

History of Manitou Park

As you turn off Highway 67 to drive to your home in Ridgewood, you pass by the beautifully built buildings that comprise the headquarters of the Manitou Experimental Forest. This area was formerly part of “Manitou Park”, at one time in the heart of Ute Indian country. The Ute's used this area for winter hunting camps.

The first known settler of Manitou Park was a man named Bergen. He wintered his cattle in 1861. He built a cabin northwest of Missouri Gulch, near Rainbow Falls fishing area. In the 1860s and 1870s many small scale farmers moved into Manitou Park. Dr. William Bell, the founder of Manitou Springs, also came to Manitou Park in the 1870s. His ambition was to create a tourist resort there. Construction of a hotel started in the spring of 1875. The three story log structure was capable of boarding 40 guests. By 1878 guests enjoyed nightly dances and a campfire with singing. The meat locker in Hotel Gulch was frequently raided by mountain lions. During the next ten years many additions were built; including a large bungalow used as a billiard room, dining hall, church, and spa, five cottages with running water, a spacious dining room, and a beautiful 16 room cottage. The rates were \$3 per day, \$17.50 per week.

On June 6, 1888, Dr. Bell visited the Park to inspect the newly completed dining room. That night, a log left burning in the parlor fireplace ignited the mantel piece. The ensuing fire burned so rapidly that all the buildings except the surrounding cottages were destroyed.

The spring of 1889 saw the construction of a second hotel, a three story building with dormer windows. Many of its 30 rooms had hot and cold running water. Other improvements built over the following years included a casino, a bowling alley, and an amusement hall. In 1899 an oil stove caught some woodwork on fire and the second hotel and casino completely burned down. The hotel was not rebuilt, but the resort continued to operate its cottages until 1906.

While operating the Manitou Park resort, Dr. Bell also experimented with a fish hatchery, logging operations, and a dude ranch. Part of the dude ranch operations included having ranch guests brand cattle. Bell stocked trout in his hatchery ponds, hence the name Trout Creek for the local stream. Bell shipped his timber on a narrow-gauge railroad that he built from Manitou Park to Woodland Park. Unfortunately, his logging enterprise did not make a profit. In 1906 Dr. Bell, experiencing financial difficulties, was influenced by his friend, General William Jackson Palmer, to donate his property in Manitou Park to the new Colorado College School of Forestry.

From 1906 to 1934, Colorado College operated its School of Forestry in Manitou Park. In 1909, the school built the **third hotel** on the site. In 1912, the college, suffering from financial and management problems, sold 3,200 acres of its property along Trout Creek including the hotel. The School of Forestry still retained a large property and intensely logged the same area that Dr. Bell had harvested thirty years before. Much of the timber was used by mining operations in Cripple Creek. The hotel burned in 1925 and the land along Trout Creek was heavily grazed and farmed by several owners before it was sold under foreclosure to the federal government in 1932. After the Colorado College School of Forestry closed in 1934, it entered into a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Forest Service to give the Manitou forest permanent protection as a demonstration forest. In 1936, much of the land in Manitou Park was incorporated into the Manitou Experimental Forest.

During the 1930s, the Great Depression left thousands of men across the country without jobs. Two federal worker relief agencies created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Civilian

Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA), put men back to work in Teller and El Paso Counties. During the mid-1930s, both of these agencies restored and improved Manitou Park.

One of the major activities of the CCC was tree planting to replace the timber removed by Dr. Bell and the Colorado College School of Forestry. Ponds were constructed to irrigate growing tree seedlings...now the south parking lot at Manitou Lake. The WPA began the construction of the buildings to continue the studies begun by the Colorado College School of Forestry. The guest lodge and office, caretaker's residence, garage, and storage sheds were built out of local sandstone quarried from Missouri Gulch.

Both CCC and WPA crews rebuilt Dr. Bell's dam, unchanged since its construction in 1896. They also built two picnic shelters in 1937, one still stands. The second shelter, on the eastern shore, is thought to have burned a few years after completion. Almost nothing remains of it today.

In the Ute Pass area, the crews of the CCC helped with flood and erosion control work in Ute Pass, preventing damage to the road because of flooding of Fountain Creek. They also built the Rampart Range Road and the beautiful building at Glen Cove on Pikes Peak. Yellowstone National Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, and Shenandoah National Park are a few of the areas where buildings and trails were constructed by these untrained crews who learned the masonry, woodworking, and construction necessary to do this high quality, and enduring, work. They have left us the architectural legacy that we enjoy in our neighborhood today. These buildings are now listed in the Colorado State Register of Historic Properties, and the National Register of Historic Places.

Most of the information above was condensed from a three part series authored by our own Ridgewood neighbor, Jean Rodeck. Jean used information from the U.S. Forest Service. It appeared in 2007 Ridgewood newsletters. Thank you, Jean, for allowing me to take such liberties with your articles!

Mary Ann Todd