

THE HISTORY COLORADO | WINTER/SPRING 2023

# THE COLORADO

MAGAZINE



## Una Carta de Amor a Mi Comunidad

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Who Make Us Who We Are

Building Camp Hale / All-American Ruins / Cheers to Ben's Super Market



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# Authentic Artifacts Connect Us



**T**he other night at an event, Polly Baca, one of Colorado's best-known barrier-busting Latina leaders, shared with me that her family history stretches back at least thirteen generations in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. We were discussing the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Her ancestors, who are connected to History Colorado's Baca House in Trinidad, are among many Coloradans who can quite honestly state, "I didn't cross the border; the border crossed me."

History Colorado is hosting original pages from the transformational Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo through May 22. I have been contemplating why, even though you can see the entire Treaty digitally online, there is power in seeing the actual authentic document in person. I, of course, love authentic artifacts, documents and place-based history, and I'm lucky to spend most of my days immersed in it all.

I also intuitively understand the power of seeing original documents, but sometimes it can be hard to articulate experiences that are so instinctual. Thinking about this, I called one of my favorite museum colleagues to talk this out. She thoughtfully suggested that it is the humanity we recognize in authentic objects and documents that is powerful. We are reminded of the humans who formed them. When you see the handmade fibrous paper, the carefully hand-scripted text, the shape and weight of the signatures, the imperfect wax seal of the Treaty, you certainly know that human hands made this document. Even more, you are reminded that humans formed the Treaty's terms that moved international boundaries and disrupted the lives of those already living in what is now the southwestern part of our nation.

The actual presence of the 175-year-old pages serve as historical evidence. The authenticity of these pages is an important counterpoint in what feels like a post-truth world punctuated by artificial intelligence and digital distortions. It affirms the experiences of the families generationally rooted in this space.

It is important to witness such a profound historic document in a place transformed by it, and to do so as a community. When we are able to learn and witness together how past human hands have formed our present lives, we can also imagine together how we are forging a future for those who will follow us.

I hope you will find time within the next few months to join us and other Coloradans for this once-in-lifetime opportunity to bear witness to this history.

Executive Director

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 forty-eight 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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▲ John Fielder captured this shot on a frosty morning in Roxborough State Park. In early 2023, Fielder donated his life's work to History Colorado. It's a collection of thousands of photos from around Colorado—a lasting legacy of natural beauty bequeathed to the people of the state he loves.

**ON THE COVER** Colorado State Historian Nicki Gonzales's grandmother Margaret Lujan sits in Denver's City Park with her sons (left to right) Manuel Lujan, Robert Gonzales, and Nicki's father Joseph Gonzales around 1950. *Courtesy of Joseph and Alberta Gonzales*

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# THE FORUM

## We love hearing from you.

### **The Sand Creek Massacre**

*We've heard from many of you about the Sand Creek Massacre exhibition at History Colorado Center.*

I recently visited [the exhibition] with family members as a birthday outing. The exhibit was excellent, I was especially struck by the use of the word trespassers to refer to the non-Native people coming into the area. That one word was especially powerful in my understanding of the whole exhibit. Thank you very much for all you do.  
—Susan Keller, via email

Are you certain that your portrayal of the Sand Creek affair is fair and balanced? Have you personally read the account by Colonel Chivington? Does the exhibit recognize the terror in the hearts of most Colorado citizens of the day, who definitely—and for good reason—did not regard the Indians as "peaceful" as you claim.

Obviously we have different views of this matter, but one-sided history insults everyone interested in it.  
—Hugh Fowler, via email

### **History Colorado replies:**

*Our intention with this exhibition was to create a fuller picture of this dark moment in our shared history, which, as you pointed out, left behind long-lasting feelings of mistrust. By consulting in-depth with the descendants of the massacre's victims, we collected new information that has not been widely shared. This exhibition foregrounds those Tribal histories that have been intentionally obscured, but does not shy away from describing the climate of violence and fear that gripped many communities at the time.*

*We certainly agree that one-sided history does a disservice to all serious students of the past. That is why History Colorado has spent the last ten years seeking out new stories and creating a more-complete narrative of the Sand Creek Massacre.*

So grateful to have exhibits so beautifully and respectfully made honoring groups of people who should have more of a foothold in this beautiful state. Massacre of children, old folks, babies who were under the American flag and white flag of peace... shame on you, America, and army. Trying to guide these little anti-violence empaths to ways of seeing a new future, honoring ancestors, and making up for the grave mistakes of the past.  
—gaheartcolosoul, via Instagram

### **Dia De Los Muertos at Fort Garland**

*History Colorado commemorated Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) statewide with shrines at four museums in November 2022, including a free and open-to-the-community shrine at the Fort Garland Museum.*

Beautiful thing to see these young people involved in mariachi.  
—Walter Roybal, via Facebook

About time! Been trying to get a celebration of the Dead there for years! They have really come a long way at the Fort from a whitewashed version of the West to embracing the community that supports the place! Well done!  
—Doc Grable, via Facebook

### **Mineral Palace at El Pueblo**

*The new exhibition You Should Have Seen It: Colorado Mineral Palace at El Pueblo History Museum has been getting good reviews from you.*

Such a terrific exhibit about a place that would have been magical to experience first-hand.

—Derek Everett, via Facebook

### **Museum of Memory**

*Museum of Memory is a public history initiative that works collaboratively to center marginalized histories and help communities around Colorado decide how to remember their collective pasts.*

Thank you for "The Museum of Memory." Once it's gone, it's gone forever (except in museums).

—M. Joanne Meury, via Facebook

### **History Colorado Center Museum**

The ski jump area is my kids' favorite! They would stay there all day if I let them!  
—Jesserin111, via Instagram

### **The Colorado Magazine**

*We love that you love reading it!*

We read *The Colorado Magazine* from cover to cover! The articles are excellent and we will continue to be members just to receive the magazine (if for no other reason).

—June Krantz, via email

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## THE COLORADO MAGAZINE

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# Much More Love and Acceptance

## PRESERVING THE STORIES OF COLORADO'S LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

BY LEE BISHOP

**“The more we band together, the stronger we are,”**

said Sister Cheyenne Demure during her 2021 oral history, reminding us that the history of Colorado’s LGBTQ+ community is all about banding together. It’s a

complex fight that all members of the community take up every day through quiet resistance and out-and-proud activism. Whether the adversary is open homophobia, the AIDS crisis, Amendment 2, or bullying, Colorado’s LGBTQ+ community has never stopped fighting for acceptance.

One of my favorite resources in History Colorado’s collection is an oral history from Sister Cheyenne Demure of the Golden Nugget Sisters, “an inclusive order of queer drag nuns.” As the collection entry explains, Sister Cheyenne’s oral history is the first of History Colorado’s in forty-six years to explore drag culture,





making it a vitally important record of Colorado's past. Sister Cheyenne Demure's infectious joy demonstrates the optimism of drag organizing, and her passion is clear in the numerous projects she describes. It's an example of the activism that is interwoven with the fabric of Colorado's drag community.

Contrasting this joy, Sister Cheyenne's oral history goes on to discuss the struggles she endured. She shares the pain of interacting with her biological family: "Yes, I lost my birth family," she says, "but there was another family ready to step in and fill that void with much more love and acceptance."

I felt my own pain mirrored in her experiences, but I also felt the hope she shares relating to her chosen family. Additionally, she shares the challenges of supporting her community during the COVID-19 pandemic and all of the creative ways the Sisters found to show up.

Towards the end of the oral history, the interviewer asks how Sister Cheyenne wants to be commemorated. She responds, "If anything, I just want to be remembered as somebody who picked up chairs, and put them down where they needed to be put down. I want to be remembered as someone who showed up and did what needed to be done." Her commitment to the work of organizing is clear throughout her oral history as she makes this sometimes unglamorous work seem completely fabulous.

Working towards greater tolerance is a never-ending task, and History Colorado's commitment to this work is only beginning. *Rainbows & Revolutions* represents months of groundbreaking scholarship on the state's LGBTQ+ history. Standing in the brightly colored gallery, I deeply feel Sister Cheyenne's words: "You're not alone." Setbacks are an expected part of progress, but seeing how many people have fought this fight before me inspires me to continue this work for future generations. If you haven't had the chance to share in this experience yet, History Colorado recently announced that *Rainbows & Revolutions* will remain open through Pride Month in June 2023.

The recent violence at Club Q in Colorado Springs left me feeling hopeless. One of the many benefits I gain from studying history, however, is a reassurance that though discrimination is persistent, activism is even more so. Combing through History Colorado's LGBTQ+ resources, I felt a spark of hope as I caught a glimpse of the constant work that keeps us moving towards a future where LGBTQ+ people can live as their full selves without fear. 🌈

**LEE BISHOP** is a Koch Fellow at History Colorado and an Educator Performer at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. Their research in Gender History includes a focus on Colorado transgender stories.



◀ Activists at PrideFest 2021. Photo by Katie Bush. *History Colorado*. 2021.7048

▲ The Gay and Lesbian Community Center's inaugural board members at their Capitol Hill building in 1977. *History Colorado*. 10052686

▶ Stephanie dances at an Imperial Court of the Rocky Mountain Empire gathering, 1979. *History Colorado*. MSS.1832

# More Than Ephemeral

## Preserving a Powerful Story of Resilience and Family, One Pint at a Time

BY JASON L. HANSON

**W**hen thirsty patrons step into Ephemeral Rotating Taproom in Denver's Skyline neighborhood, they find, as the name suggests, a here-today-gone-tomorrow selection from the best breweries around Colorado and the country. On a recent winter weekday, the stylish wooden handles of Frisco's Outer Range Brewery (emblazoned with the slogan "Leave the Life Below") occupied most of the twenty-four taps on the wall behind the bar as locals filtered in after work to meet friends and catch up over a pint.

But when Derek Okubo steps through the door and orders a pint, he tastes something else: his family legacy. Ephemeral is the recent incarnation of Ben's Super Market, a long-time neighborhood anchor operated by

Derek's grandparents. "This store, for our family, this location, is symbolic of the determination and resilience of my grandparents, of the restart of our whole family," Derek explained over beers at Ephemeral.

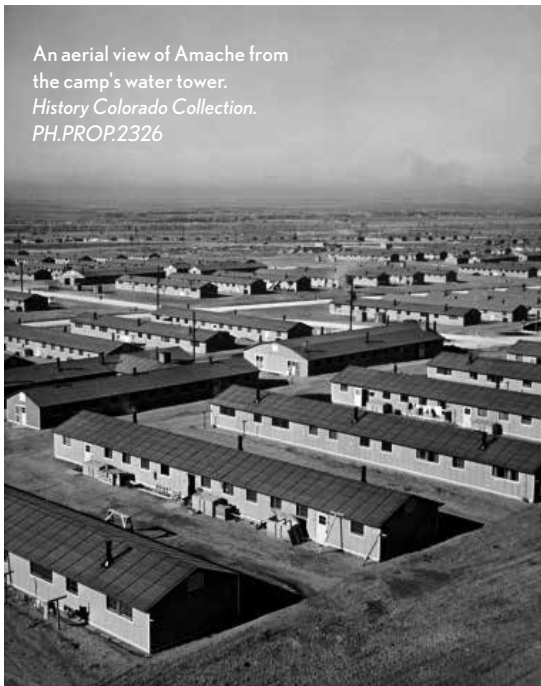
During World War II, Derek's grandparents, Ben and Susan Okubo, who had immigrated to the United States from Japan, were forcibly removed from their home in Los Angeles and sent to the Amache Internment Camp near Granada in southeast Colorado. President Franklin D. Roosevelt set their displacement in motion when he signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, mandating that all people of Japanese ancestry living along the West Coast—approximately 120,000 men, women, and children,

American citizens and immigrants alike—be removed from the region. The Okubos were forced to sell their store in the Eagle Rock neighborhood of LA. "They almost gave it away," recalled their son, Henry, a young teenager at the time who said that his parents had accepted a price that barely covered the cost of the new butcher's showcase they had just installed.

In a 1994 oral history archived at History Colorado, Henry recalled that his parents, foreseeing that they would be forced from their homes, quickly moved the family so that they would be able to evacuate together with his grandfather, aunt, and uncle as the government carried out removals one area at a time. In the summer of 1942, the Okubos were sent to the



Ben and Susan Okubo in the 1920s, around the time they were married in Los Angeles. *Courtesy of Derek Okubo* Henry Okubo as a young man. *Courtesy of Derek Okubo*



An aerial view of Amache from the camp's water tower.  
History Colorado Collection.  
PH.PROP.2326



New arrivals disembarking from the train onto school buses waiting to take them to Amache. History Colorado Collection.  
PH.PROP.2328

hastily established assembly center at the Santa Anita horse racing track. “We were one of the fortunate ones,” Henry explained matter-of-factly, “because our barracks were in the parking lot instead of the stables.” They lived at the assembly center until September, when they were put onto a train heading east. Henry remembers that on the long journey they were ordered to lower the shades over the windows every time they pulled into a station: “Either they didn’t want the people there to see in or they didn’t want us to see out—I don’t know which.”

When the family arrived at the train station in Granada, then (and now) a small agricultural community on Colorado’s southeastern plains, the window shades couldn’t hide the reality of removal anymore. They were met by armed military policemen and escorted to their new home, the hastily constructed prison camp that officials referred to as the Granada Relocation Center, but everyone else commonly called Amache. The Okubos were ushered to barracks on block 10H, a single room bounded by timber-framed walls lined with tar paper. Ben, Susan, and their three children (two more would be born at Amache)

were assigned the room next door to their relatives. It would be their home for the next three years. They were among the more than 10,000 people incarcerated at Amache during the war.

Henry’s memories of life in the prison camp are scoured by the wind-blown dust and snow that seemed constant. It gusted across the plains and whipped between the long, low-slung wooden barracks. And it blew through the cracks in the window sills, filling the dormitories with dust and, in the winter, dulling the effectiveness of the pot-bellied stove meant to warm the poorly insulated rooms. But Henry remembers days spent fishing and swimming with friends—the guards looked the other way when the children took the most direct route to the water, slipping over the fence surrounding the camp rather than going through the front gate. Henry excelled at the camp’s high school—he recalled that his math teacher had been a professor at Stanford—and with nothing much else to do he took classes year round, allowing him to graduate a year ahead of schedule.

Ben Okubo worked in the mess hall and later on the camp’s police force. During the growing season, he joined

other men in the camp working on local farms, picking sugar beets and cutting broom corn. As the war wound down, the US government conceded that men and women of Japanese ancestry it had sent to the camps were not a threat to the nation’s security, and the people confined at Amache were freed. But for Ben and Susan, like many who had been sent to the camps, the lives they had made before their incarceration were gone. “They couldn’t go back to LA because they didn’t have anything to go back to,” explained Derek Okubo. Even the few valuables they had left behind, stored in a Buddhist temple, had been looted during the war. “And they couldn’t afford to go back there either,” Derek continued, “because, you know, when they were released, they got \$25 and a bus ticket to start their lives over again.”

“They left Amache with nothing,” Derek says.

Instead of going back to LA, they went to Denver. In the summer of 1945, Ben went ahead of the family to find work, securing a job in a market. Henry followed him and was employed in a warehouse. Soon Ben was able to purchase a house for the family to live in at 29th Avenue and Arapahoe Street

in the city's Five Points neighborhood, a historically Black community that many Japanese American families found more welcoming than other parts of Denver in the years after the war.

Henry started classes that fall at Colorado A&M (Colorado State University in Fort Collins today), but he couldn't continue his studies after he realized how much his family was sacrificing for him to attend college. "He came home one day after class and he found his younger sisters and his parents eating peanut butter for dinner because they were sacrificing, you know, saving to send him to school," said Derek. "And seeing his younger siblings eating peanut butter for dinner broke his heart." Instead of school, he convinced his father to take him to sign up for the Army. He was stationed in Japan, and sent a portion of his pay back home to support the family.

Eventually, by 1951 the family pooled enough money to purchase an old Piggly Wiggly grocery store on the corner of 28th Avenue and York Street. The location, with a bus stop out front, several churches nearby, in one of the most diverse areas of the city, seemed ideal to Ben, and he got to work remodeling the 1894 brick building for business. The final touch was installing large signs over the door—one facing each way on the corner—proclaiming the establishment as Ben's Super Market in hand-painted blue and gold letters.

Ben's Super Market created a foundation upon which the family rebuilt their lives. The store quickly became part of the fabric of the neighborhood, and the Okubos—Ben, Susan, and their five children who all worked at the store—went out of their way to serve their community. "People would come over to the house and knock on the door and say, oh, they needed milk or whatever and the store was closed," said Derek,

explaining that his grandfather was always willing to help out his neighbors. "He'd come over here and open up and get it for them."

After his military service, Henry returned to Denver and finished school at the University of Denver on the GI Bill and launched into a career as a successful aeronautical engineer. Neither he nor his parents were eager to talk about their time at Amache, as Derek learned when he asked his grandmother about it one day. "I asked her about the camp,



and I saw a look come over her face that I'd never seen before. It was one of pain and disgust and anger. I mean, just this thing that I had never, ever seen. And she just paused and shook her head and got up and left the table."

But over time, Henry and his wife Aiko decided they had to speak out for the sake of their children. Derek remembers being called racist slurs by a PE teacher at his Littleton grade school, but his parents were reluctant to speak out until another teacher called his brother a liar for mentioning the intern-

ment camps. "His teacher said, 'That never happened. You're a liar.'...And I remember my dad, in the conversation at the dinner table that night, my dad said, 'Well, I guess we're going to have to talk about it.'" After speaking with the school's principal, who was supportive, Aiko came to speak with students about her experience at the Minidoka internment camp in Idaho. And Henry started sharing about his experience publicly as well. As Derek remembers it, "for a long time they were the only ones in all of Colorado that really spoke about it, because it was so painful and so the media would always go to them for stories about the camps."

Henry told his children that life in the camps was perched on "a fine line between hope and despair on a daily basis." It's a sentiment that resonates with Derek still: "I can imagine my grandparents trying to be hopeful for the kids...but inside dying, just not knowing what the future held, what was going to come—and knowing what they had lost and that they were stuck in this camp because of their race by their country that they had come to, that they wanted to be a part of, and then the country sticks them in a prison camp because of their race. So that all was part of that despair."

Eventually, in the early 1980s Henry and some friends who had been in Amache with him began leading an effort to preserve the site of the camp and commemorate the stories of those who had lived there. Several years later, in 1988, President Ronald Reagan would apologize on behalf of the nation to those who the government had imprisoned "without trial, without jury... solely on race," calling it a "grave wrong" in which Americans gripped by wartime fear had forgotten our "commitment as a nation to equal justice under the law." He signed a bill providing modest financial reparations to those who had been imprisoned while noting that "no payment can make up for those lost years."

But in southeast Colorado, remembering and ultimately memorializing Amache was slow work, progressing only as quickly as survivors of the camp and residents of Granada built relationships with one another. When Henry died in 2002, Derek carried on the effort in his father's place. Over the years, more residents of Granada have embraced the need to preserve and share the story of what happened at Amache. Today a museum in town is filled with items donated by families whose relatives had been imprisoned at Amache and is staffed by students from the local high school, all organized by the school's history teacher, John Hopper. And last year, President Biden signed an act making Amache a National Historic Site that will be managed by the National Park Service.

As the president was elevating Amache's status in the nation's official memory, Shannon Lavelle and Weston Scott were busy remodeling Ben's Super Market—Ben and Susan had sold the business in the early 1960s, but the name lived on—into a new community gathering place. And when they learned about the history behind the name, they wanted to honor the Okubo family legacy in that place. Derek recalls first meeting the new owners: “My sister and I came over and met with them, and we... talked about my grandparents and their history. And I just expressed my gratitude. And Shannon expressed her relief because she wasn't quite sure how we would respond.”

Today the original hand-painted “Ben's Super Market” sign greets Ephemeral's patrons, prominently positioned above a selection of grocery staples and other provisions that recall the store's history as a neighborhood grocer. “I was so grateful that they would feel compelled to honor the history and to use my grandpa's sign still in the bar,” says Derek. “I think my grandparents are smiling. I sincerely do. Because, one, the building is still here. It's still a gathering place



The Ben's Super Market sign greets Ephemeral's patrons as they enter the taproom. Courtesy of Jason L. Hanson

for people. They loved people. I think that they are being remembered is icing on the cake. I don't think they would expect that. I didn't expect it.”

Ben's Super Market should never have existed. The Okubos should not have had to open the store in Denver to rebuild their lives. The decision that Lavelle and Scott made to preserve the memory of Ben's Super Market at Ephemeral spotlights the inspiring legacy of the family's resilience. But it is also an everyday reminder of the injustices that can be committed by a nation when we lose sight of the shared ideals that unite Americans of all backgrounds. It's a heavy thought to grapple with over a beer, but we benefit from having places like Ephemeral that encourage us to do so.

Today, Derek Okubo is the head of Denver's Agency for Human Rights and Community Partnerships, a unit of the municipal government that traces its history back to 1947, when Derek's grandparents were restarting

their lives in the city he now works to make more welcoming and equitable for all who call it home. Derek has led the agency since 2011, but he is looking ahead to what he will do when a new mayor takes office later this year. As he thought about it, he smiled and took a sip of his beer, saying “Maybe I'll be a bartender.” It might have been a tongue-in-cheek suggestion, but as we continued talking over our beers, I looked up at his grandfather's sign and I could see the logic in it. Derek is a storyteller, a keeper of his family's remarkable story. And establishments like Ephemeral are good places to tell stories that can have a lasting impact. 🍷

**JASON L. HANSON** is History Colorado's chief creative officer and director of interpretation and research.



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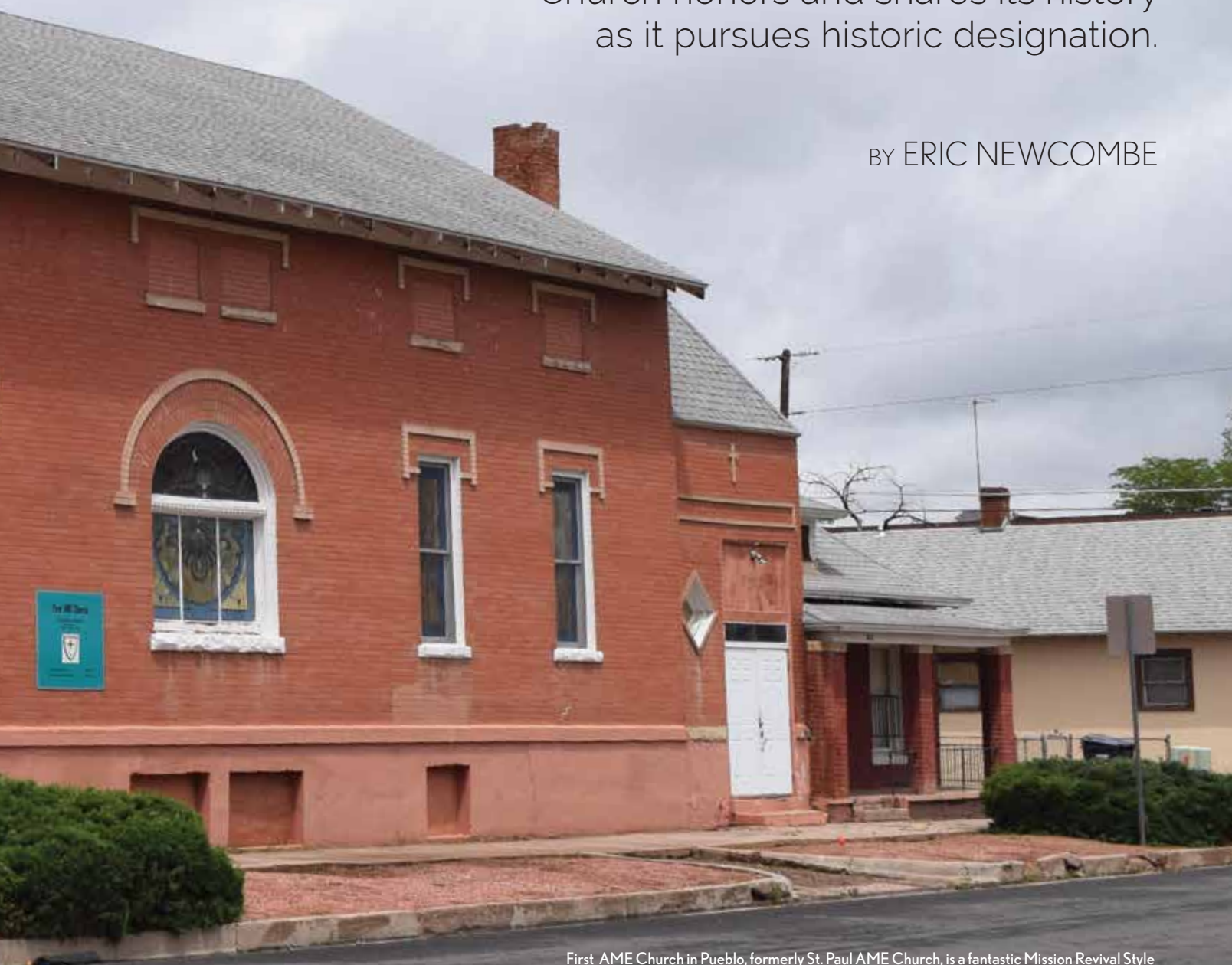
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# Sanctuary, Refuge, and Shelter

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A cornerstone of the African American community in Pueblo, First AME Church honors and shares its history as it pursues historic designation.

BY ERIC NEWCOMBE



First AME Church in Pueblo, formerly St. Paul AME Church, is a fantastic Mission Revival Style Church in the heart of the Bessemer neighborhood in Pueblo. *Courtesy of Tom Simmons, National Register Nomination, St. Paul AME Church.*

**E**nsconced in the soaring red brick walls that compose the striking First American Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Pueblo's Bessemer neighborhood, an African American community forged their identity and created a space where they found fellowship. Today it's an established landmark. Its curvilinear parapet and domineering tower—characteristic features of its mission revival style—continue to beckon Puebloans to its doors. In January 2023, the Colorado State Review Board, which is responsible for recommending to the National Park Service which sites in the state should be included in the National Register of Historic Places, voted to advance First AME to the roster in recognition of its role in the history of Pueblo's Black community.

African Americans migrated to Pueblo in fairly large numbers in the nineteenth century mainly to work for the Colorado Coal and Iron Company (which eventually became Colorado Fuel and Iron).

Many had family roots in southern states and worked in the great steel works of the South. African Americans migrating to Pueblo did not escape racism. Segregation was enforced in public spaces like theaters, hotels, restaurants, swimming pools, and high schools, even in the West. Residential segregation through the process of “redlining” was rampant, and as a result, Black Puebloans were concentrated in certain neighborhoods like Bessemer. The community there found itself in need of a place of worship, and so began an effort to organize an AME congregation in Pueblo.

By 1899, Von Dickerson, John Moore, Gabriel Holmes, W.A. Holly, John K. Williams, and Doel Gray had organized an AME congregation that eventually became St. Paul American Methodist Episcopal Church (St. Paul AME was renamed First AME in 1976). In 1903, the group purchased property that could be its home. By October of that year, the congregation acquired

the lot at the northeast corner of West Mesa Avenue and Pine Street where an existing simple white and black frame church already held services.

A turning point for the church came in 1914 with the appointment of the determined and capable Reverend John Adams Sr. Educated at Lincoln University, Yale, Gammon Theological Seminary, and Campbell College, Rev. Adams led an acclaimed life. Although not formally educated in the law, he was admitted to the South Carolina bar in the 1900s, eventually arguing in front of the US Supreme Court to challenge the conviction of his client who had been found guilty by an all-

**Black social justice organizations faced hostility and discrimination in Pueblo and beyond.**

white jury. He was a prominent civil rights advocate who organized marches in Omaha, where he was elected state senator. His reputation as an exemplary orator fighting to pass legislation to end discrimination in employment followed him throughout his life and works. Invigorated by the leadership of John Adams Sr., planning for the construction of St. Paul AME progressed rapidly. On May 19, 1915, the cornerstone of the building was laid in a ceremony that was attended by the head of the Fifth Episcopal District of the AME Church who came from Chicago. The Denver Star noted that St. Paul AME was the second largest AME church in Colorado at the time, with Shorter AME in Denver being the largest.

When construction of the church finally completed in 1916, St. Paul AME hosted the Colorado AME annual conference—an honor for the new church and congregation. Thereafter, the congregation became an anchor for the African American community in Pueblo. The thriving church, with 400 members at its height, served a vital role in the religious community, and held meetings of the Colorado AME annual conference in 1916, 1957, and 1971.

Black social justice organizations faced hostility and discrimination in Pueblo and beyond throughout the twentieth century, so having a place for the community to meet, discuss, and find fellowship helped to forge an identity and foster community activism. St. Paul AME quickly became a refuge, hosting civic and social groups and serving as a crucible of the fight for civil rights. The parsonage behind the church was listed in *The Negro Motorist Green Book* as the location of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The Colored Women's Clubs of Colorado, the Girl Reserves of the Young Women's Christian Association, and the Black chapters of the Knights of Pythias from Colorado and Wyoming were just a few of the numerous groups that held meetings and receptions at St. Paul AME.



Cornerstone of the St. Paul AME Church. Courtesy of Tom Simmons, National Register Nomination, St. Paul AME Church.



Though it was a hub for Black community and culture, the church also served the broader community of Pueblo. The distinctive and venerable building held musical performances, displays of art, banquets, and lectures on topics of the day. One of the more unique events was an annual gathering recognizing formerly enslaved people. Established by the Helpers Club of the church in 1934 to honor living Black Puebloans who were born into slavery, the Lincoln Day banquet was a yearly event through 1965. In keeping with its social justice mission, in 1970 the church held a symposium on civil rights that promoted speakers featuring Lt. Gov. George L. Brown, the first African American man elected to statewide office in Colorado. In 1976, after a meeting of the Colorado AME conference, St. Paul AME and St. John AME merged together to form First AME Church as a result of the demolition of St. John AME in the Bessemer neighborhood.

The historian Henry Louis Gates Jr. once said “The Black church has been a seminal force in shaping the history of the African American people. It’s the root out of which so many celebrated aspects of Black culture would branch. It’s the first institution that enslaved Black people and their freed descendants created, and it will become the longest lasting and without a doubt the most consequential.” First AME Church in Pueblo is the epitome of this statement, and continues to illustrate the congregation’s importance to the history of Pueblo and the state of Colorado. 🇺🇸

**ERIC NEWCOMBE** is a National and State Register Historian at History Colorado.



Congregation of St. Paul AME Church. Courtesy of First AME Church, photograph collection, Pueblo, Colorado.



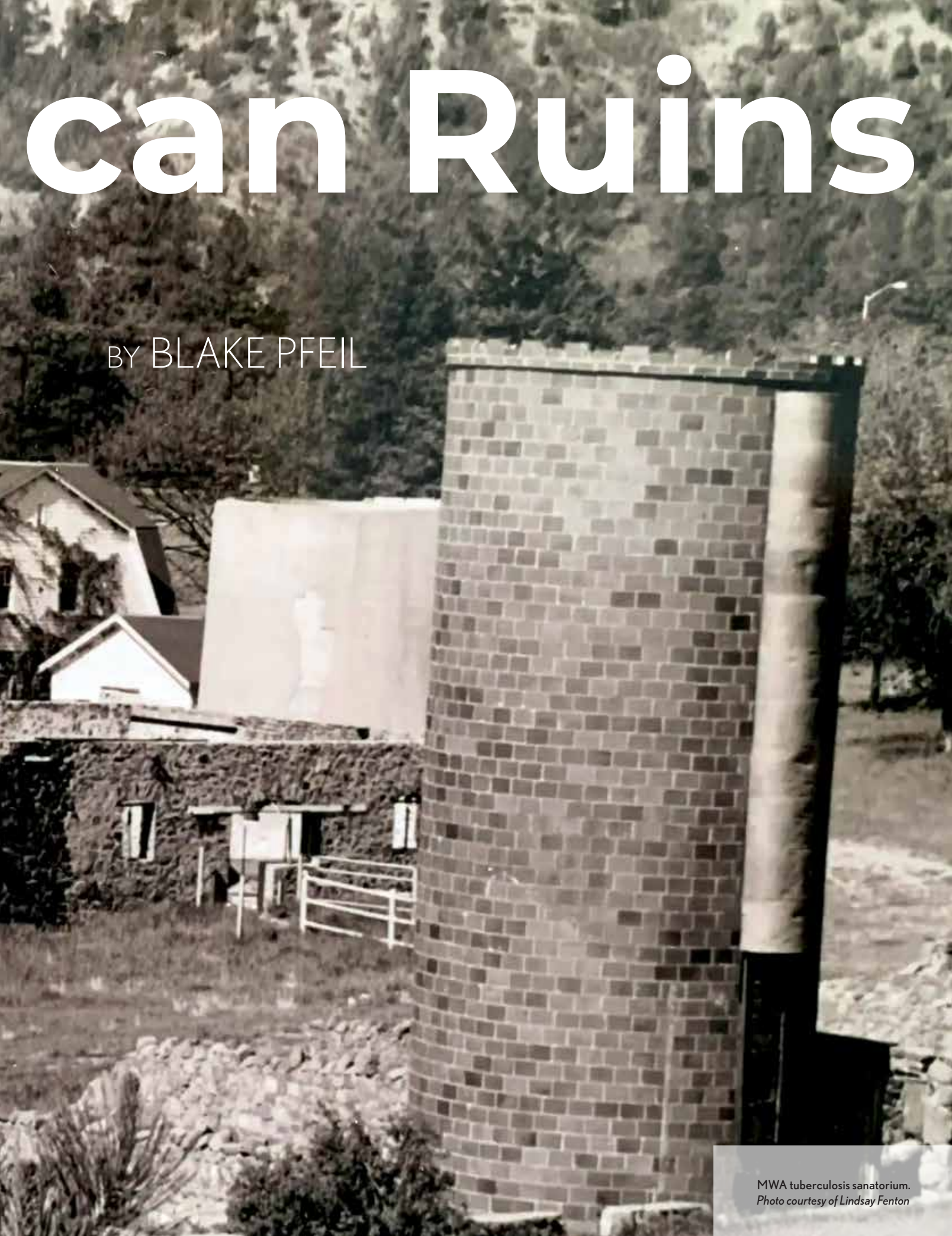
# All-Ameri

**Discovering the meaning of anemoia  
and reawakening the healing power  
of abandoned places.**



# can Ruins

BY BLAKE PFEIL



MWA tuberculosis sanatorium.  
Photo courtesy of Lindsay Fenton

The first time I poked around the abandoned dairy farm down the hill from my childhood home in Colorado Springs was in 1993. I was only six years old. When I figured out how to get inside, I immediately had this funny feeling, right down in my gut, as if I'd been there before. This wasn't possible, of course, because the dairy farm, a gift to the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration from millionaire Blevins Davis, was out of use by 1980. In the thirteen years between its closure and eventual demise, the site became a popular destination for thrill-seekers and trespassers.

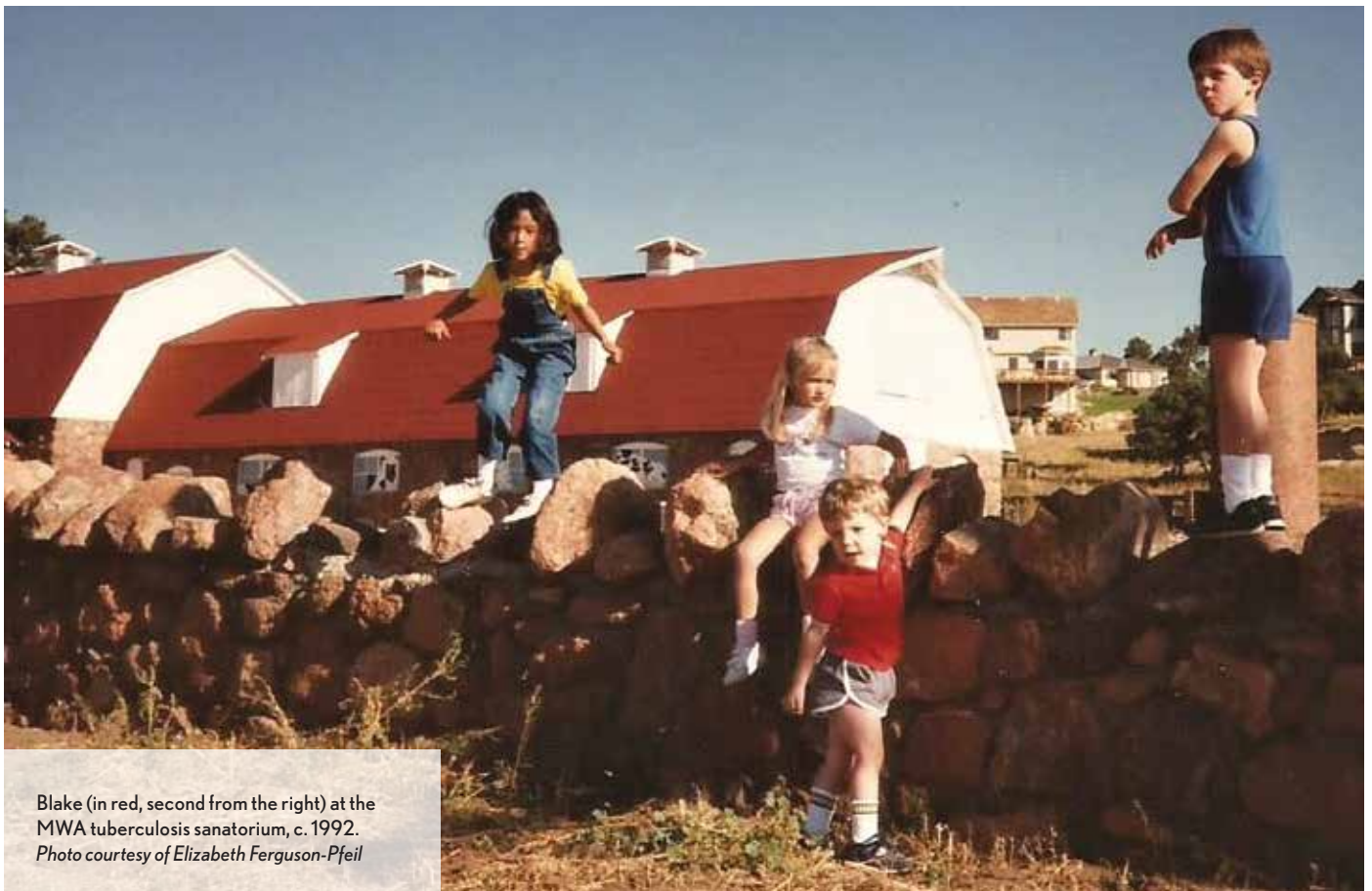
That funny feeling in my gut was more than a strange, almost other-worldly familiarity; it also gave me a sense of safety, security, and serenity. Inside the barn or the grain silo or the aforementioned house, still full of dishes, furniture, clothes, and animals painted on the windows, I ran my fingers along the walls, and somehow, it was recognizable to me.

I began to frequent the ruins of a time gone by, nestled neatly in the foothills of the Rockies near Colorado Springs, and it slowly transformed into my private sanctuary where I was shielded from the reality of the outside world. This unidentifiable sensation I felt actually has a name. It's referred to as *anemoia*, "a deep feeling of nostalgia for a time one has never known." C.S. Lewis championed a German term that also vaguely describes it, *sehnsucht*, "a yearning, wistful longing." I also found someone online who coined the phrase *vicarious nostalgia*, which seems to fit the bill. Sort of.

Whatever this all-encompassing sensation was that I felt right down to my toes, it brought me peace, and I sought it out as much as I could. On every quest to the abandoned dairy farm, I found myself engaging in made-up conversations with imaginary characters who might've once lived there. These inventions of dialogue made me feel even closer to the place and time which I had never known or experienced. I don't know how else to

explain it. I felt as though I'd been there before—that I belonged there. With my imaginary friends, the dairy farmer, his wife, and their kids, I found kinship and safety and meaning. Consequently, the abandoned dairy farm became the genesis of an extraordinary, personal credence: that my imagination could exist not only as a place of wonderment and creativity but also as a place of great comfort and healing.

Arson took the life of my private sanctuary in 1994 when four teenagers burned the dairy farm to the ground. The remains were bulldozed, and overpriced, gaudy condos took their place. Though the physical space had been destroyed, the spiritual domain I discovered there seemed to linger in me. I carried those memories in my subconscious until May of 2020, when I woke up from a dream that I was back inside the dairy farm. That same funny feeling was still right down in my gut. It was the first time in months that I felt a sense of safety, security, and serenity. At that



Blake (in red, second from the right) at the MWA tuberculosis sanatorium, c. 1992.  
Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Ferguson-Pfeil



MWA tuberculosis sanatorium after the 1994 fire left only ruins behind. Photo courtesy of Marie Bus

point, the COVID-19 pandemic had been raging for more than three months in the United States, and my germa-phobe-centric anxiety had taken full control of my life. With the isolation wreaking serious havoc on my head and heart, and though I knew I wasn't alone in the collective feelings of confusion, fear, and hopelessness, I still felt isolated. I lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, thinking about the abandoned dairy farm, and I wondered if there were any abandoned buildings near my current home in the Hudson Valley, New York. I hopped out of bed, did a quick Google search for "abandoned spaces near me," and, as it turns out, they're *everywhere*.

## Urban Exploration

I'd stumbled on a world I'd never heard of: Urban Exploration, or "Urbex" for short, is an underground community devoted to mini odysseys all over the world in search of the drudge and decay of once-occupied dwellings—and not just in urban areas, but in suburban and rural areas too. Most Urbexers aren't arsonists; rather, they're deeply respectful admirers of history, gatekeepers into the past who

understand the significance of even the most unknown, unexplored spaces. Exploring abandoned spaces is, of course, a dangerous hobby and often comes with its own architectural, legal, and safety liabilities. Old buildings have often been compromised by time, and some abandoned places like mines were probably never all that safe to begin with. But as I devoured more information on this global company of misfits intent on seeing the unseen, unafraid to bend a trespassing rule or two, I couldn't help but laugh. Apparently I'd been an unofficial Urbexer myself ever since I was six years old, traipsing about the abandoned dairy farm.

With my interest piqued, I began to scour the Internet, hoping to learn more about the abandoned dairy farm from my past, and I discovered that it had its own pandemic-related roots: tuberculosis. Yes, the disease that kills Satine (played by Nicole Kidman), the fallible heroine of Baz Luhrmann's 2001 movie musical *Moulin Rouge!* Yes, the virus that afflicts Hans Castorp, the observant protagonist of Thomas Mann's 1924 modernist novel *The Magic Mountain*. It was Mimi's death sentence in Puccini's 1896 masterpiece *La bohème*, and it

took the life of Claude Monet's actual wife Camille, later depicted on her deathbed in Monet's 1879 visual dirge "Camille Monet sur Son Lit de Dort." That tuberculosis.

As the Centers for Disease Control suggests (with a strangely excited tone), "[Germanphysician] Johann Schönlein coined the term "tuberculosis" in 1834, though it is estimated that [the bacterium] may have been around as long as 3 million years!" The National Library of Medicine estimates the genus *Mycobacterium* (which causes tuberculosis) may have originated 150 million years ago. However long it's been with us, "TB" is an infectious, highly contagious disease. An infected person's chance of survival was extremely low until the mid-1850s when the first kind of treatment popped up in Germany: the tuberculosis sanatorium. Modeled after European mountain spas and resorts, sanatoria offered the "consumptive" (as TB patients were known) a chance to breathe fresh mountain air, bathe in sunshine, and take lengthy walks as part of an intense healing regimen that included protein-packed diets and relaxation.



Winter at the MWA tuberculosis sanatorium's dairy farm. Photo courtesy of Marie Bush

After General William Jackson Palmer founded Colorado Springs in 1871, the city and surrounding area became a hot spot for “Go West” tourism, a gateway to the Rockies. Known for its year-round sunshine and dry climate, it seemed like the ideal place for sanatoria. They began popping up across the Front Range region, making Colorado “a most desirable destination for chasing the TB cure [in] the ‘The City of Sunshine,’” according to the city’s Pioneers Museum in their *City of Sunshine* exhibit. Among the many sanatoria located in Colorado Springs, the Modern Woodmen of America Sanitorium became internationally recognized as one of the most restorative healing spots, due to its location in the shadow of Blodgett Peak.

## Exploring the Sanitarium

Enter: the abandoned dairy farm from my childhood. The dairy farm was originally erected as part of the much more sizable tuberculosis sanatorium, owned and operated by fraternal benefit society Modern Woodmen of America (MWA). From 1909 to 1947, the sanatorium essentially functioned as its own town, boasting a train station, power plant, reservoir, orchard, administrative buildings, an auditorium, 245 of the iconic “TB huts” (with their emblematic peaked roofs, resembling a tragic Christmas village, many of which you can still find all over the state), as well as the state’s largest dairy herd. One of the more frightening symptoms of tuberculosis is excessive weight loss, and as part of their extensive treatment, the more than 12,000 patients who passed through the MWA sanatorium community were encouraged to drink up to ten glasses of milk a day, provided exclusively by the bovine beauties at the dairy farm. This also wasn’t any old herd of cows. They were recognized nationally as one of the finest Holstein herds

in the nation, having won dozens and dozens of prizes over the course of their existence. In fact, the herd had an international celebrity in the mix: Parthena Nudine was an exceptional milk producer, who by 1932 had already pumped out over 186,000 pounds of

milk, more than any other cow in the world her age.

I am enchanted by sites like the abandoned dairy farm from my childhood, places that look like they’ve been raptured, locations where I could once again time travel and feel that sense of



MWA dairy farm house.  
Photo courtesy of Lindsay Fenton



**What's evolved out of that childhood fascination has been nothing short of extraordinary, and I invite you to experience it too.**


serenity that I felt when I was a kid. The intentional act of getting lost has always been an important component of managing my emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing: The way that the Modern Woodmen of America Sanatorium existed to manage the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing of its patients. In fact, in his Report to the Executive Council for the sanatorium's operations from 1929-1932, Superintendent John E. Swanger passionately elaborates on the existence of the sanatorium: "But the paramount purpose of the Sanatorium is what should concern and interest every Modern Woodman. Why was it built... and known throughout the land as the great Hope Station of Humanity? ... the care and treatment of Beneficial members of the Society, afflicted with tuberculosis, so as to give them the best possible chance to overcome the disease and live."

It isn't lost on me that, in a different pandemic, a century later, the intentional mission of the Modern Woodmen of America Sanatorium has lasted, in its own way, and helped me overcome a different disease, spiritually, and live. For nearly three years, I've ventured out to over fifty different abandoned spaces in thirteen states and three countries: military bases, factories, churches,

bowling alleys, resorts, motels, arcades, psychiatric facilities, movie theaters, and houses. What started as a way to pass the time safely evolved into a salve for my mental health and a realm for my creativity to explode. I began to write about my experiences in each location, not just about each space itself, its architectural narrative, or the sordid history behind it, but also about what was going on inside my head as I wandered through each one. The more I explore, the more I realize that I've been reconnecting with my childhood self and imagination that became a healing realm all those years ago at the abandoned dairy farm.

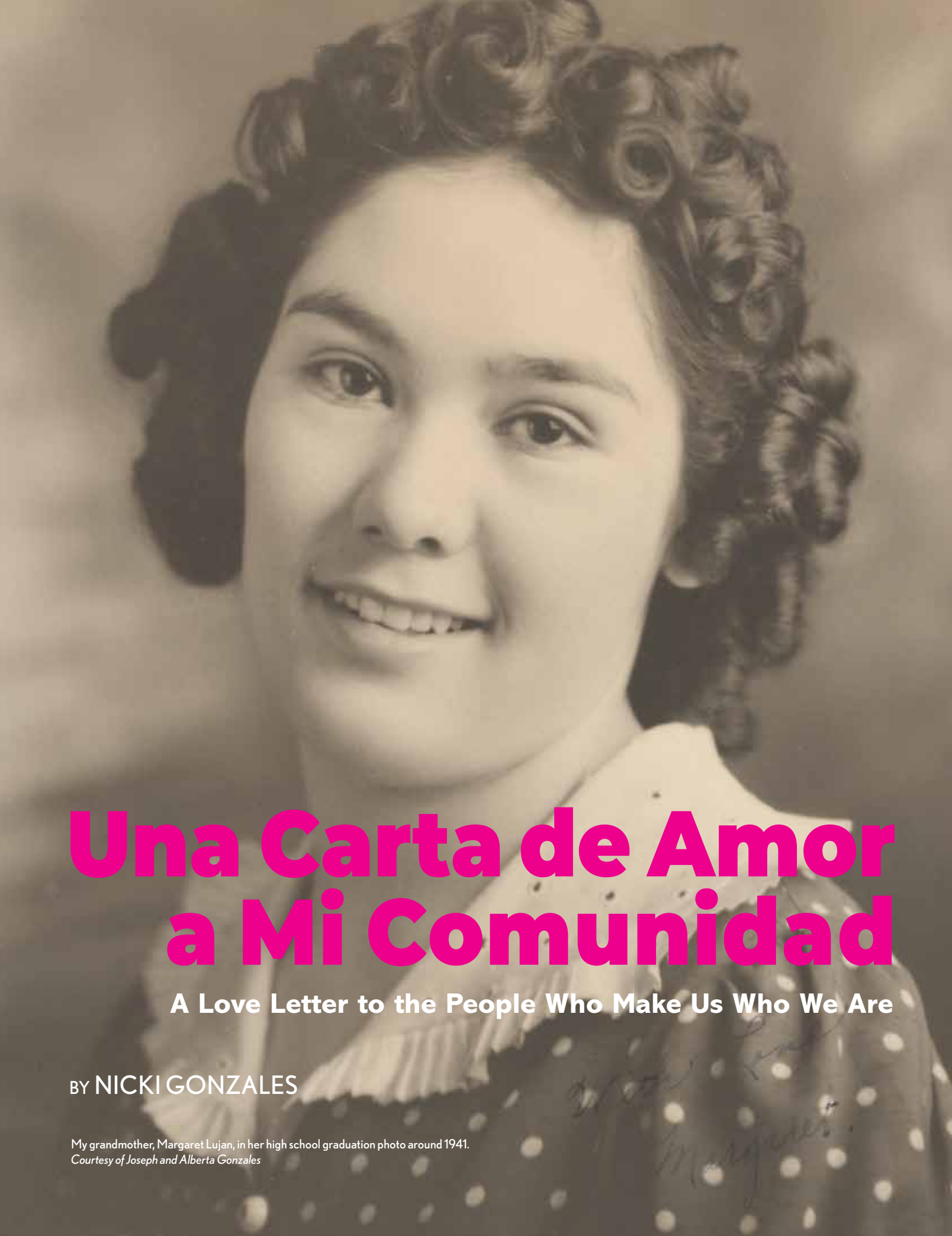
What's evolved out of that childhood fascination has been nothing short of extraordinary, and I invite you to experience it too. *All-American Ruins* is a multimedia travelog in which I recount my experiences exploring abandoned spaces across the United States and reimagine them via written, photographic, audio, and cinematic storytelling. Along the way, *All-American Ruins* asks critical questions about American history, culture, community, capitalism, economics, the environment, and mental health while encouraging folks to activate their imaginations as a tool for healing. You can join me inside these dreamscapes that

blur the lines between fact and fantasy by reading the blog or listening to the immersive podcast, including a special bonus episode produced exclusively for this collaboration with History Colorado.

I've been able to bear witness to humanity and honor the sometimes soiled American past, the untold stories of regular, everyday folk just like me, forgotten histories that live inside the walls of each abandoned space where lives were once lived, pain was once felt, and love was once expressed. It's grounded me in a way that I can't explain except through immense gratitude and creative expression and the sheer willingness to keep showing up for that magical, funny feeling, right down in my gut, the same one that brought me the safety, security, and serenity I felt all those years ago at an abandoned dairy farm in the foothills of the Colorado Rockies. 

**BLAKE PFEIL** is a multidisciplinary musician, writer, and performance artist who grew up in Colorado Springs.





# Una Carta de Amor a Mi Comunidad

A Love Letter to the People Who Make Us Who We Are

BY NICKI GONZALES

My grandmother, Margaret Lujan, in her high school graduation photo around 1941.  
Courtesy of Joseph and Alberta Gonzales

In a tiny windowless adobe building in the hamlet of El Rito, Colorado, the leaders of the Land Rights Council of San Luis called a meeting to outline their new legal strategy. It was August 18, 1980, and the Land Rights Council leaders, Shirley Romero Otero, Ray Otero, and elder Apolinar Rael, spoke passionately in the meeting about the injustice they suffered fifteen years earlier, when a district court took away their community's historic land rights to La Sierra, a 77,500-acre mountainous common land in southern Colorado. The district judge who issued the ruling in 1965 invoked the racist attitudes of the time, going so far to say that "those Mexicans needed to be brought into the twentieth century." For the mountain people of El Rito (also known as San Francisco), their connection to the lands of La Sierra was vital to every aspect of their lives. It shaped everything from their diets and their homes to their history and spirituality. Losing their right to legal access was economically and culturally devastating, not only for them, but also for the people of the surrounding villages of San Luis, San Pablo, San Pedro, and Chama.

From their windowless adobe meeting room, the activists called their fellow community members to join their new lawsuit, *Rael v. Taylor*, which would challenge that 1965 ruling with the goal of winning back their historic rights. When asked to sign on as plaintiffs, however, those in the audience responded with silence. Many looked down at their feet. Some looked down at their hands. The American legal system had done them wrong in the past—why trust it now? Why pick up the fight when the obstacles seemed so insurmountable and when it was hard enough to just make a living each day?

Suddenly, a woman standing no more than four feet tall—a victim of childhood polio—steadied her crutches in both hands and rose to her feet. Her squeaking metal supports and her chastising words broke the deafening

silence, as she made her way to the front of the room: "Bueno cabrones, si usted hombres no tienen los huevos para firmar, déjame pasar." ("Okay, bastards, if you men don't have the balls to sign, get out of the way and let me pass.")

The woman was Agatha Medina, and her husband, Ray Medina, followed her to the front. Agatha was the first plaintiff to sign on to the legal fight to regain the community's 130-year-old land rights—rights they had fought to keep for generations. And following her lead, the community would fight to vacate the judge's 1965 ruling. Others followed, and soon, ranks of people stood in line to sign their names to a historic petition.

**"Bueno cabrones,  
si usted hombres no  
tienen los huevos para  
firmar, déjame pasar."  
("Okay, bastards, if you  
men don't have the balls  
to sign, get out of the way  
and let me pass.")**

Agatha shaped history that night. She would remain a critical presence in the lawsuit, and her chutzpah and fierce determination certainly always inspired me and many others. Her desire to fight for her community's sacred relationship with the mountains they called La Sierra helped propel their community to victory years later. Agatha Medina passed away in October 2021. She was seventy-eight years old, and is still one of the bravest women I've ever known. Her story, like so many others, deserves to be told.

Why do I start with this story? Why does it stay with me, after hearing it for the first time about twenty years ago?

For me, Agatha's story highlights an important chapter in the civil rights history of our state. Her contribution to the history of the Chicano movement cannot be overstated, and her courage and determination to fight for the

cultural and economic survival of her community gives us a truer, richer picture of our state's past and elevates heroic figures to look up to in tough times. Learning her story directly from her shaped my own work as an activist historian and taught me that I have a responsibility to use any platform I have to amplify those histories that have been excluded.

I think a lot about community, but never more than during my year as Colorado's State Historian. As a person born and raised in Colorado with a deep love for our state, I define my community as all of Colorado. But I'm also part of the Latino community, whose stories I share, and whose members reach out consistently with love and support, and who always share their stories with me. It is also my Regis University community who have supported my work and given me a framework of Jesuit values to help guide me through the years. This essay and the talk it was adapted from are love letters, or letters of gratitude, to all of my communities.

On a deeper, more personal level, this is a love letter to my family—to my parents, who have worked themselves to the point of exhaustion and have guided me by how they have lived their own lives. They inspired my sisters and me to get an education and raise families of our own with the same values. This is also a love letter to my boys, Danny and Teddy, to my sisters and their families, to my aunts, uncles, and cousins whose lives have shaped my world. To my grandparents and earlier ancestors whose dreams, sacrifices, and toil paved the way for my family to be here today. It is a love letter to my paternal grandmother, Margaret Lujan Gonzales to whom I dedicate all of my work as State Historian. She was a brilliant, athletic, strong single mother in Denver, who raised three boys in a city that was so different from the Denver we still call home. Though I never met her, during this past year I have felt her with me in ways I can't explain. Every conversation I have had with community

members who shared their stories has brought me to a deeper understanding of the life she lived and the challenges she faced and the courage and resilience she passed down to all of us.

Those who know me know that I have a favorite passage, which sums up my belief that we carry our histories with us, consciously and unconsciously. In 1965, James Baldwin—whose prophetic voice has been uplifted since the murder of George Floyd and the racial justice movements that have followed—wrote an essay in *Ebony Magazine* called “The White Man’s Guilt.” In it, he wrote about the pervasive power of history:

History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations.

I would add that in order to fully understand ourselves, we must know our own past.

## My Story

My journey as a historian began in second and third grade, when my mom and dad and Grandpa Stanley bought me my first history books about people like Helen Keller, Abraham Lincoln, Amelia Earhart, Eleanor Roosevelt, Florence Nightingale, and Thomas Edison. In about fourth grade, I discovered an entire series of orange-colored books in my school’s little library. *Sitting Bull*, *Geronimo*, *Crazy Horse*, and *Red Cloud*—stories of courageous heroes who stood up for their people and showed bravery in the face of danger. These images are still vivid in my mind. At a young age, I was transported to the nineteenth-century American West, before I even knew what the West was.

Some of my best childhood memories were spent listening to my dad and my Grandpa Stanley talk about history. As families are almost always complicated, my Grandpa Stanley wasn’t my biological grandfather. Rather, he was an angel who swooped into my dad’s life at age seventeen, when he tragically lost his mother.

Grandpa Stanley was Polish Canadian by birth. During the Second World War, he served in the Royal Canadian Air Force as a bombardier during the Battle of Britain. One morning, a case of the mumps saved his life: He was grounded while his crew flew their mission and never returned. After the war, he went to Chicago, and then, in the process of moving to California, his car broke down in Denver. Luckily for us, he liked it here.

My grandparents Grace and Albert Marck with my mom Alberta Marck (right) and her younger sister, my aunt, Brenda Marck in San Francisco around 1954. Courtesy of Joseph and Alberta Gonzales



My grandfather, boxing coach Albert Marck, in San Francisco in the late 1950s. Courtesy of Joseph and Alberta Gonzales

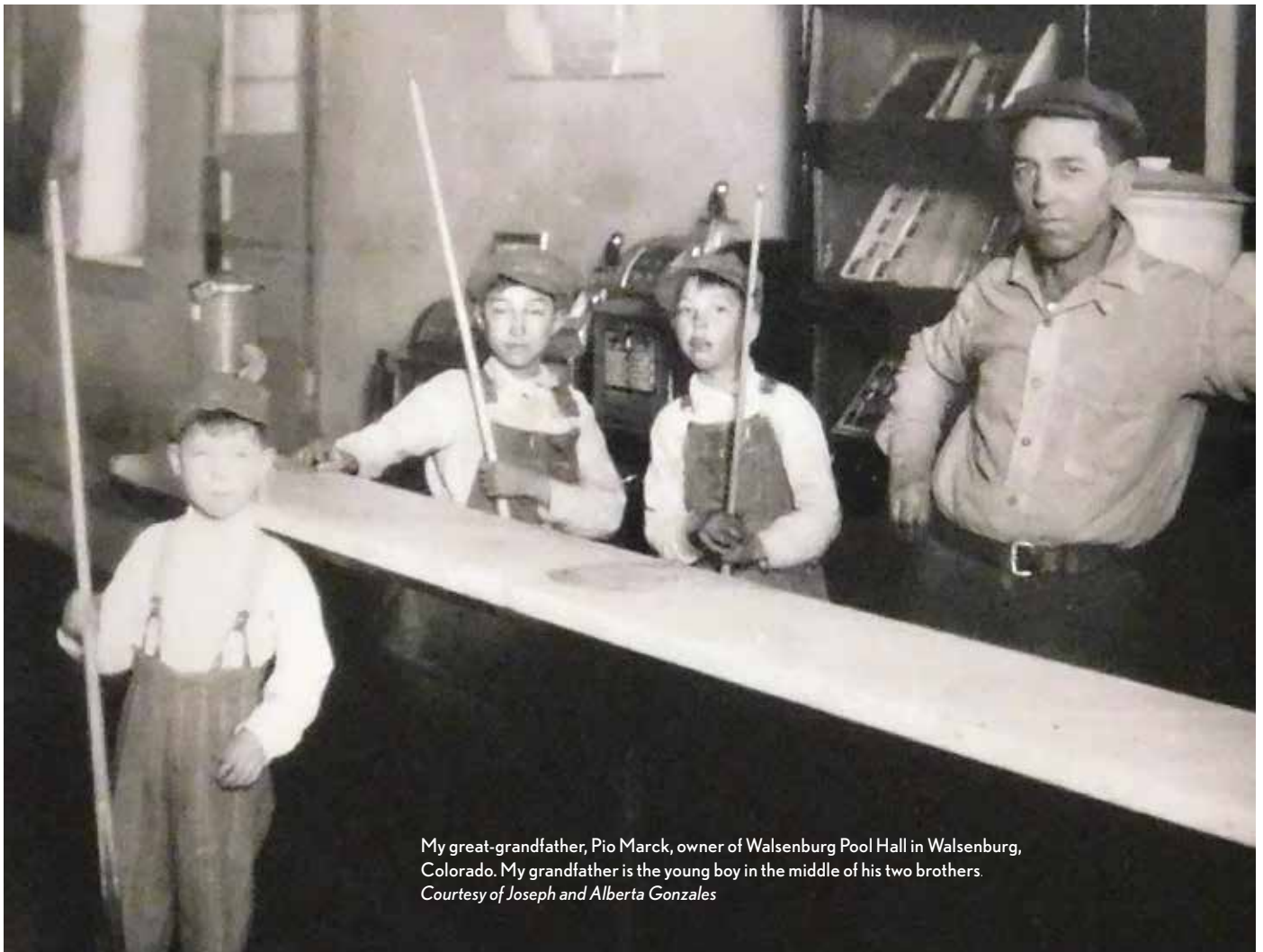
Sometime in the mid-1960s, he met my dad, becoming a father figure to him. And, years later, he became my Grandpa Stanley. I relished listening to the long, lively conversations they had about the Second World War and how Churchill held on against Hitler. They also talked of Lincoln's brilliant leadership—long before Doris Kearns Goodwin would write about the genius of Lincoln's *Team of Rivals*. I still miss my grandpa and have wondered what he would say about the latest critiques of Lincoln's leadership in light of his approval of the hanging of thirty-eight Dakota Sioux in 1862 for violence during wartime against white settlers. (Some have pointed out that Lincoln did not follow general military practice at the time, but made a political decision based on the nation's general racist attitudes toward Indigenous people.)

Of course, my favorite conversations between my grandpa and my dad were those about Bobby Kennedy. "If only Bobby had lived" was an oft-repeated sentiment in our homes. Bobby was a leader of the people. He cared. He understood. My dad taught my sisters and me that Bobby cared about our Mexican American community. He met with Cesar Chavez. I have joked that the Holy Trinity for Mexican American families like mine consisted of Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and Bobby Kennedy. My dad and grandpa's message was that we could trust Bobby. Had he lived, they believed that he would have ended the war in Vietnam—where my dad served as a young US Marine in 1967-68. Such moments are seared in my memory—and have surfaced during my time as State Historian, as so many community

members have shared their special stories with me.

In grade school, we learned the history of how our nation was formed: The Mayflower, the thirteen colonies, the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and the westward migration. In fourth grade, we learned about Colorado History. I learned about Baby Doe, Horace Tabor, and the Moffat Tunnel. It was also at this time that many of my classmates who came from Italian American families that had moved to Arvada from North Denver began talking a lot about their family stories. They seemed to know so much about their families and about one another.

I wondered about my own history. I asked my parents, especially my mom. Who am I? Where are we from? Where did I fit in in the story of westward migration? My mom answered these



My great-grandfather, Pío Marck, owner of Walsenburg Pool Hall in Walsenburg, Colorado. My grandfather is the young boy in the middle of his two brothers.  
*Courtesy of Joseph and Alberta Gonzales*

questions with a vague “Nicki, you are American.” I kept asking and putting pieces of our family story together from my Grandpa Gonzales, who came to live with us and who spoke Spanish to his sister on the phone—a language I did not understand—and from conversations with my cousins and great-aunts and uncles, who shared information when I asked. As I grew older and put more pieces together, my parents’ evasive answers eventually made sense.

My parents grew up in a time—my dad in Globeville and my mom in North Denver and the San Francisco Bay Area, when her dad took a job with Bethlehem Steel—when de facto discrimination and de jure segregation shaped the landscape. My dad remembers that someone put up a sign at the pool in Globeville that said “No Mexicans,” and nobody bothered to take it down. This era reflected Denver’s long history of racist and discriminatory policies and practices restricting access to pools, parks, housing, and other city services to whites only.

Two professors—Jeremy Nemeth, CU-Denver’s professor of urban and regional planning and Alessandro Rigolon, of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign—have studied Denver’s history and have defined three main periods that added to and together compounded Denver’s history of racism and discrimination.

The first was from 1902-1945, and included the City Beautiful and New Deal eras when policies like redlining dominated, relegating Blacks and Latinos to areas of the city deemed “hazardous” neighborhoods that contained “undesirable elements.” In Denver, these neighborhoods included Baker, Globeville, Highland, and Five Points, as well as others.

The second was the post-World War II era. It was a time of white flight and suburbanization. White people moved away from the city, taking investments and resources with them. Blacks and Latinos remained. Redlining continued, while realtors also steered certain



The Fort Lupton Girls Basketball team in 1921. My great-great-Aunt Flora Sandoval (later Abeyta) is the player on the top left. Courtesy of Joseph and Alberta Gonzales

groups away from some areas and into other parts of the city. Preventing racial integration remained the name of the game until 1968, when the Fair Housing Act prohibited discriminatory policies and practices like redlining. This was the world in which my parents came of age.

The third era that Nemeth and Rigolon wrote about is from 1983 to the present—what they’ve termed a time of Urban Renaissance. It is defined by renewal projects like Coors Field, and infrastructure improvements like the light rail. It is an era that began with the election of Denver’s first Latino Mayor, Federico Peña and his call to “Imagine a Great City.” Despite being a “renaissance,” old patterns have persisted. Some scholars have argued that in this time of urban renewal, gentrification is the new redlining, as once again, communities of color are being displaced and relegated to areas deemed less desirable.

Considering this context, I realized that my parents hoped to shield my sisters and me from the pain of the past. They wanted to protect us from a society that treated them as inferior and limited their opportunities because their families were Mexican American. They wanted to make sure that we had opportunities that they did not have.

Pervasive racism stole our stories and our sense that we belonged in the larger American story. It robbed us of a fuller understanding of ourselves. But it could not take away our resilience and determination.

## Una Carta de Amor

Ironically, it wasn’t until I journeyed east for College that I truly discovered the West and the histories of the people who were my ancestors. Courses at Yale University in the History of the American West introduced me to my own roots. My history professor, Howard Lamar, and my English professor, Victor Luftig, reinforced that my stories and my voice mattered. In our American West course, we read about nineteenth-century Hispanic women who carried more power and authority than their Anglo American counterparts arriving from the East. We read about the diverse mining camps of Southern Colorado, and about a place called Ludlow. I later learned from my great uncle Moises Lujan that my great grandfather traveled, as an eleven- or twelve-year-old boy, through Ludlow in April 1914. That was the same month as the Ludlow Massacre, when John

D. Rockefeller Jr.'s hired police force teamed up with the Colorado Militia and attacked a tent colony of striking miners and their families, leaving at least twenty of them, mostly women and children, dead. Recently, I heard that Professor Lamar, who is now in his nineties and in a nursing home in Connecticut, expressed his delight that he had a hand in my journey to the position of Colorado State Historian. And, Professor Luftig, who happened upon a TV interview I did where I mentioned the role he has played in my journey, said it was a highlight of his year.

When I was in graduate school in Boulder, a Denver attorney named Jeff Goldstein hired me to be the research assistant for a group of lawyers representing the community who had met in that El Rito adobe room in 1980. They were cash-poor Hispano farmers and ranchers. And decades earlier, they had lost their historic land rights to unscrupulous outsiders, a justice system that had refused to recognize their legal documents—some written in Spanish—and part of Mexican property customs, and a US treaty with Mexico that had never been honored. My work on

the La Sierra land rights case, especially my conversations with plaintiffs like Agatha Medina and Shirley Romero Otero, changed my life and shaped my convictions as an activist historian who would use the tools of history to tell the stories that had not been told.

As I was completing my PhD dissertation, I was hired to join the faculty of Regis University, where I found my academic home. Regis, a Jesuit university with a mission of social justice and standing with the historically excluded, has always supported my work with students and the larger community. I wake up each day grateful to be able to serve.

As I mentioned, when my appointment as State Historian was announced, love poured in from the Latino community—from leaders of agencies and foundations to community activists and teachers to middle school students who wanted advice on their history projects. A year was not nearly long enough to show my appreciation for their support, so I offer the following, gathered from the stories shared with me. I hope they serve as reminders of where we, as Latinos, have been. And,

to our youth, who inherit this historical legacy and will carry it forward in ways that make the rest of us proud, they are reminders of who they are.

We are spiritual people. Our spirituality is practical. It is tied to the land and defined by a reverence for Mother Earth, expressed through traditions like blessing the fields and gathering healing plants for traditional remedies. This reverence persists in places like San Luis, in the legacy of leaders like Apolinar Rael who spoke frequently about this spiritual connection to the land, “La Sierra le pertenesce a Dios y nosotros le pertenesemos la Sierra.” (“The Mountain belongs to God, and we belong to the Mountain.”)

Our churches—mostly Catholic, but not exclusively so—have served as the centers of our communities for generations. It is well known that Black churches in the South and around the nation were both centers of spirituality and of political engagement. Here in Colorado we see similar patterns. Denver parishes like Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Cajetan's, and St. Anthony de Padua, and Most Precious Blood in San Luis, served as places of



My grandfather, Louis Gonzales, with my dad, Joseph Gonzales (far right), my uncle Robert Gonzales (middle), and my uncle Manuel Lujan (far left), in Denver's City Park around 1950. *Courtesy of Joseph and Alberta Gonzales*



My mom (Alberta Marck) and dad (Joseph Gonzales) in Denver sometime around 1952. *Courtesy of Joseph and Alberta Gonzales*



social justice work: offering social programs, immigration legal support, English classes, tutoring for youth, and spaces for political organizing. Priests like Father Jose Maria Lara, Fr. Pete Garcia, and Fr. Pat Valdez served these parishes and became pillars of the community. Fr. Pete, known as being “diplomatically stubborn,” took on the Denver Urban Renewal Authority and the Denver Archbishop, fighting against the displacement of the residents of the Auraria neighborhood in the early 1970s. And it was the Catholic Church’s “Campaign for Human Development”—its version of the War on Poverty—in the 1970s that funded the early years of the Land Rights Council in San Luis.

Spirituality ran deep into other areas as well. I learned of Diana Velazquez, a well-respected curandera—a spiritual healer—who combined her Mexican and Indigenous spiritual practices with mainstream western mental health care practices to create a hybrid approach to mental health care at El Centro de las Familias Clinic—a westside clinic. Today women like Charlene Barrientos Ortiz carry on this tradition, passing on ancestral wisdom to our youth.

We are hardworking people. In “A Worker Reads History,” German poet, Bertolt Brecht, celebrates the laborers

who labored to build the grand cities of the world while history exalted only the kings and emperors.

Who built the seven gates  
of Thebes?

The books are filled with names  
of kings.

Was it the kings who hauled  
the craggy blocks of stone?

... In which of Lima’s houses,  
That city glittering with gold,  
lived those who built it?

In the evening when the  
Chinese wall was finished

Where did the masons go?

Imperial Rome Is full of arcs  
of triumph.

Who reared them up?...

Our labor helped build this state. Community members shared family stories of physical labor in heavy industries like railroads, smelters, mining, factories, meatpacking, agriculture, construction, machine shops, as well as restaurants and custodial jobs. It was grueling and honest work that fed our families and provided the framework for our daily lives. During times of war, in particular, we answered our country’s call of duty.

With World War II, our presence grew. About fifteen million Americans migrated from one place to another during the war, and Denver saw a large increase in the Latino population, fueled by economic opportunities brought about by the defense industries; for Denver that was Gates Rubber Company and Remington Arms Plant. In 1940, there were 12,000 Latinos, but by 1960, there were 43,000. Some of this migration came as a result of the 1942 Bracero Program—a guest worker agreement between President Franklin Roosevelt and Mexican President Manuel Ávila Camacho. Between 1942-64, an estimated five million bracero laborers emigrated to the US to fill the mostly agricultural jobs needed during the war. Many worked the sugar beet fields in Northern Colorado. Many braceros stayed beyond their labor contracts, adding to the diversity of cultures within the larger Latino community.

We are shaped by our kinship ties and commitment to community. As I listened to our stories of kinship and community, I recalled what Jesuit priest Greg Boyle has written:

What we’ve come to see as a community is that no kinship, no peace; no kinship, no justice; no kinship, no equality...No matter how singularly focused we may well be on those worthy goals, things can’t happen unless there is some undergirding sense that we belong to each other. How can we stand against forgetting that?

Indeed, we need one another, and we always have. Our long history of mutualistas, or mutual aid societies, reflects our reliance on one another for survival during challenging times and has shaped our cultures, especially in rural areas of our state, where community was a lifeline. Since the early 1900s, in places like Antonito and Chama and later in Denver, the Sociedad Protección Mutualista De Trabajadores Unidos (Society for the Mutual

Protection of Workers) provided a menu of supports for workers and their family members, while also serving as gathering places for recreation and community building.

Our rich history of labor union organizing is yet another expression of collective action—often across racial and ethnic lines—for the common good. For generations, our union laborers have fought for just wages and humane conditions for working people. My own grandfather was a proud member of the Meatpacking Union in one of Denver’s meatpacking houses, along with Denver City Councilwoman Amanda Sandoval’s grandfather. Both believed in the dignity of the working class and both passed those values on to their descendents.

Certain sports became very popular among Latino youth and offered safe spaces to come together in community, often forming bonds of kinship. Boxing clubs provided an arena where young boys could learn discipline and gain experience outside their neighborhoods, some traveling out of state to boxing matches. Beloved coaches and individuals made names for themselves in the ring, like Crusade for Justice founder Corky Gonzales. Girls and women, too, played sports, which served as a space of racial and ethnic integration, where they formed friendships and learned the value of teamwork in a society that still saw them as inferior to men. My grandmother, along with her volleyball and softball teammates, challenged the traditional gender norms that were often reinforced at home.

Many community members shared with me stories of evenings spent at the Good Americans Organization. Founded by local leader and Spanish-language radio founder, Paco Sanchez, the GAO was a civic and social organization that often addressed issues important to Mexican Americans and provided a safe gathering space for the community. While both English and Spanish were welcome

within the walls of the GAO, its patriotic name reflects larger trends in post-World War II Mexican American history, when societal pressures led many to believe that assimilation offered the best defense against American racism.

**My grandmother, along with her volleyball and softball teammates, challenged the traditional gender norms that were often reinforced at home.**

Despite such experiences with racism, we are a patriotic community. Following World War II, mainstream veterans’ groups excluded Mexican American war veterans and the US Department of Veterans Affairs often denied them medical treatment. Organizations like the American GI Forum arose to offer a space where Mexican American veterans could gather in community and claim their dignity following military service. Today the GI Forum in Colorado, in the spirit of mutual aid that has shaped our history, supports college scholarships for active-duty veterans, and children and grandchildren of veterans. They have also supported my work of recording the oral histories of Chicano Vietnam veterans. Young Chicanos served in disproportionate numbers in Vietnam, including my father, who served as a US Marine in 1967-68. I have sought to understand how this experience shaped my father, who is only now sharing his experiences, and other young Chicanos and their communities.

We are a resilient people shaped by a politics of resistance. The era of Vietnam and Civil Rights and President Johnson’s War on Poverty fueled a visible and deeply rooted politics of resistance and empowerment that would shape Latino history going forward. Building on decades of

resistance already present in Colorado’s Latino communities, our state became a center of Chicano activism in the ’60s, ’70s, and ’80s, as activists took on the inequities that had relegated Mexican Americans to second-class citizenship for generations. Activists protested discrimination in the education system, demanding representation in faculty, leadership, and curriculum. Black and Latino parents sued Denver Public Schools, and in one of the first landmark school desegregation cases in 1973, *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, Denver began bussing Chicano and Black students to integrate Denver’s schools. The bussing policy lasted until 1995, when the *Keyes* ruling was rescinded. During the era of bussing, many white families moved to the suburbs to escape these integration efforts.

This political resistance permeated other sectors of society as well. Organizations like Denver’s Westside Coalition advocated for local voices in the economic development of westside Chicano neighborhoods, while groups like the Crusade for Justice hosted gatherings like the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in 1969, where El Plan de Espiritual de Aztlán, a defining Chicano movement document, was first presented. Noting disproportionate numbers of young Mexican Americans drafted to fight in Vietnam, Colorado Chicano activists protested what they deemed a racist war, while others took on issues like land rights in southern Colorado, as well as farmworkers’ and floral workers’ rights. This tradition of resisting injustice continues today, as Latino-run organizations continue to take on the most pressing issues of the day.

Our political struggles have led to more inclusion, as we have seen more Latinos entering mainstream electoral politics. Today, powerful Latinas like Jamie Torres, Amanda Sandoval, Candy CdeBaca, and Debbie Ortega sit on city council. They carry our history with them, representing all of





Grandpa Stanley Cody with Nicki, Joey, and Randi Gonzales and Cinnamon, Denver 1990. *Courtesy of Joseph and Alberta Gonzales*



My parents, Joseph and Alberta Gonzales in San Francisco, California in the early 2000s. *Courtesy of Joseph and Alberta Gonzales*

their constituents, while bringing their historical and cultural sensibilities and convictions to the table.

We are creative people. When denied mainstream opportunities, we have time and again found ways to create our own opportunities. When banks denied us financing for our businesses, we built business districts like Larimer Street and Santa Fe Drive that nurtured our community with businesses that required less funding, like barber shops, beauty salons, print shops, nightclubs, and restaurants. These would become places where people would gather and share food and stories. They became pillars of our community.

While exclusion from mainstream history books and courses prevented us from learning our history in classrooms, our muralists, sculptors, dancers, musicians, playwrights, actors, poets, and storytellers recorded our history on walls, in wood, on stage, and through musical instruments. Today activists are focused on preserving those works of art—our historical record—for future generations.

## Lessons from a Year as the State Historian

In 1968, American poet Muriel Rukeyser penned a line in her poem “The Speed of Darkness.” “The universe is made of stories, not atoms,” she tells us. My year as State Historian was a universe of its own, and it was full of stories. They were about the blessings of kinship, the strength of communities, and finding generosity in the most unexpected ways and places. I discovered many new things as I collected stories from around the state, and each left a lasting impression.

In September 2021, I was invited to a remembrance for the Irish immigrants and children who were buried in unmarked graves in the pauper section of the Evergreen Cemetery in Leadville. They were miners, railroad workers, domestic servants, and laundresses working hard in a land that was not always hospitable to them because

of their accents, their culture, their poverty, and their Catholic faith. Some of those buried were children. We know they endured hardship, as many immigrants still do. We know they tended to their faith lives, founding the Annunciation Church. We know they remained faithful to their Irish roots, as they took up Irish Nationalist causes and formed Irish Civic groups that celebrated and preserved their identity. We know they were tough and fought for what they thought was right. At the ceremony, speakers celebrated the fact that in 1880, Irish miners marched down the main street demanding higher pay and better conditions only to be defeated, like other striking workers during the Gilded Age, in their search for dignified treatment and a fair wage.

We heard remarkable stories of individuals like Michael Mooney, who embodied resilience and political savvy and became a strong Irish American labor leader.

This particular event was extra meaningful, as my boys are half Irish; their paternal great-grandparents



**Yale University graduation in New Haven, Connecticut in 1992:** Shown left are me and my sister, Joey Gonzales (later Kilgour) and at right are me and my mentor, Professor Victor Luftig. Courtesy of Joseph and Alberta Gonzales

arrived in Boston during the Great Depression, fleeing poverty in Ireland. It highlighted the richness of the Irish immigration experience and the culture that they formed from the hopes and dreams that brought them to America and the often-harsh realities that awaited them in places like Leadville. There was a spirit of solidarity—as the speakers included Latin American immigrants, union organizers, and Ute leaders. The Irish consulate represented the Irish government’s support for the monument. It was also the last public event that many shared with the late, great Dennis Gallagher, who was in his glory shaking hands and giving out his famous business cards with his name written in italics.

During one of my Friday morning coffee gatherings at the History Colorado Center, retired Denver District Judge Gary Jackson, whose accolades are too numerous to name here, joined us and shared his story. Notably, Judge Jackson founded the Sam Cary Bar Association, the African American bar association in Colorado, in 1971, an

organization that still today supports and uplifts African American lawyers. Judge Jackson’s mother, Nancelia Jackson, was one of the early settlers in Harman, arriving in 1926. Harman at the time was a Black neighborhood in what is today North Cherry Creek. African Americans settled there because in segregated Denver, it was one of the few areas of the emerging city—near garbage dumps and an area prone to flooding before Cherry Creek reservoir was constructed—where African Americans were permitted to live. Nancelia still lives in the same house, and you can find interviews online where she shares her memories of her nearly century-long life. Harman was annexed by Denver in 1895, in the wake of the Panic of 1893 and the collapse of the silver industry. It, along with many other towns, especially in Colorado, had been on the verge of bankruptcy. Judge Jackson’s family story offers a critical window into Colorado history of Jim Crow in the Post-Civil War American West—reflecting the history that Professors Nemeth and Rigolon doc-

umented in their research on Denver’s history of racism and discrimination in the city’s design and distribution of services.

As a state, we are reckoning with this racist past in various ways. I’m grateful to be serving, along with Dr. William Wei and other state leaders, on Governor Jared Polis’s Colorado Geographic Naming Advisory Board. The very existence of this advisory board is one of many indications that we are living in extraordinary times. The governor has charged the board with evaluating proposals submitted by the public to rename geographical features in Colorado and to recommend name changes. He will then send them to the National Board of Geographic Names. Recently, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, the first Indigenous person to be appointed to a presidential cabinet position, issued her version of an executive order to swiftly eliminate the offensive word “sq--w” from all 660 geographic features in the US that used the term. Twenty-eight of them were in Colorado, where mountains,

creeks, canyons, and hills bore the name. Throughout the process, the board has given preference to Colorado Tribes proposing replacement names, and we recently recommended that the previously named Squaw Mountain be named after Owl Woman, a prominent Cheyenne peacemaker. The Governor approved the name Mestaa'êhehe Mountain, the Cheyenne name for Owl Woman.

Another highlight was the effort led by Dr. William Wei, who convened board members, Asian American leaders, Regis professor Dr. Michael Chiang, and college students in an effort to rename “Chinaman Gulch” in Chaffee County. Productive research and conversation culminated in a recommendation to Governor Polis to rename the Gulch “Yan Sing Gulch.” Yan Sing means “resilience in the face of hardship” in Cantonese. This new name reflects a much richer, truer story of 19th century Chinese immigrants coming to Colorado for jobs in mining, only to face racism and eventual exclusion with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. Yet, they survived and left their mark on Colorado history.

In this post-George Floyd era of reckoning with our racist past, one issue we are hearing a lot about in Colorado is the history of Indigenous boarding schools run by the US government and the Catholic Church. In 2022, the US government issued the first installment of its report on US boarding schools. The investigation found that from 1819 to 1969, the federal Indian boarding school system consisted of 408 federal schools across thirty-seven states or territories, including twenty-one schools in Alaska and seven schools in Hawaii.

The investigation identified marked or unmarked burial sites at approximately fifty-three different schools across the school system. As the investigation continues, the department expects the number of identified burial sites to increase.

Conversations are now happening about how to respond to the investigations into Indian residential schools—

first in Canada and now in the United States. Colorado is doing its own work on this issue. History Colorado is supporting several Tribes in examining the lands around the Teller School in Grand Junction where they believe children are buried. Throughout all of this work, one thing that has become clear to me is a need to do this work alongside Tribal communities, respectfully, gently, and in ways that account for the historical trauma some of them bear, and which generations of family members carry with them.

This work of examining our collective past is all of our work. It was a privilege to witness the efforts of Coloradans all over our beautiful state lifting up the stories that have all too often been ignored or suppressed.


## Celebrating Our Stories

As I reflect on my year as State Historian, I think about the grassroots historians I met who were dedicating their time and talent to collecting and preserving stories of the past. They reflect our collective hunger to mine our past for a deeper understanding of who we are and how we got here. I also think about the lessons that our histories offer us. As one Chicana activist told me, “We tell our stories to make sense of our lives.” Our histories offer us a window into ourselves and an understanding of the present. Our histories offer us a repository of wisdom from which to draw on, as we encounter life’s challenges. We are not alone. Our histories also teach us that we are resilient and creative and that we have a responsibility to preserve and share them with younger generations.

Finally, I return to the small, windowless adobe building in El Rito, in 1980, where Agatha Medina made her way to the front of the room to sign on as a plaintiff in the *Rael v. Taylor* lawsuit. *Rael v. Taylor* was the latest chapter in a century-long struggle for her commu-

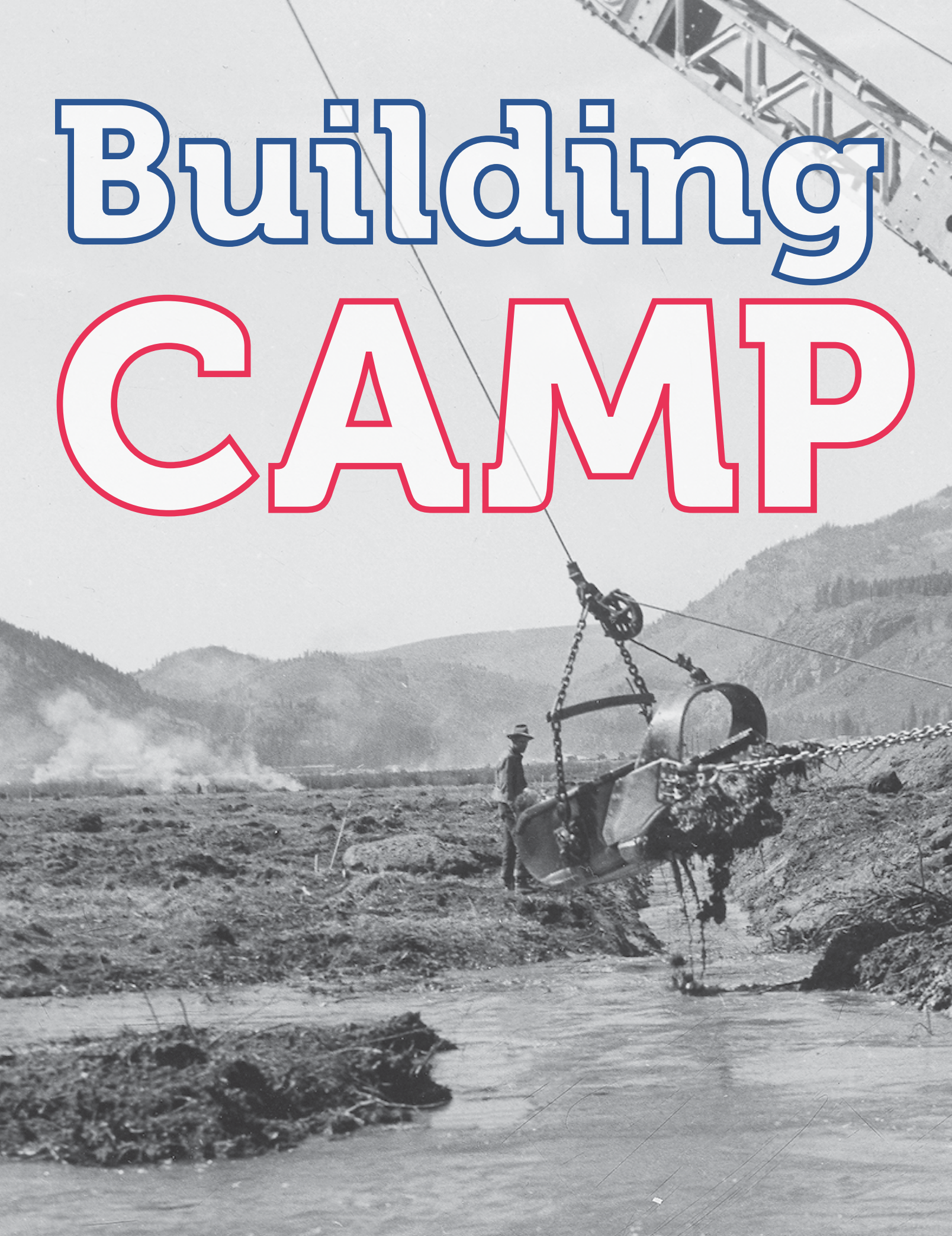
nity to defend their historic land rights. Agatha’s courage shaped history that night. She embodied what writer John Nichols wrote in his novel *The Milagro Beanfield War*, about a Hispano man in Northern New Mexico who defends his beanfield against outside economic and political interests. In describing the residents of Milagro, John Nichols could have easily been describing the tenacious people in El Rito, Chama, San Pablo, and San Luis:

I was just amazed at the ability, particularly of the elderly Spanish-speaking people, to just persist against all odds...they didn’t have the money...the political power...they didn’t have any power with the courts...they just didn’t give up...It was quite a lesson. Call it the stoic, stolid persistence of a community to sustain its land and its culture, its language, and its customs.

In amplifying Agatha’s story, I call on all of us to amplify and celebrate our own histories—and one another’s—especially those that were stolen and deemed not worthy of inclusion in the broader American story. In her widely-regarded TED Talk, “The Danger of a Single Story,” author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie reminds us that “Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.” In reclaiming my own family’s story and sharing it, I honor my ancestors and my community. I empower and restore the dignity of those who came before me. 

**Dr. Nicki Gonzales** served as Colorado’s State Historian from 2021-2022, and is a member of the State Historian’s Council. She is a professor of history and vice-provost for diversity and inclusion at Regis University.

# Building CAMP





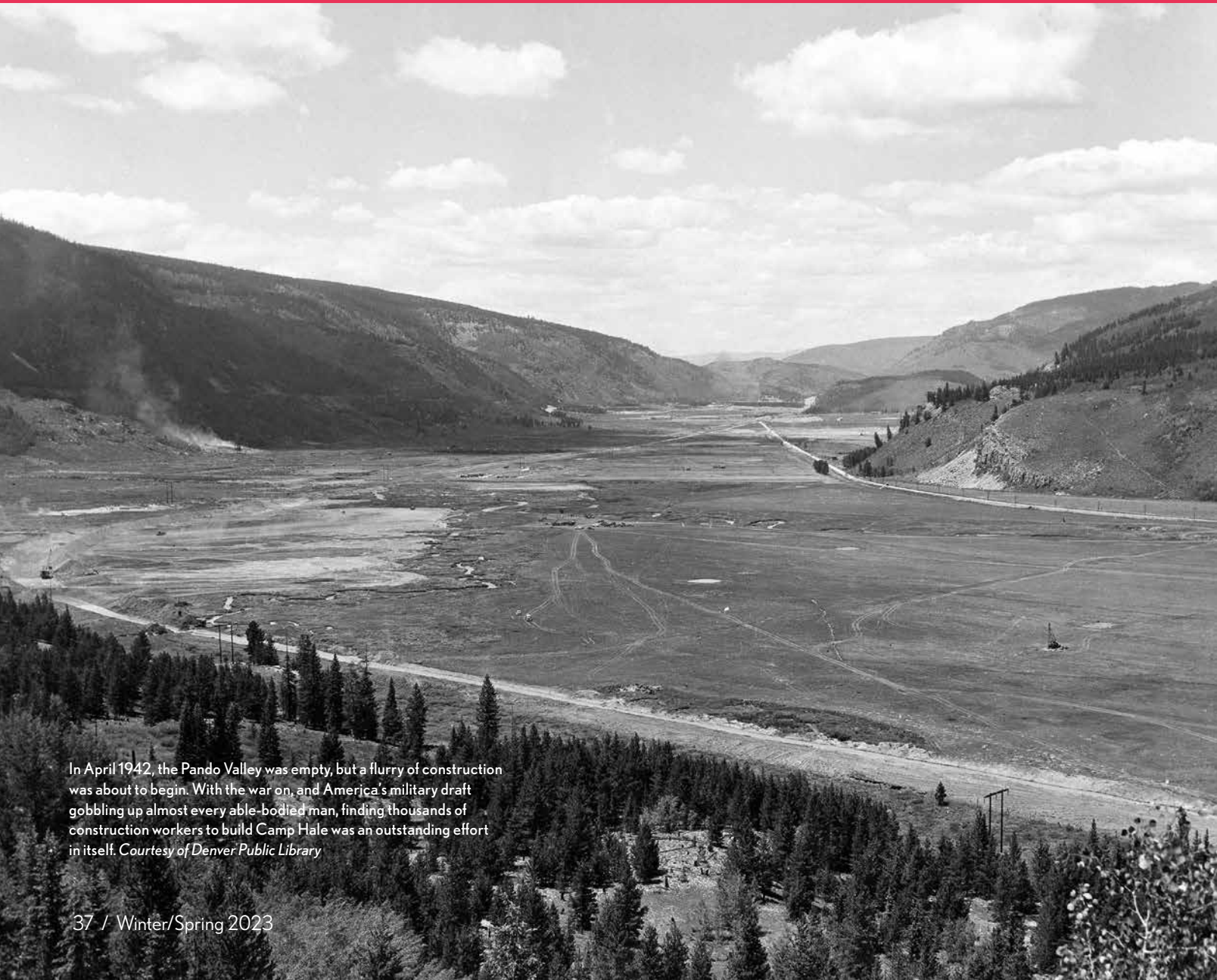
# HAILE

**A PHOTOGRAPHIC  
HISTORY OF AMERICA'S  
HIGH-ALTITUDE ARMY  
TRAINING GROUND**

BY FLINT WHITLOCK & ERIC MILLER

Heavy equipment was necessary to widen, deepen, and straighten the Eagle River that ran through the site. *Courtesy of Denver Public Library*

The Pando Constructors built Camp Hale with extraordinary speed. Their unsung contributions to America's war effort set the stage for the 10th Mountain Division's heroism during World War II.



In April 1942, the Pando Valley was empty, but a flurry of construction was about to begin. With the war on, and America's military draft gobbling up almost every able-bodied man, finding thousands of construction workers to build Camp Hale was an outstanding effort in itself. *Courtesy of Denver Public Library*

**H**igh in the Colorado Rockies, between Minturn and Leadville on US Highway 24, there sits a flat, open valley, some three miles long and nearly a mile wide. History buffs and regular high-country travelers might know that this was the site of Camp Hale, the World War II training camp for the 14,000-man 10th Mountain Division.

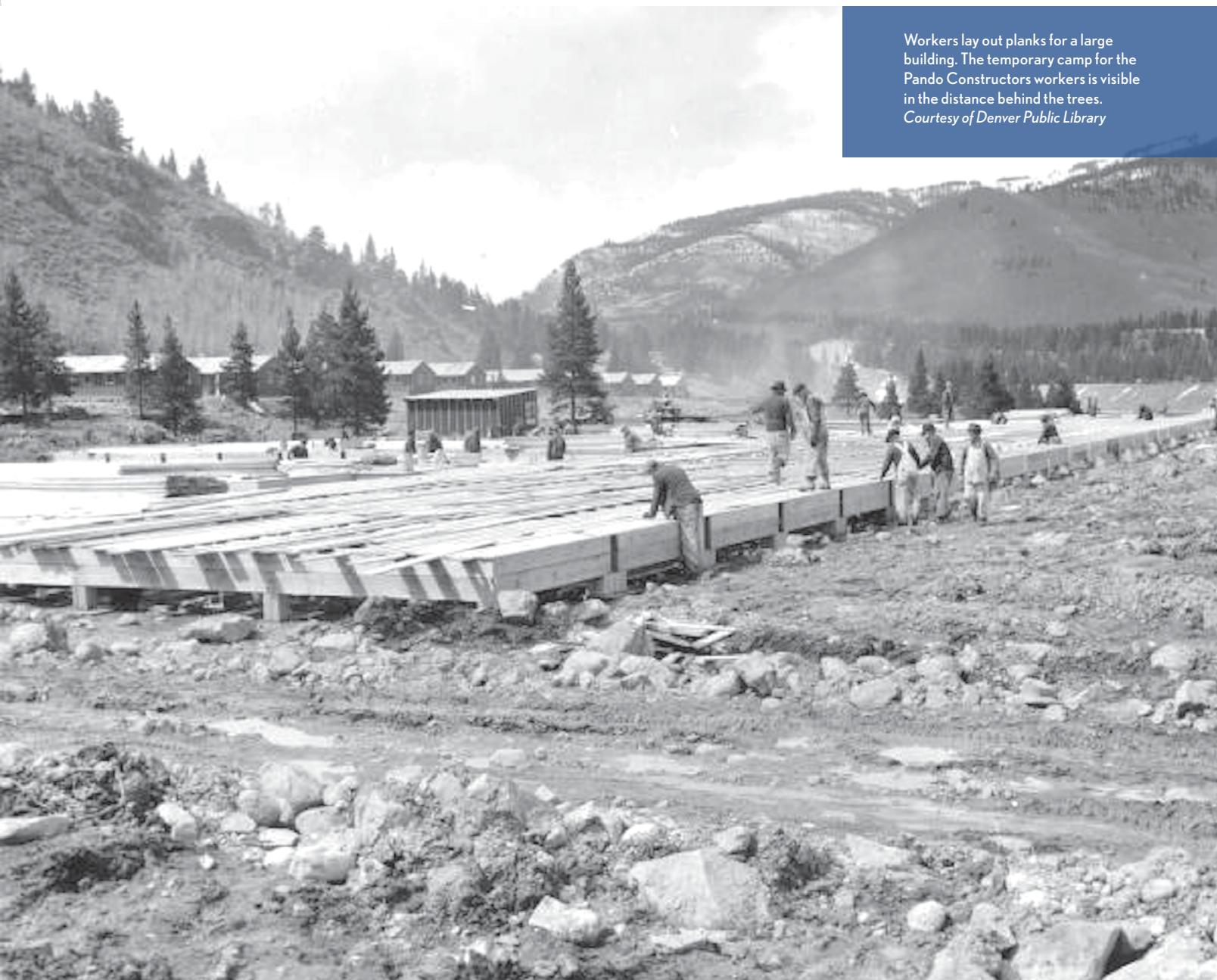
Faded Forest Service interpretive signs in the area show the camp in its glory in 1943—a thousand white buildings that housed the only American military unit specifically trained for mountain and winter warfare. Camp Hale, which was named for Brigadier General Irving Hale, born and raised

in Denver and commander of the Colorado regiment that captured Manila during the Spanish-American War, is Colorado's most famous military site. Generations of Colorado skiers have thanked the veterans who returned to Colorado to start the ski areas of Aspen, Vail, and Arapahoe Basin.

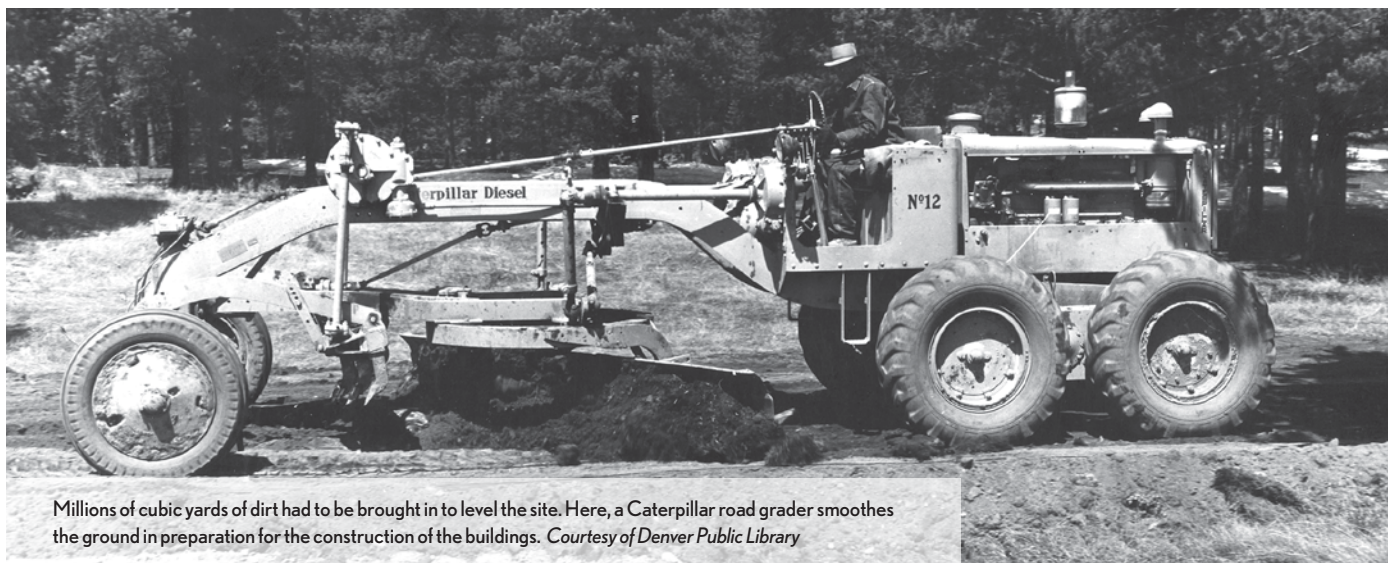
But there's more to the story of Camp Hale. In fact, the deeper history of what could have been the birthplace of modern Colorado's booming ski industry is relatively unknown because the people who built it—the Pando Constructors—have been overlooked. Since President Joe Biden designated Camp Hale as a national monument last October, interest in

the site has surged. The incredible work of the Pando Constructors, who built the Army's training ground for high mountain warfare, is more relevant and important than ever.

Camp Hale's story began in 1940, before Pearl Harbor thrust the US into World War II, when three East Coast ski enthusiasts—Charles Minot Dole, Roger Langley, and Roland Palmedo (who, in 1936, combined to create the National Ski Patrol System, with Dole as its president)—were worried about how unprepared America was to become embroiled in the war that had just started in Europe. More specifically, the trio was concerned that the US Army would not be able to effectively



Workers lay out planks for a large building. The temporary camp for the Pando Constructors workers is visible in the distance behind the trees.  
*Courtesy of Denver Public Library*



Millions of cubic yards of dirt had to be brought in to level the site. Here, a Caterpillar road grader smooths the ground in preparation for the construction of the buildings. Courtesy of Denver Public Library

fight and survive in Europe's harsh alpine regions. Their efforts to alert the Army to their fears were initially met with official indifference, but as the US became more involved with the international war effort, plans were made to create a unit capable of countering Germany's mountain troops. Several sites around the country were evaluated as a site for a potential training camp, but the one that met all the criteria was a place in Colorado known as the Pando Valley. Sitting at an elevation of 9,250 feet, the area had the high altitude necessary to acclimate the troops. The valley's steep cliffs and an annual snowfall of 250 inches made it the ideal training ground. It was 100 miles west of Denver, so it was remote, yet accessible by road and the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad. Plus the mining town of Leadville was only twenty miles away.

In October 1941, the Army authorized the Dole-Langley-Palmedo trio to begin recruiting skiers, mountaineers, and outdoorsmen to what became known as the 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment, forerunner to the 10th Mountain Division. Its members began training on Mount Rainier, near Seattle, Washington, while construction started at the Colorado site.

Moving with incredible wartime swiftness, by the end of March 1942, the Army had authorized con-


struction. The initial budget was five million dollars, but the cost would balloon to thirty million by the time the project was completed. Declaring eminent domain, the land for the camp and its artillery range was purchased by the government from local property owners, who at that time consisted mostly of ranchers.

Over 10,000 men—mostly men beyond draft age and others who were otherwise exempt from the draft—became the workers for an organization known as Pando Constructors. With no adequate housing nearby that could hold such a large army of workers, the men first had to build their own barracks—eighty-eight of them.

Construction began in April 1942—an extraordinary feat that has largely gone unheralded until now. By the middle of 1942, the mostly forgotten Pando Constructors workmen had finished their temporary camp and had concurrently begun work on the military cantonment area. It was now time to finish what they had started back in April: the main camp.

Built in just seven months were 226 barracks, thirty-three administration buildings, a 676-bed hospital, a veterinarian hospital for horses, mules, and dogs, five churches and chapels, 100 mess halls, a bakery, three theaters, one field house, indoor pistol ranges, seven post exchanges, two service clubs, one

officers club, horse and mule barns, grain storage, coal storage, numerous warehouses, a stockade, vehicle-maintenance facilities, weapons ranges, six underground ammunition magazines, four water storage tanks, three fire stations, a school, post office, medical and dental clinics, a combat village, two ski areas, and much more. It was an amazing feat of wartime construction that has largely been overshadowed by the heroics and sacrifices of the soldiers who trained at what was essentially a small city built high in the Rocky Mountains.

These photos track the amazing history of how this instant city came to be, and the incredible accomplishments of the Pando Constructors who made it possible to train America's mountain troops here in Colorado. 

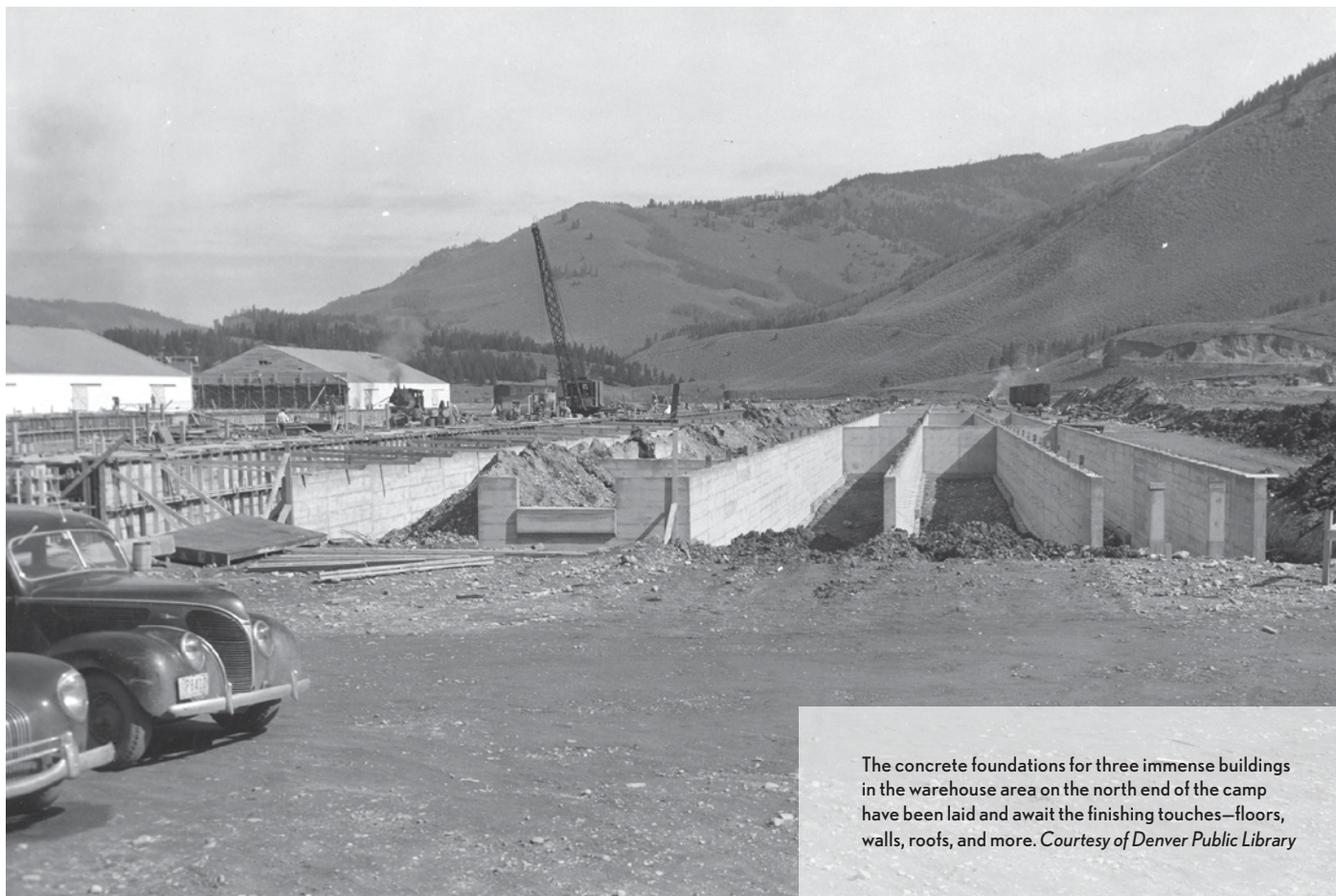
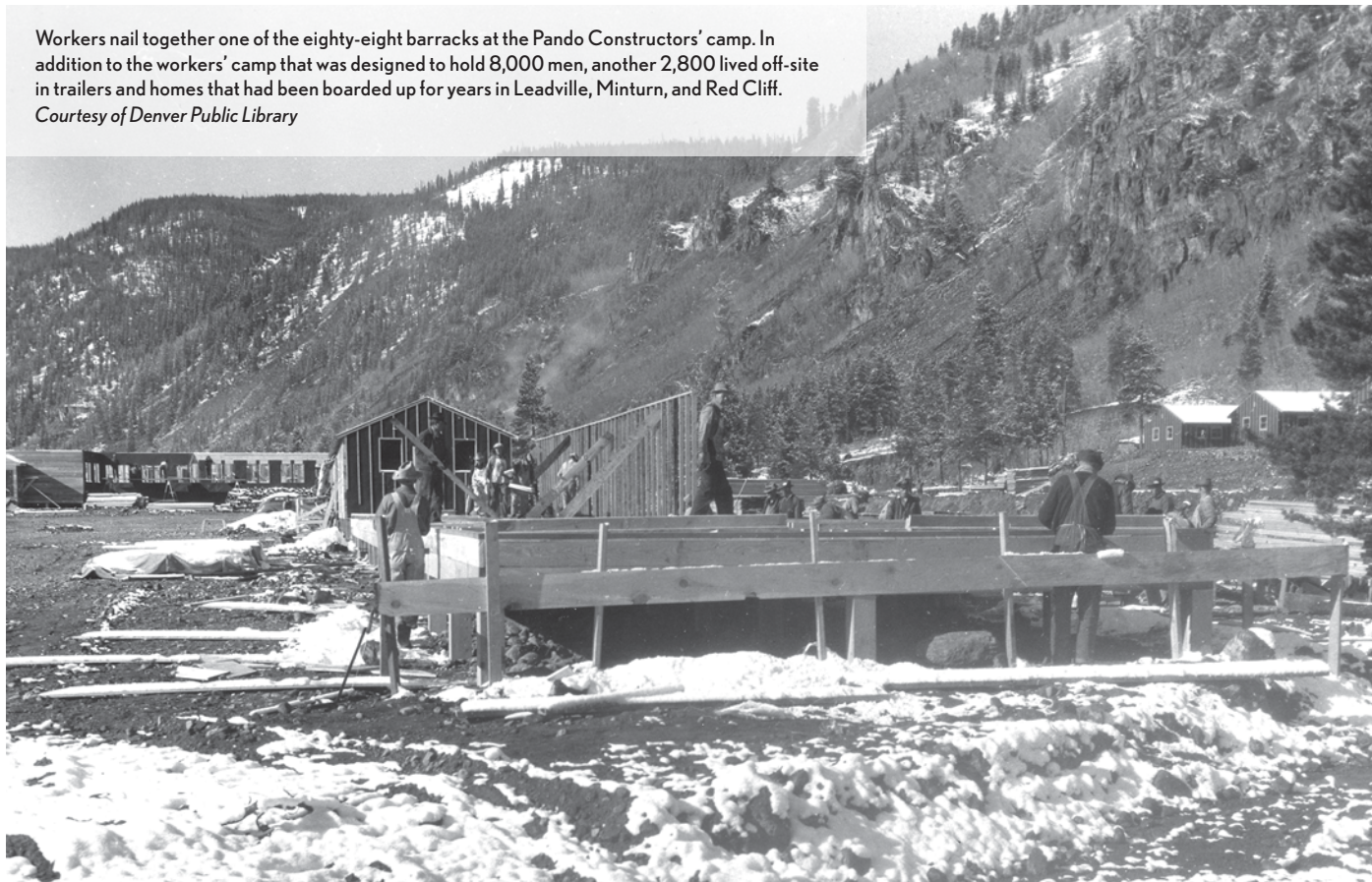
**FLINT WHITLOCK** is a Denver military historian and author of more than sixteen books.

**ERIC MILLER** is a ski patrol volunteer at Monarch Mountain, and a Lt Col in the USAF Reserves. He is also the co-author of the *Ski Patrol in Colorado*.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** A pictorial history of Camp Hale titled *10th Mountain Division at Camp Hale* by Flint Whitlock and Eric Miller will be published in early 2023 by Arcadia Publishing Company.



Workers nail together one of the eighty-eight barracks at the Pando Constructors' camp. In addition to the workers' camp that was designed to hold 8,000 men, another 2,800 lived off-site in trailers and homes that had been boarded up for years in Leadville, Minturn, and Red Cliff. *Courtesy of Denver Public Library*



The concrete foundations for three immense buildings in the warehouse area on the north end of the camp have been laid and await the finishing touches—floors, walls, roofs, and more. *Courtesy of Denver Public Library*



**Scaffolding rises on the exterior of a three-story building. Millions of board feet of lumber were used in the construction of the camp.**

*Courtesy of Denver Public Library*



▲ Two workmen hammer together one of the buildings. One day in August 1942, sixty-one carpenters and four shinglers set out to build a complete sixty-three-man barracks building in record time. They did—in seven hours and forty-five minutes, breaking the old national record by more than three hours! *Courtesy of Denver Public Library*

▼ A carpenter cuts a board to length. In order to meet the deadline, work went on six and sometimes seven days a week. Attention to detail and craftsmanship were important to Pando Constructors. Although the November 1942 deadline loomed, there is no indication that any shortcuts were taken by the builders. *Courtesy of Denver Public Library*

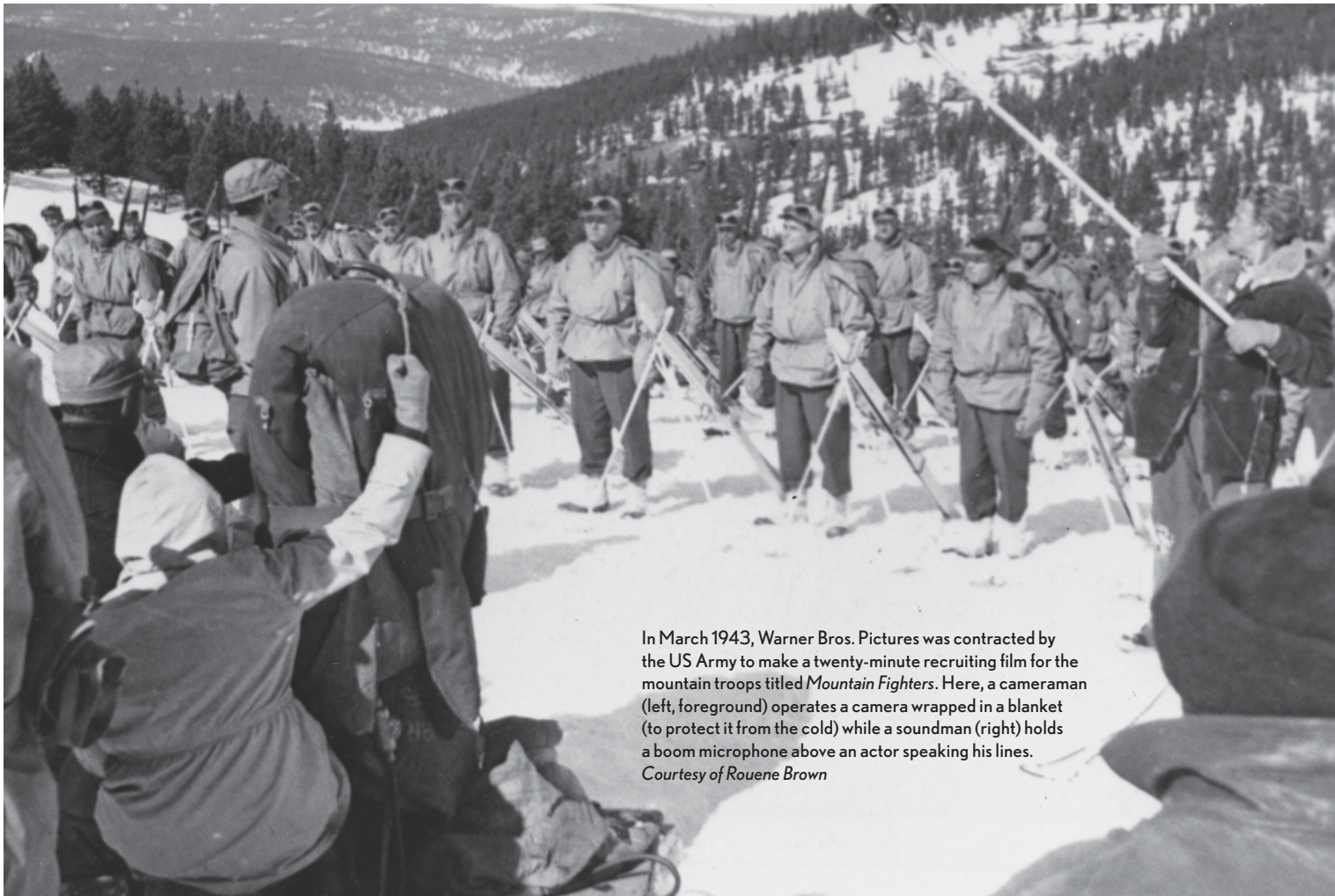


► The Pando Valley hummed with non-stop construction activity for seven months. Here, a lumber truck delivers boards to a building in the hospital area.  
*Courtesy of Denver Public Library*

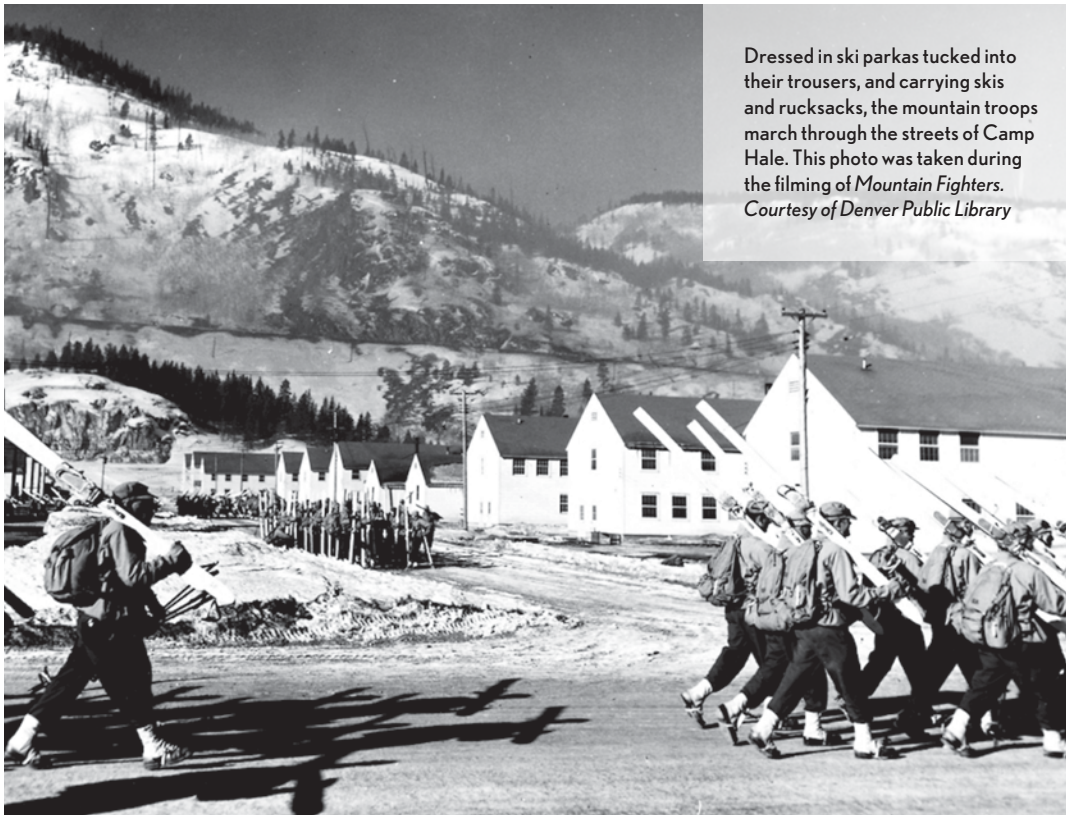
▼ The largest building at Camp Hale—the 18,000-square-foot field house—was the scene of ceremonies, basketball and volleyball games, exhibition boxing matches (world heavyweight champion Joe Louis once staged an exhibition here), concerts, and dances. The concrete remains of the field house can still be seen today.  
*Courtesy of Denver Public Library*

▼ A high-angle view of the 676-bed Camp Hale hospital complex located at the north end of the valley shows enclosed walkways connecting the various hospital wards. Also visible is a pall of smoke drifting over the camp—a major health concern with a lung condition the men dubbed the “Pando Hack,” and some needed to be transferred out of the division because of it.  
*Courtesy of Denver Public Library*





In March 1943, Warner Bros. Pictures was contracted by the US Army to make a twenty-minute recruiting film for the mountain troops titled *Mountain Fighters*. Here, a cameraman (left, foreground) operates a camera wrapped in a blanket (to protect it from the cold) while a soundman (right) holds a boom microphone above an actor speaking his lines.  
*Courtesy of Rouene Brown*



Dressed in ski parkas tucked into their trousers, and carrying skis and rucksacks, the mountain troops march through the streets of Camp Hale. This photo was taken during the filming of *Mountain Fighters*.  
*Courtesy of Denver Public Library*



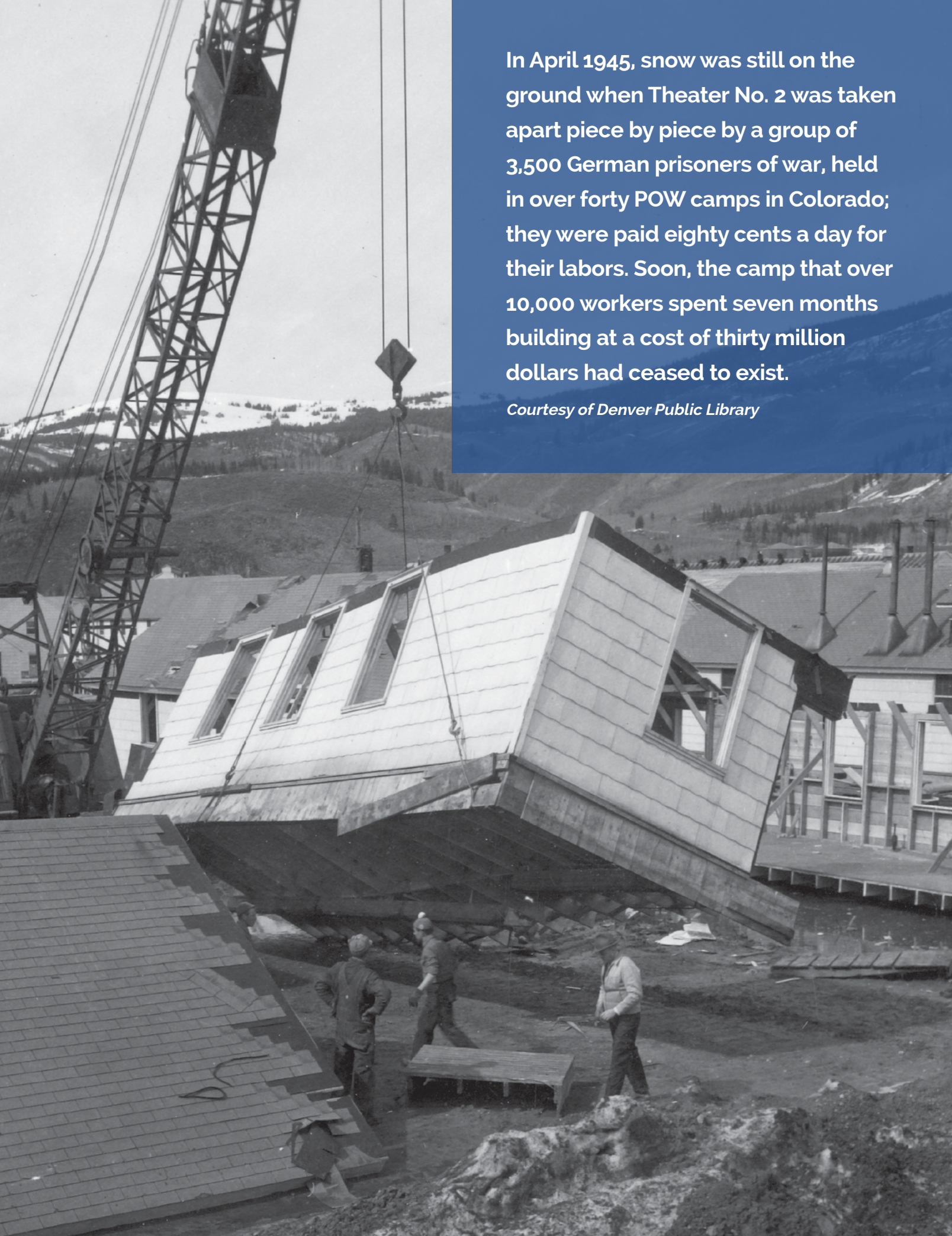
Besides being the highest military post in the nation, Camp Hale was one of the most scenic. This view is from the north, looking south. *Courtesy of Denver Public Library*



A 240-woman WAC detachment (Women's Army Corps) arrived at Camp Hale on May 27, 1943. They were motor pool drivers and mechanics, supply specialists, secretaries, and worked in communications and accounting. Their barracks were at First and B Streets. *Courtesy of Colorado Snowsports Museum & Hall of Fame*

In April 1945, snow was still on the ground when Theater No. 2 was taken apart piece by piece by a group of 3,500 German prisoners of war, held in over forty POW camps in Colorado; they were paid eighty cents a day for their labors. Soon, the camp that over 10,000 workers spent seven months building at a cost of thirty million dollars had ceased to exist.

*Courtesy of Denver Public Library*



# THE FORT

## Preserves History One Meal at a Time

Sixty years of family, food, and history with Holly Arnold Kinney. She's an author as well as the proprietor and owner of The Fort Restaurant in Morrison, Colorado.

### What's the story behind The Fort?

It was an amazing story of destiny! My parents, Samuel and Elizabeth (known as Bay), eloped in Santa Fe in 1948. They became friends with many of the local Indigenous artists there, and like so many of the people who moved west at the time, they fell in love with the landscape, the Indigenous cultures, and the history. Real Western history wasn't taught in schools, especially back then, so discovering the stories of the Spanish conquistadors, the Pueblo Revolt, Bent's Fort, and the mix of cultures was amazing for them. When they moved to Denver, they wanted to bring along a piece of the southwestern culture. They had a romantic vision to build a castle, so since they loved the adobe buildings of Santa Fe, my parents called adobe expert William Lumpkins who helped them design a reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort outside of Denver.

### The vision changed from family home to restaurant.

#### What happened?

My family hired a contractor from Santa Fe who employed twenty-seven men to puddle over 80,000 adobe bricks weighing forty pounds each. But construction costs soon overran the budget, so the bank suggested that our family turn part of the home into a business. My father turned to my mother and said, "Well, you can cook." And my mother said "No, you can cook!" And the restaurant was born.

### Was history baked into the restaurant from the very beginning?

Both of my parents came from families with strong food traditions, and my father was very interested in the foods of the old West. There was always a plan to include a history museum in the building, so it was natural that my parents would want to research what people ate back then too! They started reading these old diaries and learning more about things like "prairie butter," which is roasted bison femur bone marrow. Today we're the only restaurant that I know of that serves bison bone marrow.

### Is it true you had a pet bear as a kid at the Fort?

Yes, her name was Sissy! The story is that the restaurant opened in 1963, and back then, it was an hour or an hour-



Holly Arnold Kinney

and-a-half drive from Denver to get all the way out to Morrison. My father brought in a circus act to perform in the courtyard thinking it would be a good way to get people to drive out from Denver. Well the Denver Zoo heard about this and got in touch to say that they had this little cub who had been abused by her previous owner and declawed so she couldn't stay with the other bears at the zoo. So we got a zoo license and, long story short, that's how, when I was nine years old, Sissy came to live with us for nineteen years at The Fort.

### What does the future look like for The Fort?

It's been here for sixty years now, and we're still going strong! We keep working to learn more about the foodways of the old West, and I'm proud that our menu preserves old traditions from Mexico as well. We've hosted summits for world leaders, Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribal elders, and dinners for so many people that it's really become a part of Colorado history. And The Fort itself was recently added to the National Register of Historic Places, which was a huge undertaking! But the designation will help make sure that we're here preserving the cultures and foodways of the West for at least another sixty years!



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