

# **History of Boulder Mountain Parks**

**by Mary Reilly-McNellan**

## CITY OF BOULDER MOUNTAIN PARKS HISTORY

### ACQUISITIONS

Before the turn of the century, the Huggins Ranch occupied the land at the base of Flagstaff Mountain, and the Batchelder Ranch embraced all of the present Chautauqua area. The Rea Ranch extended from approximately the foot of Flagstaff east to Ninth Street, and from Chautauqua north to College. The Reas built a home in 1883 at the mouth of Gregory Canyon, and went into the business of raising vegetables. In addition to land, the Reas held all the water rights to Gregory Canyon.

In 1898, Boulder citizens voted 1358-38 to buy the 75 acre Batchelder tract for Chautauqua use, and the park was named Texado Park. Inspired by the coming of Chautauqua, the city also bought the eastern slope of Flagstaff Mountain (another 96 acres) from the U.S. (the adjoining Russell-Austin tract), which was a condition required by the Association for future expansion. The Chautauqua ultimately extended from Twelfth Street on the east to the foot of Flagstaff Mountain on the west. Its northern border was Park Avenue, renamed Baseline Road several years later.

In December of 1898, the city council named the mountain tract "Flagstaff Mountain" and named the park ground at the top "American Park". On July 5, 1898, Boulder petitioned the U.S. Congress for 1,800 acres of land as a gift; this was approved in 1899. The land extended from the top of Flagstaff Mountain west to Four Mile Canyon, and from Sunshine Canyon on the north to South Boulder Creek on the south. Congress withdrew the gift shortly thereafter (probably 1899 or 1900), deciding that the City had not met the stipulations that the boundaries be signed and the forest protected as stated in the agreement. Boulder once again petitioned Congress for the property in 1907, although it was reduced to 1,601.75 acres by then due to property acquisitions by the public (including the Schnell property, later acquired as City of Boulder Open Space) during the interim period. In 1912 Boulder bought 1,200 more acres of mountain park land from the Federal Government for \$1.25 an acre.

Boulder continued to acquire lands in this area; some were federal and some were state-owned school lands. Two private tracts of land were purchased to prevent the Red Rocks and the Flatirons from being mined by stone quarries and other commercial uses (this may have been the reason for the purchase of the Bergheim-Wood property, which was deeded to the City of Boulder on March 26, 1920, by Jonas Bergheim and Frank P. Wood for a purchase price of \$5,800.00.) The quarries below the Third Flatiron provided stone for the Hale Science Building. City also had a deed for right-of-way across the land of Jonas Anderson dated November 27, 1896. The sandstone for the Union Pacific Depot, built in 1890 at Fourteenth and Canyon, was quarried from the "Anderson Quarry" in Skunk Canyon.

In 1903 a parks improvement group, which had just been organized in 1890, became more active under president Junius Henderson. Their first interest was to develop land around Chautauqua. They hired landscape architect W.W. Parce to design greenery around the bare Texado Park. The Women's Club of Boulder gave \$400 for tree planting.



Bear Canyon and Bear Mountain were purchased in 1912-1917. Royal Arch and Green Mountain were purchased in 1920. The following year the Boulder Rotarians, as one of their very first projects, built the trail from Bluebell Springs to the Royal Arch, with the assistance of the Boy Scouts, Ernest Greenman, and Eben Fine. An earlier trail to Royal Arch had been built during the first years of Chautauqua by Rocky Mountain Joe.

In 1964 the citizens of Boulder became concerned about a proposed real estate development on Enchanted Mesa (which had formerly been known as "Mystic Meadow.") They raised the monies for purchasing the Mesa by a bond issue and private subscription. More recent Mountain Parks acquisitions include property adjacent to NCAR, Sawhill Ponds (owned by the State, managed by the City), property at Boulder Reservoir and Coot Lake, Bear Peak west, Cathedral Park property and Tram Hill.

A proposal was put before the electorate in November of 1967 to raise the sales tax by one cent, with 4/10 of each cent to be used for open space land purchases and 6/10 for transportation. The first priority would be 5,000 acres of mountain backdrop. The "Greenbelt/Major Thoroughfare" program was approved by a 61% margin. From the open space program's inception, the responsibility of management of open space had gone to the Parks and Recreation Department, though the department was not given additional funding. In 1977, in an effort to streamline the open space program, the City Real Estate Department became the Department of Real Estate and Open Space, but the Parks and Recreation Department was not yet absolved of its maintenance duties. The mountain park ranger force of four continued to patrol and protect the 9,000 acres of open space land in addition to 4,200 acres of mountain parks. The Open Space Department paid half their salaries. Not until 1983 was Parks and Recreation relieved of open space duty when the Open Space Department hired its own professional ranger force to maintain its more than 20,000 acres of open space land.

## **FLAGSTAFF MOUNTAIN**

In 1899, the mountain west of Boulder was referred to as "Flagstaff Hill", and by 1900, it was called "Flagstaff Mountain". According to Mart Parsons, at "an early date" two men were scouring Gregory Gulch to the saddle of Flagstaff. They got into an argument, and one man ended up losing his shirt. The victor tied the shirt high on a dead pine visible from the valley, and "Flagstaff" became a reference.

George Sale (whose parents built and operated the historic Sale Hotel that formerly existed on the west side of Broadway, between Spruce and Pine) related a story in 1933 about the naming of Flagstaff. He stated that two young men arrived in Boulder one morning in 1879, and bet one of their fathers ten dollars that they could make it from the depot to the top of the "unnamed hill" (later known as Flagstaff) and back by lunch time. The father required that they take a flag with them to hang on an old dead tree near the top. This would be clearly visible in town to prove that they had indeed made it to the summit. According to Sale, the boys did not get back to town until 2 p.m., but the flag had been erected as instructed.