.



# HALL OF FAME

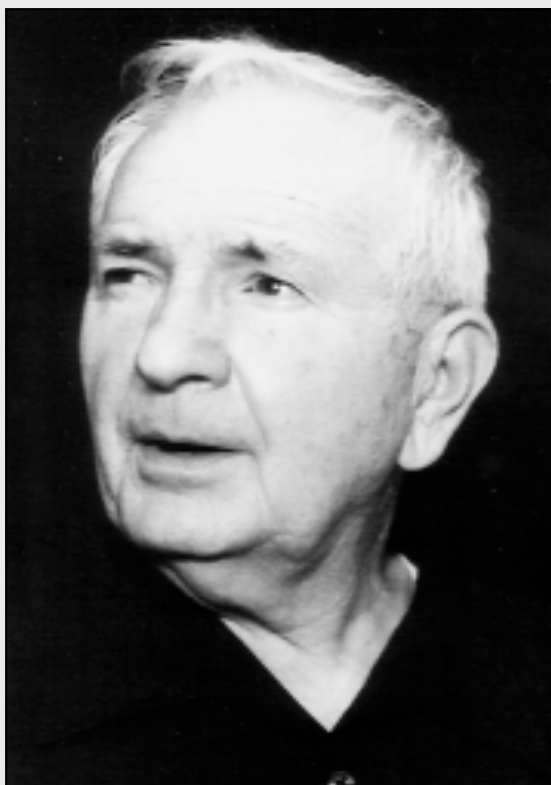
## Robert W. "Bob" Richardson

### *Railroad Author and Preservationist*

Robert W. "Bob" Richardson has chased trains all over the world. from Ohio to Colorado to Iran. He has photographed nearly every train he has come across, beginning in 1931. When looking for a permanent home for his collection of railroad artifacts, he chose Golden, Colorado. Founded in Alamosa, Colorado, in 1948, Richardson's museum has grown from a personal collection of locomotives and cars to the premier railroad history repository in the Rocky Mountain Region. He has gone from being an "eccentric" collector of discarded railroad flotsam (including documents, maps, correspondence, photographs, station signs, and other hardware) to recognition as a foresightful preservationist of the state's railroad history.

Born in Rochester, Pennsylvania, May 21, 1910, Richardson was reared in Akron, Ohio. Robert came to rail-roading almost by accident. He was hired by a group of homing-pigeon enthusiasts to carry birds to distant points for release. This job

gave him the opportunity to ride passenger trains and electric inter-urban cars around northeastern Ohio. Serving in the Army Signal Corps during World War II, he was sent to Iran where he



Robert W. "Bob" Richardson

dispatched trains to Russia and spent free time photographing wartime locomotives. After the war, he moved from Ohio to Alamosa, where he opened the

Narrow Gauge Motel and began to collect rapidly vanishing remains of the state's narrow gauge railroad history. He founded the Colorado Railroad Museum in Golden in 1958,

located at 17155 W. 44th Avenue, and until his retirement he served as the museum curator and executive director.

Richardson's efforts go beyond railroading. He was active during his museum years in promoting and encouraging tourism in Golden. In 1991, the Colorado Historical Society awarded him its prestigious Stephen H. Hart Award for Historic Preservation. In his review of Richardson's *Chasing Trains*, Dick Kreck of *The Denver Post* wrote, "Every Colorado railroad fan should face Golden once a day and say a blessing for Robert Richardson. It is thanks to him that so much of Colorado's rail history has survived."

Robert Richardson was elected to the Jefferson County Historical Commission Hall of Fame in 2002.



Elsie Gray feeding calves in front of the grainery in 1916.

Photo courtesy of Jefferson County Historical Society

# Pleasant Park: In the Beginning

First Place, Writers' Award Contest  
by Karen Land Cranford

It is probably hard for most people to visualize an empty landscape where today throngs of people go about their daily living. It may be equally hard to envision people trekking along singly or in small clusters, moving up water-courses into the mountains, bent on making a satisfactory life. Some individuals headed for the gold diggings but stopped along the way and found an appealing alternative. The pioneers who settled the picturesque territory

south of Conifer may not have considered their own fortitude extraordinary, but their descendants have long admired the dedication of their forbearers.

## **A founding patriarch**

Harvey Leander Corbin, a young Confederate soldier, had been taken prisoner at the battle of Gettysburg. After the close of the war, his release meant a chance for a new life, and he headed west. Reaching the territory of Colorado, he passed up the valuable and productive land below the foothills of Jefferson

County and instead ascended a ways into the mountains. His grandson, Torrence W. Corbin, a popular Jefferson County Courthouse figure, said in a 1972 interview that Harvey probably did this "because he and his friends and relatives were all mountain people in North Carolina."<sup>1</sup>

It's reported that Corbin reached the beautiful valley located on the east side of Highway 285 between Conifer and Critchell and observed, "This looks like a pleasant place to park," and gave it its name.<sup>2</sup>



In reality Corbin settled on this property by squatting in 1868, then returned to North Carolina for his family and moved out permanently in 1870 or 1871. The name Pleasant Park may actually have been in place as early as 1860. Even then it wasn't its first name. The *Western Mountaineer* had an article on January 25, 1860, headlined "Illian" and said "The above is the very pretty name of a new town which has just been laid out on Bergen Hill... our informant says there is plenty of building and saw timber and limestone in the vicinity and also good farming and ranching claims within a few miles and good mill sites on Bear Creek five miles distant. Success to Illian."<sup>3</sup>

A month later, February 15, 1860, the same paper ran this: "We noticed a new town two or three weeks ago by name of Illian... Since then the name has been changed to Pleasant Park. The town includes 320 acres consisting of prairie and timber land and has been surveyed and partly platted. There are several living springs upon the town site, which will afford an ample supply of water. Already several houses are started. We paid a visit to the pleasant valley where Pleasant Park is situated and were much pleased with the location... Liberal donations we understand will be made to those who will build."<sup>4</sup>

A third name for this area came by way of the 1881 Atlas of Colorado by F. V. Hayden, the U.S. Geological Survey of the Territories. Margaret Bentley, in her book *The Upper Side of the Pie Crust*, says this map shows the sketchy beginnings of southwestern Jefferson County, and on



Photo courtesy of Dean Corbin

Harvey and Lucinda Corbin – 1878.

it is a place called "Junction Ho," which would sit today at the crossroads of Highway 73 and Barkley Road in Conifer. She says "southeast of this Junction is a trail extending several miles through 'Hay Claim Park,' now known as Pleasant Park."<sup>5</sup> Hay was an important crop there.

When Harvey Corbin returned to Colorado with his wife and three sons, they built a log cabin and named their new home "Echo Valley Ranch," because of the resounding echos that resulted from every loud noise.<sup>6</sup> In 1878 Harvey purchased additional land

down the valley, not considered Pleasant Park, that came to be known as Resort Creek. One particularly hard winter he'd oversold his hay, leaving insufficient feed for his own animals, and then he decided as a last resort to move the cattle to that nearby lower valley. The move saved his herd, which prompted him to name that next locale "Resort Creek." After his first wife Lucinda died, Corbin remarried and moved his new wife and family to this Resort Creek. He eventually had seven children.

In 1898, Harvey Corbin sold



Harvey and Lucinda Corbin - 1878.

Photo courtesy of Dean Corbin

Echo Valley Ranch, the Pleasant Park property, to his eldest son Henry Pinkney Corbin. Henry, although a rancher, was well educated and became involved in politics. In 1914 President Wilson appointed him to head the United States Boundary Commission. He died in 1922 in El Paso, Texas, still serving in that capacity.

The Pleasant Park ranch next went to Henry's son, Torrence "Doc" Corbin. In 1972 this tract of land was selected by the Colorado State Fair as the oldest continued ownership of a farm or ranch land in Jefferson county. An interview back then found "Doc" remembering the original log house where "deer hides, scraped paper thin, substituted for glass in the windows and the family cooked in a four-foot wide stone and mud fireplace." He also remembered his dad and grandfather using deer tallow to mold candles for light and cooking in bear grease.<sup>7</sup>

January 1940 brought disaster upon the family, however, because that same log house burned to the ground. "Doc" and his youngest son Hank were both in the

hospital at the time. According to "Doc's" wife Madge, a wood stove had been jarred the night before, knocking the chimney pipe loose. Thinking they'd fixed it, they went to bed and next morning tended chores as usual. When they gathered for breakfast and opened the door to the other room, though, they found that part of the house on fire. There was no way to douse the blaze, and they lost everything. They then moved into an old bunkhouse up the hill with sons Dean and Hank,

sleeping in an old trailer house next to them. It took them two years to build a new home.<sup>8</sup>

By the time "Doc" Corbin died in 1979, he had had a major impact on Jefferson County. He'd been a cowboy, a ranch hand, a blacksmith and even a bronc rider, as was his Uncle Ned. "Doc" started working on the roads for Jefferson County in 1930. He served as bailiff for the County Court and election judge for Elk Creek and Pleasant Park precincts. He was President of Jefferson County Schools, District 35, for three years and Secretary of District 19 for nine. In spite of losing both his legs in the early '50's due to complications from a logging accident, he began full time employment with Jefferson County in 1951. From 1959 to his retirement in 1973 he was Deputy Assessor for the county.<sup>9</sup>

"Doc" and Madge sold Echo Valley Ranch in 1977. Today, Madge still lives in Golden next to her daughter Arlene Munyon. Tom Koehler, owner of The Morrison Inn in Morrison, has owned the original Ranch property since

Glen Gray on horse working for Huff Corbin.

Photo courtesy Jefferson County Historical Society





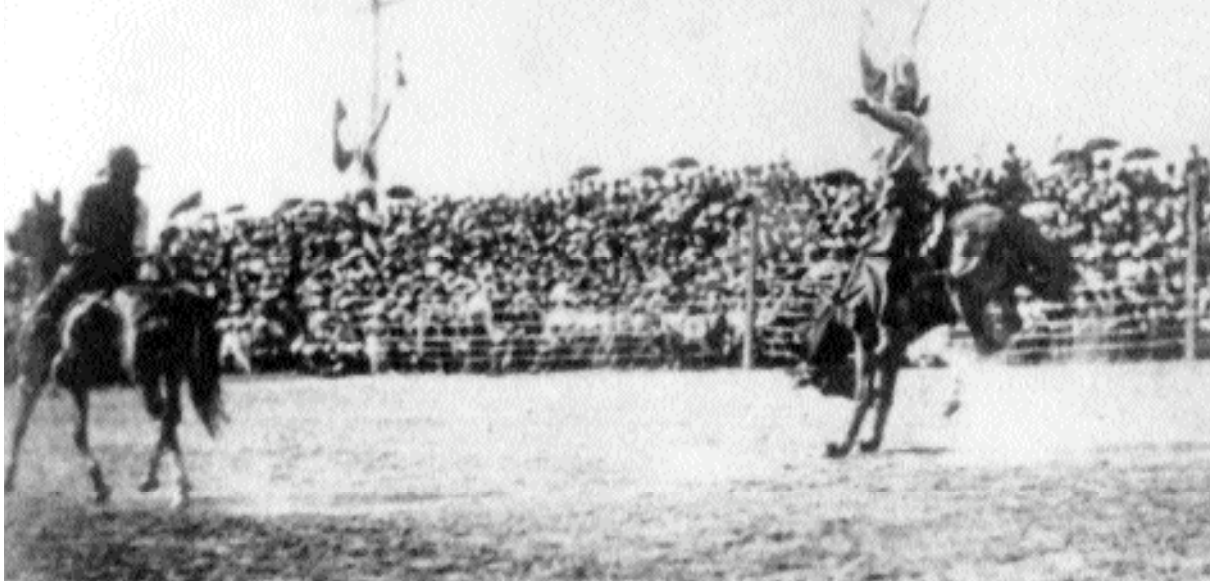
1995 and has built a beautiful home there.

“Doc” got his nickname because he was naturally talented at providing vet services for the animals and livestock in the area, licensed veterinarians not being numerous back then.<sup>10</sup>

## Legault

The promise of gold is what brought Joseph Legault of Canada to Pleasant Park. Legault, (pro-nounced Loo-go) left the stage in Denver and walked up South Turkey Creek Canyon around 1870. A quick affection for this special valley replaced his dream of finding riches. In 1871 he sent for his wife Delphine and son Noah. By 1875 he had obtained a loan for \$610 to secure a homestead made up of 160 acres.<sup>11</sup> Joseph also convinced two of his grown sons by his first marriage to come to Colorado at that time; and one of them, Alphonse, established another homestead adjoining his father’s. Today’s Legault Mountain stands 9,074 feet just north of the two homesteads. Eventually, Elmer Legault, the youngest son of Joseph Sr. and Delphine, acquired both properties, and from there they ended up belonging to Elmer’s two sons, Adrian and Alden Legault. Later, Alden bought out Adrian’s share.

Although Alden passed away in 1984, his wife Betty still lives in the house that contains the original homestead. The cellar has stone work done by Alphonse, who was a stone cutter by trade. Over the years remodeling has



1897 – Ned Corbin – Bronco busting contest. Overland Park Denver Mtn. & Plain.

Photo courtesy Jefferson County Historical Society

been done to keep up with a growing family, but some of the original outside log walls are still visible.

Alphonse did timber work and also drove a stagecoach between Denver and Leadville. He and his wife Cornelia had ten children altogether. All the family’s clothes were hand-sewn by her. But she’s also remembered for the tenacity she showed when a big storm came one day late in the fall. Cornelia had just given birth to one of their children, but within two hours she was out in the field picking up potatoes to keep from losing their cash crop.

Legault family members also left their mark on this state. Alphonse helped cut the stone for the Capitol Building in Denver and for the first City Hall of Denver, and he also helped build the Turkey Creek and Deer Creek roads. He listed his occupation in the 1900 Census Records as “mining of ores.” He did own a mine on Richmond Hill Road that held some gold, silver and copper, but it never amounted to much.<sup>12</sup>

Alden Legault was born in 1906 and remained on the Pleasant Park ranch for all but four years during

World War II. He retired at age 66 from Jefferson County Maintenance. Alden Legault’s wife Betty says life on the ranch is sometimes “isolated” but she still likes living there. She and Alden have four daughters. One of them and a grandson still live nearby on the original property.<sup>13</sup>

## Gray

Tom and Elsie Gray came to the area with their family in 1913. They bought 480 acres next to Legault’s property from Albert R. Fisher who had bought it originally from one Jesse Ray. Tom, born in 1850, and Elsie, in 1869, had homesteaded property in Oklahoma and then spent a year and-a-half in Kansas; but Pleasant Park captivated them too.<sup>14</sup>

The Grays had six children... Olive and Anna, and sons Sharon or “Buzz,” Othal D., T. Glenn and J. Harold. Glenn was 13 years old when they moved to the foothills. In a 1977 interview Glenn Gray remembered working for the Corbins around 1920 when their two ranches were “tied together.” Glenn said it was Henry Corbin’s property but son “Huff” was running it, and “they took a lot

of hay out of Pleasant Park” for Resort Creek. A big snowstorm in April of 1920 caused the Corbins to lose a lot of cattle because they just couldn’t get feed to them. “Oh, it was snowing like the dickens and it snowed for three days and nights.” It was a month before the roads opened up again.

Glenn’s father mostly raised hay. He said they also plowed and planted crops such as rye, barley, and oats, but they always had plenty of hay and potatoes. Several years he said they had 50 to 60 tons of potatoes in the basement. There were times they got as high as \$6.00 a hundred and others when they got as low as 50 cents a hundred. Glenn said they finally stopped growing potatoes because the weather changed. “It just got so dry...”<sup>15</sup>

Today, Buzz Gray’s son Bill lives in the red house on the west side of Legault Lane on property named Angel Acres that their family bought in 1970. Bill’s brother Ed lives on the east side of Legault Lane in



Henry Corbin – Pitching hay onto a wagon.

the original log cabin that Buzz built back in 1923. Bill serves as Treasurer for the Pleasant Park Cemetery Association.<sup>16</sup>

### Kuehster and Huebner

Another prominent name in the area is Kuehster. Frederick Kuehster came to America in 1848 and worked in the mines in Central City. He married Caroline Strehlke in 1872, and in 1875 they homesteaded the property

later married Gertrude Huebner, daughter of Joseph and Clara Shaffer Huebner of Pleasant Park. Carl and Gertrude became a part of Pleasant Park history when they built a house in 1915 on property that had been owned by I. B. Green. This ranch sat halfway between their parents’ places. Gertrude’s father Joseph Huebner built Pleasant Park School House, and Huebner Peak is named for this family.<sup>17</sup>

at the end of Kuehster Road which runs south from Critchell. The settlement called Critchell was about six miles southeast of present day Conifer, on current Pleasant Park Road. The Kuehsters had four children, with Carl being born in 1881. Carl

Rogers Home – Earl, Ethel, Fredrick Rogers holding Ruth, Helen (Thompson) Rogers and Avis.



**Rogers – Granzella**  
The Corbin property sat on the south side at the end of Oehlmann Park Road, and the Frederick Rogers’ property sat on the north side.

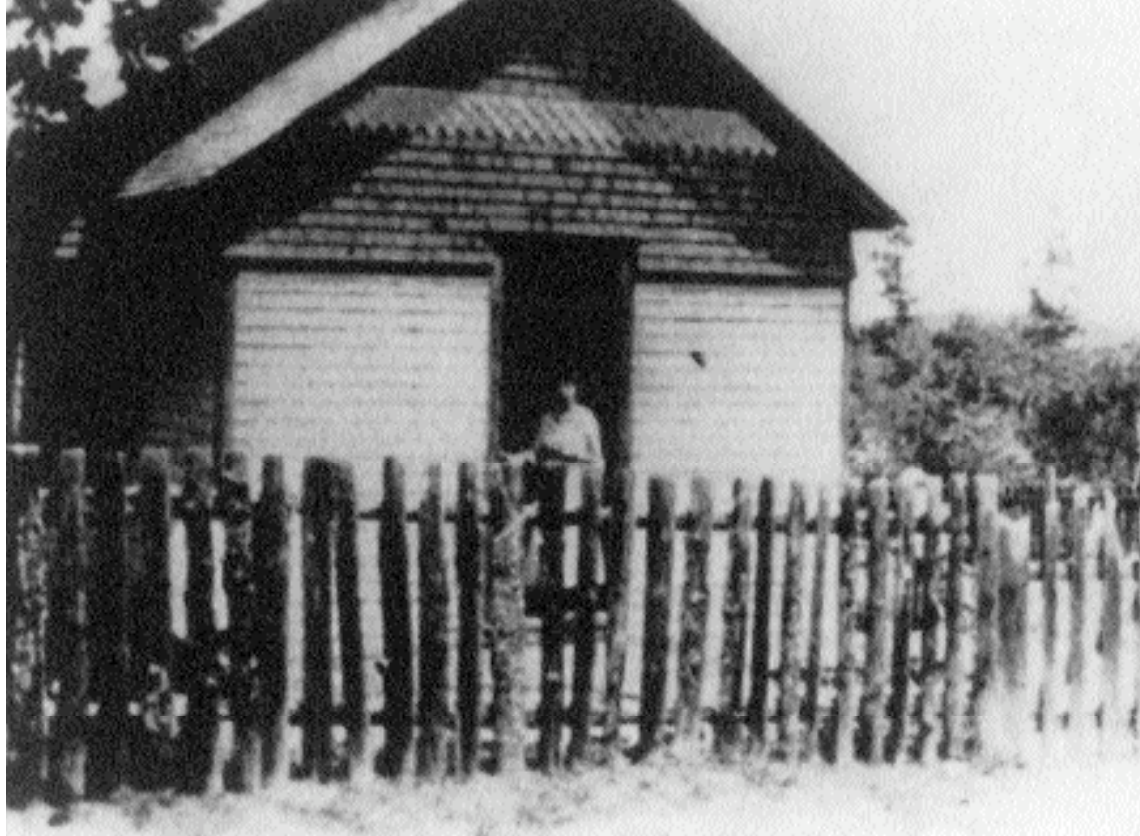


Frederick and Helen Thompson Rogers homesteaded their land in 1898. They had two children when they first came to Pleasant Park and eventually had eight more, with one dying in infancy. The most well known of these children is Margaret, fifth in order of birth. She married James Granzella.

In a 1977 interview Margaret said her dad built a log house and barns that don't exist anymore. They raised cattle, kept work horses, grew vegetables in their own garden, and raised chickens and pigs. They churned their own butter, and as soon as Margaret was old enough to hold the bucket, she milked cows too. Like many of the youngsters in the area, Margaret and her siblings attended Pleasant Park School during *summers*. "With so much snow and everything in the wintertime, and people lived so far away that the kids had to go in the summertime in order to get there most of the time." Margaret's brother Fred, known as Fritz, died in 1949 from pneumonia and is buried in the Pleasant Park Cemetery. Margaret and her husband are also buried there along with a number of other family members.<sup>18</sup>

### **Pleasant Park School**

Before the existing Pleasant Park School building was constructed on Pleasant Park Road, there was an earlier school. In fact, this was the first school in District 19 and was a half "dug-in" and half log structure not far from highway 88 on Oehlmann Park Road. John



Pleasant Park School – 1919

Photo courtesy of Jefferson County Historical Society

Webb, the oldest former pupil to attend the alumni picnic held in 1960, said his mother asked the neighbors in the area to help her build a school. Jess Ray had a sawmill in what is now Aspen Park and he donated all the logs and lumber while the men in the area built it in a day! Wedged in the side of a hill meant that the back and part of the sides were protected by earth. One window in the front was the only light available, and the door could be left open for air circulation when weather permitted.

When a bigger school was needed, the structure that stands today was built in 1894 by Joe Huebner. It was one of the few schools in Jefferson County to have summer sessions only. In the late 1930's Mrs. Bonnie Pickell, a teacher, got the school year changed.

Phebe Granzella, author of *A Century of Jefferson County Mountain Schools*, said her mother

taught at the school from 1940 to 1942. Phebe then taught six weeks the next fall until another teacher was found. Many of these teachers boarded with the Huebners or the Legaults.

The school closed in 1946 due to the decrease in population but was opened again from 1953 to 1955 for grades four through six because of overcrowding at the Conifer school. Pleasant Park Grange No. 156, which was formed in 1907, took over the school in 1956 and has kept it in good repair to this day. It has been used for community meetings and events.<sup>19</sup>

### **Pleasant Park Cemetery**

Most early day communities had their own cemeteries that could be easily spotted from roadsides. The Pleasant Park Cemetery is difficult to find, though, because it sits on private land. This burial ground is located within Legault property lines, but at one time it belonged to the Gray family. According to



Torrence "Doc" Corbin's headstone in Pleasant Park Cemetery one of the largest family plots here.

person buried there was a Mrs. Brown, who passed away in 1875.<sup>21</sup> After that it became sort of an unofficial neighborhood cemetery with the familiar names mentioned earlier on markers and headstones. At one time, four grave sites in this cemetery would have cost a total of \$2.50.<sup>22</sup> It's also the final resting place for many infants and young children. A sign at the entrance to the cemetery asks visitors to please

chain up the gate when leaving.

"Doc" and Madge Corbin's daughter Arlene Munyon said that about ten members of the association, all people who have relatives buried there, gather each June for their annual meeting and to help clean up the area.

A soldier, a miner, and a farmer brought life to the attractive valley of Pleasant Park. The impressive views, the proud pines and the fertile ground held them there. These several enterprising pioneer fami-

lies saw promise in the pristine environment, and through creative diligence they built solid if unspectacular lives. Their offspring consider them adventuresome and resourceful. Many of them rest in the place they found ultimately satisfying.

## Sources

1. "Golden Man's Land Kept in Family," *Golden Daily Transcript*, September 1, 1972.
2. *A Century of Jefferson County Mountain Area Schools*, Phebe Granzella, p. 14.
3. "Illian," *Western Mountaineer*, January 25, 1860.
4. "Changed to Pleasant Park," *Western Mountaineer*, February 15, 1860.
5. *The Upper Side of the Pie Crust*, Margaret V. Bentley, p. 244.
6. Biography of Harvey Leander Corbin, Hiwan Homestead Museum.
7. "Golden Man's Land Kept in Family," *Golden Daily Transcript*, September 1, 1972.
8. "Madge's Story," as told to her daughter, Arlene Munyon, 2001.
9. Obituary, Torrence Corbin, provided by Dean Corbin
10. Interview with Arlene Munyon, 4/29/02.
11. *The Upper Side of the Pie Crust*, Bentley, pp. 111-112.
12. *The Upper Side of the Pie Crust*, Bentley, pp. 116-118.
13. Interview with Betty Legault, 4/22/02.
14. *The Upper Side of the Pie Crust*, Bentley, p. 95.
15. Transcribed interview with Glenn Gray, 1977, Hiwan Homestead Museum.
16. Interview with Bill Gray, 4/26/02.
17. *Mountain Memories*, Betty Moynihan and Helen W. Waters, pp. 108-109.
18. Transcribed interview with Margaret Granzella, 1977, Hiwan Homestead Museum.
19. *A Century of Jefferson County Mountain Area Schools*, Granzella, pp. 14-18.
20. Interview with Arlene Munyon, 4/25/02.
21. *From Scratch, A History of Jefferson County, Colorado* by Members of the Jefferson County Historical Association, p. 128.
22. *Mountain Memories*, Moynihan and Waters, p.110.

Glenn, his dad, T. M. Gray, deeded the cemetery in 1919 to the Pleasant Park Cemetery Association. Years later his folks sold that north quarter to Elmer Legault. Arlene Munyon, Torrence Corbin's daughter and Secretary of the Cemetery Association, says Alden and Betty Legault donated another half acre adjoining the southern end of the cemetery to the association in the late '70s.<sup>20</sup>

A reference in the book *From Scratch* by the Jefferson County Historical Society says the first

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Land Cranford spent twelve years in the broadcasting industry during which time she and her husband owned and operated radio stations in Colorado and Nebraska. She won numerous awards for her news stories and commercials, and she spent a years as TV news anchor for the ABC affiliate in Kearney, NE. Karen is past chairman of the Board for Mt. San Rafael hospital in southern Colorado and



was named one of fifty Outstanding Working Women by Colorado's Council on Working Women. She is also a past president of the Englewood BPW. She was selected Miss Colorado 1976 and still travels the

country as a judge. Today she is a full-time mom to her eight-year-old son, Cory, is involved in PTA and works as a freelance writer. She and her husband Tony live in Morrison.

Headstone for Lenora Gray, Ed Gray's wife, in the Gray family area in Pleasant Park Cemetery.

Photo by Karen Land Cranford







# Ralston Remains

Denver and Rio Grande Western with Ralston Depot far right, 1939.

Otto Perry photographer, courtesy Denver Public Library

Second Place, Writers' Award Contest  
By Martha Martin

Ralston Creek rises in the center of Gilpin County, a few miles north of Blackhawk, near Dory Hill, and it courses east-southeast past Golden and through Arvada, joining Clear Creek at present Sheridan Boulevard. Its approximate length is 20 miles. The Ralston Creek valley west of Arvada is a flood plain north of North Table Mountain, a volcanic outcropping. Today Ralston Creek is impounded just west of state Highway 93 in Ralston Reservoir. Ralston Buttes and Little Rocky Flat, also called Leyden Flats, border this watershed on the north, while Golden Gate Canyon also spills out toward it from the west. At one point thousands of years ago Clear Creek overflowed – from the south –

and left traces of gold in Ralston Creek. Flecks of this gold were the first samples of the precious metal found in Colorado, by a Lewis Ralston from Georgia in 1850, who basically ignored his find and returned home, unlike so many thousands of others who became inflamed with the prospect of scooping up nuggets and “making it rich.” This valley also contained coal, however, still mined today, plus traces of uranium. The Leyden, Murphy, and Ralston coal mines were notable local producers, with the Leyden Coal Mine still continuing production.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the valley's agricultural crops and fruits supplied inhabitants of the mining districts, forming a second tie between Ralston Valley pioneers and these districts. Ranching was a third

profitable link. Ranchers brought their cattle in from the summer mountain pastures to Glencoe, near the base of the buttes mentioned above. Alfalfa fields and haystacks filled sections of the valley, providing both fodder and income.

At one time several small communities dotted Ralston Valley from Glencoe to Ralston Crossing on Arvada's Pioneer Highway 72, east to Denver View. At various times in Ralston Valley's history the name Ralston was used in conjunction with railroad depots and stations along the Ralston line. A Ralston settlement may have been associated with the Ralston Coal Mine, which was located south of Glencoe on Little Dry Creek (Van Bibber). Other Ralston Valley communities were Murphyville, Tindale and Leyden, named for their



Ralston Crossing School House, 1894-1895.

related coal mines.

The Glencoe Land Company at one time owned property in Glencoe Valley with holdings at White Ranch and the entrance to Ralston Canyon. By 1926 parcels of land encompassing the smaller hogback formations were purchased by Coors Brewery Company for porcelain mining. Later Coors' acquisitions included acreage on Ralston Creek. Public travel along the Ralston Wagon Road was effectively halted by the Ralston Dam construction in 1937. When Ralston Reservoir was filled, the settlement at Glencoe was inundated, although occasionally structures are still visible under a low waterline. Remains of the brick bridge supports for a creek crossing at Glencoe probably supported a wagon road or the Ralston Railroad, which ran to Glencoe Station.

Ralston Wagon Toll Road was incorporated in 1865.<sup>1</sup> The wagon road started in Arvada as Ralston Avenue, became a toll road at the buttes, and roughly followed Ralston Creek to Gilpin County, passing through portions of today's Golden Gate Canyon State Park. Golden and Boulder connections on a Golden to Cheyenne Road led hopeful miners to

Ralston Canyon. The Golden route, Pine Ridge Road, followed a broad valley behind the lower hogback formations northwest from the towns of Golden and Golden Gate City along the eastern border of Jefferson County's White Ranch Open Space holdings, near Pine Cliff Stable.

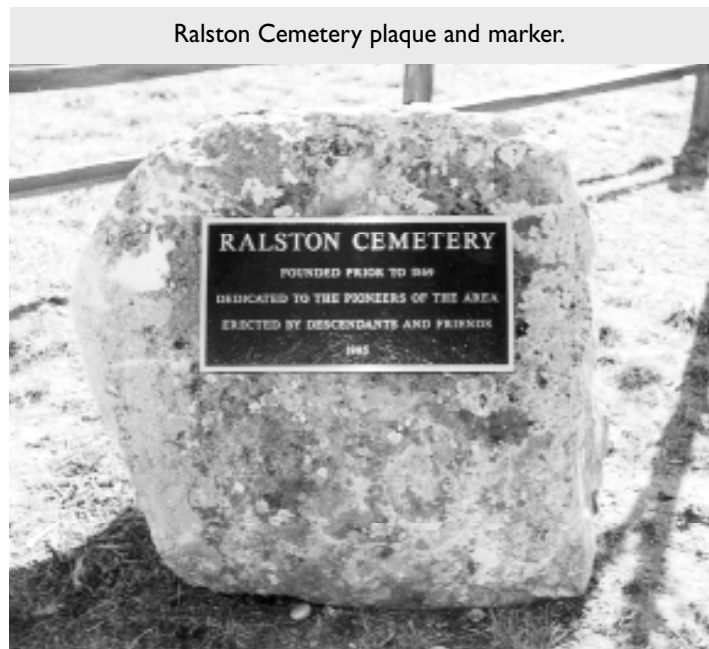
Ralston Valley pioneers could travel to and from the Gilpin and Clear Creek County gold mining districts along numerous toll roads, one being the Ralston Wagon Road. Another name for the Ralston Wagon Road was the Freighters and Farmers Road. Today a graded service road has replaced the original wagon road. That pioneer route up the stream is still visible and is even traversable in places. The first route left Ralston Creek, and its narrow path climbed a hill opposite Ralston Buttes following an unnamed intermittent spring's course down a tree-lined ravine. A tight switch-back would cause problems for a vehicle today, but one can imagine narrow-beamed freight wagons

negotiating the turn. According to Mary Ramstetter in her book *John Gregory Country*, much of the Ralston Wagon Road through Ralston Canyon is eroded and overgrown as could be expected of a crude route carved out of clay and rock over one hundred years ago.

Ralston Crossing was the name of the community on Indiana Street between 64<sup>th</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup> Avenues, extending east to Simms Street and west to Churches Ranch. Prior to Arvada's official naming by Mrs. B. F. Wadsworth, that settlement was variously known as Ralston, Ralston Point, and Ralston Station. Ralston Crossing was an important junction on Pioneer Highway 72. Here, Ralston Road branched from a main highway that went north to Louisville, Marshall, and Boulder. Ralston Road continued west past McIntyre, Quaker, and Easley Roads.

Small jumbles of rocks and scattered aged timber mark the shafts of numerous hard rock mines in the Ralston Mining District. Uranium surface deposits were also noted by the early miners, and significant high-grade hard rock uranium ore deposits were subsequently rediscovered in the Precambrian rock at the onset of the Cold War, whereupon the entrance to Ralston Canyon moved under the

Ralston Cemetery plaque and marker.





authority of the Atomic Energy Commission. Ralston Canyon became a “Secret Garden,” the entrance hidden behind the flank of the Ralston Buttes’ uplifted hogback.

Ralston Creek bisects Ralston Crossing near 68<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Indiana Street. Homes and barns dating to the early settlement are still standing, many in need of paint and repairs. The Ralston Crossing Church at 7400 Indiana Street has been restored as Randall’s Photography Studio. The West family barn standing north of Ralston Creek on the east side of Indiana in more recent history served as a temporary foster home for Colorado Horse Rescue charges awaiting placement.<sup>2</sup> Numerous fires have destroyed structures at the junction of Ralston Road and Indiana. The burnt remains were bulldozed when the road was widened to accommodate increased usage.

Arapahoe City is Jefferson County’s earliest settlement, part of Fairmount district. It was a close neighbor due south of Ralston Crossing and north of Clear Creek at the base of North Table Mountain. The Ralston Railroad line diverted from the Colorado Central Railroad main line from Denver to Golden at Arapahoe City, striking northwesterly through Fairmount. The Golden City and Ralston Ditch and the Arapahoe Ditch diverted water from the north bank of Clear Creek, with courses traversing the east flank contours on North Table Mountain near this line. Railroad grades and dry ditch lines remain.

Joyce Manley’s interpretation of a 1939 USGS map of the Denver to Golden railroad and tramway track lines through Fairmount, in her *Arapahoe City to Fairmount*, shows an active track line running an Easley Road alignment, crossing 64<sup>th</sup> and



Photo courtesy Denver Public Library

Original homestead of Henry J. Juchem, 1890. Ray on Johnny the donkey, Minnie, Guy E., Henry J., Rover the dog and Harold H. Taken at what is now 52nd and Independence, 1904.

Easley and running northwest. The map indicates that at some time between 1889 and 1935 track was re-laid from the first cutoff through Fairmount to Churches Ranch. According to Lynn Yehle, a geologist who has been mapping the course of the Ralston Railroad and area school locations, this cutoff shouldn’t be on the map because the track had been abandoned. He maintains that an active line should have been running northeast to assume a McIntyre alignment, then crossing Ralston Creek two blocks west of Indiana. Railroad ties now imbedded in the embankment mark the crossing and are easily seen from the Ralston Creek trail.

If the 1939 map is correct, this line seems to have been a “mystery railroad.” Yehle almost jokingly retells the folklore of the “mystery railroad’s” existence. Apparently the incline into Golden on the Denver-Golden line was steep. This was a place of frequent accidents involving railroad cars running into each other, and sometimes catching men unawares, causing debilitating injuries

and deaths. Therefore, the cutoff from 44<sup>th</sup> and McIntyre may have been used as a preferred but undocumented alternate track, bypassing Golden.

Slag used for the Ralston Railroad fill at the Churches Ranch/Van Bibber Creek crossing remains one of the few evidences of the railroad’s presence. Lynn Yehle believes the Ralston Railroad had two depot locations, the first being moved 400 feet when the tracks were moved from the east side of North Table Mountain to the west side. Other sections of track fill had been visible before being replaced by the Long Lake Regional Park soccer fields.

An abundant water supply being necessary for mining, farming, and ranching, as well as for steam powered trains, the ‘59ers established priorities on Ralston Creek and Clear Creek. Extensive ditch and canal systems were developed, resulting in ponds and irrigation channels. Among the first Ralston Creek filings was the Ballinger and Bunny Ditch, incorporated in 1862 and drawing water from the south bank of Ralston

Creek. The Ralston Wagon Road Ditch Company also filed rights on Ralston Creek in 1865.

Jefferson County's first ditch, the Arapahoe Ditch, diverted water from Clear Creek near Golden a distance of two miles, to the Arapahoe Bar placer gold mining operations.<sup>3</sup> Today, the Arapahoe Ditch is known as the Farmer's and High Line Canal and Reservoir Company, with thirty-eight miles of ditch line servicing Ralston Valley and Arvada.

Additional water priorities were established with claimants changing when rights were transferred or sold. Ditch lines took the names of the local settlers, with the following among the earliest priorities: Tucker, Churches, Picquette, Haines, Juchem-Reno, Swadley, and Wannamaker Ditches. Today most of the channels are dry, with traces still discernible circling around the flattops and snaking through Ralston Valley and Arvada. In addition to the Farmer's and High Line Canal, the Agricultural Ditch, Churches Ditch, and Croke Canal are presently in service.

Today, draining off high and distant Dory Hill, once rural Ralston Creek curls through sedate and clean-looking Arvada neighborhoods, behind manicured back yards, accompanied by a sylvan path for bikers and pedestrians. In this dry year parts of it seep beneath the surface, so that it too resembles a ditch, trickling intermittently instead of murmuring.

Much of what remains of the Ralston settlement is either under water or has been paved over. Jefferson County's site listings identify the town of Ralston in section 33 as abandoned by 1900,



Ralston Crossing Schoolhouse, Lakewood Heritage Center at Belmar, 2002.

and in another reference it is classified as a previous settlement on Ralston Creek. The Ralston Railroad and the Golden to Cheyenne Road crossed Ralston Creek at this ephemeral town site and proceeded west to Ralston Buttes. The crossing is most likely under Highway 93. Despite this "ghostly" record, however, the *Jefferson County Republican* newspaper continued to carry news from the Ralston community until the 1940's. Events such as choir performances, dances, and meetings at the Ralston Crossing School were reported, indicating that the schoolhouse continued serving as a social community center, acting much like a grange hall.

The Ralston Crossing Schoolhouse in district #12 represents a preservation success story in the saga of Ralston remains. The white wooden schoolhouse, active at Ralston Crossing from the 1870s until the 1950s, outlived the district #7 brick schoolhouse east of Highway 93 and 64<sup>th</sup> Avenue that was dismantled around 1900.<sup>4</sup> Arvada historical records indicate that the Ralston Crossing structure may have been used as a church in the late 1860s with a M.F. McQuinstan as the deeded landowner. In the early 1970s when the Arvada Historical Commission wrote the history of Arvada, it was assumed that the

Ralston Crossing School had been moved to Freemont Elementary School off Ralston and Ward Roads. Because of this confusion in the identification of Arvada area schools, the Ralston Crossing School's whereabouts at that time were unknown.

However, in 1956 the pioneer schoolhouse was moved from the east side of 68<sup>th</sup> and Indiana Street to the grounds of the John F. Vivian Elementary School near 25<sup>th</sup> and Kipling, where it served until 1983 as a temporary classroom. Millie Roeder of the Jefferson County Historical Commission recalled that this structure was moved in two sections down Kipling and across Alameda to the Lakewood Heritage Center at Belmar. Surviving as an example of a rural Jefferson County schoolhouse, it has been well cared for, a gracious and fitting retirement for its hundred years of service.

Records for both the Ralston Crossing Schoolhouse and John F. Vivian Elementary School show why the Ralston Crossing School relocated to Wheat Ridge, and why it resides presently in Lakewood. The Vivian family had a close attachment to the structure, and when scheduled for demolition it was moved to the grounds of the newly constructed John F. Vivian Elementary School. Former Colorado Governor John C. Vivian sold property to the school district in 1954 for the school named in his father's honor. His mother, Addie Higgins, surely attended the Ralston Crossing School inasmuch as her father, John Higgins, served on the first recorded school board.

Ralston Valley High School at



80<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Alkire Street near Leyden, is Ralston's first high school. Opened in 2000, Ralston Valley High School's site south of the railroad tracks occupies the last recorded area associated with the name Ralston. The Alkire House, a foursquare brick farmhouse owned at one time by Wayne Harkness of Ralston, was moved west on 80<sup>th</sup> Avenue during the school's construction and is being restored.

The Ralston pioneers left an impression on the landscape with their roads, ditches, mines, and settlements, but they themselves didn't stay. Many people moved back and forth between mining strikes, and some returned to their homes in other states. A few families, including the Belgins and Tuckers, remained in the Ralston area, their descendants living on the same ground their grandfathers homesteaded.

The Ralston Cemetery is slightly southwest of 64<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Eldridge Street, on a knoll with the Golden City and Ralston Ditch and the Farmer's High Line Canal meandering nearby. The earliest recorded burials date to the late 1860s, with the last interments before 1910. Some folks believe this site began as an Indian graveyard. The 1899 Willets Farm Map labels it simply as a graveyard above Hyatt Lake. Children who perished in the nearby communities at Ralston

Crossing and Fairmount are among the earliest recorded burials. The list of burials at the cemetery is incomplete, because many families of these pioneers had remains relocated to other cemeteries, including Mt. Olivet, Crown Hill, and the Arvada and Golden cemeteries. Having been rescued from a planned housing development, the Ralston Cemetery was enclosed in 1995 by a wooden rail fence, and numerous vandalized markers have also been restored. A marker and plaque have been erected and dedicated to the early pioneers who rest there.

<sup>1</sup> Gold mining dredging operations on Arapahoe Bar resumed at the turn of the past century and during the Depression. A marker and plaque dedicated in 1946 to honor the original settlement at Arapahoe City can be viewed on 44<sup>th</sup> Ave. west of McIntyre St.

<sup>2</sup> This may have been either the Ballinger or Haines School. The Leyden Schoolhouse is recorded as serving after 1900 and given designation district #7. For the past decade it sat in a clearing west of Indiana and 64<sup>th</sup> Ave.

## Sources

*Arvada, Just Between You and Me: A History of Arvada, Colorado, During the Period 1904-1941.* Boulder: Johnson Pub. Co., for the Arvada Historical Society, 1985.

Arvada Cemetery. List of burials for Ralston Cemetery. Courtesy Arvada Cemetery staff.

Colorado Railroad Museum. Records and Files; Ralston Railroad. Courtesy Kenton Forrest and volunteer staff. Spring 2002.

Colorado State Archives. Colorado Department of Personnel & Administration: Colorado Corporations 1861-1875. Online website. <http://www.archives.state.co.us/corp/rcorp.htm> Feb. 2002.

Denver Public Library. Western History/ Genealogy Department. Western History Photos. Copyright: Denver Public Library, Colorado Historical Society, and Denver Art Museum, 2002.

Lakewood Heritage Center. Permission to photograph Ralston Crossing Schoolhouse. Spring 2002.

Jefferson County. Archives and Records; Clerk and Recorder; Millie Roeder, Jefferson County Historical Commission telephone interviews. Spring 2001.

Jefferson County Open Space. Natural Resources Special Usage Access Permit: Ralston Canyon Holdings. Apr. 9, 2002.

Jefferson County Public Library. Special Maps Collection; Northwestern Jefferson County. Courtesy Karen Jones. Summer 2002.

John F. Vivian Elementary School. Jeffco Public Schools. Communication Services: School Profile. Apr. 2001.

Manley, Joyce. *Arapahoe City to Fairmount: From a Ghost Town to a Community.* Copyright: Joyce Manley, 1989.

*More Than Gold: A History of Arvada, Colorado, During the Period 1870-1904.* Arvada: Arvada Historical Society, 1976.

Ralston Valley High School. Jeffco Public Schools. Communication Services: School Profile, May 2002.

Ramstetter, Charles and Mary. *John Gregory Country: Place Names and History of Ralston Buttes Quadrangle Jefferson County, Colorado.* Charles and Mary Ramstetter Editors. Golden: C Lazy Three Press, for Charles and Mary Ramstetter, 1996.

Steele, Rick. "From DSP&P to C&S: C&S Narrow Gauge History." Online webpage. <http://www.railway-eng.com/dspp/dsphst.htm>. Feb. 2002.

*Waters of Gold: The History of Arvada, Colorado During the Period 1850-1870.*

Arvada: Arvada Historical Society, 1973.

"Waters of Gold" reference used with permission of Marcetta Lutz, Arvada Historical Society, Apr. 2002.

Yehle, Lynn. Telephone interviews Mar.- Apr. 2002. Ralston Railroad Van Bibber Creek Crossing Field Exploration-Churches Ranch, Apr. 15, 2002.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

July 1, 2002 marked my fifth anniversary with Jefferson County Public Library. My daughter is planning for college, so I am preparing for life as an empty-nester at the tale end of the baby-boomer generation. I

have two pet ferrets. My great-grandfather hunted with a ferret in Indiana. I remember stories of his adventures in the woods hunting rabbit, possum, raccoon, and squirrel. On one occasion his dogs followed something in the dark after the lantern had been knocked over, and they were never seen again. He accidentally clubbed his hunting ferret

when the prey escaped through another burrow, and I'm told he always grieved his mistake.

Last year's essay, "County of Vivian," supports the nucleus for a thesis on Jefferson County history. I'd never wanted to undertake such an endeavor before because the fright of a fifty-page paper has been too much to contemplate. Colleagues have told me I should write a book to which I reply, "Who'd read it?" However, the more research I conduct, the more I'm finding the story I'm relating in bits and pieces every year lends itself nicely to a book and chapter format. Future essays will cover bootlegging and Federal Prohibition enforcement in Jefferson County.



# STARTING FROM SCRATCH

## *Chicken Scratch*

Special Award, Writers' Award Contest  
By Fran Hackethal

Based on their contribution to the commerce and industry in Jefferson County, Roxy and Frances Vendena are true pioneers. The way they conceived and built their businesses identifies them as resolute entrepreneurs of the WWII years and the mid-century.

Until the 1940s the county was definitely rural. Then, farms, orchards, green-houses, developing suburban commercial clusters, and new industries signaled exceptional growth. The far east end of the county was unincorporated, and within this sparsely settled area was a place called Columbia Gardens. Its boundaries bordered West 33rd

Avenue to the north, Sheridan Boulevard on the east, Fenton Street on the west, and the north side of West 29th Avenue on the south. The adjacent south side of West 29th Avenue was considered a "no man's land."

Roxy and Frances Vendena settled in this area in 1942 and started the **Ridge Valley Poultry** and **Perma-green Plant Food**, two businesses that have continued to offer products and services to Jefferson County and its surrounding communities for the past sixty years. This is a story about the Vendenas and their successful journey, starting from very modest beginnings.

Roxy Vendena was born Rocco Vendegna at the family home in north Denver on January 4, 1916.

His parents were Italian immigrants who had arrived in this country at the turn of the century and settled in north Denver near Mt. Carmel Catholic Church. He was the middle of nine children. When Roxy was five the family moved to the northeast area of Jefferson County in Arvada on Rhea Avenue, now called 60th Avenue, between Lamar Street and Sheridan Boulevard.

Roxy's parents operated a truck farm, growing celery, carrots, beets, and lettuce. His father sold produce to local grocers in and around Denver as well as at Denver's busy Denargo Market, an every day wholesale outlet for fresh fruits and vegetables that sold to grocers from in and out of the state. The market encompassed an area several blocks



square and was located under the present 23rd Street viaduct in lower downtown.

Roxy's formal schooling ended at the eighth grade, which was not unusual for farm children in the mid 1920s. At about age fourteen he left home to live with one of his older brothers and did odd jobs for people in and around Arvada and Golden. That included building brick and mortar ash pits which were used for collecting burnt ashes from cook stoves and wood burning fire places. These conical structures consisted of bricks mortared in a circle with an opening at the ground level so that burned ashes could be removed. As this procedure continued with one row of brick attached to the next, the design closed in to form a dome with a large opening at the top. It took Roxy several days to construct one ash pit. He recalls being paid "around \$5.00 and that included the materials." It is possible that an ash pit or two may still be standing today, perhaps as a planter in someone's back yard.

In addition to building ash pits, Roxy Vendena worked occasionally at the Piggly Wiggly grocery in Arvada. In his 1914 Model "T" Ford pickup he also delivered and spread mushroom compost that he purchased from Savory Mushroom Farms, and manure that he bought from outlying farms around Denver. This was his first venture in independent enterprise. Eventually, though, he found full time work in a grocery market in east Denver and learned about retailing. Around 1935, age 19, about five years after he left home and was on his own, he met Frances Lucille Feese and was instantly smitten.

Frances was born on January 1, 1918 in Alma, Nebraska. She was of Irish/German heritage. Her father

had been town sheriff for many years and, her parents operated a dairy farm. Her maternal grandmother lived with the family much of the time. Frances recalls having a lively childhood. She was a spelling champion in elementary school and a cheerleader in high school, in addition to studying piano and voice. Upon high school graduation in 1935, accompanied by her mother Lucy,

Frances took the train to Denver for classes in cosmetology at the Denver Beauty School. She was joined a week later by her grandmother Eliza, who was to stay with her during Frances' schooling. Just nine hours after her arrival in Denver she and her mother and some Nebraska friends who were already living in Denver went to the Denver Dancing Academy for the evening. There she met Roxy Vendena, and there was an immediate magnetism in



**Above:** A caricature of Roxy that appeared in a local newspaper in the 1950's.

**Left:** Brooder houses (in the background) were built to house and shelter mature turkeys as well as for their roosting at night.

the encounter for her too.

Roxy and Frances describe their courtship as ordinary. He was working hard and she was in school for long hours, but they spent time together on weekends. Roxy owned a black 1929 Model "A" Roadster. He had it painted white with red flames that cascaded over the hood and down to the running boards, and there was a Gilmore lion head decal on each door. The couple went on drives in the mountains, and they ate out on Saturday nights, and went



The 1937 Reo pick-up filled with chickens.

dancing. Along with Frances's grandmother, they went to church on Sunday and visited Roxy's parents and family. He recalls that they also went to Lakeside and Elitch's amusement parks and to Eldorado Springs, and they also motored to Inspiration Point in North Denver, where he "just held her tight."

Frances finished her beauty course, took the state cosmetology board exam, and went back to Nebraska to wait for her grades, after which she returned to Denver

to begin her first job. In the meantime, Roxy had secured a position with Safeway Stores and was ready to propose marriage. They were married on May 1, 1937 at Mt. Carmel Catholic Church in Denver.

With scant funds in the midst of the Depression they had no honeymoon, just a hamburger and malt and dancing at the Rainbow ballroom. In the fall of 1937 they learned that their first daughter would arrive the following June. Frances abandoned a career in a

beauty salon, and grandma Eliza agreed to remain to help with the family.

### **What Came First, the Idea or the Opportunity?**

After working for Safeway stores for about three years and with the added responsibility of a second daughter in 1939, Roxy decided to develop a private business of his own. Recognizing an opportunity to supply dealers on busy Market Street in Denver, he began hauling live poultry. With his 1932 Chevy four-door sedan and \$50 borrowed from a friend, Roxy and Frances began their poultry business. First, Roxy contrived a "frontbed" for the Chevy sedan. Using wooden pallets that he attached to the front of the car, he was able to secure a few chicken coops, each coop holding twenty-four chickens. Eggs he transported inside the vehicle. He began each day at 5:00 a.m. by placing the empty chicken coops on the "frontbed." He borrowed additional funds from Eliza, and drove to outlying towns north and east of Denver where he bought live poultry. Then he returned to Market Street in downtown Denver to sell his daily "haul."

Roxy quickly realized the benefit of direct sales, because eager customers approached him for fresh poultry right off his truck. Soon he was able to afford another vehicle, and he purchased a 1937 Reo pick-up truck. He fashioned a post on the back of the truck to hang a scale for weighing the poultry that he would buy by the pound. He recalls that he paid 5 cents per pound for old roosters. Hens, ducks, geese, turkeys, whatever the farmers would have and what he could carry became his load for the day. He would catch about five chickens at a



time, place them on the hanging scale to report their weight, pay the farmer, place the chickens in the coops, then then hoist them onto the “frontbed” and return to Denver to sell his quota for the day.

Having lived in the north Denver area for the previous three years, in 1942 the Vendenas moved to the Columbia Gardens community in east Jefferson County. Because of complications due to Roxy’s father passing away, a place to locate their growing business was delayed, but at length for a borrowed \$300 down payment they purchased a home at 2893 Depew Street with its detached single car garage and five additional 25 ft. lots. This property allowed them to begin their venture in a business that would become known throughout Denver and its surrounding suburbs as **Ridge Valley Poultry**. Along with launching a brand new business in 1942, their last child was also born, a son.

At their new property the single car garage became the processing facility as well as a retail store. The Vendenas’ enterprise rapidly developed into the production of fresh dressed poultry and fresh eggs. Dressed poultry means slaughtered and scalded, feathers plucked, entrails removed, whole or with the carcass quartered, cooled in ice water and then refrigerated. Roxy taught Frances the process. While he was on buying trips, Frances attended to business matters, answering the phone, taking orders, and on Saturdays waiting on customers. Grandmother Eliza helped with cooking meals, doing laundry, and helping with the children. Eliza continued living with the family for nine more years, until 1949 when



The 1932 Chevy four-door sedan – before it became the “frontbed.” Roxy at his parents home on Rhea Ave. in Arvada. He was about 24 years old.

she returned to her daughter’s home in Nebraska.

For their holiday business in 1942 Roxy bought fifty turkeys at about 15 cents per pound - live weight to the farmer. At Thanksgiving that first year they sold the birds oven-ready, dressed weight for 49 cents per pound. After this sample of success for their first Thanksgiving and Christmas season, they rewarded themselves with a brand new 1943 two-ton Chevrolet flatbed truck that made buying trips much more efficient. Before long they hired a helper or two, including Roxy’s younger brother as well as a couple of part-time people to candle eggs.

Egg candling featured a box-like apparatus with a rubber-rimmed one inch hole and a light bulb on the inside. Each egg was held to the light and observed for its air space (which indicated the age of the egg or other irregularities.) Selling fresh eggs, meant making sure they were perfect. The smaller sized eggs were considered “seconds” and were sold to several nearby institutions. Egg candling was a very meticulous job.

### **Water, Water Anywhere**

Along with the increasing volume of business, the Vendenas were up against an obstacle that meant a problem for their processing procedure. As mentioned earlier, the south side of West 29th. Avenue was a “no mans land,” not considered part of the Columbia Gardens. The water supply for this side of the avenue came from the Ashland Reservoir on West 29th Avenue at Fenton Street, moving through a pipe in a gravity flow. Consequently, there was little volume and pressure in the running water, and with the Vendenas’ needs for dressing fresh poultry it became a problem. Knowing that Columbia Gardens received its water from Denver, Roxy explained his water difficulties to the president of the Columbia Gardens Association, asking for a hook-up to the Denver water main. When this request was taken to the board, an interesting trade-off transpired. The Columbia Gardens Volunteer Fire Department was short of day-time manpower, and because Roxy was close-by and many of the male residents worked elsewhere during



**Left:** Roxy and Frances in 2001.



**Right:** Roxy and Frances a week or so after their marriage in 1937.

the day, they asked him if he could join the force and help with fire calls. Although still working ten or more hours each day, with the help that he now had Roxy then began going out on fire calls.

The Columbia Gardens Association disconnected him from the old water source and hooked the business onto the high pressure system, supplying the volume of water needed to process the fresh poultry. Today Roxy Vendena is proud of the Captain's badge that he earned for his years of service in the fire department.

The business grew so rapidly during the 40s that Roxy knew he would have to find easier and better ways to do things. He constructed additions to the original single garage to provide more room for both the processing area and the retail outlet. He designed, built, and installed machines to automate the dressing plant. Then he added scalding tanks, a room-sized walk-in refrigerator, and he developed an automated device for bleeding the poultry. He opened up the attic with a pulley-type elevator that gave added storage, and by 1949 he and Frances made plans to build a new home on a parcel of their land on

Depew Street, just south of the business. In Roxy's and Frances's new home in 1950 Frances sewed clothing for the children, went weekly to downtown Denver to do the banking, played the piano accompaniment for the dancing school where her daughters studied, and finally could be involved in PTA and playing the organ at church.

### **Diversify, Diversify**

Later the Vendena's were able to diversify by purchasing several properties in the adjacent block on West 29th Avenue as investments. Ever economically creative, in 1950 Roxy experimented with another idea, processing fertilizer to bag and sell. From his former days of hauling and spreading manure, he knew that fertilizer was a product that could be in demand. He had an eye on a property in Arvada at 55th and Harlan Street, a big old barn with an acre of land, envisioning it for a fertilizer plant.

Another of the Vendena ventures was producing a pet food that he called, Chick'n Dinner - For Your Pets. He used ground chicken parts packed in cottage cheese cartons and sold frozen. The demand became so great that he discontin-

ued the product because "there were not enough hours in the day."

Along with regular buying trips for poultry and eggs, he began buying chicken, cow, and horse manure. He bought some used paper sugar bags from Pepsi Cola and Coca Cola. In an area behind the poultry processing plant, he and his workers mixed the concoction, filled 200 of the sugar bags and displayed them in the front of the retail store to see how they would move, selling them for 79 cents per bag on Saturday, always their busiest day. They sold out so quickly that they were obliged to stop production after experimenting for two or three weeks. This success convinced Vendena that he could succeed selling fertilizer for a profit.

Another problem surfaced in 1950, however, that signaled major changes in buying live poultry. Because of competition with grocery stores in the city, many poultry farms ceased operating. After the war buying trips took Roxy further away to eastern plains towns such as Brush, Ft. Morgan, Sterling, Akron, and Wray and even to some western Nebraska villages. He became disappointed, however, with the diminishing quality of poultry from these farms. Compared to turkeys available in the grocery stores, the farm turkeys lacked flavor and plumpness because of inadequate feeding practices. Therefore, he decided to raise his own turkeys and began easing "off the road" for good. As far as purchasing other poultry for the store, he would buy it "ready dressed" from local poultry processing plants. Eggs could be purchased from the Market Street egg dealers. In that same year he bought four more acres of land adjacent to the Harlan Street property to raise turkeys and to process fertilizer.



Roxy named the product *Permagreen* by combining the words *permanently* and *green*. The “barn” as the family called it, became a multi-purpose establishment. One end of the building was used for processing the fertilizer and the other end was remodeled for raising baby turkeys. About 3000 young turkeys were purchased early in the year for the Thanksgiving holiday in 1950. They were housed on the inside until they were about six weeks old, and then they were turned out into the fields to mature.

Permagreen, like Ridge Valley Poultry, became an immediate success and grew very quickly. A full-time crew of 8 to 10 people was hired during the peak of the season. A couple of heavy duty trucks were purchased for transporting manure from farmyards as well as for taking deliveries, after which Roxy again invented machines for a faster, more efficient production. Accounts were established in hardware, grocery, and discount stores in Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, New Mexico, Utah, and Texas. Soon, Vendena also processed and bagged mountain peat moss from a bog in Jefferson, Colorado. He blended products and added a

potting soil for house plants. In a short time the truck fleet multiplied to six or seven.

### **Expanding, Expanding**

By 1960, the Vendenas had expanded their trade to include a shoppette on the corner of 29th and Depew. The businesses at the shoppette as well as those on the adjacent block of West 29th Avenue included a bakery, a dairy, a laundromat, a beauty shop, a dry cleaning establishment, a pizza parlor, and a dance studio. The Vendenas also added on and remodeled the Ridge Valley Poultry retail store for the final time

Today Permagreen Products Company, owned and operated by the Vendenas’ son, offers a variety of landscape services and garden products. The Ridge Valley Poultry on the corner of 29th & Depew Street remains a tribute to the family and their years of hard work. During the holidays in their first year of business in 1942, Roxy Vendena sold fifty turkeys at Thanksgiving and Christmas, but by the time of their retirement in 1976 they were selling six thousand turkeys during the holidays. Prices for poultry over the years really have not escalated to a great

degree. In 1942 Roxy sold turkeys for 49 cents per pound. When they retired in 1976 they were selling turkeys for 59 cents per pound. Their prices were always a little higher than the super markets, though. Freshness and high quality were key factors in selling out a couple of weeks before each holiday.

In 1976, the Vendenas retired and sold the poultry business. They continued, however, to own and lease the peripheral properties until 1990 when the Ridge Valley Poultry sold again. It then became known as Wheat Ridge Poultry and Meat, which today continues to market fresh poultry and eggs as well as beef. This firm also processes about 1,000 head of deer, elk, and bear each year. In 1994 the Vendenas liquidated all of their West 29th properties.

When the Vendenas left their thriving businesses, they built a home high above Clear Creek near the west end of Inspiration Point, and they remain residents of Wheat Ridge. At 86 and 84 years of age, they enjoy their home, three children, six grandchildren and three great grandchildren. This year was very special; they celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary on May 1, 2002.



### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Francille E. Vendena Hackethal is a native of Jefferson County, having lived in the Columbia Gardens area as a child until 1958 and in Wheat Ridge for the following 37 years. She is the first-born daughter of Roxy and Frances Vendena. In 1996 Francille and her husband moved to

the Applewood area in Lakewood. She was in the first graduating class of Jefferson High School in 1956, and she and her husband Clem were married in 1958. They have one son, Clem III, and a grandchild, Stefan.

Mostly a stay-at-home mom when her son was young, Fran later worked part time giving organ lessons for several

institutions and in her home. In 1973 she began work at Wheat Ridge Junior High School as an educational assistant. Early on she developed a program for enhancing self esteem in adolescents. Along with a team teacher and an educational grant through the Colorado Education Association and the Jefferson County School District, she worked with students over a five-year period to implement this curriculum. She also co-authored a teaching manual that was published in 1980. In the following 14 years Fran worked in the gifted and talented program while continuing to instruct life-skills studies. She was also the cheerleading coach and student government sponsor. After 26 years she retired in 1999, at that time serving as event coordinator.

Fran is pleased that the Historical Commission is publishing this tribute to her parents.

## JEFFCO HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEMBERS



Deborah Andrews  
Founder  
Andrews & Anderson  
Architecture,  
Historic  
restoration  
specialist



Lucy Bambrey  
Teaches  
Anthropology,  
Archaeology,  
Earth Sciences,  
Environmental  
Law & Property  
Law.



Denzil (Denny)  
Boeka  
Retired, Jeffco  
Sheriff's Dept.;  
Received Metro  
Law Enforcement  
Association  
Humanitarian  
Award



Donald E.  
Ebner  
Retired  
executive  
Chronicler of  
history, Ken  
Caryl Ranch



Lorre Gibson  
Recent Olympic  
torchbearer;  
Chemo Angels  
volunteer;  
program assistant  
at CNI Center  
for Brain & Spinal  
Tumors



Liz Grady  
Has served  
many charitable  
organizations



Jerry Grunski  
Retired English  
teacher and  
sports referee,  
author of  
sports  
officiating books



Max Haug  
Past President  
Olde Town  
Arvada Assoc.,  
Arvada  
Historical  
Society, Realtor



*Th Jefferson*

### Jefferson County Historical Commission

## JCHC NEWS

Cathleen Norman's article "Glimpses of the Past" in this issue contains at the end an explanation of her mission in identifying and researching over 4,000 properties in the county that have significant historic value. This three-year cultural survey has been sponsored by the Jefferson County Historical Commission and funded by grants from the Colorado State Historic Fund.

The Commission continues its program of identifying historic sites with its Place Names Directory project, headed by Chuck Hanson. The Commission website contains over 3,000 place names of county historical sites: <http://www.co.jefferson.co.us/archives/search.cfm>

Hanson and another Commission member, Jack Raven, have also spoken at various service clubs, explaining the function of the Commission and offering tidbits of county history. Commission member Don Ebner's wife Dolores and Commission member Milly Roeder also appeared on public television, giving interviews on historic preservation of the Bradford House in Ken Caryl Ranch and the Foxton Post Office.

Preservation and education continue to be main thrusts of Commission activity, and toward that end members have helped plan a Rocky Flats Cold War Museum (most notably Chairman Max Haug's involvement) and have assisted grants' applications that resulted in \$868,000 distributed for eleven projects, among which are building restoration efforts at the Hiwan Homestead Museum in Evergreen. Commission member Ebner has reported that additional programs awarded grants from the State Historical Fund include interpretive signage at Red Rocks Park and log repair at the Chief Hosa Lodges.

Results of other Commission activities appear in this magazine: writers' award contest winning articles, Hall of Fame selections, an addition to the National Register of Historic Places (the Barnes-Peery house in Golden), and even compelling childhood memories of member Lawrence Lotito.

## JEFFCO HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEMBERS (continued)



Rita Peterson  
American Cancer  
Society and  
Senior Resource  
Center boards.  
Real estate  
appraiser



Jack Raven  
President Arvada  
Historical Society,  
Arvada Lions  
Club, Arvada  
Cemetery  
Association.  
Retired Safeway  
Manager



Milly Roeder  
English-German  
translator,  
consultant for  
Urban Design;  
historical  
researcher; grant  
writer



Richard Simmons.  
Writers' Award  
Chair;  
Pilot, flight  
instructor;  
Manager &  
Principal  
Sunamerica  
Securities



Joyce Weedon  
Former member  
Historical &  
Architectural  
Sites Commission  
and other  
community  
organizations

## COMMISSION STAFF



Duncan  
McCollum  
Jefferson  
County  
Archives &  
Records  
Manager



Susan  
Casteleneto  
Archives &  
Records  
Management  
secretary





Lee Heideman  
Former writer/  
editor, taught  
history in jr/sr  
high school,  
writes history  
column in  
"Mountain  
Connection"



Viona "Vi" Mae  
Hader  
Historian. Past  
Manager Golden  
Chamber of  
Commerce,  
Astor House &  
Foothills Art  
Center



Charles Hanson  
Architectural  
Historian,  
History  
Graduate  
student CU  
Denver,  
Certified Public  
Accountant



Erlene  
Hulsey-Lutz  
Real Estate  
Broker



Carole Lomond  
Publisher *City &  
Mountain Views*  
magazine and  
book: "Historical  
Tour of Lariat  
Loop Heritage  
Area



Larry Lotito  
Retired U.S.  
Army 1981,  
Weather Officer  
in Europe and  
Korea, civilian  
career in Europe  
& US



Norman Meyer  
Pilot, rancher,  
journalist,  
developer. Much  
of Meyer family  
ranch now Jeffco  
Open Space  
Park. Colorado  
Native; lives near  
Conifer.



Tim  
Montgomery  
Active in Arvada  
City Council,  
Planning & Zon-  
ing Commission.  
Certified Public  
Accountant &  
Management  
Consultant

Six Commission members participated in a weekend Historic Preservation Conference held by Colorado Preservation, Inc. at the end of January. Among the sessions summarized was a report on "ghost signs" by Erlene Hulsey-Lutz. These are not religious graffiti but instead are faded or partially covered commercial emblems from the past which signal a new use for a building, such as a railroad's depot being transformed into a boutique or an old schoolhouse becoming a grange hall.

An ongoing record of county history is on display in the courthouse atrium, with panels being renewed each month. Attractively presented topics this year have included backgrounds of pioneer families in the Morrison area (mounted by Sally White, on behalf of the Morrison Heritage Museum) and illustrations of early railroading, by the Colorado Railroad Museum in Golden, Charles Albi, President, and Kenton Forrest, Historian. One month's presentation also featured a portrayal of Commission projects.

Further examples of the Commission's own efforts at discovery are Lee Heideman's story in this magazine about early wagon roads and Norm Meyer's follow-up efforts to find remnants of early trails. Heideman used maps of late 1800s toll road construction, while Meyer flew his Cessna over the route from South Turkey Creek to the Ken Caryl Ranch, photographing the steep forested terrain to see if faint trail markings were still evident.

#### DISCLAIMER

The information in this magazine is solely provided by the authors. JCHC, the Board of County Commissioners and the *Historically Jeffco* committee are not responsible for the opinions of authors and the content of their articles.

#### OBTAINING COPIES

Copies can be purchased for \$5 at the Department of Archives and Records Management. The magazine is available free of charge to members of Jefferson County Historical Societies.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Archives and Records Management Department has further information for those interested in history and historic preservation in Jefferson County, plus applications for Commission membership. Call Duncan McCollum at 303-271-8446.

## COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



The Jefferson County Historical Commission members are appointed by the Board of County Commissioners. The current County Commissioners are (from left): Richard Sheehan, Michelle Lawrence and Pat Holloway.

## JEFFCO WRITERS AWARD CONTEST

Jefferson County Historical Commission invites writers of all ages to participate in its Writers' Award Contest. All topics must relate directly to the factual history of Jefferson County. For new contest rules and application forms, please contact Duncan McCollum at Archives and Records Management Department at 303-271-8446.

# *A Glimpse of Jeffco History – From Dinosaurs to Covered Wagons and Candymaking*



Above: "Tracks Make a Big Impression on New Golden Links," page 1; below "Southwest Jeffco Trails and Toll Roads," page 20; right: "Jolly Rancher," page 16.



**Jefferson County Historical Commission**  
Archives & Records Management, Rm 1500  
100 Jefferson County Parkway  
Golden, CO 80419

Prsrt Std  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit #148  
Golden, CO

ISSN 153-6047-4



50500