

# La Alma Lincoln Park



## City of the Plains

1866 Pencil Sketch by A.E. Matthews

(View northwest from Capitol Hill, Broadway along fence, Cherry Creek in foreground)

Prepared by

**Historic Denver, Inc.**

With

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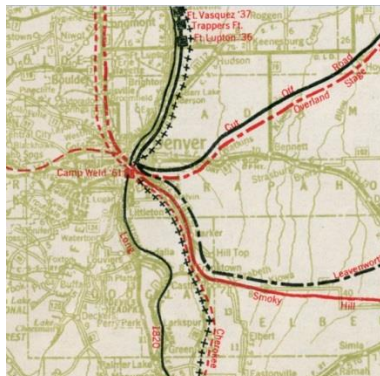
## **19<sup>th</sup> Century - Early History**

La Alma Lincoln Park (LALP) is Denver's oldest residential neighborhood and embodies more history of the beginnings of Colorado, early Denver and a century later, important moments of the Chicano Movement. . The La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood story demonstrates the close connection between place and the people, made tangible by the central role of the Park in the community's life and the surviving modest structures set close together, diverse in their styles yet maintaining a consistent pattern for 150 years.

Some of LALP's story has been forgotten, yet it is comprised of the embedded experiences of the diverse residents who have called it home, beginning with the Cheyenne and Arapaho people who camped here before gold was discovered nearby 160 years ago. The story speaks of how wars fought elsewhere leave local imprints. This story tells the tale of how devastation from floods a century apart changed the future of the community, twice. Transportation plays a significant role in the development of this popular neighborhood, first because of the wagon road, then the railroads and even later, the dominance of the automobile that helped usher an era of decline.

The Great Depression and subsequent federal, state and local government's efforts to address housing issues tell the story of unintended consequences on a cohesive community. The more complete history of La Alma Lincoln Park is one of inclusion and activism, resilience and perseverance to improve the quality of life for one's family and community across two centuries.

Until the late 1850s, this land was the site for occasional and seasonal encampments of several Native tribes, including the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Ute Mountain Utes, and others. Following Mexico's Independence from Spain in 1821, French fur trappers and other traders established trails that followed major rivers and creeks along what is now Colorado's Front Range. These "mountain men" traded wares with Mexican and New Mexican residents, bringing supplies north to Fort Vasquez and Fort Laramie in present-day Wyoming. The trail that traversed mountains and plains eventually followed the west bank of Cherry Creek and came to be called "The Trappers Trail."



In 1857, gold was discovered along the South Platte River, in an area known as the "Spanish Diggings," mined near present-day West Virginia Avenue by a party of Mexicans working for

John Smith, the mountain trapper, (History of Denver, J.E. Wharton, Denver 1866:7). Within two years, as many as 30,000 people swarmed the area searching for gold.

The discovery of gold brought attempts to establish several town sites near the confluence of the South Platte River and Cherry Creek, including Montana City, St. Charles, Auraria, and lastly Denver. Quickly “The Trapper’s Trail” became the wagon road supplying these new town sites.

The Auraria Town Company was formed on November 1, 1858, and began to claim land at the confluence of the South Platte River on the west side of Cherry Creek. The first maps of Auraria, drawn in 1859, designated one full block for a “park.” It would take 25 years before a genuine park was established, when the City of Denver purchased land in 1885 one block west of the originally designated site and named it for President Lincoln, twenty years after his assassination. Once the homestead of A.C. Hunt, Colorado’s 4<sup>th</sup> Territorial Governor, Lincoln Park has been the center around which this neighborhood developed and has played an integral part in every era of its history. The Park continues to serve as the soul of the neighborhood, “alma” in Spanish. In 2013 the Park and neighborhood were renamed La Alma Lincoln Park to demonstrate the importance of identity to the community’s sense of place, extending from the earliest history of the people who camped or lived here.

By January 1860, the wagon road had evolved into Ferry Street, and became the core of the burgeoning commercial district where the former trail reached the Platte River, immediately west of Cherry Creek. Later, Ferry Street would be renamed Kalamath Street, stretching south and linking with early Arapahoe County Route 30 that followed the east bank of the South Platte River. These linkages are the earliest evidences of the area’s geographic significance and the role transportation would play in the lives and livelihoods of the area’s residents over the next 150 years.

## **Claims Clubs**

In 1859-1860 town-company shareholders began to buy and sell land parcels throughout the region, even as Native tribes held title to it. Alongside the town companies, settlers formed extra-legal protective associations known as claim clubs. They were designed to make it possible to claim and then protect land ownership (such as mining claims). Like shareholders in town companies, members of these clubs could protect their claims against latecomers, claim-jumpers, or the government, prior to the land being surveyed or legally administered as part of the public domain. Among the more than half-dozen claim clubs established in Colorado was the Arapahoe Claims Club (1859) that recorded thousands of ownership claims in Denver, Auraria, and their environs.

By the end 1858, the town of Auraria, on the west side of Cherry Creek, was “distinctly ahead in material progress,” with twice the number of cabins and all the commercial establishments than had been erected in the area, according to Jerome Smiley’s History of Denver (1901: 234). Other historians noted that “In those days, a corner lot on the west bank was considered worth a whole block on the east side” (Baskin & Vickers, 1880: 187). Beginning in the summer/fall of 1859, the Auraria Town Company began to sell land south of what became West Colfax Avenue in the

area that is now La Alma Lincoln Park. Among the earliest purchasers to buy significant portions of this land was Alexander Cameron Hunt.

### **Alexander Cameron Hunt: the inclusive pioneer**

Alexander Cameron Hunt (popularly referred to as A. C. Hunt or Governor Hunt) arrived in Auraria in June 1859. Hunt was among the most prominent of Auraria's earliest permanent settlers and built his home here. Considered the historic founder of much of the area now known as La Alma Lincoln Park, the land on which Hunt's homestead once stood eventually became Lincoln Park.

During the first decade of the twenty-five years Hunt lived in Colorado he served in elected and appointed roles in the emerging local and territorial governments, including as its local law man. Later Hunt was appointed U.S. Marshall by President Lincoln. As the local law man, Hunt mediated the pivotal community meeting that resulted in the consolidation of Denver, Auraria and Highland in 1860. Henceforth, the section of Denver east of the Cherry Creek would be known as East Denver (as noted in grantee/grantor records), Auraria, including the future Lincoln Park area, would be called West Denver. Highland, sited on the *north* side of the South Platte River, would be referred to as North Denver. (Fiftyniner's Directory: 142)

Hunt befriended the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes by inviting them to camp on his homestead. Eventually, he knew the name of every chief in the territory. In 1865, Hunt publicly defended the rights of the Native people when he testified against the actions that became known as the Sand Creek Massacre. Hunt called Native chiefs Black Kettle and White Antelope "special friends of the white man". A stained glass window in the old Supreme Court Chambers of the Colorado State Capitol commemorates the successful negotiation of the 1868 Ute Treaty between Hunt and Chief Ouray, Chief of the Ute Mountain Ute tribe.

Politically, Hunt was also known as a leader of those resisting the 1860s march to statehood. The Territory's population did not meet the minimum requirement and Negro male suffrage had been excluded from the proposed state constitution. Representing an "anti-statehood" platform, Hunt ran for Congressional Delegate in 1866 in what became a hotly contested election.

Hunt's actions and positions solidified an intense rivalry between himself and 2<sup>nd</sup> Territorial Governor John Evans and the Rocky Mountain News founder, William N. Byers, who represented another faction of the Republican Party. In Denver's earliest days, a rivalry for commercial dominance had begun between the settlers on the east and west banks of the Cherry Creek with Hunt a vocal proponent for the West Side. The commercial rivalry later spread to a political rivalry and, later still to competing railroad interests. Each rivalry pitted Hunt against Evans and Byers.

Colorado's pursuit of statehood ran into the political storm of Reconstruction politics following the Civil War. Out of which, as one outcome of the contested 1866 Congressional Delegate race, came the appointment of Hunt as Colorado's 4th Territorial Governor by President Andrew Johnson in 1867.



## The High Ground

Hunt purchased his first land in Colorado with his business partner John M. Clark a few weeks after he arrived in June 1859. It was a lot at Third & Ferry Streets (Auraria) where they opened a livery. The funds for this purchase came from profits from the 'eating house' Hunt and his wife Ellen operated upon their arrival for which she famously made 175 loaves of bread and 450 pies in the month of July 1859. By the end of December 1859, Hunt and Clark had purchased an additional 78 lots, many of which became "Hunt's Addition" on historic maps and in the present-day La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood.

Hunt made his home here and spent the next years greening his homestead with trees brought from the mountains. An observer in 1870 called Hunt's West Denver home a "showplace of the city," a "pretty story and a half brick home standing in a wide park of evergreens and cottonwoods, the door approached with a winding drive." (Fiftyniners' Directory, p. 142) Hunt's daughter, Isa, tells a story of their home, called "Cloverside:"

*A few years later father took up 160 acres of ground on a hill south of town and built a small brick house, improved the grounds, hauling pine trees from the mountains in the winter with great pieces of earth attached to insure their having good soil to grow in. In the summer working hard irrigating, enriching the soil and planting the only trees in Denver at that time, and often adding to the house as well, until finally a comfortable, rambling house of fifteen rooms was the result, with grounds that were the admiration of the whole country. (Isa Hunt Stearns, Reminiscences of Isa Hunt Stearns, Colorado Magazine, p.184)*



"Cloverside," The Home of Governor and Mrs. Alexander Cameron Hunt, Lincoln Park, West Denver, Colorado. A sketch made from memory by Ellen Stearns Ament, Granddaughter of Governor and Mrs. A. C. Hunt.

(Colorado History Magazine)

The historic 1864 flood wiped out businesses and homes in original Auraria but spared Hunt's homestead. Hunt's daughter, Isa Hunt Stearns, recalled the flood as the "death blow" to the potential prominence of West Denver. Hunt had chosen the elevated plateau for his home site. When another flood struck a century later, the land that is now a park again was spared. Hunt offered refuge to those stranded by the 1864 flood waters as did local residents when the 1965 flood hit the western portion of the West Side.

While pursuing his numerous civic duties, Hunt also initiated or partnered in several business ventures, most prominently as a real estate agent for the Denver & Rio Grande Railway as one of its founding directors. Hunt wasted little time endearing himself to the business community in Auraria. By late October 1859, four months after arriving, he was elected Vice-President of the Auraria Town Company. Several weeks later the 1<sup>st</sup> Legislature of the Jefferson Territory named Hunt, along with his business partner John Clark, the incorporators of Denver's first fire insurance company (Smiley, 1901: 319).

In February 1860, Hunt was 'promptly and unanimously' elected President of the Arapahoe Claim Club (History of Agriculture in Colorado, Alvin T. Steinel, D.W. Working; State Agricultural College, Ft. Collins, 1926). Also in 1860, the U.S. Congress granted a franchise to Hunt, with John Clark, to organize the Capitol Hydraulic Company to construct ditches to supply water from the South Platte River and the Cherry Creek for the new town sites. Merchant's Mill and Excelsior Mill races were constructed by this company. Their efforts were viewed as unsuccessful yet made early town development and sustainability feasible. The Merchant's Mill race ran north through Hunt's homestead into the core of Auraria and operated for the next 50 years until purchased by the City of Denver and then buried.

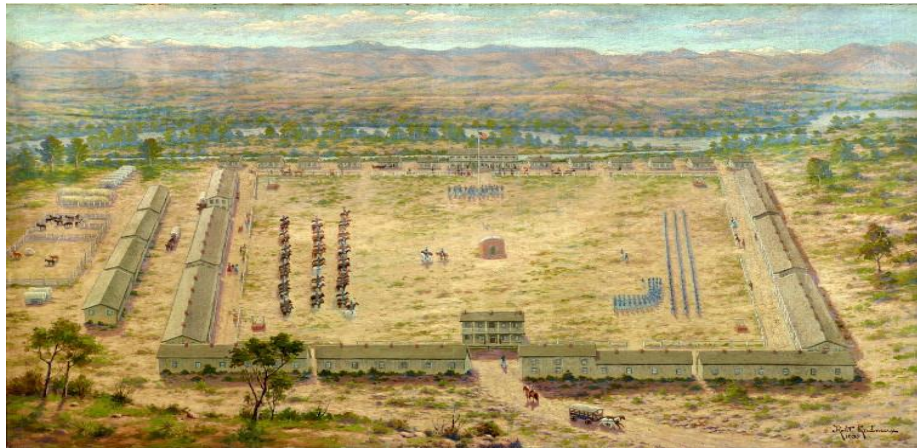
By the end of 1860, Hunt had formed a real estate business, again with John M. Clark and a new partner, early pioneer Andrew Sagendorf. Sagendorf was a leader in early Denver's development as an original shareholder of the Auraria Town Company, was its first Secretary and was also instrumental in the consolidation of Denver with Auraria and Highland.

## **Camp Weld**

Around this same time, William Gilpin, who had recently been appointed Colorado's 1st Territorial Governor by President Lincoln, wanted to establish a garrison to defend Colorado from Confederate Civil War incursions. The Confederates had hopes of capturing Colorado gold to fund their conquest of the southwest. A portion of "Hunt's Rancho" was sold to Governor Gilpin for the hastily constructed Camp Weld, paid with "negotiable drafts" that were not authorized by the U.S. Treasury and had no official value. (Smiley, 1901: 379) Locally this script was called "Gilpin Dollars." The Union soldiers quartered here served in the victorious Battle of Glorietta Pass over Confederate troops in northern New Mexico in March 1862. The Camp was occupied continuously throughout the Civil War, but it would fall into partial disuse whenever the troops were away on campaigns. Late in 1864, and again in early 1865, two fires effectively destroyed much of the camp. It was abandoned in 1865.

Camp Weld represents a contested and painful legacy from this era because of its association with the Sand Creek Massacre, a dark piece of Colorado history. In August 1864, Colorado's 2nd Territorial Governor John Evans, urged the U.S. War Department to authorize volunteer regiment formations "*to pursue, kill, and destroy all hostile Indians that infest the plains*" in retaliation for attacks on settlers and wagon trains in the Territory (Abbott...McComb, 74). A council meeting to broker a peace agreement was held at Camp Weld in late September, attended by many prominent Native chiefs. Governor Evans rebuffed those attending, announcing that "*he had placed the matter in the hands of the military authorities to chastise them...*" (RMN

29Sept1864: 3). Weeks later, after the Chiefs had returned to their camps near Fort Lyon (formerly Fort Wise), Governor Evans dispatched cavalry companies from Camp Weld to Fort Lyon, led by Colonel Chivington, where the now-infamous Sand Creek Massacre occurred on November 29, 1864.



*In 1905, Robert Lindneux, (1871-1970) an artist who had arrived in Colorado in 1899, painted a bird's-eye-view of Camp Weld (34 x 54 inches), perhaps based on Dillingham's sketch and other material that has since been lost. It was painted 40 years after the camp was abandoned, but there also may have been input from surviving witnesses. In 1936 Lindneux also completed a large painting of the Sand Creek Massacre. The Camp Weld painting is in the collection of the Denver Art Museum (ID:2001.1167).*

At first claimed as a victorious battle, the Massacre was later accurately reported in gruesome detail by soldiers who had refused to participate. Silas Soule of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry wrote a letter to his superior officer, Colonel Wynkoop that would prompt a hearing in Washington, D.C., in March 1865. A.C. Hunt, as U.S. Marshall, testified:

*"We have always regarded Black Kettle and White Antelope as the special friends of the white man ever since I have been in the country". He ended his testimony by noting, "the Indians have feelings as well as we have, and are entitled to certain rights; which, by the by, they never get."*

This testimony inflamed the contentious political rivalry between Evans and Hunt. The day before Hunt's testimony, Governor Evans wrote to President Lincoln requesting Hunt's dismissal as U.S. Marshall. It appears this letter was never acted on. Soon after, Lincoln was assassinated and Andrew Johnson became President. An outcome of the hearing was the resignation of Governor Evans at the request of then-President Andrew Johnson. That summer, letter-writer Silas Soule was murdered on a Denver street, his assailant was never caught.

By this time, Camp Weld was mostly abandoned. Elisha Milleson, who had served at Camp Weld, found that no one claimed title to the land as property or military reservation. He filed a homestead claim and received title to 40 acres on December 1, 1865. While awaiting his title,

Milleson began living in the surviving officer's quarters. Milleson turned the camp ruin into a market garden and small fruit farm, and operated a resort-like picnic ground for many years that included a pond for swimming.

A 1924 article reported on the industrialization of the site: "*The Colorado and Southern and the Santa Fe tracks cross the old parade ground now occupied in part by the store houses of the Denver Water System and cement material factories.*" (Albert Sanford [born at the camp], Colorado Trail, Nov 1924:14) In 1940, Herndon Davis, who lived in nearby Lincoln Park, painted the surviving house as part of a series of watercolor renderings. In 1960, the house was the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Carlos Rivera, who had lived there for 16 years. (Denver Post, *History Was Forged at Obscure Denver Site*, June 26, 1960:22a) A controversial monument still stands at West 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Vallejo Street commemorating the former camp site.

### **After the Civil War: Hunt as Governor**

In the mid-1860s, four attempts to secure statehood were made, all failed. The pursuit became entangled in Reconstruction politics along with the passage and ratification of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Into this fractious mix, President Johnson appointed Hunt the 4<sup>th</sup> Territorial Governor, in January 1867. Hunt's selection as Governor, a leader in the anti-statehood faction, dampened any near-term hopes of success for statehood (which ultimately took another decade to achieve).

One of Hunt's first significant activities as Governor (1867-1869) presaged the influential role he would later play in the development of the railroad in Denver and Colorado. In 1866, the Union Pacific Railroad decided to bypass Colorado and run its tracks through Cheyenne, Wyoming. This was an economic disaster for Denver and Colorado. In July 1867, Union Pacific representatives came to Denver seeking public aid to build a tributary branch south from Cheyenne. As the new Territorial Governor, A.C. Hunt presided over the crucial community-wide planning meeting where former Governor Evans proposed that Arapahoe County finance one-third of the cost to bring the Union Pacific tracks south. A committee that included both Hunt and Evans called for the formation of the Board of Trade. Arapahoe County voters passed the measure by a margin of 88%. The first train arrived in Denver in June 1870.

Another significant achievement of the Hunt administration occurred in 1868 when he and Kit Carson negotiated the Ute Treaty with the Ute Mountain Ute tribe. This treaty reserved much of western Colorado south of the 40<sup>th</sup> Parallel and west of the 107<sup>th</sup> Meridian (Abbott, Leonard & McComb: 123) for the tribe. This treaty was vital to the Ute nation because it was the first to give land and water rights to an indigenous tribe. Hunt's extensive experience with tribal members dated from his personal acquaintances welcoming Native Americans to his West Denver homestead, plus his encounters with them during his years as U.S. Marshall and as ex-officio Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Most importantly, this treaty was the basis for a later successful court battle over Native American control of water rights. In a mere five years, however, 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Governor McCook's administration would undermine this treaty by the 1873 Brunot Agreement, which separated the mineral-rich San Juan Mountains from Ute territory. Hunt was removed as Governor by the newly-elected President Grant based on unfounded rumors of malfeasance. President Grant later apologized to A.C. Hunt.



## **Railroads come to West Denver**

Railroads are the defining element for Denver, for Colorado and for the West Side in the decade of the 1870s. The 1871 Colorado Gazetteer (page 115) described Colorado's benefits from the arrival of the railroads as "incalculable." The mining and nascent agricultural industries were given new life due to the greatly reduced costs of shipping goods and people. Railroads stimulated immigration and decreased the general cost of living in the region by 30% - 50% in as little as three years (Abbott, Leonard, & McComb: 84). In October, 1870, Hunt was one of three incorporators of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, served on its first Board of Directors and was responsible for most the land purchased by the railroad throughout southern Colorado. In less than three months the first train reached Colorado Springs, five hours and 74 miles away on October 21, 1871.

In either 1870 or 1871 Hunt conveyed some of his land in Section 4, southwest of his homestead, to the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. This land eventually became the site of Burnham Yards. Burnham Shops and Yards supported Colorado's largest home-grown railroad for almost 150 years. In West Denver, Burnham Shops and Yards, and the tracks, defined the western boundary of the greater neighborhood of Lincoln Park. More notably, the railroad became neighborhood residents' principal employer for many generations and was the source of its predominantly working class identity and residences.

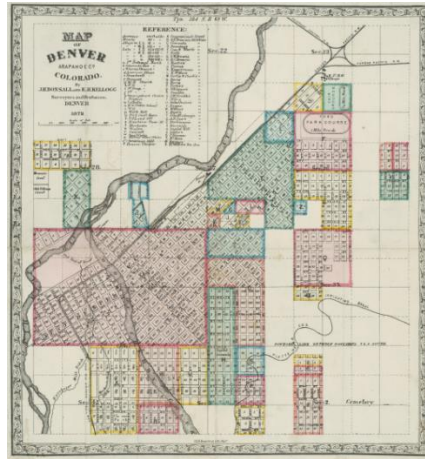
## **Developing the Neighborhood: Hunt's Addition**

When the railroad arrived in Denver, evidence shows only a handful of people residing south of Colfax Avenue and west of Santa Fe Drive – in what would become the La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood. An economic downturn hit in 1873, halting further railroad construction and depressing the local real estate market. Its impact here is evident by the lack of grantor/grantee transactions specifically owned by A.C. or Hamilton Hunt (A.C.'s brother) between 1870 and late 1875. In November 1873, John M. Clark, Hunt's long-time business partner, mapped Hunt's Addition with blocks and lots. Early in 1874 Clark and Julius Hotchkiss recorded the plat map for Hunt's Addition.

Beginning late in 1875 AC Hunt began to transfer ownership of lots in Hunt's Addition. The first sale was to Helen M. Buchtel, daughter of carnival barker P.T. Barnum and sister-in-law of the eventual Governor and Chancellor of the University of Denver, Henry M. Buchtel. A few weeks later, Hunt conveyed 4 lots to his 16-year old daughter Isa Hunt, directly east of his homestead, now 1168 and 1178 Mariposa. Numerous land transfers were executed over the next two years.

One of the few residents in the late 1860s and early 1870s in what would become Hunt's Addition, was Hunt's brother-in-law, Edwin H. Kellogg, who lived here with his immediate family and employees. Kellogg became an influential, longtime resident of West Denver, known as a cartographer, civil engineer and surveyor. In 1872, he partnered with J.B. Bonsall to map Denver, Arapahoe County.

This is the first map that set blocks south of West Colfax Avenue in the cardinal direction, in what became Hunt's Addition. Like the 1859 Auraria map, this map also set aside two blocks for *Clover Park*, between Kalamath and Mariposa Streets from West 10<sup>th</sup> to West 11<sup>th</sup> Avenues, reinforcing the importance West Siders give to the legacy of place. Clover Park was re-platted in 1885 into blocks and lots and developed for residences, now blocks 22 and 23.



(J.B. Bonsall & E.H. Kellogg, 1872)

The 1873 City Directory gives Kellogg's occupation as civil engineer with offices near his grocery on Larimer. In 1876, he was elected Arapahoe County Surveyor (Smiley: 540), a position he held at least through 1879. By 1882, Kellogg had his own engineering firm and began to serve as Denver's City Engineer, when two of the city's most prominent structures were built, City Hall and the Arapahoe County Courthouse.

City directories between 1866 and 1892 show Kellogg lived east of AC Hunt's homestead, now addressed as 1165 Lipan Street. It appears that Kellogg lived here in or before 1873. Over the decades the residence's address changed as the street names changed. In 1876, Kellogg's residence was listed simply as "*Hunt's Addition, southwest limits*" and included his and Ellen Hunt's mother, Mrs. A.E. Kellogg. Between 1875 & 1880, Kellogg's residence was typically listed as "*Pine, corner of 10th*", which changed to "*1165 S. Tenth*" in 1887 before its current address of 1165 Lipan. The Denver Assessor record provides a construction date of 1886 for Kellogg's home but this is almost certainly an error. The still extant residence is named on the 1878 Willett's Map and the 1887 Robinson map for Block 18 coincides with this depiction.



1165 Lipan (ca 1873)

After 1892 there is no listing for Kellogg in the City Directories. By this time A.C. Hunt had moved from Colorado after going bankrupt, prompting him to sell his Denver homestead to the City of Denver for \$40,000 in 1885. It is this land that became Lincoln Park in 1886, and is now La Alma Lincoln Park.

### **Early Residents**

The 1873 City Directory turned up two other residents living near Hunt and Kellogg: a machinist living on Cheyenne Avenue (Mariposa) and a laborer for AC Hunt. There is evidence that the laborer's residence may exist today as 1438 Lipan. A gradual increase in the number of residents can be seen in the directories, and most are labeled as laborers or carpenters. The 1975 National Register nomination for the West Side Historic District claimed that "by 1874 one-half of the area was built in small brick residences," however, the 1878 Willetts Farm map depicts only two residences in Hunt's Addition – A.C. Hunt's homestead and Kellogg's residence at 1165 Lipan, indicating that this area was still largely undeveloped in 1878.

Of the two dozen new households that arrived in Hunt's Addition in 1879, the Riley Family stands out. In October 1879, Mary Riley purchased the lot and 1430 Lipan was built. This residence is typical of the houses built here before 1886: wood frame in a subtype of the Italianate style with the front porch later altered by a Craftsman-inspired gabled roof. The grantee/grantor records show Mary was not an unusual buyer. A surprising number of women followed Helen Buchtel and purchased lots here beginning in 1879, continuing into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Mrs. Riley is listed living here in the 1880 Census with her husband, Daniel and their two children. Daniel H. Riley was a long-time conductor for the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. In 1884, they bought the lot next door and built 1434 Lipan. It stands today as one of only three 2<sup>nd</sup> Empire architectural style homes remaining in La Alma Lincoln Park. The Riley's lived here only a few years before moving again to 1375 Kalamath, now demolished.



1430 Lipan (ca 1879)



1434 Lipan (ca 1884)

The 1879 City Directory hints at how the neighborhood was poised to grow, with approximately 50 residents now living in Hunt's Addition. Of these 50, seven of their houses are still occupied today. Foremost is E.H. Kellogg's home. The efforts to verify its location highlight the complexities of historic research in Denver prior to 1889, when building permits were first required. City permits came too late for this research because a significant portion of Hunt's Addition was developed between 1879 and 1889. City directories have proven more reliable for identifying who moved here and when.

Multiple other research barriers include legal descriptions that use the 1862 U.S. Survey map coordinates or block numbers from the 1859 Fosdick & Tappan map. Block alignments aggravate deciphering, angled to the southeast following Cherry Creek's channel. After Hunt's Addition was platted, property owner identification became easier, except for the erroneous recordings as "Hunter's Addition." Two more hurdles challenge researchers: three street-name changes occurred in the first decades after settlement and then house numbering changed late in 1886. The three-digit system was replaced with a four-digit system and flipped odd-numbered sides of streets to even-numbered. Furthermore, house numbers reversed direction from increasing as one headed south from Colfax Avenue to increasing as one progressed north from Ellsworth Avenue.

#### North – South Streets, west of Cherry Creek

1860s (angled SE)	1878	After 1900
Front		
Cherry	<u>South of Colfax</u>	<u>South of Colfax</u>
Santa Fe	Santa Fe	Jason/Santa Fe
Ferry	So Eleventh	Kalamath
San Luis	So Tenth	Lipan
Cheyenne	So Ninth	Mariposa
Arapahoe	So Eighth	Navajo
Washington	So Seventh	Osage
Adams		Pecos
Jefferson		Quivas



Land that had been open prairie 20 years earlier was now dotted with small farms. Nearby jobs with the railroad or other industries were plentiful and commuting was easier with the introduction of horse-drawn streetcars using the old wagon road. Groceries and other small businesses were moving into the area as many dozens of new residences were constructed, forecasting the beginning of a new neighborhood of diverse immigrant residents striving for a better life for their families. Hunt's Addition was on the brink of greater changes before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century -- 1929**

By 1880, West Denver, south of Colfax Avenue, was poised for full scale residential development. Industrial growth to the north and west, particularly given the presence of Burnham Yards, attracted new families to the burgeoning neighborhood. In The Legacy of Conquest, author Patricia Limerick speaks of the American West as a meeting ground for diverse groups tied into the same story, occupying a common ground (page 27). The 1880 census for this emerging neighborhood is a local example of this story where Germans, Swedes, Dutch, English and Irish settled side-by-side to live near their work.

By the June 1880 Census, two hundred and twenty-five residents were living on either Kalamath, Lipan or Mariposa streets with another several hundred residing in the "suburbs," which began south of West Tenth Avenue. Among the 54 households on the named streets, many included first generation residents whose parents had been born outside the country and eight were headed by women. Thirteen percent of the residents were native Coloradoans, mostly children; another 15% had been born outside the United States with the remaining 72% had arrived from elsewhere in the United States. The predominant occupation for women was "keeps house" and many children were listed either as "at home" or "at school." The predominant male occupation was carpenter. The important role transportation modes played in this neighborhood is underscored by the number who worked for or with the railroads as machinists, engineers, conductors, or brakemen.

In December 1880, the *Rocky Mountain News* reported that many improvements could be seen in the area. Close to the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad's (DxRG) shops, employees were building "neat little cottages convenient to the shops. Another summer will see the entire elevated plateau a half mile on each side of the great works covered with happy little homes." (RMN 5Dec1880: 6) Horsecars began to crisscross the neighborhood establishing new connections among the diverse residents.

Manufacturing industries sprung up nearby including the Mullen and Davis flour mills. In the succeeding decades the proximity to water via ditches, the river and the creek, attracted more industry, including a woolen mill, a paper mill, several breweries, ice houses, pottery works, machine shops, and a chemical factory (Thomas J. Noel, Rocky Mountain Gold, Tulsa, Oklahoma: Continental Heritage Press, 1980: 465). Its location near the commercial core was another attraction for residential development and the community continued to grow rapidly until the Silver Panic of 1893. The era of neighborhood stability would stretch into the 1930s.

By 1893, occupations in Hunt's Addition had shifted to more professional positions such as lawyer, physician, veterinarian, and auditor. Clerk was the most numerous of the occupations listed in the city directory but salesmen and bookkeepers also lived here. One-sixth of the workers were proprietors of various businesses including grocers, barbers, meat market owners, and druggists. Occupations of others in the area included teachers, policemen, reporters and editors, musicians, artists, and postal workers. When women were listed few occupations were identified. (See, Charles O. Brantigan, ed., 1893 Denver City Directory (Denver: Canzona Publications, 1992)



Flett's Birds Eye Map 1882

View to east: Colfax Avenue on left & Burnham Yards on the lower right

### **Schools and Churches**

One enduring tangible symbol of the stabilization of Hunt's Addition was the successive building of churches and schools. Within a dozen years, four schools and six churches were erected between Colfax Avenue and West 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The first school in Hunt's Addition was Central School, located on Kalamath Street at the site of the current Greenlee Elementary playground. In December 1880, the *Rocky Mountain News* boasted that its "exterior is elegant, grand, imposing and would be a credit to any city in America." (RMN 12Dec1880:5) An interior distinguishing feature was that all the blackboards were blue, unlike any other school in the city. High school classes began there in 1882. The historic school building was demolished in 1952 when Greenlee Elementary opened.

Two years later, Franklin School, sited on West Colfax Avenue between Lipan & Mariposa Streets, opened and was used as the district's high school from 1884-1893. Designed by noted architect William Quayle in an Italianate style, it was said to be "one of the finest and best adapted buildings in the country". It was a large, two-story, 12-room school with three towers and constructed of Fort Collins flagstone, Coal Creek sandstone, brick and lava stone. The main entrance was surmounted by a heavy stone arch supported by granite columns and the interior was dominated by a massive walnut staircase. Famous graduates include Daniel T. Harrington, Helen Evans Harrington (Lecturer, Department of Finance, Columbia University), the Schwayder brothers, Jess and Mark (future Samsonite founders), and jazz singer, Paul Whiteman. In 1893, the high school classes moved to a new West Side High built at West 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Elati Street on the site that is now Baker Middle School. Franklin School was torn down in 1953 after Greenlee Elementary opened.

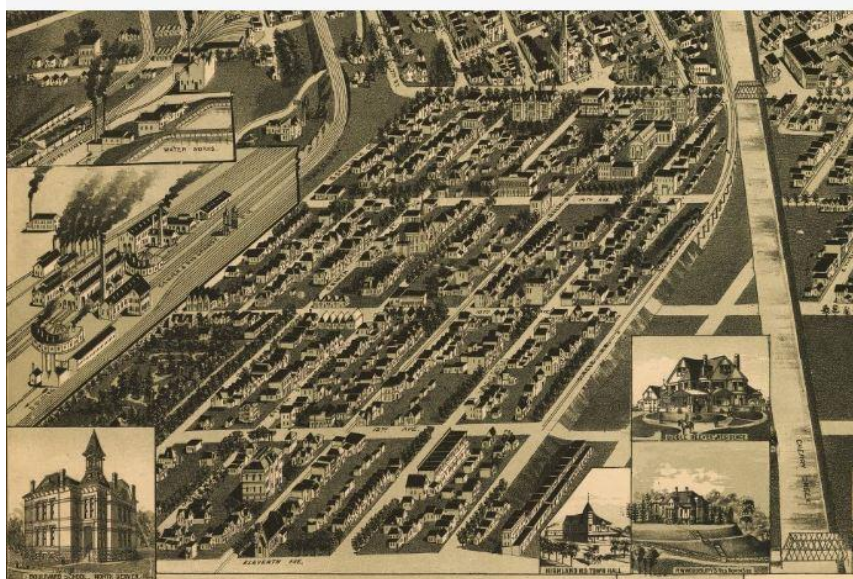


Franklin School ca. 1911

In the summer of 1880, Ellen Hunt, wife of A.C. Hunt, died and Hunt chose to honor her memory by donating land for the neighborhood's first church. Ellen Hunt's mother (Mrs. A.E. Kellogg) arranged for the construction of the Third Congregational Church at 935 W. 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue (at Kalamath) in 1881, now privately owned. The Congregationalists occupied the space until the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, after which a succession of congregations occupied the building. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, the space became the long-time home of El Centro Cultural, a neighborhood gathering place for dances, lunches and other Latino recreational activities. It was expected that if a politician was looking for support from West Siders, it was imperative to attend one of El Centro Cultural's bi-monthly lunches (Interview of Celina Benavidez, September 8, 2017). Today it serves a commercial use.

Other churches constructed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Hunt's Addition include: the 1882 Westminster Presbyterian on the west side of Lipan Street between West 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> Avenues (now demolished); the 1883 St. Joseph's Church and school at West 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Galapago Street; the 1884 Burnham Chapel located on Lipan Street at West 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue; the 1885 Swedish Methodist Church located on the southwest corner of Kalamath Street and West 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue (now a residence); the 1887 Judson Memorial Church (later the Memorial Baptist Church) at the corner of West 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Lipan Street; and the 1893 Emmanuel Memorial Episcopal building erected at West 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Lipan Street.

### Library of Congress 1889 Map



Detail of Lincoln Park Neighborhood

(W. 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue at bottom, West Colfax Ave at top, Cherry Creek at right, Burnham Yards at left)

### Cottage Architecture

The 1880s saw a surge in home building of modest cottages on narrow lots embodying Italianate characteristics at first, and later shifting to the Queen Anne architectural style through the 1890s. These residences retain their architectural integrity and reflect the craftsmanship of local builders, often neighbors, rather than the work of prominent architects, such as William Quayle who designed La Alma Lincoln Park's first school buildings.

Most of the houses retain their original scale, setback and setting with intact stone curbs, wide planting strips and stone sidewalks. Open low front porches dominate the facades with many retaining their original post supports. This semi-private space is accessed via a walkway, most sitting flush with the stone sidewalks, typically delineated from the public space by three-foot metal fences or low walls.

The oldest residences were erected close to the ground in a simplified Italianate style designed in the front-gabled subtype (see 1212 Lipan Street). According to Virginia McAlester in [A Field Guide To American Houses](#), this subtype is commonly found on narrow lots in larger cities (page 211). Italianate detailing is added that generally includes tall, narrow, double-hung sash windows with inverted U-shaped hood molds or other surround embellishments and porches supported by square columns with beveled corners. Two other Italianate style subtypes are found here, which include the center-gabled and the town house subtype characterized by wide, projecting cornices with brackets concealing a flat or low-pitched roof (see 1132 Mariposa Street).





1212 Lipan Street, 1885



1132 Mariposa Street, 1890

Beginning in the late 1880s, Queen Anne-styled cottages became popular in the neighborhood, a dozen or more in a design that is found infrequently elsewhere in Denver. Single-story cottages were built with a hipped-roof and a dominant front-facing gable or gabled-dormer. 1232 Lipan Street is an excellent example of this Queen Anne subtype. Other Queen Anne-styled cottages constructed here are the more typical design with overlapping or nested gables. The raised foundations of these and later residences differentiate them from the neighborhood's earliest homes.



1232 Lipan, ca 1890s

## Lincoln Park

The importance of place to West Siders has been evident since the first maps were drawn in 1859 that designated land for a park. In 1874, when Hunt's Addition was platted, two of its blocks were set aside for Clover Park. In 1885, West Siders finally acquired their park when the City of Denver purchased A.C. Hunt's homestead between West 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Avenues from Mariposa to Osage Streets. With the land, the City inherited a green oasis fed by the Merchant's Mill Ditch (renamed Mullen Ditch in 1878).



**Vista at Lincoln Park ca 1911**  
(Courtesy Denver Public Library)

Amid the park's greenery, there was a seamy side at its north end, where saloons along West 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue operated in the early 1890s. A ribald atmosphere existed causing locals to name the area "The Zoo."

After his 1904 election, Mayor Robert Speer brought new energy to the idea of public park space and a gradual implementation of principles of Denver's City Beautiful movement influenced Lincoln Park beginning in 1908. Construction started here on the City's first outdoor heated pool. Separate playgrounds were built for boys and girls, and dedicated by hundreds of children in 1909 and 1910. Also in 1910, a Mission style bathhouse was completed with indoor showers, toilets and 150 lockers. Soon the bathhouse was open year-round serving many nearby who still lacked indoor plumbing. Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Mission style of the bathhouse was a familiar and comforting architectural form to Latino residents.

### *Bath House for Lincoln Park*



*Design for Bath House in Lincoln Park.*

Ca 1910

In the 1920s, the City invested \$5,000 for more plantings and landscaping in Lincoln Park (DMF July-August 1930: 11). In 1926, the childcare facility known as Neighborhood House constructed a new building for their programs on the northeast corner of the Park. This building remains today.

The City continued its improvements to Lincoln Park during the Depression with staff initiating a robust outdoor sports program for neighborhood youth featuring swimming, diving, and

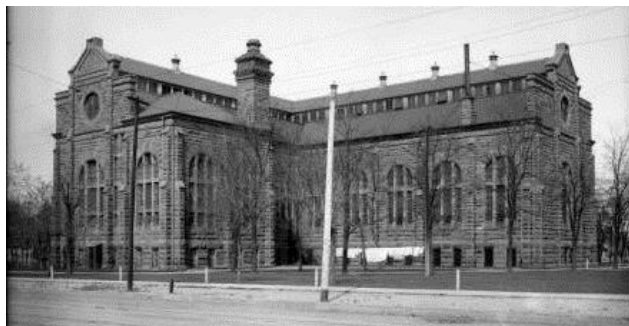
baseball. An amphitheater was constructed south of the pool and bathhouse, a project of the Works Project Administration (WPA) in 1936. In 1939, a new pool was constructed that was reported to be the largest in the state. Its dedication ceremony drew several thousand spectators to see the featured color-illuminated aquacade of divers and swimmers covered in gold paint. The Park was enhanced again in 1962 when a recreation center was built to provide year-round activities.

The Park is foundational to community identity. It has been a refuge from floods and a gathering place for the neighborhood, especially for youth in the summer months where the best divers and swimmers, like Thatcher Barela, are remembered decades later. The Park was integral to the participants of Denver's Chicano movement and is the location of Denver's first public community mural (painted in 1970 by Emanuel Martinez), and named "La Alma," Spanish for "soul." In 2013, the Park was officially renamed La Alma Lincoln Park in recognition of its significance as the soul of the community.

### **"Hotel Kalamath"**

On the day in 1874 that Hunt's Addition was platted, A.C. Hunt sold Block 1 to Arapahoe County. Over the years Hunt attempted to convince others that the West Side would be a good location for public buildings such as City Hall, the County Courthouse or perhaps even the State Capitol. In the early 1880s, when sites for these institutions were chosen, they were placed in east Denver. Arapahoe County still owned the block at West Colfax Avenue and Santa Fe Drive. In 1885, Firehouse #2 was constructed at the southwest corner, which was eventually replaced in the late 1920s.

In 1889, construction of the county jail began on the southern portion of this block, sited at the northeast corner of Capitol and South Eleventh Street (West 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Kalamath). Locally the jail was referred to as "Hotel Kalamath" and it remained in use from 1891 until 1956 when a new jail was constructed. (How the West Side Won: 172) This jail was demolished in 1963.



Arapahoe County Jail ca. 1900 (Courtesy of DPL)

In 1922, a two-courtroom courthouse was constructed on the northern portion of Block 1 by the City of Denver for its criminal division, at the south west corner of West Colfax Avenue and Speer Boulevard. A tunnel linked the jail with the courthouse, which operated as a courthouse until 1952. For a number of years afterward, the courthouse was used as offices until the building was vacated in 1984.

In 1998, the courthouse building was converted to the Bernie Valdez Hispanic Heritage Center, named for Bernie Valdez to honor his contributions to address the needs of Chicano and Latino youth. The Westside Courthouse building became a Denver Landmark in 1998 and is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

### **Prominent Westsiders**

Representative of the area during this period of growth are the early workers of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad (DxRG), including James R. Groves and Nathaniel W. Sample, Sr. These two men were neighbors, worked together and both were elected to political offices representing the West Side.

Sample came to Denver in 1871 as a foreman with the first three engines used by the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. Sample's son relayed to the Denver Post (10Dec1935) that his father "named the place," Burnham Yards, after George Burnham who was the head of Baldwin Locomotive Works of Philadelphia - who was responsible for sending Sample and the engines to Denver. (Burnham Yards Research Report, Historic Denver, Inc. with Square Moon Consultants, 2016/2017) Sample was described as a skillful mechanic and rose through the ranks of the DxRG until he was appointed general superintendent of the complete system in 1892. At that time, the Railroad covered more than 1600 miles of standard and narrow gauge track.

During Sample's early years in Denver he boarded on 12<sup>th</sup> Street in Auraria. In 1881, he moved to a new home, at 1207 S. Tenth Street (now 1203-1207 Lipan Street). In 1882 he was elected to City Council to serve a two-year term. Sample also served as the first President of the Burnham Library Association. In 1885, Sample was elected to the School Board for District #2 along with his co-worker James R. Groves.



Sample Residence at 1207 Lipan (built in 1881)

Groves lived from 1873 to 1879 at the Denver Pacific Junction, near 16<sup>th</sup> & Wynkoop Streets, working as a machinist for the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. In 1879, his wife Hattie purchased the lot for 1223 Kalamath Street, where they lived in 1880. Later that year, the census indicates that they moved one street west to 1233 Lipan Street. Groves was also promoted to



Master Mechanic for the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad and worked alongside Nathaniel Sample. In 1883, Groves moved away from Hunt's Addition to a house on Tenth Street north of Colfax Avenue. Two years later, with Sample, he was elected to School District #2's School Board. Later information on Groves' history is limited but, as late as 1893 grantee records show that he still owned property on Block 3 in Hunt's Addition, which he conveyed to a relative.



Grove Residence at 1223 Kalamath (built 1879)



Grove Residence at 1233 Lipan (built 1880)

In 1888 another prominent resident, Lewis Greenlee, came to Denver to serve as the second principal at Elmwood School in School District #2. Within three years he became District #2's Superintendent. When Denver's multiple school districts were consolidated in 1902, Greenlee was appointed the Assistant Superintendent for new Denver Public School District (DPS). Two years later he was named District Superintendent.

While working for the school district he lived at 1103 Lipan Street (extant). In 1908, he was elected City Treasurer. In 1915, Denver began a short-lived five-member commission form of city government in which Greenlee was elected Commissioner of Property. Greenlee later became President of the Interstate Trust Company and moved to 549 Elati Street, which was later demolished for fields at Baker School, the original site of West Side High school. Later Greenlee moved to east Denver. In 1952, DPS replaced both Central School and Franklin School with an International style elementary school at West Eleventh Avenue and Lipan Street designed by local architect, Alan B. Fisher, and named for Lewis Greenlee.

*"For all those who wish to learn."* These words of Ms. Emily Griffith's uncle inspired her to begin an "Opportunity School" in Denver in 1916 located nearby at 1250 Welton Street. Since its founding, the Emily Griffith Opportunity School has helped 1.5 million adults and young people of varying ages, races and incomes gain skills and education that improve their job prospects to find success in American society. Griffith believed that the public school system should provide all residents with opportunities to learn and improve themselves (Denver Landmark nomination, March 31, 2016: 6). The school has earned a national and international reputation for vocational and continuing education.

A long-time resident of the West Side, Ms. Griffith arrived in Denver in 1894 and taught at Central School, near her home at 1247 Lipan Street, a two-story Queen Anne residence. She later lived at 1162 Lipan Street, now demolished. She also taught at the 24<sup>th</sup> Street School, another school that served a working class and immigrant population. Ms. Griffith began night classes to teach English to parents and children alike. Despite having only an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education

herself, in 1904 she was appointed Colorado's Deputy Superintendent of Schools with an office in the State Capitol. Later she accepted the position of Colorado's Deputy State Superintendent of Instruction, which put her in the position to direct how all Colorado students were taught. After Ms. Griffith retired in 1933, she moved from Denver. In 1975, her legacy was memorialized with a stained-glass portrait in the Colorado State Capitol, one of few women so honored.

## **Commercial Stores and Merchants**

Another sign of the impending stability of the emerging neighborhood was the proliferation of local grocery stores beginning in 1879. One of the earliest grocers to move to Hunt's Addition, was Henry L. Pitzer. His first store was at 5<sup>th</sup> & Cherry (Larimer & 12<sup>th</sup> Streets) in 1871. By 1879, he was a resident at "*Pine, corner of 11<sup>th</sup>*" (West 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue & Kalamath Street) and is listed in the 1880 census with his wife Mary C. and his son Robert. By 1887, Pitzer had moved his residence to 1203 South Eleventh (Kalamath) with his grocery store at the rear of this property, addressed as *1015 12<sup>th</sup> Ave, West*, across from Central School. The site is now occupied by a multi-unit residential structure.

In 1890, William Hind, a mantel maker for Halleck Lumber Co., built the two-story brick store at 1135-35-39 Lipan and lived next door.



1135-1137-1139 Lipan

For almost 50 years a grocery occupied this building that was owned by the Hind Family at least through 1948. Another long-term grocery was at 1244 Mariposa Street, established by Mary Federlin in 1892, and continued as a grocery into the 1940s. Both of these former grocery buildings are extant.

## **The Emergence of Santa Fe Drive**

Lincoln Park thrived as a neighborhood of modest homes and local businesses in the late 19th Century. After 1905, the business hub for local shopping began its shift from Kalamath Street to Santa Fe Drive with commercial development accelerating. Santa Fe Drive became home to two department stores, Woolworth's and J.C. Penney, as well as drug stores and movie theaters and a main post office station was located there, which remained for many decades. Numerous streetcar lines crossed the area, including lines down Mariposa and Kalamath Streets. Today's Regional Transportation District (RTD) bus lines continue to follow along these streets, much like the early cable car routes in the 1880s. A former resident, Eugene Vervalin, remembers the complete neighborhood of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century,

*"... the neighborhood of bungalows, terraces, and two-story residences spread mostly to the west – Santa Fe Drive, West Colfax Avenue, and beyond. It was a neighborhood of backyard fences, [and] dirt alleys that contained many young people."* (Front Range Research Associates: 50-52)

Land that had been dotted with small farms in the 1870s had developed over the next 50 years into a close-knit, thriving, stable community. In the 1870s, when A.C. Hunt sold Block 1 in Hunt's Addition to Arapahoe County, he had hopes that august public buildings would be sited in West Denver. It appears, however, that vestiges of the early rivalry between east/west Denver continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when, in 1922, the City chose Block 1 for the site of its criminal division courthouse. Nonetheless, the neighborhood operated and felt more like a small town than the big city.

## **Neighborhood House**

A childcare facility for Denver children, known as Neighborhood House, was established in 1902 on Galapago Street in a former private medical college. Children of families whose mothers needed to work were taken care of at the nursery. Many of these mothers were widows or married to sick or unemployed husbands. The nursery would care for these children from 7:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. In 1909, seventy-six children were enrolled in the program.

The facility was open in the evening as well for use by young working women and young men. Ten resident workers lived at Neighborhood House and anyone interested in social work was invited to move in, paying weekly board. Neighborhood House was operated as part of the settlement house movement that emphasized social reform rather than personal problems as the proper focus of the charity. Funding for Neighborhood House came from the local community chest, a forerunner of the Denver-founded United Way system.

In 1926, Neighborhood House built a new facility located on the northwest corner of Lincoln Park, at 1265 Mariposa Street. This is a two-story wood frame structure with stucco and brick cladding, designed in an English Norman Cottage with Tudor style influences. Decorative timbering adorn the house, with large front facing gables, dormers and a prominent chimney.

Over the years the Neighborhood House has been used as a Mutual Aid Society office, location of the Boys Club of Denver, housing for a Head Start program and, more recently the location for Denver's Bridge Project, serving young people "aging out" of foster care.

Shortly after the new Neighborhood House facility opened, a severe economic downturn would strike in 1929. Efforts to address its dire impacts would change the face of this stable, cohesive community.

The Neighborhood House is now owned by the City and County of Denver.

## **La Alma Lincoln Park Evolves: 1930s - 1950s**

As the Great Depression swept across America, communities changed as families sought better economic opportunities. Federal government attention to public housing issues reached a turning point due to the extreme unemployment and other related pressures. La Alma Lincoln Park was no different. The 1930s saw new lines drawn on the neighborhood map that redefined and reallocated the land. Two policy categories that influenced West Denver in long-lasting ways related to transportation and housing.

### **Transportation Policies**

Evolving modes of transportation played a significant and ongoing role in changing the face and livelihood of La Alma Lincoln Park. First, The Trapper's Trail became the wagon road, Ferry Street and finally Kalamath Street, stretching south to link with what is now Santa Fe Drive. Most significantly, the arrival of the railroads laid down a man-made boundary that came to define the western border of the neighborhood, both insulating and isolating it. Then trolleys began to travel along Kalamath and other local streets continuing through the 1930s, but public transit policy began to shift to one that was auto-centric, resulting in residential streets converted into commuter arterials.

In 1935, tree lawns were cut down along Santa Fe Drive as part of a street widening program, disrupting the vibrant shopping district. Speeding cars close to the sidewalks made the environment less pedestrian friendly ([How The West Side Won](#), Phil Goodstein, 2015, page 209). In 1937, a viaduct was constructed along West 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, extending from Mariposa Street crossing over the railroad tracks and the South Platte River to Umatilla Street. This converted West 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue from a local neighborhood street to an arterial.

Residential street changes continued every few years until both West 6<sup>th</sup> and West 8<sup>th</sup> Avenues, and later Santa Fe Drive and Kalamath Street, had become arterials. The removal of trees and narrowing of sidewalks to accommodate more lanes of traffic "destroyed the business activity of the community" (The Life and Times of Richard Castro: 36). City efforts to alter more streets finally halted in the late 1960s when Richard Castro, representing the West Side, successfully



rebuffed the city's plans to convert 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenues from Lincoln Park to Cheeseman Park into a one-way couplet.

Since the 1860s, the term “West Siders” referred to residents who lived between the South Platte River and Cherry Creek with three enclaves comprising this cohesive community. Those who lived north of Colfax Avenue lived in “Auraria”. Those who lived between West Colfax Avenue and West 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue lived in “Lincoln Park” and those who lived south of West 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue lived in “Baker” (Veronica Barela, April 20, 2017). The construction of the viaducts and the one-way street conversions served as new man-made barriers, which much like mountains, rivers or railroad tracks, divided and isolated these once seamless neighborhoods.

## **Housing Policies**

The Great Depression prompted federal, state, and local governments to address perceived substandard housing and to encourage home-ownership via new public housing legislation. In 1933, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation Act (HOLC) was established to refinance home mortgages that were in default as a result of bank failures during the Depression, with the hope of preventing home foreclosures. Color-coded maps were drawn to indicate the level of potential risk of offering credit.

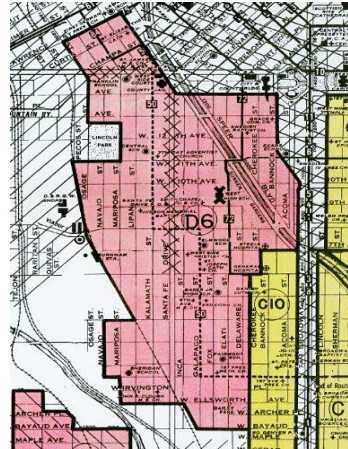
A 1938 report of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, which mapped and described Denver neighborhoods and ranked their favorability for loan access, graded the La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood its lowest category (red) and included the following description:

*Because of its proximity to the railroad yards and shops, this area has always been occupied by railroad workers principally. Structures near the railroad yards are cheap, having deteriorated considerably since 1929. Some of these ramshackle terraces have been picked up by speculators. It is a good rent area. Sales have been slow. Speculators have been reasonably active in this area for years. (FHLBB report, Section D-9)*

The report also noted that “in the northwest part of the area and bordering the industrial district to the west is a Mexican concentration” [along the South Platte River], despite a 1941 WPA Housing study that identified only 4.7% of Lincoln Park residents as Mexican. The ethnic concentration here, however, was twice the average of other Denver neighborhoods (4.7% versus 2.7%).

Discriminatory attitudes found their way into the maps created by HOLC, and resulted in discriminatory housing and financial policies that were both punishing and manipulative in low-income “redlined” neighborhoods for decades to come.

Although the HOLC program ended in 1951, recent analysis by economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago shows that negative consequences from the use of these maps has lasted for decades. Differences in the level of racial segregation, homeownership rates, home values and credit scores are still apparent where these boundaries were drawn. (New York Times, Emily Badger, August 24, 2017)



(1938 Denver Residential Security Map)

Locally, in 1938 the Denver Housing Authority (DHA) was established after an investigation into the living conditions in Denver for low-income families. The new Board of Commissioners began working to replace unsatisfactory housing.

A 1941 WPA study provided a number of detailed tables and narrative descriptions of the status of low-income housing in Denver across a number of variables. The report found that in La Alma Lincoln Park almost two-thirds of the houses (58%) had been built before 1895 and 85% had been built before 1915. Only ten homes had been built from 1930 to 1939. Almost one-third of the homes (28.2%) were reported to be in 'good condition' and 30.6% were 'owner occupied'.

The disinvestment that began with the Great Depression and changing housing preferences, devalued the older homes in La Alma Lincoln Park. Slightly less than half of the homes were reported to be substandard, either physically (in need of repairs or lacking key amenities) occupationally (if two or more families live there or more than 1.5 persons per room), or both.

The 1941 report also showed that more than a third of the homes lacked a private toilet and/or bath (36.8%), and 28% lacked facilities for central heating. More homes had ice boxes for refrigeration (63%) than had gas or electric refrigerators (13%) and 24% had no refrigeration. Yet, the HOLC map suggested that providing credit or refinancing in this area would be too risky, which only allowed the housing to deteriorate further.

This data was ultimately used to support policies that restricted capital access to residents and justified large scale redevelopment and displacement.

## Herndon and Juanita Davis

Despite the challenges the neighborhood faced during this period, the community continued to foster long-standing, notable residents. Among them was one of Colorado's most famous 20<sup>th</sup>



Century artists, Herndon Davis (1901-1962). Davis lived at 1323 Kalamath Street with his wife Juanita. Although his fame rests primarily on a small, whimsical painting which has come to be called "The Face on the Bar Room Floor," painted in the Teller House Hotel in Central City in 1936, Davis is also famous for the history found in his portraits and illustrations. He is also remembered for his artistic record of local architecture of many buildings that would be lost before the start of the historic preservation movement in Colorado.

Davis worked as an illustrator for both the *Denver Post* and the *Rocky Mountain News*. In 1945 he painted a mural of the *Rocky Mountain News* Press Room in the basement card room of the Denver Press Club, where it remains intact, one of few of Davis' works to have survived.

"The Face on the Bar Room Floor" has become the Mona Lisa of Colorado tourism. The story of its midnight creation by a tipsy artist has entered Colorado lore, along with the story, at Davis' death in 1962, that the face might have been that of his wife "Nita" Davis.

Edna Juanita Cotter (1890) was born in Jamaica and schooled in Canada. She was a window dresser for Saks Fifth Avenue in New York City before moving with Davis to their home on Kalamath Street. Known by her neighbors of 40 years as a great cook, she died in 1975.



Juanita Davis, at home, circa 1930s



In 1940-41, Davis painted a series of watercolor renderings of buildings now regarded as Colorado landmarks. This series was published under the title “Survivors of Yesteryear” in a weekly series in the Sunday News, with narratives by Joseph Emerson Smith. The series included a painting of the last surviving structure from Camp Weld (at left), a portion of the original Officer’s Quarters, a cottage at West 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Vallejo Street that was lived in by the Rivera Family for more than a decade. At the time, it was likely the oldest continuously inhabited residence in Denver.

### **New Affordable Housing: a response to “blight”**

To improve the living conditions of low-income families in Denver, the Denver Housing Authority began to build new affordable housing. The first of four housing projects in Denver was constructed as the Lincoln Park Homes, which opened in 1942. Located south of West Colfax Avenue along Mariposa Street, the new housing complex was constructed where multiple blocks of Denver’s oldest housing had been the homes of Spanish surnamed residents. At the start, however, Lincoln Park Homes was restricted to “whites only” and in its first years the units were reserved for displaced defense workers and later for returning veterans.

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, labor shortages in the U.S. generated on again/off again immigration policies, especially for agricultural workers and later (World War II) for industrial labor. Beginning in the 1920s, Colorado’s sugar beet industry encouraged Mexicans migrants to work as seasonal labor and later in year-round jobs. It was during this period that the Spanish surnamed population on the West Side grew in greater numbers, which included both long-time Colorado residents of Spanish or Mexican descent, as well as newcomers from Mexico. Here they formed a vibrant, supportive community evidenced by local businesses such as the family-owned, cultural gathering center “Casa Mayan,” sited on historic 9<sup>th</sup> Street on what would become the Auraria campus.

The onset of World War II created a new demand for workers to support the war effort and housing needs surged throughout Denver. To mitigate the labor shortages, particularly in the agricultural sector, the federal government established the Bracero Program (1942-1964) to attract Mexicans as guest workers to the U.S. The Program’s intent was to supply workers for short-term, primarily agricultural labor contracts. Among the Program’s guarantees was free housing. The 1945 City Directory conveys the Program’s local impact with a noticeable increase in Spanish-surnamed residents living in the La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood.



By the late 1940s, DHA removed its occupancy restrictions at the Lincoln Park Homes and the Spanish surnamed proportion of the population in La Alma Lincoln Park grew further over the next two decades. The 1950 census records show that “White, with Spanish surname” represented 15% of census tract’s population and then jumped to 55% (in a reduced census tract area) in the 1960 census. 80% of census responders identified as “Persons of Spanish language or surname” in the 1970 census, which marked the peak concentration in La Alma Lincoln Park. By 1980, the percentage of Latino residents had decreased slightly, to 75%.

The opening of the Lincoln Park Homes to non-white residents was a critical step in reestablishing affordable housing in this neighborhood, especially for Spanish surnamed residents. In Colorado in the 1940s, only 11% of Spanish-surnamed families owned their homes. Whites had higher average family incomes and home-ownership rates than either Blacks or Spanish-surnamed residents. Disparities were also reported on infant mortality rates with Spanish-surnamed families experiencing a rate three times higher than Whites (205/1000 versus 71/1000). (Abbott, McComb, Leonard: 299)

The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) formed in 1929 to promote the mutual obligations of republican civic duty to achieve equality and rights. Its political agenda focused on citizenship training and naturalization of “foreign-born Mexicans” and English language training. It actively supported anti-discriminatory litigation and legislation (particularly regarding public schools) and strict control of further immigration from Mexico (Wiki).

Despite LULAC’s efforts, disparities experienced by the Spanish surnamed population went beyond average income, home-ownership or infant mortality rates to also include access to education and criminal justice. In 1947, Denver’s new Mayor, Quigg Newton, established a Committee on Human Relations, which was a response to two Grand Juries in 1946 that investigated the Denver Police Department. The Grand Juries were charged to look for a “pattern of abuse and mistreatment among “Spanish-Americans” but resulted in no indictments despite testimony to the contrary (RMN 13Aug1946 via “No Prejudice Here... note 105). Mayor Newton appointed Helen Peterson, a Cheyenne Ogala Sioux, as the first Director of Denver’s Committee on Human Relations.

The appointment of Ms. Peterson may not have remedied the entrenched discrimination LALP residents faced, but she was later recognized nationally for her work as Executive Director of the National Congress of the American Indian (1954-1962) and then as an official in the federal Indian Affairs Commission, a forerunner to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. (The Oregonian, obituary, July 15, 2000) Ms. Peterson was an early catalyst and leader for the social activism that later came to define the La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood in the decades that followed.

### **Auraria Community Center**

DHA opened a second public housing complex in 1954 known as South Lincoln Park Homes. To serve these new residents and to compliment the recreational and social programs that were then offered at the Lincoln Park Homes Community Center, DHA purchased the Craftsman style bungalow at 1178 Mariposa for use as the Auraria Community Center (ACC). ACC also

acquired a duplex around the corner at 1120-1122 W. 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which was connected to 1178 Mariposa by a new extension. The Auraria Community Center offered multiple programs including sewing classes, youth recreational activities, Saturday morning drop-in activities for youth, and Mothers' Morning Out programs. The Center had a meeting hall and became one of the few available gathering places for Spanish surnamed residents (Delfie Martinez, interview June xx, 2017).

Beginning in 1962, Auraria Community Center staff expanded programming with a five-year grant to establish the Community Organizing Project linked with a six-year federal program called "Community Renewal Program" (CRP). CRP looked for new ways to attack urban blight on a comprehensive and more massive scale to achieve urban renewal and bridge the gap between physical and social planning (Community Renewal Programs: A Bibliography, May 1965). The Denver Urban Observatory at the University of Colorado, Graduate School of Urban Studies, noted in its 1982 program evaluation that:

*...Lincoln Park is one of Denver's oldest neighborhoods... It has become a center for the Hispanic community in Denver.... The neighborhood was designated a blighted area in the 1972 Community Renewal Program, based on a variety of housing and socio-economic indicators. (Lincoln Park Evaluation Study, 1982: 2)*

A separate goal of the Community Organizing Project's multi-year initiatives was to develop citizen participation. For this purpose it created the West Side Improvement Association (WSIA) in 1963, which later had offices in the ACC. WSIA was a budding neighborhood organization learning how to generate community activism when the federal Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 was passed to address systemic inequalities in education and jobs promoted by President Lyndon Johnson as his "War on Poverty." Eventually these programs and local players became intertwined with the local Chicano movement as the 1960s progressed.

Influential West Sider, Adolpho Gomez Sr., recalled the two decades of decline before the 1960s. Reduced buying power along with new competition from downtown and zoning changes altered the neighborhood-based commerce. The result was the Safeway and Piggly Wiggly grocery stores being replaced by auto body repair shops and eventually to the closing of the daily shops, the Woolworth's and J.C. Penney department stores, the two drugstores and the three movie theaters (Life and Times of Richard Castro). Government housing policies, including Denver zoning laws that prohibited new residential construction in the neighborhood, coupled with street expansion and one-way conversations through the neighborhood, made possible a decades-long, slow-motion decline for La Alma Lincoln Park residents.

League of United Latin American Citizens' (LULAC) emphasis on assimilation began to wane as disparities frustratingly persisted. A time of confrontation and reclamation of cultural identity was about to unfold. Ironically, a June, 1960 Denver Post article recalling the history of Camp Weld reported that the home of Mr. and Mrs. Carlos Rivera at West 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Vallejo Street was the surviving remnant of the long-gone 1861-1865 encampment. The Riveras had lived in the home for sixteen years when the article was published (Denver Post, *History Was Forged at Obscure Denver Site*, June 26, 1960, p22a). The presence of the Riveras in this now-demolished historic home is emblematic of the identity that La Alma Lincoln Park had grown

into over the course of its first century and that its residents were about to claim and own in the next decades.

The succeeding decades saw the emergence of civil rights activism and a war on poverty that also spawned pragmatic community organizing. It was centered on the preservation of community identity and control, leveraging federal, state, and local programs to defend a resilient residential community that would survive the erasure of original Auraria.

## **1960s and 70s**

Over 100 years, The Westside became the soul of Denver's Mexican community. The people who have been so intrinsic to the history of this neighborhood self-identify as Raza, Mestizos, Aztecas, Mexican-Americans, Mexicanos, Latinos, Latinx and Chicanos; and like their predecessors, they are Westsiders, loyal to the neighborhood and one another, grounded in a specific sense of place.

### **Mexicanos in Colorado and the Westside**

The generation that predated the Chicano Movement Generation, the Mexican American Generation is defined as the first group of Mexicanos to significantly identify as U.S. citizens (ref: Chicano!); but in Colorado, people of indigenous and European heritage were settling in what is now northern New Mexico and southern Colorado in the 1500s, before the territory was officially claimed by Mexico (1821) or the United States (Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 1848) and long before Colorado statehood (1876). People from northern New Mexico and southern Colorado migrated at different times throughout the centuries to look for work in the mines, fields and factories in response to economic conditions and to organized and systematic political pressure designed to relieve them of their land. Many Westsiders can trace their roots back to southern Colorado. According to Su Teatro Executive Artistic Director Tony Garcia, the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) provided another significant wave of migration. Union Station was a major stop for people fleeing the violence of the Mexican Revolution, contributing to the growth of Auraria.

### **Legacies of Civic Engagement and Convergence**

For generations, mutualistas (mutual aid societies) like the SPMDTU had been sustaining Mexicanos in poor communities but the 1930s and 1940s saw the rise of LULAC and the American GI Forum. The American GI Forum was organized in Texas in 1948 when Mexican-American veterans of World War II were denied services. Mexican American veterans accounted for the highest number of Medal of Honor awardees among World War II veterans, yet they were denied benefits when they returned home. The American GI Forum mission soon expanded to involve non-veteran issues such as voting rights, jury selection, and education desegregation.

Voluntary associations and mutualistas like La Sociedad Protección Mutua de Trabajadores Unidos, e.g., the SPMDTU (established in the San Luis Valley in 1900), LULAC (established in 1929) and the American GI Forum (established in 1948), speak to the historical penchant of Mexican Americans for organizing and civic participation. In Denver, the efficacy of voluntary organizations predated the Chicano Movement which seeded an explosion of neighborhood and community organizations like The Westside Action Center, The Denver Inner City Parish, NEWSED-CDC and Su Teatro in the 1970s.

Westside resident Paul Martinez helped to organize and became the first president of the Lincoln Chapter of the Forum in 1962. Paul's father, Alfonso Martinez, moved his family to Lincoln Park in 1941, settling at 1378 Mariposa where they lived until the late 1990s. After marrying, Paul moved with his wife Delfie to 1319 Lipan. GI Forum members met in a variety of places including the Auraria Community Center, at 1178 Mariposa. Local members, such as Art and Teresa Valadez (1219 Kalamath), raised funds for scholarships among other service activities. From 1969 to 1979, the GI Forum led the national boycott against the Coors Brewing Company hoping to change the corporation's discriminatory employment practices affecting Chicanos.

The 1960s and 70s brought both tumult and opportunity to the Westside and the period is marked by energetic public participation. Chicanos forcefully articulated their cultural identity and demanded social justice. Specific progressive policies and initiatives created growth in civil society and stimulated economic development. Machiavellian politics took hold in some sectors. The Westside was a bustling hub in the middle of the fray.

The Westside is a neighborhood known for how community members cared for each other, how they organized their own community institutions and infrastructure, how they resisted and how they persevered. One of the best examples of this legacy is The Denver Inner City Parish, founded in 1960 by the Mennonite Church and originally housed in the Yellow Jets – e.g. the housing projects.

The Denver Inner City Parish became a force for the community at a time when churches were changing. Long established institutions were leaving the cities as the GI Bill and anti-segregation sentiment informed the move of European Americans to the suburbs. The void created an opportunity for progressive, nontraditional entities like DICP to take hold. The Denver Inner City Parish, a nondenominational community refuge subsequently moved to 910 Galapago St. Steve Johnson became the Pastor at the Parish in 1965, when he was attending the University of Denver. He started programs such as The Young Fathers Program, La Academia de la Gente, a school that ran for 53 years, a senior program and a food bank. The Denver Inner City Parish was a meaningful institution at the heart of the community. Much like St. Cajetan's Church which served as a community center in Auraria. These free spaces and many others like them in the Westside were places for people to meet, to socialize, to exchange information and ideas and to practice democracy.



An influx of resources provided in part by War on Poverty programs provided Westsiders with new tools to fortify their efficacy, which was needed as an unforgiving local political environment, the tumult of the Civil Rights Era and the war in Vietnam began to affect the neighborhood.

## **The War on Poverty**

In 1962, the Auraria Community Center had expanded its programming under the *Community Organizing Project*. One of its multi-year initiatives was the creation in 1963 of the West Side Improvement Association (WSIA), a budding neighborhood organization with the goal of developing citizen participation. WSIA's most significant contribution to the community may have been its positioning of West Side residents to take full advantage of President Lyndon Johnson's Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the *War on Poverty*. Coming on the heels of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, President Johnson's goal was to eliminate poverty, expand education opportunities, increase the safety net for the poor and unemployed, and tend to health and financial needs of the elderly.

This Act of 1964 brought an influx of federal dollars to the neighborhood, allocated through what was called "*Denver Opportunity*." Lincoln Park residents used the initiative to attack localized inequities with a network of positive, varied, and coordinated programs. One of the most influential of those in this network was the job corps and work-training program that provided work experience and training for youth ages 16 through 21. There were also work-study programs for college students from low-income families that offered part-time employment. When the Neighborhood Youth Corps was established in 1965, it found a ready-audience in Denver's Chicano youth.

War on Poverty programs and its descendants in the form of other Federal programs gave residents and organizers access to resources that had never previously been available, which they used to create an infrastructure for organizing, advocacy and direct service on a larger scale. War on Poverty programs interacted with other community-based initiatives and created a nexus of protest, advocacy, political participation and civic engagement and an authentic, local, and homegrown civil society. Although residents and organizers leveraged War on Poverty programs, they did not abandon their critical analysis.

In January 1965, West Side resident, Anita Alire, mother of five living in the North Lincoln Park Homes on the 1400 block of Navajo Street, was one of 14 featured speakers at the *National Conference on Poverty in the Southwest*. She asked the assembly,

*"Is this great War on Poverty just one more political exploitation? Who will be conducting the programs at the local level?... The same bigots who for years have discriminated against us economically, as well as politically, and exploited us for years?....Those same who patted us on the back for a short time before elections only to forget our existence after election?"*

Conference organizers, a cadre of almost five dozen private organizations, admit in the event's summary report, "*Leaders among ethnic or racial minorities are seldom cultivated by the*

*powers-that-be unless their efforts would be of value to long-existing goals of the “Anglos”* (1965:11).

Anita Alire exemplified the savvy and shrewdness that Westsiders are known for: she became a nurse, sent her children to college and taught them to follow her lead by becoming vocal activists making a difference in the lives of others. Her son, Jay Alire, taught business /technology education at the Community College of Denver for 28 years and for a decade was an organizer of the annual Sand Creek Massacre Healing Run/Walk. Westsiders were always resilient and resourceful: as a community they had long put practices and knowledge into place that allowed them to make the most of resources when they flowed their way.

Despite their active participation in various *War on Poverty* programs and local non-profit organizations, key jobs in the neighborhood were still held by whites as late as 1969. The principle of community control had begun to drive local action (Life and Times of Richard Castro, page 134). The underlying question arose on how best to achieve local control: within the system or by going around it

A broad and deep field of leaders in The Westside confronted this question again and again. One such leader was Waldo Benavidez. Waldo Benavidez was called the “conscience” of the West Side. He served in many positions including as a Director of the Auraria Community Center. Waldo Benavidez’s main interest was neighborhood preservation, both of buildings and people. For more than 25 years he managed the community center and a food bank. He marched for civil rights in the 1960's and relishes the memory of his first vote for president, for John F. Kennedy, in 1960. He shepherded many community achievements among which were working with neighbors to keep the Byers Branch Library open, to keep pornographic movie theaters off Santa Fe, and to prevent the Greyhound Bus terminal from moving to West Colfax - which generated a new city ordinance prohibiting commercial ventures in residential areas. Waldo Benavidez mentored Gerry Garcia, who at 22 years old became the director of The Denver Inner City Parish from 1969-1970.

Throughout the era, residents involved themselves in the nuts and bolts issues of daily life: jobs, housing and health concerns. Richard Castro was Director of the Auraria Community Center in 1972 while Celina Benavidez was Secretary for the West Side Coalition. Celina Benavidez and her twin sister Cecelia Garcia were active Chicanas who, as teens, participated in lettuce and grape boycotts standing against Teamsters driving in their tractor trailers.

Ms. Benavidez and Ms. Garcia participated in the Neighborhood Youth Corps by working for Denver Parks and Recreation Department. As children, they “experienced segregation.... but after college, they recognized that “education and politics were two elements that provided them access to career growth, entrepreneurial experiences and stepping stones. They found support from non-traditional sponsors such as the student leaders in UMAS and the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund” (Cecelia Garcia biography).

In 1972, research revealed that incidents of strep throat were “killing our babies in our community at higher rates than the infant mortality rates in Vietnam” according Celina Benavidez. When Richard Castro saw this research, he created a campaign to raise community

awareness to combat this illness. A coloring book featuring an imaginary *Strep Throat Aztec* god was designed by local artist John Flores as both a reward and as an expression of cultural affirmation. Celina and Cecelia started knocking on doors asking parents to bring their children to the Mariposa Health Clinic to get a throat culture. Those who did, received one of the new coloring books. The initiative proved very successful and soon the incidences of strep throat in the community were drastically reduced.

Into the 1970s, the descendants of Alfonso Martinez continued to take leadership positions within the community. Paul Martinez' brother, Lawrence, also grew up at 1378 Mariposa and later lived at 1324 Lipan with his bride, Ramona, a West High graduate. For six years they lived in half the duplex that was 1324-1326 Lipan.

Lawrence helped start and served as the President of the Colorado Chapter of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA) in 1972. LCLAA was formed to gain union recognition in the workplace for Chicanos and to advocate in Congress on issues effecting families. This grassroots organization works to secure job rights and protections, and gives voice to improving justice and change in Latino communities.

After Lawrence and his wife, Ramona, moved out of the West Side, Ramona was elected to Denver's City Council. Eventually, she was appointed by President William Clinton to serve as an At-large member of the Democratic National Committee where she served for 16 years on the Hispanic Caucus, two years as its President. Another Martinez brother, Cecil, still lives in the 1300 block of Lipan with his wife Frances in the home they have owned since before 1960.

## **Action Centers**

The Economic Opportunity Act's Community Action Programs also created "*action centers*," where every resident of the community age 16 years or older was considered a voting member. The Action Centers provided financial support for local anti-poverty campaigns in urban and rural areas, on Indian reservations, and among migrant workers.

Denver established several "*action centers*," including the West Side Action Center and the Platte Valley Action Center, each with a resident-led council. In 1966, 1200 votes were cast by West Side Action Council members on possible projects and programs to initiate and implement. On the West Side, these eventually included: a remedial reading program, literacy instruction, a tenants rights advocacy effort, a community information center, a job training program known as Operation SER, West Denver Legal Services, an "Emergency House" at 1118 Santa Fe known as La Sangre Housing Corporation, a mental health counseling and treatment program, job placement service, assistance in applying for food stamps, a food bank, furniture/clothing donations, and the West Side Housing Service.

The education and job training services made available through the Action Center programs and the Neighborhood Youth Corps gradually began to address systemic inequalities against which the Chicano community had been fighting. These programs resulted in West Side residents eventually getting hired for local jobs with local non-profits, at the local pools and recreation

centers and elsewhere in the public and private sectors and these programs dovetailed with the burgeoning Chicano Civil Rights Movement, especially on the West Side.

NEWSED, a community development corporation that was originally a program of the Westside Action Center is a lasting legacy of the era, and still a major force in the neighborhood. NEWSED secured major grants, including funding from the Anne E. Casey Foundation, attracted a major grocery store (King Soopers), helped build two shopping centers, and started the country's largest annual Cinco de Mayo celebration along Santa Fe Dr. The event attracted so many people that it eventually moved to the much bigger Civic Center Park. NEWSED began several programs to facilitate home ownership in the neighborhood, including one that bought, refurbished and sold single-family houses. NEWSED currently controls two sites with 12 and 38 units of affordable housing, respectively and is developing a third.

The infrastructure for political participation and civic engagement provided by neighborhood organizations is but one example of the intensity that Westsiders demonstrated throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Westsiders participated in mainstream politics and they participated in political protest.

### State Representative Election 1964

John F. Kennedy's 1960 campaign for President sparked Frank Anaya's interest in politics. Anaya was a native West Sider (1939-1972) and another active GI Forum member. Athletics gave this West High and the University of Northern Colorado graduate a place to put his young energy. In 1964, Frank Anaya was elected to the Colorado House of Representatives, over his rival Rudolfo "Corky" Gonzales. Anaya was the second youngest lawmaker to serve in the Colorado Legislature. During his term, Anaya sponsored the bill that created the *Colorado Commission on Spanish-Surnamed Citizens* and was selected to chair the Commission in 1965. While representing West Denver in the state House of Representatives, Anaya lived at 1102 W. 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue. In the spring of 1966, Anaya said, *"Despite the differences in tactics and fragmented leadership, there is more unity among the Spanish-surnamed people today than ever before"*. Anaya is also quoted as saying *"what is good for the Spanish-surnamed community is good for the whole community"* (RMN 11May1966:36).

While in college, he joined the Young Democrats, at age 20 before he was eligible to vote. In 1964, he joined the *Viva Johnson!* effort and later headed other West Side "Viva" organizations, for former U.S. Rep. Byron Rogers in 1970 and former Denver Mayor William McNichols in 1971. Anaya with (l to r) Vincente Ximenes, Joe Herrera, and Roger Cisneros. (Courtesy *Denver Post* 30Sept1964).



(Courtesy The Denver Post)



Anaya ran for re-election in 1966 but failed to secure a slot on Denver's at-large ballot that had been found unconstitutional in 1964. He continued his local activism serving for a time as an officer in the Skyline Chapter of the American GI Forum. Later Anaya worked as the Director of Platte Valley Action Center, for *Denver Opportunity*, Denver's War on Poverty program.

In the 1960s African Americans, Chicanos and other communities of color began to revise their assimilationist and participatory approach to inclusion in favor of a more insistent and uncompromising approach. Racism, segregation, forced relocation and displacement of native communities, communities of color and other poor communities. Consistently poor treatment, lack of opportunity and police brutality had taken their toll on communities of color. The Civil Rights Movement, labor movements and growing discord over the War in Vietnam converged in a national landscape that invited protest and fueled community organizing.

### **The Chicano Movement on the Westside**

"The Movement came about due to discrimination," stated Dr. Ramon del Castillo, Professor at Metropolitan State University, in the 2014 production of *Jústicia Y Libertad* (Colorado Experience, Rocky Mountain PBS); discrimination in jobs, in education, and in the justice system. "Chicanos wanted parity, recognition and control over their own destiny; an opportunity to fully contribute" (Federico Pena, *Jústicia Y Libertad*, 2014). It integrated political activism with a Cultural renaissance in education, arts, music, theater, graphic arts, and literature.

The Chicano Movement represents the convergence of independent issues: land rights, labor rights, opposition to the war, civil rights as embodied in the Civil Rights Movement, cultural identity, lack of equity in education and the inadequacy of dominant political institutions to represent the issues of Chicanos.

**Land Rights.** An early aim was the restoration of land grants that had been codified in the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hildago at the conclusion of the Mexican American War.

**Labor Rights.** Founded in 1962 by César Chavez and Dolores Huerta, the United Farm Workers (UFW) brought the struggle of farm workers out of the fields and into cities across the U.S., organizing for better pay and safer working conditions for farm workers through nonviolent tactics such as pilgrimages, boycotts, pickets, and strikes (nfwf.org accessed 11.18.18). A march from Pueblo to Denver, Colorado to boycott lettuce in 1970 brought the nationwide boycott to the streets of West Denver.

**Equity in Education.** A 1947 U.S. Supreme Court decision (*Mendez v. Westminster*) specifically prohibited segregating Latino children from white children. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment guaranteed equal protection to all racial groups, not just blacks and whites (*Hernandez v. Texas*). Fifteen years later, the ongoing unequal access to facilities, the lack of bilingual programs, and disrespect for cultural heritage in many public education programs, led to high school walk-outs that began in Los Angeles, California in 1968 and sparked the blow out at Denver's West High School in the spring of 1969.

Voting and Political Rights. A series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions in 1964 establishing the “one man, one vote” doctrine. Denver, like other cities, had a multi-member electoral district for state legislative seats in which two or more representatives were elected at-large from a single district. This form of allocation of legislative seats was found unconstitutional in the ruling on *Reynolds v. Sims*. A few years earlier, the Denver-based, non-partisan group, *Los Voluntarios*, was founded with a focus on voter registration.

*Los Voluntarios* was founded by local Chicano leader, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales who was also the state coordinator for *Viva Kennedy!* After a conflict with Mayor Tom Currigan, Gonzales was fired as the first Director of *Denver Opportunity’s* Neighborhood Youth Corps. Subsequently, he became the charismatic leader of the *Crusade for Justice* in 1966, which helped fortify the Chicano Movement, a rebellion against injustice (Dr. Ramon del Castillo, *Jústicia Y Libertad*, 2014). The leadership and high profile of Gonzales brought national prominence to Denver’s Chicano Movement.

## **1969 – A year of protests**

Westside residents describe the turmoil of 1969 as an inevitable result of “always being disrespected, always being treated as inferior.” (Tony Lucero story circle- Su Teatro 1/10/19). Counselors at West High School asked students “Do you want to go to jail or do you want to go into the service?” (Thomas Trujillo- story circle- Su Teatro 1/10/19). Residents recall extreme segregation and poverty. “When I was seven years old, I sold papers from 6 p.m.- 2a.m. At 13 I started busing tables and at 18, I was married and out of the house” (Tony Lucero – story circle Su Teatro 1/10/19). “Everyone had a hustle. Shining shoes, selling papers, shoveling snow” (Rich Rodriguez story circle – Su Teatro 1/10/19).

Recurring unequal treatment of Westsiders resulted in repeated demands for an independent police review board. In 1956 Paul Martinez was shot three times by a white man who was never charged with assault. This continued into the 1960s and 1970s, as men of color were beaten or shot by the police who acted with impunity. In 1968 local media repeated police claims that a young man had been shot in the chest when the Coroner’s reports confirmed that the youth had been shot in the back (La Gente, *Ruldolfo Gonzales and the Advent of the Crusade for Justice*, Ernesto Vigil, page 173). The young man was Louie Pineda, allegedly vandalizing cars for parts at O’Meara Ford at Colfax and Mariposa. His death nurtured bitter resentment among Westsiders who placed “Justice for Louie” signs in their windows (ref: Tony Garcia).

The West High School blowouts were a response to rising tensions that had been fed by racism and segregation. The backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement and opposition to the war in Vietnam (which had begun with demonstrations in 1964) and the growing efficacy of Chicanos in asserting positive cultural identity and in articulating an organized political response to labor issues under Cesar Chavez in California and to land rights issues under Reies Lopez Tijerina at Tierra Amarilla was creating widespread awareness that political protest could be effective.

Meanwhile, Denver’s police force was mobilizing to maintain the status quo. Law enforcement officials across the country had become concerned about the spilling of “bottled rage” and the

mood became ominous. George L. Seaton was appointed Chief of Police after the Detroit riots in 1967 and he had vowed to not allow Denver to become another Detroit. Just weeks before the West High School Blowouts Denver police had received riot training, new helicopters were in place, and Denver was starting to feel like a city under siege (Ref: Tony Garcia and Su Tetro story circles 1/10/19).

Students at West High had voiced their protest of the ill-treatment by a teacher whose insults about Chicano culture went unabated. After no resolution, on March 20, 1969 the students walked out. A crowd of 50 was anticipated but, more than 300 students, family and friends converged. The police were called who arrived wearing gas masks and carrying billy clubs. Of the two dozen arrests, only one protestor was convicted (The Denver Post, March 21, 2009, updated May 7, 2016 by Jason Kosena). Gerry Garcia provided refuge to many students at the Denver Inner City Parish.

A reporter for the *West Side Recorder* recalled “Everything broke loose – night sticks started swinging....” Referring to the blowout, Ernesto Vigil said it was “*The central event in Denver for what was later called the Chicano Movement*” (La Voz Bilingue, James Mejia 14Oct2015, “West High School Walkout of 1969”). The walkout spawned a “blow out” among hundreds of students from other Denver middle and high schools with a march to Lincoln Park over the next several days. Cecelia Benavidez led her fellow South High School students’ march to join their West High School compatriots at Lincoln Park. Lincoln Park is historically important ground for Chicano rights in Denver (Leonard Vigil interview, 2Sept 2017).

Eventually, the students developed a list of demands including securing bilingual education, the dismissal of the offending teacher and enforcement of the inclusion of Chicano history, culture and language in the district curriculum. By the fall of 1969, four of the five school principals in the La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood had been replaced -- West High, Baker Middle, Fairview and Greenlee Elementary. The West High walkout remains a symbol of the power of protest (Boulder Weekly, “Whitewashing the past”, March 26, 2015 by Matt Cortina).

The following week, the *Crusade for Justice* held their First Annual National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, attended by 1500 youth from across the country, including many young Chicanos from West Denver. The conference yielded *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan* (The Spiritual Plan of Aztlan). Through this manifesto, conferees demanded self-determination for Chicanos:

*“We...conclude that social, economic, cultural, and political independence is the only road to total liberation from oppression, exploitation, and racism. Our struggle then must be for the control of our barrios, campos, pueblos, lands, our economy, our culture, and our political life”* (ThoughtCo., 2018).

A few weeks later, in May 1969, an election of the Denver Board of Education was held where the dominant issue was busing to achieve integration. Actions taken by newly-elected board members spawned a lawsuit known as “*Keyes v. Denver School District #1*”. This lawsuit eventually reached the U.S. Supreme Court in 1974, who heard testimony from long-time Kalamath Street resident, Josephine Perez. The court’s ruling ordered busing to achieve school integration in Denver.

It was also in 1969 that the local Skyline Chapter of the American GI Forum began its boycott of Coors Brewing Company for unfair labor practices against Chicanos. In 1984, that boycott ended when the Coors company gave \$300 million to the American GI Forum and the National Council of La Raza.

## **Madres del Movimiento**

Seldom are women credited for their influential role in the Chicano Movement. It was the women....who were the unsung heroes of the Movement (Federico Pena, *Jústicia Y Libertad*, 2014).

As the Action Centers in Denver got underway, women of the West Side found another new arena for their impressive political and social organizing skills: the Chicano Movement. When not standing at the kitchen stove making tortillas for their families, women such as Josie Acosta, Josie Perez, Vi Medrano, Alberta Crespin among many others, worked for *Denver Opportunity*, or served as founding members of the action centers, worked in the local schools, actively supported Chicano political candidates, and spent “any spare time on the Movement.”

Interviews with the daughters of just two West Side Chicanas reveal their roles as cornerstones in the Movement to improve the quality of life in Denver. Josie Acosta came to Denver from Pueblo at age 5 years and lived at 1106 W. 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue. She was active in *Viva Kennedy!* and was an early member of *Los Voluntarios*, for which she was its historian, keeping a scrapbook of events. Josie Perez moved with her husband and children to 1154 Kalamath Street in 1957. Here she developed a tight-knit group of friends with whom she utilized her considerable organizing skills. She lived on Kalamath Street for more than 50 years.

After all the grocery stores in the neighborhood closed, Josie Perez worked with others to establish the Adelante Food Market at 8<sup>th</sup> & Santa Fe. With her friends, she arranged with the University of Denver for swimming, skating and tennis lessons for their daughters and other local girls of the West Side. They secured tickets to professional sporting events and first run theater productions. These mothers were “adamant that their daughters should have the same opportunities” as others.

For a time, Josie Perez also served as a local spokesperson for The United Farm Workers, spreading the cry ¡Si se puede! (Yes, it can be done!). Daughters of both Josie Acosta and Josie Perez participated in the grape and lettuce boycotts and walked the picket lines as children, at 11 and 15 years of age; like the children of numerous other activist leaders. These were formative events in the lives of these young Chicanos/Chicanas. Women were among the organizers of the 110-mile march from Pueblo to Denver in August 1970 rallying for the rights of farm workers.

Improving the access to better education was another focus of these activists. Josie Acosta attended West High School but her mother made her quit school at age 16 to go to work. She later ensured that her children graduated from West High School. Josie Perez didn’t get that far in her formal education, never attending past 4<sup>th</sup> grade. As a child, she attended the first day of



school, to be counted, but left to work in the vegetable fields with her family. Self-taught, in both English and Spanish, she easily passed her GED. As adults, these women knew the invaluable difference an education brings to a person's life.

Josie Perez did everything she could to advance learning. In 1969, she became one of the named plaintiffs of the lawsuit, *Keyes vs. Denver Public Schools*, to integrate Denver's schools. Ms. Perez testified before the U.S. Supreme Court, whose 1974 ruling ordered busing to achieve integration in Denver.

Many *Madres del Movimiento* were early members of the *Crusade for Justice* with Josie Acosta being one of its founding members. These women became very active participants in Denver politics. They canvased their neighborhoods in support of numerous candidates including their neighbors such as Betty Benavidez.

Elizabeth (Betty) Quintana was born and raised on the West Side, like her cousin former State Representative Frank Anaya (1964-1966). Betty's first marriage was into the local Barela family, descendants of Jesus Barela who had served in Colorado's 1<sup>st</sup> Territorial Legislature in 1861, representing southern Colorado. Jesus Barela is credited among those who helped establish the University of Colorado. Later in the 1960s, Betty married Waldo Benavidez.

In 1970, Betty Benavidez was elected the first Latina to the Colorado Legislature (1971-1974) as State Representative for the new house district that included the La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood. She and Waldo lived at that time at 1175 Lipan Street. While Waldo is remembered as a complex but effective organizer, Betty Benavidez is remembered more simply. It is said that "nothing is ever done by just one person, except Betty" (Celina Benavidez, 2017).

Westside women also supported candidates such as Don Sandoval, Laura DeHerrera, Reuben Valdez (first Latino speaker of the Colorado House of Representatives), Richard Castro, and Federico Pena among others.

Josie Acosta was very active in her church where she was renowned for her cooking at the annual summer carnival. She became active with the New West Side Economic Development Corporation (NEWSSED) and with Denver Inner City Parish, at West 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Galapago Street, where she worked with seniors. Her efforts to provide a better space for seniors led to her greatest honor: the naming of the "Josie Acosta Senior Wing Addition" at the La Alma Recreation Center, West 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Mariposa Street. Mrs. Acosta was also appointed by Mayor Wellington Webb to the Latino Advisory Council and twice was named *La Reina* of the Cinco de Mayo Festival, the largest of its kind in the U.S.

Mrs. Perez worked as a teacher's aide for the Baker Junior High Extension Center, a program to aid students with school attendance challenges to learn how to reach their individual life goals (West Side Recorder, June 1970). Josie Perez also joined her friends Minnie Conict, Vidilia Medrano, and Alberta Crespín, among the 15 newly-elected local resident board members of the Auraria Community Center, achieving their goal for community control of Board membership in June 1970.

Later, Mrs. Perez also worked for NEWSED, helped Anna Jo Haynes establish the Mile-High Childcare Center, and was among the neighborhood women who worked with Juana Bordas to create Mi Casa Resource Center. In 1977, Mrs. Perez also helped form the *Citizen's Committee Against Police Brutality* after another police killing, this time of a South Lincoln Park Homes resident.

In 2009, U.S. Senator Michael Bennet remembered Josephine Perez in the Congressional Record as “a champion for justice and equality.” She was regarded as “.... an exemplary voice for minority students in Denver.” As the daughters of both Josie Acosta and Josie Perez told their story of their mothers, they shared how these women did not act alone.

### **The Mural and the Park**

Many of the leaders and activists of the 1960s and 1970s recalled a youth spent in and near Lincoln Park. Weddings and other celebrations were often held at its amphitheater. The presence of the pool, first constructed in 1910 and periodically rebuilt, cultivated a long tradition of excellence in swimming and diving in West Denver. Thatcher Barela is remembered by many for his diving prowess. Residents also recall the local restaurants and shops on Santa Fe Drive that served their community, which created the feeling of safety within the neighborhood, created as a defense against the discrimination many Chicano residents felt in greater Denver. Lincoln Park remained at the heart of the neighborhood.

Another Chicano member of the West Side Action Council was local artist and sculptor Emanuel Martinez who asked if he could paint a community mural in Lincoln Park in 1970. Martinez recognized the power of art as social commentary; it “stimulates creativity and educates the people of the community” (The Denver Post, George Lane, August 23, 1970).



**“La Alma”, first mural on Lincoln Park Toolshed, ca. 1970**

Martinez was raised in east Denver, where, like too many other young people of color, he experienced police violence in the killing of his first cousin, Danny Romero in 1961. At age 13, while detained at Lookout Mountain Juvenile Detention facility, Martinez realized his love for art and began using charcoal from burnt matches to draw on the only available paper -- paper towels. His talent was recognized and Martinez’s first mural was painted at the detention facility. His artwork drew the attention of Bill Longley, a prominent artist from Santa Fe, New

Mexico, who was implementing an arts apprenticeship program for troubled youth. With Longley's support and encouragement, Emanuel graduated from Manual High School and began his career.

Martinez met Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales at Longley's studio and started the *Junior Los Voluntarios*. Later Gonzales hired Martinez as a youth organizer for the Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC). In 1966, Martinez became one of three incorporators of the *Crusade for Justice*. That same year, Martinez put on his first art exhibit at an event at the Union Hall in west Denver where he met César Chavez, President of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. Chavez was the guest speaker at a dinner attended by 500 Chicanos. After presenting a painting to Chavez, they had dinner together and Chavez invited Martinez to go to Delano, California to do artwork for the union. Martinez agreed and soon thereafter he went to work for \$5 per week plus room and board.

The following year Martinez was commissioned to create the *Farm Workers Altar* commemorating the end of César Chavez's first fast. This is one of three of his works added to the permanent collection at the National Museum of American Art, part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Martinez also traveled to Washington, D.C., to work on the *Poor People's Campaign* for the Southern Christian Leadership Council. In 1968, Martinez worked as caretaker of the Crusade for Justice's headquarters (1567 Downing Street) where he lived with his family and painted interior and exterior murals.

In 1969, Martinez moved his family to the North Lincoln Park Homes. Residents here were known as the "Yellow Jets," due to the brick color of the buildings' façades. That year, Martinez was arrested at the West High School walkouts. Martinez also wanted to spruce up the North Lincoln Park Homes buildings' exterior. Without permission, Martinez and his neighbors painted a mural on the exterior building where he resided, which almost got him evicted.

After learning only city employees were allowed to paint anything in city parks, Martinez trained for and secured a job as a lifeguard at the Lincoln Park pool in 1970, paid \$1.68 per hour. Once hired, Martinez painted his first public community mural on the toolshed in Lincoln Park, which he named "La Alma". According to the feature article in The Denver Post by George Lane (August 23, 1970), the mural "tells Mexican-Americans' past, present and future." This mural featured reproductions of renowned Mexican muralist Emiliano Zapata and depicted a representation of Quetzalcoatl, the demi-god and mythical ruler of the Toltec empire in ancient Mexico. The mural also displayed among the first of Martinez's iconic representations of the tripartite mestizo head, where the left and right profiles bracket a full face view representing the dual Indian and Spanish inheritance of the Chicano people, which was inspired by a mosaic image at the University of Mexico (Emanuel Martinez: A Retrospective, 1995).

That same summer, Martinez was asked to paint a sign to mark the community's intention to claim Lincoln Park by renaming it "Aztlán Park." As the community gathered to post the new sign, their ceremony was interrupted by the arrival of city police attempting to make an arrest. The encounter devolved into a spontaneous protest with a march to the city jail. Before the evening ended, police had surrounded the area and with its helicopter, donated by the Coors Brewing Company, dropped tear gas on North Lincoln Park Homes as well as on those still

gathered near Lincoln Park. The tear gas affected all in the vicinity, whether participants or not, including the elderly and children. The prevailing winds, however, sent the tear gas into Anglo neighborhoods, which raised the alarm about the mistreatment of their Chicano neighbors.

Later in 1970, through a grant Martinez secured from *Denver Opportunity*, Martinez created an Arts and Crafts training program that eventually was housed inside the Lincoln Park toolshed, which he also named “La Alma”. After six months, when grant funds ran out Martinez asked the Director of Denver Parks and Recreation, Joe Ciancio, if he could continue his program year-round through the support of the city. Reluctantly, Ciancio agreed and hired Martinez as the first director of La Alma Recreation Center. After a year as director, Martinez gave up this job to paint murals for Denver Parks and Recreation. Later, the tool shed that housed his murals and the first recreation center was knocked down to build a new La Alma Recreation Center in the Park. Martinez then volunteered to paint the iconic new mural on the new building titled “La Alma.”

Martinez has since received national acclaim as a forerunner of the contemporary mural movement in the U.S. Martinez has been featured in more than 250 articles and 30 published books. He now shares his professional skills with incarcerated young people, designing and painting murals with them on facilities throughout the U.S. His work, and the pride and identity it brought to the Chicano residents of the neighborhood, ultimately inspired the 2013 name change of the Park and neighborhood, which are both now known as La Alma Lincoln Park.

Politics, protest and burgeoning neighborhood organizing typified the Westside during the 1960s and 1970s, but what residents most remember at the end of the day was a nurturing and tight knit community. One of the most significant wounds to the neighborhood was the demolition of Auraria, in order for the Auraria Higher Education Center to be built in 1972.

### **Resilience, Resistance and Resourcefulness in the Westside**

Westsidiers created their own vital community institutions and practices to fortify themselves against the racism and oppression of the outside world. Residents built their own capacity for civic engagement by creating neighborhood organizations and an internal civic infrastructure that provided direct service, education, social life, civil society, solidarity, camaraderie and restorative justice. Community institutions formed a strong back bone for the Westside that sustained members through poverty and generational trauma. The internal mechanisms that neighbors engineered together gave them practice in community building, afforded them with the means to resist and prepared them for the public protest that would mark the Chicano Movement Era.

Westside youth were protected by adults who created an elaborate kinship network, tightly knit with friendship, solidarity, and reciprocity, designed to give their children the best of what they had. The success of voluntary associations reveals the desire of residents to create a thriving social fabric. In times of crisis, residents came together. Delfie Martinez recalls the 1965 South



Platte River flood and the agency of residents working through the SPMDTU to support and protect each other.

The flood killed 28 people, and neighbors worked in tandem with the SPMDTU to rescue “relatives and relatives of relatives” who had lost their homes. They provided food and shelter and collected replacement household items such as furniture, clothes and linens. For a time after the flood, 36 people were sheltered at Delfie Martinez’s house.

The 1965 flood reached all the way to Osage Street, sparing La Alma Lincoln Park, as did the 1864 flood waters. The “elevated plateau” that is now La Alma Lincoln Park offered refuge to the hundreds who lost their homes in the 1864 flood. The 1965 flood inundated the Jerome Park neighborhood, located between the river and the railroad tracks, which was never rebuilt. This flood hastened city plans to eradicate portions of the West Side although less than one-half of the residences had been damaged (Virginia Castro, interview November 24, 2018).

### **Displacement of Aurarians**

Auraria residents recall St. Cajetan’s Church and The Casa Mayan as gathering places and neighborhood anchors bustling with vitality and participation. In 1926, St. Cajetan’s Catholic Church was erected at Ninth and Lawrence streets. According to Magdalena Gallegos, whose family had lived in the neighborhood for four generations, the lives of residents revolved around their church. Su Teatro Executive Artistic Director and resident playwright Anthony J. Garcia notes, St. Cajetan’s was “the first church for the Spanish speaking in the city. Aside from weddings, baptisms and funerals, the Church operated an elementary school, a credit union, and numerous fraternal and religious organizations.” According to the Casa Mayan Heritage Center, in 1934 Ramon and Carolina Gonzalez purchased a home at 1020 9th street, the oldest clapboard house built in 1872 by Dr. William Smedley. The Gonzalez home became a site of hospitality, a refuge and a gathering place that evolved by 1946 into the Casa Mayan restaurant, a cultural hub and a place that transcended social, cultural and economic barriers, unique and pulsing in a segregated Denver.

Because Auraria was an important source of living culture for residents, the neighborhood demolition in 1972 left a deep wound. Over time and clandestinely, city and state officials had begun planning for the creation of an urban consolidated college campus. It would host the University of Colorado Denver, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and the Community College of Denver. Planners settled on the site of original Auraria, the city’s oldest enclave, north of LALP and West Colfax Avenue. In 1956, the City had altered the zoning code to prohibit new residential construction in this area. Destruction from the 1965 South Platte River flood served only to accelerate this plan.

Residents learned of the relocation through leaflets distributed by the city, describing the proposal. In 1968, details for the Auraria Higher Education Center (AHEC) campus were

announced that would entail demolition of the original Auraria neighborhood, the largest cache of Denver's oldest structures. This meant displacing more than 150 Chicano families, many of whom were long-time residents. Some locals referred to the plan as an "invasion" or a "political bulldozer".

According to Gallegos, "The residents did not want to move, and the families filed lawsuits. Governor John Love then created the Auraria Higher Education Board to act as both landlord and moderator.

Dean Punke was a University of Colorado graduate student in 1968 who was concerned that Auraria's residents, the ones who would be most affected by the AHEC plan, were likely unaware of how thoroughly the plan would alter their community. Punke sought out and was introduced to Waldo Benavidez who lived on the West Side. Commonly called by his first name only, Waldo was then representing El Centro Cultural for Metropolitan State College. An Albuquerque native, Waldo had come to Denver in the late 1950s and began working for the City of Denver.

Punke and Waldo agreed to collaborate and sought assistance from active members of UMAS (United Mexican-American Students) at Metropolitan State College, including Virginia and Richard Castro. A Denver native, Richard Castro served for 10 years as a Colorado state legislator beginning in 1974. He also served as a member of Denver Public School's Board of Education. Castro later became the Director of Human Rights and Community Relations for Mayor Federico Pena in the 1980s. The trio of Punke, Benavidez and Castro combined their knowledge and skills to establish the *Committee to Preserve the West Side* in opposition to the AHEC plan. They united the growing resistance among West Side churches, organizations and residents to the proposed plan for a consolidated campus in Auraria.

In November 1969 the city called a special bond election to secure funds for the project. According to Gallegos, Father Pete Garcia, Assistant Pastor of St. Cajetan's Church, helped to organize the Auraria Residents Organization (ARO Inc.) to oppose the bond election. In spite of these efforts, in November the bond election to build AHEC narrowly passed, possibly due to a letter from Archbishop James Casey, urging Catholics to vote for the bond issue.

The loss generated fear in the community that the planned demolitions would creep south of West Colfax Avenue, raise property values forcing out long-term low-income residents. The risk, then, was that absentee landlords would favor renting to students over Chicano families.

Today, St. Cajetan's Church is desanctified, and the Casa Mayan Restaurant stands as a museum and heritage area. They sit in Ninth St. Park, in the middle of the tri-institutional Auraria Campus for Higher Learning (housing Metro State College, University of Colorado-Denver and the Community College of Denver).

Garcia writes:

The 'West side' called Auraria by the city consisted of Victorian houses owned by the families living in them. The houses are still standing, but the tenants are

gone, replaced by offices for the Auraria Higher Education Center. They stand as a monument to the concept of property value over human values. There are ghosts that haunt Ninth St. Park which runs through the center of “Auraria.” They are the echoes of the Torres, DeLeon, Rodriguez and Gonzalez families who gave birth, celebrated weddings, and shared sorrows as all communities do.

## **West Side Coalition**

The narrow victory to create AHEC raised fears among West Siders of further encroachment and redevelopment. To counter these concerns, the *Committee to Preserve the West Side* met at Casa Mayan to change the Committee’s name to the West Side Coalition. Their aim was to advocate neighborhood self-determination by decreasing external control to preserve their residential family neighborhood (Life and Times of Richard Castro: 38). This dynamic entity coalesced as many as 136 organizations (Celina Benavidez, interview September 8, 2017). It was comprised of a mixture of residents and organizational representatives that included the American GI Forum, the West Side Improvement Association, members of the West Side Action Council, among other agencies, numerous local churches and schools.

Since the 1950s, this area had been zoned for high-density buildings. The Coalition spearheaded a down-zoning effort in 1971 that, although failed, resulted in the discouragement of high-density redevelopment, until recently, keeping intact the neighborhood’s predominantly 19<sup>th</sup> Century single-family residences. The Coalition also helped negotiate agreements with AHEC that remain in effect 40 years later: to keep student housing from drifting south of West Colfax Avenue and a parking permit system that benefits La Alma Lincoln Park residents.

## **Resiliency and Revitalization in The Westside**

By the mid-1970s, federal funding was drying up for jobs and training programs that had flowed to the West Side in the 1960s. A new conglomerate arose on the West Side comprised of members of local liberal churches, staff of social agencies and West Siders. In November 1976, a West Denver Town Meeting was held at St. Joseph’s Church to develop a new Community Plan to aid the community via improved economic opportunities and an upgrade in housing.

By the late 1970s the Westside was in decline. The obliteration of Auraria removed middle income residents and their associated influence from the neighborhood. In the 1980s this once-thriving community experienced poverty and crime rates much higher than the city and national averages. Santa Fe Dr., which was once a bustling corridor of commerce – the pride of the Westside - was intact, but it was rundown. NEWSED CDC was one important driver the Westside’s rebound. Veronica Barela took over NEWSED the same year that Auraria families were displaced. “This community did not want the campus, but they just ram-rodged it down people’s throats,” she said. NEWSED’s mandate was to stimulate new development to replace Auraria with another middle-income group. The result was a 13-million-dollar grant and the Parkway Centre at 1391 N. Speer Blvd. which houses offices and one of the busiest King Soopers in the state. The Parkway Centre project occurred in tandem with an Urban

Development Action grant in partnership with HUD and the City of Denver (awarded in 1977 and completed in 1984) which allowed for streetscaping and curb cutbacks. NEWSED administered the grant and organized the neighborhood block by block. Each block received \$12,000 to be used toward painting homes, or revealing the original façade, new sidewalks and fencing. Wrought iron fencing at 7<sup>th</sup> and Galapago and flagstone sidewalks are a lasting testament to the impact of these improvements.

In 1978, NEWSED started the Santa Fe Dr. Redevelopment Corporation: their first loan went to Barela and Sons Janitorial Services. Soon they were making loans to architects and artists that started to populate the strip. Barela sought to protect the Santa Fe business corridor by buying at least one building on both sides of every block so that no developer could come in and bulldoze an entire block. “And we almost succeeded,” she said, failing only to secure land on the 600 block of Santa Fe. (John Moore- The Denver Post). The national proliferation of nonprofit community development corporations, or CDCs, started with Robert and Ethel Kennedy. About 2,500 CDCs now provide services for low-income residents in struggling neighborhoods. Barela considers the CDC movement to be as important as the civil-rights and labor movements.

“CDCs were started as a response to what was taking place in the ’60s and ’70s, when the cities were being abandoned,” Su Teatro’s Tony Garcia said. “NEWSED was very much an outgrowth of the Chicano movement. It was all these activists saying, ‘Our communities are being blighted. There are no jobs for our people. We don’t have any control over anything.’ So it was a move to try to create our own community foundation.”

Political activism and economic empowerment have been interconnected from the start. “Changing zoning laws were starting to segregate neighborhoods by ethnicity, creating welfare states,” Barela said. “So one of the reasons CDCs were started was to create more of a balance in these neighborhoods by investing in businesses for people of color.”

### **Chicano Art, Culture and Community Pride Continue to Thrive**

Once the civic, spiritual and economic epicenter of Denver’s Mexican community, the Westside is now home to the Santa Fe Arts District. The cultural arts exist as one of the compelling legacies of this community. Three generations of Westside families can lovingly describe mambo lessons at St. Cajetan’s Church, or The Classical Guitar Society at The Casa Mayan restaurant. During the period of the Chicano Movement, activists spread the message of identity on the barrio’s walls and created museums and galleries in the streets. Poets shouted their truths in the park and on corners throughout the neighborhood and performers marched through the housing projects with guitars and drums and conch shells, inviting one and all to spontaneous performances in the park.

Su Teatro, Museo de las Americas and the Chicano Humanities Arts Council (CHAC) continue to fuel this legacy. Su Teatro is an authentic, original, provocative cultural and performing arts center. It began in 1971 as a student-organized theater group at the University of Colorado at



Denver that has since established a national reputation for artistic excellence. In 2010, Su Teatro purchased The Denver Civic Theater at West 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Santa Fe Drive where it continues to perform homegrown productions that speak to the history and experience of Chicanos.

Museo de las Americas has established itself on Santa Fe Drive as the premier Latin American art museum in the Rocky Mountain region. Through its innovative exhibitions and programs, it has succeeded since 1991 in educating the community through collecting, preserving, interpreting, and exhibiting the ancient to contemporary diverse arts and culture of the Americas.

The Chicano Humanities & Arts Council (CHAC) was founded in 1978 by a group of visual and performing artists. The organization was established as a place where Chicano/Latino artists were provided with a venue to explore visual, and performance art and promote, and preserve the Chicano/Latino culture through the expression of the arts. The gallery generally offers two shows each month by local visual art exhibits and performances by area musicians, actors, dancers, writers and poets. Popular annual events include the Members Season Opener in January, Santos & Crosses in August, El Dia De Los Muertos in November and our Luminarias de la Guadalupe & Christmas Mercado in December.

Denver Inner City Parish (DICP) continues its legacy as a non-sectarian human services non-profit organization that was established in 1960. For many years its programs were housed out of a former church at West 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Galapago Street. In recent time, 1212 Mariposa Street has become synonymous with this non-profit. In classical Greek, the word “parish” also refers to one’s “neighbor”. DICP empowers their neighbors by supporting personal transformations and creates self-sustaining lifestyles for those who are most vulnerable (website). DICP is known for its senior services but also provides hunger relief to the community.

### **The Denver Housing Authority Commits to Transformation**

The Denver Housing Authority is also anchoring the neighborhood’s future. DHA is responsible for construction of the Mariposa Development, which includes a total of 800 units. A third of those units are for low-income residents, a third are workforce housing and a third are market-rate housing. The development replaces 270 units of low-income housing currently on the site and represents a change from low-density, concentrated poverty to transit-oriented density (the development is located next to the 10th and Osage light rail station) through a mixed-use, mixed-income development. A focus on health for both the environment and the residents has led to a walkable site with better bike connections, community gardens, art programs and economic opportunities. Residents have immediately adjacent access to light rail and therefore better connectivity to jobs and education.

#### **Planning and Design Highlights:**

- Opening of the light rail station at 10th and Osage (1994)
- Creation of the Santa Fe Arts District (2003)

- La Alma/Lincoln Park Neighborhood Assessment (2006)
- Reconstruction of 11th Avenue, which connects the 10th and Osage light rail station and Santa Fe Arts; facilitates transit oriented development (2009)
- La Alma/Lincoln Park Neighborhood Plan (2010)
- La Alma Recreational Pool reconstructed (2012); existing pool and pool house have been replaced with a new regional aquatic facility and pool house
- The Santa Fe and Kalamath Pedestrian and Bicycle Crossing Study helped identify pedestrian and cyclist movements and impediments to movement, proposing near-term, implementable solutions within the study area (2013)
- Current redevelopment of South Lincoln Park Homes into Mariposa Development (2010-2018)

### **The Santa Fe Arts District**

The neighborhood is best known by non-resident locals for the Santa Fe Arts District. Galleries and artist studios began to move into the area as rents in other parts of Denver rose. In 2003, a group of 17 galleries, museum and theatres organized the Art District on Santa Fe as a non-profit corporation. Since 2003, membership in the Art District on Santa Fe has grown from 12 to over 60 creative industry members between Alameda and 12<sup>th</sup> avenues on and near Santa Fe Drive and Kalamath Street.

#### **Arts and Cultural Highlights:**

- The Colorado Ballet (1951) opened a 30,000-square-foot building on Santa Fe Drive as a new home for the company in 2014.
- Su Teatro (1971), the region's first theater dedicated to the art and culture of Latinos and has established a national reputation for productions that represent the history and experience of Chicanos
- The Museo de las Americas (1991) educates the community about the diversity of Latino American art and culture through exhibitions and programs; the museum boasts a collection of over 4,000 items from Pre-Columbian to colonial to contemporary.
- Art District on Santa Fe (2003), located along Santa Fe Drive, features over 70 art galleries, studios, restaurants, theaters, and other creative businesses and organizations
- Art Students League of Denver offers classes to artists of all abilities and has a commitment to outreach into communities across Denver
- Metro State University's Center for Visual Arts is an off-campus art gallery that features contemporary art and serves as an art laboratory for students and the wider community
- First Friday Art Walk attracts over 5,000 patrons per walk to the Santa Fe Arts District where people can enjoy great art while listening to live music and sampling delicacies from an array of food trucks
- Third Friday Collector's Preview offers a more intimate version of First Friday, providing an opportunity to see art and meet the artists and owners without large crowds

## National Register of Historic Places

In 1974, the Denver Planning Office conducted a survey, “A Plan for Historic Preservation in Denver” involving the first two blocks south of Colfax on Kalamath, Lipan and Mariposa Streets. This survey resulted in a National Register of Historic Places district nomination application.

The nomination was submitted in December 1974. In its statement of significance, the nomination application states:

*“The growth of this neighborhood parallels Denver’s role as supplier and market for the mining areas which were the source of fabulous wealth from the 1870s to the 1890s.”*

*“For Denver, it is important that the West Side Neighborhood be preserved as an example of its boom-town character as experienced by most of its early residents.”*

The significance statement also reads: “The area borders a proposed site for a HUD-assisted high density development. Acquisition and demolition of the subject structures has been considered by the city of Denver to provide a “buffer zone.” The nomination application was written by Peter Snell, Architect for Colorado Preservation Coalition. The 115 surveyed structures were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975, as a district called the Westside Neighborhood. This district designation is purely honorary and does not protect against demolition but can aid owners within the district who renovate their property by applying for state or federal historic preservation tax credits.

## CONCLUSION

Research of the La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood uncovered remarkable parallels between the events surrounding its earliest permanent residents of the 1860s and 1870s with those a century later in the 1960s and 1970s. The 1860s had a war; the 1960s had a war. 1860s Denver had its political rivalries; the 1960s had its political rivalries. The 1860s had its President Johnson; the 1960s had its President Johnson, each of whose administrations were noted for passage of civil rights legislation. Each era was also marked by a devastating flood.

Achievements of residents from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century through to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century have been poorly chronicled. Little of the enduring history of this resilient neighborhood is known or taught. Its residents from both centuries are remembered more for controversies than for their respective accomplishments. Yet, it is a history that had both local and national impact, spanning one hundred years.

A.C. Hunt was the most prominent of the 1860s settlers south of West Colfax Avenue. The land on which Hunt’s homestead once stood became Lincoln Park, now La Alma Lincoln Park. The Park is foundational to the community’s identity. It has been a refuge from floods and a

gathering place for celebrations in every era. The Park continues to serve as the soul of the community. “Alma” is Spanish for “soul”.

Unlike many of Denver’s older neighborhoods, this one remains recognizable to someone who might have lived here in 1905. Few other Denver neighborhoods could say the same.

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