

DENVER'S MOUNTAIN PLAYGROUND:
THE DENVER MOUNTAIN PARKS, THE CITY BEAUTIFUL,
AND THE RISE OF MODERN WILDERNESS RECREATION
IN COLORADO, 1900-1940

by

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ABSTRACT

The history of the Denver Mountain Parks exposes the profound connections between city life and scenic preservation, outdoor recreation, and wilderness appreciation during the early twentieth century. By examining the cultural roots of Denver's mountain parks this study links the conservation and preservation movements of the Progressive Era to specifically urban concerns. Denver's history highlights the central role that urban reform, urban planning, and municipal politics played in shaping the scenic natural landscape parks of these years. Denver developed its mountain parks at a time of growing federal commitment to resource conservation and the national parks. In Denver, however, these trends were less significant in conceptualizing the mountain parks than the City Beautiful movement. In 1912 a coalition of Denver's commercial interests persuaded voters to fund municipal development of extra-urban mountain parks. Building upon the popularity of exiting Mayor Robert Speer's urban beautification program, these advocates extended City Beautiful thinking beyond the bounds of the city proper, applying urban park geographies and ideologies to justify the distant mountain parks and join them to the city. These ideas included the pursuit of tourism, thereby linking City Beautiful thought with the See America First idea and the coincident boom in national tourism. Denver commissioned a mountain park plan from Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., which provided a template for preserving vast tracts of essentially wild mountain land. Over time, however,

Denver's park planners moved away from Olmsted's large tracts toward an urban geography of smaller parks. The city created a legal framework that extended its political power into the mountain hinterland, giving Denver the right to buy or condemn land outside its corporate limits, and to develop, police, and manage its mountain parks. Denver developed a range of attractions and amenities in the mountain parks including a game preserve, rustic lodges, and Buffalo Bill's grave that connected the mountain landscapes with the popular symbolism of the frontier. These images were joined with a wealth of promotional literature that celebrated modernity, especially the technologies that paved the way for new forms of outdoor recreation in nature made accessible by road and car.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Jonathan, Ethan, and Madeline.
With all my love and appreciation.

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INTRODUCTION

GENESEE PARK WILDLIFE PRESERVE

In the cold early months of 1914—a full year *before* the federal government established Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado—the City of Denver received 31 wild elk from Yellowstone National Park. Within a few months a shipment of twelve bison followed, another gift to the city’s park board from Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane. The animals were destined not for the Denver Zoo, which was by then more than a decade old, but for a 165-acre enclosure in Genesee Park, twenty miles from downtown Denver. The previous year, the city had purchased 840 acres of land on Genesee Mountain in neighboring Jefferson County as one of the first acquisitions in its ambitious plan for an extensive system of “mountain parks.” Today, Interstate 70 runs through this very park, and a large sign invites motorists to exit the freeway to view the buffalo herd, descendants of the Yellowstone bison brought here a century ago. The animals seem incongruous in their scenic mountain meadow, which is not only surrounded by the foothills suburbs of Genesee Park and Lookout Mountain, but also is equipped with a tunnel to allow the bison passage beneath the eight-lane freeway that bisects their pasture.¹

I found the scene somewhat peculiar when I first encountered it after moving to the Denver area for graduate school. Coexisting with the noisy thoroughfare, shopping centers, and

¹ P. J. Gallavan, “History of Denver Mountain Parks,” typescript, (n.d.), in Western History Collection, DPL; Carolyn and Don Etter, *The Denver Zoo: A Centennial History* (The Denver Zoological Foundation, 1995), 65-66; “City Awaits Elk Promised by Lane to Mountain Park,” *Post* (7 January 1914); “U.S. Gives Buffalo and Elk to Denver,” *Times* (12 January 1914); “Parks Get 31 Elk; Two Buffalo, Also,” *Post* (12 January, 1914); “31 Elk Shipped to Denver for Zoo and Genesee Park,” *RMN* (18 February 1914); “Elk Welcome Elk in Denver but Great Deer Spurn Humans,” *Post* (21 February 1914).

condominiums, the bison seemed a strange relic from a distant past. When I learned that the herd actually belonged to the City of Denver rather than the state wildlife division, and that it was part of the Denver Mountain Parks, the buffalo raised another host of provocative questions. Why would a city keep herds of wild bison and elk, and why in this particular place rather than in the municipal zoo? Why did Denver create such an extensive system of nature parks so far outside city boundaries, and why at that particular moment in its history? Most broadly, I wondered what the history of the Denver Mountain Parks might reveal about the shape and meaning of nature preservation in the early twentieth century.

Denver's game preserve and mountain parks were created during the heady days of the Progressive Era. These years represent a defining moment in the history of American conservation and have been the subject of extensive study by environmental historians. It is a period I thought I understood well. However, as I began to research the history of Denver's mountain parks, the story that emerged confounded my expectations time and again. I came to realize that the questions I brought with me into the archives were framed by my own perspective as a child of the environmental movement of the 1970s. Given my background, I at first assumed that the Denver Mountain Parks represented a unique case study that would show how a forward-thinking municipal government was inspired by the national parks movement to preserve wild lands, even before the National Park Service had been established. To me, the Denver Mountain Parks seemed to resemble nothing so much as national parks in miniature. Even today—in spite of the homes, businesses, and highways that now surround them—it is quite easy to imagine the scenic mountain landscapes the parks presented to visitors before those neighborhoods were built, and the encounters with that authentic, wild nature that visitors experienced. Once the city views recede to the east, the beauty of the Rockies in this region

invites comparison to the iconic mountain landscapes of the American West: not simply the high peaks and ranges of nearby Rocky Mountain National Park, but also the Grand Tetons, Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada, Glacier and the northern Rockies.

And simple chronology confirms that the Denver Mountain Parks are historical siblings of the nation's most revered national parks. Although Yellowstone, the first national park, was established in 1872, most of America's flagship national parks were established between 1890 and 1915 in a flurry of federal conservation activity. By 1912, when Denver formally launched its mountain park project, Congress had already designated eleven national parks and nineteen national monuments across the western states. Of the eleven parks, seven showcased spectacular mountain scenery: Yellowstone, Yosemite (1890), Sequoia (1890), Kings Canyon (1890), Mount Rainier (1899), Crater Lake (1902), and Glacier (1910). As a group, these parks claimed the vast majority of national park acreage, and they quickly came to represent the highest realization of the national park ideal.²

Both national park and national forest conservation were highly visible in Colorado during Theodore Roosevelt's presidency. By the time he left office in 1907 sixteen federal forest reserves had been established in Colorado, enclosing nearly 12 million acres of the state's public

² The other four national parks in 1912 were Wind Cave, South Dakota (1903), Mesa Verde, Colorado (1906), Petrified Forest, Arizona (1906), and the mineral springs at Platt, Oklahoma (1906), which are now part of the much larger Chickasaw National Recreation Area (1976). Although Yosemite predated Yellowstone, it was designated a state park by Congress when first established in 1862; jurisdiction was transferred to the federal government in 1890. The Antiquities Act of 1906 greatly streamlined the process by which an area could gain federal protection as a national monument. Because it allowed the president to establish monuments by simple proclamation, the lengthy process of obtaining Congressional approval for a park could be circumvented. In several cases, notably Olympic, Grand Canyon and Zion, monuments were established first to form the core of a future national park. Olympic National Park was first designated a forest reserve in 1897; President Theodore Roosevelt selected a part of the reserve to be a national monument in 1909; in 1939 it was redesignated a national park. See Hal Rothman and Sara Dant Ewert, eds., *Encyclopedia of American National Parks*, 2 vols. (New York: Sharp Reference, 2004); and Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1971), 517-529. See also Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* and *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness*.

lands in a contentious process that pitted mountain locals against federal foresters. Mesa Verde, Colorado's first national park, was established in 1906 to protect the archaeological remains of prehistoric cliff dwellings in the Four Corners region. Among those who lobbied vigorously for this park were the members of Denver's women's clubs. And by the time Denver began construction of its mountain parks the campaign to secure federal designation of Rocky Mountain National Park was in full swing. Colorado's Enos Mills—the mountain guide, naturalist, and writer who led the effort to preserve the Estes Park country that he loved—was by this time well-known among Denver's clubwomen and civic leaders. Mills had the hearty endorsement of a long list of Denver figures, including the Chamber of Commerce, which boosted Rocky Mountain National Park and the Denver Mountain Parks in nearly equal measure. Mills and his allies would fight three more years before Congress finally approved Colorado's second national park in January 1915.³

If the chronological record makes the Denver Mountain Parks' debt to the national park movement seem obvious, so too does a historical and literary tradition grounded in the environmental movement of the 1960s suggest that the establishment of parks protecting pristine mountain landscapes must have drawn inspiration from the national park preservation campaigns of John Muir and like-minded activists from the 1890s through the 1910s. In particular, historian Roderick Nash's seminal intellectual history *Wilderness and the American Mind* portrayed these first national parks as the original prototypes in the preservation of the American wilderness.

³ G. Michael McCarthy, *Hour of Trial: The Conservation Conflict in Colorado and the West, 1891-1907* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 25-45, 152, 154. Wendy Keefover-Ring, "Municipal Housekeeping, Domestic Science, Animal Protection, and Conservation: Women's Political and Environmental Activism in Denver, Colorado, 1894-1912," (M.A. thesis, University of Colorado at Boulder, 2002); C.W. Buchholtz, *Rocky Mountain National Park: A History* (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1983); Enos A. Mills, *The Spell of the Rockies* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1911) and *The Rocky Mountain Wonderland* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1915).

First published in 1967, then revised in two subsequent editions, Nash's narrative remains relevant, and powerful, because it captured so well the teleological sense of history that an emerging environmental movement sought.

Nash identified the founding tenets of modern wilderness preservation in the art and philosophy of nineteenth-century romanticism, the nostalgic celebration of the American frontier, and the ideas of Henry David Thoreau and John Muir. These intellectual and cultural trends, Nash argues, culminated in the visionary establishment of national parks and forests by the end of the nineteenth century to preserve wilderness as a place apart from urban life and forever protect such places from industrial resource development. Nash then traces how the ideals associated with wilderness were refined over the course of the twentieth century in tension with pressures on parks from both resource development and increasing tourism. Over time, the wilderness idea accrued associations with absolute preservation, ecological science, biodiversity, and ecosystem management. These developments culminated in such landmark legislation as the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the establishment of wilderness areas on the public lands.⁴

Satisfying as it was to a movement in need of a sense of its own history, Nash's teleological narrative was not without its problems. As William Cronon pointed out in a controversial essay in the early 1990s, the Nash thesis virtually ignored the residence of native peoples in the American wilderness and their use of natural resources. It was blind to the racism, ethnocentrism, and class biases of elite, white wilderness advocates. And it relied on an overdrawn contrast between wilderness and civilization that obscured the basic interdependence of wilderness advocacy with modern, industrial, urban life. Cronon emphasized that the concept of wilderness reified by modern environmentalists was not a pure, timeless state of nature but

⁴ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 317.

rather was constructed of cultural ideas and rooted in specific historical contexts. Cronon's essay ignited a heated controversy among historians and environmentalists that has yet to fully subside. At the very least, the "great wilderness debate" has forced scholars to think critically about the semiotics and politics of wilderness in history. Historians in particular can no longer take wilderness for granted. Perhaps the most significant outcome of Cronon's critique is how it has focused attention on the historicity of wilderness. What wilderness represents in any given time and place is particular; and the concept changes over time in response to shifting cultural, social, political, and ecological conditions.⁵

Beginning in the 1990s a new generation of environmental historians, influenced as much by the new social history and cultural theory as by environmentalism, have plumbed the gaps in Nash's tidy thesis. Mark Spence, for example, described how Native Americans were actually *removed* from the early national parks to create an uninhabited wilderness landscape for the consumption of white tourists. Louis Warren and Karl Jacoby explored how the establishment of a government reserve could wreak havoc on local ethnic and rural communities whose resource use practices were suddenly decreed illegal by distant government elites. Historians of tourism, such as Hal Rothman and Marguerite Shaffer, have worked to unpack the ways that nature was reimagined and then employed in the designation and creation of scenic tourist destinations, particularly the early national parks, for an emerging mass consumer market. From roughly the 1880s to the mid-1910s the national parks were developed primarily by corporate interests as sites for the consumption of natural scenery by tourists. After 1916 the National Park Service

⁵ William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in William Cronon, ed. *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996); J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds. *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998); Michael Lewis, ed. *American Wilderness: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

continued this pattern of tourist-oriented park development of roads and amenities, and mass marketing to promote tourism. And as Paul Sutter has shown, it was in response to the profound environmental impacts of auto tourism in national parks and national forests that Aldo Leopold and the other founders of The Wilderness Society came to redefine the concept of wilderness and distance it from the tourism-oriented national park model in the 1920s-40s.⁶

This study joins with these and other recent works that aim to illuminate and clarify the thinking of Progressive-Era preservationists and conservationists on their own terms, distinguishing them from the environmental thought of more recent decades.⁷ I argue that by analyzing the early national parks primarily in terms of wilderness preservation, historians and non-historians alike have overlooked the critical role played by the modern city and urban theory in the construction—both ideological and physical—of natural landscape parks during this

⁶ Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Louis S. Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001); Hal K. Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), and *The New Urban Park: Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Civic Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington's National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Theodore Catton, *National Park, City Playground: Mount Rainier in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Matthew Klinge, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). Also see R. Bruce Stephenson, *Visions of Eden: Environmentalism, Urban Planning, and City Building in St. Petersburg, Florida, 1900-1995* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997); Greg Hise and William Deverell, *Eden by Design: The 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Greg Hise and William Deverell, "The art political' and Los Angeles Park Planning," *Planning Perspectives* 16 (2001): 329-331; Terence Young, "Moral Order, Language, and the Failure of the 1930 Recreation Plan for Los Angeles County," *Planning Perspectives* 16 (2001): 333-356.

⁷ Robert Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy: America's Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Char Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Washington: Island Press, 2001).

period. Environmental historians interested in the history of wilderness or nature recreation have continued to focus on the more “natural” national parks, leaving the study of urban parks to historians of the city. Even in the important subfield of urban environmental history, Matthew Klinge’s recent study of Seattle is rare in combining attention to both city parks and outlying natural park areas.⁸

For this reason the history of the Denver Mountain Parks offers a significant contribution not only to urban park history, but also to national park and wilderness history, for they highlight the ways that a city created a system of nature parks that were rooted in urban concerns, urban interests, and urban planning theory. In contrast to what the traditional narrative of wilderness and national parks might lead modern readers to expect, the iconic national parks of the American West were *not* the primary models behind the Denver Mountain Parks. Instead, the leaders of this movement drew their inspiration from a collection of related ideas about the role of nature, beauty, and recreation in *urban* life. They looked not to the national parks, but to the city for their inspiration: to the Olmstedian park-and-parkway systems of the City Beautiful movement, the extra-urban nature reserves being developed by leading cities across the country, and a rising effort to promote national tourism known as See America First. As Denver’s mountain park system took shape after 1912, it reflected nothing so much as the extension of City Beautiful ideals far beyond the conventional boundaries of the city, mapping the spatial forms developed by urban planners for urban spaces onto natural mountain landscapes. While a cultural appreciation of natural beauty unquestionably made the enterprise logical in the first place, these values were embedded within a larger urban frame of reference. And so the history of the Denver Mountain Parks also illuminates the historically particular type of park landscape

⁸ Klinge, *Emerald City*.

that park planners and advocates hoped to create. It was a vision that embraced roads, cars, and people involved in scenic tourism and nature recreation. Advocates envisioned the mountain parks not as unpeopled, untouched wilderness preserves but, in the lingo of the day, as “playgrounds of nature.”⁹

None of this will come as news to students of urban park history, city planning, and landscape architecture. But in focusing upon the connections between turn-of-the-century urban parks and their wilder siblings, my study does offer a needed corrective to traditional wilderness historiography, which has largely overlooked an important—even central—component of the early national park movement. It is telling that Frederick Law Olmsted, the undisputed father of nineteenth-century American park design and landscape architecture, is virtually absent from Roderick Nash’s pantheon of wilderness heroes. Similarly, Alfred Runte recognizes the aid of the American Civic Association (ACA) in the national park movement, but he does not explain the reasons behind that organization’s steadfast commitment to preservation. In fact, as I show in detail, both the Olmstedian school of landscape architects and the ACA played central, highly influential roles in the national park movement. Indeed, I suggest that the absence of these figures in wilderness historiography helps to explain the difficulty scholars have faced in explaining the central irony of the national park idea: its awkward marriage of landscape preservation with recreational use. By re-placing urban planning and reform in the center of the national park movement, it becomes clear that by 1900, parks—wherever they lay—were primarily understood as places designated for public recreation in natural surroundings. As I argue in Chapter Three, John Muir—the era’s most eloquent advocate for the American wilderness—hoped to convince his readers to begin thinking of wilderness as a *park*: a place

⁹ “Playgrounds of Nature,” advertisement in *RMN* (n.d., but circa 19 May 1912).

people could visit for recreation and restoration. Muir, along with the Olmsted family and the ACA, worked to apply the park concept to grander scenes and wilder landscapes, but they carried the park idea almost whole from the city into the forests and mountains of the West.

Denver's mountain park campaign of 1910-1912 and its development of the park system after 1912 followed much the same pattern. Mountain park advocates and planners used the theory and geography of an extended, multifunctional urban park system first to persuade the city's voters to support their plan, and then to acquire and develop particular park sites in the mountains of Jefferson County. Denver's story highlights this urban-centered trajectory especially well. For despite the fact that by 1910 the wilderness literature of naturalists John Muir and Enos Mills enjoyed a broad readership (particularly among middle-class city folk, who were among the strongest supporters of Denver's mountain park campaign), Denver's extensive public mountain park campaign made strikingly few references to any national parks, including Mills's proposed one. Instead, local mountain park proponents overwhelmingly looked to other cities then developing extra-urban parks as their primary exemplars. And the advocates of the mountain parks bore little resemblance to John Muir at all. They were men of wealth, accomplishment, and refinement drawn from the city's boosters and commercial elite. They justified the city's public investment primarily in terms drawn from the urban park movement, City Beautiful ideology, and tourism development. Indeed, the language of wilderness is strikingly absent from the voluminous promotional literature of the mountain park campaign in Denver. Although park advocates recognized their project as an effort to "conserve the scenery," they meant to preserve beautiful landscapes specifically for public recreational use. And this argument was never central in the campaign to secure public funding. It would be several years before Denver's park promoters began to employ the discourse of wilderness appreciation in

their public communications. They did so as they began promotional efforts to solicit visitation to the new parks, essentially using wilderness as a marketing technique to lure people to the mountain parks.

Denver's story has much to tell about the broader relationship between Progressive-Era urban park history, preservation, conservation, and the evolution of the wilderness idea in American culture. First, it is clear that the preservation of wilderness in presentist terms—of protecting nature solely for nature's sake—was not the goal of Denver's mountain park proponents in the 1910s. In fact Denver's mountain park advocates simply did not use the term “wilderness” to describe the parks they hoped to create. Instead they spoke of “nature,” “mountain scenery,” “beauty spots,” and “playgrounds.” At the core of their thinking was the notion of the public park as a site for outdoor recreation amidst beautiful natural surroundings. This is consistent with the findings of historian Robert Righter in his thorough study of the Hetch Hetchy dam controversy. Widely recognized as a watershed in the history of American environmentalism, the battle to protect Hetch Hetchy was at its peak between 1910 and 1913; it precisely bookends the Denver Mountain Parks campaign. Righter found that the defenders of the Hetch Hetchy Valley—John Muir, the American Civic Association's Horace MacFarland, and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., being among the most prominent—employed the same discourse of natural beauty and recreation (but not wilderness protection) as that found in Denver. The absence of wilderness rhetoric from Denver's mountain park discourse was not simply due to the fact that this was to be a “city park in the mountains.” Wilderness was markedly absent from preservationist language in general at this time.¹⁰

¹⁰ Righter states, “... the Hetch Hetchy defenders did not use the word *wilderness*. Preservation of wild lands, however slippery that concept, was not among their objectives. ... When they explained their preservationist positions, they referred to ‘playgrounds,’ scenery, scenic values, places of ‘solitary loneliness,’ ‘beauties of nature,’ ‘picturesque spots,’ and ‘beautiful natural features,’ but seldom

What, then, were the arguments that nature lovers used to persuade government officials to protect a beautiful natural site from destructive uses such as logging, mining, and dams? Many scholars have demonstrated how tourism provided the needed economic rationale for preserving scenic lands in the national parks.¹¹ But Denver's case also suggests that the urban park idea was at least as significant as tourism in providing a rationale for public investment in the preservation of natural parklands. Mountain park advocates framed their ideas and justified their goals in the terms of the urban park movement. Rooted in Frederick Law Olmsted's naturalistic design for Central Park, by the early twentieth century there was widespread acceptance of government provision of public recreation in beautiful natural surroundings via city parks. The City Beautiful ideology that underlay city park development in the Progressive Era joined public recreation, natural beauty, civic identity, and tourism in a neat package, one that could sustain not only city-bound park plans but also extra-urban park development. It was the park idea that became the primary vehicle for designating places of natural beauty where people might go to restore physical or psychic health through outdoor recreation. In this way, the fundamental concept of outdoor recreation in a public park tied scenic preservation and the national park movement more closely to urban park development and city planning during the Progressive Era than at any time since. Public outdoor recreation, as much as scenic natural beauty and tourist profits, lay at the heart of the exurban natural parks of the time.

Implicit in this concept was providing access for the public to engage in fishing, picnicking, camping, hiking, or mountaineering. Recreational parks required development: rails

wilderness." *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 207-208. "City Park in the Mountains" and "Mountain Park for Denver Approved by Many Citizens" *DMF* (7 January 1911), 10.

¹¹ In addition to Righter see Rothman, *Devil's Bargains*; Shaffer, *See America First*; and Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience*, 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

and trails, roads and parking lots, comfort stations and restaurants. And increasing numbers of visitors to scenic natural parks by the 1920s left profound environmental consequences in their wake. As historian Paul Sutter explains in his recent study *Driven Wild*, it was in response to the destruction wrought by nature tourists, especially those traveling by car, that critics began to question the possibility of preserving nature while opening it to such intensive recreational use. In the years after World War I a new cohort of preservationists—including forester Aldo Leopold, national park promoter Robert Sterling Yard, and urban planner Benton McKaye—founded the Wilderness Society, “the first national organization dedicated solely to the preservation of wilderness.” The new ideal that grew from these concerns focused upon roads, and the automobile tourists that they carried, as the chief threat to wilderness, and articulated a distinction between parks designed for outdoor recreation, and wilderness areas as public lands that would be protected from, especially, road incursions, along with other forms of development. The wilderness idea that rings most true to today’s environmentalists emerged, finally, here.¹²

And so I returned to the image that today’s motorists encounter daily as they speed along I-70 in the Denver foothills: the buffalo herd of Genesee Park. The buffalo themselves are rich with symbolism, recalling the great herds that roamed the nineteenth-century frontier and a time when Colorado’s mountains and plains were still beyond the reach of American settlement. Seen in this way, the animals are a living testament to the timeless mythology of the western frontier. When the buffalo are read as nostalgic icons of a wilderness lost, the web of roads and neighborhoods that now hem them in seem to desecrate the noble beasts’ last sanctuary. The contemporary scene, complete with roads and residents, actually finishes this narrative, bearing

¹² Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 4.

witness to the inexorable spread of urban development and the isolation of America's remaining wilderness in small, threatened islands.

But this is only a small part of the story that Denver's municipal buffalo herd has to tell. For, grazing peacefully in the midst of busy expressways and bustling suburbs, the animals in their paradoxical habitat are an apt tableau for the scenic nature parks of the Progressive Era. These buffalo were not native to Genesee Mountain, and they did not migrate to these mountains on their own. The animals arrived by train. Imported from Yellowstone by the most advanced technology of the day, they were brought to Genesee Park by men determined to build an outdoor tourist destination of national caliber. Denver's park planners believed that living buffalo would be a valuable component of the mountain park experience. As a feature within the larger park landscape, buffalo would enhance the western frontier themes that park planners hoped to capitalize upon. In a very real sense the game preserve was designed to display the animals as a roadside attraction. Indeed, Denver's mountain parks and roadways actually paved the way for the bison; the animals would not exist in this place today had the park system not provided a rationale for bringing them here.

From the very inception of the Genesee Game Preserve then, railroads, park roads, automobiles, and tourists have been inseparable from the buffalo and their new home. This tidy marriage of modern technology and tourist development with wildlife conservation and nature appreciation epitomizes Progressive-Era park advocacy. Among the many promises of modern technology was a new way to enjoy the rugged natural beauties of the Rockies: by automobile. Good roads and motorcars changed the character of a mountain excursion dramatically, freeing travelers from train routes as well as arduous horse-and-carriage excursions. Practically overnight, the mountain holiday was transformed into a day trip from the city.

Grounded as it was in the urban experience, the park idea also offered a powerful vehicle for the preservation of beautiful natural areas from degradation by logging, overgrazing, mining, and unsightly commercial development. But much of its power lay in the way it authorized an alternate form of utility for a given place. Parks were people-oriented spaces, expressly intended to provide areas for public recreational use. In the Denver Mountain Parks, the creation of recreational amenities and tourist attractions such as the game preserve always went hand in hand with efforts to protect the mountain scenery that made the parks a desirable destination for urban visitors. As natural as they appeared, the mountain parks were also carefully designed landscapes, organizing an array of western frontier images and experiences for the consumption of park visitors.

In the chapters that follow, I explore the origins, design, and development of the Denver Mountain Parks from the nineteenth century into the 1930s. Because Denver's case offers an unparalleled window to examine the connections between urban parks and scenic preservation during the Progressive Era, the first chapter demonstrates how these seemingly disparate movements were deeply intertwined during the nineteenth century. In Chapter Two, I turn to Denver to locate the origins of the mountain park idea among the city's boosters and businessmen around 1910. The chapter details the roles of local entrepreneur John Brisben Walker, Mayor Robert W. Speer, and the city's Chamber of Commerce, Real Estate Exchange, and Motor Club in conceptualizing and promoting the mountain park plan. I offer a new interpretation of this history, for I found that Mayor Speer, who often receives the lion's share of credit for creating the mountain parks, played a largely oppositional role in the two-year campaign to secure public funding for the parks. The third chapter focuses on the way that City Beautiful theories and geographical models shaped the conceptualization of the mountain parks

in Denver. My analysis reveals the striking parallels between City Beautiful and See America First ideology, again reinforcing the intertwined nature of the urban and national park movements at this time. This chapter makes a significant contribution to both urban park and wilderness historiography by bringing to light the ways that nature appreciation and urban social theories intertwined and overlapped to infuse both urban and extra-urban parks with shared cultural relevance.

In Chapter Four I examine the development of the park system over nearly three decades. In 1912-14, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., completed a mountain park plan for Denver's system which guided park development for many years. However, over time the city's park planners departed from Olmsted's plan in important ways. The resulting park system reflected both the assertion of local interests and the influence of urban concerns as the park system evolved. The chapter also explores the geographies of power that underlay Denver's recreational empire. I focus especially on land acquisitions, preservation law, and policing as ways that the city exerted its municipal authority in the hinterland. In the final chapter, I analyze the symbolic landscape of the mountain parks, which Denver's promoters constructed through the development of park amenities and attractions and through extensive publicity materials. The mountain parks were associated with a seemingly incongruous array of ideas that brought together popular images of the Old West and the celebration of modernity and technology in the landscape. In addition, Denver promoters seized upon the mountain parks as a means to claim a new identity for the city as a premier destination for mountain recreation and the promotion of the city's distinctive outdoor lifestyle.

CHAPTER I

BREATHING SPACES: CITIES, PARKS, AND SCENIC NATURE

IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

Introduction: "An Idea Without Precedent"

When Warwick M. Downing, Denver civic leader, oil industry attorney, and conservationist, sat down in the early 1930s to write a “condensed” history of the Denver Mountain Parks, he emphasized their uniqueness. In February of 1911, Downing had accepted the chairmanship of a Denver Chamber of Commerce committee that would investigate the feasibility of establishing municipal parks in the nearby mountains of Jefferson County. From this beginning, he became one of the key players in the early conceptualization, promotion, and construction of a distinctive network of wild nature parks in the Colorado Rockies by the City of Denver. The civic committee that spearheaded the effort, Downing stressed, “had no precedent to follow. The idea was unique, never before considered by any municipality, and by the way, even until this day, no other American city has undertaken a project at all similar.”¹³

Subsequent historians and Denver parks department literature have largely agreed with Downing. Certainly, the park builders believed in the uniqueness of their project. Visiting the parks today one is reminded not of typical urban parks but of late-twentieth century natural open

¹³ Warwick M. Downing, “How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks: A Condensed History of the Building of America’s Most Unique Park System,” *DMF* (March-April 1931), 12.

space parks, or of the national parks that enshrine a notion of primeval wilderness and grand scenery. And lauding the mountain parks as a one-of-a-kind municipal asset could readily enhance the civic pride and identification that generations of Denver residents felt toward their city. But conceptually Denver's mountain parks drew on a rich heritage. By situating Denver's parks in the overall context of park development from the mid-nineteenth century through the early twentieth century, it becomes clear that in many ways the mountain parks reflected the major trends of this period in nature appreciation, health and recreation, park development, and, most significantly, urban social theory.

Denver's mountain park plan was without question an ambitious attempt to create a new kind of park; the concept was derived as much from the relatively few nature reserves and national parks of the day as from the far more numerous urban parks in America's leading cities. While it is certainly the case that there were few existing precedents for the political and legal structures that would make it possible for Denver to build a park system outside its jurisdiction, the ideology supporting other landscape parks of the period—whether they were created inside cities, in surrounding suburban areas, or in remote corners of the Far West—was quite fully developed by 1911. Indeed, the mountain parks reflect a distinctive confluence of ideas regarding nature, society, beauty, scenery, urban life, and urban space that were specific to both time and place. Perhaps it is this quality that has given the mountain parks such a lasting legacy as a unique system. By the 1930s America's city parks had become far less natural and more artificial; while the national parks had become more deeply associated with wilderness and a rising ecological perspective on what that word meant. For this reason, the mountain parks offer an ideal window for examining the Progressive-era development of landscape parks as a whole.

This chapter discusses the rise of the urban park movement and its supporting ideology in the United States during the last half of the nineteenth century and the closely related development of the national park idea. I focus particularly on the pioneering work of Frederick Law Olmsted in both arenas and the shared landscape ideology that joined the urban parks and scenic nature parks of the period. The two park genres—different as they appear today—shared a common heritage in social, cultural, and aesthetic ideas rooted in the mid-nineteenth century urban experience; moreover, the politics and ideology of the early scenic and urban parks were closely intertwined. Finally, I examine the interrelated manifestations of nature appreciation and urban reform in the City Beautiful and scenic preservation movements of the Progressive Era. Where Olmsted exemplified the unity of landscape ideology across urban space and scenic natural areas in the nineteenth century, the work of Horace MacFarland and the American Civic Association in both civic beautification and scenic preservation during the Progressive Era illustrates how the Olmstedian theory of natural beauty as a solution to urban problems continued to shape both wild and urban park landscapes.

In addition to fleshing out the ideological and political background that made Denver's mountain park system possible, this chapter demonstrates how the rise of scenic preservation and nature reserve parks was deeply intertwined with urban park theory and practice. The turn to nature so often observed during this period was not simply a reaction to urbanization that took form in Romantic art, literature, and landscape architecture; the construction of natural parks also involved the very people, political processes, and ideas refined by urban reformers and landscape architects as they worked to improve the urban environment.

Parks in an Urban Age

The movement to create public parks in American cities germinated during the 1840s among New York City's cultural elite. In 1844 the famed romantic poet and newspaper editor William Cullen Bryant was the first to raise the issue publicly when he published an editorial calling for "a new park" in his *New York Evening Post*. In 1849 and 1850 the nation's foremost landscape gardener, Andrew Jackson Downing, penned a series of letters explaining "the necessity of a great Park" for the city. Finally in 1850 the cause was taken up by the gentlemanly merchant Robert Minturn, who launched the campaign that would result in the passage of legislation for Central Park in 1853. Construction on the park began in 1857, after the last residents of the park site were removed from their homes.¹⁴ Central Park then served as the key precedent spurring fledgling park efforts in such cities as Boston and Buffalo during the 1860s. After the close of the Civil War the park movement accelerated in tandem with the pace of suburbanization around large Eastern cities, and in the last three decades of the century park-building spread widely among American cities.¹⁵

The first supporters of the park idea in New York City outlined a whole set of justifications for the city to assume such an unprecedented role in providing recreational amenities to the public. When these wealthy businessmen looked to Europe's great cities as cultural models they found their own city sorely lacking in landscape art and civic space by comparison. These New Yorkers wanted to do more than simply emulate Paris or London, they believed that fine parks, architecture, and other embellishments to the urban landscape would

¹⁴ Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 15-91.

¹⁵ Laura Wood Roper, *FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 317-326.

help their city compete with its national and international rivals. Building a park that was not only beautiful, but also grand in scale, would demonstrate New York's cultural attainments and help confirm its importance as a leading city, both nationally and internationally. A landscaped park would improve public health as well. Like other cities, New York suffered from rampant disease and high mortality rates due, among other things, to contagion, malnourishment, and the polluted water and air of the industrial city. Physicians of the time, however, believed that gases, or "miasmas," emitted by polluted, moist, and swampy refuse areas within the city caused most urban diseases. In this context, park advocates argued that parks would remedy an urgent public health need by creating "lungs of the city" and "breathing spaces." These terms were more literal than they may seem today, referring to the actual lungs and breathing of urbanites, for whom parks provided a rare opportunity to inhale fresh air, popularly understood to have been cleansed of miasmatic pollutants by park trees and greenery. In addition, for women and children, a park would provide a safe space for outdoor exercise and clean air that was simply not attainable on crowded, filthy, and dangerous city streets. A park would enhance the moral well being of city dwellers as well, providing men in particular with a healthy alternative to drinking, gambling, and other "immoral" forms of recreation popular among the laboring classes.

This line of argument bridged to a larger concept of the park as a public institution uniquely suited to a republic. In an age when landscape aesthetics, grounded in the study of romantic art and letters, was regarded as an art form that could be attained by only a small cultural elite, park advocates believed that the park could be a tool to educate and uplift the lower classes. Andrew Jackson Downing argued that "salubrious and wholesome breathing places" should be "open to all classes of people, provided at public cost, maintained at public expense and enjoyed daily and hourly, by all classes of persons." In support of the Central Park campaign

he asserted, “it is republican in its very idea and tendency... and raises up the man of the workingmen to the same level of enjoyment with the man of leisure and accomplishment.”¹⁶

These arguments acknowledged the class and ethnic tensions that riddled the industrializing city. A naturalistic park would not only provide moral, healthful recreational alternatives to the lower classes, but exposure to picturesque and beautiful scenery would also educate patrons of all classes in the appreciation of these artistic forms, now available to all citizens. In this way, the park could become a tool for social reform and help to defuse class tensions. At the same time, it would benefit the members of elite society by creating a decorous environment for promenading and socializing, safe from the chaotic diversity of the streets. In these ways, the park could benefit everyone, justifying the use of public funds for its creation. During the three-year battle over the type, size, and location of the proposed park, representatives of working-class interests argued against the large, naturalistic landscape park which, at the time, lay on the northern periphery of city’s grid in favor of several smaller, more accessible parks in established urban neighborhoods that would be accessible without much travel and would accommodate more popular recreational activities. But the small group of wealthy and powerful men who shuttled Central Park through the political process saw no contradiction in their views. While the park would most obviously serve the interests of the city’s elite families, supporters argued—and believed—that they did in fact represent the interests of “the public.” Central Park was to become a grand public institution alongside New York City’s

¹⁶ William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 14. It should be noted that Rosenzweig and Blackmar report that Downing referred to the working classes only rarely. See Rosenzweig and Blackmar, 29-30.

museums, art galleries, and libraries; all of which were patronized by an increasingly educated and affluent middle-class constituency.¹⁷

Frederick Law Olmsted and the Rise of the Landscape Park Ideal in America

If Central Park opened the urban park movement in America, it also launched the career of Frederick Law Olmsted, who became the iconic figure of late-nineteenth century park ideology and the emergent profession of landscape architecture in the United States. Scholars differ over his role in creating and defining Central Park, but his subsequent influence in the field of landscape architecture cannot be denied. Still, environmental histories of the national parks have largely overlooked the heavy Olmstedian influences on their development, as well as the important connections that linked national park development with the urban park movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁸ While Olmsted is best known as the creator of America's most famed urban parks, it is the comprehensiveness of his work and influence that must be emphasized here. He played a central role not only in the design of Central Park, but also in the designation of California's Yosemite Valley as a public park, as well as the campaign to restore a natural landscape to Niagara Falls. More than any other figure, Olmsted embodies the shared heritage of America's urban parks with their wilder siblings, the national parks, and the urban roots of these seemingly natural places.¹⁹

¹⁷ Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park*, 23, 30, 37-58.

¹⁸ For example, Roderick Nash and Alfred Runte's preeminent books give Olmsted a distinctly peripheral role in the heritage of the national park idea. See Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), and Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience*, 3rd ed., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Rosenzweig and Blackmar counter older scholarly accounts of Olmsted's predominance over Vaux in the design of Central Park, in *The Park and the People*. On Olmsted see Albert Fein, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the American Environmental Tradition* (New York: George Braziller, 1972); Irving D. Fisher, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the City Planning Movement in the United States* (Ann Arbor: UMI

Olmsted came to his life's work as a creator of artful natural landscapes indirectly when, at the age of thirty-five, he was appointed superintendent of Central Park in 1857. By this time, Olmsted was well known among New York's cultural elite for his work as a writer and publisher. In addition to reporting for the *New York Daily Tribune* and serving as managing editor for *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, he had published two widely read antislavery accounts of his travels in the South.²⁰ He had recently completed a European park tour and published an important article on the park landscapes he studied there. In 1858, when the park commissioners held a competition to design the new park, the English architect Calvert Vaux asked superintendent Olmsted to partner with him in creating a park design. After Olmsted and Vaux's naturalistic plan "Greensward" was selected by the park commissioners Olmsted continued as park superintendent, supervising the implementation of the plan.²¹

Work on Central Park was interrupted by the outbreak of the Civil War. During the war Olmsted spent two years as executive secretary of the U.S. Sanitary Commission (precursor to the American Red Cross); he then moved to California to manage the Mariposa Estate, a large

Research Press, 1986); Stephen Germic, *American Green: Class, Crisis, and the Deployment of Nature in Central Park, Yosemite, and Yellowstone* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001); Roper, *FLO*; Witold Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Scribner, 1999); Anne Whiston Spirn, "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 91-113; Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, Ch. 1; Cynthia Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

²⁰ During his time at *Putnam's Monthly* he worked with the most eminent writers of the day, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Harriett Beecher Stowe. His position among the intelligentsia of the day is confirmed by the small fact that Olmsted's application for the Central Park superintendency included nearly two hundred signatures, including those of Washington Irving and William Cullen Bryant. Olmsted's published works from this period include *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England* (1852), *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (1856), and *A Journey through Texas* (1856). He later completed a third southern book, *A Journey in the Back Country*.

²¹ Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance*, 60-157; Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System*, 19-22.

mining operation in central California. During his time there he was closely involved in the effort to establish a state park at Yosemite—pioneering work that would have important ramifications on the development of urban parks in the East and on the evolution of the national parks. He returned to New York and to full-time landscape architecture in 1865 when he and Vaux partnered once again to create the design firm Olmsted, Vaux, and Co. Their first project was the design and construction of Brooklyn’s Prospect Park, now widely considered to represent the perfection of Olmsted’s vision of an ideal urban landscape park. Along with Central Park, Prospect Park (and, soon, Boston’s Franklin Park) would come to be known as a “rural park,” “country park,” or “large park,” a type that would become the centerpiece of American park planning for many decades to come. Thenceforth Olmsted concentrated his energies on landscape architecture (for many years in partnership with Vaux, and, later as the head of his own firm, Olmsted Associates) until his retirement in 1895. During his thirty years in private practice, Olmsted trained or collaborated with many of the most talented landscape architects of the age, including Henry Sargent Codman, Charles Eliot, stepson John Charles Olmsted, and son Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. His influence on the nascent profession was such that his apprentices were known as scions of the Fairsted School, named after Olmsted’s offices at his Massachusetts estate near Boston.²²

In addition to Central and Prospect parks, some of Olmsted’s most famous park designs grace the cities of Boston, Montreal, Detroit, and Chicago. But the scope of Olmsted’s work was by no means limited to parks; he designed landscapes for college campuses, hospital and asylum

²² This very brief chronology of Olmsted’s early career was derived from Roper, *FLO*, Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance*, and Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System*.

grounds, cemeteries, country estates, and residential suburbs.²³ He also created a number of urban plans, including one for upper Manhattan, but he quickly learned that city governments were unlikely to implement such expensive large-scale projects. Instead, Olmsted came to view park planning as an integral device for shaping the urban environment, by integrating green space into the urban fabric as well as encouraging higher quality residential and commercial development around parks.²⁴

One of Olmsted's most lasting contributions to American city planning was the park-and-boulevard system, in which a network of parks serving various functions was linked together by landscaped boulevards, or parkways, through the city. Olmsted's conception of the boulevard as an extension of the park drive, rather than simply an access road, evolved from his earliest roadway designs for Central Park and Brooklyn. In 1881, Olmsted Associates designed the first comprehensive park-and-boulevard system for the city of Buffalo. The system provided a complete slate of park types, connected by a system of boulevards, to meet all kinds of recreational needs in every part of the city.²⁵ Building on these precedents, the Boston Park Commission in 1878 outlined a plan for the "most comprehensive park system of the era." Boston's highly influential "Emerald Necklace," as it came to be called, was a chain of parklands looping through the city linked by landscaped parkways and boulevards. Thirty years later, as Denver park advocates promoted their own version of the Emerald Necklace in the nearby Rocky

²³ For a comprehensive listing of the Olmsted firm's projects, see Charles E. Beveridge and Carolyn F. Hoffman, *The Master List of Design Projects of the Olmsted Firm, 1857-1950* (New York: National Association for Olmsted Parks in conjunction with the Massachusetts Association for Olmsted Parks, 1987).

²⁴ Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance*, 344.

²⁵ Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 22-29. Wilson attributes the development of the park and boulevard idea wholly to Olmsted.

Mountains, they pointed to Boston's parks as an exemplar. Olmsted consulted with the Boston park commission as it conceptualized the necklace system; the city then contracted with Olmsted Associates to design several of the parks. Olmsted's design for Boston's Franklin Park, the shining pendant of the Emerald Necklace, is widely considered to be one of his finest country parks, ranking on a par with Central and Prospect parks in Olmsted's oeuvre.²⁶

Fluent in romantic thought, literature, and art, Olmsted's goal was to construct—literally, since his projects often demanded that the original ground be reengineered, sometimes extensively—landscapes that appeared “natural” and embodied the aesthetic styles known at the time by the terms “Beautiful” and “Picturesque.” Developed among the writers and practitioners of the Picturesque movement in English landscape gardening during the eighteenth century, both styles were naturalistic reactions to the more formal, crisply ordered classical parks and gardens of Europe. Beautiful (or, more conveniently, “pastoral”) scenery was characterized by flowing lines, gentle transitions, and a quality of “smoothness.” English landscape gardeners such as Capability Brown created these effects with mown lawns, bare-banked streams, trees planted in clumps to accent or frame desired views, and screening trees planted around the property line.

Picturesque scenes, by contrast, were much less tame in their appearance. They embodied more of nature's unimproved roughness and randomness, displaying “variety, intricacy, irregularity, contrast, and surprise.” In this way, the Picturesque movement provided a vital rubric for the aesthetic appreciation of wilderness scenery by a broadening public in the United States. American landscape gardeners of the mid-nineteenth century such as Andrew Jackson Downing worked within the picturesque tradition to create wooded country estates and rural cemeteries featuring both pastoral and picturesque passages of scenery. A third aesthetic

²⁶ Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System*, chs. 4 and 5.

category, the Sublime, described immense or dramatic natural scenes with qualities of vastness or solitude that inspired sensations of awe, humility, or fear in the viewer. Considered to embody the “awful” hand of God, the sublime lay outside the purview of landscape gardeners. As one theorist explained, only the Beautiful and the Picturesque were “subject to the improver; to *create* the sublime is above our . . . powers.”²⁷

As a young man Olmsted had been inspired by the pastoral landscapes of rural England, with their long views of green hills rolling gently into the distance, framed by stands of trees and accented by lakes, groves, and peaceful herds of sheep or fallow deer.²⁸ In Central Park, he and Vaux hoped that by screening out the city with treed borders and creating long, rolling meadows they could evoke the same sense of limitlessness. In their plan for Prospect Park, Olmsted and Vaux recommended a paddock for deer to bring in this essential pastoral element. In addition, no doubt influenced by his recent experiences in the California mountains, Olmsted sought to echo Yosemite’s sublimity in Brooklyn: “Although we cannot have wild mountain gorges, for instance, on the park, we may have rugged ravines shaded with trees and made picturesque with shrubs, the forms and arrangement of which remind us of mountain scenery.”²⁹

At the same time, Olmsted believed that landscape designs should respect as much as possible the local natural environment. For example, he butted heads with railroad tycoon Leland Stanford when, to his client’s horror, Olmsted recommended plantings suited to Central

²⁷ Quotes from Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System*, 25-26. See also Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 44-47, and Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

²⁸ Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance*, 86-87.

²⁹ Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance*, 272.

California's semi-arid climate for the grounds of Stanford's new college.³⁰ Indeed, Olmsted's great artistic gift was his ability to combine and arrange both pastoral and picturesque elements while keeping within the general character of a site's particular geography and flora.³¹

Over the course of a career that spanned more than three decades, Olmsted formulated a comprehensive ideology on the many and various benefits of natural landscape parks. A social reformer at heart, he sought to combat what he and his contemporaries called "barbarism," or the triumph of self-interest, avarice, competitiveness, and poor moral standards, and to nurture "civilization," or civility, virtue, selflessness, community, and morality. His travels in the antebellum South and the West had convinced him that both slavery and the frontier cultivated qualities antithetical to a humane civilization: grasping greed and the pursuit of self-interest to the detriment of others; he believed that large cities bred these uncivilized qualities as well.

In creating naturalistic landscapes Olmsted found a means to combine his art with his social ideals by positing that the first-hand contemplation of beautiful natural scenery could actually be a civilizing force. From Olmsted's point of view, scenery was far from benign. On the contrary, it had the power to change human thought, to educate, uplift, and transform human behavior, even for those without a formal education. He countered the argument that a romantic nature park would only serve wealthy patrons who were versed in the writings of "Wordsworth, Emerson, Ruskin, and Lowell" by asserting that "To enjoy it intellectually, yes;" an education was necessary, but "to be affected by it, made healthier, better, happier by it, no." Olmsted saw parks—through the natural scenes they presented to their patrons and the social space that all

³⁰ For this reason Olmsted eventually resigned from the project. See Fein, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the American Environmental Tradition*, 62.

³¹ Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System*, 22-26.

classes might share—as institutions that might “civilize the city” by helping to restore a sense of community and good-will among all residents.³²

Central to Olmsted’s park philosophy was a fundamental marriage of aesthetics and utility. A city’s investment in creating natural beauty would be repaid not only through class reconciliation, social uplift, and both physical and psychic restoration of workers through outdoor recreation, but also by shaping a cityscape that would attract and retain desirable residents. Moreover, parks provided an immediate economic stimulus to the real estate market by raising property values, and the associated tax revenues, of abutting lands. Rising values could transform the social and commercial composition of an area by forcing out “shanties, stables, breweries, distilleries, and swine yards” to allow the development of more upscale residential areas where “driving, riding, and walking can be conveniently pursued in association with pleasant people, and without the liability of encountering the unpleasant sights and sounds [and surely odors] . . . of the common streets.” Olmsted repeatedly trotted out the example of Central Park, where parkside land values had increased a shocking \$200 per year. In addition, parks stimulated the growth of localized economies, creating a demand for recreational goods and services. Olmsted advised cities to capture these benefits early by planning ahead for future growth and purchasing parklands well in advance of urban development, when prices would be far lower.³³

³² Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance*, 253-254, quotes on 363, 344. See also Fein *Frederick Law Olmsted and the American Environmental Tradition*; Germic, *American Green*; Roper, *FLO*; Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 9-34; Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System*; and Geoffrey Blodgett, “Frederick Law Olmsted: Landscape Architecture as Conservative Reform,” *Journal of American History* 62 (March 1976): 869-889.

³³ Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 29-32.

This multifaceted park philosophy, addressing as it did a range of social and political concerns rooted in the urban experience with artful solutions combining beauty, moral and physical improvement, and economic benefit, was adopted nearly whole by the next generation of urban planners and landscape architects during the Progressive Era. To be sure, the City Beautiful movement of succeeding years, which joined landscape architects and city planners with local municipal improvement activists in the first decade of the twentieth century, differed from its Olmstedian origins in important ways. However, the core of Olmsted's landscape park philosophy remained largely consistent, informing the design of urban park systems well into the twentieth century.

Frederick Law Olmsted and the Rise of Scenic Park and Forest Conservation

Perhaps because Olmsted's urban parks seem so far removed from the wild and wondrous landscapes of the national parks, environmental historians have rarely recognized him as a major figure in the evolution of the national park concept.³⁴ However, the cultural distance from Central Park to Yosemite, Yellowstone, or Mt. Rainier is actually quite short. The appreciation of natural scenery and its preservation by government in a public park actually depended a great deal upon "the precedent and influence of the landscape park as it was being advocated within the contemporary municipal park movement," professor of landscape architecture Ethan Carr has recently shown. "The American landscape park," he asserts, "was

³⁴ Alfred Runte, for example, states that the national parks owe an "obvious" debt to the urban park movement and the precedent these parks set for preserving recreational landscapes for public use, but he stresses how the national parks "evolved in response to environmental perceptions of a dramatically different kind." See his *National Parks: The American Experience*, 4-5.

born in the city but moved to the country.”³⁵ Olmsted’s career provides an apt illustration of this process. He played a central role in the seminal efforts to construct Central Park, to preserve Yosemite as a park, and to restore a natural landscape at Niagara Falls. These three parks established not only the ideological but also the political precedents upon which all future municipal, regional, state, and national parks were based. This is not to suggest that Olmsted deserves sole credit for the national park idea. His influence was ubiquitous, but he was not the driving force behind every landscape park effort of the period. Park building required coalitions of supporters in every locale—and typically these supporters included powerful commercial interests such as real estate developers or railroads who would profit from park schemes—but park advocates shared much of the philosophy articulated by Olmsted. For these reasons, the story of Olmsted’s involvement in the Yosemite and Niagara efforts presents a concise illustration of the conjoined genealogy of America’s urban and wild parks.

By the time Olmsted arrived in central California in late 1863 to manage the Mariposa gold mine he was widely known as a park expert, having spent nearly five years as Central Park’s superintendent before the Civil War began. Within just a few months of his arrival, California’s junior Senator John Conness introduced a bill in Washington that would cede the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove to the state of California to protect these areas from private development. The state was to hold the grant “inalienable for all time” for “public use, resort, and recreation.” The plan had been brought to Conness by a group of unnamed Californians: men, in Conness’s words, “of fortune, of taste, and of refinement.” Historians are quite certain that Israel Ward Raymond, of the Central American Steamship Transit Company, was one of these men. While no evidence survives to demonstrate Olmsted’s

³⁵ Ethan Carr, *Wilderness by Design: Landscape Architecture and the National Park Service* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 11-93, quotes on 52, 26.

involvement, historians agree that he was almost certainly part of the effort, and was the likely author of the particular language used in the legislation. On June 30, 1864, President Lincoln signed the Yosemite bill, and the following September California's governor Frederick F. Low formally prohibited lumbering, trespassing, and settlement within the land grant. Low then appointed a commission of eight men to administer the grant, one of whom was Olmsted. If Olmsted's role in the effort to set the valley aside is unclear, his record as the *de facto* head of the Yosemite Commission is undisputed.³⁶

To Olmsted fell the task of preparing a report for the California legislature that would outline the state's responsibilities in managing the grant. In August 1865, Olmsted presented his report at a meeting of the Yosemite Commission. The document is a touchstone, for it represents the first coherent and comprehensive statement justifying the creation of parks by state or federal government, as well as a specific plan for developing the area as a park. Olmsted argued that Yosemite's greatest scenic asset was not just its towering cliffs and waterfalls, but the harmonious—even artful—juxtaposition of the awesome rocks (a classic sublime scene) with the “soft and peaceful pastoral beauty” of the valley. “The union of the deepest sublimity with the deepest beauty of nature, not in one feature or another, not in one part or one scene or another, not in any landscape that can be framed by itself, but all around and wherever the visitor goes,” he wrote, “constitutes the Yo Semite the greatest glory of nature.”

To justify the preservation of such natural scenery at public expense, Olmsted drew on the same republican rationale that had long been a part of the municipal park movement. In the private parks of Europe, he noted, “the enjoyment of the choicest natural scenes in the country and the means of recreation connected with them is thus a monopoly . . . of a very few, very rich

³⁶ Roper, *FLO*, 282-287, 301-302; Runte, *National Parks*, 28-31; Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance*, 238, 256-258, 279-280.

people. The great mass of society, including those to whom it would be of the greatest benefit, is excluded from it.” In a republic, he argued, it was especially critical that the benefits of education extend throughout society, and to Olmsted, contemplating natural scenery was one means of exercising “the esthetic and contemplative faculties.” Just as “the water of rivers should be guarded against private appropriation . . . for the purpose of navigation, . . . portions of natural scenery may therefore properly be guarded and cared for by government.” Indeed, the government had not only the authority, but also the duty to “withhold from the grasp of individuals, all places favorable in scenery to the recreation of the mind and body.” Simply protecting lands from private ownership would not be enough, however. “It is necessary that they should be laid open to the use of the body of the public.” In other words, he envisioned Yosemite not simply as a scenic preserve, but as a public park—a place, like Central Park, that the public was to use for restoration and recreation.³⁷

Read as the founding document of the national park movement, Olmsted’s report appears revolutionary. But in the context of his recent tenure at Central Park, it becomes clear that Olmsted took the aesthetic, social, and political logic developed at Central Park, then applied it on a national scale. While others before him, including Thomas Jefferson and George Catlin, had toyed with the notion of government protection of natural scenic areas, in Olmsted’s Yosemite report this idea finally “crystallize[d] in its clearest form.”³⁸ Park ideology, which assigned value to picturesque and pastoral scenery as a means for promoting republicanism, class reconciliation, public health, and personal restoration, was quite easily adapted to the sublime

³⁷ Frederick Law Olmsted, “The Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Trees, A Preliminary Report (1865),” *Landscape Architecture* 43 (October 1952): 12-25.

³⁸ Roper, *FLO*, 285. On earlier iterations of the national park idea, see Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), ch. 1.

and picturesque environs of Yosemite. And Central Park had already established the significant precedent that the government could, and should, play a role in providing these amenities. The key difference between the urban park and Yosemite was less the nature of the scenery or the intent for how it would be developed for public use, but in the means that would be required to do so. In the cities of the East, park building was a municipal enterprise that frequently involved taking lands back out of private hands and sometimes rebuilding a natural landscape. In the West, on the other hand, iconic landscapes that were still part of the public domain needed to be preserved as public property and protected from private development. In the West this might be done under the aegis of the federal or state government if not undertaken by a local municipality.

Finally, Olmsted laid out a careful plan for developing the valley to make it accessible to the public it was established to serve. The “first necessity” was to build a good road to the valley and another to the Mariposa Grove to replace the arduous 40-mile trail visitors currently traveled from the nearest roads. An access road would also protect the valley scenery by allowing construction timber and other supplies to come in from elsewhere. Within the valley, Olmsted recommended building a one-way circuit route for carriage travel, “reaching all the finer points of view,” with suitable rest stops, frequent turnouts, and footpaths to viewpoints away from the road. Olmsted placed the road carefully within the valley to limit “the necessity for artificial construction within the narrowest practicable limits, destroying as it must the natural conditions of the ground and presenting an unpleasant object to the eye in the midst of the scenery.” Lastly, he recommended constructing five simple cabins for visitors. He concluded by asking the legislature for \$37,000 to implement the plan, \$25,000 of which was earmarked as state aid in construction of the access road.³⁹ However, some members of the commission feared that this

³⁹ Olmsted, “The Yosemite Valley,” 24.

price tag was too great, and so without Olmsted's knowledge the plan was scuttled by his colleagues. After learning of their actions, he resigned the commission, and he never returned to Yosemite after the summer of 1865.

Quietly buried by the commissioners, Olmsted's Yosemite Commission report was not widely read at the time. Even Olmsted felt that he could not take credit for originating the national park concept, later attributing it to "the workings of the national genius." However, the report's influence can be traced quite directly to subsequent events at Niagara Falls. For Samuel Bowles, the influential editor of the Massachusetts *Springfield Republican*, had been a member of the audience that summer day when Olmsted read his report to the Yosemite Commission, and he and Olmsted became good friends during his stay in California that year. Bowles's subsequent book about his trip, *Across the Continent: A Summer's Journey by the Rocky Mountains, the Mormons and the Pacific States*, was immediately popular among the reading public. In it, Bowles included the conspicuous proposal that reservations modeled on the Yosemite grant should be established at Niagara Falls, as well as in portions of the Adirondacks and Maine.⁴⁰ Moreover, Olmsted's lifetime of work was continually shaped by the cumulative influences of his various projects. We have already seen how his time in Yosemite helped to inspire some of the design elements of Prospect Park. Likewise, Olmsted's involvement in the other most significant precursor to the national parks—Niagara—was surely informed by his work at Yosemite.

Niagara had long been the country's most well-known and accessible scenic wonder, attracting increasing numbers of tourists after the opening of the Erie Canal. When Alexis de Tocqueville visited the falls in 1831, he quite accurately anticipated their fate, noting to a friend,

⁴⁰ Samuel Bowles, *Across the Continent: A Summer's Journey by the Rocky Mountains, the Mormons and the Pacific States* (Springfield, Mass.: S. Bowles & Co., 1866), cited in Roper, *FLO*, 287.

“I don’t give the Americans ten years to establish a saw or flour mill at the base of the cataract.”⁴¹ By the time of the Civil War, the falls had become a national disgrace. Private developers had laid claim to every inch of the riverbank, charging exorbitant fees at the overlooks and lining the rim of the gorge with fences and tollhouses. Tourists coming to view a sublime natural wonder were forced instead to navigate a gaudy, commercialized landscape of curio stands, tour outfits, museums, grog-shops and, yes, mills.⁴² By 1870 Niagara Falls had become an ironic monument to American commercialism and rampant individualism. But it also served to galvanize public sentiment behind the protection of exceptional landscapes from private development.

By the late 1860s Olmsted was already discussing what might be done to rescue the falls and restore the natural scenery to the area. Ten years later, sufficient interest had coalesced to sustain a movement, and Olmsted played a central role in the effort to convince the state of New York to buy out Niagara’s landholders and convert the area into a state reserve. This campaign finally applied the rationale Olmsted had developed for Yosemite Park fifteen years earlier. Together with James T. Gardener, director of the New York State Survey, Olmsted prepared a report urging the state to establish a scenic reserve at the falls and outlining the lands that the state ought to include in the reserve. When this failed to move the legislators Olmsted, Gardener, and Charles Eliot Norton (a professor of art history at Harvard not to be confused with his contemporary, the landscape architect Charles Eliot), organized a petition. This effort, too, failed, and so Olmsted and Norton formed the Niagara Falls Association, which launched an energetic campaign to mobilize public opinion in support of the idea and bring public pressure to bear on

⁴¹ Alexis de Tocqueville quoted in Runte, *National Parks*, 6.

⁴² Runte, *National Parks*, 5-9.

the state assembly. In this way the Niagara campaign educated for the first time a broad, national reading public in the rationale Olmsted first articulated for Yosemite, justifying the role of government in the protection of natural scenery as a public resource. By contrast, the preceding efforts to create reserves at both Yosemite (1864) and Yellowstone (established 1872), were the work of small groups of influential men working directly with legislators.

Olmsted's contributions to the Niagara campaign went beyond ideology: after the state approved the park bill in 1885 and established a park commission to manage the project, Olmsted and Vaux were hired to prepare the park plan. The 1887 Niagara plan represents yet another landmark in scenic park history. Olmsted remarked that the project was "the most difficult problem in landscape architecture to do justice to, it is the most serious . . . the world has yet had." The problem was finding a way to create a natural experience for park visitors who could number up to ten thousand in a single day. It would not do to simply remove the tacky commercial debris from the area and let nature restore itself. And so Olmsted and Vaux limited park structures and kept them apart from the scenic areas; they screened carriageways from the riverbanks with trees; and they designed footpaths to the overlooks so that no buildings or vehicles would mar the views of natural scenery along the falls. They made specific recommendations for controlling riverbank erosion and managing the natural areas, and addressed such issues as handicapped access, public safety, and vandalism. In sum, the Niagara plan was a pioneering model for the development of a public nature preserve.⁴³

The impact of the Niagara campaign on the development of the national park idea was quite immediate. Back in California, Yosemite had rapidly devolved into a specter of Niagara. Lacking a plan for the unprecedented park after Olmsted's report was shelved, the California

⁴³ On the Niagara campaign and 1887 plan, see Roper, *FLO*, 378-382, 395-397; and Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance*, 341, 369-375.

legislature had quickly approved two homestead claims for hoteliers on the valley floor, effectively ceding the development of tourism in Yosemite to private hands. One of the claimholders erected a sawmill and cut more than four hundred trees on the valley floor. Another cut a swath through the forest to provide an unimpeded view of the falls from his barroom. The state's indifferent management continued for years, with increasingly visible degradation of the valley's natural scenery that prompted concerned critics to draw pointed comparisons between Yosemite and Niagara Falls. Not until 1905—after a lengthy campaign led most notably by John Muir, who had arrived in the region three years after Olmsted's departure—did California turn over the Yosemite grant to the federal government.⁴⁴

Even Yellowstone, established in 1872 as the country's first federally owned scenic park, and a project in which Olmsted was not involved, drew its inspiration from the logic of picturesque culture and its application in the municipal park movement and at Yosemite. The act establishing Yellowstone was “explicitly modeled on the Yosemite Grant legislation,” notes Ethan Carr. In fact, the park fell to the federal government for management by default, as there was no state government with jurisdiction over the area to accept the land grant. Administered and developed for over thirty-five years by the U.S. Army, the road system constructed by the Corps of Engineers exhibit “a technical awareness” of the interior park drives and connecting parkways being constructed by city governments across the country during the 1890s. If Olmsted's Yosemite plan had failed to direct the development of that park, landscape park ideal

⁴⁴ Roper, *FLO*, 302; Runte, *National Parks*, 59-64. See also Thurman Wilkins, *John Muir: Apostle of Nature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), and Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

and the park and parkway designs he and other landscape architects had devised for numerous American cities found ready application in the virtual wilderness of Yellowstone.⁴⁵

Shortly after completing the Niagara Plan, Olmsted took on another seminal project in the history of American conservation when George W. Vanderbilt hired him in 1888 to plan the grounds of his North Carolina country estate, Biltmore. On Olmsted's initial visit to the 2,000-acre site, he advised Vanderbilt against making a park of the entire grounds, as the soil was poor and the forest in dire condition after years of harvesting the best trees had left only the "runts and ruins and saplings." Instead, Olmsted suggested Vanderbilt undertake the first large-scale experiment in scientific forestry in the United States. "Such land in Europe would be made a forest; partly, if it belonged to a gentleman of large means, as a hunting preserve for game, mainly with a view to crops of timber," Olmsted wrote. "That would be a suitable and dignified business for you to engage in; it would in the long run, be probably a fair investment of capital and it would be of great value to the country to have a thoroughly well organized and systematically conducted attempt in forestry made on a large scale." He advised creating only a small park "into which to look from your house," and to "make the rest a forest, improving the existing woods and planting the old fields." Vanderbilt embraced the concept, eventually adding several thousand more acres to the property.⁴⁶

Then, in 1891, Olmsted hired the young Gifford Pinchot, recently graduated from university studies of forestry in Europe, to manage the forest. This was not only Pinchot's first professional appointment in forestry, it was also the first professionally managed forest in the country. Pinchot worked closely with Olmsted over the next four years, leaving Biltmore in

⁴⁵ Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 31-33.

⁴⁶ Roper, *FLO*, 414-419, quote on 415-416.

1895. The German forester Carl Alwin Schenck, whom Pinchot hired to take over as chief forester at the estate, later wrote that Olmsted “was not merely *the* great authority on all landscapism and indeed the creator of landscape architecture in the U.S.A.; he was also *the* inspirer of American forestry.”⁴⁷

Twentieth Century Touchstones: Chicago’s White City and Boston’s Metropolitan Park System

Until his retirement in 1895, Olmsted made several trips annually to work at Biltmore. Through the waning years of his professional career he was also working on two other important projects, both of which would wield tremendous influence on landscape architecture, park building, and urban planning well into the twentieth century. The first was the design of the grounds for the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which opened in 1893. If Olmsted’s naturalistic aesthetic seems a poor match for the ostentatious neoclassical architecture of the White City, his work on the Chicago Fair illustrates several important points. The fair failed to change Olmsted’s low opinion of neoclassicism and the intrusion of architecture into parks, two trends that a younger generation of landscape architects and city planners would come to embrace as part of the City Beautiful movement. Olmsted remained steadfastly committed to naturalism and saw naturalistic landscaping as a means to counterbalance architectural structures and provide relief from cityscapes dominated by buildings. On the other hand, Olmsted embraced the comprehensive approach to urban planning that the White City illustrated. This holistic view of how the urban environment might be shaped and improved paralleled the way that Olmsted and many of his contemporaries extended their interest in nature well beyond the boundaries of the city proper. Completed as Olmsted’s career drew to a close, the Chicago Fair

⁴⁷ Roper, *FLO*, 419, 462, quote on 467.

helped to inspire a new generation of urban planners, architects, and landscape architects. The fair became the touchstone of the City Beautiful movement of the early twentieth century, and it fired the imaginations of civic and commercial leaders across the country, including many in Denver who worked to recreate elements of the White City at home.⁴⁸

The second was Boston's Metropolitan Park system, which would become the first regional scenic park system in the country. Regional, or metropolitan, park planning (as distinct from parks operated by a single municipality) was particularly pertinent in Boston due to the area's physical and political geography. The city proper, cramped on its narrow peninsula, could not spare the space for large parks, prompting park advocates from the 1860s on to look outward to the city's expanding suburbs for park sites that would serve the urban population. As other American cities spread outward toward suburban towns, Boston's experience would find increasing relevance nationally.

In 1888 Charles Eliot, then a junior member of the Olmsted firm, proposed that such suburban parks might be conceptualized primarily as scenic preserves. In an article on the Waverley Oaks grove in *Garden and Forest* magazine, Eliot argued that areas of significant natural beauty surrounding Boston ought to be preserved under the administration of a trans-jurisdictional park commission. Eliot conceived of the parks as a linked system of scenic nature reserves—as distinct from suburban small parks or large urban landscape parks—from the beginning. During the early 1890s Eliot led the effort to create the Boston Metropolitan Park Commission, which had the authority to acquire, develop, and manage parklands in the various political jurisdictions comprising Boston's suburbs. In 1892 the commission quickly engaged Eliot as its landscape architect and he prepared a comprehensive report identifying a slate of

⁴⁸ Roper, *FLO*, 464-465; Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance*, 399; Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 9-10, 22.

natural areas for acquirement and development as scenic preserves. Key supporters in the effort to establish the metropolitan system included both Olmsted and the Appalachian Mountain Club. By the time acquisitions began in 1893 Eliot was a partner at Olmsted Associates, and the work on the metropolitan system was done under the aegis of the Olmsted firm with Eliot as its designer. During the 1890s, Eliot personally oversaw the acquisition of more than 9,000 acres by the Boston Metropolitan Park Commission, including seashores and islands along the inner Massachusetts Bay, beaches and estuaries, river ways and forest groves such as the Waverley Oaks, and scenic geological formations.

Eliot's work demonstrated that scenic preservation could provide the basis for regional park planning in an age of urban expansion. These ideas were rooted in nineteenth-century precedents in municipal park and parkway plans, and in the ideology of the urban landscape park articulated by Frederick Law Olmsted at mid-century. Eliot's 1893 park plan outlined the goals of his scenic park system in terms long used to express the value of a large urban landscape park. The scenic reserves would provide the "space for air, for light, for exercise, for rest, and for the enjoyment of the peaceful beauty of nature which, because it is the opposite of the noisy ugliness of towns, is so wonderfully refreshing to the tired souls of townspeople." As Ethan Carr observes, "the ideal had not changed but the geographic setting of the landscape park had moved out to where such park development had always made the most sense: the periphery of the urban sphere of influence."⁴⁹

Olmsted recognized Boston's Metropolitan Park system as the logical extension of his own work in city planning and another path breaking project. "Nothing else compares in importance to us with the Boston work, meaning the Metropolitan quite equally with the city

⁴⁹ Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 44-46.

work,” he wrote to his partners in 1893. “The two together will be the most important work of our profession now in hand anywhere in the world. . . . In your probable lifetime, Muddy River, Blue Hills, the [Middlesex] Fells, Waverley Oaks, Charles River, the Beaches, will be points to date from in the history of American Landscape Architecture, as much as Central Park. They will be the openings of new chapters of the art.”⁵⁰ Characteristically, Olmsted was correct. By 1905 Boston’s metropolitan park system included 15,000 acres of nature reserves in thirty-nine different municipalities, all within twelve miles of the city. The influence of Boston’s experiment in preserving beautiful natural areas on the urban fringe was quite immediate. By 1900 New Jersey counties were actively developing rural park systems to serve the greater New York City area. And by 1912, Chicago had launched an ambitious plan to preserve scenic forest reserves outside the city.⁵¹ More broadly, Olmsted’s park-and-boulevard system, his commitment to shaping urban development via park planning, and the extension of these practices to a metropolitan scale would become central tenets of the City Beautiful movement embraced by Olmsted’s immediate heirs in the field. As he passed the helm of the Olmsted Associates firm to his sons this new era in urban planning lay just over the horizon. Within just a decade, civic boosters in Denver would be sufficiently inspired by Olmsted’s foundational contributions to the park ideal in America—from Central Park to the Boston park system; by his theories of urban social reform via landscape beauty; by his approach to city planning via the park-and-boulevard system; and by his grand Columbian Exposition cityscapes—that they would engage their city in

⁵⁰ Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System*, 118-123.

⁵¹ Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 46-48. Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, orig. pub. 1969), 71-72. See, for example, “Executive Committee Report to the Joint Committee of the Mountain Park Project,” 7 December 1911, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job No. 5582, microfilm in Denver Historic Parks Collection, Western History/Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library.

hugely ambitious park-building schemes both within the urban area and on its mountain outskirts.

Beauty, Nature, and Recreation: Linking the City Beautiful and Scenic Preservation in the Progressive Era

The growing popularity of parks, in which beautiful natural landscapes were preserved and made available for public enjoyment, was in line with broadening cultural trends that promoted natural scenery, scenic wonders, and outdoor experience as a remedy for the dire physical and psychological effects of modern urban life. On one hand, the breathtaking pace of industrialization and urban sprawl in the last quarter of the nineteenth century gobbled up the countryside at a rate that could hardly be ignored, prompting the desire to preserve (or create) pockets of natural open space within the urban environment. On the other hand, the industrial city could be distinctly unpleasant: filthy, smelly, overcrowded, and dangerous. Immigration, urban migration, poverty, and economic change contributed to heightened tensions among city dwellers. In response to the stresses of urban living, increasing numbers of urban upper- and middle-class Americans turned “back to nature” in a variety of modes. From the 1880s through the 1920s, a cadre of popular writers, intellectuals, and social scientists developed a wide-ranging ideology that embraced a love of nature as a necessary component of modern, civilized life.

By reading popular works of wilderness fiction, natural history, and an extensive magazine literature on “country life;” by commuting to suburbs, restoring abandoned farms, and building expensive urban park systems; by advocating nature study, bird watching, horticulture, and landscaping; and by enrolling their children in Boy Scouts, Campfire Girls, and rural summer camps, burgeoning numbers of middle-class “nature lovers” demonstrated their

conviction that nature, best appreciated through the lenses of urban culture and Romantic literature, offered the optimal counterpoint to the problems of city life. This Arcadian mythology departed from Jeffersonian agrarianism and nineteenth-century Transcendentalism to idealize a new blending of nature and culture, in which urban, middle-class environmental values replaced rural ones, and nature was understood as a vital amenity of urban (and suburban) life. Nature lovers sought, in the words of one contemporary writer, to enjoy both “the cream of the country and the cream of the city.” Cornell University’s Liberty Hyde Bailey elaborated on this new ideal in 1901, explaining that the goal was to combine “something of the social and intellectual advantages and physical comforts of the city with the inspiration and peaceful joys of the country.”⁵²

The turn to nature in middle-class culture of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was less a rejection of modernity than a multifaceted response to urbanization, industrialization, and modernization. Believers embraced the virtues of nature in an effort to improve modern civilization and ameliorate its worst side effects. Widespread anxiety about the enervating effects of office work and a growing tendency of middle-class men to suffer from nervous exhaustion, neurasthenia, and general ill health prompted people such as Theodore Roosevelt to advocate “the strenuous life,” in which outdoor activity could restore the strength and vigor that the modern workplace sapped. With fellow outdoorsman George Bird Grinnell, Roosevelt founded the Boone and Crockett Club for sports hunters in 1893 to develop the qualities that urban living could not. Hunting, wrote Grinnell, was a proper sport “for a vigorous

⁵² Schmitt, *Back to Nature*, esp. xvii-19, 188-189, quotes on *xix*, 4.

and masterful people,” because it demanded that hunters “be sound of body and firm of mind, and ... possess energy, resolution, manliness, self-reliance, and a capacity for self-help.”⁵³

This rationale drew on wildlife and wilderness landscapes to temper the crisis of middle-class masculinity, reflecting not simply nostalgia for the frontier which had, according to the 1890 census, come to an end, but also a broader fear that middle- and upper-class men risked losing their capacity to maintain leadership of the nation’s business and industrial infrastructure. Parallel concerns about the health of women and children and the cultivation of capable mothers led to similar prescriptions for family excursions to local parks, rural cemeteries, country meadows, and mountain resorts for rest, recreation, and education. Women found ready applications for Victorian notions of domesticity beyond the confines of the home in nature study, bird watching, gardening and horticulture, and by organizing to support park building, playgrounds, and a range of urban beautification projects to improve the urban environment. In fact, much of the grassroots support for national park preservation that emerged after 1900 came not only from hunting and alpine clubs such as the Sierra Club, Appalachian Mountain Club, and Boone and Crocket Club, but also the horticultural societies, women’s clubs, and civic improvement organizations that were at the heart of urban reform.⁵⁴

⁵³ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 140-159, quote on 152-153. On the broader search for therapeutic solutions to the problems of modernity, see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

⁵⁴ Schmitt, *Back to Nature*: Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*; David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Stephen Fox, *John Muir and His Legacy* (New York: Little, Brown, 1981). On women, see Vera Norwood, *Made from this Earth: American Women and Nature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Wendy Keefover-Ring, “Municipal Housekeeping, Domestic Science, Animal Protection, and Conservation: Women's Political and Environmental Activism in Denver, Colorado, 1894-1912,” (M.A. thesis, Dept. of History, University of Colorado at Boulder, 2002); Adam Rome, “Political Hermaphrodites: Gender and Environmental Reform in Progressive America,” *Environmental History* 11 (July 2006): 440-463; as well as Runte, *National Parks*, 86-87; Wilson, *The City Beautiful*, Ch. 2; and Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy: America’s Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 88-91.

Until the 1890s few cities other than Boston could boast park systems that contained ample acreage for their populations, with a fair geographical distribution, adequate development, and consistent maintenance. Paved and well-lit streets were rare, rivers were fouled, and smoke, dust, garbage, filth, and flies created an oppressive urban environment in America's cities.⁵⁵ In response to such problems a range of lay activists and professionals—optimistic and determined to improve urban life—set to work to change these conditions. By 1906 a new era of civic improvement had emerged, known by the term “City Beautiful.” Advocates of the City Beautiful movement drew heavily on Olmstedian precedents in park planning and design, but they also incorporated the major tenets of Progressive thought and social science to their program for improving the urban environment.

City Beautiful reformers worked to transform the unpleasant, inefficient, disorganized city into a “beautiful, rationalized entity.” In a multifaceted “crusade against ugliness” they sought to pave streets and install sewers; to clean up polluted waterways and purify the air through smoke abatement programs; to bring natural beauty into the city through landscaped parks, boulevards, and public spaces; to build beautiful public buildings that would enhance the urban landscape and foster efficiency in government; and to promote central planning that might direct urban growth in the interest of creating a simultaneously beautiful, functional, and efficient urban organism.

Echoing Olmsted, these reformers believed in the “meliorative power of beauty” to actively shape the thoughts and actions of city dwellers. They were confident that beauty could serve as an instrument of passive, secular influence that could create an internalized bond among

⁵⁵ Most often, states City Beautiful historian William Wilson, “parks were poorly located, undeveloped, or uncoordinated into park and boulevard systems. In 1890 Chicago and Minneapolis could be proud of their parks, but Chicago displayed just over 2,000 acres of parkland and a pitiful 799 improved acres for its more than 1 million citizens.” Wilson, *The City Beautiful*, 79.

all members of a society, a sort of civic religion. More broadly, these middle- and upper-middle class reformers understood that much of the urban working class was unable to escape the city and find release from the urban environment. They saw the provision by local government of public recreational facilities such as parks, public baths, picnic areas, and facilities for popular sports as means to promote public health and improve the quality of life for the city-bound. They believed that a beautiful, efficient, orderly urban environment would cultivate a civic community that transcended economic and social differences by fostering a unifying civic pride and identity.

City Beautiful projects joined this rich notion of beauty with a Progressive embrace of efficiency and utility, believing that “no structure or scene could be truly beautiful without being functional as well.” City Beautiful plans typically went beyond park systems and public buildings to include street and sewer improvements, traffic circulation, railroad routing, and station designs. And, typical of the Progressive era, the City Beautiful movement embraced the role of the expert, advocating the engagement of trained urban planners, landscape architects, architects, and other professionals in urban design projects. The professionalization of these fields within the City Beautiful rubric absorbed, and sometimes marginalized, the prior work of village improvement societies and women’s municipal housekeeping activities. Yet not all City Beautiful projects were grand, costly park systems or public buildings. The scope of initiatives ranged widely, including community efforts to enact anti-billboard and smoke-abatement laws, and even small-scale local projects: a neighborhood park or cleanup, a community garden.⁵⁶

The Olmstedian park-and-parkway system quickly became one of the hallmarks of City Beautiful planning, as local committees and professional park planners worked to shape the character of private development by establishing networks of parks linked by landscaped

⁵⁶ Wilson, *The City Beautiful*, 75-95.

parkways within the urban fabric. However, the Progressive Era saw a considerable shift in urban park planning away from Olmsted's emphasis on the large landscape park as the centerpiece of an urban park system. On one hand, as medical science came to understand disease transmission via germs, the perceived need for large urban forests to dissipate dangerous miasmas evaporated. On the other hand, social scientists and urban reformers increasingly concerned with the plight of the urban poor argued loudly, and successfully, that parks ought to be located in these urban neighborhoods and equipped with facilities for public recreation that would appeal to working-class people. After 1900, therefore, urban park commissions turned away from the restorative picturesque nature of the "large park" in favor of developing "small parks" and playgrounds, and providing recreational programming. After 1905, notes Ethan Carr, "few American municipal parks of any size would ever again be managed as scenery."⁵⁷

Moreover, existing large parks were increasingly adapted from their purely landscape emphasis, as parts of them were made over into playgrounds and playing fields, or made the sites of museums, zoos, conservatories, libraries, and architectural monuments—structures often displaying ostentatious neoclassical architecture. If City Beautiful advocates could point to the harmonious composition of Olmstedian naturalism and neoclassical grandeur at the Columbian Exposition's White City as their inspiration, Olmsted himself would have been dismayed. For the nineteenth-century urban landscape park had been conceived largely as an alternative, and an antidote, to the architectural landscape of the industrial city. Throughout his life Olmsted struggled against the infiltration of buildings into his landscape parks, for these places were meant to present a completely natural landscape to park patrons. In the Progressive Era the

⁵⁷ Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 34-36.

removal of “Keep Off the Grass” signs from an earlier time signified the shift in urban park ideology as active recreation supplanted the quiet contemplation of natural scenes.

“If the landscape park had embodied the ideals of mid-nineteenth century American urbanism,” writes Carr, “the emblematic space of Progressive municipal reform was the ‘civic center.’” This concept—the second hallmark of City Beautiful urban design—grouped the city’s major public buildings, appropriately grand in architectural style, around a public park or square and approached by widened boulevards. City Beautiful proponents believed that the civic center would enhance the efficiency of municipal governance through the proximity of government buildings; that its park areas would provide an arena for public gatherings and celebrations that would foster civic community; and that its monumental architecture, grand avenues, and imposing composition would beautify the urban environment and thereby promote social reform and civic identity. And if the civic center concept was unified in many ways by its park spaces, these landscapes were rarely designed according to picturesque aesthetics; they were often the sites for statuary and fountains, flowerbeds and terraces, pergolas and monuments, all reminiscent of European formalism. As one contemporary observed, after the turn of the century the municipal landscape park increasingly became “less of a park and more of a garden.”⁵⁸

If the sociology and aesthetics shaping parks in the urban core shifted perceptibly away from scenic naturalism in the early twentieth century, the landscape park ideal maintained its relevance among a middle-class constituency that was embracing various tenets of the “back to nature” ethos. Following the precedent established around Boston by Charles Eliot, in cities from New York to Chicago, from Minneapolis to Seattle, the early twentieth-century landscape park moved again to the periphery of the urban area, where it took the form of an extra-urban scenic

⁵⁸ Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 37, 51.

nature reserve. The design and construction of amenities in these parks was overwhelmingly similar: curvilinear roads and trails that carried visitors to the best views, native stone masonry and rustic wood construction, few buildings, and minimal alteration to the existing landscape. This naturalistic style of architecture and minimalist design strategy had been perfected long before in Olmsted's urban landscape parks. Denver's system of mountain parks was only one manifestation of this trend, and it demonstrates how closely related to urban park development the scenic reserve ideal remained.⁵⁹

Although urban parks became more formal, more specific in purpose, and less devoted to scenic naturalism during the City Beautiful period, scenic preservation remained closely linked to urban beautification. During the 1890s the confluence of interests joining scenic preservation and civic improvement, landscape architecture, horticulture, and scientific forestry was particularly apparent in such publications as *Garden and Forest*. Co-founded in 1888 by Frederick Law Olmsted and Charles Sprague Sargent, director of Boston's Arnold Arboretum, this weekly magazine reflected its founders' sense that forestry and horticulture, landscape architecture and scenic preservation were deeply interrelated endeavors. Sargent was at once an arborist and horticulturalist of national renown, as well as an influential advocate for the national forests and the national parks. He was not alone in believing that these fields shared a fundamental interest in nature and its beneficent role in urban life.⁶⁰

The American Park and Outdoor Art Association (APOAA) illustrates the way such naturalism joined professionals and laypersons in seemingly disparate efforts to preserve scenic areas, establish urban parks, and otherwise beautify the urban environment. Founded in 1897,

⁵⁹ Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 47-50.

⁶⁰ Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 44-45; Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 35.

members included professional landscape architects and park commissioners as well as village improvement societies and women's clubs interested in park development. Addressing the organization at its first meeting, John Charles Olmsted educated his audience on "the true purpose" of a large urban landscape park. Because the goal was to preserve an area "in its simple, natural beauty, as a priceless heritage for future generations," he urged park developers to follow "rigorous aesthetic guidelines" that would preserve the natural beauty while facilitating public use, and to be especially vigilant in excluding "Coney Island amusements" from natural parkscapes.⁶¹ These guidelines, which grew less achievable in urban parks over the next ten years, remained fundamental in the planning of scenic natural parks on the urban periphery. Moreover, the same sets of interest groups: women's clubs, garden clubs, and civic improvement societies, landscape architects and city planners joined forces with alpine and hunting clubs time and again to battle for parklands not only within cities, but also in suburban areas and at major scenic destinations from Niagara to Yosemite.

The record of the American Civic Association, the organization that best represented the City Beautiful movement, and particularly of its energetic leader J. Horace McFarland underscores the way that beauty—both natural and manufactured beauty—served as the foundation for mobilizing an urban constituency in support of scenic preservation on the one hand and urban improvement on the other, with utter consistency of purpose. A prosperous Pennsylvania publisher, horticulturist, and rosarian, McFarland was the long-running president of the American League for Civic Improvement and its successor the American Civic Association. The organization was founded in 1903 through the merger of the American League for Civic Improvement and the American Park and Outdoor Art Association. Its membership

⁶¹ Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 50-51; Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 36-41.

embraced professionals in landscape architecture, urban planning, and sociology, along with lay activists from local women's clubs, beautification societies, forestry and horticultural clubs, and civic clubs. The American Civic Association, writes historian William Wilson, "gave organizational expression to the struggle for the City Beautiful, uniting activists and professionals in the fight for civic perfection." As its president for twenty years, McFarland became "the national spokesman for the City Beautiful."⁶² And from his position at the crest of the movement for civic improvement, McFarland was also one of the most influential advocates for scenic preservation at the national level in the early twentieth century.⁶³

Shortly after taking the helm of the ACA, McFarland threw his considerable influence, skill, and the weight of his organization behind the protection of Niagara Falls from yet another threat. Despite its status as a public scenic park since 1885, by the early 1900s Niagara was again vulnerable to the forces of technology and commerce, this time at the hands of professional civil and electrical engineers who proposed to divert the river's flow to hydroelectric plants elsewhere on the gorge. In true Progressive spirit, one engineer insisted that civilization could have its Niagara power and enjoy the scenery (and the tourist trade) too. Managers could divert the river only on weekdays, turning the falls "back on" for weekend tourists. Subject to such upstream diversions, the danger that the falls might, literally, run dry, was palpable.

Quite single-handedly, McFarland made the Niagara diversion controversy known nationwide. On several occasions, McFarland requested, and got, one-on-one meetings with President Theodore Roosevelt to discuss the issue, hoping to infect him with what he called

⁶² Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 50-51.

⁶³ On McFarland, see Ernest Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland: A Thorn for Beauty* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1995); William H. Wilson, "J. Horace McFarland and the City Beautiful Movement," *Journal of Urban History* 7:3 (May 1981): 315-334. McFarland makes limited appearances in Righter, *Hetch Hetchy*, 62-63; and Runte, *National Parks*, 86-87.

“Niagaritis!” In addition to representing the diverse membership of the American Civic Association, he was editor of the “Beautiful America” column in *Ladies Home Journal*, and was an editor and regular contributor to *The Outlook* magazine. His writings for these publications became influential vehicles for mobilizing a grassroots constituency that McFarland put to good use in his carefully timed letter-writing campaigns. The mail-in campaign McFarland orchestrated on behalf of Niagara was so formidable that Secretary of War William Howard Taft alone received 6,585 letters imploring him to save the falls. “Among them, Taft laughingly admitted to McFarland, were those from his mother and aunt,” writes McFarland’s biographer.⁶⁴ The anecdote is indicative of the important role women’s clubs played in scenic preservation efforts at this time. More to the point, the deluge of letters and petitions upon the heads of lawmakers and the Roosevelt administration quickly bore fruit. Within six months the Burton Act, which prohibited diversion of the Niagara River above the falls, had been introduced and passed by both houses. Unfortunately, extended treaty negotiations with Canada over the issue, combined with the recurring need to apply for extensions on the act’s provisions, meant that, for McFarland, the effort to protect Niagara as a scenic area would drag on for forty more years.

By 1908 the prestige of McFarland and the American Civic Association was recognized by the Roosevelt administration, earning McFarland an invitation to speak at Gifford Pinchot’s first-of-its-kind Governors Conference on Conservation. Pinchot was by this time the head of the U.S. Forest Service and one of the most powerful members of Theodore Roosevelt’s administration. McFarland’s organization had earned a reputation as a force to be reckoned with—it was able not only to rally significant public support behind an issue, but also to back it up with the patient political work—often undertaken personally by McFarland or his tiny staff—

⁶⁴ Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland*, 118.

needed to accomplish its goals. These goals, it must be remembered, centered upon civic improvement and urban beautification, not simply scenic preservation.⁶⁵

The invitation to the conference was somewhat remarkable, because—surprising as it might seem today—the Roosevelt administration had demonstrated little commitment to scenic preservation. In spite of the fact that the number of national parks and monuments increased markedly during Roosevelt’s tenure in office, Roosevelt’s various conservation bureaus were overwhelmingly committed to the efficient management and rational harvesting of natural resources on the public domain, and not to the uncompromising preservation of scenic parks for their aesthetic and recreational value. Pinchot, who never lost his respect for his old mentor Frederick Law Olmsted, had nevertheless come to view the strict preservation of scenic natural areas as hopelessly outdated and inefficient. He felt that such areas, many of which abutted or were surrounded by the national forests he oversaw, ought to be managed as part of the forest system. In Pinchot’s view, logging, grazing, dam building, or other uses could be made of scenic lands if such projects would benefit the greater public good. As Pinchot’s influence in the Roosevelt administration increased, the president himself was hard-pressed to justify protections for the sake of scenic beauty alone. Ironically, during the Roosevelt years the national parks were at greater risk of being subsumed by Progressive conservation with its utilitarian bent than at any previous time. Advocates of strict scenic preservation recognized the danger. In 1900, 1902, and 1903 legislation proposing the establishment of a federal bureau to manage and protect the parks as scenic resources was introduced in Congress. All three efforts were killed by Pinchot.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland*, 131.

⁶⁶ Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 61-65. “Scenic preservation,” writes Carr, “had been virtually excluded from the Progressive agenda of natural resource conservation. . . . Within government, those in favor of rigorous scenic preservation and exclusively recreational uses for national parks did not make much progress until after Theodore Roosevelt left office in 1909.”

When McFarland addressed the assembled state governors on the question of conservation, his speech elegantly wove together the major strands of City Beautiful rhetoric with those of scenic preservation. The common thread was the uplifting social and psychological effect of beauty in the face of ugliness, greed, and waste. The “glory of the United States must rest ... upon a firmer foundation than that of her purely material resources,” he began. The backbone of the nation’s strength was found not in economic greatness but in the “love of country” felt by its citizens. This “holy fire of patriotism,” he asserted, “is excited primarily by the beauty of the country.” Americans would sacrifice this priceless national resource at grave risk to the nation’s health and welfare. “We can continue to convert the fairest land the sun shines upon into a desert of ugliness,” he said, then challenged the governors to make a different choice. “It is for us to decide whether we shall permanently retain as a valuable national asset any considerable portion of the natural scenery which is so beneficently influential upon our lives, or whether we shall continue to substitute for it the unnatural scenery of man’s careless waste.” By labeling the extraction of resources, the expansion of industrial cities, and the attendant environmental degradation as wasteful—a central preoccupation of Progressives who were committed to maximizing efficiency—McFarland worked to frame the preservation of natural beauty as a way to conserve that beauty for sustained public use, in much the way that the other conservation bureaus sought to manage the resources under their stewardship.

Industrial cities such as Pittsburgh or Chicago, with “their wasteful smoke, their formless streets, their all-pervading billboards and grime” could not hope to excite the same civic love and pride as did Washington, D.C., with its beautified landscapes and architecture, McFarland pointed out. Natural beauty, as a form of relief and restoration from the industrial landscape, promised the same benefits to the vast public. McFarland criticized those wealthy industrialists

who subjected their workers to gritty Hoboken and “dreadful Homestead,” while using their ill-gotten profits to escape “the all-pervading ugliness they have created” by purchasing “scenic beauty in a foreign country.” Having ruined the native scenery around their own homes, America’s Carnegies spent millions annually in travel to Europe’s scenic destinations.

“Can we not see to it,” McFarland queried, “that the further use of our unrenewable resources of minerals and primeval forest is no longer attended with a sad change of beautiful, restful, and truly valuable scenery into the blasted hillside and painful ore-dump, ugly, disturbing, and valueless?” Scenic nature parks offered an alternative with persuasive economic and social benefits that McFarland encouraged the assembled governors to consider. “The scenic value of all the national domain yet remaining should be jealously guarded as a distinctly important natural resource,” he urged. “We have for a century stood actually, if not ostensibly, for an uglier America;” he charged, “let us here and now resolve, for every patriotic and economic reason, to stand openly and solidly for a more beautiful, and, therefore, more prosperous America!” In this way, McFarland showed how seamlessly the logic of beautification and scenic tourism—civic pride and national patriotism, public health and social reform, and beautiful surroundings as a profitable asset—could join to support efforts to improve the urban environment or preserve the natural environment. He represented a much larger constituency who shared these largely overlapping concerns.

McFarland referred his audience again and again to his struggle to protect Niagara Falls from exploitation by economic interests. But the problem was not unique to Niagara, he informed the governors. Resource development proposals of one kind or another threatened natural scenic destinations from the White Mountains to Grand Canyon to Yosemite. McFarland made it clear that he opposed Pinchot’s use-oriented position regarding the western scenic parks.

“Shall we hold inviolate all the glories of the Yosemite,” he challenged, “or are we to permit insidious corporate attacks upon its beauty under the guise of questionable economics?” He concluded his speech with another bold attack on Pinchot’s public lands policies. “The National Parks—all too few in number and extent—ought to be held absolutely inviolate, as intended by Congress. Intrusions for questionable water-supply needs” he said, in a clear reference to Yosemite’s Hetch Hetchy valley, “should not be permitted.”⁶⁷

McFarland’s repeated references to Yosemite were not merely rhetoric. His passionate publicity on the Niagara threat had caught the attention of the Sierra Club in California, which had been alerted in 1907 to a plan by the City of San Francisco to dam the park’s Hetch Hetchy valley for a municipal water supply. The Club’s John Muir and William Colby had formed a parallel organization, The Society for the Preservation of National Parks, to lobby on behalf of the valley. To give the new organization a national base, they recruited board members from across the country. J. Horace McFarland was one of these; pledging his assistance in the Hetch Hetchy struggle while the Sierra Club promised its support of his Niagara campaign in return. As it turned out, McFarland played a central role in the long, but ultimately unsuccessful, effort to prevent the inundation of Hetch Hetchy. In addition to marshalling the American Civic Association membership behind the issue, McFarland and his tiny staff conducted the lion’s share of the personal lobbying of Congress and several presidential administrations out of the American Civic Association’s Washington office.⁶⁸

Arrayed against the defenders of the valley stood not only the City of San Francisco but also Gifford Pinchot. Pinchot had early on encouraged San Francisco’s plan “to make provision

⁶⁷ McFarland speech excerpted in Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland*, 132-133.

⁶⁸ Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland*, 153-172.

for a water supply from the Yosemite National Park,” promising to do whatever was in his power to assist the city’s efforts in Washington. In his view, using parkland for water storage was a legitimate use of a publicly held resource given the need of the many thousands of citizens of San Francisco for water. “I feel very strongly that San Francisco must have an adequate water supply,” Pinchot had written to Colby in 1905, and while he agreed “as to the extreme desirability of preserving the Hetch Hetchy in its original beauty,” he felt this must “be done without serious interference with a matter of such large importance as the water supply of a great group of communities.”⁶⁹

In this way, the extended public debate over the fate of the valley brought the differences between Progressive-era conservationism, with its broad ethic of conserving natural resources in the public interest, and scenic preservation, with its overarching concern for preserving natural beauty while making it accessible for public recreation, into sharp relief. McFarland understood this, and in a 1909 letter to Pinchot on behalf of Hetch Hetchy, he presented an argument that had been well-honed by civic improvers: “I feel that the conservation movement is now weak, because it has failed to join hands with the preservation of scenery, with the provision of agreeable working conditions, and with that suggestion which is the first thing to produce patriotism.” Emphasizing the social value of scenic nature parks in promoting the health and productivity of urban workers and in fostering patriotic emotions, McFarland went on: “somehow we must get you to see that the man whose efforts we want to conserve produces the best effort and more effort in agreeable surroundings; that the preservation of forests, water

⁶⁹ Righter, *Hetch Hetchy*, 60, 69; letter to Colby quoted in Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland*, 154.

powers, minerals and other items of national prosperity in a sane way must be associated with the pleasure to the eye and the mind and the regeneration of the spirit of man.”⁷⁰

McFarland’s work on behalf of scenic natural park preservation extended well beyond the Niagara and Hetch Hetchy controversies. Not only was McFarland in the forefront in the two most significant preservation battles of the Progressive years, he was also the primary force behind the successful effort to establish the National Park Service. His leadership in these three efforts made him one of, if not the, most important leaders in the preservation movement. All of this work was done in his capacity as president of the American Civic Association, making the association among the most active of all the grassroots preservation groups (which are typically understood to have predominantly been alpine, hunting, or outdoor clubs).

Among the legacies of the Niagara and Hetch Hetchy campaigns was a growing realization among proponents of scenic preservation that simply designating an area as a park was not enough to protect it from development for other uses. Well before 1913, when the Raker Act passed giving San Francisco the right to dam the Hetch Hetchy valley, McFarland had begun working on another front to assemble a new administrative framework along the lines of a municipal park commission that would be able to protect the national parks from such incursions.⁷¹

During his ample time in Washington conducting American Civic Association business, McFarland found to his dismay that there was no “single desk or a single individual who worked full time” on the national parks, which numbered eleven in 1910. Although the parks were under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior, the army was managing most of them. This

⁷⁰ McFarland quoted in Runte, *National Parks*, 88-89.

⁷¹ Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland*, 168-172.

made sense as the army was best able to patrol the parks for illegal squatters, poachers, and grazers. And army engineers designed and built many of the early park roads. Park superintendents, often retired military men, worked quite independently, applying to Congress annually for funding allocations. To complicate matters further, of the fifteen national monuments established by 1910, which included Grand Canyon, Zion Canyon, and Olympic, most were housed under Pinchot's Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture. The army managed others. None were to be found in Interior with the parks. This absence of system and inefficient management of the nation's scenic resources disturbed McFarland, and he was all too aware of the danger that predatory resource bureaus might push development projects through on the scenic lands given the lack of coordination in their management. And so in 1910 he began what his biographer calls "the process of patiently hectoring a national park bureau into being."⁷²

McFarland first met with Interior Secretary Richard Ballinger to discuss the need for a bureau specifically for the parks. The Secretary agreed with McFarland's assessment of the problem and invited him to draw up a bill providing for a national parks bureau. McFarland did not hesitate. Working closely with his good friend and colleague Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., McFarland drafted the bill that would eventually establish the National Park Service. (McFarland brought Olmsted into the project because of his long experience in the design and management of urban park systems, a subject that will be fully considered in Chapter Three.) McFarland's bill made it the responsibility of the Interior Secretary to publish "rules and regulations ... for the management, care and preservation of such parks, monuments, and reservations, and for the protection of property and improvements, game and natural curiosities and resources therein." Only the secretary would have the authority to "grant leases and permits for use of the land, or

⁷² Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland*, 173-174.

the development of the resources therein,” and to contract with concessionaires. Olmsted was concerned that these stipulations might raise opposition to the bill due to the concentration of power in the secretary’s office. To prevent this, he thought that the bill should delineate an overarching purpose of the parks “as agencies for promoting public recreation and public health through the use and enjoyment by the people.” The bill then went on to proscribe any use that would be detrimental to natural scenery or objects of interest that underlay the purpose of a given park.⁷³

In January 1911 the bill went before Congress, sponsored by Utah Senator Reed Smoot. It met with immediate opposition, particularly by Gifford Pinchot, who felt that his own bureau ought to take over management of all the scenic lands. The five-year campaign to win Congressional support of the measure involved the heavy contribution of time and resources from McFarland and the American Civic Association’s Washington bureau. McFarland was untiring as he worked to “befriend” each new interior secretary and gain the support of the current presidential administration for the plan. He then “used publicity to arouse the public and the public to agitate among their legislators,” in this way building the necessary awareness and support in Congress.⁷⁴

When it finally passed in 1916, the National Park Service Act created a new federal agency within the Interior Department to manage the parks. It also articulated a coherent mission statement to establish the guidelines for their development and care. In contrast to the Forest Service and other resource agencies, the mission of the National Park Service was to “conserve

⁷³ Bill text quoted in Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland*, 176. See also Righter, *Hetch Hetchy*, 193.

⁷⁴ Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland*, 174. See also Runte, *National Parks*, 98-104; Righter, *Hetch Hetchy*, 194; and Horace M. Albright and Marian Albright Schenck, *Creating the National Park Service: The Missing Years* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for future generations.”⁷⁵ Not many years later this mission would become the subject of some controversy, because its dual mandates to manage parks for recreation while preserving their wilderness qualities would come to be seen as increasingly contradictory. But the logic behind the national parks legislation is quite consistent with the park ideology of the Progressive era, and this body of ideas had been the most fully developed and applied by the civic improvers and park planners of the City Beautiful movement.

When McFarland testified at the Congressional hearings on the proposed bureau in 1916, he worked to educate his audience about the purpose of parks. “I think sometimes we fall into a misapprehension because the word ‘park’ in the minds of most of us suggests a place where there are flower beds . . . and things of that kind.” Make no mistake, he asserted, “that the park has passed out of this category in the United States.” Not only had naturalistic park aesthetics reached their fullest expression in the grand, sublime nature captured within the national parks, the function of the urban park extended to the national parks as well. “The park is the direct competitor . . . of the courts, of the jail, of the cemetery, and a very efficient competitor with all of them.” Recreation could restore the urban American worker both physically and psychologically. Keeping “at work men who otherwise would be away from work. That is the park idea in America,” McFarland concluded.⁷⁶ Parks, then, were places where exceptionally beautiful nature was preserved, then managed and presented expressly for human use and improvement through recreation and restoration.

⁷⁵ Righter, *Hetch Hetchy*, 193.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Runte, *National Parks*, 100.

The national parks bill is rightly understood as an early landmark in the preservation of natural landscapes and small islands of American wilderness, and it undoubtedly institutionalized the response of nature lovers to the demonstrated threats of dams and other commercial development in Yosemite and Niagara. But the national parks should also be interpreted as a nationalized articulation of urban park ideology. Municipal park systems served urban populations by providing recreational nature on a local scale, and in so doing helped to foster civic identity, civic pride, and civic community. The national parks could achieve these goals writ large, for they fostered national identity and patriotism through outdoor recreation and experience with monumental, iconic symbols of the American wilderness. In this way, recreation and tourism were not simply means to the ultimate end of preserving wild nature in the national parks; human recreation and the desirable effects it could create was central to their very purpose.

Conclusion

Scholars interested in the rising popularity of wilderness in the early twentieth century have attributed Americans' turn toward wilderness appreciation to Romantic art and literature, frontier nostalgia, antimodernism, primitivism, and, most generally, as a reaction to industrialization and urbanization. They have recognized that wilderness appreciation originated among the elite classes of Eastern cities. However, they have for the most part failed to consider the complex and productive relationship between urban life, urban social theory, and the ideology of the nature park. Looking back from the early twenty-first century, Central Park and all the city parks that followed it seem to have little in common with the national parks, state parks, or even local open space areas. Today, the national parks loom so large as icons of

wilderness that Denver's century-old system of mountain parks appear to have drawn their inspiration from Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Mt. Rainier.

As this chapter demonstrates, however, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux first articulated the concept of the natural landscape park as a public institution with Central Park; this idea provided a foundation for establishing Yosemite and Yellowstone. Over the course of his career Olmsted worked to bring restorative natural scenery into the city in his "large parks" and parkway systems. The body of ideas that made the landscape park persuasive to nineteenth century municipal governments attributed to naturalistic Olmstedian parks important roles in social reform and public health, in ameliorating class tensions and fostering a sense of community, in enhancing real estate values in park neighborhoods and along parkways, as well as in shaping the character of future development by planning park systems that would promote higher quality residential and business construction. The fundamental belief that recreation amidst beautiful natural scenery could remedy the strains of urban life and improve physical and psychological health underlay the urban large parks of these years just as it did the early national parks.

By the 1890s, scores of American cities had embraced Olmstedian landscapism and established such parks, and Charles Eliot had extended these ideas to a metropolitan or regional context, creating a suburban system of nature reserve parks around Boston. The Boston Metropolitan System marked the beginning of the movement of natural landscape parks out of the urban core to its periphery. Nonetheless, these parks remained part of an urban system, oriented around an urban hub and designed to meet the recreational needs of a nearby urban population. After the turn of the century the urban park movement underwent significant transformation, as growing concern with the plight of poor urban workers led to a shift in

emphasis for city parks. Increasingly, city parks would be smaller, dispersed throughout the cityscape, and designed to meet specific needs: playgrounds, sports fields, and recreational programming came to predominate in urban park systems.

At the same time, the City Beautiful movement brought together local village improvement societies, women's clubs, and horticultural clubs with professional city planners and landscape architects in the interest of beautifying and improving the urban environment. This same constituency represented one of the most significant forces in the rise of the scenic preservation movement during these years. United by their faith in the meliorative power of beauty and the beneficent effects of beautiful surroundings on patriotism and productivity, these grassroots activists worked to improve their own cities and fought to protect distant "beauty spots" such as Yosemite and Niagara Falls from destructive commercial uses. Best embodied by J. Horace McFarland, the civic improvers drew upon the beliefs and concerns shaped by their efforts to improve urban life as they fought to protect the beauty of natural scenic parks.

Here again, the early protection of American scenic areas arose not as a simplistic rejection of modern urban life, but as a constructive response to it. In the context of the proliferation of urban park types, stretching from inner city playgrounds to extra-urban nature reserves, beautiful natural scenery reserved from commercial development and devoted to public use and enjoyment was increasingly understood as a desirable amenity of city life. In Denver, park advocates would build upon a half-century's evolution of park and urban beautification ideology to build an extensive system of city parks and parkways that would eventually reach more than thirty miles into the distant mountains.

CHAPTER II

BOOSTERS, BOSSES, AND THE POLITICS OF NATURE RECREATION

IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA: THE MOUNTAIN PARKS MOVEMENT

IN DENVER, 1900-1912

Introduction

By 1900 Denver had established itself as the dominant metropolitan center of banking, commerce, and shipping on the Eastern flank of the Central Rockies, capitalizing especially on the extraction of natural resources from its mountain hinterland. In addition to economic growth and a booming population, Denver boasted a busy railroad hub that brought a steady stream of goods and business travelers through town. Tourists also came, but those who came searching for scenery passed quickly through the city en route to the Rocky Mountains; one asset that Denver did not possess was mountain land itself. To be sure, the Rockies form Denver's spectacular western horizon, and views of the range provide the city its most distinctive element. However, Denver itself lies on the Great Plains, and mountain-bound travelers at the turn of the twentieth century faced an arduous ten to fifteen miles of bumpy wagon roads just to reach the point where the foothills begin their abrupt rise from the prairie. In 1900, a mountain excursion from Denver entailed no small expense of time and effort. By 1910, however, the growing popularity of outdoor recreation and scenic tourism could no longer be ignored by the city with a mountain

wilderness in its backyard. Increasingly, the Rocky Mountain Front Range beckoned enterprising Denverites who saw a ripening opportunity in the beautiful mountain landscape.

In the early years of the new century, a small but growing number of Denver boosters and businessmen recognized the nearby mountains as a potentially lucrative natural resource for national tourism and local recreation. As railroad tourism to scenic western destinations grew more affordable, as the number of middle class Americans embracing a back-to-nature ideology swelled, and as progressive cities across the country moved to establish extended park and parkway systems, a movement to capitalize on these trends in Denver took shape, peaking in the years 1910-1912. While the mountain parks' wild, scenic landscapes might appear—from the twenty-first century—to be the product of an early community of enlightened preservationists, they were actually the offspring of Denver's activist business and booster community, particularly the Denver Real Estate Exchange, Chamber of Commerce, and Motor Club. The leaders of this movement—all men, and all of whom counted themselves among Denver's civic elite—looked on the mountains to the west not with a singular eye toward tourist profits, but with a very typical Progressive conception of serving both the public good and private enterprise through nature recreation.

While modern readers might expect to find in Denver an earnest campaign to protect wilderness, employing antimodern ideas and rhetoric critical of civilization and city life, they will find quite the opposite. Certainly the parks' appeal rested upon a widely shared appreciation of natural beauty, but this did not indicate a concomitant rejection of urban life. Instead, the mountain parks offered Denver residents a distinctive and desirable urban amenity—beautiful natural scenery made accessible and available to the city's residents for public recreation. This urban orientation was not at all unique to Denver's mountain parks plan. As shown in the

previous chapter, it derived from the urban park systems then being developed by other progressive cities. Among the cities across the nation who established nature parks in the urban periphery (Boston and Chicago among many others), similar sets of interests championed the projects: City Beautiful advocates and women's clubs, boosters and politicians, and real estate, transportation, and tourist businesses who stood to profit from parks. This broad range of benefits to various interests was part of what made parks politically and economically viable. It also demonstrates how park ideology forged an inextricable link between the scenic natural beauty and public recreation offered by parks with the well-being of the city—parks would improve the physical health and lifestyle of Denver's people as well as the economic health of its business sector.

This chapter begins with a brief history of Denver's early efforts at park development. It then traces the earliest conceptualizations of the mountain park idea and its evolution into a broad-based movement, offering a new interpretation of this history. Both contemporary and later accounts of the origins of the mountain park idea in Denver differ substantially in their assessment of the early park advocates, with the result that the existing historiography on the question remains muddled. The dominant narrative—the one embraced by the Denver Parks Department and several prominent historians—credits Mayor Robert W. Speer with making the earliest call for such parks and then wrapping them within the mantle of his larger beautification program. However, there is much evidence to indicate that this was not in fact the case. Although Speer left a visible legacy in his remarkable expansion of Denver's urban park and parkway system, and he was an early proponent of various mountain recreation schemes, during his first two terms he consistently refused to make the mountain parks a municipal project. Other sources emphasize instead the efforts of local entrepreneur John Brisben Walker in conceptualizing the

parks and prompting Denver's commercial organizations to embrace his scheme. Walker's influence in these areas was indeed substantial, and he was certainly responsible for bringing a larger group of civic leaders to the table in support of the mountain parks project.⁷⁷

Both of these narratives, however, present an incomplete portrayal of the political origins of the mountain parks. Both Speer and Walker were, for different reasons, disengaged from the movement early on. Just as neither man can claim to be the first to propose the mountain parks; similarly, neither was responsible for seeing the idea through to its successful execution. Instead, after a committee representing Denver's commercial organizations took over the project, Walker and Speer's involvement ended. It was this committee that finally devised a coherent geography for the mountain parks, created a legal and fiscal framework that would allow the city to establish and maintain them, and, most importantly, convinced Denver voters to support the plan. Finally, most accounts have failed to fully consider the influence of municipal politics on the mountain parks movement. By positioning the mountain parks movement squarely within the political life of the city in 1910-1912, my account clarifies not only the relationship between

⁷⁷ Works that credit Mayor Speer include Edgar C. MacMechen, *Robert W. Speer: A City Builder*, (Denver: The Smith-Brooks Printing Co., 1919), esp. 71; Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 148; William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 184-185; "Manual of Operations: Mountain Parks," Division of Parks, Department of Improvements and Parks, City and County of Denver, November 1948, DHPC, Box 22, FF 2; Edmund Wallace, "The History of the Denver Mountain Park System," *Green Thumb* 21 (June/July 1964), 158-160. In addition to many newspaper biographies on John Brisben Walker, accounts that credit him include Seth B. Bradley, "The Origin of the Denver Mountain Parks System," *The Colorado Magazine* 9 (January 1932): 26-29; Charles A. Johnson, *Denver's Mayor Speer* (Denver: Green Mountain Press, 1969), 202; William H. Wilson, "New Wine in Old Bottles," *Colorado Heritage* (1989): 10-15; Phil Goodstein, *Robert Speer's Denver, 1904-1920: The Mile High City in the Progressive Era* (Denver: New Social Publications, 2004), 237-39; and Thomas J. Noel, *Sacred Stones: Colorado's Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre*, ed. Erik Dyce, (Denver: Denver Division of Theatres and Arenas, 2004), ch. 5. It will be noted that Noel's two books contradict each other on this point. Warwick M. Downing's 1931 account, which has been cited by many later historians, minimizes the role of J.B. Walker and the Real Estate Exchange; see Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks: A Condensed History of the Building of America's Most Unique Park System," *DMF* (March-April 1931), 12.

Speer and the mountain parks but also the extent to which the support of the business community and the broader public—not the mayoral administration or any single crusader—made the mountain parks viable as a municipal endeavor. The chapter concludes with the city election of May 1912, in which Denver voters approved the mountain parks bill by a substantial majority, confirming the popular association of the mountain parks idea with grassroots public activism.

Parks in Early Denver, 1860-1904

Planted at the confluence of Cherry Creek and the South Platte River in 1858, Denver in its early years was a scrappy miner's town, an entry point to the gold country during the Colorado Gold Rush. The number of permanent residents hovered just under 5,000 through 1870. The city's transient population, however, was much higher. Local estimates counted as many as 150,000 people annually passing through Denver. The vast majority of these were solitary men, waiting out the winter on the plains before returning to the mountains, or traveling on their way to and from the gold fields. In many ways, this transient population defined the town. Economically, Denver depended on servicing the needs of mountain mines and traveling miners, and by decade's end more than \$27 million in gold had been harvested from the Central Rockies. Outfitters and saloon-keepers in Denver—in 1859 there were thirty-one saloons in town, before a single church, bank, school, or hospital opened—profited enormously. Prostitution was another major business, and for many years most of Denver's few female residents worked as prostitutes. Not surprisingly, the streets of town were dangerous places, plagued by violence at the hands of local gangs.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Lyle W. Dorsett, *The Queen City: A History of Denver* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing, 1977), 6-9, 29.

The rough character of early Denver was echoed by the local landscape, for the native high plains environment was a barren one of low hills, windswept grass, and sage brush, prompting many early visitors to comment on the desolate feel of the place. Lavina Porter, who arrived from Missouri with her husband and young son in 1860, had expected to find a “thriving, bustling, busy city.” Instead, she was dismayed to report that Denver was “an exceedingly primitive town, consisting of numerous tents and numbers of crude and illy constructed cabins, with nearly as many rum shops and low saloons as cabins.” Albert Richardson, another 1860 arrival, found the landscape “reminiscent of the Sahara.” And when the English sojourner and diarist Isabella Bird rode into Denver thirteen years later, at a time when the city was beginning to emerge from the primitive conditions of its early years, she expected to find “the great ‘City of the Plains,’ the metropolis of the territories” of which she had heard. Her disappointment at the city’s prospect, however, was palpable. “There the great braggart city of 16,000 souls lay spread out brown and treeless upon a brown and treeless plain.”⁷⁹

But what Denver lacked in natural beauty of its own, it made up for with its views. Enhanced by the region’s clear, dry air, Denver’s skyline was defined by staggering views of successive ranges stepping westward to snow-capped peaks, rimming the westerly horizon from north to south, as far as the eye could see. Lavina Porter contrasted her first impressions of the miner’s town with the beauty of its skyline. The “almost level plain” was dramatically “surrounded on all sides by towering mountains, whose highest peaks were snow covered even in midsummer.”⁸⁰ When the popular travel writer Bayard Taylor visited Denver in 1867, he found the mountain views as striking as the new brick buildings, churches, and tidy cottages that

⁷⁹ For Porter and Richardson see Dorsett, *The Queen City*, 8, 27-28; for Isabella Bird see Louisa Ward Arps, *Denver in Slices* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 1959), 18.

⁸⁰ Dorsett, *The Queen City*, 27-28.

leant the young town an “air of permanence, very surprising to one who has just arrived from the East.” Writing from his room at the Pacific Hotel, he observed, “I find myself constantly returning to the point which my eyes seek, with unwearied interest, whenever I lift them from the paper. Ever since my arrival I have been studying the mountains. Their beauty and grandeur grow upon me with every hour of my stay.”

Few places in Denver failed to afford some view of the “great range.” Longs Peak, Taylor noted with approval, “just fills the vista of the principal business street.” Taylor couldn’t help but notice how attached Denver’s residents—all relative newcomers to the area—were to their young town. “Even ladies,” he observed with some surprise, “forget the greater luxuries and refinements of the Atlantic coast, when they see the Rocky Mountains once more.” He recognized that although Denver was hardly a decade old, its mountain skyline already had become a central focus of residents’ sense of identification with the place. “The people look upon this glorious Alpine view as one of the properties of the town. Every street opens (in one direction, at least) upon it; and the evening drives along the Platte or over the flowering ridges, become as beautiful as any in the world, when the long line of snowy peaks flash down a brighter gold than ever was unpacked from their veins.”⁸¹

The last third of the nineteenth century saw Denver transformed from a mere miner’s stopover to a large city of regional importance. After rail connections to the transcontinental lines were completed in 1870 and city boosters undertook a concerted effort to promote growth, the population skyrocketed from just under 5,000 to nearly 134,000 by 1900. This rapid growth created a host of urban problems, making many parts of Denver—like other large cities of the period—distinctly unpleasant, in stark contrast to its beautiful montane backdrop. Smoke and

⁸¹ Bayard Taylor, *Colorado: A Summer Trip* (Niwot, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 1989; orig. pub. 1867), 37-39.

coal dust from the three smelters in north Denver blanketed the city and often obscured the mountains from view. The city's dirt streets, gutters, and alleys, which plagued residents with either choking dust or inches-deep mud, were littered with rotting garbage, horse excrement, and animal carcasses. Noxious odors from the railroad stockyards and from raw sewage wafted through working class neighborhoods and the downtown business district. Until the 1880s the city had no sewers, and residents used open cesspools or privy vaults for human waste. Sewage collected from the closed vaults was dumped, untreated, directly into the South Platte River, along with the sewage from downtown businesses. After the city finally took action and built a municipal sewer system in the early 1880s it struggled to keep pace with the booming population. By the time the underground sewers began functioning they were already inadequate. Moreover, the Platte remained the destination for the public sewer system, making both the river and Cherry Creek filthy, malodorous corridors through the town.⁸²

Partly in response to the growing city's unpleasant environment, and partly out of their desire to create an appealing city that would attract and retain new residents, Denver's civic elite worked to build what they considered an ideal urban landscape, modeled on the established cities of the East and Midwest. Along with homes and businesses, churches and schools, hospitals and libraries, Denver's city builders worked to bring natural beauty into the townscape through lawns and flower gardens, street trees, parkways, and public parks.⁸³ When the City Ditch opened in 1867 bringing Platte water into town, the water was used for, among other things, landscaping. That same year a load of cottonwood trees arrived from Kansas City, opening a long tradition of

⁸² Dorsett, *The Queen City*, 57, 91-93. Also see Greg Francis, "History of Denver Parks," unpublished manuscript in author's possession, ch. 1, pp. 2-3.

⁸³ Carolyn and Don Etter, *City of Parks: The Preservation of Denver's Park and Parkway System* (Denver: The Denver Public Library, 2006), 5-7.

street tree planting in Denver. These trees did more than beautify and green the townscape. Residents understood that trees provided cooling shade during the hot summer months, shelter from the plains winds, and that they cleansed the air of impurities.

The city gained its first public park in 1868, when two real estate developers hoping to prompt a rise in property values donated a city block for Curtis Park, in the Five Points district. In the early 1870s various civic leaders and the *Rocky Mountain News* made repeated calls to encourage park building in Denver. An 1874 *News* editorial urged readers:

A public park is demanded by every consideration of health, beauty, improvement and pleasure, no matter how varied and grand our mountain views, no matter how fine our drives, no matter how rapid our growth, no matter how extended our commerce... Denver will not be a perfect city until she has a public park, which will be the care and pride of every citizen, as Central Park is to the dwellers of Manhattan Island.⁸⁴

But much of Denver's public remained leery of park-building schemes promoted by the city's elite. Many thought that parks were, at best, impractical and expensive luxuries that would increase their tax burden, or worse, mere real estate scams. Moreover, parks seemed an oxymoron in a small city struggling to grow. "The difficulty," many believed, "was to get the ground occupied; not to keep it open," explained the historian Jerome C. Smiley in his 1901 *History of Denver*. "It is quite probable that if anyone had suggested to them the actual need for city parks on their plats, they would have concluded that a far greater and an immediate one existed for a small asylum for insane advisors."⁸⁵ Even those who favored parks were unwilling

⁸⁴ *RMN* (21 October 1874), quoted in Francis, "History of Denver Parks," ch. 1, p. 4.

⁸⁵ Jerome C. Smiley, *History of Denver* (Evansville, Ind.: Unigraphic, 1971), 457.

to help pay for parks in other neighborhoods. By the late 1870s, as its population neared 35,000, Denver had just 5 acres of dedicated parkland.⁸⁶

In 1878 a group of civic leaders led by Denver's mayor, Richard Sopris, along with state representative Henry Lee and real estate developer Jacob Downing, introduced a bill in the state legislature to create two 640-acre parks for Denver connected by a tree-lined boulevard through the city. One of the proposed parks was at Sloan's Lake to the northwest of the town, the other tract—which would become City Park—was several miles east of town. This "Hourglass Plan" was in tune with the broader American park movement of the day, but many in Denver failed to see the need for such extensive open space. At the time, both the Sloan's Lake and City Park sites were some distance outside the developed area of Denver, which meant a visit to either park would require an excursion from town. Controversy raged over the acquisition of these parklands during the four years of Mayor Sopris's term until finally in 1881 the city purchased 320 acres to build City Park. (Sloan's Lake was brought into the Denver park system in 1906.)⁸⁷

In 1881, Sopris's mayoral term ended and he was appointed Denver's first park commissioner, a position through which he engineered the early development of City Park. Sopris hired Henry F. Meryweather, a civil engineer, to draw up a plan for City Park. Approved by the city council in May 1882, the park plan was clearly intended to resemble New York's Central Park. But Meryweather had no training in park design, and his plan did little more than recommend converting a slough into a series of lakes, and lay out what many would later characterize as an illogical maze of carriageways and walking paths. Meryweather made no

⁸⁶ The five acres of parkland did not include ten additional acres that had been designated as a parkway along Park Avenue, which remained undeveloped. Francis, "History of Denver Parks," ch. 1, p. 5.

⁸⁷ Francis, "History of Denver Parks," ch. 1, pp. 5-11. See also Bette D. Peters, *Denver's City Park*, Denver: University of Colorado at Denver, 1986), 3-7.

recommendations whatsoever for planting. Sopris had even less relevant training than Meryweather, yet working from the approved plan, he set about creating the park virtually out of whole cloth. He faced quite a challenge.

Squatters had settled along York Street, and their encampments featured the usual tents, shacks, vegetable plots, and livestock. It took the city several years to obtain clear title to the land and relocate the former residents. Another hurdle was lack of funding, as the city had not allocated funds to develop the park site. As Sopris worked to build an oasis of green nature in the midst of the dry, brown prairie, he also struggled with the native environment. There were no existing trees on the site, only sagebrush and prairie grasses. Indeed, few trees besides cottonwoods would thrive in the alkaline soil, and Sopris soon began researching what types of trees might successfully be planted in Denver. Beginning in 1885, Denver enlisted its school children every Arbor Day to plant trees in the park. While this practice resulted in rather erratic planting, it nonetheless helped to ingrain the new park in the fabric of the community.⁸⁸

Still, City Park's early development was painfully slow. By the early 1890s only forty acres of lawn had been seeded out of the vast 320-acre site, a total of seventeen miles of driveways and walkways had been graded and graveled, and a pavilion constructed on the park's sole pond: still known as Duck Lake, it abuts the modern Denver Zoo grounds. In 1889 the city finally designated a \$10,000 annual appropriation for its parks, most of which was dedicated to City Park development, and by 1900 the park featured a large new lake with a grand pavilion and

⁸⁸ The result of Meryweather and Sopris's amateur efforts at park design drew heated criticism from subsequent professionals in landscape architecture, such as S.R. DeBoer, who wrote acerbically, "The whole area . . . was a maze of concentric circles with trees bordering the circular roads. . . . Imagine a large park with miles of silly roads and walks, trees everywhere and no open space. There were many ridiculous S-shaped walks. The edges of which had to be hand-trimmed." See Francis, "History of Denver Parks," ch. 1, pp. 12-13. For a positive assessment of Sopris's development of City Park see Peters, *Denver's City Park*, 7-15.

bandstand, a zoo, and a harness racing track. In addition to City Park, Sopris worked on a few other park projects during these years. By 1893 Denver had acquired a second large park—eighty-acre Congress (now Cheesman) Park—and possessed a total of 428 acres in seven parks. Little was done to improve these tracts, however.⁸⁹

During the 1890s and early 1900s Denver’s park movement found a stable footing and made major strides in expanding and developing the city’s parks. Inspired by the grand neoclassical architecture and naturalistically landscaped grounds of the Chicago World’s Fair, which opened in May of 1893, Denver’s civic leaders promoted an ambitious park agenda during that year. That spring the city established its first park commission to oversee park acquisitions and development. The three-member volunteer board answered directly to the mayor, which gave them considerable power in negotiating and acquiring parkland. Appointees were typically wealthy businessmen with good connections to the Chamber of Commerce. Right away the commission hired Reinhard Schuetze, a German immigrant educated in landscape gardening and forestry, as Denver’s first full-time landscape architect. The gifted and capable Schuetze would guide Denver’s park development for seventeen years.⁹⁰

In May 1893 an ambitious plan for an extensive system of park and parkways, cooperatively developed by the Chamber of Commerce, Real Estate Exchange, and new park commission, was unveiled to the public. The park plan envisioned up to thirty new parks as well as grand boulevards throughout the city, and it quickly gained broad support among the civic elite, including such notables as former territorial governor John Evans. In June the Denver *Republican* featured an editorial recommending the plan. “If Denver is to become a metropolitan

⁸⁹ Peters, *Denver’s City Park*, 15-17.

⁹⁰ Francis, “History of Denver Parks,” ch. 2. On Schuetze, see Don and Carolyn Etter, *Reinhard Schuetze: Forgotten Dreamer* (Denver: Denver Public Library, 2001).

city,” the editorial stated, “its parks ... should be metropolitan in character.”⁹¹ The plan drew its inspiration from the metropolitan park-and-parkway systems designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and his contemporaries during the 1880s for cities such as Buffalo and Boston. Unfortunately for these park backers, the summer of 1893 saw the beginning of a depression that would hit Colorado particularly hard as the price of silver plummeted. Moreover, the plan foundered on the question of whether the city could purchase and manage parklands outside its corporate limits. In July, the park commission issued a resolution that it could not do so until such lands were formally annexed to the city. The decision rendered moot any plans for an extended park system that stretched across the metropolitan area, at least for the time being. By December 1894, after lengthy controversy, the Olmstedian park plan was a dead letter. The acquisitions would have increased taxes during a time of crisis, and much of the public felt this was a luxury they could ill afford.⁹²

But even in the shadow of depression, some continued to shine a light on park development. After Colorado women gained the right to vote in 1893, a delegation of Denver women promptly met with the City Council to demand that the city finally landscape its parkway lands along Park Avenue, which, having been left undeveloped for years, had become eyesores. Denver clubwomen soon formed two influential organizations, the Woman’s Club and the Denver Civic Improvement Society, which focused their political energies on civic beautification, municipal housekeeping, and assistance to Denver’s poor and children. By 1899,

⁹¹ Denver *Republican*, June 18, 1893, quoted in Francis, “History of Denver Parks,” ch. 2, p. 5.

⁹² Francis, “History of Denver Parks,” ch. 2, pp. 7-8; Denver Park Commission, “Resolution,” (14 July 1893), DHCP, Box 15, FF 8.

both women's organizations were sufficiently powerful to influence the park selection process as well as park development.⁹³

In spite of the depression, Denver managed to acquire five new parks over the next ten years, including Washington and Highland parks. Designed and developed under the direction of Reinhard Schuetze, these would eventually come to be counted among the city's finest parks. By 1904, when Robert Speer entered the mayor's office, Denver held roughly 630 acres in parklands. This was the merest fraction of the city's 59 square miles, and most of this acreage was concentrated in City, Washington, and Congress parks—large parks located near the city's best neighborhoods. City Park remained the centerpiece of Denver's parks, enjoying the most extensive development and use at this time. Washington and Congress parks still awaited landscaping and the construction of paths and structures. It was a beginning, but little more than that. In comparison to the park systems of other major cities, Denver's parks were too few and too limited in their amenities. While the city could boast a number of large parks, too many remained unimproved. Lacking in system, the city's parklands failed to include playgrounds or neighborhood "small parks," particularly in poorer neighborhoods. Nonetheless, the municipal improvement efforts of the 1890s had established a tradition of favorable sentiment toward such public investments, particularly in the middle and upper classes. Such urban oases of green, many felt, would go a long way toward helping Denver realize its dream of becoming "the great City of the Plains."⁹⁴

⁹³ Francis, "History of Denver Parks," ch. 2, briefly covers the role of Denver club women in the park movement. A more detailed history of these women's varied contributions to parks and urban improvement is Wendy Keefover-Ring, "Municipal Housekeeping, Domestic Science, Animal Protection, and Conservation: Women's Political and Environmental Activism in Denver, Colorado, 1894-1912," (M.A. thesis, University of Colorado, 2002).

⁹⁴ These weaknesses in Denver's park system were pointed out by City Beautiful expert Charles Mulford Robinson in his "Proposed Plans for the Improvement of the City of Denver," (Denver: Denver

Originators of the Mountain Park Idea in Denver

By 1901, at least a few people in Denver had begun to talk about creating a scenic mountain park in the nearby foothills. The idea was first presented to the Chamber of Commerce at about this time, and over the next several years real estate men John S. Flower and E.W. Merritt made periodic attempts to interest the mayor, city council, and various public bodies in taking on the project. All of this amounted to little more than talk. For a decade the idea circulated among Denver's boosters and businessmen, eventually making regular appearances in the public addresses of Mayor Robert W. Speer. But before 1910 the mountain park idea lacked a vocal, dedicated, and well-connected champion. That year, the flamboyant entrepreneur John Brisben Walker brought the matter before the city's commercial bodies and the public; he presented a plan based on such simple logic and persuasive rationale that it quickly spread among a growing coterie of supporters. By the following spring, the idea had finally grown into a movement.⁹⁵

Most historical sources, both primary and secondary, credit either Mayor Speer or J.B. Walker with originating the idea for Denver's mountain parks; few if any commentators acknowledge fully the roles that both men played in the development of the concept. This is true even of the influential accounts written by Seth B. Bradley, Warwick M. Downing, and Edward MacMechen, all of whom were contemporaries of the mountain parks movement. Bradley, who was president of the Real Estate Exchange in 1910, emphasized Walker's leading role in

Art Commission, 1906), in Western History Collection, DPL. Francis, "History of Denver Parks," ch. 2, p. 23; Leonard and Noel, *Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 141; Goodstein, *Robert Speer's Denver*, 3-5.

⁹⁵ Warwick M. Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," 12, recounts the first presentation to the Chamber c. 1901. Seth B. Bradley, "The Origin of the Denver Mountain Parks System," *The Colorado Magazine* 9 (January 1932), 26, describes the "sporadic" efforts of Flower and Merritt to enlist the city's interest before 1910.

bringing the matter to the commercial bodies for action, while noting that Speer showed little interest in the project. Downing, who chaired one of the mountain park committees in 1911, minimized Walker's contribution and argued that Speer was a strong ally to the mountain parks committee. MacMechen, a former member of Speer's publicity staff, strove mightily to claim the mountain parks as part of Speer's legacy, arguing that Speer, not Walker, had prophetically originated the idea. Most of the subsequent accounts of the origins of the mountain parks tend to draw on one or another of these sources, inevitably presenting a very partial accounting of events.⁹⁶

Rather than arguing for the provenance of Denver's mountain parks in the mind of one person, my account presents the prior work and public statements of both men to show that both Speer and Walker had backgrounds that might facilitate park development. By 1905 each was deeply involved in local real estate, each had experience in the business of public amusements and park building. Each of them hoped to boost Denver's national reputation and his own fortunes along with it. Moreover, both men believed in the Progressive-era faith that social uplift could be achieved through beauty and education, and both were students of civic beautification in other cities. The account then places the major actors in relationship with each other and centers them within the political context of the day. By 1905 both Walker and Speer had come into positions that might allow each to push Denver toward actively developing mountain tourism. Walker took decisive action toward this end; Mayor Speer, on the other hand, made only token efforts in this direction. By the close of 1911, however, as the mountain park idea became a movement, both Walker and Speer diminished in significance while a cadre of

⁹⁶ See Bradley, "The Origin of the Denver Mountain Parks System," 26; Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," 12; and MacMechen, *Robert W. Speer, A City Builder*, 71.

different men took the lead under the banner of Denver's Real Estate Exchange, Chamber of Commerce, and Motor Club.

J.B. Walker, the "Wonder Man"

John Brisben Walker, Sr., was a well-known member of Denver's business elite and, by 1905, a man of national prominence. Brilliant, uncompromising, and possessed of prodigious energy, his contemporaries knew him as an "idea man" who was far ahead of his time.⁹⁷ Born near Pittsburgh, Walker arrived in Denver at age 32, having already made and lost his first fortune as an iron manufacturer and forged a second career in journalism in Washington, D.C. He came to Colorado in 1879 to make a report on the potential for irrigated agriculture in the arid West for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Denver area immediately appealed to him and he soon returned with his wife and children. Walker purchased 1,600 acres to grow alfalfa on top of the bluff northwest of downtown, naming the farm for his home in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. Alfalfa proved a lucrative crop, as did the land on which his farm sat. In 1888 Walker and his investors sold most of the farm to a real estate developer for \$325,000. Soon the fashionable town of Berkeley rose there, graced with two natural lakes (Berkeley and Rocky Mountain), gorgeous views of the mountains, and fresh, clean air away from Denver's smelters and stockyards below the bluff.⁹⁸ From his Berkeley home Walker often rode into the foothills

⁹⁷ "Mr. Walker possesses a commanding personality," wrote the *Denver Times* (1 December 1901), "and would forge to the front in any avocation he chose to follow. Alert, shrewd, and foresighted, his hands keep pace with his mobile mind. He is a planner as well as an executer, and his judgment seldom leads the members that do into error." See also "John Brisben Walker: Idea Man," *RMN* (13 June 1948), 8A; and "Jefferson County's Wonder Man" quoted in "John Brisben Walker, Sept. 10, 1847–July 7, 1931," typescript in Mount Falcon Open Space file, JCHS.

⁹⁸ The best treatments of Walker are Noel, *Sacred Stones*, chs. 4 and 5; Susan Sheridan, "John Brisben Walker," typescript, n.d., in Mount Falcon Open Space file, Jefferson County Historical Society (JCHS); Catherine Dittman, "John Brisben Walker, the Man and the Myth," *Evergreen Magazine* (Fall/Winter 1978): 21-27; and Sally L. White, "John Brisben Walker, the Man and Mt. Morrison,"

around Morrison and quickly grew to love the country. He is said to have conceived of a mountain recreation destination in the Morrison hills as early as 1880, the year that he first visited the red sandstone formations then known as Garden of the Angels (now Red Rocks Park).⁹⁹

As Denver boomed during the 1880s Walker invested boldly in real estate and made his first venture in commercial recreation, an arena in which he proved to possess an innate genius. He purchased forty acres along the South Platte River at 19th Street, built retaining walls along the riverbank, and on July 3, 1887, opened Colorado's first major amusement park. River Front Park offered a range of enticements in a pleasant, natural setting. Cottonwoods lined the river, and the expansive grounds featured green turf, walking paths, and benches. Walker built a movable grandstand that could seat 5,000 for weekend and holiday concerts and the state's first rodeo. There was a baseball diamond and an oval track that hosted horse and bicycle races. After damming the river to create enough depth in the shallow Platte, Walker launched a side-wheel steamer that paddled from the park to 15th Street. The steamboat featured live bands and, for a time, performances of Gilbert and Sullivan's opera *H.M.S. Pinafore*. During winter, a 1,000-foot-long toboggan slide running from the top of the grandstand, across the racetrack and ball field to the riverbank was doused with water daily. Men as well as women braved the icy slide, reaching speeds near 100 miles per hour.

Historically Jeffco 18, no. 26 (2005): 4-8. See also the clippings files on John Brisben Walker at JCHS and in the Western History Collection, DPL.

⁹⁹ Several sources mention Walker having the idea of a mountain park in 1880, but none give specifics. I was unable to locate any source that could confirm this, other than his comments on the potential of making Red Rocks a destination during an 1880 walk there with friends. See Noel, *Sacred Stones*, ch. 5; and State Register of Historic Properties Owner Consent Form for "J.B. Walker House/Mt. Falcon Ruins," n.a., n.d., in John Brisben Walker files, JCHS.

Walker rounded out River Front Park's attractions by building an imposing stone Castle of Culture and Commerce, popularly dubbed "Walker's Castle." In what would become a familiar pattern, Walker's Castle deftly joined education with boosterism. The displays inside the castle included an art gallery of local works, a bookshop, sculpture garden of Colorado wildlife, and the Exposition of Products of Colorado. In sum, River Front Park offered its patrons a menu of recreational options that ranged from decorous outdoor activities such as picnicking and promenading to wild and thrilling experiences. The park also combined both cultural edification through music, drama, and the castle's museum-like displays, with technological spectacles such as the toboggan slide. In combining all of these seemingly disparate forms of entertainment, Walker showed a deft understanding of both popular tastes as well as a Progressive faith in the power to uplift the disadvantaged through education, recreation, and a carefully built environment.

Never one to think small, Walker appears to have tired of River Front Park and its primarily local appeal. He sold the property—quite fortuitously—early in 1893, just months before the collapse of the silver mining industry sent Colorado reeling into depression. After nearly fifteen years in Denver, Walker headed east and back into the world of journalism. Using the proceeds from River Front Park he purchased a moribund little magazine called *Cosmopolitan* and moved to New York, leaving Denverites to muddle through the Silver Panic and the difficult 1890s without him.¹⁰⁰

His time in New York would see Walker develop into a journalist, entrepreneur, and promoter of national renown and influence. Working as both editor and publisher, Walker transformed *Cosmopolitan* into one of the nation's leading magazines. He recruited the best

¹⁰⁰ On River Front Park see Noel, *Sacred Stones*, ch. 4; "Castle on the Platte," *Rocky Mountain Empire Magazine* (21 May 1950), 5; and Sheridan typescript.

writing talent of the day—Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Mark Twain—while reducing the price to 10 cents per issue. In just five years *Cosmopolitan's* circulation jumped from 16,000 to 400,000. Practically overnight Walker had cultivated a significant national literary audience. His approach reflected his earlier practices at River Front Park: this time he made literary excellence affordable and therefore available to a much larger public.¹⁰¹

A committed advocate for new transportation technologies, Walker became deeply involved in the early automobile industry. With a two-year patent from the Stanley brothers he founded the Mobile Company of America and built a manufacturing plant for the steam-powered autos on his New York estate. His commitment to steam autos was one of Walker's most notable failures, but the Mobile Company, which offered 24 models in 1900 and operated a plant in Denver, continued to manufacture Locomobile steamers until 1929. Not surprisingly, Walker applied his gift for promotion to the cause of automobile development, using *Cosmopolitan* to publicize the nation's first auto race. He also founded the Automobile Manufacturer's Association of America, which, in partnership with the Auto Club of America, co-sponsored the first auto show in New York City in 1900.

Through more than a decade in New York Walker had clearly not forgotten about Colorado. In 1902 he was elected president of the Colorado Society in New York City, and he made frequent visits to Denver. The *Denver Times* reported that year that Walker was working on plans to build a new country club and golf course on the heights above Berkeley Lake (this is very likely the site of the current Willis Case Municipal Golf Course in North Denver), where he still held considerable real estate. Because a links on Denver's "North side," as the area was commonly known, would be difficult for most golfers to reach from central and south Denver,

¹⁰¹ Noel, *Sacred Stones*, ch. 4; Sheridan typescript.

Walker planned to build “a magnificent boulevard” to connect the city to the club. “In the East,” the paper explained, auto “enthusiasts have constructed long stretches of road at their own expense, but Mr. Walker is the first one to introduce the idea in the West.” His willingness to fund an access boulevard to the country club may well have come back to haunt him in later years.¹⁰²

In 1905 Walker sold *Cosmopolitan* to William Randolph Hearst for \$1 million and returned to his beloved Colorado. He arrived with a fortune in his pocket from *Cosmopolitan*'s breathtaking success and ambitious plans to invest it in the fallow field of tourist development. From late November 1905 through 1906, Walker, along with his father and his son, John Brisben Walker, Jr., purchased nearly 5,000 acres of real estate in the foothills region around Morrison. Doing business as the Colorado Resort Co., the Walker holdings soon included Mount Falcon, Mount Morrison, Garden of the Angels (now Red Rocks Park), much of Morrison township, and the Troutdale resort near Evergreen.¹⁰³ Walker's vision for developing the mountains nearest Denver was as grandiose as any other venture he embraced. He planned nothing less than making the region into a scenic recreational destination of national caliber.

The Walkers set out to transform the sleepy little town of Morrison, nestled behind the hogback ridge at the mouth of Bear Creek Canyon, into an attractive gateway and “model suburb of Denver.” After purchasing the town site from the Colorado & Southern, along with a controlling interest in the water company, Walker set to work beautifying the town by “tearing down unsightly shacks,” landscaping along the major roads, and renovating the town's old

¹⁰² “Colorado Society in New York,” *Times* (20 June 1902), 6; “John Brisben Walker Visits His Old Home,” *Times* (1 July 1902), 3; “Plans New Country Club,” *Times* (9 October 1902), 8.

¹⁰³ See Noel, *Sacred Stones*, ch. 4, for a good summary of these purchases and the various Walker family members involved.

hotel.¹⁰⁴ Morrison needed sprucing up to serve as the point of entry for the varied menu of scenic attractions Walker had in mind.

The town also needed improved transportation connections to bring tourists to the scenery. At a time when only a very few Coloradoans owned motorcars, visitors from Denver suffered a bumpy 15-mile wagon road to reach Morrison. Rail service was limited to infrequent quarry trains. To remedy this problem, Walker promised road and rail improvements leading to and through the town. An electric rail line was needed to bring visitors and commuters from Denver in easy time. He also planned to improve the Bear Creek Canyon road and add a narrow gauge rail line up the canyon, leading to the alpine resort he planned to build at Troutdale. High in the pines near the town of Evergreen, Troutdale was slated to offer a fine hotel, vacation cottages, and tents in a wilderness setting. “It is not widely known,” Walker observed somewhat disingenuously to the *Denver Post*, “that there are deer, fish, wildcats and other game in abundance in the canons [*sic*] above Morrison. I was through there a short time ago and saw plenty of deer, some mountain sheep and any amount of bear tracks.” The area, he boasted, held “one of the finest fishing places in the state. . . . I caught sixty fish there in two hours and a half not very long ago.” At “less than thirty-five miles from Denver” Walker forecast that the new resort “should prove to be one of the most popular mountain trips for those in search of a short outing.”¹⁰⁵

But Troutdale’s forested resort was secondary to Walker’s immediate focus on the scenic areas surrounding Morrison. In the spring of 1906 the Walkers purchased 720 acres containing

¹⁰⁴ “Mount Morrison Will be Made Into a Model Suburb of Denver,” *Post* (26 October 1906); *Colorado Transcript* (1 November 1906); “Large Purchase Near Morrison, John Brisben Walker Buys Four Thousand Acres,” *Times* (18 October 1906). Also see Noel, *Sacred Stones*, ch. 4.

¹⁰⁵ “Beautiful Resort at Denver’s Door,” *Post* (14 November 1905).

the striking red sandstone formations known as Garden of the Angels, now called Red Rocks Park. Walker credited his son, J.B. Jr., with convincing him to purchase and develop Garden of the Angels, and the junior Walker proved an adept partner in the development of the site. Although the park had long been open to public use under its prior owner, it remained largely unimproved. The Walkers believed that by developing a tourist infrastructure and promoting the Garden as a scenic wonder and a world-class acoustical phenomenon, the red rocks could become a major destination for a national tourist market. With a sidelong glance at Colorado Springs's by-that-time famous Garden of the Gods, the Walkers rechristened their park Garden of the Titans, renaming many of the natural features after Greek and Roman mythology. They mapped out trails amid the formations and bolted a wooden stairway up the dizzying face of Creation Rock to an observation deck and teahouse. After building a road to the natural amphitheatre, they installed a stage in front of Stage Rock. There, in grand Walker style, the park was officially opened to the public on May 31, 1906. More than 2,600 people jammed the park to listen to Denver's most popular brass band in the natural amphitheatre, marvel at the formations, and thrill at the glorious views.¹⁰⁶

By the close of 1906 the Walkers had purchased an additional 4,000 acres in and around Morrison, including the two nearest and highest peaks, Mount Falcon and Mount Morrison.¹⁰⁷ Their promotion and development of Garden of the Titans continued as they commissioned picture postcards, expanded the Mount Morrison Hotel with a casino, swimming pool, and Japanese garden, and began construction of a funicular railway to the top of Mount Morrison.

¹⁰⁶ Noel, *Sacred Stones*, ch. 4. "Little Coney Island for Denver," *Post* (14 May 1906); "New Resort Near Crags of Morrison," *Denver Republican* (15 May 1906).

¹⁰⁷ "Large Purchase Near Morrison, John Brisben Walker Buys Four Thousand Acres," *Times* (18 October 1906).

Completed in late summer 1909, the Mount Morrison Incline Railroad carried passengers in backward-facing seats 2,000 feet straight up the mountainside, revealing as it climbed a 200-mile view “so wonderful that the eye never tires.” The Walkers also began to exploit the acoustical possibilities of the natural amphitheatre—which would become the source of the park’s most lasting fame—inviting the opera star Mary Garden to sing there in May 1911. “Never in any opera house, the world over,” she wrote, “have I found more perfect acoustic properties than those under Creation Rock in the natural auditorium at Mount Morrison.” Concerts and pageants on the old stage drew enthusiastic crowds. As word of the park and its wonders—both natural and technological—spread, it caught the attention of early filmmakers. Several westerns had been filmed in Morrison, Garden of the Titans, and Bear Creek Canyon by 1910. By this time it was clear that the Walkers had succeeded in placing the scenic wonders of their park on the map of national tourism.¹⁰⁸

Mayor Speer and the City Beautiful

When J.B. Walker, Sr., returned to Denver in 1905, he came back to a very different town. After recovering from the depression of the 1890s the city was positively booming. From a count of 134,000 souls in 1900, Denver’s population nearly doubled in just ten years, reaching 213,000 in 1910. After annexations in 1902 the city limits enclosed 59 square miles, and these did not change until long after the Second World War. By far Colorado’s largest city, the state capital contained roughly one-quarter of the state’s population and was the economic hub of a much larger Rocky Mountain region. Like other large cities of the day Denver struggled to deal with the complicated effects of growth and industrialization, from class and ethnic discord,

¹⁰⁸ Material and quotes from Noel, *Sacred Stones*, ch. 4.

poverty, and corruption, to pollution and degradation of the urban environment. In response to these problems a significant number of Denverites from across the social spectrum came to embrace the conviction that, as historian Phil Goodstein writes, “the citizenry had to shape the community and make it a good place to live.” Women and men, reformers and Progressives of every stripe took an active part in municipal politics and civic affairs, “convinced they could build a new world, centered on a beautiful Denver filled with trees, parks, and gardens.”¹⁰⁹

In May 1904 Robert W. Speer, the powerful boss at the helm of the Democratic Party’s political machine, was elected the first home rule mayor of the recently combined City and County of Denver.¹¹⁰ He would win reelection two more times before his death in 1918 and earn a lasting reputation as the city’s most capable, visionary, and corrupt mayor. From the very beginning of his mayoralty Speer made City Beautiful planning and aesthetics central to his agenda. In doing so, he engineered a dramatic transformation in Denver’s appearance, amenities, and quality of life. A masterful executive with a pragmatic view of human nature, Speer understood the workings of power and knew how to use it. He had built his machine on carefully cultivated relations with the city’s business interests and the proprietors of Denver’s red light district—undisguised facts that drew nearly constant criticism from Speer’s opponents, most of whom embraced the tenets of moral reform and good government to counter Speer’s nearly dictatorial power and his tolerance of vice. Speer did not deny these charges. “I am a boss,” he

¹⁰⁹ Goodstein, *Robert Speer’s Denver*, 3-5.

¹¹⁰ In 1902 the city had made a long-awaited political break from the state legislature by achieving home rule and establishing the City and County of Denver. The merger of city and county governments was immediately challenged in court and became an ongoing controversy that rocked local government for years. Not until 1911 was the matter settled by the Colorado Supreme Court, officially and permanently joining city and county government in Denver. By the time the mountain parks came before the public in 1911 and 1912, the issue seems to have had little impact on their development. Phil Goodstein’s *Robert Speer’s Denver* gives detailed coverage of the city-county controversy and its effects.

stated matter-of-factly upon his election, “and I want to be a good one.” He promised that his administration would offer benefits for everyone, from the workers at the backbone of his party to the most elite members of society. And working class Democrats, who typically voted as the machine told them to, usually supported Speer’s policies despite his transparent catering to the interests of Denver’s biggest companies, despite the spiraling taxes needed to fund his improvement projects, and despite the fact that poor neighborhoods saw pitifully few civic improvements.¹¹¹

Indeed, Speer presents something of a dilemma for park lovers who have embraced his legacy of green parks, landscaped boulevards, and attractive neighborhoods graced with street trees. In Denver, these features of the urban landscape became—as Speer believed they would—central components of civic identity and pride. Denver also became a showcase for the City Beautiful nationally, earning a lasting reputation for its achievements in civic improvement and beautification under Speer. As a result, most of Speer’s historians have celebrated his record of civic improvement while downplaying his seedy politics. Yet these seemingly countervailing facets of Speer were undoubtedly two sides of the same coin. His commitment to the City Beautiful was unambiguous. A beautified Denver would, foremost, be good for business, attracting tourists who would spend their dollars and spread the word, attracting new residents who would fuel growth, and enhancing property values to the benefit of real estate developers

¹¹¹ Speer’s inaugural speech quoted in Johnson, *Denver’s Mayor Speer*, 1-5. In addition to Johnson’s biography, the major treatments of Speer include: MacMechen, *Speer: A City Builder*, Dorsett, *The Queen City*, 121-160; Noel and Leonard, *Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 130-148; Wilson, *The City Beautiful*, ch. 8; and Goodstein, *Robert Speer’s Denver*. See also John R. Pickering, “Blueprint of Power: The Public Career of Robert Speer in Denver, 1878-1918,” Ph.D. diss., (University of Denver, 1978); Carol M. Reese, “The Politician and the City: Urban Form and City Beautiful Rhetoric in Progressive Era Denver,” Ph.D. diss., (University of Texas at Austin, 1992); and Robert Todd Laugen, “The Promise and Defeat of the Progressive Public: Reform Politics in Colorado, 1902-1929,” Ph.D. diss., (University of Colorado at Boulder, 2005).

and property owners (himself among them). It would also be good for residents, who would enjoy an improved quality of life. And it would be good for government, fostering civic identity and pride—or, in the lingo of the day, “patriotism”—among citizens. None of these convictions was unique to Speer; he shared these basic tenets of City Beautiful ideology with its proponents across the nation.

Born in 1855, Robert Walter Speer was—like J.B. Walker—a Pennsylvania native who arrived in Colorado in the late 1870s. He came to the Colorado high country as a “lunger” in hopes of curing his tuberculosis, then made Denver his permanent home after his successful recovery. He soon entered the real estate business and became involved in local politics. A Democrat, he was elected city clerk in 1884 and was appointed Denver’s postmaster by President Grover Cleveland the following year. In 1888 he left the post office, then returned to public office in 1891 as one of the three-member Fire and Police Board. In this position he began to build his political machine through the careful use of patronage, doling out jobs to his supporters. Then in 1901 he was appointed president of the city’s Board of Public Works. This powerful agency wielded nearly half of the municipal budget and in this position Speer not only honed his machine but also cut his teeth in the art and politics of civic improvement. From here it was a relatively short leap to the mayor’s office in 1904.

In addition to real estate development Speer—like Walker—also had his hand in the commercial amusement park business. Located on the banks of Cherry Creek at Downing Street, Arlington Park promised to rival Walker’s Riverfront Park with “a lake and race track, pavilions, merry-go-rounds, and other dizzy amusements.” During the 1890s the resort was renamed Chutes Park after a “shoot the chutes” attraction that featured such improbable stunts as a “herd of driving and diving elk” that “splashed into a specially built tank.” Chutes Park’s colorful

amusements were relatively short-lived: the management company Speer had hired declared bankruptcy in 1900, and shortly afterward several of the park's structures caught fire and burnt to the ground.¹¹²

However, it was through urban beautification that Speer forged his most lasting legacy. By the time Speer took over the mayor's office in 1904 he was already well versed in the ideology and the politics of civic improvement. As president of the Board of Public Works in 1902 he had made an early call for urban forestry. After returning from a tour of Mexico and Havana, Speer was impressed with the "importance of maintaining uniform and beautiful lines of shade trees along our streets" to combat the summer heat and to beautify the city. While Denver could boast "more sunshine than any other city," trees would provide cooling shade on the hottest days. The shaded streets would help sell the city, he argued. "To tourists Denver is an oasis in the desert. After a dusty ride the lines of green trees in the bright sunshine, contrasting with the red brick of the houses, furnish a degree of relief that captivates them. The secret determination to make this charming oasis their future home irresistibly steals in upon thousands of them." If trees could be "a most valuable asset" in Denver's arid climate, they could not thrive in that climate without extra care. To this end Speer suggested that the city "take complete charge of the planting, trimming, and watering of the trees, as it does of paving." Speer became a

¹¹² Johnson, *Denver's Mayor Speer*, 10-13. In 1903 the 35-acre park was converted to building lots. In an ironic twist of events some of this area was returned to parkland in May 1912. Just days before Speer's second mayoral term came to a close, the city completed condemnation proceedings against the Arlington Park Realty Company, of which Speer remained secretary. In this way the city acquired several blocks of the original park for development of Alamo Placita Park. Johnson writes that "it is reasonable to assume that the price of \$30,450 was no more than the then current worth of the land. Considering the ups and down the area had experienced over the years, it is doubtful if Speer gained great benefit from his holdings in Arlington Park," although the city's improvements at Alamo Placita park may have bolstered the value of some property Speer continued to hold in the surrounding area.

devoted student of civic improvements in other cities and countries, a practice he continued throughout his long political career.¹¹³

In mid-November 1904, just a few months into his first mayoral term, Speer made a speech before the Artist's Club that effectively launched his City Beautiful program. "In all new cities necessities must come first," he admitted, but under his leadership "we would all try to see that the necessities were made a little more ornamental." Walling Cherry Creek to contain the stream's periodic disastrous floods and cleaning up the refuse dumped there were high on his list, along with building "a shady driveway along its banks"—now Speer Boulevard—to "improve values of surrounding property, and make ornamental what is now the perverse." Other items were less glamorous but typical civic improvement fare: macadam street paving, street sprinkling, public drinking fountains, ornamental street lighting, burying electrical wires underground, and limitations on billboards and signs.¹¹⁴

Parks and boulevards, those mainstays of the City Beautiful, followed quickly. By the close of that November the Art Commission, which had long been working to create something like the Washington, D.C. Mall for Denver, formally requested that Speer adopt a city plan. He, in turn, approved the commission's decision to hire the noted planner Charles Mulford Robinson to draw up such a plan for Denver. Robinson's plan, presented in January 1906, recommended a system of boulevards linking the proposed Cherry Creek (now Speer) Boulevard with City, Congress, and Washington parks; landscaping Federal Boulevard from a connection at Cherry Creek Boulevard to Rocky Mountain Lake Park, and landscaping Montview Boulevard east of

¹¹³ "President Speer on Street Shade Trees," *Times* (5 February 1902). During the summer of 1911, Speer was part of a tour of American mayors who traveled through Europe to study civic governance, architecture, and urban planning.

¹¹⁴ Speech quoted in Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 178-180.

City Park. All of these recommendations had been implemented within a few years' time.

Robinson also urged a slate of standard City Beautiful improvements: expansion of playgrounds, hiring a city forester, sign and billboard control, and smoke abatement.¹¹⁵

The centerpiece of Robinson's plan, however, was a civic center. This core concept of City Beautiful urban planning was intended to increase efficiency in government by keeping public offices in close proximity grouped around a public plaza or park, while promising enhanced civic patriotism among the citizenry by creating a civic space for public gatherings, performances, and recreation. Speer quickly committed himself to the civic center idea, but the expensive project struggled to win public support. A vigorous public debate led by real estate developer John S. Flower ensued over whether Denver should adopt Robinson's plan. The issue, as Flower framed it, was less about the merits of civic beautification, but about the expense of the civic center proposal and Speer's intention to fund the project with a 50-year bond. At the May election that year, the civic center plan was defeated in a rather stunning blow to Speer. It was a project, however, to which he would return.

Meanwhile, he forged ahead with other improvement schemes, notably his popular and transformative free tree program. At the same election that saw the defeat of the Robinson plan, voters approved the renewal of the Denver Tramway Company's franchise. The new contract, which Speer had worked out with his close friend and Tramway boss "Napoleon" Evans (critics frequently portrayed Speer as an Evans puppet) was considered by many a naked giveaway to the company. In a classic example of how Speer's pro-business bossism parlayed directly into civic improvement, the contract stipulated that Tramway pay \$60,000 annually for the right to operate its virtual monopoly over public transit on the city's streets. This entire sum would be

¹¹⁵ Robinson, "Proposed Plans for the Improvement of the City of Denver;" Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 180.

earmarked for park and boulevard improvements and maintenance. Critics charged that the amount was far too small, representing less than five percent of Tramway's annual profits, where similar franchises in other cities could net the municipality up to fifty percent of the utility's profits. They further argued that Tramway stood to benefit from park improvements since it would profit from increased ridership to the parks, and that no company ought to be dictating how the city allocates funds.¹¹⁶

Such criticisms notwithstanding, once the franchise deal had been approved Speer took \$5,000 each year from the Tramway proceeds to purchase saplings for free distribution to the public. Denver residents who obtained a card signed by their alderman or by Speer would then receive three trees (either "one elm and two maples or one maple and two elms") for their own use. "Each recipient received planting instructions and a suggestion to place the trees in a street parking [strip], but in fact there were no restrictions on planting," writes historian William Wilson. "From 1906 through 1912 the city gave away about 100,000 saplings. Some 75,000 reached maturity." The program was great publicity: as one historian has observed, "a free tree in arid Denver was comparable to kissing a baby." Newspapers showcased the tree giveaway each year and it found lasting popularity. It also made a significant contribution to creating a cooling, green urban forest canopy over many of Denver's neighborhoods.¹¹⁷

Speer's City Beautiful improvements ran the gamut from the mundane to the grandiose. Sewers, paved streets, and sidewalks were no civic center, but they dramatically improved sanitation, dust, and mud. Street cleaners attacked the problems of refuse and filth, as did the improvement of Cherry Creek. Public baths and a city bakery directly served the public health

¹¹⁶ For criticism of the Tramway deal see Goodstein, *Robert Speer's Denver*, 43-45.

¹¹⁷ Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 183. "Kissing a baby" quote from Noel and Leonard, *Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 140.

and welfare needs of Denver's poor. Street lighting and other decorative lighting, such as the gaudy Welcome Arch and lighted fountain in City Park, were lavish investments that Speer promoted heartily, hoping that Denver would become known as the western City of Lights. In 1909 alone the city spent \$160,000 on lighting projects. Another large project was the Auditorium, built to attract large conventions to the city. Speer also made sure the auditorium featured many free events for the public. Speer courted wealthy patrons of the arts and civic culture, encouraging them to donate land, sculptures, monuments, and other embellishments to the city. Finally, Speer's commitment to parks and boulevards within the city remained central. He transformed the paltry and partial parks he inherited into a full-fledged park system. He more than doubled park acreage in his first two terms and extended the system through much of the city. He built playgrounds, swimming pools, and bathing beaches at several parks, and supported Denver's distinctive "habitat zoo," one of the earliest zoological gardens to build animal enclosures that imitated the natural habitats of the species on display.¹¹⁸

All of these programs were costly. By 1910 Denver ranked first in per capita indebtedness among cities with 100,000-300,000 populations. Only three years prior the city had ranked 21st out of 29 cities in that range. Speer sought to deter criticism and cultivate public support for his projects via a municipal newspaper. Published weekly and distributed free to all taxpayers, *Denver Municipal Facts* became the primary publicity arm of Speer's City Beautiful campaign. Its glossy pages were filled with photos of the mayor's improvements, of the beautiful homes and gardens of Denver, and with reporting on similar civic beautification efforts in cities nationwide. A common Progressive device, the municipal newspaper was a serious effort to

¹¹⁸ Speer's City Beautiful improvements are covered in Noel and Leonard, *Mining Camp to Metropolis*; Johnson, *Denver's Mayor Speer*; MacMechen, *Speer, A City Builder*, Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, and Goodstein, *Robert Speer's Denver*.

disseminate both legitimate public information and obvious propaganda for the mayor's office. In both of these forms, the paper helped to shape the terms of public discourse regarding the meaning of the improvements for Denver's residents, framing them as central to Denver's new civic identity.¹¹⁹

Indeed, Speer's beautification agenda cannot be understood simply as a political ploy to purchase public support for his corrupt administration, nor as an egotistical effort to build monuments to his mayoralty, although surely it served both of these purposes quite ably. Speer's commitment to civic improvement also reflected his thoroughgoing embrace of urban environmental reform. He believed that an improved urban environment would at once improve the quality of life of all urban residents, uplift minds and morals, and cultivate a sense of pride and identification with the city that would enhance civic patriotism. "Ugly things," he observed, "do not please. It is much easier to love a thing of beauty—and this applies to cities as well as to persons and things. Fountains, statues, artistic lights, music, playgrounds, parks, etc., make people love the place in which they live."¹²⁰ Speer shared with other City Beautiful adherents the conviction that a beautified urban environment would cultivate a "love of place" that would, in turn, foster civic patriotism, identity, and pride.

Speer's Appian Way

Three years into Speer's first term, in a January 1907 speech before the Chamber of Commerce, Real Estate Exchange, and other commercial bodies, Speer made his first public mention of extending his City Beautiful improvements beyond the city limits to the mountains.

¹¹⁹ Statistics from Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 188-189.

¹²⁰ Quote from MacMechen, *Robert W. Speer*, 75.

As we have seen, the idea of developing mountain recreation was not new in Denver, but combining it with Speer's record of civic improvements gave the concept a new significance as a potential component of civic beautification. And while Speer's biographer Edward MacMechen later made much of this speech as the first conceptualization of the mountain park idea, in actuality Speer called for something quite different and far more limited in scope than municipally owned mountain parks. Rather, he outlined a system of boulevards that would unify the city's public park spaces—standard City Beautiful fare. In addition to this network of roadways, he called for a single parkway that would connect the city with mountain scenery. "The time has arrived," Speer announced, "when a complete system of boulevards must be planned and laid out for Denver, the lands secured, and a certain amount of construction and beautification done each year. Our parks must be connected with well-shaded drives, and great care taken to forever preserve the finest views of the mountain range." He promised to soon appoint a commission whose members would study the parks and the city's topography and then specify boulevard routes that would connect all the parks and reach to the city limits.

Speer recommended one route in particular that would extend the city's boulevard system all the way to the mountains. "Starting at Congress Park," the shaded drive would wind its way southward "through Washington Park to the city limits near Englewood." From there, the route would continue southerly along the Platte River and on up the canyon at Waterton to the boundary of the federal reserve lands, "where no doubt the [federal] government would continue it" to reach destinations within the national forest. The proposed route would take trippers not west, to the nearest mountain scenery, but many miles further out of town to the south. Presumably, Speer's logic was to access the nearest public land available for mountain recreation, which was the Pike National Forest to the southwest of town.

The foremost problem, Speer understood, was how to fund, build, and maintain the mountain boulevard once it left the city's jurisdiction. His solution was to encourage philanthropic donors to partner with the city in the venture. As with the other boulevards, Denver should build the drive as far as its city limits using park district and general park revenue funds. Although this would be the shortest mileage of the drive it was, he noted, "the most expensive part, on account of [securing] the right of way." Beyond city limits, however, he appealed to Denver's "public spirited citizens to continue it from there into Platte canon. No citizen," he emphasized, "could leave a monument to his memory which would add more to the pleasure, comfort and pride of his fellow citizens than this Appian Way from Denver into the Rockies." The city's "necessities can be provided for from taxation," Speer continued, "but the ornaments which her youth, position and beauty require must be furnished by gifts from her citizens."

This would become a recurring theme during Speer's administration as he courted Denver's wealthy families, exhorting them to "give while you live" to the city that had fostered their success. Private donations could make the difference between an average city and an exceptional one, Speer argued. "Denver can be made either one of the pleasing, ordinary cities of the country or she can be made in fact not in words the Paris of America. ... Let us make a positive start by building not an ordinary, but an extraordinary drive or Appian Way into the mountains, shaded and beautified with native trees, shrubs and plants, made so attractive and complete that it will be known everywhere." By drawing such pointed references to Paris and to Italy's famed boulevard, Speer could both associate his City Beautiful ambitions with classical

models, as well as suggest how these improvements would enhance Denver's national reputation and its appeal to tourists.¹²¹

If Speer's Appian Way to the canyon of the South Platte occupied an important place in this particular speech, it never moved to the center of his City Beautiful program. It remained for several years as one item among many that the mayor expected a civic benefactor to present to Denver. The civic center, the municipal auditorium, the Cherry Creek improvement, and the park and boulevard system remained the central components of Speer's civic improvement agenda. By the end of January, he had appointed a twelve-member commission to reassess the defeated civic center plan and come up with a solution that would be functional, aesthetic, and achievable at reasonable cost. Later that spring, Speer hired the well-regarded planner George Kessler to draw up plans for the "complete system of boulevards" he had promised in his January address. After working closely with Speer for more than a year, Kessler's final proposal included plans for parks around Berkeley and Rocky Mountain lakes, a boulevard from Berkeley Lake to Inspiration Point, and the parking of Monaco and Speer boulevards, the City Park Esplanade, and the Isle of Safety near the state capitol. However, Kessler's plan did not include the Appian Way.¹²²

Two years later, in 1909, Speer overcame the problem of taking property outside the city's jurisdiction when he engineered the acquisition of Inspiration Point. It set an important precedent. He had wanted to purchase the scenic overlook for a city park for at least three years, but it lay just outside the city's northwest boundary, next to Berkeley Lake. Speer initially asked the city attorney to render an opinion on the city's ability to purchase land outside its boundaries.

¹²¹ "Mayor Wined and Dined by Men of Commerce," *RMN* (8 January 1907).

¹²² Kessler's plan is described in "Denver Has the Most Beautiful Parkway Vistas in the World," *DMF* (29 May 1909), 3-4; and Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 181.

The attorney replied that the city had no legal grounds to do so, which prompted the mayor to use an alternate approach. With the help of J.B. Walker, who still owned substantial real estate in Berkeley, Speer arranged to purchase the property through a third party for about \$8,000. Title in hand, the mayor then offered to sell it to the park board “at the cost of acquisition.” In spite of lingering questions about jurisdiction the park board accepted Speer’s offer and quickly set to work building an observatory area and access road from Berkeley Park. Inspiration Point Park quickly became a favorite sunset excursion among Denver’s motoring class.¹²³

But Speer’s view of the city’s role in creating an Appian Way for Denver had changed very little. When he addressed the Chamber of Commerce in honor of its twenty-fifth anniversary in May 1909, he echoed themes that were by then timeworn and familiar to his audience. “Denver has been kind to most of us by giving to some health, to some wealth, to some happiness and to some a combination of all. We can pay a part of this debt by making our city more attractive.” The newly purchased Inspiration Point overlook, he suggested, presented “to some a fine opportunity to erect a shelter-house as a gift from themselves, or in memory to some friend.” While his administration could boast about the number of acres in parkland it had acquired, much of this remained unimproved. A number of the new parks, he warned, “will have to remain without improvements for years to come, unless some of our citizens improve them from their private purses.”

For Speer, the mountain boulevard fell into this category as well. “The man, or combination of men,” he intoned, “who will build a shaded drive or Appian way from our city into the mountains, up into the canons, and to the summit of our lofty peaks, will be remembered and praised by other generations.” If Denver was to have a mountain boulevard, Speer firmly

¹²³ On the acquisition of Inspiration Point, see MacMechen, *Robert W. Speer*, 22; Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 181-183; and Goodstein, *Robert Speer’s Denver*, 238.

believed that it should not be built with municipal funds. Such a boulevard, stretching so many miles beyond the city's legal boundaries, must be the work of private initiative. Indeed, he stressed, Denver could not do it all—carry out Kessler's boulevard plans, improve all its new parks, equip its playgrounds, build its mountain boulevard, or even the civic center he so desired—without the active participation of private benefactors serving the public good. The city would work in collaboration with “public spirited citizens” to make the Denver of their dreams a reality. “With our gift tree in full bloom,” promised Speer, “Denver will indeed be on the map. We will not have to ask the railroads to put us on the main line—the traveling public will bring the main lines to us. Let us all work together to make Denver the ideal city.”¹²⁴

When Speer called upon some “man, or combination of men,” to build his Appian Way into the Rockies, he may well have had the Walkers in mind. Their Garden of the Titans in the red rocks of Morrison had, by that time, been in operation for three years, and J.B. Walker and his son John Jr. had been hard at work developing amenities and publicizing the park. They had made the Mount Morrison Hotel into a fashionable resort, adding a casino, Japanese garden, swimming pool, and naturalistic landscaping to complement views of Bear Creek and the red rocks. Their Mount Morrison Incline Railway had been under construction for two years and was nearing completion: it would open that September.

More to the point, Walker was then in the process of building a mountain drive on his extensive property, one that was just the sort of scenic roadway Speer seemed to have in mind. In fact, the first leg of the drive, which went from Morrison to the top of Mount Falcon, was already complete. It had been opened to the public the previous September with much fanfare.

¹²⁴ “Mayor Speer Speaks of the Accomplishments of the Past and of the Needs of the Future,” *DMF* (29 May 1909), 6-7. This piece reprints Speer's address at a banquet honoring the 25th anniversary of the Chamber of Commerce.

Walker's gala publicity event featured a "Feast of the Lanterns," in which the route was lined with more than 1,500 Japanese paper lanterns, while horsemen rode a line of fire up and down the mountain road. The evening was capped with a fireworks display launched alternately from mounts Morrison and Falcon.¹²⁵ Speer—an avid motorist himself who was fond of taking his car on mountain excursions—must have known of Walker's road by that time.

In June 1909, about a month after Speer's address before the Chamber, the *Denver Post* reported the completion of Walker's "Mount Falcon high line drive," which opened to Denver's small but growing number of auto enthusiasts "a short route to one of the prettiest views in the world." From Morrison, motorists could travel up the face of Mount Falcon, then wind through Eden Park and on to Bear Creek Canyon. "By his own skillful engineering," the paper reported, Walker had "constructed a drive that brings a large scope of scenic mountain country to the doors of Denver." The gravel surface and 12 percent grade assured ease of travel "while the brain is dazzled with the entrancing and awe-inspiring scenery on either side and in front and behind. So skillfully is the drive constructed that little trees and other touches of nature are left just in the right place to add to the beauty of the work of the man and the Maker."¹²⁶ Walker clearly intended the drive to provide a scenic alpine experience that evoked expanses of native wilderness, in contrast to the natural red rock wonders on display at Garden of the Titans.

In addition to the red rocks park with its amphitheatre, the Mount Morrison funicular railroad, the tony resort hotel, and the completed high line drive, Walker held one more important asset for mountain recreation: several thousand acres of undeveloped mountain land on and near Mount Falcon. Walker had named the mountain after he and his second wife, Ethel

¹²⁵ Noel, *Red Rocks*, ch. 4. The September 5 Feast of the Lanterns was described by the *Jefferson County Graphic* (12 September 1908).

¹²⁶ "Walker Completes High Line Drive," *Post* (22 June 1909).

Richmond Walker, had watched a falcon soaring above the site where they were planning to build their home. In 1908 construction began on the mountaintop home that would house the large Walker family and entertain its numerous influential guests. Designed by Jules Jacques Benois Benedict—“Colorado’s most flamboyant architect”—the imposing stone mansion featured a “grand reception hall, a library, music room, and formal dining room.” A two-story bedroom observatory overlooked the red rocks park, while massive bay windows in many rooms framed stunning views of mountain scenery and the plains stretching eastward. Completed in 1911, the home was for a time the only developed area on Walker’s Mount Falcon property aside from the high line drive.¹²⁷

With these facts in mind, we are left to wonder what prompted Speer to make a substantial modification to his mountain boulevard concept in early 1910. Speaking before the YMCA in February, Speer pointedly invited “some one with means to secure and present to the city a 10,000 acre mountain park, within 20 or 25 miles of the city, with beautiful valleys, canons, streams, cliffs and scenery unsurpassed, where the masses may spend a happy day and feel that some of the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains belongs to them.” Such a park would open to tourists and residents alike “the scenery of Switzerland.” The problem, Speer recognized, was not only in designating scenic lands for public recreation by creating parks, but also in providing means of access from the city. To capitalize on mountain scenery Denver needed railways and auto roads in other jurisdictions. “The question is,” Speer rhetorically asked, “how are they to be built? Our state is behind in road building. The city has not authority to go beyond its limits. The surrounding counties are new and cannot alone afford to build the highways

¹²⁷ The Walker family occupied the Mount Falcon mansion for less than a decade before a lightning strike in late 1918 set it afire, burning it to the ground. Noel, *Sacred Stones*, ch. 4. Also see Sheridan typescript and various articles in the Walker and Mount Falcon clipping files.

required.” To address this problem, Speer proposed the creation of a “road improvement district, consisting of Denver, Adams, Arapahoe, Douglas, Jefferson, and Boulder counties, with authority to issue long-term district bonds to build modern road-ways. Denver needs them to send our new people and tourists out to see the wonders surrounding us, and Denver should help pay for them.”¹²⁸

This was a far cry from Speer’s original proposal to have a patron build a parkway from Englewood to the Pike National Forest. It also demonstrates an important shift in Speer’s willingness to use city financing for road-building projects in other jurisdictions, grounded in the recognition that such roadways would serve Denver’s interests. Nonetheless, as had the Appian Way, the 10,000-acre mountain park remained little more than a point on a long wish list for potential benefactors. Speer did not intend to follow the precedent he had set with Inspiration Point by purchasing mountain lands with municipal funds.¹²⁹

J.B. Walker’s Plan

John Brisben Walker was not by any means the only wealthy Denverite to own mountain property in the foothills region of Jefferson County—summer homes in the canyons, foothills, or near Evergreen were practically *de rigueur* among Denver’s elite families. But he was the one most actively involved in developing his mountain property for public recreation. As one of Denver’s most wealthy and well-known citizens, and as a member of the Chamber of Commerce

¹²⁸ For the complete text of this speech see MacMechen, *Robert W. Speer*, 71.

¹²⁹ According to one commentator, Speer “did not at any time contemplate the purchase of the ground” for mountain parks; his preference was to limit the city’s commitment to construction of a boulevard. See the clipping “Roads and Inns are Needed for Mountain Parks, No Necessity for Buying Any Property in the Hills,” n.d., no source, in Kingsley A. Pence Scrapbook, Hart Library, Colorado Historical Society.

and the Real Estate Exchange, J.B. Walker certainly was familiar with the mountain park idea that had been simmering in the booster community for years. He surely knew of Speer's efforts to find a wealthy patron to give the city a mountain boulevard or a mountain park. Speer's pronouncements, perpetually made without the backing of an administration policy or concrete discussion of public funding, must have seemed increasingly hollow. We can surmise from Walker's prior and subsequent actions that he felt quite differently about the matter, believing instead that the city ought to be an active financial partner in the development of mountain recreation by entrepreneurs such as himself. Walker had already called on Denver's commercial bodies to partner with him in high-dollar projects to facilitate public access to his attractions in Morrison. In 1907, for example, Walker had approached the Real Estate Exchange and the Chamber of Commerce, asking the organizations' assistance "in placing \$150,000 of the \$250,000 bond issue" with which he hoped to fund the construction of an electric interurban rail line from Denver to Morrison. His efforts toward this end met with failure.¹³⁰

During the fall of 1910, Walker again made the rounds of the commercial bodies, this time pitching an even more ambitious and pricey plan for a large mountain park behind Morrison. He first met with Chamber of Commerce President F.L. Bartlett, who received his proposal coolly and quickly referred him elsewhere. "The Chamber is not in the promotion business," Bartlett reportedly told Walker. "You had better see Seth Bradley, President of the Denver Real Estate Exchange, as the real estate men are promoters." An influential real estate and insurance investor, Bradley had been the inaugural president of the powerful Real Estate Exchange and was also a member of the pro-Speer, pro-growth Denver Business Men's League.

¹³⁰ I must give credit to Phil Goodstein for describing how the mountain park idea "percolated for years," in *Robert Speer's Denver*, 237. "Walker Outlines Plans for Road," *Post* (4 December 1907). His appeal to the Chamber of Commerce is referenced in "Grafter, Tool, Egotist, Walker Hurls at Head of Chamber," *Post* (22 January 1911).

He met with Walker around the first of November and, “after a full talk” that left Bradley “impressed with his arguments in favor of this enterprise,” invited Walker to make a presentation at the Exchange luncheon the following week.¹³¹

Meanwhile, Walker had taken the initiative himself, placing a full-page illustrated story in the October 30 Sunday edition of the *Denver Post* to outline his “amazing” plan for the “most extensive and magnificent system of parks possessed by any city in the world.” Walker proposed that the city purchase a whopping 41,000 acres (the equivalent of 64 square miles) of mountain land running roughly eight miles north to south and eight miles westward between Mt. Vernon and Turkey Creek canyons (Mt. Vernon canyon is the route of modern Interstate 70; Turkey Creek of Hwy. 285). Stretching westward from the easternmost rise of the Rockies, such a park would set aside a vast area for mountain recreation “within ten miles of this city.”¹³² (See Figure 1.)

If the city and its commercial organizations made haste, the real estate could be purchased for, Walker estimated, just \$750,000, before prices escalated. But Walker knew from experience that mountain destinations could not thrive without means of convenient access, and so he made the mountain park only one component of a larger system that would link, both conceptually and geographically, with Denver’s City Beautiful amenities. The grand mountain park would be connected with the city by not one, but “five great boulevards, which would be extensions of the city’s prominent thoroughfares!” The drives would radiate from Denver to the

¹³¹ Bartlett is quoted in Seth Bradley, “The Origin of the Denver Mountain Parks System,” *Colorado Magazine* 9 (January 1932), 26. On Bradley, see Goodstein, *Robert Speer’s Denver*, 165, 237-238.

¹³² “Magnificent Park System, Eight Square Miles, and Costing Only \$750,000, Planned for Denver,” *Post* (30 October 1910).



Source: “Magnificent Park System,” *Denver Post* (30 October 1910).

Figure 1. John Brisben Walker’s Mountain Park Plan, 1910.

mountain region along West 44th Avenue, West Colfax Boulevard, Alameda Avenue, along Bear Creek, and the fifth “by way of Petersburg and Fort Logan along the bluffs” overlooking the Bear Creek valley. As a whole, Walker’s plan offered premium access to scenic mountain recreation simply by extending Denver’s established park and boulevard system to the nearby mountains.¹³³

“Mr. Walker,” wrote the *Post*, “does not emphasize the beautiful scenic driveways, the wonderful rugged canyons, the inspiring mountain views, that would make Denver one of the most notable resorts for tourists in the world if they were made easily accessible to the city He realizes that such a scheme as he suggests can never be converted into an actuality by

¹³³ Ibid.

appealing to the love of the beautiful in men of financial power.” Although such nature appreciation on the part of a touring, home-building public was the required ingredient for success, it was not the primary rationale for public expenditure on a mountain park plan. Instead, like countless City Beautiful proponents before him, Walker emphasized the profitability of beauty, insisting that a mountain “park system must be secured for Denver ... because it will increase the annual income of the city and its people by many millions of dollars!”¹³⁴

In making his case, Walker emphasized the need to create a distinct identity for Denver that would capitalize on its well-known location near the Rockies. Speer’s City Beautiful improvements had made Denver into “a pretty city,” Walker granted. But Speer’s endless promotion of his efforts to create a “Paris on the Platte” notwithstanding, the pretty city was not what made Denver unique as a destination for the nation’s traveling public. “People who come here from the Atlantic seaboard and from the prairies of the Middle West,” Walker was at pains to point out, “do not come to look at handsome buildings and well-kept streets. They come here to see the marvelous mountain scenery they have heard and read so much about.”¹³⁵

But without practical means of access to those marvelous mountains, Denver’s tourists “quickly become discouraged and rush off to Colorado Springs or somewhere else.” With parks established to display the scenery and with boulevards built to reach them, Walker promised “travelers who stop off in Denver to see ‘the Rockies’ will establish comfortable headquarters in the city’s hotels and spend weeks at a time making side trips over the boulevards and scenic roads, through parks and to bits of wonderful mountain views that are scarcely visited now.” The nearby foothills, thinly populated and largely undeveloped, promised a wilderness retreat of

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

utmost convenience—provided that good roads to facilitate auto travel and train lines to gateway towns were built to make them accessible.¹³⁶

Indeed, Walker argued, Denver leaders had been laggard in making the investments needed to take advantage of the gifts of nature God had freely provided to the city. A project of this scale, he made clear, ought to be a public, not private, enterprise, undertaken by the city government. Aware of protestations that the city could not purchase land beyond its boundaries, Walker suggested Denver follow the example of Los Angeles, asking the state legislature “to annex to Denver a narrow strip of land reaching out through Jefferson County to this park system, and including the limits of the parks.” Such a tactic would allow Denver to avoid the complicated process of securing amendments and ordinances allowing the city to purchase and manage parklands outside its jurisdiction.¹³⁷

Clearly, Walker hoped to convince the civic powers of Denver to support a project that would be a boon to his own scenic enterprises at Morrison, Red Rocks, Mount Falcon, and Troutdale. Located at the mouth of Bear Creek Canyon, Morrison would become the primary gateway to the park Walker was proposing. The alpine recreation up the canyons would offer an ideal complement to the unusual natural wonders on display in the Garden of the Titans, and would increase demand in Morrison for tourist amenities and services. In addition to direct profits from increased tourism, the establishment of mountain parks in the area could also be expected to boost the value of real estate for vacation home sites, and Walker held considerable acreage in the region that likely stood to benefit. As previously mentioned, Walker had by this time established a reputation for seeking out high-dollar partnerships with the city and its

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

commercial bodies for his development schemes. Perhaps to assuage critics who might see his proposal as entirely too self-serving, Walker sweetened the pot by offering to donate one square mile of land—at 640 acres this was a mere trifle of the total 41,000 on the table—to the project. He further promised to bring the urban planner George Kessler back to town to advise on the plan, apparently at his own expense.¹³⁸

In short, Walker presented to the readers of the *Post* a much more coherent, detailed, and well-argued plan for mountain parks and boulevards than anyone preceding him. His proposal went far beyond any of Speer's in recommending the acquisition of vast mountain acreage, and also in how it sketched out a unified, logical system of parks and roadways that would connect seamlessly with the city's existing park and boulevard system. Walker's plan effectively brought the mountains within the boundaries of the city, both politically through annexing the land, and spatially, by constructing harmonious access routes and destinations that would flow directly into the patterns already established in town.

Launching a Booster Movement

Having thus made his case in the press, Walker hoped to net the support of Denver's booster organizations. The Chamber of Commerce, though, still was not biting. At its next board of directors meeting—held just four days after Walker's piece in the *Post* was published—his proposal was read and, on motion, tabled. A follow-up letter to Walker assured him that the

¹³⁸ Ibid.

group had given careful consideration to his proposal and that the directors expressed personal support for the concept, but urged him to “go ahead and work out the idea” on his own.¹³⁹

By contrast, when Walker spoke at the Real Estate Exchange luncheon a few days later, his “eloquent plea” was received with enthusiasm. Exchange president Seth Bradley quickly appointed a committee “to investigate ... and, if it was found feasible, to organize and promote said parks and boulevards.” Bradley advised the committee “to confer with Mr. Walker, and also with Mayor Speer in regard to this proposition, which is a very important and far reaching one,” and asked that the members “give mature and conservative consideration to the matter before making recommendations to the Exchange.” Chaired by the wealthy real estate developer Kingsley A. Pence, the Exchange committee included, among others, real estate man E. W. Merritt, who had been one of the earliest proponents of the idea. Inquiries about the park plan had flooded in after Walker’s late-October press piece, and the committee had reason to proceed with haste. By the close of November the Exchange was publicizing its investigations in an effort to “arouse public sentiment” and cultivate support for the project. Over the next few months, the investigative committee formally recommended the project to the Exchange, then proceeded to evaluate possible park sites on Lookout Mountain and in Mt. Vernon and Bear Creek canyons. Additionally, this group raised funds to hire an engineer who surveyed the route of the first parkway to be completed, the hairpin drive from Golden to the top of Lookout Mountain.¹⁴⁰

The Exchange committee consistently credited J.B. Walker for conceptualizing the plan and bringing it to them for action. And while the group emphasized that “Mr. Walker has no real

¹³⁹ Denver Chamber of Commerce, Meeting Minutes, 4 November 1910, in Denver Chamber of Commerce Papers, Box 4, FF 10, Western History Collection, DPL; Thorndike Deland, Secretary, Denver Chamber of Commerce to John Brisben Walker, 7 November 1910, in Pence Scrapbook.

¹⁴⁰ Seth Bradley, “Origins,” 26-29; Letter, Seth Bradley, Denver Real Estate Exchange to committee members, 25 November 1910, in Pence Scrapbook.

estate interest in it,” whatever interests their own members might have had in the plan went unstated. If the Chamber looked on the Exchange as a group more oriented toward promotion, it was also true that people involved in the real estate business readily understood how a park or parkway could boost property values and stimulate higher-dollar real estate development. Denver-based developers would benefit greatly from the enhanced market for summer homes that the mountain parks, with their access roads and rail lines, would promote.¹⁴¹

By mid-winter, interest in the project had mushroomed, perhaps prompting Mayor Speer to weigh in on the matter again. In early January 1911 his *Denver Municipal Facts* moved to claim the initiative, announcing that “Mayor Speer’s idea for the establishment of a mountain park within twenty-five miles of Denver to be maintained by the city, has struck a popular chord,” as evidenced by the “many verbal and written messages” to the mayor’s office “from citizens commending the proposition and offering suggestions for sites.” Speer then outlined his new mountain park plan, which, while it differed from his earlier proposals, resembled nothing so much as the concept detailed by J.B. Walker the previous autumn. “The plan of the Mayor is to have the city select several thousand acres in the mountains back of the foot hills near Golden or Morrison, purchase any ranches that may be located upon the tract and have the [federal] government give to the city the balance of the land not yet taken up.”

Since the mayor had “explored the foot hill country west of Denver quite thoroughly on Sunday auto trips during the summer” he had several potential locations in mind. The park would be on a site where “Nature’s treasures abounded” and, “as the intention is to have the park as wild and natural as possible,” the cost of creating it would be small. A street car line to the new park had been promised “by responsible parties”—surely the Denver Tramway Company, one of

¹⁴¹ “40,000-Acre Park Plan is Praised,” *Post* (29 November 1910).

Speer's strongest allies. "Everybody knows what the mountain parks are worth to Colorado Springs," the article went on, "and if Denver had one first-class recreation place in the mountains ... the people would be made happier, and our yearly visitors would no doubt be doubled in numbers." Such a "municipal resort" promised to enhance "Denver's fame as a city of beauty and a pleasant place in which to dwell. The article concluded with a selection of letters from citizens in support of the project, including Martin J. O'Fallon, who favored Lookout Mountain as a park site and would in subsequent years donate 860 acres near Bear Creek to the system, and another who wrote to commend the "idea of establishing a city park in the mountains."¹⁴²

Public sentiment was sufficiently aroused to spur other civic bodies to action later that winter. The next to act was the Chamber of Commerce, which formed its own investigative committee in early February 1911, despite having only months earlier sent J.B. Walker elsewhere to seek support for his proposal.¹⁴³ The organization tapped Warwick M. Downing, an oil industry lawyer, member of the Chamber's Board of Directors, and Manager of Parks and Improvements under Speer, to chair its committee. Described by historian Phil Goodstein as Speer's "right-hand man in making Denver the city beautiful," by 1910 Downing was adept in the politics of park making. He had worked to secure the tree-lined boulevards that shade the

¹⁴² "Mountain Park for Denver Approved by Many Citizens," *DMF* (7 January 1911), 10. For O'Fallon's donation, see "Donated Areas," DHCP, Box 2, FF 13.

¹⁴³ The timing of this change in policy may well have been in response to a different sort of public sentiment that arose against the Chamber in late January, when it forced Walker to resign from the body. See "Grafter, Tool, Egotist, Walker Hurls at Head of Chamber" *Post* (22 January 1911), 1; "Walker is Asked to Resign from Commerce Body," *Post* (25 January 1911), 5; "Walker Will Make Reply to Chamber," *Post* (26 January 1911), 5; "Walker Demands that Directors of Chamber of Commerce Resign," *Post* (27 January 1911), 1.

Montclair Park District, an area where, not coincidentally, his family owned considerable real estate.¹⁴⁴

Just a few days after the Chamber appointed its committee, the Denver Motor Club formed one of its own to investigate the mountain park idea. The following month, on 2 March 1911, the three committees met and combined their efforts, resolving themselves into the Joint Committee on Mountain Parks and electing K.A. Pence as their chair. The executive committee of this larger group, composed of three representatives each from the Real Estate Exchange, Chamber of Commerce, and Motor Club, shouldered the burden of the subsequent work in creating the parks and as such came to be known as the Mountain Parks Committee of the Commercial Bodies (or, more simply, the Mountain Parks Committee). Downing served as its chair and Pence as vice-chair. As winter's hold over the mountains began to break the committee set to work. By the close of March they had held initial meetings with the governor, the state Highway Commission, members of the state legislature, Mayor Speer and other Denver city officials, and representatives from Arapahoe, Jefferson, and Park counties.¹⁴⁵

In early April the group set off on its first official tour to inspect potential park sites accompanied by an assortment of newspapermen and interested parties, including the new Chamber of Commerce president Charles A. Johnson, W.W. Porter and F.A. Bailey of the Denver park board, and the city's superintendent of parks Fred Steinhauer. And although some historians have surmised that Speer was a member of this tour, the mayor was conspicuously missing among the travelers.¹⁴⁶ The caravan of automobiles motored from downtown Denver to

¹⁴⁴ Goodstein, *Robert Speer's Denver*, 20-21.

¹⁴⁵ Warwick M. Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," 12.

¹⁴⁶ Although some historians have asserted that Speer was a member of this tour, local newspapers did not list Speer among the participants. And, as my investigation shows, Speer had been

Morrison and along J.B. Walker's scenic drive to Walker's mountain home, then nearing completion at the summit of Mt. Falcon. There the group enjoyed a campfire lunch hosted by Walker and Carl Morrison, grandson of the town's founder. The tour then traveled through Turkey Creek Canyon to Eden Park, up Bear Creek Canyon to Evergreen and Bergen Park, and finally down Mt. Vernon Canyon to Golden.

In addition to the day's inspection of the Morrison area, the committee had tours planned of two other regions in a forty-mile swath of mountain land convenient to Denver. But this route covered the territory Walker had outlined in his original proposal the previous year, and his hand is evident in the trip. In addition to hosting the luncheon, Walker had also arranged for stages and carriages to carry the party into areas the motors could not go. He reiterated his promised donation of one square mile, pointing out the "densely wooded tract of 640 acres" to the group and assuring them his offer would stand so long as the city established the parks "in accordance with his views." In addition he promised that "the road to Mount Falcon, and Mount Falcon itself, which is on private ground, shall always be open and accessible to visitors to the park." Another report confirmed that "Mr. Walker does not want to sell Mt. Falcon—in fact, I believe he has nothing at all that he wants to sell the city—but there are a hundred hills just as accessible, and with outlooks on the plains and the mountains, which are quite as wonderful."¹⁴⁷

By all accounts, the tour left its participants bubbling over with enthusiasm. Jaded news reporters found themselves struggling for words sufficient to portray the "scenes of beauty and

talking about the Appian Way and mountain parks long before the date of this tour. See, for example, Noel, *Sacred Stones*, ch. 5.

¹⁴⁷ "Yip-I-Addy-I-Ay, Off to the Foothills," *Times* (8 April 1911); "Committee in Autos Seeks Site for Foothills Park," *Post* (8 April 1911); "Great, Say Denver Men After Trip to Mountains; Foothill Park Sure," *RMN* (9 April 1911); "Denver Will Have Series of Foothill Parks is Plan," *Post* (9 April 1911).

grandeur” they encountered: the shady river ways and rocky canyons, the wooded hillsides, sunny meadows, and the way the “snow-capped mountain peaks rear their heads, making a background for a panoramic view that can not be described.” The writers convey a sense of wonder at discovering a landscape that, while so nearby, was largely unknown to them. If Denverites loved their mountain horizon, thousands of them had little knowledge of the wild mountain landscapes that comprised it, simply “because they have never been brought to their notice, and the roads to them have been neglected.”

That the press coverage echoed J.B. Walker’s argument from the previous fall was probably not a coincidence, given his participation in the site tour. Reporters pointed out that the beauty at least equaled that offered by Colorado Springs, and by investing just a million dollars in acquiring mountain parks and building scenic roads Denver could retain tourists not for a day, as it currently did, but for a week. The profits Denver businesses realized from tourism each year would jump sevenfold. The logic of the investment was based on quick action to buy up lands at current values in the anticipation of future urban growth and escalation of real estate prices. The main expenses would be land acquisition—and even this was minimal as supporters anticipated that federally owned land in the region would be given over to the city just for the asking—and construction of roadways. Supporters anticipated that because the parks were intended to showcase wild nature, they would cost very little to maintain. “I think they ought to be left just as wild as they are now, with the exception of the drives,” stated one. “Good roads and great parks are what we must furnish—nature has done the rest.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ “Denver Will Have Series of Foothill Parks is Plan,” *Post* (9 April 1911).

The Mountain Parks Committee Plan

The Mountain Parks Committee worked feverishly through the spring, summer, and fall of 1911. The members, unpaid, devoted countless hours to the work, often meeting several times a week and making repeated trips by team or on horseback into the mountains.¹⁴⁹ One issue among several that the group worked to resolve that spring centered on J.B. Walker and his obvious financial interest in the project. He remained a member of the Real Estate Exchange, he had played a large role in the April site tour, and overall it was Walker who had articulated much of the rationale for the mountain parks that the committee adopted. Yet the committee members clearly viewed Walker's involvement in the city's development of the parks as a liability. In the Chamber's May *News Bulletin* to its members, it was reported that the larger Joint Committee had engaged in "much discussion along the lines that no one having any personal interest in the sale of land for the proposed park should serve on the committee," a point on which all were agreed.¹⁵⁰ Walker would soon find himself watching the mountain parks movement unfold from the sidelines.

By late spring the Mountain Parks Committee had already begun plumbing local, state, and national governments for funds and acquisitions. The committee met with Speer, hoping to secure an immediate appropriation of \$25,000 from the city with which to purchase land. They had a bill before the state legislature to obtain a \$20,000 appropriation to build a convict road from Denver to Evergreen. And they were actively lobbying Congress to procure an outright donation of ten thousand acres from the federal government. It soon became apparent that none of these strategies to obtain land or roads from government entities were viable. Speer politely

¹⁴⁹ Warwick M. Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," 12.

¹⁵⁰ "Mountain Park Coming," *Denver Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* v. 1, no. 11 (May 1911), 9.

refused to commit any city money to the effort. The legislature did not pass the Carringer bill, to the dismay of both Pence and Downing. And the committee quickly learned that “working with Congress is working at long range, and [although] a large number of letters have been written to our Senators and congressmen in order to enthuse them to the proper pitch,” congressional enthusiasm was distinctly lacking.¹⁵¹

Despite the fact that other prominent American cities were actively developing extra-urban park systems during this period, the committee had few practical models to guide them in creating a legal framework for building a park system outside the city’s jurisdiction. K.A. Pence told reporters that the committee’s work was primarily “handicapped by the laws.” Because the city charter failed to specify Denver’s authority to take parklands outside city limits, the city attorney’s office advised that an amendment to the charter would be the necessary prerequisite to any action. Such an amendment would require voter approval at a citywide election. Pence, who attended a city planning conference in June 1911 and inspected parks in fourteen Eastern cities, returned to Denver with a list of other cities from Washington, D.C. to Seattle that were already “taking the lead ... in [establishing] parks outside their own boundaries.” He was optimistic that Denver could follow their example.¹⁵²

As Warwick Downing later recalled, “On every side were difficulties, legal and financial; an innate opposition of the people to the crazy idea of spending any of the City’s money way off in the mountains.” Speer’s early refusal to involve the city in their efforts had perhaps

¹⁵¹ “Foot Hills Park Dream to Become Reality,” *Denver Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* v. 1, no. 10 (April 1911), 2; “Mountain Park Coming,” *Denver Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* v. 1, no. 11 (May 1911), 9; “Failure to Get \$20,000 to Delay Mountain Park,” and “Real Estate Men Think Legislature Indifferent,” undated, unsourced clippings in Pence Scrapbook.

¹⁵² “K.A. Pence has New Ideas as to Foothills Park, Returns from City Planning Conference Brimful of Suggestions,” *Post* (4 June 1911); “Mountain Park Scheme to Go Before People” and “The Mountain Park Project,” undated, unsourced clippings in Pence Scrapbook.

contributed to the larger realization “that City officials would never lead in such a project; that no City Council would ever appropriate money for its commencement, and it would be difficult to procure continuing appropriations in a region where there would be no votes.” The charter amendment would help overcome this difficulty as well. However, the committee recognized that “the people would never vote to tax themselves for an ‘idea’,” and so set as its next task the compilation of a “definite, complete, comprehensive and practical plan” that would explain to Denver voters “just what a Mountain Park System was, what it would accomplish, and what it would cost.” Marshaled together under the banner of a mountain park movement, the group reasoned, the people of Denver could bring the city to the table, effectively bypassing the Speer administration.¹⁵³

By December the Mountain Parks Committee had prepared a plan of action which offered a detailed rationale and vision for the project, recommended park sites, and included a draft of an amendment to the city charter which would pave the way for the city to proceed. “A Mountain Park for Denver will be the first step, and, perhaps, the greatest step, in the great movement of making our mountains available for the people,” the report argued. Here was “Denver’s chance to open a gateway into the mountains” for public recreation. As had earlier advocates, the committee promised that such parks would ably serve two publics—tourists (which, by extension, meant the city’s business sector) and average Denver citizens—and would provide a wide range of benefits as a return on the city’s investment. “Such a park will yield untold pleasure to the people of Denver, and as an attraction to visitors will prove a commercial asset worth one hundred times its cost.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Warwick M. Downing, “How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks,” 12.

¹⁵⁴ “Executive Committee Report to the Joint Committee of the Mountain Park Project,” (7 December 1911), in Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job No. 5582, microfilm in DHCP.

The committee recognized that the growing popularity of the automobile and scenic tourism presented a prime opportunity to make mountain recreation pay Denver handsomely. The report describes a “vast region immediately tributary to Denver”—bounded by South Boulder Creek on the north, the Platte River on the south, and reaching westward all the way to the continental divide—as a geographic hinterland containing scenic resources that could be developed to enhance Denver’s tourist economy. This mountain region “embraces scenery that for beauty and grandeur is unexcelled in the world. It is well watered and well wooded, some of it covered with immense pine forests. It has all the attractions that endear the mountains to everyone.” This largely undeveloped wilderness in Denver’s backyard held the promise of becoming “the great playground of the nation.”¹⁵⁵

Citing a range of attractions long touted by mountain boosters, the committee boasted, “Our mountains offer the opportunity of the greatest summer resort country in America. Nowhere else is there such a combination. Cool weather, climate, healthful surroundings, variety of amusement, with an invigorating atmosphere.” Given these resources, Denver should invest in making the local mountains accessible to visitors as a way to increase tourist numbers and their length of stay in the city. “[I]f the average length of their stay in and about Denver be doubled, the cost of the parks would be repaid in a single year. Our belief is that such parks will not only prolong the average visit of the tourist several times, but will add very largely to the number of

Copies of this report can also be found in Mountain Park Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, Meeting Minutes, 8 December 1911, in Denver Chamber of Commerce Papers, Box 4, FF 10, Western History Collection, DPL. Page numbers cited hereafter for this report indicate the original report pagination. The copy in the Chamber of Commerce Minute Books is doubly paginated to indicate which pages in the minute books contain the report and related documents (pp. 737-746).

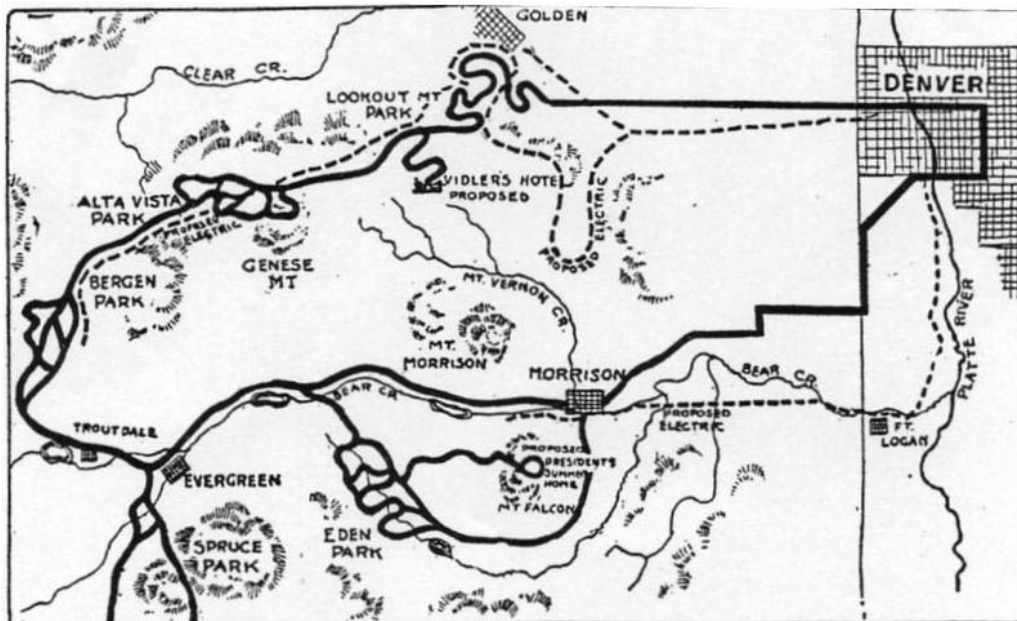
¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

visitors, and in the end will largely be the cause of adding millions yearly to the wealth of the state.”

In addition to serving Denver’s business community by boosting tourism, the parks would be of great benefit to Denver’s urban denizens, including those without the means for auto travel. “We believe the Mountain Park should be more than a picnic place; it should be a summer home for the people of Denver.... The masses should be encouraged to spend a week or a month every summer in the mountains, and everything should be provided for their comfort and amusement.” To serve these constituents as well as tourists lodging in town, the committee reiterated its firm conviction that private rail lines from Denver to Golden and Morrison “would be speedily built when proper franchises were granted by the people.” Ideally, scenic railways within the park region would also be constructed, with “several small rustic depots at convenient points.” Accordingly, the committee included in its proposed amendment to the city charter a clause providing for the granting of a long-term franchise for streetcar or rail companies by vote of Denver taxpayers.¹⁵⁶

Importantly, the report outlined a fairly specific park geography, one that diverged significantly from J.B. Walker’s 1910 proposal. Rather than a single large reservation, which is what Walker and other proponents seem to have envisioned, the committee proposed instead an integrated network of smaller parks and connecting parkways. “Our conception of a Mountain Park is a chain or series of parks somewhat in the form of a semi-circle... Each park should be connected with all the others by a well built road, and each end of the chain should be connected with Denver by a splendid drive.” But the Mountain Parks Committee plan departed even further from Walker’s in that the loop it described bypassed completely the lower section of Bear Creek

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 2, 3, 5-7.



Source: Denver Chamber of Commerce, *News Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (May, 1912).

Figure 2. Mountain Parks Committee Plan, 1912. This map shows the location of parks, roads, and electric car or trolley lines proposed by the MPAC in advance of the May 1912 municipal election.

Canyon with its outlet at Morrison, as well as Mount Falcon and Walker's Garden of the Titans commercial park. "[C]ommencing at a point in the vicinity of Lookout Mountain" with an entry from Golden, the committee suggested that the loop of parks include "a tract in Spruce Park," another "along Bear Creek above [to the west of] Evergreen," another in Eden Park, and a final tract that followed Turkey Creek to the mouth of its canyon a mile south of Morrison. Once again, the committee had moved to distance its work from J.B. Walker.¹⁵⁷

Thorough in its logic, beautiful in its simplicity, awesome in its ambitions, the committee's plan still depended upon convincing the city's government to take an active role. "Private initiative in this regard has proved a failure," stated the report, in a pointed reference to Speer's efforts to secure a mountain park via philanthropy. "It requires the power of Government

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 2-3.

to make the movement a success,” and if Denver would just make the initial investment, enthusiasm for the project would “spread over the entire state and unite with it the private capital so necessary in addition to Governmental action.” In fact, the committee recommended a stepped-up campaign to solicit Denver’s wealthy for donations of land or money toward the parks. “Denver has been unfortunate in that private wealth has done comparatively little to beautify our city, and it is our belief that if the matter is properly explained a large share if not all the money for the acquisition of the land might be derived in this way.” In addition, the committee had already contacted Congress, the Colorado State Board of Land Commissioners, and the Union Pacific Railway Company, asking these major landowners to withdraw land in the park region from sale pending action by the city.

The final component of the plan was a draft of legislation amending the city’s charter that would allow the city to proceed in executing the plan. The bill contained just three clauses. First, it gave the Park Commission the authority “to acquire and improve land for parks, parkways and roads outside the limits of the City and County of Denver.” The city claimed the authority to obtain the parklands not only through direct purchases or the receipt of gifts, but also through condemnation proceedings if necessary. Second, the bill authorized the city to grant a franchise for railway and streetcar services to and within the parks. This clause was necessary to override an existing ordinance that prohibited rail or streetcar lines within the city’s interior parks. Third, the amendment established a modest tax of one-half mill on each dollar of taxable property in Denver, to be earmarked for mountain park development. At a time of heightening public concern about municipal taxes, this levy was designed to be “small, so small that the amount of increase for each taxpayer will only be about one and one-half cent.” The tax would initiate with a five-year term, and then be renewable annually at a rate not to exceed one-half mill. The

committee felt that a tax levy was more appropriate to fund the parks because “the entire cost will not be sufficiently large to justify a bond issue, and because the project should be started in a small way.” Accordingly, the bill provided for bonds to be issued in the future as deemed necessary.¹⁵⁸

On 8 December 1911, the Mountain Parks Committee presented this report at a meeting including the Real Estate Exchange and Chamber of Commerce mountain park committees, and the Chamber’s board of directors. The plan was unanimously approved, and K.A. Pence immediately sent off copies of the plan to the general membership of the Chamber of Commerce, Real Estate Exchange, and Motor Club. The support of the three commercial bodies was virtually unanimous; only one voting member dissented in the three votes for approval. Within just a week, 8,000 citizen signatures had been secured to place the matter on the ballot at the upcoming municipal election in May.¹⁵⁹

Mobilizing the People of Denver

If the Mountain Parks Committee had planned on help from Speer or his machine in the upcoming months as they mobilized public support for the May 1912 vote, any such expectations were quickly dashed. Within days of the Mountain Parks Committee’s triumphant presentation of its report, Speer had embroiled himself in a political debacle so foul that his reputation

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 5-6. The final version is Denver, Colorado, Ordinance No. 56, Series 1912, Supervisors’ Bill No. 36, pp. 17-18.

¹⁵⁹ For the meeting attendees and memo forwarding the plan to the three organizations, see Mountain Park Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, Meeting Minutes, 8 December 1911; and Kingsley A. Pence to the Denver Chamber of Commerce, The Denver Real Estate Exchange, and The Denver Motor Club, memo, 8 December 1911; both in Denver Chamber of Commerce Papers, Box 4, FF 10, Western History Collection, DPL. For the votes of the commercial bodies and 8,000 signatures, see Warwick M. Downing, “Mountain Park for Denver in Sight,” *The Denver Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin*, v. 2, no. 9 (March 1912), 10.

suffered permanent damage, and his mayoral administration quickly began to hemorrhage. Whatever political capital he might have brought to bear in favor of the mountain parks during the upcoming election was rendered impotent by the scandal, making Speer quite irrelevant—if not an outright liability—in the passage of the Mountain Parks Amendment.

The drama unfolded around the way Speer booted county assessor Henry J. Arnold from office. Arnold was a business partner of Seth Bradley's who had previously worked for William Bell and William Jackson Palmer of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. In a nod to Bradley, Bell, and Palmer, Speer had chosen Arnold in 1910 as the Democratic candidate for the post of county assessor. Soon, however, Arnold was at odds with Speer, as he began to champion equity in assessing property values, especially those of downtown businesses and wealthy estates. His efforts quickly gained him the support of good-government reformers, particularly the vehemently anti-Speer Citizen's Party, which was led by J.B. Walker's son James Randolph. During the fall of 1911 Arnold publicly threatened to use the power of his office to detain the entire 1912 tax assessment in protest of the Speer administration's quasi-legal actions.

In early December Speer moved decisively to rid himself of Arnold's meddling. On the evening of 14 December—just inside of a week after the three commercial bodies had embraced the mountain park plan—Speer sent his slate of new city/county officials, including a new assessor, to the board of supervisors at their regular evening meeting. The roster came without prior notification and Speer made it known he expected immediate approval. Obediently, the board swore in the new officials that very night, effectively removing Arnold from his post. But word of the purge leaked to Arnold, who rushed to the courthouse, barricaded himself in his

office, and alerted the press. Surrounded by Speer's police and armed toughs deep into the night, Arnold eventually left peacefully, surrendering his office to the new appointee.¹⁶⁰

The incident ignited a firestorm of public fury against Speer and his machine from which the mayor could not recover. An anti-Speer rally the weekend after the purge drew, according to some estimates, as many as 30,000 participants—as much as thirteen percent of the city's population. To a growing number of Denverites, Speer's longtime critics increasingly appeared to be right. His tax policies were notoriously imbalanced in favor of his wealthiest partisans; his refusal to reign in Denver's utilities as they charged flagrantly excessive rates for services smacked of corporate interests; worse, he exercised a dictatorial grasp on city hall. The Arnold affair overshadowed all of these issues, but also gave them a new meaning by highlighting Speer's intolerance of dissent and his heavy-handed manipulation of power. In light of all this, reformers who had long been pushing for commission government, which they naively believed would rid city hall of corruption, gained a new following among Denver voters. His second term nearing its end, Speer declined even to run for reelection, effectively ending any official role he might have played in the mountain parks campaign.¹⁶¹

Nonetheless, the mayor's tarnished reputation and the fiery political debates that accompanied the campaign to elect his replacement shaped the mountain parks effort in critical ways. In light of the scandal, Speer's beautification efforts, which had previously garnered substantial bipartisan support, increasingly came under question. Projects that had once seemed to epitomize his civic patriotism looked more like land grabs and special favors to friends in the real estate business. Moreover, as public animosity toward Speer grew after December so did

¹⁶⁰ Detailed treatment of this incident, its background, and the ensuing public outcry is given in Goodstein, *Robert Speer's Denver*, 164-177.

¹⁶¹ Goodstein, *Robert Speer's Denver*, 178-186.

dissatisfaction with the mayor's expensive City Beautiful projects, particularly the Civic Center, and the heavy burden of taxes and debt that Speer had created. It was in just this context that the Mountain Parks Committee and the three commercial organizations set out to sway the voters of Denver in favor of their ambitious plan. The campaign, organizers realized, had to accomplish several things at once: explain the mountain park concept and its benefits to Denver's residents; emphasize the affordability of the proposed mill levy; and detach the mountain parks movement from the political controversies surrounding the mayor, his machine, and the upcoming election that would replace him.

To these ends, K.A. Pence orchestrated an elaborate public relations campaign to win public support for the charter amendment. In addition to extensive publicity to members of the Denver Chamber, Real Estate Exchange, and Motor Club, the Mountain Parks Committee worked to reach a much broader segment of the public via both coverage and advertising in all the daily newspapers, public addresses, a moving picture show to be screened at the city's cinema houses, and bulletins posted inside the city's streetcars. The materials planned included 300 panoramic views and 750 large maps for display in businesses throughout town. On 2 May, "thousands of letters and circulars explaining the project were sent out to the people of Denver," officially launching the election campaign.¹⁶²

Pence penned a one-minute talk that members of the Denver Chamber could memorize and then help spread the word. "If you believe in the project, buttonhole the first man you see and strenuously preach the doctrine of mountain parks," he urged. His talk emphasized that the chain of parks back of Golden and Morrison would all be within 18 miles of the city limits,

¹⁶² Warwick M. Downing, "Mountain Park for Denver in Sight," *The Denver Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin*, v. 2, no. 9 (March 1912), 10; "Mountain Parks Movement List," in Pence Scrapbook, p. 18; letters and circulars described in "Campaign Started for Mountain Park," *Colorado Transcript* (2 May 1912).

would be connected by a 55-mile drive, and would without doubt be served by an electric car line. The increase in tourism and value of the parks would raise the value of Denver real estate across the board, he pointed out. And, most importantly, the immediate cost to taxpayers would be so minimal—only \$1 per year on a home worth \$6,000, and only 1/70th of the total levy—that it would be easily repaid by a day's enjoyment of the mountains. Indeed, the committee had settled on a half-mill levy specifically to address concerns about taxation, intentionally setting the amount low enough to avoid opposition and cultivate support even among small taxpayers. This strategy worked, as well before the election Downing could report with pride that even “the smaller taxpayers heartily support the amendment.” Large advertisements demonstrating the individual cost to homeowners—ranging from 25 cents per year up to a dollar, depending upon the value on one's home—ran not only in the *Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* but also in the Denver dailies.¹⁶³

This economic argument was carefully paired with a second rationale emphasizing how the mountain parks would bequeath a lasting nature amenity to Denver residents. “Playgrounds of Nature,” read one such ad, promising that a yes vote would represent “the first step in securing for yourself and your children the greatest and most healthful parks of any city in the country.” Through arguments such as these, mountain park promoters could balance the narrow interest of Denver's business community in boosting tourism and real estate development through the park plan with a broad appeal to the public good. The natural mountain playgrounds promised a tangible benefit to a wider community of individual families that would improve the physical and psychical health of men, women, and children. The promised rail service would open the parks to nature-seekers from the middle and working classes, who did not yet own automobiles. These

¹⁶³ K.A. Pence, “One Minute Talk on Mountain Parks,” *The Denver Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin*, v. 2, no. 11 (May 1912), 8.

concerns reflected the committee's awareness and acceptance of a range of Progressive-era beliefs in the way nature recreation fostered individual and public health, and how by the early twentieth century public parks were understood as both desirable amenities and tools for social and environmental reform. Framed in this way the mountain parks, which would "bring thousands of tourists—give enjoyment to all people—and add millions to Denver values," promised something for everyone. It was a powerful rationale for public expenditure on relatively distant nature recreation that might appeal to the growing number of progressive-minded voters in the city.¹⁶⁴

In April, the Chamber of Commerce presented its members a list of "Five Things to Do This Summer!" First on the agenda was the admonition to "Keep out of Politics," followed closely by "Make the Mountain Park a Reality for Denver."¹⁶⁵ The pairing of these two goals illustrates quite precisely how important the municipal political scene of spring 1912 was in the minds of the mountain park movement leaders. While they viewed the ongoing political upheaval as a source of negative national publicity that was harming Denver's ability to attract new business and residents, they saw in the mountain parks a means to overcome these losses and, perhaps, divert attention from seedy political news. The challenge was to win passage of the mountain parks amendment from a voting public that was hungry for political change, fiscal retrenchment, and an end to corruption in government.

One vehicle the committee devised for divorcing the mountain parks from partisan politics was a group known as the Mountain Park League. Established in March 1912, the league

¹⁶⁴ "Playgrounds of Nature," *RMN* (n.d.); "Vote for Mountain Parks At Tuesday's Election," *RMN* (19 May 1912), 2; "What Mountain Parks Mean," undated, unsourced clipping in Pence Scrapbook.

¹⁶⁵ "Five Things to Do This Summer!" *Denver Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* v. 2, no. 10 (April 1912), cover.

played an important role in the publicity effort leading up to the election. Its members included luminaries representing many of the major civic, religious, and political groups across the political spectrum. In this way, the league could both foster multi-partisan support for the mountain parks, as well as demonstrate that the project was non-partisan. Its members pledged to “recommend our citizens to vote for the mountain parks charter amendment, using all honorable means to obtain its passage.” Leading the league’s member list were Governor John Shafroth, Mayor Speer, and the three mayoral candidates standing for election that spring: the Citizens’ party candidate Henry Arnold, Dewey C. Bailey of the Republican party, and the Democratic nominee J.B. Hunter. The editors and publishers of Denver’s four major newspapers, including Thomas Patterson and F. G. Bonfils, were members of the league, representing the varied political interests of these dailies. A long, unsurprising roster of Denver’s most influential businessmen and government officials joined with religious leaders and a strong cadre of anti-Speer reform leaders on the league, including the juvenile court judge Benjamin Lindsey, one of Speer’s most vocal opponents. Missing from the list, however, were any members of the Walker family.¹⁶⁶

A number of prominent women were members of the league as well, perhaps the most significant one being Sarah Platt Decker, a leader of national renown in the women’s club movement. Decker had helped found the Colorado Federation of Women’s Clubs Lobby, an organization so influential in the state capital that it earned a reputation as the legislature’s third branch. She had served as president of the national General Federation of Women’s Clubs from 1904-1908, and vice president for two years before that, during which time the GFWC played a

¹⁶⁶ “Mountain Parks League Formed to Boost Plan,” *Denver Republican* (12 May 1912). Members of Mountain Park League listed in “Mountain Park League,” *Denver Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* v. 2, no. 11 (May 1912), 4. The central role of this group in the movement’s publicity effort is indicated in “Mountain Parks Movement List,” in Pence Scrapbook, p. 18.

major role in the battle to preserve Hetch Hetchy, to establish Mesa Verde National Park, and in forest preservation nationwide. Locally, Denver clubwomen had built a lengthy resume of successful civic improvement and municipal housekeeping reforms. Decker's presence on the league indicated that Denver's able clubwomen—who had gained suffrage in 1893 and were seasoned voters, as well as influential politicians, by 1912—would support the amendment. By enlisting the support of Decker and the other women on the Mountain Park League, movement leaders may well have hoped that their presence would lend connotations of feminine virtue to the mountain parks idea, in sharp contrast to the government corruption represented by Speer.¹⁶⁷

Indeed, such gendered symbolism lies at the heart of the most memorable, and previously unexplained, tactic of the campaign for the mountain park amendment. On Election Day, the Mountain Parks Committee stationed “two or more beautiful young ladies ... each dressed in white with wide blue sashes,” at each polling location. The maidens “carried the appeal, ‘Vote For the Mountain Parks.’” More than 200 girls flooded the Chamber of Commerce building the day after K.A. Pence posted the call for “good looking young ladies” to serve as election-day workers, and more came in the days that followed. The sheer number of applicants demonstrated the popularity of the mountain parks idea among middle class young women. And if Pence had worried that the mayoral race would overwhelm voters' attention, leading many to neglect the charter amendment at the end of the ballot, his unusual strategy to hold voter's attention paid off doubly. The press lavished coverage on the girls—many articles featured the photos and names of those hired—adding yet another element to the publicity given the amendment.

This was no quaint publicity stunt—it was a shrewd and sophisticated campaign strategy that employed gendered symbolism to frame the mountain parks as an apolitical project. Pence

¹⁶⁷ On Decker, see Keefover-Ring, ch. 1.

issued strict instructions to his workers: they were to avoid any form of flirtatious behavior and refrain from advocating for any party. And so, their behavior carefully desexualized and dressed in virginal white, the maidens symbolized purity, virtue, and an innocent detachment from politics. All of these characteristics were qualities that movement leaders hoped to associate with the mountain parks and, in so doing, disassociate the parks with the city's noisy politics, its corrupt machines, its shrill reformers, and, especially, with Speer's sullied name. In Warwick Downing's estimation, the girls were the single "most effective feature" of the entire mountain parks campaign. As one reporter observed, "What voters could resist the dainty miss with her white frock, her plump but rapidly tanning bare arms and an exquisite neck that was in for its share of freckles too? Nobody!"¹⁶⁸

The committee's efforts met with resounding success. The May 1912 election saw Denver voters throw Speer's machine decisively out of office and elect Henry Arnold of the progressive Citizen's Party as mayor. Moreover, while voters defeated a playgrounds bill that was widely held to be another Speer graft, the mountain parks amendment passed with a strong majority.¹⁶⁹ The day after the election the *Denver Post* published preliminary election results, which detailed the votes for and against the mountain parks amendment by voting district.

¹⁶⁸ "400 Pretty Girls Wanted," *RMN*, (15 May 1912); "Mountain Parks Committee Asks for Assistance," *Denver Republican* (15 May 1912); "Girls, Thin, Fat, Blonde, Brunette and 'Sorrel' Storm Commerce Chamber," *Post* (16 May 1912); " 'Don't Flirt, Girls,' Say Park Boosters," *Denver Express* (16 May 1912); "400 Girls to Work at Polls Will Boost Mountain Parks," *RMN* (17 May 1912); "Smile All Girls May Venture to Offer When Asking Votes for Mountain Park Amendment," *Denver Republican* (17 May 1912); "Maids to Buttonhole Voters in Behalf of Mountain Parks," *Denver Republican* (18 May 1912); "Pretty Girls Dare Freckles to Win for Mountain Parks," *Times* 21 May 1912. Also see Warwick Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," 14.

¹⁶⁹ A raft of pre-election newspaper editorials and advertisements warned voters that the playgrounds bill was a Speer graft, see, for example, "Smash Playground Commission Scheme; Amendment is Trap," *RMN* (18 May 1912); "Nothing But Fake is Playground Act, Says Ben Lindsey," *RMN* (19 May 1912); "Women Denounce Playgrounds Law Change as Vicious," *RMN* (19 May 1912); "Vote Down Playground Amendment; It's a Fake," *RMN* (20 May 1912); "Father of Playgrounds Says 'Defeat Denver Amendment'," *Post* (20 May 1912).

Though incomplete (the paper was able to report on 29,500 of the eventual 37,100 votes tallied), these results provide a remarkable map of where support for and opposition to the mountain parks was strongest. The largest majorities in favor of the mountain parks amendment came from voting wards 8, 9, and 10. Bounded roughly by 9th Avenue on the south, Speer Boulevard, Welton Street, and Downing Avenue through downtown, 33rd Avenue on the north, and Colorado Boulevard on the east, this area contained Denver's most prominent upper and middle-class neighborhoods. As might be expected, the measure also attracted strong majorities in the downtown business district, as well as the large southern and eastern residential areas bounded by Yale Avenue to the south and Yosemite Street on the east. These voting patterns confirmed that progressive minded middle- and upper-class voters made up the core of support for the mountain parks plan.

In working-class districts the measure polled equivocally, where the numbers for and against were quite close. This suggests that the possibility of accessible, affordable mountain recreation appealed to a significant number of working-class voters as well. Only two districts reported a pronounced majority in opposition to the amendment: these lay west of the central Platte Valley and included the North Denver neighborhoods of Berkeley Park and Highlands. The reasons for such strong opposition to the mountain parks in this area are unclear. This part of the city included ethnic working-class neighborhoods as well as prosperous ones. The primary road to Golden, West 44th Avenue, ran through the area, and so local businesses stood to benefit from park traffic. But it is possible that the Walker family, who may well have opposed the legislation, retained significant ties in the area. Once all votes were counted, the amendment passed with a decisive majority of 8,000. Effectively divorced from Speer and his brand of politics by the Mountain Parks Committee and its shrewd promotion of the mountain parks

amendment, the parks instead seem to have represented to many Denver voters a truly progressive, democratic initiative: a peoples' movement for public mountain recreation.¹⁷⁰

Conclusion

If the idea of establishing municipal mountain parks had circulated within Denver's booster community for years, it did not attain a definite shape until late 1910, after J.B. Walker presented a coherent, detailed, and well-argued plan for making such parks a civic enterprise. Walker's vigorous efforts to convince the Chamber of Commerce and Real Estate Exchange to embrace his plan were successful only to an extent, however, for once the commercial bodies took up the matter that winter, they moved rather quickly to distance the mountain parks plan from Walker and his obvious conflict of interest in the project. In addition to limiting its membership to those who did not hold real estate in the area, the committee also came up with a park geography of its own, one that largely skirted Morrison and Walker's Garden of the Titans. After this, Walker largely moved on to other schemes, including the construction of a presidential summer home on Mt. Falcon, a project that was never completed. He would later offer Garden of the Titans to the city to add to the mountain park system. After years of haggling Denver purchased the site in 1928, renaming it Red Rocks Park.

As for Mayor Speer, his role in the mountain parks movement has been largely misunderstood. During his first two terms in office, Speer refused to commit city money to developing mountain recreation of any kind, while he lavished funds on other improvements

¹⁷⁰ "Election Results," *Post* (22 May 1912). The paper also published a precinct map before the election which I have used to analyze the results: "Learn Today Where You Vote," *Post* (20 May 1912); Seth B. Bradley, "The Origin of the Denver Mountain Parks System," *The Colorado Magazine* 9 (January 1932), 27. There is no concrete evidence that J.B. Walker opposed (or supported) the bill. His stance on the legislation is not known. However, his absence from membership on the Mountain Parks League suggests, at least, that he no longer supported the Mountain Parks Committee.

such as the civic center, Cherry Creek, and urban parks and boulevards. Speer largely drew the line at city limits; other than the purchase of Inspiration Point, he would not invest municipal money in parks outside the city's geopolitical boundaries. Even before Speer's administration was hobbled by political scandal in December 1911, the Mountain Parks Committee had concluded that it must bring the matter directly before the public; and as Speer's credibility plummeted the committee strove to divorce the mountain parks campaign from Speer and city politics generally. When Speer left office in May 1912, *Denver Municipal Facts* recounted his many achievements as mayor. The article made no mention whatsoever of the mountain parks among the legacy of his first two terms.¹⁷¹ Speer returned to office in 1916 for a third term, one that was cut short by his death in 1918. Even during this two-year period, after the mountain parks had been written into the city charter and proven their popularity, Speer battled the committee (recomposed by that time as a formal advisory commission) over funding, acquisitions, and development (see Chapter Four). In the memorials written at his death, the mountain parks were not included in the record of his many achievements.¹⁷² Clearly Speer did not consider the mountain parks one of his own projects.

Nonetheless, Speer's indirect contributions to the mountain parks were substantial, for historians have correctly linked the mountain parks with Denver's City Beautiful efforts, a topic which is the focus of the next chapter. Although he provided little in the way of direct support for the effort, Speer's City Beautiful campaigns formed the essential precedent for public acceptance of the mountain park scheme. Speer not only schooled a larger public in the value of public parks, parkways, and mountain viewing areas, these amenities also garnered the

¹⁷¹ "Eight Years Brought Many Improvements in Parks and Playgrounds," *DMF* 4 (1 June 1912), 9-10. See also *DMF* (11 May 1912), 9-10.

¹⁷² "In Memoriam," and "The Story of Mayor Speer," *DMF* (May 1918), 2-4, 17.

appreciation of Denver residents across the political and social spectrum. Indeed, by the time of the election in May 1912, the parks had gained the support of a striking range of political partisans, civic leaders, commercial interests, and women's groups. During a time of political discord, mountain parks appeared to be one thing on which all—or at least most—could agree.

Still, the Mountain Parks Committee faced a daunting task in convincing Denver's voters to tax themselves for parks many miles outside the city. Given the political discord associated with the mayoral election, voters were wary of taxes and alert to the possibility of graft, fraud, or the lingering influence of Speer. Moreover, only a tiny fraction of Denver residents owned motorcars at this time: the population at large was not an obvious constituency for such distant parks and roads.¹⁷³ K.A. Pence's successful campaign to win public support for the mountain parks charter amendment addressed all of these issues. He carefully disengaged the mountain parks idea from city politics, in part through the Mountain Parks League and the young women stationed at the polls. He preached the economics of tourism to the business community. Then he emphasized the affordability of the tax levy and its direct benefit to the average voter. The mountain parks would not simply be for tourists; they would provide a desirable nature amenity to Denver's citizens. By making mountain recreation accessible through roads, rail lines, and park sites, the parks would enhance the quality of life of all Denver residents, not simply the city's wealthy, for generations to come. By framing the parks as "playgrounds of nature" that all Denver residents could enjoy, Pence and the committee convinced a strong majority of voters to commit their tax money to the project, effectively forcing the city government to come along. In all of these ways, the mountain parks defined the natural mountain scenery in terms oriented around the city. As a tourist destination and a public amenity, park promoters packaged the

¹⁷³ The 1910 census reported 5,220 automobiles registered in Denver, representing roughly 2.5 percent of the total population. See Leonard and Noel, *Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 257.

beautiful natural landscapes of the mountains as a means to enhance the quality of life of Denver residents as well as the economic life of the city.

CHAPTER III

PLAYGROUNDS OF NATURE:

THE CITY BEAUTIFUL, SCENIC PRESERVATION, AND THE MOUNTAIN PARKS

Introduction: "The Wild Parks and Forest Reserves of the West"

"The tendency nowadays to wander in wildernesses is delightful to see," wrote the famed wilderness prophet John Muir in 1898. "Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life."¹⁷⁴ More than a century later these remain some of Muir's most oft-quoted words. The stuff of Sierra Club calendars and coffee-table books—and promotional literature for the Denver Mountain Parks—they are phrases that continue to evoke the meaning of wilderness to generations of readers far removed from Muir's world.

For this reason, modern readers of Muir can, perhaps too easily, imbue his wilderness rhetoric with their own presumptions about wild land and its preservation. However, read in its entirety Muir's "The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West" offers an insightful window onto the historical moment from which the national park boom of the Progressive Era emerged. Because Muir is best remembered for his evangelical promotion of wilderness preservation through the creation of national parks, this piece is instructive in unpacking what this idea meant to Progressive-Era nature lovers before the national park idea was fully

¹⁷⁴ John Muir, "The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West," *Atlantic Monthly* 81 (January 1898): 15-28.

developed, before the controversy over Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy valley had clarified the range of viewpoints within the conservation movement, and before the wilderness idea had accrued later associations with absolute preservation, roadlessness, ecology, and the absence of both humanity and technology.¹⁷⁵

In fact, in this essay Muir outlines quite neatly a conception of wilderness as parkland, in which human excursionists, and the infrastructure to support them, were central to the concept of nature preservation. It was a body of ideas that was not entirely new. For while many of Muir's ideas about nature, particularly his biocentrism, were fresh and revolutionary, he also drew heavily upon the well-developed ideology of the urban park movement. Urban landscape parks had long been framed as a remedy for the tiredness and shaken nerves that unmitigated city life fostered. In an important sense, Muir's critique of "overcivilization" recognized that his readers felt overwhelmed by stifling city environs and an unhealthy urban lifestyle. While Muir developed his philosophy of wild nature well beyond most of his contemporaries, he often framed his ideas in the familiar language of the urban park.

Muir's goal in this essay was not simply to "show forth the beauty, grandeur, and all-embracing usefulness our wild mountain forest reservations and parks." His larger point was to encourage the public to think of these areas as vast parks. Muir hoped his words would incite

¹⁷⁵ On Muir, see Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, (1982), 122-181; Thurman Wilkins, *John Muir: Apostle of Nature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995); Char Miller, "A Sylvan Prospect: John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and Early Twentieth-Century Conservationism," in *American Wilderness: A New History*, ed. Michael Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 131-147; and Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). A growing body of literature is bringing attention to the marked differences in conservationist thought of the Progressive Era versus later periods. See especially Paul S. Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington's National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), and Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy: America's Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

“the people to come and enjoy them, and get them into their hearts, that so at length their preservation and right use might be made sure.”¹⁷⁶ By framing wilderness as parkland, Muir hoped to lay the foundation for a public commitment to preserving the natural integrity of these landscapes. This grouping of ideas, linking natural beauty and the public park, tourism and public health, as well as a growing understanding of the need for measures to preserve the desired natural landscape within parklands, had long been tenets of the urban park movement. Muir’s singular rhetorical gifts aside, much of his message would have rung true to city folk across the country who had campaigned for the municipal establishment of local landscape parks in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

In Muir’s view, there were naturally occurring parks scattered throughout the mountains of the American West. In Mount Rainier, he wrote, surely “Nature had what we call parks in mind—places for rest, inspiration, and prayers.” In this way Muir naturalized the concept of the wild landscape park as a place for human restoration. Created, in his thinking, by Nature herself for this purpose, it was the original nature of places like Mount Rainier that defined them as parks. In addition, Muir tended to pair this notion of a naturally existing park with mountainous terrain. He frequently used the term “mountain park” to describe such places as distinct from, or distinct elements within, a forest reserve. At a time when the national parks were but few, naturally occurring mountain parks were more likely to be found within a forest reserve, on unprotected public lands, or under some other jurisdiction. To Muir, and presumably many others, the notion of a mountain park connoted an area not only of natural beauty, but one that

¹⁷⁶ After its initial publication, “Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West” was reprinted in Muir’s 1901 collection, *Our National Parks*, which devoted two chapters to the forest reserves and the remaining chapters to Yosemite, Yellowstone, General Grant and Sequoia national parks. The quotes showing his intent are from his preface to this volume. John Muir, *Our National Parks* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991, orig. pub. 1901), xvii.

also possessed naturally occurring park-like features: he conceived of them as places created by Nature, or God, for human restoration.

Moreover, Muir's memorable criticisms of modern "civilization" did not amount to simple antimodernism; instead, these themes shared much with the ideology of the urban park movement, particularly its concern for ameliorating the physical, psychological, and moral demands of urban life. This was precisely the reasoning behind his argument that "mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life." He applauded the growing number of people who, "Awakening from the stupefying effects of the vice of over-industry and the deadly apathy of luxury" were "trying as best they can to mix and enrich their own little ongoings with those of Nature, and to get rid of rust and disease." The modern age, he observed with a sense of hope and promise, found these wakening creatures "briskly venturing and roaming" through woods and meadows, along riverbanks and mountaintops, "panting in whole-souled exercise, and rejoicing in deep, long-drawn breaths of pure wildness."

By 1900 such activities were no longer the province of a few rugged enthusiasts who had the means to travel to distant mountain destinations. Middle-class families already practiced just this kind of nature tramping in local park systems in a number of American cities. Boston's metropolitan park network offered such enjoyments, with natural forest, beach, and river way preserves close enough to the city for inexpensive day excursions. And Muir points approvingly to the "good roads" already built into the San Gabriel mountains that allowed "lowlanders" from Los Angeles and Orange County to "get well up into the sky and find refuge in hospitable camps and club-houses where, while breathing reviving ozone, they may absorb the beauty about them."

In fact, Muir took great pains to convince his readers that the western parks and forest reserves he so lovingly sketches were easily accessible for the public to use as parks. “All the Western mountains are still rich in wildness,” he pointed out, “and by means of good roads are being brought nearer civilization every year.” Indeed, the mountain parks and forest reservations of the West offered “the wildest health and pleasure grounds accessible and available to tourists seeking escape from care and dust and early death.” If the distant forest reserves seemed too remote and impenetrable, Muir informed his readers that this “magnificent realm of woods” was actually quite accessible “by railroads and trails and open ridges . . . not only to the determined traveler rejoicing in difficulties, but to those (may their tribe increase) who, not tired, not sick, just naturally take wing every summer in search of wildness.”

Muir believed that tourism would foster increased concern for the preservation of the natural landscape. “These grand reservations should draw thousands of admiring visitors at least in summer, yet they are neglected as if of no account, and spoilers are allowed to ruin them as fast as they like.” It was no coincidence, in Muir’s view, that interest “in the care and preservation of forests and wild places” was growing simultaneously with concern for “the half wild parks and gardens of towns.” To ensure the “right use” of the western forest reserves and mountain parks, Muir worked to develop a body of human patrons interested in protecting wild country. He did so by encouraging visitation and public access, not just of widely recognized destinations like Yosemite, Mt. Rainier, or Grand Canyon, but of the forest reserves generally.

Muir’s writing here reflects a historical moment when nature conservation in the United States was broad and diffuse, an optimistic and confident muddle of purpose and sentiment. During the 1890s federal conservation was predominantly a matter of decreeing forest reserves. After an 1891 law quietly authorized the president to “set apart and reserve” timbered lands on

the public domain “as public reservations,” some 40 million acres of mountainous and forested land in the West were withdrawn from entry.¹⁷⁷ Yet the purpose of the reserves remained undefined and the protections this status offered unspecified. Forest advocates—Muir was one of the most prominent during this period—watched in dismay as logging, grazing, and mining continued almost unabated, stripping the forests of their vegetation and the reserve system of its credibility.

By the late 1890s debate had come to center on whether use of the forests ought to be stopped entirely, as Muir and his cohort wanted, or managed to ensure a sustainable yield of forest resources while protecting watersheds and forest lands from utter denudation, a viewpoint embodied by the young forester Gifford Pinchot. The 1897 Forest Management Act largely settled the matter by establishing in law the purpose of the forest reserve system, which would be to manage use of the forests for timber, mining, and grazing to ensure a continued supply of these resources in perpetuity. Henceforth, the “principle object” of the forest reserves would have “nothing to do with beauty or pleasure;” instead forest management would be governed by economic considerations.¹⁷⁸

Muir responded to this blow by expanding his efforts to promote the nation’s forest reserves as public parklands for urban travelers. The 1898 essay under discussion here was his first response to the new law of the forests, and in it he determinedly educated his readers on the thirty forest reserves, “still in the main unspoiled,” that beckoned travelers who sought unmarred

¹⁷⁷ General Revision Act of 1891 quoted in G. Michael McCarthy, *Hour of Trial: The Conservation Conflict in Colorado and the West, 1891-1907* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 11.

¹⁷⁸ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 133-138.

natural beauty.¹⁷⁹ After 1900, however, Muir increasingly turned to the national parks as a vehicle for wilderness preservation. As places set aside from sale or development to serve expressly as parks where the public could encounter and enjoy natural beauty, scenic parks offered a more secure rationale for the wilderness protection he sought.

Yet in contrast to the forest reserves, the national parks were still a slender reed for such grand hopes. Only five existed by 1900: vast Yellowstone, sublime Yosemite, and the two tiny parks protecting the Sierra's big trees, Sequoia and General Grant, all of which dated from 1890 or before. Mount Rainier had just been reclassified a national park in 1899, having previously been part of a forest reserve. And, while Theodore Roosevelt is recognized for bringing conservation to the White House in 1901, he did not bring along a parallel commitment to scenic preservation. While Roosevelt took full advantage of the power granted to his office by the Antiquities Act of 1906 to declare national monuments that could protect sites with rare geologic or historical significance, Roosevelt's policies largely reflected Pinchot's point of view. The federal conservation agencies of his administration were dedicated to managing multiple uses of public resources, but they were often openly hostile to the strict preservation of beautiful scenery for public recreation.

By 1910, when Denver boosters gathered their energies to promote a mountain park plan for their city, scenic landscape park-making was still, by and large, the province of local governments. To be sure, Muir's earlier writings had done much to develop the concept of a "mountain park" as both wilderness and parkland, made accessible and beneficial to the public by good roads and good management. And considered on its own terms Muir's work certainly appears to have informed Denver's plan for a mountain park system. It seems to confirm the

¹⁷⁹ Muir, "The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West."

centrality of Muir's wilderness idea and of the national park movement in prompting Denver's mountain park plan. The problem with drawing such a conclusion, however, is that such a direct relationship is not supported by the evidence.

Between 1910 and 1913, during the two-year campaign that resulted in the successful mountain park bill of 1912 and the year of planning and development that followed, not one of Denver's mountain park promoters referenced Muir's writings or preservation work. Indeed, the terms "wild" or "wilderness" were notably rare in the public discussion of the parks.¹⁸⁰ This fact is telling, because Muir's writings were not only widely available by 1910 but would have provided ready-made support for Denver's mountain park scheme and lent the project some of Muir's credibility as a wilderness park advocate. But only an occasional reference to Yosemite appears in the many reports and recommendations of the Mountain Parks Committee and the Chamber of Commerce, and virtually no mention is made of the other national parks. Moreover, Denver organizers did not draw on the preservationist message of Colorado's own Enos Mills—another literary naturalist already known as the "John Muir of the Rockies"—who was in those same years spearheading the campaign to establish Rocky Mountain National Park in northern Colorado. This despite the fact that the Denver Chamber was an ardent supporter of the Rocky Mountain National Park proposal as a means of bringing tourists through Denver, and many leading Denverites lent their influence to Mills's cause.

In short, Denver's mountain park movement was neither originated nor promoted by a Muir-like figurehead who hoped to preserve primeval nature for nature's sake. Instead, again and again Denver's mountain park advocates—from J.B. Walker to K.A. Pence and Warwick Downing of the Mountain Parks Committee—pointed to the city as both the source of their

¹⁸⁰ The opening paragraph of Muir's "Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West" is quoted in its entirety in "Denver's Mountain Parks," *DMF [City of Denver]* (9 August 1913), 7.

inspiration and the beneficiary of their plans. They looked to the park-and-parkway systems of the City Beautiful; to the world-class cities that Denver hoped to emulate; to the theories that linked beautiful surroundings with civic patriotism and identity; and to the ideology that promoted national scenic tourism known as See America First. Instead of Muir's paean to the inherent spiritual values of wilderness, Denver boosters saw in the mountain beauty on their doorstep a recreational resource to be claimed and utilized for human betterment. To be sure, capturing the beauty of wild nature was basic to their plans, for this was the recreational medium they sought to develop. But it was the ideology of the urban park movement, which in Progressive-Era Denver was understood within the rubric of the City Beautiful, that guided Denver's mountain park promoters in their effort to obtain nature parks as a public amenity that would promote public health, enhance civic patriotism, and attract a lucrative tourist traffic to the city's doorstep.

This chapter explores the ways that the forms and theories of the City Beautiful movement shaped Denver's mountain park system. I begin by revisiting the mountain park debates of 1910-1912 to analyze how City Beautiful ideas informed the mountain parks endeavor. I then examine how these ideals dovetailed with See America First ideology to underwrite a persuasive argument for making extra-urban nature parks a municipal, publicly funded enterprise. Finally, I consider the mountain park plan created for Denver by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., focusing especially upon how Olmsted's plan bridged the distance between the City Beautiful and scenic preservation. This reflected Olmsted's pioneering work in comprehensive urban planning, in the Hetch Hetchy controversy, and in the effort to establish the National Park Service. Olmsted brought to the Denver Mountain Parks both concrete experience with the design and management of urban landscape parks, as well as a complex understanding

of the need for scenic preservation measures for such parklands. It was during Olmsted's two-year consulting relationship with Denver's park-makers that local rhetoric came, increasingly, to resemble the discourse of nature preservation and wilderness parks.

How the City Beautiful Created the Mountain Parks

As shown in the previous chapter, both John Brisben Walker, Sr., and Mayor Robert Speer positioned their mountain boulevard and park proposals within the framework of Denver's existing City Beautiful campaign. Rooted in disparate beginnings in nineteenth-century village improvement, municipal art, and Olmstedian landscape design, the City Beautiful idea had congealed by 1902 into a national movement that provided unity of theory and organizational support for thousands of local improvement societies. The movement continued to develop in theoretical and professional sophistication through the rest of that decade, as it gave aesthetic and spatial expression to Progressive-era urban reform and theory. At the height of its influence between 1902 and 1914, the City Beautiful movement included the fledgling stages of urban planning in the United States, along with an embrace of monumental design and elaborate classical-renaissance architecture that complemented its ongoing support of smaller-scale improvements.¹⁸¹

Mayor Speer, who began by calling simply for an access boulevard to the Pike National Forest, consistently spoke of his "Appian Way" as an extension of a city boulevard. However, as

¹⁸¹ The City Beautiful movement declined in significance by 1915 as urban planners moved away from its emphasis on costly embellishments in favor of more practical design solutions to urban problems. On the origins, chronology, and ideology of the City Beautiful, see Jon A. Peterson, "The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings," in Donald A. Krueckeberg, ed. *Introduction to Planning History in the United States* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers University, 1983), 40-57; and William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 9-95.

shown in Chapter Two, Speer never actually made the mountain parks a part of his City Beautiful program in the way he did urban park acquisitions, boulevards, or the civic center. All of the projects that Speer funded and shepherded to completion lay within city limits—they beautified the city itself—and Speer made these works the centerpiece of his publicity strategy. Throughout 1910, for example, the pages of the weekly city newsletter *Denver Municipal Facts* were packed with City Beautiful coverage. Speer’s publicity staff wrote feature after feature on Denver’s public amenities and City Beautiful efforts—its various parks and playgrounds, the zoo, and the neighborhood beautification projects of the local Out-Door League—along with regular coverage of national civic improvement trends. Because Speer’s improvements were popular among a wide range of Denver citizens, his beautification campaign helped to create a civic culture that was literate in City Beautiful ideology and open to ambitious public improvement schemes.¹⁸²

J.B. Walker surely understood this, for when he brought his mountain park proposal before Denver’s commercial organizations and readers of the *Post* in the autumn of 1910, he made extensive use of City Beautiful logic in crafting his appeal. First, Walker’s plan utilized the geography of the urban park-and-parkway system in a more complex way than did Speer’s. Walker did not propose a lone parkway reaching toward the mountains; he envisioned the mountain park as one component, complex in its own design, of a larger urban system featuring five landscaped boulevards from various Denver exit points to multiple park entrances. Walker’s

¹⁸² See, for example, “Denver’s Far-Sighted Park Policy,” *DMF* (30 April 1910), “Noted Civic Expert [Charles Mulford Robinson] on ‘The Development of Denver’,” *DMF* (14 May 1910), “Amusement Season at City Park is Now at Its Height,” *DMF* (27 August 1910), “Denver’s Great Show Park Popular with All Classes,” *DMF* (1 October 1910), “Inspiration Point Excels in Variety of Scenic Features,” *DMF* (29 October 1910), “Animals at City Park Zoo Friendly and Tame at Approach of Winter Season,” *DMF* (17 December 1910).

mountain park and radial boulevards comprised an intricate plan that promised to integrate Denver's many neighborhoods, urban parks, and parkways with an extensive mountain territory.

In addition to the familiar geography of his plan, Walker offered a thoroughgoing rationale for the mountain parks that placed them squarely within the ideological tradition of the City Beautiful movement. Explicitly framing his plan as a "scheme to beautify [the] city," Walker employed well-honed City Beautiful social and environmental theory to emphasize how the mountain park plan would cultivate civic pride and identity; how feeding an innate "love of beauty" through direct experience with mountain scenery would uplift and improve residents and visitors alike; and how capitalizing on this distinctive natural asset would give Denver an advantage over other cities hoping to attract desirable residents. His appeal to civic patriotism, economic rationality, and municipal competition was typical City Beautiful fare.

Walker also pointed to a number of precedents for extra-urban boulevards and landscape parks, citing three contemporary examples as the primary models for his plan. First, he had been inspired by a recent visit to Kansas City—well known as an exemplar of the City Beautiful—where he toured its famous park-and-boulevard system. In addition to this interurban system, Kansas City also boasted a large natural landscape park outside of town. Swope Park, a picturesque 1,334-acre tract of rolling, forested hills along the Blue River, lay four miles outside the city limits and had been donated to the city in 1898. Walker described how Kansas City's "progressive citizens" had fought tooth and nail against "the prejudice of old fogy property owners who just could not see the advantage of making their unimproved real estate more valuable by spending money on boulevards." But now the city's "splendid boulevard system" had garnered widespread acclaim. Indeed, as Walker had elaborated in his October 1910 meeting with Seth Bradley, Kansas City's beautification program "had created a new public spirit ... and

was bearing fruit in attracting many wealthy people from different sections of the country, who had erected beautiful homes near the parks and boulevards.” Walker believed “we had a much better opportunity to develop such a system in the mountains west of Denver.”¹⁸³

Two more provocative examples helped to make his point. The “little republic of Switzerland” netted \$100 million annually from mountain tourism, simply “because it was wise enough to develop fully its great canons, parks, and boulevards, making its splendid scenery so accessible that tourists lingered to view it all, spending their money freely while they lingered.” Closer to home, Colorado Springs, just ninety miles south, had already proven that such a strategy would work in Colorado. Because that small city had already “made the utmost of its parks and canons... tourists gladly spend two or three weeks there and have made the Springs one of the most famous and popular resorts in America.”¹⁸⁴

Denver’s hoteliers, shopkeepers, and restaurateurs, Walker argued, were losing millions in tourist dollars every year to their little neighbor to the south. “Having failed to develop her nearby places of natural beauty by rapid transit lines and boulevards for automobiles and carriage travel,” Denver only hosted scenic tourists “for a couple of days, one of which they spend in a trip over the Moffat road through the mountains, and the other in enjoying the Loop; then they flit away to Colorado Springs, where the far-sightedness of the people has furnished delightful driveways and swift-moving trolleys and inclined railways to all the places of scenic grandeur and beauty.” By comparing Denver’s progress—unfavorably—to other cities, Walker was

¹⁸³ “Magnificent Park System, Eight Square Miles, and Costing Only \$750,000, Planned for Denver,” *Post* (30 October 1910); Seth Bradley, “Origins of the Denver Mountain Park System,” *The Colorado Magazine* 9 (January 1932), 26. On Kansas City’s park system and Swope Park, see Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 118-119.

¹⁸⁴ “Magnificent Park System, Eight Square Miles, and Costing Only \$750,000, Planned for Denver,” *Post* (30 October 1910).

engaging in a common booster tactic and one often employed in City Beautiful campaigns. But he was also issuing a challenge to Denver's progressive-minded citizens, and to Mayor Speer, suggesting that the success of his mountain parks plan would be a measure of the city's achievement that promised to enhance Denver's national reputation.

During 1911, as the Mountain Parks Committee representing the city's commercial bodies took the lead on the project and Walker's influence diminished, City Beautiful ideas and forms remained central to the evolving mountain park concept. When the committee moved away from Walker's Morrison enterprises and his apparent preference for a single large park, they proposed instead a "necklace" of small parks linked by scenic drives.¹⁸⁵ This kind of park geography was modeled not on the few national parks then in existence, but on the far more numerous park-and-parkway systems gracing urban areas across the country. In fact, the committee's plan represented a direct application of City Beautiful park geography to wild mountain landscapes. It made particular sense for a municipal project: since the committee understood that city funding would be limited, they believed this design would be a pragmatic way to capture the best of the mountains' recreational resources while circumventing the need to purchase thousands of contiguous acres from countless property owners.¹⁸⁶

Citing relevant national models for the proposal, the committee situated its plan not in the context of the national parks and forests, but in the company of other cities then developing extra-urban park systems. Boston's metropolitan system, the committee pointed out, included

¹⁸⁵ While Walker's piece in the *Post*, particularly the map and photographs that accompany it, seems to suggest that Walker envisioned a single large park reserve, his intent remains unclear. The article refers inconsistently to both a single mountain park as well as to parks and, perhaps intentionally, leaves the actual boundaries of said park/s to readers' imaginations.

¹⁸⁶ "Executive Committee Report to the Joint Committee of the Mountain Park Project," 7 December 1911, Records of the Olmsted Associations, Series B, Job No. 5582, microfilm in DHCP.

parklands in “some eleven cities and twenty-three towns” at a cost of \$10 million. Chicago voters had recently approved by a “tremendous majority” a “great outlying forest reserve park system” and 75-mile scenic drive around the city. Philadelphia was then at work “on a scheme to park both sides of the Schuylkill River for many miles, taking in many of the outlying cities and towns.” Oklahoma City and San Diego, both much smaller than Denver, were already planning outlying parks and drives. If Denver wanted to “keep abreast of the times, and hold her own population as well as attract other population,” the committee urged, employing a typical competitive booster rationale, “she must be abreast with the other live cities.”¹⁸⁷ Thus, although the Mountain Parks Committee parted ways with Walker over size, scale and location, its members continued to conceive of the mountain parks in terms of the urban geography of the City Beautiful movement, and they continued to use much of Walker’s original rationale in their promotion of the project.

See America First and the City Beautiful

If Denver’s mountain park campaign grew out of City Beautiful thought and an urban frame of reference, it also drew on a relatively new idea for promoting western tourism known as See America First. Indeed, many of the arguments put forth by J.B. Walker and the Mountain Parks Committee had been introduced to Denver boosters a few years prior by Fisher Sanford Harris of Salt Lake City. It was Harris who coined the term “See America First” and articulated a detailed rationale for the development of scenic tourism in America, and particularly the West. Recent scholarship by historian Marguerite Shaffer has shown how this ideology linked scenic tourism in the West to the formation of national identity in the first half of the twentieth century.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

Schaffer explores how the rise of the urban-industrial nation-state created an infrastructure that made national scenic tourism possible on a broad scale, particularly through the corporate development of early national parks and publicity by railroad companies. Elsewhere, Shaffer observes that by the early twentieth century natural scenery had been widely reinterpreted as a type of economic asset; a belief that See America First shared with City Beautiful ideology.¹⁸⁸ However, as my analysis reveals, the two bodies of thought shared much more than one idea: the core tenets of See America First drew quite directly on City Beautiful thought. In this way urban environmental reform joined with national scenic tourism in a formulation that would find particular relevance in western cities such as Denver.

At its birth in late 1905, the See America First idea was motivated by a combination of economic and cultural nationalism and local boosterism. In response to reports in the financial press that American tourists spent more than \$150 million annually in foreign travel, Fisher Harris, secretary of the Salt Lake Commercial Club, came up with a platform that might unify western civic leaders and businessmen in an effort to capture those dollars for the home market by selling American travelers on western scenery. Harris's slogan "See Europe if You Will, but See America First," was aimed squarely at the class of travelers who went abroad regularly but rarely, if ever, ventured to scenic destinations within the United States.¹⁸⁹

In January 1906, the Salt Lake Commercial Club hosted a lively conference that saw the creation of the See America First League. Organizers hoped the league would function as a kind of interstate commercial organization whereby civic leaders, businessmen, railroad companies,

¹⁸⁸ Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001); "Scenery as an Asset: Assessing the 1930 Los Angeles Regional Park Plan," *Planning Perspectives* 16 (2001): 357-382.

¹⁸⁹ "The 'See America First' Conference," Salt Lake City, Utah, January 25-26, 1906," conference program, Manuscript Collections, Utah State History Archives.

and related financial interests would cooperatively work to advertise scenic tourism within the United States. The group planned to coordinate a “vast propaganda of education” that would instruct the people in the commercial and cultural value of American scenery. Experiencing firsthand the natural grandeur of Yosemite, Yellowstone, or Niagara, they fervently believed, would cultivate patriotism and pride in America; it would also help to overcome the persistent regionalism that lingered after Reconstruction, fostering instead a broader sense of national identity. For these reasons, Americans with the wealth and means to travel ought to invest first in knowing their own country.¹⁹⁰

At the inaugural conference Harris was elected executive secretary of the league, and he soon embarked on a six-week junket to win both followers and financial backing for the organization and its work. A gifted orator, Harris spoke before enthusiastic audiences in such cities as Spokane, Minneapolis, Washington, D.C., Denver, and Colorado Springs.¹⁹¹ Seemingly everywhere Harris went his message struck a responsive chord among listeners who appreciated its perfect blending of “business and sentiment.” He exhorted his audiences to imagine what they might build with the money they captured from the European tourist trade if those streams of sightseers were redirected to the American interior. “Millions of people know nothing about their own country except what they have read. ... [W]hat we want to do is to make Americans think of their own country first and not go galloping off to Europe or some other foreign land in search of recreation or beautiful scenery when we can furnish a superior article in the home market.” But

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ “Vast propaganda of education” is from “The ‘See American First’ Conference” program, p. 5. On Harris’s tour, see “To Crowd Work of ‘See America First,’” *The Salt Lake Tribune* (8 February 1906); “Fisher Harris is Back from East,” *The Salt Lake Tribune* (5 April 1906); “Fisher Harris Returns Home,” *Salt Lake Herald* (5 April 1906).

Harris's appeal was never limited to a simple profit motive. "Our movement," he emphasized, "is at once patriotic and economic."¹⁹²

Although Harris and other league advocates strove to frame their plan as a transregional project, including not only eastern destinations but also Canada and Mexico in their discussions, See America First clearly held out the most promise for boosters in the West, many of whom could capitalize on scenic resources that were relatively near at hand. To this constituency, Harris repeatedly emphasized the combined economic, patriotic, and therapeutic value of the sublime scenery and appealing climate of the West. "The golden West offers a treasure house filled to overflowing with the rarest gems of towering snow-capped mountains; noble rivers, bearing in their broad bosoms the commerce of a nation; blue lakes smiling in the face of unclouded skies, gorgeous sunsets, whose ravishing beauty fills the soul with reverential awe, while over all and around all there is an atmosphere so pure that simply breathing it brings life to the lifeless, hope to the hopeless, and happiness to the miserable."

Western cities had an unmatched opportunity to tap into an urban market increasingly in search of "the health renewing, soul-uplifting qualities of outdoor life," Harris believed. "The number of jaded, overworked men and women of the crowded cities who feel in their hearts the irresistible 'call of the wild' is greatly increasing. To such as these the fields and streams, the mountains, lakes and canyons of the West lie fallow for the working out of their physical and mental salvation."¹⁹³ Such language, so similar to the rhetoric of John Muir during this period,

¹⁹² "Business and sentiment" quote from undated, unsourced clipping from a Minneapolis newspaper entitled "Fisher Harris and His Phrase, 'See America First,' Has Caught Popular Fancy," in clippings box, Fisher Sanford Harris Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

¹⁹³ Clipping, *Los Angeles Arrowhead*, December 1905, Scrapbook 3, Harris Papers, quoted in Shaffer, *See America First*, 38-39.

drew much of its credibility from ideas long accepted among urban reformers of the day that recreation in nature would improve the health of urban white- and blue-collar workers.

Indeed, the relationship of See America First with Progressive-era urban theory has gone largely unremarked by scholars. However, much of Harris's original concept was undergirded by logic that was, by 1906, well-known and accepted in the literature of the City Beautiful movement. The See America First idea took shape in a cultural context strongly influenced by local municipal improvement activism, particularly in the young cities of the American West, and it shared a great deal of intellectual territory with its older sibling. For example, See America First shared the City Beautiful assumption that cities must compete to attract visitors and residents. This localized, competitive argument was a regular part of City Beautiful campaigns across the country, as boosters garnered support for their improvement projects by promising they would attract tourists and new residents and thus stimulate the local economy. In Harris's formula it was American cities (and businesses) competing with European destinations for tourism revenues. And, as with the City Beautiful, See America First offered an ideology and organizational structure that would be immediately applicable to local action.

See America First also relied on the belief that beautiful and grand surroundings would instill moral and patriotic sentiments in those exposed to them. For City Beautiful adherents such as Denver's Mayor Speer, civic improvements would create an emotional attachment and loyalty to one's city, or, in his words, civic patriotism. For Harris, the natural splendor of western scenery would foster national patriotism by overcoming both ignorance and sectional biases. As one proponent explained, the See America First movement promised to "bring great good to the West, greater good to the East by teaching an appreciation of the power and sublimity of

Western scenery, greatest good of all to the Nation itself, by raising the standard of patriotism.”¹⁹⁴

Closely related to this line of thought was the way both the City Beautiful and See America First embraced an aesthetic of monumentalism. Students of the early national parks have long observed how the peerless grandeur of Yosemite, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon—indeed most of the national parks established by the 1920s—served as a uniquely American substitute for the man-made monuments of Europe. Such landscapes gave evidence of God’s hand at work and manifested America’s providential destiny as a great nation, leading some scholars to interpret a somewhat insecure cultural nationalism as the motive for designating these landscape parks. Yet few have noted how this natural monumentalism so closely paralleled contemporary developments in American cities of the day. Particularly after the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 awed visitors with its sparkling neoclassical White City, inspiring civic leaders across the nation, monumental architecture quickly grew in popularity and became one of the defining elements of City Beautiful aesthetics.¹⁹⁵

This Progressive-era taste for monumental scenes, and the environmentalist theory that associated such beauty and sublimity with social reform, applied equally well to both cityscapes and wilderness landscapes. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter One, a substantial proportion of the nation’s leading proponents of scenic preservation were leaders of even greater influence in

¹⁹⁴ The comments are those of Boise, Idaho’s Judge Richards, who addressed the See America First conference in Salt Lake City. See “Judge Richards Heard” under “Fisher Harris is Chosen Chairman,” *The Salt Lake Tribune* (26 January 1906).

¹⁹⁵ On natural monumentalism, see especially Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); and Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). On the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition, see Robert W. Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Ch. 2, and Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, Ch. 3.

the City Beautiful movement. In the thinking of such men as J. Horace McFarland, the moral and physical benefits of spectacular natural scenery in the national parks were quite analogous to the effects of civic beautification. In both instances, monumental structures—whether constructed by man or by God—might elevate human thinking, revive minds and bodies worn from urban living, and inspire patriotic sentiments in the viewer. Applying this formula to western scenery, one See America First proponent explained, “When men come West their ideas expand. In the vast solitudes of these mountains—cathedrals of nature—they receive grander conceptions of what man may be and should be—thoughts that will never come while the mind is cramped by sordid toil.”¹⁹⁶

The See America First League initially garnered substantial interest among Colorado boosters. Colorado sent one of the largest delegations of any state to the inaugural See America First conference held in Salt Lake City in January 1906, with 14 representatives from the Denver Chamber of Commerce, Denver Business Men’s League, the State Commercial Association, and the cities of Pueblo, Colorado Springs, and Cripple Creek. Several Coloradoans, including W.F.R. Mills of the Denver Chamber of Commerce, became officers in the league.¹⁹⁷ When Harris visited Denver later that spring he addressed members of “all the commercial organizations” of the city.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ “Judge Richards Heard” under “Fisher Harris is Chosen Chairman,” *The Salt Lake Tribune* (26 January 1906).

¹⁹⁷ Ten years hence, Mills would become involved in the administration of Denver’s mountain parks program in his capacity as Manager of Improvements and Parks during Mayor Speer’s third term. However, although he was surely familiar with the mountain park idea through his work in the Chamber of Commerce, Mills was not directly involved in the mountain parks campaign of 1910-1912.

¹⁹⁸ For Denver and Colorado participation in 1906, see “The ‘See America First’ Conference” program; “Great Work Has Been Inaugurated in Zion,” *Salt Lake Tribune* (26 January 1906); “Real Work Has Only Now Begun,” *Salt Lake Tribune* (28 January 1906); “Fisher Harris is Back From East,” *Salt Lake Tribune* (5 April 1906). I was unable to find coverage of Harris’s Denver meetings in the Denver press or Chamber of Commerce minutes.

However, after the initial enthusiasm surrounding its launch, the See America First League struggled to secure funding. Harris used the existing Utah magazine *Western Monthly* as a platform, publishing articles on western destinations and scenery. But the league languished after Harris became ill and fizzled entirely after his death in 1909. Over the next several years the movement diffused into uncoordinated publicity efforts by various western interests. In 1910, for example, See America First became the slogan for the Great Northern Railway as it capitalized on its service to the new Glacier National Park. In 1912, a Tacoma, Washington, publisher launched *See America First* magazine, which was, in his words, “devoted to a patriotic endeavor of stimulating interest in America as a land for the traveler.”¹⁹⁹ And by 1915 the organizers of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, in need of a way to tempt eastern travelers to make a lengthy and expensive transcontinental railroad trip to attend the fair, had made the See America First idea the core of their publicity campaign. No doubt, Denver’s own John Brisben Walker, who served as “Director of Exploitation” for the fair after his involvement in the Denver mountain parks movement ended, helped to conceptualize and coordinate this advertising campaign. Finally, after 1916 the See America First idea came to be associated with the newly established National Park Service and its promotion of scenic tourism.²⁰⁰

Despite Denver’s early interest in the league, it never used the slogan on its own.

However, we can assume that a number of Denver’s leading boosters and businessmen were part of Harris’s enthusiastic audience when he visited in 1906, and that these meetings introduced to Denver leaders a persuasive rationale for local development of scenic mountain tourism. During

¹⁹⁹ Sommers quoted in Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First*, 31.

²⁰⁰ On Fisher Harris and the See America First League, and subsequent diffusion of the idea, see Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First*, 26-43. John Brisben Walker accepted his post on the Panama-Pacific Exposition in April 1912, just as the Denver mountain parks bill was going before voters. See “Walker Appointed Exhibit Director Frisco Exposition,” *Post* (3 April 1912).

Harris's time in Denver that spring, he would have found J. B. Walker busily preparing to open his Garden of the Titans park at Red Rocks, purchasing mountain lands, and making Morrison over into a tourist stop. Mayor Speer may well have been inspired by Harris's presentation too, because the following winter he made his first public mention of a mountain boulevard with his idea for an Appian Way. This chronology suggests that Harris and his See America First League played some role in prompting Denver boosters to seriously consider developing mountain recreation. Although concrete evidence demonstrating a direct linkage between Fisher Harris, the See America First League, and the early advocates of the mountain parks is lacking, it seems clear that these were all very much related.²⁰¹ In any case, as the mountain park movement developed, the See America First idea reappeared in Denver, where it was neatly interwoven with City Beautiful thinking.

In April 1911, when the newly formed Mountain Parks Committee made its highly publicized initial tour of possible mountain park sites, members immediately connected the plan with national tourism. "Denver must have this series of parks," asserted one of those on the trip, pointing first to Denver's nearest competitor for mountain tourists, Colorado Springs. With its scenic canyons, Garden of the Gods, Pikes Peak, and other attractions developed for tourists, the Springs captured visitors for an average of nearly four days, whereas such travelers made Denver a quick overnight stop. "If we had a series of parks here in easy reach, with good motor roads and drives, it would make the people want to stay here a week instead of one day," he went on, which would boost Denver's current tourist income a tantalizing sevenfold. This reasoning—

²⁰¹ I have been unable to locate press or other coverage of Fisher Harris's 1906 meetings in Denver, making it difficult to ascertain exactly who heard him during his visit. Similarly, I have looked unsuccessfully for correspondence between Fisher Harris and J.B. Walker, Mayor Speer, or the members of the mountain park committee.

drawn nearly verbatim from J.B. Walker's original proposal—also paralleled Fisher Harris's earlier emphasis on capturing tourist dollars from other destinations.

But the Mountain Parks Committee did not limit its view to one of intra-city competition within the region. Tourism advocates dating back to the 1860s had dubbed the Colorado Rockies America's Switzerland, and more recently the See America First idea had begun marketing western scenery as an alternative to European travel. In the minds of Denver's mountain park advocates Europe was both model and competitor. "The view from any one of a dozen points [in the mountain park region] is as fine as the most famous views of Europe," observed an unnamed tour member (very possibly J.B. Walker), "and people would gladly come here to see them if we would put them in easy reach." In addition to developing an infrastructure that would provide access to these scenic resources through good roads, Denver would need to publicize its mountain attractions. For this, See America First provided the most relevant guidance. "We need to advertise," the speaker emphasized, "we need systematic work to keep the attractions of Colorado and Denver before the world. I have seen some advertising with the legend 'See America First' designed to reach the people who go abroad every year. That is a splendid idea. We need something on the same order for Colorado, and we must keep it in all the magazines until people come to expect it everywhere."²⁰²

Over the ensuing year as the Mountain Parks Committee worked to publicize its mountain park project and cultivate the support of Denver businesses, politicians, and voters, the logic of See America First provided persuasive rhetoric that encouraged local investment to tap into a national market. Soon, the committee promised, the nation's traveling public would "learn

²⁰² "Denver Will Have Series of Foothill Parks is Plan," *Post* (9 April 1911).

that a trip to the West is not complete without a stay in the parks.”²⁰³ The mountain parks, these advocates imagined with some accuracy, could shape Denver’s future in important ways, not the least of which was in lending a unique mountain identity to the city’s public image through national advertising that marketed the city as a tourist resort and residential destination known for its outdoor lifestyle. See America First offered western cities such as Denver a persuasive rationale for investing in parks and amenities that might attract both tourists and permanent residents, in precisely the same way that City Beautiful rhetoric did. In Denver, these arguments supporting civic betterment and scenic tourism development were seamlessly joined in the promotion of the mountain park scheme.

Indeed, the way that mountain park advocates tended to intertwine arguments from both City Beautiful and See America First in support of their plan offers a striking demonstration of the way that the two bodies of thought reinforced each other in a mutually productive way. In Denver, the combination of the two helped to enhance the credibility of the mountain park plan as a way to improve the quality of life of residents, boost the city’s economy, and burnish its national reputation by developing scenic amenities. Denver’s history suggests that a similar confluence of the two ideologies might well have been at work in other western cities, particularly Seattle, that both embraced the City Beautiful and boasted scenic park resources near at hand.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Executive Committee Report to the Joint Committee of the Mountain Park Project.

²⁰⁴ On Seattle and its role in the development of Mount Rainier see Theodore Catton, *National Park, City Playground: Mount Rainier in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington’s National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); and Matthew Klinge, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

Playgrounds of Nature: Mountain Scenery as Civic Improvement

Proponents in these early years saw the mountain parks as a logical component of Denver's existing City Beautiful infrastructure. Rather than placing nature in opposition to the city and its artificial environs, advocates emphasized instead how the mountain parks were simply one more element of civic beautification, one that promised to create an idealized unity between nature and the city. To many commentators, the mountain scenery represented not only a desirable type of parkland, but also offered an ideal complement to the monumental public space that the civic center promised to bring to the central city.

A British journalist, for example, applauded Denver's civic center and mountain park proposals together as perfect embodiments of "the public spirit displayed in the beautifying of [American] cities" through "the creation of beauty spots." The civic center would at once aggregate public buildings in a central location, coordinate their appropriately grand architectural design, and create an interior park area for public gatherings graced by fountains, sculpture, and other forms of outdoor art. No less important, the plan would "preserve the magnificent view of the Rocky Mountains to be had from the front of the Capitol," which he regarded as a "most sublime and stupendous spectacle." The "conservation of scenery" was, in his view, just another manifestation of "this growing taste for beautification" in Colorado, which might take the form of "annexing a bit of mountain landscape and constructing a scenic drive." He noted how "the booming of towns has something to do with the alacerty [*sic*] displayed in attaching scenery, but behind this may be recognized a genuine desire to preserve unimpaired the picturesqueness so lavishly provided by nature."²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ "Projects of Denver and State for Conserving Scenery Featured in Great English Magazine," *DMF* (11 March 1911), 6-7.

Other commentators shared this propensity to link the mountain parks and the civic center in a shared fabric of beautified civic space. “In connection with the Civic Center and its system of radiating boulevards, the mountain parks will form a climax of beauty and an opportunity for pleasure unequalled in the world,” enthused one. “With walks and shrubs and flowers and trees, the Civic Center will present the center-piece of civic adornment; surrounded by public buildings of architectural beauty and harmony ... connected by boulevards and parkways with the public parks, it will be the center of a city beautiful.” The mountain parks promised to connect “by a golden link, 100 miles in length, this beautiful city with the greatest natural attraction possessed by any city in the world—the scenic beauty and sublime grandeur of the Rocky Mountains.”²⁰⁶

Many described the mountain parks as not simply an extension of the recreational landscape of the city’s parks and boulevards, but also as a way to integrate the mountains into the city itself. “A suburban park, reached by a boulevard,” reported the *Post* in November 1910, “is conceded to be a grand acquisition. ... This one would *bring within the city* some of the most entrancing scenery in the Rockies,” and would become “one of the banner features of the beautifying campaign which is one of the prides of Denver” (emphasis added).²⁰⁷ A year later the Mountain Parks Committee observed how “with electric car lines to the parks they would be practically a suburb of Denver.”²⁰⁸

What exactly did these commentators mean when they spoke of bringing mountain land into the city or making it a suburb? In the most limited interpretation, the purchase of distant

²⁰⁶ “What the Mountain Parks Mean for Denver,” *DMF [City of Denver]* (17 May 1913), 16-17.

²⁰⁷ “40,000-Acre Park Plan is Praised,” *Post* (29 November 1910).

²⁰⁸ “Executive Committee Report to the Joint Committee of the Mountain Park Project.”

parklands would make them the legal property of the city. But this language should also be read more broadly, because it indicates that public ownership of mountain parklands by the city of Denver would translate into broad public access to a desired recreational resource. Parks and drives, boulevards and electric rail lines all promised to reduce the time, distance, and expense of visiting mountain landscapes, effectively bringing the mountains within easy reach of those residing in town.

Similarly, when park advocates used terms such as “municipal resort” or “city park in the mountains,” they suggested more than simple ownership and jurisdiction over parklands or resort facilities by the city.²⁰⁹ This type of language disrupts the conceptual boundary that set off pristine, untouched wilderness against the domesticated, manipulated environment of the city. Here, rather than placing the two types of landscape in opposition, mountain park promoters worked to reposition them in a harmonious, integrated composition. The municipal resort would bring the city into the wild mountain landscape in the form of roads and rail lines, parks and people, but these elements of civilization were not intended to degrade the natural environment, nor to create a replica of a typical urban park with clipped lawns and flower beds. Instead, advocates made it clear that they envisioned the mountain parks as places where visitors could experience wild and scenic nature firsthand.

“The mountains should be left with their natural beauty,” the committee asserted, not made over through intensive landscaping or construction. The few structures that might be needed ought to be rustic in design, in keeping with the natural aesthetic. The committee’s report called for only minimal improvements to accommodate visitors, such as the provision of

²⁰⁹ “Mountain Park for Denver Approved by Many Citizens,” *DMF* (7 January 1911), 10.

drinking water and “sanitary conveniences.”²¹⁰ Thus, like the national parks, the mountain parks were understood to be places where visitors could experience the natural beauty and sublimity of a wild, or at least undeveloped, mountain landscape. Like a city park, the mountain parks could be enjoyed as part of Denver’s larger urban fabric of parks and boulevards. In fact, the close proximity of the mountain parks to the urban center was perhaps their defining characteristic. It was the nearby city, which could transform mountain lands into suburban natural landscape parks, that gave the mountain parks idea its central meaning.

The Mountain Parks Committee made this point clear in its December 1911 report. Although the report makes not a single mention of Yosemite, Yellowstone, or even of the current effort to establish Rocky Mountain National Park in northern Colorado, it does show that the committee took federal conservation programs into consideration as it made its plans. “We have considered the question of asking the Federal Government to establish a Mountain Park immediately west of Denver’s park extending westward so as to include the crest of the Continental Divide.” The federal government already owned much of the land in the area around Mount Evans, and perhaps it could be convinced to designate a park. “[S]uch a National Park would add many fold to the value of Denver’s park, and would make available a region of surpassing grandeur and beauty, too far removed from Denver to be desirable for Denver’s park,” argued the committee. Yet the region would remain “practically inaccessible” without Denver’s network of scenic mountain parks and parkways. Notably, it was not the scenic quality of the mountain landscapes that made them appropriate for municipal parks but their relative

²¹⁰ “Executive Committee Report to the Joint Committee of the Mountain Park Project.”

distance from the city. The Mount Evans region ought to be the province of federal conservation not because its peaks were higher and grander, but because it was more remote.²¹¹

In the minds of the committee, it was this proximity to the city that placed Denver's mountain parks proposal within the province of local rather than national government. The natural landscape parks supporters had in mind had to be near enough to the city to provide convenient access to a local urban constituency and tourists who would lodge in town. In this way, the mountain parks demonstrate again how the history of urban parks interrelates with the national parks of the Progressive Era. At the most fundamental level, this period witnessed a burgeoning appreciation of natural beauty and the therapeutic value of healthful outdoor recreation for urban workers. On one hand, these ideas contributed to a sharpening public concern for the conservation of natural resources and support for the preservation of scenic and historic treasures. These sentiments, as so many scholars have shown, underlay the flurry of protective actions taken by the federal government in establishing national forests, monuments, parks, and historic sites during this period.²¹²

At the same time, urban parks were growing substantially less “natural,” as the Olmstedian landscape park of the nineteenth century—which sought to bring picturesque and beautiful natural scenery into the city itself—declined in popularity and importance. In particular, urban reformers seeking to improve the lives of a city's poor, immigrant, or working-

²¹¹ “Executive Committee Report to the Joint Committee of the Mountain Park Project.” The committee's attention to the federal parks was stated months earlier, when in April 1911, the Chamber of Commerce cited relevant precedents for Denver's effort including New York's Palisades Interstate Park, Yellowstone, and Yosemite. See “Foothills Park Dream to Become Reality,” *Denver Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* v. 1, no. 10 (April 1911), 2.

²¹² See for example Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*; Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987); Thurman Wilkins, *John Muir: Apostle of Nature*; Hal Rothman, *Preserving Different Pasts: The American National Monuments* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); and several of the essays in Michael Lewis, ed., *American Wilderness: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

class residents began to champion a slate of park reforms to make urban parks more relevant and beneficial to these groups. These changes ranged from an end to “keep off the grass” policies to the construction of playing fields for organized sports and, most significantly, the playground movement. Urban playgrounds offered the working-class children of the city—whose working parents could not supervise them during the day—a place to engage in healthful, constructive recreational activity under the watchful eye of a trained playground supervisor.

Overall, the urban parks established during this period tended to be smaller, more numerous, and designed with specific recreational uses in mind. And although large Olmstedian landscape parks continued to exist, they were, increasingly, modified toward more intensive uses, setting out areas for sports, museums, zoos, and the like. In the context of this transformation in the purpose and design of urban parks, the concomitant rise of metropolitan extra-urban nature parks in cities such as Boston and Chicago can be seen as a different approach to providing the experience of nature once offered by the grand Olmstedian parks to a city’s residents. Increasingly, however, the nature parks would lie on the city’s fringes, rather than in its core.²¹³

Mountain park advocates in Denver understood this. The Chamber of Commerce noted a rising consensus of “modern opinion ... that the greatest work at hand today for our large cities, is to provide immense areas in the country, where the urban population may readily enjoy

²¹³ See Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991); Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Donald A. Krueckenberge, *Introduction to Planning History in the United States* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1983); Dominick Cavallo, *Muscles and Morals: Organized Playgrounds and Urban Reform, 1880-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981). Urban historians have described this as a process by which urban space was increasingly rationalized among a variety of uses. See for example Howard P. Chudacoff and Judith E. Smith, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 6th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), ch. 4.

recreation.” The extended metropolitan park systems of Boston, New York, and Chicago epitomized the trend.²¹⁴ The notion of the extra-urban nature park as a site for public recreation was absolutely central to the mountain park concept in Denver. The terminology these park advocates chose is telling: they consistently described what they hoped to achieve as playgrounds. “Playgrounds of Nature” read a newspaper advertisement the week before the May 1912 election. “Each vote for this charter amendment means the first step in securing for yourself and your children the greatest and most healthful parks of any city in the country.” Other writers used the term “mountain playgrounds.” Such phrases drew together the connotations of the progressive-era urban playground, a place set out from the city to provide grounds for healthful outdoor exercise, with the celebration of nature’s unmarred beauty and invigorating mountain climates to restore human health and well being. The “mountain playgrounds” that lay quite literally on the city’s doorstep offered scenery of unparalleled “beauty and grandeur” which promised Denver’s residents and tourists “delightful recreation grounds.” With careful development of access roads, railroads, and amenities, the mountain park region could well become “the great playground of the nation.”²¹⁵

It is a strange but telling fact that mountain park advocates in Denver did not perceive much similarity between their project and the national parks. Yellowstone was only rarely mentioned; Yosemite was thought by one writer to be still under state jurisdiction; Mount Rainier, with its similarly close proximity to Seattle, was never cited; nor was Glacier, which after 1910 was formally identified with the Great Northern Railway’s See America First logo.

²¹⁴ ‘Foot Hills Park Dream to Become Reality,’ *The Denver Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin* v. 1, no. 10 (April 1911), 2, 14.

²¹⁵ “Playgrounds of Nature,” advertisement, *RMN*, undated clipping from May 1912; “Executive Committee Report to the Joint Committee of the Mountain Park Project;” and “The Beautiful Canon of the Platte River is One of Denver’s Mountain Playgrounds,” *DMF* (27 July 1912), 8-9.

But most mysterious of all was the virtual absence of Rocky Mountain National Park in Denver's mountain park discourse.

By 1911, as press coverage of the Mountain Parks Committee's work grew and the Chamber of Commerce began promoting the parks in its publications, Enos Mills's effort to win congressional approval for Rocky Mountain was several years old. Both Denver's Chamber of Commerce and its Real Estate Exchange were vigorous supporters of the Rocky Mountain campaign and publicized it, along with the Denver mountain parks, extensively throughout this period. And while the Rocky Mountain project was frequently identified with wilderness rhetoric in such reports, the Denver mountain park proposal was not. "People are feeling the call of the wild, and they want the wild world beautiful," wrote one Rocky Mountain National Park promoter in 1910. "The proposed Estes National Park and Game Preserve is a big move to save some of our vanishing scenic wealth and also to make it productive," the author continued, arguing that "Nature's best wild gardens should never be despoiled but should be kept and used for their ever uplifting eloquence."²¹⁶

This kind of rationale is notably absent from Denver mountain parks publicity. On occasion, park supporters linked the mountain parks to conservation, but their discourse was distinct from strict wilderness preservation. "A vote for the ... mountain parks will conserve these scenic spots for the enjoyment of Denver people forever," wrote one, in a formula that clarifies the appeal of scenic parks in the early twentieth century. The resource that such parks would conserve were beautiful natural landscapes; the purpose for preserving them was to

²¹⁶ See "Estes National Park and Game Preserve Would Rival Swiss Resorts," *DMF* (23 April 1910), 11. Enos Mills, it is worth noting, did occasionally offer his advice to Denver's mountain park builders, but not until after Rocky Mountain finally achieved national park status in early 1915. By that time, Denver had already begun developing its mountain park system. Mills was not closely involved in the Denver project. See Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 24 February 1915, in DHCP, Box 5, FF 7.

provide a lasting source of outdoor recreation for Denver's urban constituents. The mountain parks that Denver boosters hoped to build, it seems clear, were understood at the time not as pure wilderness preserves that would protect wild landscapes from all development, but in a quite literal sense as playgrounds of nature, in which the mountain landscape would form a logical component of Denver's extended urban park system and its recreational offerings.²¹⁷

Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and the Evolution of Comprehensive Park Planning

Following Denver's municipal election of May 1912, at which voters approved the dedicated mill levy for the mountain parks, the city quickly moved forward, bringing Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., to town for a week's consultation in July. At the time, the junior Olmsted was arguably the most well-known and influential landscape architect in the nation. Groomed from a young age to enter the family business, he proved himself quite able to follow in his father's illustrious footsteps. He joined the Olmsted firm in 1895 at age 25, having already worked with his father on the famed White City of the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition. When the senior Olmsted retired from professional practice in 1895, Frederick Jr. became a full partner in the firm, joining his elder half-brother John Charles Olmsted at its helm and leading the firm into the 1950s.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ "What Mountain Parks Mean," undated, unsourced clipping in Pence Scrapbook.

²¹⁸ The name of the family's landscape architecture firm in Brookline, Mass., was changed in 1897 from Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot to Olmsted Brothers, reflecting the death of partner Charles Eliot, the retirement of the senior Olmsted, and the advancement of Frederick Jr. to full partner. Sources on Olmsted, Jr., include Edward C. Whiting and William L. Phillips, "Frederick Law Olmsted, 1870-1957, An Appreciation of the Man and his Achievements," *Landscape Architecture* 48 (April 1958): 145-158; Susan L. Klaus, "Efficiency, Economy, Beauty: The City Planning Reports of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., 1905-1915," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 57, no. 4 (Autumn 1991): 456-470; Susan L. Klaus, *A Modern Arcadia: Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. & the Plan for Forest Hills Gardens* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 26-29. One of Olmsted's later plans has recently been published in its entirety in *Eden by Design: The 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region* by Greg Hise and William Deverell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

His leadership in the related, yet distinct, fields of landscape architecture and urban planning was largely undisputed. He helped found the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1899. In 1900 he opened the first university program in landscape architecture in the United States at Harvard, where he lectured through 1914. In 1901 he joined the McMillan Commission, tasked with creating a plan to shape the future growth of Washington, D.C. It was Olmsted who designed the plan's extensive park-and-parkway system for the D.C. metropolitan area. Olmsted soon became the "chief spokesman for the planning movement," offering the first university course in city planning, and chairing the National Conference on City Planning from 1910 to 1919. He was, with J. Horace McFarland, one of the founding members of the American Civic Association in 1904, and served for many years among its leadership.²¹⁹

Although by the close of his career he was well known for his work on behalf of scenic preservation and outdoor recreation, during the 1910s this phase of his career was well ahead of him. In 1912 Olmsted was best known for his pioneering work designing planned suburban communities, his urban parks and park systems, and his leadership in the emerging field of city planning.²²⁰ Between 1905 and 1915—the only period that is relevant to his work in Denver—Olmsted focused almost exclusively on city plans and planned suburban communities. His reports for such cities as Pittsburgh, Newport, and Boulder, Colorado, all completed during this period, reflected Olmsted's faith that a scientific approach could create comprehensive plans that

²¹⁹ Olmsted was one among a number of well-known and respected landscape architects, planners, and architects during this period, including Daniel Burnham and Charles McKim, who had worked with his father on the Chicago Exposition's White City; Charles Mulford Robinson, voice of the City Beautiful movement who had authored a plan for Denver in 1906; George Kessler, author of another park and parkway plan for Denver under Mayor Speer; and John Nolen, a well-known planner and former student of Olmsted's who worked collaboratively with him on numerous projects.

²²⁰ In his later career Olmsted was renowned for his extensive work on Yosemite National Park, the California state park system, the Colorado River Basin, and the Save-the-Redwoods League.

might guide the development of cities while coordinating its complex elements to achieve a harmony of efficiency, economy, and beauty in urban space. This increased attention to complexity led Olmsted to describe cities as constantly changing systems comprised of many interrelated parts. His comprehensive plans aimed to coordinate the city's many functions and forms, integrating a wide array of systems such as railways and roads, sanitation and flood control, parks and schools.

Olmsted viewed the city as the core of a larger region, advocating planning that took future suburban growth into account. In contrast to the work of other planners at this time, Olmsted's city plans usually recommended "a comprehensive system of urban parks and outlying rural open spaces to be made accessible to all classes of residents through parkways and public transportation." He frequently urged upon municipal governments their responsibility to obtain outlying open space for park systems well in advance of actual suburban development. Olmsted's emphasis on comprehensive metropolitan planning allowed him to frame these extensive park networks as vital components of an urban system, oriented around the central city and extending outward through existing suburbs and into the countryside.²²¹

In a 1906 article Olmsted wrote with colleague and former student John Nolen, the authors delineated in minute detail the various types of parks and public open spaces that large cities ought to provide their citizens.²²² The planners offered a "clear and intelligent differentiation" of such spaces based upon the "recognition that the ends to be served are different and that therefore different means must usually be employed to meet them." Olmsted

²²¹Susan L. Klaus, "Efficiency, Economy, Beauty."

²²² On John Nolen see R. Bruce Stephenson, *Visions of Eden: Environmentalism, Urban Planning, and City Building in St. Petersburg, Florida, 1900-1995* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), 40-69.

and Nolen's typology also reflected their core-and-periphery approach to organizing urban recreational space, moving outward from the urban center. The authors outlined six distinct types of public grounds, beginning with "streets, boulevards, and parkways" and progressing in size and location from playgrounds and small city parks to large suburban parks. Their park typology illustrates the way Olmsted had come to conceive of parks as components of a larger comprehensive system meant to serve a wide range of needs and populations over an entire metropolitan area. "A complex system is called for," the authors emphasized, "a widening of aims, a finer discrimination, an expansion of the ideas of service."²²³

The authors recommended an ample distribution of three types of parks for the urban core. Playgrounds, they argued, ought be designed specifically for young children, school-aged children, or adults, their facilities and distribution differing radically depending upon which population they were designed to serve. Tiny "city squares, commons, and public gardens" featuring formal walks, statuary, fountains, and flowerbeds were appropriate for business districts in the central city. These created "breathing spaces" within the city and provided "agreeable views for those passing by them or through them in the course of their daily business." The third category, termed "small or neighborhood parks," ranged from ten to two hundred acres in size. Small parks featured formal design elements similar to the public square. They were not intended to provide "seclusion from the city" nor the "broad and beautiful natural scenery" that characterized the large "country parks" built by Olmsted's father in New York, Brooklyn, and Boston during the nineteenth century.²²⁴

²²³ F. L. Olmsted, Jr. and John Nolen, "The Normal Requirements of American Towns and Cities in Respect to Public Open Spaces," *Charities and the Commons* 16 (30 June 1906): 411-426.

²²⁴ Olmsted and Nolen, "The Normal Requirements of American Towns and Cities in Respect to Public Open Spaces."

Still, a centrally located “large park” remained an appropriate centerpiece for a city’s park system, the authors argued. Ranging from two hundred to a thousand or more acres in size, the “main object” of the large park was “the provision of beautiful, quiet scenery of the type that is called natural.” This purpose called for landscape and architectural designs quite distinct from the small parks and squares. The large park was not the place for formal walks or plantings, for statuary or fountains, or for imposing buildings, roads, or bridges. On the contrary, “architectural display is here to be deliberately eschewed,” the authors asserted, “because it is essentially contradictory to the purpose of the parks.” At the same time, such parks required enough artificial construction to accommodate “large numbers of people.” Indeed, the authors observed, “it is the problem of making them available without destroying their most valuable quality that presents the greatest practical difficulty to the landscape architect.” The necessary “roads, paths, steps, bridges, seats, shelters, buildings, and other constructions,” the authors advised, should be at once beautiful and “modest” in character, designed to blend with and contribute to the natural scenery. Here in the Olmstedian large park, therefore, lay the source of the rustic design forms that came to characterize natural landscape parks from the urban core and beyond, to the remote scenic nature parks such as Niagara and Yosemite.²²⁵

If the primary purpose of the urban “large park” was to place “scenery of a natural, placid and beautiful character” within easy reach of city dwellers, it followed that the provision of urban landscape parks was a responsibility of municipal or other local governments. It also meant that large landscape parks would have to be protected from incursions by zoos and museums, monuments and flower beds, playgrounds and athletic fields. Such amenities perpetually threatened to impinge on the natural landscape the parks had been intended to

²²⁵ On the roots of rustic design in urban country parks, see Ethan Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 43-44.

provide; Olmsted argued that such needs should be met in separate public grounds. In this way, the Olmstedian large park came increasingly to resemble a nature preserve—the nature on display there required protection from development in ways quite similar to remoter scenic areas. It was just another among the many conceptual footbridges between the urban park movement and scenic preservation.

Completing Olmsted and Nolen's 1906 typology was a kind of park that Olmsted would soon find an opportunity to develop for Denver. American municipalities, the authors argued, ought not limit their park holdings to the city and its suburbs. Ideally, a comprehensive urban park system should also include "great outlying reservations" consisting of "forests, beaches, meadows, mountains, lakes and rivers" that lay outside the city. Only a few cities had yet taken this ambitious step. Boston's metropolitan system was "the most notable" then in existence, containing over 10,000 acres of forest, seashore, and riverbank preserves and 23 miles of connecting parkways. Generally located "at a considerable distance from the centers of population," such areas required little in the way of artificial construction or maintenance. "Their chief value," the authors observed, "is in the protection they afford for future generations; therefore, their preservation and possession by the public is of immense importance." In other words, Olmsted and Nolen argued that natural areas on the urban periphery ought to be acquired for park purposes well before such lands were in demand for suburban residential or commercial development.²²⁶

Olmsted's seminal work on comprehensive urban park planning served as the basis for the central role he would play in the national scenic preservation movement. He made critical contributions to both the effort to protect Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy valley from being dammed

²²⁶ Olmsted and Nolen, "The Normal Requirements of American Towns and Cities in Respect to Public Open Spaces."

(eventually unsuccessful), as well as the campaign to establish the National Park Service. These largely parallel campaigns, which took place primarily between 1908 and 1916, represented the two most significant events in the evolution of the Progressive-era scenic preservation movement. Together, they crystallized the realization among preservationists that the national parks required a defining purpose and management philosophy quite different from forests or other natural resources. The Hetch Hetchy and National Park Service efforts not only prompted an unprecedented mobilization of public support for scenic preservation, they also forced the intellectuals at the head of the movement to come up with precise definitions of the purpose of national parks as scenic preserves closed to other forms of resource development, along with effective arguments that could justify the intervention of the federal government in their protection.

Olmsted was one among the short list of activists at the very heart of both campaigns, working from his leadership in the American Society of Landscape Architects, the American Civic Association, and urban park planning and design. This work coincided quite neatly with his work in Denver. During the winter of 1913, as Olmsted was nearing completion of his plan for the Denver Mountain Parks, he published an important essay on the Hetch Hetchy affair just as the U.S. Senate prepared to debate the bill for what would be the last time. "Certain kinds of valuably-refreshing scenery are so incompatible with the ordinary economic uses of land in and about large cities that, if they are to be made available for the use of the citizens at all, certain tracts must be given over specifically to that purpose," Olmsted argued. "Some things ... are of value wholly or primarily for their beauty," he explained. "If we can afford it, we direct our efforts toward conserving and making available its primary value, its beauty, ... never

subordinating it to considerations which we have decided to be secondary in this particular case.”²²⁷

Well before the fate of Hetch Hetchy was sealed, preservationists had come to realize that the same conservation bureaus that sought to regulate the exploitation of timber, water, or other natural resources could not effectively protect the scenic beauty of the national parks. In such an arrangement, the parks would be at the mercy of a utilitarian philosophy that favored the controlled *use* of resources, whatever impacts that use might have on an area’s beauty. In 1910, the American Civic Association’s indefatigable J. Horace McFarland, with the approval of Interior Secretary Richard A. Ballinger, called on Olmsted to join him, and the two began the process that would result in the creation of the National Park Service. As one scholar recently surmised, “Other figures in scenic preservation, such as John Muir, may have been superior polemicists; but probably no one in the early 20th century was better qualified than Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., to prepare legislation and policies that would establish a national park system and a national park commission to manage it.”²²⁸ By 1912, Olmsted was sufficiently engaged in this effort that he urged Denver’s park commissioners to “see that the Colorado congressional delegation and other influential people accessible to you are properly posted in regard to the excellent bill now before Congress, with the backing of the [presidential] Administration and the support of the American Civic Association, for the organization of a Bureau of National Parks in

²²⁷ Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., “Hetch Hetchy: The San Francisco Water-Supply Controversy,” *Boston Evening Transcript* (Nov. 19, 1913); the article was immediately reprinted in *Landscape Architecture* 4, no. 2 (Jan. 1914): 37-46.

²²⁸ Ethan Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 70. Carr is a professor of landscape architecture.

the Department of the Interior, intended to provide proper administrative machinery in place of the present chaotic condition under which the National Parks are administered.”²²⁹

Indeed, it was Olmsted who drafted the most significant phrase of the park service act finally signed by President Wilson in August 1916. The “fundamental purpose” of the national parks, in Olmsted’s eloquent definition, was “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”²³⁰

Although this phrase would come to vex later generations of park managers, supporters, and critics as an impossibly contradictory mandate, at the time it reflected not only the fully developed philosophy of the landscape park, but also the success of Boston’s regional park system and others like it. With public ownership that would guarantee the preservation of landscape beauty; with appropriate design of roads, paths, and structures; and with managers whose mission was carefully defined, municipal, county, and a few state-run landscape parks had already proven themselves capable of preserving natural beauty while making it accessible to the public. The new national park bureau and the nationwide system of parks it would adopt and expand, develop and manage, were solidly grounded, then, upon the well-established precedents of the urban park movement.

²²⁹ Olmsted to Board of Park Commissioners, Denver, Colorado, 17 July 1912, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5582, p. 2, microfilm in DHCP.

²³⁰ National Park Service Organic Act, *Statutes at Large of the United States of America* 39, Stat. 535 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1916).

The Olmsted Plan: Scenic Preservation and Park Development

In the early summer of 1912 the city of Denver was eager to move forward on its mountain park project. The amendment had polled strongly at the May election, and the new mayor—the progressive Citizen’s Party candidate Henry Arnold—threw the support of his administration behind the mountain parks in a way that Speer never had.²³¹ The tax revenue needed to fund the system was guaranteed: the first levy would be collected the following April, giving the park board less than a year to prepare before actual acquisitions or construction could begin.²³² Arnold decided to bring in the Olmsted firm primarily to draw up a new plan for the civic center, secondarily adding the mountain parks and some other city park projects to the firm’s duties. By summer’s end, the city had contracted with Olmsted to provide a detailed plan for the mountain parks, along with the civic center, the zoo, and several other park issues.²³³

Given Olmsted’s highly developed ideology of a comprehensive system of parks radiating outward from a given urban core, designed to meet the health and recreational needs of urban populations, and embracing natural areas on the urban periphery, he was the ideal choice to plan Denver’s mountain park system. In soliciting Olmsted’s services, Denver’s park board demonstrated its intention to create a world-class system of mountain parks to complement its ambitious civic center. For the next two years Olmsted provided ongoing consulting services on these projects, submitting a series of substantive reports to the park board as his work

²³¹ Phil Goodstein, *Robert Speer’s Denver, 1904-1920: The Mile-High City in the Progressive Era* (Denver: New Social Publications, 2004), 237-39.

²³² “Mountain Park Bids Received,” *Post* (10 December 1912), 9.

²³³ “Denver’s Proposed Mountain Parks,” *DMF* 4 (10 August 1912). The scope of Olmsted’s work and structure of compensation is detailed in Olmsted to John S. Macbeth, Board of Park Commissioners, Denver, Colorado, 25 September 1912, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5580, microfilm in DHCP.

progressed. The scope of his consultation on the mountain parks extended beyond simple matters of design to include extensive guidance for the city in implementing the park scheme.²³⁴

The Olmsted firm's relationship with city administrators grew strained, however, when Arnold was replaced, after only one year as mayor, by a commission government. The new commissioners fought both Olmsted and the park commission over money and control of the civic center project. Eventually the entire park commission resigned in frustration. Olmsted, after submitting several unremarkable designs for the civic center, walked away from that project as well. His heart had never been in it anyway; Olmsted was far more interested in the mountain parks, and the quality of his work on them reflected this.²³⁵ He presented his completed mountain park plan to the park board in January 1914, and he continued to advise the city as work progressed for the next several months.²³⁶ Of all the projects Olmsted completed for Denver during this period, the mountain parks plan was by far the most significant. While his proposals for the civic center were largely rejected, his mountain park plan became the foundation for much of the city's subsequent development of the mountain park region.

During Olmsted's preliminary week in Denver during July 1912, he was escorted through the mountain park region by his hosts, and promised to make a thorough "reconnaissance of the whole region" by horseback should he be charged with planning the park system.²³⁷ He met with

²³⁴ Olmsted to John S. Macbeth, Board of Park Commissioners, Denver, Colorado, 25 September 1912, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5580, microfilm in DHCP.

²³⁵ Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 242-245.

²³⁶ The final mountain park plan consists of two written reports and a set of detailed maps that correlate with the reports. The written reports, entitled "Denver Mountain Park Roads" and "Denver Mountain Park Lands," both dated 20 January 1914, can be found in Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5582, microfilm in DHCP. Copies of the corresponding maps are also held in the DHCP Maps Collection.

²³⁷ Olmsted to Board of Park Commissioners, Denver, Colorado, 17 July 1912, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5582, p. 7, microfilm in DHCP.

the Denver park board, members of the Mountain Parks Committee, and with J.B. Walker at his Mt. Falcon home. He received a copy of the committee's December 1911 plan as well as a clipping of J.B. Walker's 1910 article in the *Post*.²³⁸ In an early meeting with the Mountain Parks Committee, K.A. Pence urged "that as far as possible [Olmsted] adopt the plan and boundaries ... as outlined by this Committee" in its 1911 report. Olmsted assured the committee that he would.²³⁹ And so in his plan the idea, first developed by the Mountain Parks Committee, solidified that the mountain parks would comprise a dispersed network of parks and roads rather than a single large reservation. The final report recommended a substantial 41,310 acres in 20 distinct tracts of parkland for acquirement, "determined by the natural charm and fitness of each, and in part by the relative ease with which they may be reached."²⁴⁰ The park tracts Olmsted proposed, however, differed in important respects from the Mountain Parks Committee plan. Ranging in size from over 9,000 acres to a mere 20 acres, they dotted a circuit from Lookout and Genesee mountains, west to Bergen and Squaw Mountains, and back via Evergreen and Turkey Creek Canyon to Mount Falcon. Olmsted's plan then detailed how the park sites would be linked to the city and each other with a whopping 214 miles of scenic roadways.²⁴¹

This geography was quite obviously drawn from the extended metropolitan park systems of cities such as Boston or Washington, D.C., systems with which Olmsted was intimately

²³⁸ His agenda during this visit is not documented, however, a copy of the Executive Committee report to the Joint Committee of the Mountain Park Project, Denver, Colorado, 7 December 1911, is part of Olmsted's records on the project. It can be found in Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5582, microfilm in DHCP.

²³⁹ Mountain Park Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, Meeting Minutes, 2 October 1912, in Denver Chamber of Commerce Papers, Box 130, Western History Collection, DPL.

²⁴⁰ Olmsted Brothers, "Denver Mountain Park Lands," 20 January 1914, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5582, pp. 1-4, microfilm in DHCP.

²⁴¹ Olmsted Brothers, "Denver Mountain Park Roads," 20 January 1914, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5582, pp. 2-3, microfilm in DHCP.

familiar. And Olmsted clearly viewed the mountain parks as places especially set aside for the enjoyment of natural beauty by a nearby urban public. His reports and plans are replete not only with recommendations for the protection of the region's scenic qualities, but also, in virtually the same breath, for the provision to the public of convenient access to that scenery. In these ways Olmsted's plan represents the nexus at which the design of an urban park system and the ideology of the urban landscape park joined with an undeveloped extra-urban landscape to create, in Denver's mountain hinterland, an integrated system of natural landscape parks.

Indeed, in Olmsted's Denver reports public access and scenic preservation were intimately joined. During his initial visit he outlined "the three chief things to be accomplished" by his mountain parks plan. Of first importance was "the provision of a system of first-class roads, giving the public convenient access to the best of the mountain scenery." Next, and no less critical, would be "the protection of at least the more important parts of that scenery, by any and every means which may be found expedient, from defacement by fire, by indiscriminate logging operations and injudicious exploitation of other sorts, or by mere neglect and carelessness." The actual development of the park tracts with "resting places, picnic places, camping places, and ultimately ... shelters and hotels and other facilities" was secondary to these goals.²⁴²

The symbiotic relationships in Olmsted's formula between roadways and parklands, between public access and scenic preservation, were clear, then, from the beginning. In bringing a heightened awareness of the need for scenic preservation into the equation along with a variety of methods to implement these protections, Olmsted's plan moved beyond the framework of the City Beautiful that had given the mountain park idea so much logic and credibility among Denver supporters. This emphasis on preservation, however, did not alter the plan's fundamental

²⁴² Olmsted to Board of Park Commissioners, Denver, Colorado, 17 July 1912, p. 5, in Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5580, microfilm in DHCP.

composition as a regional extension of Denver's urban park system. Indeed, Denver's mountain park initiative represented perhaps the highest contemporary realization of Olmsted and Nolen's vision of developing "great outlying reservations" from the whole cloth of (relatively) undeveloped scenic lands just outside the city.

If the geography of Olmsted's mountain park plan appeared, on paper, as a simple facsimile of an urban park-and-parkway system, his instructions for creating the parks on the ground demonstrate that he had no intention of re-creating a groomed, programmed city park experience. What Olmsted had in mind was a plan that would foster a wilderness experience and perpetuate those qualities for future generations. The primary attraction of the mountain parks, he pointed out, would be the opportunity "to enjoy the wild and mountainous quality of the scenery." For this reason the park roads and structures required careful design that would enhance, not detract, from this fundamental purpose. "[A] scrupulous regard for getting just the right quality in these details, really excellent and beautiful without appearing either sophisticated or commonplace, will do more to give distinction to the work of the Commission than anything else," he promised. "It is in fact almost unfortunate that they should be called Parks at all," he observed, "because of the extremely sophisticated ideas which have become attached to that word in connection with municipal undertakings. To call them *Denver Mountain Forests* would be far more expressive of their essential character," he concluded.²⁴³

Olmsted warned strongly against erecting any but the most necessary buildings in the parks. "Except in stormy weather a roofed shelter is a distinctly undesirable thing in the Mountain Parks," he asserted. "Those who go for a real tramp in the real mountains know that they must be prepared for an occasional wetting," he observed, reemphasizing the wilderness

²⁴³ The emphasis is mine; Olmsted to John S. Macbeth, 29 October 1913, in Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5582, microfilm in DHCP.

qualities that he felt defined the proposed parks. “[E]very added building, especially every large building and every building of a type associated with city parks, street railway parks, or amusement resorts where the principal attractions are gregarious pastimes, detracts by so much from the peculiar and absolutely unique quality of these Mountain Parks.” Olmsted conceded that some few shelters, providing protection from rain, sanitary conveniences, and perhaps light food and hot drinks, might be found necessary at future transportation stations, where visitors would spend time debarking and waiting. Such structures, however, ought “not to be regarded as attractions but as necessary evils.” He warned particularly against the placement of any structures, such as picnic shelters, viewing stands, or pavilions, in places that might obstruct the views because “those views can be more perfectly enjoyed under ordinary conditions without the shelter.”²⁴⁴

Similarly, Olmsted urged the park commissioners to devote particular attention to the treatment of roadways and their margins throughout the parks. To minimize their visual impact on the mountain landscape, park roads should be “just ample in size to serve [their] purpose, but not a foot larger.” Then, the “obviously artificial and manhandled surface” of the park roads should be edged with a “clean-cut, continuous, graceful line” rather than rough, unfinished edges. Finally, Olmsted pressed the commission to bring all the roadside cuts and fills “practically to a slope of rest at nearly all points” after construction, which would allow native foliage to regrow right up to the roadside. “Otherwise,” he warned, “constant sliding will keep the surface raw and prevent vegetation from giving it that appearance of stability, permanence, and adjustment to the surrounding conditions of nature which is so desirable. It is this quality,” he went on, “which distinguishes an obviously perfected and permanent work from one that

²⁴⁴ Olmsted to John S. Macbeth, 29 October 1913, in Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5582, microfilm in DHCP.

seems temporary, unfinished, half-baked and inharmonious with the surrounding landscape.” Painstaking attention to such details of construction, Olmsted argued, were essential to make Denver’s mountain parks a world-class destination for “tourists and pleasure-seekers” rather than merely a shabby system of local parks.²⁴⁵

In addition to such matters of construction and architecture, Olmsted brought a heightened concern for scenic preservation to his correspondence with the Denver park board. He foresaw three main threats to the mountain scenery—wildfires, timber cutting, and grazing—that would require mitigation. Moreover, Olmsted immediately realized that the dispersed geography of the park system would make protecting the scenery from degradation far more complicated than if only one large park were planned. The city would only have complete authority to prevent logging and grazing on the lands it purchased for parks and roadways. However, these promised to be but a small percentage of the park region itself. Much of the land visible from the parks, and especially from the scenic roads, would remain in other hands, and the majority of these hands were those of private owners. For this reason, Olmsted urged the city to “make careful inquiry into the possibility of indirect control over and protection of much more extensive areas of mountain scenery visible from the road and from [the] chain of park lands held by the City.”²⁴⁶

For federal lands already part of the Pike or Leadville national forests, or that might yet be designated a national park, Olmsted thought it would be relatively simple to convince the federal government to adopt a “policy which will conserve the scenery and make it available for

²⁴⁵ Olmsted to John S. Macbeth, 29 October 1913, in Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5582, microfilm in DHCP.

²⁴⁶ Olmsted to Board of Park Commissioners, Denver, Colorado, 17 July 1912, in Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5582, microfilm in DHCP.

the enjoyment of the public as well as if it were under the direct control of the City.” Similarly, the city should approach the state government to discuss “suitable methods” that would protect state lands in the mountain park region from fire, and that would regulate their “systematic economic use for grazing and timber production . . . in a manner not inconsistent with the beautiful qualities of the mountain scenery of which, as seen from a distance, they form important parts.” Likewise, Olmsted advised the city to consider ways it might garner the cooperation of mountain landowners in fire protection and managing logging and grazing on private lands.²⁴⁷

Olmsted brought the full scope of his expertise to bear in his work on the mountain parks. He came to the project after a decade’s work focused on comprehensive city planning, no small part of which involved the refinement of park planning and design to provide for a full range of uses in a given metropolitan area. Reflecting these concerns, the geography of Olmsted’s Denver mountain park plan linked the park system into the existing park and transportation infrastructure of the city, paying close attention to means of access for the public. But Olmsted also brought a new emphasis on scenic preservation to the mountain park concept in Denver, arguing that mechanisms to ensure preservation must be central to the city’s acquisition and development of the parks. Moreover, Olmsted clearly understood the mountain parks in terms of wilderness, and he worked to loosen the mountain park idea from its urban connotations. While framing the mountain parks as a peripheral component of Denver’s city park system, as Denver’s park boosters had always done, Olmsted also brought a new clarity to the type of natural scenic experience Denver’s park makers might create in their mountain hinterland. The purpose of the

²⁴⁷ Olmsted to Board of Park Commissioners, Denver, Colorado, 17 July 1912, in Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5582, microfilm in DHCP.

parks, in his view, was to showcase mountain scenery and provide means for visitors to enjoy a wilderness experience.

It should come as little surprise, then, that after Olmsted became involved in the Denver project, the local mountain park discourse shifted perceptibly in the direction of wilderness rhetoric. In August 1913 the words of the great nature poets of the day were finally brought to the service of the mountain parks in Denver. In a lengthy article that described the summer's work on the mountain parks (which included construction of the Genesee and Lookout Mountain roads as well as land acquisitions in these two areas) Edward S. Letts, assistant secretary to the park commission, turned to literature to help describe the new parks. He cited the Romantic poet Thomas Carlyle's verse "Come, let's to the fields, the meads and the mountains; The forests invite us, the streams and the fountains." Letts also included a highly appropriate selection from the writings of John Muir, quoting the lines that opened this chapter from "The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West." In effect, Letts used Carlyle and Muir's recognized voices to invite "thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people" to come home to Denver's mountain parks, to "wander in [their] wildernesses," and to drink of their "fountains of life."²⁴⁸ If the language of wilderness had played little part in the campaign to convince Denver voters to pledge their dollars for this "city park in the mountains," its relevance in defining the parks and promoting visitation was now clear.

Conclusion

The years surrounding 1910 were heady times for Progressives interested in civic improvement, urban parks and recreation, national tourism, and scenic preservation. And while

²⁴⁸ "Denver's Mountain Parks," *DMF [City of Denver]* (9 August 1913), 5, 7.

Denver's ambitious mountain park plan might appear in retrospect to have been inspired by other scenic preservation campaigns—such as the national forest and Hetch Hetchy battles associated with John Muir, or Horace McFarland's ongoing struggle to protect Niagara Falls—they actually grew from a concatenation of three interrelated bodies of thought: the City Beautiful movement, See America First ideology, and the rise of the comprehensive metropolitan park system.

The interconnected ideas about city life and nature recreation, beauty and local identity, that infused the mountain parks with their distinctive appeal derived quite directly from City Beautiful ideology. The Mountain Parks Committee shared with J.B. Walker the faith that beautiful mountain scenery would cultivate civic patriotism—a love of place that would translate into loyalty and an enhanced commitment to Denver's well being on the part of its citizens. And such an amenity would attract potential residents, fostering urban growth and continuing prosperity. These linked themes of interurban competition, boosterism, and the social value of beauty were familiar to Denver residents schooled in City Beautiful thought during the Speer years.

But the influence of urban theory went beyond persuasion. All three of the design plans put forward for the parks—the Walker Plan, the Mountain Parks Committee Plan, and the Olmsted Plan—applied geographical models derived from existing urban park systems to the mountain park region. The “necklace” design of destination parks linked by scenic drives looping around the park region is a facsimile of the park-and-boulevard system that had been a mainstay of City Beautiful design. And the explicit connection of Denver's civic center and mountain park projects in both public discussion and in the hiring of Olmsted to consult on both projects together, confirms how the mountain parks were conceived as a major component of Denver's City Beautiful.

Tourism was central to the mountain park plan from the beginning as well. Walker had emphasized how a park infrastructure in the mountains would capture the tourist dollars that other resort cities currently reaped and create a new image of Denver as a world-class mountain resort. And while City Beautiful boosters had long touted how fine civic centers and park systems would attract tourists to a city—promises that could ring hollow—See America First applied much of this logic to the scenic destinations of the West. Doubly persuaded by City Beautiful and See America First, Denver boosters saw in their city's mountainous backyard a promising means to capture a portion of the growing market for scenic tourism.

But mountain tourism required development of roads and railways to provide for public access as well as sites for public recreation. The landscape had to be made into parkland before tourism could become feasible or profitable. Here, the logic of tourism looped back into the theory and design of urban systems for outdoor recreation: the park movement. The ideology of the urban landscape park, developed to its highest degree of sophistication in this period by F.L. Olmsted and his colleagues in the field of comprehensive urban planning, provided a model for understanding wild nature in a way that was specifically relevant to urban concerns, urban issues, and urban lives. In selecting park sites that combined ease of access with exceptional beauty, in platting scenic mountain drives, and especially in advising the city to minimize the appearance of artificiality in constructing park roads, trails, buildings, and other amenities, Olmsted's plan aimed to create a wilderness park system expressly oriented to serve metropolitan Denver. As an urban amenity, the mountain parks epitomized the highest realization of Olmsted's outlying landscape park, a place where nature's unadulterated beauty offered its restorative therapies for harried city denizens in an easy day's journey from home.

Finally, the evolution of the mountain parks between 1910 and 1914 reveals a distinct progression of influences. For the first three years, local mountain park advocates consistently placed their project in the context of the City Beautiful, the urban park movement, and See America First. The discourse of wilderness—so much a part of the rhetoric employed in the Rocky Mountain National Park campaign during these years—was markedly absent from the public discussion surrounding the Denver mountain parks. Local sentiment converged instead around the notion of “mountain playgrounds,” a concept that implied a much closer relationship to the city than John Muir’s federally owned wild parks and forests. Not until 1913 did Denver promoters introduce wilderness literature to their mountain parks publicity.

Why was this the case? Surely, F.L. Olmsted brought a new dimension to the project as he defined the parks as a wilderness destination and instructed the Mountain Parks Committee and the Denver Park Commission in the means for achieving and preserving these qualities. Perhaps mountain park promoters avoided wilderness rhetoric during their public campaign in order to distinguish their project—which would rely totally on local government for its success—from Rocky Mountain National Park, which would be placed under federal jurisdiction. Perhaps, as well, the national discourse of scenic preservation in 1911-1912 seemed a poor fit for Denver’s campaign because it was largely defensive, rather than productive, in character. John Muir, F.L. Olmsted, J. Horace McFarland, and other preservationists struggled to fend off imminent water development plans at Niagara and Hetch Hetchy, and to halt the clear-cutting and overgrazing already underway in the national forests. In Denver’s 1912 mountain park campaign, no serious threats to the mountain landscape presented themselves. Occasional references to rumored plans for logging that would destroy the area’s scenic value failed to capture the public’s attention. And if boosters and businessmen had their eyes on tourist profits,

other voters—particularly working class and women voters—were captivated by the promise of public mountain recreation: “playgrounds of nature.” Whatever the reasons for the delay, wilderness rhetoric finally proved useful when the time came to begin encouraging visitation.

Most significantly, the Denver Mountain Parks demonstrate how urban sociology and reform theory—particularly as embodied in City Beautiful aesthetics and environmentalism—not only set the stage but also provided the most relevant models for the municipal development of remote wilderness parks. In a very real sense, the city of Denver *created* a wilderness for recreational purposes out of a patchwork of privately owned mountain land. The meaning of the mountain parks actually relied very little on the conceptual juxtaposition of wild nature to urban life, an opposition that John Muir and other preservationists of the day emphasized. Instead, mountain parks rhetoric celebrated a symbiotic relationship between wild nature and the city, in which nature represented not simply a therapy for urban ills but a desired amenity that would enhance the lifestyle of Denverites and tourists alike. As acquisitions and construction got under way after 1913, the city went on to create a complex legal and physical infrastructure of property ownership, legal and jurisdictional regulations, and land management that made the existence of that wilderness utterly dependent upon, and inextricably linked to, the fortunes of the city.

CHAPTER IV

BUILDING A RECREATIONAL EMPIRE:

THE OLMSTED PLAN AND BEYOND, 1912-1939

Introduction: Parks, Plans, and Politics

Warwick Downing could hardly contain his aggravation.²⁴⁹ Scarcely a year had passed since the Mountain Parks Committee (of which he was chair) had shepherded its project to a successful vote, and the installation of an untried new form of municipal government threatened to derail the project entirely. The May 1912 election that twinned the passage of the mountain parks amendment with the defeat of Mayor Speer had brought only a temporary mayor into office. It was true that the new mayor, Henry J. Arnold, threw his support behind the mountain parks; it had been his idea to bring in the Olmsted Brothers firm to consult on the mountain parks and civic center. But Arnold had taken office under a tacit agreement to cede his position to a commission government at the earliest opportunity, and his term would end after just one year. Riding a wave of reformist sentiment and frustration with the centralized power epitomized by Speer's regime, the progressive Citizen's Party spearheaded the successful drive to replace the mayor's office with a slate of city commissioners that would, they believed, reduce corruption and better represent the interests of Denver citizens. The new City Commission took office 1

²⁴⁹ Downing wryly noted how, after voting to fund the mountain parks, Denver voters then seemed determined to elect those city officials least willing to spend money on park development. See Warwick M. Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks: A Condensed History of the Building of America's Most Unique Park System," *DMF* (March-April 1931), 14.

June 1913. Although Denverites would soon judge the commission system a failure and return Speer to the mayor's office in 1916, this was a critical moment for the mountain parks: the commission's three-year reign fell squarely within the initial five-year term of the mill levy dedicated to fund the development of the mountain parks.²⁵⁰

For more than a year after taking office as the new Commissioner of Property, the position with authority over all the city's parks, Otto F. Thum remained "suspicious ... and indeed hostile" of the Mountain Parks Committee, whose members remained involved with both Olmsted and the city's park officials as plans were developed and the first acquisitions and road building begun. In fact, the City Commission quickly alienated F.L. Olmsted and his staff over what the commissioners considered an exorbitant consulting fee. The city's relationship with the Olmsted firm eventually ended on a sour note with the landscape architects forced to file suit to compel the city to pay the balance of its contract on the completed mountain park and civic center plans. The members of the Mountain Parks Committee, therefore, were justifiably worried by the winter of 1913-14. If the mountain park system could not be launched within the five-year window they had established in the terms of the charter amendment—regardless of who occupied the seat of municipal authority—the entire project would certainly collapse.²⁵¹

Before long the City Commission's determination to maintain authority over, and economy in, park matters raised tensions with the city's sitting park board, which formally

²⁵⁰ The Citizen's Party was led by John Brisben Walker's son James Randolph Walker. The younger Walker played a central role in the drive for commission government. On Henry J. Arnold's year as mayor, his support for mountain parks, and the drive for commission government see Phil Goodstein, *Robert Speer's Denver, 1904-1920: The Mile High City in the Progressive Era* (Denver: New Social Publications, 2004), 222-311.

²⁵¹ Park board member E. W. Robinson worked to correct these misapprehensions in "Civic Center and Mountain Park Plans," *DMF* (23 May 1914), 5-6. For the challenges surrounding the final payment to the Olmsted firm see Benedict Phelps to Olmsted Brothers, 14 October 1915, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5580, microfilm in DHCP. Also see Greg Francis, "History of Denver Parks," ch. 4, unpublished manuscript in author's possession.

oversaw development of the mountain parks, as well. (Mountain Parks Committee Chairman Downing, it should be noted, was also a member of the city's park board at this time.²⁵²) By June 1914 relations between the city commissioners and the park board reached their breaking point in a flap between the board, the city auditor, and the commissioner of finance. The entire park board summarily resigned, leaving Commissioner Thum alone in charge of all park matters, which included the urban parks, mountain parks, the civic center, and relations with the Olmsted firm. It was a change welcomed by many at the time who distrusted the park board.²⁵³ But Commissioner Thum was simply not up to the task before him. By September, he was under fire from auditors for both the city and the state for the "childish" business practices he oversaw in both property acquisitions and road construction in the mountain parks.²⁵⁴

At this point, Thum prudently asked the Mountain Parks Committee, still led by Warwick Downing and K.A. Pence, to act formally "as the Mountain Parks Advisory [Commission] of the City of Denver, [and] to take under his supervision the active charge and management" of the mountain parks.²⁵⁵ Through the 1920s, the Mountain Parks Advisory Commission (hereafter

²⁵² See Motion, Denver Department of Parks, 17 June 1913, in DHCP, Box 1, FF 3.

²⁵³ For hostility between Thum and the Mountain Park Committee, see Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," 23; "Thum Turns Down Plan for Separate Mountain Park Rule," *Times* (3 April 1914); "Park Plan Scored by Otto F. Thum," *Post* (4 April 1914). On the resignation of the park board see "Park Board President Resigns, Quarrel with Markey is Cause," *RMN* (10 June 1914); "A Good Move," *Times* (13 June 1914); "Retirement of Park Board," *DMF* (27 June 1914), 12-14; "Thum and Himself Meet as Park Board," *RMN* (25 June 1914).

²⁵⁴ "Mountain Park Work Badly Managed, Say Experts of Auditor," *RMN* (3 Sept., 1914); "Childish Methods Followed by City in Park Accounts," *Post* (29 Sept., 1914).

²⁵⁵ After 1914 the group's official name was the Mountain Parks Advisory Commission and it operated formally as an advisory body to the city, as opposed to its previous position as an organized interest group. Its membership was little changed, however, and it was still commonly referred to as "the Committee." See Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," 23. On the resignation of the park board see "Park Board President Resigns, Quarrel with Markey is Cause," *RMN* (10 June 1914); and "Retirement of Park Board," *DMF* (27 June 1914), 12-14.

MPAC), comprised of leading men from Denver's commercial elite—its businessmen, real estate men, automobile enthusiasts, and good roads advocates—remained the most constant source of leadership in the development and management of the Denver Mountain Parks. Through a succession of mayoral administrations and park department appointees with varying levels of commitment to the mountain parks, ranging from outright hostility to indifference to wholehearted support, Denver's commercial elite exerted the power of the private sector through the machinery of municipal government to direct the development of the mountain park system.²⁵⁶

The mountain parks were firmly rooted in the city: in its business and booster communities, in its urban park ideology, and in its politics and municipal government. As argued in the previous chapter, the social and cultural ideas that infused the mountain parks with meaning were grounded in the urban experience and the City Beautiful movement: the necklace-style geography of linked parks and scenic drives; the cultural appreciation of sublime, pristine mountain scenery; the reciprocal notions of civic patriotism and political support; and the faith that social uplift would result from personal regeneration through outdoor recreation in beautiful natural surroundings. In order to implement these ideologies on the landscape, the city would also construct an elaborate geography of legal and political power centered in Denver's municipal government and reaching far beyond the city into neighboring mountain counties. As much as city politics might enhance or limit the ability of the MPAC to realize its designs on the

²⁵⁶ Warwick Downing describes how mayors Speer in 1916, Dewey C. Bailey in 1919, and Benjamin Stapleton in 1923 each continued the quasi-public powers of the Mountain Parks Advisory Commission. Extant meeting minutes show that the committee met at least until 1924, and it is likely that the group continued to function, perhaps to a lesser degree, throughout Stapleton's first two terms. It appears that Stapleton did not reinstate the committee when he returned to office in 1935. See Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," 14, 23, 28; and Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 1915-1924, in DHCP, Box 5, FF 7.

landscape, the power to build and control the parks rested, finally, in the statutory authority vested in Denver's municipal government.

Significantly, not just the physical geography of the park system but also the political geography that organized and asserted Denver's legal authority in the mountain hinterland bears the stamp of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. The 1912 amendment to the city charter, which gave the mountain parks a foundation in Denver's municipal authority, had been written by the MPAC. But the city charter alone could not authorize Denver to acquire or to manage lands outside its corporate limits. Such powers had to be granted by the state legislature before the city could proceed beyond the planning phase. By the time the MPAC set to work drafting state legislation Olmsted had signed on to develop a mountain park plan. His advice lies at the heart of the state law passed in April, 1913, that established a legal framework for the park system. This legislation extended the city's statutory authority into Jefferson County in critical ways, granting Denver the right of eminent domain for park purposes, and securing the city's rights to exercise "full municipal ... power and authority in management, control, improvement, and maintenance" in its hinterland parks.²⁵⁷ This codification of the city's jurisdiction created the legal substructure of Denver's recreational empire, while the parks, roads, and attractions constituted its fabric.

This chapter analyzes the development and application of this dual park geography—the physical geography of the unfolding park system and the geography of power that supported and sustained the parks—during the primary period of mountain park development from 1912-1939. In addition to tracing the history of planning, acquisitions, construction, management, and control in the mountain parks from their Olmstedian origins and beyond, I offer an assessment of how the early goals of Olmsted and the MPAC were realized as political and historical

²⁵⁷ Senate Bill No. 302, 15 April 1913, *Laws Passed at the Nineteenth Session of the General Assembly of the State of Colorado, 1913*, pp. 422-424.

conditions changed over time. I begin with a general overview of park development during these decades and the significance of the Olmsted Plan in guiding local park planning decisions over time. While the park plan created by F.L. Olmsted, Jr., between 1912 and 1914 served as the basis for much of the early design and construction of the park system, by 1920 the MPAC increasingly asserted its own interests, and park development moved away from the letter of the Olmsted Plan.

I then turn to focus in depth on geographies of power, concentrating on the ways that Denver established and exercised its authority in acquiring, developing, and managing its mountain park lands. I explore how the city used its legal and municipal power to acquire lands, focusing especially on the condemnation of the deDisse ranch in Evergreen. The city also established and enforced a range of easements, laws, and regulations that subjected both park users and mountain locals to its distant authority. More often than not these efforts were connected with environmental preservation, as the city worked to protect the mountain landscape from threats ranging from cattle to campfires. And yet the considerable power that Denver wielded in its mountain hinterland was limited in critical ways, prompting mountain homeowners to create a protective association that would supplement the city's ability to police the park region.

The Olmsted Plan and Beyond: Mountain Park Development, 1912-1939

Following the successful election of May 1912, the city of Denver began what would become a decades-long effort to construct its system of mountain parks. Working from F.L. Olmsted's plan for mountain parks and roads, the city's park board, its department of improvements and parks, and the MPAC engaged in extensive lobbying, negotiations, planning, and oversight of the long, often contentious, processes of land acquisition, road construction, and

infrastructure development. In the early years the MPAC shared much the same vision that Olmsted did of the future park system; Olmsted had given the group his assurance that he would adhere to the concept the committee had developed in 1911. And throughout the two years he was actively engaged in the project, Olmsted consulted extensively as to the prioritization of land purchases—which parcels to obtain first to create park destinations for immediate use by city patrons—and the routing, design, and construction of the first roads. Likewise, much planning on the part of the city's park department and the MPAC was devoted to how each year's mountain park fund would be allocated to build the system in logical increments. Olmsted understood this challenge, and therefore his plan categorized his site selections and roadway recommendations in order of importance.²⁵⁸

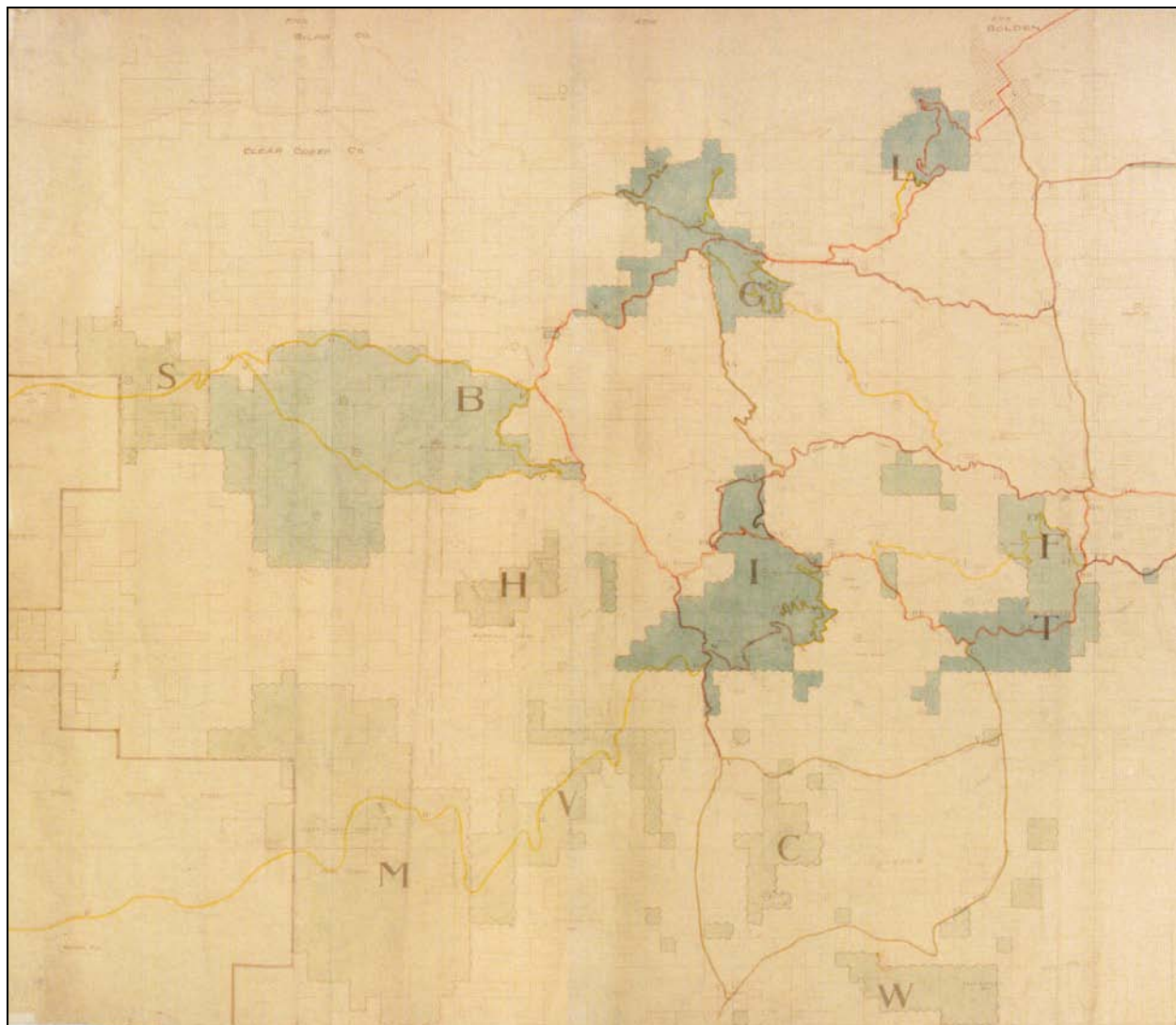
If the city had followed Olmsted's plan to the letter, it would have first cobbled together parcels to create four large parks—at Lookout Mountain, Genesee Mountain, Bear Mountain, and lower Turkey Creek Canyon—totaling some 9,800 acres. These parks defined the primary loop of parkways from Golden up Mount Lookout, west to Genesee, south to Evergreen and upper Bear Creek, and back toward the plains via Turkey Creek or Bear Creek canyons. Then, if the city was able to expand the system beyond this first loop, Olmsted recommended acquiring a very large tract (9,600 acres) of high alpine country running westward from Bergen Park to Squaw Peak, along with 1,500 acres around Mount Falcon near Morrison. Of tertiary importance in the Olmsted Plan were outlying lands quite removed from the core loop in the system. These included major tracts at Squaw Mountain (2,200 acres), Black Mountain (9,960 acres), and

²⁵⁸ For Olmsted's assurances to the committee, see Mountain Park Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, Meeting Minutes, 2 October 1912, in Denver Chamber of Commerce Papers, Box 130, Western History Collection, DPL.

Upper Cub Creek (2,920 acres), along with smaller parcels at Hester Mountain, Conifer, and Legault Mountain, all to the south of the main system. (See Figure 3.)

In theory, this represented a logical plan for concentrating the annual park fund on incremental development of the core loop. But the process of park building proved to be highly contingent, subject to a wide array of influences such as politics and wartime, tax revenues and real estate markets, the rising popularity of automobiles, and the behavior of park visitors. Moreover, the process of land getting was, ultimately, subject to local discretion. And so while the park system that emerged by 1930 embodied in many respects a scaled-back version of the Olmsted plan, it also diverged from Olmsted's vision in significant ways. Where Olmsted had identified 41,320 acres for acquirement, the city owned about 12,000 acres. Rather than large parks concentrated around the core loop, the city's holdings were smaller in size, larger in number, and more widely dispersed than Olmsted's plan indicated. The inner loop parks were much smaller than Olmsted had called for, and the city held a large number of small tracts scattered around the periphery of the inner loop. Most significantly, some of the system's most popular destinations by 1930—Red Rocks, Evergreen Lake, and Echo Lake—had not been part of Olmsted's plan at all. In these and other instances, local park advocates asserted their own particular vision of what the mountain park system would become. Initially, however, Denver's park builders worked closely within the framework of Olmsted's guidance as they made initial acquisitions and began road construction.

In the first phase of development (1913-1914), the city acquired the land for Lookout Mountain and Genesee parks and built the road that would link the two parks to Denver. Although Genesee is commonly cited as the city's first mountain park, in the strictest interpretation this honor might go to Lookout Mountain Park, which was donated to the city by



Key: Olmsted Plan for Mountain Parks and Roads, Map No. 58

Tracts of First Importance		Tracts of Secondary Importance		Tracts of Tertiary Importance	
L	Lookout Mountain (1,000)	B	Bergen Mountain (9,600)	S	Squaw Mountain (2,200)
G	Genesee Mountain (3,230)	F	Mt. Falcon (1,570)	M	Black Mountain (9,960)
I	Bear Mountain (4,060)		Lower Bear Creek (400)	V	Upper Cub Creek (2,920)
T	Lower Turkey Creek (1,570)		Kawartha & Three Sisters Ridge (190)	H	Hester Mountain (900)
			Cresswell (20)	C	Conifer Mountain (1,120)
				W	Legault Mountain (1,980)
					North & South Turkey Creek Fragments (840)

**Acreages, in parentheses, are rounded to nearest ten.*

Courtesy Denver Public Library Western History Department.

Figure 3. Olmsted Plan for Denver Mountain Parks and Roads, Map No. 58 (1914). Key adapted from the report by Olmsted Brothers, "Denver Mountain Park Lands," (1914), p. 3.

the Lookout Mountain Resort Company in April 1913. This development company had been formed in 1891 by, among others, Denver millionaire Horace Tabor and future mayor Robert W. Speer, who hoped to sell lots for a posh mountaintop resort. They hired Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., to prepare a site plan (work that may have brought young F.L. Olmsted, Jr., to Denver as well). But the resort was never built and the company was eventually sold to British developer Rees Vidler. On the heels of the successful mountain park election, Vidler opened a funicular railway that began carrying passengers from Golden to the summit of Mount Lookout in 1912. The trip quickly became a popular picnic excursion, and the following year Vidler donated 58 acres to the city for Lookout Mountain Park as well as a 100-foot right-of-way through his extensive property for the promised scenic road.²⁵⁹

Genesee Park came informally into the city's possession in 1912, after a group of "public spirited citizens" from Denver narrowly rescued it from the axe. During its initial investigations in 1911, the Mountain Parks Committee discovered that the Exline family, who owned some 1,200 acres on top of Genesee Mountain, had decided to sell the timber on the property, and a sawmill stood ready "to convert that magnificent forest into lumber." Logging had long been an important economic activity among the mountain landowners of Jefferson County, and by the early years of the twentieth century naked hillsides were a common sight in the future mountain park region. Once influential Denverites began to reconceive of the foothills as a scenic

²⁵⁹ On Speer's involvement in the Lookout Mountain Resort Company, see Charles A. Johnson, *Denver's Mayor Speer* (Denver: Green Mountain Press, 1969), 9. On the company's activities, see Carole Lomond, "Legacies of Frederick Law Olmsted," *City & Mountain Views* (22 April 2006), <http://www.citymntnviews.com/Olmsted.php4>. For the land and road transaction see "Agreement between The Lookout Mountain Park Development Company and City and County of Denver," 21 April 1913, in DHPC, Box 27, FF 32. In 1918, the company offered to sell "its entire holdings"—1,800 acres plus the funicular railway and all structures—to the city for \$100,000, arguing correctly that Lookout remained the only really accessible area for the majority of Denver's population, those who did not own automobiles. The city declined. See Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 2 August 1918, in DHPC, Box 5, FF 3.

recreational destination, however, logging became a direct threat to these designs. If park advocates hoped to create a park on Genesee Mountain in the future, quick action was needed to preserve the native landscape in the meantime.

And so real estate man E.W. Merritt, who had been an early advocate of the mountain park idea and who represented the Real Estate Exchange on the larger Joint Committee, spearheaded a fund drive to “save” Genesee Mountain, collecting subscriptions from Denver park supporters to purchase the Exline tract preemptively before it could be logged clean. Merritt gathered \$6,250 from leading Denver businessmen, such as F.G. Bonfils, H.M. Porter, W.G. Evans, and E.B. Field, and businesses including Joslin Dry Goods, the Denver Omnibus and Cab Company, and the Seeing Denver auto tour company. In January 1912 Merritt used these funds to purchase 840 acres of the Exline property. He then deeded the land to a trust company, which would “hold it for the chance that Denver would at a later time reimburse them.” Denver waited until spring 1914 to purchase the land from the trust company, making Genesee the city’s second park acquisition, but the first it actually paid for. In thanking the subscribers for their assistance, the Denver Park Commission wrote of its “hearty appreciation of the public spirited thing which you did; for it preserved for the use of the public Genesee Mountain Park, with its beautifully wooded slopes, which will always be a thing of beauty and a joy to the people of our State and Nation. It is something we are all proud of.” It would not be the last time that Denver took action to prevent logging on private lands in the interest of preserving the forests that would make the land valuable for park purposes.²⁶⁰

²⁶⁰ For a complete list of the subscribers, see E.W. Merritt to Ed. S. Letts, 3 June 1914, and Denver Park Commission to Dear Sir, 15 May 1914, in DHPC, Box 19, FF 18; also E.W. Merritt to The International Trust Company, 16 September 1913, in DHPC, Box 20, FF 34. Some sources have the initial purchase at 1,200 acres rather than 840; see Gene and Barbara Sternberg, *Evergreen: Our Mountain Community* (Evergreen, Colo.: Evergreen Kiwanis Foundation, 2004), 104; “History of the Mountain Parks,” typescript in DHCP, Box 3, FF 2. Downing recounts the story of “Saving Genesee

Like Vidler's funicular, private parties moved ahead of the city's bureaucracy in road construction as well. Using his own funds and crews, "Cement Bill" Williams began cutting the hairpin drive up the steep face of Lookout Mountain from Golden in 1912. During 1913 Olmsted advised the city on routing and construction as work continued—road crews working with explosives, shovels, wagons, and mules carving the roadbed out of the sheer, rocky face. Recognized as a wonder of engineering technology at the time, the road reached the top of Lookout Mountain that summer, and the following year stretched to the Genesee Saddle. (See Figure 4.) The Lookout Mountain Road (or Lariat Trail) also demonstrated that the park roads would constitute the largest expense in building the system. Denver spent a whopping \$85,000 to bring the road as far as Genesee, with additional funds totaling \$32,500 from Jefferson County and \$8,500 from the State Highway Fund.²⁶¹

With great fanfare, the city formally opened its still-tiny park system in August 1913.²⁶² After receiving Olmsted's completed park plan in April 1914, Denver continued its efforts to create an initial circuit of parks and parkways following Olmsted's model. That summer the Denver Tramway Company and Seeing Denver auto tour company partnered to offer a reduced excursion fare to the mountain parks, transporting visitors by rail to Golden, then by car up to the

Mountain" in "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," 12. Also see Carole Lomond, "The Amazing Legacy of the Lariat Trail," *City & Mountain Views* (14 October 2004), <http://www.citymtnviews.com/Lariat.php4>; and Denver Park & Recreation Department, "Donated Areas," DHPC, Box 2, FF 13. For another example of preemptive concern for forest preservation, see Dix Correspondence/Papers, DHPC, Box 20, FF 12.

²⁶¹ Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," 14, 23. The city ran into trouble with "Cement" Bill Williams in 1914 when, in an effort to force the city to make good on promises to pay him for his services, he erected a gate across the road and turned back all Denver motorists enroute to the mountain parks. See "Gate Bars Denver Autos at Golden," *RMN* (18 May 1914); "Golden Highway Blocked Securely by 'Cement Bill'," *Post* (19 May 1914); "\$2,000 Claim Won by 'Cement Bill'," *RMN* (21 May 1914).

²⁶² "Mountain Park System for Denver is Officially Opened," *Times* (27 August 1913); "Opening of Denver's Mountain Parks," *DMF [City of Denver]* (13 September 1913), 8-9.



Source: *City of Denver [DMF]* (9 August 1913), 5.

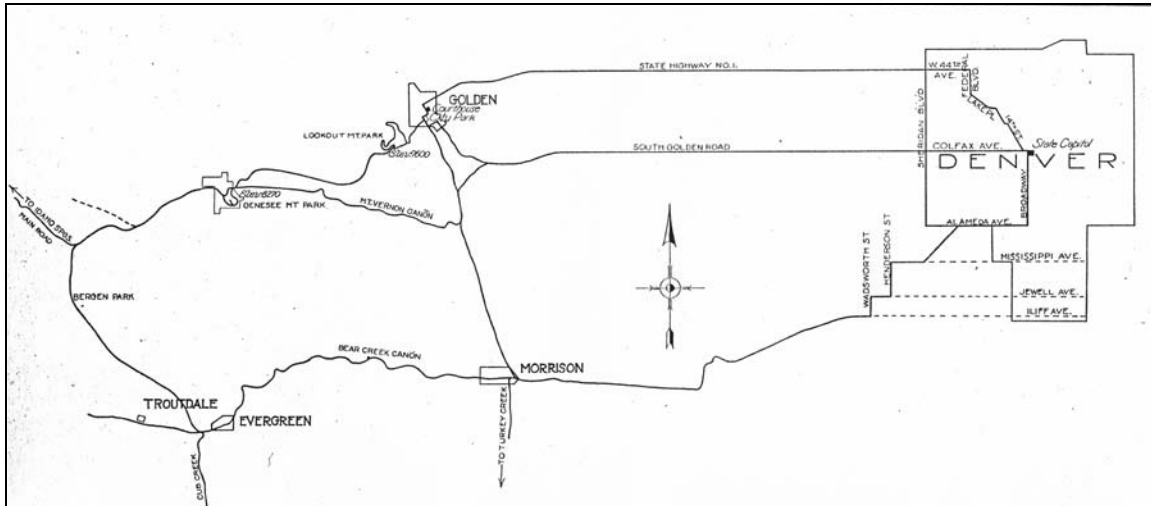
Figure 4. Building Lookout Mountain Road, 1913. North and South Table mountains in the background frame the small valley of Golden.

parks. The rail, auto, and funicular companies were fairly inundated with weekend customers from Denver.²⁶³ Mountain park advocates marked another milestone in 1915, when the construction of the Bear Creek Canyon Road, the extension of the Lookout Mountain Road to Bergen Park, and the cutting of a passable road connecting Bergen with Bear Creek completed the first loop of park roads. This feat seemed to most observers to assure the success of the parks and, according to Downing, made converts of many former opponents of the park plan.²⁶⁴

By the end of 1917, when the first five-year funding term came to a close, the park advocates' ambitious hopes had been largely gratified. The system had grown to include ten

²⁶³ "New Mountain Park Trip System, Plan," *Times* (8 May 1914); "Thousands Wend Way to Mountain Parks," *Times* (11 May 1914); "Round-Trip Fare to Mountain Park is Reduced to \$1," *Times* (16 June 1914).

²⁶⁴ Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," 23.



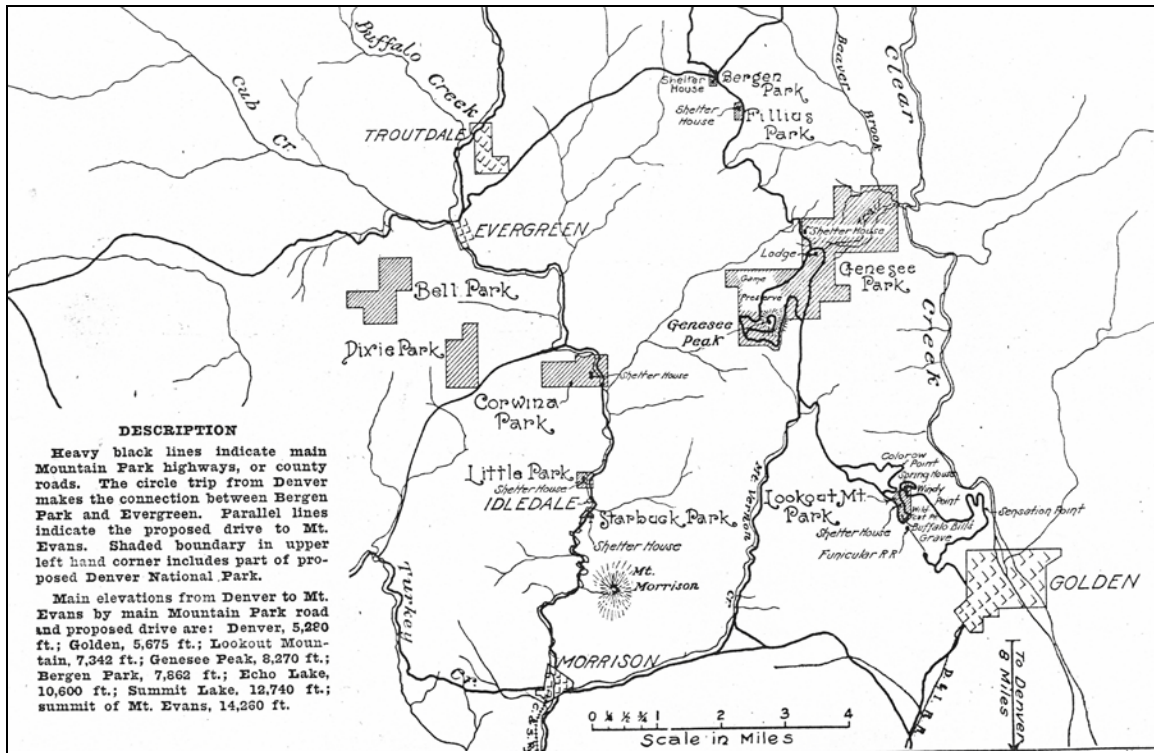
Source: *City of Denver [DMF]* (8 August 1914), p. 16.

Figure 5. Denver Mountain Parks, 1914.

parcs, comprising a total area of five square miles and spread over a region roughly 150 miles square. Colorow Point, Lookout, Genesee, Filius, Bergen, Bell, Pence, Corwina, and Little parks dotted the Golden-Evergreen-Bear Creek loop. The rustic Chief Hosa Lodge at Genesee was nearing completion, and William “Buffalo Bill” Cody’s body had been laid to rest atop Lookout Mountain. Denver had by this time invested \$414,000 in land acquisitions and road construction, and the sheer volume of park visitors seemed to confirm the wisdom and foresight of the early park proponents. During the peak summer months of 1917, tallies recorded well in excess of 300,000 daytime visitors arriving in 69,500 cars.²⁶⁵

Mountain park development in the next five years would be marked by an increasing assertion of local prerogative and a movement away from the letter of the Olmsted Plan. Park-building efforts during this period were focused on three main areas. First, heavy auto traffic and

²⁶⁵ “Denver’s Mountain Parks: What the City Has Done in Five Years to Bring Wilderness Charm to the Masses,” *DMF* (April 1918), 3-6.



Source: *DMF*, (April 1918), back cover.

Figure 6. Denver Mountain Parks, 1918.

overcrowding of park areas had become, by 1918, a major problem. In response, the MPAC issued a revised plan for park development. The new plan called for expansion beyond the inner loop with road construction in three new canyons (Mt. Vernon, Turkey Creek, and Deer Creek) and acquisition of smaller picnic parks along these routes. This would increase the number of entrances to the park region from two to five, and help to disperse congestion on the inner loop. The new roads largely followed the Olmsted Plan while, as had previously been the case, the new parklands obtained by the city in these areas tended to be smaller than the tracts Olmsted had outlined.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ "The Mountain Parks Development Plan," *DMF* (December 1919), 10-11, 17; "The Mountain Parks by Car and Camera," *DMF* (April-May 1920), 3-6; "Picnic Parks of Cub Creek" and "Road Development," *DMF* (June-July 1921), 7-9.

This pattern may have been due in part to the high cost of road building in the rugged mountain terrain consuming a disproportionate share of annual development funds, and the recognition that parks would go unvisited unless roads were built to reach them. That lesson had already been learned with Pence Park: one of the city's earliest land purchases, it went virtually unused until Parmalee Gulch Road was completed nearly a decade later. Moreover, the MPAC often faced significant opposition from city officials when it came to purchasing land.²⁶⁷ The net result of this emphasis on road development, however, was a patchwork of small, dispersed picnic parks beaded along the mountain highways, and a movement away from the compilation of the larger tracts that Olmsted's plan suggested. Rather than preserving the scenic qualities of the park region by acquiring large tracts, the city would eventually purchase only the most critical views—individual mountain peaks or hillsides that were viewed from specific park areas—leaving the remainder in the hands of the U.S. Forest Service or private owners. The park system that evolved, then, looked far more like an urban network of small parks than the large preserve parks that Olmsted proposed.²⁶⁸

A second area of focus—opening the Mount Evans region—deviated considerably from the Olmsted Plan. In 1916 the MPAC and the Chamber of Commerce launched a vigorous campaign to win national park status for Mt. Evans, which lay on the western periphery of the mountain park region. The MPAC demonstrated its commitment to the project with decisive action, and in 1916 began cutting a new road from Bergen Park to Squaw Pass, the first leg of

²⁶⁷ On the opening of Pence Park (formerly Dixie) by Parmalee Gulch Road see "Mountain Park Plans," *DMF* (March 1921), 13. On city officials' opposition to the acquisition recommendations of the MPAC, see especially the record of correspondence between the MPAC and Mayor Speer found in Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 13 June 1917, 15 June 1917, 17 July 1917, in DHCP, Box 5, FF 4-5.

²⁶⁸ See "The Greater Mountain Park Region," *DMF* (March-April 1922), 3-5; "Mountain Park Improvements," *DMF* (Sept.-Oct. 1924), 7, 14.

the future Mt. Evans Drive. Dedicating a share of the city's mountain park funds to the development of this remote and costly road met with substantial opposition, notably on the part of Mayor Speer, who returned to the mayor's office in 1916. Speer's new manager of improvements and parks, W.F.R. Mills, quickly ordered construction stopped, arguing, "It is a road that starts nowhere, ends nowhere, and never gets there." Without question, the project was risky; if it failed to convince the federal government to develop Mt. Evans for recreation and provide a destination for the new highway, the city would be hard-pressed to recoup its investment. For a second time, the MPAC had to persuade Speer that their plans merited his support; Speer and Mills were soon brought around and the work toward Mt. Evans resumed.²⁶⁹

While critics believed that the Mt. Evans country was too distant, too rugged, and too expensive for Denver to develop with municipal tax revenues—the 14,240-foot peak is some seventy miles from the city—the MPAC's initiative could also be interpreted as a logical modification of the Olmsted Plan. Olmsted had detailed the route for the Bergen-Squaw road to connect Denver's system with the Pike National Forest. He had also identified a nearly 12,000-acre stretch of land embracing Bergen and Squaw Mountains as secondary and tertiary acquisitions: had the city acquired both parcels this would have created the largest and most remote park in the city's system, one that would have abutted the national forest to the west creating an even larger reserve. (See Figure 3.) The commission shifted its emphasis from making Bergen and Squaw a destination, as Olmsted had, to making it a gateway to the Evans region. It scaled back land purchases in the Bergen and Squaw tracts drastically, concentrating

²⁶⁹ Mills quoted in Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," 23.

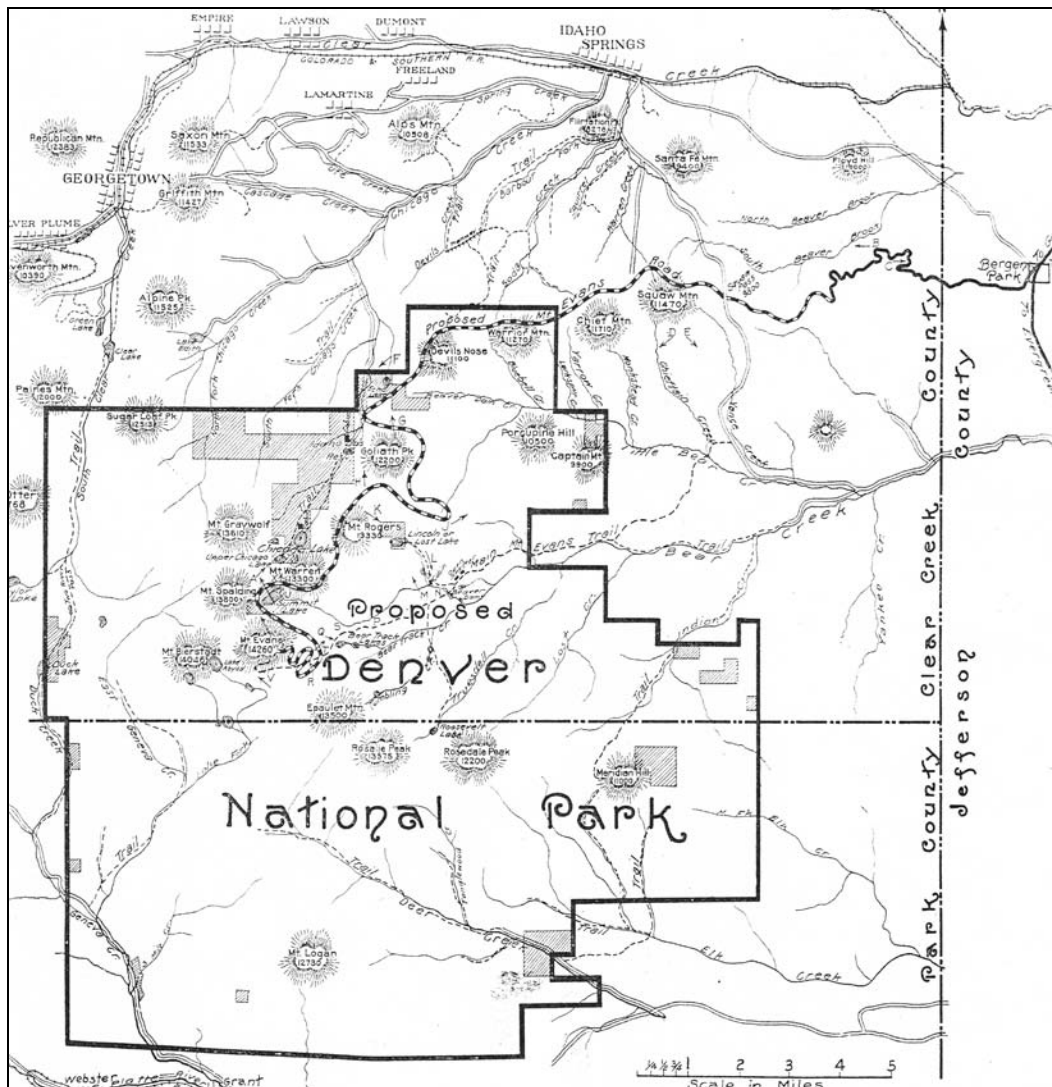
instead on the Squaw Pass Road, a few key sites outside the Olmsted area, and convincing the National Park Service to support the project.²⁷⁰

In 1917 Denver forces began lobbying the young NPS, which had only been established the preceding year, to declare Mt. Evans the “Denver National Park.” (See Figure 7.) Assistant director Horace Albright wholeheartedly favored the plan, and so in 1918 the city began condemnation proceedings on several prime scenic tracts in the region, including Echo, Summit, and Chicago lakes. It was felt that public ownership of these destination areas would reduce congressional opposition to the national park proposal and hasten the approval process.²⁷¹ The effort, however, foundered under heavy opposition from the U.S. Forest Service, which administered much of the Mt. Evans territory as part of the Pike National Forest. In 1919 the three parties worked out a deal in which the forest service would keep Mt. Evans and work in partnership with Denver to develop the area for recreational use. That fall the city completed the Mt. Evans Drive from Bergen Park to Squaw Pass, where the national forest boundary began. The forest service would continue the road from Squaw Pass to Echo Lake, which the city planned to purchase, stock with trout, and develop with picnicking and camping facilities. Denver fulfilled its commitment by purchasing Echo Lake in 1921 and Summit Lake in 1924, creating two destination parks on the slopes of Mt. Evans. In the eyes of Denver’s mountain park advocates, Echo Lake was the “key” to “unlocking” the Mt. Evans country, a region that promised to become the crowning glory of the city’s “recreational empire.”²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Today’s popular Elk Meadow Park adjoins the Denver Mountain Park property on Bergen Mountain. It was established by Jefferson County Open Space.

²⁷¹ “Will Condemn Lakes on Mt. Evans,” *DMF* (April 1918), 16.

²⁷² The Mt. Evans national park campaign, the construction of the Mt. Evans Drive, and the acquisition of Echo Lake were all widely covered in *Denver Municipal Facts* and Denver Chamber of Commerce bulletins. See especially Horace M. Albright, “Report on the Proposed Mount Evans Addition



Source: *DMF* (August 1918), p. 20.

Figure 7. Map of Proposed Denver National Park, showing Mt. Evans Drive from Bergen Park, 1918. Shaded areas shown within the proposed national park indicate private claims, which included Echo Lake.

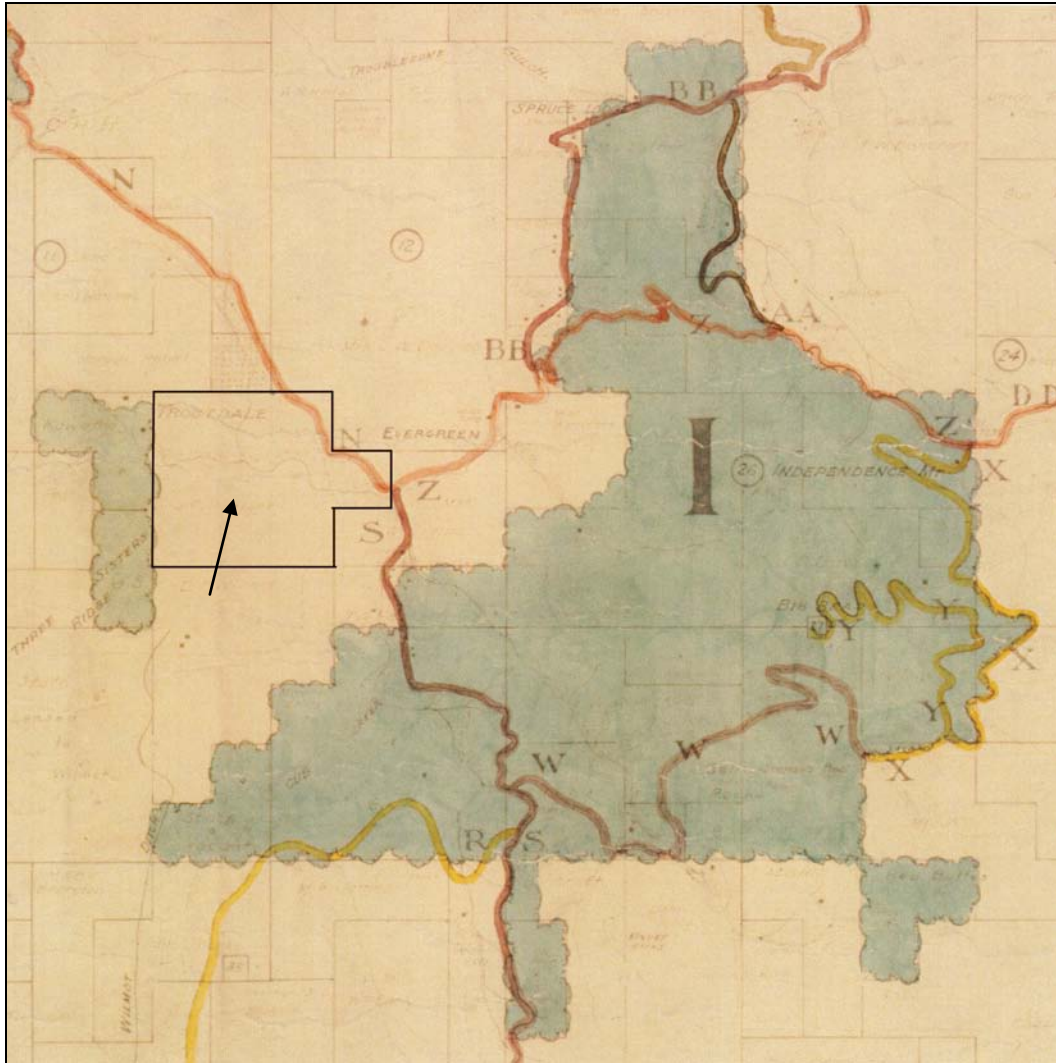
If the effort to open the Evans region to mountain recreation was in some ways consistent with the Olmsted Plan, the same cannot be said of the MPAC's third initiative: the creation of Evergreen Lake on meadowlands above Evergreen. This project involved the condemnation of

to Rocky Mountain National Park," *DMF* (August 1919), 3-17; and "Unlocking the Mount Evans Region," *DMF* (August 1921), 3-7.

some 400 acres of private ranch land and the construction of an artificial lake (a process that is examined in detail in the next section). Evergreen Lake, it must be emphasized here, lay entirely outside the scope of the Olmsted Plan. Olmsted's lands plan left the meadow untouched, and nowhere in the plan did he advocate the construction of a lake in any location. Instead, Olmsted identified 4,060 acres extending south from Evergreen to be acquired as the Bear Mountain tract. (See Figure 8.) Like the Mt. Evans initiative, Evergreen Lake was the result of local prerogative. Supporters of these projects fervently believed that without Mt. Evans, and without a recreational mountain lake for fishing and boating, "the Denver Mountain Parks will never be complete." The logic of the park system, as they understood it, required every component of mountain recreation to be in place, whether they occurred naturally within the designated park region or not.²⁷³

These three expansion initiatives—all ambitious and expensive—were begun between 1916 and 1918 and carried on into the early 1920s. But by 1922 development had stalled as the mountain park mill levy was pared down drastically during the administration of Mayor Dewey C. Bailey. The funding reductions brought new acquisitions and construction to a standstill at a time when the popularity of the parks, assisted by rising rates of automobile ownership, was soaring. In 1922, supporters in the Denver Civic Association pointed out, the Denver Mountain Parks hosted just as many summer visitors as all the national parks combined. Overcrowding and congestion continued to sully the park experience, yet there existed a "tendency on the part of some of our people to regard the Mountain Parks as a completed improvement." With the city

²⁷³ "Will Condemn Lakes on Mt. Evans," *DMF* (April 1918), 16. The history of Evergreen Lake is detailed later in this chapter.



Courtesy Denver Public Library Western History Department.

Figure 8. Evergreen detail, Olmsted Plan, Map No. 58. The black outlines (indicated with arrow) show the boundaries of the deDisse tract. As this detail shows, Olmsted recommended Kawartha and Three Sisters Ridge (left), and Bear Mountain (I), all shaded green in bubbled outlines for acquisition. No portion of the J. C. deDisse ranch is included in Olmsted's recommendation.

elections approaching, the civic bodies of Denver called for a renewed commitment to improving existing facilities and acquiring more parklands.²⁷⁴

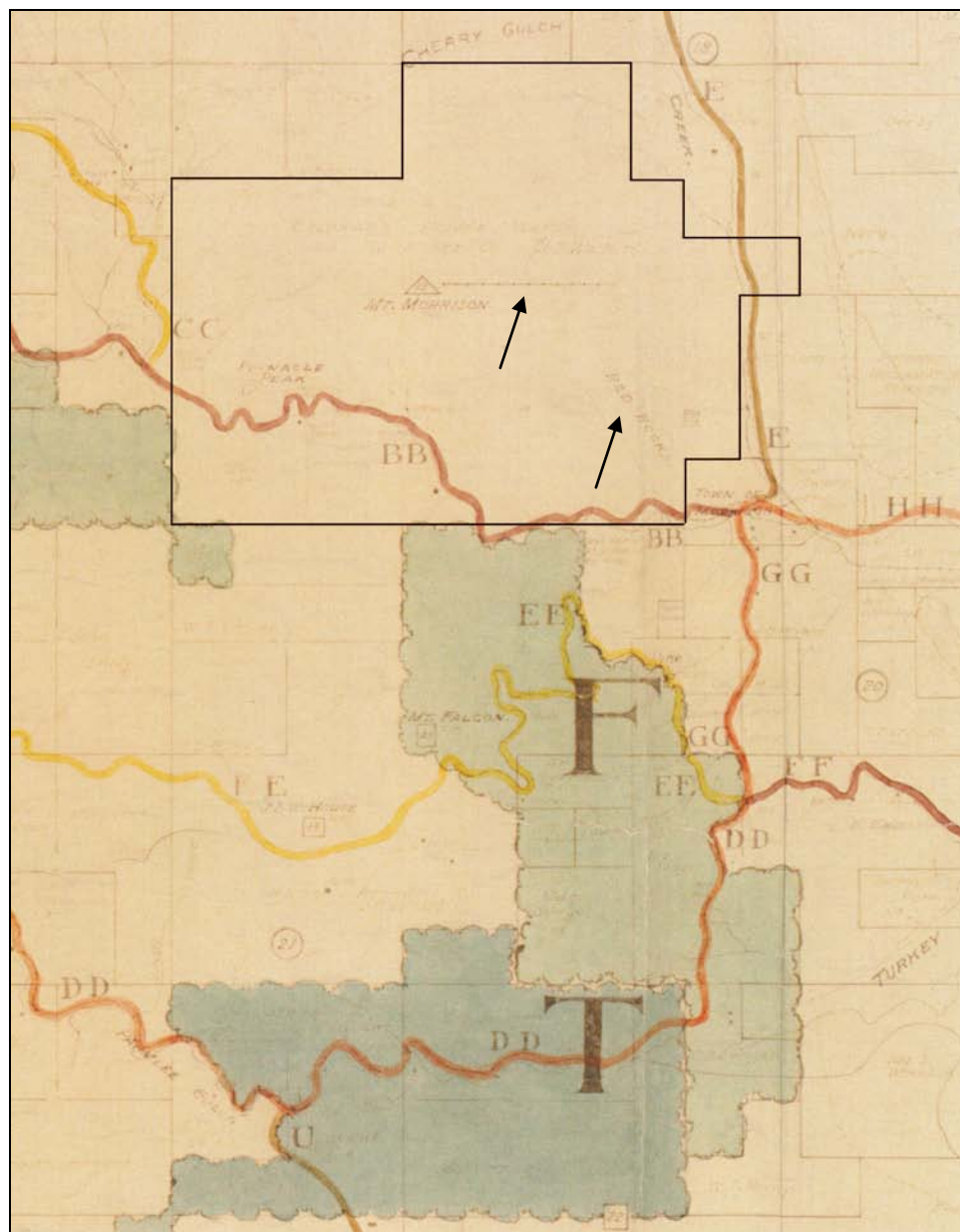
²⁷⁴ "Improvement Program Urged for Mountain Parks," *DMF* (March-April 1923), 10; Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," 28.

Benjamin Stapleton won the mayor's office in 1923 having pledged his support for the mountain parks as a candidate. During his first two terms in office he fulfilled his promise and claimed the mountain parks as one of his lasting legacies. In just five years Stapleton oversaw the doubling of mountain park acreage, adding Summit Lake, Morrison, Turkey Creek, and Bear Creek parks, along with some 2,200 acres of scenic and watershed preserve lands, to the system. With the mayor's support, funds were restored to languishing projects, such as Evergreen Lake and Echo Lake Lodge, which were completed in 1926 and 1927. In 1928 the city finally purchased Park of the Red Rocks from John Brisben Walker, after years of haggling over an acceptable price.²⁷⁵ And while many recognized the red sandstone formations as a logical complement to the alpine and canyon scenery of the existing mountain park system, the Park of the Red Rocks was not included in Olmsted's 1914 lands plan. Instead of the red rock area, which was already open to the public as a commercial park run by the Walker family, Olmsted had identified 1,570 forested acres on Mt. Falcon. In the end Denver acquired but two tiny tracts of the Mt. Falcon parcel; the open space park that exists there today was established by Jefferson County some sixty years later.²⁷⁶

Red Rocks would be the last purchase of a major mountain park site by the city. As the Great Depression began its inexorable spread in 1930, Denver owned some 12,000 acres of mountain parklands and was responsible for nearly 80 miles of roadway reaching from the city to Squaw Pass. A recreational infrastructure laced the park region, from fireplaces, trails, and campgrounds to picnic shelters, rustic lodges, and a museum. In 1931 wary voters elected their former city auditor George Begole mayor. The parsimonious mayor not only brought mountain

²⁷⁵ Walker had, by this time, lost his last fortune. He would retire to New York and die there in obscure poverty.

²⁷⁶ "Developments in Denver Within the Past Five Years," *DMF* (Sept.-Oct. 1928), 4.



Courtesy Denver Public Library Western History Department.

Figure 9. Red Rocks/Mt. Falcon detail, Olmsted Plan, Map No. 58. The large tract owned and operated as a commercial scenic park by J.B. Walker is outlined in black in this detail map (outline added); the arrows point out Walker's incline railway and the red rocks area. The tracts Olmsted recommended for acquisition are shaded green with bubbled outlines. They include the Lower Bear Creek tract (upper left), Mt. Falcon tract (F), and the Turkey Creek tract (T).

park development to a halt but also scaled back maintenance spending severely. Opposed not simply to park spending, which was in his mind an unwarranted luxury, but also to federal aid programs on principle, Begole refused to allow his parks staff to apply for Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) or Works Progress Administration (WPA) grants that might have gone toward infrastructure improvements, reforestation, or other needs.²⁷⁷

Voters returned Benjamin Stapleton to the mayor's office in 1935, and Stapleton appointed George Cranmer, optimistic, creative, and a longtime mountain park supporter, as his manager of improvements and parks. Cranmer brought a new dynamism to his office, and in spite of the continuing depression he procured a small park for Denver girl scouts and the donation of two new parks (O'Fallon and Newton)—the final, albeit minor, acquisitions to the traditional mountain park system. Cranmer was best known, however, for two ambitious projects: building the distinctive Red Rocks Amphitheatre using CCC labor, and developing the municipal ski area at Winter Park. Although the concept of municipal skiing facilities can be traced to earlier skiing at the city's Genesee and Inspiration Point parks, which had become popular among amateur skiers by 1920, Winter Park represented a significant departure from both the geography and the concept of the Olmstedian mountain park system. Of the 5,600 acres comprising the resort, the city purchased only 89 acres; the remainder was leased from the forest service. The costly project relied upon supporting financing from the Chamber of Commerce and a small group of local citizens, as well as WPA aid. Winter Park was the city's final effort in directly building a mountain recreation infrastructure; its acquisition brought 27 years of municipal mountain park development to a close.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ Francis, "History of Denver Parks," ch. 6.

²⁷⁸ "Skiing in the Mountain Parks," *DMF* (Feb.-March 1920), 3-5. On Winter Park, see Denver Parks Department, "Denver's Winter Park," DHCP, Box 2, FF 13; Hal K. Rothman, *Devil's Bargains*:

The evolution of the city's mountain parks was shaped by a variety of exigencies over the thirty year period of development, including local interests, changing patterns of tourism, and the changing political and economic fortunes of the municipal government. Nevertheless F.L. Olmsted's 1914 plan and his two-year consultation as the mountain parks were launched did provide a lasting template that would guide the development of the park system for at least two decades. His road plan proved especially enduring, forming a skeleton that supported a more malleable musculature of different park sites and recreational facilities. Still, the park system that had evolved by the 1940s varied considerably from Olmsted's lands plan. Rather than the consolidated large tracts that Olmsted recommended, most of the city's parks were smaller, dispersed picnicking, camping, and fishing grounds along the five canyons and loop roads. Genesee remained the largest city tract with just over 2,000 continuous acres. Where Olmsted had outlined 40,000 acres of parklands, the city had acquired roughly 13,500. Yet of this amount nearly 3,000 acres lay outside Olmsted's designated areas. Indeed, most of the system's major destination parks and attractions were absent from the Olmsted plan: Evergreen Lake, Echo and Summit lakes on Mt. Evans, Red Rocks Park, and Winter Park. The Denver Mountain Parks, then, were as much an expression of local ideas about mountain recreation and tourism, and products of the contingencies inherent in municipal political processes, as they were a reflection of national trends in conservation and preservation.

Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 180-186. On Cranmer and his projects generally, see Thomas J. Noel, *Sacred Stones: Colorado's Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre*, ed. Eric Dyce, (Denver: Denver Division of Theatres and Arenas, 2004), ch. 5, 6, 7; Thomas J. Noel and Barbara S. Norgren, *Denver: The City Beautiful* (Denver: Historic Denver, Inc., 1987), 167-172; Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 242-250; Phil Goodstein, *Denver in Our Time: Big Money in the Big City* (Denver: New Social Publications, 1999), 147-148.

provide a legal framework for the mountain parks granted Denver the right of eminent domain, or the right to condemn land, for park purposes. This gave the city power not just to purchase land but also to *take* it from reluctant sellers. Eminent domain was commonly used to facilitate public works projects such as water systems, sanitation, or transportation, and even city parks. But in the mountain parks, this authority would be exercised not by the local government jurisdiction, which was Jefferson County, but by a distant municipality. In fact, Denver's authority to acquire mountain lands created the substructure of empire, by which the power of the metropolis was exerted in the hinterland through the mechanisms of the state.²⁷⁹ The following discussion begins by outlining the statutory authority constituted in the City and County of Denver to provide for land acquisitions, then focuses on the various means by which the city secured its mountain parklands.

The charter amendment that Denver voters approved in 1912 contained three simple clauses. One allowed the city to grant a franchise for private rail service into the new parks. The other two clauses were more significant. One provided for a dedicated tax levy of one-half mill for five years, the funds to be specifically earmarked for land acquisitions, construction, and development of the mountain parks. Finally, the charter amendment vested in the city's park commission a new right, where "by purchase, gift, or condemnation proceedings," the city claimed the authority "to acquire and improve land for parks, parkways and roads outside the

²⁷⁹ For examples of metropolis-hinterland theory in historical studies, see William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991); Kathleen A. Brosnan, *Uniting Mountain and Plain: Cities, Law, and Environmental Change Along the Front Range* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002); Katherine G. Morrissey, *Mental Territories: Mapping the Inland Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); and William Wyckoff, *Creating Colorado: The Making of a Western American Landscape, 1860-1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

limits of the City and County of Denver.”²⁸⁰ These powers were confirmed by the state of Colorado in enabling legislation passed in 1913. The state law confirmed Denver’s right to “acquire lands for parks, parkways, boulevards or roads outside the corporate limits [of the city]... by gift, devise, purchase, or by right of eminent domain.”²⁸¹ Together, these enabling laws laid the legal foundation upon which the mountain parks could be built.

The park board and MPAC initially hoped to receive large quantities of land through donations, and the first mountain landholder the city solicited was the federal government. Immediately after the mountain parks amendment passed in 1912, the city’s representatives approached Washington to obtain federal lands for the new park system at no cost. In August 1912 Colorado Senator Simon Guggenheim introduced a bill requesting the transfer of title to some 34,000 acres of mountain land to Denver without compensation to the federal government. The following year Colorado Congressman Edward Taylor introduced the same bill in the House of Representatives. Although the bill stipulated that such lands could only be used for park purposes, that no portion of the land grant could be alienated, and that if the city failed to develop a mountain park on the grant within three years title would revert to federal hands, the uncompensated cession was a sticking point. The committees on public lands in both houses referred the matter to the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture, where Denver’s proposal met with a chilly reception. By early 1914 the two bills were dead in the water.

²⁸⁰ The franchise clause was necessary to counter an existing statute that blocked the construction of any rail lines over parkland inside the city. Although the clause paved the way for private interests to build rail lines to, and through, the mountain parks for public transportation, in the end this hope was not realized. Denver, Colorado, Ordinance No. 56, Series 1912, Supervisors’ Bill No. 36, pp. 17-18.

²⁸¹ Senate Bill No. 302, 15 April 1913, *Laws Passed at the Nineteenth Session of the General Assembly of the State of Colorado, 1913*, pp. 422-424.

By this time, however, F.L. Olmsted's mountain park plan, in which he recommended 17,560 acres of federal land for acquisition, was complete. At a meeting in Denver's Brown Palace Hotel with the city's park commissioners and Assistant Secretary of the Interior A. C. Miller, Olmsted had suggested that a "considerable portion of the [federal] land in question" might be added instead to the Pike National Forest, "as it was contiguous and near the same." Back in Washington, E.S. Letts presented the alternative plan to officials in Interior, Agriculture, the Forest Service, and the General Land Office. Bolstered by Olmsted's reputation and credibility, the proposal was received favorably by these federal agencies.

Thus encouraged, mountain park advocates prepared two new bills in the spring of 1914. The first bill identified 7,040 acres that the city could purchase from the government for \$1.25 an acre. The legislation withdrew the lands from entry indefinitely, leaving the city the option to purchase all, "or such portions as [Denver] might select," at any time in the future. The second bill provided for the incorporation of 9,680 acres, recommended by Olmsted, into the Pike National Forest. The twin measures were debated heartily in Congress before being passed by both houses. On August 25, 1914, President Woodrow signed the two bills into law, bringing Denver's first campaign with the federal government for mountain parkland to a successful end. Exactly five months hence, the president would designate another nearby swath of mountain land in Colorado as parkland with the establishment of Rocky Mountain National Park.²⁸²

²⁸² Supporters of the measures included Senators Charles Thomas and John Shafroth (Colorado), Marcus Smith (Arizona), Reed Smoot (Utah), John Williams (Mississippi), Francis Warren (Wyoming); and Congressmen Edward Taylor, H.H. Seldomridge, George Kindel, and Edward Keating (all of Colorado), also W.H. Stafford (Wisconsin), James Mann (Illinois), J.W. Bryan (Iowa), Frank Mondell (Wyoming), and Jeremiah Donovan (Connecticut). E.S. Letts gave the history of the bills in "President Signs Bills to Increase Denver's Mountain Parks," *DMF* (12 September 1914): 1, 4-6. See also "An Act Granting Public Lands to the City and County of Denver," *Statutes at Large of the United States of America*, 38, Ch. 286, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1915), pp. 706-708.

The passage of the two land bills was celebrated with much fanfare by the city, the news coming at a time when progress on park purchases and road construction was being closely followed by the Denver press as well as the city's public relations arm. Once won, however, the city failed to act on the legislation for a full ten years. While the MPAC had voted to purchase all of the reserved lands immediately after passage of the bill, it was up to city officials to transact the purchase. The reasons for the city's inaction remain unclear in the documentary record. We can, however, speculate that the frugal city commission then in office opposed the \$8,800 expenditure, especially, perhaps, with the understanding that the territory in question had been withdrawn from entry and would therefore not be sold to another party. The legislation essentially gave Denver an option on the land with no expiration date while protecting it from other uses: by default, these lands would remain untouched whether the city purchased them or not.

In 1924, the MPAC finally persuaded Mayor Stapleton to exercise Denver's option on the federal tracts. The city selected nineteen distinct parcels that would protect prominent peaks and slopes in the mountain park region. These sites comprised park views and served as watershed areas; municipal ownership would prevent both logging and home site development, preserving views and watersheds at the same time. Designated as "municipal forest" lands, these tracts were understood as forest reserves with conservation purposes, as distinct from park sites to be developed for recreational use. The city got the land at the bargain price that E.S. Letts had negotiated in 1914; still, it took just 2,240 acres: less than one-third of the 7,040 acres that had been reserved under the legislation.²⁸³

²⁸³ "Improvement Program Urged for Mountain Parks," *DMF* (March-April 1923), 10. "Mountain Park Improvements," *DMF* (Sept.-Oct. 1924), 7, 14.

When the Mountain Parks Committee made its earliest proposals in 1911, its members broadcast their assumption that most of the land was in the hands of the federal government—still part of the public domain, it was undeveloped, belonging to no-one. These statements belied the committee's sense that the mountains were yet a wilderness and that land there could be had for little cost. Such assumptions, however, proved largely inaccurate, for as the committee soon learned, the federal government owned precious little of the region it ultimately chose as the site for its mountain parks. While plenty of government land was still to be had further west and south of what would become the mountain park region, the committee felt that those areas were too remote and inaccessible to serve its urban clientele. And so in selecting the part of Jefferson County designated Townships 4 and 5 South, Range 71 and 72, the committee chose as well to carve its public parklands not out of a wilderness, but from a complex patchwork of private holdings that were, in many cases, already in use. The park system, then, was mapped onto a previously existing pattern of ownership and land use.

To pore over the property map that Olmsted's surveyors prepared in 1912 is to read a patchwork landscape of gridded property lines arced with names—Earl Exline and J.C. deDisse, the Walkers and their Colorado Resort Co., and scores of others. Each outline on the property map sketched a widely varying set of relations between landowner and land: investor or developer, summer homeowner, Denver resident, or mountain local making a living by farming or ranching on their mountain land. Real estate investors owned some of the land that Olmsted identified for acquisition, men with offices in Nebraska or Idaho or Denver whose primary goal was to hold the land until a profitable sale could be made. To such landowners Denver might be less attractive than other buyers, as it was understood that the city would not pay top dollar for land it would make into parks. Still, such investors ultimately planned to utilize their land by

selling it to another party to develop however they might choose. But to Jefferson County locals who lived on or used their land, the Olmsted plan for park acquisition must have looked nothing short of predatory.

Once the city had decided to acquire land in a given location, the purchase process generally went thus. The land agent for the mountain parks would contact a landowner to open purchase discussions. In cases where the owner was willing to sell, negotiations ensued over the price and terms of sale. If a satisfactory agreement was reached the sale might be completed relatively quickly. But the process was rarely so simple. Landowners frequently protested that the city offered far less than the land was worth for summer homes or agriculture.²⁸⁴ Others complained when the city asked to buy an option on the property for future purchase. Real estate investor Don T. Edwards, for example, correctly charged that such an arrangement gave every advantage to the city, which might choose to let its option expire after having kept Edwards's land off the market for several years, depriving him of the right to find a competitive buyer in the meantime. Such negotiations could drag on for months.²⁸⁵

If the parties could not reach an agreement on price, the city held the trump card in its right to condemn land. It was a power that the MPAC did not hesitate to exercise, particularly when the land in question was considered essential to the park system. In 1918, for example, the commission approached Charles Boettcher to purchase land he held on Colorow Point and in Deer Creek Canyon. Boettcher reluctantly offered to sell the Deer Creek land for \$25 an acre; he

²⁸⁴ R.T. Shaw argued that he had already sold 100 acres for homesites at \$110 per acre, and set his price on a 500-acre tract for the city at \$30,000, or \$60 an acre. W.F.R. Mills, who was head of parks and improvements at the time, replied that even this price was "very much more than I would be willing to recommend paying." See R.T. Shaw to R.W. Speer, 15 April 1918, and W.F.R. Mills to R.T. Shaw, 17 April 1918, in DHPC, Box 19, FF 24.

²⁸⁵ Don T. Edwards correspondence, 4 March 1914–12 May 1915, in DHPC, Box 20, FF 16.

refused to sell any part of his property on Colorow Point. The commission voted to counter on the Deer Creek parcel at half that price and, if Boettcher refused this offer to “immediately start condemnation proceedings.”²⁸⁶ The exchange is significant, for Boettcher, a wealthy Denver businessman well known for his philanthropy, was also a supporter of the mountain parks. He had donated cement for the construction of the Lookout Mountain Road in 1913-14. In 1917 he built a grand hunting lodge on 110 acres at the summit of Lookout Mountain (the Boettcher Mansion now owned by Jefferson County), which became his primary summer residence thereafter. For decades, he navigated the hairpin drive daily in his commute to work in Denver.²⁸⁷ Nonetheless, the MPAC did not hesitate to coerce Boettcher in its efforts to secure his Deer Creek Canyon holdings. Clearly the commissioners viewed condemnation as a tool that could help the city secure parkland at the lowest possible price, whether the court determined the amount or the landowner simply acceded to avoid a formal suit.

The MPAC often used the threat of condemnation to bring unwilling landowners to the bargaining table. In 1914, for example, Dr. Josepha W. Douglas, a woman physician and one of Evergreen’s most prominent year-round citizens, knew that her land in the heart of town had been identified for acquisition. Rather than risk a condemnation suit, she offered to preemptively sell two alternate parcels to the park commission. “This land we are farming, and are very loth [sic] to part with,” she explained, “and are only offering it to save Condemnation proceedings.” The tract that the city desired, she insisted, was not for sale.²⁸⁸ Indeed, a condemnation suit did

²⁸⁶ Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 18 June 1918, in DHPC, Box 5, FF 3.

²⁸⁷ Geraldine Bean, *Charles Boettcher: A Study in Pioneer Western Enterprise* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1976).

²⁸⁸ See the correspondence between Thornton B. Rennell (who acted as agent for Josepha Douglas) to E.S. Letts, Esq., 30 October 1914, 13 November 1914, 17 December 1914, 29 December

not necessarily conclude with a court-ordered sale of the property. In many cases the city used such suits as a tool to bring about some kind of settlement out of court. Similarly, when John Brisben Walker granted the city an easement for public fishing on his property along Bear Creek; the arrangement was the result of a condemnation suit the city had brought to claim a larger swath of his canyon holdings. By allowing the public to use his property for fishing, Walker was able to retain title to his extensive canyon lands.²⁸⁹

By definition, the right of eminent domain gave Denver almost unchecked power to take any parcel of land that it desired. If the city and the MPAC were determined to acquire a given piece of property, there was little the landowner could do to prevent it. Still, Denver faced a significant number of mountain locals who were determined not to lose their land to the growing system of parks, particularly among the residents of Evergreen. The best known of these was an elderly widow named Mary Ann deDisse. While F.L. Olmsted's 1914 park plan did not call for acquisition of Mrs. deDisse's large ranch—nor for the construction of an artificial lake at any site—Denver's mountain park boosters had eyed the open meadow hungrily for many years. Evidence suggests that the Mountain Parks Committee first considered the ranch as a park site during its initial investigations in 1911.²⁹⁰

By the time the urban elite of Denver began prospecting around Evergreen for park sites, Mary Ann deDisse was in her seventies. She had come west as a young wife with her husband, a

1914; Otto F. Thum to K.A. Pence, 3 December 1914; and Otto F. Thum to Rev. T.B. Rennell, 8 January 1915; all in DHCP, Box 20, FF13. On Ms. Douglas, see Barbara and Gene Sternberg, *Evergreen: Our Mountain Community*, 50-55.

²⁸⁹ Fillius Park was acquired through such a settlement as well; see Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 7 May 1918, in DHCP, Box 5, FF 3. For the fishing easement on the Walker strip, see Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 2 May 1917, in DHCP, Box 5, FF 4; also "The Mountain Parks by Car and Camera," *DMF* (April-May 1920), 4.

²⁹⁰ First notes on the deDisse ranch dated 1911, in DHCP, Box 20, FF 11.

Frenchman named Julius Caesar. In 1869 the couple homesteaded a 400-acre ranch in the fertile open meadow straddling Bear Creek just above Evergreen. Here the family stayed, making their living raising hay, grain, potatoes, and livestock for nearly fifty years. After J.C. deDisse died in 1909, Mrs. deDisse continued on her ranch in the home her husband had built. Her grown sons Charles and Jerome worked the family land; Charles lived with his mother, while Jerome lived with his wife and six children in Evergreen. The deDisse daughters had by this time married and moved away to Denver, Los Angeles, and other cities.²⁹¹

Denver's dealings with the deDisse family began in 1915. That spring the MPAC made a concerted search for possible lake sites in the mountain park region, and soon afterwards the committee set its sights on the deDisse meadowlands. In June the city signed a right-of-way deed with Mrs. deDisse for state primary road N-27, which would traverse her property. Then, just seven weeks later, the MPAC voted to open negotiations with Mrs. deDisse for purchase of her ranch, with the intention of damming Bear Creek and flooding the great meadow to create a scenic mountain lake. The ranch, the commission agreed, "should be acquired as soon as possible if [it] can be obtained at [a] reasonable price, and if not, condemnation suits should be brought." From the outset, then, the MPAC signaled its intention to take the ranch whether or not the family was willing to sell. In February 1916, the MPAC was informed that the best price its land agent could obtain on the deDisse tract was \$20,000, or about \$50 an acre. This was too

²⁹¹ I am grateful to Suzie deDisse for giving me access to her personal files on family genealogy and on the condemnation suit: Carmen Suzanne deDisse, interview by author, 5 February 2007, Evergreen, Colorado, tape recording in author's possession. I consulted the U.S. Census for 1910, 1920, and 1930 and searched Golden's *Colorado Transcript* newspaper for residence, occupation, and marital information on the deDisse family. Published accounts include Barbara and Gene Sternberg, *Evergreen: Our Mountain Community*, 102-108; Carole Lomond, "Heart of Evergreen," *City & Mountain Views* (19 December 2001), <http://www.citymtnviews.com/Evergreen1.php4>; and Ann Moss, National Register of Historic Places Registration for Dedisse Park, 3 October 1988, in "DeDisse Park" file, Jefferson County Historical Society, Evergreen, Colorado.

expensive for the city's taste. Denver's park superintendent Frederick C. Steinhauer recommended a counteroffer of \$15,000, which, we can surmise, Mrs. deDisse and her family rejected. By June of 1916, however, the city had completed maps and plans for the proposed lake, despite the fact that purchase negotiations had yet to bear fruit.²⁹²

The deDisse ranch was only one tract among many along Bear Creek that the commission hoped to obtain at this time. The very presence of the waterway—which made open lands valuable as farmland and wooded lands valuable for home sites—made the same creek side parcels desirable as parks for picnickers and fishermen. A September MPAC report called for the purchase of ten creek side properties between Morrison and Evergreen; all together these purchases would have transformed virtually all of Bear Creek Canyon into parkland from the Morrison all the way to the deDisse ranch. The plan targeted local landowners such as J.B. Walker and sons (who owned huge parcels in the lower canyon), C.J. Stromberg, C.W. Little, J.A. Johnson, M.V. Luther, and George Bancroft (who had rebuffed the city's first overtures in 1914). By spring 1916, the commission was determined to move quickly to condemn all of the Bear Creek properties. "We believe that by this method we should start the proceedings to acquire the necessary tracts along Bear Creek," the commissioners agreed.²⁹³

Behind the push for Bear Creek land was frustration that park acquisitions were lagging too far behind roadwork in this section. "The present anomalous situation of the city having

²⁹² Notes dated 1911 and Right of Way Agreement, 29 June 1915, both in "Dedisse Notes/Correspondence," DHCP, Box 20, FF 11. Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 15 April 1915, 19 August 1915, 23 September 1915, February 17 1916, 16 March 1916, 3 May 1916, all in DHCP, Box 5, FF 5-7. Maps and plans for Evergreen Lake dated 1916 in "Dedisse Park" map file, DHCP, Series 6.

²⁹³ Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 23 September 1915, 17 February 1916, 16 March 1916, in DHCP, Box 5, FF 5-6. George Bancroft to E.S. Letts, 9 December 1914, in DHCP, Box 19, FF 24.

spent over \$60,000 in road building along Bear Creek without a single place where the people may stop for any purpose,” the commissioners asserted, “should be corrected.” Bear Creek, the members of the MPAC argued, “should be to a large extent the people’s stream.” But in contrast to the site of the proposed lake, the city could afford to select its Bear Creek Canyon park sites based upon their comparative costs. “Every effort should be made to acquire the Dedisse [*sic*] Ranch as a site for a beautiful mountain lake. As respects the other tracts, these should or should not be acquired, depending upon the prices awarded in the condemnation suits.”²⁹⁴

Despite the MPAC’s determination to move forward aggressively on all the Bear Creek acquisitions, after April 1916 the deDisse matter was, quite suddenly, dropped from its agenda. The city later explained this by stating that “city authorities have been unable to reach a satisfactory agreement [with Mrs. deDisse] on the purchase price.” And by all accounts, Mary Ann deDisse “could not bear to consider the question” of giving up her ranch.²⁹⁵ However, the timing of this lapse corresponds so closely to a major change in city government that it seems likely that it was Robert Speer’s return to office that gave the deDisse family a reprieve, albeit a temporary one. Elected to his third mayoral term in May 1916, Speer immediately voiced his displeasure with the influence of the MPAC over the city’s department of parks and improvements. Six months later, he and the MPAC reached an accord by which Speer designated the group an official advisory board to the city (a designation it had been given by the previous City Commission). This formal recognition, apparently, did little to improve matters, and the

²⁹⁴ Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 17 February 1916, in DHCP, Box 19, FF 24.

²⁹⁵ “The Mountain Home Colony in Picturesque Bear Creek,” *DMF* (March 1919), 6; “Plan Bear Creek Lake,” *DMF* (April 1919), 17.

MPAC grew increasingly frustrated as Speer's park appointees declined to carry out its directives.²⁹⁶

This tendency to ignore the MPAC's advice could almost certainly be traced to Speer. The new manager of parks and improvements W.F.R. Mills would surely have sought the mayor's consent for major expenditures on the mountain parks. And the mayor had plenty of reasons to dislike the MPAC. The group, still comprised of many of its original members, had never forged a close relationship with Speer; indeed, their 1912 campaign had framed the mountain parks as the antithesis of his corrupt administration. Moreover, 1916 was the last year that the five-year mill levy established in the mountain parks charter amendment would be collected; after this, the commission would be forced to seek renewal of the dedicated fund. Sure enough, Speer met personally with the MPAC in early 1917 to discuss its budget appropriations for the year, suggesting that he would directly oversee mountain park expenditures. Under Speer mountain-park funding was pared down drastically. Only \$14,500 was budgeted for land acquisitions in 1917, even though the MPAC had identified purchases, including the deDisse ranch, totaling well over \$50,000. The few purchases that the city made in 1917 and 1918 were small tracts without premium price tags.²⁹⁷

Speer and the MPAC finally hammered out their differences, with the commissioners convincing Speer and Mills of the necessity of expanding the park system beyond the primary

²⁹⁶ From August 1915 through April 1916, the month before the mayoral election, the MPAC discussed the deDisse case and the Bear Creek Canyon properties frequently at its meetings. On the tensions between Speer and the MPAC, see Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 25 April 1917, 17 July 1917, in DHCP, Box 5, FF 4; and J.S. Flower to R.W. Speer, 15 June 1917, copy in Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, in DHCP, Box 5, FF 4.

²⁹⁷ On Speer and the budget, see Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 18 April 1917, 25 April 1917, and 9 November 1918, in DHCP, Box 5, FF 3-4. Parks acquired during 1917 included 39-acre Little Park, which the city purchased for \$1,000, and Bergen Park, donated to the city by Oscar N. Johnson. See Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 17 February 1917, 13 March 1917, in DHCP, Box 5, FF 4.

loop to relieve congestion in the central area between Lookout, Genesee, Evergreen, and Morrison. By 1918 condemnation suits were pending in Bear Creek Canyon on several tracts totaling 238 acres, signaling a return to the acquisitions effort. The deDisse ranch, notably, was not among these sites, suggesting again that Speer did not favor the lake plan. Then, unexpectedly, Robert Speer died in August 1918, leaving W.F.R. Mills to take over as mayor. By this time Mills had a good working relationship with the MPAC and played a central role in developing the plan, announced in late 1919, to expand the mountain park system. With the MPAC and the mayor finally marching in time, it was not long before the city's resources were focused again on major mountain park investments. As previously shown the 1919 expansion plan rested on three pillars: developing new corridors in Turkey Creek, Deer Creek, and Mt. Vernon canyons; acquiring Echo Lake in the Mt. Evans region; and acquiring the deDisse ranch to build a scenic lake at Evergreen.²⁹⁸

In April 1919, the city announced its plans to build Evergreen Lake, and the following month filed a lawsuit against Mary Ann deDisse in the District Court of Jefferson County to condemn her ranch. According to J.A. Burnett, Manager of Improvements and Parks under Mayor Mills, the suit was to be “a friendly one.” He had already “reached an agreement with the heirs of the Dedisse [*sic*] estate for purchase of the ranch” for \$25,000—a good deal more than the \$15,000 that Steinhauer had hoped to pay in 1916. Only after looking up the title did the city learn that “the estate had been left in trust and could not be sold until the death or marriage of the widow.” It was this technicality that rendered the condemnation suit necessary, in the city's

²⁹⁸ Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 7 May 1918, 23 May 1918, in DHCP, Box 5, FF 3. “The Mountain Parks Development Plan,” *DMF* (December 1919), 10-11; “New Mountain Park Acquired,” *DMF* (April 1919), 16.

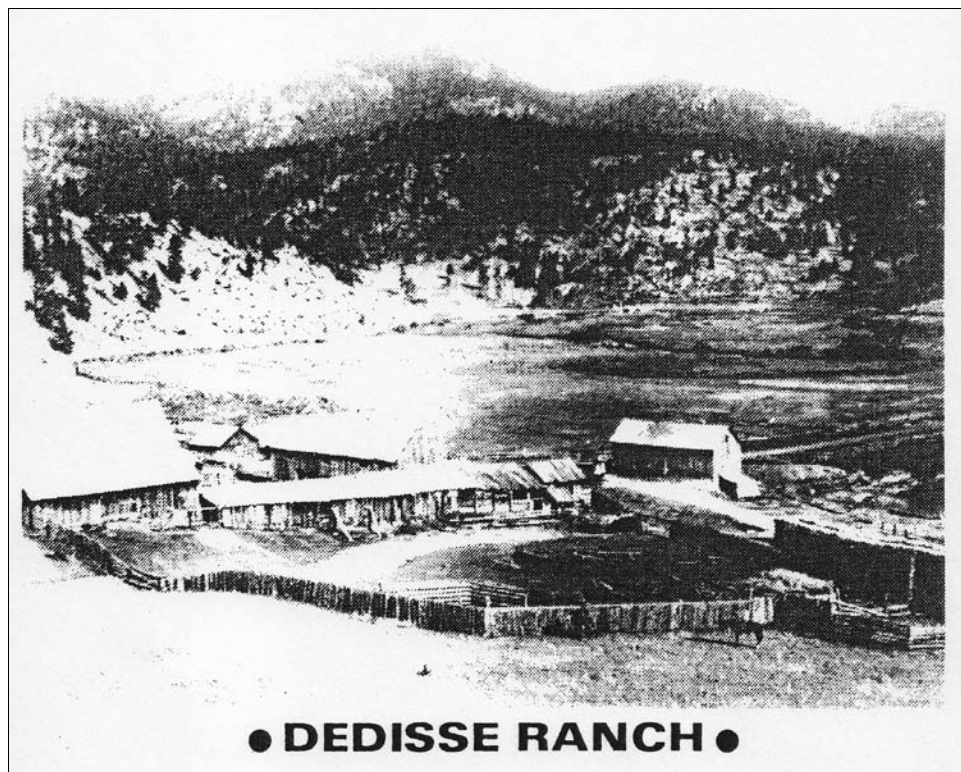
view. The family, however, surely knew that Denver's attention would not be diverted this time: once again the threat of condemnation had brought unwilling sellers to the bargaining table.²⁹⁹

The lawsuit proceeded smoothly; the court assigning an independent commission of peers to determine the "fair market value" of the ranch. The appraisers included Rev. Thornton B. Rennell, vicar of Evergreen's Episcopal church and host of the respected annual Evergreen Conferences; Dr. Michael Baker, who operated a summer medical practice in Evergreen while spending winters in Denver; and local rancher Oscar N. Johnson, who in 1917 had donated 20 acres of his own land to create Bergen Park. All three men knew the deDisse family personally.³⁰⁰ Rennell was also very familiar with the MPAC; in 1914 he had represented Dr. Josepha Douglas in her effort to keep Denver from condemning her own land, and had defended Douglas's interests assertively. However, Rennell would also soon offer to donate land to the mountain parks on which to build the promised dam. The appraisers set the ranch's value at \$25,000, the amount that had already been agreed upon between Manager Burnett and the deDisse heirs. In November court proceedings the family formally accepted the award; in March 1920 the city completed its payments on the land, and the transaction was officially complete. Denver now owned virtually all of the land the deDisse family had homesteaded, and that had provided a living for two generations. In reshaping farmland into a scenic playground for distant urbanites, the lake would cost Mary Ann, and her sons Charles and Jerome, their primary source of income.

²⁹⁹ "Plan Bear Creek Lake," *DMF* (April 1919), 17; "Bear Creek Lake Plans," *DMF* (May 1919), 6.

³⁰⁰ *City and County of Denver v. Mary Ann Dedisse, et. al.*, case no. 2157, 27 May 1919, District Court of Jefferson County, Colorado. On Rennell and Baker see Barbara and Gene Sternberg, *Evergreen: Our Mountain Community*, 54-55, 104, 171. Local newspapers reported frequent social interactions amongst the deDisse women, Rennell, and Baker; for example the social column "Evergreen," *Colorado Transcript* (13 May 1920).

In perhaps no other case did Denver condemn the site of a mountain resident's home, forcing the landowner to relocate. But the deDisse farmhouse was on the meadow. (See Figure 11.) And so, in exchange for the family's promise not to contest the lawsuit, the city agreed to reserve a two-acre lot from the taking. The family, however, would have to build a house at the new site. This they proved unable to do, and in July 1920 Mary Ann deDisse moved to Denver to live with her daughter. She was 82. (See Figure 13.) Her health declined precipitously that winter, and two years later she passed away, still remembered in the town she pioneered as a "fine old lady." Jerome, 51, and his large family continued to live in Evergreen, but in rented accommodations rather than on the two acres the family still owned. By 1924 both he and his



Courtesy Jefferson County Historical Society.

Figure 11. Situated on the large, open meadow above the town of Evergreen, the deDisse ranch had long been an important part of the Evergreen community. Bear Creek meandered down through the meadow, nourishing bountiful harvests of timothy hay. The deDisse fields hosted beloved community baseball games for many years.

wife had died, leaving six children between the ages of ten and twenty-four. Many in the family attributed Jerome's early death to the loss of the ranch.³⁰¹

After the family abandoned the ranch it lay idle for several years before the city marshaled the funds and political support needed to begin construction on the dam. Work did not begin until 1926; the dam was completed in 1927. Once filled, the new lake would cover “a territory of 55 acres, its greatest depth being 35 feet and its average depth 17 feet.” Between the cost of the land and the dam, the city spent nearly \$250,000 to create an alpine lake in beautiful mountain surroundings for the scenic enjoyment and recreational use of an urban park clientele. Although the city bolstered its rationale for the project by noting that a dam on Bear Creek would protect downstream communities from flood danger (as well as the streamside summer homes of Denver's upper class), this utilitarian justification was never the central purpose of the lake. For years *Denver Municipal Facts* had touted the promised attractions for outdoor lovers: the lake would be stocked with trout for fishermen, outfitted with pleasure boats, and rimmed with lovely picnic areas where families could enjoy the undeniably beautiful setting, with mountains ringing the open, park-like valley and its new water feature. The lake was immediately popular for these activities as well as winter ice skating and sledding.³⁰²

In 1926, golf was added to the list when the Troutdale Hotel and Realty Company donated to the city a nine-hole course and rustic clubhouse overlooking the water. The city soon expanded the course to its present eighteen holes, and it was for many years popular as “one of the ‘sportiest’ mountain golf courses in the country.” The gift—which came just as construction on the dam began—was contingent on the condition that the city would “always maintain a golf

³⁰¹ Suzie deDisse interview and family records; U.S. Census, 1920.

³⁰² Sternberg, *Evergreen: Our Mountain Community*, 105-106. “Plan Bear Creek Lake,” *DMF* (April 1919), 17; “Bear Creek Lake Plans,” *DMF* (May 1919), 6.

course on said tract.” And to many Evergreen locals, it testified to the influence of Troutdale’s wealthy owner Harry Sidles with the power brokers of Denver.

By the 1920s Troutdale-in-the-Pines had been transformed from the rather modest casino and dance hall long operated by the Walker family to a five-star establishment comparable to the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park. (See Figure 12.) After a devastating fire in 1914, the Walkers had sold the resort property to the Denver Mountain Parks Securities Co., an investment company made up of Denver businessmen and eastern capitalists with plans to sell 500 sites for mountain homes. The plans failed to materialize and the hotel suffered under poor management. In July 1919—just after the city filed its suit for the deDisse ranch—Harry Sidles bought the troubled resort, tore down the old structures, and built a lavish resort hotel that successfully catered to the nation’s rich and famous throughout the 1920s and 1930s.³⁰³

Without sources that conclusively demonstrate Sidles’s influence on the city’s lake project, we are left to consider the circumstantial evidence. A millionaire auto dealer from Lincoln, Nebraska, Sidles owned a summer home on upper Bear Creek (it was featured in *Denver Municipal Facts*) and had been a summer resident of the area since at least 1914. He would surely have taken the resumption of Denver’s lake-building scheme into consideration as he poured money into his new resort. Without question, the lake was an enhancement to the

³⁰³ The 1912 Olmsted survey shows the Troutdale tract owned by the Walker family’s Colorado Resort Company; see “Mountain Parks – General Plan of Mountain Park Lands [property map]” in DHPC, FFC 17, Dwr 1, FF 5. For the 1914 fire see “Local Paragraphs” and “Colorado News,” *Colorado Transcript* 23 July 1914. Then see “Buy Troutdale Resort,” *Colorado Transcript* (18 May 1916); “Local Paragraphs,” *Colorado Transcript* (3 October 1918); “To Build \$100,000 Hotel,” *Colorado Transcript* (31 July 1919); “Evergreen,” *Colorado Transcript* (25 September 1919); “Local Paragraphs,” *Colorado Transcript* (18 December 1919); “Plan Further Development of Bear Creek Canon,” *Colorado Transcript* (29 April 1920). On Troutdale’s later fame, see “Upper Bear Creek Road,” *Colorado City & Mountain Views* (6 December 2006).



Courtesy CardCow.com Vintage Postcards and Collectibles.

Figure 12. Troutdale-in-the-Pines, the exclusive resort hotel built by Harry Sidles at Evergreen. This vintage postcard shows the hotel in its heyday during the 1920s, when it attracted a wealthy clientele from all over the country.

recreational landscape surrounding Troutdale, which shared a long border with the deDisse property. It replaced the worn ranch buildings, corrals, and livestock with a natural-looking, scenic lake that blended almost seamlessly with the surrounding peaks and hillsides. The lake itself promised enhanced opportunities for outdoor recreation for the resort's clientele. Whether or not he was solely responsible for convincing Denver to resume the Evergreen Lake project in 1919—which seems unlikely since the MPAC had dreamed of the lake perhaps as early as 1911—Sidles had every reason to support it. And his gift of the golf course, coming just as dam construction began, appears to confirm some kind of arrangement by which the golf course was given as *quid pro quo*.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ As I have made clear, this analysis is necessarily speculative. Other sources that suggest Sidles's collusion include Carole Lomond, who states that Sidles "encouraged Denver to purchase the Dedisse Ranch for its Mountain Park system," in "Heart of Evergreen." Also Suzie deDisse interview.

In 1928—the year that Evergreen Lake was at last filled to capacity—Denver filed suit against the deDisse family again, this time to take the two-acre parcel that had been reserved from the original acquisition. The land, which now was on the shoreline of Evergreen Lake, was a part of the city’s scenic area, but it had become a private inholding over which the city had no control. Park officials believed Denver “should acquire this property so as to avoid all possible danger in the future of having unsightly concessions on the shores of the beautiful lake” it had created. This time, however, the family resisted. They filed an objection to the court-appointed appraisal of the land and requested a jury trial. The jury found in favor of the family, increasing “the value fixed by the commission from \$7,000 to \$10,000.” Denver’s Manager of Improvements and Parks Charles D. Vail, faced with the choice of appealing the case to the state supreme court or paying \$10,000 for two lakeshore acres, decided to walk away from the deal. Vail had the case dismissed. The deDisse family eventually sold the property; it is today the site of a shopping center.³⁰⁵

Evergreen Lake was immediately popular among Denverites and mountain park patrons as a recreational destination. It also soon became the central emblem of local identity among Evergreen residents, its artificiality losing significance as naturalists and sportsmen came to see it as a natural habitat for wetlands birds and fish. But the story of Denver’s determination to engineer a scenic mountain lake has much to tell about the struggle of hinterland residents to resist the power of a distant metropolis. The deDisse case is consistent with the findings of such historians as Louis Warren and Karl Jacoby, who have tracked the ways that urban elites wielding government authority imposed a new set of environmental relations in rural areas,

³⁰⁵ City and County of Denver v. Nellie Marie Dedisse, et al., case no. 2811, 6 July 1928, District Court of Jefferson County, Colorado. W.J. Ailinger to F.C. Steinhauer, 16 April 1926, in DHPC Box 21, FF 12; Thomas H. Gibson to Charles D. Vail, 4 December 1928; C.D. Vail to Thomas Gibson, 20 December 1928; and “Dedisse 2 Acres” notes, all in DHPC, Box 28, FF 15.

arrangements that often undermined local residents' preexisting modes and ethics of land use.³⁰⁶

The case also illustrates the way that a complex milieu of social and cultural beliefs were embedded in Progressive-Era nature recreation, beliefs that were coded not simply by class but by their specifically urban origins.

For park advocates in Denver—urbane and educated, successful businessmen whose wealth and social power was rooted in the city's economy—moving an elderly woman off her ranch to make way for a nature lover's destination was not avaricious or even regrettable, it was progressive in every way. In the same breath that *Municipal Facts* portrayed Mary Ann deDisse as a pioneer, a member of Colorado's founding generation, it also sketched her as a sentimental, frail old woman past her prime and out of step with the advance of civilization. (See Figure 13.) In a tableau that set the old woman alone (her children and grandchildren's continuing stake in the ranch were carefully elided in the promotional press coverage) against the advancement of the city, the mountain parks represented not a timeless wilderness or even a bygone frontier, but *modernity*. Denver's park advocates believed the pioneer past that Mrs. deDisse—and the landscape her family had created in their ranch—represented must give way as the march of progress converted their land to its modern use.³⁰⁷

This notion of modernity and progress was embodied in Denver's ambitions to redefine the mountains as a recreational landscape, as distinct from both an undeveloped wilderness and an agricultural or extractive resource. As parkland, the mountain landscapes would pay financial,

³⁰⁶ Louis S. Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Hal K. Rothman, *Devil's Bargains*.

³⁰⁷ "The Mountain Home Colony in Picturesque Bear Creek," *DMF* (March 1919): 6-7; "Plan Bear Creek Lake," *DMF* (April 1919): 17; "Bear Creek Lake Plans," *DMF* (May 1919): 6.



Source: *DMF* (March 1919), 7.

Figure 13. Mary Ann deDisse at her home, 1919. This photo accompanied a feature story on the mountain homes of Bear Creek in *Denver Municipal Facts*. The article described Mrs. deDisse as a quaint, sentimental old woman who, having lived on her mountain ranch for more than fifty years, was emotionally attached to her land. “Several years ago the city tried to purchase this land in order to construct a lake in her bottom land, but Mrs. Dedisse [*sic*] could not bear to consider the question of taking up her abode in another place.”

physical, and moral dividends to the businesses and the citizens of Denver. In conceptualizing Bear Creek as “the people’s stream” the park faithful subsumed the claim of mountain locals with their own interests as affluent urbanites who viewed nature recreation as an essential amenity of city life. By remapping the mountain district with a system of public lands designated to isolate natural beauty and develop a recreational infrastructure, the city was also engaging in a process of rationalizing its mountain hinterland, categorizing its many physical components into newer types of resources according to their value in the urban marketplace. Scenery had become an economic resource with a proven market among urban outdoor lovers.

Denver would eventually buy the majority of its mountain parklands—some 11,000 acres—in scores of transactions with individuals and families, corporations and investors, and the federal government. As we have seen, a significant number of these purchases involved condemnation proceedings. Sometimes the threat of a lawsuit was enough to compel landowners to accept the city’s offer, while other times the entire transaction was completed in court. But not every land acquisition was hostile. A number of donors came forward with land as well, including wealthy patrons such as Florence Martin, Adolph Coors, and park board member Charles MacAllister Willcox. A number of mountain locals gave land as well, including Lucian Ralston, Oscar Johnson, and E.H. Rollins. All told the city received more than 2,300 acres through philanthropy. (See Appendix B.)

Preservation, Law, and the Limits of Authority

When F.L. Olmsted signed on to plan Denver’s mountain parks, he outlined his contractual duties to include not simply preparing surveys, site plans, and construction guidelines, but also advising the city in the preservation and maintenance of parklands, roadways, and other “incidental features.”³⁰⁸ The state enabling legislation written under Olmsted’s guidance included a number of detailed clauses that extended the city’s statutory authority into Jefferson County in important ways. First, the law vested in the city “full police power and jurisdiction and full municipal ... power and authority in management, control, improvement, and maintenance of and over any and all such lands.” The law further stipulated that Denver could exercise its police powers “to prevent the commission of any and all acts

³⁰⁸ F.L. Olmsted, Jr. to John G. Macbeth, 26 July 1912, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job No. 5580, microfilm in DHCP. Also see “Annual Report for the Year 1913 of the Board of Park Commissioners of the City and County of Denver,” p. 17, in DHCP, Box 1, FF 4; and Downing, “How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks,” 14.

which are or may be declared unlawful,” and to “prosecute and punish the violation of any ordinances in its municipal or police courts.” Thus empowered, the city could establish an extensive set of governing ordinances specific to the mountain parks that subjected park users and, just as easily, residents of the mountain park region, to Denver’s police, laws, and courts.

Finally, the state law addressed several specific concerns that Olmsted and the MPAC believed critical to the city’s ability to both preserve park landscapes and shape visitors experiences. They made sure that the state granted Denver the right to “prevent from pollution” all water sources flowing through its parks; to control how the linking parkways would be used by both visitors and local traffic; to prevent the construction of billboards or other advertising nuisances within 300 feet of any park or connecting roadway; and to prohibit the sale of liquor in or near the parks and the parkways.³⁰⁹ These concerns were drawn directly from City Beautiful ideology and practice; it was a language in which both Olmsted and Denver’s park advocates were fluent. Denver’s civic improvement activists were by this time veterans of campaigns to combat pollution in Cherry Creek and the Platte River, to restrict unsightly advertising billboards within the city, and to oppose drink and vice in Denver’s famed tavern district.

All three issues took on new importance in creating and preserving a natural outdoor park experience for tourists. The streams and springs within the parks would be used for culinary water as well as for fishing, wading, and picnicking, and so their value as recreational resources rested in preserving the clarity of their waters. Water pollution would quickly render Denver’s large investment in the mountain parks unprofitable. In writing controls on billboards and liquor into the enabling legislation, the committee demonstrated its recognition that the park system would integrate a maze of parklands through a patchwork of privately held land, and that locals

³⁰⁹ Senate Bill No. 302, 15 April 1913, *Laws Passed at the Nineteenth Session of the General Assembly of the State of Colorado, 1913*, pp. 422-424.

would seize the opportunity to open tourist-oriented businesses. Olmsted and the committee were determined to prevent a landscape of taverns, casinos, and tacky billboards from marring the scenic experience of driving the parkways. It wasn't simply that such businesses would contaminate the pristine natural scenery with the hand of man (a term that park advocates might well have used), they would also sully the type of experience that park-makers hoped to create by facilitating public drunkenness and unruly behavior among park-goers, many of whom would be operating motor vehicles.

By several measures, the Mountain Parks Committee's early decision to go with a "necklace" system of parks and roads extending over a large mountain region—a type of park geography developed in metropolitan areas and well-suited to dispersing a variety of park amenities across the city and amongst its neighborhoods—was a brilliant strategy. Early expectations that much of the land in the desired region was held by the federal government, which might be induced to simply grant it to Denver outright, had been dashed as surveyors found instead that most of the land was privately owned. This being the case, a city (even one with the resources at Denver's command) could simply not afford to cobble together from countless private sellers a single tract that would capture enough mountain scenery to attract tourists from great distances. A single mountain park, even the eight-mile-square tract originally proposed by J.B. Walker, would amount to little more than another city park, one frequented mainly by Denverites.³¹⁰

And so the committee seized on the geography of an urban park system in order to create a mountain tourist destination that they hoped would compete with the federal government's national parks. As the group explained in 1911, "It is impossible to select the entire region as a

³¹⁰ J.B. Walker's plan outlined in "Magnificent Park System," *Post*, 30 October 1910.

park, and similarly impossible to select any one portion without omitting much of value. Hence the plan of a chain of parks so as to embrace every character of mountain scenery.” The committee wanted the parks to offer views of the plains to the east as well as the high peaks to the west. Of course the system had to feature alpine forests and wildflower meadows, “the open rolling parks” of the high country, the dramatic rocky walls that rise above Turkey Creek, and the beautiful “running water of Bear Creek” in the two canyons.³¹¹ Given the constraints imposed by municipal funds they knew would be limited, the necklace of parks and scenic drives represented a pragmatic and creative way to capture the best of the mountains’ recreational resources.

The extended park-and-parkway system model, however, would present a host of challenges to park planners and later managers. F.L. Olmsted understood the problem at once. Ensuring a high quality scenic experience for park visitors for decades to come would involve more than expert site selection, landscape design, road construction, and building architecture. Just as important was finding a way to control the land use practices of abutting private landowners to preserve the scenery just outside the parks that would provide the lasting foundation of the mountain park experience. Olmsted was alert to “the danger that shortsightedly selfish owners,” particularly of lands adjacent to the parkways, might at any time choose to log their property “and thus destroy the quality of the scenery which was the main inducement to the city for expending money in the construction of a road in that particular location.”

In such a vast park-and-parkway region there was no way the city could afford to protect roadside scenery by directly purchasing the strips of land bordering every road. Therefore, Olmsted advised the city “to secure from the owners through whose land any of the proposed

³¹¹ “Executive Committee Report to the Joint Committee of the Mountain Park Project,” 7 December 1911, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job No. 5582, microfilm in DHCP.

park roads may run, permanent easements ... preventing the erection of advertising signs conspicuously visible from the roads, and in other ways protecting the character of the scenery which the road is intended to exhibit, without interfering with the legitimate use of the land for its most productive purposes.” Olmsted hoped the city could strike a balance between scenic preservation and clear cutting through logging easements that would allow limited timber cutting while requiring maintenance of a certain degree of tree growth. He also advised easements “prohibiting the erection of certain structures within a certain distance of the park road.”³¹²

The Mountain Parks Committee referenced some of these concerns in the enabling legislation approved by the state legislature. Yet restrictions on property use in the interest of scenic preservation were primarily implemented in binding agreements with property owners whose land bordered the parkways. In these agreements, the power of the metropolis came in force to the doorstep of mountain locals. Road right-of-way deeds typically saw landowners ceding 60 to 100-foot swaths through their property for the new scenic drives at a nominal settlement, usually one dollar. In return, the agreements subjected abutting landowners to various restrictions on the use of their property in the vicinity of the parkways.

Depending upon the particular location and qualities of a given property, deeds were written specifically to restrict the construction of buildings and other structures to preserve views and roadside scenery. The agreements also circumscribed the right of local property owners to engage in tourist-oriented business activities, limiting this function to selected concessionaires. Denver’s agreement with the Lookout Mountain Resort Company was explicit: although the Lookout Mountain Road would wind through the resort property, the city reserved to itself the rights “for sale of refreshments, curios, souvenirs, renting or hiring burros or horses and the

³¹² F.L. Olmsted, Jr. to John Brisben Walker, 6 November 1912, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job No. 5580, microfilm in DHCP.

taking and sale of photographs or pictures.” And, as provided for in the state legislation, virtually all roadside properties were prohibited from erecting billboards, advertisements, or other visual nuisances, and from the manufacture, sale, or distribution of “spirituous, malt, or intoxicating liquors” within 500 feet of the parkways.³¹³

The restrictions are telling. They reflect the park planners’ determination not simply to preserve nature—to save forests from logging and streams from pollution—but to shape a particular way of experiencing nature in the mountain parks. Between the destination parks, where visitors would walk, hike, picnic, fish, or camp, natural scenery would be organized in relationship to the road, where it would be viewed from automobiles. By controlling roadside scenery throughout the region, Olmsted and the committee hoped to create the illusion of a much larger natural park, one that would appear to visitors more like Yosemite or Yellowstone than the patchwork of remote park sites that it really was. If in 1912 the surrounding mountain landscape was still largely undeveloped, preserving its pristine appearance was an artifice that would become increasingly difficult to sustain.

And while the controls on alcohol sales, billboards, advertising, and local entrepreneurial ventures certainly reflected some of the primary concerns of City Beautiful activists, in their extension into Denver’s rural hinterland they took on new significance as well. It was more than a matter of preventing man-made construction from interrupting the natural scenery in order to sustain a sense of untouched nature throughout the region. Such restrictions also reflect a determination to control the type of architecture and commerce that would serve visitors throughout the park region. Rustic architecture, featuring rough-hewn wood and native stone,

³¹³ “Agreement between Lookout Mountain Park Development Company and City and County of Denver,” 21 April 1913, in DHPC, Box 27, FF 32; see also various deeds in DHCP, Box 19, FF 5.

would characterize the limited buildings and structures allowed within the view of park patrons, ensuring that such necessary services were consistent with the natural scenery.

Park advocates also hoped to prevent the type of tawdry commercial landscape that had developed at Niagara Falls during the nineteenth century. But these regulations also illuminate the way the mountain parks were constructed according to middle- and upper-class cultural and social values. Roadside vending stands, burro trains, or other ventures operated by mountain locals might be unsightly, unkempt, or even dangerous. Worse still was the specter of taverns and casinos lining the mountain highways. In all of these cases, park planners hoped to shape not only the visual experience of nature in the park region but also the social experience of park visitors according to the norms of civil behavior embraced by the educated classes. This array of concerns—encompassing nature preservation and social control—was also reflected in the regulations developed to govern activity in the mountain park region.

The changes that park visitors would introduce upon park landscapes were not long in coming. Merely a month into the summer of 1913 campfires, carelessly built and left unextinguished, had already become a “dangerous nuisance.” At this early date it often fell to the road construction crews to put out such wildfires. In 1917 the Colorado Mountain Club took the initiative to install signs throughout the park region urging visitors to be “A Good Woodsman.” In a cordial way, the signs instructed visitors in basic park ethics. Park goers were encouraged to resist the temptation to pick wildflowers, kill birds and other wildlife, or cut trees, and to burn or bury all trash and put out campfires completely, leaving “the pleasant places along the way just as pleasant for those who follow you.” By this time, as the number of summer visitors topped 300,000 in the mountain parks, it had become abundantly clear that more specific regulations,

along with a means to enforce them, were desperately needed to protect both the natural environment and the visitors' experience in the mountain parks.³¹⁴

In 1919, Denver adopted its first set of laws specific to the mountain parks as part of its municipal code. These regulations, which would soon be enforced by a small staff of mountain parks police officers, focused on two immediate threats: motorists and livestock. Over the years the city established additional laws targeting disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, and cutting of trees.³¹⁵ The highway ordinance, which was printed as a pamphlet and distributed directly to drivers in the region, represented a dual effort to educate motorists new to mountain driving, and to combat unsafe traffic conditions on the roads. The law required the use of basic vehicle safety equipment (headlights, taillights, and brakes), and instructed drivers in basic rules of the road. It sought to ameliorate traffic congestion by implementing guidelines and restrictions on roadside parking and standing. It also established speed limits for up hills, down hills, curves, and other designated areas. Motorists on the park roads were now obligated by law to drive “in a careful and prudent manner, at a rate of speed no greater than is reasonable and safe, having regard for the width, grade, curves, corners, [and] traffic ... so as not to endanger the life or limb or property of any person.” Those who did not could be cited for their offenses.³¹⁶

Although all drivers, including mountain residents, were subject to the new highway laws, clearly the traffic ordinances were directed at people visiting the park region by

³¹⁴ On campfires and other issues, see *Colorado Transcript* (17 July 1913), p. 8, and “Policing the Mountain Parks,” *Colorado Transcript* (11 June 1914). The Colorado Mountain Club signs are detailed in Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 2 July 1917, in DHCP, Box 5, FF 4. Tourist numbers for 1917 reported in “State News in Brief,” *Colorado Transcript* (25 October 1917).

³¹⁵ Most of the regulatory ordinances are compiled in “Manual of Operations: Mountain Parks,” Division of Parks, Department of Improvements and Parks, City and County of Denver, November 1948, DHCP, Box 22, FF 2.

³¹⁶ “Denver Mountain Parks Highway Ordinances, Ordinance No. 96, Series of 1919,” pamphlet in DHCP, Box 21, FF 7.

automobile. The livestock regulations, however, directly targeted the actions of mountain locals. A 1919 Denver ordinance made it “unlawful for any person to permit or allow any horses, cattle, sheep, goats, hogs, or any livestock whatsoever to pasture, graze or run at large within the limits of any of the Mountain Parks of the City and County of Denver.” Mountain ranchers who violated this ordinance faced a citation, a fine, and the impoundment of their livestock by Denver authorities.³¹⁷ The stiff penalties indicate the degree to which trespassing livestock had, by 1919, become a significant problem in the opinion of many mountain park enthusiasts in Denver. The issue exposes the very different perspectives with which mountain locals and middle- and upper-class urbanites viewed the mountain landscape.

In 1929, Denver attorney Wilbur Denious requested that Denver step up its enforcement of the livestock regulations. Denious represented the owners of several vacation homes in Bear Creek Canyon, one of the primary traffic arteries in the mountain park system and an area where Denver controlled several hundred acres of land in its designated parks. Both the public parks and the privately owned mountain homes in the park region, he argued, were “rendered much less useful, less beautiful, and less valuable” when cattle were allowed to roam freely in their vicinity. Tellingly, the way that Denious and his Denver clients understood the beauty, value, and utility of the natural landscape was framed within the terms of both nature conservation and urban improvement.

“The livestock destroy the natural and artificial beauty” of the park region, Denious explained, “by loosening stones and exposing the roots of trees, thereby promoting the washing away of the soil and damaging the roads and trails.” In addition to causing soil erosion and

³¹⁷ Violation warning, 1929, in DHCP, Box 21, FF 16. Ordinance No. 97 of 1919, Section 1611, Denver Municipal Code, can be found in ““Manual of Operations: Mountain Parks,” Division of Parks, Department of Improvements and Parks, City and County of Denver, November 1948, DHCP, Box 22, FF 2.

damaging the built infrastructure of the parks, cattle also ruined the natural beauty of the landscape. More than aesthetics was at stake here, for the mountains' value as a recreational destination, and as a profitable site for vacation homes, lay in the preservation of their natural beauty. "These cattle are constantly killing the flowers, destroying the sod, and leaving dust and manure in their place." Moreover, Denious continued, "cattle furnish a natural breeding place for flies and other pests. Flies and mosquitoes always follow livestock in swarms." Finally, he added, "cattle are a menace to children," and their presence discouraged families from visiting the park region. For all of these reasons, he asserted, "the presence of livestock renders the locality undesirable for homes."³¹⁸

To a middle- and upper-class audience fluent in the language of urban beautification, the triple threat of dust, manure, and flies was loaded with significance. These were central objects of the "municipal housekeeping" campaigns of the Progressive Era, a nationwide trend in which Denver clubwomen played an important part. In the early twentieth century, scientists believed that airborne dust, much of it derived from the filth of urban streets (of which animal manure comprised a large part), as well as the common housefly (derived from the same filth), carried disease. To urban middle-class women, then, fell the responsibility of protecting their families from dust that entered their homes from the surrounding urban environment. The municipal housekeeping movement educated millions of clubwomen on the dangers of dust, manure, and flies, and instructed them in ways to combat these threats in their own homes.

Just as dust and flies transgressed the boundaries between the public space of the city streets and the private space of the middle class home, municipal housekeepers expanded the focus of their efforts to clean and beautify the domestic world to include the urban environment

³¹⁸ Wilbur F. Denious to Charles D. Vail, Manager of Parks & Improvements, 10 October 1929, in DHCP, Box 21, FF 16.

that continually threatened to invade their homes. In this way, municipal housekeeping transcended the limits of the home and provided a path for women's activism in the larger community. And the municipal housekeeping campaigns of urban women quickly became a central component of the larger City Beautiful movement. (It was no coincidence, then, that F.L. Olmsted, Jr., also coordinated the American Civic Association's "Swat the Fly" campaign.)³¹⁹

While middle-class women struggled perpetually against the infiltration of urban pollutants into their homes, more affluent households could afford to take their families out of the city into what they believed was a healthier environment in the country. In Denver, a summer home in the nearby mountains seemed to offer just such an escape for families—especially for women and children, whose husbands and fathers could commute to the city for work—from the environmental dangers of the city. However, the presence of livestock, turned out by local ranchers to graze the open forests as they had for decades, hollowed out the promise of the domestic mountain refuge. Hence counselor Denious's emphasis on how livestock represented a threat to children, and to the safety and health of the home. This was more than a simple case of wealthy second-home owners angry about trampled wildflowers, or even about trampled property values. Much of the logic of a mountain home rested upon the ideology of domesticity. In the mountain park region, the longstanding husbandry practices of rural mountain locals came directly into conflict with a decidedly urban culture of nature.

Denver inevitably faced limitations on its power in the mountain-park hinterland, despite the enabling legislation, property easements, and governing ordinances it and MPAC assembled

³¹⁹ Wendy Keefover-Ring, "Municipal Housekeeping, Domestic Science, Animal Protection, and Conservation: Women's Political and Environmental Activism in Denver, Colorado, 1894-1912," M.A. thesis, University of Colorado at Boulder, 2002. "Swat the Fly" referenced in Ernest Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland: A Thorn for Beauty* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1995), 175.

to control the behavior of cows, motorists, local entrepreneurs, and park goers. Violations of the anti-billboard clauses, for example, abounded. Mountain locals launched a range of tourist businesses in spite of Denver's efforts to prevent them. And despite the perennial complaints of city folk about trespassing cattle destroying the natural beauty—and the illusion of an isolated wilderness—in the mountain parks, the city's ability to prosecute Jefferson County ranchers for livestock violations was limited by the courts. When Denver brought suit against mountain rancher Andrew Anderson for animal trespass, county judge Osmer Smith ruled against the city. The rancher could not be fined, Smith decided, unless the city fenced the perimeters of all its parks.³²⁰

By the early 1920s, the annual flood of visitors to the mountain parks region was bringing a host of problems with them that challenged not only the city of Denver but also the owners of private property throughout the area. Campfires left to burn threatened the forests, park buildings, and summer cottages. Wildflowers were continually picked until they had little chance of reseeding. Game laws were violated. Pot shooters aimed their guns at park signs and any other available targets, making guns a perpetual threat to hikers and picnickers. Campers overflowed the park campgrounds and squatted on private land. Christmas tree hunters prowled the forests every December. And the number of burglaries and break-ins of mountain cottages seemingly rose continuously. Denver had created a special police force to patrol the mountain parks in 1919, but the distances were vast, the park sites dispersed, and the city's authority to capture and prosecute such law-breakers was limited to city property—that is, only to the parks and connecting roads. Denver's patrolmen could not follow perpetrators who turned off the public highways onto national forest land or private property. The summer homes were often vacant,

³²⁰ Reference to the Anderson case is made in "History of Mountain Parks," undated typescript in DHPC, Box 3, FF 2.

and quickly became prime targets for vandals and burglars. And at a time when the mountain towns of Jefferson County remained unincorporated, local law enforcement was simply not sufficient to cope with the influx of outsiders.

To fill this vacuum, owners of mountain property joined in 1925 to form the Denver Mountain Parks Improvement and Protective Association (hereafter DMPIPA). This nonprofit cooperative organization collected subscriptions from its members to patrol their mountain homes, scout and extinguish unattended fires, orchestrate fire prevention campaigns, and investigate burglaries, fire violations, and other crimes. Most of the DMPIPA officers were well-connected Denver men, such as longtime president Dr. C.E. Tennant. And while much of its membership maintained their primary residence outside of the mountains, the organization employed a number of mountain locals to do its work. E.W. King served as the DMPIPA's full-time on-site supervisor for many years. Working around the clock from an Evergreen office, King and his small staff of patrolmen responded to fire calls, manned ongoing patrols, investigated cases, and conducted extensive publicity campaigns. King also coordinated an extensive volunteer fire-fighting squad, which in 1927 included 290 men, all permanent mountain residents, in 56 crews across the entire parks region.³²¹

By 1930 nearly 500 homeowners belonged to the association. That year alone King and his staff extinguished 30 grass and brush fires and one 90-acre timber fire on the Mt. Evans Highway. The DMPIPA prosecuted two people for leaving campfires burning, and a third for causing a forest fire. King's crews also responded to seven home fires that year, dousing two before serious losses could occur. Four of the five homes destroyed by fire, King emphasized, belonged to non-members who kept no rain barrels at their properties. In fact, the DMPIPA

³²¹ "A Brief Report of the Work Accomplished by the Denver Mountain Parks Improvement & Protective Association During the Year 1927," in DHCP, Box 23, FF 4.

devoted much time to educating both its members and visitors to the mountain parks region in fire safety and prevention. In addition to patrolling the roads of the park region in its marked cars, the DMPIPA also offered daily patrols of individual mountain homes. This service, available at additional cost, virtually eliminated break-ins for its 80 subscribers in 1927. In 1930 King's staff reported 17 burglaries, apprehended all but one of the suspects, and recovered \$1,400 worth of stolen goods. The DMPIPA actively patrolled the mountain park region into the 1950s, which by that time boasted some 4,500 summer homes.³²²

The work of the DMPIPA was not limited to protecting private homes. As its emblem, attached to each member's home, announced, its goals were to "Save Trees, Birds, Flowers, Animals, Prevent Fires, [and] Protect Property." (See Figure 14.) Initially, the organization approached these conservation issues in much the same way it did fire and theft. It posted "State Game Refuge," "Isaac Walton League," and "No Shooting Allowed" signs throughout the region, and apprehended people caught shooting or mistreating animals. During the late 1930s, however, the DMPIPA played a central role in the effort to control a Black Hills Bark Beetle infestation on 40,000 acres of forest. Working with the State of Colorado, the U.S. Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Forest Service, the DMPIPA coordinated efforts to raise funds and apply for a federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) project grant. The successful WPA project removed over 10,000 infected

³²² The Denver Mountain Parks Improvement & Protective Association, "Happenings in the Hills in 1930," in DHCP, Box 21, FF 21; "Protection for Your Mountain Home," Twenty-fourth Annual Report of the Denver Mountain Parks Improvement & Protective Association, June 1949, in Denver Mountain Parks Improvement & Protective Association clippings file, Western History Collection, DPL.



Courtesy Denver Public Library Western History Department.

Figure 14. The Denver Mountain Parks Improvement and Protective Association emblem graced signs on summer homes and residences throughout the mountain park region.

trees and stopped the spread of the pest, which could easily have left much of the park district denuded of its pine forest.³²³

In fact, the DMPIPA's concern for protecting the mountain environment effectively crossed the legal and jurisdictional boundaries demarcating the patchwork of private and public lands. Just as a park visitor's campfire might spark a wildfire that could destroy private homes, cabin fires could lead to destructive blazes that could spread to the parks. The association's efforts to protect birds, game, and even wildflowers illustrated the same recognition that the mountain environment remained connected across the region, and across the legal boundaries separating public from private lands. Well before the Black Hills Beetle campaign, the DMPIPA cultivated collaborative relationships with Denver's mountain parks division, police department,

³²³ Arthur Ponsford, President, Denver Mountain Parks Improvement & Protective Association, to Mayor B.F. Stapleton, Denver, 5 February 1940, in DHPC, Box 21, FF 31; Horace F. Phelps, President, Denver Mountain Parks Improvement & Protective Association, to Property Owners in the Mountain Parks Area, 10 August 1939; and "Bark Beetle Clean-Up Campaign," 31 May 1940, both in Denver Mountain Parks Improvement & Protective Association clippings file, Western History Collection, DPL.

and detective bureau, with sheriffs, county commissions, district attorneys and judges in several mountain counties, the Colorado State Game and Fish Department, U.S. Forest Service, and many others.³²⁴

The work of the association was broadly understood to supplement the limitations of Denver's authority and to extend its protective services to the mountain parks themselves. Throughout the 1940s the DMPIPA remained "the only organization providing facilities for fire protection to the properties in this area." This arrangement, as well as the expanded policing and investigative capabilities of the Evergreen office, conferred substantial benefits upon the city of Denver, which of course owned more property than any other entity in the region. Moreover, the DMPIPA recognized that Denver's recreational development of the region had set into motion a tourist boom that in turn generated a raft of problems, problems that then spilled over the geopolitical boundaries of the city's park holdings as well as its statutory authority. In recognition of both the city's responsibility for its tourists as well as the limits of its authority, the Denver mountain parks division for many years paid a monthly stipend to the DMPIPA for its services.³²⁵

Through right-of-way agreements and property easements, as well as through the enforcement of mountain park ordinances, mountain locals experienced the coming of the mountain parks as a mixed bag of pros and cons. The parks brought with them improved public roads, rising property values, and, for some, tourism profits, as well as a host of problems, from trespassing and vandalism to land-use restrictions that applied even to private property. And

³²⁴ "Protection for Your Mountain Home," Twenty-fourth Annual Report of the Denver Mountain Parks Improvement & Protective Association, June 1949, in Denver Mountain Parks Improvement & Protective Association clippings file, Western History Collection, DPL.

³²⁵ Arthur Ponsford to Mayor B.F. Stapleton, 5 February 1940, in DHCP, Box 21, FF 31.

while Denver wielded considerable power to establish regulations, police behavior, and prosecute violations, the city ultimately could do little to protect mountain residents from some of the worst impacts of tourism, especially crime and fire. For this reason mountain locals sought ways to fill the gaps of metropolitan authority in the hinterland.

Conclusion

F.L. Olmsted's 1914 plan for mountain parks and roads formed the backbone of the future park system, but as Denver added flesh to these bones the mountain parks were shaped in critical ways by both the MPAC and the mayor's office. Olmsted's recommendations on the routing and design of park roads proved especially enduring. But over time, and in response to a variety of factors, Denver's park planners gradually moved away from strict adherence to the Olmsted Plan to focus on projects that they deemed more valuable or practical. After a few years the city turned away from cobbling together the several large wildland parks that Olmsted hoped for, instead creating a greater number of small parks. This shift in strategy favored the needs of Denver residents over tourists and resulted in a park geography that resembled an urban park system far more than a national park. Other local initiatives that diverged from the Olmsted Plan included the construction of Evergreen Lake, the acquisition of Echo Lake and development of Mt. Evans, the purchase of Red Rocks Park and construction of its famed amphitheatre, and the development of Winter Park ski resort. Interestingly, these parks became some of the most beloved mountain park destinations among Denver locals.

By 1912 Denver had long since consolidated its role as the industrial, financial, and political metropolis of the central Rocky Mountain region.³²⁶ Denver's mountain park promoters

³²⁶ Kathleen Brosnan, *Uniting Mountain and Plain*.

spoke of their plan in these very terms, recognizing in the nearby mountains “a vast region immediately tributary to Denver” offering scenic resources that could be profitably developed.³²⁷ But describing the mountain parks as a resource hinterland of Denver’s urban core expressed more than a simple acknowledgement of the mountains’ geographical position in relation to the city on the plains. The creation and preservation of a scenic recreational landscape was also constituted in institutional power structures grounded in the municipal government: enabling laws, land acquisition rights, property easements, governing ordinances, and powers to police and enforce laws. As much as they were composed of forests, streams, peaks, and views, and of manmade roads, trails, lodges, and picnic shelters, Denver’s mountain parks also mapped upon the physical landscape a network of legal structures that brought these places within the scope of the city’s municipal authority.

The city made its power felt to mountain locals most acutely through aggressive land acquisition efforts, roadway easements, and preservation laws. In its purchase negotiations the MPAC relied heavily on the threat of condemnation to compel landowners to accept lower prices; in many other cases the city completed condemnation proceedings to obtain land from owners unwilling to sell. Road right-of-way agreements constrained the rights of mountain landowners to use their land as they wished, restricting especially any logging or construction of buildings that would degrade the scenery along the park roads. And while the city passed stringent laws to control the trespass of local livestock on park property, these regulations proved difficult to enforce. Without a large police force to patrol the mountain park region, the power of the metropolis to control the behavior of park visitors and mountain residents had reached its effective limit.

³²⁷ “Executive Committee Report to the Joint Committee of the Mountain Park Project,” 7 December 1911, Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job No. 5582, in DHCP.

The political and legal structures that had made the creation of the mountain parks possible remained the foundation of the city's recreational empire, a concept that integrated both metropolitan political and economic dominance with the spatial organization of the city's mountain parks as they interlaced parks and parkways across the mountain landscape. If Denver had long been the urban center of an extractive empire in the Rockies, by the 1930s it also anchored a recreational hinterland reaching ever further westward toward the Continental Divide.

CHAPTER V

SCENIC CAPITAL: ATTRACTIONS, IMAGE-MAKING, AND THE CREATION OF A MOUNTAIN TOURIST DESTINATION

Introduction: Mountain Landscapes and the Symbols of Western Tourism

By chance, really, William F. Cody passed away in Denver, in early 1917. The storied showman had led a largely itinerant life as he moved perpetually between working as a professional hunter and army scout, and touring with his traveling show “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West.” The show first opened in 1883, after Cody had achieved fame as the frontier hero whose larger-than-life exploits animated the hugely popular Buffalo Bill dime novels. Cody’s Wild West show ran, in varying forms, for over 30 years, playing in cities and towns across the United States and Europe and making William “Buffalo Bill” Cody one of the best-known celebrities of the time. Cody had close family and business ties to Denver, but Colorado was not his home. He and his wife, Louisa Frederici Cody, maintained a large town house and ranch in North Platte, Nebraska. But their marriage was not a happy one and the old scout spent little time there, preferring instead to spend much of his off-season in Cody, Wyoming. He had poured his heart, soul, and savings into building the town that bore his name. He owned a hotel and a ranch in Cody, and had left written instructions that he be buried on a hill overlooking the town. Yet he

was, instead, interred in the Denver Mountain Parks. Cut into the rock on the summit of Lookout Mountain, his tomb overlooks Denver and the sprawling plains beyond.³²⁸

How Buffalo Bill came to rest in this unlikely spot, and the meanings that his presence attached to the place, comprise an important part of the mountain parks story. For in addition to creating the natural landscape parks that the Olmsted Plan described, Denver's mountain park builders also worked to imbue the evolving parkscapes with an array of signs and symbols that park visitors would easily understand and appreciate. This chapter examines a number of mountain park attractions along with publicity and advertising materials to explore the cultural meanings that park builders sought to attach to the park landscapes. These symbols and ideals however, did not always correlate with the social and environmental conditions that accompanied park development and the introduction of tourism into the mountain ecosystem. Therefore the analysis also situates the images and ideas associated with the park landscapes within their broader historical contexts.

The chapter is organized by the three main themes that characterized the imagery associated with the mountain parks. First, park planners developed an extensive menu of amenities and attractions that invited visitors to remember the paradigmatic elements of the nineteenth-century western frontier. Second, mountain parks publicity celebrated modernity, technology, and progress in a formula that emphasized a harmonious blending of nature and technology, past and present in the park landscape. Finally, promoters of the mountain parks worked to establish an identity for Denver as the premier city for mountain recreation in the West, an image that involved a subtle blurring of the actual miles that separated the city from its

³²⁸ Louisa Ward Arps, *Denver in Slices* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 1959), 194-209; Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 541-549.

recreational hinterland. In the mountain parks, then, lay the origins of Denver's lasting image as a mountain city, a place whose residents enjoyed a distinctive western lifestyle enhanced by accessible, plentiful mountain recreation.

A Menu of Western Attractions

From the earliest years of park development, Denver's park builders assumed that the natural environment in the mountain park region would require certain enhancements that would increase the appeal of the parks and attract visitors to them. Additionally, mountain park builders compiled and employed a range of cultural symbols representing America's pioneer heritage that linked the powerful mythology of the frontier with the mountain landscapes, and imbued the experience of park visitors with a sense of that history. Through wildlife and place names, architecture and advertising, planners brought buffalo, American Indians, log cabins, and, serendipitously, Buffalo Bill himself, together in the Denver Mountain Parks. First conceived as an interconnected system of landscape sites, by 1920 the mountain parks also offered an interrelated set of attractions and amenities that joined the appreciation of natural mountain scenery with the celebration of Colorado's frontier past through powerful icons of the nineteenth-century American West. In this way the mountain parks presented to visitors a visual narrative, one that was constituted, first, through the creation of landscape parks that presented typical forms of mountain scenery to viewers, and also through the construction of wildlife habitats, naturalistic buildings, and western attractions throughout the park region.

Even before the Denver Mountain Parks were opened to public use (which occurred in August 1913 when the city held an official opening of Lookout Mountain and Genesee parks), plans were underway to ensure the presence of wildlife in the mountain parks by creating a game preserve. In December 1912 the Mountain Parks Committee met with Governor Elias M.

Ammons, who “was anxious to have the Mountain Park become a game preserve.” Colorado’s state park board was soon looking into stocking Genesee Park with “deer, elk, mountain sheep, buffalo, pheasants, and other native wild creatures.” Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. agreed. In addition to the mountain parks plan, Olmsted was under contract with the city to consult on the improvement of the Denver Zoo in City Park. Among his recommendations for the zoo was the relocation of all the large North American game animals to a wildlife preserve in the mountain parks. The park board moved quickly to establish such a preserve at Genesee Park; it became the first attraction built within the mountain park system. But it never did replace the zoo; the city would choose instead to keep several collections of large game animals, at the zoo, the Genesee Game Preserve, and eventually Daniels Park.³²⁹

When Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane visited Denver in October 1913, the city’s park commissioners took advantage of the opportunity to solicit a shipment of elk from the federal government’s Yellowstone herd. Lane agreed to do so, for Denver’s request helped relieve a growing game management problem he faced in Wyoming. As one newspaper explained, the federal government was farming out surplus elk to neighboring states that could protect and care for them, due to “the rapidity with which the herd of elk in the Yellowstone National Park has increased since protected by the government. ... It is claimed that there are now so many elk in the park that they cannot be properly taken care of within the limits and many of them are going outside the boundaries for food.” Denver requested 75 head, to be divided between the city zoo and Genesee Park game preserve. Park planners anticipated

³²⁹ Governor Ammons quoted in Mountain Park Executive Committee, Meeting Minutes, 23 December 1912, in “Minutes of Committee and General Meetings of the Denver Chamber of Commerce,” Denver Chamber of Commerce Papers, Box 130, Western History Collection, DPL. State park board in “Denver’s Mountain Parks,” *DMF* (9 August 1913), 3-9. Olmsted’s zoo plan in Carolyn and Don Etter, *The Denver Zoo: A Centennial History* (Boulder: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1995), 51-52.

enclosing from three to five hundred acres to keep the elk in as natural a setting as possible. “The tract would include a part of the mountain, with small timber and a part of the valley, so that the elk would have their natural habitat without any artificial improvements.” At the same time, the animals were expressly meant to be on display. “Roads would be made around the fence, and possibly a road inclosed [*sic*] with woven wire through so that the animals could be seen by tourists and park visitors.” Such a preserve, the park commissioners boasted, would be the largest in the country and would prove “a great attraction for tourists in the mountain parks.”³³⁰

In some ways, the Genesee Game Preserve was a logical extension of a tradition established decades earlier by the Denver Zoo. In 1898-99 the park board had established the city’s first buffalo herd, purchasing six bison from Kansas City, shipping them to Denver by rail, and placing them in an enclosure in the then-tiny zoo within City Park. In doing so, Denver was one of the first cities to take part in the effort to save the American bison from extinction through government stewardship of captive herds in zoos and game preserves. During the early 1900s the Denver Zoo focused its collection primarily on large, native western animals. Animal keeper Alfred Hill procured additional bison from Montana’s Flathead Indian Reservation, picking up the stock personally. By 1908 the zoo’s buffalo and elk herds “roamed freely” together in a roomy enclosure, while nearly 50 bears and wolves cohabited in a 100-foot square cage known as “the Stockade.” Given the ample publicity given the zoo by the press and easy access to the city park zoo, Denver residents were thoroughly accustomed to viewing captive wildlife, and also to the notion of municipal stewardship of such animals. And if the animals could be

³³⁰ Estimates of the size of the promised enclosure ranged from 200 to 500 acres. “Annual Report for the Year 1913 of the Board of Park Commissioners of the City and County of Denver,” p. 19, in DHCP, Box 1, FF 4. “City Awaits Elk Promised by Lane to Mountain Park: Denver Hopes to Make Genesee Mountain Largest Preserve in U.S.” *Post* (7 January 1914); “31 Elk Will be Sent to Denver,” *Miles City Montana Star* (24 January 1914).

obtained at little cost from the federal interior department the city had little to lose. For all these reasons the installation of a captive herd in a natural habitat enclosure in the city's new mountain parks drew wide support from park officials and advocates in Denver.³³¹

The game preserve was constructed and stocked even as crews rushed to finish the new park road to Genesee Summit. In February 1914, thirty-one wild elk from Yellowstone National Park boarded a train bound for Denver. Secretary Lane also promised to send buffalo once the weather improved. The animals were a gift from the federal government to the city, and one that met park officials slightly unprepared. The elk were temporarily housed at the city park zoo while park officials waited for the snows to melt so they could transport the animals by wagon up to their mountain destination. They also awaited the construction of the enclosure fence, which was built around an initial 165 acres later that year using "common stock wire and iron pipes from the boilers of discarded locomotives" to keep costs down. Seven buffalo and 23 elk were placed in the preserve in 1914. The enclosure was soon expanded to the 500 acres originally hoped for. By 1918 the Genesee preserve boasted "seventy-six elk, fourteen buffalo, eight big horn mountain sheep, three varieties of deer and a small bunch of antelope." The elk were especially prolific, with up to forty calves expected that summer.³³²

³³¹ Carolyn and Don Etter, *The Denver Zoo*, 34-43.

³³² Initially, the preserve operated as an adjunct of the city zoo, under the direction of the zoo's capable headmaster Victor Borchardt. During the early 1920s responsibility for the preserve was transferred from the zoo to the mountain parks division. "City Awaits Elk Promised by Lane to Mountain Park," *Post* (7 January 1914); "U.S. Gives Buffalo and Elk to Denver," *Times* (12 January 1914); "Parks Get 31 Elk; Two Buffalo, Also," *Post* (12 January 1914); "Park Chief Cries for Help Because Elk are Heralded," *Post* (16 January 1914); "31 Elk Shipped to Denver for Zoo and Genesee Park," *RMN* (18 February 1914); "Elk Welcome Elk in Denver But Great Deer Spurn Humans," *Post* (21 February 1914); "Elk Immigrants Arouse Park Zoo," *Times* (23 February 1914); "Elk Welcomed to Denver," *DMF* (28 February 1914), 10-11; "Denver's Mountain Parks: What the City has Done in Five Years to Bring Wilderness Charm to the Masses," *DMF* (April 1918), 5; "Wild Game and the War," *DMF* (June 1918), 3-5. Carolyn and Don Etter, *The Denver Zoo*, 65-66.

The rationale behind the city's maintenance of the game animals at Genesee combined tourism, conservation, and zoological science. This manifold idea included "adding to the picturesque character of the Mountain Parks, ... affording a recuperation resort for depleted zoo specimens," and providing "educational advantages to those interested in zoology." In addition, park and zoo officials were keenly aware of the important role zoos and preserves played in restoring populations of endangered American bison. By 1908, *Denver Municipal Facts* informed its readers, only 800 buffalo remained on the continent, a result of "the most wanton slaughter of wild life in the history of the world" during the nineteenth century. Ten years later these numbers had increased to 4,000, thanks to the reserves and game farms operated by federal and state governments.³³³ Denver's municipal promoters worked hard to link the city's mountain game preserve to scenic tourism, progressive government, and conservation with audiences well outside Colorado. Both Edgar C. MacMechen, Mayor Speer's indefatigable publicity man, and parks chair W.F.R. Mills placed illustrated articles featuring the game preserve in national magazines such as *Outing*, *The Modern City*, and *Scientific American*, among many others.³³⁴

Big game animals weren't the only kind of wildlife that the city placed and maintained in its mountain parks. Fishing was a popular recreational activity in the park region, and one that Denver park officials publicized eagerly. The pressure from fishermen was particularly heavy on Bear Creek, which courses alongside the roadway for practically the entire length of Bear Creek

³³³ "Wild Game and the War," *DMF* (June 1918), 3-5.

³³⁴ On the game preserve alone, MacMechen and Mills published "Denver's Municipal Game Preserve," *American Field* (23 March 1918); "Denver's Big Game Sanctuary," *Outing* (February 1917); "A City Repeopling the Wild," *Outing* (August 1917); "Vacation Resort for Wild Animals Maintained by Denver," *Popular Mechanics* (December 1917); "Wild Game as a War Weapon," *Scientific American* (26 January 1918); "Denver's Municipal Game Preserve," *The Modern City* (June 1917). See "Bibliography of Denver's Municipal Activities," *DMF* (April 1918), 17-18.



Photograph by the author.

Figure 15. Descendants of the Yellowstone bison graze in the Genesee Game Preserve, 2005.

Canyon from Morrison to Evergreen. By 1916, possibly as a result of over fishing, plans were underway to boost fish populations by stocking Bear Creek. Mountain park officials worked out a deal with the state game warden whereby the city built and maintained “nursery ponds” and the state provided an annual donation of young fish for the ponds each spring. After caring for the fry as they grew over the summer, park staff released some 200,000 “Rainbow, Eastern Brook, and Black Native Trout” into Bear Creek each fall to supply the following year’s catch. The program was designed expressly “for the Pleasure of Denver’s Citizens and Visitors,” for whom fishing was a prototypical form of mountain recreation, one in which visitors expected to engage on a mountain park excursion. Denver officials boasted that their “municipal trout stream” was “one of the finest natural trout streams in the state.”³³⁵

³³⁵ Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 3 February 1916, in DHPC, Box 5, FF 5; “Place 200,000 Trout in Bear Creek,” *Fairplay Flume* (9 November 1917); “That Her Citizens May



Source: *DMF* (April 1918), 8.

Figure 16. Fishing on Bear Creek, Denver's Municipal Trout Stream, 1918.

In taking on the responsibility to operate a game preserve and trout stocking program, Denver once again combined conservation—in this case of wildlife—with typical municipal concerns, particularly public recreation. The city intervened with the fish populations in Bear Creek to maintain a supply for recreational fishermen, a category that included both Denver citizens and tourists. The game preserve was justified by the same logic that dedicated municipal funds to maintain the city zoo: a threefold mission of public education, recreation, and conservation/zoological science. And while the mountain enclosure provided hundreds of acres in which the game animals could roam—a far cry from the confinement they faced in the city zoo—the buffalo, elk, bighorn sheep, and deer were viewed through fences, and were fed on hay during winter. And as game populations increased in the preserve, park staff spent considerable time selling off excess stock, often to local groups who used the meat. During the Depression,

Fish," *All Outdoors* (March 1917); "On Denver's Municipal Trout Stream," *DMF* (July 1918), 11, back cover.

Denver supplied meat from its game preserve to feed needy families. In sum, as natural as the fish one caught in Bear Creek might seem, the wildlife encounters Denver officials designed for mountain park visitors were not entirely natural. Even in the seemingly pristine mountain environment, a certain amount of artifice was required to fulfill the recreational purposes of the program. Fences and fishponds were necessary to the success of the mountain parks endeavor because the point was to provide reliable access to prototypical Colorado wildlife for visitors. The opportunity to view wild game (hunting was prohibited) or fish natural rivers in the mountain parks enhanced the experience of picturesque mountain scenery that the parks and scenic drives provided by presenting opportunities for visitors to interact with iconic Western wildlife.

And while programs to ensure the reliable presence of wildlife were a logical complement to parks that were meant to showcase the stunning natural environments of the Rockies, Denver's park designers also drew on an array of symbols drawn from the human culture of the Western frontier. Particularly in the early years of mountain park development park officials drew upon American Indian iconography through both place-names and visual imagery. In October 1913, Denver played host to the third annual Conference of American Indians. During their stay, Native American delegates visited the new mountain parks and posed for photographs atop Wildcat Point, a promontory on the Lookout Mountain Road overlooking the Golden foothills. The photos were featured prominently in Denver's mountain parks publicity, particularly one titled "The Homeland." This photograph is clearly staged, for it features six native men and women wearing traditional dress. Although a much larger number of Indian delegates wore western clothing in other pictures, none of them appear in "The Homeland." The appropriately attired representatives of Indian people stand among the rocks,



Source: *DMF* (8 November 1913), 16.

Figure 17. “The Homeland,” 1913. The city used this photograph in several different promotional pieces.

several with their arms pointing over the precipice toward the foothills that comprise the view. The photo centers on the space between the Indians and the distant landscape, as though to emphasize the distance that now separates them from the increasingly distant past when the land was theirs. As a component of mountain park publicity, the image suggests that the mountain landscape in the parks was yet pristine as it had been in the Indian past, and that the parks had captured a timeless natural landscape and preserved it in a premodern state.³³⁶

Aside from the chance presence of the Society of American Indians in 1913, Denver park officials primarily linked the mountain park landscapes to an Indian past through place names. One of the city’s first land acquisitions was Colorow Point, a spur on the summit of Lookout

³³⁶ “Photograph of Delegates to the Third Annual Conference of the Society of American Indians,” *DMF [City of Denver]* (25 October 1913), 8-9; “Delegates of the Third Annual Conference of American Indians Viewing the Scenery from Wildcat Point,” *DMF [City of Denver]* (8 November 1913), 16.

Mountain providing a dramatic view back over the Lookout Mountain Road, Windy Point, Golden and the Table mountains. The point is named after a Ute chief who, according to one popular legend, leapt from the rocky point to protest the encroachment of white settlers, plunging 2,000 feet to his death. This “celebrated ‘Bad Chief’ of the Utes,” reported *Denver Municipal Facts*, was known for his violent opposition to the pioneers and role in bloody attacks on settlers in Meeker and Thornton. Although historians later determined that it was not Colorow who made the legendary jump, to white listeners in the 1910s and 20s, the story evoked the Indian wars that marked Denver’s early years as well as the popular mythology of the vanishing Indian.³³⁷

By contrast, park officials named Chief Hosa Lodge in Genesee Park after a Southern Arapaho leader known for cultivating peaceful relations with the whites who settled Denver. “Hosa was an intelligent Indian,” noted *Denver Municipal Facts*, who ranked alongside Joseph of the Nez Perce and Ouray of the Utes in his commitment to diplomacy and negotiation rather than warfare. The chief’s common name was Little Raven, and he was recognized among whites and fellow natives for his friendly relations with the white settlers of early Denver. Even in the wake of the Sand Creek Massacre, as his people were forced from their winter homes in the Cherry Creek and South Platte valleys, Little Raven avoided violence. In recognition of these qualities he earned the name Hosa, meaning “peacemaker.”³³⁸ In choosing to identify Genesee Park with the historical Chief Hosa, park builders balanced the image of hostile Indians associated with Chief Colorow with one more akin to the popular concept of the “noble savage.”

³³⁷ “Denver’s Mountain Parks: What the City has Done in Five Years to Bring Wilderness Charm to the Masses,” *DMF* (April 1918), 5, 12.

³³⁸ “Hosa Lodge Now Open,” *DMF* (May 1918), 17. Tom Noel, “Buffalo Bill has his eye on the pedestal again,” *RMN* (14 April 2007).

Denver was not alone in creating symbolic associations between natural park landscapes and Indian figures (both real and imagined). This imagery was comparable to that being employed by railroad magnates and hoteliers in Glacier, Yellowstone, and Grand Canyon at the time. Stylized representations of Indians were prominent in the “Wonderland” Yellowstone guidebooks produced by the Northern Pacific Railroad. In 1905 the Fred Harvey Company, hotel concessionaire at Grand Canyon, opened Hopi House. This authentic-looking pueblo building housed a living history gallery, in which tourists could observe native men, women and children demonstrating Hopi arts, crafts, and performance. By 1913, the Glacier Park Hotel (which was owned by the Great Northern Railway) employed Blackfoot Indians wearing authentic buckskin clothing and feather headdresses to greet and escort tourists from the train station to the hotel. Although Denver never went this far, Indian references continued to appear in park amenities developed through the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in buildings such as the pueblo style Indian Concession House built at Red Rocks Park in 1931.³³⁹

The architectural style of mountain park buildings and amenities was one of the primary ways that park builders worked to shape visitors’ interpretation of the evolving parkscapes. However, neither Indian nor pioneer symbolism defined mountain park architecture fully. Particularly in the early years, park buildings spoke most eloquently of the local Rocky Mountain landscape and the recreational ethos of the parks themselves. The style and design of the mountain park system’s major buildings played a key role in creating a sense of place that would be specific to the Denver Mountain Parks scenic region and the recreational experience of its visitors. This was most clear in the way that local architects made extensive use of rustic

³³⁹ On Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Glacier see Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 40-81. For the Red Rocks Pueblo, see Thomas J. Noel and Barbara S. Norgren, *Denver: The City Beautiful* (Denver: Historic Denver, Inc., 1987), 170.

architectural techniques to create the built environment of the mountain parks. This was consistent with longstanding national trends, as “various forms of stylized ‘rustic’ construction” had become typical for buildings in the large urban landscape parks during the 1880s and 1890s, especially those designed by the Olmsted firm and its scions in New York, Boston, and other big cities. Situated in wooded or natural parkscapes, these buildings “recalled mountain resort architecture from the Adirondacks to the Alps,” observes landscape architect Ethan Carr. Naturalistic construction was also highly developed in residential and recreational architecture after the 1880s. In particular, Shingle Style architecture was widely used in the country homes, seaside cottages, and rural vacation resorts of the wealthy throughout the Northeast. Although the visual components of this style were highly variable, it was most identifiable by finish materials that harmonized with the surrounding landscape, such as rough-hewn wood shingle siding and rusticated stonework. Many Shingle homes featured informal design elements like long porches, dormers, and asymmetrical rooflines. These influences found a distinctive expression in the Denver Mountain Parks region in the park buildings and mountain homes designed by local architect Jules Jacques Benois (J.J.B.) Benedict.³⁴⁰

Originally from Chicago, Benedict took his architectural degree at L’ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, the wellspring of the highly formal neoclassical architecture that characterized the City Beautiful Movement in America. After working for noted architectural firms in Chicago and New York City, Benedict moved to Denver in 1909 and opened his own firm. “It prospered,” notes a biographer, “due to his gifted design and strong society ties.” Benedict designed some of

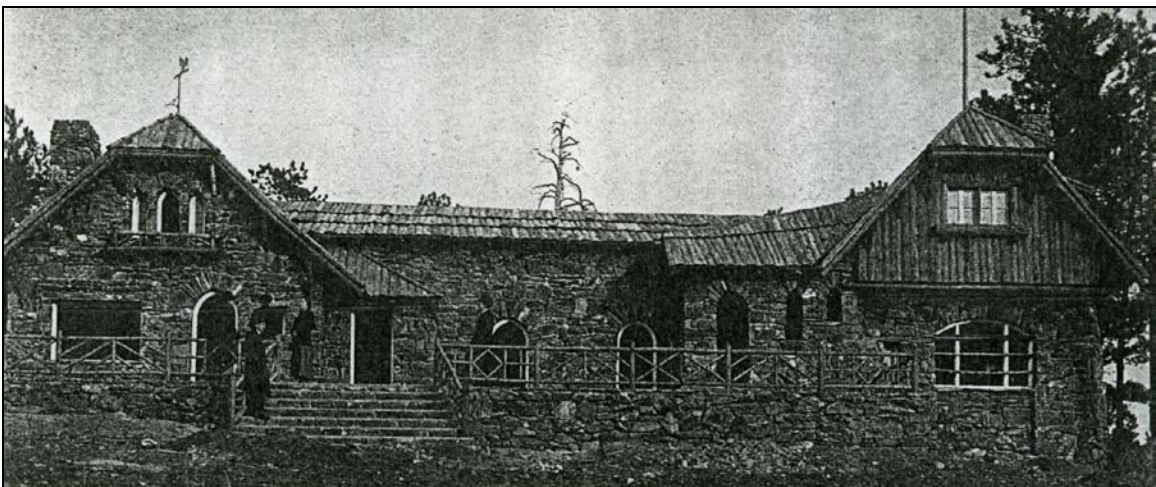
³⁴⁰ Ethan Carr, *Wilderness by Design: Landscape Architecture and the National Park Service* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 43, 107, 121-124; Leland M. Roth, *Shingle Styles: Innovation and Tradition in American Architecture, 1874-1982* (New York: Norfleet Press, 1999); Vincent Joseph Scully, *The Shingle Style and the Stick Style: Architectural Theory and Design from Richardson to the Origins of Wright* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

Denver's best-known Beaux-Arts mansions, churches, and public buildings. Fluent as he was in neoclassicism, Benedict quickly developed a reputation for his distinctive alpine architecture. By the early 1920s he had designed a number of elegant mountain homes for such local notables as Paul T. Mayo, A.P. Phelan, Dr. James J. Waring, and Herman Coors. John Brisben Walker hired Benedict to design a "Summer White House" on Mt. Falcon for the use of U.S. presidents, for which he created an elaborate gothic design based on a Bavarian castle. After a lightning strike burned the building during construction, the project was abandoned. (Its ruins can be seen today in Mt. Falcon Park.) In 1922 Benedict was invited to speak on mountain architecture at the American Institute of Architects annual conference in Chicago, where he was credited with developing "a new style of architecture" unique to the Denver mountain parks region. Most interesting to the "Eastern architects" in Benedict's audience was "the combination of timber and native stone used around Denver. This combination has never before been used." Benedict's designs differed from the rustic homes typical to the Berkshires and even the western Cascades, which used timber exclusively. But Benedict's use of local timber and native stone together was "very effective in harmonizing these homes with their natural surroundings. In many instances," reported *Denver Municipal Facts*, "the blending has been so effective that the houses seem to have grown from the spots on which they are standing."³⁴¹

In addition to private mountain residences, Benedict designed a number of buildings for the Denver Mountain Park system, including Chief Hosa Lodge in Genesee Park, shelter houses in Filius and Bergen parks, and both the golf clubhouse and warming hut at Evergreen Lake.

³⁴¹ J.J.B. Benedict's reception at the AIA, along with photos and descriptions of his mountain homes, are the subject of "Mountain Park Architecture Admired," *DMF* (May-June 1922), 8-9. Noel and Norgren, *Denver: The City Beautiful*, 188-189; Ann Moss, "Denver Mountain Parks Multiple Property Listing," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 20 October 1988, pp. E17-E18, F6-F7, in DHCP, Box 3, FF 7.

Chief Hosa Lodge was intended to provide a reasonably priced restaurant and resting house for mountain day-trippers. Because it did not offer overnight accommodations its size was relatively modest. In fact, the lodge resembled a private home much more than a resort lodge, accounting for a dearth of patrons in its early years. The building featured rusticated stone walls with peeled timber railings and details. The roof was finished with split log siding (the wood roof was later replaced with asphalt shingles). The stone and wood surfaces mirrored the colors and textures of the surrounding rocky hills and pine forests. Benedict used other techniques to help the building blend into the landscape as well. The lodge does not sit on a summit or outcrop, but nestles into the west-facing slope of Genesee Mountain. The rear of the building was set into the hillside at the back, and the roofline was low, rather than tall and peaked, with rounded jerkinhead roofs facing forward on the two wings. A wide, full-length porch allowed ample space for patrons to gather and enjoy the mountain views toward the west. The open interior of Hosa Lodge featured stone walls, exposed timber beams, a maplewood dance floor, and a large stone fireplace.



Source: *DMF* (April, 1918), 8.

Figure 18. Chief Hosa Lodge, 1918.

Benedict also chose stone and timber construction for picnic shelters and open fireplaces in the mountain parks. The shelter house at Bergen Park was “admired especially for the artistic use of white quartz, many of the stones being covered with the grey lichen of the hills.” Benedict’s trademark stonework—gracing both park structures and the private homes around the parks—lent a marked degree of consistency in the built environment of the mountain park region. In echoing the rocky, dry forests of the mountains near Denver, the style emphasized the local distinctiveness of that landscape in comparison to other resort destinations, from the humid forest of the Pacific Northwest to the woodlands of the East.³⁴²

Hosa Lodge bears a striking resemblance to the private mountain homes designed by Benedict in the teens and early 1920s, and in fact the homes were as prominent a feature of the mountain park region as were the city-owned structures. As a group, these buildings contributed a sense of visual unity to the recreational landscape. By and large, however, Benedict’s mountain creations from these early years did not draw any particular associations with the mythology of the American West. Instead, the lines, shapes, and textures that characterized Benedict’s mountain buildings—such as the stone walls and jerkinhead rooflines of Hosa Lodge—drew on Shingle Style design. By combining stone-and-timber exteriors that echoed the Rocky Mountain landscape with buildings that recalled the seaside and mountain resorts of the American Northeast, Benedict helped to frame Denver’s mountain park region as an elite vacation landscape that compared to the time-honored summer haunts of the upper classes.

And although Hosa Lodge bears little outward resemblance to the grand hotels of the early national parks, it shared important traits with these iconic buildings as well. Before the 1920s, building design in the national parks was varied and unsystematic; the style that would

³⁴² “Hosa Lodge Now Open,” *DMF* (May 1918), 17; “Chief Hosa Lodge,” *DMF* (June-July 1921), 6.

come to be known as “National Park Service Rustic” did not coalesce until 1921. Before then—and especially between 1900-1915, the formative period of the Denver Mountain Parks—the concessionaires that developed the early national parks commissioned hotel and other building plans that displayed a range of architectural styles. At Grand Canyon, the El Tovar Hotel combined elements of Swiss chalet and Norwegian villa design to create a relaxed and yet refined “big country clubhouse.” At Glacier, Great Northern Railroad owner Louis W. Hill drew extensively on Swiss themes, from the Swiss chalets scattered through the park, to the Swiss costumes worn by waitresses in the Glacier Park Hotel. At Yellowstone, hotel design themes ranged from formal neoclassical to Shingle and Prairie styles.

Despite their visual eclecticism, these national park hotels shared two significant characteristics. First, through architectural references to the Swiss Alps, the Alleghenies, and other well-known tourist landscapes, these buildings helped visitors interpret the park landscapes as world-class vacation destinations that rivaled those of Europe or the Northeast. Second, the famed hotels at Grand Canyon, Glacier, and Yellowstone used local natural materials to ground each building in its unique natural setting. The peeled timber, log pillars, stonework, and other rustic finishes defined these buildings as harmonious extensions of the natural scenery. And while architectural references to the Swiss Alps forged a connection with traditional mountain resort vacations, other design forms emphasized the Americanness of the landscape. No hotel is a better example of this than Yellowstone’s Old Faithful Inn, which combined dramatic pitched rooflines and dormer windows with stacked-log walls, massive log pillars, twisted pine and worked iron detailing. The evocative design of the hotel invited guests to imagine themselves in

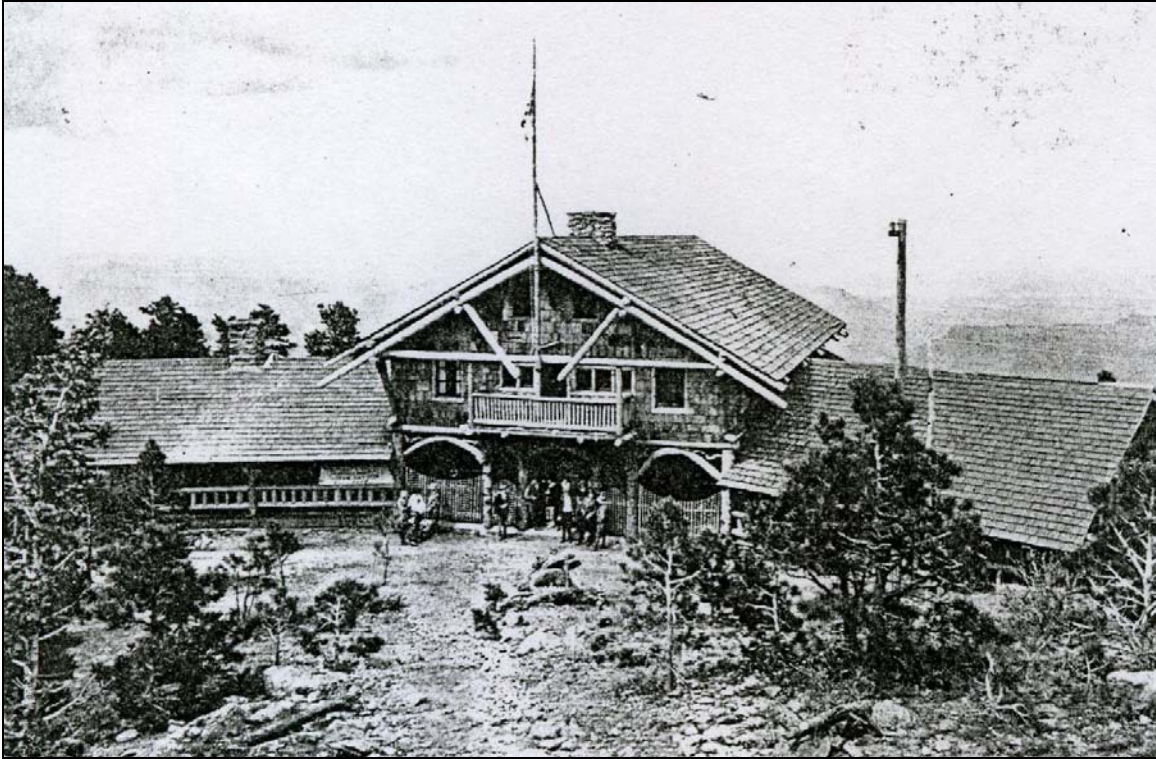
a log cabin in the wilderness, in spite of the building's truly grand scale and luxurious appointments.³⁴³

Denver's Pahaska Tepee, built in 1921, marked the beginning of a noticeable shift in mountain park architecture, away from the northeastern resort references of Benedict's earlier work and toward the iconography of the American West. (See Figure 19.) Built as a museum to display William F. Cody's personal collection of art and memorabilia, Pahaska Tepee makes obvious design references to Old Faithful Inn. Contemporaries considered the building both "unique and typical of the West." It looked nothing like an actual tepee; instead, visitors encountered an artistic log cabin-style hunting lodge. Its walls were built of "undressed pine logs, covered with hand-split shingles," and the building's "crowning feature" was "the remarkable use made of gnarled and curved logs and branches, stumps, and roots of trees" as accents throughout the interior and outside viewing deck. The city credited construction foreman Louis Spallone with the "inspired" design, in which "the frontier atmosphere is admirably carried out." The spacious interior continued the theme, with mounted animals heads, hides, and art from William Cody's personal collection adorning the walls.³⁴⁴

Other mountain park buildings would soon follow suit, further developing an association with the western frontier through log cabin style architecture. At Evergreen Lake, J.J.B. Benedict designed both the golf clubhouse—now Keys on the Green Restaurant—and lakeshore warming house with stacked log construction. (See Figure 20.) Like Benedict's golf clubhouse, Echo Lake

³⁴³ Shaffer, *See America First*, 46-66; Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, 121-124; National Park Service, "Rustic Architecture: 1916-1942," online book, accessed November 20, 2010, http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/rusticarch/introduction.htm.

³⁴⁴ "The Buffalo Bill Museum," *DMF* (April-May 1920), 14; also *DMF* (June-July 1921), 3-5.



Source: *DMF* (June-July, 1921), 4.

Figure 19. Pahaska Tepee; or, The Buffalo Bill Museum, 1921.



Source: *DMF* (March-April, 1926), 28.

Figure 20. Evergreen Golf House, 1926.

Lodge, which was designed by another architect, referenced both an American log cabin and a Navajo Hogan with its octagonal shape and stacked log walls. (See Figure 21.) Throughout the nineteenth century, the log cabin had remained one of the most-recognized symbols of the American frontier in popular culture. And although by 1900 most Americans agreed that the frontier was a thing of the past, the recent conclusion of the nation's expansion across the continent remained much on peoples' minds. The pioneer experience, most commentators believed, had provided a nurturing environment for democracy, had sustained the manly vigor of the nation's workforce, and had forged a common heritage that America's polyglot population could share. With the source of these defining virtues gone, many worried that cultural declension was imminent. The growing popularity of mountain recreation after the turn of the century was fueled in part by the desire of the urban middle and upper classes to recapture and relive in some way the pioneer encounter with raw nature. In so doing, many believed they could restore the vitality, strength, independence, and resourcefulness that city living seemed to sap.³⁴⁵

³⁴⁵ "Echo Lake Lodge Complete," *DMF* (August-October 1926), 12-13; Moss, "Denver Mountain Parks Multiple Property Listing," pp. F6-F7. Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," in *The Frontier in American Culture*, ed. James R. Grossman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 7-65; David M. Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993). I use the term "frontier" here in spite of its limitations and biases for two reasons. First, it was the term used during the years and by the people under discussion here. Second, it captures the commingling of history and cultural mythology at work in creating the tourist landscapes of the mountain parks. For more on the historiographical issues surrounding the term "frontier," see Patricia Nelson Limerick, "The Adventures of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century," in *The Frontier in American Culture*, ed. James R. Grossman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 67-102; Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin, eds., *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991); William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin, "Becoming West: Toward a New Meaning for Western History," in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, ed. Cronon, Miles, and Gitlin (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 3-27; Kerwin Lee Klein, "Reclaiming the 'F'-Word; Or, Being and Becoming Postwestern," *Pacific Historical Review* 65 (1996): 179-215.



Source: *DMF* (May-June, 1927), 21.

Figure 21. Echo Lake Lodge, 1927.

In the Denver Mountain Parks, no attraction did more to cement the association between mountain landscapes, nature recreation, and the old frontier than the gravesite of William “Buffalo Bill” Cody. Today, Cody’s grave is perhaps the most difficult park attraction to understand, given the preeminence of wilderness preservation in the way natural landscape parks have been imagined in our own time. When the mountain parks are understood primarily in terms of nature preservation, the presence of Buffalo Bill—remembered as much for his role in butchering the great buffalo herds of the plains as for his fame as a western showman—is hard to explain. However, I believe that Denver’s successful drive to claim Buffalo Bill as its own was more than a crass publicity stunt (which it certainly was). For in addition to the naked boosterism apparent in the scheme, when understood in the context of the late-1910s and the development of mountain tourism, Buffalo Bill’s place in the mountain parks also reveals a fascinating logic. Moreover, whatever the motives behind it might have been, Buffalo Bill’s grave rapidly became the most popular attraction in the park system, drawing visitors from all over the world to

Lookout Mountain. Any analysis of place-making in the mountain parks must account for Cody's presence there.³⁴⁶

At the time of his death, William F. Cody was the single most celebrated living representative of the Old West in American culture. Cody's public career spanned nearly fifty years, from roughly 1870 to his last touring season in 1916. As a young man he worked by turns as a rider for the Pony Express, a buffalo hunter for the work crews of the Kansas Pacific Railroad, a hunting guide for sport-hunting tourists, and an army scout during the Plains wars. He was a horseman and marksman of legendary grace and ability who rode, it was said, "as though he couldn't help it." He was handsome and possessed an innate sense of style, dressing the part of the romantic frontier hero even in battle. He was also a master storyteller, who embellished his own history so deftly that the most determined historians struggled to discern fact from fiction in Cody's life. This artful enhancement of lived reality became central to Cody's lasting fame, for through the media of popular culture—dime novels, theatre, and traveling shows—William Cody crafted a public persona as a frontier hero that was grounded in lived experience. In his phenomenally successful live show, "Buffalo Bill's Wild West," Cody created a dramatic formula he hoped viewers would interpret as history itself, rather than simple entertainment. By presenting reenactments of the primary markers of frontier mythology—from covered wagons and the Pony Express to Custer's last stand—Cody organized and interpreted the conquest of the West for popular audiences across the country. In doing so, he effectively defined the frontier experience for generations of Americans.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ "The World Meets in Pahaska Tepee," *DMF* (November-December 1921): 14.

³⁴⁷ My treatment of Buffalo Bill is indebted to two exceptional recent analyses: Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*; and Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," in *The Frontier in American Culture*. Quote is from Arps, *Denver in Slices*, 195.

Discovered by writer Ned Buntline in the late 1860s, William Cody's journey from young plainsman to cultural icon began in the sensational "Buffalo Bill" serials and dime novels of the 1870s. From there, Cody went east to perform in stage melodramas derived from the series. By the early 1880s, Cody began to conceptualize a new kind of live performance, akin to a circus but aimed at a much larger audience, including middle and upper-class families. He would eventually play for the royal families of Europe, to wide acclaim. From its first season in 1883, Cody continued to hone the content of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show to broaden its appeal and adapt to shifting cultural concerns. The show ran in changing forms and with varying players for more than thirty years, but a few themes remained central to Cody's historical dramatizations. The acts included a buffalo hunt, Pony Express ride, and demonstrations of sharp shooting and horsemanship. Bandits attacked a train and settlers battled a prairie fire. Indians attacked a stagecoach (often laden with local notables), a log cabin, and George Armstrong Custer's troops. As the show developed, these themes were unified within a larger narrative that framed the frontier experience as "The Drama of Civilization." At the center of this story was a pioneer couple played by Frank Butler and Annie Oakley. Scenes such as "Attack on the Settler's Cabin," portrayed how the men and women who settled the West faced innumerable dangers that threatened the home and family. Buffalo Bill's character represented the white scout, long a central figure in the mythology of the frontier. Uncorrupted by modern life, he possessed unique abilities honed by the wilderness environment in which he preferred to live. A consummate horseman, hunter, pathfinder, and warrior, he combined the highest virtues of the noble savage and the civilized man. It was his role to rescue the settler family from the dangers of the frontier, in this way protecting the home as the cradle of civilization and ensuring the forward march of progress through the survival of the household.

All of these frontier scenarios and symbols were already highly developed in American popular culture of the nineteenth century. But Buffalo Bill's Wild West show offered something new to its audiences: dramatic live performances that were presented as faithful reenactments of history. This sense of reality was fostered especially by the show's cast, in which the key players were drawn directly from the West. Cody reenacted some of his own best-known exploits, including his 1876 killing and scalping of the Cheyenne Yellow Hand (actual name Yellow Hair) when scouting for the Fifth Cavalry in Nebraska. Cody had created and starred in a "highly fictionalized" play based on the incident shortly after it happened, titled "The First Scalp for Custer." He later included the by-then famous scene in the Wild West show. Cody also assumed the figure of the boy general in "Custer's Last Rally," which recreated the bloody victory of the Sioux over Custer's division. In this scene Sioux men who had actually fought at Little Big Horn battled Cody-as-Custer for rapt audiences from Colorado Springs to London. For decades many Sioux, along with Pawnee who had fought alongside U.S. troops, performed in the Wild West show. Accompanied on tour by their wives and children, the show's Indian cast was a major source of public interest both on and off stage. And despite the celebrity Cody had cultivated as a real Indian fighter, he earned a reputation among Indian people as an excellent employer, known for his fairness and generosity to his cast.³⁴⁸

William Cody first brought his Wild West show to Denver in 1898, where it played two days on Arlington Heights. It began with a parade of the entire company through the city, the "Great Scout" leading the way astride a fine mount, "shattering glass balls in the air with scatter shot from his rifle."³⁴⁹ The show was thronged: reports that 20,000 showed up hoping for one of

³⁴⁸ On Indian performers, see the above works by Louis Warren and Richard White, as well as Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

³⁴⁹ Arps, *Denver in Slices*, 195.

the 14,000 stadium seats were not exaggerated. The Wild West would play in Denver many times over the next fifteen years, drawing crowds even as Cody aged and his persona grew tarnished by scandal. Then in 1913 Denver residents witnessed first-hand the end of an era for Buffalo Bill's Wild West. The previous season had been a poor one, leaving Cody short of the cash he needed to cover the show's expenses. Desperate for money to keep his show afloat, Cody borrowed \$10,000 from Denver's Henry Tammen. The calculating Tammen owned the Sells-Floto Circus, a competitor of the Wild West show, and was co-owner with F.G. Bonfils of the *Denver Post* at a time the paper was notorious for its sensationalism. In July 1913, the Wild West show arrived in Denver for its scheduled run. But when Cody could not pay his debt Tammen quickly maneuvered the show into bankruptcy court. At Denver's Overland Park that September, all of the show's assets were sold at auction, from its 343 horses and 45 railroad cars to the blue wooden benches. Tammen had scored a coup, for in place of payment he secured a contract with Buffalo Bill to perform with the Sells-Floto Circus.

Cody rode in Tammen's circus for the next two years, where he was given a private car and a generous salary. He spent a considerable amount of time in Denver during his employment with Tammen, and was known to sit on the steps of the *Denver Post* offices in his buckskins on Saturday mornings, telling stories to the children who gathered at his knees. In 1915 he hired on with Miller's 101 Ranch Show. Nearing seventy by this time and suffering from arthritis, he still rode his horse like a centaur. When the 1916 season ended in Virginia that November, Cody was worn out. He came to Denver and stayed with his sister May Cody Decker for two weeks, then went on to his Wyoming ranch, hoping to recover his strength. But by mid-December he was back in Denver, seeking a doctor as his health continued to fail. In early January he traveled to Glenwood Springs to take the mineral baths. He returned to Denver a few days later without the

strength to return to Wyoming. His family was sent for, Louisa and a daughter arriving on a midnight train. In spite of the family's best efforts to keep his ill health out of the papers, the press surrounded the Decker home, reporting daily on the colonel's last days. On January 10, 1917, William F. Cody died at his sister's home. He was 71.³⁵⁰

Denver boosters and the Speer administration were quick to take advantage of these unusual circumstances. Ed MacMechen, the editor of *Municipal Facts* and vigorous promoter of mountain park tourism, coordinated the effort to claim William Cody as one of Denver's own. Parks chief W.F.R. Mills met with Cody's widow, sister, and a committee of local Elks, Masons, and friends. Together the group agreed to bury the old showman on a promontory in Lookout Mountain Park (it was speculated that Louisa Cody gave her approval to the plan as a last act of revenge against the town of Cody). The mountaintop burial would have to wait until the site could be prepared—a tomb would be blasted out of the solid granite in the spring. In the meantime the city hosted an elaborate public funeral in January. Cody's body lay in a glass casket under the state capitol dome as some 18,000 mourners filed past, then rode in a traditional caisson through the city in a funeral procession filled with military, Elks, Masons, Knights Templar, and Indians in full war dress. In June Cody's body was laid to rest on Mount Lookout with full ceremony. "The site was one that the old scout himself would have selected," wrote Golden's *Colorado Transcript*, "on the lofty eminence commanding the mountains and plains which he loved so well."³⁵¹

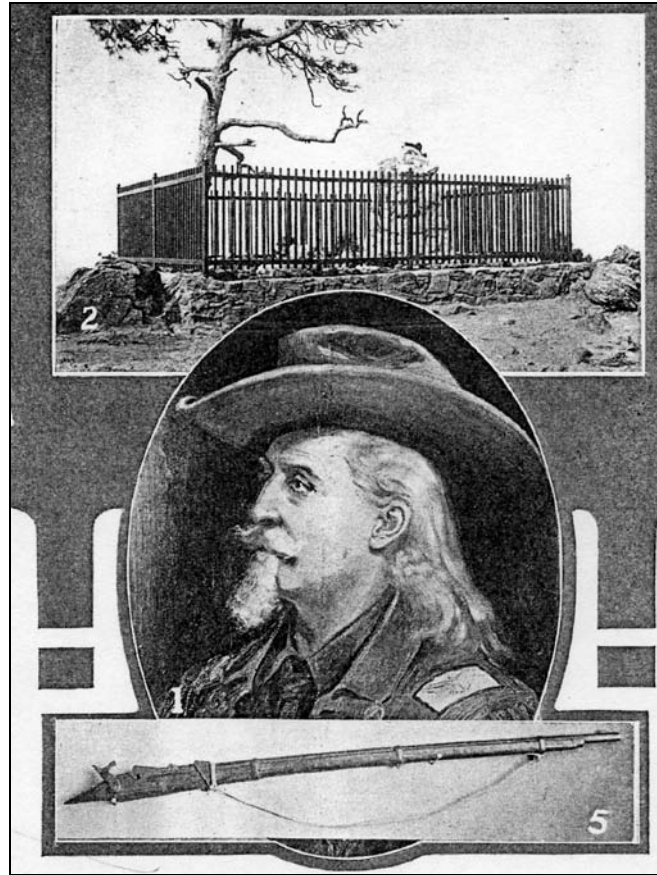
³⁵⁰ The affair with Tammien, Cody's late career, and his death in Denver are described in Arps, *Denver in Slices*, 202-206; and Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 536-542.

³⁵¹ "Golden Masons Bury Buffalo Bill; Thousands Attend Funeral on Lookout," *Colorado Transcript*, (7 June 1917).

In 1920, the city finalized arrangements with Johnny Baker, Cody's beloved foster son, to operate a museum next to the grave where a large collection of Cody's relics and memorabilia, loaned by Louisa Cody, would be displayed. As described earlier, the building was purposefully designed to evoke a sense of the frontier, and was a departure from earlier mountain park architecture. Additionally, the name Pahaska Tepee drew explicit reference to Cody's close connection with Indian symbolism. Pahaska, or "long hair," was the name given to Cody by the Sioux and one that he had used alongside his stage name "Buffalo Bill." Indeed, in the mountain parks neither Cody's grave nor museum were identified by his given name—where the museum used his Indian name, the tomb was called "Buffalo Bill's Grave." This fact speaks both to the power of Cody's carefully crafted persona, and also to how that image leant meaning to the mountain parks as a coherent symbolic landscape.³⁵²

For in the person of Buffalo Bill all the major symbols of the American frontier came together in a single, monumental narrative. Denver's park builders had already used place names to link park landscapes to an Indian past, and had established a game preserve and fishery to recreate the abundant wildlife of the unsettled West for park visitors. But the presence of Buffalo Bill united all of these western references as no other attraction could. As both historical figure and frontier icon, Buffalo Bill embodied the Euro-American encounter with the West in all its complexity: both the buffalo herds and the hunters who nearly extinguished them; Indians as both dangerous opponents and noble savages; the West as a place where raw nature cultivated physical prowess, self-reliance, even heroism. Moreover, given the substantial national and international audiences that Buffalo Bill's Wild West enjoyed during its thirty-year run, visitors

³⁵² "The Buffalo Bill Museum," *DMF* (April-May 1920): 14; and "The Buffalo Bill Museum," *DMF* (June-July 1921): 3-5.



Source: *DMF* (April-May, 1920), 14.

Figure 22. Buffalo Bill's Grave, 1920. This excerpt from a full-page illustration in *Denver Municipal Facts* shows Buffalo Bill's grave on Lookout Mountain along with items on display at the Pahaska Tepee museum. Shown here: a portrait of Col. William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody, and Cody's famed hunting rifle "Lucretia Borgia."

to Buffalo Bill's grave and the Pahaska Tepee museum were invited to relive not just the frontier mythology that he represented, but also their own memories of seeing him recreate that past in his Wild West show. Thanks to the art of such men as F.L. Olmsted who laid out roads, trails, and parks to capture the most evocative mountain scenery, and J.J.B. Benedict, who designed buildings that would blend into their natural surroundings, visitors to the mountain parks could engage directly with pristine nature and emerge strengthened and reinvigorated by their encounter with this vestige of a bygone era. With the addition of Buffalo Bill's grave and

museum, the mountain parks experience could easily be interpreted as—oddly enough—a living example of the Old West.

Uneasy Marriages: Modernity and Mountain Play

From 1910, when mountain park advocates first began peddling their scheme in Denver, they had agreed that the parks would be “rustic” in character, defined by the natural mountain scenery. And throughout the primary development years in the 1910s and 1920s the landscape architecture, building design, and creation of park attractions and amenities remained largely true to this goal: with the notable exception of the Evergreen golf course, the built environment of attractions and amenities was predominantly rustic and naturalistic. Olmsted managed to persuade city park planners to forsake the installation of parking lots and viewing towers on mountaintops, thereby preserving the natural skylines of the park region. Park buildings, from Benedict’s stone-and-timber resort cottages to the later log cabin motifs, were designed to harmonize with the surrounding landscapes and foster a distinctive sense of place in the mountain parks. Attractions such as the game preserve and municipal trout stream ensured that visitors would encounter the prototypical wildlife of the West, while the use of Indian imagery and presence of Buffalo Bill’s grave and Pahaska Tepee cemented these associations. This western nostalgia and naturalism, however, was just one aspect of a larger pattern that joined the modern city with the primitive past in continuous tension.

As demonstrated in Chapters One and Two, urban park theory and practice was a primary source of natural park ideology well into the twentieth century. Even during the City Beautiful era, when urban planners and sociologists increasingly focused on differentiating among park types and purposes, urban models continued to influence the design of natural parks. This was particularly the case in Denver. Here, City Beautiful geographical models and social theory

sustained much of the political logic and landscape design of the Denver Mountain Parks. The city's mountain parks gained the critical support of Denver's business communities precisely because the concept promised to draw tourists and new residents, which would in turn stimulate business and residential development. Perhaps because they were, in essence, a booster project overtly conceived as a way to enhance Denver's appeal to both residents and travelers, the mountain parks were generally not portrayed in stark opposition to the city. Although anxiety about the rise of cities, industrialization, and modernity characterized much of the cultural appreciation of wilderness, primitivism, and frontier life in American culture, especially after the 1890s, these themes were largely absent from the promotional literature of the Denver Mountain Parks. Instead, much of the city's publicity portrayed the mountain parks as a harmonious marriage of city life with pristine nature through modern recreation. Yet the strains implicit within this idealized marriage became apparent in both park environments and the tourist experience. Visitors complained of traffic jams and crowds, while the Colorado Mountain Club fought to preserve the natural environment from the tourists themselves. Although promotional imagery celebrated the marriage of the modern city with primitive nature in the mountain parks as a progressive, harmonious ideal, the realities of bringing urban recreationists into the mountain environment soon brought the complexities of modern outdoor recreational management to the forefront.

The early proponents of the mountain park idea—from local boosters John Brisben Walker and Mayor Speer; to the city's Chamber of Commerce, Real Estate Exchange, and Auto Club, whose members comprised the MPAC; to the renowned landscape architect Frederick L. Olmsted, Jr.—shared the conviction that roads would be the foundation of the mountain parks. To all of these people, roads represented access. They were the key that could unlock the

Rockies and open them to public recreation. As late as 1913 the mountains, so temptingly close to the city, remained largely inaccessible. Olmsted toured much of the future park region on horseback in 1912. In his initial assessment, he argued that the first priority of his mountain park plan would be “the provision of a system of first-class roads, giving the public convenient access to the best of the mountain scenery.” In Olmsted’s opinion, the acquisition of parklands and development of park facilities were both secondary to the roadways, which would form the backbone of the park system.³⁵³

And as the MPAC argued in 1913, the mountain landscape had “little, if any, commercial value” in its current, unimproved state; but “improved by making it easily accessible, its value will run into millions of dollars annually.” If any portion of Mayor Speer’s earliest mountain park plans remained apparent in the Olmsted Plan, it was his call for an elegant access boulevard—an Appian Way—that would reach from his City Beautiful into the mountains. The MPAC agreed, explaining that roads represented the “golden link” that would connect Denver with “the greatest natural attraction possessed by any city in the world—the scenic beauty and sublime grandeur of the Rocky Mountains[.] That link of gold is in the proposed mountain parks: not in a great reservation of land alone, but more particularly and emphatically in a magnificent highway” that would open the mountains to recreational use.³⁵⁴

The prospect of new mountain roads appealed to Good Roads advocates outside Denver as well, who saw that the park plan offered improved commercial and residential transportation to isolated mountain destinations. Colorado had established a state highway commission in 1909

³⁵³ F.L. Olmsted to Board of Park Commissioners, Denver, Co., 17 July 1912, in Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job File 5582, microfilm in DHCP. The report was reprinted in “Denver’s Proposed Mountain Parks,” *DMF* (10 August 1912), 1-6.

³⁵⁴ “What the Mountain Parks Mean for Denver,” *DMF [City of Denver]* (17 May 1913), 16-17.

in response to growing demand for intra-state road construction by local auto clubs, chambers of commerce, and Good Roads advocates. Early on, Olmsted urged the Denver Park Commission to solicit the cooperation of both Jefferson County and the State Highway Commission in funding, building, and maintaining the new park roads, many of which would also serve as regional thoroughfares. This the city eagerly did, entering into cooperative agreements on most of its major mountain highways that defrayed the substantial costs involved in engineering and building roads in the rugged terrain. In 1913 alone, Jefferson County and the Denver Park Commission each contributed \$7,500, while the state gave \$17,500 toward work on the Lookout Mountain Road and other park roads. Such interagency collaboration would continue to characterize roadwork and maintenance in the mountain park region into the 1930s. By the close of 1930, the Mountain Parks Division was maintaining—with state aid—a total of 76 miles on five state highways in Jefferson and Clear Creek counties, at an estimated cost of \$71,550 for that year alone. That year the city maintained an additional 17 miles of inner park roadways at its own expense.³⁵⁵

The heavy investment in road building was accompanied by a dynamic public relations campaign that celebrated the technological prowess on display in the park roads. In the pages of *Denver Municipal Facts* and elsewhere, the Park Board and the MPAC tallied completed miles, offered details on construction, and most of all emphasized how the city's road engineers had, through scientific expertise, created a technological wonder in roads such as the one that climbed

³⁵⁵ On the establishment of the Colorado Highway Commission see Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 261. For roadway collaborations, see "Annual Report for the Year 1913 of the Board of Park Commissioners of the City and County of Denver," p. 18, in DHCP, Box 1, FF 4; also Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 1917-1918, passim, in DHPC, Box 5, FF 3-4. For road mileages, maintenance costs, and state funding, see "Roads Maintained in the Denver Mountain Parks," (n.d.), DHPC, Box 21, FF7; and Mountain Parks Superintendent to Charles D. Vail, Manager of Improvements and Parks, 9 October 1930, in DHPC, Box 21, FF 17.

Lookout Mountain. This highly visible road snakes up the face of the mountain from Golden; the Lookout Mountain Road quickly became one of the most recognizable icons of the mountain parks. It was soon dubbed the Lariat Trail, a name that forged yet another paradoxical connection with the mythology of the Old West. Its route was surveyed and laid out in 1912 with the help of F.L. Olmsted, who went on to specify the placement of the scenic parkways for the entire system in his 1914 plan. Parks superintendent Frederick Steinhauer, an engineer by profession, supervised the actual construction, which commenced in 1913. The city took pains to educate the public about the technical features of the mountain parkways, which both showcased the expertise of its engineers and emphasized the safety and accessibility of the new road. Mountain park publicity carefully explained how none of the mountain park roadways exceeded a six percent grade, thus allowing even the lightest automobile to climb them with ease. A minimum width of twenty feet provided for two-way traffic, while care was taken to grade the road toward the slope and provide rock walls or iron cables along exposed edges. Rustic stone cisterns along the way provided a means for motorists to refill radiators and canteens, while pullouts allowed them to stop and enjoy views without inconveniencing other travelers.³⁵⁶

In addition to detailing the rational, thoughtful planning evident in the park roads, the city also celebrated how its engineers successfully overcame the difficulties of road building through the rugged terrain. The Lariat Trail road soon became known for its distinctive hairpin turns and winding traverses, which were designed to ameliorate the steep inclines. For example, the Upper Hairpin section alone featured an astonishing “five levels on a transverse axis of two hundred and fifty feet.” Still, the geography underlying the mountain’s face presented continual

³⁵⁶ “Denver’s Mountain Parks: What the City has Done in Five Years to Bring Wilderness Charm to the Masses,” *DMF* (April 1918), 3; also A.G. Vestal, “Denver’s Unique System of Mountain Parks,” *Illustrated World* 35 (August 1921): 998-1,000.

challenges. At Sensation Point, for example, the road was “blasted from solid granite, but a dangerous slide carried the roadbed away as fast as it was cleared.” To solve this problem “the engineers dammed the mountainside by throwing a concrete wall across the treacherous spot and anchoring it to solid rock on either side.” A photograph of the concrete dam shows a group of women at the railing along its top, looking over the sheer, rocky cliff some 700 feet above Clear Creek.³⁵⁷

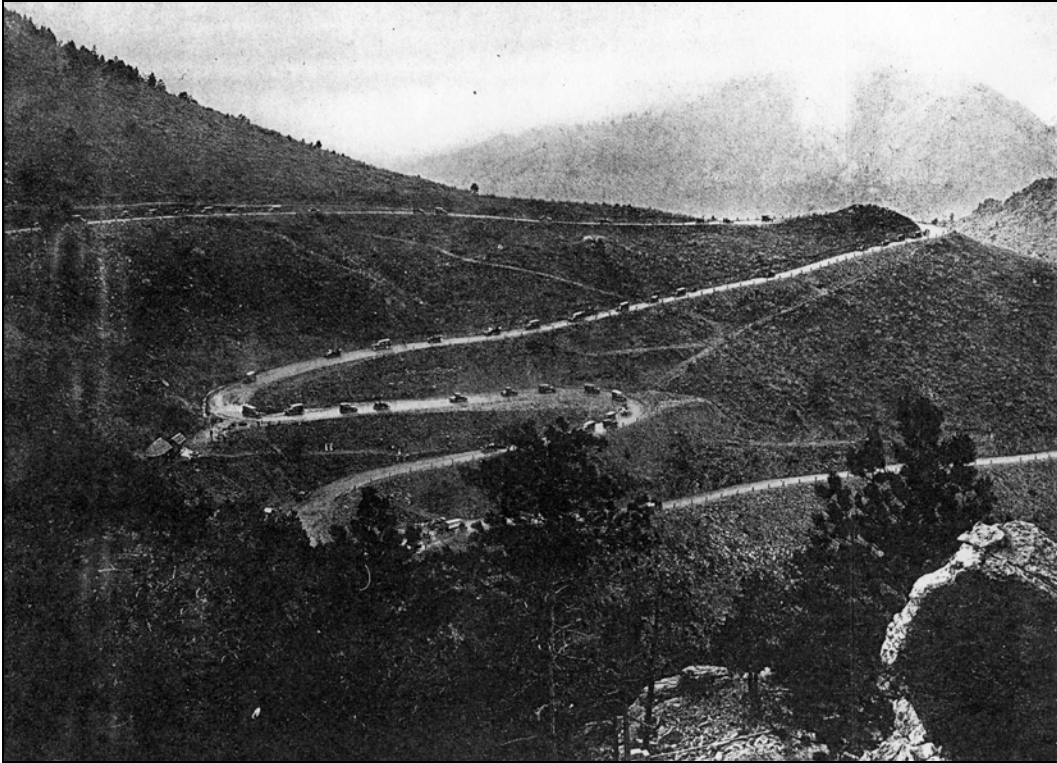
Such triumphal stories, however, cannot be read simply as one more example of man’s successful conquest of nature through technology. For the goal of both engineer and tourist was access to nature via the roadway. One of the most striking features of the city’s discourse concerning the mountain park roads is the way that technical language explaining engineering and construction was interwoven quite seamlessly with lyrical descriptions of the driving experience. One report described how the Lariat Trail “twists and curves like a serpent, with hairpin curves, verging on the edge of precipices and constantly unfolding views of surpassing splendor of mountains and valley and of the plains that stretch away to the skyline in the east.”³⁵⁸ Indeed, photographs and drawings of the Lariat Trail, and of points along its route, became some of the most common images used in mountain park publicity; likewise, the road quickly became an attraction in its own right.³⁵⁹ (See Figure 23.)

Park planners understood that, when executed with care, such roads would offer a new way to experience the scenic environment of the park region. In addition to the sense of

³⁵⁷ “Denver’s Mountain Parks: What the City has Done in Five Years to Bring Wilderness Charm to the Masses,” *DMF* (April 1918), 3; “A Dam in the Mountain,” *DMF* (April 1918), 10.

³⁵⁸ “Annual Report for the Year 1913 of the Board of Park Commissioners of the City and County of Denver,” p. 18, in DHCP, Box 1, FF 4.

³⁵⁹ See especially the dedicated Mountain Parks editions of *Denver Municipal Facts* dated April 1918 and March 1919 for the significance of roads in mountain park imagery.



Source: *DMF* (April, 1918), 4.

Figure 23. Following the Lariat Trail, 1918. This photo featuring a string of cars winding their way up the famed hairpin turns of Lookout Mountain Road was widely used in publicity materials.

perpetually unfolding views and changing perspectives as one traveled—tropes long familiar to railroad tourists—there was also the palpable thrill of piloting one’s own machine along the very edge of a cliff; the drop from many points a sheer one of over one thousand feet. This was markedly different from touring by railroad, and it brought to mountain recreation a new and more personal encounter with nature’s dangers. Successfully navigating such technical routes offered a test of the driver’s skill and nerve, a thrilling, even frightening challenge, and a defining rite of passage that marked the difference between seasoned “mountain climbers” and “tenderfeet.” As the architect J.J.B. Benedict observed, “The roads were built by the spirit of daring youth, in miles they measure sixty, but in hazards and jabs at the primitive senses they run

into millions. One takes one's life, not exactly into one's own hands, but rather into the confidence of the chauffeur."³⁶⁰

Automobiles went hand-in-hand with the centrality of roads in mountain park design, publicity, and the tourist experience. Through written and pictorial accounts in *Denver Municipal Facts*, other magazines, pamphlets and brochures, the motorist's perspective of seeing the mountain parks by automobile became nearly ubiquitous. Scenes featuring roads and cars in natural mountain landscapes were often more prominent in park publicity than depictions of pristine nature. In countless mountain park photographs the motorcar occupies the center of the scene. Typically shown with its top stowed, the car's scarved and goggled passengers are fully exposed to the mountain environment—to the fresh air, the exhilarating heights, and the shaded forests. In such depictions the automobile represents a new, and distinctively modern, form of access to the natural world. And where the evolution of automotive design would soon enclose passengers in a sealed chamber of metal and glass, the open cars of the 1910s and 20s offered an immediate encounter with nature that contrasted with both railroad travel and later auto touring. Moreover, as motorists were freed from the timetables and set routes of rail travel, the touring experience became individualized and self-directed, qualities that dovetailed with the mythology of western tourism and its veneration of self-reliance forged in nature. To mountain park planners and automobile advocates during this period, then, the motorcar promised to enhance access to nature recreation and to offer a new, modern, and seemingly unmediated encounter

³⁶⁰ J.B. Benedict, "Impressions and Reveries of a Mountain Motorist," *DMF* (March 1919), 12. On the contrasts between railroad and auto touring, see especially Hal K. Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998). On the qualities of nature auto touring during this period, see also David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington's National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), and Paul S. Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

with nature.³⁶¹ For these reasons mountain park publicity did not downplay the presence of cars and roads in the natural setting of the parks, nor did they portray the road and the car as intrusions or violations of the surrounding wilderness. Instead, Denver's image-makers placed the automobile-in-nature at the center of a harmonious composition.



Source: *DMF* (August 1919), 3.

Figure 24. Motoring in the mountain parks, 1919. The scene shows the Mt. Evans Road near Squaw Pass.

Rather than emphasizing a contrast between nature and the machine, such images celebrated the ideal integration of mountain landscapes and modern technology in the parks. This is a distinctive example of what scholars have termed the “technological sublime.” During the

³⁶¹ This is consistent with the findings of historian David Louter, in *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington's National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

nineteenth century Americans began to expand their use of the concept of the sublime beyond strictly natural scenes. Rooted primarily in the ideas of eighteenth-century philosophers such as Edmund Burke and Emmanuel Kant, sublimity was usually associated with dramatic natural phenomena that prompted an emotional response in the viewer characterized by awe and astonishment, horror and fear. While Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon became icons of the natural sublime, the concept was also relevant to dynamic natural phenomena such as floods or volcanic eruptions. With the rise of the steam age, Americans found in the sublime a useful way to interpret astounding new technologies such as the steam locomotive and the railroads that seemed to conquer time and space. Over time, the sublime was increasingly associated in popular culture with solely human technologies such as bridges, skyscrapers, industrial factories, and, the electrified cityscape. Promotions of Denver as the “City of Lights” were another example of a growing fascination with the technological sublime.³⁶²

In the Denver Mountain Parks image-makers could effectively combine these two different manifestations of the sublime into a single cohesive visual statement. Here the modern automobile and technical roadway it traveled represented the technological sublime, and it was integrated within the sublime natural environments of the park region. Particularly in depictions of the Lariat Trail, with its sheer precipices and views over the deep gorge of Clear Creek Canyon, the natural and technological sublimes were deeply intertwined. And the written descriptions of motoring on the dangerous, exposed roadway confirmed that through the

³⁶² On the technological sublime see David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965); John Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900* (Penguin, 1977); and John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

distinctive combination of awe-inspiring, often frightening mountain terrain with the new technology of the automobile, the mountain parks promised a powerful way to experience the sublime. Here the simple viewing of nature's overwhelming landscapes could be joined with the thrill of navigating them in one's own machine.



Source: *DMF* (April 1918), 6.

Figure 25. "Honking to the Call of the Wild," 1918. Cars descend Bear Creek Canyon, a "favorite haunt" of picnickers, campers, fishers, and motorists.

While a growing number of critics would focus on how automobiles and roads represented a fundamental threat to wilderness, and while the city would wrestle with the problems of overcrowding, overuse, and traffic congestion in the mountain parks, this idea was never prominent in mountain park promotion. This led to a fascinating tension in the range of symbols employed in the parks. On the one hand, park planners created a built environment that

blended with the natural scenery, that offered encounters with native wild game and fish, and that called up popular associations with the Old West through references to Indians and Buffalo Bill, log cabins and lariat trails. All of these qualities in the built and natural environments of the parks were joined, without irony, with two powerful manifestations of modern technology: roads and cars. Rather than developing an oppositional relationship between these two seeming extremes, mountain park imagery celebrated the rich and rare amalgamation of nature, modernity, and a bygone era in the parks.

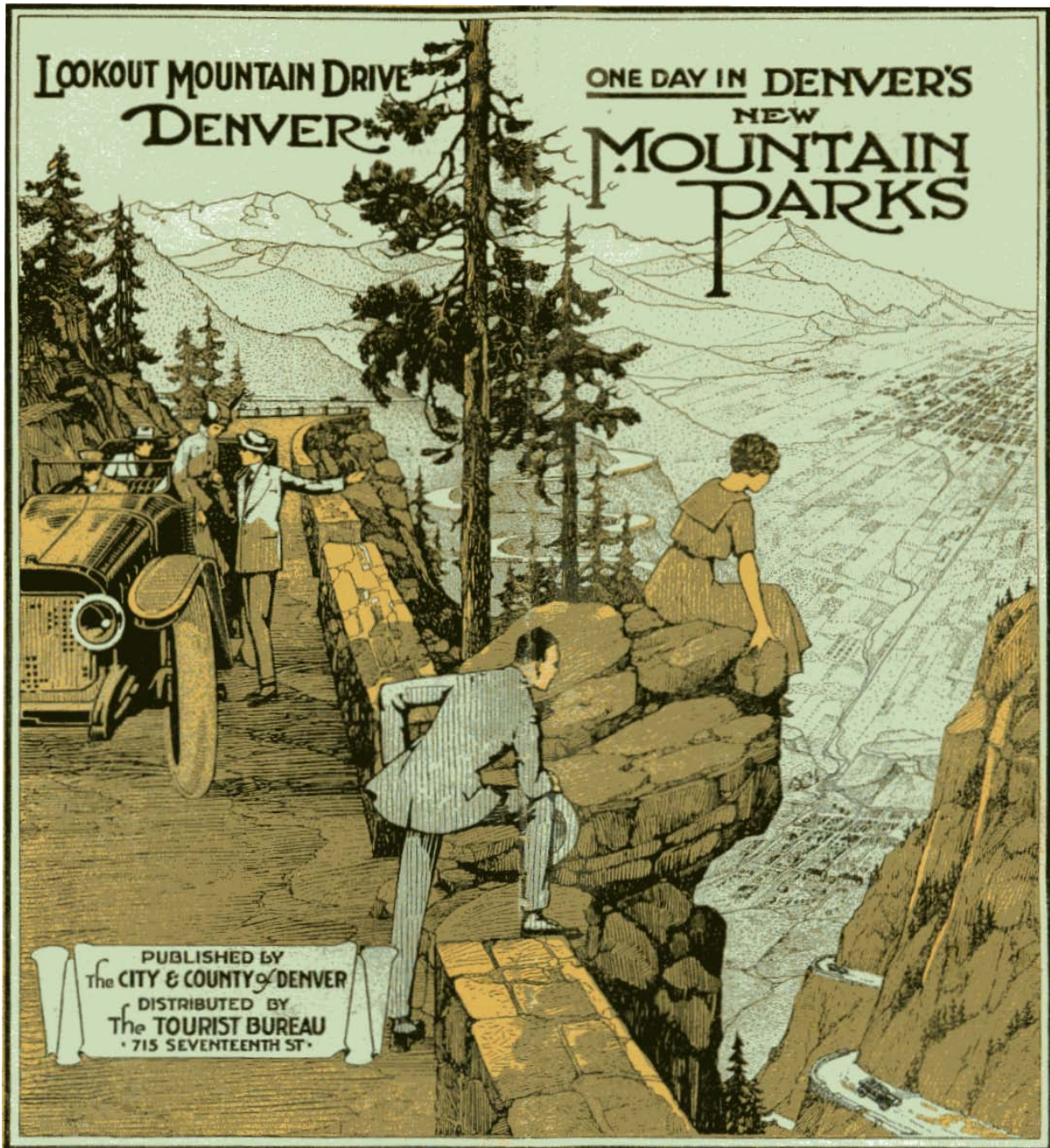
Indeed, in much park promotion it was the successful marriage of the two in the mountain parks themselves that invested the scenery with distinctive significance. One writer found that the summit of Genesee Mountain was “truly the climax of sublimity.” The source of the sublime response here was the dramatic juxtaposition of civilization and wilderness found in the panoramic views from the mountaintop. While other places might boast of “beautiful mountain scenery,” there were “surely none that afford such wonderful contrasts; for by simply facing about there is spread upon Nature’s canvas an expanse of plains limited only by the extent of vision.” By simply turning around the viewer encountered “a wonderful contrast, so immediate, so striking as to be appalling—150 miles of the great range of the Rocky Mountains, a turn and at your feet a great city in the midst of the most wonderful natural panorama in the world.” These awe-inducing contrasts, however, were joined within a larger composition that organized popular conceptions of the frontier process with almost linear clarity. To the east, the prairie landscape bespoke the civilizing process, “dotted here and there with towns, villages, ranches, wooded streams, and right at your feet, as it were, the Queen City of the Plains.” The mountains—which,

in providential consistency with history, lay to the west—represented the wild nature of the untamed continent.³⁶³

This theme was echoed in much of the visual material created to promote the mountain parks. From Genesee Mountain, or Lookout Mountain, or any number of points on the Lariat Trail Road, park visitors could read the story of Manifest Destiny on the landscapes before them. Such scenes suggested that Nature, which many felt expressed the hand of God in the world, blessed the triumphal march of civilization into the American wilderness. This had been a predominant image in the popular culture of the frontier since the mid-nineteenth century, and artists frequently framed pictorial representations of progress by situating the viewer on an eminence, from which vantage point one could watch history unfold on the landscape, in a divinely sanctioned progression from savagery to civilization. This trope was particularly applicable in mountain parks publicity, which capitalized on the many sites that provided views of the plains from the mountain heights. (See Figure 26.)

Where an earlier generation had focused on covered wagons and railroads, explorers, miners, and farmers as the harbingers of civilization, mountain park imagery emphasized the triumph of civilization and the arrival of modernity, technology, and industry. This ideal state was represented in park literature and visual imagery by the professionally engineered park roads, technologically advanced motorcars, and the comforting display of farmland, towns, and the great city of Denver on the plains below. Through this broad narrative of divinely sanctioned progress, mountain parks publicity married the carefully constructed natural parkscapes to the modern city in a seemingly organic whole. Just as the earliest advocates of the mountain park

³⁶³ “What the Mountain Parks Mean for Denver,” *DMF [City of Denver]* (17 May 1913), 17-18; “Lookout Mountain Drive Denver, One Day in Denver’s Mountain Parks,” (City and County of Denver, 1916), in Western History Collection, DPL.



Courtesy Denver Public Library Western History Collection.

Figure 26. "Lookout Mountain Drive, Denver: One Day in Denver's New Mountain Parks," 1916.

idea in Denver had before them, later mountain park promoters saw in the mountain parks a rich nexus that brought the city and the wilderness together in an idealized, harmonious union.³⁶⁴

The realities of operating and maintaining the far-flung parks, however, soon belied the optimistic narrative of the mountain park ideal, revealing several points of discord in the marriage between the city and the wild nature of the parks. As discussed in the previous chapter, as early as 1913 the MPAC and the park board could see the detrimental impacts of tourism on the landscape, and were forced to impress upon visitors the importance of not killing wildflowers, birds, and small animals, of picking up trash and extinguishing campfires. These preservation campaigns would continue through the succeeding years with increasing urgency as visitation grew. Heavy traffic on the park roads led park planners to establish traffic laws, step up policing efforts, and open new areas to recreation with the 1919 expansion plan. Finally, true to the central place of road building and auto tourism in park planning and promotion, the obvious primacy of the automobile in mountain park development soon became a flashpoint for class tensions.

The Denver Mountain Parks were developed in tandem with the rise of the automobile age. Between 1900 and 1910 the number of cars registered in Denver grew from one to 5,220, while the population increased from 133,859 to 213,381. As the mountain park campaign began in 1911, then, only about one in 40 Denverites owned an automobile. By the time the Lookout Mountain Road was opened in 1913 the price of Henry Ford's Model T had dropped by almost half (from a high of \$950 to \$550) due to the efficiency of Ford's new mass production factories.

³⁶⁴ For an excellent discussion of frontier art that presented view of progress unfolding from the heights, see Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," in *The Frontier in American Culture*, 13-17, 45-50. On cultural treatments of nature, civilization, and progress see especially Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*; and Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875*.

As cars grew more affordable a growing number of middle-class families entered the automobile market, using their new vehicles primarily for recreation. By 1920, as mountain park visitation surged, Denverites owned some 32,600 cars, or roughly one car for every eight residents. Auto sales continued to boom in Colorado, which by 1930 had one of the highest rates of car ownership in the nation, with a ratio of one car for every 4.28 people.³⁶⁵ While such statistics show tremendous growth in auto ownership in the first four decades of the twentieth century, it was still the case that throughout this time the majority of Denver residents did not own cars. Automobiles remained a mark of privilege, while most middle- and working-class people relied upon public transportation to get around.

The MPAC was not insensitive to these realities. The plan it had presented to the public in advance of the 1912 election showed two electric rail lines that would run all the way to Bergen Park from Golden, and partway up Bear Creek Canyon from Morrison. (See Figure 2.) The MPAC assured voters that private interests had promised to build a mountain park line if the measure passed. And the Mountain Parks Amendment to the city charter paved the way for rail service by modifying the city's franchise law to allow rail lines to enter city-owned parklands in the mountains (which remained illegal within the city). However, city money would not go toward the construction of any rails; instead the mountain park tax fund was dedicated to road building, land acquisition, and the construction of park amenities. The development of public transportation into the mountain parks fell to the private sector, just as it did within the city

³⁶⁵ The statistics are taken from Leonard and Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 257-265.

proper. This imbalance in the distribution of public funds, and the advantage it gave to motorists, was clear to both the MPAC and the public by 1914.³⁶⁶

The previous winter the Denver Tramway Company, which operated a line to Golden, and Rees Vidler, who operated the Lookout Mountain Funicular, together had asked the city for \$10,000 to help fund an extension of the line from Golden to Lookout. The park board refused the request, and quickly began discussing forms of public transportation that the city might fund and operate on its own, providing an alternative to the “exorbitant rates” charged by private companies including the tramway, the funicular, and private car services. The MPAC pressured Tramway and Vidler to lower their fares with some success; the combined fare dropped from \$1.35 to \$1. However, the city did not move forward with the proposed public bus line or trackless trolley.³⁶⁷

Even wealthy auto owners complained at the absence of equity. Charles K. Philipps, “an auto enthusiast and owner, who is very fond of the country rides and unselfishly eager that all should enjoy them,” argued in a *Denver Post* editorial that the cost of the Tramway/funicular ride was ten times greater than intercity fares for a similar distance. This put the mountain parks out of reach of “the toiling citizen” and especially families with children, and ran counter to the democratic promise of mountain recreation for Denver’s citizens. “The parks were not undertaken for a favored few,” Philipps insisted. “It was felt and understood that everybody

³⁶⁶ Denver Chamber of Commerce, *News Bulletin* v. 2, no. 1 (May 1912); “Executive Committee Report to the Joint Committee of the Mountain Park Project,” 7 December 1911, pp. 2, 3, 5-7, in Records of the Olmsted Associates, Series B, Job No. 5582, microfilm in DHCP; Denver, Colorado, Ordinance No. 56, Series 1912, Supervisors’ Bill No. 36, pp. 17-18.

³⁶⁷ “Trackless Trolley Proposed as Way to Reach Mountain Parks,” *Denver Express* (25 March 1914); also untitled editorial in *Post* (14 June 1914). The \$1 fare is reported in “General and Municipal Information about Denver,” *DMF* (11 July 1914), 5, which also listed a roundtrip fare of \$5 to complete the 68-mile loop in a Seeing Denver touring car. Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 25 May 1915, 23 December 1915, in DHCP, Box 5, FF 6, 7.

should and would have the benefit of the public outlay and of the health and recreation so near to our doors, and this not once in a while, but by quick and economic access.” He urged the city to allocate public funds for public transportation to the mountain parks. How else, he asked rhetorically, “can the man on the street and the children secure a fair share of enjoyment of this magnificent playground? ... Not once in a while, but regularly, so that they get the benefit of this public investment, made for their benefit.” Other critics lambasted the city for sidelining the development of Bear Creek Canyon in favor of the route from Golden to Genesee. Bear Creek was already “so popular that upon a holiday the narrow and tortuous road becomes almost impassable with every variety of conveyance from bicycles and express and hay wagons up to the big touring cars.” Instead, the writer fumed, “Two years of our mountain park taxes have gone in providing a far-back Genesee Park, which only the rich can reach in high powered automobiles.”³⁶⁸

For reasons that remain unclear in the sources—perhaps the parsimony or ineptitude of the short-lived commission government, the turbulence inherent in the rapidly changing city administrations during the 1910s, the tempting availability of matching public funds for roads and highways, the apparent rise in the popularity of auto touring, the interests of the organizations represented on the MPAC (including the motor club and the chamber of commerce) in promoting road development, or any number of other factors—the city failed to make a direct investment in public transportation beyond the entrances to the mountain parks. Instead, the MPAC responded to critics of its automobile-oriented mountain park policies with a range of less-costly measures designed to serve the non-motoring public, including youth programs, a municipal tent camp, and trail development.

³⁶⁸ “So the People May Know,” *Post* (16 June 1914); “Local Paragraphs,” *Colorado Transcript* (18 February 1915).

In 1914 the city countered its critics by reaching out to inner-city children through its playground programs. Along with the YMCA and local churches, Denver's playground supervisors organized summer camp outings to the mountain parks for "happy youngsters" from Denver's poorest neighborhoods. These programs connected the mountain parks with the playground movement in both rhetoric and practice. "Soon a majority of America's boys and girls will be living in cities; and many of them in the crowded part of cities, where smoke and shadow and grime rob them of the beautiful gifts of nature which were intended for all," observed *Municipal Facts*, arguing that the mountain parks should serve more than wealthy tourists. "Let us not neglect the boys and girls of Denver. ... Let us make the mountain park a playground for the rich and poor alike." The concern for social reform services for the city's poor evident in such programs was not limited to the mountain parks. In 1918 the city made much of new policies that promised to democratize its urban parks as well, such as ending its "keep off the grass" practices, stocking fishing lakes, and providing free concerts.³⁶⁹

In response to continuing criticism that the mountain parks were only "for the motorists," MPAC chairman Warwick M. Downing came up with the idea of building a municipal camping area at Genesee Park. The campground opened in July 1918, near Chief Hosa Lodge. It featured twenty tent cabins with electricity, water, and fireplaces for cooking. Moreover, it was expressly reserved for the use of Denver residents, who could rent a site for \$2.50 per week. Car-campers, who carried their own tents and beds, could stay for free. The new campground was recognized at the time as a "policy calculated to democratize the mountain parks so that people of moderate means might experience the inspiration that dwells in mountain heights and find rest and recreation from the daily grind of city life." The MPAC saw the campground as a way to provide

³⁶⁹ "Denver's Mountain Playground," *DMF [City of Denver]* (25 July 1914), 15. "Hippodroming the Parks," *DMF* (May 1918), 5-7.

“country homes for the people,” allowing Denverites “of moderate means” to spend an extended stay in the mountains, as the wealthy owners of summer homes regularly did. Through the tent camp park planners again linked mountain recreation to urban social reform, emphasizing the health and personal uplift that the camping experience would foster, promising that “Radiant health and wisdom in the broader meaning of life lurk under the pines.” They also worked to frame mountain recreation as a mark of distinction that middle class city dwellers might aspire to achieve. “There is much in the wilds worth seeing. He who has not inhaled the entrancing odor of bacon frying over an open fire or watched the dance of ruddy flames at night upon the somber pines, is but an amateur in recreation.”³⁷⁰

In addition to the municipal tent camp and youth outings, the city saw the development of hiking trails as a way to both democratize mountain recreation and reduce increasing traffic congestion on the park roads. The trail program was conceptualized by the MPAC in 1917, at the same time as the municipal campground. “The original plan called for a trail system that will connect the mountain parks, Golden and Morrison so that a good walker might spend several days upon them without having to follow the main roads.” The trails plan was expressly designed to alleviate the need for an automobile to enter the mountain parks. Its centerpiece was the Beaver Brook Trail (still in use today), which began at a Colorado and Southern Railroad station seven miles up Clear Creek Canyon from Golden. By 1919 hikers could take the train to the trailhead, then follow the trail up and out of the “wild and rugged canon” to Hosa Lodge and the municipal campground, where they could rest, dine, or set up camp. The trail was soon extended all the way to the Windy Saddle pullout on the Lariat Trail road, where it connected with the Chimney Gulch trail leading to Golden. Here hikers could board the train or Tramway line to

³⁷⁰ Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, Meeting Minutes, 31 July 1917, in DHCP, Box 5, FF 4; “Country Homes for the People,” *DMF* (July 1918), 2; “Tent Houses Opened,” *DMF* (July 1918), 15.

return to Denver. The MPAC argued that the trail system would “supply a definite and growing demand from those who have no automobiles.”

Whatever the extent to which these hopes were realized, the trail system was central in the growing effort by the city to draw park visitors off the roads and promote alternatives to the motorist’s day trip. Seeing the parks solely by car, the argument went, gave visitors only a passing acquaintance with the mountain environment. “There is more of health, information and enjoyment packed away in an hour of the winding, shady trail than in a half-day on the automobile roads. The intimate and friendly trail ... leads its human friend away from everyday cares, mentally as well as physically.” Unlike motorists, hikers had the “time to become acquainted with the moods of the mountains, flowers, trees and birds.” Trails also promised to distance hikers from the noise and crowds increasingly found on the roadways, leading them to “virgin” and “unfrequented” places where “one never hears the sound of an automobile horn.” In contrast to driving, hiking “quiets the nerves, invites the mind to new subjects of interest, [and] entices one into meditation and rest.”³⁷¹

The trails campaign points to two significant areas of tension in the marriage between nature recreation and urban modernity in the mountain parks. On the one hand, it suggests how deeply the automobile—and by extension, issues of access—was associated with class divisions. And in spite of the city’s lofty rhetoric about democratization of its parks, there were clear limits to these policies. Other than the camp outing programs for children from Denver’s poorest neighborhoods, the city’s efforts to improve access to the mountain parks were directed quite specifically at the middle class, but not the working class. “Mountaineering was once the sport of

³⁷¹ Henry F. Brooks, “Moods of the Mountains and Secrets of the Trail,” *DMF* (March 1919), 8-9; “Denver’s Mountain Parks: What the City has Done in Five Years to Bring Wilderness Charm to the Masses,” *DMF* (April 1918), 3; “The Hiker Comes Into His Own: The Lure of the Winding Trail Now Preferred by Many to the Speeding Motorcar,” *DMF* (June-July 1921), 10-11.

the adventurous rich,” wrote MPAC member Henry F. Brooks. “Now thousands of business men and women don the khaki and hobnail, and on their short annual vacations, go above the clouds.” By 1918, as Denver hosted “thousands of motor cars from the corn and cotton belts” in the city’s auto camps, catering to car owners could be seen as democratic in itself. “The great majority of these vacation motorists,” opined *Municipal Facts*, were not wealthy but instead, “people of moderate means. They have neither the wealth to frequent ocean resorts, nor time to make a round of all the National Parks.” For this growing segment of the middle class, the car represented freedom to sightsee on a limited budget. Moreover, the cultural conventions that promised personal growth and improvement through nature recreation were already familiar to the nation’s middle class.³⁷²

On the other hand, disenchantment with the realities of auto touring in the mountain parks would continue to rise, as the clean, quiet, and pristine ideals put forward in park promotion ran up against the realities of heavy recreational use: traffic jams, exhaust, and noise on the roads, littered and trampled picnicking and camping sites, meadows denuded of wildflowers, and a scarcity of solitude or peace. The MPAC and the park board faced challenges on numerous fronts as the success they had hoped for also brought a host of unanticipated problems. The city responded with a range of measures to accommodate the burgeoning crowds in addition to encouraging park patrons to eschew their vehicles for hiking boots and khakis. As detailed in Chapter Four, these included expanding the road system to Turkey Creek and Deer Creek Canyons; acquiring new park sites geared toward day use; pressing westward with the Mt. Evans Highway, and developing new destination sites at Evergreen Lake, Echo Lake, and

³⁷² Brooks, “Moods of the Mountains and Secrets of the Trail,” *DMF* (March 1919), 9; “The Great Spring Drive: Motordom’s Annual Migration Soon to Start—Denver’s Tent City the Half-Way House,” *DMF* (April 1918), 7; “The Timberline Trail,” *DMF* (August 1918), 2.

Summit Lake. The city also stepped up its efforts to instruct patrons in scenic preservation. In cooperation with organizations such as the Colorado Mountain Club and the Denver Mountain Parks Improvement and Protection Association, these campaigns taught park goers to extinguish their campfires, bury their trash, leave a clean campsite, and refrain from killing birds and small animals. Through images like “Colorado Columbines,” the city urged women to gather wildflowers by cutting them at the stem rather than pulling out the roots, so that the plant would survive to bloom again the next year.



Source: *DMF* (April 1918), 11.

Figure 27. “Colorado Columbines,” 1918. The state flower, reads the caption, is “so fragile ... that an attempt to pluck it tears the entire plant from the earth and destroys it permanently. The little lady in the picture is receiving a lesson in the proper way to gather wild flowers.” Her mother holds a small knife with which to cut the stem.

In all of these ways, the mountain parks exhibited the same contradictions and challenges that faced the managers of nature and wilderness parks across the nation. By marrying the fate of the mountain parks to automobiles and the roads that carried them, Denver's planners opened a large mountain region to heavy recreational use. While the volume of tourist traffic surely gratified booster hopes for the success of the park system, the popularity of the parks fundamentally changed the ecological conditions of the park region as well as the nature of the mountain park experience. These changes threatened the individual encounter with wild nature and its scenic wonders that park promotions continued to promise.

Urban Promotions: Making Denver a Mountain City

Mountain tourism in Colorado dates from the 1870s, when the railroads arrived in Denver and from there reached westward, deep into the mining country of the Rockies. In 1870, Denver's first two rail lines were completed: the Denver Pacific Railway, connecting Denver to the Union Pacific hub in Cheyenne; and the Kansas Pacific, which offered a direct connection with Kansas City and St. Louis. From Denver lines were soon built to reach Central City, Georgetown, South Park, Leadville, and finally Durango and Silverton. This network of rails, radiating from Denver into the Rockies, secured Denver's transformation into the region's dominant metropolis in the last quarter of the nineteenth century by making Denver the major hub for business, warehousing, and distribution between the Central Rockies and the East. These railroads also opened the Rockies to the new transcontinental tourist trade by bringing the mountain scenery and resort towns along the mining trails within easy reach of rail travelers.³⁷³

³⁷³ Leonard and Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 34-39.

Long before John Brisben Walker and the members of Denver's MPAC brought their mountain park plan before the city, local boosters saw the potential for mountain tourism and worked to develop it. William N. Byers, for example, was a mountaineer as well as an energetic promoter of Rocky Mountain scenery during the nineteenth century. As editor and publisher of the *Rocky Mountain News* he used his newspaper to publicize his own mountaineering exploits—including the first recorded ascent of Long's Peak—as well as the Rocky Mountains as a travel destination. Byers also played an important role in the creation of two influential books that would introduce the touring public to Colorado's scenic wonders. He escorted the well-known authors Bayard Taylor, a travel writer, and Samuel Bowles, editor and publisher of the Springfield (Massachusetts) *Republican*, on expeditions into the Central Rockies. Taylor and Bowles respectively produced two popular books about these trips: *Colorado: A Summer Trip* (1867) and *The Switzerland of America* (1869). Published just as work on the transcontinental railroad was nearing completion, Taylor and Bowles's travel narratives helped to lay the groundwork among the elite touring class of the East for the development of railroad-based Western tourism in the 1870s.³⁷⁴

Both Taylor and Bowles drew an explicit comparison between the Rockies and the Swiss Alps, a formula upon which the boosters of Colorado tourism would rely for decades to come. Indeed, Taylor's *Summer Trip* introduced many of the ideas that would later come together in See America First and City Beautiful ideology. "Colorado will soon be recognized as our Switzerland," he predicted. "The enervated luxury, the ignorant and imitative wealth, and the

³⁷⁴ Byers was a member of the first recorded party to ascend 14,259-foot Longs Peak in 1868. See Carl Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard, and David McComb, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, 3rd ed., (Niwot, Co.: University Press of Colorado, 1994), 221-224; C. W. Buchholtz, *Rocky Mountain National Park: A History* (Boulder, Co.: Colorado Associated University Press, 1983), 49-60; Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience*, 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 12-13; and Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First*, 7-21.

overtasked business of our cities, will come hither, in all future summers, for health, and rest, and recreation.” Some forty-five years before Denver began its mountain parks, Taylor laid out the requirements for developing the region for tourism. “We shall, I hope, have Alpine clubs, intelligent guides, good roads, bridges, and access to a thousand wonders yet unknown. It will be a national blessing when this region is opened to general travel.”³⁷⁵

Following completion of the first transcontinental line in 1869, a host of new travel guidebooks appeared alongside Taylor’s and Bowles’s that introduced the traveling public of the East and Midwest to the sights and specifics of western travel by train. These publicists helped to redirect a portion of the tourist trade away from the established tradition of the European Grand Tour or Northeastern resort vacation to the American West, launching a new form of national tourism that grew in popularity as the development of more extensive railways and tourist amenities made travel easier and more comfortable.³⁷⁶ California and Colorado held some of the most popular destinations for transcontinental tourists, and by the mid-1870s mountain tourism in Colorado followed a consistent pattern that would remain in place for decades, in which pleasure travelers stayed in Colorado Springs, Denver, Boulder, or Fort Collins, making mountain excursions from the piedmont towns.

Initially, this was a form of pleasure travel enjoyed solely by America’s elite, who traveled in Pullman palace cars and stayed in luxury resort hotels. However, the demography of mountain tourism changed dramatically in the 1890s when, in response to the depression of that decade, railroads began targeting middle class tourists with low fares and shorter excursions. Colorado offered a prime destination to the average businessman and his family, who hadn’t the

³⁷⁵ Bayard Taylor, *Colorado: A Summer Trip* (Niwot, Co.: University Press of Colorado, 1989; orig. pub. 1867), 165-166.

³⁷⁶ Shaffer, *See America First*, 16-21.

vacation time nor the money to take a lengthy Pacific tour, but who could afford a shorter excursion to the Rockies.³⁷⁷ As the rail hub connecting Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City with the mines of Idaho Springs and Georgetown, Leadville and Durango, Denver also became an important jumping off point for all sorts of visitors to Colorado. These tourists were by no means limited to the lovers of mountain scenery and outdoor leisure who rode the scenic rails into the Rockies. They also included a significant number of business travelers, people drawn to the city's famed red-light district, and tuberculars drawn by the region's mild winters and dry climate.³⁷⁸

Still, by the early 1900s Denverites interested in developing mountain tourism might well have believed that the city had already fallen hopelessly behind its local rivals. Denver's later, endlessly-repeated claims to the uniqueness of its mountain parks have largely glossed over the fact that the city's two closest competitors for mountain tourists—Colorado Springs and Boulder—had long before established mountain parks and scenic recreation facilities of their own. Boulder launched its mountain park system in 1898 with the purchase of 80 acres on the slopes of the Flatirons for Chautauqua Park. Boulder then successfully lobbied the federal government to donate three more mountain parks, while private citizens donated several additional sites. Boulder was also ahead of Denver in commissioning a city plan from Frederick

³⁷⁷ Abbott, Leonard, and McComb, *Colorado: A History*, 224-233; William Wyckoff, *Creating Colorado: The Making of a Western American Landscape, 1860-1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 78-88.

³⁷⁸ Abbott, Leonard, and McComb, *Colorado: A History*, 224-233. On Denver's red light district and its appeal to tourists, see Phil Goodstein, *Robert Speer's Denver, 1904-1920: The Mile High City in the Progressive Era* (Denver: New Social Publications, 2004), 102, 108.

Law Olmsted, Jr., which he completed in 1908. It included a floodplain park for Boulder Creek and an “urban forest” in the surrounding foothills.³⁷⁹

Colorado Springs, which was also nestled right at the base of the foothills, was designed to be a mountain resort town from the beginning. In 1871 the first trail to the summit of Pikes Peak, seventeen-mile Bear Creek Trail, was begun, and soon this trail boasted up to fifty hikers a day. Construction of a shelf road for burro travel and a comfortable hotel on the mountainside made the climb more direct, more comfortable, and increasingly popular. In 1885 Colorado Springs successfully lobbied the state legislature for a bill allowing the city to acquire parkland outside its corporate limits. By the mid-1880s, Colorado Springs had emerged as one of the premier resorts in the country, inviting well-heeled guests to lodge at the premium Antlers Hotel and enjoy the finest society engagements in town while visiting nearby scenic wonders such as Garden of the Gods, Manitou Springs, and Pikes Peak.³⁸⁰ The specter of trainloads of tourists rushing off from Denver to “the Springs” haunted more than one of Denver’s boosters. Compared to other Colorado cities, then, Denver came late to investing in an infrastructure that would provide for mountain tourism nearby.

As we have seen, Denver’s development of the mountain parks during the 1910s and ‘20s was intimately connected with the dramatic rise of automobile tourism in Colorado. During the busy summer season of 1917, the city counted more than 300,000 visitors entering the mountain parks in cars alone. City officials understood the significance of this volume of traffic, which was, officials stressed, “more than the combined attendance at all of the Federal national parks in

³⁷⁹ Goodstein, *Robert Speer’s Denver*, 237-238; Noel and Leonard, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 318, 338.

³⁸⁰ Marshall Sprague, *Newport in the Rockies: The Life and Good Times of Colorado Springs* (Athens: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 1987), 76-88; Goodstein, *Robert Speer’s Denver*, 238.

the country during the corresponding period.”³⁸¹ Within just a few years the mountain parks had come to reflect the profound commitment of Denver’s leaders to attracting automobile tourists. For in conjunction with its development of mountain roads and recreation, in 1915 the city opened its first automobile campground, providing a place where out-of-town motorists could camp in the city free of cost, and then make day trips into the mountains. The auto camp proved so popular that the city was forced to move it from its original site at City Park to Rocky Mountain Lake Park in 1918; it was later moved again to Overland Park.³⁸²

Denver’s embrace of mountain tourism went hand in hand with a distinct shift in the slogans used to brand the city with a nationally recognized identity. In contrast to earlier slogans such as “Queen City of the Plains,” “City of Lights,” “Denver, the City Beautiful,” and events such as the annual “Festival of Mountain and Plain,” after 1910 promoters increasingly emphasized the city’s mountain environment.³⁸³ “When an Easterner thinks of Denver, the thought is linked inseparably with the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains,” wrote the editors of *Municipal Facts* in 1913. The question was, how best to articulate and reinforce that general perception in promotional materials. The Real Estate Exchange favored the phrase “Foot of the Rockies,” while the Colorado Publicity League trademarked its slogan “Denver: Front Door of the West.” By 1920 the moniker “Mile High City” emerged, which met with widespread agreement among the city’s promoters. While the slogan prompted a host of efforts to determine

³⁸¹ Wilbur Fisk Stone, *History of Colorado*, v. 1 (Chicago: S.J. Clark, 1918), 569.

³⁸² On the opening of the autocamp at Rocky Mountain Lake, see “Come Up to Colorado,” (Denver Tourist and Publicity Bureau, 1918), in Western History Collection, DPL. Also see Leonard and Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 263-264; and Wyckoff, *Creating Colorado*, 85-87.

³⁸³ From the 1880s into the early 1900s Denver was most commonly touted as the “Queen City of the Plains.” The “Festival of Mountain and Plain” celebrated Denver’s role as the metropole linking the natural resources of the mountains and the agricultural productivity of prairie farms and ranches with the markets of the east. This popular celebration began in 1895 and ran annually until 1912, the same year that Denver committed to building the mountain parks.

the city's altitude with some accuracy, its larger significance was in the way it artfully blurred the geophysical location of the city. In emphasizing Denver's altitude the phrase was highly suggestive, fostering a perception that the city was, in essence, a mountain destination.³⁸⁴

While no single slogan came to dominate the marketing of the mountain parks, publicity materials such as those created by the Denver Tourist and Publicity Bureau (part of the Chamber of Commerce) during the late-1910s and '20s centered on a few consistent themes. The bureau's "Come Up to Colorado" booklets, issued annually after 1918, situated mountain recreation as the primary attraction Denver offered to visitors. Rocky Mountain destinations filled its pages, while information on Denver's urban attractions was kept to a minimum. Not surprisingly, among Colorado's mountain destinations, the booklets gave primacy to the Denver Mountain Parks, which appeared first in the contents and were portrayed as being fully comparable to Rocky Mountain National Park, Pike's Peak, and other famous destinations. The tourist bureau went even further, situating the Denver Mountain Parks as one of the largest natural parks in the country. In the illustrated map "Denver, the Gateway to Twelve National Parks and Thirty-two National Monuments," Denver is depicted as the only rail connection between the population centers of the East and Midwest and all of the national parks and monuments of the West. Moreover, the Denver Mountain Parks are represented as a solid block of reserved land almost as large as Rocky Mountain, Yellowstone, and Glacier national parks, comparable in size to Yosemite and Sequoia, and larger than all the remaining parks and monuments owned by the federal government. In numerous ways the map overstated its case, but it also illustrates the centrality of the Denver Mountain Parks in the drive to promote Denver as a mountain

³⁸⁴ "What the Mountain Parks Mean for Denver," *DMF [City of Denver]* (May 17 1913), 16. My discussion here is indebted to Phil Goodstein, *Robert Speer's Denver*, 108-111.

destination. As a 1929 cartoon sent to *Municipal Facts* by a reader from Indiana confirms, this type of publicity helped to create a lasting association between Denver and its “park country.”³⁸⁵



Source: *DMF* (May-June, 1929), 14.

Figure 28. “How Municipal Facts Appeals to Out of Town Readers,” 1929.

The tourist bureau faced something of a challenge in marketing the mountain parks to potential tourists. It needed to find ways to appeal to two very different constituencies: those who would tour by private automobile and those who would travel by train. And however one got to Denver, the only way to get beyond the outer margins of the mountain park region was in a

³⁸⁵ “Come Up to Colorado,” (Denver Tourist and Publicity Bureau, 1918), in Western History Collection, DPL.

motor vehicle (or, for a hardy few, on foot). Indeed, this fact marked a fundamental distinction between visiting the Denver Mountain Parks and taking a scenic train tour to the mining country. As we have seen, the park system was carefully designed to provide an immediate, self-directed, and convenient mountain excursion for autoists. Despite the fact that only a privileged minority owned automobiles during the 1910s and '20s, cars and their occupants held pride of place in mountain parks publicity.

Particularly in the late-1910s, Denver promoters crafted lovely and provocative images that would appeal to the most elite of travelers. The people depicted in pieces such as “One Day in Denver’s New Mountain Parks” (Figure 26) and “Enjoy Your Vacation Denver Way” (Figure 29) are dignified and proper, they display the cultural markers of education, wealth, and privilege. The chauffeur-driven car, the elegant touring attire of the men and the women, and the integration of the well-built road and railway into the natural scenery suggest that Denver offered world class mountain scenery that could be enjoyed in refined, civilized comfort. Moreover, these types of appeals to elite travelers enhanced the credibility of the mountain parks, for the upper class accoutrements in the scene also cultivated an expectation that Denver offered true excellence in mountain recreation for discerning world travelers.

Without question, such imagery betrayed the class interests at work in the mountain parks, for the aristocratic ladies and gentlemen that graced these brochures were anything but democratic figures. If these materials were intended to build Denver’s reputation as an exclusive mountain resort destination, they also connoted exclusion. For the pleasures of the mountain parks remained locked to those without the means to vacation by car. This sense of exclusivity would lessen as time went on, as more and more people “of moderate means” purchased cars, and as auto touring came to be viewed as a democratic form of recreation during the 1920s.



Courtesy Denver Public Library Western History Collection.

Figure 29. "Enjoy Your Vacation Denver Way," 1916.

Even so, throughout this period many average travelers stuck with the train, and Denver wanted the business of this large middle-class market as well. Accordingly, many publicity materials for the mountain parks addressed a combination of rail and auto travel. Those who used the trains to get to Denver would typically lodge in the city and need conveyance from there into

the parks. Here the needs of rail tourists dovetailed with those of Denver citizens. Like most the majority of local residents, railroad tourists could not visit the mountain parks on their own.

Those without a car had two options: they could choose to pay for a commercial auto tour out of Denver, or take the electric interurban line to Golden and board an auto tour there to enter the parks.

It was a bit less expensive to take the trolley. In 1926 the round trip from Denver to Lookout Mountain Park cost \$2.50 by hired car; \$2.23 for the trolley and car combined. By comparison, a four-hour trip around the 65-mile “circle drive” cost \$5.00 by car from Denver, or \$4.00 by motorbus, while an excursion to Mt. Evans and Echo Lake ran \$7.00. In addition, older scenic rail routes such as the Georgetown Loop remained popular, allowing tourists who stayed in Denver to make any number of mountain excursions in addition to seeing the city’s parks. One brochure counted “thirty-eight rail, auto and trolley scenic and sightseeing trips” that could be made from Denver, fourteen of which were full-day excursions.³⁸⁶

The demographics of auto tourism changed dramatically between 1910 and 1930. What began as an elite form of recreation in the early 1910s had begun to spread rapidly among the nation’s middle class by 1920. Denver’s planners responded to this growth in middle-class automobile tourism with the 1919 mountain park expansion plan and the development of the municipal auto camps. The city’s mountain park promotions reflected this shift as well, moving away from the cultured elitism of the mid-teens to appeal to a much larger group of middle-class travelers who might come by train, or might drive their new cars across the plains in search of mountain recreation.

³⁸⁶ “Come Up to Colorado,” (Denver Tourist and Publicity Bureau, 1926), 3-5; “Enjoy Your Vacation Denver Way: Short Scenic Trips from Denver into the Colorado Rockies,” (City and County of Denver, 1916); “One Day Scenic Trips into Denver’s Mountain Parks and Resorts,” (Denver Convention Association and Tourist Bureau, 1915), all in Western History Collection, DPL.

In addition to these efforts to create an image of Denver as a mountain destination for tourists from outside the state, Denver's mountain park promoters also developed a related theme that would resonate among Denver's own citizens as well as potential immigrants to the city. This theme focused upon developing a local or civic identity that connected residency in Denver with an outdoor lifestyle that integrated mountain recreation with city living through play. "We are known to be mountain worshippers," wrote J.B. Benedict. "[W]e are constantly thinking and talking about [the mountains] for our amusements, our inspirations ... [our] thrills, sunsets and good health." To Benedict, a shared love of mountain play represented the "native tongue" of Denver's residents, giving them the status of nativity no matter where they had been born. Participation in mountain recreation made the lifestyle of such Denver "natives" distinct from any other city. For them, recreation was not circumscribed within an annual vacation. Rather, "every day of the year people motor up to picnic and play in the warm sun and fresh snows." Incorporating mountain recreation into everyday life, Benedict believed, enhanced the physical and mental health of Denver residents. It also fostered a sort of perpetual youthfulness. Benedict contrasted Denver with other cities, arguing that unlike most city folk, Denver natives understood that no matter one's age, one was "always young enough to play."³⁸⁷

Other writers emphasized how the parks would democratize the manifold benefits of outdoor recreation by making them available not just to the wealthy, who already owned summer homes and vacationed at posh resorts, but also to the average residents of Denver. For the broad middle class at least, the mountain parks promised "equality of opportunity, resenting an exclusion from the enjoyment of the wonders of the [natural] world when only a little money is needed to make them a part of our lives, to make them pay dividends in humanity." The addition

³⁸⁷ J.B. Benedict, "Impressions and Reveries of a Mountain Motorist," *DMF* (March 1919), 12, 17.

of the mountain parks to Denver's urban amenities promised to enhance the city's famed mountain views and climate, creating a city in which residents could experience "real life, showing forth the power of God unto the health of the body and contentment of the soul."³⁸⁸

In 1926 Edith Sampson, who during her tenure as editor of *Municipal Facts* used the newspaper extensively to publicize the mountain parks, published a poem entitled "Come Out and Play" (see Appendix C for the complete text). While the quality of the verse does not compare to the artistry apparent in the city's brochures and visuals, it captures many of the themes that mountain park promoters developed in their dual appeal to tourists and Denver residents. The poem offered a utopian vision in which divisions of class, gender, and age were transcended in a common love of mountain recreation. In Colorado, it was possible to "Abandon your profession and your learning," and "make recreation your 'line of business.'" Mountain play offered therapeutic benefits, promising to restore physical and spiritual well being to minds and bodies taxed by "noise and heat and grind and worry." City life emerged here as the antipode of a healing mountain environment, but the poem also intimated that Denver was the exception that proved the rule. Through the mountain parks, the city offered up a recreational lifestyle that promised to ameliorate the ill effects of modern urban life.³⁸⁹

Conclusion

Park building involved far more than just landscape planning and design, acquisitions, and construction. It also demanded the thoughtful development of amenities and attractions, of technical and beautiful roadways, and the cultivation of visitation and tourism through publicity.

³⁸⁸ "What the Mountain Parks Mean for Denver," *DMF [City of Denver]* (17 May 1913), 16.

³⁸⁹ Edith Sampson, "Come Out and Play," *DMF* (March-April 1926), 8.

The planners and promoters of Denver's Mountain Parks drew upon a recognizable set of symbols and ideas in creating the built environments of the parks, and in marketing them to both local and national publics. The Genesee Game Preserve and the management of trout populations in Bear Creek joined with the acquisition of scenic parklands to provide ample opportunities to encounter and appreciate nature in the mountain parks. Place names evoked the Indian past and the cowboy's lariat, while stacked-log architecture alluded to the frontier settler's cabin. These images combined with the complex symbolism inherent in Buffalo Bill's gravesite and museum to create powerful associations between the mountain parks and the Old West.

This frontier nostalgia did not stand alone, however. These themes were interwoven with an array of images that celebrated modernity, technology, and progress, ideas that were chiefly associated with road engineering and the automobile, which represented the ideal mode of conveyance into the park landscapes. Promotional literature and imagery emphasized especially how the technological and natural sublimines could here be combined in a unified and coherent park experience. Indeed, one of the most significant traits of mountain park publicity was the way it positioned modernity and primitive nature not as fundamentally opposed conditions. Rather, the mountain parks realized an idealized marriage in which the two contrasting elements were harmoniously joined together. Through scientific expertise and technology the mountain landscape was made available to an urban public for modern forms of recreation. In the succession of stunning views from the mountain roads and summits, park goers could read the history of progress in the landscape, evidence of what most conceived as an inevitable advance from the primitive to the highest form of civilization. For many, the harmonious contrast between nature and the city lent added significance to the scenery before them.

By the 1920s Denver was publicizing the Denver Mountain Parks extensively to tourists, business prospects, and locals, portraying these wild landscapes as part and parcel of the city. To experience Denver completely, such ads suggested, one must also play in the mountains 30 and more miles outside of town. In ways that they had not done before, Denver's image-makers seized upon the mountain parks to create an identity for Denver as a unique mountain metropolis, a place that held out to residents and tourists alike the promise of a distinctive outdoor lifestyle. The flood of auto campers that traveled to Denver in the 1920s and 30s demonstrated the success of the mountain park system in attracting tourists and new residents to the city and anchoring Denver's national image as a premium destination for mountain recreation.

CONCLUSION

The Denver Mountain Parks occupy a nexus between the city and the wild that is frequently overlooked in both historical studies and in contemporary environmental discourse. Scholars including Roderick Nash, William Cronon, and many others recognize that scenic preservation and natural resource conservation were the projects of America's urban upper and middle classes. Historians have long understood that nature appreciation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries grew from an education in Romantic philosophy, literature, and art typical of these groups. Historians such as Karl Jacoby and Louis Warren have shown how the establishment of national parks and forest preserves brought the power of distant government experts into conflict with locals who lost their right to occupy or use desired lands. Hal Rothman, Margueritte Shaffer, and others have emphasized how upper- and middle-class nature tourism was implicated in the modern industrial economy. As expendable income and leisure time increased, nature tourism became a profitable industry for railroads and hospitality companies, as well as for western cities that were near scenic resources. Tourism developers then packaged natural beauty and seemingly authentic experiences for the consumption of tourists. In all of this literature, however, the direct role of cities in scenic preservation has not been thoroughly studied. As the present study shows, urban institutions, urban social theories, urban reform, and urban park ideology played determining roles in the creation of natural park preserves outside Denver.

The Denver Mountain Parks offer scholars a new perspective on the shape and character of Progressive Era environmentalism as well. Histories of preservation tend to portray the rise of the national parks, conservation, and wilderness protection in the early twentieth century in ways that position urban civilization and primitive nature as fundamentally opposed conditions. Recently, cultural critics have viewed these efforts as a form of naïve antimodernism, little more than an ironic, self-limiting form of opposition to industrial, urban life. But in the history of the Denver Mountain Parks we find something rather unexpected, a story that forces us to take a closer look at the relationships between urban culture and nature preservation. For in the 1910s and 1920s Denver's civic elite conceived of these far-flung natural landscape parks not as the city's opposite, but as a desirable, complementary component of an idealized modern urban lifestyle.

Denver's history shows that the turn to outdoor recreation in natural parks during this period was not a simple rejection of modernity; rather, it was a constructive response to city life, designed to ameliorate and improve the urban experience. The advocates for the mountain parks believed that modernity held the key that might unlock the door to new ways to enjoy scenic beauty and healthful recreation in nature. Through the political machinery of the city, the economic machinery of tourism, the expertise of engineers and landscape architects, and especially the technology of the automobile, mountain landscapes could be opened up for modern consumers of outdoor leisure. Mountain park planning as well as promotion aimed to join the city and its people with natural mountain landscapes in a synchronous relationship. Ideologically, politically, and economically, the mountain parks were bound to, and oriented toward, the city.

Denver offers an important case study that forces us to bring together the history of the city and the history of wilderness in modern America. Due to their urban provenance and natural characteristics, the mountain parks shine a light on the profound linkages that joined urban and natural parks during this period. After the 1920s, the sheer popularity of nature tourism would propel wilderness advocacy in new directions, in which wilderness might be preserved by protecting it from roads and hordes of auto tourists. But during the Progressive Era the park idea, with its urban qualities and its emphasis on public recreational use, was the primary vehicle for nature preservation. Only later would cars, roads, and campers propel advocates for wilderness to redefine preservation in such a way as to keep these very incursions out of wild country.

The Denver Mountain Parks offer scholars a local case study that presents a number of larger implications for environmental history. In particular, they encourage historians to look more closely at the various ways that cities played a constitutive role in nature preservation. This is why the first chapter of this study explicates the interrelated origins of urban parks and scenic preservation during the nineteenth century. The American landscape park originated in New York's Central Park, where the selection of Frederick Law Olmsted and Charles Vaux's naturalistic plan set the precedent for establishing large landscape parks in the city. During his tenure as park superintendent, Olmsted developed a wide-ranging philosophy that would support public investment in parks by linking together Romantic naturalism, urban social reform, and economic development. At the same time, Olmsted and Vaux did much to articulate standards for naturalistic park design, such as the placement and design of scenic drives, the constitution of views, and the arrangement of landscape elements.

By the 1890s, a new generation of landscape architects began to reframe urban park geographies as larger, regional systems of linked park spaces such as the Boston Metropolitan

Park System. With the rise of regional park planning, experts such as Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., worked to differentiate parks by purpose, then situate and design them accordingly across the cityscape. As part of this process large landscape parks moved outward from the urban core to the periphery of the metropolitan area. In concert with these developments, park planning joined with the rise of comprehensive urban planning. Together, these national developments created the geographical and theoretical models that Denver would apply in its own parks.

From the construction of Central Park in the late 1850s through the Progressive Era, efforts to establish urban parks and scenic natural parks went hand in hand. As often as not, the same individuals and organizations were simultaneously involved in campaigns to secure urban parks and preserve natural areas. Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., for example, applied the park ideologies developed around Central Park in his recommendations for Yosemite and his later involvement in restoring a natural landscape to Niagara Falls, two critical precursors to the national park movement. Later, J. Horace MacFarland and F.L. Olmsted, Jr., would work from their positions of national leadership in urban parks, city planning, and civic beautification to play determining roles in the most critical preservation battles of the day: Niagara, Hetch Hetchy, and the creation of the National Park Service. The ideology that connected these seemingly distant concerns joined Romantic nature appreciation with urban reform, giving beauty and natural scenery important roles in improving the quality of city life.

These national trends found expression in Denver's urban parks as the city remade itself into a respectable business town in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Chapters Two and Three analyze the origins and significance of the campaign to launch the mountain parks in Denver. After 1900, and especially during the tenure of Mayor Robert W. Speer, civic leaders embraced City Beautiful ideology and devoted considerable resources to city parks and public

recreation, the civic center, street lights and paving, and a host of other civic improvements. While most historians have credited Mayor Speer for originating the mountain park idea, I present a different interpretation of the mayor's place in the mountain parks movement in Denver. For the evidence shows that while Speer pumped thousands of municipal dollars into civic improvements in Denver, he did not support the use of public funds on the mountain parks. The Mountain Parks Committee worked around Speer to win public support for their plan with the 1912 mountain parks amendment, which passed as Speer left office in disgrace after a political scandal. During his third term in office (1916-1918) Speer frequently opposed the MPAC. While he was alive, not once did Speer claim the mountain parks as one of his legacies. Speer's contribution to the mountain parks was indirect. It was centered in his embrace of the City Beautiful and his lavish public spending on parks and improvements, even though he limited them to the city proper. These actions established the crucial precedent for widespread acceptance of the mountain park scheme as a municipal investment. Moreover, both the geography and supporting rationale developed by mountain park supporters were firmly grounded in City Beautiful ideals.

It was the well-connected entrepreneur John Brisben Walker, busy developing Red Rocks, Morrison, and Troutdale as commercial tourist resorts at the time, who presented the first realistic plan for a mountain park in the foothills west of Denver in 1910. Walker peddled his idea to the city's booster organizations: the Real Estate Exchange, Chamber of Commerce, and Motor Club. These groups would soon take over the mountain parks campaign, leaving Walker on the sidelines as they put together a plan that was substantially different from his original proposal. Upon learning that the Speer administration would not come forward with public funding, the Mountain Parks Committee decided to place the mountain parks before Denver

voters instead. In the campaign to win public support for their project the committee worked to distance the parks from Speer and his tarnished public image. But the committee also had to win public support for a new property tax to pay for the parks. To do this, they crafted a dual appeal, emphasizing how mountain parks would not only serve tourists (and therefore Denver businesses), but also that they would become “playgrounds of nature” open to all Denver residents.

The public discourse surrounding the mountain parks movement in Denver between 1910 and 1913 illustrates the confluence of City Beautiful and See America First ideology at this time. Indeed, these two bodies of thought were so similar in their patterns that in combination they reinforced and strengthened each other. Both celebrated beauty and monumentalism in the natural and built environments. Both linked the effects of beautiful and sublime surroundings to social reform, uplift, health, and the cultivation of patriotism. Both supported the economics of tourism and sought to redirect tourist traffic from European or regional competitors. Both offered powerful motives to develop scenic and civic attractions that were particularly attractive to Western cities. The synergistic combination of these two ideologies is one more concrete example of how ideas oriented around the improvement of city life also created the impetus for scenic preservation. Moreover, the intertwined character of City Beautiful and See America First thinking in the mountain parks campaign offers a significant contribution to the larger historiography on western tourism and preservation.

The park plans devised by J.B. Walker and the Mountain Parks Committee—different as they were—both reflected the influence of City Beautiful design theories, especially the park-and-boulevard system that had been established within the city. Indeed, the urban social theories and park geographies of the City Beautiful Movement were the paramount models and

precedents for mountain parks advocates before 1913. The national parks, by contrast, were rarely mentioned in connection with the city's mountain parks. This changed, however, after the city commissioned F.L. Olmsted, Jr., to create a comprehensive plan for the mountain parks. At the time that he was engaged in the Denver work, the junior Olmsted was known for his development of comprehensive urban planning and his efforts to differentiate parks and make their purposes more specific. Through his work with the American Civic Association he was also involved in the campaign to protect Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley from damming, and the related effort to establish a federal bureau to manage the national parks.

Olmsted's mountain park plan for Denver (1912-14) reflected his growing involvement in the national park movement as well as his experience in comprehensive regional planning. It featured very large tracts of essentially wild lands connected to each other and to Denver by interlinking scenic roadways that tied in with the city's main boulevards. While he retained the basic park-and-parkway geography advanced by the local Mountain Parks Committee, his plan also offered a template for preserving some 40,000 acres of mountain land from unregulated logging, overgrazing, fire, and development. As Olmsted noted, the proposed tracts were so large that they were more similar to forest reserves than suburban landscape parks. Olmsted's plan and his consultation with Denver resulted in a palpable shift toward national park models and wilderness rhetoric. Especially after 1913 mountain park promoters in Denver turned to such well-known writers as John Muir as they began to market the parks to local visitors. The strong influence of urban park ideology continued, however, showing again the close relationship that persisted between natural parks and city parks during these years.

Carried out to the letter, the Olmsted Plan would have created a park region somewhat comparable to a national park, with large contiguous reserved areas. As shown in Chapter Four,

however, over time Denver's park planners departed from the Olmsted Plan in significant ways. The available funds had to be split between land purchases and road construction, and the mountain roads were costly to build. In addition, the willingness of the city's changing administrations to sanction land purchases, and the difficulty and expense involved in cobbling together large tracts such as Genesee Park in scores of individual transactions tempered the pace of acquisitions. In 1919, in response to heavy visitation and automobile congestion, the city shifted its emphasis from acquiring large land tracts to developing roads and smaller parks across an extended area. The resulting pattern resembled an urban park system far more than the expansive tracts Olmsted suggested.

The physical geography of the mountain parks rested on a geography of power that allowed the city to extend its municipal authority into the mountain hinterland. The legal structures that the city put into place were also rooted in Olmsted's expertise. For in addition to designing the park system, Olmsted helped Denver to frame the state legislation that constituted the city's authority to acquire, improve, develop, maintain, and police its mountain park territory. Once this statutory framework was in place Denver wielded substantial power in its relations with mountain locals. The processes involved in acquiring land, particularly the condemnation of the deDisse ranch and construction of Evergreen Lake on that site, demonstrate these dynamics especially well. Finally, Denver instituted a body of laws, regulations, and easements aimed at preserving the scenic quality of the mountain landscapes. Still, the city's substantial power met crucial limits in the mountain parks, creating a gap that mountain residents attempted to fill via a quasi-public police organization. When it came to policing the vast mountain region it had opened to the motoring public, Denver's power weakened significantly. Nonetheless, the city

remained the metropolitan center that contained the economic and legal foundations of a mountain hinterland organized for tourism and recreation.

Finally, in addition to acquiring land and building roads, Denver's park planners created a range of amenities and attractions that complemented the natural landscapes that the parks showcased. These features of the built environment of the parks joined with extensive publicity to create a complex symbolic landscape that invested the mountain parks with meaning. This is the subject of the final chapter. On one hand, Denver's image-makers worked to connect the mountain parks with the popular symbolism of the western frontier through attractions such as the Genesee game preserve, J.J.B. Benedict's rustic architecture, and Buffalo Bill's grave and museum. Probably the most provocative aspect of mountain park symbolism, however, was how promoters joined this western nostalgia with a celebration of modernity and progress. Here, the mountain parks represented a new form of outdoor recreation that was quintessentially modern.

Modernity was especially prominent in the technical mastery displayed in the park roads and the role of the automobile in defining the mountain park experience. It soon became clear that the promised electric rail lines into the parks would not materialize, meaning that the majority of Denver residents would be unable to reach the mountain parks. Not surprisingly, the obvious biases toward motorists in mountain park development became the focus of class tensions, as critics charged that they were only for wealthy automobile owners. The city responded by building a tent campground for the use of Denver residents, and by encouraging hiking into the parks from one of the peripheral rail stations.

Denver's marketing of its mountain parks also created a new identity for the city as a national destination for mountain recreation. The mountain parks era witnessed a distinct shift in the way Denver boosters sought to identify the city, as urban promotions deemphasized the city's

plains environment and began to foster a lasting image of Denver as a city known primarily for mountain scenery and outdoor recreation. This message appealed not only to tourists, but also to Denver residents and potential immigrants who appreciated the distinctive outdoor lifestyle that the city and its mountain parks offered.

Denver's heavy investment in the mountain parks was concentrated in the 1910s and 1920s. In 1928 the city made its last large land purchase when it bought Red Rocks Park from John Brisben Walker. Although planners continued to discuss further additions to the mountain park system,³⁹⁰ during the Depression years the city moved away from funding major new acquisitions or development. George Cranmer managed a few exceptions to this rule, including the construction of Red Rocks Amphitheatre using CCC labor, and the development of Winter Park ski area. But these projects lay well outside the scope of the Olmsted Plan, and the drive behind further development along Olmstedian lines never returned after World War II. The few new mountain park tracts that Denver gained in later decades came as gifts, not capital purchases. Half a century later, Jefferson County launched its own open space program and acquired a significant percentage of the lands Olmsted had first recommended. The county's present open space parks, which abut and adjoin many of Denver's older tracts, finally created the extensive preserves that Olmsted had envisioned.

The hardships of depression and war were not entirely to blame for Denver's turn away from further development of the Olmsted Plan. By 1929 a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the mountain parks idea had become impossible for the city's planners to ignore. This conflict was not an ideological debate over the inherent values of wilderness versus recreational use, but rather a practical dilemma. The question was: where should the city spend its limited park dollars

³⁹⁰ The Denver Planning Commission, "The Denver Plan: Preliminary Outline for a Regional Plan," vol. 4, 3rd ed. (City and County of Denver, 1937), 13-19, esp. 14.

and for whom? Increasingly, it seemed that the mountain parks served the city's tourist interests at the expense of its resident population, who still needed parks and recreation services at convenient locations in town. In 1929 the Denver Planning Commission—a group that included many who had been integrally involved in developing the mountain parks—concluded that the mountain parks must be secondary to the provision of adequate park facilities and services within the city proper. The commission's report is worth examining at some length:

Denver possesses large areas of mountain park lands ... Certainly their value must not be under rated. They have done much toward establishing the city as a tourist center. But for all their loveliness and their recreational possibilities, they cannot possibly replace the city parks, which provide open air for crowded areas, recreational places in home districts and ... contribute much to the beauty of the city.

An earlier generation of advocates had argued that mountain parks would serve both Denver residents and tourists. But these expectations quickly broke down over the immediate problem of access. For many years the necessity of having a car effectively limited access to Denver's elite and to wealthy tourists, despite the fact that the mountain park tax was levied on all property owners. By 1929 the sheer volume of automobiles in the city seems to have mitigated that problem somewhat. As the planning commission noted, "virtually every family in Denver has some sort of a motor vehicle for use in getting into the open country." Still, the commission felt it was "doubtful if Denver uses the mountain parks as much as do our tourist visitors."³⁹¹

The report suggests that the original question of access for average Denver citizens had shifted; however much locals might use them (and the commission was not sure on this score), the mountain parks did not replace the need for park services within the city. While taxpayer

³⁹¹ The Denver Planning Commission, "The Denver Plan" (City and County of Denver, 1929), 34-38.

funds had poured into expensive mountain roads, land acquisitions, and the construction of lakes, lodges, and other amenities for mountain park visitors, Denver had fallen behind in providing adequate park and recreation services within the city. Where comparable cities aimed to provide one acre of parkland per 100 residents, when mountain park acreage was excluded Denver had a shameful ratio of 201:1 in 1929. In addition, the park and recreational services that cities were expected to provide were changing. Large natural parks in the central city were a thing of the past; Denver now needed multi-purpose parks with enhanced recreational facilities in convenient locations. “The present-day tendency,” explained the report, “is toward more parks of moderate size or a combined park and playfield, and so distributed as to be readily accessible to everyone.” A municipal tax base would be hard-pressed to sustain both the expansion of in-city park services and the continued development of exterior parks.

Finally, the traffic, crowding, and deterioration of the landscape grew worse as the number of cars on Denver roads increased, causing the mountain parks to lose some of their appeal. “It is improbable,” the commission asserted, “that we will long continue to believe that crawling over fifty or seventy-five miles of mountain roads, bumper to bumper in a stream of cars, constitutes real recreation.”³⁹² It was a shocking admission for the city’s park planners to make. Perhaps the paramount issue the mountain parks faced in attracting dedicated municipal support was linked to the urban character of the parks themselves. The dispersed network of relatively small parks simply could not absorb the traffic that the scenic road network carried. Nor did they provide sufficient open space for the walking, hiking, or riding that would allow park goers to escape the noise and crowds of the roads and picnic areas. The personal encounter with mountain nature that the parks had promised became ever more elusive as the limited park

³⁹² Ibid.

tracts kept visitors largely confined to the road for their recreation. In this way the mountain parks bore mute witness to the central irony of progress; the roads that opened the mountain wilds to modern forms of nature play also paved the way for the loss of the very qualities that visitors desired.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

- DHPC Denver Historic Parks Collection. This collection is housed in the Western History Collection, Denver Public Library. Box and file numbers are given in the citations.
- DMF* *Denver Municipal Facts* (1909-1912), *City of Denver* (Oct. 1912-1914), *Municipal Facts* (1918-1931). The title of this municipal newsletter changed as different city administrations made it their own, as did the frequency of publication, which ranged from weekly to bi-monthly over the course of its run. However, all of the volumes are collected and bound together. Therefore I use the acronym *DMF* to refer to all three titles to reduce confusion about the source. Bound volumes and microfilm are both available at Denver Public Library.
- DPL The Denver Public Library.
- JCHS Jefferson County Historical Society, Evergreen, Colorado.
- MPAC Mountain Parks Advisory Commission. This group grew out of the original Joint Mountain Park Committee of the Commercial Bodies, which formed in early 1911 when the Denver Chamber of Commerce, Real Estate Exchange, and Denver Motor Club combined their mountain park committees into one body. The executive committee of the joint group took over the planning and promotion of the plan leading up to the May 1912 election when the mountain parks secured voter approval. This smaller body, generally called the Mountain Parks Committee, continued to advise the city on mountain park development after the election. In 1914 the group's role as an official advisory committee to the Denver Park Board was formalized and it was renamed the Mountain Parks Advisory Commission (MPAC).
- Post* *The Denver Post*
- RMN* *Rocky Mountain News*
- Times* *The Denver Times*

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APPENDIX A

MOUNTAIN PARKS DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

1904	<i>Mayor Speer and the City Beautiful</i>	Robert W. Speer began the first of an eventual two and one-half terms as Denver's mayor (1904-08, 1908-12, 1916-18). His administration was best known for its ambitious City Beautiful improvements.
1905	<i>John Brisben Walker and resort development</i>	Walker began scenic tourism development around Morrison, buying large amounts of land and facilities including Mt. Falcon, Park of the Red Rocks, Bear Creek Canyon, and Troutdale-in-the-Pines near Evergreen.
1906	<i>See America First Conference</i>	Members of Denver's Chamber of Commerce attend inaugural meeting of See America First League in Salt Lake City in January. Denver's W.F.R. Mills appointed to the board. Originator of the plan Fisher Harris visits Denver later that spring, meeting with businessmen and booster groups.
1907	<i>Speer's Appian Way</i>	Speer makes first call for the donation of a boulevard from Denver city limits to the South Platte canyon area of Pike National Forest. Speer repeated this idea over ensuing years but never incorporated it into his City Beautiful program of improvements. In early 1910 Speer would shift his emphasis from an access boulevard to the donation of a park site.
1910	<i>John Brisben Walker's Mountain Park Campaign</i>	October/November: Millionaire entrepreneur and Red Rocks owner J.B. Walker outlines his mountain park idea in <i>Denver Post</i> , at meetings with Chamber of Commerce, Real Estate Exchange. Denver Real Estate Exchange forms investigative committee.

1911	<i>Denver's Commercial Organizations Take the Lead</i>	<p>February/March: Denver Chamber of Commerce and Motor Club each form investigative committees. The three organizations meet and join forces, creating the Joint Mountain Park Committee of the Commercial Bodies.</p> <p>December 8: Mountain Parks Executive Committee presents its final report and park plan to the joint committee of the three commercial bodies, to virtually unanimous approval.</p> <p>December 14: Mayor Speer suddenly embroiled in political controversy. Discredited, he declines to run for reelection, leaving the Mountain Parks Committee to pursue the necessary charter amendment on its own.</p>
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1912	<i>Municipal Election</i>	In the May election, the Mountain Parks Amendment passed by wide margin, authorizing a dedicated property tax to fund development of park system.
	<i>Mayor Arnold</i>	Voted into office during the same election that saw the passage of the Mountain Parks Amendment, Henry J. Arnold would serve for only one year.
<hr/>		
	Genesee Park 2,412.72 acres	Genesee, the system's largest park, was cobbled together through the purchase of several contiguous tracts over many years. The initial purchase of 840 acres was made in January 1912 by a group of private citizens determined to avert the imminent logging of the forest. This tract was placed in trust with the understanding that the city would purchase it for the promised mountain park system, which it did in 1914. Genesee soon became the home of a municipal game preserve stocked with elk and buffalo from Yellowstone National Park, a municipal campground, and Chief Hosa Lodge.
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	<i>Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects</i>	At the invitation of Mayor Arnold and the Denver Park Commission, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., spent several weeks in Denver in July reviewing the mountain park region, civic center, and other park projects. The firm was retained and began formal work on these projects that summer. Olmsted was directly involved in much of the work for the nearly two years needed to complete the mountain parks plan.

1913	Lookout Mountain Park 66.11 acres	Original 58 acres donated by Rees Vidler's Lookout Mountain Resort Co., which also opened Lookout Mountain Funicular Railway in 1912.
	Lookout Mountain Road (Lariat Trail)	Begun in 1912, the famous hairpin drive from Golden reached summit of Lookout Mountain during the summer. The road was laid out by Olmsted; local roadbuilder "Cement Bill" Williams began construction from Golden while a second crew worked downward from the top.
	Official Opening of Denver Mountain Parks	City officials formally celebrate the opening of Denver's Mountain Parks on August 27, 1913. The system was at this time comprised of Lookout Mountain Park, the first leg of the Lariat Trail, and the tract on Genesee Mountain that was being held in trust for the city.
	<i>Commission Government</i>	Denver begins three-year experiment in commission government in June 1913. Commissioner of Property Otto F. Thum given responsibility for the city's park matters, including mountain park development.
1914	Genesee Game Preserve	Denver received 23 elk and seven buffalo from Yellowstone National Park in February and June shipments to begin its municipal game preserve at Genesee Park. The buffalo herd descended from these animals is a prominent landmark today to motorists speeding along I-70 west of Denver.
	<i>Olmsted Plan</i>	Olmsted's completed plan for mountain parks and roads was presented to Denver in April 1914.
	Lookout-Genesee Road	Road from Lookout Mountain summit reaches Genesee Park.
	Colorow Point 0.537 acres	This view area on Lookout Mountain Road gave motorists a place to park and take in the view overlooking sheer Clear Creek Canyon. The point is named after a Ute chief who was known for his violent resistance to white settlements on the Western Slope.

	Fillius Park 107.67 acres	This park straddles the primary road between Genesee and Bergen Park. After an initial purchase of 11 acres in 1914, the park was expanded through, in part, the condemnation of 51 acres. Some sources indicate that rancher J.J. Clark donated land as well. A rustic stone shelter house designed by J.J.B. Benedict was built in 1918.
	Pence Park 320 acres	Originally named Dixie, this park was renamed in honor of Kingsley A. Pence. It is now one of three contiguous parks at the top of Bear Creek Canyon (with Corwina and O'Fallon) forming a 1,478-acre tract.
1915	<i>Federal Lands Bills Passed</i>	Legislation granting federal lands to Denver for public park purposes at \$1.25/acre passed, giving the city an option on some 7,000 acres of federal land. This bill was paired with a second bill in which 17,500 acres Olmsted had recommended were added instead to the Pike National Forest.
	Bell Park 480 acres	Straddling Little Cub Creek just south of Evergreen, this park was originally known by that name. It adjoins Cub Creek Park which, established in 1922, sits aside the Cub Creek drainage. Together the two parks comprise a 1,029-acre tract.
	First Loop Drive Completed	Several roads finished this year formed a continuous circle drive from Golden up Lookout Mountain, through Genesee Mountain, Bergen Park, and Bear Creek Canyon to Morrison.
1916	Corwina Park 297.82 acres	Located a short distance downstream from Evergreen, Corwina was one of the first parks acquired on Bear Creek. In 1938, the addition of O'Fallon Park joined Corwina with Pence in a single contiguous tract of 1,478 acres.
	Starbuck Park 11.13 acres	This small park in Bear Creek Canyon was donated by John C. Starbuck.
	Mt. Evans National Park Campaign Begins	In 1916, the MPAC and Chamber of Commerce began extensive lobbying of National Park Service and Congress to create a national park in the Mount Evans region. This appeal was paired with construction of Squaw Pass Road from Bergen Park and land acquisitions to connect the Denver Mountain Parks with the area.

<i>Mayor Speer & W.F.R. Mills</i>	Robert Speer returned to mayor's office for a third term with overwhelming public support, then died suddenly in May 1918. W.F.R. Mills, who had been Mayor Speer's Manager of Improvements and Parks since 1916, served as mayor for the remainder of Speer's term.
1917 Bergen Park 25.43 acres	Donated by Evergreen rancher Oscar N. Johnson, Bergen Park is located at the busy intersection where the Squaw Pass Road takes off from the primary loop drive (now Rt. 74). This location has made Bergen one of the best-known and most-used parks in the system. It features a rustic stone shelter house, picnic facilities, and playground equipment made in Denver's municipal shop.
Little Park 400.34 acres	Begun with an initial tract of 39 acres in 1917, Little Park was the first of several parks acquired to provide stream access for park patrons in Bear Creek Canyon.
Buffalo Bill's Grave	William "Buffalo Bill" Cody's body was interred at Lookout Mountain Park, June 3, 1917. The grave quickly became one of the most popular destinations in the mountain parks. The Pahaska Teepee museum, housing an extensive collection of Cody's memorabilia, was built nearby and operated for many years by Cody's stepson.
Beaver Brook Trail	This 7-mile trail from Lookout Mountain to Genesee Park was begun in 1917 and completed 1919. The city negotiated rights of way across numerous private holdings along the trail route.
1918 Forsberg Saddle 1.91 acres	This tiny roadside stop on the Squaw Pass Road was donated by C.A. Forsberg.
Chief Hosa Lodge (Genesee)	Denver architect J.J.B. Benedict designed this building in the rustic mountain style he would become known for. The lodge offered a restaurant operated by concessionaire. It can now be booked for special events.

Municipal Tent Camp (Genesee)	This campground, still in use today, was built in 1918 to cater to Denver citizens “of moderate means.” For a small fee, Denver residents could camp for up to two weeks in tent cabins built by the city. In combination with the Beaver Brook Trail, which was completed the following year, the tent camp made it possible to spend an entire holiday in the mountain parks without a car. Park patrons could take the tramway line to Golden, ride the funicular up Lookout Mountain, hike the seven miles to Genesee Park, lodge at the tent camp, and return via the same route.
1919 Deer Creek Park 89.7 acres	Two separate tracts near the mouth of Deer Creek Canyon comprise this park, which the city hoped would draw picnickers and fishing parties away from the overburdened central loop. However, the park areas suffered from severe vandalism nearly from the date of their inception.
Dedisse Park/Evergreen Lake 420.42 acres	After initial efforts lapsed during Speer’s last term, in 1919 Denver began condemnation proceedings to acquire the deDisse ranch, where park officials planned to build an alpine lake for fishing and boating as well as picnic and park areas. The city paid \$25,000 for the land. Work on the lake did not begin until 1926.
Mt. Evans Drive Reaches Squaw Pass	In 1919 Denver finished its road from Bergen Park to Squaw Pass, demonstrating the city’s commitment to opening the Mt. Evans region to mountain tourism. This same year the U.S. Forest Service began construction on the next leg of the road, from Squaw Pass to Echo Lake.
<i>1919 Expansion Plan</i>	In response to congestion on the park roads and in the parks, the Mountain Parks Advisory Commission develops a plan, endorsed by W.F.R. Mills, to expand the park system beyond the central loop, developing new parks, roads, and entrances further to the west and south. New corridors slated for development included Mt. Vernon Canyon, Turkey Creek Canyon, and Deer Creek Canyon. The plan also advocated developing the Mt. Evans highway and Echo Lake in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service, as well as the construction of Evergreen Lake on the deDisse ranch.

<i>Mt. Evans Agreement with U.S. Forest Service</i>	Denver's campaign to have a national park established in Mt. Evans region ended in 1919 with the U.S. Forest Service taking responsibility for recreational development of the area. For its part, Denver promised to purchase and develop Echo and Summit Lakes as destination areas within the region.
<i>Mayor Bailey & W.F.R. Mills</i>	Dewey C. Bailey served as mayor 1919-1923. Bailey would oversee drastic cuts in the dedicated mountain parks mill levy, reducing it from .5 to .02 mills and a record low annual budget of \$8,300 in 1922, with similar reductions in development and maintenance in the mountain parks. Bailey appointed W.F.R. Mills as Manager of Improvements and Parks, the post Mills held during Speer's final term. Bailey then reappointed the Mountain Parks Advisory Commission, assigning Mills to take over as its chair, placing a municipal officer over this board for the first time. (Mills also chaired the Municipal Water Board during these years.)
1920 Daniels Park 1,000.65 acres	Long a popular spot for sunset viewing by auto, this park is located in Douglas County atop the ridge west of Palmer Lake. The initial 38-acre tract was donated by Charles MacAllister Willcox (president of the Daniels and Fisher department store) and Florence Martin. The park was enlarged with 963-acre donation by Florence Martin in 1937, on which the city established a second buffalo preserve.
1921 Cub Creek Park (Dillon Park) 549.14 acres	This tract on Big Cub Creek adjoins Bell Park (1915). Designed expressly to accommodate large numbers of picnickers, together the two parks created the second largest tract in the system at that time with nearly 1,000 combined acres over the two neighboring watersheds. During the 1960s a 160-acre section of Cub Creek Park was renamed to honor Frank C. Dillon. Dillon oversaw the popular Probation Crew program that provided low-cost labor for many mountain park projects at the time.
Echo Lake 616.3 acres	47 miles west of Denver via the Mt. Evans Drive, Echo Lake was considered the keystone in the development of Mt. Evans for tourism. The city would soon build a grand stone and timber lodge on the lake. The property was condemned.

	Mt. Evans Drive reaches Echo Lake	The leg from Squaw Pass to Echo Lake was built by the U.S. Forest Service under the terms of the 1919 agreement. Together, this road and Denver's park at Echo Lake opened Mt. Evans to auto tourism.
	Pahaska Teepee (Buffalo Bill Museum)	This rustic building houses the personal collection of William F. Cody. It quickly became one of the most popular stops on the mountain park circuit.
1922	Parmalee Gulch Rd.	Park officials hoped completion of this road linking Turkey Creek to Bergen Park would finally open Pence (Dixie) Park to use. One of the first purchases in the system, Pence sat unvisited until reached by roadway.
1923	<i>Mayor Stapleton</i>	In office from 1923-31 and 1935-47, Benjamin Stapleton would oversee a doubling of mountain park acreage in his first two terms, shepherding the system to its final form.
1924	Summit Lake 161.83 acres	This tiny lake, at the treeless altitude of 12,740 feet, provided another destination on Mt. Evans above Echo Lake. The property was condemned.
	"Municipal Forest" Tracts Purchased 2,240 acres	In 1924, Denver finally purchased nineteen tracts from the U.S. government in 1924 under the terms of the 1914 federal lands bill. Called "municipal forest" lands at the time, the tracts included isolated peaks and slopes that comprised critical views from the developed mountain parks. They have been managed as conservation areas rather than developed for recreational use.
	Mt. Evans Drive reaches Summit Lake	Road crews completed the extension of this scenic drive from Echo Lake to Summit Lake during the fall.
1925	Deer Creek Canyon Road	This road, long needed, proved costly and difficult to build.
1926	Evergreen Golf Course 18 acres	The original nine-hole golf course and clubhouse overlooking the future Evergreen Lake were built by the Troutdale Hotel and Realty Company and donated to the city in 1926. The city later developed the back nine holes.

	Echo Lake Lodge	Touted as “the most pretentious shelter house in the Mountain Parks,” this rustic stone-and-timber lodge offered food and overnight accommodations in a building “as picturesque as its setting” on the shores of Echo Lake. It cost \$10,000 to build.
1927	Evergreen Lake completed	This 55-acre artificial lake was built on the former deDisse ranch. Stocked with trout by the State Game and Fish Department, the lake quickly became popular for fishing, picnicking, and ice skating. Mountain homes and summer cabins soon lined the park boundaries, and the lake became a central icon of Evergreen identity.
	Turkey Creek Park 61 acres	This small park lies at the junction of North Turkey Creek and South Turkey Creek on Highway 285.
1928	Bear Creek Canyon Park 130 acres	This 400-foot by four-mile strip along the creek from Morrison to Idledale allowed motorists easy access to fishing and picnicking.
	Red Rocks Park 804.19 acres	After many years of wrangling, Denver finally purchased the Park of the Red Rocks from John Brisben Walker in 1928. This would be the city’s last major purchase of a park site in the core mountain park region.
1930	Mount Evans Drive Reaches Summit	The last leg of the drive, from Echo Lake to the summit of Mt. Evans, was built by the state highway department during the Stapleton years with the vigorous encouragement of mountain park advocates. It has been largely understood to be part of Denver’s mountain park system although it is not technically Denver’s property. It is still celebrated as the highest auto road in the world.
1931	<i>Mayor Begole</i>	A frugal mayor elected during the Great Depression, George Begole opposed both government works projects and park spending in general. Mountain park spending dropped sharply during his term.

1935	<i>Mayor Stapleton & George Cranmer</i>	Returned to office for three more terms, 1935-1947, Stapleton appointed George Cranmer as head of the city's parks and improvements. Cranmer was responsible for the design of Red Rocks Amphitheatre and its construction using CCC labor; the development of Winter Park ski area; and soliciting the donation of the last parks added to the mountain park system.
1937	Katherine Craig Park 56 acres	This park near the Genesee tract is for Denver area Girl Scouts.
1938	O'Fallon Park 860 acres	Donated by Martin J. O'Fallon, this large park joined Corwina and Pence to create a single tract of 1,438 acres.
	Newton Park 431 acres	This park south of Conifer was donated by James Q. Newton, father of future mayor Quigg Newton. It was expanded in 1962 to its present size.
1939	Winter Park Ski Area 88.9 acres	The city owns some 89 acres of land forming the base of the ski area; the balance of Winter Park's total 5,600 acres is leased from the U.S. Forest Service.

Sources: Denver Park & Recreation Department, "Denver Mountain Parks Master Plan 2008," pp. 2, 81-152. Denver Park & Recreation Department, "List of Mountain Parks," (1 January 1955), in Box 5; "Named Mountain Parks," in Box 2, FF 14; "Donated Areas," in Box 2, FF 13; "History of Mountain Parks," in Box 3, FF 2; untitled typescript on history of the Mt. Evans Drive, in Box 21, FF 9; all in DHCP. Warwick M. Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," *DMF* (March-April, 1931): 12, 14, 23, 28. Edmund Wallace, "The History of the Denver Mountain Park System," *Green Thumb* 21 (June-July 1964): 158-160; Barbara and Gene Sternberg, *Evergreen: Our Mountain Community*, 3rd ed. (Evergreen: Evergreen Kiwanis Foundation, 2004). MPAC Minutes, (7 May 1917), DHCP, Box 5, FF 4. "Country Homes for the People," *DMF* (July 1918): 2. "The Mountain Parks by Car and Camera," *DMF* (April-May 1920): 3-11. "Picnic Parks of Cub Creek," *DMF* (June-July 1921): 7. "Improvement Program Urged for Mountain Parks," *DMF*, (March-April 1923): 10. "Mountain Park Improvements," *DMF* (Sept.-Oct. 1924): 7, 14. "Echo Lake Lodge Complete," *DMF* (August-October 1926): 12-14. "The Park of the Red Rocks Now Denver Property," *DMF* (Sept.-Oct. 1928): 2-3. "By Colorado's Highest Way," *DMF* (March-April 1930): 6, 24.

APPENDIX B

MOUNTAIN PARK FACTS

Mountain Parks Total Area	14,141 acres <i>Acreage per County</i> Jefferson: 10,271.377 acres Clear Creek: 2,780.04 acres Douglas: 1,000.65 acres Grand: 88.9 acres
Scenic Parkways	63.2 miles
Interior Park Roads	14.9 miles
Developed Parks	24 developed park tracts <i>County, Acreage</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bell Jefferson, 480 acres Bergen Jefferson, 25.431 acres Colorow Point Jefferson, 0.537 acres Corwina Jefferson, 297.82 acres Cub Creek & Dillon Jefferson, 549.14 acres Daniels Douglas, 1,000.65 acres Dedisse Jefferson, 420.42 acres Deer Creek Jefferson, 89.7 acres Echo Lake Clear Creek, 616.3 acres Filius Jefferson, 107.674 acres Genesee Jefferson, 2,412.72 acres Katherine Craig Jefferson, 56 acres Little Jefferson, 400.34 acres Lookout Mountain Jefferson, 66.11 acres Newton Jefferson, 431 acres O'Fallon Jefferson, 860 acres Pence Jefferson, 320 acres Red Rocks Jefferson, 804.19 acres Starbuck Jefferson, 11.13 acres Turkey Creek Jefferson, 61 acres

<p>Developed Parks, <i>continued</i>...</p> <p>Summit Lake Winter Park Ski Resort</p> <p>Total Developed Acreage:</p>	<p>Clear Creek, 161.83 acres Grand, 88.9 acres (owned; remainder leased)</p> <p>9,260 acres</p>
<p>Conservation/ Wilderness Areas</p> <p>Bear Creek Canyon Bergen Peak Berrian Mountain Birch Hill Double Header Mountain Elephant Butte Fenders Flying "J" Forsberg Hicks Mountain Hobbs Peak Legault Mountain Mt. Falcon Mt. Judge Mt. Lindo N. Turkey Creek Old Cemetery Ground Parmalee Gulch Pence Mountain Snyder Mountain Stanley Park Strain Gulch W. Jefferson School Yegge Peak</p> <p>Total Conservation Area Acreage:</p>	<p>24 undeveloped tracts</p> <p><u>County, Acreage</u></p> <p>Jefferson, 130 acres Jefferson, 520 acres Jefferson, 520 acres Jefferson, 160 acres Jefferson, 40 acres Jefferson, 665.1 acres Jefferson, 40 acres Jefferson, 80 acres Clear Creek, 1.91 acres Clear Creek, 840 acres Jefferson, 40 acres Jefferson, 160 acres Jefferson, 160 acres Clear Creek, 360 acres Jefferson, 80 acres Jefferson, 40 acres Jefferson, 0.185 acres Jefferson, 2.88 acres Clear Creek, 560 acres Clear Creek, 240 acres Jefferson, 80 acres Jefferson, 40 acres Jefferson, 80 acres Jefferson, 40 acres</p> <p>4,880 acres</p>
<p>Donated Tracts</p> <p>Genesee (Exline tract) Bergen Park Starbuck Park Buffalo Bill's Grave/Museum Forsberg Saddle</p>	<p><u>Donor (Acres Given, Year)</u></p> <p>Lucian Ralston (25.5 acres, 1913) Oscar N. Johnson (20 acres, 1915) John C. Starbuck (11.13 acres, 1916) Adolph Coors (acreage unknown, 1917) C.A. Forsberg (9.04 acres, 1918)</p>

<p>Donated Tracts, <i>continued...</i></p> <p>Genesee addition Unamed tract Daniels Park</p> <p>Evergreen Dam Site Evergreen Golf Course O’Fallon Park Newton Park</p> <p>Total Donated Acreage:</p>	<p>E.H. Rollins (80 acres, 1918) Ken Caryl Ranch Co. (4.88 acres, 1919) 1,000.65 total acres given in two parts: 1. Charles MacAllister Willcox and Florence Martin (37.99 acres, 1920) 2. Florence Martin (962.76 acres, 1937)</p> <p>John S. McBeth (2 lots, 1926) Troutdale Hotel & Realty Co. (17.87 acres, 1926) Martin J. O’Fallon (860 acres, 1938) James Quigg Newton (308 acres, 1938)</p> <p>Over 2,330 acres</p>
<p>Condemned Tracts</p>	<p>Major tracts taken through condemnation*</p> <p>Dedisse Park/Evergreen Lake (420 acres) Echo Lake (600 acres) Fillius Park addition (51 acres) Summit Lake (160 acres)</p> <p><i>*While condemnation proceedings were employed in a large number of acquisition negotiations, only a few of the suits brought by Denver ended with the city taking the land in court. In many cases the lawsuit prompted an out-of-court purchase agreement; in other cases the city dropped the suit for reasons of its own. And while the historical evidence shows that the takings listed here were concluded through condemnation proceedings, this list may not be complete.</i></p>

Sources: Denver Park & Recreation Department, “List of Mountain Parks,” (1 January 1955), in DHCP, Box 5; “Named Mountain Parks,” in DHCP, Box 2, FF 14; “Donated Areas,” in DHCP, Box 2, FF 13; “History of Mountain Parks,” in DHCP, Box 3, FF 2. MPAC Minutes, 22 May 1917; 7 May 1918, in DHCP, BOX 5, FF 3, 4. “Gives Mountain Park,” *DMF* (July 1918), p. 16. Gene and Barbara Sternberg, *Evergreen: Our Mountain Community*, 3rd ed. (Evergreen: Evergreen Kiwanis Foundation, 2004), p. 104. Denver Parks & Recreation Department, “Denver Mountain Parks Master Plan 2008,” p. 2.

APPENDIX C

“COME OUT AND PLAY”

Children of the east and south and north and west, Colorado is calling to you—
‘Come out and play!’

Hermit or honeymooner, hiker or ‘dude,’ flapper or grandmother—
‘Come out and play!’

Come in a limousine or a flivver, in a state-room or a tourist sleeper—
‘Come out and play!’

Come away from noise and heat and grind and worry—
‘Come out and play!’

Shut the door of your office, close your apartment, turn your back on trouble—
‘Come out and play!’

Come away from the smart club and the stock market, the mail and the
 telephone—
‘Come out and play!’

Abandon your profession and your learning, make recreation your ‘line of
 business’—
‘Come out and play!’

Come out of the crowds, into the cool and the open. Let the peace of silence heal
 the wounds of noise—
‘Come out and play!’

Come away from the things that disturb and jar you. Leave behind the people who
 annoy and hurt you.
‘Come up! Come out and PLAY!’