BUILDING A NECROPOLIS:

LIFE, DEATH, NEWSPAPERS, AND MARGINALIZATION IN EARLY DENVER AND ITS PIONEER CEMETERY

by

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Thesis directed by Professor Thomas G. Andrews

ABSTRACT

In 1858, William H. Larimer arrived at the shallows of Cherry Creek—a launching point for the gold diggings of the Pike's Peak region. Not only did he snatch up already claimed land to build a city, but he also wrestled control of the hilltop on the outskirts of the settlement that housed an old tribal burial ground rumored to contain the graves of Native Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples. While Larimer's collection of city-building ventures proved promising early on, his role in the development of Denver was short-lived. In 1865, less than seven years after landing in the remote mining community, Larimer left the area for other pursuits.

The hilltop graveyard, however, became a symbol of early Denver, occupying the minds of residents and securing a prime spot in local newspapers throughout the late 1800s. Mount Prospect, as the cemetery came to be known, initially stirred hope that by building a charming and aesthetically pleasing location for its dead, the city might gain respectability and become a beacon of civilization and progress in the West. Sadly though, this burial ground fell into disrepair, earning bad newspaper publicity and a shameful reputation as a forlorn and unsalvageable spot. After decades of occupying space at the margins of society, Mount Prospect was officially removed from the landscape—dug up, relocated, and plowed over. In its wake, two new cemeteries came into existence, offering a renewed sense of pride for the city.

This paper explores the history of Denver's original pioneer cemetery—Mount Prospect—to portray city development from the vantage point of the burial ground. It also considers the ways newspapers depicted this space. By studying this landscape from its inception in 1858 through its deconstruction by the end of the 1940s, one can see how distinctions made in life regarding class, religion, race, and ethnicity significantly influenced one's burial location and memorialization. The graveyard of early Denver, renamed City Cemetery in time, tended to reinforce the separations forged in life between diverse groups and maintained notions of "otherness" across its terrain. The cemetery setting or "deathscape" served as a stark reminder for city residents that stratification persisted in death much as it did in life.

At its core, this project is a cemetery study, and it demonstrates that the marginalization and exclusion experienced in life by racialized groups of African Americans, Chinese, and Japanese, also carried over into death. Additionally, others who claimed membership in various social organizations also received graveyard accommodations based upon their affiliation with such groups. Thus, Denver's earliest graveyard garnered its reputation based upon those interred there.

Through time, the cemetery's image shifted dramatically in the minds of locals; It would either be well-revered and central to city life, or it would be devalued and in need of alteration or removal. In early Denver, society's conceptualization of its cemetery landscape became tethered to its notions about diverse peoples and groups.

For My Dad,

Charles Thomas Trowbridge III

1949-2017

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The following paper is but a small section of a larger body of work that looks more fully at three of Denver’s pioneer cemeteries: Mount Prospect, Riverside, and Fairmount. Despite only showcasing Mount Prospect in these pages, it would be an egregious error to leave the reader thinking that this was the only burial ground sectioned along racial, religious, and class lines in Denver. Contrarily, stratification also became apparent across other key local cemeteries, further solidifying the divisive role of the deathscape in the city’s history. I’d like to thank those interred in these spaces for affording me the opportunity to uncover portions of their lost narratives. Their stories are in need of greater illumination.

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Preface and A Note on Terminology

A tourist visiting modern-day Denver, Colorado might conduct a web-based search of the top places to see in the Mile High City, and a historically inclined individual might take extra care to compile a list of significant landmarks or even nationally designated historical sites in the area. The goal of most vacationers would probably be to stop at the spots considered most important in order to experience the city's notable and defining features, including its entertainment venues, cultural centers, museums, and other "must see" places. Likewise, some might even choose an itinerary to navigate the places of historical significance for a better understanding of the city's past and the people that made Denver what is today. Such lists are extensive, and even the national news conglomerate *USA Today* joined the bandwagon to promote Denver by creating an internet driven travel guide of the "10Best Things to Do" around town.[1] These include obvious stops at the State Capitol Building, the Denver Art Museum, Red Rocks Amphitheater, and the Botanic Gardens, amongst others.

Glaringly absent from the tourist pages, however, are Denver's three historical cemeteries, places where visitors would surely glean valuable information about the city's past and the pioneers who built its foundation. Mount Prospect, the city's first burial ground, no longer exists and has been completely erased from the landscape. One is hard-pressed to find readily available information in most online tourist guides about Riverside, Denver's second pioneer cemetery, even though this burial ground has been named a National Historic District and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.[2] Similarly, historic Fairmount Cemetery

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[1] Christine Loomis, "Get Your Bearings in Denver: 10 Best Things to Do," *USA Today,* https://www.10best.com/ destinations/colorado/denver/attractions/additional-historic-sites/ (accessed May 1, 2023).

[2] Colorado Preservation, Inc., "Riverside Cemetery," accessed June 1, 2023, http://coloradopreservation.org /programs/endangered-places/endangered-places-archives/riverside-cemetery/. See also Kaylyn M. Flowers, "Riverside Cemetery," *Colorado Encyclopedia*, Last Modified November 24, 2022. https://coloradoencyclopedia. org/article/riverside-cemetery.

does not appear on travel sites either, even though it houses three state-recognized historical landmarks on its property. Alarmingly, Riverside even earned a place on Colorado's List of Most Endangered Places in 2008. As all of this shows, Denver's cemeteries do not often occupy the forefront of our thinking.

Such inattention is easily explained away because people generally do not associate cemeteries with tourism, entertainment, or even preservation. To highlight the words of journalist Greg Melville, even though "graveyards are the time capsules of our communities…these treasure troves of Americana are almost completely overlooked."[3] The cemetery is "the soul of [the] hometown" and a repository that "holds our buried history."[4] Even so, the general population, journalists, and even historians "whistle past graveyards" when familiarizing themselves with the past, and therefore, miss out on valuable sources of information.[5] This has a lot to do with beliefs that cemeteries are creepy or taboo, but it also stems from a lack of recognition that a journey through the land of the dead could actually lend critical insights into our past. Indeed, a good way to understand the origins of our present-day state of affairs might be to look more closely at cemeteries and burial records, which many have brushed aside in the past.

This thesis explores the history of Denver's first cemetery to portray the development of the city from a very different vantage point—from a location that houses the dead. By studying the cemetery landscape, one can see how distinctions made in life regarding class, religion, and race significantly influenced one's burial site, funeral service, and memorialization through grave marking and monumentation. The graveyard setting or "deathscape" tends to reinforce the

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[3] Greg Melville, *Over My Dead Body: Unearthing the Hidden History of America's Cemeteries* (New York: Abrams Press, 2022), 5.
[4] Melville, *Over My Dead Body*, 4-5.
[5] Melville, *Over My Dead Body*, 4-5.

separations forged in life between groups and maintains notions of "otherness" from beyond the grave. Cemeteries are stark reminders that stratification persists in death just as it does in life.

The term "deathscape" is an extension of the idea originally proposed by anthropologist Arjun Appaduraitha, that a variety of 'scapes' can be used "as a means of understanding contemporary social processes."[6] The deathscape was applied by Avril Maddrell and James Sideway in their edited volume, *Deathscapes: Spaces for Death, Dying, Mourning, and Remembrance,* to "invoke both the places associated with death and for the dead and how these are imbued with meanings and associations."[7] The term has also been used by scholars of various disciplines who write about the segregation of blacks in Southern cemeteries to demonstrate how the graveyard landscape both commemorated and solidified the systems of oppression that transpired in life.[8] The reality that certain plats of land were unattainable for African Americans reinforced racial segregation even in death in what has been labeled a "deathscape." The word embodies "a landscape of the dead" and includes, as Christine Klaufus argues, the "processes of placemaking and representation."[9] Deathscapes are environments "fraught with power inequalities," and they evolve according to a multitude of various economic, political, and cultural factors.[10]

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[6] Avril Maddrell and James Sideway, *Deathscapes: Spaces for Death, Dying, Mourning, and Remembrance* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 4.
[7] Maddrell and Sideway, *Deathscapes,* 4.
[8] For segregated cemeteries for the enslaved, see China Galland, *Love Cemetery: Unburying the Secret History of Slaves* (New York: HarperCollins Books, 2007). See also Greg Melville's *Over My Dead Body*, 45-57 and 87-97. Melville which also addresses segregated Chinese cemeteries, 163- 173. For discussions on native and non-native racially-based reburial and repatriation, see Michael Kammen, *Digging Up the Dead: A History of Notable American Reburials* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 167-199.
[9] Christine Klaufus, "Deathscapes in Latin America's Metropolises: Urban Land Use, Funerary Transformations, and Daily Inconveniences," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, no. 96 (2014): 100-101 and 99-111.
[10] Klaufus, "Deathscapes," 101. For additional information and historiography, see Lily Kong, "Cemeteries and Columbaria, Memorials, and Mausoleums: Narrative and Interpretation in the Study of Deathscapes in Geography," *Australian Geographical Study* 37, no. 1 (1999): 1-10. https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/soss_research/1819/.

Building off the ideas of other scholars, I employ the term "deathscape" periodically here to encapsulate the physical graveyard terrain and its atmosphere but also to signal how funerary customs, memorialization practices, and monumentation shaped the layout and ornamentation of cemetery spaces. To clarify, the cemetery space encompasses land, atmosphere, people, traditions, and the man-made relics placed there. Consequently, the deathscape is as much a zone of interaction between each of these components as it is a sedentary place for the departed, and it must be understood as such. People gather here to both mourn and commemorate their beloved, but in doing so, they interact with others and mold the physical landscape according to deeply-held ideas and belief systems. Historically, as various people converged in these spaces, they structured them along racial, religious, and class lines. Conflict and cooperation across these terrains fostered relationships for the sake of burial and commemoration but also reinforced separation.

I also use the term "cityscape" in a similar way—to depict the interactions of early Denver's physical geography, its architectural, political, and legal structures, its people, and the sets of shared belief systems both within and across diverse groups. Fashioned after the contention that ethnoscapes, technoscapes, borderscapes, and memoryscapes, along with others, are contrived frameworks for understanding social processes, my paper posits that the "cityscape" and cemetery "landscape" also function as conceptual frames. Such a frame was also implemented by historian Thomas G. Andrews in the 2008 work, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War*, to create an understanding of yet another type of "scape," which he calls the "mine workscape." Here, he frames interactions between people, animals, organisms, and their environment to show interconnection but also the complexity of relationships, which include "the language people use to understand the world, and the lens of culture through which

they make sense of and act on their surroundings."[11] In this underground setting, people negotiated to build an infrastructure as they navigated difference and division.

In my study, the landscape, cityscape, and deathscape also become lenses through which to view human interaction and town building as they played out in Denver, particularly in the environments established for the dead. My work relies on various "scapes" to present a holistic image of place, one that considers the positive and negative consequences of human relationships and their effects on the spaces they occupy. These concepts are a conduit for seeing how city development, especially in graveyards, allowed for accommodation while at the same time fortifying division.

Furthermore, people in early Denver forged relationships along class lines, which also significantly shaped the building of the city and its burial grounds. In order to fully grasp how I use "class" structures throughout this work, it is necessary to consider the context of such systems in early Denver. According to several leading Colorado Historians, as emigrants began to crowd into the city by the mid-1860s, "newspapers, social clubs, and visits by distinguished literary figures, artists, and public figures gave Denver a sheen of sophistication."[12] Money brought refinement, and locals invigorated their city by spending close to $700,000 on infrastructure.[13] People formed distinct commercial and residential districts, and people with money and influence established a pattern for homebuilding in distinguished areas around town. Neighborhoods grew, and Denver "began to assume metropolitan airs" by building brick structures and working to rid areas of "ramshackle buildings."[14] Denver became a "square,

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[11] Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 123-125.
[12] Carl Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard, and Thomas J. Noel, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, 4th ed. (Boulder, University Press of Colorado, 2005), 62-63.
[13] Abbott and others, *Colorado*, 54.
[14] Abbot and others, *Colorado,* 63.

proud, prompt, little place" at the hands of the affluent and others who rose to the top of the social hierarchy during town development.[15] Both social and economic factors shaped class structure in early Denver, and even individuals across class lines adopted value systems similar to the elite—where one's success and social hierarchy depended upon their economic stability, morality, and ideas about progress.

In Denver, the affluent or those of means, formed the systems and structures that defined city growth, shaped the developing legal order, and molded the social aspirations of the various classes converging in the early city. An elite class quickly emerged comprised of those who built wealth either in the East and came to the city well-endowed or those who accumulated their fortunes during Denver's "Old West" period, which ranged from about 1858 to the 1870s.[16] In this era, in addition to infrastructure, the local economy grew quickly and amassed concentrated wealth through farming, ranching, and the building of local markets by burgeoning entrepreneurs. Land speculators, mining prospectors, and risk-taking homesteaders also invigorated the early economy, and some put large sums into their own pockets while bolstering the success of otherwise unlikely individuals, all of whom quickly became arbiters of affluence and a growing elite social class.[17] In a time of "practically boundless opportunity," some assembled wealth while others added to their already large bankrolls.[18]

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[15] Abbot and others, *Colorado,* 63.
[16] Thomas G. Andrews, "Colorado and the Four Wests: An Introduction to the Political Economy Section." *Colorado Encyclopedia*, last modified August 23, 2022, https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/colorado-and-four-wests-introduction-political-economy-section. For discussions of affluent elites, see Abbott and others, *Colorado,* 62, 63, and 243.
[17] Richard L. Hogan, *Class and Community in Frontier Colorado* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2021), 2-3. Historical sociologist Richard Hogan discusses the emergence of class structures in early Denver, claiming that elites, laborers, and non-laborers were "prime movers" in establishing early institutions in the city. In this manner, an elite class emerged through emigration and also from wealth gained from the bottom up, as they dictated economics, politics, and social structures in "frontier Denver."
[18] Andrews, "Colorado and the Four Wests."

It is also worth clarifying that because majorities in both the middle and lower classes subscribed to the value systems and aspirations of the affluent in the city-building campaign, this study oftentimes takes affluent-elite social values and applies them across all socio-economic groups, especially in the cemetery landscape. In other words, in death, all classes sought to achieve—or at least to approximate—an elite status by possessing land and displaying material wealth in centralized locations across the graveyard terrain, encompassed in what sociologists and historians have labeled the "deathscape." Here lies the contention that all classes came to embrace newly-developing eastern elite ideals of burial and commemoration, which shifted away from traditional, urban churchyard practices toward the modern rural cemetery movement. Furthermore, all classes desired a modicum of control within the graveyard setting, especially regarding the burial of lost loved ones, and they sought to maintain both the dignity of the physical landscape and the reputation of the cemetery as a whole. The wider population, regardless of class, rallied for change when necessary to create a suitable and reputable place for their dead, because building a proper cemetery became an important part of city-building as such values spread to the West.

Concepts of race, ethnicity, and cultural identity are also central to my work, and a clarification of how I use such terms is necessary for understanding how the spaces of pioneer cemeteries evolved through time in Denver. Early newcomers who built the city have best been designated mostly as "Anglo-Americans"—racially white or ethnically European.[19] Some were foreign born, but most had been born in the United States, with ancestors hailing from diverse regions of Europe. Starting as early as the 1850s, they arrived to areas near what would later become Denver, and interacted sporadically with local indigenous tribes, which included the

[19] Abbott and others, *Colorado*, 192.

Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute, and many others who considered the region their homeland. Spanish-speaking groups and Mexicans were sparser in the northern and central regions prior to the 1900s, and therefore, they are not a focus of this current paper.[20] Thus, in early Denver, whites who "considered themselves part of the rapid civilization of progress" dominated development, and they willfully displaced American Indians and other groups they deemed "ignorant and debased to a shameful degree."[21]

By definition and long-standing agreement amongst scholars, race is a narrower way of grouping individuals through biologically inherited traits, while ethnicity is broader and represents a collective, learned identity held by a distinct group based upon shared cultural traditions, language, and ideological associations.[22] In my study, I use "race" to acknowledge scientific and often imposed notions of heredity that dictate physical features such as skin color and facial features. Race, therefore, signals one's biological lineage. I use ethnicity to denote the cultural identification either adopted by a group or applied to the group by outsiders. Because ethnicity is a matter of cultural identity, those within an ethnic group might perceive themselves as connected by homeland, biological ancestry, language, social value systems, traditions, and sometimes religion. In other words, groups assert themselves under a "cultural-ethnic" model and such assertions, unifying in nature, are used by that group to establish their identity and place within a society. Race, however, is applied to invoke physical distinctions and categorizes disparate populations using various measures to separate or mark divisions.[23]

Problems arise though because individuals do not always fit neatly into categories, and oftentimes one's cultural-ethnic associations challenge the accepted racial categorization

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[20] Abbott and others, *Colorado*, 41.
[21] Abbott and others, *Colorado*, 40.
[22] Ali Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 38.
[23] Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction*, 32-33.

criterion for a group. For instance, a black American might tie their biological ancestry to a region in Africa but also identify culturally as Hispanic, practicing Latin customs. Subsequently, in the development of the American West, a conflation of race, nation, and citizenship often occurred, further complicating straightforward racial categorizations and their relation to cultural-ethnic identity.[24] Combined too with the intermixing of diverse groups through marriage and child-bearing, people more often saw themselves through an amalgam of lenses.

Equally important to note, seeking a biological explanation for group behavior grew more important in the 1800s, and the scientific tenets of physiology increasingly fused with the various facets of cultural-ethnicity.[25] People believed in a connection between their physical traits, their homeland, and their lifeways and therefore, came to blend culture and race. I oftentimes use hyphenation throughout this paper to acknowledge the broader meanings associated with the merging of "racial-ethnicity." In this study, "race" is meant to infer a biological connection to a place of origin and ancestry with the supposition that the term has come to also encompass the sweeping ethnic associations applied to groups from certain regions. For example, in the late1800s, Denverites subscribed to widespread thinking that the Chinese were a separate race, but they also considered ethnic Chinese culture to be foreign, feminine, peculiar, and incongruent with white-American contemporary social norms. In early Denver, blanket assertions and stereotypes based upon cultural-ethnic markers became racialized—especially in news publications—complicating definitions of race and strengthening racialized thinking in the region. Therefore, the terms "race, culture, and ethnicity" became linked, could be associated with a foreign country, and usually pushed people to interpret Others as different, alien, and incompatible with the wider city population.

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[24] Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction*, 38.
[25] Rattansi, *Racism, A Very Short Introduction,* 33-37.

Along these lines, throughout my paper, I try to associate people directly with their country of origin, meaning that I use Chinese, Japanese, African, and Mexican when referencing people from these distinct regions. Similarly, I try to use American Indian tribal names when discussing such groups. However, to save space, I periodically employ blanket terms like Native and Indian when speaking about populations comprised of diverse tribal nations. East Asian is sometimes used to depict those from regions across Asia. Likewise, I group whites under the umbrella terms of Anglo-American and Euro-American. This is not meant to minimize the importance of origin or cultural-ethnicity but rather to show that prevailing similarities existed in the treatment of broader populations of people.

Lastly, I use of the words "civilized" and "uncivilized" throughout, and they too warrant a frame of reference. Historically, Anglo-Americans drew upon both words to describe Native Americans and their dichotomous identities as assigned by whites. Oftentimes, Indigenous groups were viewed as "uncivilized savages" in need of a civilization plan to help them better conform to American cultural practices and expansionist ideologies. According to historian Claudio Saunt, American nineteenth-century popular culture conceived of "Indians" as "savage and primitive or noble and in touch with nature," but regardless, many modernity-minded Americans saw them as people of an inferior order that needed either taming or removal.[26] Modern progress meant a move from a crude state toward a more "contemporary stage of refinement."[27] Incompatible with American visions, changing Native culture and traditions became a way for whites to eliminate contradictory lifeways.[28] When civilization strategies

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[26] Claudio Saunt, *Unworthy Republic, The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020), xii and 17-20.
[27] Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction*, 24-25.
[28] Elliott West, *Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), xxiii, 11-12, 170, 260, 312, and 335. See also "Reconstructing Race," *Western Historical Quarterly 34*, Spring (2003): 7-26.

failed or change occurred too slowly, "removal" became the modus operandi. I use all three terms throughout this study—civilized, uncivilized, and removal—to show that American habits regarding the treatment of "otherness" began during early encounters with Natives, were carried West, and then dictated later relationships with populations of diversity. Such patterns became strengthened through the American institution of slavery, were again reinforced by Chinese Exclusion, and became firmly entrenched in the West as the country approached the twentieth century.

In a compelling essay, "Reconstructing Race," historian Elliott West touches on the topic of race in the development of the West, and he asserts that as Americans moved westward in the mid-1800s, "expansion triggered an American racial crisis…complicating so hugely America's ethnic character."[29] Rooted in historiography, particularly the work of Reginald Horsman, West contends that whites exhibited an ideology of natural superiority that not only justified their expansionist agendas, no matter the cost, but also dictated a developmental framework for the frontier and national policy. We can take West's ideas a step further and apply them to emerging frontier cities that grappled with racial difference while simultaneously instituting modern growth plans. As "racial outsiders" in these western landscapes, Native Americans, Mexicans, migrating Asian populations, and immigrants from other global regions posed puzzling contradictions to white notions of progress and town-building. While West posits that on the path to nation building, "consolidation" and "common ground" eventually supplanted the violence sparked by notions of difference, he emphasizes that national growth provoked a rhetoric of inferiority used to corral non-whites. Similarly, I argue that the treatment of nonwhite groups—targets of anti-Other rhetoric—paralleled that of Natives peoples and followed a similar order of

[29] Elliott West, "Reconstructing Race," Western Historical Quarterly 34 (Spring 2033): 8-9.

progression—civilize through change, separate what is different, and remove that which could not conform. Such processes shaped the development of early Denver and its cemeteries.

To elaborate further, I use the terms "remove" and "removal" frequently in this paper to underscore local efforts to rid the cityscape of undesirable elements either by changing them, confining them to a marginal area, relocating them to the periphery of society, or by erasing them from public space altogether. Such efforts allowed for a geographical segregation of unsightly places and people, which was apparent in the American Indian reservation system, in the redlining of African-American communities, and in the creation of ethnic enclaves such as Little Italy, Chinatown, and others.[30] Eliminating the uncivilized and undesirable elements or encapsulating them within niches became part of the American mosaic early on and followed similar patterns in the growth of Denver's cityscape and various landscape terrains. It even occurred within the deathscape. Just as U.S. citizens increasingly "maintained that their inability to live together with indigenous people, was a law of nature rather than a choice," many then applied this logic to other alien groups both in life and in death.[31] Therefore, civilization and removal are appropriate terms that imply a strong connection to past trends.

Lastly, a note on style: Throughout this work, I rely on historical newspapers for a large portion of information and quoted material. I take care to note each source upon first introducing it in a paragraph, but I do not cite additional facts and quotes that come from the same source if they directly follow the initial reference. I strive to limit my citations to one per paragraph when using the same press publication, unless otherwise noted.

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[30] The American institution of slavery adopted ideologies about difference, inferiority, and separation similar to those applied to Native Americans. It operated under an analogous contention that Africans also needed opportunities for improvement or salvation. Then, after the Civil War, segregation became a political and social tool that further separated blacks from whites and denied them access to space. For more, see Saunt, 17-20.
[31] For quoted material, see Saunt, *Unworthy Republic*, 10.

The Fabrication of Mount Prospect, Denver's First Burial Ground

Introduction

Local Denver policeman William O. Steam worked the area of Denver's Five Points in the spring of 1921. Well-liked and respected by fellow deputies, Steam enjoyed social gatherings both on and off-duty. On Friday night, February 18, while seated for a card game with three people at the dance hall and club rooms on Arapahoe Street, a man named Keil O'Neill entered the hall looking for the officer. Just prior to brandishing a gun, witnesses heard O'Neill smugly state, "Steam, I have come to get you."[32] He then unloaded two rounds at close range, killing the officer instantly.

Local newspapers reported the event but kept the coverage simple and off the front page. One article simply referred to Steam as "well adapted for the work he did and well thought of by the police department."[33] Another publication opted for a flashier report with a headline that read "Denver Negro Kills Negro Policeman."[34] The article went on to list a few scarce details of the crime but poignantly alerted the public to Steam's status as a "negro member of the police force" shot by "a negro ex-convict…who escaped from a Texas prison." Still other reports referred to a "colored policeman" and a "negro dance hall" within their articles.[35] According to O'Neill, who openly admitted to the killing, the shooting was not racial but justified as payback for the shutdown of a dance party, which caused him "to lose a lot of money."[36] Whether the newspapers sought to implicate race as a motive is unclear, but they certainly relied on sensationalistic reporting tactics that capitalized on racialized language to capture the attention of

[32] *The Colorado Statesman*, Volume 27, no. 20, February 26, 1921.
[33] *The Colorado Statesman*, Volume 27, no. 20, February 26, 1921.
[34] *The Colorado Daily Chieftain,* February 20, 1921.
[35] *The Herald Democrat*, February 19, 1921 and February 20, 1921.
[36] *The Fort Collins Courier*, February 21, 1921.

their audience. Such techniques highlighted difference within the community and reinforced local divisions along color lines.

Skirting the more extensive press coverage common with crimes of a similar magnitude that occurred in the growing city, the officer's murder seemed to carry little weight in the newspapers and throughout town. Steam was buried a few days later in Section 14 at Denver's Riverside Cemetery, on an overgrown plat of land towards the back of the property. Although recognized as a community servant killed in the line of duty, his grave remained unmarked and came to occupy peripheral space in the landscape. Deprived of a headstone and proper nameplate to signal his life's accomplishments, Steam was marginalized in death just as he and so many of Denver's other ethnically diverse residents had been in life.

The story of Officer Steam's murder and O'Neill's haphazard rationale for the shooting fell quickly out of news circulation. What made the murder notable at the time was not the fact that an officer of the law was shot in cold blood but that he was African American. In the early decades of the twentieth century, it was unusual for a person of color to occupy the ranks of law enforcement. Willie, as fellow comrades called him, was an anomaly at a time when skin color dictated status, and this, in and of itself, drew the attention of locals and of the press. Beginning with Denver's roots as an unsophisticated mining camp, both residents and the news media spotlighted such exceptions, often categorizing people along racial-ethnic, religious, and class lines and highlighting difference through racialized language, images, and moralized codes of conduct. These separations also applied to cemetery settings.

Surprisingly, Willie Steam's story did not end in1921, though, and almost a century after his death, he appeared in the media yet again. On February 17, 2018, the Denver Police Museum placed a commemorative headstone above his tomb to honor "the first African-American Denver

Police Officer to die in the line of duty" and to acknowledge Steam's eleven years of loyal service.[37] No longer would Steam remain nameless in what the museum called an "oversight," and in a quaint ceremony, the chief of police, retired officers, museum volunteers, and the mayor, finally gathered to formally recognize the fallen officer. Accolades for Steam's bravery, strong will, and fearless service echoed throughout the crowd, and several officials noted that "joining the Denver Police force during a time of prevailing racial prejudice" deserved recognition too. The ceremony corrected "an oversight," and according to the city public service director, it demonstrated that "we haven't forgotten about him." When news reporters asked why the grave had remained unmarked for so long, the museum president responded, "you kind of wonder that (and) we don't know, but we had the opportunity to bring him back to life today." The simple placement of a gravestone and dedicatory ceremony restored Willie Steam's honor and gave him a place amongst the living once again. The landscape at Riverside Cemetery, through the stone's installation, now illuminated the hero who remained nameless throughout an era in history where one's race rather than their accomplishments shaped their treatment in both life in death.

Yet African Americans were not the only racial group who struggled for recognition in early Denver and to obtain a fitting commemoration upon death. Many of those who spent their lives in the city's ethnic enclaves faced marginalization and became disenfranchised by the town's residents. Elites, boosters, middle-class Denverites, and workers alike, all categorized émigrés according to their ethnic, religious, and economic differences, marking the distinctions between themselves and "others." Additionally, as a tool of control and influence used by those in positions of power, newspapers and other written publications relentlessly printed material to

[37] *The Denver Post*, February 17, 2018.

further deprecate a wide variety of groups also including Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Germans, Italians, and Irish. While the press's use of racialized language and negative stereotypes worked to further disparage ethnically diverse groups, written reports also focused on crime, oftentimes conflating the two. In many instances, reports would highlight both the race and the contemptibility of the depraved criminal, forging connections between country of origin and immoral behavior.

In addition to crime, newspapers also emphasized the role growing ethnic populations played in labor disputes and economic competition. The Denver press published especially brutal reports regarding Colorado's Chinese and Japanese between 1870 and 1910. Denver's infamous Chinese riot, which caused property destruction and left one man dead, received headline coverage in the fall of 1880, and Colorado newspapers also reported two escalating situations in the early 1900s, both involving disputes between Japanese laborers and a deeply dissatisfied local workforce. The Japanese restaurant boycott in Denver in 1901 and an incident at the Chandler Mine in Freemont County in 1902 had two things in common: each stemmed from job or economic competition and each emphasized race to be the root cause of the tension.[38] In all of these stories, the solution embraced by many white local residents and endorsed through press coverage was at first exclusion and then action to remove that particular group from the landscape entirely.[39] Scholars have successfully argued that these themes became popular topics

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[38] For newspaper coverage of the Japanese Restaurant Boycott, please reference: *The Denver Times,* January 5, 1901, July 24, 1901, September 6, 1901, and December 11, 1901. For information about the Chandler Mine incident, please see: *The Denver Republican,* February 13, 1902, February 14, 1902, and February 19, 1902; and *The Denver Post,* February 13, 1902, February 14, 1902, and February 16, 1902. Most of these articles can be accessed through microfilm at Denver Public Library's Western History Collection.
[39] The term "local residents" is a sweeping term to refer to the diverse groups of people living in Denver at the time.

in newspapers, appeared with increasing frequency as the century wore on, and shaped the ideas and actions of local populations.[40]

Written publications worked tirelessly to spin stories of labor strife and economic turmoil, to create a negative picture of Chinese and Japanese workers, and to disseminate words and images that further marginalized the groups from both the local labor force and society more broadly. According to the famous *New York Tribune* writer, Horace Greeley, the Chinese were "uncivilized, unclean, and filthy beyond all conception, without any of the higher domestic or social relations."[41] In Denver, newspapers depicted the Chinese as "slant-eyed washermen and pleasure-loving females, living in hovels…marred by villainous filth."[42] Likewise, the Japanese were portrayed merely as offshoots of their Chinese "celestial" brothers, and one news writer expressed that "their physiognomy was that of a cross between an Indian and a mulatto, and although more intelligent in expression than the Chinese, there was that idiotic manifestation in their vacant and unenthusiastic manner."[43] Such portrayals shaped local perceptions of these groups and created division across the workplaces and cityscapes.

Newspapers did not stop there, though; they also printed damaging material about non-whites unrelated to the labor issues of the day. African Americans, for instance, received unfair coverage in the press as they too were at times presented as threats to the natural order despite

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[40] For discussions on the role the media played in shaping public opinion in the development of the West, see Abbott and others, *Colorado*, 47-49 and 72. See also West, *Contested Plains*, 122-129. For newspaper conceptualizations of racial difference and the spread of such information see Wei, *Asians in Colorado*, 10-11. In Cultures of War, John Dower stated, "It goes without saying that cultural differences matter; and we need only pick up the daily paper…to see how they can be manipulated to legitimize mayhem," xx. For specific ways the press influenced notions of Otherness, see also John Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 78-91, 157, 162, 176-77, 244-259. For the genesis of the media and its tendency to "manipulate public opinion," see Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media*, 395-396.
[41] *The New York Tribune,* September 29, 1854.
[42] *The Rocky Mountain News,* February 17, 1874.
[43] *The Rocky Mountain News,* June 13, 1860.

the misconception that blacks could migrate to Colorado for the chance to live free of racial tension. For example, the *Rocky Mountain News* published many articles dehumanizing blacks, and it was common to see African Americans called "savage Negros" and even a "repulsive race of black, ignorant, and cannibal barbarians."[44] One writer opined that "In Colorado, a large portion of the people…would decide against the Negro now and forever," working to exclude this group from broader society. While many worked to deny blacks voting rights and privileges similar to those of whites, others wanted to expel blacks from the cityscapes.[45]

While Colorado's more progressive constitution did provide blacks more freedom than in the South, white communities still wanted black population control and restricted blacks to certain neighborhoods and low-level, unskilled labor positions. Most worked menial jobs, becoming domestic servants, farmers, warehouse workers, and restaurant cooks.[46] By the early 1900s, segregated African American communities emerged in Denver and added to the sense of division between whites and people of color. One local newspaper noted that "the presence of the negro in this country is an evil," and another described blacks as "negro paupers and criminals."[47] Such representations solidified unfavorable sentiments toward blacks in writing and perpetuated negative stereotypes in the early city.

It became commonplace to read articles that portrayed Chinese, Japanese, and African Americans as Others, markedly different from white residents racially and culturally. Journalists often supported the social violence and vigilante justice that placed a spotlight on these groups. Historian Richard Slotkin lamented that the actions and ideologies directed toward nonwhites

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[44] *The Rocky Mountain News,* October 23, 1875 and June 16, 1868.
[45] *The Rocky Mountain News,* November 16, 1868.
[46] Arturo Aldama with Elisa Facia, Daryl Maeda, and Reiland Rabaka, *Enduring Legacies: Ethnic Histories and Cultures of Colorado* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2011), 102-103.
[47] *The Rocky Mountain News,* June 3, 1879 and May 11, 1879.

and the “dangerous classes of the post-Frontier urban, and industrial order… transformed from an assertion of a natural and democratic right-to-violence to an assertion of class and racial privilege.”[48] Printed publications then emphasized class, racial categorization, and cultural differences to further alienate and push elite-white agendas for change. Through negative reporting strategies, Denver’s presses endorsed notions of white racial superiority and further marginalized these groups physically, economically, and socially across the cityscape.[49] The press actively shaped popular opinion and escalated the disenfranchisement of racial-ethnic groups both in the work force and in the local community.

Much of the reported conflict involving Chinese and Japanese in early Colorado centered on labor discord and emphasized the stark cultural gulf that existed between East Asians and whites. But many articles also addressed the perceived lack of morality, un-cleanliness, and the basic “inhumanity” of both Chinese and Japanese populations. The conflation of these topics—in reality and in news portrayals—complicates ideas of whether negative attitudes toward these groups stemmed from labor competition or from deeper racialized ideas about those of East Asian origin. Nonetheless, a long history of yellow-peril thinking informed journalism. In other words, a distinct racism directed toward people of East Asian ancestry emerged in the press, stemming from western fears that these groups posed an alien threat to the civilization and cultural traditions of the modern, civilized world.[50] Hostile words and images also informed yellow journalism, where journalists used biased language and imagery to create and spread anti-Asian sentiment in the early city.

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[48] Quote by Richard Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation*, 173-74, as referenced in Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado,* 125.
[49] Stephen Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado, 1859-1919* (Louisville: University Press of Colorado, 2002), 125.
[50] Alexander D. Barder, *Global Race War: International Politics and Racial Hierarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 109-111. See Chapter 6 for a look at how yellow peril thinking emerged and the media’s use of imagery to influence perceptions of Asians and Asian Americans.

African American stories in the news, however, did not center on labor discord, but focused instead upon the imagined characteristics of barbaric sub-humanism that were then used to elevate community notions of white racial superiority.[51] According to historian Stephen Leonard, as early settlers migrated to Denver, they carried with them "cultural baggage" which oftentimes included a deep-seated racism towards blacks and people of color. These ideologies also became a "convenient template for racism directed at other groups," too, as many whites made race and skin color a "touchstone of their identity."[52] They mocked African Americans, Chinese, Japanese, and Italians—who were sometimes categorized as non-white—most often, disregarding their cultural importance and local contributions. Journalism solidified white racial dominance by chastising groups of color, especially those thought to be guilty of criminal behavior and particularly if it was committed against a white.

It is important to note that while some publications utilized more modest reporting techniques, others incorporated biased and flamboyant language—two contentions that have been argued at length elsewhere by a myriad of historians and scholars from various fields. No matter the styles though, through their reporting, the majority contributed to campaigns of marginalization and exclusion that defined the era. But not all groups received an equal amount of negative press. Although the bulk of such news stories focused heavily on the Chinese, Japanese, and to a lesser extent, African Americans, other groups also deemed "undesirable" by Denver's bourgeoning elite and working classes filled the pages of local newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets. For example, an "immoral" white lower class comprised of ill-behaved miners, drinkers, gamblers, and opportunistic criminals were also in the spotlight and generated their fair share of negative press. As printed publications increasingly emphasized difference,

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[51] Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado,* 125-27.
[52] Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado,* 128.

categorization, and marginalization amongst people, such notions were then applied to physical locations themselves, especially those that catered to or housed questionable outsiders.

Troublesome events, activities, and people, as well as noteworthy places and neighborhoods in town, all appeared in the press and therefore became the center of local attention. In order to fully understand how negative reporting tactics influenced opinions about places, we must remember how newspapers underscored racial and cultural difference amongst people and then transferred such ideas to landmarks and ethnic sections of the city. For example, gambling halls, saloons, opium dens, and even business establishments run by certain racial-ethnic groups became targets of moral campaigns led by the press to bring change to the city and rid it of uncivilized elements. By the 1870s, the Chinese had their own sections of town for laundries, restaurants, and living quarters.[53] The Italians resided in the bottomlands along the South Platte River and constructed shacks made of wood debris in what became known as "poverty flats."[54] African Americans in early Denver, were isolated on State Street, peripheral to central downtown, and by the 1920s, they became segregated within their own community. Other groups, including the Irish, Germans, and Scandinavians also occupied distinct sections, associated in the media with uncleanliness, vice, and a lack of civility.[55]

In early Denver, printed publications manipulated public perception about events, people, and places, and they directly created notions of "difference" between groups and the locations they frequented. Oftentimes, ideas about difference were based upon race and cultural-ethnicity, but not exclusively; Sometimes notions of propriety and criminality also factored into press narratives. Newspapers also used negative reporting to alienate people from the cityscape itself

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[53] Abbott and others, *Colorado,* 199-200 and 208.
[54] Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado,* 135.
[55] Abbott and others, *Colorado,* 69, 95, 200, and Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado,* 125.

and to bring attention to questionable establishments and even landmarks of ill-repute. News articles became a vehicle to inform the public about people and places but also to bring change, especially when potential threats to the city's image and success materialized.

Even the local cemeteries fell under public scrutiny and appeared at the center of ostentatious news reporting. Journalists wrote about those resting silently in the earth and the conditions of the burial grounds themselves in their spirited local narratives. The stories they spun captivated the attention of readers but also pushed them to conceptualize the world around them in contradicting and scripted ways. For instance, cemeteries were presented as unfavorable receptacles of decay that housed society's questionable characters but also as spaces to offer respect to the dead and to refine. Specifically, news reports would depict the local graveyard as forlorn, desolate, and full of society's unwanted folk, while simultaneously calling upon residents to honor these landscapes and reinvent them as esteemed places. Oftentimes, journalists emphasized a need to change the appearance of the graveyard to bring dignity to the cityscape while concurrently working to criticize the entity and the people in it. Such reporting forced readers to not only acknowledge places they otherwise might not have even noticed, but then pushed them to fight for change across these spaces.

Furthermore, news stories worked to tie local events and the people involved in them to discussions of race, moral conduct, and notions of place, especially as they related to criminal behavior, death, and the graveyard setting. Much early publishing would detail the commission of local crimes, usually involving gamblers or drunk ruffians, and then tie their immoral behavior directly to the burial of a victim along the outskirts of the cemetery. Oftentimes, discussions of race and cultural-ethnic affiliations factored into the reports, particularly those involving crime, death, and burial. By using these types of reporting tactics, newspapers conveniently linked the

groups they marginalized with immoral behavior, petty crimes, murder, and even interment location in the local graveyard. In this way, the cemetery became associated with society's unwanted elements and garnered an even worse reputation.

News writers wove very diverse topics and individual players into a common story, tethering them together when in reality they were very loosely connected if at all. For example, one 1860 story presented the murder of an African American at the hands of another, but then brought seemingly unrelated discussions into the narrative regarding class, race, spoken language, criminal history, and immorality. Then, the article cited how these elements defiled both the town and the graveyard where the lawless wound-up buried.[56] In other words, a featured news report often portrayed an incident accurately but then incorporated opinion and bias into the column to forge a connection between the truth and topics like race, class, and criminality. Therefore, a crime was not merely committed by an unlawful individual, it was carried out by someone belonging to a lesser class of people—oftentimes categorized as a racialized Other. In this way, journalists capitalized on bias and used questionable reporting techniques to shape public perceptions of people and places. This was especially true of early cemeteries and those who came to occupy them. Residents yearned for the ugly details that landed people in these spaces but cringed when the papers delivered them and painted their city in a bad light. Local newspapers kept people informed but also shaped their opinions and pushed them to action. Thanks to press influence, opinions circulated on every corner, fashioned after those printed across news pages.[57]

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[56] This example references the murder of an ex-slave named Professor Stark by a gambler named Charles Harrison. For details, see The *Rocky Mountain News*, July 18 and July 25, 1860 and *The Western Mountaineer*, July 26, 1860 and August 2, 1860.

[57] Abbott and others, *Colorado*, 47-49 and 72. See also Elliott West, *Contested Plains*, 122-129. For the genesis of the media and its tendency to "manipulate public opinion," see Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media*, 395-396.

Early in the 1860s, newspapers began attacking the local pioneer cemetery in ways similar to how they attacked racialized groups, criminals, and others who brought a bad name to the city. They used their reporting tactics to separate and marginalize this unwanted landscape like they had done in the past with the diverse peoples they labeled inferior. Journalists operated upon an established framework whereby racialized language and imagery helped them push and achieve their agendas and bring change. Just as journalists had used commentary to sway public opinion by associating immorality and criminality with racial-ethnic groupings, they began to implement similar strategies to influence ideas about the cemetery landscape. Historically, newspapers highlighted specific areas of Denver—like the Wazee Street Chinese district of Hop Alley and the African American neighborhood of Five Points—as racial-ethnic havens separate from the Anglo sections of town. Likewise, the cemetery—desolate, woeful, and sinister—also needed to be separated from day-to-day city life, which oftentimes also included a separation amongst those buried within it.

Creating distinctions amongst people and places became commonplace as Denver grew, and newspaper reports reflected this objective. Emphasizing difference became a journalistic tool to push agendas of change and to establish divisions. The central goal of this study is to explore how and why people maintained these separations across cemetery landscapes. In doing so, it is also important to note how news publications reported on these locations and the people attached to them to reinforce notions of difference, to separate and marginalize, and to ultimately remove or erase the unwanted from the landscape. After all, newspapers were powerful tools of influence controlled by those in positions of power and often reflected the sentiments of a wider population. This study will show that the criticism and harsh judgements assigned to people in life also applied in death. Graveyards thus came to mirror the barriers that separated the living. In

a sense, burial grounds also operated as makeshift borders, and city residents and newspapers alike used them to perpetuate division and disunion.

In 2014, the Organization of American Historians chose "Crossing Borders" as its annual conference theme, and historians Allan Amanik and Kami Fletcher sought to insert "cemetery" discussions into the national narrative of border studies. From this meeting came an edited volume titled *Till Death Do Us Part: American Ethnic Cemeteries as Borders Uncrossed*, which houses a collection of scholarly essays that illuminate the ways in which borders can also be applied to the realm of death.[58] Structured on the ideas of historian Marilyn Yalom, that "as solitary beings each of us merits a separate grave; and as members of a group, we are buried together," the essays in the volume showcase how death both unifies and divides "along communal lines rooted in race, faith, ethnicity, and social standing."[59] My study builds on this research and applies these ideas to a new context by exploring how this occurred in early Denver, a premier city in the American West. As citizens of the nation divided along racial-ethnic, religious, and class lines, they enforced such distinctions between groups and in the cemetery itself, solidifying barriers in death that mirror those imposed in life.

Contrary to logic, upon death people did not share burial space on an equal basis but were separated within it. Writer and historian Washington Irving famously proclaimed that, "the equality of the grave…brings down the oppressor to a level with the oppressed, and mingles the dust of the bittersweet enemies together," but cemeteries in Denver reveal that death was not the

[58] Allan Amanik and Kami Fletcher, *Till Death Do Us Part: American Ethnic Cemeteries as Borders Uncrossed* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020), 12.
[59] Amanik and Fletcher, *Till Death Do Us Part,* 4 and 5. Marilyn Yalom, *The American Resting Place: Four Hundred Years of History through Our Cemeteries and Burial Grounds* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 28.

great democratizer and unifier that Irving proclaimed.[60] The deathscape instead deepened the profound crevasse of difference bestowed in life between diverse people. Divisions solidified through the separation of individual graves, through the sectioning of the cemetery according to racial-ethnicity, class, and religious affiliations, and by commemorating lives unequally through funerary ceremonies, headstones placement, and the incorporation of varied memorial styles. My study builds on previous scholarship to show that the first pioneer burial ground in Denver created barriers, both real and perceived, for several reasons: to distinguish the living from the living, to separate the living from the dead, and to maintain the marked distinctions between groups across the deathscape.

Past scholarship has catalogued that a long history of marginalization and exclusion defined Denver's cityscape and the news stories that informed its population. My study supports this premise and applys it to the cemetery setting. Through newspaper portrayals, it is clear that in death, although disparate lives did connect vis-a-vis grave proximity and the human interactions between the living within this space, not all received equal treatment. Even the cemetery itself fell victim to marginalization, exclusion, and removal. This thesis will illuminate that despite the loose connections fostered in the graveyard and the efforts made at the grounds to accommodate diverse groups, insurmountable differences forged real and uncompromising divisions that affected individuals in life but also followed them to the grave and beyond.

Even in death, options for Denver's Chinese, Japanese, and other racial-ethnic populations between 1860 and 1920 were sharply limited. A detailed study of Mount Prospect,

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[60] Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent* (New York: Dutton, 1963), 158 and 126-135. (https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.262037/page/n159/mode/2up?q=grave (accessed June 10, 2023). Appears also in Blanche M.G. Linden, *Silent City on a Hill,* Picturesque Landscapes of Memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989. 89-90.

Denver's first officially recognized pioneer cemetery, shows that those interred during the city's early decades were categorized within the deathscape; Chinese, Japanese, and African American burials in prime locations were marginally low compared to whites who belonged to reputed organizations; and the vast majority of the early burials of racialized groups, like those of other social pariahs, were relegated to marginalized cemetery sections or peripheral areas of land. In navigating various archives, it is evident that not all races, statuses, classes, and religions received equal accommodations in death.

Beginning at Mount Propsect, it is evident that people were sectioned in cemeteries early in the city's history. While this partly reflected lower burial costs on less-desirable plots of land, a lack of funerary funds on the part of those making the final arrangements, and the desire to place the entombed in areas proximal to one another, patterns show that even after death, various groups stigmatized by newspapers and society more broadly did not have many options to insert themselves equally amongst their Anglo neighbors in the cemetery setting. By looking at one of Denver's earliest graveyards and the newspaper coverage of this locale, it is clear how marginalized groups remained so even in death.

This paper highlights Mount Prospect and in doing so, follows the roots of exclusion in a very different way. The segregation and marginalization of Chinese and Japanese populations did not begin in Hop Alley in 1880, with the Japanese restaurant boycott of 1901, or at the Chandler Mine in 1902. Racialized ideologies about these groups in Colorado, did not even start with local notions of that particular racial group or their cultural traditions. The roots of the poor treatment of East Asians actually began in a broader sense and with other categorizations of people, all of whom were deemed "undesirable" by both early town boosters and by upstanding

members of the newly formed community representing a culture of progress. Locals thought these groups to be uncultured at best, and "uncivilized" at their core.

Plenty of people were unwanted in the new city, but at the outset of city building, newspapers seemed to focus less on race and more on immoral conduct as the prime factor that determined undesirability. As newspapers began their campaigns against vice and crime, other categorizations of people briefly became secondary in the "battle over defiant wickedness."[61] One's adherence to an acceptable moral code of behavior, their sense of uprightness, and their desire to align with civilized notions of social progress stood front and center in both newspaper editorializations and in the minds of locals. In early Denver, people were categorized as either decent, upstanding citizens or as morally questionable characters who needed to conform or accept abjectly marginalized lives. The tenets upon which the city grew in the 1860s were solidly rooted in one's choice of lifeways, their socio-economic class alignment, and to a lesser degree, the religious basis for their codes of behavior.

However, the ways in which early Denverites perceived immorality, criminality, and social difference dictated what came later regarding racial-ethnic classifications and the exclusion of both undesirable people and places. As the Chinese and Japanese—as well as other ostracized groups—came to be associated with vice, peculiarity, and the inability to assimilate to Anglo norms, they too were marginalized in society and in the deathscape. By association, the first cemetery then became an objectionable landmark as it accommodated Denver's unwanted populations. The condemnation of the site came partially from the negative reactions to the types

[61] Gerome C. Smiley, *History of Denver* (Denver: The Times-Sun Publishing Company, 1901), 931. Here, Smiley talks of how the newspapers substantially centered campaigns around local sentiments about crime and their "battle over defiant wickedness."

of people buried there—morally questionable nonconformists, corrupt criminals, uncivilized emigrants, and others who did not fit the model norms established in the up-and-coming town.

To further elaborate, because everyone who arrived in Denver emigrated from another location, a great regional diversity defined the early city, even though the majority were Anglo-Americans. Additionally, each came west with their own agenda and each held tightly to their own beliefs about character and morality. And, these ideas differed greatly, especially in regards to what should or should not be socially tolerated. For instance, goldseekers venturing west for riches might be more inclined to hold onto vices and engage openly in raucous camp behavior. Those skilled in a trade or a laborer looking for work may be less tolerant of immorality. Those arriving with families or to settle permanently might shun uncivilized behavior entirely. One thing was certain, however, town promotors, investors, and business folk who came with the intention to build a successful city sought to procure a positive image of a proper and successful town no matter the cost. This group was perhaps the most intolerant, especially of the things that harmed the town's image or detracted from their vision to secure profit through growth. Boosters sought out the wealthy and hoped to bring to their city proper citizens who endeavored to live esteemed lives in an esteemed place.

Colorado historians Stephen Leonard and Tom Noel created a similar context for Denver's early city building in their work *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*. Here, they spoke extensively about how locals built a viable and reputable city claiming that "Denverites pursued respectability with the same vigor that prospectors sought gold."[62] According to their study, in the 1870s and 1880s, the city grew in "social graces" as the rich used their money to promote cultural sophistication and individual elitism. They "dotted the city with showy structures and

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[62] Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1991), 76.

within the ranks of the socially acceptable, a pecking order was gradually established."[63] Prejudices based on race, religion, and class also informed town building just as they had in other regions. As locals vied to overcome Denver's early image as a cow town full of shabby dives, ideologies emerged from the embarrassment caused by published dime novel portrayals of Denver as a place more aligned with the Wild West than as a respectable enterprise.[64]

In a later project, local historian David Halaas would agree with the aforementioned point that Denver pioneers "had done their work well" by bringing "culture and tradition to the mountain country."[65] The town's reputation mattered, whether spread by word of mouth or in the presses, and almost every group understood the importance of town building in some way. Any negative story that involved petty crime, gambling, alcohol, murder, or other immorality, severely affected local life. The development of Denver's "culture of progress" can be traced through newspapers, city building, and in the establishment of local cemeteries that all aimed to bolster the city's clout. My thesis explores such efforts to eliminate the negative influences from the city and to build a solid local reputation. From there, race and cultural-ethnicity become central players in the evolution of both the cityscape and cemetery deathscape.

My work focuses primarily on Mount Prospect, Denver's first cemetery, and how the image of this location asserted itself early in public consciousness. This pioneer graveyard defined the cityscape for decades, and perceptions about this spot shifted depending upon the viewer and the narrative being told. It is the story of a place, but more importantly it portrays connection, accommodation, and division. For many early Denverites, their beliefs and actions became tied in some way to this graveyard. Either in life or through death, citizens found

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[63] Leonard and Noel, *Metropolis*, 77-82.
[64] Leonard and Noel, *Metropolis*, 86.
[65] David F. Halaas, *Fairmount and Historic Colorado*, (Denver: Publishers Press Inc. and the Fairmount Cemetery Association, 1976), 93.

themselves tethered to this place as it became central to the fledgling identity of the city. Whether physically, emotionally, figuratively, consciously, or subconsciously, the graveyard became ingrained into the fabric of the city and oftentimes within individuals themselves. It is partially with the story of the cemetery that ideas about right and wrong crystalized in Denver. The cemetery landscape embodied progress and pushed American civilization forward. As it did so, it also generated notions of what a civilized society expected and what it would accept. When the cemetery did not meet the standards established by residents, they pushed to change it. If change did not remedy the problem, the people would remove it from the cityscape altogether. By looking more closely at how Mount Prospect shaped Denver, it is clear that ideas about race, difference, tolerance and exclusion became entwined with the ideology of social progress and were then embodied within the cemetery. It is here that the roots of marginalization and separation took greater hold—in an unlikely place and with unexpected players.

The following pages show that buried deep beneath the surface lurks a story of marginalization and exclusion that transcends the plane of life. Social and racial stratification did not necessarily begin with blatant racist notions but were built more so on conceptualizations about "place" and where certain categories of people might fit. In this vein, ideas about racial-ethnicity, morality, and social class solidified in Denver, pushing citizens to change those they did not like, marginalize those who could not conform, and remove that which detracted from the city. Denverites then transposed such ideas and efforts onto the cemetery setting, and this study endeavors to tell the story of how the separations forged amongst diverse peoples infiltrated the deathscape.

Denver City, Pikes Peak Country—1859

In the building of early communities in the American West, much time, money, and effort went into city planning, boosterism, and strengthening the economic potential of the entity. Not only did early settlers desire opportunity in their city, but they also sought to build institutions of familiarity that demonstrated civilized society and supported the extension of cherished American ideals. Occupants of Denver City aspired to achieve these fundamentals in their planning, and therefore, town building included the fashioning of schools, churches, homes, businesses, newspapers, postal services, and places of leisure like hotels, theatres, reading rooms, and parks. As "harbingers of civilization," all of these structures reinforced Denverites' good taste and "sense of propriety," and they became prerequisites for a successful, burgeoning town.[66]

In addition to building structures that promoted life and the pursuit of happiness, many western towns viewed the establishment of a local cemetery site to also be a notable indicator of an advanced society. Denver, was no exception. Such locations were more than just burial grounds or boneyards located along the outskirts of town; they were parklands, places of beauty, and areas in which to enjoy mother nature. These locations captivated local interest not only as places to memorialize the dearly departed but as bastions of society, serving to elevate the community's status within a modernized nation. In Denver, the sectioning off of a civilized burial ground would bring both pride and esteem to its residents—or so they hoped.

General William Larimer, founder of Denver, arrived at the shallows of Cherry Creek in Pikes Peak Country in November of 1858. His goal was not to strike it rich by gleaning placer gold from the stream but instead to create and promote a grand new town at the center of the

[66] Halaas, *Fairmount and Historic Colorado*, 11. Cemetery context adapted from Robert Athearn's introductory argument.

gold diggings.[67] He later recalled how he had brought his enterprising spirit with the intention of building a settlement that "pushed its progress with an energy and hopefulness that showed they expected it to be a city of large size and commanding influence."[68] Holding fast to these visions, he founded and became treasurer of the Denver City Town Company, where his main roles included street planning, selling lots to the public, and promoting the construction projects that framed the early Denver metropolis.[69]

Despite Larimer's drive and his business acumen, planning a city cemetery was very low on his list of priorities. Amidst his growth agenda of lobbying for statehood as well as attempting to insure that Denver should become a passing point along the transcontinental railroad route, Larimer staked suitable hilltop land in 1859 for what would become Denver City's first burial ground.[70] He named it Mount Prospect. The problem, however, was that the Arapahoe Indians held claim to the land, and it would take a series of federal petitions and the quickly growing need for burial plots to finally jostle control of the cemetery site away from the tribe. Furthermore, to secure property rights, even on a parcel not designated for tenancy, anyone wishing to stake a claim to the land would need to erect a structure of some sort to signal that the area was no longer available for the taking. This concerned Larimer and his son Will, because neither had any intention of building anything on Mount Prospect. The two rationalized,

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[67] William Larimer, *Reminiscences of General William Larimer and of his son William H.H. Larimer, two of the Founders of Denver City* (Lancaster: The New Era Printing Company, 1918) and first published in the *Cincinnati Commercial*, June 5, 1855. Biographical information about Larimer also noted in: Encyclopedia Staff, "William Larimer, Jr.," *Colorado Encyclopedia*, last modified November 02, 2022, https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/william-larimer-jr.
[68] Larimer, *Reminiscences,* 37.
[69] Halaas, *Fairmount and Historic Colorado*, 15-17. Additional facts of William Larimer's history in Cherry Creek gathered from Abbott and others, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State,* 47, 57, and 65.
[70] Encyclopedia Staff, "William Larimer Jr.", *Colorado Encyclopedia*, last modified November 02, 2022, https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/william-larimer-jr. See also William Larimer, *Reminiscences,* 150. There are accounts in Smiley's *History of Denver* of an earlier burial ground on the outskirts of Auraria that became lost with the passing of the early pioneers. Other sources also mention people being laid to rest at Acacia in the "highlands," another early burial spot that did not develop after Larimer's Mount Prospect claim solidified.

however, that human bodies, living or dead, might be sufficient to validate the claim. So, they waited patiently for someone in need of burial space, hoping it might be the start of a profitable venture.[71] In March of 1859, the 320-acre Mount Prospect site received its first set of interments, ushering in a new agenda for city promotors—to create a first-rate, modernistic graveyard for a cultured community on the rise.[72]

The first tombs at Mount Prospect housed the bodies of those who had succumbed to illness, suffering the fateful effects of untreatable disease. Burial records during the early years no longer exist and may have even been sparse at the outset; only a few published reminiscences and news articles captured the names and dates of Mount Prospect's dead. Most pioneer memories, meanwhile have been lost to history. It is safe to assume that the very first set of burials occurred at the discretion of locals who provided proper funerals for their friends or loved ones to commemorate their lives. Wooden markers or, in some cases, marble ornamentation flecked the ground—a sight that broke up the monotony of the underdeveloped graveyard. In many instances, a grave might remain unmarked, leaving forever anonymous the one resting below. Nonetheless, most of those who made Mount Prospect their permanent home in 1859 were upstanding citizens, and town builders had every reason to believe the cemetery would thrive in both appearance and reputation. A February 1860 article in the *Rocky Mountain News* confirmed that: "Mount Prospect crowns the summit of the highlands" and is "a beautiful site, covering the rounding summit of a ridge, and commanding one of the most grand and

[71] Larimer, *Reminiscences,* 151.
[72] Halaas, *Fairmount and Historic Colorado,* 19. Smiley also addresses the desire held by early pioneers to create a "dignified" burial ground amidst the reputation Mount Prospect earned as "forlorn and desolate," 900.

magnificent landscapes in the world."[73] The people of Denver, including boosters and investors, held great optimism that their town cemetery might one day achieve landmark status.[74]

Things changed quickly though, and in the spring of 1859, the cemetery received its first, in a long line of controversial burials. On April 7, a highly popularized murder story circulated throughout town and in newspapers, contradicting entirely the mission of city planners who wanted to portray Denver and Mount Prospect in a positive light. John Stoefel, a German-Hungarian gold prospector, came to Denver to reside with three family members who lived in a cabin across the street from William Larimer and his son.[75] One day in early April, along an almost deserted trail near Arvada, Stoefel shot his brother-in-law, Antoine Beingraff, killing him in cold blood as part of an alleged plot rob him of his gold flakes and to settle an earlier dispute.[76] After pleading guilty to murder in a makeshift courthouse on April 8, the judge sentenced Stoefel to death by hanging. Within a half-hour of the proceedings, a mob carted him off to a large cottonwood tree, secured a rope over a branch, and listened impatiently as he gave his last speech.[77] His broken English caused laughter amongst the crowd, and moments before

[73] The *Rocky Mountain News*, February 29, 1860.
[74] Smiley, *History of Denver*, 900. See also Halaas, *Fairmount and Historic Colorado,* 11-12.
[75] Larimer, *Reminiscences,* 147. Larimer refers to the last name as "Stoefel," but it appears as "Stuffle" in other reports and in some historical studies.
[76] Louisa Arps, "Cheeseman Park Hill," Arps Papers, Interview Transcript, 1956, (Denver Public Library Digital Collections, 1976), https://cdm16079.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15330coll4/id/1893 or Denver Public Library Special Collections, Box 3, File Folder 5, 1. For Larimer's first-hand account, see Herman S. Davis, ed, *Reminiscences of General William Larimer,* 149-151. Also noted in Smiley, 293 and 339.
[77] Smiley, *History of Denver*, 339. Smiley's account of the hanging is different from Larimer's and that printed by the Rocky Mountain News on April 23, 1859. For Smiley's rendition of names, dates, and events, refer to *History of Denver*, 339. Stephen Leonard references the event in *Lynching in Colorado,* 17. All descriptions contradict Larimer's first-hand recollection and state that the hanging occurred the following day and not in short shrift of the court judgement. Larimer acknowledges that a lack of resources like police and a jail caused restless citizens to carry out of the sentence quickly, within hours of the verdict. Due to the large mob presence during the proceedings, Larimer's eye-witness account seems plausible. Aside for the timing of the hanging though, all accounts generally are congruent.

his death Stoefel jested they "should not make sport of his faulty language."[78] During the final prayer, Stoefel remained standing while the minister and executioner knelt. The executioner provoked more crowd jeering when he "poked (Stoefel) in the ribs and asked him if he didn't know better than to act like a heathen."[79] The man condemned to death by hanging would not even get the chance to utter his final words before the mob rolled the wagon out from under him, letting him "swing into eternity."[80] As the story goes, one of the Larimer men gathered the bodies of both the murderer and his victim and buried them in the same grave at the edge of their new cemetery.[81]

Stoefel's hanging is believed to be the first in Denver by a peer-led trial, if not the first in the entire mining region, and it received national attention when a correspondent for Kansas's *Leavenworth Times* described the affair as a lynching.[82] Because Denver was not yet established as an official territory, the actions and decision of the Stoefel court lacked true legal jurisdiction. Assuming the name "People's Court," the extralegal entity rooted itself into the landscape of the early town and was justly labeled the court of "Judge Lynch" by locals as well as subsequent historians. The *New York Daily Tribune* also reprinted the People's Court story in their paper in May of 1859, further compounding the image of a lawless frontier and calling Stoefel's death the result of "lynch law in the gold mines."[83] Neither of these news sources, however, discussed how the throng of onlookers mocked Stofeld for his broken English and the reluctance to follow

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[78] Will H.H. Larimer's account of the trial and hanging from Herman S. Davis, ed, *Reminiscences of General William Larimer,* 149.
[79] Smiley, *History of Denver*, 339. The large assembled crowd and jeering is also noted in Will H.H. Larimer's eye-witness account of the hanging in *Reminiscences*, 148-150.
[80] Will H.H. Larimer's account of the trial and hanging from *Reminiscences,* 149.
[81] Arps Papers, "Cheeseman Park Hill," 2.
[82] Will H.H. Larimer's account of the trial and hanging from *Reminiscences,* 150.
[83] *The New York Daily Tribune*, May 17, 1859, p. 3, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1859-05-17/ed-1/.

religious protocols distant to his immigrant roots. This event not only shows that an inchoate system of justice began to form outside of the law in Denver but also points out that to some degree an intolerance for non-native speakers and the foreign-born lurked within the town. Early on, settlers began to form associations between moral conduct, instances of crime, and the migration of racial-ethnic others to Denver.

The local and national news publicity of the murder and hanging hurt the early image of Denver and shaped public thinking about crime in the frontier region. The cloak of Judge Lynch veiled the city in its early years. Categories of right and wrong would have to be redefined in the new and growing town. For instance, under what circumstances would killings go unpunished and, in addition to murder, what crimes would need to be prosecuted? Local citizens confronted these unknowns, and then implemented their own measures of accountability and ideas for carrying out justice. In a land lacking statehood and devoid of a territorial government, people answered questions of morality and criminality by implementing systems of punishment similar to those already established in the eastern parts of the United States. Immigrant actions were highly scrutinized, in addition to those of morally questionable character. The rowdy villains not willing to conform to socially accepted guidelines for behavior would be grouped as outlaws or shunned entirely. Such cases and unscrupulous activity allowed those seeking to pass judgement on "others" a forum, and newspaper publications became a conduit where negative ideas about difference flowed.

In addition to solidifying notions about morality, justice, and ethnic difference, the highly publicized Stoefel trial also tarnished the image of Mount Prospect cemetery. But despite the fact that controversy and crime surrounded one of its first burials, hopeful locals and city planners painstakingly fought to boost the image of Prospect Hill as a place for upstanding citizens and

visionary pioneers of western progress. As the United Sates developed and forged its path westward, people worked to build successful town structures and systems to demarcate a line between social advancement and a more rudimentary or "uncivilized" past.[84] Denverites believed wholeheartedly that their budding city would not become a revered place without an honorable space for its dead.[85] Thus, the cemetery became essential to the prosperity of the town.

A shift in American thinking occurred in the mid 1800s, and across the country, the concept of the cemetery evolved into something more than just a burial ground. It "became a place of peace, quiet, contemplation, greenery, and beauty."[86] People re-envisioned the cemetery's purpose, shifting it from a desolate spot of despair to more of a beatified urban breathing space, and over time, "aesthetics judged the character of a city by the quality of the space it set aside for the dead."[87] Denver's developers and other upper-class citizens would rely on Mount Prospect to enhance their credibility and help differentiate their refined and advanced city from the more uncivilized frontier regions.

By the end of 1859, the town graveyard became the "resting place of many a body," and its nascent reputation began to take root.[88] Larimer considered it important to stake off enough acreage for the separation of two separate sections—the Catholic and the Protestant.[89] This

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[84] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (*American Historical Association*: 1894), 4. Discusses the frontier as an outer edge where civilization wrestles with savagery—a "perennial rebirth experienced by stripping away civilized features and becoming primitive in order to transform the wilderness into something newly American," a disintegration of the savage, pathfinders of civilization. Particularly relevant are Turner's three waves of settlement—the pioneer, the emigrant, and the capitalist. In Denver, all three groups converged almost immediately, and as the pioneer and emigrant became stationary, "they rose in the scale of society," and solidified the institutions desired by the capitalists and general population.
[85] Halaas, *Fairmount and Historic Colorado,* 19. Halaas alludes to the local need to build a reputable burial ground to avoid being type casted as an antiquated, uncivilized mining town. The graveyard became an essential part of town-building.
[86] Phil Goodstein, *The Ghosts of Denver: Capitol Hill*, 5th ed. (Denver: New Social Publications, 1996), 340.
[87] Goodstein, *The Ghosts of Denver,* 340.
[88] Larimer, *Reminiscences,* 151.
[89] Larimer, *Reminiscences,* 151.

demonstrated the importance of segregating souls according to religious denomination. Another section, set aside for the sole use of the Grand Army of the Republic members prior to the 1880s, only housed Union veterans within its boundaries.[90] Likewise, the Chinese also received their own plot, adjacent to the city tract designated for pauper burials.[91] The Masons also enjoyed their own parcel in the center, but far enough away from both the Chinese and the potter's field, which remained more secluded at the southern edge. As the cemetery layout took shape, notions of separation began to define the landscape. With this, Denver would see the birth of its first proper burial ground—complete with religious, class, and racial divisions.

The dream that Mount Prospect might become a coveted location would be compromised, however, when the cemetery failed to shake its shameful reputation as the final resting place of the city's rabble of riffraff, an ignominy that would be reported and perpetuated through local newspaper outlets. One headline proclaimed that Denver suffered from a "Reign of Terror" that forced locals to take matters into their own hands to rid the town of villains and vice.[92] As such, Mount Prospect welcomed an incredibly high number of interments in its early years. An 1860 article stated that the body of a homicide victim received a great deal of attention as "his remains were followed to the cemetery by a large number of people."[93] Another journalist, writing later in 1890, could not resist compiling a very long list of ruffian internments, detailing the dates and epitaphs inscribed on tombs. Some wooden markers denoted that "those

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[90] Civil War veterans were interred at Mount Prospect until 1876. Records show that 75-100 graves sectioned by the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) were transferred from City Cemetery to Riverside starting in 1890. In the 1880s, the G.A.R. began to utilize their purchased plot in Riverside Cemetery for new veteran burials. For details, see Vicki Smejkal's ongoing work on Riverside Cemetery's Veteran's Project, as directed by the Fairmount Heritage Foundation, last modified 2017, https://www.riversidecemeterydenver.com/about.

[91] James Jefferey and Vicki Smejkal. "Denver Area Cemeteries." Denver Public Library Digital Collections. Last Modified August, 2, 2017. https://history.denverlibrary.org/sites/history/files/DenverAreaCemeteries.pdf and https://history.denverlibrary.org/research/obituaries.

[92] The *Western Mountaineer*, August 2. 1860.

[93] The *Western Mountaineer*, July 26, 1860.

who they honored were murdered," while others were marked simply with a name.[94] The same article highlighted that the burial ground accepted even the "coldest-blooded wretches" who came to share the earth with other individuals living lives of greater worth.

Criminals, their victims, and a plethora of those dying from more natural causes all received plots at Mount Prospect, but because a seedy and often criminal undercurrent comprised the bulk of the interments in its first years, locals believed the graveyard to be an embarrassment. According to Denver's pioneer historian, Jerome Smiley, many saw it as "merely a burial place for the dreariest kind imaginable."[95] As reported in the news, these solemn burials came from an intense crime wave that plagued the region during its early development, and those "killed in various affrays were put under the ground" in the graveyard conveniently located just east of town.[96] The fact that the majority of those hanged by the People's Court also ended up in this tract of land did not improve its reputation. It became commonplace to lay the convicted criminal to rest quickly, in peripheral areas of the graveyard. Many individuals who succumbed to mischief, wrote Smiley, fell victim to "the knife, the ax and the trigger," all of which "caused the death and burial of many a man with his boots on."[97] Thus, Mount Prospect quickly earned a new nickname—"The Boot Hill." With crime on the rise, a makeshift court in session until 1861 when Colorado became an official territory, and an established burial plot to house dead "rowdies, shoulder-hitters, and bullies," the graveyard turned sinister, undermining any chance for the circulation of more virtuous sobriquets.[98]

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[94] The Denver Republican, June 1, 1890. Article located in Denver Public Library Western History Collection "City Cemetery" Clippings File.
[95] Smiley, *History of Denver*, 900.
[96] Smiley, *History of Denver*, 900.
[97] Arps papers, "Cheeseman Park Hill," 2.
[98] Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado,* 21.

In March of 1860, another crime gained great publicity in the city and added to the body count at the Boot Hill. A Mormon by the name of John Rooker shot and killed a local gambler named Jack O'Neil in broad daylight from the doorway of a Denver saloon. The two had exchanged insults ten days prior to the murder, and they agreed to shoot at first sight if they crossed paths in the future. The cause of the initial tension remains vague, but witnesses claimed that during a verbal dispute in a billiards saloon Rooker scoffed O'Neil's Irish heritage. O'Neil exacerbated the tension by then spewing insults about Rooker's social class, publicly slighting his relatives as possibly the "first white family in Denver" to work as housekeepers.[99] The quarrel—developing along the lines of race, class, and possibly religion—reached its peak on March 30th when O'Neil entered town looking to buy nails for a housing project. Rooker happened to be quicker to the draw, shooting and killing O'Neil. He came out the winner in the imbroglio, but his victory was not well received by Denverites. Despite his shortcomings as a gambler, O'Neil's good looks and charming demeanor had earned him immense popularity amongst middle and lower-class locals. These groups adored him and his charismatic nature. On the other hand, Rooker was not as well-liked and was not considered admirably by many.[100] This set the stage for growing local controversy between various classes about rampant immorality, criminal behavior, and the final burial locations of those associated with questionable vices like drinking, smoking, and gambling.

Many became enraged by O'Neil's death, including the editors at the *Rocky Mountain News,* when they learned that the People's Court gathered hastily and acquitted Rooker of his crime. Lacking witnesses and unbiased testimony, the judge dismissed the slip-shod evidence and released Rooker. Upstanding town residents were alarmed by this miscarriage of justice, as

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[99] Arps papers, "Cheeseman Park Hill," 2.
[100] Arps papers, "Cheeseman Park Hill," 2.

were O'Neil's supporters who clung to the hope that a fair trial might deliver a fair punishment. William Byers of the *News* shared similar sentiments, and his paper chastised the murder as yet another "killing in cold blood, upon a public street in broad daylight, of a well-known citizen."[101] The *News* chided that Denver residents "failed to right a public wrong" and passed "in one short week, from the extreme of vigilance to the utter apathy of indifference." Such press coverage personified the evil and solidified Denver's image as a city built upon wicked vice and an aggrieved population. As Rooker celebrated the win, the news emphasized that in Denver, justice was fleeting and the system unreliable. This contradicted the mission of boosters and dashed the hopes of the social higherups and law-abiding citizens. The O'Neil murder became a blemish that the majority wished to conceal. For Denverites, the covering up and removal of undesirable elements quickly became common practice by the end of the first decades, and as the bodies of criminals and outlaws were lowered into gravesites at Mount Prospect, it too became central to the reform efforts launched by residents and newspapers.

For many of O'Neil's friends and sympathizers, the only justice imparted by the sad saga seemed to be his burial at Mount Prospect. Although he was a gambler, saloon and billiards patron, and towed a morally questionable line, many locals would push for O'Neil to receive a proper interment in the graveyard.[102] Even this, however, turned into something of a publicity circus when the more socially elite admonished the internment entirely. They did not want their cemetery to again be stripped of its good name by welcoming desperados and those who had succumbed to immorality. Despite the debate, Larimer offered up his services to bury O'Neil free-of-charge in his new cemetery.[103] Thus, the graveyard earned yet another deleterious

[101] The *Rocky Mountain News*, April 4, 1860.
[102] Arps papers, "Cheeseman Park Hill," 2-3.
[103] Halaas, *Fairmount and Historic Colorado,* 17.

nickname; it became “Jack O’Neil’s Ranch”—a title that circulated rapidly by word of mouth and in written publications.[104] This appellation further dulled the reputation of the burial ground, and Mount Prospect became a grim reminder of crime and the visceral demise of unlawful residents. These stories and burials overshadowed those of more law-abiding citizens. In the process, the graveyard came to embody the unwanted behaviors of the marginalized populations that seemed to plague early Denver. Although the site accommodated their bodies, most likely out of necessity, its reputation became tainted by the infamous who rested below its surface. With O’Neil’s burial, a combination of press reporting and agitated locals illuminated once again Mount Prospect’s tenuous reputation. In the wake of the furry, O’Neil was placed amongst the remains of Stoefel and other criminals, along the edges of the cemetery.[105]

Things continued to spiral downward for Mount Prospect as 1860 wore on; within twelve short months more than a dozen murders occurred in the city and outskirts, requiring locals to dispose of the dead quickly and to hastily forge a justice system within an uncertain legal framework. Occupants of Denver did not want a lawless town, and they felt that crime could be easily deterred in two steps. First, citizens could unite to initiate change by modeling appropriate conduct, and second, when disreputable behavior proved immune to positive influence, a temporary justice system might move into play as a way of deterring the unwanted behaviors. By doling out judgements and punishments to fit the crimes at hand, the court invoked a sense of fear, pushing criminals to first grapple with the potential consequences of their actions before engaging in crimes.[106] Locals hoped the court might become a tool to mitigate unwanted

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[104] Arps papers, “Cheeseman Park Hill,” 3.
[105] Jennifer Jones, “Shadows from Beyond the Grave,” *The Dead History*, last modified October 18, 2019, https://www.thedeadhistory.com/blog/shadows-from-beyond-the-grave-the-ghost-lore-of-cheesman-park.
[106] Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado*, 18-21. Here, Leonard discusses the sway of the people court and their goal of deterring local criminal activity through various implementations of punishment. See also Smiley, *History of Denver*, 22, 32 and 350.

behavior and future criminal actions, and calling these forums became a way for Denverites to change the local manifestations that threatened their notions of a civilized city. Residents sought to either alter poor behavior or eliminate such undesirables from the city altogether.

The People's Court, modeled after the U.S. justice system, could be assembled quickly for impromptu tribunals, which many believed might create a more civilized town. If lawbreakers could not abide by an established moral code of conduct, perhaps fear of punishment would snap them into shape. The swift nature of the consequences reinforced to such offenders the seriousness of locals to crack down on their wrongful activity. Usually, the sorts of punishments delivered through this system included the death penalty, public lashings, banishment from town centers, and even permanent exile from Denver City.[107] Harsher sentences included grotesque public hangings at the very site where the original crime took place; in such instances, average citizens would construct the shoddy gallows themselves along the east and west banks of Cherry Creek, fulfilling what they considered their civic duty. According to the *Rocky Mountain News,* "Removing the "desperate scoundrels that infested Denver," became a primary goal of locals, and they believed their justice system would help.[108] Such punishments produced more and more bodies for Larimer's graveyard.

While the newspaper writers rallied behind the verdicts delivered by the tribunals and local efforts to clean up the city, these crimes produced both victims and a subclass of dead villains, all of whom Larimer obligingly carved out space to accommodate in his graveyard. Even in death, those labeled as criminals were cast out to the more barren areas of the bone yard.

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[107] Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado*, 18-21. For discussions of punishment as deterrent, see Smiley, *History of Denver*, 16-22.

[108] The *Rocky Mountain News*, July 25, 1860, p.2.

Larimer, careful to maintain his upstanding reputation, interjected himself as a steward of the People's Court from time-to-time, offering to take care of bodies swiftly and free of charge as a public service.[109]

To a lesser degree, in more lenient verdicts, the Court tribunals served to marginalize or remove people from the cityscape. In one famous murder case, the perpetrator's supporters argued to have the man banished from the city rather than watch the People's Court deliver the death penalty.[110] It can be argued that the Court did indeed see a measure of success after 1860 as violent crime steadily declined, but this was not the case for the remainder of that year which proved to be full of violence, a variety of theft, and colorful local conflict that kept the court in session. In the end, such proceedings produced more than a fair share of bodies, which further populated Mount Prospect's landscape.

As the body count rose and burial sites began to fill, the cemetery became more segmented. Criminals and the unwanted populations, especially the diseased, came to rest along the outer edges, and with the emergence of a primitive undercurrent of crime that gained footing in the city and surrounding mine camps in 1860, segregated sections for graves became commonplace. Ushering in what the press reported to be the "reign of the lawless," the rudimentary burial ground saw an uptick in fresh interments.[111] From the earliest days, "gamblers and thieves were the pests of Cherry Creek towns," and the "bare-faced cheating, swindling, and robbing" wrought by these villains descended frequently upon the area, wrote

[109] Halaas, *Fairmount and Historic Colorado,* 16-17. See also various news articles on the murder of John Gantz and hanging of James Gordon from July to October of 1860: The *Rocky Mountain News*, July 25, 1860, October 2, 1860, and October 8, 1860. For additional information, see Tom Noel, "Cities of Sleep," *Denver Magazine*, October 1987, v. 17, no. 11, 29-30.
[110] See murder of John Gantz by James Gordon and public pleas for his release and banishment. Smiley, *History of Denver*, 345. See also *The Rocky Mountain News*, October 6, 1860 and October 8, 1860. p.2 and p.3.
[111] Smiley, *History of Denver*, 339. Citation for quoted material.

Smiley.[112] This produced more trials, more death penalties, and more bodies. It was from this group that Larimer secured his tentative land claim to Mount Prospect.[113] Some unfortunate souls, dying from illnesses like pneumonia and smallpox, suffered the same fate as lawbreakers and were relegated to marginal gravesites.[114] In death, their reputations became marred by their diseases, and they too were cast helter-skelter into borderline sections of land.

When the citizens took action like that witnessed in the establishment of the People's Court, they initiated change, and when change was not enough, they revised their cityscape to better suit their visions. This trend occurred countless times throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, sharpening notions of what belonged in the city and what needed to be altered or removed entirely. They established the tribunals to help lessen crime and prompt legal revisions, and later, they rallied to modify the status of the region to an official U.S. territory in 1861. Their actions propelled the rate of growth and development of Denver and shaped the city into a reputable locale.

Additionally, citizens sought solutions for other problems that cropped up, including property theft and random land seizures. In 1858, 1859, and 1860, a series of battles over land entitlements drove residents to revise the way petty crimes of theft were handled. This so-called Claim-Jumpers War left widespread animosity throughout town, but it confirmed that when locals desired a shift away from uncivilized behaviors and processes, they held the power to generate more positive outcomes. Oftentimes, residents wanted a legal avenue through which to

[112] Smiley, *History of Denver*, 293.
[113] Larimer, *Reminiscences,* 150-151.
[114] Larimer, *Reminiscences,* 151. For more information, visit recent articles at 9News: Amanda Kesting, "The Haunted History of Denver's Cheeseman Park," last modified October 31, 2022, https://www.9news.com/article/life/style/colorado-guide/the-haunted-history-of-denvers-cheesman-park/73-605906434. See also "Haunted History: From Cemetery to Cheeseman Park," Last modified October 22, 2015, https://www.9news.com/article/news/local/haunted-history-from-cemetery-to-cheesman-park/73-27408273. For additional sources, refer to the pest house newspaper articles cited in later sections.

operate and shunned the sorts of savage conflict that might harm the reputation of the city. Even though William Larimer himself played his own small role in questionable land seizures, many locals frowned upon this type of behavior and considered it a detriment to the stability of their society.[115] Larimer, though not to blame for starting the practice, blatantly reinforced it when he jumped the original St. Charles claim along the northeast bank of Cherry Creek in 1858 to found his own city.[116] In this manner, both Denver and the Mount Prospect burial ground developed from Larimer's crafty acquisitions of land that other groups had failed to secure proper title for.

When citizens saw a need for change, they rose to the challenge and found solutions. The desire ran strong to institute systems to maintain order in the new town but also to build a respectable city that appealed to the masses. Such efforts demonstrated the will of the people to work for the betterment of their city by remedying the sorts of problems that brought controversy and strife to the region. By establishing laws and procedures, they eliminated potential threats to their security and preserved the good name of their city. Local action brought change, and when change was not possible, residents worked to remove the problem—altering the cityscape substantially.

By the end of 1860, though, locals were ready to forget what historian Stephen Leonard has described as Denver's " blizzard of death," and they shifted their efforts toward building a moral city so that they might "live down their devilish reputation."[117] Endeavoring to attract investors and settlers to town, the people of Denver strove to be the "cultural, moral, political,

[115] For William Larimer's claim jumping tactics, the founding of the Denver City Town Company, and measures early Denverites put into place to prevent undesirable behavior, see Abbott and others, *Colorado A History of the Centennial State*, 47, and 55-56. See also Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado,* 15-16, 23, and 29. Leonard talks about Larimer's role as a "watch dog," alongside other locals, to stamp out thievery and vice despite his own participation in questionable land seizures. See also Smiley, *History of Denver,* 338-348 for discussions of the claim jumper and turkey wars.
[116] Arps papers, "Cheeseman Park Hill," 1 and 3. See also Halaas, *Fairmount and Historic Colorado,* 15-17.
[117] Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado,* 35 and 37.

economic, and social center of Colorado."[118] They dreaded having their city seen as a "violence-prone" place and wrestled hard to implement a more legal institution to halt crime.[119] That year, the murder rate in Denver was approximately 34 times greater than it was at the end of the century, and data strongly indicated that frontier Denver was an incredibly dangerous place from 1859 to 1861.[120] After that point, Denverites witnessed a shift and began to see progress toward their vision of building a safer and more "civilized" city. Town builders, boosters, and politicians capitalized off news coverage that shaped public opinion and rallied people to action. The *Rocky Mountain News* developed into "the most respected journal in the mining West," as editor Byers used the publication to "improve the living conditions of Denver and of Colorado."[121] The news educated and informed citizens, and when unhappy, early residents vied for change. When all else failed they removed that which did not elevate their city or push its good name and success. This process was applied to people, places, and even the local cemetery.

By 1867, most of the unwelcomed elements that plagued Denver had passed away, and according to Smiley, the majority of the lawless offenders that infiltrated the early town had been pushed out by "the sturdy, earnest, faithful majority of the people who so steadily and persistently battled against defiant wickedness."[122] Those who did not share similar visions of propriety or a reputable moral code were relegated to the margins of the growing society, due in part to the newspapers and their vigilance in reporting events, shaping opinions, and calling out to the people to initiate change. Such calls to action to reshape and re-envision the cityscape would also be applied to the deathscape of Mount Prospect as the next decade unfolded.

[118] Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado,* 35.
[119] Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado,* 35.
[120] Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado,* 32.
[121] Halaas, *Fairmount and Historic Colorado,* 83.
[122] Smiley, *History of Denver*, 431.

The press of early Denver comprised nothing short of "fearless and tireless warriors in the long and trying campaign against vice and crime," and newspapers also exercised influence over the ways in which locals perceived certain spaces in the city.[123] Questionable establishments like gambling halls, opium dens, and saloons received press attention, and news articles swayed popular notions of who and what belonged in the city. Citizens relied heavily and often entirely on published information, and even Denver's founder, William Larimer, especially impressed upon citizens to, "Read the *Rocky Mountain News*…I believe every word it contains."[124] Therefore, it is less than surprising that Denver newspapers prompted a city-wide campaign in the 1870s and 1880s to alter the grounds of Mount Prospect and eventually call for the cemetery's removal from the city altogether.

In the wake of the changes wrought by the 1860s, even the image of the town graveyard fell under the watchful eye of journalists, and it too received its fair share of negative press. Oftentimes, stories of crime, legal proceedings, hangings, and other punishments came to be associated in one way or another with the cemetery, as the public naturally linked images of victim and villain to that of their final resting place. Because Prospect Hill was the closest burial ground to town and because people relied on this location to house the dead, residents quickly came to associate the place itself with the people most frequently interred there. In the 1860s, news articles unwittingly added to the graveyard's poor reputation just by simply reporting on crime, illness, death, and burials. Journalists wrote woeful stories that dredged up ideas of the neglected, decaying land, and their reports certainly weighed heavily upon the minds of every citizen who desired a more uplifting image of what the end of life entailed. Additionally, those who fought to protect a sense of culture by preserving the very institutions that constituted

[123] Smiley, *History of Denver*, 431.
[124] Larimer, *Reminiscences*, 160-61. See reprinted letter.

"civilization" and "guard[ed] that cherished ideal"—like schools, churches, laws, newspapers, and even cemeteries—did not want bad publicity or imagery undermining their efforts.[125]

During its thirty-year tenure, Mount Prospect evolved under the close scrutiny of citizens and news reporters, and most residents had ties to the location in one way or another through news stories, local gossip, or in their own personal experiences with burying their lost comrades and family members. As the cemetery loomed in the distance, it displayed for the public that a very fine line separated the living from the dead. The news capitalized on this and used it to invoke action. Like their distaste for crime itself, Denverites came to shun the thought of being laid to rest amongst those they deemed undesirable, especially within such a gloomy terrain. In part, due to press reporting, Denverites knew that many of Mount Prospects "silent dwellers" met their fate by violence, and "some of the graves out there marked the end of lives which had left trails of crime and blood and sorrow behind them."[126] Therefore, most upstanding residents wanted to remain far removed from the area and had no qualms about keeping it on the outskirts of town. Victims, as well as the criminal element tried and sentenced to death, left behind an unfavorable legacy. Growing weary of the troublesome history, residents separated themselves from the story and relegated these infamous players to the peripheral regions of Mount Prospect.[127]

Furthermore, disgruntled citizens themselves added to the denigration of the cemetery by assigning it nicknames like "Old Bone Yard" and dingy "Boot-Hill." Both monikers appeared in written pieces to shame the graveyard and were then spread around town by local papers and other publications. Within a span of a few years, Mount Prospect became less a burial place for

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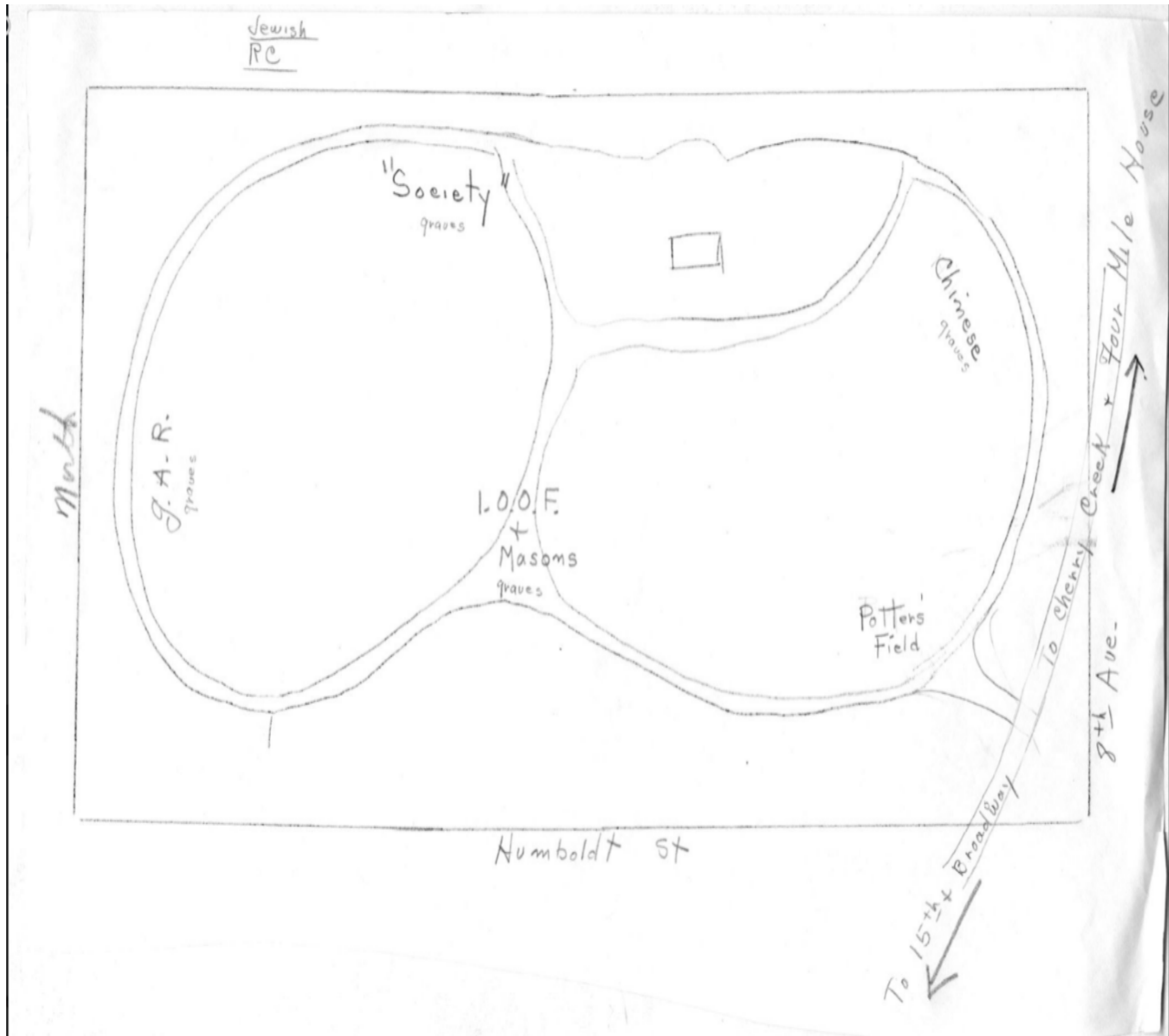
[125] Halaas, *Fairmount and Historic Colorado,* 11.
[126] Smiley, *History of Denver*, 329.
[127] Smiley, *History of Denver*, 900.

elite Denverites and more a final destination for outlaws, criminals, the poor, and other social outcasts.[128] No longer did Mount Prospect boast of a civilized, modern society, but instead, it became an eyesore to the community. Jerome Smiley, curator and editor of a volume of the earliest accounts of Denver history remembers Mount Prospect as a dreadful place, "forlorn and desolate…treeless, shrubless, waterless, utterly forsaken and could not even be dignified by the name 'cemetery.'"[129] Left to fall into disrepair, the vast portion of land at Mount Prospect came to be seen as both unwelcoming and an unsuitable location for the cultured and the elite. Although large swaths of land at the crest of the hill were sanctioned for the exclusive use of the city's wealthy and influential, the outermost edge was delegated for the burials of criminals and paupers.[130] The middle class and the upstanding citizens of town would then be interred on the land in between, forging separations amongst these very distinct groups of people. In addition to criminals and paupers, upon death, the Chinese, vagrants, and those who succumbed to lethal contagious diseases like smallpox, were also assigned to segregated burial plots at the cemetery's margins.[131] Pariahs of the city, all of these groups were at various points deemed undesirable by local residents.

[128] Kathy Weiser Alexander, "Ghosts of Cheeseman Park in Denver," *Legends of America*, last modified January 2023, https://www.legendsofamerica.com/co-cheesemanpark/Updated October 2019. See also Noel, "Cities of Sleep," 30.
[129] Smiley, *History of Denver*, 900.
[130] Weiser Alexander, "Ghosts of Cheeseman Park in Denver."
[131] Goodstein, *The Ghosts of Denver,* 343 and 366. See also Noel, "Cities of Sleep," 30, and Alexander, "Ghosts of Cheeseman Park in Denver."

Figure 1.1: Rudimentary Sketch of Mount Prospect Cemetery



Credit: Mount Prospect Cemetery Early Sketch, circa 1965, Louisa Arps Papers, Denver Public Library Special Collections (WH1234, Box 3, File Folder 2). Denver Digital Collection, https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p15330coll4/id/2661/.

Figure 1.1: A Rudimentary sketch of Mount Prospect Cemetery depicts distinct plot locations for the Grand Army of the Republic war veterans to the north (*left side of image*), high society, the Chinese, and the Masons. A separate section in the south-west corner is labeled "Potter's Field," and it is worth noting that both the potter's field and the Chinese are at the rear southern periphery of the site.

Building A Graveyard Enterprise—1860-1880

Sometime in the early 1860s, John J. Walley, a local cabinet maker, joined Larimer's cemetery enterprise, which strengthened the possibility that something positive would take shape on the land. Walley came to the funeral business completely by chance when he witnessed an 1859 murder and locals asked him to use his carpentry skills to "measure the corpse and make a coffin" for the victim.[132] Midway through the project, a Denver lynch mob brought him the body of the original perpetrator, and Walley diligently began to construct a second coffin. Once finished, rumor has it that Walley not only became the official town undertaker, but he and Larimer buried both coffins in the growing lot at Mount Prospect to help solidify the former's original land claim.[133] There is no official record of a makeshift trial for this event, but the data shows that between 1859 and 1860, three "unidentified" hangings occurred that did not summon the court or invoke a trial.[134] It seemed that even amidst the effort to beautify the graveyard, Mount Prospect would continue on as the permanent home of brazen criminals and their victims.

By December 1861, disimpassioned residents found some relief in the possibility that Mount Prospect might yet be revived. Larimer once again set out to make the grave yard "a first-rate modern cemetery with tree-lined circular drives, spacious lawns, and carefully cultured flower beds."[135] This time though, he solicited the help of Walley who rose steadily to fame building fine caskets as well as for icing the corpse of the victim in another famously publicized

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[132] Arps, "From Cemetery to Conservatory," (Denver Public Library Digital Collections, https://cdm16079.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15330coll4/id/1894/rec/7 or Denver Public Library Special Collections, Box 3, File Folder 4) 23.
[133] Arps, "From Cemetery to Conservatory," 23.
[134] Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado,* Chart and timetable of Colorado Lynching 170-71 and 173.
[135] Halaas, *Fairmount and Historic Colorado*, 19. Halaas's rendition of events, however, differs from that of Arps and Larimer. Halaas claims O'Neil to be the first burial at Mount Prospect and that Walley became acquainted with Larimer after Gordon killed Gantz. Arps speaks of an earlier shooting involving Jim Gardner, which punctuated Walley's introduction to the role of undertaker. Halaas does not highlight the Stoefel case or that of Jim Gardner.

murder in 1860.[136] Walley also received accolades for constructing the ornate coffins of both the victim and murderer in that case, and Denverites embraced his partnership with Larimer hoping the two would build a fine cemetery. The *Rocky Mountain News* printed a notice proclaiming, "we are glad to see that there is a prospect of the city cemetery being properly laid out into blocks and lots…We hope that…proper steps will be taken for beautifying the grounds of the City of the Dead."[137] In the days that followed, several advertisements ran to generate business and referred to the cemetery as "suitable and desirable…for the different denominations of Christians." [138] As reported, the land was ready for "decoration and improvement for the burial of the dead."[139] Another article commended the thoughtful design such that tracts might be broken into suitable lots by various religious groups depending upon need, which captured the public's desire for categorization and separation.[140] These optimistic sentiments, however, would not endure for long.

Less than two years later, in 1863, the *Rocky Mountain News* once again offered up contradictory, negative publicity of the cemetery calling it "a shame and a disgrace to Denver."[141] Despite being beautifully located, the press conceptualized it as a rudimentary part of the "bare plain…as wild and free to roving herds of stock as the day the white man first saw it."[142] Because the site was unprotected by fencing of any sort, the *News* exposed that "graves are trampled over, head boards rubbed down, and…are often carried away to build campfires."[143]

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[136] Noel, "Cities of Sleep," *The Denver Magazine,* October 1987, v. 17, no. 11, 30. This is a reference to the high-profile crime involving John Gantz and Jack Gordon that ravaged news publications from July to October of 1860.
[137] The *Rocky Mountain News*, December 23, 1861, p. 2 and 3.
[138] The *Rocky Mountain News*, December 24, 26, 28, 31, of 1861. The advertisement ran on the dates noted.
[139] The *Rocky Mountain News*, December 24, 26, 28, 31, of 1861. The advertisement ran on the dates noted.
[140] The *Rocky Mountain News*, December 23, 1863, p.3.
[141] The *Rocky Mountain News*, January 8, 1863. P.1.
[142] The *Rocky Mountain News*, January 8, 1863. P.1.
[143] The *Rocky Mountain News*, January 8, 1863. P.1.

Residents wanted a different appearance than what the graveyard delivered, and when the press called for their attention to the matter, they answered promptly and with elevated discontent.[144]

The *News* attempted to ruffle feathers again in 1866, pushing for a final solution to the public embarrassment Mount Prospect had become. In February, the paper challenged its readers: "Who has not felt that it is a disgrace to the City of Denver that its Grave Yard is so neglected," and "Who that has dead ones resting here is not pained upon visiting such a barren and desolate spot?"[145] Hastily, and in the same paragraph, the *News* implied that that nothing could be done to remedy the mess, and its boisterous editor demanded, "in the name of humanity let this thing no longer exist."[146] According to historian Louisa Arps, it just so happened that, "whenever the Denver newspapers lacked some sensational news, one of the editors would send a reporter out to the cemeteries" to rile up citizens and point out the continued injustices bestowed upon the dead, so many locals ignored these initial negative reports.[147] Burial options nonetheless remained limited in the 1860s, and by May of 1866, the *News* reported that a total of 627 bodies lined Prospect Hill and the attached Catholic cemetery.[148] People continued to dig graves here, and the cemetery lived on, even in light of all of the bad press.

The 1870s saw a renewed effort to restore the graveyard to a "garden cemetery," but more problems arose.[149] First, it was difficult to dig graves properly in "dry prairie land." [150] Because water was scarce in the area, this issue remained unresolved until 1888 when the city finally constructed a well in Congress Park that could potentially irrigate the cemetery. Secondly,

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[144] Items noted in this paragraph are taken from the *Rocky Mountain News*, January 8, 1863 and from the Arps Papers, "From Cemetery to Conservatory," 23.
[145] The *Rocky Mountain News*, February 20, 1866.
[146] The *Rocky Mountain News*, February 20, 1866.
[147] Arps papers, "From Cemetery to Conservatory,"17.
[148] The *Rocky Mountain News*, May, 16, 1866, p.4.
[149] Goodstein, *The Ghosts of Denver*, 342.
[150] Arps papers, "From Cemetery to Conservatory," 24.

the most common plants found there included buffalo grass, sage brush, and cacti, and they rested upon hard, bentonite clay. These elements further complicated the interment process, and families increasingly found themselves utilizing shallower graves. Slipshod burials under such circumstances caused longer-term problems. Graves that did not settle well pitted the earth and washed out in inclement weather. In such poor conditions, the ground often shifted around the tombs themselves, and it was not uncommon to find "sunken graves, turned over markers, and protruding coffins" scattered about the cemetery.[151] Periodically, and causing great alarm, a passerby might even encounter a casket projected upright out of the earth.[152] Such sightings had very simple environmental explanations, but these atrocities added to local angst over the sad state of the grounds.

Lastly, problems also arose with pauper graves, further adding to the drama. Due to a lack of profit from indigent burials, "on occasion, morticians simply dumped a body" on the north side of the property or directly to the west of the fence line.[153] It was even reported to the newspapers that crooked funeral directors would dig up previously buried remains to accommodate a fresh body. Disinterred corpses were found lying on the streets nearby, and every time a citizen witnessed such negligence, the newspapers responded with reports of the egregious errors. Mount Prospect's problems plagued Denverites, so when prompted by the press, they protested through editorials, worked to sway the actions of politicians, and finally called for the out and out removal of the cemetery from the cityscape.[154] Public sentiments were well-publicized in newspapers, especially throughout the cemetery relocation project of 1893

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[151] Goodstein, *The Ghosts of Denver*, 341.
[152] Goodstein, *The Ghosts of Denver*, 343.
[153] Goodstein, *The Ghosts of Denver,* 343.
[154] The *Denver Republican*, January 2, 1890, January 23, 1890, and March 22, 1890. See also the *Denver Daily News*, March 22, 1890. Most aforementioned articles are located in Denver Public Library Western History Collection "City Cemetery" Clippings File.

discussed later, which further disparaged the graveyard's image and haunted city residents to their core.

In 1872, having established that the land upon which the cemetery rested belonged to the federal government, Congress sold the land to the City of Denver under the caveat that it remain intact as a burial ground. In hopes of generating an entirely new image, the land was renamed Denver City Cemetery a year later. At that time, the city council formally recognized and protected three already established burial grounds in that space—Prospect Hill, which would become City Cemetery; Mount Calvary, procured by the Roman-Catholics; and the Hebrew Burying and Prayer Ground, reserved specifically for Jewish burials.[155] Much to the satisfaction of Denverites, J.J. Walley lost his tenuous claim to the land in this transaction. Even though he had "repeatedly dug open the tough prairie sod to dump in a bullet-ridden body," he could not breath life into the landscape or revive the graveyard's sour reputation.[156]

With the loss of his claim, many held renewed hope that the cemetery might then have a chance to thrive. It did not. For the next two decades, it remained "the first grim sight welcoming Easterners to Denver," as asserted by historian Tom Noel in his 1987 magazine article about the site. [157] The poor were buried in the potter's field at the bottom of the slope, which continued to receive negative press. The Chinese were also "segregated into a tiny, unwanted corner," similar to their marginalization in daily life.[158] Wealthier citizens accessed the larger plots with better views at the top of the hill, distancing themselves from the others. While the dead rested, the

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[155] Arps Papers, "From Cemetery to Conservatory," 59. A patent was also issued in Congress on November 15, 1873 to vacate the use of the land as a cemetery and convert it to a park. This congressional hearing document was published in the Denver Republican on January 16, 1890 and is in clippings file.
[156] Thomas Noel, "Cities of Sleep," 30.
[157] Thomas Noel, "Cities of Sleep," 30.
[158] Quoted material from Thomas Noel, "Cities of Sleep," 30.

living stewed in their disgust and continued to vent their anger through various newspaper outlets.

The City Pesthouse—1881-1884

Deepening the community wound inflicted by the sad state of City Cemetery, a local pesthouse stood south of the Hebrew section and operated there from about 1881until 1884. Its hasty construction within a dilapidated shack provided sub-par care to the diseased, especially those suffering from smallpox and diphtheria as well as those required to quarantine due to reported exposure. At one point, the city hired a nurse, but mostly, patients were left unattended to suffer the effects of their illnesses.[159] Commonly referred to as the "Pest House" by locals, this "isolated hut" butted up against the back end of City Cemetery and doubled as a repository for seriously ill patients and for the mentally ill.[160] Upon expiration, it became commonplace to dump the bodies of the diseased into mass graves dug in the potter's field section of land, next to the Chinese graves.[161] This practice further harmed the reputation of the newly renamed burial grounds and the prestige of the growing city.

In April of 1881, at the height of Denver's smallpox outbreak, the *Rock Mountain News* published a story about an infected twenty-one-year-old railroad passenger from New York named Albert Shaw. Shaw arrived in Denver on the Kansas Pacific Train around 6'oclock on April 2. Becoming ill enroute, train hands portended Shaw to be infected with the forsaken smallpox infection after seeing his swollen eyes and the rash that covered his washed-out skin. The newspapers worriedly proclaimed him to be one "whose company might prove more than usually unpleasant" should he be permitted to mingle too long with the locals.[162]

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[159] Arps Papers, "From Cemetery to Conservatory," 27-28.
[160] Arps Papers, "Cheeseman Park Hill," 7.
[161] Goodstein, *The Ghosts of Denver*, 343 and 366. See also Kesting, "The Haunted History of Denver's Cheeseman Park," https://www.9news.com and the reference to the pest house, noting that the sick were left here to die and their bodies dumped into mass graves near what is now the community gardens at Denver Botanical Gardens. This area became another potter's field section of City Cemetery, garnering more community outrage.
[162] *The Rocky Mountain News,* April 3, 1881.

The next morning, the *News* ran the story, albeit on the last page, capturing the sizable threat Shaw posed to those on the train and to those he came across in the hours after disembarking the railcar. Particularly concerned for town residents, the journalist who followed the story carefully catalogued Shaw's whereabouts as he "march[ed] about the city with the dreaded disease after being shuffled amongst numerous officials." The news leaked that train workers had exaggerated their efforts to quarantine the man, and instead intervened very little out of fear that "disturbing the rest of the passengers aboard," might cause a frenzy. So, except for the newspaper representative, travelers remained ignorant of the potential danger they faced. Most were entirely unaware that they might have been exposed to the illness at all. Upon arrival in the city, the man was permitted to leave the station and wander freely in search of a doctor with the overzealous newsman hot on his heels.

Shaw and the slyboots reporter eventually arrived at the city board of health office where they met a local physician. However, the health chairman, the chief of police, and the mayor himself were all initially unavailable to help at all. Finally, after some time and exposing a good number of people to illness, the doctor was able to summon the mayor who arranged for Shaw to be "sent over the hill to the pest house."[163] Although empty at the time, the men appointed Shaw a caregiver to guard the location and provide minimal patient care. They would also monitor Shaw's symptoms and give an ongoing assessment of his condition for an indefinite period, which could span many weeks. While expected to make a full recovery, everyone agreed that the disease had not yet reached its peak and Shaw was in for a tumultuous month.

The *Rocky Mountain News* presented a bleak picture of the pest house. One article described the place as "a wooden building partitioned off into two rooms…entirely void of

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[163] *The Rocky Mountain News,* April 3, 1881.

furniture, with the exception of a small bedstead and a stove."[164] The adjoining area contained a small surface covered with medicine bottles and a separate caboose for the caregiver's personal items and sleeping quarters. Uncarpeted and unwelcoming, the austere rooms languished in conditions "dreary and extreme." On the outside, however, the house which stood "on the brow of the hill a little to the right of the cemetery" appeared "passably well" except for a few broken windows "stuffed with straw and rags." Similar reports also supported the need for upgrades to the house but noted its opportune position near the segregated disease section of the burial ground.[165]

For several days following his arrival, Shaw continued on a downward spiral, and his appearance worsened from the effects of the disease. According to one news story, his condition could not be fully ascertained because the "pestules [sic] had not become actually virulent," and it would be several days before the worst stage of the disease was upon him.[166] The only contact allowed between Shaw and the living seemed to be with the pest house attendant, "an old gray-haired man of about fifty years of age." But, within a few days, newspapers grew tired of following Shaw's story, and no further information about the man or his recovery ever surfaced. It is possible that Shaw survived the ordeal, but had he not, the city would have buried him at Mount Prospect, in the diseased section with the other infected souls who succumbed to festering contagions.

While Shaw's story lacked longevity in the papers, it provided a soapbox upon which local journalists chastised city officials for their handling of smallpox and other epidemic

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[164] *The Rocky Mountain News,* April 5, 1881.

[165] Goodstein addresses the pesthouse's location in *Haunted History of Denver,* 366. See also Kesting, "The Haunted History of Denver's Cheeseman Park," and Kathy Alexander, "Ghosts of Cheeseman Park in Denver," https://www.legendsofamerica.com/co-cheesemanpark.

[166] *The Rocky Mountain News,* April 5, 1881.

outbreaks like consumption and diphtheria. First, the *News* pointed out the dangers of rail travel and postulated that "an influx of travelers from all parts of the states, and from Europe…[would] bring to this city all they may pick up enroute."[167] Then, newspapers worked to instill fear across the population by purporting that a lack of government concern might expose locals to widespread disease and would be the ill-fated consequences of both poor city-planning and the unequivocal disregard for proper disease control. After invoking fear, news writers sought to bring the public to action by lamenting that the inoculation of innocent travelers on railcars was, "too fearful to think of [and] sooner or later, some scourge bread of this car packing of human beings like hogs [would] break out [and] work a remedy in its own sad but efficacious way."[168]

Lastly, journalists printed blanket threats to further vex readers and pressure them to call for policy change regarding the handling of contagious disease. The same aforementioned article boldly declared that change would only happen once an outbreak imposed its debilitating consequences, and only then would the railway treat those who traveled "with the same consideration as they do hogs."[169] But the threats also extended beyond the transportation system, reaching farther up the ladder. To drive home their brazen point about the mishandling of the smallpox affair, the press left readers with the alarming thought that if an outbreak did claim mass casualties in the future, perhaps then "the mayor and council of this city at least would be compelled to do their duty." For newspapers, this duty entailed more than a poorly executed quarantine and separate cemetery accommodations for the diseased.

In another instance, the paper even offered up overt press coverage of a smallpox case falsely reported to be in Denver proper. It was only after a complete investigation that journalists

[167] *The Rocky Mountain News,* April 3, 1881.
[168] *The Rocky Mountain News,* April 3 and April 5, 1881.
[169] *The Rocky Mountain News,* April 3 and April 5, 1881.

learned that it "was not in town at all," and therefore, no pesthouse quarantine was necessary. [170] However, the papers leaked that when the patient died, "they were removed to the vault on the hill, near the cemetery," which placed the victim in proximity to city residents after all. Despite efforts to secure a quick, concealed burial in the remote graveyard section that served the ill-fated pest house occupants, reporters still got ahold of the story. Similar accounts continued to appear from time to time in publications throughout the 1880s and served as community reminders of the poor conditions of the pesthouse, its diseased occupants, and the need to separate the sick from the rest of society. The pesthouse and graveyard became synonymous and reflected all that was wrong within the city—disease, uncleanliness, and unsightliness. When separating these elements from the broader population was not enough, newspapers and their readers sought larger-scale change. Fixing these community eyesores then became the primary goal of residents and city officials.

One way of fixing the negative reputation of the pesthouse involved allaying citizen fears and assuring them that the pesthouse was not a hazard to the community in the first place. On January 1, 1883, *The Denver Tribune* published a more spirited article to highlight the cleanliness of Denver and the functionality of the pesthouse. This piece lauded the city's management of the increasing caseloads of consumption, diphtheria, and smallpox. They also assured readers that no red flags were ever raised regarding the safety of the facility or its proximity to the residential areas, as great care would always be taken to avoid contamination. One writer boasted that as illnesses emerged in the heart of the city, patients were "spirited away to the pesthouse…at the quiet hour of midnight" so as to not alert or upset the public

[170] *The Rocky Mountain News,* May 26, 1881.

unnecessarily.[171] Reporting in this instance worked in two ways: to diminish the threat of community contamination but to also alert citizens of the pressing need for change.

By 1886, however, publications presented the pesthouse in a mostly negative light. One article highlighted the mayor's stance on the space claiming, "He thinks it such a shame that the city's property should be neglected [and] intends to plant some trees next year himself."[172] The Mayor also publicly insisted that "the setting out of even a few trees [might] greatly enhance the value of the city's property, even if a pesthouse is located on it."[173] But shrubbery, a coat of new paint, and other minor aesthetic improvements only briefly pacified a restless public. The pesthouse's sole saving grace was that it was only used during times of pandemic and therefor avoided even wider-scale press coverage. By the end of the 1800s, though, residents had grown tired of the site and successfully rallied to remove it and the attached cemetery from downtown city limits. News reports forced the city council to raise funding to build a new, more functional facility to appease the public. But within a month of its construction, more problems arose.

Considered a public disgrace, the Hebrew cemetery owners and the Jewish community complained that the new pesthouse marred their own image, and they worried that contagions would spread easily from the site as bodies were removed for burial to the surrounding plats. They also argued over property boundaries and claimed the new pesthouse encroached upon their land.[174] Again, reporters jumped on the story, wondering why the new facility was not built entirely upon the site of the old. Unable to reconvene or find a viable solution, council members

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[171] The *Denver Republican*, January 1. 1883.
[172] *The Rocky Mountain News,* November 11, 1886.
[173] *The Rocky Mountain News,* November 11, 1886.
[174] Goodstein, *Haunted History of Denver,* 366.

opted to relocate the house to Sand Creek on the outskirts of town—a location far removed from the unsoiled and affluent sections of the cityscape. Once again, the media illuminated a problem and pushed the community to seek resolutions. As in the past, awareness brought action, but when change became untenable, undesirable places and people were removed from the cityscape—left to occupy the marginal spaces to which they were cast.

Mount Prospect's Chinese Burial Ground—1870-1890

The Chinese section at Mount Prospect had similar implications for the cemetery's reputation as did the pesthouse. People knew it was there and tolerated the segregated niche as long as it did not interfere with or detract from the scenery. By the 1880s though, Chinese funerals "were sometimes disrupted by jeering white gangs" who seemed both intrigued and shocked by the processions.[175] Disrespectful onlookers "derided the ceremonies," occasionally drawing crowds of a thousand people.[176] The intricate burial rituals of the Chinese perplexed other residents and solicited at least a small degree of local backlash. After a group of rowdy politically-driven anti-Chinese locals unleashed a violent riot upon the Chinese section of town on Halloween in1880, other Denverites began to lose what little tolerance they had for such traditions. As a result, the Chinese were "shot to death, attacked by mobs, and driven to suicide" from time to time throughout the city.[177] It is not surprising, then, that this group occupied its own subterranean space at Mount Prospect cemetery. The Chinese section comprised the area directly next to the potter's field and remained distal to the graves of high society elites and other civilians. Again, the people and things which challenged the accepted social norms and did not fit into the highly held visions of Denver, rested at the margins.

Trouble did not begin for the city's Chinese residents with cemetery segregation or even with the riot in 1880 though. As early as 1869, newspapers began to insert this group into discussions of labor and cultural difference. One news story referenced their "habits and peculiarities" and positioned them as well-adapted for Southern plantation work.[178] The same

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[175] Thomas J. Noel, *The City and the Saloon: Denver, 1858-1916* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1996), 29.
[176] William Wei, *Asians in Colorado: A History of Persecution and Perseverance in the Centennial State* (University of Washington Press: Seattle, 2016), 89.
[177] Noel, *Saloon,* 29.
[178] *The Rocky Mountain News*, July 15, 1869, p.1.

article posited that 60,000 Chinese were strongly established in mechanics and railroad work in California, alerting Denver locals to the possibility that they could migrate to other regions. In time, Coloradans came to view "Mr. Chinaman" as a "problem" based upon the cultural and traditional peculiarities emphasized in the news, and local papers began to follow the growing national trend to "Boycott the Heathen Chinese."[179]

One such tradition, opium, became well entrenched in the Chinese enclaves of Denver by the 1880s. Roughly seventeen opium dens and a growing anti-Chinese sentiment festered in Denver and blemished the landscape. The combination of drugs, xenophobia, and the threat of cheap labor exacerbated negative perceptions. Denver whites even constructed perceptions of the Chinese around vices like opium and gambling.[180] Such conceptualizations predicated relationships between the whites and the Chinese and often shaped the information delivered in the press. In the city, the Chinese connection to opium further ostracized what Denverites considered an undesirable group.[181] The drug itself and the dens associated with the contemptable habit, historian Tom Noel argues, "gave whites an excuse for persecuting" the Chinese and for labeling them "dirty…filthy heathens."[182] Yellow booze, as it was frequently referred to, was as common to the Chinese as the saloon was to other locals, and some white residents even partook in the habit themselves.[183] Nonetheless, by 1881, the citizens of Denver passed an ordinance to outlaw the dens completely, using the press to push their call to action. Again, action most often meant segregation, removal, and the outright elimination of the

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[179] *The Great West*, November 14, 1880. Volume 1, number 21. P. 5. For further disparaging reports, please see the following: *The Leadville Weekly Herald,* February 12, 1881. Volume II, p. 1, and *The Gunnison Review Press*, January 29, 1886, Volume 7, Number 11, p. 1.
[180] Wei, *Asians in Colorado*, 92.
[181] Noel, *Saloon,* 28.
[182] Noel, *Saloon,* 28.
[183] Noel, *Saloon,* 29.

undesirable elements to purify the city. These elements might include individuals, racial-ethnic groups and their neighborhoods, local gathering spaces, and even the local cemetery. Regarding opium dens, the moral majority had spoken and opted to remove what they could not accept.

On the other hand, locals did allow the Chinese to bury their dead within the segregated plot assigned to them at Mount Prospect. Although racialized sentiment and vices like opium shrouded the cityscape and furthered social division at times, the deathscape provided a common ground within which all residents might eventually share. When a "curiosity dealer" named Ah Foy died in Denver in December 1879, the *Rocky Mountain News* reported that the remains of the "Celestial…were encased in an elegant casket…followed by a long procession of mourners" in a way similar to the funeral of any other local regardless of race.[184] Even so, accommodation rather than integration dictated relationships in early Denver's cemeteries. While the Chinese might have been given a space, it was isolated from the areas occupied by the general population. Even in death, unaccepting groups further marginalized and sequestered the Chinese whose graves remained tucked away in their own area. The original *News* journalist who covered Ah Foy's procession shifted sharply in his article away from emphasizing commonalities shared between the Chinese and other locals to chastising traditional Chinese burial traditions. He wrote a litany of comments meant to mock the obsequies, including the following:

> The imposing Chinese ceremonies…proceeded by a band…who beat a couple of gongs in a loud manner…was closed with an express wagon, bearing the 'funeral baked meats,' which were deposited in the grave, and which were intended as nourishment for the dead man on his way to Josh.[185]

The funeral procession attracted great crowds of local gawkers to the street corners, and the "strange sight" was commented on by the spectators—a move most likely meant to intimidate

[184] *The Rocky Mountain News*, December 21, 1879.
[185] *The Rocky Mountain News*, December 21, 1879.

the Chinese living in Denver and emphasize the anomalies of their death practices for the wider public's consumption.

The dead also paid the price for such oppressive treatment. For example, despite having prestige and great support within the Chinese community, Ah Foy was still mocked by local newspapers in death, deprived of a fully respectable funeral procession and interred in a sectioned piece of land because of his race and cultural identity. In a later case, another Chinese funeral occurring in spring 1882 received even greater public scrutiny after it erupted into a mob scene and caused the destruction of graveside ornamentation by enraged locals. The headlines blasted the burial of a Chinese man named John Eng with the words "Mobbing a Corpse: A Riotous Crowd," and went on to use phrases such as "poor Celestials" and "little devils" to refer to the racial-ethnic group.[186] According to the paper, a loud-mouthed and disorderly crowd arrived at the coroner's office to await the arrival of Eng's body and then became violent at the cemetery as he was lowered into the ground. The mob rallied along a Denver street to both "insult the dead Chinaman" and to run off his friends by chanting slogans like "down with the Chinese" and "the Chinese must go."[187] The crowd even threw the undertaker into the hole at the gravesite at one point. Once the grave was covered, some of the crowd upset the candles meant to guide the spirit on his dark journey into the afterlife. Others tore to pieces the altar containing the offerings for the dead. The crowd struck so much fear into the Chinese performing the last rites that they abandoned the scene quickly and "disappeared as fast as their horses could take them."[188] The paper used this as an example to demonstrate how passionately people felt about

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[186] *The Gunnison Daily News-Democrat*, March 15, 1882. Reprinted from the *Denver Times*.
[187] The *Mountain Mail,* March 18, 1882. See also quotes appearing in *The Gunnison Daily News-Democrat*, March 15, 1882.
[188] *The Gunnison Daily News-Democrat*, March 15, 1882. Reprinted from the *Denver Times*.

the "Chinese Question" and suggested something be done to curb the mobs and the likelyhood that violence may again erupt at future Chinese interments.

Since the start of the 1870s, newspapers had become fascinated by stories of Chinese deaths and the cultural oddity of their funerals. In August of 1879, *The Rocky Mountain News* reprinted a story from Wyoming's *Cheyenne Sun*. The article told of the death of a Chinese baby and referred to the mother as a "raved lunatic" for the way she grieved the loss, beating herself with "celestial fists" and screaming over the tragedy.[189] The article, determined to further demean Chinese traditions, reported that the parents went back later and "disinterred their dead child," bringing the body to their "wretched hovel in the rear of the American houses." In an act meant to appease the gods, the parents were carrying out yet another Chinese funerary custom, which required them to remove the bones from the earth after a given time. The writer matter-of-factly reported that "the child was placed on a table, its hands cut off…put into a jar of alcohol [then]carried away by the heathens." Such reports failed to take notice that long-standing Chinese burial traditions often dictated such extreme measures. Apparently, newspapers in Denver also found this to be a newsworthy event, and spread the information to intrigued locals.

When a Chinese man named Gee Sam of Denver died of natural causes in April of 1879, the newspapers jumped at the chance to report the circumstances of his demise. As soon as locals learned of the death, town gossip took hold, prompting the *Rocky Mountain News* to print that Gee had been murdered in town. Upon further investigation, however, it came to light that Gee had died of natural causes, and there was no real story to report. Instead of leaving it out of the paper though, the *News* took the opportunity instead to print that "quite an excitement was created in the city yesterday morning by the report that a Chinaman had been killed."[190] They of

[189] *The Rocky Mountain News,* August 17, 1879.
[190] *The Rocky Mountain News,* April 12, 1879.

course corrected their statement, acknowledging right away that he had died of natural causes," but the next lines of the article were less considerate. According to the writer, "he was buried with distinguished honors, all the 'muchee washee' men turning out to pay their last respects." The article ended abruptly with the statement that "The ceremonies were peculiar, and partook largely of the Chinese orthodox method of interring one of their dead." These words demonstrated yet another attempt by news sources to publicly degrade the Chinese and to emphasize the conspicuous cultural differences between this group and other, supposedly more civilized Denverites. This report also signaled that the notions of "otherness" applied in life transcended to the realm of death.

One local editorialist, going against the grain, argued in 1880 that less harsh judgements be applied to the Chinese in both life and death, claiming that "Chinamen are not dirty, as generally represented."[191] Instead, the author argued that "rotten newspaper reporters" exaggerated the seriousness of job competition and spewed misconceptions to both wrangle and appease the white populace. The writer, attempting to sway local sentiment toward a more favorable notion of the Chinese, also acted as death's messenger, when, at the end of the article, they proclaimed: "Soon you will see all men…harmoniously together, remembering that all are only dust, and to dust they must return."

But the dust would not settle easily for Denverites disheartened by such ongoing displays of uncivilized behavior. Not only did they attack the Chinese, their opium, and their funerary practices, but they also targeted other social vices across wider immigrant populations; the discontent was not merely directed at the Chinese. The "saloon" enterprise created yet another source of contention that aroused the city, especially as Denver shifted from a mining camp to a

[191] *The Great West,* November 14, 1880. Volume 1, number 21. P. 5.

civilized town of progress. While pioneers of all races and socio-economic statuses relied on saloons for their livelihood from time to time and to aid the process of community building, a growing proportion of second-generation residents "condemned the taverns as a detrimental foreign institution."[192] Some locals shunned these places as conduits of vice and criminal undercurrents, and others attacked them as "nests of inferior peoples."[193] They did, after all, harbor the likes of John Stoefel, Jack O'Neil, John Rooker, and other rough and ready criminals in the past. They also served as settings for the sorts of crimes and premature deaths that landed people in the marginalized plots of the local cemetery, a fact highlighted in news stories frequently during the 1860s.[194]

Perhaps more importantly though, many of Denver's saloons were owned and patronized by racialized groups, which added fuel to the fire. Germans, Irish, Italians, and Slavs controlled much of the saloon business and were viewed in ways similar to the Chinese and their opium dens. This gave prejudiced groups a reason to further marginalize these establishments, other ethnically diverse neighborhoods of Denver, and even the borderline sections of the burial ground. Some Denverites felt that saloons catered to immorality, while others saw them as plain alien, like their owners. The nativist opposition to the saloon ran strong in the city, and by the 1890s, the moral folk who flocked to town frowned upon the taverns just as they had done with other spaces they labeled as questionable.[195] The upstanding formed the Anti-Saloon League and exerted a coordinated effort to rid the city of these spots. Once again, when locals felt that

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[192] Noel, *Saloon,* 65-66.
[193] Noel, *Saloon,* 53.
[194] For a summary of criminal activity, death, and burials see Smiley, *History of Denver*, 21-22, 338-50. See also Leonard, *Lynching in Colorado*, 20-25. For newspaper coverage, see also the Rocky Mountain news for dates corresponding to the long list of murders and misdeeds referenced in these accounts.
[195] Noel, *Saloon,* 65.

something detracted from the cityscape, they worked to change it, strongly inserting their notions of what belonged and what did not.

Although thinly dispersed in the 1800s, Denver's Japanese population also experienced exclusion in death. By 1890, and during the height of anti-Chinese campaigns, records showed that only ten Japanese lived in Colorado. Earlier census reports denied that anyone one of that nationality resided in the state at all prior to the 1880s.[196] For this reason, there are no known Japanese burials at City Cemetery. An excavation of old tombstones, however, shows that many discrete Japanese graves rest at the newer Riverside pioneer cemetery and date as far back as 1888. Kaku Nakamura, Kiku Oyama, and Tadaatsu Matsudaira are the earliest recognized burials, and each of the three graves occupies a very "remote part" of the second, newer city burial ground.[197] Amongst the overgrown weeds, several worn down plates also show the names of women without surnames, hidden "amongst the Chinese graves," who might have lived in or near Denver prior to the time that records indicate.[198] This obscurity points to the possibility that other Japanese internments likely occurred even earlier at the old City Cemetery but probably became lost entirely over time due to the lack of records and the racialized climate in Denver in those decades.

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[196] Bill Hosokawa, *Colorado's Japanese Americans from 1886 to the Present* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005), 24-25.
[197] Hosokawa, *Colorado's Japanese*, 23-24.
[198] While it has never been verified by scholars, Bill Hosokawa mentions in his foundational study on the Japanese in Colorado that rumors surfaced of female Japanese slaves residing in early Colorado. He contends that the female graves at Riverside may support this, as they too rest unidentified in the cemetery's terrain, 24.

The Inception of Riverside Cemetery—1876

Another instance of change, initiated by disgruntled community members, came with the founding of the Riverside Cemetery Association in 1876. Buoyed by the growing proclivity for respectability and disquieted by the poor condition of the old City Cemetery, residents welcomed the new business venture. A twelve-member group of distinguished citizens devised a plan to build a new cemetery north of the city, where land and water seemed more abundant than in the narrowing residential corridor occupied by the old graveyard. Their plan appeared flawless, and within a few months, a park-like burial ground arose from barren farmland and captured local attention. Riverside planners worked to build a space of picturesqueness and beauty, representative of "higher society and refinement."[199] They wanted to bring prestige to Denver but also wanted to change common attitudes about death and burial. With this addition, no longer would people conceive of the cemetery as a place of abandonment, mournful in appearance, but instead as a refuge in which to commemorate the lives of the departed. In this vein, Riverside became the "first modern cemetery of the Rockies," and it was open for business.[200] Shortly after the first plots went on sale, the number of annual burials began to surpass those at City Cemetery. Reveling in Riverside's beauty, relatives quickly made plans to relocate their loved ones out of the older, less fashionable cemetery and into the newer, more distinguished burial spot. It seemed as though the community had finally found the solution Denverites had longed for.

Within a decade, the people of Denver permanently abandoned the idea of keeping an intact cemetery at the center of the city, especially with Riverside's growing success and with

[199] Halaas, *Fairmount Historic Colorado*, 25.
[200] Halaas, *Fairmount Historic Colorado*, 27.

new plans in the works to build Fairmount, an even more desirable final resting place for Denver's esteemed. Together, Fairmount and Riverside shut out any competition that might have come from the devitalized City Cemetery, began to command the market for burials, and pushed people to consider pre-planning for their own future need for interment space.[201] Money flowed through these two new urban oases, as the business of death took on a new life of its own. The parkland cemetery model, complete with forested landscapes, manicured lawns, and lush vegetation, had finally been achieved in Denver, giving mourners a place of solace and lending inspiration to the public at large.

Yet enthusiasm over the new burial grounds proved surprisingly short-lived, and local focus quickly returned to the sad state of the old City Cemetery. Conceiving a plan for the dilapidated grounds, which now tied up prime real-estate at the very center of the budding Capitol Hill neighborhood, proved to be pressing and problematic.[202] People pleaded for an end to the defiled boneyard, and petitions to redefine the landscape flooded the capitol in the late 1880s, as questions arose about who held true title to the land and who might be charged with such beautification or reallocation projects. A fed up citizen named W.H. Dunlap wrote a letter to the *Denver Republican* newspaper early in 1890 stating that it "is to be sadly regretted that such a valuable piece of ground should be held for a cemetery which is only used for the burial of Chinese and paupers generally (and) all the improvements, ornamental fences or tombstones, have long since gone to decay."[203] These printed words emulated the wider public's view of the forsaken burial ground, and it is probable that Dunlap was also not alone in his feelings about the

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[201] Goodstein, *The Ghosts of Denver*, 344.
[202] *The Denver Republican*, January 23, 1890. Article located in Denver Public Library Western History Collection "City Cemetery" Clippings File. Referencing the location of City Cemetery, it states, "The ground embraced in the tract lies high and surrounding it are some of the most fashionable sections of the city."
[203] *The Denver Republican,* January 2, 1890. Article located in Denver Public Library Western History Collection "City Cemetery" Clippings File.

Chinese and paupers. These groups, along with the neglected plot, did not belong in the city, and articles such as this prompted a citizen response. A lack of money, irrigation, and general public enthusiasm stunted the evolution of Denver's first burial ground, and as all promise evaporated, so did future visions of the cemetery itself.

By 1890, the city graveyard had lost its lifeline, and at the behest of citizens and the press, city officials brought their concerns to the nation's capitol. On January 25, 1890, senator Henry Teller of Colorado finally won his petition in Congress to uphold the city's claim to the land. His efforts not only secured the land title for Denver, but gave the city ultimate control of the old cemetery. With the help of relentless lobbying by locals and brazen news publications, he secured his request to convert the burial ground to a park. The federal government gifted the city the right to create a leisure space atop a graveyard, reimagining the urban center altogether. In March, the *Daily News* ran a feature encapsulating both local sentiment and the possible problems associated with the reallocation:

> The city authorities are very anxious to convert the cemetery into a park, such as the citizens have long been wanting and praying for, but a park is out of the question so long as a portion of the land is filled with graves. No one would care to spend a summer evening driving or promenading through the park with whitened tombstones constantly before their vision, or should the person be of a superstitious turn of mind, he might see ghosts of the departed ones darting hither and tither.[204]

Such ideas were printed and spread by the press, uniting the public along a common front. Once again, citizens and news outlets wrought change—successfully shunning that which did not fit into their notions of a prominent cityscape. The bane of Denver's existence could finally be

[204] *The Daily News*, March 22, 1890. Article located in Denver Public Library Western History Collection "Cemetery" Clippings File.

removed, creating space for the city to flourish. Denverites celebrated Congress's gift, not thinking about the fallout that would come from their good intentions.

Removing a cemetery entrenched in the urban environment would indeed become a hellish endeavor. Uprooting graves and transforming the landscape would prove a gruesome task, littering the city with the vile relics of the entombed and scattering putrid remains during the course of the excavation process. The unintended consequences of the removal captured the attention of curious citizens but also aroused queries from sensationalized news outlets who felt obliged to both protect the public and to capitalize on the ensuing gore. It was the staff at the *Denver Republican* who most energetically answered the call to provide news coverage of this event and keep the public informed of the transformation from cemetery to park.

The first segments published in the *Republican* in 1890 struck a comparatively more benign tone, discussing the status of the cemetery and the tomb removals that had begun since Congress granted the city the right to redevelop the land. After the opening of Riverside in 1876, the newspaper argued, "bodies in the Grand Army portion" had been methodically relocated, as had the tombs of some of the Masons and Odd Fellow groups.[205] The article went on to inform the public that two pressing issues required attention. First, the city council had to enact an ordinance banning future burials at the site; and second, all unused acreage must be disposed of to generate funds for the tomb relocation process. Stated simply, "the city ha[d] no money to pay for the disinterment…and this would delay the work on the park, whose surrounding residents

[205] *The Denver Republican,* April 21, 1890. Article located in Denver Public Library Western History Collection "City Cemetery" Clippings File.

are some of the "wealthiest people of the West." Again, in June, the *Republican* riled the city with the following printed sentiments:

> Even cemeteries outlive their usefulness, and the 'houses which are built for all time' crumble and become mere earth again with the lapse of but a few years. Their tenants, resolving to their original elements, pass away, and the inscription placed like a door-plate upon the entrance to this house becomes dim and then erased. Time at last sets all things even.[206]

After this artistic soliloquy, the writer asked readers to consider both the respectable elite and the criminal pioneers who had been buried there having left few records, except for fallen monuments and weathered head-boards. The writer seemed glad the cemetery might be repurposed but wanted the public to commemorate the past and recognize their role in uprooting historical Denver. Removing this part of history from the cityscape, he portended, might mar local integrity and further erase the pioneer thumbprint from local memory.

Such news articles kept the public informed and even pushed them to action. In the 1890s the news inadvertently pressured those who had family members buried at City Cemetery to act quickly to remove and relocate loved ones.[207] Issuing an official order during the early years of the1890s, Senator Teller gave living relatives ninety days to clear their plots before the cemetery would close permanently to the public. City administrators relied on news reports and advertisements to communicate their official information too. Upon hearing of the future closure of the cemetery to burial and disinterment, families scrambled to make new arrangements. Both

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[206] *The Denver Republican,* June 1, 1890. Article located in Denver Public Library Western History Collection "City Cemetery" Clippings File.

[207] James K. Jeffrey, "Denver Area Cemeteries," Denver Public Library Digital Archives, last updated June 23, 2023, https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p16079coll14/id/1883. See also articles located in Denver Public Library Western History Collection "City Cemetery" Clippings File, including coverage in *The Denver Republican*, April 21, 1890, March 17, 1893; March 21, 1893; and March 25, 1893.

Riverside and Fairmount saw an uptick in plot sales in response to the massive evacuation. All in all, close to 700 graves were privately disinterred by families, still leaving thousands untouched. The city would have to devise a new plan to deal with the remainder of bodies still resting below the surface.

A Grave Relocation Project—Denver 1893

In 1893, the city began the removal of the graves that remained unclaimed in the cemetery. After all, city officials could not build a park upon unkempt land riddled with gravestones, debris, and human remains. Several local companies vied for the removal contract, but after extensive deliberation, the city agreed give the job to E.P. McGovern, a local undertaker. The primary duty of McGovern's firm was to remove the abandoned graves and transfer them to the newly established Riverside on the outskirts of the city. For this task, the city would pay $1.90 for each removal and a subsequent reburial fee to the new location.[208] The parties agreed to the deal, and McGovern began the relocation process at the potter's field section in March. Because no formal records had been kept for the City Cemetery, the relocation attempted to follow a pattern similar to that of the original burial layout to maintain integrity. As old coffins were removed, they were transferred to new boxes, tagged with a number, transported by carriage to Riverside, and reinterred in a similar order to maintain the prototype of the old graveyard.[209] Through this process, both the City of Denver and Riverside Cemetery hoped to set into motion a more accurate record-keeping system for burials than in previous decades. They also sought to restore dignity to the disordered mess that befell Denver's first graveyard.

Several problems arose, however, unhinging the entire excavation process. First, the majority of the reburial project became a public spectacle as citizens gathered to watch the massive disinterment. Second, hard-pressed by the reality that he must follow through on his commitment to complete the dirty job for what would be a very low profit, McGovern began to utilize questionable removal tactics to boost his income. Third, McGovern's corrupt business practices sparked frenzied press reporting and additional public outrage. Lastly, in response to

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[208] *The Denver Republican,* March 21, 1891, P. 8.
[209] *The Denver Republican,* March 21, 1891, P. 1 - p.3 and p.9.

sensationalized news coverage and negative public opinion, city officials halted the removal process entirely, built a fence around the cemetery, and abandoned a landscape that still housed thousands of souls in the subterranean space.

From the start of the relocation in March of 1893, Denver's dailies sensationalized the exhumations within the old cemetery. Extensive newspaper coverage drew crowds to gather each day along the cemetery's edges to witness tomb removals, which proved to be dirty and highly disorganized. Witnesses then reported what they saw back to the press, and these accounts generated further mayhem. Public testimony from curious onlookers about "the lifting of the damp and foul-smelling corpses from mouldy abodes" reached print in the days that followed, creating a cycle that lured still more onlookers to the City Cemetery.[210] As crowd sizes continued to grow, news reports started cautioning the public to exercise prudence when in close proximity to the action because of decay and germs. One *Denver Republican* writer stated that "disease lurks in those musty holes and pestilence hovers over the place" to forewarn onlookers of the portentous danger associated with digging up diseased flesh, especially in places where cholera and smallpox victims had been removed.[211] The papers also frowned upon the Health Department's lack of concern for the dire situation created by McGovern's ill-planned disinterment and relocation methods, which allowed caravans to pass without restriction through thickly packed community centers despite the possibility that the transport might contain lingering contagions from death.[212] Despite the heightened press warnings and the Health Department's guarantee that public safety was paramount, newspapers later reported that "the

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[210] *The Denver Republican,* March 17, 1893. Article located in Denver Public Library Western History Collection "City Cemetery" Clippings File.
[211] *The Denver Republican,* March 17, 1893.
[212] *The Denver Republican,* March 10, 1893. Article located in Denver Public Library Western History Collection "City Cemetery" Clippings File.

gruesome work went on merrily" and uncontrolled crowds continued to "scramble over the old graves to satisfy their curiosity."[213]

Aggrandized news stories, written by cutthroat investigative reporters, spewed gruesome information but also accentuated the devolution of the removal process itself. On March 10, 1893, the *Denver Republican* proclaimed that the remains of "the unknown and nameless ones are being removed in fragments," constituting "an outrage to the most sacred sentiment of civilization–respect to the dead." The article went on to describe the uprooting of 491 corpses, in a fair state of preservation, only to have their bones "cavalierly tossed by workmen, boxed up, and carted away." According to the report, the freight of a removed tomb might include the dismembered dead, the rancid earth surrounding their remains, and decomposed coffin lids. More often though, only gravel and stone comprised the contents of the new casket, which was then counted as a "whole" body and readied for transport to Riverside on the city's dime.[214] Throughout this transfer process, many tombs remained unidentified except for the number stamped on the box by McGovern's men to track the payload. The new caskets became monetized, their contents deprived of both names and life stories.

Papers did not merely print the mundane details of the conversion of City Cemetery to parkland but instead strove to spin gothic tales of horror. Headlines seared the pages of the newspapers and taunted readers with jolting titles such as "Human Bodies Torn to Pieces," "The Work of Ghouls," and "A Body Left Exposed in City Cemetery for Two Weeks."[215] If these headlines did not peak public curiosity, the jarring details contained in the news spreads presumably did. One article catalogued the work of carpenters who stood graveside to hurriedly

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[213] *The Denver Republican*, March 17, 1893. *The Denver Republican*, March 10, 1893.
[214] *The Denver Republican,* March 10 and April 9, 1893.
[215] *The Denver Republican,* March 10 and April 9, 1893.

construct new coffins when needed. Wooden boxes built of twelve-inch-wide rough-cut pine lumber were secured with only enough nails to "hold the few mouldy bones and ashes that represented human bodies."[216] Carpenters cheerfully sawed and hammered away as other workers "spade up the earth (to) disclose rotted coffins." When excavated caskets proved to be too unstable to hold their contents, new ones were provided. McGovern's system for removal required the unearthing of an entire row at once, uncovering each coffin, and exposing its contents, which sometimes included "decomposing" flesh, bones, and "a few damp locks of hair."[217] Once workers transferred the remains, they doused them with corrosive sublimate, nailed the new coffins shut, and threw them into "the wagon standing close by."[218] Reports also wrote of "fresh" bodies being "dismembered" to fit into smaller caskets and then "jostled through the streets" on their way to their new resting place at Riverside.

The procession that followed was always silent. The only funeral dirge that sounded was the "creaking of an ungreased axle and the cracking of the driver's whip." As one news writer asserted, "the dead men's bones were no obstacles in the march of progress…If the living needed a park, then the dead must move on."[219]

Perhaps the most gruesome reports were the ones that highlighted the removals occurring in the Chinese section of City Cemetery. Procuring permits from the city, the Chinese toiled to exhume their dead and ready them for shipment to China, but their unconventional and ceremonious removal tactics caused quite a stir. *The Denver Republican* referred to the Chinese

[216] *The Denver Republican,* March 17, 1893.
[217] *The Denver Republican,* March 17, 1893.
[218] *The Denver Republican,* March 17, 1893.
[219] *The Denver Republican,* March 17, 1893.

rituals as “strange sights” whereby “peculiar Celestials” prepared the bones in a ritualistic way. According to one writer, the Chinese gravediggers engaged in “mournful jabbering” while burning joss papers to produce smoke that “wafted the prayers of the living up to the souls of the dead.” The flames of the coarse bamboo paper burned at traditional Chinese funerals served as a way to honor the deities but were also a means of ancestor worship. Through the ceremony, the living paid respect and homage to the departed to fulfill their filial duty and ensure the spirit’s well-being in the afterlife. As Denver newspaper reports proved, locals found Chinese funerary traditions alien and ridiculed the very graveside practices customary to the group. Similar to the accounts detailed in a study on Australian Chinese burials by scholars Priscilla Wegars and Terry Abraham in 2003, Western onlookers often considered such traditions to be “an exotic manifestation that particularized the ‘otherness’ of the Chinese” thus reinforcing notions of separateness.[220] As gravediggers exhumed the tombs of the dead, they would place foodstuffs in saucers upon the coffin lids and lay out little glasses of intoxicating liquid called “Chinese Whisky.” Once lamentation and prayer ceased, they would remove the body, place it on the ground, and prepare it for transport. What came next though would horrify onlookers and fuel newspaper reports for weeks to come, furthering the gulf between Chinese culture and local ideas of civilized behavior.

Eyewitnesses and journalists alike were awestricken by the “strange sights” that transpired in the Chinese section of land, especially in relation to the methods used by the foreign gravediggers to clean and disinfect the bones of the dead.[221] One article reported that “Every bone, little and big, was separated from its fellows, scraped with knives and wiped with

[220] Terry Abraham and Priscilla Wegars, “Urns, Bones, and Burners: Overseas Chinese Cemeteries,” *Australian Historical Archaeology,* Volume 21, 2003, 58.
[221] *The Denver Republican,* March 17, 1893.

cloths till they almost shone." They were then wrapped in "clean muslin with straw and wheat chaff and deposited in sacks" to ready them for shipment to either Riverside or back to their provinces of origin in China.[222] Another report limned a less-favorable portrayal of the Chinese removal emphasizing that "portions of clothing, queues torn from the heads of dead Chinamen, and pieces of shattered coffins were piled promiscuously in and around the open graves."[223] Heaps of tattered clothing and rotting flesh commandeered the scene and polluted the grounds. The Chinese gravediggers allegedly even went so far as to attempt to uproot and de-flesh a fresh body when McGovern's foreman intervened and halted the butchery. He reprimanded their attempt and sternly told them that the body "would have to be removed to Riverside and buried there for a period of two years before the bones could be cleaned." According to local Health Department guidelines, a more advanced stage of decomposition was necessary before the Chinese would be permitted to perform their "gruesome" rituals in the city.[224]

And the Chinese were not the only ethnic group that was mistreated by white Denverites and the media when cataloguing the removal operation at the old cemetery. African Americans also received harsh treatment both in everyday life and in newspaper portrayals. Racial slurs were not uncommon and continued to appear in speech and in print through the 1900s. One overwhelmed gravedigger, when asked if he had dug up any bodies still covered in flesh, replied, "yes, I found a *n—ger* this morning and I broke him into two pieces and put a piece into each of the two boxes."[225] Another resident, when working to excavate piping years later, resorted to racialized language when he referred to an uncovered body washed out of its grave by nature as

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[222] *The Denver Republican,* March 17, 1893.
[223] *The Denver Republican,* "Burying Empty Boxes," March 21, 1893. Article located in Denver Public Library Western History Collection "City Cemetery" Clippings File.
[224] *The Denver Republican,* "Burying Empty Boxes," March 21, 1893.
[225] *The Denver Republican,* March 10, 1893.

belonging to "either a poor Chinaman or a *n—ger*." Even in the late 1900s conflict arose when a body was found during road construction near the old cemetery ground. A local paper reported that "a nasty tiff occurred as to whether the bones were those of a Catholic or a Jew."[226] It was not uncommon for people to speculate as to which part of the divided cemetery uprooted remains belonged in—emphasizing the divisions cast by ethnicity, class, and religion.

Just as in life, news stories also followed various groups of "others" to the grave, and they did not just cover the circumstances of an individual's demise but also catalogued any controversy that arose regarding funerary traditions and even the burials themselves. In 1893, news outlets were the first to illuminate the repulsive sites that occurred in the Chinese section of City Cemetery, damning the unskilled workers and their destruction of the landscape. One journalist liberally wrote that the Chinese and their section is "especially revolting," because scraps of bone and flesh littered their plot.[227] Another article condemned the slipshod cleanup attempt of the Chinese and issued the following statement:

> After the Chinamen had gone the appearance of the place they had left was sickening. Fragments of flesh, foul-looking rags with which the bones had been cleaned, and queues, with portions of scalp attached in some instances, were scattered around the open graves. Four queues of the above description were found close together in one place.[228]

The story later inquired whether or not anyone had supervised the work of the Chinese gravediggers and then alluded to the fact that they had been left alone after acquiring the proper removal permits. Other workers did not want much to do with the situation in the Chinese section at all, and one man even felt that the Chinese had "a perfect right" to do as they pleased

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[226] Goodstein, *The Ghosts of Denver*, 366-67.
[227] *The Denver Republican,* April 9, 1893. Article located in Denver Public Library Western History Collection "City Cemetery" Clippings File.
[228] *The Denver Republican,* "Burying Empty Boxes," March 21, 1893.

with their bodies, as it was “none of his business.”[229] This sentiment reflected the tendency of the general population to avoid the things they deemed undesirable. For many, the removal of the Chinese graves from the center of the budding affluent neighborhood was welcomed, even in light of the abominations the relocation effort had unearthed.

The very presence of the inexperienced Chinese workers at the cemetery in the first place stemmed from the exorbitant financial burden of grave relocation. Some of McGovern’s “underlings” quoted a steep price of fifteen dollars just to uncover and open a single grave. Trying to avoid the high fees invoked by McGovern’s removal operation, the Chinese opted to complete the disinterment themselves and repatriate their loved ones’ remains back to the homeland of China at a lower cost. This followed the strict system of Chinese burial traditions and also allowed individuals to be returned to their homeland. In addition to the job of performing ceremonious rituals, Chinese relatives accepted the burden of unburial, without employing the services of a third party. Upon learning that the unscrupulous Health Department had granted removal permits to the Chinese to lower costs, the *Denver Republican* derisively stated that, “The Chinamen might be unsophisticated, but they (know) enough not to allow themselves to be robbed.”[230] When it came to the Chinese, many newspapers did not miss an opportunity to publicly disparage the ethnic group or emphasize what they considered inherent differences between “Chinamen” and the vast majority of Denverites.

Differences between the two groups also rested in the ability of the Chinese to procure the very permits that would grant them permission from the Health Department to remove their own corpses for relocation, bypassing the undertakers or what the newspapers labeled McGovern’s “greedy underlings.” Most other hoodwinked local residents were stuck utilizing

[229] *The Denver Republican,* “Burying Empty Boxes,” March 21, 1893.
[230] *The Denver Republican,* “Burying Empty Boxes,” March 21, 1893.

the services of the moneygrubbing associates, receiving Health Department permission to act on their own to a lesser degree than the Chinese population. The reasons for this were two-fold. First, most residents had more discretionary funds available to them to help absorb the cost than the Chinese and other financially pressed immigrant classes, and second, when all was said and done, many middle and upper-class citizens refused to complete the revolting task of handling human remains themselves. Because this was indeed a part of the greater process in a long-standing cultural tradition, the Chinese not only found it more financially feasible but also welcomed it as part of their duty of filial piety. Despite further newspaper inquiry, McGovern's foreman "refused to tell" how the Chinese had acquired removal permission, stating simply that, "his instructions from the Health Department were to give no information to anyone [else] about the permits." [231]

The end result for the Chinese, though, was more public scrutiny over their methods of removing the bodies of their countrymen and little praise for their efforts to clear the cemetery. *The Denver Republican* mentioned that the group's work with the tombs "looked as though they had been rooted out by hogs" and reflected the fact that they were not "skilled undertakers." Not only did the Chinese avoid direct supervision, but their "work lacked much care or neatness."[232] The Health Inspector himself "said nothing" in response to the goings-on, and also seemed tight-lipped about the permits altogether. One of the aids also "refused to tell" who the Chinese permits were actually made out to and what names were on the forms. The silence prompted the newspapers to suspect that another conspiracy was at play to both "plunder the public treasury" and to "systematically rob private citizens as well." The secretiveness of local officials pointed

[231] *The Denver Republican,* "Burying Empty Boxes," March 21, 1893.
[232] *The Denver Republican,* "Burying Empty Boxes," March 21, 1893.

toward a solid effort to uphold a contractual obligation but also guaranteed McGovern a sort of monopoly on the removal project, which also had reporters and citizens in an uproar.

Both the sloppy removal by McGovern's company and the repulsion caused in the Chinese section rattled eye-witnesses and journalists. Once the initial horror of the flagrant expedition wore off, though, newspaper reporters began to adopt a more investigative approach to the cemetery saga in hopes of uncovering the scandalous business practices of McGovern himself. One reporter, who originally tallied 491 removals at municipal expense, decided to complete a recount once the wagons of hauled coffins arrived at Riverside for reinterment. When confronted by reporters, Riverside employees could only vouch for receiving and reburying 440 caskets in total. The discrepancy in the numbers prompted greater media scrutiny, which further called into question the already fragile integrity of McGovern's entire operation.

Browbeating reporters on the scene at both City Cemetery and Riverside caused a ruckus by questioning gravediggers, undertakers, Riverside employees, and other disinterested witnesses. Then, they took their news to the streets, publishing their findings for Denverites to consume. Outlandish statements describing McGovern's efforts to fleece taxpayers, provoked widespread community angst and impelled the public to see themselves and their dead as victims. For instance, the *Republican* stated that, "human harpies have seized the dead at the City cemetery as prey" and the living continue to allow themselves to be "swindled by the gang."[233] Another article referenced the poor souls crammed into coffins too small for them and then "battered down with shovels before the lids could be fitted on."[234] Such descriptions engendered feelings of victimhood across the city.

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[233] *The Denver Republican,* "Burying Empty Boxes," March 21, 1893.
[234] *The Denver Republican,* "Burying Empty Boxes," March 21, 1893.

The overly inflated tomb removal prices, the flippant desecration of the dead, the mismatching of headstones to their respective graves at Riverside, and the inaccurate reporting of body removals were among the many grievances cited by the press. First, although the city agreed to pay McGovern to remove any tomb, municipal officials established no parameters regarding the removals by relatives themselves. Fearing a financial blow, McGovern and his men denied family access to plots and boasted of their required fee ranging from $10 to $15 to uncover claimed graves. Such price-gouging did not go unnoticed by journalists. One man reported to the newspaper that when he threatened the undertakers to hire his own men to complete the removal, they retorted that, "the grave would be opened by us, and if you don't want to pay for having it done, it won't be opened at all."[235] When confronted by reporters, one of McGovern's men acknowledged the shrewd tactics, claiming that "if many people are allowed to remove the bodies of their friends, there will not be enough in it for us."[236] A similar inflation strategy was used earlier on the Chinese, but they found a way around it by securing permits from the Health Department. As word of McGovern's mischievous actions circulated, individuals began to request their own permits. The Health Department was willing to assume the high price tag for removing abandoned bodies, but under no circumstance would they tolerate McGovern's efforts to prevent the families of the deceased from making other arrangements to remove the bodies of their loved ones out of the cemetery. Therefore, they demanded that crew begin opening graves for families at the price of $2.00, far less than the money-hungry undertaker wanted. McGovern obliged, no doubt because he feared the city might cancel his contract. He and his crew, probably crestfallen at the profits that were slipping away from their grasp, continued on with the task at hand.

[235] *The Denver Republican,* "Burying Empty Boxes," March 21, 1893.
[236] *The Denver Republican,* "Burying Empty Boxes," March 21, 1893.

The second set of problems emphasized by newspapers after the initial gore-reporting had run its course involved the desecration of graves and the inability to properly identify re-interred tombs at their new location at Riverside. The news published various atrocities committed by McGovern such as the "hacking up of bodies" and the distribution of mismatched sets of remains across different coffins. This technique inflated the company's payout, which was based on the total number of removals, but it also signaled to the public that the graves themselves had not remained intact and would not be properly tracked through the relocation process. As bodies and belongings became disarrayed, grave pillagers began to frequent the sites, scavenging coffins, bones, and valuables belonging to the dead. This increased the difficulty of keeping tombs intact, and as caskets piled up, it became almost impossible to say for certain whether or not the remains within any given box (or, in some instances, set of boxes) belonged to a single individual. These measures defrauded the city, generated inflated earnings, and further repulsed Denver residents. The press, meanwhile reveled in the details.

Lastly, the news alerted the public to the fact that McGovern had produced 51 additional receipts for bodies that he could not account for. When reporters met Mayor Rogers Tammany of Denver at Riverside in March to verify the actual number of reburials, the cemetery superintendent motioned to the vast expanse of land and stated simply that the missing bodies are "scattered around there somewhere."[237] The egregious errors in reporting underscored the obvious: McGovern had indeed engaged in fraudulent practices to secure higher earnings. Worse, the swindle occurred openly for the public to witness and for reporters to detail.

While Riverside employees were spared responsibility for McGovern's questionable practices, these reports presented for public consumption Riverside's inability to maintain the

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[237] *The Denver Republican,* "Burying Empty Boxes," March 21, 1893.

integrity of tomb location. The organization and true location of burial plots would remain vague in Riverside's early recordkeeping despite the aspirations of adopting a better cataloguing system for the dead.[238] Even the Mayor himself asked sarcastically, "Have you no record of the order in which those boxes are buried?"[239] The inquiry prompted one worker to retrieve a book and a chart from the cemetery lodge, but despite pinpointing a freshly dug grave and loam, no headboard could be found to identify whose remains rested there. Additionally, the corruption spoke to the very real possibility that many of the caskets which had been accounted for actually contained nothing but dirt and rubble. As captured in the news, there were no procedures in place to prevent "the burial of thousands of empty boxes" or the loss of countless unmarked bodies being dumped haphazardly into the earth—a disgrace that could not be reconciled by journalists or the concerned public.[240]

In addition to the gruesome graveside spectacles that plagued City Cemetery's conversion to a park, McGovern's shady business tactics and possible city government corruption also earned a front-page slot in local publications. Consequently, in March and April, 1893, the *Denver Republican* sought to increase readership not only by illuminating McGovern's beguiling practices but also by keeping the city's response to the scam front and center. For two months, a series of articles chronicled the removal gone awry and the fallout. Additionally, as emphasized in several news pieces, Mayor Rogers turned a blind eye to any further investigation of McGovern or the actual transfer numbers. Because news reporters recounted what seemed to

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[238] After touring the site at Riverside with the Fairmount Heritage Foundation, the tour guides emphasized to me that there were "no records" indicating the purpose of "Chinese Row" or where it was located originally on the cemetery map. Despite the many references made regarding this plot in the burial archives held by the Western History Collection, it was revealed to me that in the present day "no such location existed and if it did in the past, no graves were interred there now."

[239] *The Denver Republican,* "Buying Empty Boxes," March 21, 1893.

[240] *The Denver Republican,* March 10, 1893.

them to be a lackluster response to the thievery by the mayor himself, the public began to think his inaction signaled his compliance. According to the city budget printed in the *Denver Republican*, $43,000 was set aside in a special improvement fund, which was said to be for the removal expenditure.[241] According to the original math calculations though, upon full completion of the job, McGovern's fee should have approximated just $5,000. Even with the cost of supplies and reinterment, the media postulated that the budget was heavily inflated and the true expenditure remained obscure. One reporter openly claimed that the mayor "intended to rob the city treasury" from the beginning, and the "whole grave-yard jobbery was conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity."[242] With reports such as these, news publications further distressed a wide readership, provoked city officials to halt the relocation effort, and ultimately hindered the completion of the cemetery removal project.

By the end of the spring in 1893, city officials had called off the venture, leaving the severely uprooted cemetery grounds an even bigger disgrace. The *Republican* wrote that "several boxes with fragmentary parts of bodies…a skeleton and a part of the cerements" were abandoned for days, and the headstone removal contract had been transferred to yet another company and still needed to be completed.[243] Another story further enflamed readers, and the following description pointed toward the state of the grounds after the halting of the removal:

> The line of desecrated graves at the southern boundary of the cemetery sickened and horrified everybody by the appearance they presented. Around their edges were piled broken coffins, rent and tattered shrouds and fragments of clothing that had been torn from the dead bodies…All were trampled into the ground by the footsteps of the gravediggers like rejected junk.[244]

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[241] *The Denver Republican,* March 21, 1893.
[242] *The Denver Republican,* March 21, 1893.
[243] *The Denver Republican*, "Burying Empty Boxes," March 21, 1893.
[244] *The Denver Republican,* March 19, 1893. Article located in Denver Public Library Western History Collection "City Cemetery" Clippings File.

One journalist described a coffin that laid abandoned for weeks, left partially opened and exposing a decaying body. They exclaimed, “the blackened head and the face of a bearded man is thrust into plain view, while the wind and sun play their devastating pranks with the flesh and bone.”[245] As people passed by, children starred curiously at the “malodorous remnants of humanity,” an offense that prompted some to question Denver’s civility once again.[246] Additional reports emphasized that the body parts and unfilled holes left by the massive coffin removal gave the appearance of a premature biblical “resurrection day,” which was only remedied when a visit by the Mayor sparked a massive cleanup effort.[247] Once complete, charred patches upon the earth indicated the spots where debris had been collected and burned to mitigate the mess of the exhumations.

In the end, local newspaper editors reported every ghastly detail of the large-scale disinterment gone awry in an effort to shape public opinion, sell papers, and initiate change. When alarming reports surfaced of the corrupt tactics used by McGovern’s company to both desecrate the dead and scam the city, newspapers diligently investigated and informed the public of their findings. One reporter asserted that “had it not been for the prompt exposure of the nefarious proceedings by the *Denver Republican*, we have no doubt that the taxpayers of Denver would have been called upon to pay more than $50,000 for the undertaking,” and the McGovern enterprise would have swindled even more unsuspecting citizens.[248] With these words, the news attested to its role in shaping public opinion and in initiating the “machinery of justice” in the matter. One article deemed the entire contract illegal and fraudulent from the start, even before the puffery of the “bogus graves” became known to the public. The writer even lauded that the

[245] *The Denver Republican,* April 9, 1893.
[246] *The Denver Republican,* April 9, 1893.
[247] *The Denver Republican,* March 17 and March 21, 1893
[248] *The Denver Republican,* “The Grave-Yard Scandal,” March 21, 1893.

Republican had “succeeded in stopping the wise work of removal” by exposing the “vilest political slander” ever known in Denver.[249] With every article in the *Republican’s* litany, Denver residents became increasingly peeved with the City Cemetery financial debacle, more scornful of the desecration of Denver’s dead pioneers, and frustrated at the ongoing state of the disheveled old cemetery itself.

The derailment of the project, due in part to the city’s lack of effort and the unavailability of viable solutions, ended with the firing of McGovern, the uprooting and removal of all remaining tombstones, and the plowing over of land that still held thousands of entombed souls. When the effort to relocate the graveyard failed, the city government trudged onward. The debacle quashed further efforts to orchestrate a more complete removal process at City Cemetery, and as a result, remnants of the old boneyard would remain deeply buried underground. Many still held out hope, however, that reallocating the cemetery land for park purposes might restore a semblance of dignity to the Denver landscape. Rather than remain a sketchy funerary landmark, what was once a community embarrassment would gain new life as a park and would become a destination of choice and a space enjoyed by residents. Although the deconstruction methods were questionable, by eliminating the dilapidated cemetery site, Denverites demonstrated their intolerance for the locale, which detracted from their city. The press and local residents lashed out against the tactics employed by McGovern, and they took a stand against memorializing their dead in ways contrary to those of a civilized society. In this vein, residents and news outlets alike made it abundantly clear “what” and even “who” belonged in the cityscape. In the end, the old bone yard was repurposed—a victory for Denverites who sought to remove, or at least cover up, the elements they deemed unfitting.

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[249] *The Denver Republican,* March 25 and April 9, 1893.

Religious Sectioning

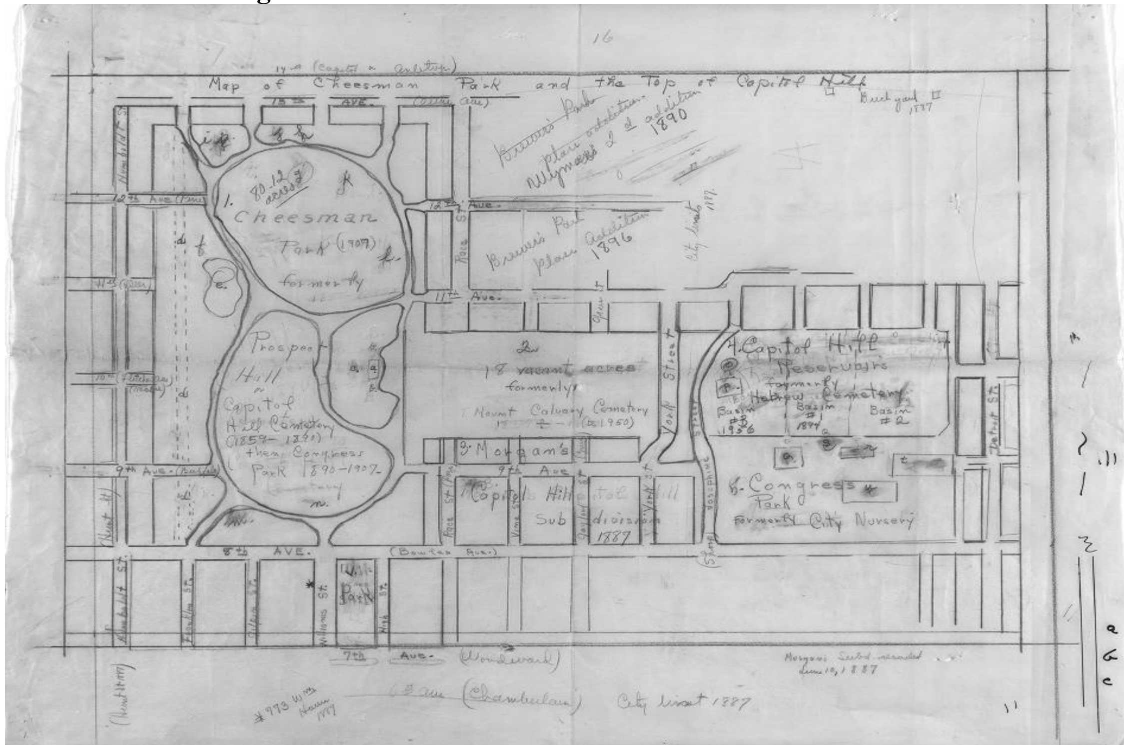
The Jewish and Calvary cemeteries, which had been separated from the original acreage of Mount Prospect in 1865 out of a desire to form distinct burial grounds for religious groups, remained intact through the end of the1800s. By1903, though, reports began to emerge in the press as to the various misdeeds occurring on these tracts. The *Denver Times* complained about the manner in which a new set of paupers were being buried "in the wide expanse of prairie land between Calvary and the Hebrew burial ground."[250] The use of the peripheral land between the two formally recognized cemeteries became a spot for society's indigents—a clandestine location between two deathscapes. An interview with a local fence peeper disclosed the presence of "rotten remains" being dug up and left for hours so that the undertaker could easily place a new coffin "at the bottom of the grave with the old ones piled on top." One councilman, however, believed the publicity was just a ploy by real estate companies to sway public opinion to help get the cemeteries moved from town once and for all.[251] Regardless, the descendants of those buried in the Calvary and Hebrew plots, remembering the horrific publicity associated with the botched removal plan at City Cemetery a decade earlier, began the burdensome transfer of their loved ones to Riverside, Mount Olivet Catholic Cemetery (a newly developed consecrated burial ground west of town), and to the Jewish Emanuel section at Fairmount.

As the Catholic Archdiocese relocated tombs from the sacred grounds at Calvary to the new, more majestic Mount Olivet cemetery, that portion of land began to suffer a fate similar to that experienced by the old City Cemetery. Unfilled grave sites collapsed from the disruption of the soil as timeworn coffins disintegrated. Old headstones toppled over, and those still standing were left askew. Children entered the property through dilapidated and broken fencing to play

[250] Arps Papers, "From Cemetery to Conservatory," 17.
[251] Arps Papers, "From Cemetery to Conservatory," 17.

and build tree houses.[252] They would also collect bones, various casket hardware, and tombstones to take home as souvenirs. At one point, locals reported picnickers on the land "grilling steaks upon pieces of iron fence laid between two headstones."[253] The graveyards became extensions of the backyards of those living proximal to the site. By 1936, the *Rocky Mountain News* "declared the neglect disgraceful." As had been the case decades earlier with City Cemetery, the public grew more and more intolerant of the mess.[254] The reshaping of Denver's original graveyard would carry on through the 1950s as the landscape continued to be reimagined.

Figure 1.2: Historical Points in Cheeseman Park



Credit: "Hand drawn map of historical Points of interest in Cheeseman Park," circa 1965, Denver Public Library Special Collections (WH1234, Box 3, File Folder 2).

Figure 1.2: A pencil drawn map of the points near the Prospect Hill acreage, including the former cemeteries of Mt. Calvary and Hebrew Cemeteries, in addition to the surrounding properties and subdivisions.

[252] Arps Papers, "From Cemetery to Conservatory," 20.
[253] Arps Papers, "From Cemetery to Conservatory," 20.
[254] Arps Papers, "From Cemetery to Conservatory," 20-21.

Finally, in the mid-sixties, the dream to cultivate an outdoor refuge was complete. With the dedication of the Conservatory at Denver Botanic Gardens in 1966, Denverites proudly welcomed the new addition to the cityscape.[255] A 23-acre garden transformed the terrain of the old Catholic burial ground and a parking garage for its visitors was eventually built over the Jewish section. A place that was once considered anathema at the margins of society, would now gain new life. A sense of pride came to fill the void left by the removal of the old pioneer graveyards—a place where countless souls continued to rest below the earth in their eternal slumber.

[255] The Denver Botanic Gardens, "Home is Where the History is." The Denver Botanic Gardens, last modified July 13, 2020, https://www.botanicgardens.org/blog/home-where-history. See also Thomas J. Noel, "Denver Botanic Gardens," *Colorado Encyclopedia*, last modified March 26, 2021, https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/denver-botanic-gardens.

Conclusion

In the sordid history of Mount Prospect there exists telling indicators that marginalization, segregation, and removal became ingrained in the city's fabric early in its inception. The original landmark started out as a place to memorialize the dead, and hopes ran high of turning it into a picturesque memorial ground to both honor lost loved ones and to bring sophistication and prestige to the city. But as the city's criminals, paupers, diseased, and racially-ethnically marginalized groups began to populate the subterrain, they stifled the bourgeoning reputation of the graveyard. Affluent citizens and those who desired a civilized society began to tie the place to negative appellations such as the "old bone yard" and "Jack O'Neil's Ranch." It became hard for the cemetery to outgrow its troublesome reputation, and despite many attempts to reinvigorate the surroundings, the land slipped into a permanent state of disrepair.

Newspapers, meanwhile, printed countless articles referencing the "uncivilized" happenings at the old graveyard.[256] The cemetery became an aberration from civilized society, similar to the social outcasts buried there. Relegating undesirable groups to the periphery of the graveyard worked for a short time, but as the general population's sentiment toward the place declined, so did all hope that Mount Prospect would ever become an esteemed locality.

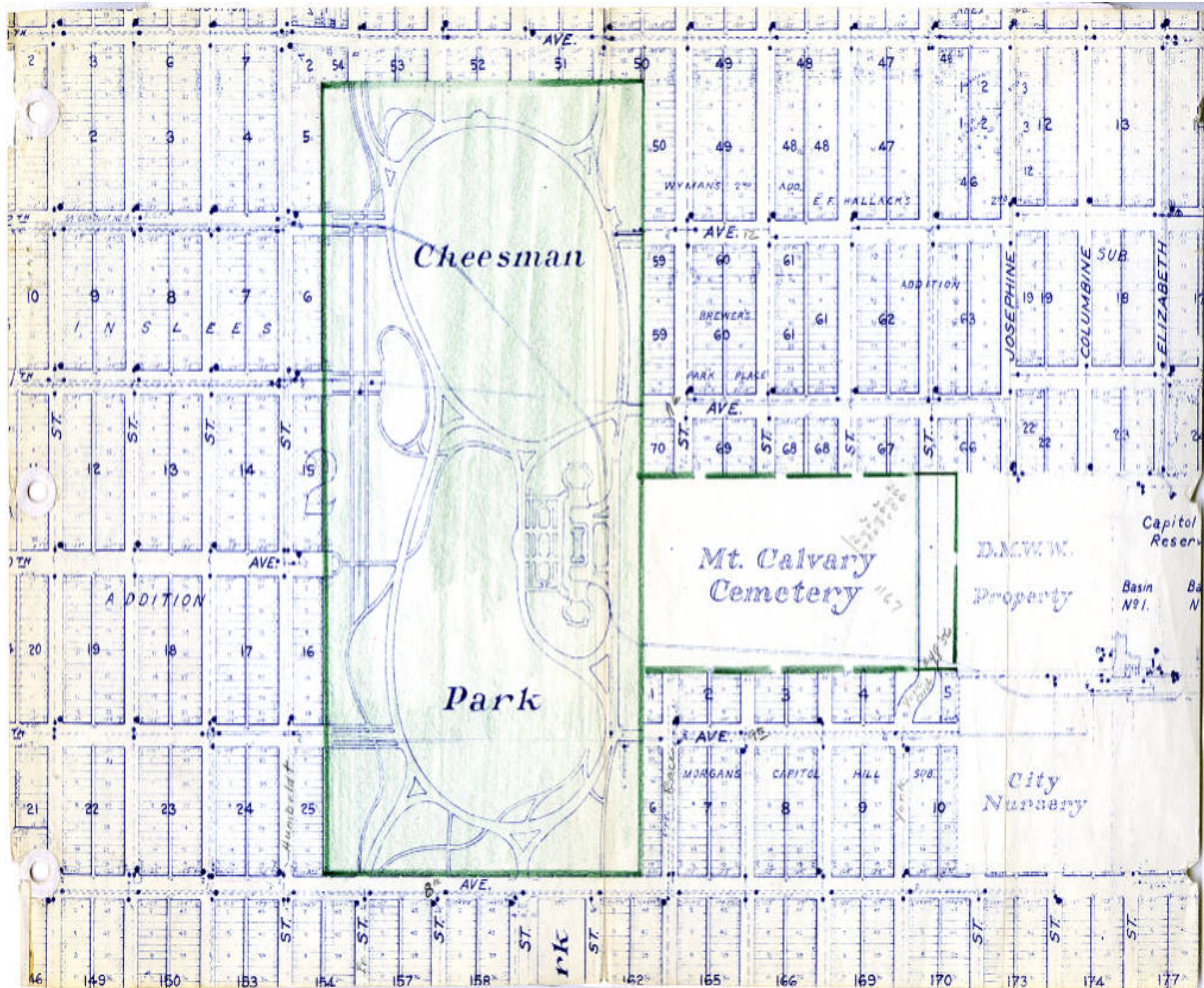
Denverites labored to build a prestigious city and this also meant they needed a revered place to pay tribute to their dead. The vision of the cemetery mirrored the goals of everyday life; local residents tried to shape the cemetery grounds into a reputable landmark just as they worked to mold the cityscape into a respectable place to be the envy of a growing nation. In everyday

[256] One example of the term appears in *The Denver Republican,* April 9, 1893. See thesis section on "Grave Relocation" for citations of various articles containing myriad uses of the word.

life, locals would work to change the people and places that did not conform to their notions of a modern, morally upstanding, and more civilized society. When change was not possible, they separated or removed what they could not accept. When Mount Prospect lagged, citizens sought change, but when change became improbable, they vied to remove the eyesore. In the process, they covered up the graveyard, erasing the remnants of the deathscape. The same stereotypes and desires that shaped everyday life in Denver also dictated the very fate of the original pioneer cemetery. As Denverites grew accustomed to the idea of changing what did not fit their ideals, they marginalized and then removed that which detracted from the cityscape.

Housed beneath the land that was once the city's oldest graveyard are the forgotten remains of some of the region's early settlers. Although the cemetery was deconstructed and hundreds of bodies relocated, it is estimated that more than 2,000 unmarked graves still reside underground, erased from the space that has since been redefined as Cheeseman Park, one of Denver's finest recreational settings. The history of Mount Prospect is one that embodies change; As the perceptions of Denverites shifted from the acceptance of this place to one of intolerance, ideas about marginalization and removal also evolved and took on new forms.

Figure 1.3: Map of Cheeseman Park and Mount Calvary Cemetery



Credit: "Map of Cheeseman Park and Mt. Calvary Cemetery," Denver Dept. of Parks and Recreation, Denver Public Library Special Collections (WH1316, Box 16, File Folder 26). See also Denver Public Library Digital Collection: https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p15330coll4/id/2655/rec/6

Figure 1.3: A historic Map of Cheeseman Park and Mt. Calvary Cemetery shows the street location of what was once Mount Prospect cemetery, running north to south. The Hebrew burial ground would be located directly above the City Nursery on the D.M.W.W. Property to the east. The pest house ran along the southern edge of Mt. Calvary where the Hebrew burial ground also merged. Visible here are the proximity of houses and surrounding neighborhoods of affluence.

Figure 1.4: Aerial View of Cheeseman Park & Ruins, 1940-1950

Credit: "Aerial Photograph of Cheeseman Park, 1940-1950," Denver Photo Company, Denver Public Library Special Collections (WH1082. S.R. DeBoer papers). See also Denver Public Library Digital Collection: https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p15330coll22/id/64638/rec/53.

Figure 1.4: An aerial image of City Cemetery in 1940-1950, after being repurposed to a city park. This image faces west, with the Cheeseman Memorial Pavilion located in the center. The abandoned sections of Mount Calvary cemetery are in the foreground.

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