

HISTORICAL INSIGHTS NEWSLETTER

Discover history in your own Denver home

Volume 1, Issue 3

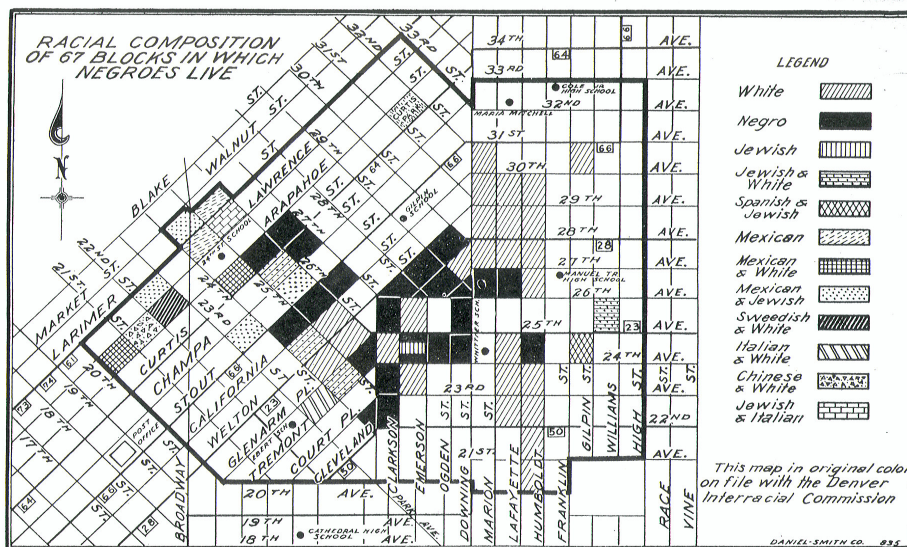
This newsletter offers articles regarding local history, historic preservation, and related interests for Realtors, homeowners, and historians. Feel free to forward to others who might enjoy its contents.

THE HISTORY OF FIVE POINTS

The unusual confluence of Welton Street, Washington Street, 26th Avenue, and 27th Street can be blamed on Henry C Brown. When he laid out Capitol Hill in a north-south orientation, it clashed with the original, South-Platte-oriented downtown. The result was a rather distinctive intersection.

So when the Stout Street Herdic Coach Line put “Five Points” on their maps in the 1880s, they were just being descriptive. Yet area residents objected to the label’s decidedly negative connotation, as New York City already had a slum of that name. But local attempts to use the more friendly “Welton Center” failed – the neighborhood had been branded.

With advent of the horsecar and the graceful open space of [Curtis Park](#), Five Points was quite fashionable in the early days as Denver’s first suburb. But by the late 1880s the elite began to move south toward Capitol Hill, making Five Points a new intersection of cultures. Around 1900, it was reported that the 24th Street School simultaneously educated children of 37 different nationalities. Perhaps it is not an accident that one Five Points resident, US House of Representatives member Joseph Stuart, sponsored a law banning racial discrimination in public accommodations. Sadly, local covenants and racial violence soon overcame such broadminded aims: by the 1920s, more than 80% of Denver’s black population lived in Five Points or Whittier.



Ironically, racial segregation gave birth the area's cultural efflorescence. Ray Charles, Fats Domino, Muddy Waters, and other musical legends all played in Ben Hooper's Five Points casino. The [Rossonian Hotel](#) hosted the likes of Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington, and Lionel Hampton. And it wasn't just popular in the black community. One owner recalled that in the 1940s, "I had white people standing out on Welton Street to get into the place. I could look around the room some nights and couldn't see a black face in there."

Elvin Caldwell, a Five Points Resident who became Denver's first black city councilman, bought the Rossonian in the 1950s, consolidating political and cultural power in this strong yet confined community.

IF WALLS COULD TALK: 2049 EMERSON

In 1939, 26-year-old Clarence Caldwell became a Denver city fireman for Engine #3, Denver's only all-black firefighting team.

Engine #3, 2500 Washington



Eleven years later in 1947, Clarence and Thelma Caldwell bought the home at 2049 Emerson. Imagine the family conversations that transpired in these rooms when in 1955, Clarence's brother Elvin became the first black man elected to Denver's City Council. His main goal? To rid the city of unfair civil service practices against black firefighters and police officers.

The Caldwell's pioneering spirit came from their father, Wilba. He had married an Irish woman, Inez, in early twentieth-century Selma, Alabama. Active in that area's civil rights movement, he continued agitating for fairness after moving to Denver. He would regularly make his way to protest the department stores, movie theaters, and restaurants where blacks were segregated. Places where today, we hardly remember such racism existed.

Elvin Caldwell helped to re-form Denver, and his efforts are celebrated in the [Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library](#). But Clarence was also an inspiration, committing himself to community service despite the denial of his own rights. And their father, committed to a freer society yet almost invisible in history, helped to start it all.

DID YOU KNOW...?

... that an informal dividing line kept blacks from moving out of Five Points? Although racial limitations were not legal in the city, a combination of housing covenants, social pressure, and occasional

violence maintained a segregated Five Points. The process was all-too-familiar to [Charles Johnson](#), author of *The Negro in American Civilization* (1930):

“There are few cities without Negro sections, and few of these sections that are not located within a stone’s throw of the city’s business district... For it develops that in each case the Negro residence area is located on approximately the first residence sites of the city. As the city grows and the encroachments of business render the original areas less desirable for residence, the first owners move farther out, to newer developments. They are followed in turn, in the old dwellings, by successively lower income classes, as owners or renters. The buildings become older and more difficult to keep in repair; boarding houses and lodging places appear. Exclusiveness is gone. Low income foreign groups may move in... These are the areas, generally, that become the Negro centers. For a greater income in rent can be secured from this social group than from the economic class of whites next in order of succession. Unlike the native or immigrant white, the elevation of economic status alone does not make possible movement to a different or newer area.”

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Country Club – how Denver’s most exclusive neighborhood sprouted out of a farm, persisting despite the ravages of floods and a nearby dump.

HISTORY NEWS & EVENTS

The recent tsunami did a tremendous amount of damage throughout southeast Asia. But it may also have [uncovered a long lost historic site](#) in India.

A group of folks in upstate New York have figured out how to profit from the history of their buildings. "This is how you compete with the big boxes - [you compete by being unique, with historic architecture](#) - especially if you know what to do with it."

BUSINESS UPDATE

To leverage the natural interest in local history, Historical Insights now contributes a feature article each month for West Washington Park realtor [Laurie Erb](#), who sends out more than 7,000 newsletters each month to Denver area residents.

Last month, Historical Insights founder Dave Burrell was the featured guest on Steve Toth’s [Real Estate and Mortgage Focus Show](#) on one of Denver’s largest AM stations, 630 KHOW.

Historical Insights has developed an application model for the [Denver Landmark Preservation Commission](#). If you have an old home and would like the local recognition, tax incentives, and preferential zoning that comes with such designation, call on us today!

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

Copyright 2005, Historical Insights Inc.

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

To start or terminate a subscription,
simply send an email to newsletter@historicalinsights.com
with “Subscribe” or “Unsubscribe” in the subject line.