

CROSSROADS IN EDEN: THE DEVELOPMENT OF FORT LUPTON, 1835-2000

A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Submitted to:
Historic Preservation Board
City of Fort Lupton, Weld County, Colorado

Prepared by:
Adam Thomas
SWCA Environmental Consultants

State Historical Fund Project 02-02-075, Deliverable 3: Fort Lupton Historic Survey and Context
SWCA Cultural Resource Report 2003-141

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On the Cover:

At left: Detail of Lancaster Lupton from the WPA mural *Fort Lupton*, by Hayes Lyon, 1941. At right: Images of buildings, old and new, in the Fort Lupton area. (*Fort Lupton Public Library, Fort Lupton Museum, Author*)

**There is in the affairs of men a tide, which taken at the flood,
leads to fortune.**

— William Shakespeare, *Julius Cæsar*
Quote appears in the journal of
Lancaster Platt Lupton.

INTRODUCTION

Timeless Connections

The men of Colonel Henry Dodge’s 1835 expedition to the Rocky Mountains, exhausted and drenched from a mid-July deluge, encamped on the banks of the South Platte River between the mouth of the Caché la Poudre and a dry creek (what is now Cherry Creek in Denver). Overnight the dreary rain ended and skies cleared. Sunrise the following Sunday morning illuminated a spectacular vista that captured the imagination of the troops and their commanders. “This morning the sun rises beautifully above the horizon as though it came up out of the Prairie,” writes Lemuel Ford in his journal of the Dodge Expedition. His amazement deepened the next day as the soldiers continued beside the Platte toward the mountains. “The command Marched S 20 West about ten miles & S 10 West 10 Miles with the Rocky Mountains covered with snow on our right presenting a most magnificent appearance[.] The Buffalowe Still more abundant fat & fine[.] We encamped on the Second Bank of the river fine timbered Bottom covered with good grass [original spelling and capitalization retained].”¹ Col. Dodge himself

described the scene in even more detail:

The River here makes a considerable bend to the south, and runs for some distance nearly parallel with the mountains.... The face of the country variable; it appears to be arranged in a succession of benches commencing at the river; there is at first a low flat from a half mile to a mile and a half wide, where the grass is good. It is generally wet with streams running through it. Above this is another bench of about the same width, of dry hard prairie, with gravelly soil. The grass upon this, which is called buffalo grass, is short, thick, dry. Above this there is still another bench, where the sand-hills commence and raise gradually as they recede from the river. The only vegetation upon them is a species of wild sage.²

Dodge and his Dragoons were neither the first nor the last people to be captivated by this pleasant stretch of the South Platte River. More than a century later, Marguerite F. Counter, president of the Fort Lupton Canning Company, described the area as the “Garden Spot of Eden.” But this place was more than just an oasis – it was a cultural, economic, and political crossroads. Indeed, the summer following Dodge’s expedition,

Figure 1.

The Front Range of the Rocky Mountains, with Longs Peak at right, as seen from Fort Lupton. Detail from the mural *Fort Lupton* by Hayes Lyon, 1940. (Fort Lupton Public Library)



the commander of its Company A returned here to establish a trading post and, inadvertently, lend his name to present-day Fort Lupton. The trader realized that the banks of the Platte were worn with footsteps long before the first Europeans arrived here; it was an ancient transportation corridor connecting the diverse worlds of the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains. Any settlement along its banks, retraced by iron rails and concrete highways, immediately became part of larger local, regional, and emerging national markets. Fort Lupton developed from an interaction of economic forces along this transportation corridor. It evolved as a rather isolated community dependent upon the vast markets to which it was connected. As a result, people of diverse cultures and experiences met, interacted, and settled here, all contributing to this community's rich culture and unique built environment.

The purpose of this document is to provide an analytical framework through which to assess the significance of historical properties in the City of Fort Lupton. It is not intended to be an exhaustive history of the area but, rather, provide the "big picture" in interpreting the built environment. Because it

is a historical context rather than a prehistorical or archaeological context, this document concentrates on the city's built environment as it exists today. Thus, because the earliest structures in Fort Lupton date to circa 1880, this context will cover that period to the present. However, earlier prehistory and history is briefly outlined to establish trends and generally inform the reader.

The first chapter of this context will present the history of the Fort Lupton area from prehistory to the decades following the establishment of Lancaster Lupton's trading post. The chapters that follow narrate the development of the town of Fort Lupton from its establishment to 2000. That story is retold through four historical themes critical in the evolution of modern Fort Lupton: (1) political, social, and economic development of the town; (2) transportation; (3) agriculture, the food-processing industry, as well as the oil and gas industries; and (4) ethnic heritage. Each of these themes relates to structures and landscapes existing within Fort Lupton today.

This project was paid for in part by a State Historical Fund grant from the Colorado Historical Society.

A Note on Sources

The most complete history of Fort Lupton is Cleon Roberts's *Fort Lupton, Colorado: The First Hundred and Forty Years*. The edition used here was published in 1987 and reprinted in 1993, 1996, 1999, and 2002. While the book is enjoyable reading and impressive in its breadth, its lack of citations and use of questionable sources make it a rather unreliable study. While this context does make use of the Roberts history, it does so with caution. Most references to the book include collaborating sources within the citation. Those references that solely cite Roberts are concentrated mainly in the first chapter and should be treated with some scholarly suspicion. The lack of credible secondary sources for the early history of Fort Lupton indicates a need for an exhaustive prehistorical and early historical narrative outside of the scope of this context.

CHAPTER 1

South Platte River Basin Prehistory to 1860

The early history of Fort Lupton is, like the rest of the American West, fraught with myth and legend. Separating the facts from the fictions of this period is achieved only through thorough and on-going archaeological and historical research. This chapter is intended to establish the historical trends that would influence the creation and development of the City of Fort Lupton. It is not intended to be an exhaustive prehistory and early history of this section of the South Platte River Valley.

The Great Plains emerged above sea level 75 million years ago, at the end of the Cretaceous period. Cycles of erosion, especially during the Pliocene epoch (20 million years ago) wore away the Rocky Mountains, spreading a mantle of Ogallala alluvium across the plains. While erosion from the Rockies built up Colorado's northeastern plains, the South Platte River and its tributaries carved deeper into it.³ The climate of this area 10,000 years ago was different from today. Cooler and wetter, the plains supported lush grasses, forage for a variety of game, including mammoth, camels, and sloth. Following them were hunters, the first humans to enter the South Platte River Basin. Little is known about these early hunters and information is limited to a handful of archaeological sites. Most likely they existed in small bands, constantly in pursuit of game. They preferred water sources, where mam-

moth and other larger mammals came to drink, places like the banks of the Platte. Around 9000 B.C. these semiautonomous bands began to cooperate with one another in hunts and stayed longer at campsites. They also started to hunt now-extinct and extant forms of bison almost exclusively, creating an economy based on the buffalo.⁴

Around 5500 B.C. the climate of Colorado's northeastern plains changed again. Big game animals died off, forcing humans to diversify their sources of subsistence, hunting smaller animals and increasing their consumption and use of plant resources. Even the number of bison dwindled, forcing inhabitants into an economy that linked plains and mountains, a trend that would continue to the present along the banks of the South Platte. These early peoples may have hunted big game, such as bison and deer, on the plains, while traveling to the foothills and mountains for smaller game and plants. While the exact subsistence patterns of South Platte River Basin inhabitants from 5500 B.C. to AD 150 are unclear, archaeologists agree that these were a people in motion. Certainly a likely route would have been along the Platte, which provided easy access from the plains, through the foothills, to South Park. Archaeologists have also discovered tipi rings and vision quest sites dating to this period.⁵

The emergence of ceramic technology

around A.D. 150 signaled a new stage in human settlement in the South Platte River Basin. Nomadic bands began to occupy campsites for longer periods and returned to them regularly. Population increased as these early peoples remained more sedentary. Between A.D. 900 and 1000, the climate of the Central Plains became moister, allowing the cultivation of corn and other cultigens. With this rise in early agriculture came the first permanent villages. But no such villages existed in the still arid South Platte River Basin. Here, hunting-and-gathering bands remained mobile, inhabiting temporary camps rather than permanent settlements. Indeed, the population of the area decreased until around 1500, as the plains suffered through decades of drought.⁶

That year also marked another shift in the climate of the Great Plains, particularly the South Platte Basin, to present-day conditions. With this shift, more and more proto-historic peoples began to settle in the area. Among the first were the Apache, who remained here only until the 1700s. At that time, the Utes, who occupied much of the mountains west of the Platte River Basin, provided horses to the Comanches, who lived north of the Ute territory. Together, they drove the Apache south of the present border of Colorado by 1750. At nearly the same time, Arapaho and Cheyenne, recently equipped with guns and horses, spread onto the plains. During his 1819-20 expedition to the Rocky Mountains, Major Stephen H. Long found a mixed camp of Arapahos, Comanches, Kiowas, Kiowa-Apaches, and Cheyennes. And the cultural diversity in the South Platte Basin would only increase in the coming decades and centuries.⁷

European Exploration

In 1540-41, Don Francisco Vásquez de

Coronado led a detachment of Spanish soldiers along the Cimarrón River. They crossed into the southeastern corner of the modern-day Colorado, becoming the first Europeans to enter the region. The expedition, like so many after it, sought gold and glory. Somewhere on the Great Plains rose the Seven Cities of Cibola, a place of unimaginable – and mythical – wealth. But Coronado found only dust and snow, searing heat and bitter cold – and treachery. Coronado returned to Mexico City empty handed; Spanish explorers did not reenter Colorado for another two decades.⁸

But Spain continued to colonize what would become the American Southwest. In 1598, General Juan de Oñate established Santa Fe as the capital city for the province of New Mexico. The settlement soon became the political, cultural, and economic center of the region, a position it would maintain for over two and a half centuries. While Spanish colonial settlements in the province of New Mexico continued to grow and prosper, however, Colorado remained isolated. Until explorers and traders blazed the Santa Fe Trail, there were no established roads north of the capital, just cart paths to Taos, Mora, and Ratón. Exploration into Colorado resumed in 1664 with the Archuleta expedition, followed by Ulibarrí (1706); Villasur (1720); Rivera (1765); Fathers Domínguez and Vélez de Escalante (1776); Governor De Anza (1779); and Melgares (1806).⁹

By 1650, Spanish settlers were familiar with much of the territory north of Taos to southern Colorado. In his 1706 expedition, Juan de Ulibarrí claimed all of what is now Colorado for the Spanish Empire, calling the new province San Luis.¹⁰ But complete Spanish control of Colorado would not last long. The empire struggled to maintain significant settlements north of the Arkansas

River as French trappers crossed into north-eastern Colorado, following, in particular, the South Platte. In 1719, Don Antonia Valverde Cosío led an expedition against the Comanches in Colorado, discovering French settlements on the river. His findings enraged government officials in Mexico City, and, in 1720, the viceroy dispatched Pedro de Villasur, 42 soldiers, three settlers, and 60 Native Americans to engage and push back the French. Spanish colonial records indicate that the Villasur expedition never accomplished its goal; marauding Pawnees – most likely incited by the French – killed Villasur and most of his men at the junction of the North and South Platte rivers. In time, all of Colorado north of the Arkansas and east of the Front Range – including Weld County – became part of French Louisiana.

But those claims were not to last long. As a condition of the treaty ending the Seven Years' War (1756-63), known as the French and Indian War in England's American colonies, France was forced to surrender all of its territories in North America. Spain received New Orleans and all French lands west of the Mississippi River. But the Spanish Empire was slowly eroding, and in 1800, Napoleon easily regained the territory from Spain after demanding it from the feeble monarchy. In 1803, France surprised the United States by offering to sell all of its Louisiana Territory for \$15 million. President Thomas Jefferson accepted the offer, and United States doubled in size and secured navigation on the Mississippi River.¹¹ Moreover, Spain ceded most of the rest of Colorado to the United States in the Florida Treaty (also known as the Transcontinental or Adams-Onís Treaty) in 1819. It established the Arkansas River as the boundary between American territory to the north and Spanish to the south. The remainder of the state was

taken from Mexico in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which concluded the Mexican War (1845-48).¹²

With vast swaths of unexplored land stretching westward, the United States needed to establish its presence across the continent. Thus, in 1804, Jefferson dispatched Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and the Corps of Discovery to the Pacific Northwest, to search for the elusive Northwest Passage, to exhibit an American presence in the region, and to catalog the landscape and its inhabitants. A result of the Lewis and Clark Expedition was the establishment of the Missouri River and its tributaries as the principal routes of access into the American West, whether by boat or by foot. Two years after Lewis and Clark and Corps of Discovery reached and returned from the Pacific Northwest, Zebulon Montgomery Pike led another expedition to the Southwest, again by traveling up the Missouri River. The party eventually crossed into the Arkansas River basin and became the first American explorers to enter Colorado. In 1820, Major Stephen H. Long once again followed the Missouri River west, traveling up the South Platte. He reached the proximity of present-day Fort Lupton around the beginning of July.¹³

But the first considerations of long-term European settlement here would not occur until the Dodge Expedition of 1835, when this place along the South Platte – its beauty and strategic location on a major trading route – left an indelible impression upon a young army lieutenant from Brooklyn.¹⁴

Lancaster Platt Lupton was born on September 20, 1807, into what would become a modest family of two boys and two girls. Lupton's father held an office at the burgeoning New York customs house and was politically active, as were his cousins up the Hudson, the Roosevelts. His father's political

connections ultimately served young Lancaster well; he entered the United States Military Academy at West Point on July 1, 1825, at the age of 17. He graduated in the prestigious class of 1829, which included future Civil War commanders Joseph E. Johnson and Robert E. Lee. Lupton entered the army as a brevet second lieutenant assigned to the third infantry at the Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis. In the fall, he and his company went to Natchitoches, Louisiana, to guard the U.S.-Mexican border along the Sabine River and to protect the Americans who had settled on Mexican soil. Ultimately, this matter erupted into the Texas Revolution (1836) and the Mexican-American War (1847-48).¹⁵

But Lupton would never see the battlefield. Indeed, events in his life seemed to compel him forward – as if fate dictated that he would establish a trading post on the South Platte. The first nudge in that direction was Lupton’s appointment as a lieutenant in the elite First Regiment of the United States Dragoons, organized on March 2, 1833. As a Dragoon, Lupton served at Fort Gibson, along the Santa Fe Trail in what is now Oklahoma. This assignment provided the young officer his first glimpse of western trade patterns and barter systems. In 1835, he was ordered to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, for an unusual western expedition under Colonel Henry Dodge. The expedition originally began a year earlier under General Henry Leavenworth. But disease followed the men and Leavenworth died on the trail, leaving his second in command, Dodge, in charge. The colonel took up Leavenworth’s mission the following spring.¹⁶ A reprint of the diaries of Lemuel Ford, who participated in the expedition, includes this glowing description of its purpose:

The expedition of the Dragoons across

the plains in 1835...was the most extraordinary mission ever carried out by any military force, in that it consisted of a march through an unsettled country occupied by many Indian tribes who resented their hunting grounds being invaded by white men. It was remarkable in that no hostile shot was fired throughout the journey of sixteen hundred miles through what was known as Indian Country....”¹⁷

While Dodge’s journey was the first expedition of strictly military character to march to the Rocky Mountains, its purpose was diplomatic. Recent Native American uprisings over white settlement and bloody intertribal feuds forced the federal government to engage the Plains Indians amicably, and it ordered Dodge to make treaties and build friendships between the United States and the tribes, and among Native American peoples. More important, however, was that Native American warfare interrupted fur trade along the Santa Fe Trail. Thus, protecting economic links between east and west once again compelled action. Under Order Number 12, the First Regiment of the Dragoons left Fort Leavenworth on May 29, 1835, with Lieutenant Lancaster Lupton commanding Company A, consisting of 40 men.¹⁸

As with the expeditions that preceded them, Dodge and his men retraced the ancient trade route, following the Missouri River west and the Platte and South Platte southwest. The Dodge expedition entered the northeastern corner of Colorado on July 9 and passed the mouth of the Caché la Poudre River, near present-day Greeley, on July 19. For the next three days the expedition followed the South Platte as its course turned almost due south – marching over and perhaps camping at the future site of Fort Lupton, before reaching what is now known as Cherry Creek in Denver. The expedition continued along the South Platte until it

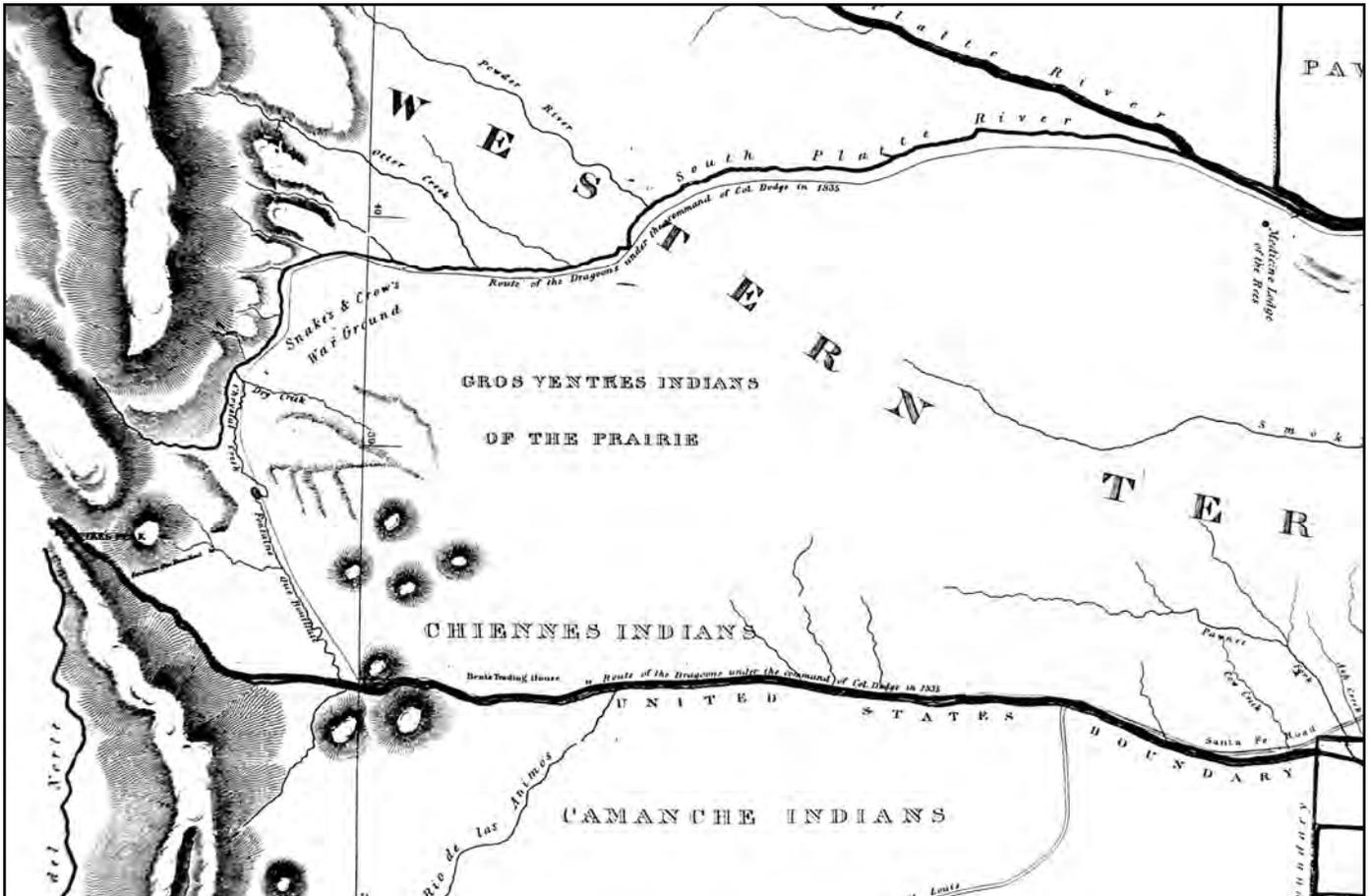
reached the mouth of Platte Canyon. From there, it turned southward until reaching the Arkansas River, returning east by that route.¹⁹

By most accounts, the Dodge Expedition was successful in its mission. General Edmund P. Gains wrote to the adjutant-general in Washington that during the expedition “many nations of Indians were conferred with, and most judiciously impressed with the *justice, humanity and power* of our Government and Country...[emphasis original].”²⁰ Dodge and his men held council with the Omaha, Pawnee, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Blackfeet, and Arickara. He settled disputes among the tribes and assured Native Americans of the government’s good faith, however fleeting, toward them. Dodge, however, gave much of the credit for the expedition’s success to Lieutenant Lupton, awarding him a brace of pistols for his service.²¹ Lupton

quickly built a strong rapport with the Arapahoe and Cheyenne, treating them with respect at same time carefully noting their customs. Moreover, Lupton began to understand the nature of trade with Native Americans. The expedition was his classroom and his commander a teacher. Henry Dodge operated a lead mine in Indian territory before the Blackhawk wars, and the very nature of the expedition was to protect trade along the Missouri and Platte river trails, as well as the Santa Fe Trail. Therefore, Dodge often included a component in speeches before Native American councils pointing out the “economic benefits to be gained by friendly intercourse.”²²

During the expedition another experience nudged Lupton toward opening a trading post on the South Platte. As Dodge and his men traveled east on the Arkansas, they

Map 1. Detail from the map *Route of the Dragons Under the Command of Col. Dodge in 1835*, by Lieutenant Steen. (Library of Congress)



stopped at Bent’s Fort. Constructed in 1832 by the Bent and St. Vrain Company, the fort was located at the confluence of the Arkansas and Purgatory rivers. It was the first permanent trading post on the southern Great Plains. Here Lupton witnessed firsthand various trading activities at this legendary western outpost. Moreover, after weeks of camping on the prairie, Bent’s Fort must have seemed exceedingly lavish – an indication of the wealth to be gained through a western trading post. “To bedazzle the officers,” writes Cleon Roberts, “[the Bent brothers] held a banquet worthy of St. Louis or New Orleans.”²³ Even more compelling than the fort itself was a man Lupton met while delivering an invitation to council to tribes scattered around the settlement. John Gantt had spent years as a fur trapper and trader in the Rocky Mountains. During that time he had gained invaluable experience with the region’s tribes, joining the Dodge expedition as a scout and interpreter. As Company A gathered the tribes, Lupton and Gantt rode with each other, the experienced trapper spinning his tales while the young lieutenant considered the possibilities.²⁴

One final nudge compelled Lupton to begin his own trading post. As the lieutenant earned the praise of superiors and the friendship of enlisted men, his fellow officers became increasingly jealous. Like his father, Lancaster Lupton had strong party affiliations and enjoyed heated political discourse. But this also proved his weakness. His fellow officers baited him into denouncing the commander-in-chief.²⁵ President Andrew Jackson was the object of much criticism during his administration, but among members of the military, especially jealous officers, such a statement was insubordination. Lupton was charged with “abuse of a superior officer,” and held at Fort Leavenworth for a court-

martial trial. He prepared his defense through the winter of 1835-36, but, in March, he discovered that the court would be composed of his opponents. He immediately resigned his commission.²⁶

Fort Lupton and Early Settlers

Fate completed her work, and Lupton accepted his new life with gusto. While traders in the Rocky Mountain region generally served an apprenticeship before going out on their own, Lancaster had no such plan. And even though Bent and St. Vrain, the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, and the American Fur Company claimed trading rights over the entire region, Lupton associated with none of them. When Rufus B. Sage met Lancaster in 1841, he described him as “arrogant” and “self-sufficient,” both necessary qualities for such a daring endeavor.²⁷ Thus, on September 15, 1836, Lancaster Lupton and his caravan left West Port, Missouri, intending to establish a trading post on the stretch of the South Platte River that had captivated him a year earlier. The party traveled west via the Missouri and Platte rivers to Fort Laramie, and then southward to the north-south stretch of the South Platte River. Here Lupton began the construction of his trading post.²⁸

The exact nature of Lupton’s trading post and the chronology of its immediate competitors are difficult to determine. An historiography based upon oral histories and popular myths only complicates the issue. By at least 1838, four trading posts occupied a twelve-mile stretch of the South Platte; beginning in the south and continuing northward, they were Fort Lupton (originally called Fort Lancaster), Fort Jackson, Fort Vasquez, and Fort St. Vrain (originally Fort Lookout). Percy Stanley Fritz’s 1941 *Colorado: The Centennial State* refers to Fort Lupton as “the first” of the South Platte River trading posts.

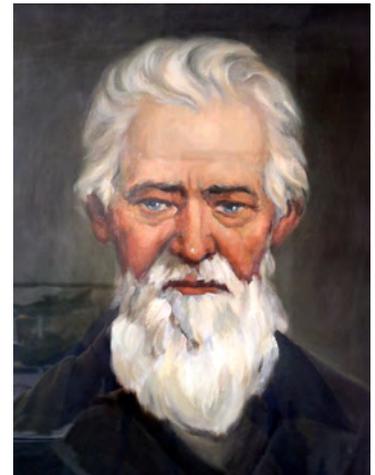


Figure 2. Lieutenant Lancaster Platt Lupton. (Fort Lupton Museum)

TABLE 1: CONFLICTING DESCRIPTIONS OF THE ORIGINAL FORT LUPTON

	W.L.H. Miller 1862	S.J. Hubbell 1877	Denver News Sept. 18, 1884	Oliver Howard 1897	Cragin Int'views 1901-1907	Carrillo/Mehls 1992
Fort Dimensions	n/a	160' by 160'	155' by 125'	n/a	n/a	n/a
Walls	12' high	12' high; 3' wide at top, 4' wide at base	4' by 15'	n/a	n/a	160' x 160' and 100' x 100'
Tower	round tower; 2 stories; first floor even with fort wall	10" center post; 16' high; well to right of tower; 12' diameter	20' by 10'; northeast corner	northwest corner; 24' high; well to right of tower; 14' diameter well	10'-12' to second story; center log post; 18'-20' diameter	18' high outer wall; 10' high inner wall; 3' wide at top, 4' at base
Portholes	loopholes in sec- ond story of tower and bastion	bastion had loopholes	with portholes	corner has pro- jecting works and portholes	6 portholes; 2.5" inside and 6" outside	n/a
Bastion	square; 1.5 times higher than fort wall	2 walls, 8' by 30'; formed L-shape	10' by 20'; southwest corner	n/a	n/a	n/a
Interior	n/a	storehouse, 60' by 40'	n/a	row of cabins outside north wall	row of rooms on east side; rooms 16' square; row of stables west side; flat, earth roofs.	n/a

However, the majority of histories date Fort Vasquez to 1835, a year before Lupton established his post. Regardless of the exact dates, historical and archaeological evidence confirms that all four forts were established within three years of each other, a testament to the sheer volume of trade passing along the South Platte and the intense competition to control the wealth of this route between the western hinterland and eastern markets. The exact dimensions and form of Fort Lupton are unclear. A 1998 document outlining a planned reconstruction of the fort presents a wide array of sizes and descriptions contained in the site's standard historiography. The accompanying table 1, based on the report, provides a glimpse at those varying views.²⁹

What is for certain is that the structure was fairly large, included both domestic and support structures within the palisade, and featured a tower. Mexican laborers construct-

ed the fort of adobe bricks they formed themselves. One wall of the decaying fort was incorporated into a barn. Remnants of the trading post were later dismantled, but a brick remaining in the Fort Lupton Museum provides some idea of the heftiness of the fort's construction. The brick has the density of concrete, suggesting the use of lime. Similar bricks have been identified at other western forts, particularly Fort Laramie, and both the Long and Dodge expeditions noted huge deposits of fossilized seashells the South Platte River had exposed.

Lupton's trading post immediately became a hub on a transportation corridor linking the West to markets in the eastern United States and in Europe, a geographic and economic position that would define much of the history of the City of Fort Lupton. Native Americans (particularly Cheyenne and Arapaho) and Mexican, French

(Adapted from Subia and Dunkle)

and American trappers and traders converged on the fort, usually during the winter. In return for beaver pelts or buffalo robes, Lupton often traded eastern agricultural and manufactured goods. Other trade items Lupton raised and prepared himself, including cattle, mules, garden vegetables, and meat. Once Lupton and his associates completed their transactions for furs, they were packed into bales and transported via caravan down the banks of the Platte to the Missouri. At West Port, Missouri, Lupton's agents traded with the Boone and Hamilton Company. Boone and Hamilton paid for beaver pelts and buffalo robes with notes drawn from St. Louis banks. Lupton's agents then used these notes to purchase more trade goods and supplies for the return trip up the Platte and South Platte rivers. Trade shipments rarely traveled by water because of the unpredictability of stream flow, which could range from a trickling stream to ranging torrent.

As it connected economies, so too did Fort Lupton connect cultures. The wives of trappers, who were often Native American, resided at the fort with their children. Into this mix also came French and Mexican trappers and laborers. The Great Plains had been a cultural crossroads from the beginning of primitive human settlement. Fort Lupton merely magnified this trend.³⁰

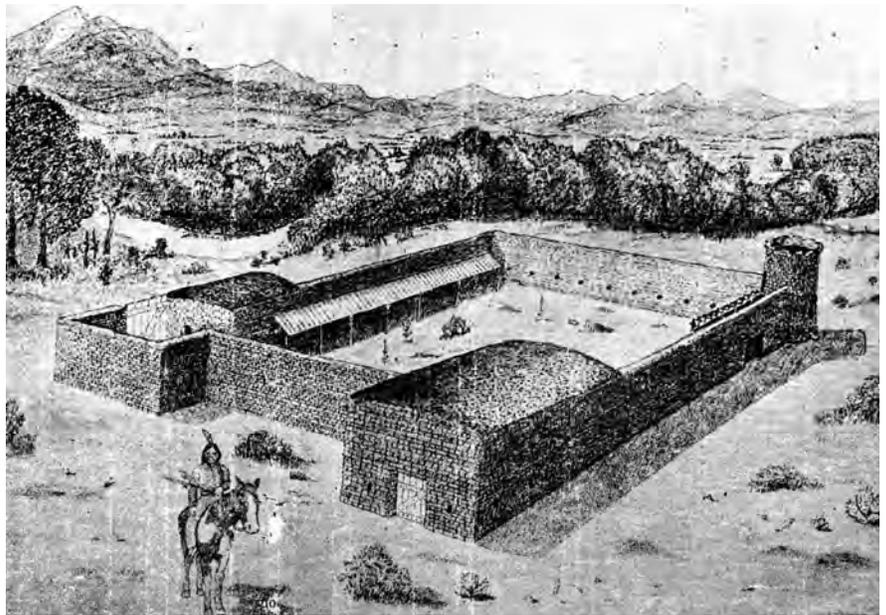
While the South Platte transportation corridor connected Lupton's trading post to national and international economies, it also made it subject to volatile and unpredictable shifts in the market. Around 1840, men in European courts began to prefer silk hats over beaver. The burgeoning European and American upper and middle classes emulated the courtiers and adopted the silk-hat fashion as well. Thus, the whims of European nobility significantly altered the economic focus of Fort Lupton, an indication of just how well

connected the outpost was to the larger world. As a result, Lupton and his fellow South Platte traders endeavored to increase trade in buffalo robes.³¹

But the principal suppliers of buffalo robes appeared at Fort Lupton less and less often. Native American economy and society were profoundly changing at this time. First, many tribes became less dependent upon white traders; they formed their own intertribal trading system, bypassing middlemen such as Lancaster Lupton. Moreover, increasing conflict with whites and lack of immunity to their diseases was beginning to take its toll on Plains Indians. Trade and the population of the fort decreased through the rest of 1843 and 1844. By the beginning of 1845, Lupton began to look elsewhere for his future and fortune. In November, after unsuccessfully petitioning the army to regain his commission, Lancaster joined one of Bent and St.

Figure 3.

A View of Fort Lupton by Dr. K.L. Clock, 1913. Developed from examinations of the ruins of the fort and interviews with pioneers. Given to the Colorado Historical Society. (*Blue and White Courier*, 18 February 1936)



Vrain's caravans as it passed southward around his fort. He followed the party up the Arkansas, where he made an agreement with William Bent to never reopen Fort Lupton.³²

Lancaster Lupton continued to travel west, first opening a store in Hardscrabble,

then joining the California Gold Rush in 1852. He mined until 1862, when he turned his interests toward farming. Lupton began an orchard at Greenpoint in 1874. He died in 1885 and was buried in California. Strangely, the legacy of a man whose life began on the shores of the Atlantic and ended on the Pacific, remains at the center of the continent – a place he resided for only a decade.³³

From the time of Lancaster Lupton's departure in 1845 until the Colorado Gold Rush in 1859, old Fort Lupton hosted a variety of residents and uses. Most stays were brief – passersby on the now well-trodden trail on the banks of the South Platte. David M. Gerry settled just east of the fort and claimed to have occupied the outpost following Lupton. Another notable resident was Marianna Modina (also spelled Madina), one of the earliest permanent Hispanic settlers in northern Colorado and the first person of European descent to settle in the Big Thompson River Valley. As a boy, Modina ran away from his home in Taos, New Mexico, and eventually joined a group of French trappers. He assisted some of the West's most renowned mountain men, including Kit Carson and Jim Baker. A year before finally settling on the Big Thompson in 1858, Modina maintained to have occupied Fort Lupton with his Native American wife and five children. But Modina's claims are difficult to substantiate; he was a gifted storyteller. In later years, he told newcomers to the area that a Spaniard named Madeiro Gonzales Lupton constructed Fort Lupton. Modina's myth was so enduring that in 1926 the Territorial Daughters erected a monument to this alleged founder.³⁴

But an even more pervasive and persuasive myth would bring thousands more by the site of Fort Lupton and spark permanent settlement there – the promise of gold. In the

summer of 1858, a party headed by William Green Russell, a Georgia and California miner, traveled to Colorado to substantiate the claims of Cherokee prospectors who reported finding gold on their way to California gold fields. The Russell party failed to find gold on Cherry Creek or any of the streams in the area. Discouraged, most of the group headed home, leaving Russell, two of his brothers, and a few friends to fend for themselves. But in early July, Russell and his remaining companions discovered a small amount of gold at the mouth of Dry Creek. Visitors to Russell's Dry Creek camp returned east with ever more wild tales of gold discoveries. And as the news traveled eastward through the papers, headlines grew larger and more exaggerated. The Colorado gold rush was born.³⁵

When news of the Dry Creek discovery reached Council Bluffs, Iowa, it caught the attention of Andrew Jackson Williams, a New-York-state native and one-time printer's apprentice. Williams had traveled west once before when a family friend, Colonel A.W. Babbitt, was appointed secretary of the newly organized Utah Territory. Williams arrived in Salt Lake City in 1853, but returned to Council Bluffs three years later when Babbitt was killed in a Native American uprising. Then the Colorado gold rush tugged Williams west once again. In the late summer of 1858, Williams, with his business partners Charles, J.B., and George E. Blake, loaded four wagons with mining equipment and supplies. On October 6, they joined an even larger party near Fort Kearney, Nebraska Territory. Traveling with this party was Colorado's renowned Chief Niwot (also known as Chief Left Hand). The party traveled west along the banks of the Platte River and southwesterly up the South Platte.³⁶

Although more than two decades sepa-

rated the initial arrivals of Lancaster Lupton and Andrew Williams on the South Platte River south of the Caché la Poudre, both men had the same epiphany that struck so many before and after them: the site occupied a strategic location on a much traversed corridor linking western resources to eastern markets. For Lupton it was fur; for Williams it was gold. Williams realized that many thousands more were in his wake, seeking fortune in the Colorado Rocky Mountains. Many would follow the South Platte River Trail. But unlike Lupton, Williams had an advantage: an already constructed, though deteriorated, outpost. Thus, Williams promptly claimed Fort Lupton for his own, left a team of oxen at the outpost, and hired a caretaker. Williams and the Blakes continued to Cherry Creek, where they constructed the first store in the entire region and only the fourth permanent structure in the fledgling town of Auraria, which would later become part of modern Denver.³⁷

When Williams returned to Fort Lupton in the spring of 1859, at the furious height of the gold rush, he was pleased to find that the oxen had grown fat. He and Charles Blake immediately organized a freighting company based at the fort. At the same time, they purchased worn-out cattle from passing wagon trains and reconditioned them on the lush grasses of the South Platte bottomlands. Williams and the Blakes then hired Henry Springer to manage the Fort Lupton trading post. He became the first postmaster and station agent. In the spring of 1860, Williams hired a group of laborers to repair and remodel the fort. As the price of beef and dairy skyrocketed in the mining camps, the Williams and Blake company grew rich supplying and



Figure 4. Detail from the mural *Frontier Woman*, by Hayes Lyon, 1941. (Fort Lupton Public Library.)

transporting those products. Thus, Williams and Blake became the first of many successful transportation and agricultural companies based in Fort Lupton.³⁸

And with the new prosperity of the old fort came more settlers. The 1860 census revealed that, in addition to Williams, the Blakes, and Springer, Fort Lupton itself was home to twelve laborers and a clerk. There were also farmers and ranchers settling around the fort site. Many were former gold seekers who realized that profiting from the highly inflated price of produce in the mining camps was a more reasonable occupation than hard-rock mining. Indeed, settlers were attracted to the Fort Lupton area for its wealth of grasses; the damp and richly fertile soils of the Platte River floodplain supported lush fodder for cattle and horses. Many of the town's founding families established fortunes fattening cattle on these grasses and selling meat and dairy products to the insatiable mining camps and boom towns.³⁹

By the time federal census takers arrived at Fort Lupton, settlers in the area had already taken steps to organize a more formal settlement. According to the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie, the Cheyenne and Arapahoe retained control of the area north of the Santa Fe Trail, east of the mountains, and south of the Oregon Trail – much of Colorado's plains. These tribes allowed whites to travel through this region on established trails and to build forts for the safety and comfort of those travelers; they did not allow permanent settlement. Technically, all the settlers in the Fort Lupton area were squatters on tribal lands. But to protect their claims, these pioneers formed a claim club. Thus, on June 13, 1860, settlers met at Fort Lupton to establish the Platte River Claim Club. Members of the club could be relatively certain that their fellow members would recognize and protect their

land claims. In addition, the clubs policed the territory, removing claim jumpers and arresting cattle and horse thieves.⁴⁰

But new treaties and changes in the government of the territory and in federal land laws soon made claim clubs unnecessary. Increasingly facing the reality of unstoppable white settlement in their territory, Arapahoe and Cheyenne tribal leaders met with William Bent at Bent's Fort in September 1860. The chiefs and Bent, acting as a federal Indian agent, signed a treaty surrendering massive swaths of tribal land and creating the Sand Creek Reservation. A huge area surrounding Fort Lupton became St. Vrain County, Nebraska Territory. While younger Cheyenne warriors refused to recognize the treaty, all of the Southern Cheyenne chiefs had signed by February 18, 1861. Ten days later, President James Buchanan signed a bill creating the Colorado Territory. The county was later renamed Weld, in honor of the first territorial secretary, Lewis Ledyard Weld.⁴¹

As Weld County matured, so too did Fort Lupton. The federal government established a post office here on January 14, 1861, with Henry Springer as the first federal postmaster. The postmark read "Ft. Lupton, C.T." But even earlier, by at least 1859, Fort Lupton received regular mail service on the route from Fort Laramie to Denver. By the time the post office opened, residents in the settlement could send mail and parcels by stage lines and pony express. Also in 1861, Marcus P. Wills joined the Williams's operation at the fort. He helped fund the operation and opened a mercantile. He sold hardware, raised livestock, brokered freight shipments, and even acted as a banker. He also obtained the settlement's first hotel and liquor licenses. By the end of the 1860s, Fort Lupton was a well-established settlement and stage stop, perched on the brink of significant settlement.⁴²

CHAPTER 2

A City Develops

Connecting Denver to the Union Pacific mainline at Cheyenne, completion of the Denver Pacific Railroad through Fort Lupton in 1870 brought a flurry of land speculation to the settlement. (For more information on the railroad, see Chapter 5.) Among its leaders were General James S. Brisben and Colonel John P. Hawkins. Beginning in 1874, Brisben worked through Willer and Todd, land agents in Denver, to promote a new townsite on the South Platte, near Fort Lupton. He offered free lots to anyone who would build a house in the proposed town and promised an acre to anyone willing to build and operate a blacksmith shop, hotel, or saloon. But his timing could not have been worse. The financial panic of 1873 propelled Colorado into a deep depression, which hit rock bottom in 1875. The development of Fort Lupton would have to await better economic times and a more dynamic promoter and leader.⁴³

That leader was William Grant Winbourn, the father of modern Fort Lupton. (For a period around the turn of the twentieth century, some family members spelled their name “Winbourne.”) W.G. was born on October 28, 1825, in Greensboro, North Carolina. He and his wife, Mary Elizabeth Wisdom, moved to Allen County, Kansas, in 1855, and Anderson County in 1859. The Winbourns arrives in Weld County in 1862. They first settled on land west of what would become the town site, on an island formed by

the South Platte River and the Lupton Bottoms Ditch. The following spring, the family moved to a new farm west of the South Platte and south of what is now Highway 52. But the fear of Native American raids and uprisings – which in 1864 drove the family to the safety Denver – continued through much of the 1860s. W.G. returned to the farm to harvest his crops. He carried his gun while in the field and slept at the old fort at night. When fears subsided, the Winbourns built a new home in Lupton Bottoms. They also constructed a milk house of grout, a cement-like mixture of lime and gravel, similar to the bricks of the original Fort Lupton. That structure was one of the oldest in the area.⁴⁴

A faithful Democrat, Winbourn quickly became involved in local politics. He was elected as a Weld County Commissioner in 1869 and county treasurer in 1873. In 1874 he ran an unsuccessful campaign for a seat in the Colorado State Senate. He lost to Ben Eaton by 40 votes. (W.G.’s grandson, Robert E. Winbourn served in the state senate from 1915 to 1918, and was also appointed attorney general.) W.G. and Mary had four children, all of whom were important figures in the history of Fort Lupton: Robert L., Thomas C., Mrs. E.E. Carl and Mrs. W.G. Burge. Mary died in February 1893. W.G. then married Carrie R. Marsh, who died in March 1897 during a pneumonia epidemic.



Figure 5. William Grant Winbourn. (*Fort Lupton Museum.*)

According to local legend, W.G.'s third wife, identified as Mrs. Halliday, poisoned the pioneer, bringing about his death on October 8, 1899.⁴⁵

Yet decades before these events, in the early 1870s, W.G. Winbourn became increasingly interested in a quarter section east of the fort site. Some histories of Fort Lupton suggest that R. E. Jackson originally homesteaded the property in 1864, but against his objections, both the main wagon road and Denver Pacific were built across his land in the 1870s. However, the legal history, as recorded at the office of the Weld County Clerk and Recorder, suggests a different story. The sections in which Fort Lupton now exists appear to have been part of a railroad land grant for the Denver Pacific Railroad. Beginning in 1850, the federal government and later, state governments, offered railroads generous grants of land to entice them to building through uninhabited areas. The railroads, in turn, tried to sell the land as quickly as possible to finance construction. While he could have purchased any one of hundreds of railroad quarter sections for sale between Denver and Cheyenne, Winbourn seemed to understand this particular location's place within a national transportation system. To him, the road and railroad made the parcel infinitely more valuable. Even before he owned the land, Winbourn acted upon his vision of a new town. Thus, in the fall of 1881, Winbourn hired L.P. Drake to survey a town site. The men agreed that the center of the town should be located at the point where travelers would turn off the wagon road to reach the depot. This represented a profound shift in Western town planning. Prior to this time, settlement was based on proximity to natural routes of travel and sources of water. Thus Lancaster Lupton located his trading post on the trail flanking the South Platte

River. Winbourn and Drake, however, re-centered settlement around man-made routes of transportation, at a point considerably more removed from the river as compared to the old fort site. While rivers ran through the center of many Eastern towns and older Western settlements, the South Platte River skirted around the western edge of Fort Lupton. Even today, Fort Lupton barely extends to the eastern bank. Instead, the wagon road and railroad constituted the heart of the town of Fort Lupton. And like the old fort, this location manifested the community's role as a funnel through which agricultural goods were processed and shipped to a national market.

Drake surveyed a narrow, north-south-oriented strip of land between the railroad and wagon road. East-west streets were centered on Fourth Street, which connected the Wagon Road to the station. The town extended south to First Street and north to Eighth Street, spanning from the railroad and Main Avenue to the east and Denver Avenue (the original wagon road) to the west.

With his plan in ink, W.G. Winbourn purchased on May 23, 1882, what would become the town of Fort Lupton from the Union Pacific Railroad, which had taken over the Denver Pacific. Drake filed the plat with Weld County on June 5, when W.G. Winbourn dedicated the graded thoroughfares to the public.⁴⁶

Winbourn immediately began a campaign to entice the Denver Pacific Railroad to take more active role in the settlement he envisioned. He convinced the railroad to move and extend the Fort Lupton siding to the center of his property. Then he circulated a petition calling on the railroad to build a formal depot at the center of his newly purchased parcel. As discussed later in this context, the railroad originally located its only station in the area at Hughes, now Brighton.

At first the railroad planned to move a frame shanty from Hughes to serve as the Fort Lupton depot. But at Winbourn's insistence, the railroad agreed to furnish the interior of a station if the townsfolk would construct the building. Everyone contributed his fair share. W.W. Ozment and his family, for instance, built a kiln on the northeast corner of the Winbourn parcel to fire the bricks for the depot. His bricks would literally become the building blocks of the town of Fort Lupton (see below).⁴⁷

Commercial and Civic Development

Suddenly the most valuable real estate in this portion of the South Platte Valley shifted from the old fort site to Fourth Street between Denver and Main avenues. George W. Twombly and his brother, John purchased a lot on the northeast corner of Denver Avenue and Fourth Street. He predicted that this location would give him the most visibility: traffic would travel north up Denver Avenue to Fourth Street, where it would turn east to the depot. Indeed, the location would remain the nexus of Fort Lupton's commercial district to the present day. In 1882, the Twomblys completed the first building on the first commercial block in Fort Lupton. To dedicate the building, they delayed moving stock onto the sales floor until after they hosted a public dinner and dance. Soon afterward, W.G. Winbourn opened a hotel and store on the east end of the same block. This building became the Hotel Lupton, the premier place of lodging in the town; the *Rocky Mountain News* described it as "a spacious building with good accommodations."⁴⁸

The Hotel Lupton was a sophisticated building for its time and place. The structure was a particularly graceful example of the Italianate style, which was popular in American commercial districts at this time. It



Figure 6. Undated photograph of the Hotel Lupton. The storefront of the Winbourn general store, at left, reads "WINBOURN SHOES & GROCERIES." Standing are (left to right) Mrs. F.J. Halliday, unidentified person, Mabel Halliday, Haynes, and F.J. Halliday. (Fort Lupton Museum.)

evoked the image of an Italian farmhouse or villa and suggested refinement and luxury on the Great Plains. The hotel was replete with segmental-arch windows, decorative brackets and cornice beneath the eaves, and a widow's walk crowning the generous hipped-roof. Unfortunately, this structure was demolished in 1977.⁴⁹

The Hotel Lupton, the original railroad depot, and many of the original commercial and domestic structures were built with Ozment bricks. Walter W. Ozment was a friend of W.G. Winbourn's from their native North Carolina. It was upon Winbourn's advice that Ozment and his family traveled across the plains in 1879, first settling in Denver. Ozment established his first formal brick works southwest of Fort Lupton, but was forced to move the operation because the clay in the area was too alkaline. This condition has created an unusual development in Fort Lupton's early built environment and presents a potentially difficult historic preservation problem. Alkaline bricks are soft and deteriorate quickly in Colorado's intense sunlight and temperature extremes. Unfortunately, it is this very brick that comprises a large portion of the city's historic structures. Over the years, owners were left with little option but to apply generous coat-

ings of stucco to the exteriors of their buildings, often hiding coping and other decorative brickwork.⁵⁰

Bricks or no bricks, Fort Lupton did not experience the same boom as many of Colorado's other towns. Economic panics and depressions continued through much of the rest of the nineteenth century. Because the town was so well linked to the gold mining camps to the west and the national markets to the east, it was not isolated from these troubled times. As Cleon Roberts writes in his history of Fort Lupton, "it would be just as accurate to say that the town just evolved...."⁵¹

Evolution, however, is a constant, unending process. Henry Bowen Allsebrook, arrived in Fort Lupton with his family in 1895. Before his family established the Philip and Allsebrook Company hardware store, Henry remembered two general stores, two blacksmith shops, one hotel that also served meals, one barbershop, and his uncle's lumberyard. Soon other storefronts joined Twombly's and Winbourn's. The years 1889 - 90 were a pivotal time in the development of modern Fort Lupton. A number of hotels, shops, and a saloon sprang up in town. William Grant Winbourn completed a two-story commercial structure on the southeast corner of Denver and Fourth. It featured retail space on the bottom floor and a social hall on the second. Sometimes referred to as Winbourn Hall, it was more often known by the name of its longtime upstairs tenant, the Knights of Pythias or K.P. Hall. On the southwest corner, E.K. Smith constructed a similar building to the K.P. Hall in 1890. The Philip and Allsebrook Company purchased the building for their hardware store in 1902.⁵²

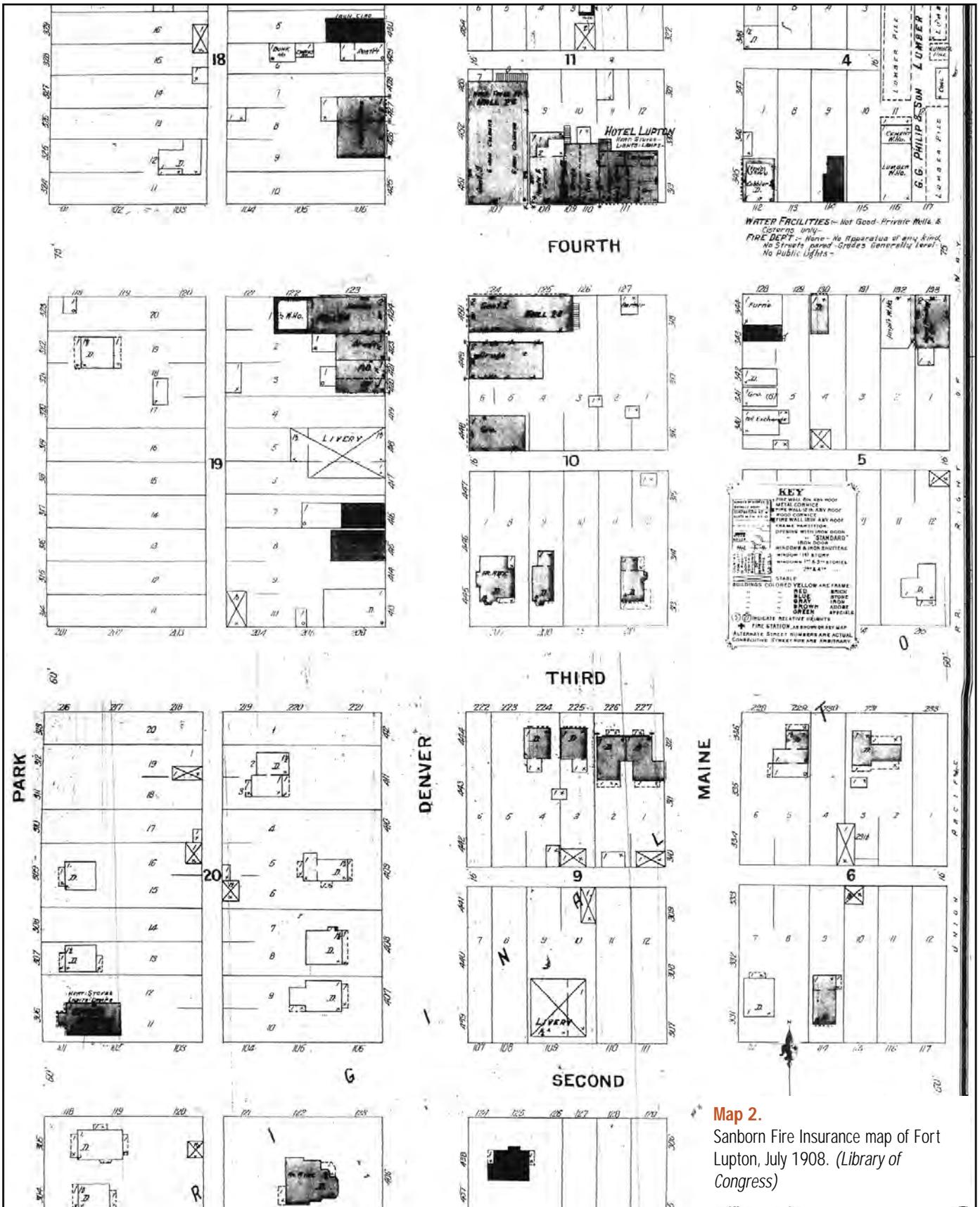
Also in 1890, John H. Farrar published the first edition of the *Fort Lupton Cyclone*. The exact lineage of papers is difficult to

trace. However other papers or incarnations of previous enterprises include the *Fort Lupton Fact* (ca. 1893) and the *Platte Valley Post* (ca. 1898).

With a formal business district and an increasing number of houses residents of Fort Lupton presented a petition for incorporation to a Weld County judge on October 29, 1889. The petition was filed on November 27 and ratified by male voters within the town limits on December 30. At 7 p.m., on February 4, 1890, at Lambrecht Hall (301 Denver Avenue), Thomas C. Winbourn, son of W.G. Winbourn, was sworn in as Fort Lupton's first mayor. Taking the oath of office with him were the town's first trustees Dr. Stephen J. Hubbell, W.S. Decker, L.G. Monson, Ben F. Twombly, and A.M. Ewing.⁵³

As Fort Lupton matured as a town, it also matured financially with the opening of the Fort Lupton State Bank in 1900. Seymour J. Rhode and his wife established the bank on the lower floor of the Hotel Lupton. Mrs. Rhode served as the bank president and Seymour was the cashier. The bank had total assets of \$25,000 and the first day's deposits were \$3,528.50. A decade after the bank opened, it completed a new building, located on the northwest corner of Fourth Street and Denver Avenue, completing the center of Fort Lupton's commercial district. In 1912, a second financial institution, Platte Valley Bank, opened.⁵⁴

The first Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Fort Lupton appeared in 1908, when the population was around 700. Dominating the commercial district was the St. John Building, the old Twombly general store, by far the largest retail structure downtown. From the corner of Denver and Fourth, the town spread south between Park Avenue and the Union Pacific right-of-way. The map depicts approximately 35 retail and industrial structures and nearly



Map 2. Sanborn Fire Insurance map of Fort Lupton, July 1908. (Library of Congress)

the same number of domestic structures. A 1912 map, however, reveals that only one major new structure was built downtown, a garage – a symbol of things yet to come.⁵⁵

A 1917 Sanborn maps actually reflects a flurry of construction since the last map in 1912. Much of that construction was associated with the automobile (see Chapter 5). Fort Lupton rebounded following the armistice concluding World War I. Through the 1920s, the canneries, the condensery, and the sugar beet factory prospered – and the automobile began eroding the dominance of the railroad. By 1930, Fort Lupton’s original commercial and residential districts reached the pinnacle of new construction and had largely evolved into the streetscape familiar to residents today.⁵⁶

Residential Development

Like most towns in Colorado, Fort Lupton doubtless hosted numerous unrecorded and unremembered wood-frame shanties. Determining the oldest domestic structure in what is now Fort Lupton is difficult because of gaps in property records and the renumbering and renaming of streets. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that the oldest house was located on the east side of Denver Avenue, north of Ninth Street. Unfortunately, attempts to move the structure appear to have demolished the original house, although a structure stands on the lot today. In his histo-



Figure 7. This photograph depicts the Odd Fellows Hall shortly after its construction in 1914. Located on the northeast corner of Denver Avenue and Third Street, the Odd Fellows Hall represents the expansion of the commercial district along Denver Avenue during the 1910s and '20s. These buildings are more substantial and architecturally sophisticated than their predecessors. (David Norcross Collection)

ry of Fort Lupton, Cleon Roberts suggests that the first house in town was erected around 1884 on two lots belonging to Mary Delano. (Property records, however, indicate that W.G. Winbourn maintained ownership of these lots until 1890.) This house is originally associated with Dr. Stephen J. Hubbell, the town’s first physician, druggist, one of Fort Lupton’s original town trustees, and a mayor. While this house is among the oldest houses in the city, it is unlikely that it was the first. Indeed, an 1885 photograph of the town shows no less than five houses, all of which, while vernacular in style, are fairly substantial structures. What is clear, however, is that the town’s earliest domestic development was concentrated in a narrow strip between Denver Avenue and the Union Pacific Railroad, bounded by Fourth Street to the north and Second Street to the south. The Dr.

Figure 8. Fort Lupton, 1885. Photograph taken from the corner of First Street and Denver Avenue. Structures are identified as (1) G.W. Twombly Store; (2) Hotel Winbourn (Hotel Lupton); (3) Andrew Ewing house; (4) Charles Safford house; (5) Dr. Hubbell house; (6) E.S. St. John house; (7) Union Pacific Depot; (8) Hepner house. (Fort Lupton Museum.)



Hubbell house still stands. Also standing are the William H. Hepner house, on the north side of Second Street, east of Main; and the original Edgar S. St. John house, on the north side of Third Street, by the railroad tracks. St. John constructed the house when he returned to Fort Lupton to become the station agent. (He later constructed a more elaborate house at 149 Park Avenue.) Certainly, this 1886 photograph does not depict all houses in Fort Lupton. Indeed, by that year, 50 people lived in the town. By 1889 the town boasted a population of 150, which more than doubled a year later.⁵⁷

And that population soon settled on lands beyond the town as originally platted. Additional subdivisions to the original town carry the names of Fort Lupton pioneers. George Twombly added two subdivisions; one was merely a block surrounded by the original town, bordered by Second Street on the north, Denver Avenue on the east, First Street on the South, and Park Avenue on the west. Another Twombly addition was located between McKinley and Fulton Avenues, stretching between Second and Fourth. In 1898, T.C. Winbourn built a house east of the Union Pacific Railroad on land acquired from his father. The parcel stretched from the railroad to Short Line Ditch and from First Street to Ninth Street. While continuing to operate a large cattle and horse operation on the land, T.C. Winbourn subdivided some of property, which became known as the Winbourn Addition, and promoted the expansion of Fort Lupton east of the U.P. The original Winbourn house still stands at 110 Pacific Avenue, on the extreme southwest corner of the addition. It was also home to another prominent Fort Lupton mayor, Dr. W.W. Aichelman. Perhaps the most important addition to the city, at least as civic affairs are concerned, were the Reynolds subdivisions



Figures 9 and 10.

The Dr. Stephen J. Hubbell house, above, and the Edgar S. St. John house, below, are among the oldest residences in modern Fort Lupton. (Photos by the author)



south of First Street. R.C. Reynolds, who owned the land, set aside significant portions of the subdivision as parks. In the past, this open space contained the town's water tower and waterworks. Today, this open space hosts the Fort Lupton Middle School, town hall, and police station.⁵⁸

Fort Lupton never developed neighborhoods of huge, Victorian-era houses that appeared in Denver, Boulder, and even Greeley. Nonetheless, around the turn of the

twentieth century, the town boasted a number of architecturally sophisticated houses. Among the most impressive was the dwelling at 149 Denver Avenue, on the southwest corner of Denver and Second Street. While the structure provided only a story and half of living space, it was brilliantly designed and sited to provide an illusion of great mass. The steeply pitched, central hipped roof, combined with the rounded tower, provide a sense of height while the unusually deep setback and corner orientation communicate depth. Styled in the free-classic Queen Anne, the structure applies classical architectural elements, such as Tuscan Doric columns and pediments, to the complicated footprint and flamboyant roof line of a more traditional Queen Anne. Moreover, this structure represents a significant shift in Fort Lupton's domestic architectural styles – from late Victorian-era to the neoclassical.

In Fort Lupton, as in the rest of Colorado, the neoclassical is best expressed in the stylistic elements of the classic cottage. These structures were widely built in Fort Lupton and almost always featured a rectangular-shaped plan, hipped roof with flared eaves, front-gabled central dormer, and classical columns, cornices, and pediments. A particularly high-style example of the classic cottage was located at 139 Park Avenue. Of note were the carved, Roman ionic columns, which supported the roof of the curved, wrap-around porch.

The classic cottage, however, was a high-style form associated with the middle class. Working-class families could not afford the decorative elements and size. Thus, a vernacular form, devoid of large porches and frills, developed alongside the classic cottage – the hipped-roof box. These structures are perhaps the most ubiquitous form in Colorado and one closely associated with agricultural and



Figures 11 and 12.

The house at 149 Denver Avenue, above, exhibits the characteristics of the free-classic Queen Anne and represents a transition from exaggerated historicist architecture to styles more accurately based on classical architecture, such as the classic cottage at 139 Park Avenue, below. (Photos by the author)



industrial workers, particularly immigrants. Often these houses were grouped beside each other, such as at 221 and 229 McKinley Avenue.

Moreover, the geographic arrangement of domestic architectural styles and forms parallels the economic and social development of Fort Lupton. Those structures closest to the intersection of Fourth Street and

Denver Avenue are typically the oldest, becoming newer in direct relationship with distance from downtown. The houses closest to town are small, wood-frame or brick vernacular structures. As a professional class increased in Fort Lupton from 1890 to 1920, so too did the occurrence of late Victorian-era houses. Classic cottages and hipped-roof boxes are emblematic of the town's agricultural-industrial economy, with the middle-class managers and merchants and working-class field and factory laborers. The circle of domestic development continues outward to the period from 1920 to 1940, when Craftsman-style bungalows and Tudor-revival cottages dominate the neighborhoods. The structures represent a growing affluence for all residents and provide the first hints that Fort Lupton was becoming a bedroom community for Denver. Indeed, sprinkled between the bungalows and even earlier classic cottages are ranch houses, the icons of 1950s and early '60s suburban development.

Social Life and Entertainment

After the 1891 openings of the E.R. Bringe Billiards and Saloon and the Henry G. Lambrecht Billiards and Saloon public drunkenness in Fort Lupton rose. G.G. Philip and Edgar St. John, along with other influential citizens, opposed the saloons but were unable to close them. In 1894, however, the temperance movement had gained support and, more importantly, women had won the right to vote in Colorado. With the organization of the Fort Lupton chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the town went "dry" until the end of Prohibition in 1929.⁵⁹

Many business owners complained that prohibition had also eradicated any social diversions from the community. Travelers simply passed through the town and went



Figures 13 and 14.

The vernacular, working-class form of the popular classic cottage was the hipped-roof box. Usually, they were constructed in groups in neighborhoods, such as the pair at 221 and 229 McKinley Avenue, above. As Fort Lupton's neighborhoods spread outward from downtown, more Craftsman-style bungalows appear, suggesting an increasing suburban influence from Denver. The example below is located at 248 South Park Avenue. (Photos by the author)



directly to Denver rather than remain in dry Fort Lupton. But from the earliest days of the town, an array of social activities delighted residents. The Knights of Pythias Hall hosted the majority of these social functions. Built 1889, it remains on the southeast corner of Denver Avenue and Fourth Street. While the bottom floor was rented out as retail space, the top floor was open for a variety of civic

affairs. Here the community held dinners and dances. In 1905, the school children presented a play entitled “Tom Thumb’s Wedding.”⁶⁰

In 1911, George Beeten, an auctioneer, opened Fort Lupton’s first movie theater, located south of the Sells Building. The structure was nothing more than a frame, barn-like structure that doubled as a basketball court. The audience was accommodated on wooden planks suspended across chairs. This system could seat about 200 people. A hand-cranked projector was located on a platform above the main door to the Beeten Theatre, also known as the Gem Theatre. Adults paid ten cents and children five cents for a glimpse at the day’s silent-picture offerings. Beeten later opened a theater in another structure before W.A. Seaman remodeled the former Putnam Garage, at 318 Denver Avenue, into the Star Theater in 1917-18. This new theater could seat 450. It opened on June 1 with William Farnum’s *The Orphan*.⁶¹

Owners of the Star reinvented the theater many times during its years of entertaining Luptonites. The first incarnation of the structure was little improvement over the original garage. Other than expanding the rear of the garage to accommodate more seating and the screen, owners merely applied a stuccoed, Spanish-mission-style façade over the garage opening. It featured the obligatory stepped parapet. In 1946, however, owners applied an art moderne exterior, replete with stainless steel and generous amounts of neon. Crowning the marquee was a neon sign, which rewrote “STAR” in red, white, and blue. As ticket sales began to decline in the early 1950s, manager E.K. Menagh renovated the theater and renamed it the “Big Top.” Inside, murals of the circus scenes graced the walls. But the Hollywood glitz and glamour of the Star must have been more alluring than the sawdust and manure of the circus; Menagh returned to the name “Star” around



1959, installing a less inspired version of the 1946 façade.⁶²

Figure 15.

The Knights of Pythias Hall, above, now the American Legion building, on the southeast corner of Denver Avenue and Fourth Street, was the social heart of early Fort Lupton. (Photo by the author)

In addition to dinners, dances, plays, and movies, Fort Lupton residents could also participate in social and fraternal organizations. By 1896, the town had two fraternal lodges. The T.X.L. Lodge No. 70 of the Knights of Pythias met on Wednesday evenings at their hall on the corner of Fourth and Denver. Birch Camp No. 44, Woodmen of the World, met Thursday evenings at the K.P. Hall. And the men were not alone; there was also a Ladies’ Aid Society.⁶³ But one of the oldest women’s clubs in Fort Lupton was formed in 1902. Originally called the Thursday Musical

Figure 16.

The Star Theater, below, actually began its life as Fort Lupton’s first filling station. Since that time, the façade has been recreated numerous times. (Photo by the author)



Club, members changed the name to the Thursday Afternoon Club when it became a literary organization as well. By 1921, these literary pursuits ultimately enticed members to establish a library in Fort Lupton, first housed in the basement of the Methodist Church. It later moved to the office of Dr. W.A. Lee and to the town hall. In the late 1920s, the library's supporters began a campaign to build a new library building. Citizens purchased subscriptions while various social clubs held fundraisers. Designed by architect John J. Huddardt and built in the Romanesque style of many small-town Carnegie libraries (but without Carnegie funding), the new Fort Lupton Library was completed in October 1929 at a cost of \$13,000. Before the competition of Fort Lupton's new high school in 1931, the library rented its main floor and a portion of the basement to the school district. This situation provided the library, which initially housed 2,850 volumes, an opportunity to completely pay off construction costs. This structure is now the Fort Lupton Museum.⁶⁴

Public Services and Utilities

In 1901, Fort Lupton town trustees acquired the community's first water rights, transferred via irrigation ditches. But it was not until 1908 that even a temporary system brought water to residents. A note on Sanborn map from that year revealed a dire situation:

Water Facilities:—Not Good—Private Wells & Cisterns only.—

Fire Department:—None—No Apparatus of any kind. No Streets Paved. Grades Generally Level.—No Public Lights.⁶⁵

The heart of the town's primitive system was a tank installed on the roof of the St. John building. But citizens and members of the town board alike were concerned that the water system would prove inadequate for

controlling a large fire in the community. Thus, on March 16, 1910, contractors handed over to the city a new municipal water works. Connecting properties to the water mains, however, was another matter. While the town installed pipes east of the Union Pacific, the railroad refused to allow the utility lay pipes beneath its right-of-way. Nonetheless, by the end of 1911, most businesses and residences in the city were connected to the water mains.⁶⁶ The next Sanborn Map, drawn and printed in 1912, reflected a vastly different situation in Fort Lupton:

Water Facilities: Water works owned and operated by the city. Water supply from two 18" bored wells 52' deep. 100,000 gallon steel water tank located 1/4 mile S.W. of P.O. [post office]. Water tank supported by steel trestle. ... Tank has an elevation of 110' feet above grade of business section. Gravity pressure [sic] domestic & fire 47 lbs. Per sq. in. 1 Fairbanks Morse gasoline pumping engine 50 hp & having a capacity of 500 gals per minute. About 8 1/4 miles of 4", 6", 8" & 10" cast iron water pipes. Pipes laid in 1911. 87 double hyd [fire hydrants].

Fire Dept: Volunteer. 70 members. Hand hook & ladder truck. 2 hand hose carts. 1000' 8 1/8" hose in good condition — 6[,] 3-gal chem'l fire extinguishers. Alarm by bell at hotel & by whistle at condensed milk plant. No paved streets. Grades level. Public lights electric.⁶⁷

Despite the notation on the 1908 Sanborn, Fort Lupton did indeed have a fire department. It was organized on December 1, 1898, with H. Burton as chief, W.A. Simmons as captain, E.K. Smith as secretary. Around 1910, the fire department acquired horse-drawn fire engine with a single gasoline-powered pump. Yet the biggest boon to fire suppression in Fort Lupton was the completion of the water works. Indeed, two years and a day after the town took control of the water plant, on the early morning of March 17,

1912, a fire started in the St. John Mercantile Company building, on the northeast corner of Fourth and Denver. The fire department quickly controlled the fire, but not before it had destroyed the building. Edgar St. John almost immediately set about rebuilding, constructing the handsome edifice that crowns the corner to this day.

While a modern fire department and water system worked to prevent fires, the dawn of municipal electric power ignited more of them. Electric lights were one of the more interesting developments. From its dawn, the nature and control of electrical power was a contentious issue that ripped apart cities and towns across America. No other innovation in history had the ability to dazzle Americans like electric lighting. In 1880, when an agent for the Brush Company turned on four, three-thousand-candlepower arc lamps at the courthouse in Wabash, Indiana, the local newspaper captured the scene:

People stood overwhelmed with awe, as if in the presence of the supernatural. The strange weird light exceeded in power only by the sun, rendered the square as midday. ... Men fell on their knees, groans were uttered at the sight, and many were dumb with amazement.⁶⁸

With the spectacle came a willing embrace of the new technology. Whereas other nineteenth-century innovations took years to develop and implement, electric lighting and power took mere months. Launched by the race to develop a safer and more practical alternative to the arc lamp – the incandescent bulb – Thomas Edison and other inventors across the globe vied to develop hundreds of innovations making electric lighting practical almost anywhere. In 1882, Edison opened the first central generating station in the heart of Manhattan’s financial district. Twenty years later, 2,250 power



plants illuminated cities across the country. Among them was Fort Lupton, which had clamored for electric lighting as early as the 1890s, only a few years after the dynamos at Edison’s first plant started spinning.⁶⁹

One problem facing Fort Lupton trustees and citizens was the nature of electricity; was it a public service that should be controlled through social policies, or was it commodity to be bought and sold, belonging to the realm of private enterprise? A second problem was the dominance of the lone engineer-entrepreneur. Gifted thinkers and tireless tinkerers, engineer-entrepreneurs combined business savvy with the technical skills necessary to implement and manage a new technology. But these entrepreneurs were offering towns their services just as the very foundations of the electric power industry – and the economy in general – shifted beneath them. Electric power transformed from novelty to necessity, sparking the evolution of high-voltage transmission networks and the ever-expanding availability of electrically powered devices. The emergence of regional and national corporate bureaucracies, referred to as the second industrial revolution, supplanted engi-

Figure 17.

Since George Twombly opened his general store in 1882, the northeast corner of Denver Avenue and Fourth Street has been the cornerstone of Fort Lupton’s commercial district. Immediately after a devastating fire destroyed the original structure in 1912, Edgar St. John built the handsome edifice pictured above. (Photo by the author)

neer-entrepreneurs.⁷⁰

Thus, it is not a surprise that electrical power issues consumed Fort Lupton’s town trustees. In 1906, the town granted a franchise to one of its trustees, Joseph J. Henry, an engineer-entrepreneur, to furnish electrical power to the community. He pledged to provide service in 18 months. He would limit the price to 12.5 cents per kilowatt hour, provide free electricity to the town council room and fire house, and operate street lights at no more than \$8 a month. But, as was typical, Henry floundered, and a year later the town extended the electric-power franchise to the Northern Colorado Power Company. This effort also appears to have failed. In 1908, the town granted yet another franchise to Consolidated Engineering. But electricity did not arrive in Fort Lupton until March 1910, when F.B. Tiffany acquired the exclusive right to operate the town’s utilities. Every street corner was lighted by June 1911. In 1912, Tiffany organized the Fort Lupton Light and Power Company, appointing W.C. Sterne as the general manager. It had 142 paying customers within one year.⁷¹

The town approved the first telephone franchise on October 7, 1895. The exchange was located at 322 Main Avenue.⁷²

Churches

Originally, religious observances in the Fort Lupton area were scattered, informal affairs conducted within the home. On April 19, 1863, Rev. L.B. Statler (or Stater), of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, preached the first sermon in Lupton Bottoms. From that time forward, the Methodist Episcopal church remained the dominant religious institution in the town. By 1864, the area had a regular, circuit-riding preacher, originally Rev. William Autes. In 1877 Rev. John Collins purchased a parcel of land from

the Union Pacific Railroad as the site of church building. During construction, Revs. A.W. Fields and H.L. Beardsley served the congregation. The church building, completed in 1879, was the first of its kind in Fort Lupton; the congregation was also only the second in Colorado. Henry Allsebrook, who arrived in Fort Lupton in 1895, remembered the church as the social and religious center of the community.⁷³ Members of the Allsebrook and Philip families were primary leaders in the early church, perhaps wielding too much influence for some. “I can recall a yarn about a certain lady who withdrew from the church,” Henry Allsebrook writes, “saying that members ‘worshiped the Philips and Allsebrooks instead of the Lord.’”⁷⁴ The congregation began construction of a new church building in 1912-14, completing the structure in 1916. It stands on the northeast corner of Third Street and Park Avenue. (The original church is now the Bostick Funeral Home.) Benefactors of the new building were some of the most prominent members of Fort Lupton: G.G. Saywell, C.C. Philip, Wylie W. Burge, H.B. Allsebrook, E.S. St. John, Sanford Davis, G.S. Allsebrook, G.G. Philip, W.S. Decker, W.D. Reynolds, and Mrs. Lena M. Twombly. The congregation adopted the name First Methodist Church in 1939.⁷⁵

Figure 18.

The first place of worship constructed in Fort Lupton was the Methodist Episcopal Church, below, completed in 1879. The congregation moved to a new structure in 1916. The old church is now the Bostick Funeral Home. However, the original buttresses are still visible, a glance beneath awning reveals gothic-arched windows, and the cornerstone remains intact, just inside the door at right. (Photo by the author)



A number of Fort Lupton's pioneer families, particularly the Winbourns, were of English descent and devout members of the Anglican church. Thus, informal meetings of Episcopalians were not uncommon. But it was not until 1886, when traveling Episcopal priest baptized a young man in the Fort Lupton area that a congregation began to form. The young man's parents were intent upon maintaining the faith, holding meetings in their home every two months. About that same time, a group of Episcopal women in the Fort Lupton area organized the St. Mary's Guild to continue and enhance to work of that first family. Services were eventually conducted monthly on the top floor of the Knights of Pythias Hall (Winbourn Hall) and Smith Hall (the Philip and Allsebrook hardware store). By 1902, an Episcopalian parish was firmly established in Fort Lupton. In 1907, the fledgling congregation purchased lots on the northeast corner of Park Avenue and Second Street. In the early summer of 1908, members of the congregation, led by Robert Ozment, son of W.W. Ozment, began construction of a new church building. It was completed in October 1908 and consecrated on November 29 of that year. Although small and without a permanent vicar, the congregation of St. Andrews continues to worship in their original church building.⁷⁶

And Baptist services were also first held in homes beginning around 1900. In 1921, the fledgling congregation completed a stunning Craftsman-style edifice on the northeast corner of First Street and McKinley Avenue.⁷⁷

The early town of Fort Lupton had few Catholic families, except for the Ockers, Stiebers, Reffertys and a few others. But construction of the railroad brought with it scores of Irish, Italian, Polish, and other predominantly Roman Catholic ethnic groups. Thus, the Church established a circuit in 1887, with



Father William J. Howlett as the first rider. Howlett was based in Brighton, but held services in Fort Lupton, Platteville, and in a host of communities throughout northeastern Colorado. In Fort Lupton, Howlett celebrated Mass at the K.P. Hall, the home of Frank Gorman, and at the St. John Building. In 1909, an Episcopalian Thomas G. Winbourn donated the land for the first Catholic Church, located at corner of Fourth Street and Harrison Avenue. The cornerstone was laid the same year. The largest contributors of the church suggested that parish be named for their two patron saints, St. William and St. Julianna. St. William was in honor of William C. Winbourn. The church was completed in 1910. A decade later, the Catholic church in Fort Lupton became a mission church of a new parish established in Platteville. By 1955, however, Fort Lupton had five times as many Catholic families as Platteville. Thus, the Fort Lupton church became the center of parish. Under Father Thomas Doran, pastor, the parish name changed to St. William Abbot and, because of severe overcrowding, Masses were celebrated at the Star Theater. The parish purchased a 7.5-acre parcel, at Tenth

Figure 19.

The members of St. Andrews Episcopal Parish have worshiped in this tidy church since its construction in 1908. (Photo by the author)

and Fulton, in 1956. The new church building was dedicated in 1957.⁷⁸

In 1909, Elder Richardson held the first Seventh-Day Adventist services in a tent. The first church was built in 1910. Brother Nichabarger preached the first sermon there.⁷⁹

Schools

Like its early churches, Fort Lupton's first schools were often informal sessions within the home. The earliest school buildings in the area were simple log or frame one-room school houses. One of the most notable of these schools was located west of the South Platte. The structure, constructed of the same lime-and-gravel mixture as the Winbourn milk house, was actually called the "Groutt School." In May 1873, all the schools in the Fort Lupton area were consolidated into Weld County School District 8. A year later, the first school in what is now Fort Lupton was constructed on the northwest corner of Denver Avenue and First Street. The original structure burned down upon completion and was immediately rebuilt. It was one room with two rows of double seats separated by a center aisle. As the population increased, two more buildings were constructed in 1885 and 1893, respectively, on the southeast corner of Ninth Street and Main Avenue, the current location of the Buddhist Temple. Quickly even these buildings proved inadequate, and the Philip and Allsebrook hardware store and the Alice Peck home both served as classrooms. The first eighth grade to graduate from a Fort Lupton school was on April 6, 1896. The graduates were Nellie Monson, Mrs. Shaw, Mrs. Daisy Counter, Ella Smith, Talbott Monson, Clarence Frink, and Ralph Haynes.⁸⁰

In 1913 the district issued \$22,300 in bonds for the construction of the town's first



large-scale school building. It was located on First Street just west of the former library, now the Fort Lupton Museum, and contained eight classrooms, an office, library, laboratory, and a manual training and domestic science room. Additions expanded the structure to the east and west. In 1930, the district approved a \$100,000 bond issue for a new high school, now the middle school, constructed in 1931-32. The building was designed by Ireland & Parr and constructed by M. McEahern. The structure received six major additions, beginning in 1948 and continuing until the 1990s. Other small additions and renovations spanned until 2003. The original core, however, remains intact and is a perfect example of the Collegiate Gothic architecture popular for academic buildings

Figure 20.

Fort Lupton Consolidated School after the addition of wings to its east and west sides. The buildings was located just west of the original library, now the Fort Lupton Museum, on First Street. (Fort Lupton Museum)

Figure 21.

Fort Lupton High School, now the middle school, is an iconic example of collegiate Gothic architecture. (Fort Lupton Museum)



throughout the 1920s. The style was even more widely built after the creation of the Works Progress (later Projects) Administration (WPA), a Depression-era, federal make-work program. WPA workers built or renovated 5,900 schools across the country. In Fort Lupton, WPA artist Hayes Lyon created three murals for the high school library in 1941. Each depicted, in bold colors and heroic postures, scenes of frontier life in

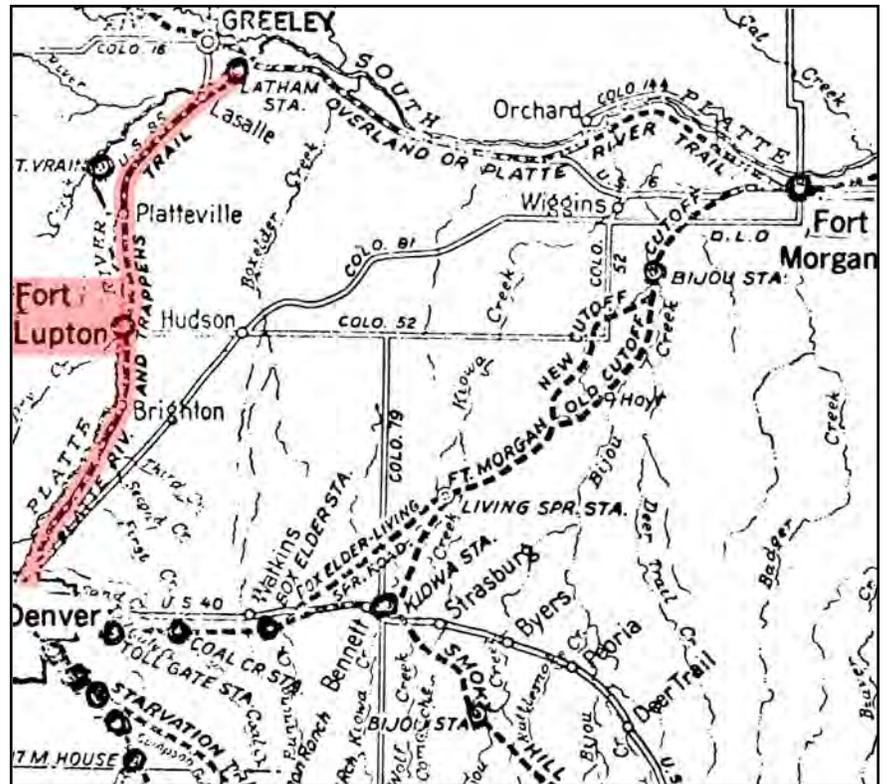
and around the original Fort Lupton. The murals were eventually removed from the library when the district converted the high school into the middle school. After years in storage, they were rehung in the new Fort Lupton Public and School Library. The city designated the murals historic objects on March 22, 1995. Details from those murals can be found throughout this context, including the cover.⁸¹

CHAPTER 3

THE FREIGHTER'S CAMPGROUND: HISTORY OF TRANSPORTATION IN FORT LUPTON

The development of modern Fort Lupton depended upon its location on an ancient and well-trodden transportation corridor linking East and West. As mentioned before in this context, the Missouri River and its tributaries, especially the Platte, provided an easy route for the commodities of the western hinterland to reach eastern markets and the manufactured goods of the east to travel west. This was the route of numerous explorers and was reinvented numerous times by foot, wagon, train, and automobile, all the while connecting Fort Lupton to larger national and international economies.

The earliest transportation routes were nothing more than dirt paths known to Native Americans and early European trappers. By the 1820s, pack trains regularly traversed the Santa Fe Trail from Missouri to New Mexico. Because of land disputes and Native American aggression, Anglo settlement and established trails remained largely south of the Arkansas River. But in the 1840s, the South Platte became part of an informal branch of the Oregon Trail, running from Fort Laramie to Denver. At that time, the trail through Fort Lupton was generally referred to as the Trappers Trail – an indication of the economic force of the fur trade in Colorado. With the establishment of the Overland Trail to Denver, the Fort Lupton Route became part of the larger Platte River Trail.⁸²



Stage Lines and Toll Roads

The first federally funded transportation endeavors to follow the South Platte River Trail were the Overland stagecoaches and the Pony Express. In the 1860s, Williams and the Blake brothers, and later Wills, evolved the former fur trading post into the nineteenth century equivalent of a modern truck stop – a freighter's campground. Here travelers and their teams could rest, purchase supplies, and retire worn out livestock and purchase fresh animals. "They would make the extra effort to get to [Fort Lupton] for they knew that

Map 3.

Pioneer trails in northeastern Colorado. (From "Fort Lupton Stagehouse: A ghost of the past," Market Place, 17 Sept 1974, p. 12)

there would be not only water for the oxen plus good grass,” writes Cleon Roberts, “but that at the foot of the river bank there was a fine spring, scooped out and walled in by the soldiers at the post. The drivers could always get a drink of pure, clear, cold water, which was a rare treat on the sixty-day drive from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountain mining camps.”⁸³

The Colorado gold rush, with its ceaseless flow of people and goods, also enticed other transportation entrepreneurs – the toll road builders. In 1862, Edwin Toole, Thomas L. MacKoy, and A.G. Clark hoped to reinvent the South Platte River transportation corridor once again with the Platte Valley Wagon Road Company. They secured a right-of-way from Julesburg to Fort Lupton and incorporated the company on January 6, 1862. The schedule of rates was as follows:

- In case of one toll gate: \$1.50 per pair of oxen or horses;
- In case of two toll gates: 75¢ for each pair;
- For each spare load wagon or other wheeled carriage: 15¢;
- Loose mules, horse, and cattle: 3¢;
- Hogs or sheep: 1 1/2¢ each.⁸⁴

But like most Colorado toll roads, the Platte Valley Wagon Road proved too costly for most travelers and freighters. Indeed, Ben Holliday immediately rerouted his stage line out of Julesburg through Fort Morgan to Denver, eliminating the Fort Lupton segment. The company was soon forced to sell its assets for \$500 to a group of investors who reorganized it as the Fort Lupton Wagon Road Company. But in time, that enterprise too went bankrupt. Like many wagon roads in Colorado, however, the right-of-way became a territorial highway and the major artery through Fort Lupton.⁸⁵

Railroads

But an even more technologically advanced reinvention of the South Platte River transportation corridor awaited Fort Lupton in the 1860s. Plans for a railroad linking the East to the Pacific Ocean had evolved as early as 1836, only eight years after America’s first common-carrier railroad, the Baltimore & Ohio, began connecting the Chesapeake Bay to the Ohio River. Pacific railroad fury only grew with reports from each expedition to the West, particularly those of Fremont. In 1856, Congress passed resolutions supporting the construction of a Pacific railroad. While the nation was beginning to pull itself apart north and south, others, including presidents Buchanan and Lincoln, were afraid that it would also divide east and west. A transcontinental railroad became a matter of national political interest. Congress funded survey parties to determine the most favorable routes to the West, ultimately deciding upon a line that had been advanced since at least the 1840s – a route that nearly paralleled the Missouri-Platte river route. The Civil War delayed construction, but following the South’s surrender in 1865, survey crews fanned out over the Rocky Mountains to find a practical route to the Pacific. Once that route was selected, one railroad would build west (the Union Pacific) and one east (the Central Pacific).⁸⁶

Denver’s residents considered it a foregone conclusion that any transcontinental railroad would come to it from the east and pass into the mountains to its west. After all, it was the largest population center between the Missouri River and the Pacific Ocean. Many of the canyons and river valleys west of Denver were surveyed and each route had its proponents. Some recommended that rails climb the Caché la Poudre, over Cameron Pass, to North Park. Others advocated fol-

lowing the North Fork of the South Platte over Kenosha Pass to South Park. But the loudest voice among them was Colorado Territorial Governor John Evans. Wealthy and politically connected, Evans arrived at the Chicago organizing convention for the Union Pacific touting “Denver and the Rockies’ Berthoud Pass as the only sensible route across the Continental Divide.”⁸⁷ No matter where the line crossed the Divide, any route would most likely approach Denver from the northeast along the South Platte, placing Fort Lupton on the mainline of the transcontinental railroad. But finding a practical route through the Colorado Rockies proved difficult. At the same time, directors of the Union Pacific appointed General Grenville M. Dodge as the railroad’s chief engineer. His experience in the Indian campaigns of 1865-66, particularly the Powder River battles, gave him an intimate familiarity with the Wyoming territory, a place that most Americans, let alone the Union Pacific’s boosters, knew little about. Also wealthy and politically connected, Dodge had his own ideas for the Union Pacific’s route over the Divide:

It was the great desire of the company to build the line through Denver, Colo., if possible, up the South Platte Valley and crossing the mountains west of Denver and reaching Salt Lake by the Yampa, White, and Uinta valleys, and I covered the country from the Laramie Canyon on the north to the Arkansas on the south, examining all the mountain passes and approaches and examined all these lines personally. These surveys demonstrated that there was no question as to where the line should cross these mountains. The general examination of the plains along the east foot of the mountains shows that the plains rose from the Arkansas north until they reached their apex at the valley of Crow Creek, near where Cheyenne now stands. Then they fell to the north toward the mountains, and when we came to examine the summits of these moun-

tains, we found their lowest altitude was in the vicinity of the Cheyenne Pass, so that there was no question as to where our line should run.⁸⁸

Denver would be bypassed, and Fort Lupton would not become a station on the first transcontinental railroad. Denver’s boosters knew that railroads had the power to make new towns and break existing ones. Thus, as the Central Pacific and Union Pacific joined their rails on May 10, 1869, at Promontory, Utah, Denver business owners and residents scurried to the railroad boomtown at Cheyenne. Meanwhile, Denver’s boosters had had some hope of gaining a railroad even as the Union Pacific was under construction. The Kansas Pacific was building westward through its namesake state to Denver and would provide a direct connection to the east. But construction stalled in western Kansas in November 1867. Without the Kansas Pacific, Denver’s political and business leaders desperately required a connection to Union Pacific at Cheyenne. Governor John Evans, *Rocky Mountain News* Editor William Byers, and other Denver leaders realized that the city itself would have to fund any connection to the Union Pacific. With the slogan “Pay or Perish,” Denver Pacific Railroad officials canvassed the city selling subscriptions of stock in the company. The sales tactic was tried and true among western railroad prospectors, but the message worked nonetheless. In one day, the railroad obtained subscriptions amounting to \$225,000. Grading began in May 1868, and the first section of track was laid in 1869. On December 16 of that year, the railroad opened for traffic between Cheyenne and Evans, named in honor of the territorial governor and president of the railroad. To those 58 route miles were added 15 more when the railroad reached Johnson Station on May 30, 1870.

By early June, the railroad reached Hughes (Brighton), and on June 23, the line was opened all the way to Denver.⁸⁹

The route of the Denver Pacific retraced the ancient South Platte River transportation corridor, bringing it right through Fort Lupton. But the settlement and the railroad initially did not live peacefully with each other. It was precisely Fort Lupton's prominence as one of the most densely settled communities along the route that worked against it. Cleon Roberts explains the problem in his history of Fort Lupton:

The [directors of the] D.P.R.R.&T. Company [were] given a grant from the federal government entitling them to every odd numbered section for ten miles on either side of their right-of-way. In reviewing the most profitable ways to dispose of the land, they abandoned any previous selection plans in favor of location where they owned the most property. The federal land grant exempted any which had already been homesteaded or pre-empted. Fort Lupton and Henderson, both early established settlements, therefore, were ignored in favor of Hughes Station located between the two. That depot eventually gave rise to the new community of Brighton.⁹⁰

Resentment toward the railroad only grew more bitter as travel guides described the Denver Pacific's route as desolate, mentioning only upstart agricultural colonies and towns the railroad itself created. An 1871 *Travelers' Guide* offered this description:

When the Denver Pacific Railway was first constructed, there was no village between Denver and Cheyenne, nor within 15 miles of the line, but great efforts have been made to settle up the wild land contiguous to the road; and the town of Greeley, now possessing a population of more than two thousand inhabitants, together with other thriving settlements at Lumry's. Evans and Green City, furnish ample proof of the systematic encouragement which has been given to immigration, and of the

attraction which Colorado offers to *bonâ fide* settlers.⁹¹

But railroad officials did not overlook Fort Lupton's status as an agricultural hub. They quickly installed a seven-car siding south of the old fort for area farmers. By 1874, Fort Lupton was second only to Greeley in the amount of goods it shipped on the Denver Pacific. Passengers, however, were required to stand on a pile of sand and flag down approaching trains.⁹²

The construction of other railroads in Fort Lupton area, however, forced the Denver Pacific, later assumed into the Union Pacific system, to play a more active role in the city. In 1882, the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad completed a line across southern Nebraska to Denver. Again, as with almost all other transportation routes in the area, the Burlington largely followed the South Platte; at Fort Morgan the railroad's course altered from westerly to southwesterly toward Denver. The closest station to Fort Lupton was at Hudson, approximately 9 miles east. While the Burlington flanked Fort Lupton and the Union Pacific to the east, another railroad would appear to the west. In 1908 David H. Moffat, Jr., a Denver railroad mogul, joined with a group of Laramie- and Denver-based financiers to compete with the Union Pacific, which had become one of Moffat's rivals. The group envisioned a railroad from Denver through Laramie to Idaho. The Denver, Laramie & Northwestern Railroad began at Moffat's own station in Denver. From there the line paralleled the undeveloped west bank of the South Platte River; by this time the east bank was already too densely developed to obtain an adequate right-of-way. The railroad opened to Greeley in 1910 and never built any farther. Serving Fort Lupton was a station at Tracyville, located 1.5 miles due west of town.⁹³

The competing railroads, particularly the Burlington, forced the Union Pacific to provide better service to the community. As Cleon Roberts notes, “The competition from the Burlington line, no doubt, had a direct influence in the decision of the Union Pacific officials to put a depot at Fort Lupton.”⁹⁴ Around 1910, the Union Pacific offered nine passenger trains daily on its line through Fort Lupton. The Burlington and DL&N each had six a day. But such fierce competition eventually ruined the weakest of the three, the Denver, Laramie & Northwestern. The railroad was under-funded, and its location on the unpopulated west bank of the South Platte proved disastrous. The settlements at Moore, Vollmar, Tracyville, and Wattenburg never achieved the status of Platteville, Fort Lupton, and Brighton across the river. David Moffat died in 1911 and many of his smaller railroads died with him. By 1913, the DL&N was bankrupt and entered into receivership. The Great Western Railroad, a subsidiary of the Great Western Sugar Company, purchased the railroad in 1917. Great Western used the line to ship sugar beets from beet dumps to the refineries. The company abandoned the route when improved trucks with beet boxes rendered it obsolete. Many of the small towns on the DL&N remain. Others, like Tracyville, have all but vanished.⁹⁵

In 1912 a new, modern hotel was constructed on the southwest corner of Third Street and Denver Avenue. Like the St. John building, the Hotel McEvers became an instant architectural icon downtown. Union Pacific soon contracted the hotel to lodge its crews during layovers in the town. Thus, the hotel represented yet another incarnation of Fort Lupton’s role as a freighter’s campground. But the location of Hotel McEvers also signaled a profound shift in American transportation. The older Lupton Hotel was



Figures 22 and 23.

Fort Lupton’s original Union Pacific depot, in 1885, above. It was constructed in 1882. Below is an advertisement for the DL&NW in a 1910 promotional pamphlet for the town. (Fort Lupton Museum [top]; Commercial Club, 1910 [bottom])

“Laramie Route”

Four Passenger Trains Daily

Between
DENVER and GREELEY
AND ALL INTERMEDIATE POINTS

Quick Time
Fine Equipment
Best Accommodations

**Denver, Laramie & Northwestern
Railroad**

Connects with All Roads at Denver

Get on { GREELEY FT. ST. VRAIN CELERYVALE
at { NORMAL HODGSON POOR FARM
EVANS MOORE PATRON
BLANDIN VOLLMAR WELBY
ELM TRACEYVILLE UTAH JUNCTION
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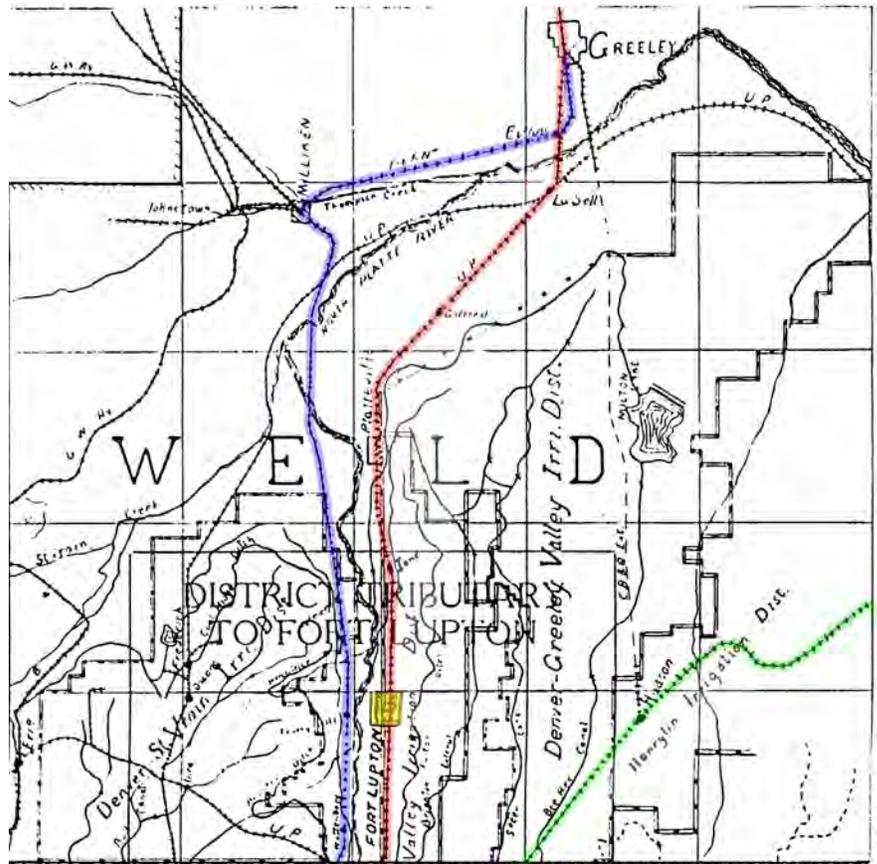
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situated within easy walking distance of the Union Pacific railroad station. Without turning onto Fourth Street, travelers on Denver Avenue could not have seen the establishment. The owners of McEvers, however, appear to have recognized that the focus of transportation in Fort Lupton was shifting westward – from the railroad to the highway.⁹⁶

The Automobile Age

The perfection of the internal combustion engine and the resulting proliferation of the automobile once again reinvented the South Platte River transportation corridor and Fort Lupton. Now cars, on federally funded highways, traveled the route between Denver and the east and required, as did the teams and trains of the past, an array of services, including gas stations, roadside cafes, and motels.

Automobiles had been manufactured in the United States since the 1890s, but they remained a luxury and a novelty – a toy for the very rich. By 1900, inventor-entrepreneurs across the country began experimenting with more low-cost contraptions. Among them was an obscure Irish immigrant farmer – Henry Ford. In 1908, Ford introduced his Model T, a low-cost automobile for the masses. By 1914, the Ford Motor Company was producing 250,000 of the vehicles a year. And each year, the price dropped and mechanization and assembly-line production reduced costs. “No single invention in previous American history had caught on so quickly or had such revolutionary impact on the lifestyles of ordinary people,” writes historian Stephan Thernstrom. “None better symbolized the broader transformation of the American economy in the first 3 decades of the twentieth century—the shift to a high consumption consumer goods economy.”⁹⁷



Moreover, the federal government showed an increased interest in funding the construction and improvement of highways. In 1916 the Federal Aid Roads Act provided states a 50-percent federal subsidy for building roads. The same year, the Colorado State Highway Commission designated 683 miles of primary road, including Denver Avenue through Fort Lupton – the Denver-Greeley Highway. For many years, this was the only paved road in Fort Lupton. By 1929, over 600,000 miles of surfaced highways crossed the United States.⁹⁸

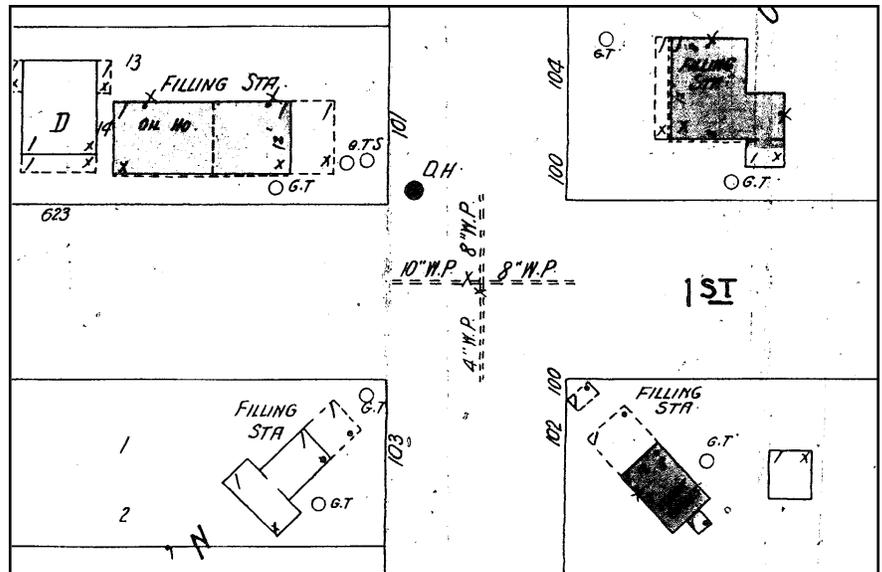
As early as 1911, however, residents could purchase Model 32 Buick cars from the Philip and Allsebrook hardware store in Fort Lupton. That same year’s Tomato Day festivities showcased an 18-mile motorbike race. Ed Camp managed the Fort Lupton Motor Company in 1916. A year earlier, enough automobiles plied the streets of Fort Lupton

Map 4. Railroads in the Fort Lupton area.
 Denver, Laramie & Northwestern (later Great Western Railway, now abandoned)
 Denver Pacific (now Union Pacific)
 Chicago, Burlington & Quincy (later Burlington Northern, now Burlington Northern Santa Fe)
 (Commercial Club, 1910)

that the town board had to begin passing regulations, including Fort Lupton’s first speed limit. The automobile came quickly and prospered in the town.⁹⁹

With the first automobiles on Fort Lupton’s streets in 1911, came also the first filling station. Mr. Coffee of Platteville purchased a lot at 312 Denver Avenue, today the location of the Star Theater. He installed a gasoline storage tank under the floor of his station and pumped it by hand into containers. The gasoline was then poured from the containers into waiting automobiles. In 1914, Ora N. Putnam left his job in the coal mines near Erie to purchased the Coffee filling station. By 1916, he had installed some of the most modern pumps in Colorado. Later, Putnam expanded his operation from a filling station to a service station by constructing a large garage directly across the street, at 323 Denver Avenue, in 1917. (This structure is today the United Power office.) Putnam employed at least six mechanics by the outbreak of World War I. In addition, he sold Maxwell automobiles in the new garage. And construction did not end there. In 1919, Putnam razed the 1874 school building on the northwest corner of Denver Avenue and First Street, replacing it with a new service station. He had become such a prominent member of the community that Putnam served three terms as mayor, from 1924 to 1926 and from 1934 to 1938. By 1930, filling and service stations crammed Denver Avenue from the northern to the southern town limits. Remarkably, the corner of Denver Avenue and First Street hosted a filling station on each corner, including the Putnam garage. Even today, three of the buildings remain, two continuing to operate as gas stations.¹⁰⁰

Putnam also pioneered a new building form to appear in Fort Lupton – the automobile showroom. Tellingly, the Maxwell deal-



Map 5 and Figure 24.

Above is a detail from a 1930 Sanborn Fire Insurance map, depicting filling stations on each corner of First Street and Denver Avenue. Most corner filling stations were oriented at an angle to the street and featured a canopy over the pumps. While the filling station of the northeast corner of Ninth Street and Denver Avenue has been converted into a house, below, it retains its angled orientation and a portion of the canopy. (Library of Congress; photo by the author)



ership was the first commercial structure in downtown Fort Lupton to exceed the size of the St. John Building.

Nearly identical in its architectural style to the Putnam Garage was Brewster Motors, a Ford dealership located at 214 Denver Avenue. (This structure is now George’s True Value Hardware.) In 1917 brothers Ollie, Joe, and John Raymund, better known as J.R.,

Brewster founded their namesake dealership. Joe died young, leaving the Ford franchise in the hands of his brothers. The Brewsters hired Denver architect John J. Huddardt, who also designed the Fort Lupton Public Library (now the museum) to construct a modern showroom, garage, and filling station for them. The new building was completed in 1928. It originally consisted of a glass-lined showroom at front (west), a service area at the rear (east), and pumps and small building for the filling station, where the parking lot for this building is now located. The Brewsters continued to operate their Ford dealership until 1968, when Ollie and J.R. sold it to Purdy Brothers while maintaining ownership of the building. Interestingly, both the Putnam and Brewster dealerships were constructed on the sites of liveryes, providing a direct example of the automobile replacing the horse and carriage. Even today, Denver Avenue continues to host a large dealership, Purifoy Chevrolet.¹⁰¹

Other automobile-inspired changes in Fort Lupton had nothing to do with the maintenance of the vehicle, but with its drivers and passengers. Hotel and restaurant owners in Fort Lupton were quick to realize that the automobile required them to alter their businesses. One owner of an old hotel, Van Ness Peckham, brother-in-law to O.E. Frink, remodeled the structure and expanded the dining room to serve passing motorists. But the most impressive automobile-related service enterprise was located on the west side of Denver Avenue at Ninth Street. On the southwest corner, J.S. and Edith Penfold established a service station, now the House of Smoke, in the 1930s. On the northwest corner, they established a café and small grocery store, root-beer barrel drive-in and a motel, the first of its kind in Fort Lupton. The café and grocery were forerunners of today's fast-

food restaurants and convenience stores. The motel is a particularly important development in American commercial design. Unlike the Hotel Lupton and Hotel McEvers downtown, the Penfold motel and tourist cabins allowed motorists to park immediately in front of their rooms, greatly expediting the unloading of luggage and children.¹⁰²

After only two decades of the automobile in Fort Lupton, the invention had revolutionized the community's built environment, and more development was on its way. Expansion of the federal highway system and consumption only accelerated exponentially following



Figures 25 and 26.

The Putnam service station and Maxwell automobile showroom, above, and the Brewster Motor Company, a Ford dealership, below, were both built on the sites of liveryes. (Photos by the author)



World War II. The number of automobiles in the United States increased 133 percent between 1945 and 1960. This growth was largely the result of a new reality in many suburban areas, including Fort Lupton; in the 1950s, the breadwinner of household drove one car to work in the city while another remained at home for the use of his wife and children. And another huge leap in federal roads funding made all of this possible. Post-war euphoria combined with Cold-War defense spending sparked a huge investment in high-speed, multi-lane, divided highways, the seeds of the modern interstate highway system. In 1955, the Valley Highway was constructed through Denver and around the west side of Fort Lupton to Greeley. Again, the South Platte transportation corridor had

been reinvented. However, for the first time since the founding of the town of Fort Lupton, the major transportation artery would not travel through the center of town. Instead, it skirted the community. Some filling stations and other businesses relocated to the new highway, but Fort Lupton appeared to have been spared the demise of its business district. After all, downtown continues to thrive and Denver and First retains two of its filling stations.¹⁰³

Highways even more profoundly altered the post-World War II economy. As the Denver metro area expanded outward from its downtown, Fort Lupton took on a new role as a bedroom community – a desirable and comfortable suburban home.



Figure 27.

Fort Lupton in the 1940s is a town dominated by the automobile. This photograph looks north up Denver Avenue from Second Street. (*Fort Lupton Museum*)



Figure 28.

In addition to a filling station on the north side of Denver Avenue at Ninth Street, J.S. and Edith Penfold operated a cafe, small grocery store, and a motel, left, all catering to the motorist. (*Photos by the author*)

CHAPTER 4

BOUNTY OF THE EARTH: AGRICULTURE, FOOD-PROCESSING, AND THE OIL AND GAS INDUSTRIES

Fort Lupton occupied a location that gave it a natural advantage over other settlements on the Great Plains. Instead of flowing within a single, established channel, the South Platte River braided through a broad flood plain. The result was an usually verdant pasture, a place to grow hay and other forage before the introduction of irrigation. This flood plain, which became known as the Lupton Bottoms, contributed to the settlement's early development as a freighter's campground and an agricultural center. In addition, the South Platte River transportation corridor, enhanced by rail and concrete or macadam, allowed the area's farmers to sell their produce in Denver, the mountain mining boomtowns, and even eastern markets. After all, Lancaster Lupton grew vegetables and raised livestock for trade at his fort; Blake and Williams continued the trend.

Ranching

And David Crockett Wyatt established his fortune with Fort Lupton hay. A native of Missouri, Wyatt came to Denver during the Colorado gold rush of 1859. As was typical, he returned from the mining camp at Gregory (now Black Hawk) poorer than when he arrived there. With what little money remained, Wyatt purchased land in Lupton Bottoms and began cutting the grasses and selling it in Denver, Gregory, and other mining camps. Before long he was buying hay

from other local farmers and established himself as one of the dominant hay producers on Front Range. Soon he began raising sheep and cattle. By 1875, Wyatt was considered one of the wealthiest men in Weld County.¹⁰⁴

Another Weld County cattleman amassed his fortune originally serving the miners. John Iliff purchased the footsore stock of emigrants and fattened them, selling them again to the mining camps. In time, Iliff ran one of the largest cattle herds in the west, earning him the name "cattle king of the plains."¹⁰⁵

Before irrigation turned the arid prairies into bands of verdant crops, cattle feeding was the dominant industry around Fort Lupton, controlling the local economy through the 1880s to 1896. With the exception of 1880 itself, unusually wet summers and mild winters in the early 1880s convinced many that fattening cattle on the seemingly limitless grasses of the Great Plains was a risk-free enterprise. At the same time an expanding railroad network carried cattle and meat products to eastern tables increasingly demanding western beef. "...[R]anchers had only to invest in horses and the wages of the cowboy who rode them, a few dugouts, and some primitive corrals," writes Western historian Richard White. "It seemed impossible to lose money." The great cattle bonanza was born.¹⁰⁶

In Colorado, the cattle bonanza was cen-

tered in Weld County, particularly Fort Lupton. Cattle grazing in the Fort Lupton area began with the need to supply earlier traders and travelers along the South Platte. But with the Colorado gold rush, demand for meat and dairy products in the mining camps skyrocketed. The construction of the transcontinental railroad through Nebraska and Wyoming in 1867 and the completion of the Denver Pacific in 1870, easily connected Weld County range land and its cattle to the entire country. With its verdant river bottoms and endless expanses of grasses, Weld County led Colorado in the cattle boom. And Fort Lupton's fathers led the cattle barons. On November 30, 1867, cattlemen across the territory met in Denver to form the Colorado Cattle Growers Association. They sought to establish and regulate brands, and control ranges. Taking charge of the meeting was Fort Lupton's own Andrew Williams, who continued to play a major role in the association for years.¹⁰⁷

Williams was not the only Luptonite involved in ranching. Indeed, most of the town's founding families established fortunes feeding cattle. Among them were the Twomblys, Irelands, and Ewings. David Ewing arrived in the mining camp at Blackhawk in 1859, at the pinnacle of the Colorado Gold Rush. Realizing, like many, that real fortunes were to be made supplying camps, Ewing amassed considerable land holdings near the old fort site through the 1860s. Ewing's brand was "FL" for Fort Lupton. David's son William was elected to the town's first Board of Trustees and was a successful businessman. Son Harry was associated with the sugar factory, Kuner-Empson cannery, the milk condensery, and feed mill. He served as vice president of Fort Lupton State Bank and a director of the Lupton Bottom Ditch Company. Harry, who eventu-

ally lived at the site of the old fort, donated land for the erection of a commemorative monument.¹⁰⁸

William G. Winbourn, the founder of the town of Fort Lupton, was himself a prominent rancher. W.G.'s son Thomas C. Winbourn joined his father, running 300 head of cattle on his first homestead south of Greeley. T.C. continued to ranch even after he had settled in Fort Lupton. As the cattle industry waned, T.C. began to raise more horses, selling 400 of them when left the ranching business in 1891.¹⁰⁹

But like most get-rich-quick schemes in the American West, disaster loomed over the cattle boom. Increasingly overstocked ranges and the introduction of barbed wire led to an unprecedented ecological and economic disaster. By around 1885, 7.5 million head of cattle grazed the Great Plains north of Texas and New Mexico. However, these cattle were eradicating nutritious native grasses and promoting the growth of unpalatable woody plants and forbs. In 1870, a single steer required only five acres of prairie land to support it; by 1880, it needed 50 to survive. In 1885, massive herds struggled to survive on the overgrazed plains just as a bitter winter struck. Some ranchers lost as much as 85 percent of their herds. And conditions did not improve. In 1886, a year of legendary misfortune on the plains, a dry, hot summer led to a winter of early blizzards and temperatures as low as -46 degrees Fahrenheit. While the native bison walked into the fierce winter winds until they found a protective hollow or valley, cattle wandered with the wind. Those that survived the winter were scattered over hundreds of miles. By 1887, many of the cattle barons were bankrupt and the open-range cattle industry collapsed. A smaller-scale, yet lucrative stock feeding industry later reemerged in Colorado and exists to this

day.¹¹⁰

Farming and Irrigation

Farming faced similar challenges to ranching. Cultivation of lands beyond the bottoms required the interaction of government land policies and small- and large-scale engineering projects to succeed. All had one theme in common: subduing the aridity of the “Great American Desert.” Beginning with the Homestead Act of 1862, the federal government created a string of liberal land policies designed to populate the West and place it under cultivation. These laws became more overtly an attempt to bring rain to the Great Plains, particularly the Timber Culture Act of 1873. Richard White explains:

[The Timber Culture Act] provided a single-quarter section of land to any head of a family who planted and maintained forty acres of trees for ten years. This attempt to forest the prairies recognized a practical problem – the lack of timber on the prairies and plains – but it attempted to solve that problem by accepting the dubious scientific theory that rain follows the plow.... They...believed that trees also encouraged rainfall. By planting trees under the Timber Culture Act, farmers could, in effect, alter the climate and make it more humid.¹¹¹

No less profound than liberal land policies were smaller innovations that made settlement on the plains possible. Among the most important was barbed wire fencing. Another was a prefabricated windmill with a reduced blade surface that made it less likely to blow apart in high winds. But these innovations still rendered the recently broken virgin sod, intact since the last Ice Age, as clumps of dust and despair. Rain did not follow the plow or trees. “Aridity is, after all, the quality that most distinguishes the West from the rest of the country,” writes historian Patricia Nelson Limerick.¹¹² Fort Lupton sat on the cusp of a change that dramatically

altered both agriculture and politics in the West – irrigation. By the mid 1860s, the construction of dams, canals, and ditches proved too expensive for individual farmers. Private corporations diverted rivers, dug ditches, and built reservoirs. In exchange, farmers purchased shares of water and agreed to a rental fee for the conduits that brought it to them. With these projects came a new concept in water law that would spark controversies to the present day. Under English common law, rights to water accompanied the land along a riverbank, a doctrine referred to as riparian rights. These landowners could use the water however they wished so long as they did not diminish or contaminate it. In the 1880s, however, Colorado claimed state ownership of water and revoked all riparian right to waters within its boundaries. In its place, the state initiated a Spanish colonial system of prior appropriation; water rights would be granted on a first-come, first-served basis. This concept of prior appropriation became known as the Colorado Doctrine.¹¹³

The first irrigation endeavor in the Fort Lupton area was also one of the first in the state – Brantner Ditch. Nine area farmers, including Samuel Brantner and Van Buren Kelsey, started building the system in April 1860. It left the South Platte about a mile south of Henderson Island. By 1863, the ditch irrigated hundreds of acres of farmland west of Fort Lupton. That same year, Roger Ireland secured a right-of-way to construct another canal and irrigation system, originally named the Big Bottom Ditch Company but later renamed the Lupton Bottoms Ditch Company. The canal’s headgate was located on the west bank of the South Platte, near the mouth of a dry creek. Hiram J. Graham, J. Ross, and Orris Knapp organized the Fulton Irrigation Ditch Company on February 16, 1865. It carried water from the Henderson

area to lands east of the South Platte.¹¹⁴

Other Fort-Lupton-area pioneer irrigation projects tested the limits of the Colorado Doctrine. On March 23, 1894, David J. McCanne incorporated the McCanne Ditch Company, but his source of water proved innovative and controversial. Earlier in the decade, McCanne, who was trained as a civil engineer, acquired over 120 acres adjacent to his father’s farm near Brighton. On that land was a swamp created by a constant stream of water seeping from the ground. To reclaim his land and harness the water, McCanne studied the place for months, finally deciding to cut a ditch along the side of a mesa on the upper end of the swamp. The project worked and McCanne soon discovered he had enough water to irrigate his property and his neighbors’ acres. But other irrigation companies quickly claimed that McCanne’s project diverted water from them and violated their water rights. In water court, McCanne testified that the stagnant pools did not contribute to previously claimed water flows. The engineer-turned-farmer won the case and set a precedent that landowners with seepage on their property owned the rights to that water.¹¹⁵

In 1905, the Denver Reservoir Irrigation Company undertook Colorado’s largest irrigation project to that time. The company purchased a number of older ditches – with their water rights – and appropriated all of the upper South Platte’s unused waters; it even bored tunnels to obtain water from the west side of the Continental Divide. The largest reservoir in the new system was Standley Lake, which was connected to water sources and to farm fields via a system of 216 miles of ditches. In all, the system could store 255,000 acre feet of water and deliver it at 300 cubic feet per second.¹¹⁶

Beyond grains and grasses, staples of

TABLE 2: PRIORITY OF DITCHES, SOUTH PLATTE WATER DISTRICT 2

Water District Number 2 consists of land irrigated via ditches from the South Platte River between the mouth of the Cache la Poudre (near Greeley) and Cherry Creek (in Denver), including all tributaries except the Big Thompson River, St. Vrain River, and Clear Creek.

Priority Number	Name of Ditch	Date of Appropriation	Section Feet
1	Brantner Ditch	April 1, 1860	29.77
1A	Gardeners or Heller Ditch	May 1, 1861	4.00
1B	Reithman Ditch	June 2, 1862	3.00
2	Platteville Irrigation & Milling Co.	July 1, 1862	47.88
3	Farmers & Gardeners Ditch	March 15, 1863	13.72
4	Brantner Ditch, First Enlargement	May 1, 1862	5.93
5	Lupton Bottom Ditch	May 15, 1863	47.70
6	Brighton Ditch	December 1, 1863	22.22
7	Duggan Ditch (Transferred to Burlington Ditch)	April 1, 1864	27.40
9	Fulton Ditch	May 1, 1865	79.70
9	Jay Thomas Ditch	June 1, 1865	18.00
10	Farmers Independent Ditch	November 20, 1865	61.60
11	Meadow Island No. 1 Ditch (Transferred to Side Hill Ditch)	May 1, 1866	22.00
12	Meadow Island No. 2 Ditch	March 15, 1866	57.83
13	Hewes & Cook Ditch	May 5, 1866	27.45
14	Hodgson Ditch	April 26, 1869	12.82
15	Lower Latham Ditch	May 12, 1869	20.40
17	Section No. 3n Ditch	March 10, 1870	26.88
18	Loomis Ditch	December 8, 1870	20.70
19	Platteville Irrigating & Milling	January 1, 1871	5.25
20	Elwood Ditch	March 10, 1871	10.00
22	Patterson Ditch	May 1, 1871	19.92
23	Hewes & Cook Ditch, First Enlargement	August 10, 1871	71.12
24	Highlander or Plum Ditch	October 1, 1871	24.40
25	Evans No. 2 Ditch - Platte Valley Irrigation	October 5, 1871	177.07
26	Brighton Ditch, First Enlargement	November 1, 1871	22.58
27	Brantner Ditch, Second Enlargement	July 1, 1872	12.18
28	Section No. 3 Ditch, First Enlargement	march 15, 1873	30.83
30	Abbott Ditch	April 1, 1873	11.80
31	Lupton Bottom Ditch, First Enlargement	September 15, 1873	92.87
32	Big Bend Ditch	September 26, 1873	16.88
32	Big Bend Ditch (Transferred to Union Ditch)	September 26, 1873	4.00
32	Union Ditch	November 5, 1874	100.00
33	Platteville Irrigating & Milling, Second Enlargement	October 15, 1873	94.25
34	Farmers & Gardeners Ditch	April 1, 1874	10.28
37	Lower Latham Ditch, First Enlargement	December 12, 1874	33.77
40	Evans No. 2, First Enlargement (Transferred to Farmers Reservoir & Irrigating)	November 29, 1879	226.98
41	Meadow Island No. 2, First Enlargement	April 10, 1876	8.33
45	Farmers Independent Ditch, First Enlargement	November 20, 1876	85.40
46	Lower Latham Ditch, Second Enlargement	November 14, 1877	97.68
47	Beeman Ditch	December 19, 1877	127.00
48	Fulton Ditch, First Enlargement	July 8, 1876	74.25
48	Wyatt Ditch	march 12, 1878	23.66
49	Bucker’s Ditch	July 8, 1879	121.87
50	Farmers Independent Ditch, Second Enlargement	November 1, 1879	373.00
51	Fulton Ditch, Second Enlargement	November 5, 1879	50.23
52	Brantner Ditch, Third Enlargement	January 15, 1881	63.30
53	Lower Latham Ditch, Third Enlargement	October 24, 188	133.88
54	Union Ditch, First Enlargement	November 2, 1881	84.03

continued

Great Plains agricultural production, farmers around Fort Lupton also grew produce for canning and sugar beets. In 1910, the town’s canneries were paying for tomatoes, green beans, pickling cucumbers, pumpkins, sweet corn, and cabbage for sauerkraut.¹¹⁷ Life on the farm in the early twentieth century was a paradox of the old and the new. Horses and wagons converged with tractors and trucks. Engines and motors, especially as water pumps for irrigation, quickly evolved from steam, to internal combustion, to electric. These were the experiences of Henry Allsebrook, as he grew up on the family farm, gracefully named Brooklands, on the south edge of Fort Lupton. One particular passage in his memoir reveals the clash of the pastoral ideal and industrialized agriculture on the farm:

The farm itself was beautiful, particularly a walk across the meadow and over the river. The slough hid a few fish. On the banks there were many frogs, crayfish, and turtles, while the air above the cattails was filled with dragonflies, caddis flies, and (not so pleasant) a lot of mosquitoes. Nests of red-winged blackbirds were to be found in the cattails around the slough and in the deep grass at other places in the meadows. Bob white quails, which later disappeared from Colorado, were then common, and their nests were usually found rather late in the summer when we mowed the natural grass hay on the lower part of the meadow. Sometimes ducks settled on the slough, and occasionally a great blue heron or an American bittern. Many muskrats lived in the slough, and occasioned us much grief after Father dammed the slough to form a drop for the installation of an hydraulic ram, since they insisted on digging holes through the dam.¹¹⁸

Food-Processing Industry

Among the first industries mechanized at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution was food processing. Small flour mills had developed water, wind, and steam-powered, con-

TABLE 2: PRIORITY OF DITCHES (CONTINUED)

Priority Number	Name of Ditch	Date of Appropriation	Section Feet
55	Side Hill Ditch	April 29, 1882	94.80
56	Fulton Ditch, Third Enlargement	November 1, 1882	244.62
57	Burlington Ditch	November 20, 1885	350.00
71	Lupton Short Line Ditch	July 6, 1892	72.00
72	Western Ditch	January 26, 1894	
75	Denver-Hudson Canal	November 28, 1907	300.00
76	O'Brien Canal	March 9, 1908	600.00

Source: Water District No. 2 document, in the collection of David Norcross

tinuous milling processes as early as the eighteenth century. But it was not until the 1880s that inventors and speculators began to experiment with ways to automate all facets of production. Interconnected to a system of conveyor belts, rollers, and gravity slides, machines greatly simplified complicated tasks, such as brewing beer, canning vegetables, and packing meat. In 1883, the first automatic canning line opened, soldering 50 cans a minute. Not surprisingly, because Fort Lupton represented a point of transition between a rich, agricultural hinterland and a nation-wide transportation network, it became a hot bed of activity for entrepreneurs and investors seeking to develop food-processing operations.¹¹⁹

Dairy Processing. The first endeavor of this kind was established in 1890 when A. Leaves opened the Fort Lupton Creamery Company. Orello E. Frink and his wife, Junetta Peckham, later purchased another early dairy processing facility, the Brendell Creamery, and renamed it the Silver State Creamery and Cheese Factory. It was located at the northwest corner of Fifth Street and McKinley Avenue. The two improved the efficiency and profitability of the company, eventually purchasing their own dairy farms and tirelessly experimenting with new ways to process and preserve dairy products.¹²⁰

In the late 1890s, entrepreneurs across the country tried various means of condensing milk for canning. In 1901, J.B. Radcliff

(or Rackliff) brought the idea to Fort Lupton, which, by that time, already had an established and productive dairy industry. As usual with these projects, he asked citizens to financially support his endeavor. Colonel Meredith, S.G. Allsebrook, W.H. Davis, and other leading citizens promoted the company. Construction of the factory began on August 5, 1901, but Radcliff's plan for condensing milk, while feasible on paper, failed in practice. Citizen-investors sold the plant in 1903 to the Mohawk Condensed Milk Company of Rochester, New York, which operated it as the Colorado Condensed Milk Company. These citizens managed to recoup their investments and the new owners successfully retooled the factory. With an initial demand of 50,000 pounds of milk per day, many farmers acquired dairy herds. Soon, the economy of Fort Lupton became linked to the monthly cycle of milk checks from the condensery. "Around Fort Lupton," writes Cleon Roberts, "the expression 'when the milk check comes' became synonymous with 'hope.'" ¹²¹ Moreover, Fort Lupton-area farmers received income from the condensery, unlike the canneries or sugar factory, all year. ¹²²

In the early years of the condensery, milk was brought to Fort Lupton each morning in horse-drawn spring wagons. As Henry Allsebrook recalled, farmers often had difficulty getting horses used to the movement of sloshing milk behind them. At the factory, wagons were unloaded into a tank on a scale and weighed. The condensery operated every day of the year, with laborers working 10-hours days. ¹²³

By 1910, the milk business was the largest farm interest in Fort Lupton; industry promoters cited the area's "luxuriant" alfalfa crop as the reason. This success did not go unnoticed by national-brand condensed milk companies. In 1921, the Carnation Company

purchased Mohawk, and subsequently, all Colorado Milk Company factories, which were also located in Johnstown and Loveland. The factory closed in February 1950. Nothing remains of the plant. ¹²⁴

Canning. Although he lacked any experience in the industry, Orello E. Frink, always called "O.E.," decided to start a vegetable canning operation in connection with his creamery in 1904. Frink was used to taking risks. In the late 1880s, he operated a wholesale commission house and two meat markets in Denver, and creameries in outlying towns. But in the panic of 1893, Frink lost his businesses. In 1895, he had moved his family to Fort Lupton where he purchased another creamery. He cobbled an addition to his facility and purchased second-hand and some new canning equipment. Frink's Silver State Canning and Produce Company first processed tomatoes, catsup, and corn. Over the years, Frink expanded his canning operation to snap beans, peas, pickles, pumpkins, and squash. In 1907, Orello fell ill just before he was to attend the first national canners' convention in New York. His daughter, Daisy, went in his place and was the only woman to attend the event. ¹²⁵

Frink's operations were so profitable that, in 1908, he sponsored a town-wide festival, Tomato Day. The estimated number of

Figure 29.
The Fort Lupton Canning Company.
(Photo by the author)



attendees is difficult to determine, but probably was around 3,000, including Governor Henry T. Buchtel. Special trains arrived from Denver. Besides all the free tomatoes, Frink furnished barbecued beef, pickles, corn on the cob, coffee, rolls, and pumpkin pie. The cannery served 1,000 rolls and roasted two steers.¹²⁶

Between 1912 and Frink's death in 1916, canning season expanded from two months to five. As the canning company expanded, so too did its labels: "Overland," "National," "Ruby," "Seal," and "Fort Lupton." The factory largely employed women for the cleaning and packing work, sometimes hiring 200 girls just to snap green beans. Many resided in a two-story dormitory just south of the factory. The cannery was so successful that Frink was able to purchase nine farms on which he experimented with new varieties of produce and machinery.¹²⁷

O.E. Frink died on November 12, 1916. His broker, W.N.W. Blayney, who was familiar with the operation, took over management of the factory. In February of the following year, he organized the Fort Lupton Canning Company. The new firm leased the factory site, buildings, and equipment from Junetta Frink, who maintained ownership after her husband's death. Upon Blayney's own death in 1936, Marguerite Counter, Frink's daughter, became president. Under Counter's leadership, the Fort Lupton Canning Company purchased the factory from Junetta Frink in September 1941. After that date, the company largely rebuilt the factory, installing the most modern processing and canning equipment available. In its heyday, the factory owned a fleet of six semi trucks, which delivered Fort Lupton canned goods to seven states, reaching as far north as Montana and south to Texas.¹²⁸

The company continued to be a dominant

force in the local economy and culture for decades, all the time remaining in control of Frink descendants and family friends. But as the town in general shifted from manufacturing-based to a service-based economy, so too did the Fort Lupton Canning Company, which Ben Counter, grandson of O.E. Frink, reluctantly closed in 1979. "It was interest rates that forced us to close," Counter said in a 1983 interview. He also admitted that the factory represented an old way doing things – a way that did not accommodate changes in canning technology and the expense of tin cans. Much of the factory site remains intact.¹²⁹

Across town, on the northwest corner of the Union Pacific right-of-way and Ninth Street, was another canning factory. In the 1890s, merchants and farmers around Fort Lupton clamored for a cannery. They began financing the project through popular subscriptions, as they did for a sugar factory. But the "Dream of Wealth" stalled and, in 1898, they sold it John H. Empson.

Like so many Americans in the late nineteenth century, Empson came to Colorado for his health. He left behind his candy store in Cincinnati but not his daughter, Lida (or Lyda), who was his closest and constant companion. In 1883 he opened another candy store in Denver, but it proved unsuccessful. Friends suggested that, with his business and mechanical sense, Empson could easily establish a cannery. He and Lida moved to Longmont in 1886, but John's health failed again, and he moved to Estes Park. A year later, a rehabilitated and energized Empson returned to Longmont and immediately established the J.H. Empson & Daughter cannery. At that time, such a prominent business role for a woman was very unusual. But its novelty proved a marketing windfall. The enterprise proved so successful that, even after an

1891 fire destroyed the entire season's pick, Empson was able to build a larger plant and expand into other northern Colorado towns. After purchasing the old Fort Lupton cannery in 1898, he appointed H.G. Canis as the first superintendent. Initially, the Fort Lupton cannery processed tomatoes and corn. Contracts to farmers for peas were fulfilled at Empson's main factory in Longmont, which in 1905 was the largest pea cannery in the world. In 1907, Empson established canneries in Loveland and Greeley and pea-vining stations in Berthoud, Johnstown, Ault, and Mead.¹³⁰

A year later, however, Empson sold his Fort Lupton factory to M.C. Barwise, who appointed Wilson Vinson, a nephew, as manager. Empson, meanwhile, sold all of his canneries in 1920 and retired. He died in 1926. A year later, the Kuner Pickle Company purchased the remnants of the Empson empire, renaming itself the Kuner-Empson Company.¹³¹

John G. Kuner arrived in Denver from Iowa in 1864 and began canning vegetables in the kitchen of his home. By 1872, Kuner gained enough business to purchase a modest factory building and name his enterprise J.C. Kuner and Sons. At John's request, his brother Max, experienced in the pickle business, moved to Denver to assist with the company around 1880. The name changed to the Kuner Pickle Company. The company relocated to Brighton in 1917 and began a period of expansion. Around 1920, the company leased the Barwise cannery in Fort Lupton, purchasing it outright in 1925. As mentioned above, Kuner absorbed the Empson company two years later, briefly returning the Empson name to the cannery in Fort Lupton. Today, nothing remains of this industrial complex.¹³²

Grain Milling. According to Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, the Fort Lupton Feed

Mill was established before 1908. The facility, located on the northwest corner of Seventh Street and the Union Pacific right-of-way, featured a corn sheller and feed roll, in addition to a hay storage barn. Although it was the only facility of its kind in the area, the Fort Lupton Mill remained a small operation until 1920. In that year, the facility's new owner, Frank Ottesen, greatly expanded and improved the facility, installing two, 50-foot-high grain tanks, of structural clay tile, which could accommodate 10,000 bushels each. The Ottesen Grain Company featured a 66-



Figure 30. The Ottesen Grain Company, now La Familia Restaurant, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. (Photo by the author)

foot-high grain elevator and two, large feed warehouses. The mill remained in operation until 1975. In 1987, Robert and Mary Vigil purchased the facility for their La Familia Restaurant. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.¹²⁷

Sugar Beets. Fort Lupton also became a center for processing one of the most profitable crops in Colorado history. Developments in industrial agriculture allowed sugar producers to increase and process the high saccharin content of sugar beets. In the early twentieth century, the

impact of the sugar beet industry was so dramatic that many referred to the crop as Colorado's white gold. After the turn of the twentieth century, three interrelated events led to a dramatic increase in sugar beet production: the increase in irrigated land, the implementation of beet varieties as well as cultivation techniques, and the construction of sugar beet processing factories. An unnamed writer for the Work Progress Administration's Writer's Program (a New-Deal-era make-work project) called the sugar beet industry "the single largest enterprise based upon irrigation."¹³⁴ Historian Leroy R. Hafen, however, suggests the growth of the sugar beet industry promoted the development of advanced irrigation engineering projects in Colorado. Sugar beets required irrigation in late summer when the state's rivers run at a trickle. In response, irrigation companies built reservoirs to store the high water of early spring and released it when farmers needed it for their beets.

Yet, even with the best irrigation methods and soils, traditional varieties of beets produced very little sugar. A new, national interest in the science and technology of agriculture soon changed that. Along with the Homestead Act, Republicans pushed through Congress in 1862 the Morrill Act, which created the land-grant college system. The federal government offered states generous subsidies to establish colleges offering instruction in agriculture, engineering, and military science. Under this plan, Colorado opened its State Agricultural College in Fort Collins. To accommodate its burgeoning research work, the institution established the Colorado Agriculture Experiment Station in 1888, which concentrated much of its early work on improving the purity and percentage of usable sugar in beets. By 1892, the United States Department of Agriculture rated the

beets grown in sections of Colorado as the best in world.¹³⁵

Even the best beets, however, were practically worthless without a plant nearby to process them into granulated sugar. While farmers clamored for processing plants, town leaders realized the potential economic boon of the industry. In November 1901, the Great Western Sugar Company completed in Loveland the first sugar factory in northern Colorado. Immediately towns across the region established sugar factory committees and cooked up generally unsuccessful schemes for securing a refinery. In 1900, C.A. Granger, associated with Utah Sugar, approached committees in Greeley and Fort Lupton about building a factory in one of their towns. Unfortunately for Luptonites, a sugar factory in Greeley opened a year later. In Fort Lupton there were initially only sugar beet dumps, the locations at which farmers brought wagonloads of beets to be transferred to waiting railroad hoppers. By 1911, Fort-Lupton-area farmers produced over 25,000 tons of sugar beets, contributing \$125,000 to the local economy.¹³⁶

Despite these impressive figures, the lack of a refinery greatly diminished Fort Lupton's economic potential during the sugar beet boom. And sugar factories in nearby Greeley and Brighton reduced the town's chances to ever secure its own refinery. But as they did when the railroad failed to provide them with their own station, Luptonites took matters into their own hands. They guaranteed the Independent Sugar Company, of Fort Morgan, that they would raise \$250,000 in the initial stock offering for the factory, which was estimated to cost \$4 million. While the size of the planned refinery ultimately had to be reduced, Fort Lupton gained its own sugar factory, called the Industrial Sugar Company in 1919-20. The Great

Western Sugar Company, which acquired control of almost all sugar refineries in Colorado, purchased the Fort Lupton factory on August 7, 1925.¹³⁷

In the 1930s, the Great Depression, coupled with Dust Bowl drought, destroyed the Great Plains agricultural economy. The prices of produce grown around Fort Lupton entered a free fall. In 1929, a bushel of potatoes cost \$1.40. In 1932, 24 cents would purchase the same bushel. Wheat fell from 96 cents a bushel in 1929 to 24 cents in 1932; hogs went from \$12.10 in 1929 to \$3.10 in 1933. As a result, some businesses in Fort Lupton, including Platte Valley Bank, closed.¹³⁸

Compared to other Great Plains towns however, Fort Lupton and many northern Colorado communities weathered the Great Depression remarkably well – probably as a result of the sugar industry. Even though beet growers experienced their smallest harvests on record, ultimately closing the Fort Lupton sugar factory during the 1935 campaign, and even though 84 percent of the people on Weld County farm relief were sugar beet workers, the sugar industry proved financially buoyant during the 1930s. The average value of the sugar beet crop in Colorado during the Great Depression was \$25,820,000 a year. While Colorado farmers grew beets on only ten percent of all irrigated land in the sixteen leading beet-growing counties from 1929 to 1939, the average value of the crop totaled 40 percent of the value of all principal crops grown on irrigated land in the state. Moreover, the federal Sugar Act of 1937 reduced tariffs and substituted a more comprehensive, albeit indirect, means of regulating sugar prices, beet prices, grower-processor relationships, and wages of contract. This redistributed beet profits in favor of farmers and field workers at the expense of the processing companies. Ultimately, however, the decision to reduce



the size of Fort Lupton's factory during its construction meant that, during the economic pinch of the industry during the 1940s, the Fort Lupton factory could not process enough sugar to remain profitable and it closed. Great Western moved the new equipment it had just purchased for the Fort Lupton factory to Brighton.¹³⁹

Oil and Gas Industry

Over 70 million years ago, the Great Plains were actually the floor of an ancient sea. Layer upon layer of organic matter collected here eventually became sealed in sediment as geological events thrust the Rocky Mountains and the Great Plains from the sea floor. Time, pressure, and heat converted that organic material into coal, oil, and natural gas, the largest sources of energy for modern America. Thus, as farmers reaped their harvests on the surface, industrialists find their crops hundreds of feet below.

The earliest energy extraction endeavors in the Fort Lupton area were coal mines established in the 1860s. Most were located near present-day Firestone and Erie, but a few were closer to town. However the 1870 cen-

Figure 31.

Fort Lupton's Industrial Sugar Company Factory later was renamed the Independent Sugar Company before becoming a piece of the Great Western Sugar Company empire. All that remains of the structure is this warehouse. (Photo by the author)

sus listed only three coal miners in the entire county. With the completion of the Denver, Laramie & Northwestern Railroad, on the west bank of the South Platte, in 1910, a coal mine opened at Tracyville, 1.5 miles west of Fort Lupton. The Alpha Mine, as it was known, was opened in 1911.¹⁴⁰

Oil and gas exploration in the Fort Lupton area remained limited while companies concentrated their efforts in places where oil was easier to extract, such as Texas and Oklahoma. However, beginning in the 1950s, those companies increasingly turned their attention to northern Colorado, particularly Weld County. Soon, drilling rigs and pumps dotted the landscape around Fort Lupton, which is situated above the Spindle and Wattenburg fields. The old Fort site itself was at last dismantled in pursuit of black gold. By

1970, the county produced over 2.5 million barrels of oil per year from 30 named oil fields.¹⁴¹

Oil and gas exploration peaked in the 1970s and '80s but reached its technological pinnacle in the 1990s. In 1993, Thermo Carbonics began the construction of a huge cogeneration plant east of Fort Lupton. The facility used natural gas to power an electrical generator. The \$200 million project also included the drilling of gas wells throughout eastern Colorado and western Kansas. Moreover, heated air from the plant was funneled into a sprawling, 20-acre green house, allowing the verdant plant and vegetable fields of Fort Lupton to grow all year long. The company later constructed a second 20-acre greenhouse.¹⁴²



Figure 32.

Oil pumps are a ubiquitous sight all around Fort Lupton, signifying the wealth of the Wattenburg and Spindle fields. *(Photo by the author)*



Figure 33.

In addition to turning natural gas into electricity, Thermo Carbonics Fort Lupton cogeneration plant warms 40 acres of greenhouses with exhaust heat. *(Photo by the author)*

CHAPTER 5

A TOWN OF DIVERSITY: ETHNIC HERITAGE OF FORT LUPTON

From prehistory to the present, the American Great Plains have been a crossroads of peoples and cultures. With its position on the South Platte River corridor and growth in agriculture-related industries, Fort Lupton has served as a microcosm of the plains. The old fort hosted Native Americans, Mexicans, Spanish, and French. The first settlers in the area, such as the Winbourns, Twomblys, and Ewings, were largely of English and Welsh descent. In later years, Germans from Russia, Hispanics, and Japanese would settle in Fort Lupton to tend and harvest crops and work at processing plants. Their histories and identities contribute to the rich cultural tapestry of modern Fort Lupton.

Germans from Russia

After her rise to the throne 1763, the German-born ruler of Russia, Tsarina Catherine II, better known as Catherine the Great, sought to create in St. Petersburg the splendor of the French court at Versailles, introducing Western European thought and culture to Russia. As an “enlightened despot,” Catherine embarked upon an ambitious plan of reform that included settling Western European farmers on Russia’s eastern frontier. She also viewed these settlers as a human buffer between her civilized empire and Asiatic invaders.¹⁴³ Catherine turned to the poorest of her own people, peasants in the

Germanic states, who had endured five generations of military conflict and ruthless nobles and warlords. Heeding Catherine’s call, over 27,000 German-speaking Evangelicals from Hesse and the Rhinlands settled in 104 mother colonies on either side of the Volga River in Russia.¹⁴⁴

As the German settlers arrived on the frontier of Russia, they found a landscape utterly alien to anything they had ever experienced. The treeless, uninhabited steppes of Russia stretched forever into the horizon. Anthropologist and German-Russian Timothy Kloberdanz argues that it was this unusual topography that sculpted the unique worldview of the Germans from Russia who emerged onto the high plains of Colorado. The sheer vastness of the steppe forced the Germans to settle in close-knit, isolated communities. Here they retained the language and customs of their forefathers while they adapted to the realities of surviving on the brutal landscape.¹⁴⁵ Germans in Russia began to idealize work in their culture. “Work was such an integral part of the Volga German world view that it was sometimes recognized as a personalized presence,” Kloberdanz argues. “It was not something to be done; it was someone to be conquered.” Repeated often was the Volga German maxim “*Arbeit, komm her, ich fress dich auf!*” (Come, work, I will devour you!) or “*Arbeit macht das Leben süß*” (Work renders life sweet). In

time, Germans in Russia developed a callous attitude toward physical burdens; they did not consider women or children exempt from grueling manual labor, and they saw their Russian peasant neighbors as lazy and slow.¹⁴⁶

Despite German successes on the steppes, Catherine's promises to the colonists were far from eternal. After a series of brutal, anti-tsarist attacks, government officials in St. Petersburg feared that without forced cultural and political assimilation, the realm would crumble. In response, the tsar initiated reforms aimed at "Russification." In January 1874, Alexander proclaimed that all residents of the Russian Empire would be subjected to military service in the imperial army. The Germans in Russia were not about to surrender the customs and traditions they had struggled so hard to maintain. But for those who failed to leave by 1897, Russian authorities placed all previously independent German schools under the Ministry of Education and made Russian language instruction mandatory.¹⁴⁷

While political and environmental crises pushed Germans from the steppes of Russia, economic and political developments in the United States pulled them to the Great Plains. Government land policies, such as the Homestead Act, allowed noncitizens to easily acquire a farm or ranch.¹⁴⁸ Railroads in the American west also desired to establish towns along their otherwise isolated rights-of-way. They sent agents to Europe, and the pledges of land for the landless proved too enticing for Germans in Russia. But perhaps the strongest pull to the United States, especially after the turn of the twentieth century, arose from the development of the sugar beet industry. Germans from Russia had long grown the beet as a garden crop, processing it into a sweet, dark syrup. But Germans from Russia offered the industry more than just

know-how; their tenacious work ethic and large families could provide the labor necessary to make sugar beets a worthwhile commodity.¹⁴⁹

The first Germans from Russia who came to United States arrived in the 1870s from the Black Sea region. From eastern port cities, they settled throughout the Midwest and West, but Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas drew the largest numbers. Those who settled in these areas brought with them hard, Turkey red wheat they had cultivated in Russia, transforming the Great American Desert into the breadbasket of the world. Particularly notable German-Russian populations evolved in Russell and Ellis counties in western Kansas. The earliest to settle in Colorado arrived in 1880-81 as laborers on the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, which built through nearby Hudson, and the Kansas (later Union) Pacific railroads. In the mid-1880s, a German-Russian settlement evolved in Globeville, northeast of Denver. The first German-Russian laborers arrived to work in sugar beet fields near Brighton in 1886. (Brighton continued to host a far larger German-Russian population than nearby Fort Lupton.) These communities, however, remained small until the boom of Colorado's sugar industry in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁰

The sugar beet industry would have been hard pressed to find the labor it required without Germans from Russia; their large families and insatiable work ethic provided cheap and dependable stoop labor. Conversely, most of the Germans from Russia who toiled in the state's beet fields needed the employment since they arrived too late to take advantage of liberal homesteading policy and land prices were too high for the impoverished immigrants to purchase farms. Emigrating from the Volga River region of Russia, these

Germans arrived nearly two decades after those from Black Sea region.¹⁵¹ Largely Protestant, these immigrants were far more isolated from the outside world and far less willing to assimilate. But the sugar beet industry provided work as well as seclusion to protect German-Russian culture. After exhausting the supply of landless Volga German families in Kansas and Nebraska, the sugar companies began importing German families directly from Russia. In time, Great Western transplanted entire villages to Northern Colorado.

Volga Germans in large numbers first arrived in Weld County shortly after Loveland's sugar factory opened. In the spring of 1902, special trains, sponsored by the sugar companies, brought hundreds of Volga Russian families from Nebraska and Kansas to northern Colorado. As they tended the fields, the families lived in tents or vacant shacks.¹⁵² The German-Russian laborers proved to be so effective that sugar beet farmers and producers hastened to receive them the next spring. Germans from Russia settled permanently in all sugar-beet towns, including Fort Lupton.

Among the prominent German-Russian families who settled in the Fort Lupton area were the Gabels, Meiers (or Maiers) and Bergers. The Gabels originally came from Goebel, Russia, and first settled in Kansas. Conrad and Katie Gabel then moved to north-eastern Kansas. Son Gottlieb, who married a fellow German-Russian, Pauline Meier, eventually purchased a farm, at County Roads 10 and 31, and later one of O.E. Frink's farms, now on South Denver Avenue. Jack Berger, who owned a farm just north of Fort Lupton, was born in Kaler, Russia, in 1905. His wife, Barbara Hochnadel, was a descendant of German-Russians who had originally fled to South America.¹⁵³

Many German-Russian families resided in a basic dwelling known colloquially as a hipped-roof box. This form was ubiquitous to Colorado and strongly connected to the working class. But it was also identified with Germans in Russia and their settlements throughout the western United States. If the lot was large enough, a German-Russian family often constructed a summer kitchen apart from the main house. This was a tradition also carried over from Russia, where each family compound included a courtyard with a *Sommerkuche*. But in general, most German-Russian houses in Colorado were simple and organic – added onto as the family grew or as money allowed.¹⁵⁴

And many families quickly climbed the ladder from contract laborers, to tenant farmers, to owning their own farms. By keeping living expenses low and working as efficiently as possible, German-Russian farming families amassed considerable savings in a rather short period of time. In just two decades after they arrived, 72.7 percent of sugar beet farm owners in Windsor were Germans from Russia. In 1930, Volga Germans operated 85 percent of all beet farms but accounted for only 15 to 25 percent of contract laborers.¹⁵⁵ “Not all of the German-Russians in Colorado or in the other states have been economically successful, but unquestionably for many immigrants and their descendants, there has been an astonishing and rapid upward mobility,” writes Colorado State University history professor Kenneth Rock. “Second- and third-generation German-Russians today include the leading farmers, livestock feeders, merchants, and professional people throughout the irrigated valleys of Colorado and neighboring states.”¹⁵⁶

Hispanics

As mentioned before in this context, peo-

ple of Spanish descent were the first Europeans to enter modern Colorado and walk the banks of the South Platte River near Fort Lupton. Indeed, Mexicans and other peoples of Spanish descent were a fixture at the old trading post. And as Spain ceded most of the rest of Colorado to the United States through a series of nineteenth-century treaties, Mexicans quickly became a significant ethnic group in the United States. (Many, however, regarded themselves as Spanish rather than Mexican because they had settled in the region before Mexican independence in 1821.) While the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo granted these Mexican settlers American citizenship, it did not protect their property rights. Many found themselves displaced and impoverished by the wave of Anglo settlement in the southwest.¹⁵⁷ This situation only further deteriorated as Mexican nationals left their country in the first half of the twentieth century. Robert Adams describes the problem:

Mexican migrants were denied a chance to learn and assimilate new customs as they were forced to move from one camp to the next; when they failed to conform they were mocked by Anglo-Americans. In turn, the Spanish Americans who had pioneered southern Colorado found themselves condemned, because of their brown skins, by the new arrivals.¹⁵⁸

Thus, while Hispanic heritage in Colorado spans centuries, it has been largely supplanted by Anglo culture.

But in 1909, Mexicans began to return to Fort Lupton, seeking seasonal employment. Between that time and 1930, a series of events combined to push even more Hispanic families out of Mexico and the Southwest and pull them into northern Colorado. A half a century of reform in Mexico increasingly divided the country's classes and military. In

1911, the middle class joined peasants and workers to overthrow dictator Porfirio Díaz in a bloody civil war known as the Mexican Revolution (1911-1920). Revolutionary leaders Emiliano Zapata and Francisco (Pancho) Villa, through local agrarian leaders, organized massive armies to fight for *tierra y libertad* (land and liberty). While they were widely supported, the revolutionary armies were poorly armed and failed to capture any of Mexico's major cities. The Mexican Constitution of 1917 did address the concerns of many of the revolutionaries, but by that time the conflict, combined with mounting population pressures and economic ruin, drove many Mexicans to seek a more peaceful existence north of the border. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, ten percent of Mexico's total population emigrated to the American Southwest.¹⁵⁹

Pulling Hispanics to northern Colorado were farmers and the food-processing industry, particularly the Great Western Sugar Company, which found their traditional sources of labor – Germans from Russia – quickly vanishing. Germans from Russia rose quickly from contract laborers, to tenant farmers, to farm owners, at the same time immigration policies tightened and, in the wake of World War I, all but ceased. Consequently, as Germans from Russia left contract labor positions, Great Western and other companies struggled to find replacements. But the “push” factors in Mexico and the southwest made the overtures of labor recruiters all the more appealing. Rumors spread of quick prosperity to be found in the agricultural fields of Colorado. Moreover, government policies limiting European immigration actually made crossing the Mexican-U.S. border easier. Western farm lobbyists convinced Congress to exempt Mexicans from its immigration policies for two reasons.

First, without European immigration growers needed a dependable source of cheap labor. Second, they argued that Mexicans had no desire to reside in the United States and would, at the end of the season, return south of the border. Soon, thousands of Hispanic families migrated to and settled in northern Colorado.¹⁶⁰ “Lots and lots of employment attracted Hispanics to Fort Lupton,” remembered Rosalie Martel Martinez. Like so many other Hispanic in the area, the Martinez family originally arrived here to toil in the sugar beet fields and canneries.¹⁶¹

Like their German-Russians predecessors, Hispanic families scattered onto homesteads and field-side shanties, bunkhouses, or hotels and houses in town. While some of the earliest Hispanic settlers brought their families with them, most were single men who moved frequently as they followed employment. Many did not intend to remain in Fort Lupton, so they never sought to purchase a home in town. But the evolution of the sugar industry changed this pattern. Officials at Great Western and other sugar companies sought a reliable, local source of labor for their beet fields and factories. Migrant laborers often required an entire season to become skilled at tending beets or working in the factory. But there was no guarantee that that same worker would return the next season. The investment in training would be lost. “The Mexican’s practice of moving away in the fall is disadvantageous to himself, to the grower and to the sugar company,” writes C.V. Maddux in the October 1923 edition of *Through the Leaves*, Great Western’s corporate magazine. “This year it cost over two hundred thousand dollars to ship in beet labor. That is an expense of making sugar, which the industry as a whole has to bear, even though it is for the time being absorbed by the Company without any charge to the

grower.”¹⁶² Great Western realized that it had to offer migrant workers an incentive to remain in Fort Lupton all year. Thus, the company launched a campaign to provide cheap housing for laborers, education for their children, and even churches and social clubs. These incentives worked and created an influx of migratory labor into Fort Lupton. In 1922, 70 percent of beet laborers already residents of Colorado were Germans from Russia. Only a tenth were Mexican or of Spanish descent. But at the same time, 90 percent of new migratory laborers Great Western brought into Larimer and Weld counties were from Mexico.¹⁶³

By the 1940s, farmers and processors in Fort Lupton came to depend upon Mexican nationals for their labor. Migrant workers were ideal because the harvest and canning seasons only lasted a few months. But housing the temporary workers became an increasingly pressing problem. Then, in 1942, the U.S. Department of Agriculture constructed the Fort Lupton Farm Labor Camp east of town. It consisted of 172 buildings, 46 of which were two- and three-bedroom bungalows for year-round workers. To house seasonal workers, the center featured 109 small cottages, with central restroom facilities, and platforms for tents. The camp also included an auditorium, library, health clinic, classrooms, nursery school, playground, offices, and warehouses. Labor agents imported Mexican and Kickapoo Indian laborers from Mexico and southwest and Sioux Indians from South Dakota.¹⁶⁴

While the camp was originally supposed to remain under federal control until 1971, President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered that all federally owned labor camps should be immediately transferred to a “responsible authority” if a need for the camp still existed. With its canneries and fields still requiring

vast amounts of labor, Fort Lupton proved its need for the center. The federal government transferred the labor camp to the Weld County Housing Authority on September 28, 1954. But events within the Hispanic migrant labor community, some dating to the late 1920s, were beginning to take their toll on the labor camp.¹⁶⁵

Living conditions among Weld County's Hispanic migrant workers had become intolerable even in the late 1920s. In 1931, the beet growers association in northern Colorado slashed field wages 25 percent – from \$23 to \$18 per acre. In Brush and Fort Morgan, prices dropped to \$9 per acre. “No family can exist on the wages paid to beet field labor this year,” laments labor activist Thomas F. Mahony. “To expect them to do so is cruel and inhuman.”¹⁶⁶ The problem, however, was that beet labor prices decreased more than sugar prices and gross income from beets. Using the Agricultural Adjustment Act (1909-1914) as a base period, W. Lewis Abbott found that wages consumed 33 percent of a sugar beet grower's gross income. In 1933, however, only 23 percent of the gross income went to pay wages. During the base period, farmers received \$5.58 per ton of beets and paid \$19.08 per acre in wages. In 1933, they received \$5.32 per ton, but paid only \$13.87 per acre in wages.¹⁶⁷

Even after the Great Depression, Hispanic field laborers throughout Weld County continued to be underpaid and poorly housed. A 1951 report the National Child Labor Committee found that half of the migrant worker families surveyed in Colorado (many in the Fort Lupton area) lived in one-room houses. Moreover, 92 percent had no means of refrigeration, and only a third could be sure their drinking water was safe, and most families used “‘pit toilets,’ of which less than 1 in 4 would have passed ele-

mentary health inspection.”¹⁶⁸ Some growers still considered their Hispanic migrant workers to be nothing more than beasts of burden. W.B. Gross, a Weld County beet grower, reveals in his 1950 testimony before the President's Survey Committee on Migrant Labor an unwillingness among himself and his fellow farm owners to accept the economic realities their migrant workers faced:

The ability and willingness of the migrant worker to better his condition economically rests with himself. ... No person regardless of race or color is barred from owning land, owning property or any other avenue which he wishes to pursue in which he wants to improve his economic conditions.

...The migrant child has the same opportunity, educationally, as any other child of school age. The tragedy of the migrant situation is that for some unknown reason the children of migrants are not encouraged by their parents to take advantage of our educational facilities.”¹⁶⁹

The real tragedy was the growers like Gross failed to understand that migrant workers did not have the financial resources to purchase land and could not afford to lose the productivity of a child working in the grower's own fields. And discrimination was so rampant and vicious during the 1940s, that the superintendent of a Weld County school district was quoted as saying, “the respectable people of Weld County do not want their children to sit alongside of dirty, filthy, diseased, infested Mexicans.”¹⁷⁰

But Hispanic migrant workers would not always remain quiet. At the conclusion of a 1942 conference in Greeley, the Commission on Organized Labor and the Problems of the Spanish Speaking People recommended “that we call upon the Trade Unions – A.F. of L., C.I.O and independent – to vigorously champion the cause of Spanish speaking people; to

receive them at all times as equal members of their unions; and to make special efforts to prevent any discrimination against them.”¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, the brutality of fieldwork, discrimination, and unceasing poverty propelled a young migrant laborer, Cesar Chavez into a new leadership role. As a champion of Mexican migrant workers, Chavez studied the tactics of the Civil Rights Movement and, in 1965, led a strike against the Delano vineyards in California. Although agricultural laborers were not covered by federal labor laws, Chavez and his United Farm Workers (UFW) managed to sustain the strike for five years. Instead of casting the action as a management-labor conflict, he transformed it into “*La Causa*” (the Cause); the strike became an emblem of Mexican pride and a demand for the rights of full citizenship. By the late 1960s, UFW had spread to the beet and vegetable fields of Colorado and became a powerful political force across the county.¹⁷² It had opened the way for a formative campaign for Hispanic civil rights. Indeed, Armando B. Rendon’s 1971 *Chicano Manifesto* cites the Delano strike as the genesis of the Chicano Movement.¹⁷³ Thus, the fight for Hispanic civil rights actually began among the poor migrant workers. In Colorado, the once politically impotent *betabeleros* (beet workers) and other migrant laborers brought about a new era in Hispanic power and pride.

This political agitation among Hispanic migrant laborers quickly arrived at the Fort Lupton Labor Camp. In 1969, laborers at the camp and outside activists formed M.I.A. – Migrants in Action – and conducted “rent strikes” to protest living and working conditions. Leading the protests was Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, founder of Crusade for Justice, which organized and concentrated Chicano political power. The agitation soon enflamed Hispanics and Anglos alike. “I

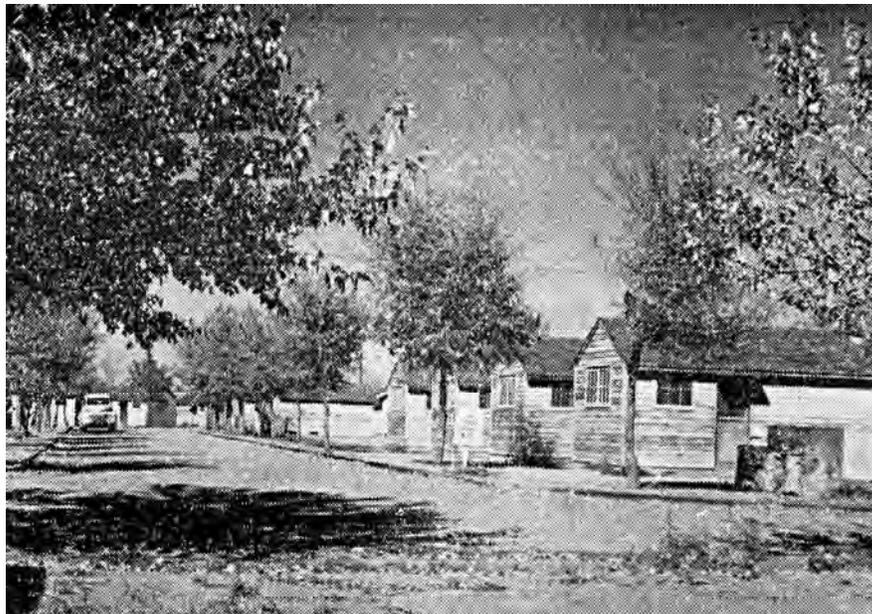


Figure 34. Bungalows in the Fort Lupton Labor Camp, circa 1950. (David Norcross Collection)

remember attending the high school auditorium, which is now the middle school, and having it filled to the brim with citizens of Fort Lupton,” recalled Rosalie Martinez. “Their anger at these protesters was so great you could just feel the hatred.” Martinez admitted that she, too, disliked the tactics of the labor camp protesters because she felt a more peaceful solution was possible. “But I have to admire them for walking down that center aisle and having people boo and hiss and stamp their feet.”¹⁷⁴

According to Ruth Rice, whose husband, Jennings Lee Rice, was superintendent of the camp, the media, particularly the *Denver Post*, only fanned the flames. She complained that while reporters printed every word of the protesters, especially the rhetoric of Corky Gonzales, they never interviewed her husband, who endeavored to operate a clean, orderly camp despite impossibly tight budgets and growing dissent. “They reported horrible conditions in the camp,” she recalled. “They referred to us as oppressors.”¹⁷⁵

By fall, the Weld County Housing Authority began circulating a petition among farmers asking them whether the camp is

needed or should be destroyed. At the same time Colorado Rural Legal Services refused to continue its representation of the increasingly militant M.I.A. Wishing to avoid political confrontation, area farmers overwhelmingly approved demolition of the camp. One set of petitions, submitted to Governor Love, contained 500 signatures in favor of closing and only five against.¹⁷⁶

In November 1969, District Judge D.A. Carpenter closed the Fort Lupton Labor Camp. But members of M.I.A. defied the order. A newspaper article for this period suggests that the group was connected to a far larger movement of American dissent:

Two weeks ago there were about 40 migrants and their families left at the camp. In the following days. Other supporters, including some 'hippies' slipped into the camp and it was estimated there were over 90 housed at the camp last week.¹⁷⁷

Following weeks of protests and legal maneuvers, the remaining residents of the camp left. It was officially closed at the end of 1969 and dismantled. The grounds of the camp have largely been developed as Lancaster subdivision. The original farm house on the site, used as the camp's office, remains.¹⁷⁸

Hispanic political activism in Fort Lupton did not end with the closing of the labor camp. Indeed, many became leaders of the community, including Joe Martinez, who served on the city council from 1974 to 1976, as mayor from 1976 to 1980, and ran for the state House of Representatives in 1980.¹⁷⁹ "...Colorado's Hispanics and Chicanos appreciate the hardships and obstacles overcome by their parents and grandparents so that they could capture a share of the American Dream," writes José Aguayo in his article on Hispanic workers in Colorado's beet fields. "And many are thankful for the

rich legacy of social and moral values carried down to them by their indigenous and Spanish forebears."¹⁸⁰

Japanese

Large numbers of Japanese immigrants first came to United States in the late nineteenth century through San Francisco, Seattle, and other ports in the Pacific Northwest. While many remained in Washington, Oregon, and northern California, others followed work eastward on railroads and farms. By 1900, Denver boasted a sizeable Japanese community, rivaled only by Fort Lupton. Here, the nexus of farms and the food-processing industry provided opportunities for many Japanese families.¹⁸¹

At first, these laborers settled in Fort Lupton only through the harvest, residing in tents. But they soon gained a reputation for their hard work and attention to detail. "The reputation of the Japanese spread far and wide," writes Matajuro Watada, a Japanese native who came to the Fort Lupton area in 1915. "They came to be known as industrious, hard working, diligent, honest, and faithful. The stories of their unexcelled conduct and achievement became a byword, and the Japanese readily found employment of all types."¹⁸² Beginning in 1902, with the encouragement of Frink and the owners of other food-processing plants, many Japanese families settled permanently in Fort Lupton, including the Kurokawa, Hayashida, Enomoto, Koshio, Eguchi, and Miyamoto families.¹⁸³

By 1908, Japanese culture had become so entrenched in Fort Lupton that exhibits of *Jujitsu*, *Kendo*, *Naganta*, and *Yari* were focal points of O.E. Frink's annual Tomato Day. Over four hundred Japanese residents and their friends took part. Roberts explains the latter three events:

Kendo presented a breath-taking sight as the contenders wore metal masks with heavily padded tops and an armor of split bamboo on the chests and hips. Points were scored for certain areas reached. Some areas were forbidden with a heavy penalty for infringement. The weapons were lance-like poles, about eight or ten feet long. The resounding whacks as they hit each other's heads made the spectators shudder. The participants were matched as individuals and as teams.

Nagata was a fencing contest between teams of women. Their lances were about six feet long with a curved hook at the end. The object was to disarm the opponent by snatching her wand.

Yari was sometimes called sword-jitsu. The participants were men, and it was more of a fencing bout with lances forty-two inches long and blunt spear tipped.¹⁸⁴

Fort Lupton's Japanese residents concluded Tomato Day festivities with a fireworks display.¹⁸⁵

By 1910, Japanese families operated 51 farms – 3,000 acres – in the Brighton-Fort Lupton-Platteville area. To protect themselves against unfair land rents, these farmers organized the Lupton Japanese Association two years earlier. In 1915, the association acquired the old, two-story, brick school building on the southeast corner of Ninth Street and Main Avenue. It quickly became the social and religious center of Fort Lupton's Japanese community. The building hosted Ho-Onko, a religious service, and The Japanese Language School, which used Japanese university students to teach their language to a new generation. The name was later changed to the Northern Colorado Japanese Grammar School.¹⁸⁶

The Japanese population in Fort Lupton and Denver expanded so dramatically that, in 1915 or '16, Rev. Banryu Yatsubuchi of the

Kumamoto Prefecture established the first Buddhist temple in Denver. By 1922, the number of Buddhists in Fort Lupton was large enough to form the Lupton *Kyudokai* (or congregation). Founders included Mr. and Mrs. Yasokichi Takaki, Kyusaburo Murakoshi, Toichi Kato, Jutaro Kato, Shunpei Momii, Mr. and Mrs. Gohachi Nakata, Mrs. Rise Yoshida, and Mrs. Kiku Tani. Services were held the first Sunday of each month. In February 1925, the groups opened the Fort Lupton Buddhist Sunday School.¹⁸⁷

Delegates from the Buddhist communities in Fort Lupton and Brighton gathered at Yamato Hall on January 2, 1938, to discuss separating from the Denver Buddhist Temple to form their own temple. Only Fort Lupton became independent; establishing the temple were Tomotaro Okamoto, Taneji Koshio, Tetsuiche Yasuda, Matasaburo Enomoto, Toichi Kato, and Senichi Nishimoto. In May, Rev. Zesei Kawasaki came to the Fort Lupton temple from Canada. With his wife, Kawasaki also conducted Japanese language classes.¹⁸⁸

But the most profound example of the Japanese presence in Fort Lupton and, in return, the acceptance of Anglos and other ethnic groups in the community, was the construction of a formal Buddhist temple. Rev. Kawasaki conducted the rites for the laying of structure's cornerstone on the morning of May 12, 1939. Construction on the temple, located at the corner of Ninth Street and Main Avenue, was soon under way, employing the time and talents of not only the Buddhist community, but of many Luptonites not connected with the temple. Work was halted during the summer growing season and fall harvest. It resumed in October and workers continued in all kinds of weather until they completed the structure. The temple was formally

dedicated on March 2, 1940.¹⁸⁹

Relations between Anglos and Japanese across the United States, however, soured after Japan attacked the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Suspicions arose among Anglos that Japanese Americans would serve their motherland over their new homeland. In March 1942, the federal government began rounding up all people of Japanese origin, citizens and noncitizens, and transported them to detention camps. “The Japanese race is an enemy race,” quipped Gen. John L. DeWitt, chief of the West Coast Defense Command, “It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen or not.”¹⁹⁰ By fall, the United States government forced more than 100,000 Japanese-Americans, mostly from the Pacific Northwest, to leave their homes and their jobs for desolate, poorly equipped detention camps, one of which was located near Granada, Colorado.

In Fort Lupton, the Japanese Association and Japanese Language schools quickly closed. Members of the Buddhist temple elected to suspend gathering for services and turned over leadership to those who were American citizens. Families began favoring English over Japanese. But because the Japanese community was so well integrated in Fort Lupton, little resentment or hostility persisted in the community.¹⁹¹

Indeed, Colorado became a haven for displaced Japanese Americans. Governor Ralph Carr detested the policy – especially the presence of a detention camp in his own state – and invited Japanese families to reside freely in Colorado throughout the war. Many of these families who accepted the governor’s invitation came to Fort Lupton. Attendance at the Buddhist Temple swelled, allowing the congregation to pay off its entire mortgage by 1943.¹⁹² Some Japanese residents of Fort

Lupton actually remembered World War II as a positive time for the community. “It was kind of funny because we met so many new people,” remembered Daisy Funakoshi Kiyota. “...Usually there was only four or five Japanese in a [public school] class, and when everyone evacuated, I graduated with 14 Japanese in the class. ...It was very good.”¹⁹³

Despite the injustices committed by the government of their new homeland, many first-generation Japanese still desired to become citizens. Thus, in the late 1940s and ‘50s, the temple became a center for citizenship classes, led by second-generation Japanese Americans. In 1954 and ‘55, many *issei*, the first-generation of Japanese to immigrate to America, became full citizens. For Matajiro Watada, the scene at the courthouse in Greeley was one of bliss: “The happy, smiling faces of those elderly *issei* I shall never forget.”¹⁹⁴ Japanese-Americans continue to be an integral part of the Fort Lupton community and symbol of the remarkable diversity of this remarkable place.



Figure 35.

Fort Lupton’s Buddhist Temple is a symbol of cooperation between townfolk and the Japanese community. (Photo by the author)

CONCLUSION

A Historical Crossroads

With the evolution of the Denver-Greeley Road to the Valley Highway to U.S. Highway 85, many businesses in Fort Lupton have carried the term “midway” in their names – 26 miles to Denver and 26 miles to Greeley. Midway suggests a place to stop and reflect upon the journey completed and the road yet ahead. Midway – Fort Lupton – is a crossroads in space, where lofty peaks rise from the prairie, where diverse people meet and trade, where the fruits of the harvest become the produce of a nation. And Fort Lupton is a crossroads in time – where one can heft a brick from the original fort, feel the rumble of a passing freight train, meditate at a Buddhist temple, stroll through neighborhoods little changed in a century, and hear the ethereal whirl of a modern cogeneration plant.

In 1835, Lancaster Lupton discovered that this place along the South Platte was

indeed an intersection in space and time. But the realization of his dream would prove impossible without cooperation from his fellow traders and settlers – without a community. Indeed, the town of Fort Lupton represents the needs of individual settlers to come together for their mutual benefit. Residents developed a symbiotic relationship with each other and with this unique place. From the farmers, to the merchants, to cannery workers and managers, to teachers, and to filling station attendants, all cooperated with each other for this town on the once desolate high prairie to survive.

“Again, I emphasize that we were a COMMUNITY in every way,” writes Henry Bowen Allsebrook in his memories of Fort Lupton, “with every individual interested in the progress of every other, and also in the progress of the institutions and business in our midst.”¹⁹⁵

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179. Cross, 154

180. Aguayo.

181. Cross, 109;

182. Matajiro Watada, trans. Sam Koshio, quoted in Cross, 108.

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184. *Ibid.*, 269; Counter 10.

185. Roberts 270.
186. Cross, 110.
187. Cross, 109; Roberts, 284, 293.
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