

HISTORY COLORADO | WINTER / SPRING 2026

THE COLORADO

MAGAZINE

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

October 4, 1957

The Rising Resilience of Carlotta Walls LaNier

PERSONAL

Dear Mrs. Walls:

I deeply appreciate your Sep
signed also by other parents
land has been clearly defin
To support and defend the
States is my solemn oath as
which imposes upon me the
the laws of our country are
continue to discharge that re
of all Americans today, as we
institutions of government for the
yet unborn.

I believe that
at
's heart goes
al. In
quality



**Forbidden Unions
Masons of Colorado
A Trail of Two Peaks**

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COMMUNITY IS THE ANTIDOTE



Oxford yet again declared a Word of the Year for 2025 that was an unflattering reflection of ourselves: *rage bait*. Its social media content designed to elicit anger, often easily ignited because of our biases and preconceived assumptions. Its usage, they cite, tripled last year.

In a recent interview with author and podcaster Scott Galloway, he noted that 40 percent of the Standard & Poor's stock market index has a financial interest in our polarization. Rage bait is what makes this attention-driven rage economy possible—the financially incentivized manufacture of anger.

And, of course, rage bait is fed by our isolating internet use. We spend increasingly more time with our tech and less time with each other. It's easier to be angry when we've lost touch with each other's humanity and when we rely on technology instead of our neighbors. We call Uber instead of a friend when we need a ride. We use Instacart instead of borrowing an emergency cup of sugar from our neighbors.

I theorize that less isolation and more real-life human interaction and interdependence are the antidote to being the raw material for profitable rage in 2026. We need community in real life in this 150th year since Colorado became a state.

Community doesn't mean that we agree on things, worship in the same way, or feel politically aligned. But it does mean that we see each other's humanity. Our year's dual anniversaries—America's 250 and Colorado's 150—offer a special opportunity for connection with each other. You can get involved in the growing list of events, exhibits, and programs across the state to mark these milestone birthdays. We can participate in these together simply because we share the same geography and we share the same obligations to the future.

I want to live in a world where the word *community* is a truer reflection of our lives than rage bait. We only get there when we realize that we belong to each other. We are responsible for making our community, showing up for people, and being helpful. We need fewer keyboard warriors and more people willing to set up the chairs at a gathering or available to lend a ride or cup of sugar. The success of our next 150 and 250 years relies on our responsibilities to our neighbors—near and far—and our ability to build and maintain community.

We are honored that you are part of History Colorado's community, and we look forward to seeing you soon. Let's gather and connect as we honor our shared past and imagine together what our future will behold.

President/CEO and State Historic Preservation Officer

We acknowledge that the land currently known as Colorado has been the traditional homelands of Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. We are grateful to work in partnership with the fifty-one sovereign nations who continue to call this land home. Together, we plan exhibits; collect, preserve, and interpret artifacts; do archaeological work; and create educational programs to share the history of Colorado.

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THE COLORADO MAGAZINE

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ABOVE This delightful photo of a young person in festive costume is from Frank Muramoto's studio in Pueblo. The Japanese-born professional photographer operated in Colorado for more than four decades from 1915 to 1958, capturing glimpses of everyday life and special occasions for the people of Pueblo.

COVER Carlotta Walls LaNier, one of the Little Rock Nine, illustrated by Thomas Lusk

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THE FORUM

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UNITED FLIGHT 629

Several astute readers kindly wrote in to point out editing errors in the last print issue of the magazine. We regret and apologize for these mistakes, and have corrected the online version. Thank you to all who brought them to our attention.

While the Fall/Winter 2025 issue of *The Colorado Magazine* is one of the best issues ever, it is marred by some sloppy editing of “The Sabotage of Flight 629.” On the very first page, the crash site is said to be in Weld County “eight miles west of Longmont.” I know people rely on GPS a lot these days, but Longmont is in Boulder County, and “eight miles west” would be in the foothills. The aerial farmland photo looks like they are along Highway 66 east of I-25, which is about eight miles east of Longmont and about six miles into Weld County.

Mr. Rassenfoss did some good research and wrote a great story. That doesn't mean *The Colorado Magazine's* editors should not have taken a close look before publishing it.

Thank you for the magazine and the e-mail newsletters.

—Christine Stannard, via email

Regarding the “The Sabotage of United Flight 629” in the last issue, this article makes interesting reading. Unfortunately there are some problems with the captions on the pictures. The caption on page thirty is obviously incorrect. Unfortunately the same caption on page twenty-eight contains an error which may not be as obvious to the casual reader. The Boeing Mainliner 300 shown in the picture was a DC-6. The DC-6 was NOT a “passenger jet.” It had radial eighteen-cylinder engines with three-blade propellers. It commenced commercial passenger service in late 1946.

The first commercial passenger jet was the ill-fated De Havilland Comet, which commenced commercial flights in 1952 and was grounded within a year due to structural defects. The first United Airlines passenger jet was the DC-8 which joined the United fleet in 1959.

—Jim Hamstra, via email

THE WEEKLY DIGEST WINS

Almost every week, a Weekly Digest subscriber writes in to give us more fascinating details about a historic moment or special place from the past. Here are a few of the more interesting things our readers shared with us. Sign up for our newsletter to get weekly doses of Colorado history delivered to your inbox!

Regarding Cody Robinson's article, “Celebrating *Star Wars*,” when he notes the deep connection between Colorado and *Star Wars*, I'm surprised he forgot to mention that a world premiere of *Return of the Jedi* took place in Denver on May 24, 1983. The event was a benefit gala focused on one or more high-profile charity organizations.

—Michael, via email

Editor's note: *Return of the Jedi's world premiere was on May 23, 1983, with several early charity screenings taking place around the country in cities like Denver.*

REGARDING THE FEBRUARY 10 WEEKLY DIGEST

What a wonderful bunch of stories in this one!! I can relate to a couple: I got a chance to see Los Mochetes at Levitt Pavillion last summer!! Great band!! I also went to Perry-Mansfield camp in the 1960's! I believe it was in '67. I wasn't interested in theater so I spent most of my time in the art building. Fun memories! Thanks for a trip down memory lane!

—P.J. Nelson, via email

EDITOR'S NOTE ON THE USE OF AI

A few readers have written in to inquire about whether AI is being deployed in the pages of *The Colorado Magazine*. The editorial team is paying close attention to rapid advances in the ability of generative artificial intelligence programs, but we've found that they cannot currently be trusted to produce the kind of compelling, insightful, and trustworthy historical writing we've published for more than 100 years.

As we always have, the editorial team fact-checks every article to the best of our ability to ensure that you can rely on what you read in *The Colorado Magazine*. We ask every author who submits a piece for publication to attest that it is their own original work. And we're proud of the crew of designers, researchers, archivists, and librarians who work behind the scenes to illustrate each article with real, verified historical imagery. If you'd like to write your own real history article for *The Colorado Magazine*, please drop us a line!

THE COLORADO MAGAZINE

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CONNECTING COLORADO WOMEN IN THREAD

How a community project fifty years ago speaks to Colorado women today.

BY AMANDA CLAPHAM

Nineteen women are memorialized in silken thread at the Colorado State Capitol on a nine-by-twelve-foot tapestry. Titled *Women's Gold*, the tapestry is delicately crafted on Irish linen by hundreds of citizens and artisans ranging in age from two to ninety-two, mostly from Colorado, but also from all over the world. This piece was envisioned by Eve Mackintosh, a Colorado educator, for the Centennial celebration of statehood in 1976. She observed that women were underrepresented in the Capitol, which was true. The historians, designers, and chief craftspeople she assembled and who made this tapestry happen were Colorado women as well.

Eve and her dedicated compatriots could have chosen lots of ways to potentially represent Colorado women. Busts and statuary are popular memorials, particularly at state capitols. They could have suggested a mural or painting. Instead they chose a medium that was often considered “women’s work,” and “crafty,” despite requiring attention to detail, years of practice, great skill, and artistry. Eve envisioned a tapestry, drawing on ancient traditions of storytelling in fabric, humble to some, but harkening back to monumental works like the eleventh-century Bayeux Tapestry.

Though there are only nineteen women on the tapestry, there were dozens behind the scenes who lovingly researched and designed it, and thousands who added a stitch or two as it was hauled from county fair to local historical society and back.

The tapestry’s name itself refers to the countless other women who helped make Colorado what it is today. The name, *Women's Gold*, calls to the pioneer women who dedicated their work, their lives, and their futures to Colorado. As women traversed our vast country, they often brought flow-

ers with them from their old homes to plant in their new ones. One such flower, a rambling cheerful yellow rose called the Harrison’s yellow, did particularly well in Colorado’s rocky, dry soil. Because of its popularity among pioneer women, and as a nod to why these women came to Colorado in the first place, the Harrison’s yellow rose earned the moniker the “Women’s Gold.”

But this tapestry is not just a memorial. Unlike the Bayeux Tapestry, for example, it does not just tell of a particular moment in time. Near the top of the tapestry is a rainbow arching over a

**The name,
Women's Gold,
calls to the pioneer
women who dedicated
their work, their lives,
and their futures
to Colorado.**

pair of dates: 1876–2076. The first date is the year Colorado became a state, August 1, 1876, to be exact. A moment in time, to be sure, but one that says nothing of the people and traditions that came before statehood, or the culture that arose and continues to change after it.

The second date, 2076, is far more nuanced, I think, and more interesting. In the year 2076, the state of Colorado will be 200 years old. The women of 2076 will face a world I can only imagine. There will be jobs I’ve never thought of, and technologies that don’t yet exist. The clothes I wear now, that I fancy are quite fashionable, will seem like costumes of a quaint past. The cities and towns of Colorado that I currently know so well would be unrecognizable to my eyes. My children may be grandparents

by 2076, at least two generations past the creators of this tapestry, who to my eyes now are quaint and old fashioned.

That date, 2076, was not put there as merely a marker of time, or a “nice round number.” It was, and is, a call into the murky future. A call to me, who was not yet born when this tapestry was finished, and a call to all the women who are yet to be born in Colorado. It says you, too, can make a life for yourself here. You can live and thrive, and create things out of whole cloth that will last for generations after you. You can create community and legacy and someone may remember your name and stitch you onto a tapestry. Or they may not, but your stitch is still there, held by silken thread, held in that future date the creators of this piece knew they would not live to see.

If I live to see 2076, I will be ninety-eight years old. I will have lived through almost half of Colorado’s existence as a state and seen it grow in so many ways. All those fourth graders I told about the tapestry on their tours through the Capitol will be adults, and will be contributing in their own ways to the state we all love. If I make it, I will have my daughter bring me down to the Colorado State Capitol one last time, whether I’m in a wheelchair or using a walker, and have my picture taken in front of this tapestry I love so much—adding myself in some tiny way to the legacy of the women of Colorado. 🌈

Amanda Clapham works for Visitor Services at the Colorado State Capitol, focusing on curation of the Capitol Collection and educational programs. She is passionate about Colorado history and government, and is an advisory board member for the A250-C150 Commission through History Colorado.



Colorado Women's Gold tapestry: This nine-by-twelve-foot tapestry, stitched in silk thread on Irish linen, is on permanent display outside the Rotunda at the Colorado State Capitol. Thousands of visitors each year learn about it on field trips and tours. Photo courtesy of Amanda Clapham

The Greatest Thrill in the World: Colorado's First Lady Parachutist

Lou Ella Purkable had a penchant for parachuting, a feat usually reserved at that time for men. So when the nineteen-year-old got the shot to be Colorado's first woman parachutist, she jumped at the chance.

BY ANN SNEESBY-KOCH

Purkey the Plucky, née Lou Ella Purkable, a nineteen-year-old telephone plug operator, made the headlines on May 15, 1927. "Girl Daredevil Floats to Earth" described Purkable, whose bold stunt made her the first Colorado woman to parachute out of a plane.

Lou Ella, former student at Denver North High School, long had hopes of being a parachute jumper, but her jump that Sunday in May was the first she had ever dared, other than an attempt at leaping from a barn roof with an umbrella to cushion her fall. (The umbrella collapsed, and Lou Ella dropped to the ground.) A fangirl of parachuting stunts, she kept an album of newspaper clippings of famous parachutists and collected bits of wood from planes that had "cracked up." She started talking with pilot Jack Euler about making her own attempt and he introduced her to Frank Van Dersarl, who owned the Favan Airport, a small strip on the north side of Denver. For a year, Lou Ella kept at Van Dersarl to let her make a jump, until he relented. He was quoted in the *Rocky Mountain News* as saying, "I suppose she won't be satisfied until she has the chance. She has the nerve, and I know she will do it." The *News* promoted the stunt with articles and photos and an invitation for folks far and wide to come to Favan Airport at 52nd Avenue and Colorado Boulevard to witness Purkey's leap. She was asked if she had done anything else as startling as jumping out of a plane and she replied, "Well, I dance the Black Bottom."

On the day of the jump, 75,000 spectators gathered to watch, from the Favan airfield all the way over to City Park. Wearing a white silk sailor suit, goggles, and hair bobbed in the flapper style, Lou Ella climbed into the cockpit



Lou Ella Purkable appeared in the May 13, 1927, issue of the *Rocky Mountain News*. When asked if she had ever been in a bathing beauty contest, she replied she didn't even know how to swim. Courtesy of Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection

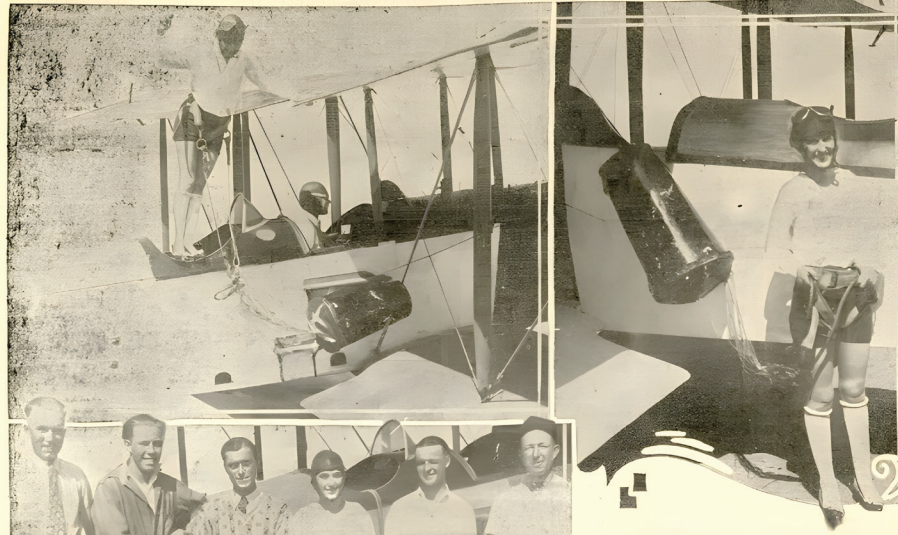
of the plane piloted by Jack Euler. She blew a kiss and Euler gunned the motor. They were off, climbing into the sky. At 1,000 feet, Lou Ella looked down at the specks of cars and people and in a *Rocky Mountain News* article recollected thinking, "Watch me closely, folks, I'm coming back to you in a big hurry." Once they hit 3,000 feet, Euler hooked the parachute, a Baldwin bundled inside a large metal can mounted to the plane, to Lou Ella's harness as she clung to a little ladder on the side of the plane. "Then I fell," said Lou Ella, relating her experience to the *News*.

"O-o-o-o! It was the most wonderful thrill of my life." But as she descended toward the ground, a buckle on her harness broke. The quick-thinking Purkable grabbed the loose rope and righted the parachute. "That rather spoiled my parachute ride, for I had to hang on to the ropes to keep straight up." Nevertheless, she glided to earth at the airfield to the relief of her mother, Ida, and sister, Fern, careful not to alight on a cactus patch. Her safe arrival was also awaited by John Carl Clement, who held a bouquet of red roses for the intrepid young woman. "Where's my powder puff?" she quipped upon landing.

After her thrilling stunt, Lou Ella went back to working the plugs in the Gallup exchange of the Mountain States Telephone Company, where she was better known as "Purkey, the Plug Pusher." Reminiscing in a 1977 *Rocky Mountain News* article, she said, "I wanted to do it again. I'd have gone up the next day, but my parents wouldn't let me." Lou Ella Purkable, by then Lou Ella Clement, added, "I didn't care anything about being the first woman to jump. I just did it because I wanted to. . . . That jump was the greatest thrill in the world." 🌻

Ann Sneesby-Koch is an Archives Collections Specialist at History Colorado, where she started in 2016 as the Project Manager for the NEH-funded Colorado Digital Newspaper Project. Ann graduated from the University of Wyoming (BA, Humanities and Fine Arts), as well as University of Maryland (MA, Classics) and University of Tennessee (MS, Information Sciences). She oversees the Colorado newspapers microfilm collection, the largest in the world, and loves old news—the weirder, the better.

DENVER GIRL READY FOR DARING PARACHUTE LEAP



DROP OF 3,000 FEET THRILLS HUGE THROING

"I Was Afraid of Landing in Cactus," Says "Purkey" After Daring Jump in Parachute



Girl Daredevil Floats to Earth

Top left Poised on the rim of the cockpit, Lou Ella Purkapple practices to make a leap from 3,000 feet in the air. Her parachute is in a container attached to the side of the plane. She is shown with mechanics and fliers from Favan Airfield, from where she'll make her jump. *Rocky Mountain News*, May 15, 1927. Courtesy of Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection

Above Purkapple floats over the plains somewhere above Colorado Boulevard, May 15, 1927. History Colorado, 89451.5056

Headline from *Rocky Mountain News*, May 16, 1927, celebrating Purkapple's successful jump from an airplane, making her Colorado's first woman parachutist. Courtesy of Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection



Top right "Purkey" hopes for a soft landing. *Rocky Mountain News*, May 16, 1927. Courtesy of Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection

Above center Clinging to the side of the plane piloted by Jack Euler, Lou Ella Purkapple prepares to jump from 3,000 feet in the air. History Colorado, 89451.5059

Above Purkapple is greeted with a bouquet of roses by John Carl Clement after landing her parachute ride. History Colorado, 89451.5060

FORBIDDEN UNIONS

How one of Colorado's most unusual and disturbing laws changed a couple's lives forever, and left echoes that still resound decades after it was repealed.

BY DEVIN FLORES

One night in 1941, James Jackson—a Black Denverite living in the primarily African American Five Points neighborhood—was awoken by a pounding on his door.

When he answered, he was met by a group of police officers, and in their custody was Jackson's stepdaughter Caroline Brethauer. Almost as soon as the door was opened and they saw Jackson, the officers forced their way into the house.

These exact officers had bothered Jackson before, so he protested. "What is it now?" he asked them, according to court transcripts.

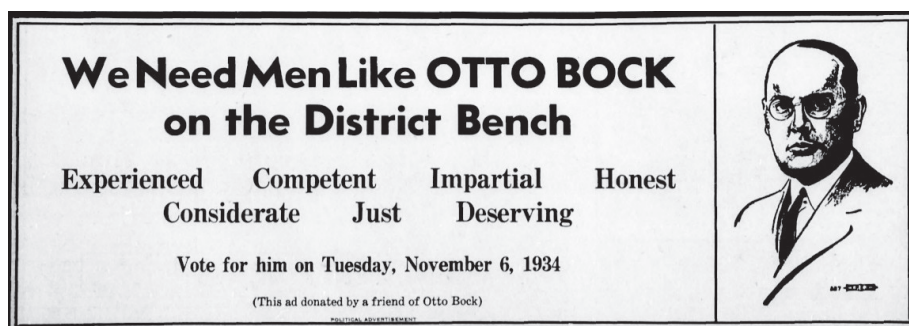
"You'll find out," one officer said as Jackson was arrested without a warrant, right there in his living room. "We've got a new judge down there. We're going to break this up. We're going to take matters in our own hands."

The officers searched the house for their next quarry. They forced their way into the bedroom, where they found Mrs. Lydia Jackson—James's wife—lying down. They told her she was coming with them and was under arrest, and told her to get dressed.

Mrs. Jackson did her best to comply, but when she tried to get some privacy as she changed out of her nightclothes, a leering officer followed her and kept his flashlight trained on her body.

"There isn't anything I've never seen before," he chided her when she protested at this awful treatment.

The Jacksons were taken away to the police station. It was not the first time the police targeted them, but it



Upholds Anti-Miscegenation Act

The court also upheld validity of a Denver ordinance holding void a marriage between a white and a Negro.

The ordinance was ruled constitutional in the case of Lydia Jackson, a white woman, and James Jackson, a Negro, who were arrested for vagrancy. The charge of vagrancy was held applicable to the case.

Justices Otto Bock and Benjamin C. Hilliard dissented on the ground the ordinance involved race discrimination.

was certainly the most serious. In fact, it was the third time they'd been arrested for violating two of the most discriminatory and unusual laws in Colorado's history.

The police were there to assert public control over the most private of institutions. They were there to break up the Jacksons' marriage.

You see, James was Black, and Lydia was white.

Anti-miscegenation laws—laws that ban marriage between people of different races or ethnicities—have a long history in the United States. Almost every state passed some version of one. Some states

Above An advertisement for Otto Bock from his 1934 Denver County Judge campaign, which appeared in the *Intermountain Jewish News*. Three years earlier Bock had also run (unsuccessfully) for mayor of Denver. *Intermountain Jewish News*, November 1934.

Left This short article from the *Rocky Mountain News* was the only time the media really reported on the Jacksons' case. Colorado's discriminatory laws, and how they were enforced, were not considered newsworthy in Denver at the time. *Rocky Mountain News*, March 10, 1942.

banned all interracial marriage, while others only forbade marriage between white and Black citizens. Only nine states never had an anti-miscegenation law on their books, and almost all of them were in the Northeast. For the rest of the country, including every contiguous state west of the Mississippi, racism dictated the rules for the institution of marriage.

Colorado's own anti-miscegenation law was introduced very early on. It was a legacy of the original territorial government. And even within the peculiar institution of anti-miscegenation, this law was a very unusual one, shaped by Colorado's history as a borderland.

Interracial marriage in Mexico had been a fact of life since the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century. While

the Spanish Empire had imposed basic laws forbidding *mestizaje*—the mixing of races—for centuries, they went largely unenforced. By the time Mexico gained its independence in 1821, most of its citizens were, to some extent, of mixed race. In fact, *mestizo* identity became a key part of Mexican national identity in the 1800s, and endures to this day.

So when the newly formed country of Mexico overturned the old caste system imposed by the Spanish in its 1827 Constitution, it also tossed out with it the institution of slavery and anti-miscegenation laws.

While discrimination endured in Mexico, especially when it came to economic class and religion, this attitude towards racial identity set the country firmly apart from its neighbor to the

north. These tensions led directly to the Texas Revolution, spearheaded by white immigrants from the United States who were loath to liberate their slaves—which, in turn, sowed the seeds of the Mexican-American War of 1846–48.

When the dust settled, Mexico ceded over 500,000 square miles of territory to the United States, stretching from central Texas all the way to the Pacific. The frontier between the two countries shifted south, from the Arkansas River all the way to the southern stretches of the Rio Grande. And as that border moved, it suddenly brought almost 100,000 Mexican nationals into the United States.

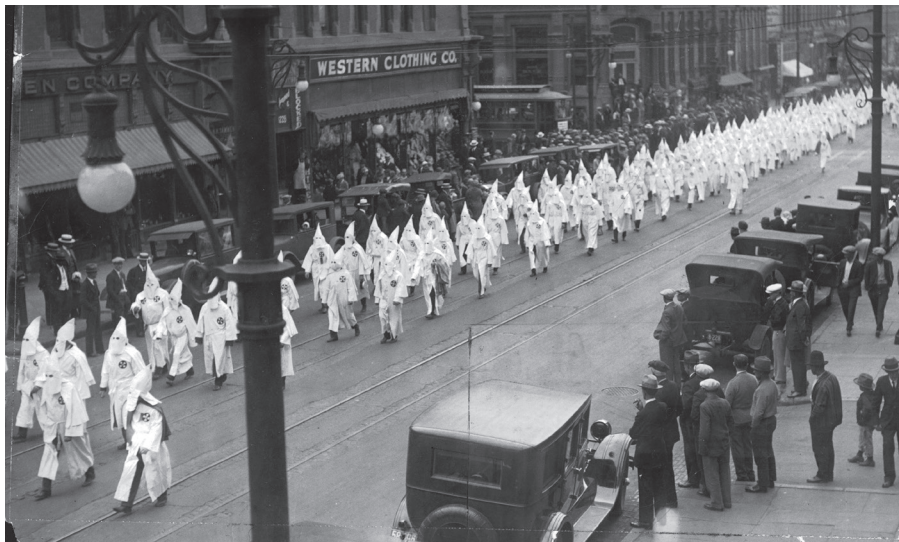
The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo included a number of protections for those people, who suddenly found their homes had transitioned from one country to another. It declared that:

The Mexicans who, in the territories aforesaid, shall not preserve the character of citizens of the Mexican Republic [...] shall be incorporated into the Union of the United States, and be admitted [...] to the enjoyment of all the rights and citizens of the United States [...] and shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty and property.

This included, implicitly, respect for their marriages, no matter their race.

Almost three decades later when Colorado was pursuing statehood, lawmakers had to take this treaty into account. Property rights, marital status, and more were already causing a seemingly endless string of disputes and headaches to officials in Texas, California, and the New Mexico Territory for years. (In fact, many of those disputes are still being brought up in court today, two centuries on.)

But this was not going to stop the openly racist leaders of the Colorado Territorial Legislature. Deeply concerned with the alleged societal evil that was mixed-race relations, the very earliest



Top Members of the Ku Klux Klan parade in downtown Denver in their regalia on May 31, 1926. At the time, many city and state officials were either firmly in the pocket of the Klan or members themselves. History Colorado, PH.PROP.1734

Above “Map of Colorado Territory embracing the Central Gold Region,” published by Jacob Monk in 1862. Only fifteen years before this map was printed, everything depicted south of the Arkansas River (visible running through Pueblo County) or west of the Great Divide was part of Mexico. Library of Congress, G4310 1862.E2

Colorado laws (passed as provisional during its time as the unrecognized Jefferson Territory) included a provision that “no white person shall be married to any person being a negro or mulatto.” When the time for statehood came, this territorial law was one of many carefully pored over by legal experts. But instead of overturning it or even simply leaving it out, they were preoccupied with how to make it more robust.



Worried the law might violate the rights of former Mexican nationals under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, but unwilling to allow Blacks to marry whites, Colorado’s First General Assembly struck upon a very unusual solution:

“All marriages between negroes or mulattoes of either sex, and white persons, are also declared to be absolutely void.”

“All marriages between negroes or mulattoes of either sex, and white persons, are also declared to be absolutely void. This section shall extend to illegitimate as well as legitimate children; *Provided*, that nothing in this section shall be so construed as to prevent the people living in that portion of the State acquired from Mexico, from marrying according to the custom of that country.”

So this ban on miscegenation only applied to Black Coloradans and their spouses, and only north of the Arkansas River. In half the state, mixed-race marriages were illegal; while in the other half they were not.

This bizarre, unique geographic carve-out ensured Colorado’s anti-miscegenation law technically abided by the terms of the treaty, but also made it that much more difficult to enforce. In much of the state it doesn’t seem to have been consistently applied, for obvious reasons. Officers and officials had no real way of tracking what part of the state marriages happened in, especially for common-law marriages or couples who moved even relatively short distances. In Pueblo, for example, a mixed-race couple’s marriage might be null and void if performed in one neighborhood, but perfectly legal and valid only a few blocks away, across the Union Avenue bridge and on the other side of the Arkansas River.

But a hundred miles north in Denver was a different story.

James and Lydia Jackson were held without bond by the City and County of Denver for three days, separated from Lydia’s teenage daughter Caroline. They’d gone through this twice before already, both times at the hands of the same arresting officer. He’d arrested them in 1939, and even after they moved to a new house, he followed and arrested them again in 1940.

The charge was never actually miscegenation under the state law (which did not make its violation a criminal offense). Instead, the Jacksons were repeatedly arrested for violating Denver’s vagrancy ordinance, which at the time applied to anybody leading an allegedly immoral course of life with-



Top left Denver Mayor Benjamin F. Stapleton in 1939. His KKK membership was an open secret, but Denver’s citizens continued re-electing Stapleton, who held the office from 1923 to 1947 with only a one-term interruption. History Colorado, 86.296.3925

Left Governor Ralph Carr with the justices of the Colorado Supreme Court in 1939. Otto Bock is third from the left in the back row; Haslett Burke is at the far left in the back row. History Colorado, 2022.57.17122



An unidentified Black woman at a drinking fountain in Denver's City Park in 1921. This photo was taken by one of the Hall brothers, who themselves were Black or of mixed descent. History Colorado, 84.371.91

out actually defining what constitutes a moral, or immoral, life.

A common application of the law was to break up premarital cohabitation, on the basis that sex before marriage was improper and, thus, immoral. It was on that basis that the Jacksons had been arrested three times, despite the fact that they were married in November 1939.

In the 1941 case, the police refused to even entertain the notion that they actually were married. One officer refused repeatedly to call Lydia by her married name, referring to her instead as Mrs. Brethauer, the name of her ex-husband. And when the Jacksons attempted to defend against the immorality charge, the courts treated them much the same. The city attorney argued that under Colorado law the Jacksons could not legally marry, and thus had been cohabitating immorally. The judge agreed. They were each fined \$150 for their crime, a large sum at the time and equivalent to almost \$3,500 today.

But that wasn't the end of it. The Jacksons fought this ruling, which not only slapped them with an immense fine but also legally annulled their

marriage. In early 1942, the Supreme Court of Colorado agreed to hear their appeal.

Denver's bizarrely extensive vagrancy law, and the Denver Police Department's habit of using it to justify harassing Black citizens and interracial couples, were unfortunately nothing new.

The vagrancy ordinance dates back to 1886, when the first version was passed into law. At that time, in the decades after the Civil War, vagrancy laws like this were increasingly common across the country.

They emerged first in former slave states as part of the "Black Codes," new laws passed during Reconstruction which restricted and controlled the labor and behavior of Black Americans. Early vagrancy laws—often passed alongside or as part of Black Codes—were often blocked by Reconstruction-era oversight for their obvious unconstitutional discrimination. General Alfred Terry, charged with overseeing Virginia's reintroduction into the Union, decried that state's 1866 Vagrancy Act as providing an excuse to arrest Black citizens and force them into prison labor—"A condition which will be slavery in all but its name," he wrote

But as Reconstruction waned through the 1870s, efforts to pass vagrancy laws persisted. Laws of this nature spread across the country specifically because of how vague they were. They could be justified with platitudes, and then were wielded with extreme prejudice against unwanted elements of society. Across the country but especially in the South, they allowed the arrest of people who were only presumed by the court to be "shiftless"—that is, homeless, jobless, or generally lacking the ability to support themselves monetarily—and put them to work for the good of society. The presumed-shiftless were often people of color.

As time went on the vagrancy laws became even broader, and as a result could be wielded against any perceived threats against social norms. People of color and mixed-race couples, of course, but also sinners, sexual nonconformists, labor activists, and more.

Following the lead of many other constituencies, Denver's city council expanded the city's vagrancy law in 1905. It now explicitly included a bafflingly long list of unwanted elements—not just the unhoused or unemployed but also pimps, prostitutes, loiterers,



The old Colorado Supreme Court Chambers in the State Capitol in Denver, where the Jacksons' appeal was heard in 1942. Library of Congress, LC-DIG-highsm-48470

drunkards, con artists, fraudsters, people who swore in public, anybody found in possession of a lockpick, owners or users of a craps table, and both bowlers and billiards players. But in doing this, they also untied immorality from “shiftlessness.” In Denver, it was now possible to be a vagrant simply by being immoral, regardless of one’s financial or housing status.

Thus, by the 1920s, this ordinance had become a one-size-fits-all cudgel the authorities could use to punish, jail, or otherwise remove citizens who didn’t fit in with their vision of a harmonious status quo. Denver City Council revisited the law in 1927, but by that point the city’s politics were firmly under the control of the Ku Klux Klan. Officers—

many of whom were KKK members themselves—harassed and intimidated people of color and religious minorities using the law as flimsy legal justification. The council was content to let the law stay as it was, and the city continued to use it as justification for discrimination—including against mixed-race couples like the Jacksons.

This happened under the administration of five-term Denver Mayor Benjamin Stapleton, who was first elected in 1923. It was an open secret that Stapleton was a member of the Klan, and earlier in 1913, when he was a Denver police-court judge, he presided over another miscegenation case.

A white woman, Nora Harrington, had married a Black man named Frank

Frazier. Harrington protested to the courts that she was one-eighth Black, and even offered to prove it (admittedly using a blood test, which was more or less quack medicine at the time). Then judge Stapleton declined, saying that the fact that she “would suffer the ignominy” of being labeled a “negro woman” was, in itself, “substantial proof” that she was one.

While the Klan was largely discredited and ousted from state-level government as the 1930s wore on, Stapleton nonetheless won reelection as Denver’s mayor again and again. He was still mayor when city police arrested the Jacksons for the third time in 1941.

When the Jacksons’ case came before the Colorado Supreme Court in 1942, it hinged largely on a single argument: that Colorado’s anti-miscegenation law, the basis for their vagrancy convictions, was unconstitutional. Their counsel based this on the Equal Protection Clause in the US Constitution’s Fourteenth Amendment: “Nor shall any state [...] deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the law.”

According to the defense, Colorado’s statute violated this clause because it discriminated against Black Coloradans, and that it was, furthermore, ambiguous and “limited in its operation to but a portion of the [state].” Unfortunately, in a five-two split decision, the court disagreed. The lead opinion, written by Justice Haslett Burke, found that the law was “impregnable to the attack here made.” Justice Burke stated bluntly that there was no question of discrimination in the Colorado law, because the statute applied “both to white and black.” Because the lower court had fined both Mr. and Mrs. Jackson there had been no discrimination, according to Burke and his fellow justices.

Denver resident Edmeaux Homer Hall and his first wife, Dorothy Ellen Miller Hall, likely photographed on a road trip along the Pikes Peak Highway. Edmeaux Hall identified as white or “Spanish” on the census, but both his parents had been listed as “Black.” Edmeaux married twice, both times to white women. History Colorado, 84.371.51



As for the argument that a law of this nature could not fairly be applied only in some parts of the state, the court seemingly didn't care to think about it too hard:

We know no custom of [Mexico] that contravenes the [anti-miscegenation law].... Again, there is no evidence that the city of Denver, wherein the alleged common-law marriage was contracted and consummated, lies within the excepted territory.

Basically, because the judges apparently weren't familiar with the treaty or with Mexican legal precedent, and because Denver was not, nor ever had been, south of the Arkansas River, they decided it was all a moot point. And so, Colorado's discriminatory anti-miscegenation law stayed on the books for another seventeen years.

However, Justice Otto Bock wrote the dissenting opinion, disagreeing with just about every point that Burke made. Bock argued that Denver's vagrancy law was ridiculous and inconsistent with common law; that two people, regardless of race, living in a common-law marriage could not be committing immorality; and that "it seems, therefore, that we have a geographical immorality within the state, applicable to Denver but not to some other portions of Colorado." He went on to conclude:

Counsel for the Jacksons challenge the constitutionality [of Colorado law] on grounds which, in my opinion, are of a serious nature.... The judgment should be reversed and the case remanded, with directions to dismiss the complaint and discharge the defendants.

But despite Bock's damning rhetoric, the dissent of two judges didn't amount to much. The court had ruled against the Jacksons, and they were forced to pay the fine and accept that, in the eyes of Colorado, not only were they no longer married—they never had been.



The home of Dr. Clarence Holmes, a Black dentist in Five Points. The Jacksons' home was not far from this one, and likely looked similar. Denver Public Library X-22307

What happened to the Jacksons was unjust, from beginning to end. For three years they were harassed repeatedly by the police. They endured violations of their most basic human rights, including their right to privacy and their right to marry. And when the time came for those rights to be defended, the Colorado Supreme Court made the ignoble decision to sweep their arguments under the rug and accept the consequences of two discriminatory laws.

***Perez v. Sharp* sent ripples across the country. Over the next two decades, fourteen states followed California's lead. Colorado was among them.**

Today Americans tend to equate Civil Rights cases with the Deep South. It's easy, as Coloradans, to forget—or not want to recall—our state's own sordid history of discrimination. But the truth is that this treatment the Jacksons endured was not unusual. Not in Denver, not in

Colorado, not anywhere in the country. Not too long ago—within some Coloradans' living memory, in fact—discrimination was not an unspoken rule. It carried the weight of law.

It wasn't until 1948 that the tide began to turn against anti-miscegenation laws in the US. That year, long after other countries such as Mexico had enshrined equal rights regardless of race, the California Supreme Court overturned its state's own discriminatory law. It ruled in *Perez v. Sharp*, on an extremely similar basis to the argument made by the Jacksons' lawyers, that California's statute violated the Fourteenth Amendment. This made California the first state in more than fifty years to overturn such a law, either in the courts or the legislature.

Perez v. Sharp sent ripples across the country. Over the next two decades, fourteen states followed California's lead. Colorado was among them.

In 1957, the Colorado State Legislature quietly struck the anti-miscegenation clause from marriage law. At a time when race relations were a nationwide hot-button issue during the Civil Rights Movement, this was a surprisingly understated occurrence. No major newspapers in the state reported on it, even as they ran front-page articles on *Brown v. Board of Education*.

This change in the law came sixteen years too late to help the Jacksons, but it did finally overturn one of the most unjust, and most unusual, laws in Colorado history.

Unfortunately, we don't know exactly what happened to the Jacksons after their trial. Like the 1957 legislation change, *Jackson v. Denver* didn't garner much media attention. The Jacksons were never famous, and like countless other victims of state-enforced discrimination they faded into history. And with their extremely common names and lack of details, trying to track their lives through census records is difficult. But they left a lasting legal legacy in the United States, one which endures to this day and crops up in strange ways.

Since the Colorado Supreme Court ruled against them in 1941, two major cases have cited *Jackson v. Denver* as precedent.

The first, in 1955, was the also unusual case of *Naim v. Naim* in the Supreme Court of Virginia. In that case, a Chinese American man had married a white woman (unlawfully, under Virginia state law), but after their divorce she sued him for alimony. He refused to pay, on the grounds that as their marriage was not legal, it had legally never happened. The court agreed, citing *Jackson v. Denver*, and in the spirit of what was characterized as "preserving racial integrity," Mr. Naim was not required to pay anything to his ex-wife.

The second was another divorce case, this one once again right here in Colorado. In 2021, a same-sex couple was locked in a legal battle over property. One of the two men argued that because their marriage was performed in 2003, more than a decade before same-sex marriage was recognized in Colorado, they had, in fact, never been married—much as the court had declared the Jacksons were never married, eighty years earlier.

This time, the Colorado Supreme Court upheld the marriage. The lead opinion argued that, despite the precedent set by the case against the Jacksons, the later United States Supreme Court case of *Obergefell v. Hodges* retroactively overruled the ban on same-sex marriages.

This is the strange legacy of the Jacksons' legal troubles. It feels simultaneously remarkable in hindsight that the monumental and disturbing case of *Jackson v. Denver* seemed to leave no impact on the public consciousness and that it would be cited as recently as 2021, in another controversial marriage termination case.

It's probably for the best, however. It's a reminder that this strange and awful story is not some product of the distant past. The horrible treatment of the Jacksons, and the unjust dissolution of their marriage, was not only all too real, but also all too recent. Millions of Americans still feel the legacies, not just of this case, but also of hundreds more. The Jackson family's fate, as much as any of the far-more-palatable incidents in our shared history, is part of Colorado's inheritance. It's up to us to decide what to do with that knowledge. 🇨🇦

Devin Flores is the assistant editor of *The Colorado Magazine* and the managing editor of the *Colorado Encyclopedia*. In addition to writing articles for History Colorado, he has also been the lead developer for the exhibits *High Water Marks: The Great Flood of Pueblo, 1923*, *You Should've Seen It: Pueblo's Mineral Palace*, and *Through the Lens: The Photography of Frank Muramoto*.



Young girls play in front of a clapboard house in Five Points during the 1930s. Denver Public Library, Z-2732

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FROM LITTLE ROCK TO THE ROCKIES

The Rising Resilience of Carlotta Walls LaNier

Carlotta Walls was only fourteen when federal troops escorted her into Little Rock Central High School. Decades later, she shared her story of this iconic event at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, and how it shaped her life in Colorado.

BY ACOMA GAITHER

As the youngest of the Little Rock Nine—the nine African American teenagers who, in 1957, walked past violent crowds to integrate Central High School—Carlotta's name is forever tied to a national story of bravery. Yet the life she built afterward in Colorado tells another kind of story: how a young woman who once stood at the center of the civil-rights storm built purpose and possibility in the West. Carlotta Walls LaNier sat down for a recent oral history interview at History Colorado. She spoke reflectively about growing up in the Jim Crow South, witnessing the Civil Rights Movement, then eventually making a home in Colorado, and the following is her story adapted from that interview.



Carlotta, four years old, at home with her parents Cartel and Juanita Walls. Courtesy of Carlotta LaNier

THE DECISION THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

The Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 declared segregated schools unconstitutional, but some states defiantly resisted, politically and violently. Nevertheless, the Little Rock school board drafted a plan for a small number of African American students to begin attending all-white public schools during the 1957–58 school year. Carlotta remembered her father talking about how his family paid taxes, so she had a right to attend the local public schools. In her last year at

"I didn't know it was going to be historic"

Dunbar Junior High, Carlotta's homeroom teacher asked students if they had any interest in attending Central High School, and if they lived within specific street boundaries to please sign a sheet of paper. Carlotta decided to sign without her parents' knowledge and received admission.

That summer before enrolling at Central, she and thirty-eight other African American students and their families met with the Little Rock school superintendent. They received a rude awakening. Carlotta remembered the rules set forth: "We could not participate in any extracurricular activity. You could only come to school at eight, leave at three. Don't go back for any basketball games or football

games. You couldn't be a part of the student council. You couldn't work on the newspaper. You couldn't be in the choir. You could not be in any of the sports." Unsurprisingly, the initial thirty-nine students dwindled to nine.

Despite these glum prospects, Carlotta was mildly optimistic. When asked about why she wanted to take on something that could ultimately be dangerous, she replied, "It was access to better books and laboratories with scientific things. I wanted to be a doctor and knew in the biology lab at Central, two kids were dissecting the frog in the science department. Over at the other all-Black schools like Dunbar and Horace Mann High School, there would be ten or twelve kids standing around and pulling at one frog. My aunt was the librarian at Dunbar Junior-Senior High. She had around 5,000 books, whereas at Central, there were 10,000 books. So it was separate, but it was certainly not equal."

When the Little Rock Nine approached Central High for the first time on the morning of September 4, the air felt charged. Crowds pressed along sidewalks, some clutched handmade signs, others shouted vehemently as Arkansas National Guard troops formed a barricade at the school's entrance. Piercing chants, hostile stares, and spit met the students as they tried to enter. Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus encouraged the angry mob and ordered the National Guard to stop this integration effort. The students decided to immediately leave. Shortly

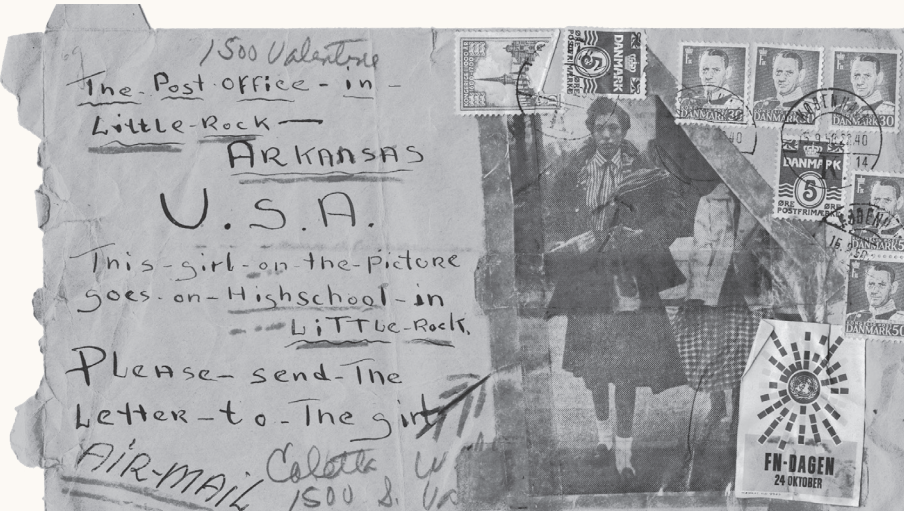


thereafter the Arkansas NAACP leader, Daisy Bates, apprised the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) of the situation. Thurgood Marshall, founder and Director Counsel of the LDF at the time, along with attorney Wiley Branton came to Little Rock to represent the NAACP in federal court. On September 20, 1957, the pair requested an injunction against

Left LaNier's 1960 graduating class photo. Courtesy of Carlotta LaNier

Below The Little Rock Nine enter Central High School escorted by the 101st Airborne Division. Courtesy of Carlotta LaNier

Bottom This letter from Denmark made it to Carlotta during her time at Central High School. Courtesy of Carlotta LaNier



Governor Faubus's use of troops to impede integration efforts subsequent to the *Brown v. Board* 1954 decision. US District Judge Ronald Davies granted the injunction, and Faubus relented.

Again, Carlotta and the other eight students attempted to enter Central High on September 23. She described a chaotic scene: "It ended up being the worst day. The mob had grown to over 1,000 people. Some beat reporters. There were people out there trying to rush the school or wanting kids to get out of the school. Kids were jumping out of windows because their parents were telling them to come out."

Eventually, a police officer arrived at her third-period class. "My teacher told me to gather my things and follow this man, which I did," she said. Officers had escorted all nine to the principal's office. "We were told to follow the policemen. They were getting us out of the school because the crowd wanted to hang someone," she said. "We were brought down into the bowels of the school and put into two police cars. And then I heard one policeman tell the other policeman, 'Put your foot to the floor and don't stop for anything.'"

President Dwight Eisenhower decided to deploy 101st Airborne Division troops to Little Rock and federalized the Arkansas National Guard to escort the students to school.

"I didn't know it was going to be historic," she recalled. "I just knew I had this right. The Supreme Court decision had given me this right." What followed is etched into civil-rights history: mobs, soldiers, and a nation forced to watch itself on television. "I approached each day like I was going to work," Carlotta said. "There's no fun in it, but I had made a commitment. Once you start something, you finish it."

LIFE AT CENTRAL HIGH

She and the other Little Rock Nine students met varied interactions with fellow students, teachers, and guards. Each of the nine had a soldier from the US Army's 101st Airborne Division

assigned to them. "The soldiers drove us every morning. We were in a station wagon, and there was a jeep in the front and a jeep in the back with fixed bayonets. Once we got there, our assigned soldier stayed with us during the day. Now, they didn't come inside the classroom, but they walked with us to each place, whether to the locker, lunch, or our various classes. All of us seemed

to have a good relationship with our guards." However, Carlotta discovered that she, in particular, received a new guard every week.

She laughed and reminisced about her unique experience: "I had a different guard every Monday morning. There was one particular girl who would want to walk on the back of my heels. So my heels bled from all of that.

My defense mechanism was to walk fast." She believes to this day that that's the reason the army assigned her a new guard weekly.

Carlotta found solace in her surrounding neighborhood and at home. She lived at 1500 Valentine Street in Little Rock, which was part of a somewhat integrated community. Many of her neighbors were professionals, laborers, and homemakers. She recalled how supportive they were during her time at Central. At home, she found comfort in faithfully watching "American Bandstand" with her sisters. In a city gripped by tension, neighbors often checked in on the Walls family and helped maintain a sense of normalcy when school felt anything but ordinary. Their quiet acts of care reflected the broader network of family and community support that sustained many of the Little Rock Nine through the daily hostilities they faced.

Many of her classmates, however, were less supportive. Most of the Little Rock Nine endured physical harassment ranging from being kicked, shoved, or thrown down flights of stairs while making their way to class. Carlotta recalled a story of Terrence Roberts in gym class. "There was so much harassment going on that the PE teacher, who happened to also be the football coach, blew the whistle and said, 'all right, all of you just line up. All of you want to have a piece of him, just line up.' Terrence knew that he was done for. He said when the first guy came to him, he quickly grabbed his dog tag chain and just kept twisting it and twisting it to the point that the teacher ended up having to stop it and then it was done. So, if it had gone two or three down the line, he would have been beaten up." Sometimes Carlotta would find her own school clothes doused in water when she returned from gym class.

The girl next to her locker was on Little Rock's "Steve's Show," which was a locally produced teenage dance show similar to the popular nationally televised "American Bandstand" that the Walls

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

October 4, 1957

PERSONAL

Dear Mrs. Walls:

I deeply appreciate your September thirtieth telegram, signed also by other parents. The supreme law of our land has been clearly defined by the Supreme Court. To support and defend the Constitution of the United States is my solemn oath as your President -- a pledge which imposes upon me the responsibility to see that the laws of our country are faithfully executed. I shall continue to discharge that responsibility in the interest of all Americans today, as well as to preserve our free institutions of government for the sake of Americans yet unborn.

I believe that America's heart goes out to you and your children in your present ordeal. In the course of our country's progress toward equality of opportunity, you have shown dignity and courage in circumstances which would daunt citizens of lesser faith.

With best wishes to you,

Sincerely,



Mrs. Juanita Walls
1500 Valentine Street
Little Rock
Arkansas

PERSONAL

Letters from President Eisenhower, expressing his support, were hand delivered by a federal agent to all nine of their mothers shortly after he sent the 101st Airborne Division to escort them into Central High School. This is the letter President Eisenhower wrote to Carlotta Walls's mother. Courtesy of Carlotta LaNier

family enjoyed at home. Carlotta wanted to compliment her on her performance on the show, but murmured from the side of her mouth: a favored strategy used to avoid other students overhearing a conversation. She knew that students commonly targeted classmates who expressed kindness or gratitude.

No matter what Carlotta endured, she remained focused on her goal. She remembered her biology teacher in particular—an ally who encouraged her to enter the school science fair, where she ultimately won third place. Because she couldn't safely walk across the stage, he accepted the award on her behalf and continued to help her succeed in class. "I think I could have told my parents I didn't want to go back anymore," she reflected, "but I never felt that way. I wanted that diploma from Central High because I knew it would open doors."

Governor Orval Faubus, however, remained staunch in his opposition to desegregation and soon found another way to delay it. After the 1957–58 school year ended, the Little Rock school board asked a federal court to postpone its integration plan, requesting a three-year delay. The court granted the request, extending the deadline to 1961. The NAACP quickly appealed the decision, and by September 1958 the case had reached the US Supreme Court. The justices overturned the lower court's ruling and ordered Little Rock to proceed with integration.

Anticipating this outcome, the Arkansas legislature had already passed a measure granting Governor Faubus authority to close public schools under the guise of an "emergency" and later called a special election to gauge public opinion. Within days of the Supreme Court's decision, Faubus invoked that



Top Rally at state capitol in Little Rock, Arkansas. 1959. Photography by John T. Bledsoe. Courtesy of Carlotta LaNier

Center The nine with President Bill Clinton at the fortieth anniversary of Little Rock Nine in 1997. Courtesy of Carlotta LaNier

Right President Clinton awarded the Little Rock Nine a Congressional Gold Medal in November 1999. Courtesy of Carlotta LaNier

new law and shut down all four of Little Rock's public high schools. When the special election was held on September 27, 1958, voters overwhelmingly sided with keeping the schools closed rather than allowing integration—19,470 to 7,561. The city's high schools would be closed for the entire 1958–59 school year, a period that became known as “the Lost Year.” Carlotta decided to enroll in supplemental courses through the University of Arkansas to stay on track.

Most of the Nine had reached their senior year and left for other states to graduate, while two others remained in Little Rock, taking correspondence courses alongside her. Jefferson Thomas and Carlotta Walls were the only ones from the original nine that went back to Central High.

When Carlotta returned for her senior year, many Central administrators tried to signal that open hostility would no longer be tolerated. Harassment still came, but not to the point where she needed a guard. Name calling persisted, but the worst had yet to come: In February 1960, someone bombed her home.

It blew out one side of her house. Her father wasn't home, and fortunately she, and her mother and sisters, did not sustain injuries from the bombing. Carlotta remembers seeing glass from the living room windows scattered about and her mother's drapes being shredded from the blast. There at the base of the chimney she could see where the dynamite had left a gaping hole. She decided to go back to school the next day, because she felt if she didn't, the perpetrators would have thought that they'd won. Returning to school the next day was an act of resistance and resilience in the face of adversity and trauma.

It wasn't until twenty years later that she found out that Central's chemistry teacher helped a group of classmates build a bomb, which she believes was used to make the blast in her home. Even through that, Carlotta walked across the graduation stage, becoming the only female member of the Little Rock Nine to graduate from Central High in May 1960. The next

morning she boarded a northbound train. “I took the first thing smoking out of Little Rock.”

She applied to numerous universities across the country and ultimately decided to attend Michigan State University as a pre-med major. “I wanted to go there because it was a large university and I would just be another number. I wouldn't be that person you'd been seeing on TV every day.” However, after a two-year stay, she chose to leave. Her uncle and aunt lived in Denver and invited her to visit during the summer breaks between her freshman and sophomore years. Deep down she knew Colorado would be her next journey.

“Here you could do whatever you wanted as long as you worked hard and were honest about it.”

A LANDSCAPE OF POSSIBILITY IN COLORADO

When she arrived in Denver in 1962, Colorado's Black population was small but growing, rooted in neighborhoods such as Five Points and Park Hill. The state had passed one of the nation's early fair-employment laws in 1957 and a fair-housing act in 1959, nearly a decade before Congress enacted similar federal legislation. For Carlotta, the move felt like an exhalation. She found the move so refreshing that she soon convinced her parents and two younger sisters to join her in Colorado.

“What I appreciated about Colorado,” she said, “was that I could be myself.”

She attended Scott Methodist Church and later Park Hill United Methodist Church. “We became the second Black family to belong there,” she remembered. “Two days after moving in, Reverend Babbs knocked

on our door to invite us to church. You just don't get that today.”

Even so, racial lines remained visible. “I heard that Blacks only lived up to York Street,” she said. Her uncle was one of the first Black homeowners in Park Hill—an act of defiance that mirrored her own. “That was an achievement.” Denver's atmosphere struck her as freer, yet imperfect. “Discrimination wasn't as blatant as Little Rock,” she explained. “But you could see it in certain people.” What mattered to her was opportunity: “Here you could do whatever you wanted as long as you worked hard and were honest about it. You didn't have to be somebody's kid—you just decided what you wanted to do and did it.”

In the early 1960s education was the prime means of economic upward mobility for Black Americans, and Carlotta was determined to finish college. While working in Denver she took night classes at CU Denver, then applied to Colorado State College (now the University of Northern Colorado).

When a bank officer refused her a student loan, suggesting she “go to your parents' bank,” Carlotta pushed back. “I told her, ‘I'm the one getting the loan, not my parents.’ When the officer denied it anyway, I asked to see the president.” The meeting worked in her favor; she received the loan. “That could not have happened in Little Rock,” she reflected. “But here, I could speak up and be heard.” Persistence and resilience in the midst of adversity had paid off.

She graduated in 1968 with a degree in recreation administration and social science while holding three jobs—at the Hilton, a drugstore, and the post office—and commuting daily to Greeley. “There was no time for socializing,” she laughed. “I had a goal.” Her achievement mirrored a larger national moment across the country: Black women were entering universities at numbers that had never been seen before, and in turn, reshaping professions that had long excluded them.

Her first job after college was with the YWCA of Denver, part of a national organization that, by the late 1960s, was confronting racial and gender inequities. “That work came naturally,” Carlotta said. “It brought back what I’d experienced as a teenager—camp, leadership, community.” She directed youth programs across Denver Public Schools, helping teens of color experience the Colorado outdoors and connect with their communities.

Through the YWCA, she was later tasked with remodeling a donated house that had once belonged to Dr. Clarence Holmes, a prominent Black dentist and civic leader. Holmes had helped found the Colorado-Wyoming branch of the NAACP and the Glenarm YMCA—one of the few YMCA branches in Denver open to African Americans—and was known for establishing the interracial Cosmopolitan Club, which challenged segregation and the influence of the Ku Klux Klan. The project connected Carlotta’s youth work to a longer legacy of Black civic activism in Denver.

When asked if she considered herself an activist, Carlotta answered quickly: “No. That word came later. Back then we called it volunteering or participating. I was just doing what I knew was right.”

Her modesty understates her influence. The Civil Rights Era often produced two kinds of leaders: those who stayed in the public eye, and those who quietly worked to transform everyday systems. Carlotta firmly belongs in the latter category.

Those years of community work placed her within the broader wave of Black civic leadership that followed the Civil Rights Movement—citizens turning protest into institution-building. For Carlotta, it also revealed a new calling. “That’s when I knew I should be in real estate,” she said. “It came easy for me.”

In the 1960s and ’70s, real estate remained circumscribed by America’s color line. Redlining and discriminatory lending had long confined Black buyers to specific neighborhoods. In 1968, Carlotta and her husband filed a complaint



Carlotta LaNier, with her husband, Ira LaNier. Courtesy of Carlotta LaNier

“I was just doing what I knew was right.”

after being denied an apartment on Colorado Boulevard. “They said it was taken, but two weeks later we saw it advertised again,” she said. “We took them to court; however, we didn’t win the case, but we stood up.” That act of resilience became a throughline in her professional life in real estate. After earning her license in the early 1970s, she joined Polly Little Realtors, a woman-owned firm where she quickly rose to the top tier of sellers. “I wanted to work in an inclusive environment,” she said. “Why shouldn’t I?”

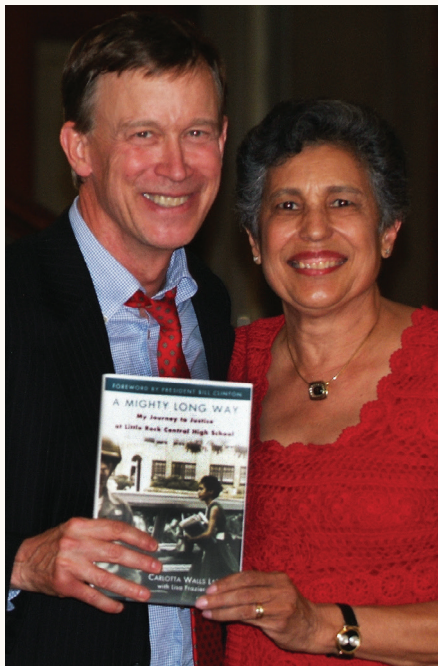
By 1977, she launched her own firm, LaNier & Company, focusing on residential development for customers from all backgrounds across the Denver metro area.

For Carlotta, housing was more than property—it marked an important point along a common circle of opportunity. “Everything falls back to education,” she said. “People want certain neighborhoods, but they need the jobs and education to afford them. It’s all connected.”

Her view echoed the logic of *Brown v. Board*: Equality in the classroom builds equality everywhere else. Watching Denver Public Schools evolve over the decades, she saw the same tensions that shaped her youth—progress, then regression, and the need to push forward again. By the 1980s, resegregation and unequal funding had returned to many locales nationwide, even in western states once thought of as more progressive. Carlotta knew the fight for equality had simply shifted from school doors to banks, zoning boards, and real-estate offices.

FAMILY LIFE AND LEGACY

Carlotta met her husband, Ike LaNier, at a Denver party in 1965, shortly after his military service. He had graduated from Tougaloo College in Mississippi and had taught school in Denver for a number of years before going into the service. They dated for three years and married in 1968. He worked for IBM, part of a generation of Black professionals whose entry into corporate America was made possible through Urban League advocacy. “They helped open doors,” she said. Soon after getting married the couple had two children, son Whitney and daughter Brooke, and the LaNiers prioritized diverse educational settings for them.



“I always wanted my kids in mixed environments,” she said. “That mattered to me.” When her son was bused across town during Denver’s desegregation era of the ’70s and ’80s, she supported it despite the inconvenience. The family later lived briefly in Atlanta. Carlotta and Ike found their children isolated in mostly white classrooms. Consequently they enrolled them in a private academy founded by a retired Navy admiral who believed children should “see people of all backgrounds together.”

Through decades of relocation—from Colorado to Georgia to California and back again—Denver kept calling her home. “I’ve enjoyed it,” she said. “I’m still selling homes. Still working.”

As our conversation drew to a close, Carlotta spoke of home. “I came here on purpose,” she said of Colorado, reflecting on the place she has lived for more than six decades. “I hope people think of me as a good person—someone who helped make this city and state a good place for all people.” She spoke of being a mother and wife, a church member, a neighbor, and a loyal supporter of Colorado sports teams and communities. “The mountains say a lot to me—it’s the strength of those mountains that I gravitate to. It keeps me going.”


In 1997, Carlotta helped establish the Little Rock Nine Foundation. The foundation provided direct financial support through scholarships and mentorship opportunities for students. She served as its acting president before it moved into the Clinton School of Public Service in 2008. Funds from the foundation helped establish an endowment at the school.

When asked what she sees in today’s cultural and political climate—book bans, debates over history, and politics surrounding race and education—she grew circumspect. “Unfortunately, I feel we are facing some of the same battles,” she said. “There was so much progress from 1954 until just a few years ago, but it’s going to take citizens to insist, to be vigilant about keeping that progress—or reinventing it if it’s taken away.”

Despite this critique, Carlotta remains hopeful. “We need leaders,” she said. “More than one or two. We need to come to the table, discuss our differences, and find a way forward. No one gets everything they want—it’s never the case. But we can still build a better environment for everyone.”

After all these years, her message remains what it was in 1957: Keep moving forward, finish what was started, choose courage over complacency.

Her legacy isn’t just that she walked through the school doors—it’s that she never stopped opening them for others.

Carlotta Walls LaNier just published her first children’s book, *Carlotta’s Special Dress: How a Walk to School Changed Civil Rights History* (2026), now available in print and audiobook at Hachette Book Group. 

Acoma Gaither is an Emmy Award-winning public historian and serves as the Associate Curator of Black History at History Colorado. She received her master’s degree in heritage studies and public history at the University of Minnesota.

Above left Carlotta LaNier with then-Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper after the publication of her memoir. Courtesy of Carlotta LaNier

Above LaNier’s family (from left: Alan Terry, Shana Terry, Russel Terry, Whitney LaNier, Brooke LaNier, Juanita Walls, Carlotta LaNier, Ira LaNier, Tina Walls, Loujuana Terry, Jevin Terry holding Cartel Terry, and Kim Terry) with President Bill Clinton in a replica of his White House office at his presidential library in Little Rock. Courtesy of the Clinton Presidential Center. Courtesy of Carlotta LaNier



The "Testament" memorial outside of the Arkansas State Capitol building features life-size bronze statues of each of the Little Rock Nine. Courtesy of Carlotta LaNier

Strings of Stone

The Institutional, Spatial, and Personal Influence of Freemasonry in the Making of Fort Collins.

BY SEAN NELSON

Editor's Note: *This essay won History Colorado's Emerging Historians Award contest. Open to undergraduate and graduate students, essays are judged by the Colorado State Historians Council and winners get a cash prize and publication in The Colorado Magazine. Submission information at historycolorado.org/emerging-historians-award.*

In the heart of Fort Collins, Colorado, lies a castle of stone and mystery. Emblazone above the six two-story-tall Tuscan columns that line the front of the building are the words "Masonic Temple," and above those, the symbol of Masonry: the square and compasses, framing the letter "G."

The four-story, 29,000-square-foot Masonic lodge sits at the intersection of Oak and Howes Streets, its

classical revival stonework looming over the landscape in a similar fashion to a medieval fortification or ancient temple. A building of such grandeur suggests the presence of an organization with significant local influence. By 1927, when the lodge was completed, Freemasonry had spent more than sixty years establishing itself as a prominent and respected institution in Fort Collins.



Exterior of the Fort Collins temple. Photo courtesy the Fort Collins Masonic Temple Association

Although Freemasonry is often regarded as a secret society, its presence is far more visible than many realize. More than one hundred Masonic lodges are scattered across Colorado, and Masonic symbols and cornerstones appear on hundreds—if not thousands—of public buildings, including libraries, government offices, schools, and university structures.

A large plaque engraved with the square and compass infamously is displayed next to the south security checkpoint at Denver International Airport, a feature that has contributed to the wide range of conspiracy theories surrounding the airport. Across from the Colorado State Capitol, a prominent building houses Denver's Scottish Rite, one of Freemasonry's major branches. Masons also participate in parades, sponsor charitable events, and contribute to civic celebrations. While these present-day appearances may seem incidental, they point to a longer history of civic involvement—especially in places, and at times, where institutional life was still being formed.

What began as a military outpost called Camp Collins in 1862 was, by the 1870s, developing into a permanent settlement. However, like many frontier communities, Fort Collins lacked the stable civic infrastructure that more established towns took for granted. In that setting, fraternal organizations such as the Freemasons found traction. Not only did they provide an established social network for new settlers, they presented themselves as institutions capable of providing social cohesion and civic structure.

Masonic involvement in the development of western towns was widespread, a pattern clearly visible in Fort Collins. The fraternity's influence in Fort Collins came in multiple ways. The sense of community it provided for its members, the encouragement of philanthropy and community building, and the physical lodge building itself, which functioned as a physical space for expression amongst the members, all contributed. Finally, and perhaps



most significantly, were the actions of individual Masons in their personal and public lives. Taken together, the presence of Masons in the growing town was instrumental in the development of Fort Collins during the latter third of the nineteenth century.

LAYING A FOUNDATION

There has been limited scholarly work done on the history of Freemasonry, particularly in the American West. Most mentions of the fraternity are brief, either in large historical works, personal journals, or books concerning masculinity and manhood. Many individual Masons are history enthusiasts, and there are a handful of trained historians who hold

Top An illustration of Camp Collins, which later became Fort Collins, as it appeared in the 1860s. History Colorado, 2022.57.507

Above Businesses in central Fort Collins in the late 1800s. History Colorado, PH.PROP.3535

membership in the fraternity but seldom write books on Masonry. This creates a gap in the scholarship that needs to be filled.

The exact origins of Freemasonry remain debated, but the formation of the Grand Lodge of England in the early 1700s was a turning point towards a global presence. British imperial troops brought Masonry across the world. Nearly every regiment hosted its own lodge, and civilian lodges emerged in port cities, colonial capitals, and frontier towns.

Masonry arrived in the American colonies by 1733, when the first lodge in the New World was chartered in Boston, Massachusetts. From that point forward, the fraternity's organizational model—built on ritual, mutual aid, and moral instruction—became interwoven with the colonial and national fabric of the United States. Nowhere was this affiliation more visible than on the late morning of September 18, 1793, when George Washington laid the cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol, clad in full Masonic regalia.

Over the next two centuries, the fraternity's membership ebbed and flowed, drawing in a curious blend of the powerful, the visionary, and the everyman. While the Founding Fathers often dominate the conversation, many others have passed through the lodge room doors. Since the humble beginnings of American Masonry in the 1700s, Masons have sworn oaths beneath chandeliers and starlight alike. Fifteen have taken the presidential oath. Astronauts like Alan Shepard, Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin, and John Glenn carried their compasses into orbit. Frontier legends like William “Buffalo Bill” Cody and Kit Carson brought the square and compasses to the West.

For all the headline names, however, the heart of the fraternity has always been built by millions of men of no particular fame who found in its rituals and lodge halls a sense of purpose and brotherhood.

But while the Freemasons as an organization have been very visible across our nation's history, researching the group presents particular challenges. Many members elected not to advertise their affiliation. Many Masonic lodges are protective of their internal records. While most of the archival materials available are rather mundane, such as minute books and treasurer's reports, others like ritual books and correspondences are reserved for initiated members. As a result, access to lodge records is often restricted, and requests from outside researchers are frequently met with hesitancy and skepticism.

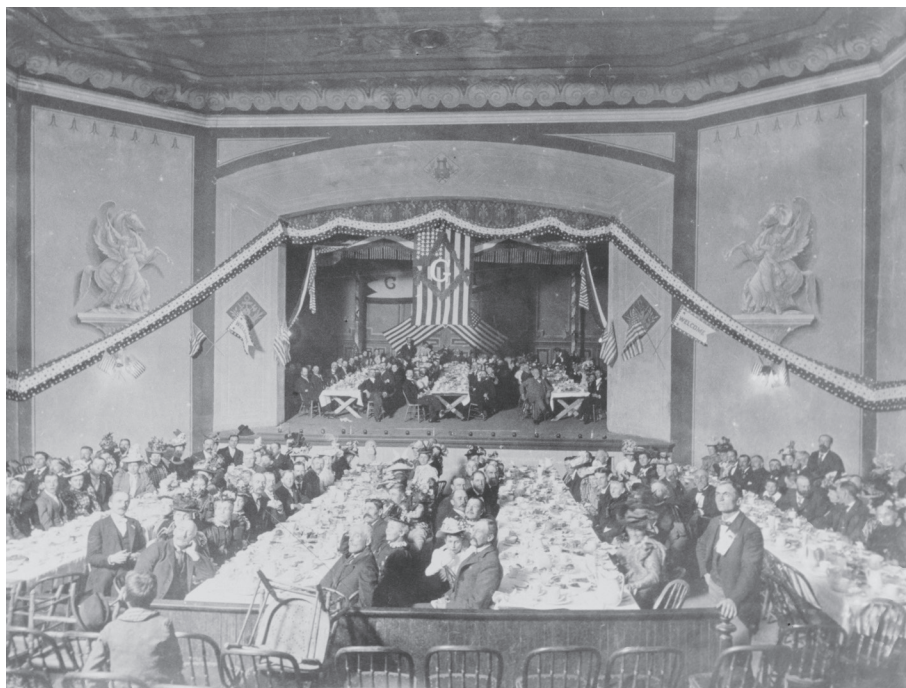


An unknown man in ceremonial Masonic regalia, c. 1882. Photographed by L. McLean of Central City, Colorado. History Colorado, 2022.57.7767

I grew up in a Masonic family, the seventh consecutive generation to be a member of the fraternity, so it is no mystery why the inner workings of the Order captivated my imagination from a young age. Upon being made a Mason shortly after my eighteenth birthday, I set about learning as much as I could. As my studies progressed, both academ-

ically and Masonically, I began to notice an interesting trend: Freemasonry appeared everywhere in American history. During my first semester at Colorado State University, I recall being assigned *The Journal of Mollie Dorsey Sanford*, a delightfully written journal of an early pioneer woman in the Colorado Territory. There were a few overt mentions of Masonry throughout, but, on page 155, she makes a passing remark: “By will take the first degree.” By, short for Byron, was her husband. Many readers would likely just pass over this sentence, not realizing that it was a record of her husband being initiated into the first degree of Freemasonry. This was my first realization that my familiarity with Masonic terms and phrases gave me a rare lens through which to view elements of the past. In addition, my own membership in the fraternity granted me relatively unique access to the records of Collins Lodge No. 19 and the archives of the Grand Lodge of Colorado.

With permission to consult internal documents, I created a dataset of every member of Collins Lodge between 1870 and 1900, using original member ledgers preserved by the lodge. This dataset includes the names, occupations, ages, and dates of advancement



A Masonic dinner held in the Central City Opera House, c. 1890s. History Colorado, 2022.57.12581

through Masonic degrees for more than 270 individuals. To complement this material, I incorporated the yearly reports submitted by the lodge secretary to the Grand Lodge of Colorado, which record every active member at the close of each Masonic year. These reports helped me track changes in membership, and allowed me to search for the names of influential Fort Collins men during this time period, revealing patterns in the membership and shifts over time as the town grew from a frontier outpost to one of the largest communities in Colorado.

LOFTY IDEALS & WESTWARD EXPANSION

As Americans pushed westward in the nineteenth century, Freemasonry followed, carried by settlers who sought land and opportunity. The structure of the fraternity was mobile, replicable, rooted in enlightenment ideas, and supportive of community building. As a result, Masonry offered a sense of order on the frontier during a time where institutions were sparse and communities were still in the early stages of their formation.

When gold was discovered in 1859 near modern-day Idaho Springs, Colorado, people flocked to the region. Lodges quickly appeared alongside mining camps, rail depots, and burgeoning urban centers. Colorado became a territory in late February 1861, and less than six months later, the Grand Lodge of Colorado was formed.

In northern Colorado, the Army established Camp Collins as a military post in 1862 to guard the Cherokee Trail and the Overland Stage Line. After a flood in 1864, Camp Collins was relocated to roughly the present location of Fort Collins, based on the advice of Joseph Mason, a Freemason and one of the area's early settlers. When the last soldiers left in 1866, a permanent settlement began to take shape. The subsequent rise of Collins Lodge No. 19 placed Freemasonry at the heart of Fort Collins, not just as a social club but as an institution and cornerstone of community.

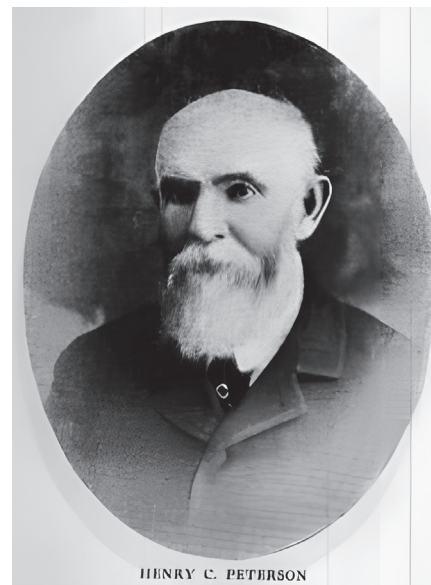
Chartered in 1870, three years before the town was incorporated, Collins

Lodge No. 19 was the result of a handful of enterprising men who helped lay both the literal and civic foundation of the future municipality. Foremost among these men was Henry Clay Peterson, an Ohio Mason drawn to Colorado by the promise of gold in 1859 and to whom the early organization of Masonry in Fort Collins is credited. Years before Fort Collins took shape as a town, Peterson hosted informal Masonic meetings in his "workshop," which local historians referred to as the "cradle of Masonry in Fort Collins." Peterson may have been the first white civilian settler at the military fort, and his imprint on the town's development is hard to overstate.

By the very nature of the Masonic institution, its principles are often obfuscated, either by means of ciphers or simply by restricted communication. Consequently, obtaining a public statement concerning Masonic ideology can be challenging. However, there are occasional instances where members deliver speeches that offer a window into Masonic morality.

One such instance occurred on the cold night of December 27, 1893. Standing before a crowd of nearly 300 Masons and their families, Edward N. Garbutt, who had served as Master of Collins Lodge No. 19 from 1881 to 1886, delivered a speech on the "Origin and Aims of Masonry." The "historical" portion of the speech is unequivocally wrong, as it cites Masonic origins in the mystery cults of the Ancient Greeks and Egyptians, and even suggests that Freemasons were present at the construction of the Tower of Babel. While certainly an aged fraternity, Masonry's fourteenth-century origins are a far cry from Biblical. However, the later portion of the speech concerned the practices and teachings of Masonic morality, presenting an exclusive look into the principles of the fraternity in the waning years of the nineteenth century.

That speech illustrated not only the moral lessons of Freemasonry, but also how, when, and why members should practice such teachings. Garbutt emphasized that Masonic values must extend



Top Photo portrait of Henry Clay Peterson, circa the early 1900s, as published in the 1911 book *History of Larimer County*. Courtesy the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery

Above Photo portrait of E.N. Garbutt in 1916. Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, H06915

beyond ritual and lodge meetings, calling on members to embody Masonic teachings in their everyday lives. He emphasized the fraternity's conception of moral duty, stating that "our religion is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, comfort the sick, relieve the distressed, and provide for the widow and orphan."

Garbutt presented a heavily idealized view of Masonic morality, but this is unsurprising. The ideals of Masonry proclaimed in his speech are emblematic of the broader tendency of Masonry at



A group of about forty Freemasons wearing their regalia on Fourth Street in Victor, Colorado, 1890–1910. History Colorado, 2022.5713558

the time to mirror Victorian America's moral culture. Masonic leaders in the late nineteenth century were hyper-aware of the "quality" of their membership, often barring or expelling those whom they saw as "notoriously profligate" or "profane." The positive public image of the organization and its membership was of the utmost importance to both Grand Lodge officers and local lodge leaders.

Garbut's speech demonstrates this through his encouragement of the members to "practice outside the lodge room the fraternal love and charity" taught to them in the lodge. Despite the overwhelming promotion of tolerance, the fraternity remained predominantly white, Protestant, and, obviously, male. Although the speech idealized Masonry, this philosophy often pushed lodge members to be active in their community in ways that lived up to the fraternity's lofty principles. They truly believed that if they acted according to this philosophy at home and in public as well as in the lodge, Fort Collins would be better for it.

However, while many Freemasons were amiable members of their communities, not every Mason was virtuous. Some were capable of great atrocities. The many social and business advantages that Masonry offered its members

could be taken advantage of for selfish gain, and this attracted men who saw the fraternity as an avenue to power. And in the history of the settlement of the western United States by European Americans, it's clear many Freemasons of the time did not believe the moral duties of their order extended to everyone equally—including and especially the Indigenous peoples of the region now called Colorado.

Perhaps the most famous Freemason in early Colorado history was Colonel John M. Chivington. For many, Chivington's name is synonymous with the Sand Creek Massacre, an atrocity committed by Chivington and his troops in 1864 whereby at least 230 peace-seeking Cheyenne and Arapaho people, including women, children, and spiritual leaders, were murdered while under a flag of truce. Chivington was the epitome of the ambitious mid-century man: a Methodist minister who traveled the West, won military glory at the Battle of Glorieta Pass, curried favor with the political elite, and leveraged his Masonic membership to great advantage. He was far from an average member, as he was in fact the first Grand Master of Masons in the Colorado Territory in 1861.

In the aftermath of Chivington's actions at Sand Creek, the fraternity

suspended his membership while a federal investigation took place, but he was reinstated within a few years. There are no records indicating if Territorial Governor and fellow Mason, John Evans, faced any Masonic charges for the part he played in the affair. Indeed, the only lasting effect on Chivington that the Colorado Masons enacted was the renaming of a lodge from "Chivington Lodge No. 6" to "Central Lodge No. 6" in the years after Sand Creek. This is not to say that Masonry as a whole supported acts like the Sand Creek Massacre—which was controversial and fiercely divisive for all Coloradans, including those who were Masons. Its membership was made up of thousands of men who erred, and several committed atrocities that modern sensibilities soundly condemn.

PUTTING IN THE WORK

Masons rarely called attention to their charities, making them hard to track with external documents. Unfortunately, the minute book of the first several decades of Collins Lodge No. 19, which would have recorded specific acts by lodge members, was seriously damaged many years ago, rendering much of the text illegible.

Some contributions are preserved in the lodge's one-hundred-year anniversary book compiled by lodge historian Lloyd Hagen in 1970. Others are alluded to in the historic newspaper collections.

Of course, fiscal contributions from Masons to their lodge brothers were not uncommon, such as the donation given to Brother William Stewart—a Mason from Crystal, Michigan—who was "sick and in want" in 1871. Whenever a member died, it was the lodge's obligation to look after the deceased's wife and children.

Hagen asserted that the first thirty years of the lodge "must be called the really serious years, because ninety percent of [the lodge's] activity was concerned with the ritual and extending relief to the poor and distressed." It is a shame that further details of the lodge's

charitable endeavors have not been preserved. Still, given the lodge's consistent emphasis on charity, the intentionally understated nature of its relief work, and the surviving examples that reflect those ideals in practice, it is reasonable to conclude that Collins Lodge No. 19 engaged in many more acts of charity than the historical record now reveals. Individual members, often acting outside of their capacity as Masons, took part in the creation of the Fort Collins community. They involved themselves in local politics, education, infrastructure, and civic celebration, often reflecting the values imparted within the lodge. The recurring presence of Masons in nearly every aspect of civic life speaks to the fraternity's cultural influence in this frontier town.

Foremost among them was Henry Clay Peterson, who had helped found the lodge. He is often given credit for "much of the early construction of Fort Collins." His contributions to the development of Fort Collins include constructing the first boarding house, co-founding the local flour mill, and opening a brick kiln that supplied material for many of the town's earliest buildings—including its first brick home, which he built for himself. Peterson also helped establish and construct the town's first schoolhouse in 1871 and its first church in 1876, and served on the inaugural school board.

Peterson was, by every measure, a civic-minded man whose work straddled both public service and Masonic ideals. Just as Washington united the young nation with the fraternity through the Capitol's cornerstone ceremony, he similarly cemented Fort Collins and Freemasonry.

Most early Masons in the area were farmers, but as the city grew, membership expanded to include tradesmen, merchants, bankers, clerks, judges, lawyers, doctors, and more. Beyond their occupations, a common trait amongst these men was their involvement in the creation and development of Fort Collins over the first thirty years of the town's existence.

Following Peterson's example, later members of Collins Lodge No. 19 often served in leading roles in the community, exemplifying leadership, another Masonic principle touted in lodge rooms across the nation. From 1873, when the town's first mayor was elected, to the turn of the century, eight out of thirteen mayors were Masons. Lodge members also served as judges, clerks, postmasters, and county assessors, suggesting that lodge membership was often a launching point for public leadership.

Masons were also influential in the city's signature institution, Colorado State University. Historian Ansel Watrous recorded that "[i]t was through the generosity and public spirit of [John C. Matthews], Arthur H. Patterson, Joseph Mason and Henry C. Peterson, each of whom made a free gift to the state of land, that the friends of the college were able to secure the location of that institution in Fort Collins." All but Patterson were members of Collins Lodge No. 19.

It is no coincidence that the principles of "generosity and public spirit" that Watrous assigned to these men could just as easily have a feature of E. N. Garbutt's 1893 speech on the principles of Masonry. Beyond the physical placement of the university, the leadership of the institution was also spearheaded by Masons. From 1879, when the university first opened as Colorado

Agricultural College, until 1940 when Charles A. Lory finally stepped down as president, a Mason was in charge of CSU for all but twelve years. The influence of Masons in Fort Collins is subtly reflected in the built environment as well. On the CSU Fort Collins campus, the student center and at least four dorm halls and academic buildings bear the names of past members of the fraternity who engaged with the university in a wide variety of ways, and thirteen buildings are adorned with Masonic cornerstones.

Even the very streets and districts of Fort Collins sport the names of influential figures in the town's history, many of whom were Masons. Whether it is the prominent thoroughway of Mason Street (named after Thomas Mason) or the historic Loomis District (named after Abner Loomis), the names of Masons appear everywhere in Fort Collins. From the infrastructure to the community spirit, Masonic influence in Fort Collins is woven into the very fabric of the town.

CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITY

But during this period when the lodge was most involved in developing the community, the town's Masons lacked a building of their own.

The first regular meeting space was the second floor of the Old Grout Building, located at the southwest corner of Linden and Jefferson Streets in



Fort Collins locals pose together on the steps of a building in 1932. History Colorado, 39.626.65



Historic photo of the Fort Collins temple. Photo courtesy of the Fort Collins Masonic Temple Association

what is now Old Town. The building's ground floor housed the area's first mercantile business, while the upper level served a range of functions over the years.

By the mid-1870s, the lodge relocated across the intersection to the second floor of the Stover & Tomlin General Store. Membership grew rapidly, reaching 79 by 1880 and 150 by 1890. To accommodate, the lodge moved a second time, this time to the third floor of the Loomis Block at Linden and Walnut, where it remained until 1903. Members began advocating for a dedicated hall, and that year the lodge finally acquired its own building.

In Fort Collins, the Masonic lodge hosted numerous community events, ranging from banquets and dances to professional workshops and meetings of other fraternal orders like the Odd Fellows and the Knights of Pythias. Historic newspapers highlighted the Masons' hospitality, noting their penchant for organizing enjoyable and well-attended events. This physical space became a local venue for art exhibitions, professional gatherings, and various social orders, demonstrating the wide range of groups that contributed to Fort Collins' growth. These events not only bolstered the town's cultural and professional life, but also exemplified how the Masons' physical spaces

empowered local organizations and fostered a sense of community. In this way, the lodge functioned not only as a masculine and moral institution, but also as a civic cornerstone—one shaped by, and in turn shaping, the men who passed through its doors.

No matter the form it took, the Masonic lodge served as more than just a meeting place—it functioned as a civic hub that reinforced Masonic influence in Fort Collins. It provided a space where men could cultivate and express ideals of masculinity through ritual, and simultaneously provide the broader community with a physical space to hold events or meetings, creating opportunities for engagement and connection.

In the early development of western settlements, many of the first buildings to be constructed were heavily gendered spaces, like saloons, inns, and brothels. Lodges, often one of the first community organizations to form in new towns, usually met in a business or in a member's house (as in the case of Henry C. Peterson). Lodges offered an alternative to the "martial masculinity" of saloons and brothels—sites of competition, sexual prowess, and even violence. Instead, lodges promoted ideals more aligned with Victorian notions of "restrained masculinity."

Lodges were a focal point in the social battle for how nineteenth-century men believed their masculinity should be expressed. This was displayed through the lodge members' internal promotion of "harmony and justice," the requirement for fine dress during meetings, and the creation of grievance committees established to help ease internal strife within the lodge.

These Victorian ideas of masculinity, especially in the context of voluntary associations, were complex and deeply tied to ritual, discipline, and moral instruction. As historian Mark Carnes observes, fraternal ritual "provided solace and psychological guidance during young men's troubled passage to manhood in Victorian America." Initiation rites acted as symbolic thresholds which marked the transition from youth to maturity, offering a communal way to establish order and purpose at a time when many young men were increasingly detached from traditional family structures and communal obligations.

The proliferation of fraternal organizations during this period was no accident. They "grew like weeds," in the words of historian E. Anthony Rotundo, precisely because they offered stability, moral guidance, and a sense of social belonging during periods of personal and societal flux. By the mid-nineteenth century, older men were founding youth-focused lodges to promote Victorian notions of virtue and self-control among younger initiates. This effort aligned with shifting generational dynamics. The American ideal of the "self-made man" complicated traditional father-son relationships. Independence became a virtue, and young men were expected to make their way without paternal guidance. Masonic lodges, and other fraternal orders, filled that gap. They provided mentorship and a model of manhood built on discipline, restraint, and fraternity.

As young men moved west and left behind their community connections, organizations like Masonic Lodges often served as a surrogate family. They even called their fellow members "brothers."

The lodges were not merely symbolic or performative—they were deeply formative, shaping how members understood themselves and their place in society.

Far from its existing as a simple meeting hall, the various homes of Collins Lodge No. 19 served as sites where men created networks, engaged in ritual, and found their place in the larger societal framework of the West. As the organization evolved and adapted to meet the shifting needs of its members, it provided locations for identity formation. It presented itself as a space for social acceptance and the moral guidance necessary to navigate an increasingly complex world. When Masons weren't holding their own regular meetings, their buildings were rented or loaned to other local organizations, each of which played its own role in the development of Fort Collins.


The Collins Lodge was not unique in this. A preliminary review of records from roughly a dozen other lodges in Colorado reveals similar patterns. From Denver to Pueblo and Leadville to Kiowa, records indicate that Masonry and its members acted as instrumental

agents in the development of Colorado as a territory and a state.

There is good reason to believe, then, that the role of Masonry in Fort Collins reflects a broader trend across Colorado and the American West. In the mid and late nineteenth-century West, where social, political, and economic structures were often still in formation, fraternal and voluntary orders took root with vigor.

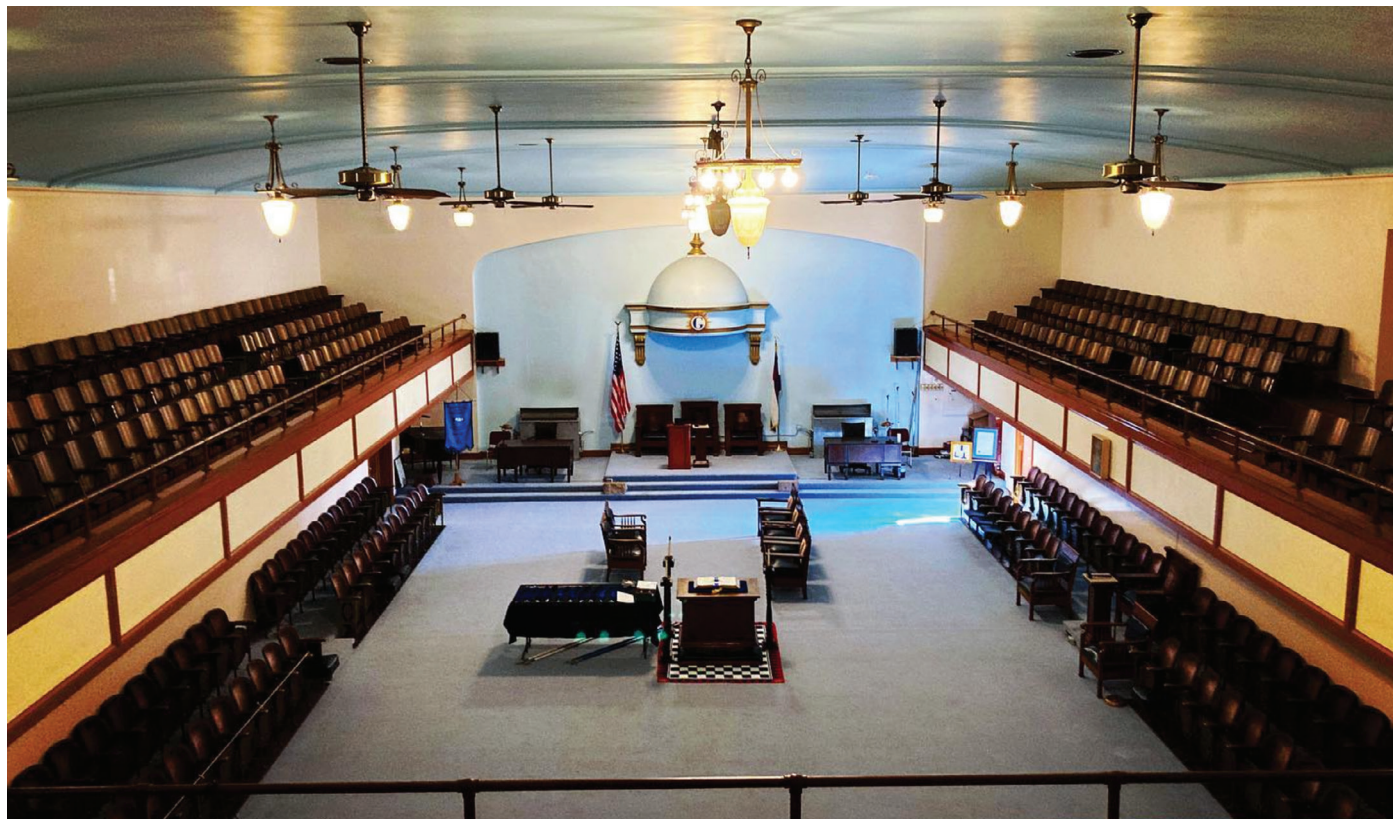
As Fort Collins grew and the Masonic membership approached 600 by 1920, it became obvious that the lodge would need a newer, larger space. In May of 1925, construction began on the colossal 29,000-square-foot lodge, officially opening on June 27, 1927. This building, a hidden castle in the heart of Fort Collins, has been the home of local Freemasonry ever since. Today the Masons continue to host community events here, contributing to communal growth just as they did in the early days of the town's development.

The Masonic legacy is inscribed in the cornerstones of courthouses, in the names etched on public buildings, and in the civic traditions that still define many

of our communities. While modern sensibilities may find the rituals and secrecy of Masonry archaic, the influence of its shared ideals—charity, fraternity, duty—remains embedded in public life. Exploring that legacy reveals how communities across Colorado grew from fragile settlements into functioning civic entities. The Masons were never the only force at work, but they were often among the first to help lay the groundwork. 

Sean Nelson is a second-year master's student in history at Colorado State University. A native Coloradan raised on the Eastern Plains, his research centers on the role of Freemasonry in the development of early Colorado, as well as the Union Navy's Mississippi Squadron during the Civil War. He serves as a graduate teaching assistant at CSU and as an editorial assistant for the *Western Historical Quarterly*.

A large meeting room inside the Masonic Temple at Fort Collins. Photo courtesy of the Fort Collins Masonic Temple Association



A Trail of Two Peaks

How the creation of a hikers' highway on Longs Peak changed the face of one of Colorado's most famous mountains.

BY JAMES RELTON

For more than a century and a half, Longs Peak has lured adventurers dreaming of conquering its glacier-carved granite summit. Soaring to 14,256 feet and eclipsing all surrounding mountains, this prominent peak inspired awe and gained fame as the “American Matterhorn” and “Monarch of the Rockies.” To an observer gazing across the rugged northern Front Range mountains from Denver International Airport, one peak stands out, dwarfing all others. But this is Mount Meeker. Longs Peak is con-

cealed by its less illustrious neighbor.

A cultural chasm developed between Longs Peak and Mount Meeker over the last two centuries, wider and deeper than their actual geological divide. The two peaks are connected, both part of the same mountain, though Longs Peak rises a mere 344 feet higher. Called Nesotaieux, “The Two Guides,” by the Arapaho, and Les Deux Oreilles, or “Two Ears,” by French fur trappers, the two peaks were perceived by early viewers as belonging together and being of

roughly equal importance. Each peak offered the same formidable challenge to daring hikers attempting to conquer their summits. Yet, by the late 1970s Mount Meeker remained trailless, tempting only a handful of technical hikers a year, in stark contrast to the thousands clogging the trail up Longs Peak.

The twin peaks of Longs Peak (right) and Mount Meeker are clearly visible from across the valley atop Twin Sisters Peaks. Photo taken by author, July 12, 2025.



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This contrast between the two neighboring peaks can help us reframe how we conceptualize national park geography. Historians of Rocky Mountain National Park, such as C.W. Buchholtz, Jerry Frank, and Ruth Alexander, have distinguished between the frontcountry (easily accessible park areas and amenities along roads) and the backcountry (remote park areas reached on foot or horseback). Most include Long's Peak as part of a monolithic backcountry. But contrasting it with Mount Meeker reveals a more complicated story, blurring the simple frontcountry and backcountry divide. The average recreationist, unskilled in rigorous trailless travel, must choose outdoor locations carefully to truly escape the commotion of modern life. Merely heading for "the backcountry" is not enough.

The difference is in the trails. Trails allow a much deeper encroachment of human development into the backcountry than first appears. But over the years, the construction, development,

and modification of trails on Long's Peak created a hikers' highway, bringing tens of thousands to the summit—especially notable in contrast to neighboring Mount Meeker, which was left relatively untouched.

BLAZING A TRAIL

The hiking experiences on Long's Peak and Mount Meeker were initially identical: rugged, routeless, and remote. William Byers, editor of the *Rocky Mountain News*, described the ordeal of reaching Long's Peak's base in 1864. He called the primitive road up the Big Thompson Canyon "quite rough; rocky and hilly." With no trail to guide them, Byers's group attempted multiple ascent routes before choosing a southern approach and making "the summit of the east peak," the notably subordinate (and then nameless) Mount Meeker. Byers concluded they "were as far as man can go."

He returned four years later with the John Wesley Powell expedition and proved himself wrong. Over five days, the party of seven proceeded on horse-

back from the "west sides of Grand Lake," camped near the timberline each night, and after multiple attempts successfully climbed Long's Peak's summit from the south. To avoid the convoluted route, which demanded repeated backtracking and skilled route-finding, would require the construction of a trail.

In 1871, the *Rocky Mountain News* still advertised "the best...ascent of Long's [*sic*] Peak is southward, passing around the east foot of the mountain to the south face." The 1873 Hayden Expedition, however, approached Long's Peak from "first north and then northwest, around the wide base of the great mountain," and found there an existing trail which was "well blazed, and leading to the direction we wanted to travel."

The party followed what's now known as the Keyhole Route, camping at Jim's Grove near timberline, leaving the horses at the Boulder Field, passing through a "notch," trough, "narrow shelves," and then making the final homestretch to the summit.



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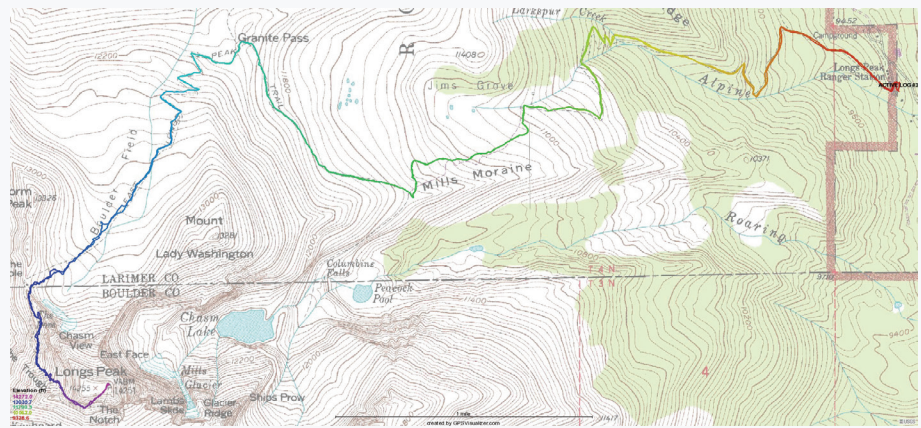
NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

British explorer Isabella Bird followed the same route just a few weeks later, camping at the timberline, passing “an expanse of large and small boulders” and “the notch” to the summit. This informal trail shortened the ascent to two days, with an overnight camp at the timberline, although hikers still rode horseback as far as the Boulder Field.

The development of that informal trail up Longs Peak in the 1870s had a profound impact on early hikers’ experiences on the peak. In 1875, the Reverend Elkanah Lamb opened the Longs Peak House near the base of the peak and constructed a toll road connecting it to Estes Park, accommodating hikers and shortening their ascent up the peak. In 1878, Lamb and his son Carlyle started the first guiding business on the peak, charging five dollars per trip, and created an informal pony trail from their resort to provide hikers an easily accessible route to Jim’s Grove campsite.

Enos Mills took over the Lambs’ guiding business in 1902, renaming it the Longs Peak Inn. Mills transformed the Lambs’ informal pony trail into the East Longs Peak Trail, with Shep Husted, a fellow Longs Peak guide. In promotional materials Mills highlighted the new trail’s impact, writing that it tempted “all grades of climbers to try for the top. Old, young, rich, poor, poetical and practical,” and opened the summit to more hikers. By 1885, climbing Longs Peak was no longer a newsworthy feat and by 1915, hundreds ventured up the mountain each year, three quarters of whom were guided. Mills alone took thirty-two parties up Longs Peak over one month in August 1906.

A stark contrast had already developed between Longs Peak and its neglected neighbor Mount Meeker. In 1908, Mills built Timberline Cabin near Jim’s Grove, the first hut on the mountain, offering hikers the luxuries of a “kitchen and two sleeping rooms with bunks.” By 1919, ascending Longs Peak typically entailed boarding at one



Map of the East Longs Peak Trail, via Wikimedia Commons.

of the adjacent hotels, embarking on a well-maintained trail, an overnight stay at Timberline Cabin, and a guided summit climb the following day. While Mount Meeker had the same surrounding resorts and road access as Longs Peak, it lacked a trail to the top. Artist and ranger Dean Babcock described Mount Meeker as “overshadowed by its slightly higher and far more famous companion” with only a few reaching the summit because its routes demanded “hours of tedious climbing over fallen timber and monotonous debris slopes.”

In contrast, the Timberline Cabin was only the most recent in a string of steady developments on Longs Peak, and it ushered in a new era for the mountain.

THE HIKERS’ HIGHWAY

After 1915, Longs Peak was part of the newly minted Rocky Mountain National Park. Federal ownership brought a surge in development along the East Longs Peak Trail, which fell under the National Park Service’s dual mandate to preserve natural scenery and provide visitor enjoyment. By the 1920s, the park had sufficient funds for significant backcountry management, and began to make major changes. In 1921, the trail section between Jim’s Grove and Granite Pass was improved, with the *Estes Park Trail* reporting the gradient was reduced from “30 to 40 percent” to “an easy 16 percent” and deliberately designed to “suffer the minimum damage from rains and melt-

ing snows.” The trail improvements reflected new National Park Service (NPS) trail-building standards and enabled hikers to make “quicker time and with much less fatigue.” The new trail was so smooth that ranger Dwight McDaniel made “the ascent unaided on a motorcycle nearly to [the] timberline.” Park Superintendent Roger Toll ordered colored discs painted along the rugged trail between the Keyhole and the summit in 1922, to direct hikers and prevent them from getting lost. This escalation in development along the trail marked the first step in creating a hikers’ highway to its summit. Already by 1921, the *Estes Park Trail* reported 1,004 people climbing Longs Peak, “over half of them without the aid of guides.” But then an unexpected tragedy escalated the development on an unprecedented scale.

In 1925, Agnes Vaille died climbing Longs Peak. She’d fallen while descending the peak’s North Face cliff amidst a severe winter snowstorm, and, while only sustaining light injuries, died from hypothermia before rescuers reached her. While several previous fatalities had occurred on the mountain, Vaille was a skilled mountaineer, member of the Colorado Mountain Club, and Superintendent Toll’s cousin. Her tragic death made news across the state and increased efforts to make the climb more safe, accessible, and scenic.

Later that year, ranger Jack Moomaw and his crew installed two steel cables onto Longs Peak’s North Face, the cliff Vaille had fallen from,



The Keyhole of Longs Peak with the Agnes Vaile Memorial Shelter (center left) blending into the surrounding rocky scenery. Photo taken by author, August 10, 2025.

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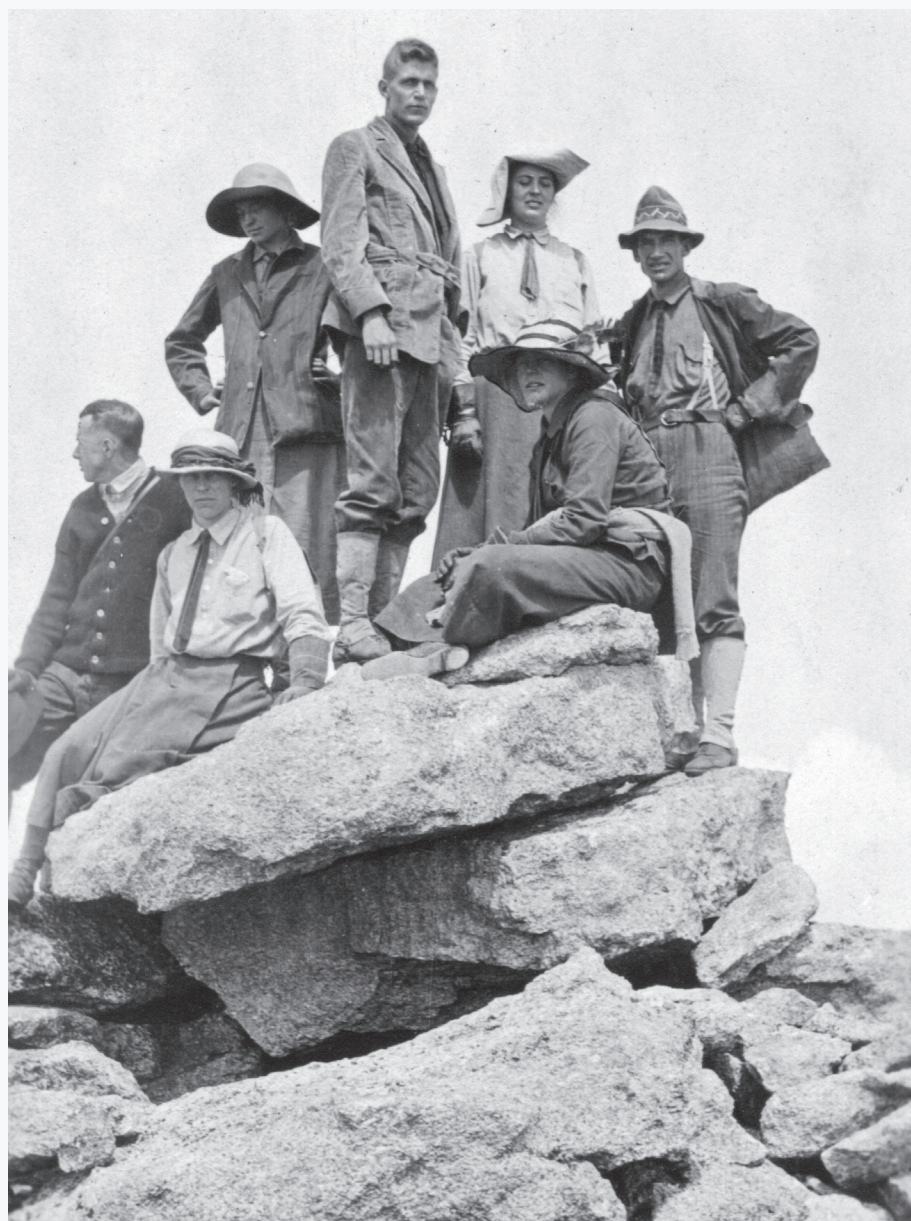
to provide climbers a handrail for ascending the peak and make the route safer. Moomaw recalled drilling holes into the rock and “cemented eyebolts into the holes” to install the cables, permanently altering the mountain. The telephone line to Timberline Cabin was extended “to the center of the Boulder Field,” enabling a faster search-and-rescue response. Moomaw also improved the trail section between timberline and the Boulder Field, constructing switchbacks which reduced the trail gradient and lengthening the horse-accessible trail to a hitching rack in the Boulder Field accommodating “twenty-five or thirty horses.” Moomaw followed NPS trail-building standards and masked the environmental harm wrought during construction, recalling the new trail “looks as though it has always been there” despite requiring more than two tons of dynamite to build it. Superintendent Toll praised the new trail’s “excellent views” and the *Estes Park Trail* lauded the new Cables Route for shortening the climb of Longs Peak “by about an hour,” providing “some remarkable views” and enabling “a circle trip.” For the first time, Longs Peak had two non-technical trails to its summit, allowing hikers to climb and descend in a loop. In September 1925, the first hikers completing the Cables Route were “very enthusiastic over its scenic attractions.” While safety was clearly Toll’s paramount concern, he also sought to fulfil the NPS’s mandate by enhancing the trail’s accessibility and scenic views to attract more hikers and provide them a more enjoyable experience.

Considerable trail development continued throughout the rest of the 1920s. A new trail to Chasm Lake, located in a glacially carved bowl surrounded by steep granite cliffs, provided easy access to “one of the most spectacular regions of the park,” according to the *Estes Park Trail*. In 1927, the park built the conical Agnes Vaille Memorial Shelter Cabin beside the Keyhole with native stone, adhering to NPS rustic

design standards and blending into the surrounding Boulder Field. Although primitive, the structure provided hikers shelter from Longs Peak’s frequent high winds and sudden storms. The Boulder Field Shelter Cabin opened the same year, offering hikers paid accommodation, twelve bunk beds, an outside latrine, and a horse stable. Robert Collier Jr. operated the cabin, and from him hikers could hire guides and

Right Queues of hikers climb the Homestretch to Longs Peak’s summit, August 14, 2011. Courtesy National Park Service

Below A group of hikers from the Colorado Mountain Club at the summit of Longs Peak, 1913. Agnes Vaille is the third from the left, standing and wearing a wide-brimmed hat. History Colorado, 83.495.1138



purchase “coffee or sandwiches” or more substantial meals, or “use the cabin for an overnight stop” with pack horses carrying in supplies. Guides took parties to the summit two to three times a day in summer, and hikers staying overnight no longer needed to carry their own food, fuel, and bedding supplies. The cabin resembled an Alpine hotel, hosting between two and three hundred hikers during the summer, and the *Estes*

Park Trail no longer considered Longs Peak “untouched by man.” Although the cabin was removed in 1937 due to the ever-shifting Boulder Field causing structural issues, it marked a further advance in human development on Longs Peak.

Individually, each of these trail developments was a significant change, but collectively their impact was massive. The summit climb became easier

and more scenic, interesting, and commercial. In 1927, Roger Toll praised the cables, saying they added “greatly to the interest and variety of the climb” and were “more direct, steeper, and more thrilling than the Keyhole Route.” Toll’s circular trip, up the Cables and down the Keyhole Routes, became very popular and could be completed in “twelve to thirteen hours” with a pre-dawn start. The developments opened Longs Peak to multitudes of inexperienced, nontechnical hikers such as Helen, Irene, and Marjorie Donahue—who in 1927 climbed the summit without a guide, despite being aged six, twelve, and sixteen, respectively. The Boulder Shelter Cabin brought commercialization to Longs Peak, with Helen Donahue recalling her father was “visibly disgruntled by the presence of such a commercial concession in this untamed primordial place.”

The number of hikers soared from roughly 1,000 in 1922 to 2,132 in 1931, and the trail was easy enough that only a quarter of hikers were guided by 1931. On paper Longs Peak was backcountry, but its development more so resembled the frontcountry. The 1920s trail developments marked the turning point in the East Longs Peak Trail’s history, permanently transforming the mountain’s face to make it a more accessible and pleasant experience for hikers.

Mount Meeker, however, remained firmly and truly backcountry. It had no trail, shelter cabins, or markers guiding hikers to its rugged summit. Adventurous climbers attempting to reach Mount Meeker’s peak had only two route options by the 1920s. Either they could start from Wild Basin to the south, navigate to Mount Meeker’s southeast ridge, and make a long, rugged hike to the summit, or they could hike the East Longs Peak Trail to Chasm Lake, ascend a steep snow couloir to the Loft between Longs Peak and Mount Meeker, and finish with a challenging climb to the summit. Roger Toll used the latter route in 1924, which he recommended only to experienced climbers because “the routes of approach and return are both fairly steep.”



Top Colorado Mountain Club members pose outside the Longs Peak Inn, which was located outside of Estes Park and served many hikers on their way to the nearby summits of Rocky Mountain National Park. History Colorado, 83.495.1148

Above Longs Peak from Estes Park. Photographed by William Henry Jackson, 1880–1900. History Colorado, 86.200.1834

In stark contrast to Mount Meeker's barely visited peak, by 1929 Longs Peak's summit was host to a Fourth of July fireworks display, visible from Denver, revealing the colossal consequences of 1920s trail developments in transforming the peak and connecting it to the wider world. The creation of Longs Peak's hikers' highway was a small-scale parallel of the road improvements to US Highways 34 and 36 and the 1933 completion of Trail Ridge Road crossing the Continental Divide, providing easier access to once-remote regions.

LEAVE NO TRACE

The East Longs Peak Trail remained largely unchanged until the 1970s, despite considerably wider changes in Rocky Mountain National Park, and in other parks across the nation. The New Deal's Civilian Conservation Corps was active in the park during the 1930s but focused on development below the timberline and caused little change to the East Longs Peak Trail. Staff and resources were redeployed for military priorities during the Second World War, resulting in limited development within the park, and the NPS's Mission 66 program, launched in 1956 to improve nationwide national parks, focused on frontcountry areas. Only in the 1970s did the consequences of the 1964 Wilderness Act reach Longs Peak.

By then, the National Park Service's management practices had changed, with ecological and environmental concerns gaining prominence. The 1964 Wilderness Act set new guidelines for the management of wilderness areas, and the postwar boom in mass recreation meant millions of hikers were hitting the trails nationally. A decade later, "overnight use within Rocky Mountain National Park had increased 390 percent from 1967," resulting in the deterioration of the park's resources. In particular, Longs Peak's popularity surged with its easy access and esteemed "Fourteener" status, as an unprecedented wave of "peakbaggers" sought to climb all of Colorado's 14,000-foot mountains.



Top A group of hikers makes the "final push" to the summit of Longs Peak, via the narrow path along a cliff. Photographed by Ed Tangen, August 17, 1916. History Colorado, 99.270.5725

Above Hikers pose on the precipice at the very summit of Longs Peak. Photographed by Ed Tangen, August 17, 1916. History Colorado, 99.270.5726

In 1974, the park implemented a backcountry permit system, setting campsite capacity limits and requiring backcountry campsite users to register for free. The park's 1975 Backcountry Management Plan outlined further new rules for backcountry users, such as staying on the trail, carrying out all trash, and camping "only in those campsites and on those dates listed on the permit tag," with groups capped at seven people. Rangers enforced the new rules and permit system.

The NPS was promoting a "Leave No Trace" and minimal-impact ethic to backcountry hikers, to "provide for visitor enjoyment of the backcountry resources without unacceptable deterioration." Entering the park's backcountry had become a managed, regulated, and civilized process.

Even so, the number of hikers brought unprecedented challenges to the park. More hikers meant more excretion and, by the 1970s, human waste on Longs Peak was a problem. Hikers produced around 8,000 pounds of human waste per season in the four overflowing privies along the East Longs Peak Trail. In 1975, the NPS installed vault toilets at high-density sites, including the Boulder Field, Chasm Junction, and Jim's Grove. Human waste was collected in eighty-gallon "honey buckets" and removed by helicopter every two to three weeks during summer. Already by 1976, however, the park's Acting Superintendent James W. Godbolt deemed helicopters "expensive, time consuming, and dangerous" and sought alternatives. Ironically, the helicopters' noise threatened the very wilderness aesthetics and hiking experiences they were introduced to preserve.

Superintendent Chester L. Brooks was forced to recommend a "special provision in the designating legislation" allowing "for the continued use and maintenance of vault toilets" on

Longs Peak for its inclusion in the park's 239,835 acres considered wilderness status. In 1979, the NPS stopped using helicopters for Longs Peak waste removal after one helicopter lost a honey bucket in flight and another crashed on the peak. After pit and incinerator toilets proved inadequate, solar toilets were installed on Longs Peak in 1983 which dehydrated most human waste, allowing pack animals to remove the remainder. Longs was a backcountry site with a frontcountry waste management problem.

The Cables Route had also become an issue by the 1970s. To ensure Longs Peak was "essentially free of manmade facilities" in accordance with the Wilderness Act, the NPS removed the cables in 1973. Although primarily removed for environmental reasons, there were also serious safety concerns with the route, as the steel cables were dangerous during thunderstorms, caused hour-long queues of hikers, and lured inexperienced hikers onto a still-potentially-dangerous trail. Longs Peak's North Face returned to being a

technical route leaving the Keyhole Route as the mountain's only trail for nontechnical hikers. Yet, rather than discouraging hikers, the cables' removal merely concentrated hikers on the Keyhole Route. In 1971, 5,214 climbed Longs Peak up the Cables Route, compared to 998 ascending the Keyhole Route—but in 1973, the year the cables were removed, 6,164 ascended via the Keyhole.

The 1977 Trahan Survey interviewed Longs Peak hikers and emphasized that their biggest complaint was overcrowding, with it "not unusual for hikers to be waiting in line to ascend and descend...the upper peak areas" and the summit clogged with "crowds of other hikers." The survey also revealed the dramatic alteration of Longs Peak's hiking experience, with 60 percent of hikers disapproving or strongly disapproving of "commercial horse use on park trails." Most respondents were repeat and experienced hikers ascending in groups of two to three people. The East Longs Peak Trail linked the mountain to profound



Hikers pose inside the "Keyhole," an iconic rock formation along one of the paths to the summit of Longs Peak. Photographed by Ed Tangen, August 17, 1916. History Colorado, 99.270.5727



nationwide transformations, with the postwar recreational boom and rising environmental concerns clearly shaping the management and hiking experience on Rocky Mountain National Park's tallest peak.

Meanwhile, the hiking experience on Mount Meeker was the polar opposite. With no toilets, trail, or telephone lines marking it, Mount Meeker required no modification or special provision to be included in the park's wilderness designation. Mount Meeker remained a technical ascent over rugged terrain, accessible only to mountaineers. In 1976, only twenty-six adventurous climbers attempted to ascend Mount Meeker, compared to 7,513 hikers parading up the Keyhole Route. Less than one mile, as the crow flies, separated the two tallest peaks in the park, yet their landscapes and hiking experiences were worlds apart.

BACK TO FRONT

Longs Peak is a cultural landscape, encompassing both natural and cultural resources. It is a place that reveals the evolution of cultural values over time. The 1870s and 1880s trail construction reflected an idealized rugged masculinity, personified in the mountain guides taking daring visitors into an "untouched" wilderness. The later trail developments reflected the transition of Longs Peak into federal management, and society's (and the government's) growing awareness of environmental and ecological issues. In the 1920s, the NPS worked to increase park visitation and enhanced visitor enjoyment, and


prioritized safety, scenery, and access. But by the 1970s, when visitation had increased to the point of overcrowding, the focus shifted to reducing environmental degradation and preserving the mountain's wilderness, despite human presence on it.

Yet the trail not only reflected human history, it provided hikers with the scenic views, overnight campsites, cabins or commercial hotels, and ease of passage that actively shaped human experiences as well. As Mount Meeker's contrasting experience demonstrates, the East Longs Peak Trail was the critical artery—the hikers' highway—that enabled access and linked Longs Peak to the surrounding road network and wider, modernizing world.

The categorization of Longs Peak as a "backcountry" destination hides the complexity of the mountain's history. Many histories emphasize the "subdividing" of the park into frontcountry and backcountry, contrasting the management styles in each. In her study "People and Nature on the Mountaintop," Ruth M. Alexander goes so far as to argue that the NPS had only "limited oversight on Longs," using "relatively inexpensive and non-intrusive practices" compared to frontcountry sites. Yet dynamite-blasted trails smooth enough for a motorbike, drilled and concreted eyebolts, and vault toilets emptied by helicopter suggest far greater NPS oversight and human intrusion on the peak compared to other backcountry sites. In fact, these interventions resemble the park's busier frontcountry sites.

A panoramic photograph of Bear Lake and Longs Peak. Photographed by Fred P. Clatworthy, 1910. History Colorado, 99164.2563

Mount Meeker stands just next door like a mirror image, reflecting back Longs Peak's past and revealing the profound alteration of Longs Peak from a rugged, remote mountain attainable to only an intrepid few to a crowded, sign-posted peak accessible to the masses. It reveals the variety within the park's backcountry and suggests a more nuanced continuum that blurs the simple frontcountry and backcountry dichotomy.

Human influence has penetrated deeper into the backcountry than many realize, and recreationists seeking truly remote places might need to search harder than they expect. But as Mount Meeker continues to remind us, they also can be hidden in plain sight. 

James Relton is a second-year history graduate at Colorado State University in Fort Collins studying historic preservation and cultural resource management. Originally from the UK, James spent six years living in New Zealand before studying in the United States. He is passionate about hiking and mountains wherever he has lived.



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TALKING SHOP WITH THE COLORADO MINING ASSOCIATION

We caught up with Adam Eckman of the Colorado Mining Association to talk about their organization, which is as old as the Centennial State itself and still represents the majority of the mining industry in Colorado.



Ben Ralston, Sachs Foundation CEO

Q What is the Colorado Mining Association? What do you do?

We're the oldest mining association in the United States—founded in 1876, the same year as Colorado. As a trade industry association, CMA represents Colorado's mining industry across a broad range of commodities. What some people might not know is that more mining industry professionals work in Colorado than in any other state. There's a huge global nexus of mining companies headquartered in and around the Denver area. We represent the majority of them. Not just the miners, but also the huge support system around them, which includes engineers, consultants, hydrologists, environmental scientists, attorneys, finance folks, and more.

Q What's the history of the Association?

Colorado was founded as a mining state. The earliest industrial economic activity in Colorado was in the hard rock mining industry. Colorado had, and still has, among the best and most diverse mineral endowments in the country. In the 1800s, Denver was the only city of any real size in the Rocky Mountain West and served as a natural convening hub. The CMA was very vital at that time, because Colorado was just setting up its government. The CMA represented the industry's needs in the new government, and really served as the first resource for best practices, including both safety and efficiency.

Q What role has the CMA had in Colorado's history?


We've been a huge part of Colorado communities from the very beginning. Many of the institutions, cities, towns, and communities were started or funded in large part by mining. Leadville is a mining community, as are Cripple Creek and Victor, where there is a historic gold mine that is still operating and is still one of the largest in the United States. These are historic institutions that built communities, funded hospitals and schools, and more.

Q What does the CMA do in Colorado today?

Over the years new technology caused a shift in the focus of mining in Colorado. CMA has represented the mining industry through many market fluctuations. From gold and silver through molybdenum, uranium, and rare earth minerals, we've been a driving force for Colorado's industrial and economic evolution.

Those same mining companies which built Colorado are now providing the raw materials that feed our tech sector. Our state has the largest aerospace employment hub in the US. Aerospace is immensely reliant on responsibly sourced minerals that we supply here.

Q What is the future of mining in Colorado?

Today, Colorado has some of the richest reserves of critical minerals vital to the nation, to clean energy, advanced tech, and aerospace. We have a responsibility to develop resources domestically for a variety of reasons. One, to do so in the most responsible and sustainable manner as we can, and two, to insulate ourselves from unreliable supply chains. Colorado, as a result of our mineral endowment and our massive mining professional infrastructure, is at the forefront of supplying minerals to meet those needs. 



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