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JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE

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Grand Junction's City Parks: A History of Community Cooperation

by Phyllis Buckley

Phyllis Buckley is a native of Grand Junction and has earned a B.A. degree in History/Political Science from Western State College. She is working toward a teaching certificate at Mesa State College, currently student teaching at Central High School.

A desire for open spaces within developing cities was expressed early in this country's history. In Boston, land was reserved for a public park in 1640, while in Philadelphia five squares were designated for permanent use by the people in 1682. Although Boston Common was used as a public park for pasturing cows and one area of Philadelphia was used for pasturing sheep, hardly fitting in with our modern notion of what constitutes a park, this was nonetheless a beginning for America's park system.[1]

As the country grew and matured, so, too, did the concept of parks as more than just open spaces for grazing animals or training soldiers. In 1733 New York set aside space for its first public park, but added a concept of walkways, beauty in landscaping, and planning for recreational use.[2]

Cities continued to grow, private developers continued to seek land on which to build, and civic leaders and others began to express concern about the need to conserve open land within the cities. Coupled with this was a belief that fresh air, open space, and greenery made a significant contribution to public health. By the middle of the nineteenth century a park movement was emerging which strongly encouraged city planners to pay close attention to setting aside open spaces within cities.[3]

The "founding fathers" who incorporated the city of Grand Junction in 1881 included this philosophy in their original plans for the town.

When incorporation papers were filed and the town was laid out, plans were included for four parks. The town's first newspaper praised the accomplishments of these men and listed park space as one of the new city's assets:

> The town of Grand Junction is laid off on a most liberal scale. The original town site comprises one section. In the center of each quarter section is reserved a square for a park . . . in the center of the town are grounds for a court house, public library, city and county jail, public hall and armory, and fire department.[4]

The original parks were named Maple, Cottonwood, Chestnut, and Walnut. Between Ute and Pitkin were two parks: Maple (between Ninth and Tenth Streets) and Cottonwood (between Fourth and Fifth Streets). The other two parks were between Hill and Gunnison Avenues — Walnut between Fourth and Fifth, and Washington between Ninth and Tenth. The names remained the same for thirty-five years, although a change was made in 1883 when an ordinance was passed which reversed the names of two of the original four parks. Maple Park thus became Cottonwood Park, while Cottonwood Park became Maple. The same ordinance provided for the planting of trees in each park, according to their names: maple trees in Maple Park, cottonwood, chestnut, and walnut trees in Cottonwood, Chestnut, and Walnut Parks.[5]

Early visions of trees in the parks were not realized immediately, however, and the first development in a park did not begin until 1887, when plans were made to have "the park" (Cottonwood) leveled and surveyed. Bids were then advertised to set out the trees. A later motion provided for the precise location of the trees, their condition, and size: planted 12½ feet apart; straight, vigorous, and thrifty; one to two inches in diameter; cut back to six feet in height; and the trunks to fork no lower than five feet.[6]

By 1889 development of City Park (Maple) was begun with plans to plant a combination of bluegrass, lawn grass, and white clover and irrigate it for a year — all for the sum of two hundred dollars. A.F. Paff proposed to care for the park that year, with the understanding that he was not responsible for irrigation if the city failed to have water in its ditches. Walnut Park was seeded in 1902, for a total of $125 plus twenty dollars a month for care.[7]

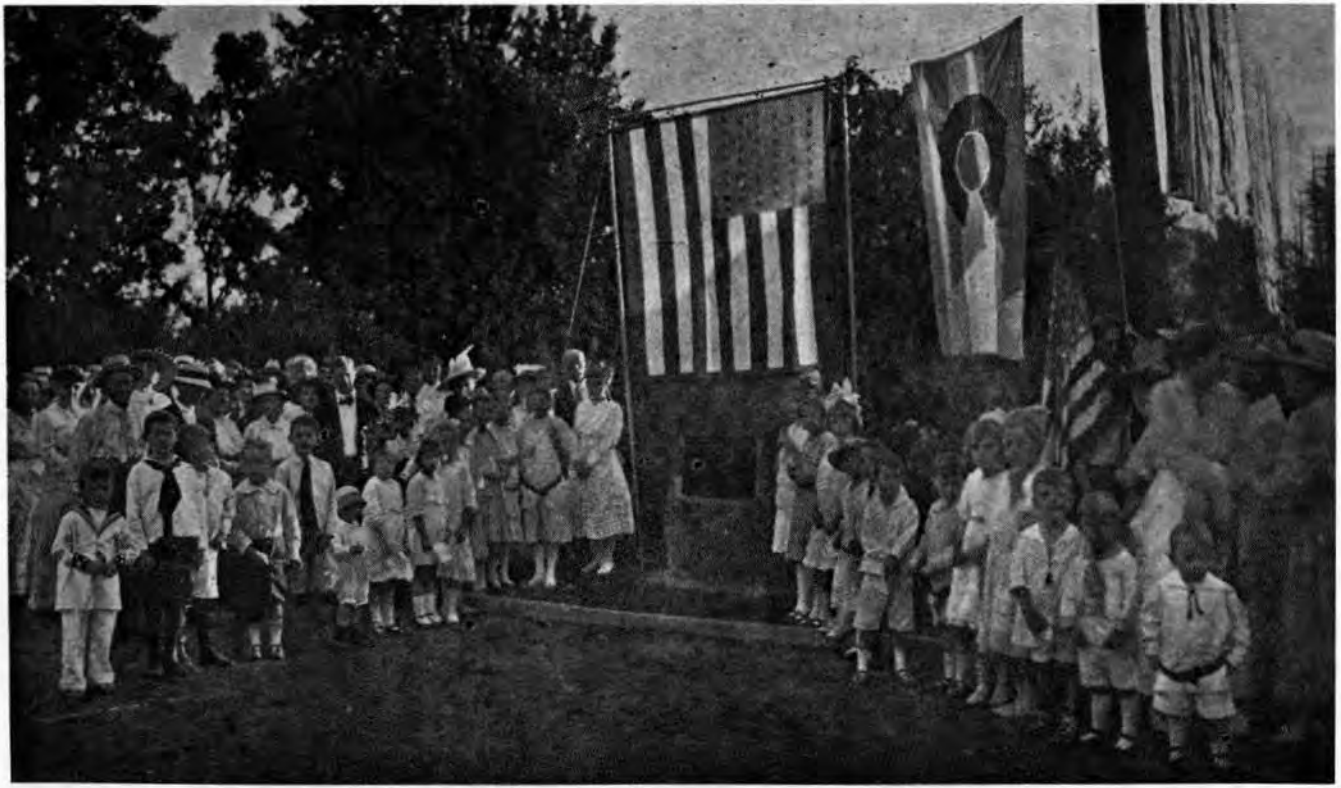
Increasingly the parks became a focus for activities in the new city, and citizens in the community approached the city fathers for permission to use one of the parks as a children's park. The Loyal Legion of Grand Junction asked that one of the parks be improved

and beautified, and permission was granted for them to use the Fifth Street (Walnut) Park. Within a month the Cadet Band had asked for permission to build a bandstand and donate it to the city for use in City (Maple) Park.[8]

As the city continued to grow, the opportunity arose for additions to designated park lands. General William Palmer, creator of the D&RG Railroad of Colorado Springs, offered to donate about fifty acres to the city in 1907 if the city would agree to spend at least one thousand dollars a year for the next ten years for improvement and if the land would be kept and used for a park. The offer was submitted to the taxpayers for a vote in 1908, but failed to carry. However, in 1911 the proposal surfaced again and the subsequent vote added Palmer Park (on Orchard Mesa where the Municipal Cemetery is now located) to the city.[9]

Responding to the need for more time, energy and money to maintain the parks, the city fathers established a fund designated for maintenance and improvement in 1908.[10] The next step was taken in 1909 when the city changed forms of government and the new charter of the city included a park commission, to be appointed by the City Council. The following year the City Council passed a resolution appropriating $1,860 for the care and maintenance of public parks, with as much as $1,200 of that amount allocated to improvement and development of Maple Park. A Boulder landscape architect, W.W. Parce, drew up plans for the park and supervised the planting of over fifteen hundred new plants and trees. That year's annual report proudly announced that "a beginning was made toward park development" and expressed the hope that within a few years Grand Junction would be able to "show at least one beauty spot to visitors."[11]

Sidewalks were added to Maple Park in 1911 and ten new seats were ordered, five each for Maple and Walnut Parks. Plans were developed that year for a children's park and playground in Walnut Park, but residents in the area objected to having a playground there. The following year a concrete foundation was laid under the bandstand in Maple Park, while at Cottonwood Park only the preliminary work was being done for development. Some work was done in Palmer Park, but it proved to be expensive due to the taxes imposed by a separate irrigation district. Ownership of that property was still unsettled.[12] Pictures of Maple Park during 1912 show the bandstand and a crowd assembled for a Sunday concert, as well as the layout of the walkways. It was beginning to take on the appearance and function of a "real" park.



(Photo courtesy of Grand Junction City Archives)

Dedication of Whitman Monument in Whitman Park, August 4, 1917.

Another large piece of property, approximately forty acres owned by the Mesa County Fair Association, was offered to the city in 1913 for $30,000 plus free use by the Fair Association for two years. An election that fall resulted in rejection of the offer by the voters. A committee was appointed the following year to investigate ways to purchase the fairgrounds. C.W. Shores, the owner of the property, offered to sell it to the city in 1914, this time for a price of $22,000, but again nothing was settled.[13]

A concrete foundation and aquatic pool costing only $327 were built in Walnut Park in 1914, and cement walks and curbing were added on two sides. That same year a small nursery was started in Chestnut Park, with about a thousand small trees and five hundred shrubs, to be transplanted later to the other parks.[14]

As continued improvements were made to the parks, the public perception of them began to change and residents began making use of them for their enjoyment. Charles K. Holmberg, the city clerk in 1914, in summarizing that year's activities, mentioned the increased use of the parks, especially Maple and Walnut Parks. He commented that the parks had been used by transients in previous years, but noted that city residents, particularly women and children, had begun to appreciate the value of the parks and the improvements that had been made.[15]

In 1915 the first playground equipment in the city parks was installed in Walnut Park. There was a twelve-foot metal slide, a swing, a "ladder Giant Stride," and a combination gym device of some kind. This provision was notable not just because it was the city's first playground in a public park, but also because the school district was involved in a cooperative effort. The school board paid one hundred dollars of the cost toward the equipment, thus beginning a pattern of cooperation and joint ownership which has continued since then.[16]

The budget for the fiscal year 1915 reflects growing concern for and commitment to development of the park system, as the annual report for that year mentions improvements in all four of the original parks. In addition to the playground equipment in Walnut Park, the playground itself was leveled and covered with a combination of cinders and fine gravel, water lines were installed to complete a sprinkling system, curbing was added on one side, and a drinking fountain was built. In Maple Park the bandstand was repainted, two obsolete howitzers from the U.S. War Department were donated and installed, and a fountain was added. Chestnut Park had only minimal maintenance work done that year, while in Cottonwood Park the ground was plowed, graded, and fertilized, and some trees and shrubs were planted.[17]

Teachers from Emerson School asked for a name change for Cottonwood Park in May of 1916, asking that the park's name become Emerson. Shortly after that, Park Commissioner Holmburg reported at a City Council meeting that some of the women of the city had asked for name changes for several of the parks. The Daughters of the American Revolution had asked that Maple Park be renamed Whitman Park in honor of Marcus D. Whitman, who had crossed the Grand (Colorado) River during the winter of 1842-43 as he traveled from the Oregon Territory to Washington, D.C.[18]

Ordinance Number 249 established new names for the four parks on May 23, 1916.

Maple Park, between Fourth and Fifth Streets, Ute and Pitkin, became Whitman Park.

Cottonwood Park, between Ninth and Tenth Streets, Ute and Pitkin, became Emerson Park.

Walnut Park, between Fourth and Fifth Streets, Hill and Gunnison, became Hawthorne Park.

Chestnut Park, between Ninth and Tenth Streets, Hill and Gunnison, became Washington Park.[19]

Pictures show the dramatic change which took place in Emerson Park in the space of two years' time — by the time it was renamed it had made the transition from "empty space" to "*planned* empty space."

A memorial to Marcus B. Whitman was placed in Whitman Park and dedicated on Flag Day of 1917. The plaque reads:

In Honor of Marcus Whitman
Patriot-Missionary
who swam the Grand River near this point
on his heroic transcontinental ride mid-
winter 1842-43 which saved the Northwest
to the United States.
Mount Garfield Chapter D.A.R.
Grand Junction Chapter D.A.R.
July 4, 1917

The purchase of the Fair Grounds was an issue raised again in 1917. This time the purchase price was set at $20,500, and another election was held to decide whether or not to sell bonds for that purpose. This time the vote carried, and 2 percent bonds were sold.[20] Originally the Fair Grounds were bounded by Twelfth and Fifteenth Streets, and by North Avenue and Grand Avenue, with part of the area reserved

(Photo courtesy of Grand Junction City Archives)

Emerson Park in 1915

(Photo courtesy of Grand Junction City Archives)

Emerson Park in 1917

(Photo courtesy of Grand Junction City Archives)

Site of Riverside Park, acquired by the city of Grand Junction in 1917

for a college. By 1926 the boundaries had shrunk to Chipeta Avenue on the south, with Lincoln School occupying part of the area between Chipeta and Gunnison Avenues, and the remainder of that area being designed as Episcopal church grounds.[21]

The city acquired another park that year, a tract at the end of West Colorado Avenue which needed a lot of filling to protect it from high water in the spring, as it was next to the river. These new parks were named, respectively, Lincoln Park and Riverside Park.[22]

The Palmer Park tract was dealt with one final time in 1921, when a resolution was submitted to the electorate in which the city bought the Orchard Mesa Cemetery for $2,500 and secured the release of Palmer Park to be used as a cemetery.[23]

With the acquisition of Lincoln Park, the focus of park-related activities began to change. The grounds already included a race track, stables, a grandstand and bleachers, an exhibition hall, and a building which was used as a residence. The race track was located where the football field and stadium presently stand, while the exhibition hall (and its main entrance) was at the corner of Twelfth Street and North Avenue.[24]

A major change was made in Lincoln Park in 1922, when a swimming pool was constructed. It was donated to the city by

Mr. and Mrs. W.J. Moyer on May 31, 1922, but with several conditions:

> maintenance and operation by the city of Grand Junction
> free days on Wednesdays and Saturdays for children under 16
> reasonable charges for maintenance (but not for profit)
> free use of the wading pool and sand beach at all times.[25]

Although the pool itself was donated, the city assumed operating responsibility and costs. Restrooms and a "refreshment room" were furnished by the city, as were sewer service, a large water main to fill the pool, and swim suits and towels to be available for rental.[26]

A spirit of cooperation among various civic groups, the City Council, and other governmental agencies manifested itself early in the history of the parks and has remained through the years. Some of the first cooperative efforts were aimed at acquisition of property, band concerts in the park, and playground supervision. Soon after Riverside Park was acquired, a parcel of land adjoining it was added through a joint effort, with the city paying twenty-five dollars and residents donating the balance of twenty-five dollars.[27]

Concerts, meanwhile, had begun as early as 1916, with a Grand Junction Choral Society and the Grand Junction Brass Band. While those early efforts were not enormously successful, they were a beginning, and in 1919 a D&RG band was performing in the parks.[28]

During the summer of 1922 there was a trained playground supervisor for the city parks. The Parent-Teachers Association and the women's clubs instigated the program; the city paid for the supervisor; and various civic clubs and fraternal organizations paid for the assistants and other incidental expenses.[29]

The Rotary and Lions Clubs, the Chamber of Commerce, the Board of Education, and the City Council had paid for the Playground and Recreation Association of America to send two representatives to Grand Junction preceding the summer of 1923 to conduct training courses and help organize community efforts toward developing a recreation department. As a result, the Community Service Department was established, with an advisory board of citizens.[30]

That summer there were playground activities at four parks, with athletic activities, story telling, games, folk dancing, drama, crafts, and art. In addition, some year-round activities were begun with a program which included after-school athletics, tournaments, and a winter carnival.[31]

An Auto Tourist Camp was operated for several years southeast of Moyer Pool at Lincoln Park. There were two small buidings with

(Photo courtesy of Grand Junction City Archives)

Washington Park's free camping ground for tourists

electric hot plates, sinks, and water, and a building with showers and toilets. In 1924 the charge was twenty-five cents per day for each car, and the income for that year reflected a high degree of use, as there were nearly two thousand cars and an estimated six thousand people. In 1925 the old camp was enlarged considerably with the provision of a larger service building containing a lounge, kitchen, laundry room and two rooms with showers and toilets. Although the tourist park was abandoned in 1929 at the request of a committee representing the Municipal Golf Club, a picture of the auto tourist camp at Washington Park during the same period of time gives an indication of its appearance.[32]

Washington Park was transferred to the school district in 1925, with the understanding that no school building would be built on the property, that no other building would be erected unless it was connected with use as a playground or park, that at least half the block would be maintained as a public park, and that the block would revert to the city if the school district failed to maintain it.[33]

In the early 1920s, the old cattle sheds on the west side of Lincoln Park were torn down, as was the old exhibition hall. A new auditorium was built south of the race track, giving the community a spacious new multi-purpose building.[34] Another major change was made in

Lincoln Park in 1930, when the old grandstands were torn down and new bleachers were built out of salvaged materials. The new bleachers could seat 1,250. Forty acres east of Lincoln Park (the "Teller Forty") were also added for a golf course, after lengthy negotiations involving the purchase of tax sale certificates, and the possibility of a lawsuit to acquire the deed.[35]

A long-term cooperative move occurred in 1933 when the softball league approached the City Council with plans for lights on the athletic field at Lincoln Park to allow the playing of night games. The softball league had already worked with Public Service to develop an agreement for installation of equipment, with payment to be made as proceeds came in from various games. A proposal by the Softball League to give the city 60 percent of their gross ticket sales if the city paid operation and maintenance costs for the season was accepted, and the league was highly successful — $2,500 was turned in to the city during its first three years of operation, and the league paid over half the cost of the lighting installation.[36]

The Great Depression in the U.S. affected even the parks department; funding during the 1930s declined and various programs suffered. The PTA organizations expressed concern about the lack of supervisors in the parks for 1933, while the City Council explained that the Community Service Department had to be discontinued for 1932 because of a lack of funds. A survey of the budgets allowed for parks during the years preceding, during, and following the Depression is indicative of that. The total parks budget in 1933 was just under $12,000. By contrast the budget during the 1920s had risen from a low of $10,000 in 1922 to a high of $28,000 in 1924. Expenditures for recreation, meanwhile, had dropped off markedly after reaching a high of $3,000 in 1929, and there were no funds allocated for recreation from 1932 through 1939.[37]

The Civil Works Administration, a federal program created in 1933, allowed the creation of jobs all across the U.S. for park and playground maintenance as well as development of city parks. Some of the projects completed by the CWA included painting of buildings at Lincoln Park (the auditorium and clubhouse), repair and remodeling of the old grandstand at Lincoln Park, and reinforcement of the riverbank for four hundred feet along Riverside Park. In addition, the Works Progress Administration, another federal agency, helped in several ways at Lincoln Park: construction of two new hard-surfaced tennis courts, a stone zoo building, a new clubhouse, a caretaker's house and an equipment building. Landscaping was completed near the golf clubhouse, and flowerbeds and practice greens were built. In addition,

(Photo courtesy of Grand Junction City Archives)

A shady spot in Whitman Park

federal money was used to pay playground supervisors as part of a WPA project.[38]

As the use of Lincoln Park increased and many service groups used the facilities for meetings, benefit games, and other activities, the City Council allowed great flexibility in administering the charges required for use of the facilities, permitting reduction or elimination of fees for community groups. The Wisemen's Club, for instance, held a benefit football game for several years to raise money for their milk fund (serving 150-200 bottles of milk a day to children). While the council took a position of being unable to reduce charges because of ordinances which set the rates for various uses, they did vote to donate 10 percent of the gate receipts which would normally have gone to the city. An Elks Club request met with a similar reaction when they asked to pay only one hundred dollars to use Lincoln Park during the circus. The council voted to charge the regular percentage of gate receipts but refund all but one hundred dollars to the Elks' charity fund. In other cases the fees were completely eliminated, and free use of the park and/or auditorium was granted for such things as the Western Slope

Radio Club convention, the Colorado Baptist Young People's Convention, PEO meetings, and teachers' conventions.[39]

A listing of activities at Lincoln Park for 1938 showed the variety of activities taking place: golf, softball leagues, football games, boxing bouts, wrestling matches, dances, carnivals, political meetings, a Halloween party, a Christmas party, and basketball games.[40]

Government usage of Lincoln Park areas included construction of a CCC camp on the "Teller Forty" in 1935. Continued use was questioned in 1943, when the council expressed reservations about leasing the CCC camp to the Seventh Service Command, Omaha, fearing that it might be used for a German prison camp over which the city would have no control. The following year there was a request by the Holly Sugar Company to use one of the CCC camps to house Mexican aliens. That request, too, was denied. A group representing the Mesa County Labor Committee appealed the decision, however, and stressed that there was an urgent need for such housing, and the Chamber of Commerce backed that appeal with a resolution urging that City Council give serious consideration to that request. Use was then allowed (with a thirty-day cancellation clause), while German prisoners of war were to assist in canning but be housed at a CCC camp in Fruita.[41]

The controversy over use of the CCC buildings was by no means settled, however. The Forestry Service asked to move the buildings to an area near New Castle, Colorado, to provide housing for prisoners of war working at a lumber camp. The City Council voted to allow removal, then found themselves "under fire" from farm labor groups, Holly Sugar, representatives of the peach industry, the canning industry, and 4-H clubs who protested that buildings were needed for agricultural workers here. After seeking clarification of priorities from senators and representatives in Washington, D.C. (and finding opinion there also divided between lumber needs versus agriculture), the Council finally approved removal of the buildings to a site near the Holly Sugar factory.[42]

Less dramatic than the controversy over housing prisoners of war, but nonetheless a reflection of the grass-roots commitment to the war effort was a decision concerning the howitzers from Whitman Park. They had been placed there during World War I; during World War II, however, the decision was made to sell them as scrap for the war effort.[43]

During the winter of 1943-44, many civic groups became involved in a discussion concerning the need for recreation, and the Grand Junction Recreation Commission was formed with the express purpose

of implementing some kind of program for that summer and developing plans for a year-round program. A Teen Age Canteen program was developed, and a learn-to-swim program in cooperation with the Red Cross was begun. The programs were small (average attendance at the Teen Age Canteen was 134 and the swim classes involved only 120 children and 24 adults) but it again reflected the community-wide support which the parks programs have consistently enjoyed. The source of money for that first summer included individuals who gave as little as $10, School District 1 ($800), and service clubs like the Lions ($200), Elks ($200), Kiwanis ($50), and Rotary ($100).[44]

By the summer of 1945 there were five playgrounds in operation for ten weeks, a paid director in charge of each park assisted by neighborhood volunteers, and an amazing variety of activities. Although there was "very little money for crafts" and salvage material was used, the report of articles made during the summer included items in four categories:

Circus Activities
- merry-go-round
- circus wagon & lions
- trick pony
- clowns

Cardboard Games & Puzzles
- Oscar the hungry man
- walking cans
- fishing game
- button baseball
- several puzzles

Woodwork
- boats
- telephones
- swords
- guns
- toys
- book ends
- shelves
- plaques
- doll furniture[45]

Miscellaneous
- macaroni name pins
- calico patch pictures
- string beads

The year-round program involved recreation clubs for boys and girls in fourth through sixth grades, meeting twice a week after school for organized activities. Boys' activities included football, speedball, basketball, and swimming, while the girls were involved in crafts, folk dancing, "social entertaining," grooming, and Junior Red Cross.[46]

Erection of a quonset hut to be a Teen Age Canteen (TAC) was suggested for Hawthorne Park, but residents nearby protested and the hut was built in Washington Park instead. Funds from the sale of the YMCA building had been earmarked for the TAC building, and it was

completed in 1947. The school district asked for permission in 1960 to build a lunch room and kitchen in Washington Park where the TAC building was located, then altered plans and decided to build on the junior high school grounds instead. In 1970, the school district asked for and received permission to move the TAC building to Lincoln Park so that Washington Park could be used exclusively as a playground and park for the new junior high school to be built.[47]

By 1948 some major changes were beginning to take place in Lincoln Park, with conveyance of the "Teller 40" to the U.S. Government for construction of three holes of a golf course. The next year there was a special bond election to raise money to construct a new football and baseball stadium, and it passed by a three-to-one margin. The bid accepted by the city was for $59,000.[48]

The city negotiated in 1948 for about twenty acres of land on North Second Street to be donated by the Columbine Company and developed into a new park. Two years later, however, the previous agreement was torn up and the process of negotiation was begun again. This time the agreement was that the city would rebuild the irrigation ditches in 1950 and begin to develop the park by 1951. The Columbine Company gave the deed to the city plus an additional thirty-foot strip to allow a sixty-foot driveway surrounding the park.[49]

Heavy use of the Lincoln Park facilities continued in the early 1950s and the established pattern of flexibility in fees charged to service groups and community organizations was extended. Fees were remitted to organizations as diverse as the Jaycees for a benefit wrestling match, the Shriners for their circus, and the Community Chest for a benefit wrestling match. During the same period groups like the Boy Scouts were allowed to use the auditorium free for their Courts of Honor, and other groups like the March of Dimes could use the facilities by paying for expenses only.[50]

By the mid-fifties, a gradual change in policy could be discerned, and the Boy Scouts were denied a request for a rebate following their use of the Lincoln Park Auditorium. The Council explained that they had recently refused comparable requests for "worthy causes" and felt that they could no longer grant the Boy Scouts free use without also doing so for other similar groups.[51]

Decisions concerning the use of Lincoln Park were not made without controversy or difficulties, however. Sometimes a simple conflict of schedule intruded, but sometimes the issue was complicated by differing uses and possible damage done. Use for rodeos was of concern for those who needed to use the same area within a few days, and assurances were sought by the Council from the sponsoring groups

to be sure the turf at Lincoln Park would not suffer undue damage from rodeo usage, especially when other events were scheduled within just a day or two.[52]

Other decisions concerning park usage which garnered adverse publicity and controversy were as diverse as where to build a new city swimming pool and whether or not to use part of Whitman Park for parking. Citizens protested about both the various locations suggested for the new pool and the parking idea. Whitman Park was also suggested as a location for fire and police department buildings (to be sold to the city for one dollar) and a special election was held. The results indicated an almost even split in public opinion: 1,145 in favor of the sale and 1,245 against.[53]

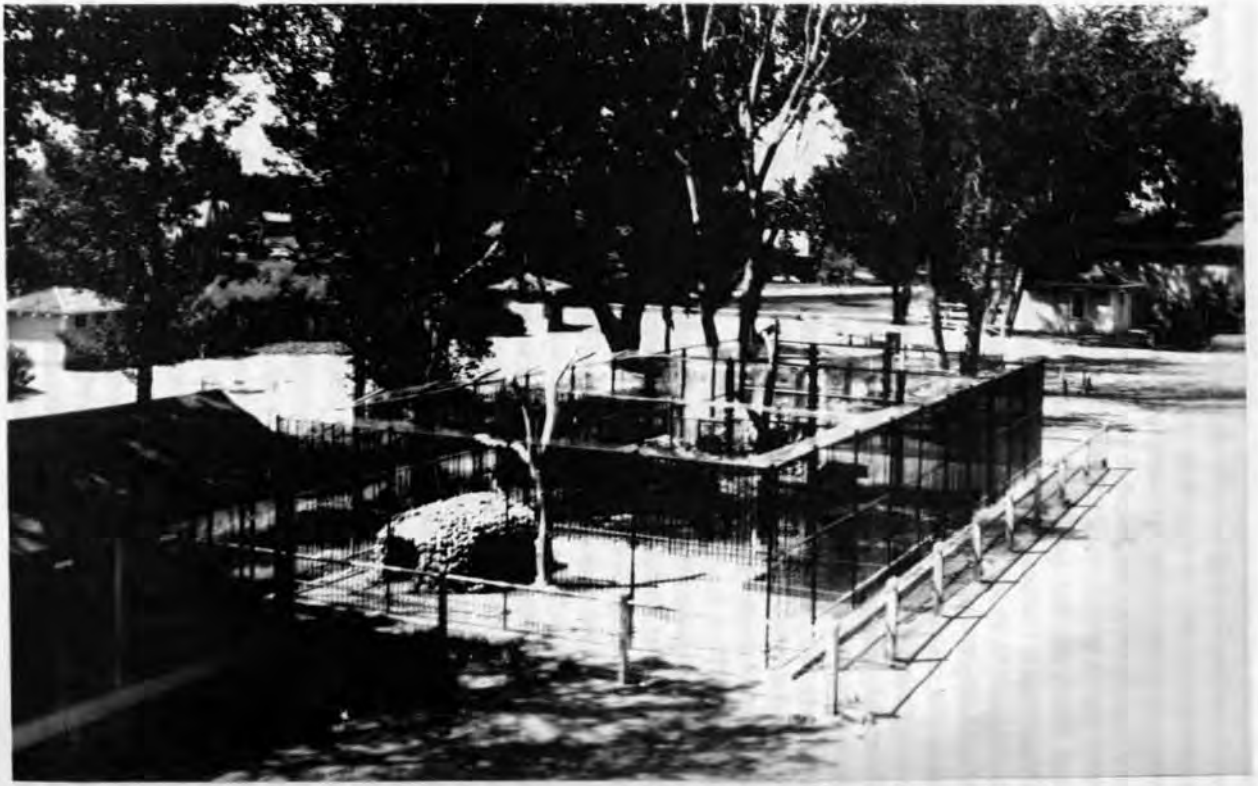
As early as 1953 it had become obvious that the Moyer Pool was no longer adequate for the number of swimmers involved, but there was also the recognition that it might be years before voters were willing to pass a bond issue to construct a new one. As a "stop-gap" measure, new filters were installed. Then in 1955 another community-wide effort emerged as the Lions Club, along with seven other clubs, formed a committee to investigate and help the City Manager design and finance a new pool. Their goal was to have a new pool ready to open by Memorial Day of 1956. The projected cost was $150,000, and the committee declared themselves ready to raise $50,000 of that.[54]

By March of 1956 the committee had raised approximately $46,000, with the Elks and the Lions agreeing to give the remaining amount to make up the $50,000 promised. The City Council authorized advertising for bids for bonds and for construction of the pool. No bids were received on the bonds, so the Council authorized the city treasurer to buy $80,000 in revenue bonds at 4 percent, with permission to sell them if an offer was received at a lower rate. The pool contract was awarded for $146,450, well within the range of initial estimates. The Memorial Day target date, however, was not reached, and the new pool was not dedicated until August.[55]

Other developments in Lincoln Park during the 1950s included the Lions Kiddie Park, which began with the installation of a miniature train in 1950. A merry-go-round, Shetland pony rides, an airplane ride, and a motorboat ride were added.[56] The zoo at Lincoln Park, which had been established in the 1930s, came in for its share of difficulties and controversy in the 1950s. Leo the Lion had been shot by a BB gun in 1950 and the question was raised whether the educational value was worth the amount of money spent on the zoo or whether the money might be better spent elsewhere. The City Council decided to publicize the issue and let "the people" decide. Following a survey and

(Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado
Mesa County Public Library Collection #1989.113)

Moyer Pool at Lincoln Park



(Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado
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A portion of Lincoln Park Zoo

letters received, the decision was made to keep the zoo and try to make improvements as the budget allowed.[57]

In 1954 the Humane Society asked that the zoo be closed, following another shooting incident which killed Leo. Council members favored keeping the zoo, and (fittingly) the Lions Club offered part of the proceeds from their 1954 carnival to buy a new lion – provided the city furnish better facilities for protection. A mother lion and two cubs were purchased from Salt Lake City. About the same time, the deer and elk from the zoo were placed by the State Game and Fish Department, but an offer for four alligators was refused.[58]

In the fall of 1957 a group of students from Grand Junction High School approached the City Council because of the need for new bleachers on the west side of the Lincoln Park stadium. A committee was appointed to work with the students, who offered to raise nine thousand dollars toward the cost of new bleachers. The Lions Club agreed to assist, and the actual work of putting the bleachers together to reduce the cost was to be done by city workers. Grand Junction Steel Fabricating estimated the cost and agreed to wait for payment until the next year's budget was prepared and the fund raisers were completed.[59]

Another joint effort resulted in installation of new lights for the football field at Lincoln Park. School District 51 and Mesa College each agreed to pay $450, and the city paid the balance.[60]

Melrose Park was developed in the 1950s, although the playground equipment which has given it its popular name was not installed until 1963, when some large scale devices were installed, including a submarine and a rocket ship (which has resulted in the "Rocket Ship Park" designation by many people). The cost was shared equally by the city, by the Lions Club, and by the Park Improvement Advisory Board. The same three groups shared the cost of installation of playground equipment in Sherwood Park the next year.[61]

At the beginning of the 1960s another lengthy discussion involved the issue of rodeo usage in Lincoln Park. Damage done to the turf was only part of the discussion, however, and the major part of the discussion concerned the health aspects (tetanus and gas gangrene) which could make it hazardous for athletes after rodeo usage – as well as involve the city in liability for illness should any of the athletes get sick. The decision was made to deny further rodeo usage and restrict activities of that type to Shrine Circus usage only. By 1963 the decision had been reversed and the Sheriff's Posse obtained permission to use the facilities as long as they left the fields in good shape afterwards.[62]

Sherwood Park development, begun in 1951, was still not completed in 1960, when the City Council received a petition asking that funds for its completion be included in the 1961 budget. Delay in completion was a result of the great expense in developing it, as it had been more expensive to develop than any of the other parks. Filling and leveling it had been extremely difficult, but help had come from an unexpected source. Climax Uranium generously offered to "let" the city use their tailings to fill the "Sherwood Park Gully!"[63]

Representative of smaller projects involving various parks were those which grew out of suggestions and donations from various community groups. The fireplace which is just north of the Lincoln Park stadium was a result of the Grand Junction Garden Club's involvement in placing a memorial as part of the Blue Star Memorial Highway Association. Approval was secured from the State Highway Department, and the city agreed to allow the building of the fireplace. The Walker Foundation donated money for the Lilac Roadside Park, and the Men's Garden Club was involved in developing about two acres at First Street and Grand Avenue.[64]

A new scoreboard at Lincoln Park in 1964 involved a sharing of expenses by the Lions Club, the Parks Improvement Advisory Board, and the National Junior College Committee. New signs were installed in all the parks through a similar cooperative venture; the U.S. Parks Service made the signs in their shop, while the city paid the men and furnished the materials. The poles used were from the old football field.[65]

The JUCO committee instigated a project in 1967 which resulted in new bleachers around the backstop area of the Lincoln Park baseball field, with costs being shared by Mesa College, School District 51, and the city. They were completed in time for the JUCO tournament in June.[66]

The 1968 annual report for park use indicated the extent to which various programs had mushroomed. The recreation program alone had 93,000 participants, not including some 60,000 who used the swimming pools. The largest adult participation program was in the softball program, which involved thirty-four teams and 9,671 players. The Older American Center had become a part of the recreation department in October of the preceding year, and the auditorium had been used for dances, archery, home shows, the Lions Carnival, elections, conventions, the Scouterama, and even a pigeon show.[67]

The Lincoln Park zoo's problems continued through the 1960s. A letter from the Bureau for Animal Protection had indicated that the staff was doing a good job within their limitations and that the animals

were well cared for and happy, but that the zoo itself was run down and in very poor condition. In December of 1969 some of the animals were sent to Delta (two mountain lions, two bears, a bobcat, and a male coyote), leaving only four coyotes, which were taken by some Grand Junction residents. Finally, the zoo was razed to make room for the new pool.[68]

Columbine Park was added in the 1970s, having acquired its name as the result of a contest. (Other suggestions were Bookcliff, Big J, Fruitvale, and Grand Junction.) The park was purchased by combining money received from a State Game, Fish, and Parks grant and matching funds from the city. The Park Improvement Advisory Board contributed funds for development, as did the Grand Junction Softball Association.[69]

During the fall football season of 1971, fans and players alike were dismayed to find that, after two hours of sitting in the dark waiting for various crews to find the problem and restore lights to the stadium, they had to go home with the homecoming game still unplayed. Public Service crews and other troubleshooters worked Friday night and Saturday examining the cables and wires. When a worker accidentally bumped one of the huge bulbs and the lights came on, the mystery was solved. Someone (or several someones) had climbed the 85-foot poles and unscrewed all 128 bulbs of the lights on the football field. The prank was amusing to some, but others found it not so funny, especially those who had worked all night Friday.[70]

In 1972 the baseball-football stadium was named Ralph Stocker Memorial Stadium during the JUCO tournament, in honor of Ralph Stocker, who was Parks and Recreation director during 1948 and 1949 when the stadium was built. That tournament had been sponsored by Mesa College until 1972, when the city voted to co-sponsor it in place of the college.[71]

A Boys Club building was erected on city-owned property adjacent to Sherwood Park in 1973, with the provision that ownership would revert to the city if it was no longer used by the Boys Club. By 1982, however, the council found themselves in the unenviable position of accepting bids for demolition of the building due to problems with ground water, seepage, and deterioration of the building.[72]

In what became a three-way deal, another neighborhood park was added in 1973. J. Perry Olson donated property to St. Mary's Hospital with the understanding that they would develop it as a park – then St. Mary's leased it to the city for use as a public park for one dollar per year, with the city to take over maintenance. The next year Mesa County deeded the "Duck Pond" area to the city, thereby adding

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Mesa County Public Library Collection #1989.113)

Riverside Park, one block south of Route 4 at Main Street bridge

another area for park development. An area park near Pomona School became part of the city park system that same year, with an agreement between the school district and the city involving use of part of the land for a fire station, part of the land for a school, and the balance to be developed as a park.[73]

The City Council became embroiled in controversy again in 1976 in what became the "Save the Barn" campaign. Original plans were to tear down the Lincoln Park auditorium, affectionately nicknamed "The Barn," since it was so run-down. A report to the council indicated, however, that the building was structurally sound, that the facility was needed in the community, and that restoration costs would be about 10 percent of replacement costs. The council voted to delay demolition for sixty days. In the meantime, a Lincoln Park Barn Committee was formed and filed a report giving its opinions and recommendations:

> Renovate
> Consider that donations will be used to save the barn, so consider that when setting user fees
> Give the public "every opportunity" to donate to the project.[74]

After consideration, the council voted to renovate the barn and budget $25,000 for that purpose in the 1977 budget – contingent upon receiving matching funds from the public. A $5,000 grant was received from the Colorado Centennial/Bicentennial Commission and renovation began. By December of 1977 the first phase was 90 percent complete.[75]

A great variety of activities and fund-raisers added to the growing funds for renovating "The Barn." The announcers and staff of radio station KEXO challenged the City Council to a basketball game with proceeds going to The Barn; one of the civic clubs sponsored a spaghetti dinner; and benefit bake sales, bazaars, and craft shows were given. In addition, there were clubs willing to forego their usual Christmas gift exchange and the members contributed to the "Barn" campaign instead. Several individuals endorsed their food tax rebate checks to the campaign, and one man even endorsed his jury duty check to the fund![76]

Soccer became a large part of the valley's recreation program during the 1970s, resulting in heavy park usage and a desire for better playing fields. In 1980 the local soccer club reminded the city that they had already donated four thousand dollars for the development of soccer fields and promised five thousand dollars more to construct two full-sized playing fields at Sherwood Park. The money was returned to the

(Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado
Mesa County Public Library Collection #1989.113)

Lincoln Park, at the northeast corner of Grand Junction on Route 1

soccer club in 1986, as it had never been used and the soccer club wanted it to develop their own fields.[77]

The old Moyer Pool, finally obsolete and plagued with problems, was eliminated in 1985 and revenue bonds were sold for the purpose of building a whole new pool complex in Lincoln Park. A third swimming pool had been added in 1982 in a cooperative move with School District 51, allowing construction of a pool at Orchard Mesa Junior High.[78]

A new program called Self Help was begun in 1989, and the first park to benefit from it was a postage-stamp-sized neighborhood park called Williams Park, located on North Fifteen Street behind Paddock's Wholesale Foods. People in the neighborhood, "Friends of Williams Park", installed a concrete slab for a basketball court, a sprinkler system, and sod. A grant through the Parks and Recreation Department's Self Help program provided funds to develop it. The city provided supplies and equipment, while the volunteer group provided the labor.[79]

A listing of activities for which the City Council set fees in 1989 revealed the extent to which the Parks and Recreation Department has grown through the years:

adult arts and crafts
adult sports and games
adult swim
aerobics
amateur wrestling
archery
arts and crafts
basic bicycle
basketball
baton
bowling
bridge
cake decorating
children's dance
communications
computer classes
country western dance
creative movement
crochet
culinary classes
dog obedience
drawing
drumming
fashion awareness
music instruction
nutrition/diet
outdoor survival
open basketball
panorama eggs
peewee basketball
peewee wrestling
photography
pizzazz
pottery
pre and post natal classes
rafting
scuba
sculpture
self defense
self motivation
senior dance instruction
sketch imagery
ski instruction
softball
special events
square dancing
stress out
stretch exercise

floore barre
floral design
fly tying
freethrow contest
gardening
gym and swim
gymnastics
international folk dance
jazz
jogging
judo
junior softball
karate
kayaking
kite flying
lapidary
latch-kid programming
low impact aerobics
summer band
Tai Chi Chuan
teen dance
tennis
theater/art class
tot tumbling
travel and leisure
treatment and prevention of athletic injuries
umpire class
volleyball
water painting
weights training
wilderness survival
wood carving
wrestling camp
yoga
youth dance
youth track[80]

In addition, fees were set for the swimming program, for use of Lincoln Park Auditorium, use of the stadium, golf fees, park permits, and use of the Older American Center. The "domain" of the Parks and Recreation Department has extended dramatically.

The increase in complexity was echoed by the increase in costs. Early in the city's history, trees were bought for seven cents each, but by 1986 trees for the Lincoln Park golf course were averaging about seventy *dollars* each! While early "maintenance" involved the use of ditch water and a few gallons of spray, the cost for weed control and fertilization had risen to $12,950. Last year's operating costs for the twenty-two parks administered by the city amounted to $689,591.[81]

The City Council, through the years, has had to deal with a great variety of concerns, from mundane matters like bathroom construction and renovation to more controversial issues such as rock concerts in Lincoln Park. Their dealings have been with individuals as well as with groups, from contractors to parent groups, from businessmen to special interest groups, from students and teachers to other government entities – a broad spectrum of humanity. A wide scope of community concerns has been addressed by a series of concerned city officials who have wielded their authority based upon the good of the community. The parks system as it has grown has contributed to the common welfare, just as the founding fathers had envisioned when they set aside those first four blocks to become parks.

NOTES

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Reminiscences of an Inveterate Colorado Skier

by Stephen B. Johnson, Jr.

Stephen B. Johnson, Jr., a lifelong resident of Western Colorado, is part owner of Johnson's House of Flowers, a family-owned Grand Junction business. In addition to being an avid skier, Mr. Johnson remains involved in a variety of community activities.

Snow skiing has become Colorado's most popular outdoor winter sports activity. A recent demographic survey shows it as an interest of one third of the adult population in our valley. With so many skiers it is, perhaps, presumptuous that I should try to be a spokesman for the group. My only credentials are that I have been around a long time and I have skied a long way. I recently played with a calculator and came up with a statistic. Let us look at an average year. I ski about twenty-three days and make eight to ten runs of a mile each day. A conservative estimate is that in more than fifty-five winters I've skied over seven thousand miles, a distance greater than from Seattle to Miami and back to Seattle. This is not nearly as impressive as it sounds because it was all downhill.

In 1932 we made our first skis in eighth grade manual training class at Montrose Grade School. We soaked the ends of one-by-four pine, bent and shaped the tips and nailed a leather toe strap across the middle. The skis were just as long as we could reach on tip-toes. I guess you could say those 7½ foot ones were the "short skis" of that day. The history of skiing indicates that early Scandinavian skiers used fourteen-foot skis to carry the mail. For them a small sapling between the legs served both as a rudder and an anchor.

At Montrose we skied either on the "Hogback" or on the adobe hills southeast of town. The procedure was to climb the hill, plant our

poles while inching our skis around until aimed downhill – let go and hope for survival. We made slight turns by using body English and strong thoughts.

One of the first truths I learned is that a boy can ski faster than he can run. We had found a long straight ridge and I was first down. All went well until I came to a windswept knob with absolutely no snow. I saw it coming and jumped out of my skis (easy enough to do with toe straps), and tried to run but my legs were too short and I went over on my face just as I got to the bare ground.

My brother, Don Johnson, and his friends decided to build a ski jump. They had never seen one; however, they had seen photos of jumpers in the air with ski tips well elevated. They assumed that this should be the position when landing so they built their jump near the bottom of a ravine with the landing area on the upslope. After all that work they only tried it one time.

In high school we obtained "store bought" Lund hickory skis with "bear claw" bindings for a total cost of about twelve dollars. This binding held the square toe of the boot in a positive grip. A toggle in front pulled a strong spring into a groove at the heel of the boot. The "bear claw" binding ensured that, if a ski were to disengage in a fall, it would do so between the foot and the ankle or at the knee.

In high school we could drive and we began going farther for longer hills and more snow. Of course, we had no lifts – the first rope tow in North America appeared in Canada in 1934. One memorable trip was to Red Mountain Pass just beyond the Million Dollar Highway above Ouray. On skis we climbed through deep snow all day and floundered down. We kept telling each other how much fun we were having. It snowed all day and by the time we headed for home there was virtually no visibility. We knew there was a sheer drop of several hundred feet on the left. I was breaking trail with my Model A Ford through six inches of snow with several cars following me. We were relieved to come up behind a snowplow just starting his run. I kept it in sight with the thought that if he disappeared I should steer right. At one spot the plow driver stopped and waited until we all caught up. He suggested that for the next quarter mile we should spread out a block apart. He explained, "The Mother Cline slide is due to run and it would be better if it didn't take all of you."

When in college at Fort Collins, we skied at Hidden Valley above Loveland. The trick there was to find someone with a car who liked to drive but did not ski. That person would pick us up at the bottom and shuttle us to the top.

Rope tows appeared in unlikely places. The first ski area on Grand

Mesa was under the rim above Cedaredge. Ouray had a small area on the side of a ravine above town which was a great place to learn left turns; if you turned right you landed in the creek. This location could be balanced by skiing Glenwood Springs where most turns were to the right.

In 1939 we skied the Pioneer Area, the first chair lift in Colorado. This was up Cement Creek about halfway between Crested Butte and Gunnison. We were told the men from the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) could do no work outside during winter so they were assigned to pack this course. However, no packing had been done the day I was there. The steepness of the run and very deep powder thoroughly intimidated me. They had clever names for the runs. Ranked according to difficulty they were the "Big Dipper," "Little Dipper," and "The Milky Way." Also there was a small ski area on Cerro Summit between Montrose and Cimarron.

On a trip to Aspen we discovered a sleepy little town with a "boat" tow. Located between the bottom of Little Nell and the Corkscrew, this tow (built in 1937) consisted of two sleds. One was at the bottom when the other was at the top. As I remember, a sled held eight skiers with skis in the back of the sled. As the loaded boat went up, the empty one came down. At the end of the day you skied off the hill clear across town to the Jerome Hotel through streets of unpacked snow. Building lots in Aspen at the time sold for eleven dollars – but who would want a lot in a place like that? Andre Roche cut Roche Run and the "Corkscrew" in 1937. Lawrence Elisha ran the Jerome Hotel and rented rooms for $2.50 a night and sold dinner for $1.50.

In the winter of 1937-1938 our family moved from Montrose to Grand Junction. The Grand Mesa Ski Club had built a rope tow located a short distance from the Mesa Lakes (Russ Sisac's) Lodge. Rope tows were quite a new thing at that time. In the winter of 1935-1936 there were only three such tows in the United States. This was during the Depression so no one could afford a commercially made product.

At Mesa Lakes the local ski club had improvised a tow. Fortunately, about the only expense was the new rope. An old Dodge truck was winched to the top of the hill. (Power must be at the top because it is much easier to pull a rope than to push it.) All the wheels from the Dodge were removed except one pair with dual tires. The rope was driven as it wedged between these tires. Two of the club members, Alden Spooner and Leo Markrud, had the skill to splice the rope leaving very little bulge. The wheels that had been removed were then hung on trees and became the idler pulleys for the down-mountain rope. The tow ran only on Sundays – we had not yet heard of a forty-hour

(Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado
Al Look Collection 2HA57E)

An energetic skier goes airborne after building a makeshift ski jump on Grand Mesa, circa 1940.

work week. A morning ritual was for lift operators to "herringbone" on skis through deep snow to carry two freshly charged acid batteries up the hill. Hopefully, these would start the motor. The hill was quite steep, even by today's standards. Skiing technique was still pretty much a matter of aim and hope. One would think that early skiers with limited skills would have started with easy hills, but this was not true. Two of the earliest areas, Aspen's "Ajax" and Sun Valley's "Baldy", are still among the most difficult of terrain today.

One of the first skills we mastered was the sheer joy of a good egg-beater fall. Unfortunately this is not taught to today's beginning skier. When an Austrian doctor and his wife, Richard and Greta Waldapful, moved to Grand Junction, they introduced us to the "stem turn" which they had learned in the Alps. This turn enabled one to go down the

hill in complete control. We entered the area of (semi) controlled skiing. (Our way was more fun.)

The stem turn is a marvelous turn that is still taught to beginners today. It is very simple; just start down the hill with your skis in a vee position and as one instructor said, "Let the water run out of your ear." If you drop your shoulder and lift your head, you turn that direction.

Any packing of the snow was done by sidestepping uphill or downhill on skis. We were honor-bound to climb back up after a fall and fill in our bathtub or "sitzmark." A shelter at the bottom of the hill was hardly more than a lean-to. The road was plowed to a dead end for extra parking, but there was no space for turning around. Eight or ten men would surround a car and bounce it, turning it a bit each time until it was headed home. This was also the method of getting cars out of the ditch. The whole experience was primitive but we loved every bit of it. Grand Mesa skiing, then and for the next thirty years, was planned, developed, and operated by volunteer club members.

By 1940 I knew I was going to be a florist, but Dad and I agreed that it would be good experience to work for a while in the outside world. I moved to Los Angeles to live with an uncle and work in defense. From there we skied at Mt. Waterman just north of the San Fernando Valley. We skied on ice until 10 a.m. and then slush in the afternoon.

After Pearl Harbor, gas rationing curtailed most skiing. In January of 1943 I had a friend with enough gas ration stamps to drive to Snow Valley in the foothill range by Lake Arrowhead. The snow was excellent and they had a boat tow. This one had three benches. We entered from one side and left skis on our feet. Then we sat "on the bias," leaving from the other side at the top. I noticed an attractive girl skiing at the same speed and having as much fun as I. We skied together and rode up in the same boat. At the end of the day we exchanged names so that if either heard of a ski ride we would let the other know. Marolyn Mackemer and I were married the end of October in Peoria and skied Alta, Utah on our honeymoon.

Grand Mesa Ski Area was moved from the Mesa Lakes area to the Mesa Creek location in 1941, about four miles up the road from the present Powderhorn. It was operated there until shortly after Pearl Harbor when gas rationing began. After the war we moved back to Grand Junction where we found the ski area now had two rope tows, one quite gentle for beginners and the other serving an intermediate slope. Laird Smith was president of the ski club. An old Civilian Conservation Corps mess hall had been moved in as a warming hut. A cook stove for the food concession warmed one end and an old heating stove

(Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado
Al Look Collection 2HA57E)

Skiers utilizing the new stem turn on an early Grand Mesa ski slope.

took the chill off the other. The wind blew through the cracks in the structure. The name "hut" became generic to all Grand Mesa skiers. In later years, if you heard anyone refer to the lovely building at the top of Vail's Lion Head Gondola as "The Hut,'" you knew where they usually skied.

Hanging on to a rope at the Mesa Creek area was quite difficult. You could usually tell our skiers because their left arms appeared a little longer because of the rope's strain. We built hinged "nutcracker" type clamps to crab the rope and tie to our belts to distribute the stress. Others affixed clamps to their poles to hang on the rope. Another inconvenience was the outdoor restrooms which could provide an excruciating experience.

Grand Mesa skiers were always extremely friendly. We parked our cars on a narrow road and left keys in the car in case somebody needed to move the car to get theirs out. The State Highway Department did a great job of keeping the road plowed of snow, but there was no gravel

on the road after you crossed the cattleguard beyond the town of Mesa. As the road warmed in late February and March, the mud was ghastly. We had to go up early in the morning before the road thawed. Driving down was barely possible in deep ruts. Our windshields were scratched from wiping off abrasive mud. We had two inches of extra topsoil on each side of our driveway at home as a result of washing Grand Mesa mud from the car.

Our equipment improved. We learned about metal edges and bought kits with steel edges and tiny screws to put on our wood skis. We had to paint the base of our skis with a lacquer-type material every year. Northland introduced laminated wood skis which were stronger and held their shape much better. We still had to block our skis when not in use to hold their camber (shape).

Our personal skiing was somewhat curtailed by the arrivals of six children. From the beginning we wanted a large family. Our version of planned parenthood was to hopefully schedule babies to arrive in August, September, or October. That way they did not ruin a ski season. Someone once remarked to Mrs. Myers, our greenhouse grower, that our son Mac was a good skier. She said he should be a good skier because he was skiing three months before he was born.

We drove to many other areas in the state, primarily because the children were racing. In this way we discovered Stoner, Cooper Hill, Climax, Arapahoe Basin, and many more. Steamboat Springs Winter Carnival was always enjoyable because it was the only place where they competed in Nordic events such as jumping and cross-country as well as downhill, an Alpine event. They had a ski jumping race where the racers negotiated slalom gates while being pulled by a galloping horse. Jumping and downhill events were held on Howelsen Hill adjacent to town. Once, when there was insufficient snow, they turned the fire hoses on the hill and racers skied on ice.

Of course, we did most of our skiing on Grand Mesa, which was gaining more converts. A big improvement was the replacing of the big rope tow with our first Poma-Lift in 1948. A platter between our legs let us sit back and be pulled up the hill on our skis. The project was accomplished with much help from the Lions Carnival funds and the community. Joe Lacy found a house trailer that we remodeled into restrooms with butane heat. We had come a long way. We now had Cubco release bindings and metal Head Standard skis.

But we were outgrowing the space and lift lines were longer. In 1954 we looked across Mesa Creek at the big mountain and went out to sell bonds for another Poma-Lift. Bob Pruess, a mining engineer, was a driving force in the designing and building of that area. In 1955

we opened some beautiful ski terrain and skied with about the same vertical drop as the present Powderhorn.

Areas of the new lift line were very steep. Lightweight skiers had to ride close to a heavier skier so the cable would not lift them off their feet. Our son Jerry, when just a little guy, wanted to go up this lift. I said, "You will fall," but he said he wouldn't. I finally gave in and followed him up the hill. Another skier had fallen on the steepest part, so Jerry just picked up his ski tips and skied right over the fallen person. I, of course, had to get off.

On this hill I once experienced pure terror. I was skiing fresh deep powder with my wife some distance behind me. I fell and the back of my skis became stuck in the snow with my body hanging downhill. I was lying on my back with my poles crossed behind me with straps on my wrists. I could move no part of me. That beautiful snow I had been reveling in the moment before settled on my face and the first breath I took was only snow. I had just enough air left to blow out hard and make a little cone of air for breathing until I could be dug out. That was the last time I used pole straps on my wrists.

Our skiing group was now Grand Mesa Winter Sports, Inc. In addition to Saturdays and Sundays, we operated on Thursdays. We took turns being president of the group. Finances were always extremely critical. Several of us would go to the bank each fall and cosign to get enough funds to open the season. Skiing was cheap — an annual family ticket cost only $95.

The State Highway Department built a hard-surfaced road up the Mesa which proved to be a mixed blessing. In the days before it was paved, the road was very narrow and we could park along it, but, when the road was surfaced and four times as wide, State Highway officials informed us that we would have to provide off-street parking. However, there was no level ground for a parking area.

The same officials declared that our warming hut was too close to the center of a state highway and would have to be moved. The entire area was on Forest Service land, and we operated under a permit that could be withdrawn if we did not follow their rules. They also asked us to upgrade our area by building a chair lift in the near future, but we did not have the money. We could see no payback when we had no private land to develop. These factors precipitated the move to the present Powderhorn area.

Skiers rode up on our lift and went cross country to the top of the present Powderhorn area. We skied the trees looking for the best slopes at this proposed new area. Gordy Wren, a member of the Ski Hall of Fame, helped with the preliminary layout. In 1967 a local group

(Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado
Al Look Collection 2HA57E)

A developing ski area complete with huts nestled in the aspens. Thought to be below Lands End on Grand Mesa.

headed by Bill Foster and including many of the same ski club members formed Colorado Grand Mesa Ski Corp. (Powderhorn) and bought out Grand Mesa Winter Sports, Inc., with enough to pay off the bonded debt. They did a great job of developing the area using the two old Pomas to make one beginners lift and building a double chair lift. Two years later, out-of-town developers put up a second chair lift on the west side of the area and ran out of money, leaving us the lift.

Marolyn skied for the last time in 1968. As she came out of cancer surgery, almost her first question was, could she ski that winter? Of course, she did not.

In 1972 son Milo talked me into dirt skiing which was a real experience. We skied off Mantey Heights in mid-summer on old skis. The hill must be quite steep to overcome friction. The thought came to mind, "If I don't stop before I get to the canal, can I swim with skis?" I was much relieved when Milo discovered kayaking. Until then his goal had been to dirt ski down Mt. Garfield.

By 1985 Powderhorn needed a large sum of money to bring our two lifts up to mandatory safety standards, but the money was not there. The result was a new owner, Jim Scott, and his Powderhorn Resort Corporation. Scott caused many improvements to be made. In addition to the original two double chair lifts we now have a first class ski area with a new four passenger lift and a new double beginners lift. The lodge is so fine that even old timers cannot call it "The Hut." Powderhorn enjoys several advantages. It is located closer to a major airport than any other Colorado ski area; we ski at a lower elevation which makes it warmer than other areas; and Grand Mesa snow conditions are usually superb. At all other areas in the nation, lifts take you to the top of a peak while Powderhorn lifts provide access to a huge flat winter playground that is ideal for controlled cross country skiing and snowmobiling. Several condominiums have now been built and tennis, swimming, and golf are in the master plan. Powderhorn is now one of the largest employers in the county. In our community it has been a tremendous asset both economically and culturally.

What can we expect in the future of skiing? My view is somewhat like the person who wanted to close the patent office because all the good ideas had been done. Skiing seems so near perfection today that it is hard to see significant improvement. Clothing in the early days was frozen bib overalls or blue jeans, later followed by gabardine flapping in the wind. Waterproofing helped greatly. We had to spray on a waterproofing solution each time our clothes came back from the cleaners. Later, the cleaners did it for us. The era of stretch pants was, perhaps, good for girl watching, but was cold and not too comfortable. Today's clothing is sensible, warm and practical. (We are now back to blue jeans in the spring.)

Most early ski boots were instruments of torture. I wore the same leather boots for twenty-five years. A lift operator at Sunlight Area commented, "Your boots are older than I am." They were comfortable and I believed they were necessary for an unusual ski style I had developed. Many years ago *Sports Illustrated* described the "world's worst turn," the "Open Christy." Naturally, this was a challenge and I developed my own version which is great fun. It required leaning back from the ankles which I was sure could not be done in a modern boot. This year I tried new boots and found them even better for my style. Modern boots are quite comfortable and models with rechargeable, battery operated heating elements are even available.

The first wooden skis required blocking between uses to prevent warping. They were stiff and unforgiving. With the advent of metal skis (Head in 1950), they became easy to care for and tremendously

more skiable. Today's fiberglass, metal, and plastic skis are great and can satisfy anyone's need. Release bindings came out in 1950 and have been constantly improved since then. Properly adjusted, they are very safe. We no longer have to put on safety straps to keep from losing a ski. A spring device keeps it from running away. Step-in bindings now make it unnecessary to even lean over to get in and out.

Unfortunately, the dangers of skiing have been exaggerated. Cartoonists habitually show a skier in a cast, and television coverage of downhill or jumping events zero in on the rare fall, showing it many times in excruciating slow motion. While there is some danger in skiing, it is not a particularly risky sport. National Ski Patrol statistics show that on any given day about four tenths of one per cent of skiers will need patrol assistance. In other words, the average skier will ski 250 days before it is his turn to ride the toboggan and often this is not a serious injury. This is more than a lifetime of skiing for most. And just as in driving a car, reasonable prudence can greatly improve those odds. In our family the six children are all hard, fast skiers, most raced, and the boys were turning front and back flips to their feet off a homemade jump, one doing back doubles, long before hot-dogging became popular. Milo skied one season with the Aspen "A" racing team, once competed in a professional downhill race, and was clocked at over seventy-five miles an hour. None has had a serious injury. Skiing involves some degree of danger but one can also fall taking baths and walking down steps.

Modern lifts are truly great. Contrast the earliest Number One single chair on Aspen's Ajax Mountain. It was slow and cold and went halfway up the mountain on Ruthie's Run. Later a clammy canvas with a hole to see out was folded around us, supposedly to keep us warm. Their Number Two lift continued on up to the top of the mountain and was made from old tramway parts. Rumor has it that chairs dropped off occasionally. We once had planned to ski the Red Mountain area just outside Glenwood Springs but decided to go on to Aspen. On that day one of Glenwood's wooden towers collapsed, injuring several riders.

Today Powderhorn has a four-passenger lift and two two-passenger lifts. There is also a Poma platter-pull for racers. Other areas have high speed lifts that load the quad chairs or a gondola at slow speed and then suddenly take off. They go so fast that there are almost no lift lines — no time to rest at the bottom. It is good for bar business because skiers get tired by 3:00 p.m. The hill itself hasn't changed but the way it is taken care of certainly has. Today powerful snow cats and excellently designed packers can pack new snow overnight, remove

moguls, and even fluff up icy conditions. Starting with Colorado snow, they leave the hill in nearly perfect condition for packed skiing.

After over fifty years of skiing, I still find the sport tremendously exhilarating. I am still thrilled with that joy of speed and motion. I am most fortunate that my present wife, Anita, is also an ardent skier and we can ski together.

So that you might possibly understand the joy of skiing, let me try to describe what can only be experienced on a perfect powder day. On a February day, twenty inches of the lightest snow possible has fallen overnight at Powderhorn. When the West End Number 2 lift is started, chairs drag snow off the loading ramp. As I ride up the lift, every tree is loaded with marshmallow topping. Small animals have not yet ventured out to leave their tracks. Fresh snow absorbs all sound except for a jet far overhead.

At the top you point your skis straight down the steepest hill you can find, one you would crawl down in the summer. You must attack powder, getting up enough speed that your skis will plane towards the surface, but you never see the tips. The only sound is a slight swish as you sink into turns. Your weight is far back on the heels of the skis. Gravity pulls you down, the snow holds you back; you find a perfect equilibrium. More effort is required to ski powder, but you are reluctant to break your rhythm; you will rest at the bottom. The exhilarating thrill of the speed and the surroundings is an ecstasy that can only be imagined if not a skier. And the marvelous feature is that, the older I become, the smoother the hills, so I've never had to slow down. I often come off the hill non-stop in a bit over three minutes.

Age does not greatly affect the way we ski. We celebrated an eightieth birthday on skis last January. Bob Irwin, a Tenth Mountain Division skier, only has one real fault on skis – he does not like to have anybody pass him. Lee Schmidt had a hip replaced four years ago and skis beautifully. Clarence Melton stopped skiing three years ago at the age of eighty-five. He would still be skiing today were it not for an eye problem. He tells about skiing at Aspen with a professor who was ninety-one years old and still doing a respectable job of skiing.

Skiing has made a tremendous impact on my life. Skiing teaches us that being outdoors in the winter need not be a time of dread but a time to be anticipated and enjoyed. It is certainly a healthy pursuit. Members of polar expeditions never have colds after they leave civilization. We old timers feel so tremendously fortunate to have lived at the right time in the right place and to have had some small part in the pioneering, development, and maturing of almost the entire era of recreational skiing.

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