

FINDING CLUES IN COLORADO CITY HISTORY MYSTERY

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HISTORY MYSTERY

Antique Store Yields Interesting West-Side Story

BY DAVE HUGHES

YOUR HUB CONTRIBUTOR

It is rare to find anything really old marked, "Colorado City." So it was a pleasure for me to spot in the now-closed Villagers Antique store years ago, and purchase, a rare old glass paperweight with pictures visible through the glass. It was dated 1901 — over a century ago. It also contained two mysteries. The paperweight shows side-by-side pictures with very faint, tiny handwriting at the bottom. It took a strong light and a jeweler's loupe to decipher the words through the thick

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and distorting glass. One picture is of a man in a black coat, vest, and white bow tie. The words beneath it say "Lester Hazlett a.m. PhD Pastor." Under the other picture are the words in tiny print "First Church M. E. Colorado City 1901." But the picture of the old church, complete with pointed steeple, at first glance looks like a dead ringer for our History Society Building a block away! Our building was the First Baptist Church of Colorado City, built in 1889. The architecture is nearly identical, with a similar original steeple, square bell tower at the entrance, peaked roof lines, and arched windows.

Was the picture in the paperweight the same church? The Polk City Directories of 1900-1903 in our library cleared up the first mystery. A Lester Hazlett was indeed the pastor of the First Methodist Church (M.E.) in 1901. The Methodist church was on the "NE. Corner of 3rd and Lincoln," which is the corner of 23rd and West Pikes Peak today. That address would be 2232 West Pikes Peak today. It was one block away from our History Center building at the turn of the century! Identical churches! We always knew that the history-conscious Methodists still have the very old, small, pump organ that was in the old church. It's a beautiful piece of furniture.

Lincoln Avenue, one block north of Colorado Avenue (before it was changed to Pikes Peak Avenue after annexation in 1917), was "Church Row" with a church on every corner for many blocks. The churches and their outspoken preachers offset "Sin Row" one block south of Colorado Avenue along Cucharas Street. The buildings on Pikes Peak Avenue are the remains of the titanic battles between the Wets and the Drys, the saloon keepers versus the church ministers, the madams versus the Women's Christian Temperance Union ladies.

It sparked an intense morality war for over 50 years, until the good guys won and the saloons and brothels had to shut down in 1913. The two churches just one block apart looked so nearly identical I wondered if any hungover parishioners wandered into the wrong church on Sundays, when Saloon Row was at its 1910 height, and north side "gentlemen" snuck through the tunnels to the southside. I've included pictures of all these buildings with this hub article (See the Old Colorado City online hub).

Further research revealed the First Methodist Church of Colorado City was organized in 1861 by the Reverend William Howbert, father of the famous Irving Howbert. That congregation first met on south 25th Street today, then on Colorado Avenue in the 2500 block. Then, this steepled First Methodist Church of Colorado City in the picture in the paperweight was built for \$11,000 in 1901 on that Lincoln Street corner. Many famous Colorado City pastors stood at its pulpit, with Howbert and Father Dyer — the Itinerant "Shoe Shoe Preacher" — among them. ,

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Pioneer Henry Templeton came to Colorado City in 1862 and built the huge Templeton Building on Colorado Avenue across from Meadow Muffs in 1891. He and his wife were very prominent members of the Church. The rare 1901 paperweight was purchased by Hughes at the now-closed Villagers Antique store in Old Colorado City.

The Methodists were conscious enough of their history, many items that were in the original church were moved to the new church. The original pump organ, and two Cornerstones are there and visible to the congregation. Right next to the original church and part of the same property — not in the picture on the paperweight — still stands the much larger, auxiliary church building, that was, until recently the meeting halls.

Templeton supported enormously financially and otherwise for 54 years until he died in 1914. But what happened to the old church? It's a parking lot now! The Methodists — named "Trinity Methodist" after annexation — sold their two-building property in 1960 to the Odd Fellows fraternal society. The Odd Fellows tore down the historic 1901 church in 1962 to make a parking lot for their Lodge next door. The Methodists had moved to a much larger new church on north 20th Street which still exists. And the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) Lodge bought the old two church buildings. The new Methodist Church was built in 1941 as the Methodist congregation grew and they needed more room for church activities. For 40 years that building left behind was used by the Odd Fellows for their society meetings, and increasingly it was provided for westside community events.

At Thanksgiving, big charity "community" Dinners were held right up to 2003. Many poor west-side families greatfully ate there. When I first started studying the history of the west side in 1975, I clearly remember that the ONLY sign on all the west side that had the words "Colorado City" on it ANY WHERE was a big wooden sign on the front of that building, announcing the "Colorado City Odd Fellows: Founded 1889"! That use by the Odd Fellows lasted until their members got too old to handle the building, so in 2003 they merged with an east-side Odd Fellows Lodge, and sold their large building. The remaining structure was converted into a dance studio, which closed about three years ago, sold again, then was made into the current a mix of small businesses such as hair salons, and living apartments. With the address 2228 West Pikes Peak Avenue on the door.

That corner has a lot of history and memories, and they were all discovered because of that rare and valuable paperweight.