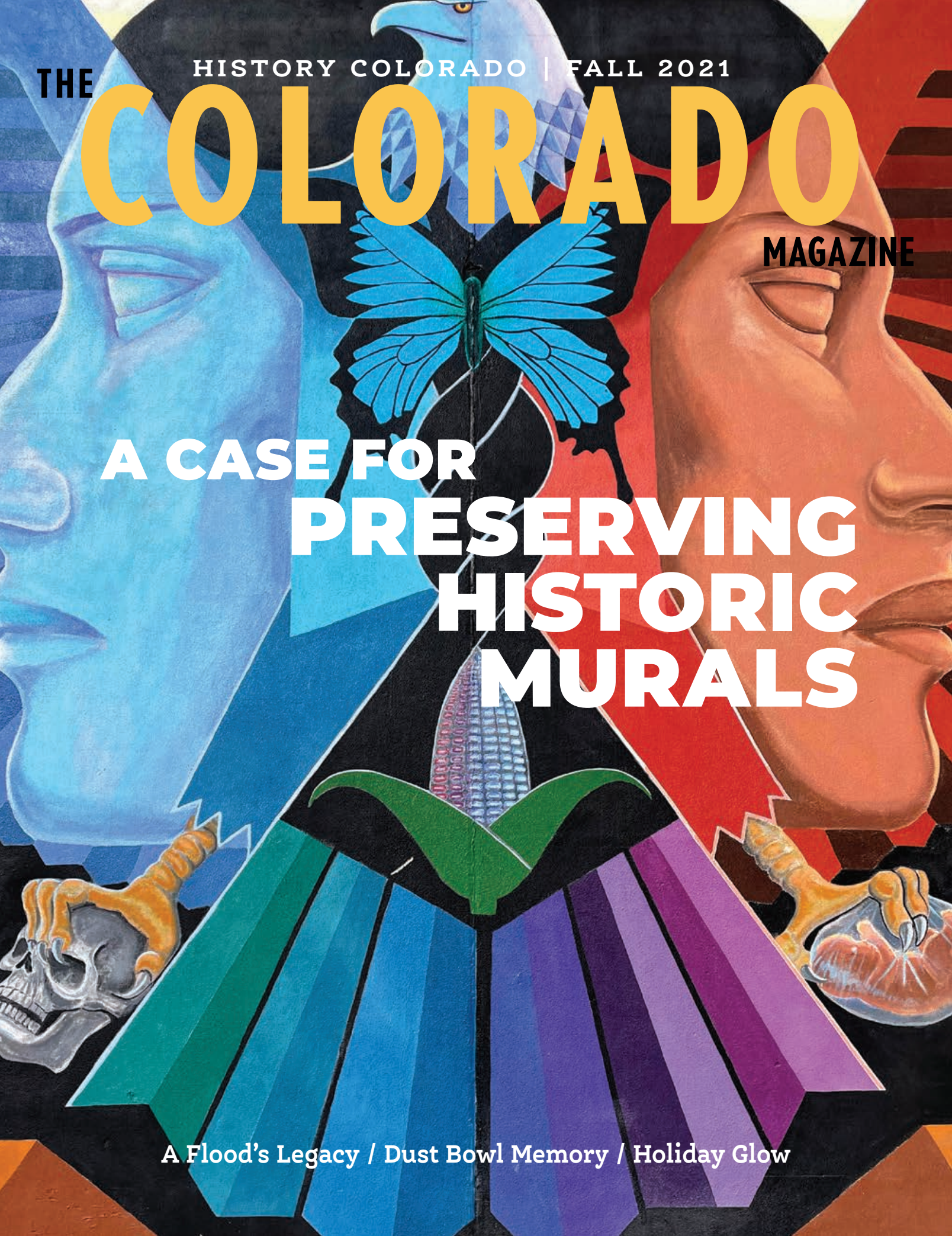
HISTORY COLORADO | FALL 2021

THE COLORADO MAGAZINE



A CASE FOR PRESERVING HISTORIC MURALS

A Flood's Legacy / Dust Bowl Memory / Holiday Glow

PLACE AND SPACE

Geography doesn't just live on paper or Google maps. It is threaded into our identities as generational residents, or newcomers, or nomadic travelers. Place and space define our destinies and our histories. And I often contemplate the words of collaborator Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk (Ute Mountain Ute), "Our history is written on the land," which became the title of our exhibit created in consultation with the three Ute Tribes. (You can experience exhibitions about the history and living culture of the Ute people at our Ute Indian Museum in Montrose or History Colorado Center in Denver.).

Place-based storytelling is one of the special ways that History Colorado serves this state. We have museums across Colorado—in both historic and modern structures—that are tied to community and geography. These museums are beautifully able to articulate that the where of the story is as important as the who, what, and when.

To illustrate this point, we invite you to experience two new *Borderlands of Southern Colorado* stories, which are both situated in historic buildings in places defined by mountains. Trinidad History Museum unveiled a new exhibit on the Santa Fe Trail, marking the 200th anniversary of the heightened era of trade and movement triggered by Mexican independence. The exhibit tells an expansive history—among chocolate-colored adobe walls and along this historic trail—that visitors have said "completely changed what we thought we knew about the Santa Fe Trail."

Fort Garland Museum commissioned an installation titled *Unsilenced*, by nationally-recognized artist jetsonarama (Chip Thomas), that uses historic evidence presented in a 1850s adobe structure to tell the underknown history of Indigenous captivity in this part of the world. You experience this history installation within the soft silence of a thick mudded building that sits in the shadow of Mount Blanca and feels essential to this story that is beginning to be told.

History Colorado continues to value and curate experiences deeply rooted in memory, historic evidence, and authentic places—Colorado storytelling tied directly to the places that we love.

Dawn DiPrince
Executive Director

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

THE COLORADO MAGAZINE

The Colorado Magazine (ISSN 2765-8856) contains articles of broad general and educational interest that link the present to the past, and is distributed quarterly to History Colorado members, to libraries, and to institutions of higher learning. Manuscripts must be documented when submitted, and originals are retained in the Publications office (publications@state.co.us). An Author's Guide is available at HistoryColorado.org. History Colorado disclaims responsibility for statements of fact or of opinion made by contributors. | Postage paid at Denver, Colorado

THE COLORADO MAGAZINE

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Brandon Livingston performs the Navajo Gourd Dance with the Dineh Tah' Navajo Dancers at the Fort Garland Museum and Cultural Center at an event on September 30 to reflect on *Unsilenced: Indigenous Enslavement in Southern Colorado*. The dance is a blessing acknowledging the vital elements of fire and water in creating and sustaining life. *Kim Marquez*.

ON THE COVER / *A detail of Emanuel Martínez's* La Alma, *La Alma Recreation Center, 1978. History Colorado*

THE FORUM

We love hearing from you

Blue Skies

The cover of our Summer 2021 featured a 1961 watercolor painting by J.P. Britton of the old air control tower at Denver's airport.

Totally in love with the cover of the new @HistoryColorado magazine. When I was a kid seeing the tower come into view from the station wagon window meant that Dad was coming home and I was one happy lad.
—Mark Cavanaugh, via Twitter

Take Me Home

In October, we celebrated the release anniversary for John Denver's "Rhymes & Reasons" album by asking for your favorite track. The title song was a popular response, as was "Leaving on a Jet Plant" and "Catch Another Butterfly."

So grateful I got to see him many times at Red Rocks and a few other places. "Rocky Mountain High" is one of my all time favorite songs.
—@beersgayle on Instagram

"Guess He'd Rather Be In Colorado." I was in Vietnam when I first heard it and I have been a John Denver fan ever since.
—@mr_doug_e on Instagram

The one that unintentionally guided me to Denver.
—@siss292 on Instagram

KKK Ledgers

This summer, after digitizing Denver's KKK membership ledgers from the 1920s, History Colorado mapped the data they contained, creating a visual representation of the Klan's widespread presence throughout Denver.

Phenomenal. @HistoryColorado spent time mapping out the historic KKK ledgers in Denver. You can see where members lived all over the city, down to your street.
—Jeremy Jojola, 9News Investigative Reporter, via Twitter

Colorado's Civil War Monument

When the "On Guard" monument was toppled in front of the State Capitol during the summer of 2020, History Colorado Center created a space to view the sculpture and continue community discussions about what monuments mean. Now the installation is informing similar discussions around the country.

Your interpretive and design choices focused on soliciting audience contemplation and feedback are impressive. As we contemplate how to interpret similarly complicated artifacts in our state, having your experience to learn from is invaluable.
—Amy Bartow-Melia, Executive Director, South Carolina State Museum

The Power of Words and Horses

What do you call the iconic sculpture outside Denver International Airport?

It is shocking and more than a little disappointing that @historycolorado would characterize the 2006–2008 sculpture *Mustang* by artist Luis Jimenez (1940–2006) by its derogatory epithet "Blucifer" in reference to its public programming *The Power of Horses*. For a heritage memory organization to reproach both the artist and the power of the artwork does a serious disservice to artists, the public, and heritage organizations everywhere. Jimenez's *Mustang* is a defiant statement about the marginalization of working people (and horses) of color, their often overlooked essential role in public services, and an affirmation of the strength, beauty and necessity of wildness and character, even in industrialized settings. Cultural and civic memory organizations such as yours must be held to account for trivializing the monumental power of artists and their work to force us to see beyond conventional labels. Regardless of your blithe intent, your thoughtless appropriation of Jimenez's work, *Mustang*, is discouraging and shameful.
—@dpkinsantafe, via Instagram

History Colorado replies:
We are grateful for (and happy to share here) the reminder that Luis Jimenez's iconic sculpture out at DIA is properly titled Mustang*, and we appreciate you sharing your thoughts on the sculpture's meaning. However, we don't believe it is disrespectful in this case to also use its common nickname. Jimenez's work has been embraced by the people of Denver as "Blucifer," a symbol of the city that inspires strong reactions. It's a sign of that embrace that it has earned a popular nickname, and its popularity is why we decided to use that nickname in the context of our next exhibition,* The Power of Horses*, to remind visitors how deeply horses have shaped and continue to influence our collective*

culture and identity. How many other pieces of public art get nicknames and are common conversation topics? It seems like a pretty high honor to us.

Five Points Plus

Reactions to our Museum of Memory exhibition on Denver's Five Points Neighborhood this summer at the History Colorado Center.

This is such a terrific exhibit, even if it does leave out Eulipions Theater and Sugar Ray's Burgers and Bones.
—Nuri Heckler, via Twitter

I have lived in Colorado since 1980 and attended public school where Colorado history was on the curriculum every year. I was never aware that Hattie McDaniel was rooted in Colorado until this exhibit.
—Crissy Deen, via Facebook

History Colorado replies:
Thank you, Nuri! We could never get all the places that made Five Points so special for so many people over the years into a single exhibit, but we're glad you enjoyed it nonetheless. We hope you will join us for future Museum of Memory projects to share more. Chrissy, you can learn more about Hattie McDaniel's Colorado roots and her impact on Hollywood from Charlene Porter's article, "Hattie McDaniel: World Icon, Colorado Unknown," in our Spring 2017 issue.

Building Denver

Many of you are letting us know you're enjoying our exhibition on how Denver became the city we know today.

The @HistoryColorado Center in Denver had an exhibit this summer on the history of Denver, and they did a good job of documenting how the city changed. Lots of historical photos and maps, and coverage of NIMBYism, redlining, and how the Native Americans were pushed out.
—Aziz, via Twitter

History Colorado replies:
We're glad you enjoyed Building Denver, Aziz. Good news: It wasn't just this summer. We still have it! It will be on view through next summer.

Bold Women. Change History.

Our popular speaker series is back.

"Began #HispanicHeritageMonth with a bang! Attended last night's Bold Women. Change History. event at History Colorado. Linda Alvarado delivered an inspirational speech on how our past is an asset to lead the change needed in the world."
—Elizabeth Suárez, via Twitter

THE COLORADO MAGAZINE

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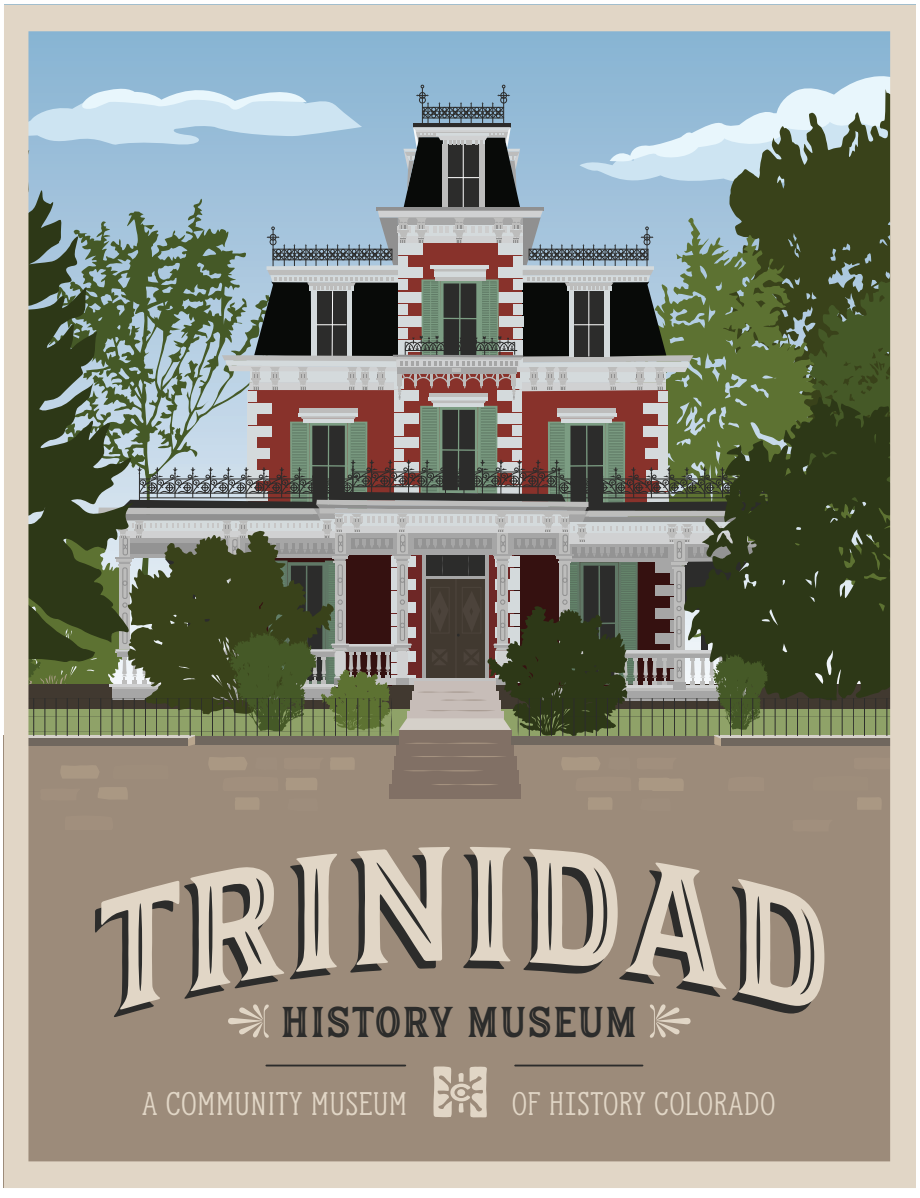


HISTORY ON HORSEBACK

We owe a lot to horses. Our equine friends have carried our loads, acted as companions and healers, and have become an indelible part of our identity. We even use their impressive strength to measure power. And now we are celebrating these incredible animals and all they mean to us in a new exhibition. *The Power of Horses* at the History Colorado Center in Denver examines the history of these animals, their impact on the West, Black cowboys and cowgirls, and (of course) the National Western Stock Show. The exhibit—which includes images like this one—will be open through May 8, 2022, so saddle up and pay us a visit.

PHOTO / *A Southern Ute man and his horse, around 1900 or 1910. Photo by Horace S. Poley. History Colorado, 95.200.118*

BY WILLIAM WEI

BRIGHT SPOT

In this excerpt from *Becoming Colorado: The Centennial State in 100 Objects*, historian William Wei shines a light on the popular holiday decoration.

Denver has its share of urban legends. One story handed down for more than a century is that Denver is the place where the custom of putting up outdoor holiday light displays, especially stringing Christmas lights on outdoor trees, got started. According to this often-told tale, in 1914, David Dwight "D. D." Sturgeon, a local electrician, wanted to bring some Christmas cheer to his bedridden son. He conceived the idea of connecting lightbulbs that had been dipped in red and green paint to a strand of electrical wire and then wrapping the wire around a pine tree outside his son's window. The colorful display soon attracted Sturgeon's neighbors and many other people who came from afar to see this novelty themselves.

This is a marvelous story, one that resonates with the popular holiday film *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). It is easy to imagine the beloved actor Jimmy Stewart portraying "D. D." Sturgeon, coming up with the idea, and then clambering up the pine tree to literally and figuratively brighten his sick son's day. Without intending to, Stewart/Sturgeon starts a new holiday tradition that is embellished over the years and practiced by countless others around the world.

The story was popularized after local city boosters such as *Denver Post* reporter Pinky Wayne began to promote Sturgeon's tree as the country's first illuminated outdoor Christmas tree. As the popularity of outdoor holiday lights took off nationally, Sturgeon was dubbed the "Father of Yule Lighting." His thoughtful act inspired others across the country to emulate him, and soon, dark winter nights in Denver and across the country were lit up with electric Christmas decorations, spreading holiday cheer. Things did not stop there. According to local historian Rosemary Fetter, the widespread use of outdoor Christmas lights gave rise to flashing electric billboards and even today's neon signs.

During the Great Depression, manufacturers came out with comparatively inexpensive all-purpose Christmas lights such as the boxed set pictured here. The "Outdoor Christmas Lights by Noma" could be used for decorating trees inside and outside the home. This particular set consists of a string of seven multicolor bulbs that can be connected to five similar strands of lightbulbs. Before then, ordinary lights as well as Christmas lights for indoor use were expensive. In 1900, a box of eight bulbs cost twelve dollars, which was a month's pay for many people. At those prices, the celebration of Christmas with colored lights was an upper-class privilege rather than a popular practice.

As the cost of Christmas lights dropped, outdoor displays spread. By 1919, Denver Civic Center's regular lights were replaced with festive holiday lights for the season. By the 1920s, the city was aglow with so many holiday lights that it proclaimed itself the "Christmas Capital of the World." By 1938, Denver's city and county buildings were being decorated with Christmas lights. Since then, Denver has marked the

beginning of the holiday season with an annual Grand Illumination celebration, when the downtown area is illuminated with 600,000 lights. In 1975, the city upped the wattage by adding an annual Parade of Lights to its holiday festivities, complete with marching bands and ornate floats.

Traditionally, the city's Christmas lights remain on until the end of the annual National Western Stock Show in January. With its buildings and parks festooned with LED magic, Denver has earned the well-deserved reputation of a city that knows how to light up the winter holidays.

You can see this object—and ninety-nine others that helped shape the Centennial State—in *Zoom In* at the History Colorado Center in Denver. Copies of *Becoming Colorado* are available at Bookshop.org/shop/HistoryColorado.

PHOTO / *A set of "Outdoor Christmas Lights by Noma" from the 1930s. Aaron Marcus*

"A LASTING DISGRACE"

Exposing Abuse at the Fort Lewis Indian School

In 1903, *The Denver Post* investigative journalist Polly Pry exposed abuses at the Fort Lewis Indian School that shocked the nation. Her reporting brought to light the mistreatment of Native children that was all too common at the country's boarding schools.

The Fort Lewis Indian School in southern Colorado was one of many boarding schools that proliferated throughout the United States, especially in the West, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These schools' purpose was to assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream American culture, and eradicate their own tribal culture, language, and identity. Indigenous children were removed from their families, often by coercion, force, or without the consent of their parents. Immersed in EuroAmerican culture, forced to cut their hair and dress in American-styled uniforms, Native children were educated in speaking, reading, and writing in English, schooled in standard EuroAmerican subjects, and trained in vocational trades.

When the Fort Lewis Indian School opened in 1892 in Hesperus (the original location was nearly twenty miles west from where present-day Fort Lewis College stands), it housed five Navajo, sixteen Southern Ute, and twenty-six Mescalero Apache students, according to Majel Boxer, chair and associate professor of Native American and Indigenous studies at Fort Lewis College. The highest enrollment was in 1899 with approximately 313 students. In 1909, there were forty students in attendance and it officially closed in 1911.

While the school was open, inspectors were sent to look into alleged misconduct on several occasions, but came up short. That's when investigative journalist Polly Pry stepped in. In 1903, with the help of a whistleblower, she exposed the school's troubling history. Her reports, shared below, include mention of sexual assault of children that readers may find upsetting.

"Polly Pry Lays Bare the Evils of the Fort Lewis Indian School...Employees Tell the Story of Outrages" was the headline that confronted readers of *The Denver Post* on March 21, 1903. The *Post*'s own investigative reporter Polly Pry—Leonel Ross Campbell by birth and the *Post*'s first female reporter—broke the news in a full-page exposé. The article began with a letter written to the *Post* by a Mrs. John Morrison Foss, a former employee of the school, who alleged "one official of the school is drunken, and according to the statements of numerous girls, takes undue liberties with them." Mrs. Foss continued:

> Some of the stories told to me by inmates were shocking in the extreme, and I had no reason to doubt their truth. I know that this is a matter for the federal authorities to ferret out—but they never will. It has been going on for years.

Mrs. Foss hoped that the *Post*, "which has demonstrated innumerable times that it is not afraid to tell the truth and to take part of the poor and the defenseless," could call the attention of the proper authorities to the "wrongs which exist at this institution, and which the state officials can neither reach or remedy."

Acting on Mrs. Foss's appeals, Pry visited her in Salida. Working as a cook at the school from October 1901 to January 1902, Mrs. Foss became acquainted with the management of the school and heard of the treatment to which the girls were subject. In the interview with Pry, Mrs. Foss confided, "I have felt ever since I left the school that it was a duty I owed those little children to at least make public what had been told me and what had come under my own observation." She also disclosed that

BY ANN SNEESBY-KOCH

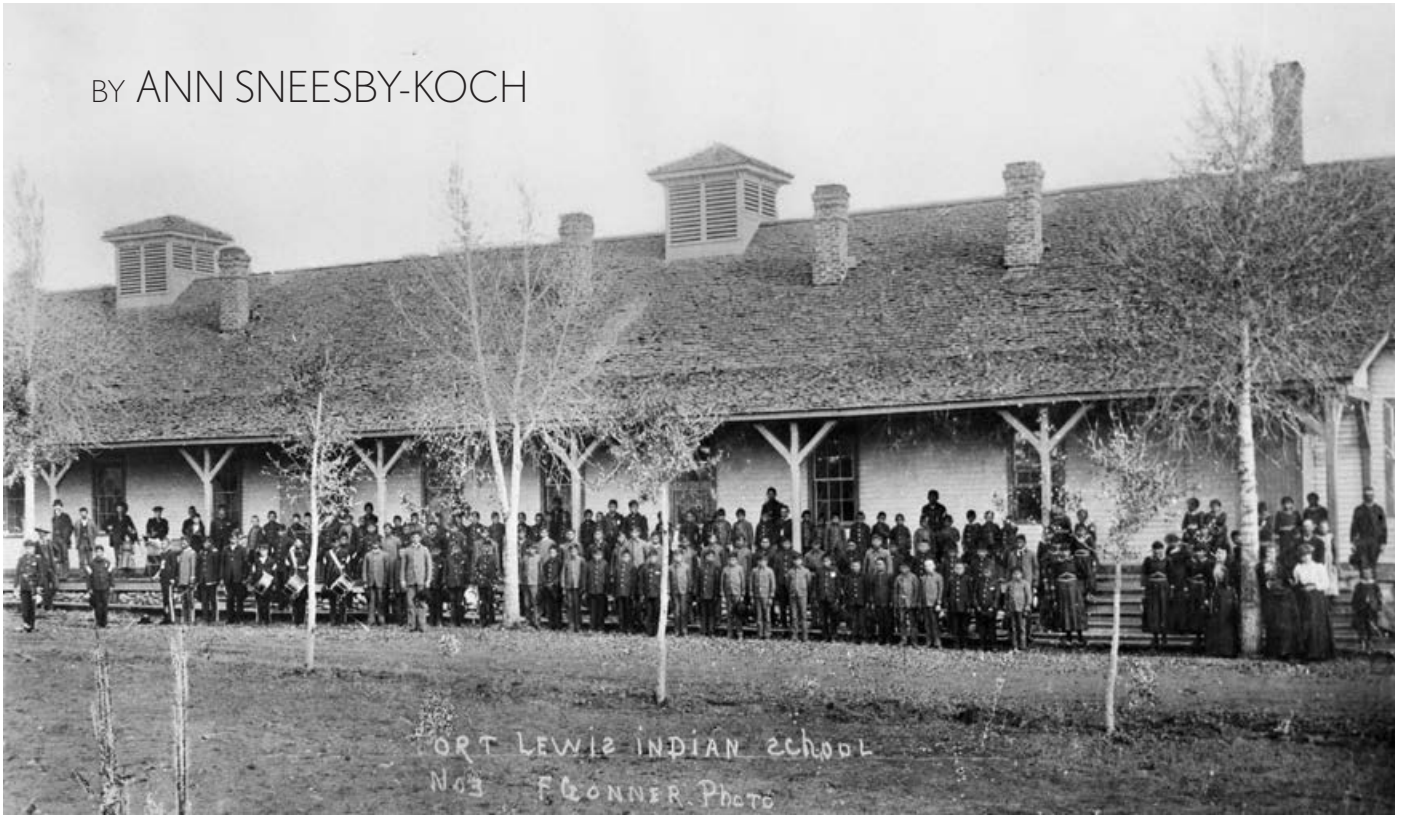


PHOTO / *Fort Lewis Indian School (date unknown). History Colorado, 2000.129.1092*

there had been two or three investigations of the school by national inspectors, but that Dr. Thomas H. Breen, the school's superintendent, had been notified in advance so he was able to conduct the tours of the school himself, and the inspectors failed to find anything amiss and Dr. Breen retained his position.

Mrs. Foss went on to describe an environment which was of a "character to horrify anyone with a grain of decency in his soul," specifically detailing a situation in which a fourteen-year-old girl, Maria Montoya, was sent away from the school, "having become pregnant." Mrs. Foss's student assistants in the kitchen said a prominent employee of the school was responsible. One of the girls, Rosa, charged that the employee "bought her [Maria] clothes to wear and found her a place to stay, and more, he has made the same proposals to me a thousand times." Rosa continued, saying that she had been there since she was eight years old—being sixteen at the time—and that this man had been trying to fondle her before she had been in school a month. Frightened, she alerted the matron about what had happened. The matron threatened to physically punish her for making such allegations. Intimidated into silence, she didn't tell anyone because "it wouldn't do any good—but through all the eight years that she had been there he had persecuted her."

Pry quotes Mrs. Foss as saying "I tried to look after the girls who worked with me, and talked with many of them," as she described how one thirteen-year-old girl came back from the school hospital, trembling and crying. After much questioning, she told Mrs. Foss that "this same official had tried to take liberties with her, and said 'My dear little girl, don't you know that God created you for this very purpose. That's the reason he made you a little woman.'" After this encounter, which had been interrupted by the arrival of someone in the building, Mrs. Foss sent her own daughter along with the girl whenever she had to visit the hospital. When asked by Pry whether she had said anything to Dr. Breen or his wife about the experiences of the girls, she admitted that she hadn't and replied, "Of course, you understand that it would have done no good and, moreover, I would have been instantly discharged." She went on to say:

> I do not want to harm anyone, but I feel that something should be done for those children, and that no man should be permitted to have charge of them who abuses his privileges and takes advantage of his opportunities as I have every reason to believe has been done at Fort Lewis.

She described yet another incident involving the official, who assaulted another girl, Katie, in the days preceding Mrs. Foss's departure from the school for a new job in Durango. Katie tearfully begged Mrs. Foss to allow her to leave with her, which she was allowed to do. After staying with Mrs. Foss for a month, Katie returned

to living with her father. Mrs. Foss asserted:

> You could never doubt that she both feared and hated that official....For that matter the majority of the little girls felt the same, but they were afraid to speak. They would say, "It is no use telling anything to a government employee, they simply order you to shut up, they don't care what happens to us, we are only Indians."

Concluding her interview with Mrs. Foss, whom she described as having a "frank and convincing candor" and an "honest and fearless woman" who could not keep silent where there were little girls to protect, Pry then visited the school. Her first impression of the Fort Lewis Indian School was that the institution was in "a deplorable condition and in sad need of complete reorganization and rehabilitation." She met with the school's superintendent, Dr. Breen, who seemed "somewhat annoyed" by Pry's appearance, and who Pry described as flying the "signs of dissipation." Dr. Breen was indisposed at the moment and instead sent for his clerk, John Harrison, to lead Pry on a tour of the institution.

As he showed Pry the place, Harrison enthusiastically reported that Dr. Breen did not believe in rules and regulations and that the employees were at "perfect liberty" to do what they pleased. "I like it. It's the right spirit—broad and liberal and as it should be—and we take advantage of it by having very good times." Pry observed that there were eighteen or twenty buildings, mostly remnants from the school's prior life as an Army fort, each in various degrees of dilapidation and decay. Only the girls' dormitory and the dining hall were new and in good repair. One hundred twenty-two pupils were crowded into two buildings and slept two, or in some instances, three in a bed. Pry described the sanitary facilities as crude and cleanliness as

PHOTO / *Investigative reporter Mrs. Leonel Ross (Campbell) Anthony wrote under the pen name "Polly Pry." History Colorado, 2000.129.348*

"almost an impossibility." At the time of Pry's visit, the hospital had been given to one of the resident teachers, leaving the school with no hospital. All this despite a $25,000 appropriation in 1900 to build a new hospital and electric light plant, among other improvements. Pry further observed:

> There is no manual training school...no physical culture, no carpentering, no blacksmith, no domestic science—no—in fact, as far as I could learn, there was literally nothing being done to properly equip the children entrusted to the care of the school....They shift for themselves.

Pry determined that the school was run solely and wholly for the benefit of the superintendent and that the Indigenous children were "necessary evils" for whom Dr. Breen was allotted $173 per child. Taking together Mrs. Foss's allegations and Pry's own observations of the poor administration of the school, Pry declared, "This government owes these little ones something better." She finished her exposé by stating that an investigation should commence at the Fort Lewis Indian School.

Shortly after the startling revelation of the gross misconduct directed at the Indigenous students at the school, its dilapidated state,

and mismanagement, Pry published another piece, "Horrors of Indian School Verified by New Witness," on March 26, 1903. The witness, J.R. Hughes of Durango, wrote to *The Denver Post* with his own account of what he had experienced as an instructor at the Fort Lewis Indian School, and corroborated the charges made by Mrs. Foss against officials at the school. Hughes's report included even more graphic and disturbing details of the sexual assault which Mrs. Foss alluded to, the least being that "every Saturday the employees sent to Hesperus for liquor and there was a general drunken orgie [*sic*], during which no attempt was made at concealment in regard to their performances with the Indian girls." Hughes added that there used to be "a good many Navajo girls at the school, but when several of them were sent away from school because they were to become mothers, the Navajo people ceased to send their girls to that school."

Hughes, describing himself as "one against a crowd" spoke to the men who were involved and begged them to stop. He wrote to the Indian department in Washington, DC—presumably the Bureau of Indian Affairs—and detailed the matter for them. Hughes said an inspector was sent out, but since Dr. Breen was notified of his visit, nothing was either seen or heard. He further revealed that "during the past three years forty-three government employees have been transferred from this school, there being constant trouble between the officials and the employees." Hughes provided the newspaper with his collection of documents from the Indian department and stated he was ready to prove any allegation he made. He ended his letter by saying, "I hope the *Post* will never let this rest until they have rendered these people powerless for further evil. The Lord surely moved the women who brought this to the light."

Pry's initial article, the allegations made, and the documentation given by J.R. Hughes compelled the *Post* to put the matter before Theodore Roosevelt, then president of the United States, and before the proper officials in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. By April 10, 1903, *The Daily Journal* of Telluride announced that President Roosevelt had ordered an immediate investigation into the accusations made against the officials of the Fort Lewis Indian School. *The Daily Sentinel* of Grand Junction, itself home of the Teller Institute—another Indian school that operated from 1886 to 1911—noted, on April 24, that Dr. Breen was once in charge of that institution. The *Sentinel* repeated the *Post*'s charges against Dr. Breen, as being "the principal in a number of drunken and obscene orgies, in which he compelled the Indian girls to participate and also to being the father of several children by Indian girls."

Glenwood Springs's *The Avalanche-Echo* reported on April 28, 1903, that Commissioner Tanner of the Indian Bureau requested the *Post* to furnish him with the evidence of charges they had leveled against Dr. Breen. The *San Miguel Examiner* of May 9, 1903, stated that "If all accounts are true Superintendent Breen should be transferred to Leavenworth." Finally, on July 27, 1903, *The Aspen Daily Times* published that Superintendent Breen had been discharged through the efforts of *The Denver Post*:

> The investigation has proved that Breen is guilty of drunkenness and other conduct unfitting to his office, and that he is mentally and physically incapacitated. W.S. Patterson of Oklahoma will take his place.

Until it closed officially in 1911, the government and school's administration continued the practice of attempting to assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream society based on nineteenth century, Euro-American notions of education and training in order to induct them as members of the white citizenry. The damage of Indian schools like Fort Lewis and the Teller Institute to the physical health, mental wellbeing, and cultural identity of its pupils extended for generations. Although these words of Pry relate to the Dr. Breen scandal specifically, they can be taken in view of Indian schools more broadly:

> It is a story to fill the heart of every fair-minded, decent person with white-hot indignation. If we did not know our world so well it would seem incredible. As it is, it can only be characterized as absolutely bestial and a lasting disgrace to the fair name of Colorado—a disgrace which only the most sweeping changes can obliterate.

ANN SNEESBY-KOCH is the Project Manager for the Colorado Digital Newspaper Project, a National Endowment for the Humanities-funded grant project to digitize historic Colorado newspapers, and the Assistant Curator of Serials at History Colorado.

A NEW PATH

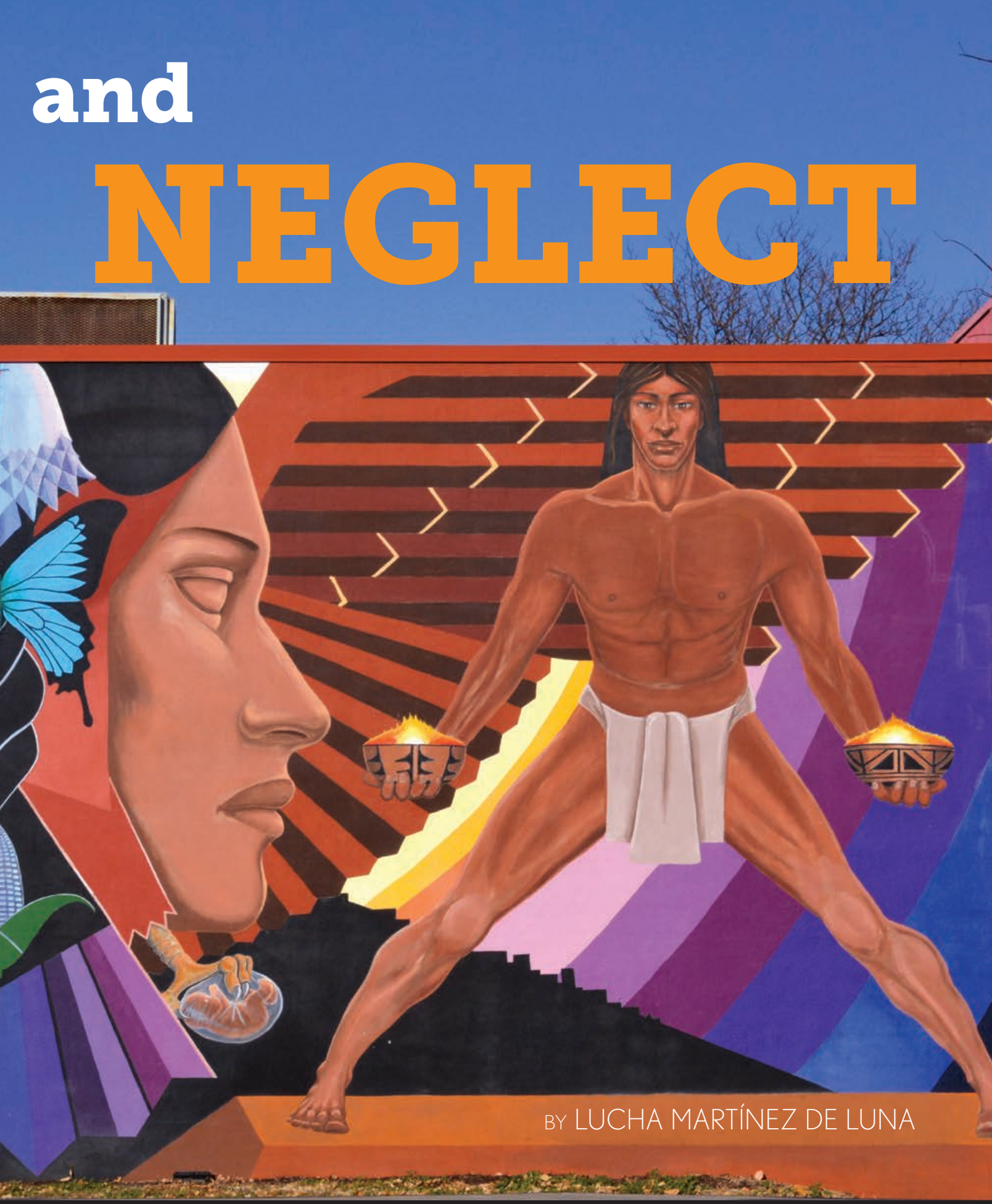
Durango's Fort Lewis College can trace its history back to the school described in this article. Although the college is at a different location—it was located about twenty miles away in what is now Hesperus—the legacy of the Fort Lewis Indian School continues to impact the present day. In recognition of that past, the school has created a Committee on FLC History to guide the interpretation of events and to create an educational and cultural environment that supports Native American students.

Shroud, Destruction,

As Chicano/a/x murals are erased in Denver, an archaeologist looks at the legacy of these art pieces—and why they need to be preserved.

PHOTO / La Alma, *Emanuel Martínez, La Alma Recreation Center, 1978. History Colorado.*

and NEGLECT



BY LUCHA MARTÍNEZ DE LUNA

As an archaeologist, I excavate ancient centers that were abandoned centuries ago. When archaeologists recover monumental art in an abandoned center, the art helps to interpret some of the customs and beliefs of the people that once lived in these sites. In ancient Mesoamerica (present day Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Belize) mural discoveries are significant because they often provide a rare glimpse into how artists visualized their supernatural and natural worlds.

Chicano/a/x* muralists in the late 1960s emulated the Mesoamerican tradition of storytelling and imagery and began to paint murals describing their customs, beliefs, and traditions on the walls of public buildings in historically marginalized neighborhoods of Denver. Interlinking iconography from Mesoamerica and the Indigenous Southwest, contemporary and ancestral figures stood in backdrops of both ancient and modern, urban and rural landscapes from New Mexico, Mexico, and Colorado. The murals were often painted in a social realist style emulating the Mexican mural movement of the early 1900s, with narratives of contemporary and historical individuals and events.

This eclectic art style often portrayed difficult themes of displacement, slavery, and socioeconomic inequality, while at the same time visualizing the present and a better, equitable future. Muralists displayed the importance of protecting our environment and the prominent role of women in our communities, while celebrating the ethnic diversity in Colorado and the nation. Muralists created art for the disenfranchised, striving to kindle a cultural reawakening and a sense of pride in Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Latino communities.

A distinct mural aesthetic developed in Colorado in the late 1960s, as bold, vibrant colors and imagery began to appear in public spaces. The murals described histories and contributions of people of color that filled a void found in cultural museums and education curriculum that failed to acknowledge their presence throughout the city, state, and nation. The images on these murals helped to replant ancestral roots and heal open wounds after centuries of cultural abasement. The murals greeted children when walking to school, observed community events, and often embraced individuals during moments of grief or happiness.

Unfortunately, from the birth of the mural movement, these images have continually been under threat and often erased from our communities by outside forces due to gentrification, displacement, and devaluing the art in Denver. Despite decades of social justice activism in the state combatting socioeconomic inequality, many communities of color continue to experience extreme displacement and cultural erasure as Denver races to be a regional cosmopolitan center, sometimes seeming to aspire to become the most gentrified city in the country. To examine these issues more closely, we will look at the events and art pieces that triggered the mural movement in two Denver neighborhoods—the Westside and the Northside—which are both experiencing extreme gentrification today.

Many families that live and once lived in these communities can trace their ancestry to the late 1500s and 1600s in the American

PHOTO / Learning From the Past, Focused on the Future *by Andy Mendoza and Linda Clemente, 1151 Osage Street, 1994. History Colorado.*

Southwest. Of both American Indian and European ancestry (largely Spanish), Hispanos lived for hundreds of years in, primarily, New Mexico and later in southern Colorado before the land became part of the United States. Hispanos formed a distinct lifestyle, Spanish dialect, and architectural and artistic style in the northernmost frontier of the Spanish Empire.

As I observed in a piece I wrote in 2019, "From the initial exploration of Coronado in 1540 to the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, from the fight for Mexican independence in 1810 to the annexation by the United States in 1848, southwestern communities witnessed intense cultural clashes and changes to their daily existence." During one lifetime, some individuals lived in the Spanish Empire, then Mexico, then the United States. These drastic changes, and the loss of land rights due to broken treaties after the annexation of the Southwest from Mexico, prompted migration from New Mexico and today's southern Colorado to Denver and other regions of Colorado.

Along the South Platte and Cherry Creek Rivers, various Tribes, including the Ute, Comanche, Arapaho, and Cheyenne peoples, lived in seasonal encampments. In the mural by Andy Mendoza and Linda Clemente, painted in 1994 on 1175 Osage Street in the La Alma neighborhood, the artists depict the discovery of gold in 1858 in a tributary of the South Platte River. The artists describe how European immigrants from the East Coast and the South—along with many displaced Hispano and Mexican American families—began to settle along the riverbanks, quickly transforming this vital Indigenous migratory route into the towns of Auraria and Denver. Immigrants worked in the nearby railroad and the rapidly growing manufacturing industries. One of the early settlers, Alexander Cameron Hunt, homesteaded what became Lincoln Park, a gathering place for the Auraria neighborhood.

The Auraria neighborhood became home to a working-class population, small business, and industry with a large concentration of Hispanos and Mexican Americans by the late 1930s. One of these families, Ramon and Carolina Gonzalez, moved into the neighborhood in the early 1920s. In 1946, the Gonzalez family transformed their home at 1020 Ninth Street into the Casa Mayan Mexican restaurant and cultural center where the family hosted events celebrating their heritage with food, music, dance, and theatre performances.

The neighborhood was one of thirteen redlined on the City of Denver map in the 1940s to delineate cultural minority neighborhoods. The red lines around neighborhoods helped banks determine which areas did not have access to mortgage loans serviced by the Federal Housing Administration. The policy was implemented to help developers mass-produce suburban white neighborhoods, while at the same time prevent investment and development in redlined minority communities.

After a devastating flood damaged the Auraria neighborhood in June of 1965, city officials seized the opportunity to declare the area irreparable and ceased to grant building permits to repair damaged homes. In 1967, the Skyline Urban Renewal Project was voted into law and the city chose Auraria as the site to build the new college campuses for the Metropolitan State College of Denver, Community College of Denver, and, eventually, University of Colorado at Denver.

The project resulted in the displacement of numerous Aurarian families, the majority of Hispano and Mexican descent. The Hispano and Mexican American population living in Auraria resisted this displacement, but attempts to stop the project were ignored by the city, and demolition of their neighborhood promptly began. By 1972 and 1973, the entire community was forced out. Some moved into the adjacent Lincoln Park Homes, while others fled to other parts of the city.

This displacement is represented in the spray-painted mural *History of the Westside Community* by artist Marc Anthony Martínez. In it, Martínez paints the role of Hispanos, Chicanos, and Mexican Americans in Auraria and the Westside. On the right side of the piece, Martínez memorializes the influence of St. Cajetan's Church, built between 1924 and 1926, which served as a cultural and religious center for the community. After Aurarians were displaced, the once sacred space of the community was converted into offices and an auditorium for the newly built campus.

Acknowledging the ancestry of Chicanos—while highlighting daily activities—Martínez depicts a mother hanging sports clothes from the neighborhood's West High School out to dry on a clothesline. The imagery references the role of student activism during the Civil Rights Movement. In March, 1969, the students from West High walked out of school to

***EDITOR'S NOTE:**
We use Chicano/a/x here, initially, to reflect a growing movement toward using more inclusive and gender-neutral language in publishing. Chicano/a/x references people involved in the Chicano Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. It is composed largely of descendants of Hispanos and Mexican Americans, who value a connection to the Indigenous/Mestizo identity.

PHOTO / History of the Westside Community *by Mark Anthony Martínez, 771 Santa Fe Drive, 2012. History Colorado.*

protest discriminating remarks and the absence of the history of ethnic people in textbooks and ethnic teachers in Denver Public Schools. History classes failed to describe the important contributions of Black, Indigenous, Asian, Hispano, Mexican, and Latino peoples in Colorado and throughout the nation.

The West High School "blowout" also marked a pivotal moment for the developing Chicano Movement. That, in itself, was a continuation of a social justice movement that began with the annexation of Mexico's territory in 1848 when the United States disregarded land and civil rights agreements promised to Hispanos and Mexicans in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Immediately following repeated actions to ignore the treaty, disenfranchised Mexican Americans and Hispanos began a movement to demand socioeconomic equality and an end to racial oppression in the country.

The term Chicano is not an ethnonym (an ethnic group), but a chosen social justice identity that was embraced in the late 1960s by primarily Mexican Americans and Hispanos from the Southwest resisting the injustice of racial discrimination in the nation. Coinciding with a grassroots neighborhood movement in Lincoln-La Alma Park, Auraria, and other neighborhoods throughout Colorado, Chicano youth across the country met in 1969 to draft "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan" at the Chicano Liberation Youth Conference in Denver. Inspired by the Aztec creation story and their ancestral homeland, Aztlan, Chicanos proclaimed the American Southwest as their Aztlan. At the conference, Chicano youth drafted a resolution to publicly celebrate and teach through music, dance, theater, and art about their heritage and traditions.

One of the early opportunities for this activism through art came at the Lincoln Park pool. At that time, many public swimming pools throughout the state were not accessible to people of color. In Denver, specific days were designated for "Blacks only" or "Hispanics only" to swim. In the Lincoln-La Alma neighborhood, community youth organized to challenge racial discrimination in the La Alma pool and police harassment in the park. The youth mobilized to establish a sense of permanency and cultural identity in the public park and pool within their community by changing the name of the park from Lincoln Park to La Alma (the Soul) Park and painting murals on the public park buildings.

With the powerful application of murals, artists and people from the community challenged the status quo by questioning the prevailing racist ideology that plagued the nation. For historically marginalized communities repeatedly threatened and displaced, murals provided a sense of place within the greater landscape, hence legitimizing their right to live peacefully.

In 1970, as an artist and resident of the Lincoln Park housing project, my father, Emanuel Martínez, assembled youth volunteers living in the projects to participate in an art summer program. With recycled paint, Martínez designed narratives of Chicano heritage, and with the aid of the youth began to paint murals around the Lincoln Park housing projects, as well as the La Alma Park storage shed, and pool building. Gradually, the community and Chicanos began to take ownership of neglected parks

throughout the city, connecting the community with their surroundings while improving the overall appearance of the parks.

Familiar faces and images on the walls of neighborhood parks created a sense of belonging and permanence in a space that was considered the soul of the community. Children from the community swam in the pools every day, while families listened to music, had picnics, and socialized. But the police closely monitored all activity in neighborhood parks—dispersing families and individuals if too many Chicanos were gathered. On at least three occasions, the Denver police arrived in riot gear to disperse crowds with tear gas at both La Raza Park (the name officially changed from Columbus Park recently) and Lincoln-La Alma Park during community events, injuring numerous residents.

The city attempted to suppress the surge of murals painted in parks, but their efforts were unsuccessful. By the mid-1970s, Denver and the state experienced an explosion of Chicano artistic expression and mural production. Between 1970 and 2000, the city, developers, and other outside forces did not benefit monetarily from murals. They often dismissed the cultural value of murals and many artworks were defaced or sandblasted.

The Northside—one of the first Chicano, Hispano, and Mexican American neighborhoods to experience rapid gentrification in the early 2000s—was a locus of mural activity, beginning in the early 1970s. At the Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, which was founded in 1936 for predominantly Chicano and Mexican American Catholics, more than thirteen Chicano murals were painted from 1976 to 1996.

That surge in artwork was supported by Jose Lara. In 1961, Lara travelled from Navarra, Spain, to the United States to minister in Colorado. When he arrived in Denver, Lara was impacted by the extreme level of racial discrimination and segregation he confronted. Ordained in 1968, he quickly sought to support the Chicano Civil Rights Movement at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and invited the United Farm Workers to use the basement of the church for their Denver branch. Between 1976 and 2001, Father Lara and, later, Father Pat Valdez supported local artists, including Andy Mendoza, Jesse Mendoza, James Romero, Jerry Jaramillo, Carlos Sandoval, Leo Tanguma, Emanuel Martínez, and Carlotta Espinoza by providing walls around the church to paint images of their faith, cultural heritage, and ancestral roots. Murals were painted inside the parish center, the interior and exterior of the church, and the hall. Today, all but one of these murals have been destroyed.

Carlotta Espinoza painted a mural in 1974 that stood behind the altar commemorating the apparition of the Virgen de Guadalupe, a powerful cultural symbol for both Mexicans and Chicanos. In *Espejos*, a film documentary by Minnie Paul, Espinoza explained that she chose to depict

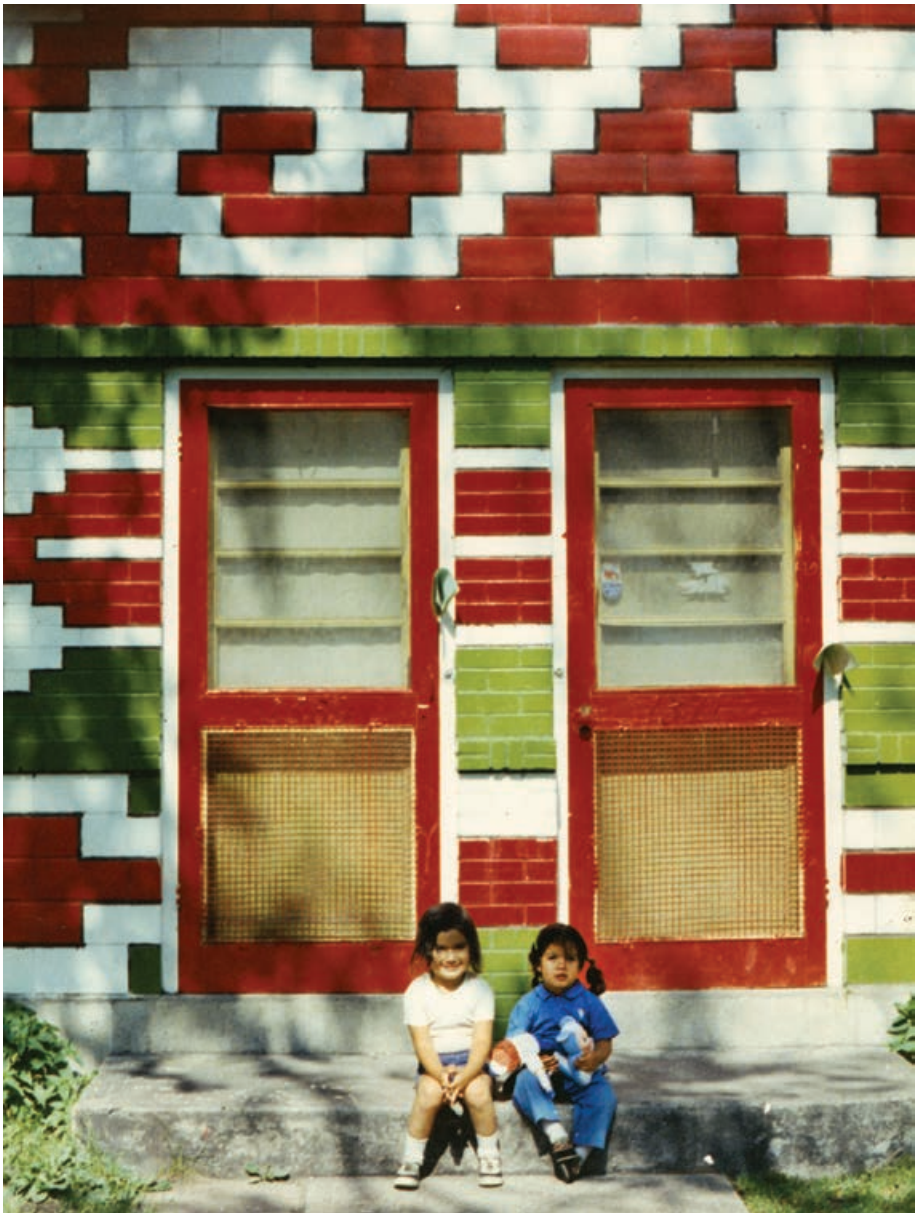


PHOTO / *Mural by Emanuel Martínez painted in 1970 on the facade of his family's home in the Lincoln Park housing projects. The author is on the right; her sister, Nacia, is on the left, 1974. Courtesy of Chicano/a Murals of Colorado Project (CMCP).*

PHOTO / *A mural by Emanuel Martínez at the Lincoln-La Alma pool building, 1970. Courtesy of CMCP.*

her "more like a Chicana, more like a modern woman."

But, with changes to the Northside, the congregation of Our Lady of Guadalupe also shifted. A more socially conservative priest and congregation painted over the church's exterior murals in the early 2000s, painted the interior murals, and built a wall to completely cover the Virgin of Guadalupe mural from public view. For Chicano community members who have attended this church for generations, this act of cultural erasure by the current congregation symbolized an unimaginable reality fifty years ago. To this day, the wall that covers the mural sparks heated debates between current and former parishioners who maintain spiritual and historical ties to the church.

Sadly, as historically marginalized communities are displaced in Denver, the public art—especially exterior legacy murals painted between 1970 to 2010—continue to be destroyed at an alarming rate. Many are in dire need of restoration. The majority of the murals painted during this period were led by artists or communities and were often painted for schools, churches, social organizations, and public spaces with the help of youth.

In 2009, Denver Arts and Venues implemented an Urban Arts Fund mural project "with the goal to create murals in areas that were deemed

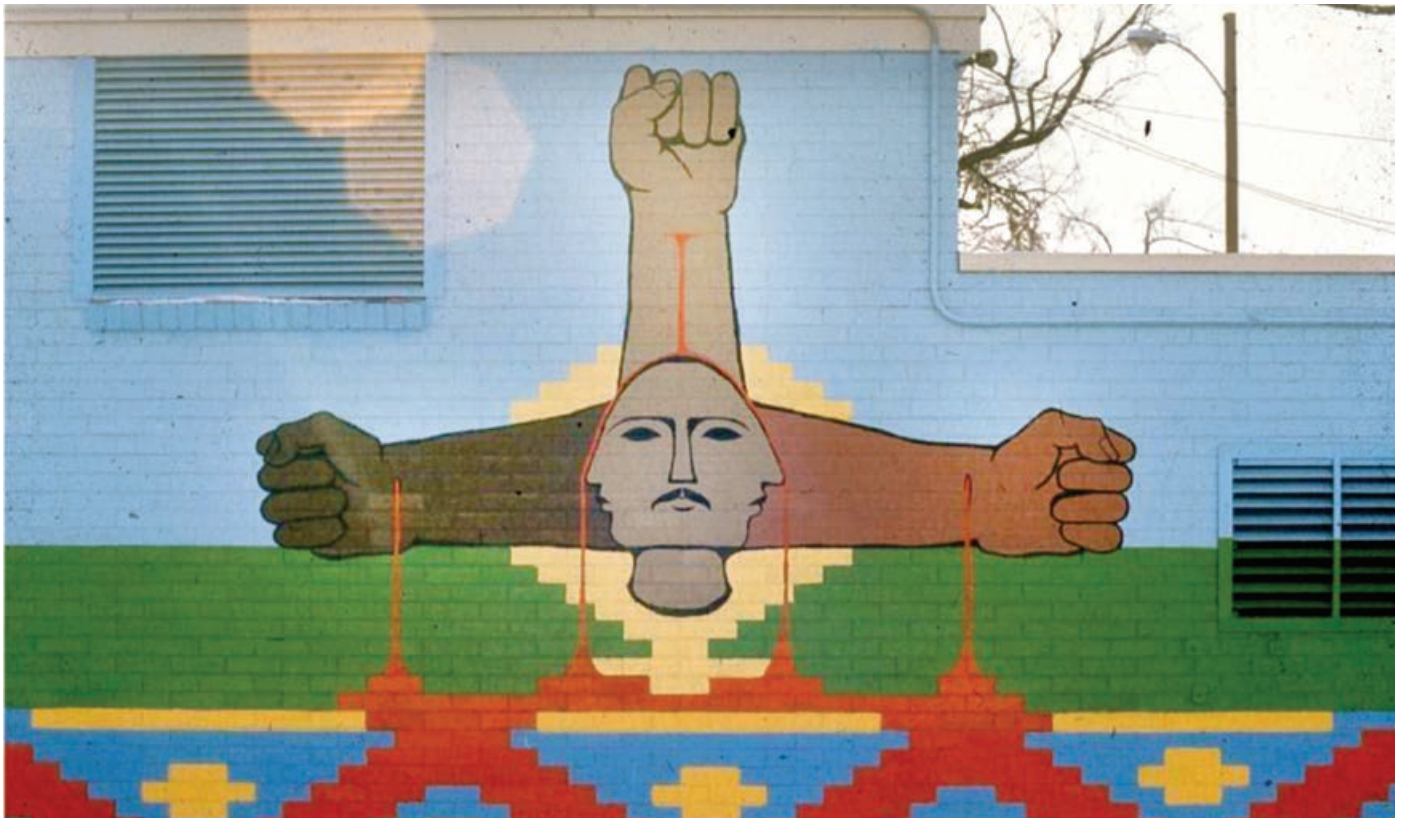


PHOTO / *A mural by Emanuel Martínez at Mestizo-Curtis Park, 1970. Courtesy of CMCP.*

'graffiti hot spots' and to provide positive creative experiences for youth to deter future vandalism." Prior to this initiative, the City of Denver had often failed to recognize or support the community mural youth projects—led by artists living in their neighborhoods—that had existed for more than five decades.

Around the same time, Denver Arts and Venues began a mural permitting process to serve "as a liaison between artists, property owners, Public Works, and Community Planning and Development." The service promised artists it would "help you make sure that your art fits any community guidelines or codes." In establishing this permitting process, the move appropriated the content and form of community public art that once gave a voice to the disenfranchised and underserved and created a sense of place in their neighborhoods.

Denver, like many cities throughout the country and world, has aggressively used the arts to entice developers to regenerate and renew historically marginalized neighborhoods, also known as "artwashing" social spaces. As art historian Stephen Pritchard explained in a 2019 article entitled "Colouring in Culture," artwashing often involves out-of-state artists and art collectives buying or renting properties in "deficient" neighborhoods where rent is relatively inexpensive in order to implement art projects. The intent, from the city's perspective, is to entice private capital to invest in making neighborhoods more amenable by transforming the aesthetics of a neighborhood.

For example, founded in 2005, the River North Art District, or RiNo, quickly began to gentrify Five Points—historically a neighborhood of primarily Black, Hispanic, Mexican American, and Asian families. Artist collectives often target neighborhoods where properties are relatively lower priced and then use artistic practices and private funding to begin the process of social and cultural erasure, which often displaces ethnic communities.

In 2017, Denver awarded CRUSH Walls, a RiNo non-profit street-art festival founded in 2010, with the Arts and Culture Innovation Award to create "controlled graffiti" and murals. Controlled graffiti projects are often financed by developers and can attract thousands of tourists. New residents in the area have almost entirely displaced the working-class community of color in the last fifteen years.

Ironically, graffiti and murals—historically considered a supposed urban nuisance by government agencies—are used today by those same government agencies to entice settlement in "regenerated" and "renewed" neighborhoods. Like other cities throughout the country, developers and government agencies in Denver then pay artists or agencies who have recently set up a satellite office in the area to memorialize the displaced community by painting murals and graffiti of the displaced people.

Meanwhile, legacy community Chicano murals from 1968 to 2005 that were painted by artists with ties to the communities and that describe the people, places, and historical events that contributed to the character of Denver are defaced. Every year of late, several murals have been lost

PHOTO / Our Lady of Guadalupe *by Jerry Jaramillo, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, 1209 West Thirty-sixth Avenue, 1984. Courtesy of CMCP.*

PHOTO / La Familia Sagrada *by Carlos Sandoval, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, 1209 West Thirty-sixth Avenue, 1982. Courtesy of Tony Ortega.*

without the new resident or owner considering the cultural value of the paintings. For example, last April, I received several calls from the community informing me another cherished mural, *Huitzilopochtli* by David Garcia, in the Sun Valley neighborhood was whitewashed.

Prior to this act of cultural erasure, I had begun to meet with artists to document and archive murals throughout the city. Since 2018, art historians, anthropologists, historians, teachers, and I have created a grassroots organization: the Chicano/a Murals of Colorado Project (CMCP) to protect, promote, and preserve the visual legacy of Colorado. I have attended numerous talks and participated in meetings with preservationists and other mural organizations from Houston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia. I have repeatedly been informed that murals in preservation are often classified as only paint on a wall and few historic protections exist for community murals in the city, state, or nation.

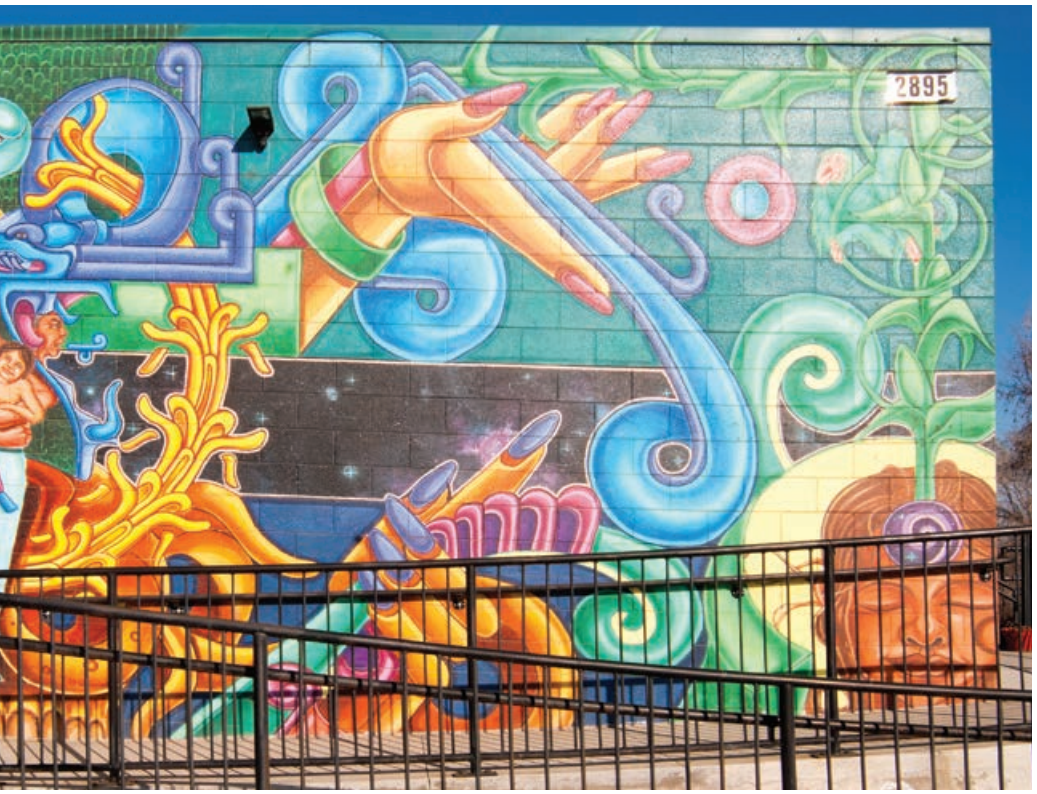
This raised many questions for me and for the field of archaeology. How do we protect a painting on a wall when the building isn't a historic building? How do we protect a mural when the artist or community doesn't own the building? This is a completely different realm for preservation work and speaks to the larger problem of redlined communities and people, including artists, who did not have access to mortgages and other financial assets. There is no guide on how to preserve these works—yet.

The sterile description of a mural as simply a painted wall speaks to the systematic racism that has too often determined whose history is preserved in this country. In ancient Mesoamerica, Greece, Italy, and beyond, a mural is a priceless work of art, a testimonial of a once thriving community and sometimes a glimpse of their supernatural world perceived through the lens of an artist. Unfortunately, many of these murals were destroyed due to exposure to the elements and other factors. In Mexico, prehistoric and historic murals are considered part of the cultural patrimony of the country and their artists are celebrated. Similar to their predecessors, Mexican and Chicano muralists captured moments in time, to acknowledge individuals from the past and present. In Denver, the historical textbooks on the walls in the once redlined communities throughout the city described the narratives unique to Colorado, histories that were not and are still not accessible in schools or museums. Currently, we still do not have any protections or preservation plans in place to stop the destruction of these historical narratives of Colorado.

PHOTO / Huitzilopochtli *by David Ocelotl Garcia, West Eighth Avenue between Federal and Decatur, 2010. Aaron Marcus.*

This meant that the only way that CMCP could seek justice for the *Huitzilopochtli* mural was to make an appeal to the property owner and the party responsible for painting over the mural. In this case, the property owner, the responsible party, the artist, and CMCP reached an agreement to restore *Huitzilopochtli*. In addition, they agreed to create an additional mural to help heal the community space. If successful, it will be the first time that we recover a whitewashed mural in Denver.

Unfortunately, a few months after *Huitzilopochtli* was painted over, I was informed the bottom half of another community mural, *Mrs. God*, painted by Carlotta Espinoza in 1998, was painted over with a new mural celebrating Covid-19 healthcare workers as the pandemic upended our lives. This mural was featured on the cover of the Spring 2020 edition of this magazine and inspired me to write this article. I reached out to the artist who painted over Espinoza's mural to better understand the situation. The artist explained that because the mural was faded, he assumed it was acceptable to paint over it, noting it was very common in Denver to paint over murals to create a new one. The artist lamented his actions.



Using the approach we'd employed to restore *Huitzilopochtli*, I asked if the property owner would be interested in collaborating to restore and protect Espinoza's historic mural. I was notified later that the owner is not interested in preserving the painting. Instead, I was informed that the building owner planned to create an artist collective in the building and he would periodically invite artists to paint a new mural on the wall.

Disheartened, I called Espinoza to update her about the status of the mural. She replied like all the first-, second-, third-, and fourth-generation artists respond when one of their murals is defaced: New people that move into the neighborhoods where we once lived don't care about our art or our history.

From an archaeological perspective, when I drive through Denver looking for the places where I, my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents once lived and socialized, I am aware that when and if archaeologists return to excavate the city of Denver in possibly five hundred years, there may be very little evidence of Indigenous, Black, Asian, Chicano, and Latino communities in the archaeological record if we continue down this path of cultural erasure and fail to protect the cultural heritage of all ethnicities that once lived in these spaces.

In 2018, CMCP partnered with Historic Denver, the two La Alma neighborhood associations, and numerous individuals to help promote the protection of the historic Lincoln-La Alma neighborhood from potential erasure due to development and displacement. On August 2, 2021, Denver City Council voted unanimously to designate the neighborhood a historic cultural district—the second designation of this type in the city, and one of the first in the nation to recognize the role of Hispanos, Mexican Americans, and the Chicano Movement in the neighborhood.

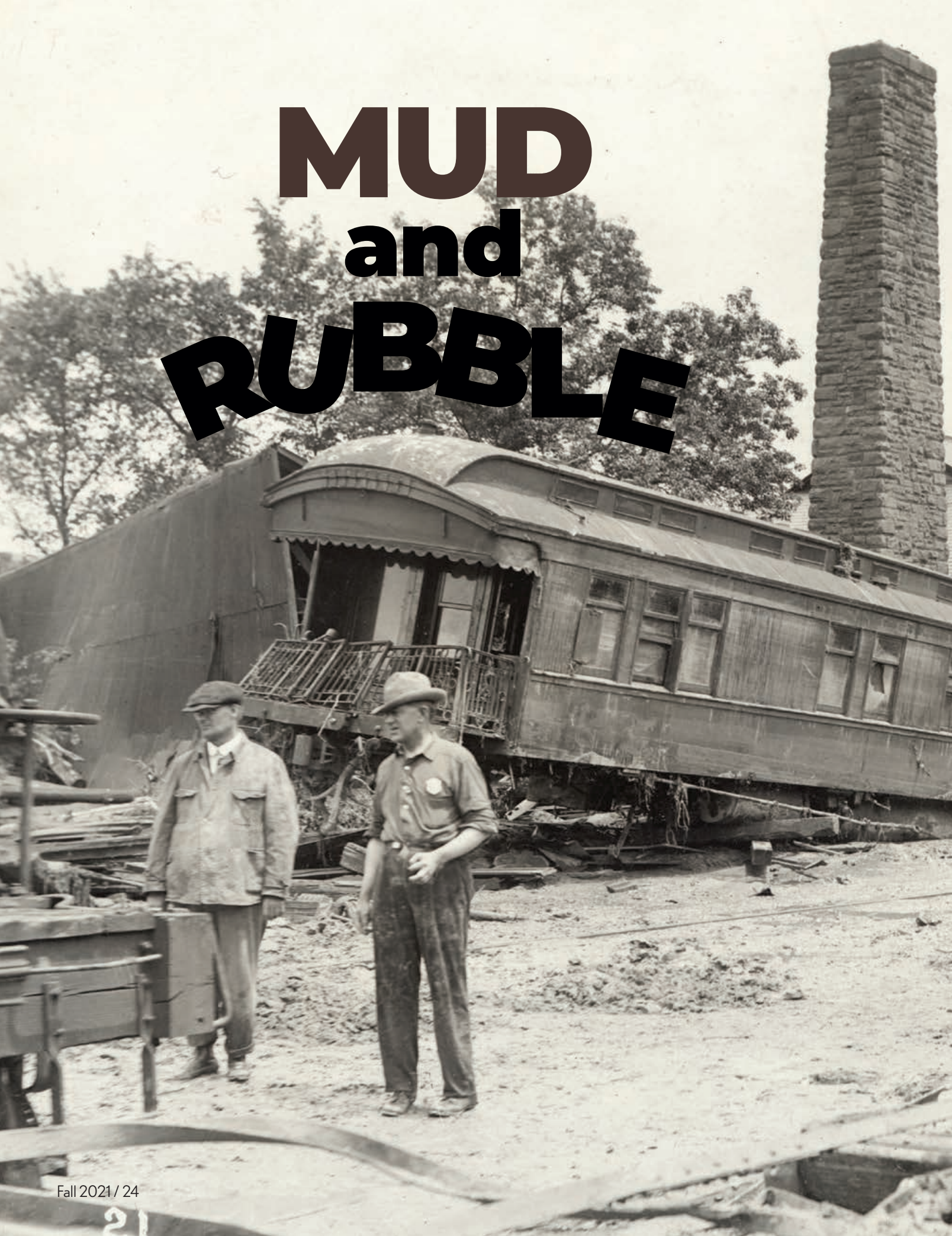
In 2002, a six-block area on Welton Street in the Five Points neighborhood was designated a historic district by the Denver City Council. Yet it was only three years later that an art district was founded in Five Points, and a section of the neighborhood was rapidly rebranded as RiNo. In 2015, with RiNo now a thriving "new" neighborhood, the six-block area on Welton Street was renamed the "Five Points Historic Cultural District," adding two more buildings to the amendment with an emphasis on goals of redevelopment per the Design Standards and Guidelines used by the Landmark Preservation Commission. As included in the guidelines, public art installation that could promote heritage tourism within the district was allowed.

The potential of the new Lincoln-La Alma Cultural Historic District encountering a similar fate remains to be seen. Already, many of the historic Chicano murals in this community have been whitewashed. CMCP is working to preserve and document others. To do so, we must create historic preservation practices to guide this work.

In my profession, I believe the disciplines of archaeology, history, art history, and preservation must apply their expertise and skills to responsibly recover and protect prehistoric, historic, and contemporary histories. The challenge for these disciplines is to evaluate how western standards and guidelines have historically ignored the unique qualities and characteristics of ethnic communities, while at the same time help them find solutions to equally recover, protect, and preserve their spaces, history, and cultural heritage.

LUCHA MARTÍNEZ DE LUNA is the associate curator of Hispanic, Latino, and Chicano History at History Colorado and the director of the Chicano/a Murals of Colorado Project.

MUD and RUBBLE



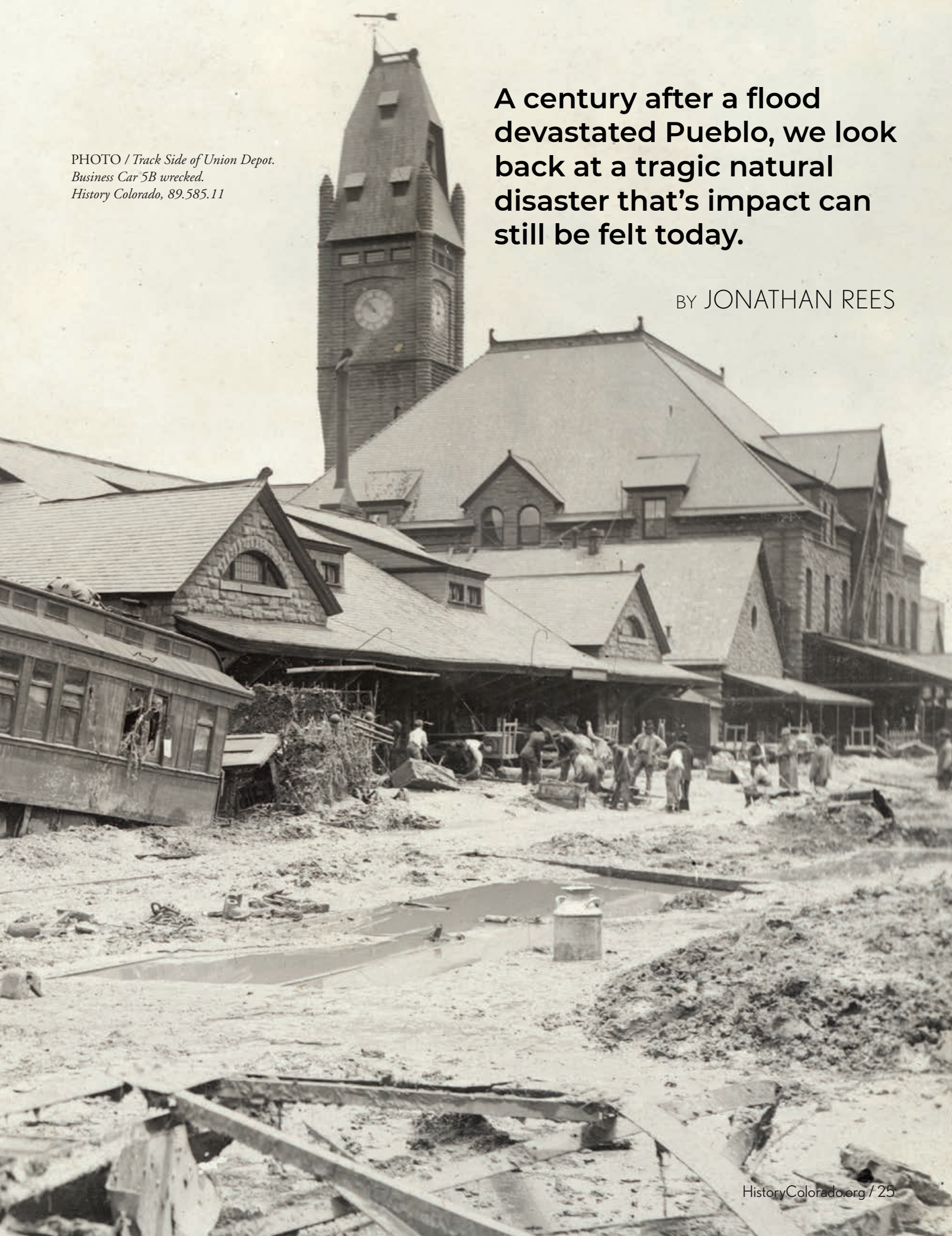


PHOTO / *Track Side of Union Depot. Business Car 5B wrecked. History Colorado, 89.585.11*

A century after a flood devastated Pueblo, we look back at a tragic natural disaster that's impact can still be felt today.

BY JONATHAN REES

A few years ago, I got a chance to work on a *Colorado Encyclopedia* article about the 1921 Pueblo Flood. Having taught history in Pueblo for almost two decades at that point, I had certainly heard of it. I had also seen more than a few pictures of the extraordinary physical devastation left over after the waters had receded. What I needed was a resource that could tell me all the basic facts associated with the disaster: Exactly when did it happen? How much economic damage did it cause? And, of course, I wanted to know exactly how many people died.

I went to the vertical file at the Western History Collection in the Rawlings Library, our main library here in Pueblo. A vertical file usually consists of a lot of newspaper clippings, organized by popular subjects for library patrons by a succession of librarians over time. Before the internet came along, vertical files were one of the best resources communities around the country had for understanding their own history. Rawlings Library, an institution whose roots go back decades, did not disappoint.

The file on the Pueblo Flood consists of four folders stuffed mostly with newspaper clippings that go back a full one hundred years—back to the papers published during the flood itself. While it includes a few papers from throughout the region, most of the clippings were from our still-surviving local paper, *The Pueblo Chieftain*, and its one-time compatriot, the *Pueblo Star-Journal*. The *Chieftain* and the *Star-Journal* ran retrospectives on the flood many times over the years, often on the major anniversaries (fifteenth, twenty-fifth, fiftieth), but sometimes as the memories of a particular survivor or as part of large retrospectives on the history of the city.

Reading those clippings is where my trouble began. In 1994, the *Chieftain* reported that the flood took "more than 250 lives." In 1981,

PHOTO / *Where destruction was greatest, aerial view. History Colorado, 89.585.3*

THROUGH THE LENS: THE AFTERMATH OF THE 1921 PUEBLO FLOOD

By Jori Johnson and Bethany Williams, History Colorado's Collections Access Coordinators

Photographers were among the first to survey the devastation caused by the flood of 1921 in Pueblo and the surrounding area. Their images captured rail lines washed away and tracks irreparably twisted. They documented overturned freight and passenger trains tipped by the force of the floodwaters. Everywhere they pointed their lens, the wreckage was catastrophic. These images of the flood were compiled in a photo book, which J. Russell, the general manager of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, offered as a gift to Rio Grande workers. The captions presented here are the original notations in the book.

PHOTO / *The Main Street at Portland. Note high water mark on buildings. History Colorado, 89.585.63*

PHOTO / *Street in front of Union Depot at daylight, June 4th. History Colorado, 89.585.8*

it reported that the flood killed "more than 200 people." An earlier, undated yellow clip that was probably from the *Star-Journal* reported that, "The Great Miracle of the Pueblo flood of June 3, 1921 was that so many hundreds of persons escaped the fury of the cloudburst and entrapment. Only 100 are known to have perished." In 1938, the Sunday edition of the paper reported that the official list placed the death toll at 78.

How could these numbers be so different? At first, I wondered if the paper was adding to the death toll as time went on in order to make the event seem more historically significant. However, the *Chieftain*'s 2011 report gave the casualty figure as 120 and the first reported casualties in the days following the flood was in the thousands, so I had to reject the idea of a steadily growing total. I had seen vastly different casualty totals for the Ludlow Massacre of 1914 based on which days the person doing the counting wanted to include as part of that event, but everyone agrees that the Pueblo Flood lasted three days.

While that is true, the answer to the question of how many people died during the Pueblo Flood seems to lie in the unknown number of bodies that washed up later—sometimes much later—than the initial aftermath of the tragedy. The later reports in the *Chieftain* include mentions of people whose bodies had washed down the river, only to be covered in silt or debris. One of those reports mentions a skeleton being discovered downriver as late as the 1950s. The morbid question becomes, then, how many of these people made up part of the grand total?

In his 2020 Harvard master's thesis on the Great Pueblo Flood of 1921, Jonathan A. Cohen notes that the death toll estimates he found range from as low as "just under a hundred" to as high as 1,500. As part of his work, he put together a spreadsheet that suggests that just over 600 (but perhaps more than 900) people lost their lives. The obvious reason for the undercount was that many of them were poor immigrants—or just poor—which meant that their absence was harder for authorities or the local newspaper to detect.

Searching for a casualty figure to use in that encyclopedia article made me much less interested in how many people had died and much more interested in why newspapers and the historians who use them fixate on casualty accounts. It is obviously a tragedy that many people died in Pueblo during the flood, but is the flood somehow more historically significant if that casualty

PHOTO / *An uninvited guest. History Colorado, 89.585.15*

PHOTO / *Mo. Pacific Terminal, Nuckolls Plant and Lower Sante Fe bridge from the air. History Colorado, 89.585.7*

PHOTO / *Cars and house substituted for north approach of Rio Grande and Sante Fe bridges at Pueblo. History Colorado, 89.585.31*

PHOTO / *Steel work of Bridge 126B was left undisturbed without rails or ties. History Colorado, 89.585.44*

PHOTO / *Walker yard south of "C" Street Viaduct. History Colorado, 89.585.17*

PHOTO / *Wreckage on South Union Avenue. History Colorado, 89.585.41*

figure is a few hundred people higher? The Pueblo Flood probably is one of the worst floods in United States history, but it remains incredibly important to Pueblo whether or not our city's misery was deeper than the misery suffered anyplace else.

Luckily, the same *Chieftain* articles that varied so greatly in the casualty figures they used tended to agree on the long-term significance of the flood to the history of the city. They did this by outlining the many public works designed to prevent future floods that ended up shaping the city in its modern form. For example, in just the two years following the flood, the Pueblo Conservancy District (formed in the wake of the tragedy) built seven bridges and moved many miles of railroad track, as well as light, telegram, gas, and sewer lines.

They also relocated the Arkansas River channel as it ran through Pueblo, moving it half a mile south so that it would do less damage if it ever flooded again. In the long term, water projects related to the flood included the Pueblo Dam, Lake Pueblo behind it, and the levees for both the Arkansas River and Fountain Creek running through town. For those of us who see them often, the murals painted along those levees are one of the defining features of the entire city.

Despite these physical improvements, the contingency of how Pueblo might have developed differently absent the flood seems most important. The 1920s, of course, are remembered as being one of the most prosperous decades in all of American history. What would Pueblo have looked like had it been able to invest in new buildings and industries during that decade instead of rebuilding and improving its physical infrastructure because of the flood? Before the New Deal, cities like Pueblo got no help from the federal government when recovering from disaster, so the city had to use local capital that might have gone toward other kinds of expansion.

I can't help but wonder if Pueblo wouldn't have ended up looking a lot more like Colorado Springs had the flood never happened. Colorado Springs experienced explosive growth after World War II during a time when Pueblo was still paying off its debts incurred in the wake of the flood. "Ever since the flood," wrote the *Chieftain* in 1978, "Union Avenue [our main downtown thoroughfare] has tried to make a comeback, like the thriving street it was before the flood, but has never quite made it." Had the flood never happened, the avenue might have just kept growing.

The centennial of a tragedy like the Pueblo Flood is obviously a good time to remember the lives that were lost, even if we don't actually know exactly how many people died. However, in the absence of a memorial, the physical changes made to Pueblo because of the flood are the most important monument to those people's lives.

Another thing I learned reading that vertical file? Floods were once a regular occurrence in Pueblo. The changes made in and around the city after the 1921 flood have solved that problem, and their scope—and their success—should serve as a reminder of a day that changed the city forever.

JONATHAN REES is a professor of history at Colorado State University–Pueblo. His books include *Representation and Rebellion: The Rockefeller Plan at the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, 1914–1942*.

EDITOR'S NOTE:
This article and photo essay were previously published on *The Colorado Magazine* online.

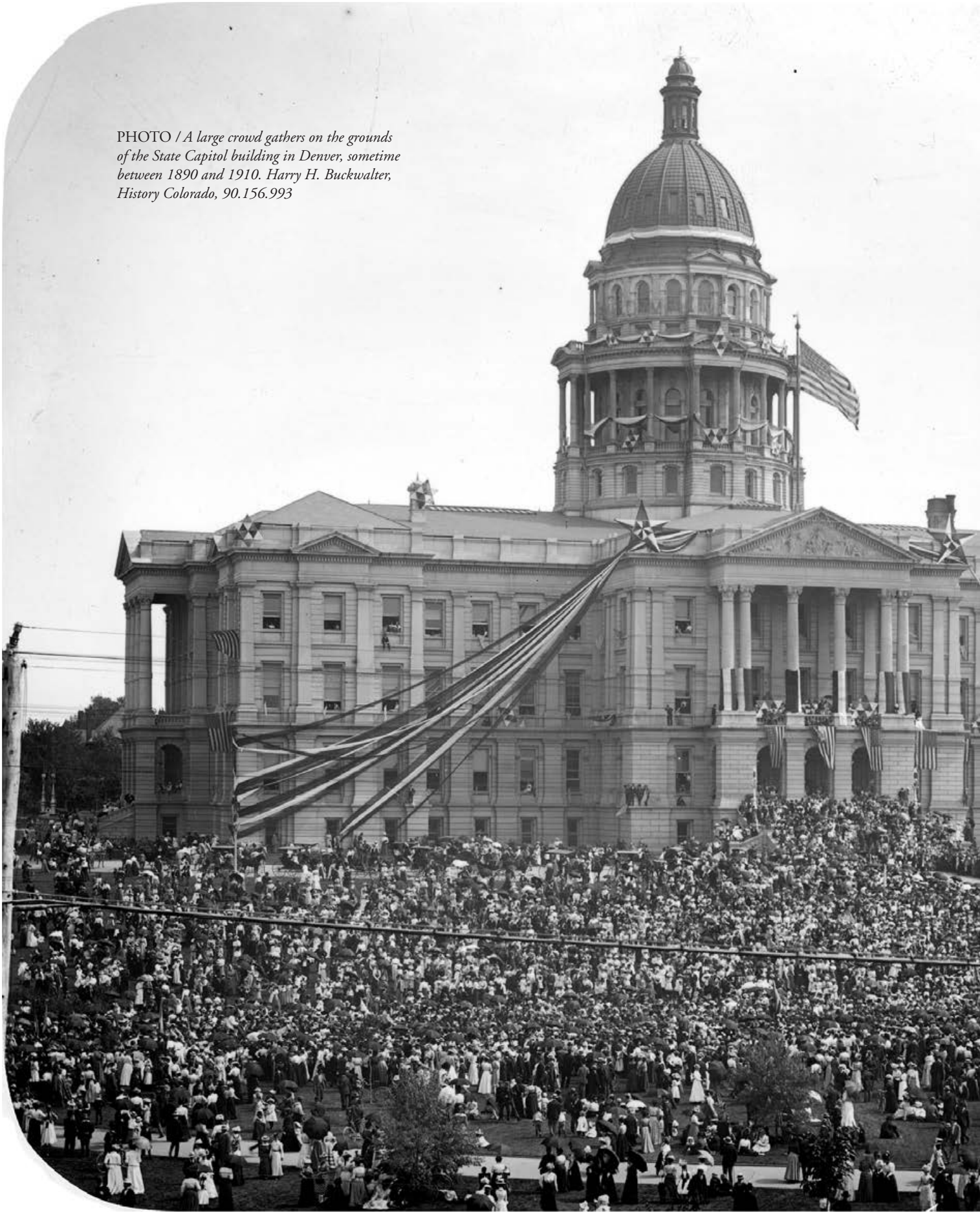
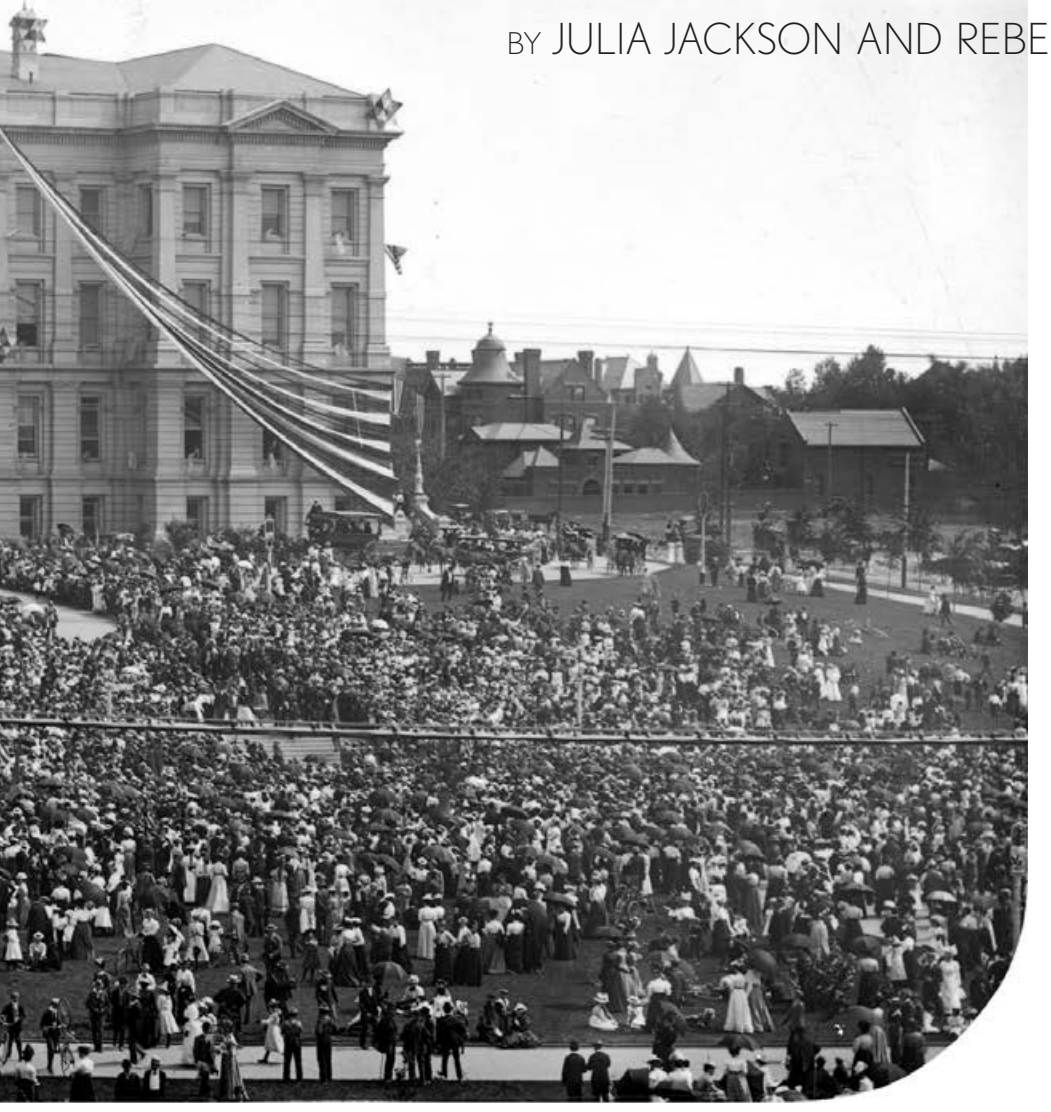


PHOTO / *A large crowd gathers on the grounds of the State Capitol building in Denver, sometime between 1890 and 1910. Harry H. Buckwalter, History Colorado, 90.156.993*

REDISTRICTING Colorado

BY JULIA JACKSON AND REBECCA THEOBALD



Now that Colorado officially has an eighth congressional seat, what can we learn from how people have been grouped together in voting districts over the past 145 years?

In November, Colorado's once-a-decade redistricting process ended when the state Supreme Court approved redistricting maps developed by two newly independent, citizen-led redistricting commissions. The challenge of redrawing districts to enable people to perceive that they have some level of fair representation is not a new phenomenon in the United States. A look back at the history of redistricting in Colorado offers perspective on how previous generations have thought about representation, and what we can learn from them and apply to the current process.

Apportionment: Colorado's Path to Eight Congressional Districts

How have Colorado's electoral districts changed over time? Many people speculate that modern redistricting, with its precise details and powerful mapping software, is more difficult than ever. But controversy over redistricting is not new. Colorado was admitted as a state in 1876. In a contested election, James Belford became the first member of the US House of Representatives from the State of Colorado, although Thomas Patterson, who succeeded him, had been a delegate from the Colorado Territory to the 44th Congress. Representation in the US House of Representatives is organized by population, with each state having at least one representative, no matter how many people live in the state.

Apportionment is the process by which the seats in the house are allocated. The methods for apportionment have changed over time, starting with Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton proposing competing mathematical formulas. Following the 1880 census, which counted 194,327 people in the state, Colorado was apportioned one of the 325 seats then in the House (thirty-three of which were added in that redistricting cycle), so no electoral district lines were drawn.

The 1890 census reported Colorado's population at 413,249. This spectacular growth—enabled by the US government's efforts to drive out Indigenous people and open the land to American settlement, and driven by mineral rushes, agriculture, and Colorado's relative proximity to eastern markets—allowed the state to gain a second seat in the House, which now had 356 members (an increase of thirty-one seats). In its growth during this decade, Colorado mirrored other western states.

Throughout the region, the growing populations in new states were propelled by national policies and military power forcing Native American Tribes into smaller and smaller territories (often in violation of existing treaties), continuing effects of the Homestead Act of 1862, and efforts of the railroad companies to encourage settlement with cheap land. Throughout the West, the steady stream of miners, ranchers, farmers, and town builders, increasingly traveling on an expanding web of railroad lines, were so diffused across the region that the 1890 census declared the "frontier"—that mythical idea of western lands with fewer than two people per square mile—no longer existed.

Having two representatives necessitated the division of the state into two districts. The text of the bill dividing the state was fairly brief, simply listing which counties would constitute the first congressional district and which the second. The state was divided among counties, meaning the district populations were not equal, but they also were not the microtargeted districts we associate with redistricting and gerrymandering today.

Though the text of the 1891 bill was straightforward, its path through the legislature was anything but. April 6 was the last day of the legislative session that year. House Bill No. 171, the redistricting bill, was referred out of its Colorado Senate committee on April 4, with amendments relocating Park and Lake Counties to the second congressional district and moving Clear Creek, Gilpin, Grand, Rio Blanco, and Routt Counties to the first. After that, in the remaining two days of the session, four conference committees considered the bill, with each of the first three dissolving without reaching agreement. Ultimately, the Senate adopted the bill as passed by the House, without the Senate amendments.

Colorado gained a third congressional seat in 1901 with a population of 539,700, an increase of 30 percent from 1890, compared to an increase of 21 percent for the United States as a whole. From 1903 until 1913, two members were elected from Districts 1 and 2, and one from an at-large district, which meant that the whole population was voting for one member in addition to individual members from smaller geographical districts (single-member districts). The US House of Representatives now had 386 members, with Illinois, New York, and Texas gaining three seats each and seven states west of the Mississippi River gaining one seat each. The relative shift in power represented by population increases in western states and migration from the northeast to the southwest has been evident for over a century.

The people who decide about apportionment and redistricting have always been cognizant of the geographic power of including or excluding certain groups of people in voting districts. Sometimes they packed people in one district to minimize their political power and at other times distributed them throughout multiple districts to dilute their voices.

Following the 1910 census, forty-nine seats were added to the US House, bringing the total number of members to its current count of 435. Colorado gained a fourth congressional seat, a number that would not change until 1971. To fill the four

seats, two members at-large were elected for the last time in 1913. That spring, the state's General Assembly passed legislation dividing the state into four congressional districts. Notably, for the first time, the City and County of Denver was designated a district unto itself (District 1) and granted its own representative. The law went into effect the following year, and since the 1914 election all US House members from Colorado have been elected from single-member congressional districts.

The 1911 reapportionment was the last in which no states would lose representation, because the hard-fought 1929 Permanent Apportionment Act fixed the size of the House at 435 seats (save for a temporary increase to 437 members from 1959 to 1963 after Alaska and Hawaii achieved statehood). Thereafter, apportionment would be constrained, with growing states gaining representation at the expense of those whose populations were not keeping pace. As the population in the United States increased, urban and rural conflicts affected the governance process, resulting in disputes among the members of Congress about representation. During this time, the authors of *The Historical Atlas of State Power in Congress, 1790–1990*, Kenneth Martis and Gregory Elmes, describe "nonapportionment" following the 1920 census as centering one of two propositions: (1) expand the House once more to accommodate all states and ensure no losses of seats; or (2) fix the House size at 435 and reapportion accordingly.

The battle tied up Congress for most of the decade, with no side prevailing until 1929, when legislators finally agreed to set the cap for representatives in the US House at 435 and to reapportion congressional seats going forward without requiring negotiation by members of Congress about the number of seats added or how those seats would be divided up mathematically.

The Census Bureau was faced with the task of implementing the reapportionment process created by the 1929 Permanent Apportionment Act. Following the 1940 census, the bureau's solution was to develop the Method of Equal Proportions in 1941, which represents an attempt to minimize the relative differences in the number of people per representative among the states. Each state is apportioned its first representative, then the priority value of each state's population, multipliers, and total seats are computed, and seat numbers are assigned to the states to divide the remaining 385 seats. The Census Bureau provides mathematical and video explanations on its website.

In 1921, while the debate heated up in Congress, Colorado redrew its congressional districts according to the directive spelled out in the US Constitution. Colorado's legislators were primarily animated by the state's growing rural-urban divide, as the 1920 census found that for the first time more than half the 106,021,537 people in the United States lived in urban areas (although in Colorado just one of the four congressional districts—the First, encompassing Denver—could be classified as urban). From 1921 through 1964, the geographic boundaries of Colorado's congressional districts remained the same, reflecting the inclination of rural areas to retain as much power as possible, in spite of a population shift away from the state's rural communities toward the urban corridor around Denver and along the Front Range.

After the US Supreme Court held in its 1964 *Wesberry v. Sanders* ruling that districts in the US House of Representatives must be equal in population in order to uphold the principle of "one person, one vote," Colorado's electoral boundary lines, as well as those of many other states, were redrawn. Nevertheless, it is difficult to create equal-population districts across states with very different populations. For instance, the total population of the United States in 1960 was 179,323,175; dividing the population by the 435 seats would mean 412,237 persons per representative. But the smallest state by population, Alaska, had 226,167 people for one representative while New York, the most populous state, had 16,782,304 people for an average of 409,324 individuals per representative, and California had one representative for each 413,611 people. The distribution will never be completely even because of how our country is organized geographically, but the court's ruling requires that the distribution within a state must be as even as possible.

Colorado did not gain another congressional seat until the 1970 census apportionment, which was also the decade that Colorado Springs surpassed Pueblo as the second largest city in the state. By 1980, when Colorado gained a sixth seat, almost 75 percent of the United States population was living in urban areas, but geographers Martis and Elmes found that California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and Colorado had greater than 80 percent urbanization. Consider that John Denver released "Rocky Mountain High" in 1972—at that point, only about 20 percent of Colorado's population lived in the idyllic settings of wilderness, mountains, and open spaces he was singing about.

Following the 2000 census, Colorado added a seventh seat in the House of Representatives, with an eighth after the 2020 census. The national population shift first seen early in the twentieth century continued, with people moving away from the Northeast and Midwest and concentrating in the South and West. As the American population increasingly tilts west and concentrates in urban areas, the region's representation in Congress continues to grow. With the 2020 reapportionment, 43 percent of the seats in the US House

of Representatives were in states west of the Mississippi, more than double what it had been in 1880, when 20 percent of the seats were in states west of the Mississippi.

In Colorado, the trend within the state has also continued, with communities on the Eastern Plains and Western Slope—with some exceptions for resort communities—continuing to decrease in population as Coloradans concentrate along the urbanized Front Range corridor from Pueblo to Fort Collins and in a few mountain communities. The 2020 census found 84 percent of people in Colorado living in urbanized areas along the Front Range.

The century-long migration, first noted in the 1920 census, of Americans concentrating in urban areas and leaving rural communities shows no sign of abating, and the issues it raises for congressional apportionment remain unsettled. Representative Ira G. Hersey of Maine framed the debate a century ago in terms that sound familiar today, raising an alarm that growing cities would seize greater representation in Congress at the expense of rural areas that produce the food and resources the nation relies on, which would make the House something less than truly representative of the nation:

> One of the greatest dangers that confront the republic to-day is the tendency of the large cities to control the American Congress under the plausible plea that the consumer should control the Congress and that the producer should have no voice in the proceedings. Every ten years the attempt is made to change the House from a representative body to a small number who have removed themselves far away from a people that they do not attempt to represent.

History of Legislative Redistricting

To what extent does Colorado's state legislative redistricting mirror its congressional redistricting history? The Colorado House of Representatives and Colorado Senate are also now elected by geographic districts. Initial provisions of the Colorado Constitution included opportunities for reapportionment every five years instead of every ten, to account for the expected rapid growth in population. As Eleanore Bushnell noted in her 1970 analysis, *Impact of Reapportionment on the Thirteen Western States*, self-governance in counties "loomed large in the minds of the framers of Colorado's Constitution."

The State House has had sixty-five members and the State Senate thirty-five since at least 1901, save for a brief period after the passage of a constitutional amendment in 1962. State legislative and US congressional redistricting are completed through separate processes in Colorado. Prior to the 1960s, legislative districts were redrawn in 1901, 1913, and 1933. As the state added new counties, minor adjustments were made to the legislative districts in between, including an additional bill in 1909 to account for the separation of Denver from Arapahoe County.

As with the 1891 congressional redistricting, the 1913 legislative redistricting bill also passed on *sine die*, the last day of the legislative session. In 1932, Colorado voters passed an initiative redrawing legislative districts, but a bill in 1933 repealed that measure and allowed the legislature to adopt its own redistricting. The urban growth of cities in Colorado described in the 1930 census did not translate into proportional representation in the State House at this time.

To create legislative districts, these early bills set ratios. For example, the 1933 bill assigned one state senator for the first 17,000 people and one representative for the first 8,000 people in a county, grouping smaller counties into a district to reach these numbers. Larger counties were considered their own districts and given additional senators and representatives depending on population. Denver was apportioned seven state senators in 1933, while the counties of Elbert, Lincoln, Kit Carson, and Cheyenne shared one. Pueblo had four state representatives under this scheme, and the counties of Eagle and Pitkin had one. The districts with multiple state senators or representatives then elected them at-large, meaning a voter in Denver would be voting for all seven state senators on the same ballot.

In considering the construction of these early state legislative districts—assigning seats to counties or groups of counties—it makes sense that during this time the process was commonly referred to as apportionment or reapportionment. Similar to congressional districts, the 1933 legislative apportionment remained in place until the 1960s. In 1956, Governor Ed Johnson called a special session to include legislative reapportionment. The legislature considered apportionment measures in the special session but failed to adopt one. Initiative #4 in 1956 also addressed apportionment, but only 31 percent of the voters supported it. So, the 1933 districts stayed.

As Bushnell observed in her 1970 analysis:

> By 1957, it had become clear that some new apportionment would have to be adopted in 1960. Population was growing and shifting rapidly; but due to imbalance of growth, the representation ratios fixed in 1953 could not be applied to the new situation. The minimum population for each senator or representative would have to be revised upward or there would have to be more seats in both houses. The problem was further complicated by the fact that small districts were actually continuing to lose population.

Redistricting Reform Comes to Colorado

By the 1960s, people were beginning to recognize that continuing to hold new elections in old districts affected their representation. Colorado was only one of a number of states that had not made changes to electoral districts in decades. Eventually, the US Supreme Court intervened, issuing several opinions that ultimately set the standard of "one person, one vote" in congressional and legislative redistricting. *Baker v. Carr*, in 1962, found that redistricting is justiciable, meaning federal courts could hear redistricting cases. In *Wesberry v. Sanders* (1964), the court held that US congressional districts must have equal population. In *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964), they applied an equal population standard to state legislative districts as well.

On the same day it announced its opinion in *Reynolds v. Sims*, the Supreme Court also decided a case specific to Colorado, *Lucas v. Colorado General Assembly* (1964). The court decided several state legislative redistricting cases that day, but *Lucas* was unique in that the apportionment plan had been enacted through an initiative. The holding in *Lucas* invalidated Amendment #7, which Colorado voters had adopted in 1962.

Amendment #7 set a requirement for substantially equal population among State House districts, and for the State Senate it instructed that when a county gets more than one senate seat, the county should be divided into districts of substantially equal population. The measure also expanded the size of the State Senate from thirty-five to thirty-nine and assigned the additional senators to specific counties. The voters in 1962 also considered and defeated an alternative, Amendment #8, which would have more evenly apportioned legislators in both houses but maintained the system of electing all legislators from a single county at large, unless the county voted to move to districts. Amendment #8 would also have created a three-person commission to periodically reapportion the legislature.

After the Supreme Court found Amendment #7 to be unconstitutional, the voters in 1966 adopted Amendment #4, requiring single-member districts for both chambers of the legislature and returning the State Senate to thirty-five senators. The measure left it to the legislature to draw the districts, requiring them to do so by 1967 and after each decennial census thereafter. Bushnell found gerrymandering did take place in Colorado, exemplified by population extremes and oddly-drawn districts, including one with fifteen jutting peninsulas and ninety-six sides. Today, drawing districts for partisan advantage can take place with much less obvious manipulation, thanks to geospatial mapping technology.

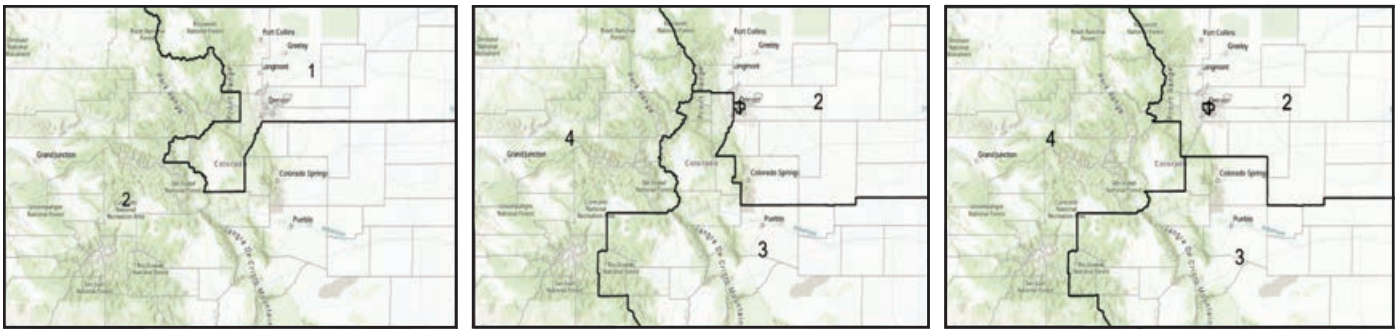
In 1972, the League of Women Voters mounted an effort to have redistricting completed by a commission and proposed a Colorado State Reapportionment Commission Amendment, creating a commission primarily composed of political appointees. The voters approved the commission amendment on November 4, 1974. No more than six members of the commission could be from one political party. No legislative committees were explicitly responsible for congressional redistricting and bills on the subject were assigned to committee after they were proposed. The governor had veto power only over the congressional plan.

As with many legal documents, there was dispute over interpretation of the amendment. The Legislative Drafting Office offered comments to the Commission in September of 1981 on elements of equal population, contiguity, preservation of municipal and county boundaries, and communities of interest, which Lyle Kyle, longtime director of Colorado Legislative Council Staff, determined to be a reasonable effort to achieve fair representation rather than assuring any group a particular representative.

There were a variety of legal challenges to the Commission's 1981 plan from residents across the state, ranging from lack of publication of proposed maps to splitting of counties, but the Colorado Supreme Court generally found that the Commission had acted within its constitutional bounds and focused on the importance of having, as Kyle noted, an "identifiable senatorial representative." The concerns presented in Kyle's review are echoed in what has been discussed this year across Colorado during public hearings and submitted as part of public comments on redistricting—seemingly arbitrary splitting and combining of political subdivisions, discussions about what constitutes a community of interest and how that community should best be represented, and procedural issues such as time constraints.

With a state relatively evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats over the past several decades, partisan drawing of districts continued to be a concern of fair government advocates in Colorado. Although several rounds of redistricting included public meetings, legal challenges to enacted districts also were a recurring factor. Gerrymandering was seen by some as an inevitable part of the legislative landscape. Colorado College Professor Emeritus Bob Loevy, who served on the Colorado Reapportionment Commission in 2011, observed that, "Political parties have no choice but to work hard at gerrymandering legislative seats in their favor. If they do not, the opposition party will gerrymander them, and the first political party will lose ground in its efforts to elect majorities in both houses of the state legislature."

In 2018, two competing groups came together to create "Fair Maps



Colorado congressional districts, (left to right): 53rd Congress, 1893; 66th Congress, 1919; 68th Congress, 1921

Colorado," proposing Amendments Y for congressional districts and Z for state legislative districts. The state legislature unanimously referred the measures to the state's voters, who passed both by large margins. As a result, Colorado's current redistricting process in 2021 was led by the Colorado Independent Redistricting Commissions. With more direct involvement from non-politicians, both as members of the commissions and as contributors to the discussion through public comments and proposed maps, Colorado had a chance to try another approach to legislative map drawing.

Having citizen involvement does not eliminate politicians' needs or desires from the conversation. Elected officials still want their voices heard in the process, and state legislators, county officials, and city council members joined other citizens in sharing their viewpoints through the public hearing process. However, they are now no longer the only voices at the table, and community members and their maps have been elevated to a more prominent position. Both commissions successfully adopted maps that the Colorado Supreme Court then approved, but whether those maps are fair is, of course, in the eye of the beholder. The commissioners were empowered to interpret the criteria described in the amendments, and to make the decision about who to group where, but there is no real way to measure whether elected officials would have made different decisions.

It may take two or three redistricting cycles—two or three decades—before we are able to assess how effective the Colorado Independent Redistricting Commissions are in promoting fair, nonpartisan maps. Future historians of redistricting in the state will ultimately write the next chapter in Colorado's effort to design a truly representative government, but today's Coloradans have developed a first draft.

For Further Reading

Explore government websites to read about historical changes in the US House of Representatives and the US Census Bureau. Compare Colorado's redistricting process with those of other states in the region in Eleanore Bushnell's review, *Impact of Reapportionment on the Thirteen Western States*. *The Congressional Record* offers a variety of perspectives on issues of the day, as can be found in Representative Ira Hersey's remarks during the 1921 Apportionment Debate on January 18. If you are looking for details about nuts and bolts of the process, Lyle C. Kyle prepared a review of the redistricting process for the Colorado Legislative Council in 1982, entitled *Reapportionment of the Colorado General Assembly 1972–1982*. More recently, Robert D. Loevy's *Confessions of a Reapportionment Commissioner–2011* brings personal perspective to the previous effort to draw lines in Colorado following the 2010 census. For additional historical and geographic context, examine *The Historical Atlas of State Power in Congress, 1790–1990* by Kenneth C. Martis and Gregory A. Elmes.

Maps

The United States Congressional District Shapefiles website provided the information for the historical congressional district lines. (Jeffrey B. Lewis, Brandon DeVine, Lincoln Pitcher, and Kenneth C. Martis, 2013. *Digital Boundary Definitions of United States Congressional Districts, 1789–2012*. Data file and code book. Retrieved from https://cdmaps.polisci.ucla.edu on 1 June 2021.) Maps were created in ArcGIS Pro through the University of Colorado Colorado Springs.

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EDITOR'S NOTE:
This article was previously published on *The Colorado Magazine* online. It has been updated to reflect current events. To keep up-to-date on the latest articles, sign up for the *Weekly Digest* newsletter at h-co.org/publications.


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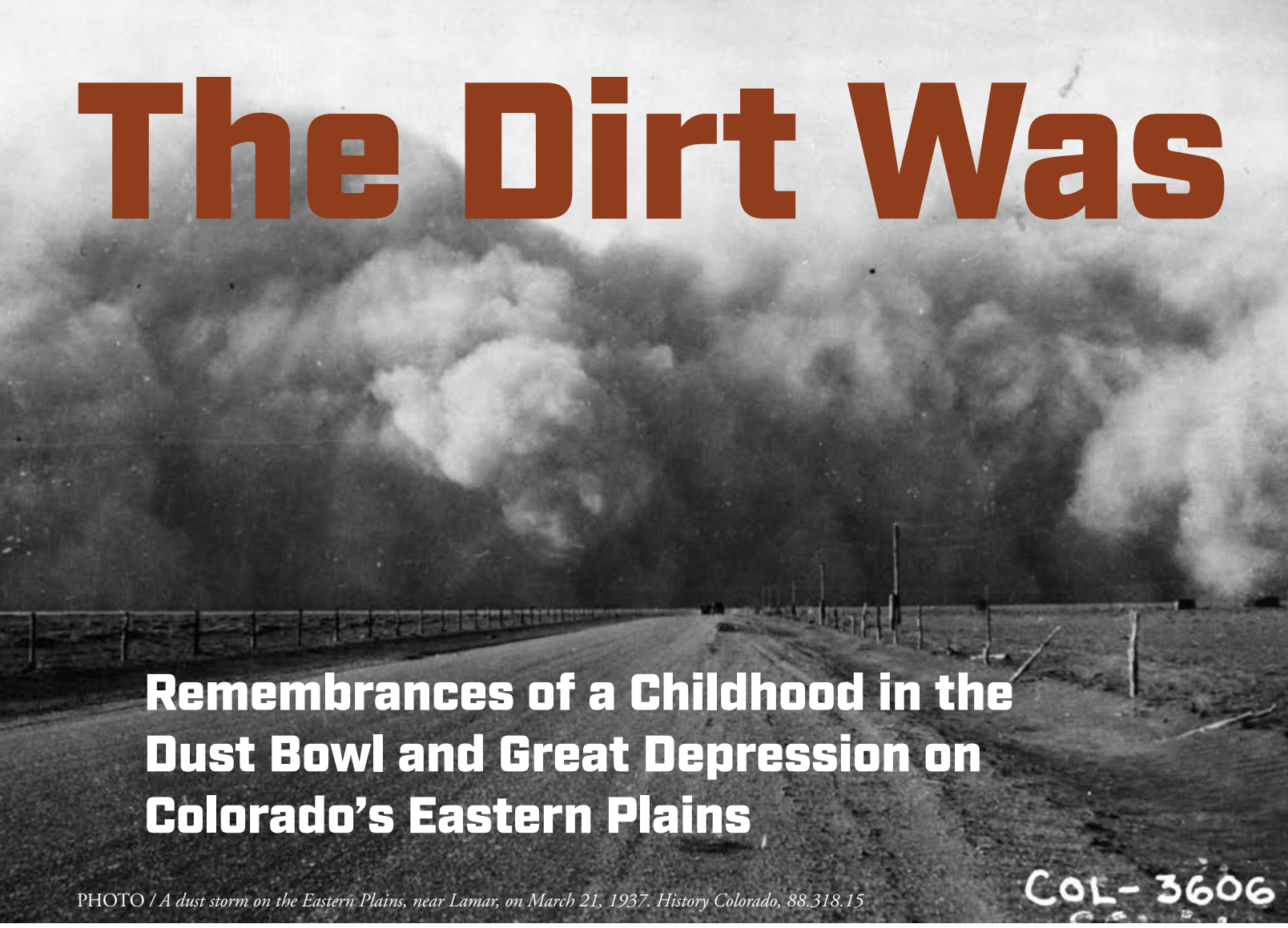
The Dirt Was



Remembrances of a Childhood in the Dust Bowl and Great Depression on Colorado's Eastern Plains

PHOTO / *A dust storm on the Eastern Plains, near Lamar, on March 21, 1937. History Colorado, 88.318.15*

BY JOSEPH P. WEIBEL
As told to J. Joseph Marr

Joseph P. Weibel was born at the beginning of the 1930s on Colorado's eastern prairies, with the dust and grasshopper storms, drought, and the Great Depression. His family endured privation that is difficult to comprehend in the twenty-first century. That time—and its terrible hardships—stayed with people, like Joe, for their entire lives. Joe and I have known each other for over fifteen years and have spoken much about that time. Now ninety years old, he agreed to tell me his full story of those terrible days in a series of interviews, sharing how it was for him then in hopes that it would help others appreciate it now. The words presented here are his, rearranged and edited for clarity and sequence.

My dad, Louis Weibel, and mom, Margaret Bracktinbach Weibel, had a farm with 160 acres in eastern Colorado, about eight miles north of Stratton, near the Kansas border. When Dad and Mom got married his father gave them 80 acres, with only the down payment made. Dad wanted to be a builder, he never wanted to be a farmer.

I was born March 6, 1931, at Grandmother Bracktinbach's house. There was a blizzard raging and a neighbor came to help Grandma. Granddad and my dad were on the way to Stratton to get the doctor. By the time the doctor got back to Grandma's house, I was lying next to Mom and screaming. I was their third child. Their first, Justin, lived only six months and died of the "dirt pneumonia." I had a brother, Andy, about two years older.

Our house was one story, with no insulation, no electricity, and no plumbing. It had a wood floor, but it wasn't very good. The water was outside; you had to go to the windmill and carry back a bucket. There was no toilet in the house, so you had to run out in the cold or heat and then use [a page from] the Montgomery Ward or J.C. Penney catalog. I never heard of toilet paper. The house had three rooms: a kitchen, a bedroom, and another room where Andy and I lived

Everywhere

along with things in storage. The only heat in the house was from the cooking stove, so we wore whatever clothes we had to stay warm. In cold weather, we heated rocks in the stove to put in the beds.

There was no icebox, but my grandmother had a pit dug at her house, with straw in the bottom. In the winter, it filled with snow and runoff water and froze. We cut ice from the pit with a saw and used horses to drag it to our house, where we put it into another pit. This was the icebox until the spring thaw. We kept root vegetables and meat that we butchered in there. Every other Saturday, the county gave away food and clothing and we were there for it.

The dust storms that began in the early 1930s were a great environmental disaster. The drought of 1888 to 1889 caused more economic damage, but it did not hold the terror and despair of the dust storms. During the Dust Bowl, more than 100 million acres of land turned into dust and the resulting clouds went up 10,000 feet in the air. For people living on the Plains, like Joe's family, there was no warning since there was no communication. The dust permeated everything and everyone. It covered homes and fences—and both disappeared under the shifting, abrasive particles that scoured paint from homes and skin from the face. Children and adults sickened and died from "dust pneumonia."

My first memory of the dust storms was Mother and Dad getting quilts wet and nailing them over the windows and doors so that when the dirt came, we would not die from it. The dirt was everywhere and went into every part of our house. I remember a neighbor who covered every opening to his house except the keyhole, and afterward he had about three inches of dirt in his house; it all came through the keyhole.

The dust storms came for years, and covered fences, houses, barns, and anyone left outside was buried and died. Sometimes the dust storms made static electricity. It would affect the vehicles and they would just stop. Every car dragged a chain along the road to ground the car so it wouldn't stop running.

We had a rope tied from the house to the barn. We would hold on to it during the dust and snowstorms when we went to milk the cows. We wore masks and bandanas over our faces, and you couldn't see anything. If you lost hold of the rope, you were lost. The dirt was in everything.

I think about 50 percent of the people left. They put everything in a truck and started to California or Oregon. Some of them stopped wherever they could get work, but most went all the way. They had a much better life out there, I think. I don't know why some of us stayed, we had nothing—not even hope.

He stopped talking for a moment, his face hardened, and he stared past me. He had gone back there. He trembled, and looked lost, and then shook his head and looked at me.

You know…the worst thing was that we didn't know if it would ever stop.

He paused again, stared back down at the table, shook his head, and became silent. Sometime later, he continued.

When I was about four, I remember Dad came in at lunch after plowing the field with two horses and a two-blade plow. He said, "If it's like this next year, we'll lose the farm and I won't care."

Dad planted rows of corn in the spring. One summer, because of the winter snows, the corn was three or four inches high. Then a cloud of grasshoppers that blocked out the sun flew in and ate the crop—every stalk—down to the dirt. I remember Mother and Dad standing over the field, crying. Yet the wind and dust never stopped, and the rain never came. But the bank came and foreclosed on the note.

In 1935, Mother, Dad, Andy, and I left the farm in a one-ton truck with only one seat. Mother started crying and said "What are we gonna do? We have nothing, we have no money. What are we gonna do?" Dad said, "It can't be any worse to move to town. We will make it." Everything Dad and Mom owned was in the back of the truck. Tied to the back of the truck was our milk cow. We drove down the dirt road toward town and closed out one part of our lives. We didn't know what the next part would be, but Dad was right, it couldn't be worse.

The Depression, dust storms, drought, and grasshoppers that finally ruined the farm were not an unusual story on the Colorado plains, in the Texas Panhandle, Oklahoma, or Kansas. It was a subsistence existence dependent on nature and luck, and both seemed to be against farmers at the time. There were no thoughts of the future, only surviving the present. Life for Joe and his family continued in Stratton, population of

300, but so did the dust and grasshopper storms and the crushing economics of the Depression. The only improvement about living in town was that the grasshoppers were eating someone else's crops.

The house we moved into was the cheapest thing Dad could find, and we lived there about ten years. It was on a dirt road—they were all dirt—and it had a kitchen, two bedrooms, and a porch on each end. There was no indoor plumbing, but we had a spigot for water right off the porch, which would freeze in winter if it was not drained each time we used it to get a bucket of water.

Since we still had a milk cow, we had fresh milk, cream, and we made our own butter. There was a chicken coop in the yard and that two-holer outhouse (with a Montgomery Ward catalog inside). I remember the rats living down the hole. Dad would shoot them, and more would move in.

Everyone was out of work unless they worked at one of the stores, or still had a farm, or was a doctor. The government started a work program and Dad went to work making outhouses for the three Cs [Civilian Conservation Corps], who built roadside parks along the highways that no one used. He also worked for them in grass fields, cutting cactus and soaproot. I think he made about two dollars a day.

Mother and Dad bought 200 baby chicks from Denver each year, which were delivered by the railroad. We had to be at the train for the delivery or they would die or disappear. When I was about five or six, one morning Andy came running into the house yelling that there were rats in the chicken coop. They wanted chicken dinner! Dad said, "We gotta fix that!" He got some wire netting from the junkyard, and Andy and I dug down six to ten inches to install the wire netting. That kept the rats out.

Since we didn't have land to plant a crop, we went to Grandma Brack-tinbach's farm, about six miles out of town, and planted potatoes. It was done on Good Friday each year, after church. Potatoes were cut up and shoved into the ground by stepping on them and then kicking dirt over them. We took care of the crop all summer and in the fall harvested the potatoes. Grandma kept some and we put ours in the root cellar for the winter. The dirt cellar was really dark and filled with spiders.

We lived right across the alley from the grocery store on Main Street. Next door to the grocery, there was a hardware store where I worked some years later. One time I found a coin that looked like a silver dollar, so I went to the grocery store and bought candy for myself, and bread, and beans, and oatmeal. It added up to a dollar. Looking back, I don't think it was an American dollar, but the grocer took it.

It was a tough life in town, too. Every other Saturday we still went to the county garage and got some food and clothes, and we were damn grateful. We did everything to survive. My brothers and I trapped skunks and badgers and shot rabbits and pheasants for dinner. We ate what we shot and that was it. If we didn't shoot something, then there was no dinner.

We did something else to survive that involved the whole town, and it will show you just how hard it was to live out there. There were lots of jackrabbits on the prairie; you could see them jumping around in the brush. In the spring, when the crops and garden vegetables began to grow, the rabbits would eat everything that came up. So, we had jackrabbit drives. We took snow fencing outside of town and set up a U-shaped trap—about the size of a football field—with one side open. There were fifty to a hundred people involved.

Then, the kids and people with dogs would spread out in a line that covered about half a section (about a half square mile) and we would drive the rabbits toward the fence. When they were inside, the fence was closed around them. There were several hundred of them in the trap. All the kids had baseball bats and we went inside and began to hit the rabbits. When all the rabbits were dead, we skinned them, and sold the skins for about twenty-five cents per hide. We gutted

the carcasses and kept the meat. The pigs got all the rest.

Dad and us boys built a bathroom on one side of the house. We really enjoyed having this because we still had to heat the water on the stove, but we didn't have to sit in a small tub on the kitchen floor to have our baths. At that time there was no sewer system in Stratton, so Dad said, "You boys are going to dig a cesspool." The cesspool was about fourteen to eighteen feet deep and four feet wide.

We used a homemade winch and hand-crank pulley system to bring up the dirt. The person not digging had to dump the dirt and send the bucket back down to the digger. The digger had to go down the hole in the bucket. We all took turns. About fourteen feet down there was a foot and a half of sandbar. The drained water went into the sand and went...someplace. All the water in the house drained into it.

The constant scramble for money dominated this era. Children in their early years assumed the work responsibility of adults. Entry into school was a temporary escape that made them aware there was a world outside the Dust Bowl. It also provided sorely needed intellectual stimulus and psychological respite from the soul-deadening pressures of continual privation.

I went to the St. Charles of Borromeo Catholic School. My older brother was in fourth grade, and then I started. Each morning we would bring in a tub of water and mother would be sure our ears and faces were clean. Walking to school and home in the dirt storm was a bastard. We wore a piece of cloth for a mask and you barely could see through it. Nobody ever smiled, except when there was good weather. Then they would smile at you and say, "How's it going? All right?" And we would answer, "All right!" But it never was.

I don't remember much of the first school years, except, since we went to daily Mass, we ate our breakfast at school. My brother and I packed breakfast and lunch in a half-gallon syrup can (it looked a lot like a two-quart paint can). Breakfast and lunch were the same: bread and a fried egg. After we ate, we lined up at the drinking fountain for water. We paid for school with milk and cream from our cows, eggs from the chickens, and sometimes the chickens too. Anyway, I got a pretty good eight years of education there.

PHOTO / *A six-year-old Joe, in 1937, holds his new brother, Don, and Ken stands to the right of the chair. Courtesy Joseph P. Weibel*

The school was run by nuns, and some of the nuns would slap you upside the head or hit you with that sharp edge of a ruler if you did not behave. The school had no indoor plumbing and no cafeteria. The girls had a three-holer and the boys had a two-holer. The boys had two tin troughs (metal tubes cut in half) in the outhouse for a urinal.

We had three classrooms. One room was grades first through fourth, the second room was fifth to eighth, and the third was the music—church music and Christmas music—and art room. There was no physical education, but we did have a fifteen-minute recess outside without any playground equipment. We made our own games. In the winter when it was cold, we brought water from home to put on the sloped sidewalk to freeze, so we had an upright sliding contest.

Dad finally got on with the power company and worked from 4 P.M. to midnight servicing diesel engines. That brought in some money and we bought another house just outside of Stratton. It had three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a porch but, this time, electricity and indoor plumbing. We still needed to expand, so Dad bought a deserted barn and we tore it down. We saved the lumber and straightened all the nails and built two bedrooms.

Life never really got easy. We had two cows now. They lived in the yard, and my brother and I had to take them out of town to a field so they could get some green in their systems. We took them out in the morning and staked them and brought them back in the afternoon. They were wet and muddy, and their tails would be covered in manure which would dry into a hard knot. We had to milk them when we brought them back and, while we did it, they would swing their tails around and hit you in the head with that knot of manure. I hated those cows!

I graduated from Stratton High School in 1949 and went to college at Colorado A&M in Fort Collins [now Colorado State University]. After one semester I realized I wasn't ready for college and went back to a job I had at the Stratton hardware store. I really wanted to get out of Stratton and looked for anything that would take me away. Finally, I went to work for the Highline Electric Association. We took electricity to rural America. I helped build the power grid one pole at a time in Kansas, New Mexico, and Colorado. But when I was between jobs, I was back home again in Stratton. It seemed I could never shake the place where there were dust and grasshopper storms, the Depression, death of a brother, and poverty that kept me looking for money every day.

In April, 1951, the Korean War and a bus finally took Joe out of Stratton. He learned from a girlfriend, whose mother worked at the draft board, that he would be drafted soon, so he and a friend took a bus from Burlington to Denver and enlisted in the Air Force. He was sent to Tokyo, Japan, and began a new life. After thirty months, he returned to northern Colorado and worked selling oil field equipment for the next thirty-seven years. He and his wife, Dee, (who grew up near Stratton under similar circumstances) were married for fifty-five years and raised six children. Although successful in his life and work, his early years never left him.

Joe designed and built a house near Casper, Wyoming in 1980. It was a masterpiece of engineering and use of renewable energy at a time when that almost was unheard of. The house was set ten feet down into the side of a hill overlooking the North Platte River—and hidden from wind. The portion below ground kept the home at a relatively constant temperature year-round and a large solar panel provided heat. One small room was devoted to a pump and water supply from their well. The top level of the house and the garage were above ground, with a third of the garage given to a heat management system that used the solar heat to supplement a heat pump. The home was a triumph over the adversity of his early years and a reward for hard work and patience. But the memories of those years on the High Plains hovered just below the surface of his mind to emerge at unpredictable moments. Ninety years later, he has not been able to put aside the dust, drought, depression, and death on the eastern Colorado plains of his childhood.

PHOTO / *Joe in his USAF uniform in the early 1950s. Courtesy Joseph P. Weibel*

J. JOSEPH MARR, MD had a twenty-year career in academic internal medicine and research. He then entered into executive management of pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies, and then was a partner in an international venture capital firm. He is now retired and spends time with family, volunteer activities, and writing.

INVESTING TIME

We talked with Bank of America's Raju Patel about investing in history, businesses, and communities.

PHOTO / *Courtesy of Bank of America*

Q Why do you think it is important to support History Colorado's work?

Raju Patel: I think History Colorado sparks critical conversations that help to educate and, ultimately, to strengthen our community. Through the *Building Denver* initiative, in particular, History Colorado is doing incredible and important work confronting the consequences of health and racial exclusivity that have emerged as a result of our city's design. Bank of America's support of this effort underpins our ongoing commitments to advance racial equality and economic opportunity, including our $1.25 billion five-year commitment, which supports investments that address racial justice, advocacy, and equality for people and communities of color.

Q What does our shared history suggest to us about how we might address the most pressing problems we face today?

Raju Patel: I think cross-sector partnerships are critical to tackling social injustice and economic inequalities. During Covid and the health and humanitarian crisis, communities of color have experienced disproportionate health and economic impacts. It's exaggerated previously existing inequities and issues of racial equality and economic opportunity are really deeply connected. Where there are racial injustices, there's also often a lack of economic mobility and vice versa. Through direct action and investment, Bank of America is focused on creating opportunity in the areas of health, jobs, small business support, and affordable housing. These areas are where there are long-term systematic gaps that have existed and where significant changes are required to achieve sustainable progress.

Q Can you share a moment in history that inspires you, personally?

Raju Patel: Merrill Lynch, which is a part of Bank of America, has been in Colorado for over one hundred years. I'm curious as to what this history of providing financial advice was like a hundred years ago. But as it relates to Bank of America today, we're fairly new in the state. We started our expansion here with financial centers and by serving small businesses and midsize to large businesses in 2015. That's what inspires me: We've come to Colorado to help people, individuals, and companies grow.

Q How do you see Bank of America engaging in Colorado communities in future years?

Raju Patel: We're committed to dedicating our resources to addressing the issues that matter the most to Denver. We want to make this a great place to live and work. We've also increased the number of employees here over the last six years, from roughly 200 to 725. I'm proud of that expansion and investment we've made to serve our clients in Denver and in Colorado. As it relates to the community, in 2020 alone, we invested a total of $2.8 million locally, really focused on alleviating unprecedented impacts to health, food insecurity, jobs, and education. And we also expect to deliver well over $3.2 million to the community by the end of this year.

We see community collaborations and partnerships as ongoing work. We continue to build upon that to help people succeed today and look into the future economy. Our vision is not only being engaged in the present issues in the community, but also to create sustainable progress and change that benefits individuals and families decades into the future. Hopefully, a hundred years from now, somebody will say, "I wonder what kind of advice they were giving out a hundred years ago?" We're excited about that.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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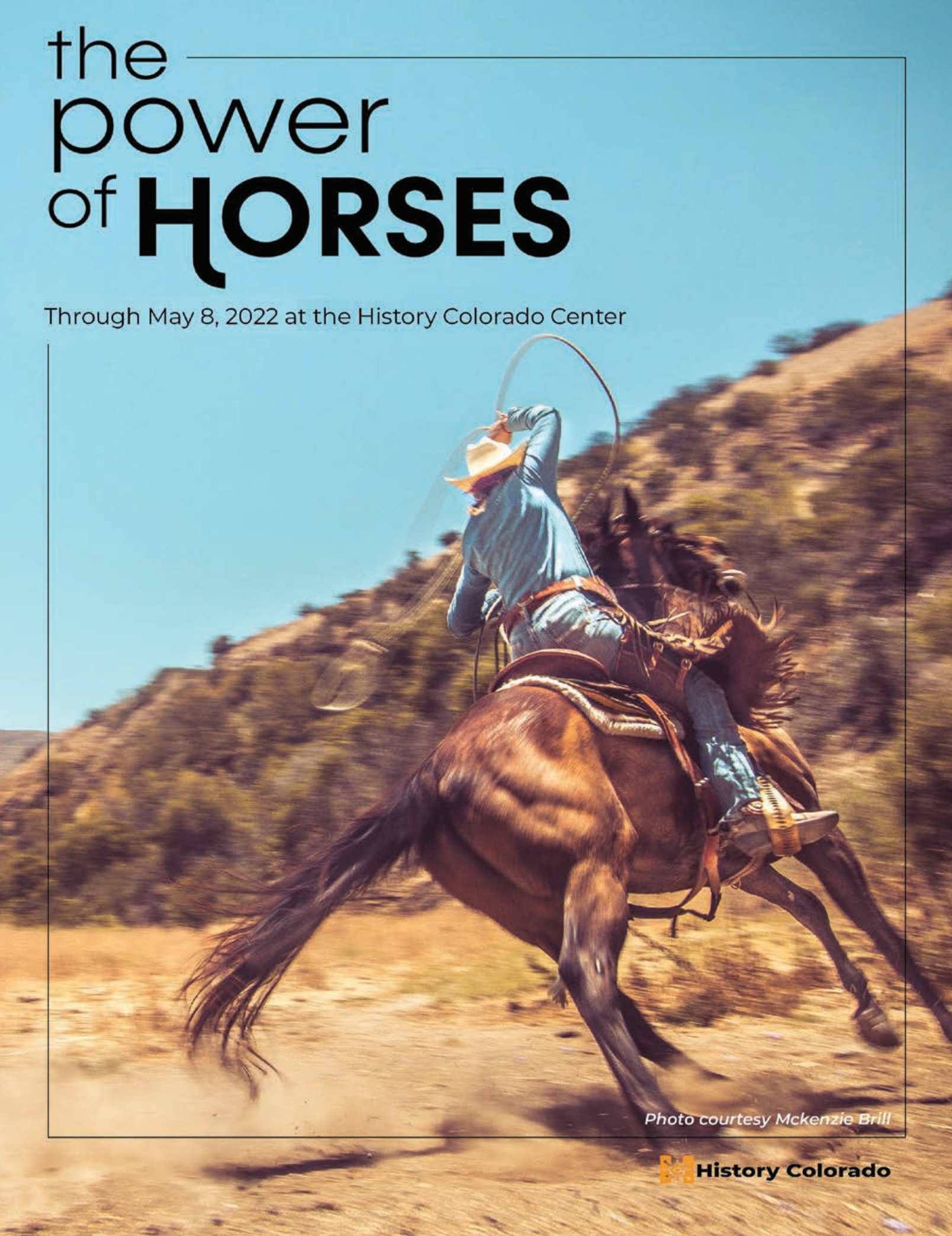

Photo courtesy Mckenzie Brill

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