

THE

HISTORY COLORADO | SUMMER 2021

# COLORADO

MAGAZINE

## In the Land of SKY BLUE WEATHER

Indian Boarding Schools

The Master Weaver  
of the San Luis Valley

A Lynching in  
Gothic, Colorado?





# HISTORY POWERS THE FUTURE

**W**e believe in the power of history. (I realize that this is not a surprising statement coming from History Colorado!) We live in a time when more people are aware of how relevant and pertinent history is to our present lives and futures. Of course, our team at History Colorado has long known history's importance — dedicating our professional lives to the cause.

For 143 years, History Colorado has championed the history of our state. Created when Colorado was newly formed, we are the designated stewards of our state's memory. Our responsibilities include 11 museums and historic sites (including two trains!) across Colorado and a collection of 15 million objects and documents that spans 13,000 years. For 30 years, we have managed the State Historical Fund, investing in all 64 Colorado counties, resulting in more than \$2 billion in historic preservation-derived economic impact.

I am deeply honored to serve as History Colorado's thirteenth Executive Director. Although I am new to this role, I am not new to the organization. In all of my work at History Colorado, starting in 2012, I have done it with my arms open as widely as possible. I believe in the power of history to transform communities, make meaning in the world, connect us to each other, and enable us to chart an informed destiny. Each day, we innovate and develop exciting ways to ensure that every Coloradan has access to history's power and knows that they belong in our state's shared story. We know that this work requires us to confront and understand Colorado's flawed moments, while celebrating the beauty and the resilience and strength of our state. Together, with you, and all Colorado residents, we are building a dynamic understanding of our history that is deeply inclusive and animates an equitable and just future.



Dawn DiPrince  
Executive Director



In the spirit of healing and education, we acknowledge the 48 contemporary tribes with historic ties to the state of Colorado. These tribes are our partners. We consult with them when we plan exhibits; collect, preserve, and interpret artifacts; do archaeological work; and create educational programs. We recognize these Indigenous peoples as the original inhabitants of this land.

## THE COLORADO MAGAZINE

### HISTORY COLORADO

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# THE COLORADO MAGAZINE

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2 **History Powers the Future** by Dawn DiPrince / 4 **The Forum** / 6 **"Obliterate & Forget"** by Glenys Echavarri and Holly Norton / 8 **The Master Weaver of the San Luis Valley** by Raena Vigil / 12 **The Best Tortillas in Five Points** by Courtney Ozaki / 16 **In the Land of Sky Blue Weather** by Kayann Short / 24 **A Lynching in Gothic, Colorado?** by Benjamin Wong Blonder / 34 **Pioneer, Indian, Cowboy, Rabbi** by Ariel Schnee / 40 **Five Items Colorado's Women's Suffrage Leaders Probably Didn't Want You to Read** by Shaun Boyd



**BASEBALL HISTORIAN JASON HANSON**, who is the chief creative officer at History Colorado, donned Rockies-purple curatorial gloves to place the PSA Gem Mint 10 1952 Topps Mickey Mantle Card at the *Hall of Legends* exhibit in Denver during Major League Baseball's All-Star Game in July at the Rally Hotel. The exhibit was a collaboration between History Colorado and the Colorado Rockies. Photo courtesy of the Colorado Rockies.

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ON THE COVER / *Stapleton Tower* by J.P. Britton, watercolor on paper, 1961 (2008.49.2).  
*Prints of this striking painting are available at the History Colorado Center Museum Store and in our History Colorado Shop online.*



# THE FORUM

## We love hearing from you

### **"Building the City We Want"**

*Many of you shared your thoughts after receiving the May 25 edition of our Weekly Digest marking one year since the protests in the wake of George Floyd's murder.*

This is just a short note to say that I have noticed, with growing appreciation and pride, how, in recent years, History Colorado has reoriented its work toward a more intentionally inclusive approach to the past, present, and future of our state. I can imagine that this transformation is not easy and perhaps not always lauded but I want you to know that the changes are palpable, and profoundly welcomed. We see you. We are thankful that you see all of us as well.

I am proud to be a member of History Colorado and I look forward to joining with you and the many other residents of Denver to create a city worthy of our best hopes and dreams as a just, healthy, multiracial community. Indeed: Building the city (and state, and nation, and world) we want.

—Rachel Harding, via email

...[Y]ou failed to mention the destruction and vandalism, not only to the Colorado History Museum, but to other public buildings and private businesses. Your failure to do so, at the very least, is tacit approval of the violence, and perhaps even more so, a blatant failure to accurately describe what happened. You've practically canonized the events of last summer by placing them alongside the others [historic protests in Denver]. I'm all for protest...but not along with violence. And, were the "riots" merely another example from which you draw inspiration? I'm certainly against any form of police brutality...

I have yet to talk to anyone that condones such. Not sure how defacing the history museum helped matters.

—Tom Sisk, via email

### **"Unsilenced"**

*On the new art installation from jetsonorama at the Fort Garland Museum and Cultural Center about the enslavement of Indigenous people in Southern Colorado.*

Just wanted to let you and others responsible know that I'm so grateful to hear about Fort Garland Museum and Cultural Center and its new exhibit about the enslavement of Indigenous people in the region's history. My wife and I have been through Fort Garland often, but never knew about the museum. We will certainly stop and take time to absorb the exhibit. This presentation is the kind of completion/correction our history needs, and the stories of our history that have not really been told. Please pass along my thanks to those who are doing this work.

—Dan Lutz, via email

So grateful to be here at this time to experience the exhibit. This installation brings to "life" many of the stories I've read regarding these souls. I'm honored to share space with the spirits that live on in this part of our world. I feel them often here but seeing the faces and reading the names is something different. May we never forget and may we somehow learn.  
—R.S., via the visitor journal in the exhibition

### **No Love for The Colorado Magazine**

I receive my copies of the magazine and am afraid to see what part of

our history you will vilify next. The cover is usually an indication. There is hatred in every article of the very fiber of who we are. Your articles are tilted toward what one "group" believes with not a single word in opposition or defense of good people. No longer do I enjoy reading it and am happy to say at least the paper is being recycled.

—Judy K. Reyher, via post

*History Colorado responds:*

*At The Colorado Magazine, we believe all Coloradans should be able to see themselves in meaningful ways in our shared history, and that we can explore our shared history with curiosity and respect without diminishing or degenerating anyone else's history. We like the way our new State Historian, Nicki Gonzales, framed it recently:*

*"We cannot understand who we are and where we are today until we've examined and really understand each other's history—our collective history, which is all of those stories together...I encourage people to lead with curiosity. To try to leave our defensiveness. We all get defensive over certain things—but to try to minimize that as much as possible. We can try to lead with curiosity about one another's experiences."*

### **"Building Denver"**

I want to commend all involved in the "Building Denver" exhibit. It is hands down one of your very best exhibits and I hope it becomes a permanent one!

—Joanne Terry, via email

### **"What is the 4th of July to a Slave?"**

*After we shared Frederick Douglass's memorable address, "What is the Fourth of July to a Slave?" on Instagram for Independence Day, we heard from a lot of you.*

Thank you so much for this beautiful post @historycolorado! Loving our country means wanting it to be better and understand[ing] it has always had a long way to go to live up to its ideals. We can not be who we say we are if we do not acknowledge and account for the ways we fall short.  
—@Sophieleap, via Instagram



It's ironic that you, @historycolorado preaches the past but yet you want to erase it. Ha.

—@silvagram, via Instagram

Imagine being so triggered by the idea of true liberty and justice for all that you spend your holiday yelling at a museum on social media. The Declaration of Independence is literally a social justice document outlining the grievances of a people oppressed by their governance and acting on it. Until we actualize the words of that declaration, I can think of no more appropriate day to celebrate those who continue to fight for their inalienable rights to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

—@jezerkajonze, via Instagram

### Visiting the History Colorado Center

Tackling serious issues of city planning, problematic historical statues, Japanese internment camps, farm workers rights, the racist history of the Klan in Colorado, Indian removal, and more cannot be easy or done

without serious effort and care. I really love the attention to having people from el Movimiento contribute to the exhibit. That alone speaks volumes about the Center's values.

I've been to many museums of all kinds in many cities, some internationally. I've never written to one of them. The History Colorado Center has struck, what I believe to be not a chord, but a whole symphony.

I'm thankful to everyone at the museum who makes these experiences possible for tourists like myself, and especially children who get exposure through experience. You've all done a phenomenal job. Thank you.

—Philip Belcastro, visiting from St. Petersburg, Florida, via email

This is an incredibly important museum, whose several floors highlighting different eras in the state's history are all *remarkably* well curated. I appreciate that the curators do not sugar coat the darker sides of Colorado's history (the state was once a KKK hotbed), and that the exhibits really make efforts to place the stories of Colorado's Native,

Black, and Latino communities front and center. Be sure not to miss the exhibit featuring 100 objects from Colorado's history (one really stands out in my memory: an original ballot box from the 1893 elections, which was the year women were first granted the franchise in Colorado).

—Nate Hake, via TravelLemming.com

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# “OBLITERATE & FORGET”

BY GLENYS ECHAVARRI  
& HOLLY NORTON

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF FEDERAL INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS IN COLORADO



PHOTO / The Grand Junction Indian Boarding School, date unknown. Most of the buildings shown here were built with student labor. History Colorado, 10037147

*As the discovery of mass graves containing the bodies of hundreds of young children at multiple Indian boarding schools in Canada focuses a spotlight on the abuses that took place at many of these schools throughout North America, we look at the history of these institutions in the United States and their legacy in Colorado.*

Our collective history is punctuated by tragedies, and while these tragedies need to be faced head-on, the following discussion may be upsetting for some readers. For many Americans, the announcement this past June that the graves of 215 children were found in Kamloops, Canada, was the first time they had heard of residential schools for Indigenous children, or that there were atrocities visited on the students who attended them. Since then, more than 1,000 graves of First Nations children have been located at other former residential schools in Canada.

Public discourse around this long-ignored history is growing, and

the U.S. boarding schools that provided a blueprint for Canadian residential schools are facing a much needed reckoning as well. Investigations into potential burial sites at boarding schools have taken place at several former Indian schools, and no doubt will be given greater scrutiny with the renewed focus from the Department of the Interior into this tragic history. As tribes, survivors, and our larger community grapple with the horror of what students experienced in these schools, there are also many questions about the history of these institutions and how they connect to larger political and social issues faced by Indigenous peoples.

The schools were born out of President Ulysses S. Grant’s Indian Peace Policy, which sought to create a permanent peace with American Indian tribes through “non-violent means,” even while the Indian wars raged in the American West. Grant argued that limiting Native people to reservations and assimilating them

to white culture was the only way to bring peace as the nation continued westward expansion. The earliest schools were founded by different Christian denominations, which established both schools and churches on reservations in an effort to abolish traditional religious practices and assimilate Native children. Denver was the site of at least one school run by the Catholic Church in the mid 1890s, although little is known about that particular institution.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) established twenty-five federally-run, off-reservation Indian boarding schools. The first such school was the infamous Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania in 1879, started by Richard Henry Pratt, whose philosophy of “Kill the Indian, Save the Man” came to dominate the boarding school ethos. The Carlisle School itself was converted from military barracks, and Pratt encouraged abusive practices to strip students of their identities and language—to “obliterate and forget”



their Tribal culture, in the words of the school newspaper—as well as corporal punishment to force “white” behaviors.

By taking Native children, the BIA intended to weaken Tribal communities and prevent resistance against federal policies. According to Ezra Hayt, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1877-1880, “the children would be hostages for the good behavior of their people.” Federal boarding schools were designed to separate children from their families and tribes, breaking familial bonds through which culture and values could be transmitted. School administrators cut students’ hair, confiscated or destroyed their handmade traditional clothing and belongings, punished them for speaking their languages and banned any type of practice or behavior relating to their culture.

Carlisle became the model for subsequent schools across the country, including the Teller Institute in Grand Junction and the Fort Lewis Indian School on what is today Fort Lewis College in Durango. A devotee of Pratt’s philosophy, Senator Henry Moore Teller sought to replicate Pratt’s methods at the Teller Institute, which housed approximately two hundred students at any given time. Publicly, the goal was to teach Native children skills that could be applied in the factories in the industrialized northeast United States, or to teach subsistence agriculture to ease the transition to reservation life. Curriculum focused on vocational training, which in reality meant long hours of hard labor for the children. They were used as free sources of labor for both the schools and local communities. For instance, students trained in farming were hired out to farm and ranch families surrounding the schools. The Teller Institute also had a rigorous carpentry program, and by the time the school closed in 1911, eleven of the twelve buildings had been built by student labor.

In the 1890s, two additional day schools were established on the

Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute reservations. While day schools allowed children to remain at home with their families, they used the same approach of assimilating Native children through education and corporal punishment.

Whether boarding schools or day schools, as federal institutions, the schools were chronically underfunded and understaffed. In addition to harsh disciplinary measures and unsafe working conditions, the children were subjected to poor living conditions and were regularly denied adequate food, clothing, bedding, or bathing and latrine facilities. Unsanitary conditions coupled with malnutrition and hard labor led to outbreaks of measles, typhoid, and other diseases. Boarding school survivors have also recounted many instances of physical and sexual abuse by educators and religious leaders.

The early years of boarding schools documented more student deaths than graduations, and subsequent records around deaths and disappearances are poor or misleading, as sick children were sometimes sent home to die. Children who escaped and died of exposure to the elements were also not added to death records. As an example, the Mount Pleasant Indian School in Michigan documented the deaths of five students throughout its forty-year existence, but Tribal research in 2010 confirmed that at least 227 children had died there.

By 1926 there were more than 60,000 Native students between the ages of six and twenty in 367 boarding schools across the country, representing nearly 83 percent of Native children of schooling age. The 1928 Meriam Report offered a scathing indictment of the boarding school system and the federal government’s treatment of Native people more broadly. The report’s authors did not mince words about the schools, writing that, “The survey staff finds itself obliged to say frankly and unequivocally that the provisions for the care of the Indian children in

boarding schools are grossly inadequate.” The Meriam Report helped pave the way for the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which allowed more self-control by Native tribes, including increased autonomy over local schools and curricula. By the 1960s, more schools became Tribally controlled and conditions substantially improved. Some former boarding schools remain educational institutions like Fort Lewis College, which today focuses on providing higher education opportunities for Native students. Others like the Phoenix Indian School in Arizona are now places of remembrance.

The legacy of the federal boarding schools is complicated and dark. These programs of assimilation were a continuation of the attempted genocide of numerous tribes and Indigenous people at various times over centuries in what is now the United States, another method of extinguishing cultures and young lives after decades of war had failed to solve “the Indian Problem.” Many students who survived the schools were left with lifelong physical and emotional scars, which continue to impact their descendants through generational trauma. Other students died, separated from their families and those who loved them, without even enough consideration from school authorities to return their bodies to their people. Forgetting these students, losing their graves, was another attempt in a long line of programs meant to erase Native people. Confronting the truth of what happened at these schools is a necessary step in supporting healing in Tribal communities.

**GLENYS ECHAVARRI** is the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) Liaison and Tribal Consultation Coordinator at History Colorado.

**HOLLY NORTON** is Colorado’s State Archaeologist and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer at History Colorado.



# THE Master Weaver OF THE San Luis Valley

BY RAENA VIGIL

## Eppie Archuleta's Legacy

Far beyond Eppie Archuleta's technical abilities, awards, and accolades as a master weaver, she was a weaver of artistry and legacy—her work strengthened by the warp of her ancestors and enriched by the weft of faith, love, and kindness.

**E**PPIE ARCHULETA could often be found weaving in the quiet, still hours of the night from dusk until dawn. With her children asleep and the Valley silent, Eppie would transform wool—dyed by the plants of the earth—into designs that echoed the patterns of her Native American and Spanish ancestors. Her work told the stories of people through portraits and illuminated the beauty of landscapes and animals. Her love for the loom bloomed later in life, but her weaving skills were cultivated at a young age. Eppie

inherited the art of weaving from the generations of artisans before her.

The traditional Hispanic folk art of weaving in the San Luis Valley has its roots in sixteenth-century northern New Mexico. Sheep were introduced to the region by Spanish settlers and weavers used the wool to make beautiful, unique textiles. This centuries-old art form is a continuing tradition, often passed down through familial generations: families like the Martínez family of Medanales, New Mexico. The legacy of Eppie Archuleta is part of this weaving heritage that spans over five generations.



PHOTO / Eppie weaving on a small loom in her home in Capulin, Colorado in 2003. Image courtesy of Ruben Archuleta.

### **Eppie's New Mexican Roots**

Epifania “Eppie” Archuleta was born on the Catholic feast day of Epiphany, January 6, 1922, in Santa Cruz, New Mexico. Growing up in Medanales, New Mexico, Eppie’s childhood consisted of helping with the family farm, listening to her father’s stories after a hard day’s work, and learning how to weave.

Eppie’s father, Eusebio Martínez, was a school teacher, postmaster, and skilled weaver from Chimayó, New Mexico. He could trace his ancestor’s weaving tradition back to the seventeenth century. Eppie’s mother, Agueda Salazar Martínez, or Doña Agueda, as she was known, was a skilled and renowned weaver, recognized as a matriarch of Hispano weaving in New Mexico. Over the years, she received numerous honors and awards.

Weaving was an integral way to add to their large family’s income. All ten of the Martínez children, including Eppie, would help in weaving-related duties, such as processing wool, gathering plants to dye the yarn, and weaving on the loom. While Eppie did not enjoy weaving initially, she developed a love and appreciation for the art form later in life. She said, “They made me do it. I didn’t do it because I want to. But looks like it printed on my head pretty good. I love it now...I just love to weave.”

### **The Art of Weaving**

In the 1950s, Eppie and her husband, Francisco “Frank” Archuleta moved to Capulin, Colorado, to raise their ten children, eight of whom lived to adulthood.





In 1991, she was profiled in a *National Geographic* magazine article. In the article, she described weaving as an integral part of her life.

**“It’s part of my soul,” she proclaimed.**

PHOTO / This is an image of an article from the January 1991 issue of the *National Geographic* magazine profiling Eppie Archuleta. The photographer, David Alan Harvey, photographed Eppie for a series titled “Masters of Traditional Arts.” The photo of the magazine and its published image were taken by Aaron Martinez (Eppie Archuleta’s great-nephew).

Eppie used weaving to supplement her family’s subsistence farming income, which allowed her to stay home with her children. Using the traditional techniques that she observed and learned during her childhood, Eppie processed her own wool by washing, carding, and spinning it. Then, she used the resources of the earth to dye the yarn.

Eppie’s daughter Norma Medina, a notable weaver herself, remembered, “My dad always had a lot of sheep. We would use our own wool. When he would shear the sheep, she would take the wool that didn’t have too many stickers. We’d wash it and hand-card it.”

To wash the wool, it would be placed in giant tubs of water heated over a wood fire. Then, using plants and herbs, like cota, aspen, juniper, bark, weeds, and black walnut hulls, she would dye the fresh wool into rich, vibrant colors, ready to be woven on the loom.

In a 1980 interview for a journal of women’s studies, Eppie described

the process. “And at the same time that the weeds are boiling, I have this other wool over here in the mordant boiling, too, at the side. It have to be the same temperature. I boil the thing already two hours. Now, I have to boil them again another two to get the color in the wool. And it takes about two hours for these weeds to get the color I want.”

### **Passing Down a Love for the Loom**

While weaving was initially just an extra source of income, Eppie began to discover a love for the loom and her own creative style. Years of cultivating her skills allowed her the ability to experiment with weaving as an artistic form of storytelling. She would challenge herself to do pictorials and large Navajo blankets—which were very valuable and intricate. According to her daughter, Norma, she was unafraid of challenges and would say, “I can do that.” Eppie embraced both traditional and contemporary design styles in her

weavings. Over the years, Eppie was recognized for her work with several awards and honors.

In 1983, Eppie received the Colorado Governor’s Award, and she was awarded the prestigious National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1985. In folk and traditional arts, this award is the highest honor. In 1991, she was profiled in a *National Geographic* magazine article. In the article, she described weaving as an integral part of her life. “It’s part of my soul,” she proclaimed.

Over the years, her artistry received many more accolades and is on permanent display at the Smithsonian Institute. In 1995, Eppie received an Honorary Doctorate in Arts from Adams State University, an accomplishment that her daughter, Norma, is most proud of. Norma explained that the doctorate demonstrated that her community valued and recognized Eppie as a master weaver and expert artisan for work she did in her latter years.

In 1986, Eppie Archuleta, her mother Doña Agueda, daughter Norma Medina, and granddaughter Delores Medina, were invited to the Festival of American Folklife at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. The four generations of weavers demonstrated their tradition to thousands of people, showing every step of the process from carding to dyeing to weaving.

Eppie's children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren carry on this centuries-old tradition. Like Eppie with her own mother, Norma Medina learned the craft by observing, stating, "My mom really didn't even teach me. I just picked it up...I learned it by watching her."

Norma Medina has continued the weaving heritage. In the early 1990s, Norma was commissioned to weave the Passion of Christ for St. Peter Catholic Church in Greeley, Colorado. The three-year project was a fourteen-piece Stations of the Cross weaving set. Norma credits the success of her project to the knowledge and creativity she inherited from her mother, grandmother, and ancestors. Like her mother, Norma finds creative inspiration from nature and her faith, stating, "You learn to appreciate nature. When I want to weave something—and my mom, too—we'd look at the mountains and the skies...In our color wheel, too. It comes from all kinds of herbs...It's an artwork and we don't realize it... God's the artist."

Along with teaching her family how to weave, Eppie passed down the craft to her many students over the years. She taught people in the San Luis Valley community how to weave so that they could supplement their income and enjoy the art. Eppie worked as an instructor for the Virginia Neal Blue Women's Resource Center and the Los Artes del Valle crafts cooperative. These programs were created to boost the local economy in the late 1950s and

preserve Hispano weaving folk art in the area. Eppie would also visit local elementary schools with her miniature loom to demonstrate for the children.

### **A Legacy of Kindness, Strength, and Grit**

Eppie Archuleta's family, love for weaving, and strong faith were the heartbeat of her life. After her husband, Frank Archuleta, passed away, Eppie moved to live with family in New Mexico. She continued to weave as much as she was able to in her final years. Eppie passed away on Friday, April 11, 2014.

Not only is Eppie's legacy laced with her many weaving accomplishments, but kindness and compassion were also central to her life. She was quick to help those in need. Chris Medina, her grandson, remembers when Eppie helped a woman who was hitchhiking. Chris said, "She took care of her for a month...My grandma taught her how to weave. She was that kind of a person."

Later in life, Eppie's care for others and entrepreneurial spirit inspired her to purchase a wool mill. In the early 1990s, she opened the San Luis Valley Wool Mill in La Jara, Colorado with the help of her family, including her grandson, Chris Medina. Eppie worked to have her mill be a fully operational employer for the people of the San Luis Valley.

Like weaving, Eppie's endurance and drive were passed down through generations. Throughout his life experiences as an athlete, musician, and other life endeavors, Chris realized that his grandmother's grit and dedication were traits she had given him. She taught him to "believe and never give up." Eppie's legacy continues through her example of determination. Chris Medina talks to his son about his grandmother's strength and passes down the life lessons he learned from her to keep going through difficult circumstances.

Chris remembers his grandmother's endurance, stating, "She went from dawn until like ten o'clock at night. She was one of the hardest working people I've ever met. My grandma. I admired that...But we never worked on Sundays." While Eppie was a very hard worker, Norma remembered that her mother would "always make time for her kids." She recalls her mother carving little toys out of wood or making bows and arrows for the boys of the family.

### **The Master Storyteller**

This multifaceted woman was creative and intelligent. Among her family, Eppie was known as an amazing storyteller. Whether it was stories she had heard from her father growing up or tales she created, her children and grandchildren were the audience for her oral masterpieces. In 2004, one of her stories was published as the book, *Eppie Archuleta and the Tale of Juan de la Burra* by Ruben Archuleta. Eppie's creativity was expressed through her beautiful weavings, her funny and interesting stories, and in every other area of her life.

Eppie's years told a story of kindness and strength. This textile artisan was a storyteller at heart and passed down wisdom along with her love for the loom. She inspired her family and her community to appreciate the tradition and art of weaving, be compassionate and kind to others, and never give up when life gets difficult. The art form she inherited was her avenue for helping people and making her community a better place.

The fabric of Eppie Archuleta's life is woven with the threads of excellence, hard work, kindness, faith, and strength.

**RAENA VIGIL** is a social media intern for community museums with History Colorado. She graduated in 2021 from Colorado State University-Pueblo with a BA in mass communications and a minor in English.



the disCOurse

# THE Best Tortillas IN Five Points

**A JAPANESE AMERICAN FAMILY'S  
JOURNEY TO DENVER**

BY COURTNEY OZAKI



PHOTO / *The Ozaki Family on Larimer Street. Top row: Joe, Tamiye, Martha, and Joe.  
Bottom row: Hiromi, Nancy, and Charles. Courtesy of the author.*

## the disCOurse

features writers sharing their lived experiences and their perspectives on the past with an eye toward informing our present.

In this article, Courtney Ozaki shares her family's journey to Denver's historically Black Five Points neighborhood, where a multigenerational love of tortillas was born.

**B**ORN AND RAISED IN COLORADO, I am a “San-Hansey,” or third-and-a-half generation Japanese American; my mother is third generation with grandparents born in Japan and parents born in California, and my father is second generation with parents who were both born in Japan. My parents were born and raised in Colorado with both sides of my family finding a place of belonging in Denver's Five Points and Curtis Park neighborhoods, after the closing of the incarceration camps following the bombing of Hiroshima and the end of World War II.

Due to the signing of Executive Order 9066, which ordered 120,000 people of Japanese descent from the West Coast into incarceration camps with no legal cause, the families of my grandparents on my mom's side, Mich and Rose Tanouye (with Rose at the time being a Tateishi) were forced alongside their families to leave all possessions and property behind, including their California farms, apart from what they were able to pack in one

suitcase each. They were tagged like cattle with numbers and did not know where they were headed; their only crime being that they were of Japanese descent. Both of my maternal grandparents were American citizens.

The families were transported first to a race track where they had to degradingly clean out horse stalls so they might sleep in them temporarily, and were then sent to an incarceration camp which was built for them to “relocate” to in Poston, Arizona. My grandma and grandpa Tanouye were introduced in the Poston Camp and eventually reconnected in Denver, where they were married and settled down at 1026 29th Street, in a house which remains standing today but is now a lovely shade of bright blue.

After long years of war and life in the camps, Colorado, and more specifically Denver, was one of the ideal places to turn to in order to start anew amidst postwar racism, and many families ended-up rebuilding here. When my mom was born, and her sister, my aunt Maureen, was seven years old, the family moved to a small but slightly larger two bedroom house in north Denver. Grandpa Tanouye built a career doing upholstery work, and my grandma applied for a seamstress job at a western wear manufacturer. In order to be hired, she told a white lie that she had previous experience operating a power sewing machine. Despite not knowing what she was doing, she carefully observed and copied others who were doing the same job and she caught on quickly. She ended up working for that company for over 40 years, eventually working her way up to an administrative position in the office.

My Grandma and Grandpa, Tamiye and “Joe” Motoichi Ozaki, my father's parents, had a much different story. In 1931, my grandfather left Japan to live in Peru with his uncle to help build up his parquet flooring business. My grandpa found success doing this, and eventually my grandmother was sent to Peru as a bride, arranged by their families. She

arrived after days travelling on a boat, to a husband who didn't recognize her from her picture due to the effects of the long journey.

Eventually, my grandfather took over his uncle's business, and he and my grandma gave birth to my uncle Francisco (who now goes by “Joe”). When Joe was two years old, and while my grandmother was eight months pregnant with another child, World War II broke out. With no warning, my grandfather was seized by the American government, with the consent of the Peruvian government, essentially “kidnapped” by the United States. The intent was for Latin American Japanese to be used as a pawn of war, traded with Japan in exchange for Americans stranded there after the attack on Pearl Harbor. My grandmother, pregnant and with my uncle in tow, was able to eventually find her way to be with my grandfather, who ended-up in an “Alien Detention Center” in Crystal City, Texas. Sadly, she lost the baby, Hatsuko, born and deceased on August 8, 1943—eerily the same birthdate as my father's when he was born years later.

My grandparents and uncle were also now forcibly “illegal aliens” entering the country without visas or passports. Following the war, Peru and other Latin American countries refused to let most Japanese people return to their homes. In order to stay in the United States, my family was able to get sponsored by a distant cousin of my grandfather, who resided in Denver. My grandfather eventually purchased his cousin's husband's grocery store, and was able to provide for his family despite all odds against him including only sparingly speaking English.

The title of this article is “The Best Tortillas in Five Points,” so what does all of this have to do with tortillas? The answer is in several stories of shared cultural joy. With both sides of my family landing initially in the Five Points and Curtis Park neighborhoods, they were not only with other Japanese people but shared this space with communities that were





PHOTO / *My grandpa and grandma, Mich and Rose Tanouye. Courtesy of the author.*

predominantly Black and Latinx, mostly of Mexican descent, who had moved in there starting from the 1920s. Like those who came before them, the Japanese were not welcome to live where they wanted in Colorado, so many of them migrated to Curtis Park, which had long since become home to others who were not wanted elsewhere. The greater Five Points area, which included Curtis Park and Whittier, was considered undesirable real estate. As a result, housing costs were low and in many areas within the neighborhoods there were no restrictive covenants to keep anybody out. So those of modest means, or with no place else to go, could put a roof over their heads and settle down in this historically diverse, accepting place.

The fact that many people in the neighborhood spoke Spanish was helpful to my Ozaki grandparents for whom Spanish was more accessible than English after spending many years in Lima. In fact, during incarceration, my grandfather helped run a Spanish and Japanese newspaper. When asked about living in Five Points, the first thing that my father recalls from childhood is the MG Cafe, a Mexican restaurant that to this day he says had the “best burrito and green chili in Denver.” The cafe was on the same block as his house, which stood between 27th and 28th Streets on Larimer, beside the grocery store my grandparents managed. He and my mother both reminisce about the matriarch of the family-owned

restaurant, who would sit by the door and pick through the pinto beans by hand. And, they fondly remember the sign on display that said something like, “Keep your little feet off the counter” or “off the chairs.” Throughout my life I have accompanied my parents to numerous Mexican restaurants as they are always in search of an elusive dupe for the MG Cafe burrito.

Another story that has stuck in my memory is one my father shared with me of him playing by himself in the alley at the end of the block on the corner of 28th and Lawrence. A nice Mexican lady called him over and asked if he would like a freshly made tortilla. In this day and age it would be frowned upon for a child to accept a gift like this from a stranger, but back then he eagerly accepted it. Throughout my childhood, my dad was always very picky and particular about his tortillas, and he would often feed me a soft and deliciously comforting warm tortilla with melted butter inside it for breakfast.

My mother is also particular about her tortillas and she claims that her first generation Japanese grandmother, who lived with her family after the war because my grandfather was the oldest son, made the very best tortillas she has ever eaten. Though she spoke little English, and no Spanish, her neighbor in north Denver, Mrs. Rodriguez, taught her how to make tortillas and she in turn made them regularly for my mom and the whole family. I love reflecting on this now and cherishing the realization that this small bit of cultural joy, despite the circumstances, brought our communities together and has been passed down through generations of cultural continuum.

There are many more stories about my family’s life beyond World War II: rebuilding in Denver and Colorado, being entrepreneurial, and working hard so that we, the future generations, would have the opportunity to be educated and pursue dreams of having a positive impact

**This small bit of cultural joy, despite the circumstances, brought our communities together and has been passed down through generations of cultural continuum.**

on the world. What was sacrificed by my family, and how they were able to rebuild in Denver despite being stripped of all of their rights and most of their worldly possessions, has had a significant impact on who I am today. My background and upbringing constantly provide me with strength, perspective, and resilience as I continue to forge my own entrepreneurial and sometimes overly ambitious path.

My grandparents on both sides of my family were resourceful and resilient, and I only ever knew them to be optimistic and generally cheerful. They didn't always have a lot, but they still always were able to provide for their families. Any time I doubt my ability to keep moving forward, I remind myself that my entire family, only two generations back, had to gaman (or to "endure the seemingly unbearable with patience

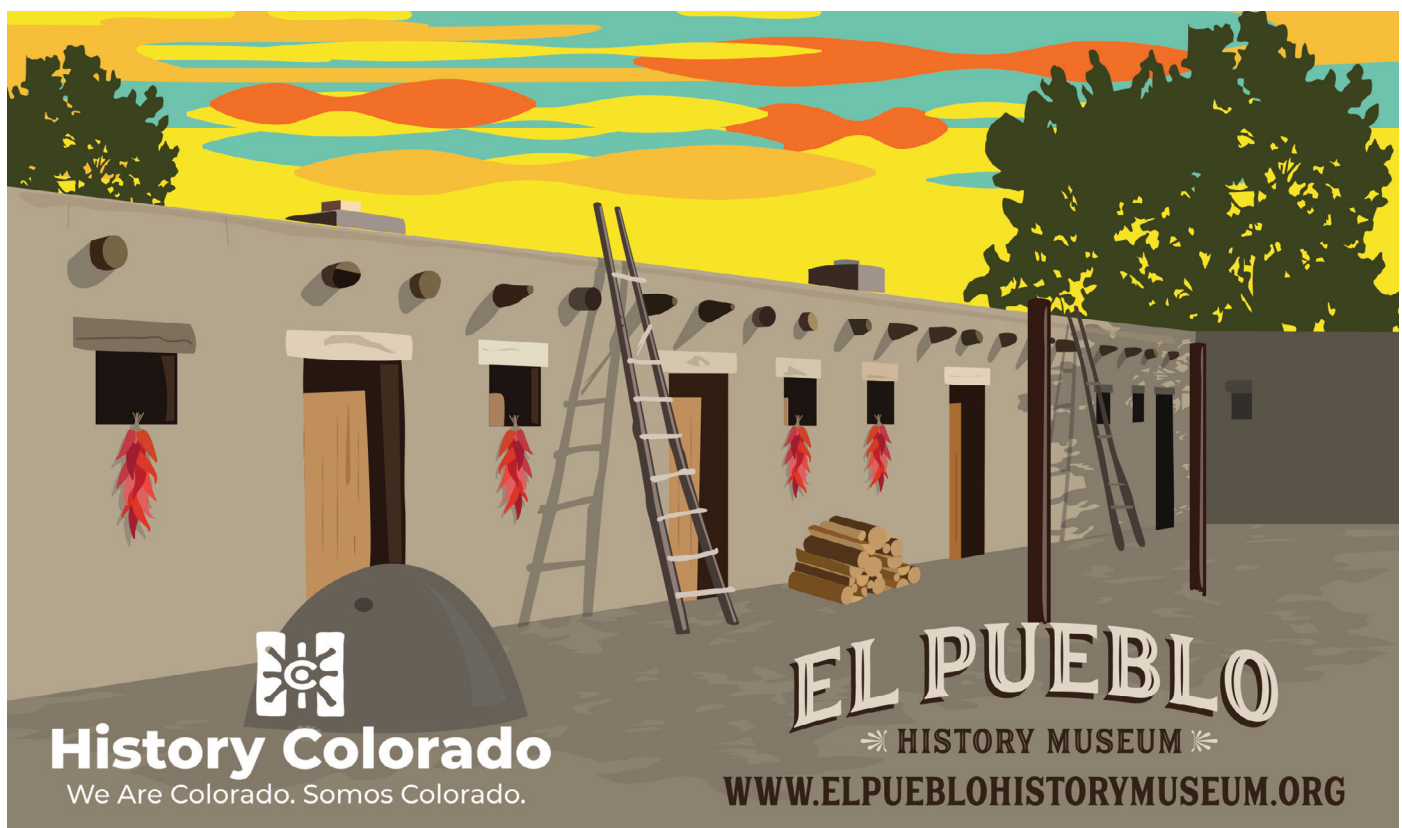
and dignity"), and I observe how my parents established themselves in their respective professions. Recently retired, they have never stopped working hard to support me in my creative pursuits.

Not having been incarcerated, but surely being passed down generational trauma, while encountering racism and adversity on their own, my parents have taught me to not take anything in this life for granted, to always maintain deep gratitude, and to look forward to the future confidently, never doubting my ability, worth, rights, and value. My family history of surviving displacement, forced incarceration, and hardship has ingrained values that have encouraged me to pursue a meaningful life of helping others and encouraging artists to share their own stories of identity and cultural connection through

artistic and creative platforms. I am proud to carry forward the integration and intersectionality of Japanese culture with other cultural communities through collaborative efforts between community organizations and the Japanese Arts Network, and I am grateful to History Colorado for highlighting the stories of how Denver's Five Points was built by many incredible individuals within our communities of color.

**Courtney Ozaki** is the Creative Producer and Founder of the Japanese Arts Network

*Courtney and the Japanese Arts Network will lead a History Colorado walking tour of the Historic Japanese American Nibonmachi (Japantown) Neighborhood on August 28th, 2021, in Denver's Five Points Neighborhood.*





# IN THE Land OF Sky Blue Weather

The Mystery of the Blue Bird Club Photo Album



PHOTO / Courtesy of Carnegie Library for Local History in Boulder.

BY KAYANN SHORT





PHOTO / Courtesy of Carnegie Library for Local History in Boulder.

*Mrs. and Mrs. Hayseed - Gold Hill 621-1*

**A forgotten photo album reveals a window into the experiences of women enjoying independence and female friendship amid Colorado's spectacular Rocky Mountain landscapes in the early twentieth century.**

**"Mr. and Mrs. Hayseed—Gold Hill"**

declared the caption beneath the vintage photograph of two young women in boots and knicker pants seated in the open air, a row of wooden buildings forming a weathered backdrop to the rustic scene. Part of a historic photo album in the Blue Bird Club collection at the Boulder Carnegie Library for Local History, the names implied humor in the women's relationship, as well as a certain city sensibility brought to the Colorado mining town they were visiting.

I first learned of the Blue Birds on my own trip to Gold Hill, a

charming hamlet in the mountains above Boulder, for dinner at the acclaimed Gold Hill Inn. Peeking in the window of the old lodge next door, I read that a Chicago women's organization called the Blue Birds had owned the building from the 1920s to 1960s. They had built what was now the Inn, in fact, as their club kitchen, dining, and living rooms. Wondering who these women had been and what they had been doing in my neck of the woods, I resolved to find out more—someday.

I returned to the Blue Birds when a friend and I kicked around the idea of a book about women's friendships in the West. At the Boulder Carnegie Library for Local History, I leafed through old scrapbooks in the club's archives and enjoyed black and white photographs of women in riding breeches, lace-up boots, and wide-brimmed hats on horseback or riding in the 1920s touring car that ran between Boulder and Gold Hill in the organization's heyday. I marveled at the idea of Blue Birds in full skirts hiking early Chautauqua trails, where, even with improvements in the years since then, some of the paths are still steep or slick enough that I struggle

in jeans and hiking boots today. And they didn't grow up at high altitude, like I did.

As I dipped into research, I decided the Blue Birds deserved a book of their own. I was drawn to their story of early-twentieth-century "New Women" embracing the natural world for recreation and companionship in the Colorado mountains. I wanted to know more about these single, urban women who came west from Chicago on the railroad to vacation with other "self-supporting" women, as they were called in those days.

On my third trip to the Boulder Carnegie, I discovered the vintage photo album—the best artifact I had yet encountered in my research as a record of a typical Blue Bird vacation, dated from the first year members stayed at the club's newly purchased lodge in Gold Hill. The unnamed creator of the album had even titled it as a travelogue in elegant handwriting on the inside front cover: "In the land of the sky blue weather, Boulder, Colorado, August 14–30, 1921."

Here were candid glimpses into the lives of the women who called themselves Blue Birds. Photographs



## A BLUE BIRD SLOGAN COULD HAVE BEEN “Come for the air, stay for the freedom.”

of founder Jean Sherwood in her beloved cottage garden. Blue Birds in calf-length skirts posed at Boulder’s Flagstaff Mountain and Royal Arch. A Model T “stage” used by A.J. “Tim” Walter to chauffeur Blue Birds on steep dirt roads between Boulder and Gold Hill—highlighted by the caption “A thrilling ride we’ll say!”

In these photographs showing Blue Bird activities in the club’s earliest years, this small album, with its black, tattered pages unbound from the shabby cover, offers a rare portal into the experiences of women enjoying independence and female friendship amid Colorado’s spectacular Rocky Mountain landscapes in the early twentieth century. The album records a visual log of Blue Bird excursions in Boulder and the Rocky Mountains, a portrait of the club women themselves, as well as the historical appearance of the structures they built as headquarters for their adventures. And what adventures they had, exchanging Chicago’s city streets for Colorado’s mountain paths!

I wanted to get to know these women. Two of them, in particular, caught my eye: “Mr. and Mrs. Hayseed.” Who were these intrepid women venturing so far from home?

**T**he Blue Bird Club was founded by Jean Sherwood, a Chicago art teacher and philanthropist who came to Boulder for the first Texas-Colorado Chautauqua season in 1898. Sherwood and co-teacher Matilda Vanderpoel loved the beautiful natural scenery surrounding the emerging city of Boulder, hatching a plan to create a vacation home for self-supporting Chicago women, which meant predominantly

white women working as sales clerks, secretaries, nurses, and teachers. In 1906, Sherwood bought four lots at Twelfth Street and Park Avenue, now Baseline, near Chautauqua Park, and then founded the Holiday House Association to raise money, including through \$10 lifetime memberships, to build Blue Bird Cottage there.

Although some of the Chicago Art Institute men whom Sherwood approached for funding thought Colorado was *too far* for women to go on their own, Sherwood, Vanderpoel, and the women on the newly formed Holiday House board knew better. Blue Bird Cottage, a twelve-room, gabled stone rubble bungalow designed by Boulder architect Arthur E. Saunders, opened on June 15, 1911—one of the first houses built on the grassy hillside directly below Chautauqua Park. In July, stenographer Emma Tracy came for a vacation and stayed on as business manager until 1951. Forty-three women stayed that first summer at Blue Bird Cottage, named, according to Sherwood, for a mountain bluebird that made her nest in the bungalow’s porch during construction.

By 1935, the club’s twenty-fifth season, Blue Birds had made 5,000 visits by rail from Chicago to Boulder County to find the good health, rest, and “inspiration given by mountain altitudes and rarely beautiful scenery” promised in Blue Bird brochures. Some members even bought property in Boulder and Gold Hill, reviving that small town not only through real estate deals, but with money spent for local entertainment like horseback rides and ice cream cones in newly opened businesses. An anonymous writer in a 1941 bulletin remembers

spending “good old Chicago money” on “Coca-Cola, Seven Up, Dr Peppers, ice cream and Coor’s [*sic*], brewed from sparkling mountain waters” at the Gold Hill Café.

Part of my larger book project on the Blue Birds is mapping the collaborative women’s community they created, particularly in Gold Hill. The little photo album piqued my interest because it expressed the joy of single women vacationing with other women, a novel experience for its day. I also love a good historical mystery, especially one I sense has genealogical roots. Perhaps I could find out who Mr. and Mrs. Hayseed and other members were by researching the remaining Blue Bird club bulletins in the Boulder Carnegie Local History and Gold Hill Museum Special Artifact collections and tracing names through the genealogy database Ancestry.com.

When I first encountered the photo album, I asked Carnegie librarian Wendy Hall for any information the library had on its acquisition. According to the donation record, the album was given by Elizabeth Autry Jernigan of Mobile, Alabama, the year before. When Ms. Hall called the number on the form, Mrs. Jernigan’s son sadly informed her that his mother had died the previous Saturday. The only information he could tell us was that his mother purchased the album from an estate sale. Although the pages were worn and the binding was no longer intact, she had recognized the photographs’ historical value and sent the pieces to Boulder’s Carnegie Library for Local History. Her son said his mother liked to buy things she thought were of historical interest and donate them to libraries and museums. Unfortunately, it would be

impossible to trace from which estate the album had come, because the sale included items from many different estates. Although we had missed the chance to talk with Jernigan herself, I became even more determined to trace the provenance of her gift.

The first page of the album contains a photograph of a mountain goat in the foothills, a creature curious enough for any tourist to memorialize. The picture next to it is of the person the Carnegie record refers to as the “album creator,” the same young woman properly posed with a playful smile in “Mr. and Mrs. Hayseed.” Captioned “Ready for a Hike,” this photograph of the Blue Bird in her hiking suit about to drink from a stone water fountain was taken across the street from Blue Bird Cottage at the former trolley stop next to the beautiful Chautauqua Park, where members hiked and attended programs during their stay.

The same jaunty woman appears throughout the album. In “On one of our climbs,” she poses near boulders with three Blue Birds in cotton blouses and neckerchiefs, while in “Among the rocks,” she shelters in between what looks like the redstone slabs of Boulder’s distinctive Flatirons. In another, she points to a window of the newly purchased lodge in Gold Hill; the caption reads, “Pointing out Eugene Field’s room at Bluebird [*sic*] Lodge,” referring to the poet who wrote “Casey’s Table d’Hote” in honor of Gold Hill’s mining days during his 1879 stay at the former miner’s home-turned-tourist hotel. Or perhaps, with her face turned away from the camera, it is the other woman of the “Hayseed” pair who points?

Providing outdoor experiences for city women was essential to the Blue Bird vacation. Club president Jean Sherwood believed in Colorado’s climate as a curative for long hours of indoor work. In an August 8, 1927, *Christian Science Monitor* interview, she said, “I know of nothing better for a girl who comes out here tired than to give her a sandwich lunch and let her spend the day alone in the mountains...[P]arties of girls with a guide go out on three-day trips, sleeping under the stars at night. As for clothes, it’s just a knicker suit and a sport shirt.”

An October 1932, Blue Bird bulletin extolled the difference between the mountains and the city in a reminiscence of “Audubon, Arapahoe, Long’s, and Meeker, which dwarf and cheapen the showy towers of Michigan Avenue which dominate our working days . . . We remember the snap there was to living up there in contrast to







PHOTOS / Courtesy of Carnegie Library for Local History in Boulder.

our limp days in the Chicago heat.” According to a 1912 *La Follette's* article by “One of the Girls” (a.k.a. Eda Kunz, according to Sherwood’s note in a Blue Bird scrapbook in the Carnegie collection), “Day after day girls would come worn out and hopeless, too tired to do anything for a week but sleep and eat, and at the end of another week full of life and spirit, eager to climb every mountain within sight.” By the 1930s, the Blue Birds embraced what were called “sunbaths,” clothed, of course, in cotton slips, with Sherwood writing, “real ultraviolet rays make for rugged health” while “the Colorado sunshine never ceases its healing powers at all seasons.”

Railroad companies realized the potential for travel between Chicago and Boulder, eventually creating special Blue Bird excursions with devoted staff and fancy brochures that described the wonders of the Colorado mountains in elevated language such as this passage from the Burlington Railroad: “Here the sky has the rare view of an Italian sky; the pines blow balsam breath, heartening to weary bodies and minds.” The rate in 1921 was \$30 round trip.

But the crisp mountain air and wilderness immersion brought more than good health. It brought independence to city women in new ways. For perhaps the first time in their lives, they weren’t traveling with parents or brothers, nor did they have to be married to travel. Instead, they traveled with other women, some whom they met en route, some who were friends and sisters, and others who became life companions and partners. A Blue Bird slogan could have been “Come for the air, stay for the freedom.” As Chicago journalist Lena McCauley, herself a board member, wrote in her 1912 *Chicago Evening Post* column: “The feeling of having a summer home of your own helps independence.” It’s important to note that Colorado passed full suffrage in 1893, the first state to do so by voting for it (men voting for it, that is). Illinois did not pass even limited suffrage for another twenty years, getting full suffrage only with national ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920. For working women from Illinois, Colorado must have seemed a haven of progressive politics.

The Blue Birds embraced excursions for the sense of independence and adventure such expeditions fulfilled. In a 1922 talk, Sherwood called the area “A Rocky Mountain Playground.” A March 1931, Blue Bird bulletin proclaimed that “prowling around the mountains—helps digestion and sleep.” And prowled they did.

## THE FRESH AIR AND BEAUTIFUL SCENERY OF THE MOUNTAIN WEST PROVIDED THE PERFECT PLACE for single, working women's adventures.

Blue Bird excursions came in many packages: a ten-minute walk from Blue Bird Cottage brought hikers to surrounding canyons with whimsically named points of interest like the Witch's Cabin and Enchanted Mesa. Those with a taste for "roughing it" could camp a few miles away in the mountains, including al fresco dinners called "steak-frys."

Or they could go further afield, with day trips such as were noted in a 1916–17 brochure. For 80 cents, a Blue Bird could take a "tally-ho" horse-drawn coach ride twelve miles up Boulder Canyon to Boulder Falls for lunch and play. A dollar and a half bought a narrow-gauge trip on the Switzerland Trail railroad to Eldora, now a ski resort, or the other direction to tour deserted gold mines. In the earliest days, particularly hardy Blue Birds could make the three-day hiking and camping trip to Arapahoe Peak glacier, 14,000 feet high. (This trip closed to the public in the 1920s because the glacier supplied Boulder's water and the city feared hikers brought risk of contagion.) The photo album includes several scenic views of favorite sites such as Boulder Falls and Flagstaff Mountain, while a Blue Bird scrapbook in the Carnegie collection contains an ad for the Denver-Central City "circle trip" with the notes "You may reverse trip start from Boulder" and "This automobile trip is taken by all Bluebird [sic] girls" in Jean Sherwood's elderly handwriting.

For longer trips, the Blue Birds used the transportation services of Mabel MacLeay and Florence Molloy, two New York widows who started a Boulder taxi business in 1916. They

took the Blue Birds on all-day excursions to Colorado Springs, Denver, and Estes Park, about fifty miles away on dirt roads in winding canyons. The photo album follows one Estes trip in the Model T driven by Molloy ("The machine we drove in to Estes Park"), with a stop in the St. Vrain canyon on the way up and another along the river in Big Thompson Canyon on the way down. Another photograph shows a bustling Estes Park, the tourist town where cars could be hired to visit Rocky Mountain National Park, established just six years earlier.

From the beginning, Jean Sherwood and Matilda Vanderpoel knew the fresh air and beautiful scenery of the mountain West provided the perfect place for single, working women's adventures. A 1910 photo postcard in the Gold Hill Museum shows Sherwood and Vanderpoel on horseback visiting John and Mary Jane Cox, a Gold Hill mining couple from England who may have been related to Charles H. Cox who taught art with Sherwood and Vanderpoel at Chautauqua.

The mountain town must have impressed the women, for in 1919, when Blue Bird Cottage became too popular to accommodate all the summer guests, the club rented private cabins in Gold Hill until buying the old Wentworth Hotel for \$350 in August 1920. The 1921 album includes a picture of the new Blue Bird Lodge before the wide veranda porch and dormer windows for attic sleeping were added and the wood siding removed to showcase its original log structure. The plaque over the door reads "Blue Bird Lodge" and "Casey's

Table d'Hôte" in honor of Field's poem.

In 1926, a second lodge with dining hall, living room, and kitchen was built next door by Tim Walter, owner of the "thrilling ride" motor stage. The original lodge was expanded to twenty-eight rooms, providing accommodations for sixty Blue Birds a week, according to a June 11, 1926, news article in Boulder's *Daily Camera*. Other Blue Birds eventually purchased cabins in Gold Hill, including Matilda Vanderpoel, who in 1923 bought a former dry goods store-turned-cabin there with her sister-in-law, Marie, and in 1924 built her own artist studio on the same property.

In one photo of a group of Blue Birds enjoying the view from Gold Hill, I was particularly intrigued to find them holding hands with a young, African American child whose name is captioned elsewhere in the album as "Clifford." The 1920 Gold Hill census and the Gold Hill Museum contain no information about him or his family, but in a search of all Colorado census records for 1920 I found an almost-five-year-old boy named Clifford Seymour living in Pueblo. The 1923 Pueblo city directory lists Clifford's father, Matthew O. Seymour, as the President of Western Ideal Publishing Company; the 1930 census gives Seymour's occupation as publisher of a newspaper. Researching early Black Colorado newspapers revealed Seymour's *The Western Ideal*, published weekly from the late 1910s or early '20s through the 1960s. How did Clifford get from Pueblo to Gold Hill? Perhaps his father came to cover a story or to visit a friend or relative.



# TO BE FREE WITHIN NATURE AND UNFETTERED BY domestic responsibilities and restrictive gender roles

Whatever the reason, the Blue Birds in the photos seem to have taken Clifford under their collective wing. Many of them were teachers, after all, who no doubt would have welcomed the opportunity to befriend a small boy away from home.

It is also in Gold Hill that I found Mr. and Mrs. Hayseed, the same two women who appear together throughout the album. Their matching pants, leggings, and jackets tell us they were not previously strangers but rather were traveling together. Another photo shows them together at September Springs in Chautauqua's Bluebell Canyon. Were they friends? Intimate companions? Sisters? Or cousins? Dressed so closely alike, I reasoned they were more likely to be sisters than friends, and perhaps close enough in age to have grown up wearing matching outfits. It was also likely that the women were siblings because 1920s parents would more likely allow sisters to travel together from Chicago to Boulder than they would a daughter alone, figuring they would act as chaperones for each other.

If the women were sisters, then the name written below two photos could provide the key to solving the mystery of the album's ownership. In one, captioned "Ruth and I in Estes Park Big Thompson Canyon," the pair sit on rocks jutting into the Big Thompson River, with the bespeckled Ruth looking a little worried about the water's swift current, or perhaps squinting from the bright Colorado sun. We find her again sitting alone in a derelict train car, possibly at the old Red Rock quarry near the entrance to Boulder Canyon, in a photo simply

captioned "Ruth." And in a third picture, taken in the St. Vrain with a guide and other Blue Birds, their family resemblance is even more apparent.

With these clues in mind, I searched Blue Bird club bulletins for any mention of the name Ruth and found several, but a 1935 note in particular seemed promising. Here I found Ruth Zipperer in a list of returning members referred to as the "old guard." From there, I turned to Ancestry.com, filling in her name and "Chicago," with a guess at her age in 1921 as between eighteen and twenty-four years old.

To my delight, I found Ruth, born in October 1894, in a 1900, Peoria, Illinois, census record; with a sister named Dora born in September 1892, Dora became the likely creator of the photo album. Their father's occupation was listed as "minister gospel," perhaps of the liberal type that supported women's education. Their mother had no occupation listed, meaning she was what we now call a "stay-at-home mom." Both parents could read and write. The family also included three sons and the father's German mother, for whom Dora is named. In 1910, I found the family living in Chicago, where the father is a "clergyman." I was excited to see that one of the brothers worked in a picture frame shop. Perhaps photography was a family passion?

I knew for certain I had discovered the right sisters after I found a photo of Ruth in a 1916 yearbook of Chicago Normal College (which became Chicago State University in 1971). Here was the Ruth of the album photos with her Brunette hair,

round glasses, and inquisitive expression, as the poem next to her photo attests: "Ruth Zipperer is a serious maiden/who comes to school with arms book-laden." She was a member of the Deutsche Gesellschaft (German Club) and the Junior Glee Club, a singing group.

These two sisters, raised by a minister father, educated mother, and immigrant grandmother, along with three younger brothers, followed two different paths typical for Blue Birds of their era. When they came to Colorado in 1921, Ruth was already an elementary teacher who may have learned about the Blue Birds from other teachers. Dora was the elder of the sisters by two years; it is her album housed in the Carnegie. I was surprised to discover that Dora was not only married when she accompanied Ruth to Colorado, but had a six-month-old daughter. Perhaps, following the norms of the day, the Zipperer parents would only allow Ruth to make the trip if Dora travelled with her. Colorado was 1000 miles from Chicago and may have seemed like quite a wilderness for city mothers and fathers worried about young women traveling away from home for what was likely the first time. Or perhaps Dora needed some time away from a new husband and baby.

Further records reveal that Ruth never married, becoming first a teacher and, in 1942, assistant principal at Howland Elementary in Chicago. Blue Bird bulletins show her returning to Colorado in 1935, leading sing-alongs at club meetings in the 1940s and working on membership drives in the 1950s. Sister Dora raised two daughters.

ters who grew up to join the Nursing Corp during World War II and a son who served in the war and later moved to California. I have not yet determined how Dora's photo album found its way to an estate sale in Alabama, but, as with much family ephemera, it may have become separated from Zipperer descendents through neglect or the need to leave behind the artifacts of previous generations as families became more mobile.

As educated, financially independent "New Women" of the early twentieth century with life choices beyond the domestic sphere, members of the Blue Bird Club formed a women's community—a space for single, self-supporting women to experience the freedom of nature—away from the city, and away from the supervision of male employers, fathers, and brothers. Even in their earliest days, the Blue Birds established a unique place for women to be independent and, as a group, self-sufficient through collaborative living with other women. As journalist McCauley wrote in 1914, "The [Blue Bird] household is united as a family, the outside world and the trials of the working ranks being forgotten. . . ." To be free within nature and unfettered by domestic responsibilities and restrictive gender roles—perhaps these freedoms are what truly precipitated a Blue Bird's return to health.

After Jean Sherwood died at age ninety-two in 1938, the Blue Birds carried on. But as social restrictions on women loosened by the 1960s, women *could* travel alone and to pretty much anywhere they desired. Younger women, in particular, didn't feel the need for even collaborative chaperonage. As the long-time Blue Birds aged and traveled less, the economics of running a cottage and a lodge didn't pencil out.

In 1960, final Blue Bird president Mary Collopy explained how changes for women were affecting the organization: "In the '20s and '30s, girls wanted to travel in groups and their families wanted to know where they

were and what they were doing." Now the only ones who came were returnees: "The younger group just doesn't come any more."

In 1957, Blue Bird Cottage at Twelfth and Baseline was sold to a University of Colorado professor and his wife. Blue Birds continued to come to Boulder, staying in Chautauqua cabins and the lodge for a few summers more. In 1962, Blue Bird Lodge and dining hall were sold to a Gold Hill family, who turned the dining hall into the fine Gold Hill Inn still open today, with the original lodge only rented for special events. In 1966, Holiday House Association formally disbanded and disbursed their remaining assets to "do-good" nonprofit organizations.

But in the fifty-some years they operated, the Blue Bird Club brought thousands of working women to the Colorado wilderness, where they toured, hiked, rode, laughed, and lived alongside other women. In Colorado's clean air, dry climate, and inspiring vistas, they experienced the connection between health and nature, a prime imperative behind wilderness preservation today. As forerunners and shapers of what by the time of their demise was known as "women's liberation," they gained social and financial independence through group governance and freedom from patriarchal strictures. They raised their own money through investments and real estate, and they *spent* their own money, too, reviving Gold Hill in the process. Like the Gold Hill miners before them, they looked to the hills for treasure, but what the Blue Birds found was love of the mountains, their freedom, and each other.

I looked for Ruth again while cross-referencing 1960s property assessments with 1964 Blue Bird membership cards, the only extant list of members in the Carnegie collection. As I picked up the envelope for W–Z, I hoped I might find Ruth's name in the stack, but I didn't skip to the end to find out. The research-

er in me went card by card, just as I had for every other envelope. As I approached the end of the stack, I felt tingly. Was Ruth still a member forty-three years after she and Dora had come west together for a mountain vacation with other women?

And suddenly there she was on the last card of the bunch: Ruth Zipperer on Troy Street in Chicago. She had been a Blue Bird since 1921, the first summer the Blue Birds stayed in the Gold Hill lodge. She had returned for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary season and was still in the club in its final years, making her one of the longest-involved members, a true Blue Bird through and through who surely agreed with a 1935 bulletin's assertion that "Blue Bird means Home, and Friends, and always a welcome from those who make possible this great experiment of bringing new life and new hope to the tired women workers of Chicago."

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### Further Reading

Sources used in this essay are found in Boulder's Carnegie Library for Local History and the Gold Hill Museum. The photo album is property of the Carnegie Library for Local History. Other items in the Blue Bird collection on permanent loan to the CLLH are the property of the Boulder Historical Society and Museum of Boulder. The Woman's Bluebird Organization Collection at the Gold Hill Museum was designated as one of Colorado's Most Significant Artifacts in 2015.









BY BENJAMIN WONG BLONDER

# A Lynching in Gothic, Colorado?

**After coming across a newspaper notice of the lynching of a Chinese man in a long-forgotten mining camp, the author undertakes a deeply personal journey into Colorado history as he contemplates who really “belongs” in our narratives about the past—and our present.**

PHOTO / *Gothic, Colorado, featuring a prominent hotel amid homes and other businesses during the 1880s. History Colorado, PH.PROP.2922.*





PHOTO / Gothic today, seen from the same vantage the photographer had in the 1880s, is now a biological field station but retains much of its character as a mining town. Courtesy of the author.

*Author's Note: Much of the racialized terminology that appears in this article is now understood to be harmful and not appropriate for contemporary usage. I have retained such terms only when quoting historical sources, and use modern terms in my own writing. Likewise, other grammatical quirks in quoted sources reflect the original typography.*

**T**he first time I ever came to Gothic, Colorado, was in the autumn of 2009. Gothic is a ghost town, once a bustling city—a city larger in the 1880s than modern Crested Butte, situated eight miles south, is today. Mining—for wire silver, ruby silver, pyrite, galena, and gold—is what once brought people there, but now the townsite contains only some cabins and buildings that serve as the home of the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory. I made my way out there on the invitation of a friend, to carry equipment up a nearby mountain for her climate change experiment. My memories of the trip are of shimmering golden aspen forests, cows being driven down-valley, the silence of the mountains at noontime on a still day, and an early-season snowfall that dusted the high peaks the day after we finished our work. I remember Billy Barr (he

prefers not to capitalize his name), one of the Gothic's few year-round residents, closing up the visitor center for the winter, unplugging the freezers, and giving out the last of the summer's ice cream to the few scientists still working at the laboratory. I felt, like many visitors past and present, entranced by the magic of the place, and welcomed by people in the valley.

I've been back every year since that first trip. Gothic has become a place where my research group carries out long-term work monitoring alpine plants and tracing the causes of aspen forest dieback—and more importantly, a place deep with community, somewhere I belong. I admit that I have even, on occasion, felt that the mountains were mine.

But belonging requires a dividing line—a feeling that with those who do belong, some others cannot belong. This eventually brought me to a contemplation of today's community. Who is in—and who is out?

I first began to wonder about this a few years ago, while working out of an old mining cabin in Gothic. What would belonging have meant to that past Gothic community?

Photographs of Gothic at this time show a city full of saloons, prospectors, and hopes of riches. Historical accounts of mining town life are also full of hardship—

# As the years passed, I couldn't get the story of the hanging out of my mind. Who was this person, and what had he done?

snowslides, men frozen to death, mines collapsed, disputes ending in murders, and so on. The old town hall has a few bullet holes in it, which date from this era. This frontier-driven wildness of man and mountain alike pervades the histories, and evokes, at least in me, a spirit of opportunity and exploration. I had a hard time reconciling this spirit with the clear boundaries of that world. The people who did the mining, who kept the saloons, who owned the capital, whose stories appeared in these histories—they were all white, they were nearly all men, and they never doubted that the place belonged to them.

But who else was there, and did not belong? I started to confront this question when reading through Carl Leroy Haase's 1971 history, *Gothic, Colorado: City of Silver Wires*, one late autumn I spent living in Gothic. There is a small mention, meant to illustrate the frontier spirit, of a time when Gothic hanged a Chinese man. And that is it—the narrative continues on to other topics.

My life also went on, but as the years passed, I couldn't get the story of the hanging out of my mind. Who was this person, and what had he done? The event held some personal resonance for me. I am half Chinese myself on my mother's side. My family's stories and identities were familiar to me, but the only story of Chinese people in Gothic I had heard involved only a single person from a century prior, whose only relevant characteristic was being hanged—a man who did not merit being named, and who surely did not belong.

This spring in San Francisco, near where I live now, two Asian women, one 84 years old, the other 63, were stabbed. In prior weeks, other elderly Asian community members had been variously assaulted, robbed, or murdered, often at the hands of white assailants. That long-ago hanging in Gothic, the feeling of fear in my family in the present—the stories began to intersect. And so, I did some more research.

The hanging took place in Gothic on March 5, 1881, at least according to the March 11 edition of the weekly *Lake City Mining Register*. Several accounts of the event can be found in contemporary newspapers. The *Elk Mountain Pilot*, published in nearby Irwin, reported on March 19:

The mining towns of Colorado, as a general thing, are averse to John Chinaman and never allow him in the wealth producing districts when they can possibly avoid it. They look upon him as an enemy to the laborer and a bane upon society.

Not until a short time ago has the Elk Mountains been the recipient of a visit from the almond-eyed celestial. He came to Gothic under protest of the citizens and opened a "washee" house. As is usual, his cheap rates proved a serious detriment to the old time washer women of the town and caused them to become very indignant. An anti-Chinese organization was formed and the pig-tailed man ordered to leave the town instanter. This the Chinaman refused to do, and defied the organization to drive him out.

Saturday afternoon, about 4 o'clock, the organization appeared at John's house and once more requested him to "git." But John was still imperturbable and informed the committee that he was there for the season. Seeing that argument was useless the organization took the Chinaman out and hung him to the nearest tree.

Also on March 19, however, *The Elk Mountain Bonanza* (published weekly in Gothic) instead reported:

It seems a Chinaman, described as "a poor, dirty, half starved specimen of humanity" was found in Flagg's saloon in Gothic. It says when discovered "a number of cool determined men" assembled for consultation. They soon arranged their plans and made ready for the attack. At a bugle call 200 strong men were called together to attack this "half starved" human being... They then marched him down the street and hung him in a public place... Her citizens uttered no protest, with the single exception of the saloon keeper, to his credit, be it said, who objected to take a man under his roof to be hung.

But it seems the hanging may not have happened in either of those ways. A few weeks later, on March 26, the *Bonanza* indicated that it had originally published,

a column account of the hanging of a heathen Chinese ... [concluding] ... with the following: "Here is the picture of our first—it is hoped our last—Chinaman hanged—in effigy..."

and confirmed by the *Gunnison News*, which on the same date also noted:

The hanging of the Chinaman at Gothic created great fun. The ceremony was performed with great solemnity.



## They Hung Him.

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PHOTO / Excerpt from the *Elk Mountain Bonanza* of March 19, 1881.  
*History Colorado.*

ty, and a ball in the evening celebrated the event. The Chinaman was a man of straw.

So perhaps no one was murdered on March 5 that year. Regardless of whether it happened, some contemporary papers did speak out against it. The *Colorado Springs Gazette* noted the "Inhuman Outrage" in a column on March 19, writing:

It is foolish to get up this anti-Chinese feeling when their presence does not endanger any man's living and may be essential to our rapid growth. If there is any white man in the state who feels his inability to cope with the Chinaman in getting a living in Colorado he had better get out of the state and make room for the manlier, more industrious and stronger.

Somewhat less strongly, and closer in time to the supposed incident, the *Gunnison News* wrote on March 12:

We are no "Chinee lover" nor are we an advocate of cheap labor, but we have no hesitation in saying that, if the report was correct, the affair is a disgrace to Gothic and one which her fair-minded citizens will regret. A Chinaman's life is just as dear to him, as he has just as good a right to walk on God's earth and breathe God's air as any other living being...

But others felt that no harm had been done. Indeed, on March 26 the *Bonanza* itself said:

We confess our utter inability to see any thing inhuman in hanging a bundle of stuffed old clothes labeled "heathen Chinee."

And went on, in a separate editorial, to note:

We can't have the capital at Gothic and have in addition received a castigation from the *Gazette*. Gothic had now better cease its existence. But seriously this preaching up the Chinamen in opposite to every utterance by men who are as human as the *Gazette* and far better acquainted with the subject is injurious in every form...was the *Gazette* blind when it read the recital of the hanging? The *Bonanza* gave the facts of the hanging of a Chinaman in effigy, and had the *Gazette* printed our entire article its readers would have seen what would seem to have escaped the scrutiny of the *Gazette*, unless purposely omitted in order to fasten a crime upon our people of which they were in no sense guilty. Was that honest?

Gothic is as law abiding as Colorado Springs, and will not heedlessly take the life of even the most miserable specimens of humanity; but it has a right to make its emphatic expression of dislike for the Chinaman.

Whether a man was killed or not, a message was clearly sent. And the message was one that was heard. The *Bonanza* also ran a letter on March 19 from a woman in Denver:

SIR, I am a poor woman anxious to go somewhere to make a better living. Can I run a laundry in your town and do well? Have you any Chinamen? Please answer. Mrs. R.H.A.

ANSWER - You should do well here. There is no regular laundry, and if you can apply yourself to the business it will prove profitable. We have no Chinamen, and after the late expression of the people it is probable that no Chinaman will care to dwell here.

And on March 26 the *Pitkin Independent* wrote in strong support:

The anti-Chinese organization on Saturday last hanged a Chinaman at Gothic...Pitkin will soon have an opportunity of following suit.

In September the same year, an attempted lynching did take place in Gunnison—this one, certainly real. The *Gunnison Daily News-Democrat* reported that on September 22, police and sheriff's officers narrowly held off a mob intent on murdering a Chinese man identified as Mr. L. Sing. To provoke the mob, Sing had done nothing more than open

a laundry business, to the chagrin of those already doing the wash in Gunnison. The *News-Democrat* reported on the incident the following day:

It is not claimed that the Chinamen attempted to cut down prices, but the mere fact of his presuming to come here and start in business was enough.

Among those who were particularly opposed to this were Miss Kate Lowry, who keeps a laundry in the rear of Mr. Preston's store, and a colored woman named Harriet Jones, who was formerly employed in the Tabor House laundry. About nine o'clock these two women went to Sing's place and ordered him to quit. Words followed when, it is said, the Chinaman picked up a hatchet and ordered them to leave. Upon this Miss Lowrey picked up a wash-board and threatened to strike him. He then took a revolver from his pocket, and, so she claims, threatened to shoot her. She went out on the side walk and Sing followed her and fired the gun into the air. She then struck him over the head with a club which she had procured. The Chinaman fired three or four times in this way but always into the air, probably to attract the officers, and all the time the infuriated woman was giving him an unmerciful beating over the head and shoulders with the club. Finding that he was getting the worst of it Sing pointed the weapon at her and might have shot her had it not been snatched from his grasp by a man named Long who came up.

A crowd soon gathered and cries of "Lynch him" were heard, and for a few moments it certainly looked as if the Chinaman would be strung up then and there. The noise of the shots attracted the attention of Sheriff Clark and his deputies and the city police, and before the crowd had time to do anything, the officers were on the ground and took the man in charge. As quick as a flash revolvers were drawn on all sides. Nearly every man in the crowd had a weapon, and for a minute or two things looked decidedly squally. Several of the mob rushed forward to wrest the prisoner from the officers, but the latter drew their revolvers and ordered the crowd back. One man, said to be a gambler, had a pistol pointed at the Chinaman when it was snatched away from him by Sheriff Clark. The Chinaman was terribly frightened evidently thinking his time had come, but the officers kept the crowd back and retreated toward the jail where they arrived safely with the prisoner who was locked up.

The instigating women, along with another woman and her husband who also ran a laundry business and had come to Sing's laundry to "smash things generally," were only fined five dollars plus expenses (\$17 total, worth about \$460 today) by a local judge, with these fines paid in sympathy by members of the community. In contrast,

"The Chinaman will probably come up... on charges of carrying concealed weapons and discharging firearms," the *News-Democrat* concluded.

It is difficult to judge the past by modern standards, but it is hard now to see these events as anything besides hate crimes, painfully evocative of the lynchings used widely by whites against Blacks, especially in the post-Civil War South. Extrajudicial killings, carried out in public view, and reported favorably by the press, were and are a powerful form of social control and intimidation—a way to clearly delineate the line between the people who did belong, and those who did not.

I was tempted to imagine these stories as isolated incidents from the deep past. At the time, I wanted to leave them in the past, and by extension, to secure my own belonging in the present. I don't think that way any longer, because of the answers to three questions I ended up posing to myself. There was more to learn about the situation in Colorado in 1881.

First, why the conflict over laundry work and wages? The answer comes at the intersection of capitalism and empire. The British, with United States support, fought and won several wars in China in the nineteenth century, primarily seeking to close foreign trade deficits, expand influence, and import opium to sell to the Chinese population. The Second Opium War concluded with the forced signing of the Treaty of Tianjin in 1858. The United States gained trade opportunities and diplomatic presence in China, which were later used to extract further concessions in the Burlingame-Seward Treaty of 1868. Critically, this latter treaty allowed for free Chinese immigration to the United States.

The impetus for this immigration was economic development—the Chinese were seen as a source of inexpensive physical labor for the companies building the railroads that would cross the American continent. Decades later, with the construction work gone, other economic opportunity was scarce, and returning home was often unaffordable to those workers who survived the railroads. Washing clothes was low status work, typically done by women or Black people, with long hours and low profits—and so it was work suitable for the Chinese to take on. To reduce costs and with few other rental options, Chinese laundrymen typically lived in the backs of their shops—an arrangement that enabled the white community to avoid social interaction with the people behind the work, pushing the Chinese further into the category of people who did not belong.

Thus, the Chinese in laundry jobs remained perpetually foreign, socially unintegrated in a way wholly different from the experience of some other immigrant groups, bound up in low-wage jobs where accumulation of capital and prestige was neither economically realistic nor socially permissible. And with this economic and social marginalization came conflict—in many cases with other poor





PHOTO / *An author's illustration of the anti-Chinese riot that erupted in Denver on October 31, 1880, published in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper the following month. History Colorado, 89.451.1959*



people, like the white and Black women who attacked L. Sing in Gunnison. In some cases, this conflict was even encouraged by white capitalists who largely owned the major mining and railroad concerns and sought to minimize labor conflicts and displace anger over economic inequality into conflict among whites and non-whites. President Lyndon Johnson noted some decades later, "If you can convince the lowest white man he's better than the best colored man, he won't notice you're picking his pocket."

These 1881 stories come at a particular inflection point in American history. The year 1875 saw the signing of the Page Act, which essentially prevented the immigration of Chinese women, cutting many off from their families. The prior year, 1880, saw the signing of the Angell Treaty between the United States and China, which, "because of the constantly increasing immigration of Chinese laborers to the territory of the United States, and the embarrassments consequent upon such immigration," restricted Chinese immigration to arbitrarily low levels—effectively protecting the interests of white American workers. And the subsequent year, 1882, saw the signing of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited all Chinese immigration. This law was extended by the Geary Act in 1892, which forced Chinese to carry identity papers or be deported or do a year of hard labor, and then made permanent in 1902. These laws remained in force until the Magnuson Act of 1943. The historical arc of racism is long.

Second, were these hate crimes isolated moments of violence? They were not. More than two hundred anti-Chinese incidents have been documented in the late-nineteenth-century American West. One, in Denver in 1880, was especially widely reported, and may have provided inspiration for the attempted lynchings in Gothic and Gunnison the following year. The year 1880 saw the question of Chinese immigration play a major role in the presidential contest between James Garfield and Winfield Hancock. Allegations were made that Hancock's party was seeking to naturalize Chinese mine workers, and then to buy their votes for the presidential contest; other allegations were made that Garfield was planning to run on a strong pro-labor platform but then actually support the importation of Chinese "coolies" as cheap labor after the election to reward the capitalist and manufacturing elite that supported his candidacy. This question of Chinese immigration was central to the election, especially in Denver, where an anti-Chinese parade was organized days before the election. Tensions came to a head the following day, when a group of white men entered a Denver saloon, John's Place, and interrupted two Chinese men playing pool. According to the saloon keeper John Asmussen:

The men then commenced abusing the Chinamen, and I remonstrated with them, and they said they were as good as Chinamen, and they came up to the bar and got some beer. While they were drinking I advised the

Chinamen to go out of the house to prevent a row, and they went out at the back door. After a few minutes one of the white men went out at the back door and struck one of the Chinamen without provocation. Another one of the crowd called to one of the gang inside to "come on Charley, he has got him," and he picked up a piece of board and struck at the Chinese, which the Chinese defended against as well as they could, and tried to get away. This was the beginning of the riot.

Another Denver businessman, Mark Pomeroy, wrote:

At this time about 3,000 persons were assembled... about the houses occupied by the Chinese on Blake street; the houses were entirely surrounded by a surging, infuriated mob of brutal cowards, with clubs, stones, &c. They were breaking in windows and doors, cursing, howling, and yelling "Kill the Chinese! Kill the damned heathens! Burn the buildings! Give them hell! Run them out! Shoot them; hang them!" &c. I saw doors broken, saw men entering the houses with impromptu torches look for those who were inside hiding; saw clothes and other articles brought and thieves run away with them.

At one point, the mob went to a Chinese laundry owned by a man named Sing Lee. According to witness Nicholas Kendall, they:

commenced to breaking in the windows. A portion of the mob went into the house in the rear. They proceeded to break up everything and throw it out. There were about ten who went into the house. They caught one Chinaman [Look Young] and brought him out with a rope around his neck, and they were dragging him with the rope while he was on his back.

Look Young was eventually tortured, hung from a lamp post, beaten, and killed. By late that night, much of the Chinese community in Denver had been destroyed. A few men were brought forward on rioting charges; three men accused of murdering Look Young were ultimately acquitted in court when provided alibis by others. Diplomatic protests by Chinese businessmen were ignored by the city. The Chinese ambassador Chen Lanbin lodged a protest to the United States, but was ultimately dismissed by Secretary of State William Evarts, who claimed that the matter was outside of federal jurisdiction, that "many of the ringleaders" had been arrested, and that he had done what "the principles of international law and the usages of national comity demand."

A year and half later the Exclusion Act was passed. On the same day the legislation was adopted, May 6, 1882, a mob of fifty people in Rico, Colorado, dragged the town's Chinese population from their homes, assaulted them, and took their possessions. Three years later, in



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1885, another mob in Rock Springs, Wyoming, saw white miners kill twenty-eight Chinese residents and drive out hundreds more. In 1902, the year the Exclusion Act was extended, another mob ran the Chinese community out of Silverton, Colorado; two restaurant proprietors were “roughly used, ropes being placed around their necks and...led out of town.” Many other similar stories in other mountain towns can be found in the archives. That is, the events in Gothic and Gunnison were not at all notable for their scope of racialized violence. Local racial violence and racist immigration policy went hand-in-hand.

Third, what forces created these nineteenth-century frontier towns that brought together white people and Chinese men? The question is most directly tied up in the expansion of railroads and the prospects of wealth associated with the expansion of mining. But these stories cannot be told without exploring how these lands became available for railroads and mining to begin with. The land around Gothic and Gunnison was part of the Spanish Viceroyalty of New Spain until 1821, when it became part of newly independent Mexico. In 1836 it narrowly missed becoming part of the Republic of Texas, which was later annexed by the United States in 1845, triggering the Mexican-American War. Within two years, United States forces led punitive expeditions that reached Mexico City, and by 1848 the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war—ceding what is now western Colorado to the United States. Colorado was a territory by 1861 and a state by 1876.

These western Colorado frontier towns were not empty places, open for settlement and economic exploitation. They were traditional lands of the Utes, whose Uncompahgre (Tabeguache) band would have used the land that is now Gothic. Pressure from settlers and mining interests paralleling the creation of the Colorado territory led to the development of an agency system that nominally provided rations in exchange for movement of Utes to settlements, but that often instead drove a forced dependence on wage labor

and interaction with capitalist systems, and the erosion of traditional livelihoods. As the agricultural potential of eastern Colorado became more apparent, the Utes were forced to sign a series of disadvantageous treaties. One signed in 1868 at Conejos, with Ouray and other Ute leaders present, provided a single reservation for all seven Ute bands in the largely unsettled western part of Colorado. The eastern boundary of the reservation was set to “the meridian of longitude 107° west from Greenwich,” which put the future town site of Gothic, but not most of the mineral wealth of its mountains, just a kilometer east of the reservation.

By 1873, when the mining potential of the western part of the state had become apparent (especially in the San Juans and the Gunnison country), the federal government negotiated the signing of the Brunot Agreement, which was approved by Congress in 1874. The terms were agreed under the alternative scenario of these lands being taken instead by force and without compensation, so the final terms were very unfavorable to the Utes. Almost four million acres of land were taken in exchange for limited cash payments and hunting rights. The location of Gunnison, being more than “ten miles north of the point where said line intersects the thirty-eighth parallel of north latitude,” was excluded from this agreement, meaning the area remained nominally part of the reservation, into which non-Utes were not allowed to trespass.

But there was little to stop the incursions of prospectors. Mineral deposits were found all around Gothic in 1879, and mines began appearing, legally or not. The same year, calls for the removal of all Utes from Colorado grew, spurred in part by the rhetoric of Frederick Pitkin, who was elected Colorado governor in 1879, campaigning on a platform of “The Utes Must Go!”, as well as the military hostilities involving the White River Indian Agency, which culminated in 1879 with violence at Meeker. By 1880, the Ute Removal Act was signed in Washington DC, signifying that “the confederated bands of the Utes also agree and

promise to use their best endeavors with their people to... cede to the United States all the territory of the present Ute Reservation in Colorado.” Another twelve million acres of land were ceded, and the White River and Uncompahgre Utes were forcibly removed to reservations out of the state. The removal was completed by late 1881, under forced march supported by the United States Army. So, the Gothic of 1879 was founded on stolen land, and the Gothic of 1881 continued only by virtue of military force.

It is no wonder that in the months prior to the removal of the Utes, in the same months surrounding the hanging at Gothic, that violence was in the air—and that the targets of this violence intersected both the Chinese laborer and the Utes. The *Gothic Miner*, the local newspaper, wrote on April 2, just a month after the hanging, that “Every preparation is making by the Utes to begin their hellish work of murder...Let us sweep the rascals from the reservation...Down with the Utes,...and the Chinamen.”

My historical explorations ended here.

**T**his chapter of violence, I feel, provides a foundation for the community we see today. The mountains mostly belong to the United States Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management; the valleys are in private hands, or with large corporations whose capital and ownership are often far away. In the visitor center in Gothic, the museums in Crested Butte and Gunnison, there is little to be seen or heard of the Utes, the Chinese immigrants, or the other marginalized groups whose stories are also here. These silences make it very clear who belongs, and who does not.

Learning these stories, I also began to re-examine whether I myself felt I belonged in this community. All the Chinese side of my family comes from farming villages near Toisan in the southern Guangdong Province. Many people from this region came to the United States as railroad laborers after immigration was opened to them. Perhaps an ancestor of mine found work in Colorado, or was witness to the events in Gothic or Gunnison. Our family history is not clear enough to say.

I do know that some of my family had immigrated to the United States by the late nineteenth century, and that by the 1930s my great-grandfather, Ben Lim, was a citizen in business among the cotton fields outside Tucson, Arizona. I know my grandfather, Edward Wong, was an aircraft mechanic in the US Army’s 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force Flying Tigers in the China-Burma-India Theater during the Second World War, and was introduced to my grandmother Lana Lim, Ben Lim’s daughter, after the war ended. They both became citizens and moved to Sacramento, California, where he had a corner grocery store, and my grandmother worked in a fruit cannery. And I know that my great-uncle, William Lee Sr., and his wife, Mary Wong Lee, operated a Chinese laundry in Washington, DC, in the 1940s and ’50s,

and that her father, my other great-grandfather, discouraged others from following the same path, because of the constant hard work with little to show for it all.

We are all American now, and most of us have moved up the economic ladder. My mother was able to attend college, and I now spend my days at a university studying plants, instead of the hard life of growing them. I can read only the most basic Chinese, mix freely in white institutions and communities, and have seen far more of Gothic than I have of my family’s ancestral villages. So I felt for a while that I had crossed to the other side, to belonging. Now I am not so sure.

What is the price of belonging, if it is founded on exploitation, discrimination, and violence? What should we make of a region that until recently had an “Asian” restaurant whose logo was a slanty-eyed man, and whose population in the 2010 census included fewer than sixty

non-white people out of almost 1,500, of which fewer than ten were Native American? Who is paying the price of others’ belonging? It is not possible to answer these questions honestly without this historical context. Learning is not easy. The details of these stories are hidden away on microfilm and in government archives, and the broader stories, while in public view, are not widely taught. But we do not always learn our history, as I certainly had not, least of all in school. Even my own family’s stories, and the immigration context behind them, I only have begun to learn as an adult. The silence around some of these histories is explanation enough for who belongs, and who does not.

If we have any hope of building a better future, we must remember, and learn from, our past—all of it.

**Benjamin Wong Blonder** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management at the University of California, Berkeley, and principal investigator at the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory.

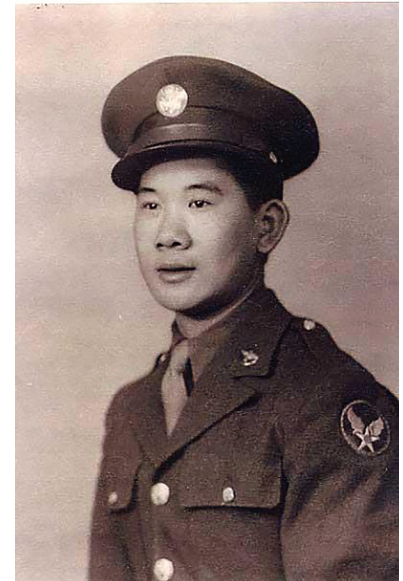


PHOTO / Edward Wong, the author’s grandfather, during World War II. Courtesy of the author.



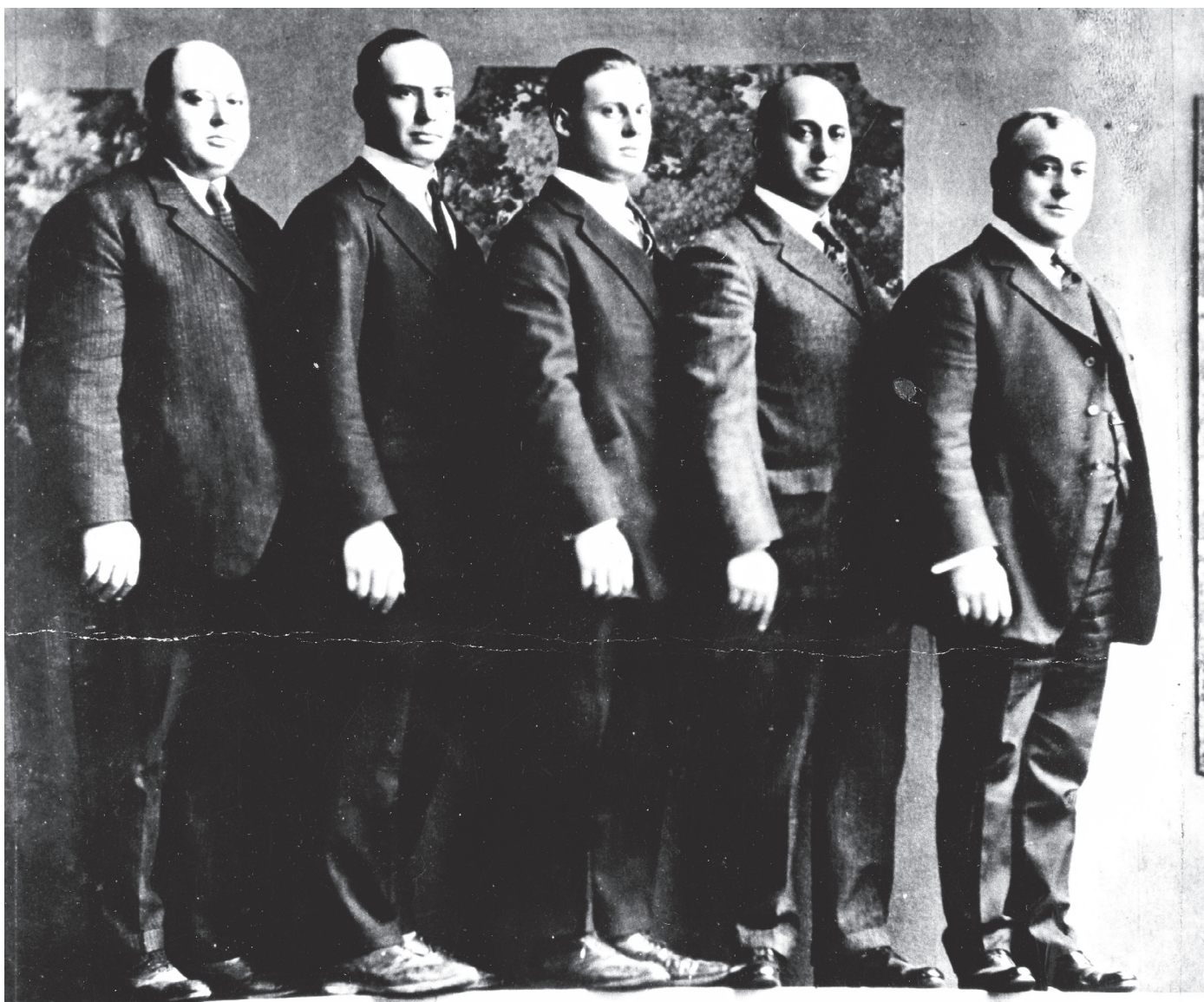


PHOTO / *The Shwayder Brothers—Mark, Maurice, Benjamin, Jesse, and Solomon—standing on a Samsonite Suitcase to demonstrate its strong construction, around 1910. Courtesy of the Beck Archives, Special Collections, University of Denver Libraries.*

# PIONEER, INDIAN, COWBOY, RABBI

BY ARIEL SCHNEE

## Jewish Summer Camping in Colorado

## **Generations of Jewish Coloradans have spent summer days at Camp Shwayder and the JCC Ranch Camp.**

### **Colorado's mountains have provided the ideal setting for distinctly western Jewish American experiences.**

#### **Ariel Schnee examines this lesser-known side of Jewish identity in Colorado.**

**I**n the early 2000s, I spent a memorable few weeks at Camp Shwayder in Colorado's Rocky Mountains. I started the camp a deeply skeptical and self-identified loner, more interested in books than bonding. But after spending my days hiking, zip lining, and meeting other Jewish kids from around the state, by the end of camp I had fun and even (somewhat grudgingly) absorbed a little of the legendary "Shwayder Magic."

My adventure in the woods was a small link in a longstanding Jewish American relationship with organized camping. Jewish organized camping arose from many of the same historical trends as American camping at large: progressivism, anxiety about rapid urbanization, and belief in the patriotic, moral, and spiritual benefits of American wilderness. Over time, it assimilated many of the idioms of American organized camping while adapting them to meet changing Jewish cultural needs. As historian Jenna Weissman-Joselit points out, this ongoing dialogue between cultures made Jewish camping a hybrid cultural phenomenon. However, Jewish camps in Colorado understood their cultural roots as not only Jewish American, but also western. At camp, Jews engaged with Colorado's mountain environments, as well as with western history, myth, and iconography, creating distinctly western Jewish American experiences and identities.

Jewish organized camping began on the East Coast in the late nineteenth century. Not coincidentally,

these decades were also the heydays of the early Progressive era: the time of settlement houses, the Chautauqua and "fresh air" movements, and a wealth of other pushes for social reform that engaged issues from public health to temperance. It was also a high point for American immigration, and recent immigrants were the focus of a great deal of Progressive attention. Within American Jewish communities, wealthier, better-established, often Western European Jewish Progressives pursued a range of efforts to support and assimilate largely Eastern European Jewish immigrants who had recently arrived in the United States. Organized camping was a part of that agenda.

Jewish progressives recognized organized camping as a powerful engine for cultural change. American Progressives, Jewish and not, associated camping with education, self-improvement, and the development of American cultural values. Begun in 1893 by the Jewish Working Girls' Vacation Society of New York, Camp Lehman was likely the first organized Jewish camp. It offered young Jewish women a chance to escape the city's tenements and factories and take inexpensive trips to the seaside. Jewish summer camps, developed by charitable and communal organizations as well as by private businesses, proliferated throughout New York state, New Jersey, Maine, and elsewhere along the East Coast.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, Jewish camps had

begun pushing west, popping up across the American Midwest. Meanwhile, Jewish people were migrating westward as well. The Galveston Movement, a Jewish resettlement effort active between 1907–1914, transported around 10,000 Jewish immigrants directly from Europe to the American West. For these immigrants, Galveston, Texas was the gateway to the western frontier. The seemingly random choice of destination was, in fact, calculated; in the urban centers of the East, more established Jewish communities began to be concerned that large numbers of conspicuously foreign Jewish newcomers might imperil their own paths to American assimilation and acceptance. Paradoxically, the Jewish-led Galveston Movement both critiqued and reflected many of the anti-Semitic tropes typically levied against male Jewish immigrants at the time—namely that Jewish men were weak, unhealthy, lazy, and effeminate. To counteract immigrants' perceived effeminacy, the movement recruited only healthy, skilled, "vigorous" Jewish men under forty and their families and placed them onto the American frontier—the symbolic wellspring of American masculinity—to claim and prove immigrant Jews' rugged physicality through the American ritual of western conquest.

Despite these efforts to recast Jewish immigrants into rough and ready frontiersmen, in Colorado, most Jews settled in urban areas. The road to acceptance was rocky. Even within established Jewish populations, such as that in Denver, Jews were openly harassed, threatened, baited, attacked, beaten with iron bars, and even lynched by their fellow citizens. Often, there was little justice for crimes committed against Jews. Jews also faced obstacles that limited their access to the state's mountain environments. Many organized mountain camps and dude ranches had Christian religious leanings or informally discriminated against Jews and were inaccessible. In addition, uncertainty





PHOTO / Campers at Camp Shwayder in the 1970s or '80s. Courtesy of the Beck Archives, Special Collections, University of Denver Libraries.

or a lack of access to Kosher food, the threat of rejection or humiliation at the hands of rural populations, and, by 1921, the risk of violence at the hands of Colorado's viciously anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant Ku Klux Klan, all circumscribed Jews' freedom to explore their state like other Coloradans. Organized Jewish camping, by contrast, offered a reliable, safe way for Colorado Jews to engage with natural environments.

As Colorado's Jews weathered discrimination at home, internationally they grappled with the trauma of World War II and the Holocaust. For American Jews, the global upheavals of the 1930s and 1940s shook Jewish culture and tradition to its core, and they changed Jewish camping as well. Postwar, the trauma of genocide lent renewed urgency to longstanding Jewish cultural movements like Zionism,

Yiddishism, and Hebraism (the preservation of the Yiddish and Hebrew languages, respectively) and deepened concerns about assimilation, Jewish American identity, and the education of Jewish youth. As Jewish camping developed in Colorado in the late 1940s, it reflected these evolutions in Jewish American intellectual and political life.

Founded in 1949, Camp Shwayder was the first organized Jewish camp in Colorado and the first Reform Jewish camp in the United States. The camp was Maurice B. Shwayder and Ruth Shwayder's legacy. Maurice's brother, Jesse Shwayder, was the charismatic leader and founder of the luggage brand Samsonite, previously known as the Shwayder Trunk Manufacturing Company. The five brothers and family patriarch, Isaac Shwayder, were all involved in

the business—one of the company's iconic early advertisements featured the brothers standing on one of their trunks with the tagline "Strong enough to stand on." The Shwayder family was active in the Denver Jewish community and were well-known local philanthropists. Following Maurice's death in 1948, Ruth donated the family's 242-acre fishing retreat in the shadow of Mount Evans to Denver's Reform Jewish synagogue, Temple Emanuel. Shwayder's gift illuminated the changes in Jewish camping that had taken place since the 1880s. Rather than being geared towards the acculturation and education of young adults, Camp Shwayder was a children's camp. There, Jewish youth connected to their Judaism, one another, and to the camp's mountain environment. Camp activities featured organized sports, a smatter-





PHOTO / Campers at Camp Shwayder in the 1980s or '90s. Courtesy of the Beck Archives, Special Collections, University of Denver Libraries.

ing of Jewish education and prayer, hiking, and, by the 1970s and 1980s, more strenuous activities including backpacking, overnight camping trips, and mountain ascents.

As a Reform Jewish camp, Camp Shwayder was never intended to meet Colorado's entire Jewish community's need for access to organized camping. It did not observe Kosher dietary restrictions and did not maintain a Kosher kitchen, which prevented children from orthodox and conservative households from attending camp. It also reflected the class dynamics of the larger Jewish community in Denver. The Reform Jewish community tended to be wealthier, and the conservative and orthodox Jewish communities less so. As a result, another kind of Jewish camping emerged to fill the gap.

JCC Ranch Camp, supported by the Staenberg-Loup Jewish Community Center (JCC Denver), primarily served orthodox and conservative Jewish populations. Located on 175 acres of the Black Forest near Elbert, Colorado, the camp developed on the site of a historic ranch. Known both as The Ten Sleep Ranch and the Hubbard Ranch, the land was once owned by Ralph Hubbard, a well-known historical enthusiast and western collector. The land had been a working cattle ranch since at least 1916. After Hubbard sold the ranch, it passed through several hands and, according to camp lore, shifted from working ranch to dude or guest ranch. In 1952, JCC Denver acquired the land for \$15,000, as well as several of the historic log and stone buildings that had comprised the Hubbard Ranch's original facilities. Money

raised from a wide range of Jewish foundations, businesses, and private donors went toward outfitting the camp, building cabins, and improving facilities for its first season in 1953.

At Ranch Camp, the connection between Judaism and Western Americana was apparent—the camp even sold a grazing lease to N.W. Cook of Elbert, Colorado for thirty head of cattle. Described by one of the camp's founders, JCC Executive Director Arnold J. Auerbach, as “an unusual project which combines an American western ranching program with Jewish content and a Kosher kitchen,” the camp consciously blended western experiences with Jewish education and culture. Originally, the camp's founders envisioned campers participating in many of the activities involved in operating a working ranch—growing hay, branding and



**While Jewish organized camping originated as a driving force for American cultural assimilation, after World War II the purpose of Jewish camping shifted to the cultivation of Jewish youth.**



rounding up cattle, and caring for the ranch's horses. While only some of these goals were actually realized, many of the activities at Ranch Camp would have been right at home at any other Colorado dude ranch, including horseback riding, pack trips, square dancing, hikes, cook outs, and camp-fire sing-a-longs.

The "Jewish content" of the camp focused on creating a sense of cultural (rather than exclusively religious) Jewish identity among campers and a spiritual Jewish connection to land that recognized the divine in the natural world. This approach connected campers with specific Jewish figures associated with nature and animals, such as the Jewish mystic,

Bal Shem Tov. The camp's unique environment also created new kinds of Jewish experiences, such as outdoor religious meditation conducted as the ranch's horses grazed nearby. Other traditions emerged that were unique to Ranch Camp itself. At the end of a session, campers were instructed to rub dirt on their jeans, and never wash them until they returned the next summer, keeping them connected to camp by literally carrying the land home with them. Formal instruction, prayer, shared experiences, and informal rituals were the building blocks of campers' western Jewish American identity.

Inescapable from Jews' embrace of their own western identity was the

West's Native American history, both imagined and real. The entanglement between organized camping and Native history was longstanding, but peaked in the 1940s and 1950s. At the time, a broad American fascination with all things western expressed itself at camps nationwide through the appropriation of Native folklore, language, clothing, art and design, tradition, and iconography with varying levels of accuracy and respect—even extending to encouraging campers to imagine themselves as Native Americans or "play Indian" in redface. These tropes were present at Jewish camps as well.

At the JCC Ranch Camp, the land's Native history was impossible

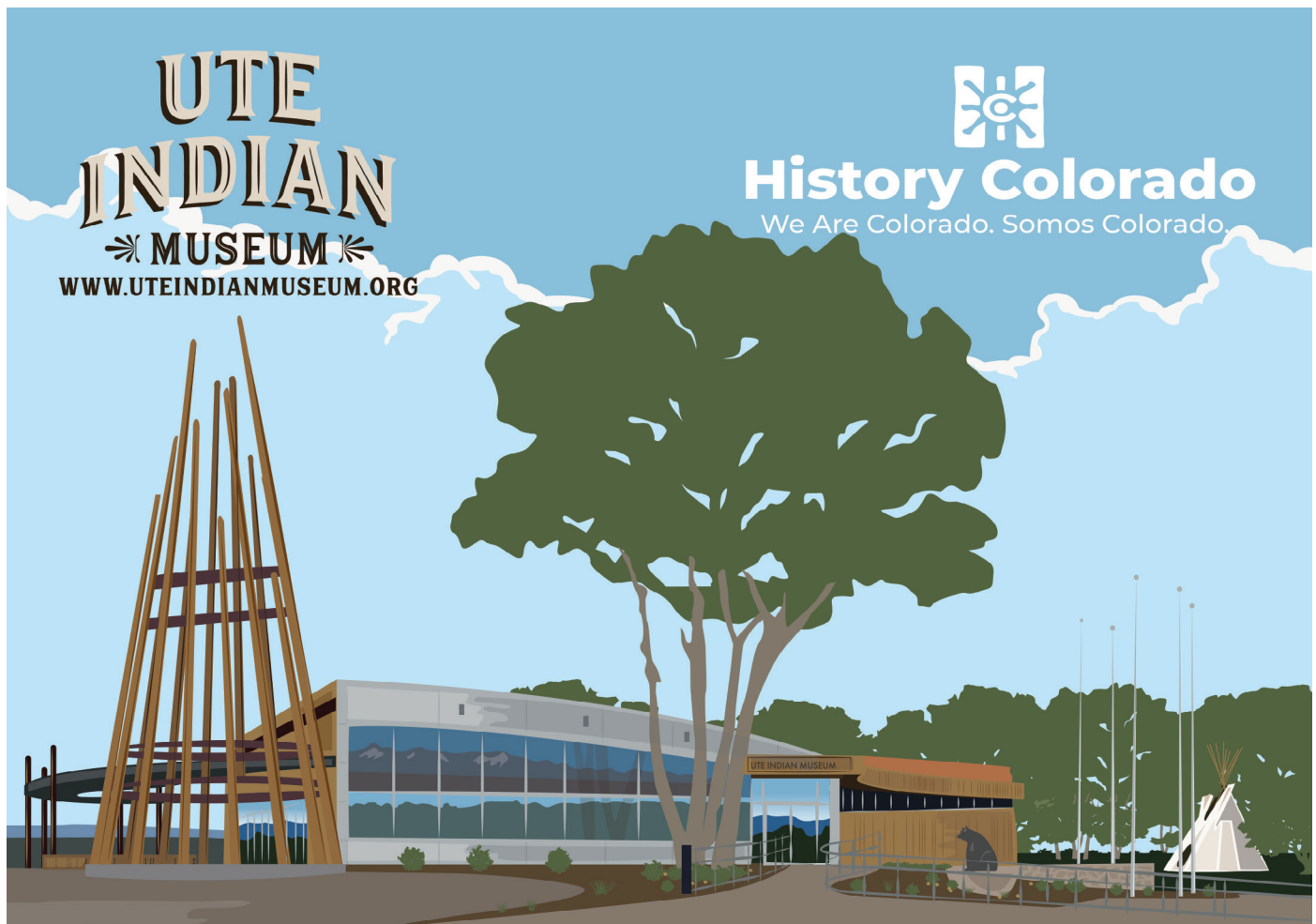
to ignore. Ralph Hubbard claimed that the land had a longstanding connection to Native American history, and artifacts created by Indigenous people had been discovered on the camp's land. Even as it celebrated western ranch life, the camp's approach to educating campers about its longer history was relatively sophisticated. According to Dr. Julie Kramer, one of the camp's former directors, by the 1960s the camp's curriculum included critical engagement with Native American history, including dispelling myths about Native peoples, differentiating among different tribes associated with the area, and developing relationships with Native people who had connections to the land the camp occupied. While it is difficult to say why the camp's leadership chose to acknowledge its cultural and historical paradoxes, it is possible that their choice reflected western Jewish

Americans' own complicated experiences of oppression, intergenerational trauma, cultural loss, displacement, and genocide.

While Jewish organized camping originated as a driving force for American cultural assimilation, after World War II the purpose of Jewish camping shifted to the cultivation of Jewish youth. Under the post-war model, Jewish youth developed interpersonal connections and skills intended to make them secure and confident in their Jewish American cultural identity. In Colorado, Jewish organized camps reflected that change, but they also took on a distinctly western flavor, integrating hiking, overnight camping trips, backpacking, horseback riding, and other activities. The camp experience at Camp Shwayder and JCC Ranch Camp alike relied on dependable, permanent access to western landscapes

that provided both recreational opportunities and a sense of place—rugged mountain terrain, deep pine forests, and the open sweep of Colorado's ranchlands. For campers (as well as staff and camp alumni), these places are imbued with community memory, but the land is also connected to Colorado's wider history. While western Jews did not, in general, turn out to be the rough and tumble pioneers the recruiters of the Galveston Movement had envisioned, ultimately, they still became Westerners.

**ARIEL SCHNEE** is the Program Manager of the Public Lands History Center at Colorado State University and holds a Master's degree in Public History. Her research addresses the complex histories of American public lands and the ways in which they intersect with race and gender.





# 5

## Items COLORADO'S WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE Leaders Probably Didn't Want You to Read

BY SHAUN BOYD

**The campaign for the women's vote in Colorado was one of letters. Organizers traded views and information regularly in private letters. Many of those letters are now in History Colorado's collection, offering us a behind-the-scenes look at the campaign—even a few things they might not have wished to preserve for posterity.**

**O**ne of the benefits of digging in the archives is that you get to read other people's mail.

Emails and social media posts have become our primary way to communicate with the world. People in the past were just as snarky, shy, and judgmental as we are—they just communicated by slower means. Political and business leaders were as concerned that their “real” views would get out, and spin doctors and media savvy people were called in when something went wrong. When this happens in today's world, the Twitterverse blows up and careers are made or ruined in the space of 280 characters. In the pre-internet world of letters, a cutting remark was as likely to result in hurt feelings, but unless someone leaked it to the newspapers, it was generally just a personal beef between enemies.

Ellis Meredith, an up-and-coming reporter, author, and the Corresponding Secretary of the Colorado Equal Suffrage Association during the 1893 Colorado women's suffrage campaign, shared her papers with History Colorado in 1925. She gathered and curated these letters so that future generations could understand the campaign and the events surrounding it. She just didn't know how similar they would still be to our present political online discussions.

You will notice in some of the entries below that the letters are addressed to Mrs. Stansbury. In her professional

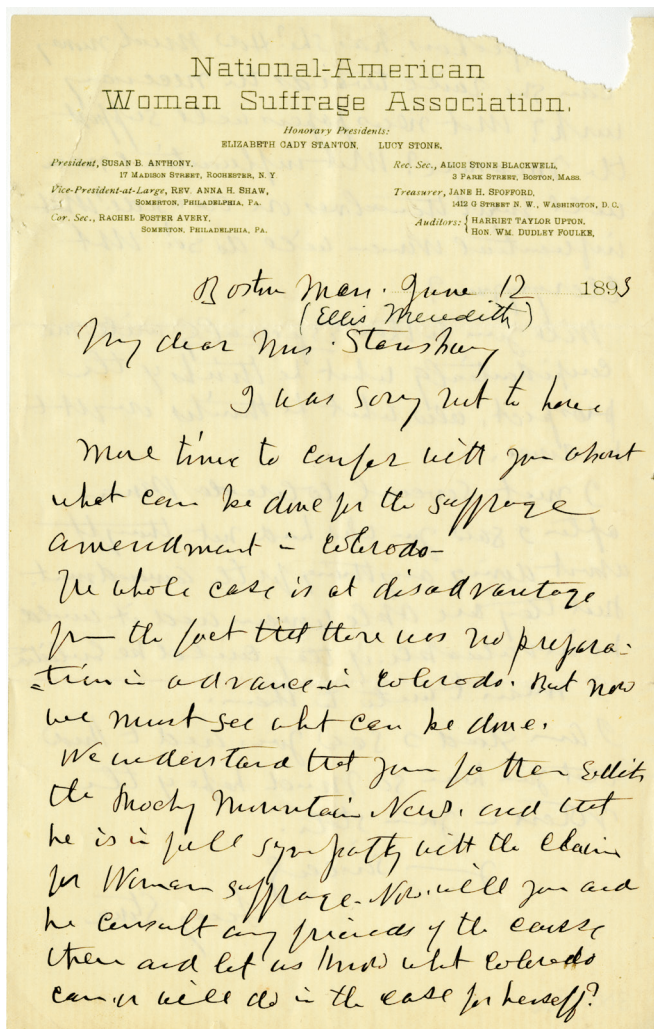
writing life she was always Ellis Meredith, even though in her personal life she may have used her married name. Yet another example of women's shifting identities in a political and social world.

You can read each of the full letters below by downloading the pdf from the bottom of the catalog record.

### Politics Has Always Been About Who You Know (Especially Your Dad)

June 12, 1893 - Lucy Stone to Ellis Meredith

When Colorado suffragists started working toward putting women's voting rights on the November 1893 ballot they contacted some national leaders for help. One of them, Lucy Stone, wrote back in June of 1893. The letter to Ellis Meredith was probably written after Stone and Meredith met at the World's Fair in Chicago. This event seemed to be the kickoff to the campaign, as organizers had been working behind the scenes through their social networks but didn't want to alert the anti-suffrage forces, particularly the brewing industry, to their plans. The breweries were often opposed to women's suffrage because of many ties to the Women's Christian Temperance Union—something Ellis and the Colorado suffragists were wary of, but also willing to use.



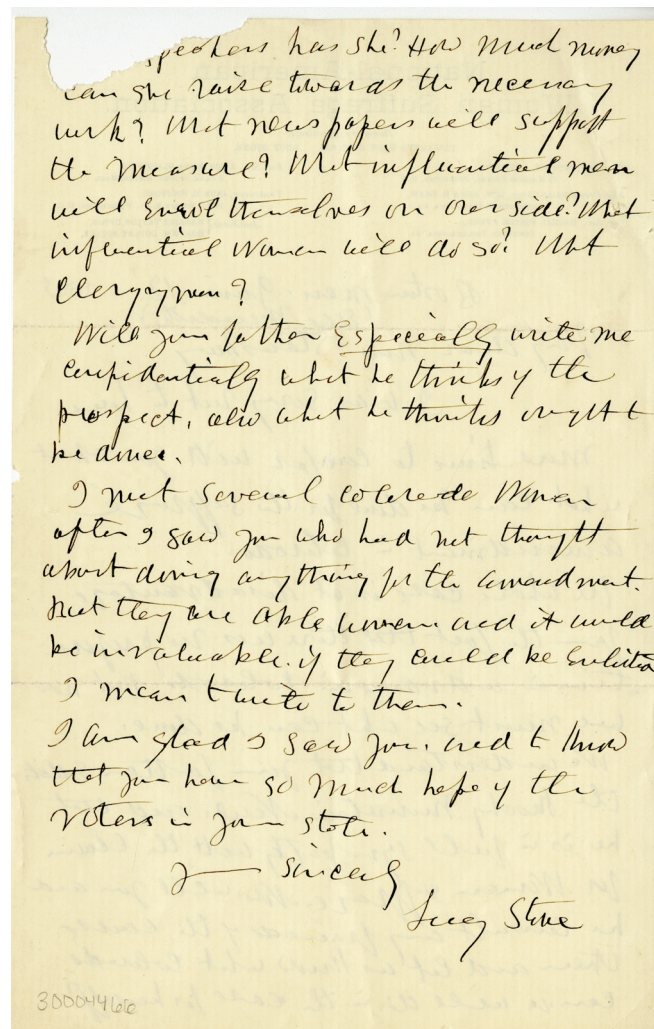
After assessing that the campaign was at a disadvantage because the groundwork had not been laid in advance, Stone asked Ellis if her father had any advice for the campaign because he was the editor of the *Rocky Mountain News*, one of the leading newspapers in Colorado. Stone also said that there were some women who she met that were not yet participating in the suffrage campaign, but that she would write to them to ask for their help.

Here's an excerpt of the transcript:

*Boston Mass. June 12 1895 - My dear Mrs. Stansbury, I was sorry not to have more time to confer with you about what [should] be done for the suffrage amendment in Colorado. The whole case is at a disadvantage from the fact that there was no preparation in advance in Colorado. But now we must see what can be done. We understand that your father edits the Rocky Mountain News, and that he is in full sympathy with the cause for Woman suffrage. [-] will you and he consult any friends of the cause then and let us know what Colorado can and will do in the case for herself?"...*

*Will your father especially write me confidentially what he thinks of the prospect, also what he thinks ought to be done.*

*I am glad I saw you... [and] that you have so much hope of the voters in your state. Yours Sincerely, Lucy Stone*



## "Probably you will think us Maniacs" (Snark Never Goes Out of Style)

June 30, 1893 - Ellis Meredith to Carrie Chapman Catt

The political campaign was still being laid out in mid-1893, when Ellis Meredith wrote a lengthy letter to Carrie Chapman Catt of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), a frank, no-holds-barred assessment of the campaign and who the suffragists could rely upon.

The letter covers many other topics, but has been extracted here for clarity. Obviously this sort of strategy document would have been a gold mine to opponents if published in the anti-suffrage newspapers at the time. Among the zingers in this letter informing NAWSA of the situation in Colorado are takedowns of local politicians:

*I know in writing to us Mr. Blackwell mentioned a lawyer in this city who would be such a great help to us, strong, suffragist, etc. Now we know the man to be a contemptible ward politician; if he is a suffragist it is the first good thing I ever heard of him. I do hope he is not one of your advisors.*



# The Durango Democrat

Durango, Colo. July 12 1893.

Mrs L M Stansbury  
Denver Colo

Dear Mrs S.

Replying to yours will say  
that I shall start nothing but a weekly at present  
and continue, at least try to, in a modest easy  
way until England lets loose of the "American  
Eagle". Hence will now require a reporter - As to  
Women Suffrage I am frank to admit that if  
your sex were as well endowed with intelligence  
as yourself I would cheerfully aid in the work  
of securing for you the ballot - but as my  
experience in observing the class of females who  
exercise the right of Suffrage during School elections  
has had a demoralizing tendency I will be very  
certain to vote against the proposition - Trusting that  
you are well & with kindest regards to yourself  
Father & the corpulent freak on the ground  
floor

I am Respy  
D F Day



We wish we knew what lawyer Ellis was referring to, but it's lost to time. Meredith was careful not to reveal the name of the lawyer she was slandering (perhaps aware that private words in print have a habit of becoming public one day), but she was less cagey when it came to her dismissal of two speakers from Kansas whom Catt had suggested. Mary Elizabeth Lease and Annie L. Diggs had risen to political prominence in a campaign that led to the formation of the People's Party in 1890. Lease was known to urge Kansas farmers to "raise less corn and more hell," and Diggs was a harsh critic of capitalism involved at that time in a scheme to promote a new utopian society on Colorado's Western Slope (which became today's town of Nucla). Meredith doesn't mince words about the pair:

*Neither Mrs. Lease nor Mrs. Diggs would do here, I am told; they are ultra, and say very ill-advised things.*

She also commented on the relationship between the suffrage association and the Women's Christian Temperance Union, noting that while they shared the goal of winning the women's vote, it was not a fully aligned partnership. Perhaps looking forward to toasting the campaign's success with an unprohibited beverage, Meredith noted:

*We have already asked help from the W.C.T.U. and they have promised to make suffrage the dominant issue, but prefer to work by themselves; it is better that they should, than that they should try to ring in prohibition on us.*

She laid out what would become the dominant strategy based on the lessons learned from the campaign in 1877:

*Now let me explain as well as I can what we mean by a "quiet campaign": Do you remember Mrs. Nicholls? She was a wheel-horse in 76-77; so was Judge Bromwell and some other people that we have consulted; they say work among your friends, get votes for it; many who would vote against it will never discover it on their ballots unless you tell them.*

### **"If Your Sex Were As Well Endowed With Intelligence as Yourself" (Be Mindful of What You Put in Print and How it Might Look in Hindsight)**

July 12, 1893 - D.F. Day to Ellis Meredith

Ellis and the other members of the suffrage association embarked on a letter-writing campaign to local newspapers throughout the state. Knowing how poorly the 1877 campaign had gone in southern Colorado, they especially wanted support from those newspapers. Unfortunately D.F. Day, the editor of the *Durango Democrat* said he would not support the cause. He explained, "my experience in observing the class of females who exercise the right of

suffrage during school elections has had a demoralizing tendency," in the nineteenth-century equivalent of a resurfaced tweet that the author will now never outlive. Ellis knew Day, probably because of his connection to the Colorado newspaper publishers. He ends the letter in an informal way, as he clearly knew Ellis personally, yet leaves no clue as to the identity of the "corpulent freak" at the *Rocky Mountain News* he so fondly mentions.

*"The Durango Democrat \ Durango, Colo July 12 1893 Mrs. LM Stansbury Denver [---] Dear Mrs. S. Replying to yours will say that I shall start nothing but a weekly at present and continue, at least try, in a modest easy way...As to women suffrage I am frank to admit that if your sex were as well endowed with intelligence as yourself I would cheerfully aid in the work of securing for you the ballot - but as my experience in observing the class of females who exercise the right of suffrage during school elections has had a demoralizing tendency I will be very certain to vote against the proposition. Trusting you are well and with kindest regards to yourself, Father and the corpulent freak on the ground floor. I am Respectfully DF Day*



### **Who's Left Out (Exclusion Isn't a Good Look)**

The women's suffrage movement had a complicated history when it comes to race. Colorado in some ways bucked the national trend, with a Black woman named Elizabeth Ensley as the Treasurer of the Colorado Equal Suffrage Association during the 1893 campaign.

Ten years later, however, in 1903 a dinner celebration was held to commemorate the victory. Several board members from 1893 were presenting. Mrs. Ensley, who by



*May furnish*

C O P Y

THE INTERSTATE TRUST COMPANY

DENVER, COLORADO

April 8, 1916

Mr. James L. Laidlaw,  
26 Broadway,  
New York City, N. Y.

Dear Sir:

Replying to yours of the 5th inst. in regard to Mr. John B. Maling who is now travelling throughout the State of Iowa in the interest of the Anti-Woman Suffrage movement, will say:

It would require a very long letter to explain to you the trying conditions Colorado has passed through during the last ten or twelve years, politically, industrially and otherwise. We have had the most unjust campaign of untruthful, sensational, uncomplimentary advertising from such men as Judge Ben Lindsey, George Creel and certain women from this state, that any state has had to endure in my recollection. I have lived in Colorado the most of my life, viz., since 1879. For a number of years I was the Editor of a Daily Associated press newspaper at Victor, Colorado. I advocated Woman Suffrage and still believe that in equity and justice, women, especially those who pay taxes, are certainly entitled to the ballot. I do not believe Woman Suffrage helps any state onto a higher level of political life. This, however, does not force the conclusion that women are not entitled to vote. They are no worse than the men when it comes to voting, but they are no better. Conditions are practically the same with Woman Suffrage as they are without it. I am not opposed, therefore, to Woman Suffrage, and have never assisted Mr. Maling nor any one else in an Anti-Woman Suffrage campaign. I did give him a personal letter some two years ago, before he entered the Anti-Woman Suffrage fight, addressed "To Whom It May Concern", in which I stated that Mr. Maling was well acquainted with public affairs in this State and qualified to give the actual facts concerning business and industrial conditions here. He also had letters of this nature from several other prominent business men. He still has these letters so far as I know.

He has not been backed by the bankers of Denver in a financial way. No one that I know of has advanced him a dollar for expenses, wages or salary since he left this city.

As I understand it the line of argument used by Mr. Maling is something like this. If the statements made by Ben Lindsey, George Creel and others are true to the effect that Colorado is politically debauched; that its judges, from the Supreme Court down, are willing tools of political and corporation managers; that official life in this state is the most corrupt of that in any city on this continent; that laboring people are misused and abused and imposed upon in every possible way by capital; that owing to these conditions, Colorado is in a deplorable situation, without freedom, without justice, without decency, and Woman Suffrage having been in operation in this State for twenty-three years

*5301 H5JAC005*



this point was the State Organizer of the Colorado Colored Women's Clubs and who was serving on their national board, was left off the speaker's list.

It turns out white female politicians weren't all that different than men. They knew which way the wind was blowing and were willing to use racism and bigotry to elevate their causes. Ensley's exclusion may have been explicitly because of her race, but it may also have been because of who else was coming to power in Denver at the time.

Minnie Love, who was on the board of the Denver Suffrage League in 1893, had a much more limited role in the suffrage campaign but was given prominent placement at the 1903 event alongside Denver's mayor and a couple of former governors. By this point, Love was one of the founders of the project that became Children's Hospital, as well as the State Industrial School for Girls and the Florence Chittenden Home. She would go on to be the head of the Women's Auxiliary of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s.

We don't know if it was overt racism on behalf of the rest of the organizing committee, or merely an omission, but it's not a good look to our present eyes.

### **"I Would Very Much Prefer That You Did Not Publish My Views" (Don't Count on Things in Writing Staying Confidential)**

Letters on suffrage from Colorado bankers, 1916.

Because Colorado was an early adopter of suffrage, as the issue continued to grow throughout the country the state became the subject of scrutiny as to how women had impacted politics. A minor scandal was caused by one J.B. Mailing, who claimed to be associated with the business community of Denver. He blamed Colorado's labor strife, including the Ludlow Massacre, on women voters. Suffragists on the national scale reacted quickly, soliciting letters of support from various "leading men of Denver." Among the seventeen pages of supporting letters, some specifically say not to publish them. In the nineteenth-century equivalent of "please delete this text," Hugh J. Alexander of the First National Bank of Denver said that he didn't know of Mr. Mailing well, and that:

*There is quite a division of opinion here in our state as to whether this movement has been for the interests of the state or not. My personal impressions are that it had been a benefit, but I know of some pretty level headed people who take the opposite view of it. I would very much prefer that you did not publish my views in this matter.*

He wasn't alone, but his carefully held political views in support of suffrage were still helpful to the national association, as they knew they had another friend in Colorado.

**SHAUN BOYD** is the Curator of Archives at History Colorado.





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