

Old Colorado City Historical Society (1)

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Written by dave

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Why A New Historical Society?

When I started getting involved with efforts to revitalize 'Old' Colorado City and the Westside, I started looking around for Histories that would account for how 'Old Town' got, and kept so many Victorian era buildings.

I found very little about that 1890s to 1917 era of the Gold Mills. More - starting with Irving Howbert's "A Lifetime of Memories of the Pikes Peak Region" - a funny little book by John Fetler - a Gazette Reporter who dabbled in History - "The Pikes Peak People" and scattered articles in the State Historical Society Quarterly about the very earliest 1859-1870s. But not a single separate history of just the original "Colorado City" much less about the "Westside" after 1917 when it became a part of Colorado Springs.

I quickly learned also that the fully city-funded and so-called Pioneer's Museum - because of the sharp social, cultural and economic differences between greater Colorado Springs (moneyed, educated, Republican, upscale) and the 'Westside' (the blue collar railroad, gold, Democratic, Union side of town) largely ignored the westside AND its original Colorado City History. In short, except for occasional displays and stories about the 1859 'Gold Rush' days - which Colorado Springs never went through - and storing and preserving papers done by long dead members of the "El Paso County Pioneer Association" - the closest thing to a Colorado Springs historical society.

So I wrote the first modern history of Old Town in 1977 myself. Naming it 'Historic Old Colorado City - Volume 1' printed by Shirley Bond's long time westside 'Peerless Graphics' company and it was copyrighted in 1978. It was a very slight book - 8 by 5 inches, only 11 printed pages with 7 illustrations and photographs. But because, by then I had located local artist Jack Ekstrom - whose fine-line ink drawings reflected magazine illustrations of the 1800's before photographs were printed in books I teamed up with Jack - I providing the history, he the art, and together we produced a 12 by 15 inch fold out cartoon map rendition of 'Colorado City' looking up Colorado Avenue with all the visible images of historical characters, events, and buildings. It was included folded up in the book. Its a complete early Colorado City History on a page. It is still being used as both a separate map - obtained by a \$1 'donation' into the donation box of the Society, or as included in my booklet.

I had already commissioned him to draw our 1900 home, and several of the Victorian Buildings, whose owners were happy to buy the originals.

While downtown Colorado Springs had destroyed its architectural heritage, the Westside was celebrating and enhancing it. In art as well as in architecture.

Here is that first book - (as a PDF file). Following, separately is the cartoon map (in jpeg format). The book and map sold for \$1.50 together. And was snapped up with its light reading, great illustrations the fold out map, and low price. It was 20 years - 1996 before a full sized book was written, which I collaborated on, by Dorothy Aldrich, another Gazette Telegraph reporter who wrote Western Fiction and stories on the side.

[my1977oldcolocitybook](#)

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[the Eckstrom-Hughes Colorado City map](#)

I never did a "Volume 2." When people asked me about it, I said - pointing to historically restored 'Old Town' THAT is my Volume 2.

But I started collecting everything I could get my hands on, storing books, papers, artifacts, in an office I rented in the Templeton Building at 2502 West Colorado.

I already had also recruited my daughter Rebecca to help me, and a blind DJ who knew sound and recorders start tape recording old timers before they died. We did 100 tapes, some quite long, some only a few anecdotes. Rebecca interviewed the last racing 'Unser' - Louie - still living in Colorado Springs - while he related not only the story of the entire racing clan Unsers who came to Colorado City in 1909 - but also the death and burial of Laura Bell McDaniel the most prominent Madame of Colorado City.

First Meetings

The first gathering of the Historical Society, with about 6 people, as I remember, including, myself, Agnes Johnson, Virginia Cox, Kay Arnold, and my daughter Rebecca (with her brand new baby), met in a back room of a "Tea House" on Colorado Avenue in 1976.

By the third meeting those who were organizing the Society included

Kay Arnold, Lucille Damico, Margaret Bofenkamp, David Hughes, Sally Brawner, Flora Belle Hull, Vera Chambon, Barbara Keller, Bertha Chilcott, Agnes Johnson Loesch, Ralph Conner, Isabelle Mosley, Leon Young, Virginia Cox, Rebecca Hughes

We named it the "Old Colorado City Historical Society"

It was all pretty informal until we started thinking about a permanent society place - even a museum - and so met over lunch at the Mason Jar restaurant. We elected in 1981 Ray Castillo the first President OF OCCHS. He was into real estate and might find us a building. I was the second President, elected in 1982 - and served as such until 1986. For a few foolish meetings we considered a really old, but terribly run down frame building in the 2600 Block of Colorado Avenue which had been used as a kind of headquarters during the Colorado Centennial of 1959. Here is a picture of that building.

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But it would take real money to do such a thing, so we abandoned that idea, and I continued to store all that I accumulated in my second floor office in the Templeton Building.

Soon we were able to work with the Trinity Methodist Church to start having our Society meetings there together with lunches and a Program. And by 1985 Ralph Conner, who had been a founding member, and who owned a small building on 23d Street next to Goodwill (which originally was a Colorado City -Westside Telephone Office, and who had a printing press was able to start our Society Publication-Newsletter called 'West Word.' Ralph did all the work putting the West Word 'almost every month' together. The earliest issue I have is October 11th, 1985.

We had \$558.75 in our general account, and \$815.00 in our 'Endowment' Account. Connor was the Society Treasurer.

From the outset of the Society's legal 'incorporation' in 1980, and after receiving our Tax Exempt status in 1985, we agreed that which we then put into the Societies' first by-laws - that anything in the Fixed Endowment fund can only be spent by vote by a majority of the members, while any interest earned from Endowment investments - such as CD's or Bonds, may be expended by the Board to meet its obligations. Later we decided that any \$150 Lifetime memberships would go into the fixed Endowment also. While the lesser membership dues - then \$20 a year for a single, \$25 for a family - and money earned from our events or sales of historical books would go into the General Fund.

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And the 'Mission' of the Society got refined to the Histories of (1) Early El Paso County (which until 1900 included today's Teller County), (2) the original Colorado City and (3) the 'Westside' after 1917

Logs, Plats, The Bock Museum and Estate

As my association with the Society - and historical knowledge of Colorado City I was accumulating - became more widely known, I started to be offered items or documents related to Old Colorado City's history. Both area high school and college students researched and wrote papers on many aspects of Colorado City life. Some of the best research on topics such as the 'El Paso Canal' and 'The Glass Factory' were written by such students.

One day I was perusing an odd, self published book by the original (dead before I knew him) John Bock about 'Red Rock Canyon' whose 800 acres he developed after 1920 returning from World War I. In that book he mentioned he had had a Museum in Colorado City but that the rich folks of Colorado Springs had a 'free museum' (the Pioneer's Museum) that put him out of business.

I hurried out to the Bock Property - owned then - 1977 - by both his son's John and Richard. I asked them 'where was the Museum your father had. They answered "In the old City Hall" which lost its identity after Colorado City dissolved itself and the westside was annexed to Colorado Springs.

I asked them 'What happened to everything that was in it?' Their answer astounded me. "Its all out here on our property!"

They wanted \$32,000 for it. I didn't have that kind of money or I would have bought it hook line and sinker. It had a large collection of valuable weapons, like Civil War Henry Rifles. A gun store owner bought the bulk of it and the rest they sold at Ross Auction. I went there, knowing what item might be most connected to the original Colorado City AND southern Colorado ranch country - like Oxen yoke, spurs.

I spent - bid- over \$7,000 for a lot of items, many gambling items from the saloons of Colorado City.

And I had to store them at both my house and office.

Then another matter turned up. A woman named Lorraine Englert had done some of the only serious research after 1950 about the original Colorado City. Her husband Kenneth was, for a time, the head of the 'Pikes Peak Historical Society' which faded away in the 1970s.

They learned, in 1959 that an 1859 log building - which had been the original "Gerrish and Cobb' building in Colorado City on the Avenue was going to be razed for a new structure. They bought about 10 of those notched logs and, after the both of them had retired, moved to Salida, Colorado, bought a small property and built a house. They put several of the 1859 logs from the Cobb building into the inside ceiling of their house - which had alternating white plaster, then part of a protruding log, then plaster and a log all the way across the ceiling

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of the room. But they only selected the logs which had bullet holes in them from the days when that log building was a saloon!

I bought the rest of the logs they didn't use - 4 of them. I knew I would have some use for them at our museum when and if we ever got one. For those 4 logs were certifiably 1859 from the same woods that the 1859 Cabin in Bancroft Park logs came from when both buildings were built.

But the more important acquisition from Lorraine came when she took me into their house, told me she had emphysema - they would have to move to California and lower altitude. But she wanted me to have all her papers about Colorado City and especially the framed 'Fosdick' Plat' and all the research she had done on it the last 20 years. That was quite an honor for me.

The story of how she got the plat was fascinating. No such complete Plat existed in Colorado Springs or at the State level - either in the Penrose Library system, or the Pioneers Museum. It appears she wrote a story for the Denver Post about the original Colorado City sometime in the 1960s, and it was published in the Sunday Supplement called the 'Empire Magazine.'

A man who had grown up in Denver, now worked in the National Archives in Washington DC, got the 'Sunday Post' at his home. He read the article, went into the Archives, and found an original "Fosdick Plat" map that defined, in 1959 the 2 mile long, 1 mile wide Colorado City, and all 302 of its Blocks and 9,000+ of its lots and all its streets and avenues. He made a copy by the rather poor copying technology of the day, and mailed it to her.

That was a bonanza, for after she had also recorded on 3 by 5 cards every property transfer in Colorado City by lot and block number from early records, she was able to correlate the Plat with the records, and unlock the riddle of the changed street names, the shift of block numbers and other data about the Directors of the Land Company, and the route to Colorado City from Kansas.

So she bequeathed to me the Plat, her shoe box of records, and meticulous decoding the block numbering system. That helped me greatly correlate the original large Fosdick Plat, with the core blocks and lots that still are in the legal County property records today. In fact my house at 6 North 24th Street, Colorado Springs, 80904, has exactly the same Fosdick Plat block and lot numbers he set down in 1860.