

HISTORICAL INSIGHTS NEWSLETTER

Discover history in your own Denver home

Volume 2, Issue 1

This newsletter offers articles regarding local history and historic preservation. Feel free to forward to others who might enjoy its contents.

REDISCOVERING DENVER'S NEIGHBORHOODS: CHEESMAN PARK

Filled with graceful homes, centrally-located, and imbued with interesting characters, Cheesman Park rises above the gravestones that once dominated its landscape.

Two miles from city center, this gently sloping hill seemed the perfect place to lay out a burying ground: near enough for burials, yet far enough for comfort. So in 1859, William Larimer founded [Mount Prospect Cemetery](#) here. But he didn't exactly own it. John J Walley, a cabinetmaker-turned-undertaker, thought he did, and indeed sold plots to others. When yet another man, "Graveyard Johnny" Voight, filed a homestead claim in 1870, the US Land Office denied all the competing claims, declaring the land instead to be federal property.



Never the graceful rural cemetery that its founders had hoped, in 1890 these grounds were converted into a park. Even then, the transformation was slow, as funds were lacking. It was only when Mayor Speer put the naming rights up for sale that a generous benefactor came forth. The widow of druggist and water baron William Cheesman secured the civic prize in exchange for her \$100,000 donation.

The neighborhood attracted wealthy, creative, and occasionally unsavory characters. *Denver Post* co-founder Harry Tammen was all of the above. So when neighbors circulated a petition in 1908 to block his proposed residence, Tammen was quick to offer an alternative. If his home was not to their liking, perhaps they would prefer that he erect a barn for his circus elephants instead. Unsurprisingly, opposition to his original plans quickly vanished.

Cheesman Park became a hub of social activity. In 1934, *Denver Post* owner Helen Bonfils began sponsoring free operas in the park, starting a tradition that would last more than three decades. The nearby Botanic Gardens, founded in 1958, has been similarly vibrant, attracting gardeners and tourists along with their popular concerts and social gatherings. And the park itself has offered a treasured respite for many Denverites in the middle of the city – so much so that in the 1960s, the Cheesman Park Mountain View Ordinance was enacted to preserve the park's spectacular vista.

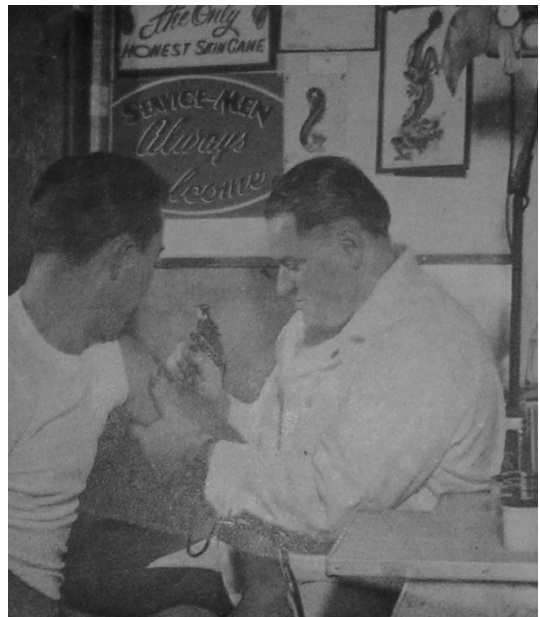
Cheesman Park remains one of Denver's truly central neighborhoods: in the middle of the action and often the controversy as well.

IF WALLS COULD TALK: 281 SOUTH PEARL

Sometimes a home itself holds clues to its past. For instance, the owners of 281 South Pearl noticed that while the trim downstairs is the same as that found in the home to the south, the trim upstairs is reminiscent of that displayed in the home to the north. The reason behind these similarities was revealed through research. As it turned out, Charles Holmgren constructed all three homes, changing the detailing over concerns with the original supply.

For more than 65 years, the home served as a rental property. Its claim to fame came thereafter with homeowners William and Mary Neely. On March 4, 1956, Mr Neely appeared on the popular television program [What's My Line?](#) Since the object of the game was to see whether the panel could guess the guest's occupation, William's specialty offered a special challenge: he was a professional tattoo artist, one of just 200 in the nation at the time. So 281 South Pearl Street became the home of "Frenchie's Tattoo Parlor," as could be guessed many years later by motorcycle scuffs on the floors and a few hidden papers containing tattoo art (called "flash"). Thankfully, the television panel couldn't see William's home, and so he walked away with the show's \$50 prize.

After decades of rental use and neglect, [Classic Homeworks](#) rescued the home and restored it to its current state. As a result, 281 South Pearl now offers quality construction for homeowners throughout Denver, helping each structure build upon its classic character. Their restoration of this home and research into the hidden story within these walls remind us that although faint traces of history may resist guesses, they can illuminate life when we ask the right questions, daub the past with some color, and put ink to paper.



DID YOU KNOW...?

...that Colorado is the original home of "the agony of defeat"? Jim "Moose" Barrows grew up in Steamboat and started ski jumping at age five. At the University of Colorado, coach Bob Beattie honed his skills in a variety of races. Through hard work, Barrows qualified for the 1968 Olympics, and was ranked seventh in the world in the downhill. But he met tragedy in Grenoble, France with a fall so spectacular that was featured at the beginning of every *ABC Wide World of Sports* broadcast "bringing you the thrill of victory.... and the agony of defeat." Though Barrows' life would include many more thrills, his public fate was sealed. The man elected to the Colorado Ski Hall of Fame in 1996 would go down in history as a model of athletic mishap.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

The "explosive" character of the history in our urbane Park Hill neighborhood.

HISTORY NEWS & EVENTS

Everyone hates graffiti, except possibly curators at the Andrew Johnson Homestead in Tennessee, who were excited to find [markings of Civil War soldiers](#) scrawled into the plaster walls of our seventeenth President's home.

Officials in Ecija, Spain decided to [pave over an ancient Roman town in favor of a parking lot](#), calling it "essential for the commercial future of the city."

BUSINESS NEWS

A major controversy has erupted over local history. Historical Insights is supporting the efforts of homeowner Leigh LaFon to preserve the undeniably important legacy of the [proposed S.R. DeBoer Historic District](#), but the outcome remains very much in doubt.

Historical Insights was selected as [one of 11 grand prize winners](#) in the nationwide "Tell America's Story" contest. Sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and announced in *Parade* magazine, the winning entry unveiled the history of Jeppesen house.

Thank you to the historically-minded KlippArch. Because of their vision, a plaque in the lobby of the [Hyatt Denver Convention Center Hotel](#) reveals the wonderful history of a site which gave us Denver's first high school diploma and a candy startup known as Russell Stover.

Our stories themselves are making history: as of July, we are two years old. To celebrate our terrible twos, we're offering [22% off new research projects](#) until the end of August. Contact us amidst our jubilation, and we'll work to find the same joy in your own storied past.

Historical Insights is the only historical research agency in the country specializing in realty and homeowners. Call on us to add value to your home, business, or community.

Copyright 2006, Historical Insights Inc.
Dave Burrell, chief historical officer, Historical Insights Inc. , 303.818.3263, <http://www.historicalinsights.com>

Previous newsletters available at <http://www.historicalinsights.com/denver.html>