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BUILDING A FUTURE FOR *Historic Places*

HAYDEN RANCH
SKERRITT HOUSE
KIT CARSON HOTEL
TEMPLE AARON

The Past and Future of Hayden Ranch

by Mike Conlin, Principal, Conlin Associates

A Brief History of Leadville

In April of 1860, a small band of wizened prospectors, veterans of the 1849 California Gold Rush, stooped patiently over the bone chilling cold waters of a small tributary stream in Colorado's central mountains. Patiently they searched the swirling waters of their gold pans for the color that would bring them fortune.

The tedium was broken when one of the prospectors, Abe Lee, rose stiffly from the bed of the creek and exclaimed, "Boys, I just found all of California in this here pan!" With those words, the rush was on, and the legacy of one of Colorado's richest and bawdiest mining camps was born.

Word of the rich strike spread like wildfire, and soon the sounds of picks and shovels striking the hard Rocky Mountain earth rang from every tributary in the basin. By July of 1860, over 8,000 miners and prospectors fanned out over the length and breadth of the Upper Arkansas River Valley, spilling over the mountain passes into the valleys of the Eagle, Gunnison, and Roaring Fork Rivers in search of precious metals.

Beginning as a crude assortment of mud roofed cabins and tents, a community aptly named Oro City, Spanish for gold, sprang up seemingly overnight. Millions of dollars in placer gold were extracted from the glacial alluvium of gulches with names like California, Nugget, and Stray Horse, but the color soon panned out, and many miners moved on to the next strike.

The mining camp, now renamed Leadville, could have become just another Colorado ghost town gracing the pages of modern history books, had it not been for Alvinus Wood's fortuitous discovery in 1873, that the black sands that had clogged the sluice boxes and gold pans of the early gold miners, was in fact lead carbonate, fabulously rich in silver.

Leadville made its fortune extracting the rich veins of silver that lay buried beneath the hills east of town. During this second "boom" cycle, Leadville boasted a population of over 30,000, was the first community in Colorado to have electrical power, and was considered as a possible site for the State Capital.

Shadowy characters from Colorado's early history including Doc Holiday, the James Gang, and "Soapy" Smith frequented the flourishing brothels, bars, and gambling houses, while the new wealth of the "Silver Kings" built grand hotels and opera houses, drawing headliners like Oscar Wilde and Harry Houdini to the frontier town. While Horace and Baby Doe Tabor entertained Heads of State, the "Unsinkable Molly Brown" struggled to shed her commoner's past to gain entry into Colorado's elite society. Leadville staked its claim in history as Colorado's "Silver City."



Panning for gold, 1898.

A Ranch's Role in Mining

While the vast mineral resources of the Leadville Mining District were a driving force for settlement of the central Colorado Rockies, the literal "horsepower" to support the early mining industry was provided by the horses, burros, oxen, and mules that carried the prospectors packs, pulled the stage coaches, ore and freight wagons, turned the winzes at the mines, and skidded the timber from the forest. Prior to the arrival of the first train, virtually everything that came into, passed through, or left the mining camp, did so under power provided by beasts of burden.

If beasts of burden provided the literal horsepower, it was the hay that fed the livestock that fueled the mining boom. There was just one problem: the sparse mountain grasses of the mining camp, at an elevation typically exceeding 10,000 feet, however, couldn't support the thousands of toiling "hay burners."

The solution lay in the lush bottom lands of the Arkansas River Valley. Here abundant water and rich soils support a luxurious mantle of the hay and cool season grasses that were needed to fuel the growing mining industry. Astute ranchers quickly homesteaded the lands along the river bottom to raise and harvest the lucrative crop.



A pair of bulls on the Hayden Ranch.

The History of Hayden Ranch, *continued*

The Hayden Ranch

The Hayden Ranch was first called the Elkhorn, and records of its operations date back to 1860. It is located on an ancient terrace of the Arkansas River, ten miles south of Leadville. Perched above a shallow water table, this broad expanse of verdant grasslands is nestled between the Sawatch and Mosquito Ranges of the Rocky Mountain Cordillera, at the base of Mount Elbert, Colorado's highest peak. Its eastern boundary is formed by the braided channel of the Arkansas River. The meandering course of Box Creek, with its headwaters high on the snow covered slopes of Mount Elbert, flows lazily across the ranchlands, recharging the underlying aquifer, and supporting rich meadows and wetlands.

Photo credit: Mike Conlin



The bunkhouse on the Hayden Ranch.

The ranch passed through many famous hands in Leadville's early "boom" years. In 1864, part interest in the ranch was purchased by Father John Dyer, Colorado's "Snowshoe Itinerant," and renamed the Dyer and Harrington Hay Ranch. Besides spreading the gospel to the remote mining camps, Father Dyer delivered the mail between Fairplay and Leadville, which required traversing the treacherous 13,000 foot elevations of Mosquito Pass on nine foot long snowshoes in the dead of winter.

In 1868, Father Dyer sold a one half interest to the Ranch to his son, Judge Elias Dyer. Judge Dyer was murdered by vigilantes in his own courtroom in Granite in 1875 during the infamous "Leadville Wars," a violent dispute triggered by the murder of Mr. Harrington over ranch water rights.

In 1871, the Ranch was sold to a mercantile owner by the name of Charles Mater, one of Leadville's founding fathers and a member of its first Board of County Commissioners. Mater also chartered Leadville's First

National Bank, and founded the Leadville Chamber of Commerce. Mater sold the Ranch to Olive and Francis Hayden in 1872. The property was held within the same family for more than six decades, and still bears their name today.

The Hayden Ranch was operated primarily as a hay ranch through the early 1890s, when the Silver Panic of 1893 dropped the bottom out of the silver market, plummeting Leadville once again into the classic "bust" cycle so typical of mining economies. With the advent of electricity and arrival of the automobile shortly thereafter, the horse drawn era began its steady decline into obscurity, and the hay market never recovered.

To survive the hard times, the Hayden family had to adapt or perish. They turned to grazing cattle, and harvested hay to winter over the livestock so that they could be sold as long yearlings in the more profitable spring market. To store the hay, tend to the cattle, and house the ranch hands, they built the structures that today constitute the Hayden Homestead, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Inside of the main hay barn they constructed an undershot water wheel to power a stationary hay bailer and sawmill, which allowed them to package their products for sale. A ranch siding off of the Denver and Rio Grande rail line allowed them to transport their products outside of the depressed local market. The Ranch survived where many others faltered or failed.

The Ranch was sold to the Callahan Construction Company in 1933, and was used briefly as part of the U.S. Army Remount Service to breed choice horses for the Calvary in 1939. World War II rendered the horse soldier obsolete, however, and the program was dropped. Callahan sold the ranch in 1947, and since that time, it has been used for seasonal cattle grazing. With no need to store winter hay, or to house the ranch hands, the buildings were taken out of use and began the inevitable process of deterioration.

The End of Ranching at Hayden

In the 1960s, encouraged by the successes of the Aspen and Vail Ski Areas, a consortium of investors acquired the Hayden and several other ranches in Lake County, convinced that the ski industry would spill over into the Arkansas River Valley. Lands at the base of Mount Elbert were subdivided and a speculative condominium complex constructed. A circular configuration of stone faced columns still stands where the base of the gondola to the summit of Mount Elbert was to be built. It was a dream that was never to come to fruition.

In the summer of 1997, the investment consortium decided to liquidate its holdings, and some 7,000 acres of historic ranch land, including the Hayden Ranch, were simultaneously dumped on the real estate market. Citizens of Lake County raised the alarm that

The Preservation of Hayden Ranch, *continued*



Photo credit: Jeff Stoffel

The Hayden Ranch sits at the foot of both Mount Elbert and Mount Massive, Colorado's tallest peaks, and is part of the scenic view of the Top of the Rockies Scenic Byway.

development of the ranches into low density "ranchettes" could lead to the degradation of the scenic viewsheds guarding Colorado's highest peaks, interruption of essential wildlife migration routes, fragmentation of critical winter wildlife habitat, and a severance of the tangible links to our ranching heritage.

At the same time, Lake County was struggling from the loss of approximately 80% of its assessed valuation due to the closure of the Climax Mine, with no appreciable decrease in demand for basic services. In a deficit spending position, with limited manpower and planning budget, there was little that the County could do to respond to these public concerns on their own. The prospect of losing local control over growth, coupled with the potential loss of the natural resource values that drew many residents and visitors to Lake County, rallied the community to action.

The Beginning of Hayden's Preservation

In early 1998, the Hayden Ranch was optioned by the City of Aurora, whose primary interest was in securing the ranch water rights to meet their existing and future municipal needs. In an unprecedented move, the City approached the Lake County Commissioners with the unique offer to work cooperatively in determining how the community wanted to see the surplus lands of the Hayden Ranch used.

The Board of Commissioners seized on the opportunity, and assembled a diverse mix of stakeholders in the future of the Upper Arkansas River Basin. The partnership that would result from the effort would come to be known as the Lake County Open Space Initiative (LCOSI), and would grow to include some twenty-five federal, state, and local agencies, municipalities, citizen groups, and organizations.

The first order of business was a community poll, conducted for LCOSI by Colorado Mountain College, which specifically asked whether survey participants supported the acquisition of ranch lands along the Arkansas River for the preservation of open space and the creation of parks. An overwhelming 91% of respondents indicated support, providing a strong public mandate to protect the lands as open space.

Based on that mandate, LCOSI adopted a mission statement that prioritized the preservation and stewardship of land and water resources for open space, wildlife, historic preservation, public education, smart growth, and outdoor recreation.

Over the course of the next seven years, LCOSI successfully placed over 8,000-acres of land under a single Ecosystem Management Plan. Ecosystem Management Planning views the land in much the same way as wildlife does, as an interwoven matrix of forage, water, and cover, rather than as a series of political or jurisdictional property lines, and seeks to manage the land and its resources to their highest and best use, regardless of man imposed boundaries.



Photo courtesy of the Betty Farrington collection.

As this boy enjoyed winter at Hayden Ranch, so a consortium of investors thought others might if Leadville became a ski resort.

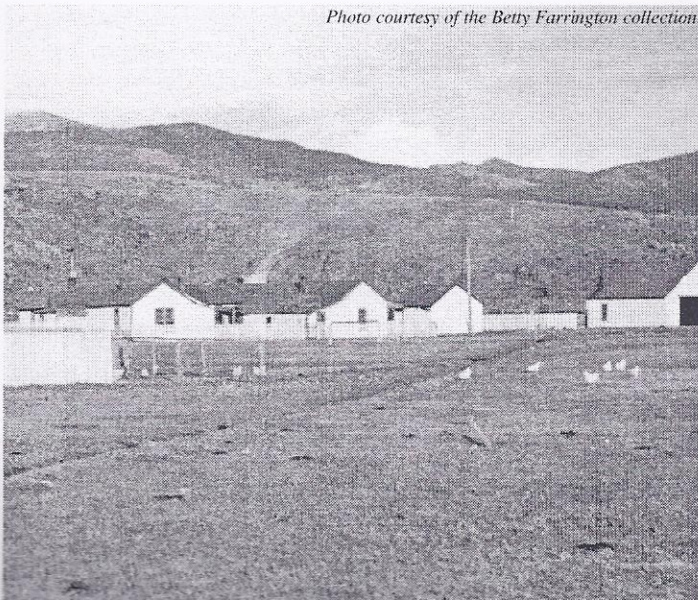
The Future of Hayden Ranch, *continued*

The LCOSI Ecosystem Management Plan is a voluntary, consensus document, developed through cooperation between the agency land owners and the local community to cross jurisdictional lines in establishing management emphasis areas for such varied uses as wildlife winter range, historic preservation, dispersed outdoor recreation, water storage, viewshed protection, and water based recreation. The plan recognizes man as an integral part of the ecosystem, and acknowledges the need to seek balance between human and wildlife resource needs.

Under this plan, the LCOSI partnership has created a thirteen square mile landscape linkage spanning the Arkansas River between the Sawatch and Mosquito Mountain Ranges, securing traditional migration routes and winter range, and preserving the foreground viewsheds framing Colorado's two highest peaks. They have also constructed the Hayden Meadows Recreation Area, and the Hayden Meadows Reservoir to provide developed recreational opportunities, and to store 50 acre feet of water to help sustain smart growth and community development. Further, the City of Aurora has optioned 10% of the water they derived from the Hayden Ranch to Lake County to help meet their current and future needs.

Additionally, the LCOSI Partners constructed the Sawatch Range Interpretive Trail, opened five and a half miles of public recreational access to the Arkansas River, placed the Derry Ranch on the National Register, performed an inventory and structural analysis of the Hayden Homestead buildings, expanded the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area into Lake County, and restored one quarter mile of floodplain that had been subjected to past natural resource damages along the Arkansas River.

Photo courtesy of the Betty Farrington collection.



Through partnerships, Hayden Ranch will be restored and put to practical use.

COLORADO PRESERVATION, INC.

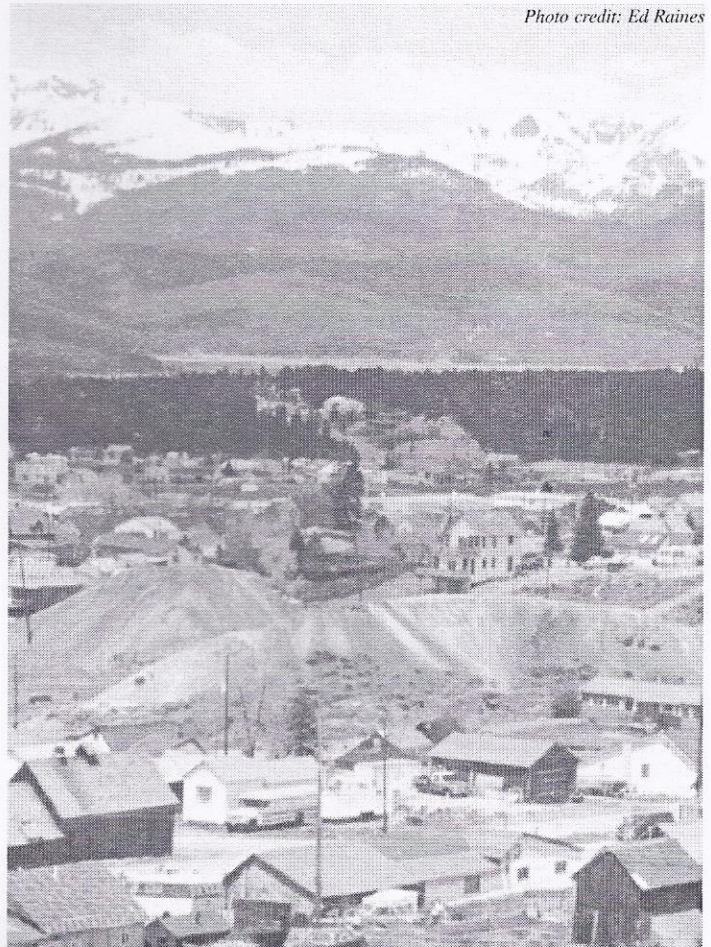
Enter Colorado Preservation, Inc.

But perhaps LCOSI's proudest accomplishment has been in the area of historic preservation.

While everyone agreed in principle that the Hayden Homestead was a significant icon of the role that ranching played in Colorado's early history, the prospect of stabilizing, restoring, and placing the structures back into productive use was daunting. Neither the City of Aurora, nor the resource agencies interested in acquiring the Ranch for preservation as open space, had the mandate, the expertise, or the resources to take on the task of preserving the structures. The ability to place the balance of the ranch in open space hinged upon finding a conservation owner and an adaptive use for the structures of the Homestead.

Hours of brainstorming workshops by the LCOSI partners led to the conclusion that they would have to look outside of the current membership for the expertise to resolve the problem. An invitation to join in the discussions was sent out to Colorado Preservation Inc., whose Endangered Places Program had successfully helped to preserve portions of the historic Leadville Mining District (*Colorado's Most Endangered Places List 1998*) some years earlier.

Photo credit: Ed Raines



Leadville Mining District in 1998.

The Future of Hayden Ranch, *continued*



Graduate students, and others, at a preservation workshop in Silverton.

The Future of Hayden Ranch

Simultaneously, the Timberline Campus of Colorado Mountain College (CMC) was looking to expand their program offerings, and was considering capitalizing on the unique niche provided by Leadville's place in history to initiate a degree program in historic preservation. Colorado Preservation, Inc. provided the needed expertise and became the catalyst for drawing together and coordinating the varied interests of the partnership in the formation of a plan to: protect and preserve the historic ranch and its structures, interpret the ranch's history for the public, return the property to productive use, develop an economic generator for Lake County; create a model for historic preservation, and generate public interest in historic preservation.

Under the plan, the City of Aurora agreed to partition off a 36-acre parcel of land encompassing the sixteen contributing structures of the historic Homestead for donation to Colorado Preservation Inc. Using the historic context and structural analysis generated by LCOSI, Colorado Preservation, Inc. submitted an application, and was successful in placing the Hayden Homestead on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

With the National Register status secured, Colorado Preservation, Inc. applied for and was awarded a State Historical Fund grant of \$200,000 to resolve the immediate stabilization needs of the major ranch

structures. LCOSI partners provided the cash match, including a substantial contribution from CMC. Under an agreement with CMC, Colorado Preservation, Inc. will act as interim owner of the Hayden Homestead through the stabilization process, after which CMC will have the option to take ownership of the property for its adaptive use as a hands-on laboratory for historic preservation.

The Historic Preservation Program at CMC will be the only two-year program of its kind in the Rocky Mountain Region, and its unique hands-on, experiential learning opportunities have already drawn the interest of the historic preservation programs of the University of Colorado at Denver and Colorado State University. These universities are now partners with CMC as these three institutions of higher education bring to Colorado comprehensive historic preservation offerings that cross disciplines, expertise, and various levels of degree options. The initiative has also secured the support of the Gates Family Foundation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Colorado Historical Society, who see the need for training individuals in the skills and trades necessary to preserve our nation's historic treasures.

From its initial status as the proverbial "albatross," the Hayden Homestead Project too has taken wing, and stands as a model for what can be done when dedicated individuals and agencies set aside narrowly focused agendas to attain common goals. The expertise and spirit of cooperation that Colorado Preservation, Inc., CMC, and the City of Aurora brought to the LCOSI partnership not only established a national model for historic preservation, but cleared the way for the placement of the surrounding lands of the Hayden Ranch into perpetual open space, held and maintained by the Bureau of Land Management and Colorado State Parks.

That the Hayden Homestead will be reborn as an educational facility, increasing the public's understanding and appreciation of our shared heritage, is a tribute to the power of partnership building.

COLORADO PRESERVATION, INC.'S GOALS FOR HAYDEN RANCH

PROTECT AND PRESERVE THE HISTORIC RANCH AND ITS STRUCTURES
INTERPRET THE RANCH'S HISTORY FOR THE PUBLIC
RETURN THE PROPERTY TO PRODUCTIVE USE
DEVELOP AN ECONOMIC GENERATOR FOR LAKE COUNTY
CREATE A MODEL FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
GENERATE PUBLIC INTEREST IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION