

HISTORICAL INSIGHTS NEWSLETTER

Discover history in your own Denver home

Volume 1, Issue 4

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.

REDISCOVERING DENVER'S NEIGHBORHOODS: COUNTRY CLUB

Their recurrent horse racing up and down 14th Avenue was becoming a civic menace, so the Gentlemen's Driving Association sought a more exclusive venue. In 1880, they purchased land at Corona and 4th with plans for creating a racecourse. Their "driving park for pleasure driving and speed" quickly became popular, with matinees twice a week and gala parties in their extravagant clubhouse. Although the club technically went bankrupt by 1882, the reorganized club simply repurchased the property the next year for half its assessed value. Denver's [robber barons](#) had pulled off another shady deal.

More plebian amusement was soon available just west of Driving Park. When the waters of Cherry Creek were diverted in 1897, a small lake formed and Chutes Park opened. In addition to water slides, scenic railway, vaudeville shows, casino, bicycle races, and fireworks, there were weddings performed in a lion's den and rather unique herd of diving elks trained by Professor Barnes. As one reporter noted, "the elks seemed to enjoy the performance as much as [the spectators]. They trot contentedly to the top of the almost perpendicular runway, and, at a given signal, jump head foremost into a tank of water 60 feet below." A spectacle indeed.



Amidst this strange display, a group of dedicated golfers bought 240 acres of the old John Reithmann property in 1902 to provide an exclusive (and expensive) country club. Covenants specified minimum home prices well above the city average. And since both

Denver and Madrid were near the 40th parallel, this “Spanish suburb” with arched entryways, courtyards, and stucco walls certainly sought to stand out.

Unlike other neighborhoods which experienced decline and rebirth, Country Club retained its elite status throughout the twentieth century. As such, its homes and spirit have been well preserved. In 1990, the Denver Landmarks Commission approved the entire neighborhood for historic designation (after having denied the application earlier), making Country Club the largest neighborhood yet to attain historic status. So despite the loss of turn-of-the-century amusements, this opulent and historic neighborhood seems likely to persevere well into the future.

IF WALLS COULD TALK: 4224 CLAY

Lewis K Perrin owned a lot of land in early northwest Denver, and he used it well. In the 1870 Governor’s Cup competition, he won for best potatoes, best carrots, best parsnips, best tomatoes, best beans, best cabbages, largest head cabbage, best cauliflower, best bushel spring wheat, best bushel small corn, best bushel Norway oats, and best bushel Surprise oats. His expertise in vegetables soon led him into fruits, and he became a local leader in horticulture.

But it wasn’t easy being a gardener. On July 19, 1874, the *Rocky Mountain News* reported a veritable plague on local fields.



A Grasshopper Deluge

People have complained greatly lately of the infrequency of showers here, but there was a shower in the Clear creek valley the other day that would have made them complain on the other side of their mouths. The inhabitants of the vicinity of Boyd’s bridge suddenly noticed a peculiarly black and threatening cloud overhanging the valley, but before they had time to take observations of the same a la the [Wheeler](#) and [Hayden](#) expeditions, the rains descended and the floods came in the form of 1,000,000,000 grasshoppers (at least that was all our reporter counted) which immediately set to work and began eating all the corn, and other crops, within a radius of half a mile. A particularly fine field of lettuce, belonging to Mr Perrin, was almost entirely destroyed. At the same time, some ten hundred thousand billions more were counted by our reporter flying southward.

Though it would be easy to dismiss this as newspaper hype, scientific sources at the height of the swarm in 1873-77 estimated that the infestation included [12.5 trillion grasshoppers](#). And yet within a generation, [they disappeared](#), one of the most dramatic stories of extinction in modern history.

Lewis Perrin died in 1897 at the age of 82. Some of his land had been given to Regis University; others served as the foundation for residential communities around 42nd and Clay. But today as we drive around Perrin territory in northwest Denver or the old Reithmann property that formed Country Club, it's worth remembering that some of Denver's most successful real estate men were once simply farmers, and the land they tilled was contested by more than Native Americans.

DID YOU KNOW...?

...that [John Brisben Walker](#) jumpstarted his fortune in Denver real estate? Walker made millions in real estate developing Highland Park and Berkeley. He and Lewis Perrin gave land for the Jesuits to found a college in northwest Denver not because they were great religious men, but because they knew it would raise the value of their surrounding lands. Walker later got divorced and fought with the Catholic church, resulting in his picture being taken down at Regis. He experimented with alfalfa crops, designed Denver's first great amusement park (River Front Park, near Union Station), and ultimately left Denver to lead companies in magazine publishing (*Cosmopolitan*) and automobile manufacturing (*Locomobile*). Despite his business acumen and success, Walker died in 1931... penniless.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

A Colorado moose features prominently in "the agony of defeat."

HISTORY NEWS & EVENTS

Imagine the turmoil in African American literature when a historian discovers that a black 19th century novelist [was actually white](#).

The election of the new Pope has a lot of people excited, including the macabre folks who participate in "dead pools," betting on the deaths of others. It's a strange phenomena, but not new. Such pools existed as early as the sixteenth century, because newly-minted [Pope Gregory XIV issued a papal bull against them](#) in 1591, partly because he was concerned that victory seekers would try to off him for a win.

BUSINESS NEWS

History News Network Rick Shenckman noticed us in his [Grapevine](#) column. “From time to time we like to feature the different ways people are using history to earn a living... But perhaps the prize for creativity should go to Dave Burrell, a former Smithsonian curator who helps prepare histories of historic homes so the owners can fetch higher prices when they sell... We have one word for this: Nifty!”

On May 10 and May 14, Historical Insights was featured on Colorado Public Radio’s “Colorado Matters.” The 20-minute interview spurred a significant amount of local interest in the company. You can still listen online at http://www.cpr.org/co_matters.

Historical Insights had a booth at this year's [City Park Festival of the Arts](#) and met a lot of homeowners with interesting stories. Stop by next weekend (June 4 & 5) at the [Capitol Hill People's Fair](#) where we'll be talking local history with a quarter of a million fairgoers.

Thank you to active Historical Insights clients: [Regis University](#)'s provost Alan Service, who used a last-minute Historical Insights study to prove that a long-neglected campus structure was older than originally thought, used for different purposes than generally believed, and worth saving.

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 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.