BESTS FIRSTS & WORST:
ASPEN IN OBJECTS

ASPEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY EXHIBITION
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“Bests, Firsts and Worsts: Aspen in Objects” offers an intimate glimpse at the stories and events that have made the Aspen area such an exceptional place to live and visit. Aspen is a town of superlatives; most are positive but there have been a few stumbles along the way. The “superlative” theme was chosen for this exhibit in order to interpret the highs and lows of the Aspen experience and produce a concentrated view of our history through fun and interesting stories. Visitors to the exhibit will learn about the area’s unique history as told through nearly 90 artifacts, each with its own tale that sheds light on our bright — and dark — times. Some of these pieces include: a chunk of the largest silver nugget ever mined in the U.S.; Aspen’s first female mayor’s gavel; a rare edition of The Aspen Times printed on the back of old maps when exceptionally heavy snows closed down the railroads; a single chair from Aspen Mountain’s first chair lift; and Steve Jobs’ personal mouse donated to the IDCA time capsule in 1983. On their own, the artifacts are interesting; together, they weave a tapestry of this area’s colorful history. In developing this exhibit, I have already found that people often have opposite reactions to the same object; some think it is a “best” while others think it is a “worst.” I hope this exhibit will give us the opportunity to discuss these differences of opinions in an open manner. Some exhibit guests will remember many of the stories and others will be experiencing our community for the first time, but everyone will gain a sense of why it is such a special place.

Lisa Hancock
Curator, Aspen Historical Society

Photo Aspen Historical Society
Mastodons and Mammoths

Mastodons and mammoths at 8,300 feet? And other extinct animals — giant sloths, tiny salamanders and ice age camels, horses and buffalo? In October 2011, while expanding Snowmass Village’s Ziegler Reservoir, bulldozer operator Jesse Steele unearthed one of the most significant paleontology sites in North America. The Denver Museum of Nature and Science started a massive dig effort, recruiting volunteers including teachers from the Roaring Fork Valley and scientists from around the world. “Bones are just popping out of the ground!” said Kirk Johnson, PhD, then head curator of paleontology and dig supervisor for DMNS. The prehistoric flora and fauna uncovered at the site are revealing startling information about high-altitude ecosystems and climate changes dating from 150,000 years ago.
Early Occupants of the Roaring Fork Valley

A rare, high-altitude Archaic Indian site, dating from 4,000 to 6,000 years ago, was recently uncovered in the Aspen area. The site is littered with flakes from tool making and broken lithic tools made from non-local stone such as chert from Wyoming, quartz from Utah, and obsidian from New Mexico, which indicates an extensive trade network and a large nomadic territory. Situated on a ridge high above the valley floor, the site allowed Archaic Indians to survey the area while they worked on tools. The different types of material indicate long-term, seasonal occupation of the site, possibly for thousands of years.
The Ute People

The Ute people occupied Colorado and Utah when the first Spanish explorers entered the area. Before they acquired horses from the Spanish, the nomadic Ute people traveled on foot and used dogs to pull travois. Horses allowed Ute bands to expand their territory and carry more belongings. However, Ute territory shrunk as settlers and miners came onto their lands. By 1861, the front range of the Rocky Mountains had filled with gold seekers, and the Ute people were moved to a large reservation in the western part of the state. After the Meeker Incident of 1879, when members of the Ute tribe killed Indian agent Nathan Meeker after he broke some of his promises to them, they were forcibly removed to reservations in Utah and southern Colorado, which they still occupy.

Aspen’s Largest Silver Nugget

This little piece of solid silver came from the largest silver nugget ever mined in the United States. It weighed 1,853 pounds and had to be cut into three pieces to be removed from the Smuggler Mine in 1894. It assayed at 96 percent pure silver. Unfortunately for mine owner David Hyman, the nugget was mined after the Silver Panic of 1893, which triggered a large drop in the price of silver. The Aspen Mining District sits on a large mineral belt rich in silver, gold, lead, zinc and copper that runs from Aspen to Leadville.
Tree Tales

The inner rings of this 125-year-old lodgepole pine from the Roaring Fork Valley are spaced much farther apart than the outer rings. The spacing of the inner rings indicates rapid growth early in the tree’s life. The extremely compact outer rings indicate that the tree didn’t grow much at all for the last 25 years of its life. This makes sense as lodgepole pine is a pioneer species — one of the first to grow following a “disturbance” such as a forest fire or clear cutting. As other trees fill in the space, they compete for limited resources. Its neighbors would likely exhibit a similar growth pattern.

Lodgepole Pine Cross Section, on loan from Aspen Center for Environmental Studies

Wheeler Dealer: Founding Aspen

“Mining” the miners could be as profitable as mining silver, but a town promoter had to be the first to establish the town site claim in order to sell town lots. During the winter of 1880, B. Clark Wheeler used homemade skis to travel over Independence Pass from Leadville into the camp at the base of Aspen Mountain that had been named “Ute City” by another town promoter. He immediately saw the potential. While his competitor spent time in Cincinnati courting investors, Wheeler went straight to Washington, D.C. to register a post office, the first step in securing ownership of the town site. After some legal wrangling, Ute City became Aspen, and B. Clark Wheeler became the man who gave Aspen its famous moniker.

Wheeler ... knew how to transform the campsite on the Roaring Fork into a legal urban entity, carrying with him the force of Colorado town site law. Unlike the news-starved prospectors who were wintering in the camp, Wheeler did not intend to wait for spring to stake his claim. He intended to “jump” the previous town site claim, and to this end he began his line-of-sight survey, laying out the boundaries of the camp.


Homemade Ski, circa 1890, AHS Collection, donated by Bill McClusky

B. Clark Wheeler, circa 1880
“The Utes Must Go”

Pitkin County is named for Colorado’s second governor, Frederick Pitkin, who was elected in 1878 with the campaign slogan of “The Utes Must Go.” Pitkin believed the Ute people did not utilize their land properly, and therefore, white settlers had the right to take it. During his tenure as governor, Colorado’s native people were removed from their homeland and interred on reservations.

Chief Buckskin Charlie, Moache Band, on being forced onto the reservation said: “I had been a brave man ... I had something to think about all the time, and got the full enjoyment out of the ... active days as they passed. But now I had nothing to do but eat and sleep and be lazy like a child. I will not be sorry when my time comes to die.”

“The Utes Must Go” ad, circa 1878, Denver Tribune, History Colorado Collection
Politics, Populism and Petticoats
by Michael Monroney, History Coach, Aspen Historical Society

In 1893, under Davis H. Waite, Aspen resident and Colorado’s only Populist governor, male voters passed a referendum granting women the right to vote. Colorado was the first state to do this.

The rallying cry of “Let the Women Vote! They can’t do any worse than the men have!” was shouted all over the state by disgruntled and unemployed miners, farmers, ranchers, factory workers and businessmen. With extra help from unionists and the People’s (Populist) Party, Colorado’s women’s suffrage referendum passed by an overwhelming majority on November 7, 1893, 27 years before women’s suffrage saw national success with the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Waite was elected during one of the most turbulent periods in Colorado history. Nationwide, the Populist Party rose to prominence as an anti-elitist, “tramps vs. millionaires,” rights-for-the-common-man, pro-union movement that was reacting to the perceived over-concentration of wealth — captains of industry such as Carnegie, Rockefeller and Morgan. In 1893 the nation was in the throes of economic recession as railroads and banks were shutting their doors following rampant over-building linked to the U.S. Government’s subsequent “demonetization” of silver, the backbone of Aspen’s economy. This led to the collapse of the silver economy and mining camps throughout the West.

Women’s suffrage was not a new phenomenon in the American West. When Wyoming became a territory in 1869, the 20-member territorial legislature granted women the right to vote with very little fanfare: “That every woman of the age of twenty-one years, residing in this Territory, may at every election to be held under the law thereof, cast her vote.” William Bright, the bill’s sponsor, had come to share his wife, Julia’s, belief that suffrage was a basic right of American citizenship. Wyoming gained statehood in 1890, after vowing against resistance at the U.S. Congressional level, “that Wyoming would remain out of the Union 100 years rather than join without women’s suffrage.” Stubborn Wyoming was admitted to the union as the “Equality State” with suffrage intact.

Two-piece Dress, circa 1892, AHS Collection, unknown donor; Ballot Box, 1884, AHS Collection, donated by the Aspen School District; Sash, reproduction

Continued on next page....
Politics, Populism and Petticoats cont.

Not coincidentally, supporters of suffrage targeted the same downtrodden demographic as the Populists. The two movements shared a common desire for human rights that included all citizens, male and female, feeling that mainstream politicians were ignoring the needs of the common people. Both sought support from the ranks of the unfortunate, unemployed and homeless.

Waite was a member of the Knights of Labor and jumped on the opportunity to bring women’s rights into his Populist campaign platform for governor in 1892. Even though they couldn’t vote for him, they could certainly exert influence over those who could. One faction supporting Waite argued that voting women would be a strong deterrent to that staple of the mining town, “the saloon element.” Years later, women’s suffrage and Prohibition would go hand in hand.

Governor Waite tied taxation without representation into the argument for suffrage, saying that if women could be taxed, they ought to be able to vote. However, Waite failed to win reelection in 1894, despite tallying half again as many votes as two years previously, and he ended up blaming his failed campaign on women. Later, he was a proponent against suffrage.

Such are the vagaries of political winds, then and now. In the 1894 election, three Republican women were elected to the Colorado House. They were the first women ever elected to serve in a state legislature anywhere in the country. Suffrage in Colorado was here to stay, even as the People’s Party faded into obscurity.

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The Human Cost of World War I

Hundreds of young Aspenites answered the call and enlisted in the armed forces during World War I. The Aspen Democrat-Times published a “Roll of Honor” containing 232 names, including seven women who completed nurses’ training. The “War to End All Wars” cost the lives of at least seven of these soldiers, six of whom died of the Spanish Flu during the worldwide pandemic. Peter Galligan, a 24-year-old Aspen miner, was the only one killed in action. Galligan died in the Battle of Sedan on November 4, 1918, just seven days before the Armistice was signed.

WWI Helmet, 89th Infantry Division, formed with Kansas, Missouri and Colorado recruits, 1917, AHS Collection, donated by Robert Zupancis

Funeral service of Peter Galligan, first Aspen man killed in WWI, Aspen Grove Cemetery, 1921
Aspen Keeps Sippin’ During Prohibition
by Christine Benedetti, Marketing Director,
Aspen Historical Society

When the Volstead Act of 1920 outlawing the consumption of alcohol ushered in the Prohibition era, the uproar seen in larger cities was absent in Aspen. Instead, normal life continued in the small town whose population dipped to 700 by 1930. For many that meant frequent visits to one of Aspen’s more popular bartenders, Hannibal Brown. By day, Brown was a janitor and chauffeur, by night he slung drinks for the town’s residents and often entertained them at his own home.

“When that party ended, we’d go over to Hannibal’s and then carry on ‘til morning,” says one resident in “Aspen: The Quiet Years.” Known for his eggnogs and whiskey-spiked milkshakes, Brown had quite the following but was unable to formally charge for his concoctions because of Prohibition. Another interviewee in “The Quiet Years” says many drinkers made their gratitude known to Brown through donations.

Despite Brown’s popularity, not everyone in Aspen got away with bootlegging. A couple of the town’s characters with nicknames like “Tony the Weasel” and “Cactus” were eventually apprehended by federal Prohibition officers. One article from The Aspen Times in 1929 says that two officers made an unannounced visit to Tony’s home in Woody Creek, where they discovered 60 gallons of “Dago Red” (red wine) and a quantity of “Sugar Moon.” “(He) is an undesirable alien and should be sent back to his native land, where he can make his home with his folk,” says the article. The newspapers were largely encouraging of the raids on booze and peddlers, often publicly congratulating police on their arrests and deportations.

Though Prohibition didn’t last — ending in 1933 — one of its most popular byproducts still exists in town: the Aspen Crud. Not to be mistaken for the seasonal cold common among locals, the crud is still served at the Hotel Jerome where it originated. The whiskey-spiked milkshakes were a way of sneaking booze to patrons. “You’d go in there and see these people giggling and carrying on drinking a malted milk,” said yet another “Quiet Years” interviewee.

As it turns out, it was just another group of convivial Aspenites surviving Prohibition by keeping anything but quiet.
Aspen on the Home Front

With the advent of World War II, Pitkin County’s 1,700 residents, like the rest of the country, turned their attention to the war effort. Aspen’s budding ski industry was put on hold as steel for lift towers was impossible to obtain. In 1942 Aspenites participated in the national scrap metal drive to support the military’s demand for metal to construct planes, tanks, ships, guns and ammunition. Scrap metal, from deserted mines, littered the local mountainsides. Ironically, for an area that couldn’t buy enough steel to build ski lifts, Pitkin County won Colorado’s Victory Pennant for most scrap metal salvaged per resident, harvesting an average of 104.11 pounds per person. The pennant was proudly flown below the American flag at the courthouse.

Aspenite Sgt. Edward J. Wegner with wife, Josephine, in front of the Hotel Jerome, 1943
From War to Winter Sports

The highly decorated soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division of the U.S. Army distinguished themselves in several battles during World War II. They came to Aspen for training and to relax during their training period at Camp Hale near Leadville, and many vowed to return if they survived the war. Native Austrian and ski racer, Friedl Pfeifer, was one of the 10th men who had dreamed of returning to Aspen. Pfeifer established the Aspen Ski School and a host of other 10th veterans became ski instructors, ski patrollers and started ski shops and restaurants or bars in Aspen. The veterans of the 10th Mountain Division were the originators of Aspen the ski resort.

10th Mountain Division Skis, 1942, AHS Collection, unknown donor

10th Mountain Division troops with their ski equipment at Camp Hale near Leadville, 1942

10th Mountain Division convoy trucks outside of Hotel Jerome, 1942
No Hippies Allowed

by D.J. Watkins

Aspen in the late 1960s was a popular place to drop out and escape the Vietnam War draft and the conformity of America. Young artists, hippies, radicals and outlaws arrived in late 1967 after the famous “Summer of Love” in San Francisco, abandoning the city to seek a new kind of refuge in the natural beauty surrounding Aspen. They worked as bar-backs, dishwashers, ski instructors, day laborers, dope dealers and hustlers, filling the cheaper housing scattered around the edge of town. Aspen was a mostly blank slate newly populated with an eccentric mix of intellectuals, musicians and idealists. By all accounts, it was a truly special place to drop out.

Aspen had been repopulated after World War II with a conservative, pro-business population that was nervous about what the new “hippy” population would do to the emerging tourist trade in Aspen. According to former Pitkin County Sheriff Bob Braudis, one of his first memories of early Aspen was walking into Guido Meyer’s restaurant in downtown Aspen. “One summer evening in 1970, I and a prep school classmate who had just graduated from medical school walked into Guido Meyer’s bar in downtown Aspen for a beer. Guido — also the local magistrate and proudly anti-change — had his back to us, polishing glassware, and in his Swiss accent said, ‘I will be right with you.’ When he turned around and saw our long hair, he started shouting, ‘Get out of here! You shit in the rivers. You pollute our mountains. I will not serve hippies!’”

Aspen had become fertile ground for this battle between conservatives and hippies because of an influx of intellectual, liberal, and unregistered voters who had moved there in the preceding years. Adding to the problem was the constant harassment of hippies though heavy-handed local law enforcement. One defendant, a 15-year-old hitchhiking his way through town on his way to San Francisco, had been detained and
sentenced to 90 days in jail in municipal Judge Guido Meyer’s infamous magistrate courtroom. Meyer was notorious for his militant opposition to the influx of what he called “undesirables” into Aspen, often sentencing youth to 90 days for petty offenses.

When Joe Edwards, who had recently graduated law school and who had never before tried a case in court, heard about the unrepresented youth languishing in the local jail, he brought the first civil rights case in Colorado to court by suing the Aspen Police Department, the City of Aspen and local magistrates for harassing the hippies and violating their civil rights. At the hearing in federal court in Denver in 1968, the judge in the case castigated the police force and magistrates and threatened to issue an injunction if any more people were discriminated against, harassed or unjustly imprisoned. Edwards became a hero overnight in Aspen for defending its burgeoning counterculture.

Young artists, hippies, radicals and outlaws arrived in late 1967 after the famous “Summer of Love” in San Francisco, abandoning the city to seek a new kind of refuge in the natural beauty surrounding Aspen.
In 1968 the first hints of serious change in the way politics had been conducted in Aspen and Pitkin County for years came with the arrest and prosecution of seven alleged vagrants and transients (the profilers’ codes of the day for hippies). One of them led a class action lawsuit alleging civil rights violations and their lawyer, who was 28 and fairly new to town, proved it.

Problems with local courts and law enforcement were becoming legend, and this incident seemed to crystallize all of them. The young lawyer, Joe Edwards, was catapulted into a 1969 race for mayor of Aspen by the likes of writer Hunter S. Thompson, artist Tom Benton and other local activists. In what previously seemed a staunchly right-wing community, the progressive Edwards only lost by six votes to Eve Homeyer, Aspen’s first female mayor.

By the late 1960s, what had come before in the way of politics here, and many places, was being swept up in a worldwide cultural and generational maelstrom that would transform everything. The near-miss by Edwards was a watershed moment in local politics that marked the emergence of a whole new political force in the valley, one in which noted outlaw journalist Thompson played a large part.

Buoyed by the close mayoral race, Thompson decided to run for sheriff of Pitkin County on the Freak Power ticket in 1970. His platform included much-needed reforms, along with promises to legalize soft drugs and tear up the streets and plant them with sod. The latter, along with Thompson’s avowed use and advocacy of drugs ranging from weed to acid to cocaine, attracted attention. Lots of it. News crews from around the country and the world covered the first real counterculture power push of its kind in America.

The serving sheriff, Carol Whitmire, was a good ol’ boy who, in order to scare up funding for a bigger arsenal, once portrayed Thompson as a menace who was going to attract the Hell’s Angels to town in retribution for the book Thompson wrote about them.

The anti-hero that Thompson so capably played was a brilliant, shaved-headed, drug-gobbling, literary legend and politically-astute crazy who liked to wrap himself in the American flag for photo ops. Literally wrap himself in the flag.

So the lines were clearly drawn and in the end Thompson only lost by a narrow percentage in a countywide race where many voters were still much more conservative than those

Eve Homeyer Mayoral Gavel, 1970, and Name Plate, 1970. AHS Collection, donated by Kris Marsh (Eve Homeyer Estate). *Artifact adopted by Roaring Fork Transportation Authority*
in Aspen. Thompson canonized the race in his first story for *Rolling Stone* magazine, and the two narrow defeats paved the way for important victories to come.

Edwards and law partner Dwight Shellman were elected as county commissioners and soon joined by Michael Kinsley for a troika that rewrote the zoning laws of Pitkin County to help control growth. They did it with a mandate of the county’s voters, and those progressive, proactive types of policies prevail in the county to this day.

Another focal point in the new politics was, of course, the sheriff’s office. In 1976, Whitmire resigned for misconduct and a special election was held. “I definitely think one of the big events in Pitkin County was when Dick Kienast was elected sheriff,” says Bob Braudis, who followed Kienast in office and served for nearly three decades. “That took us from the Neanderthal era into the modern community-based era of policing.”

Voters have remained committed to that concept. And all of it has resulted in a remarkable legacy for Freak Power, with its mantra that politics is the art of controlling your environment and nothing is more important than the political environment in which you live.

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**Aspen’s Downtown Mall**

In reaction to businesses moving out of downtown areas to suburban indoor malls, Governor John Love signed the Colorado Public Mall Act into law in 1970, allowing municipalities to close off downtown streets. But the situation in Aspen was different. The citizens of Aspen wanted the mall in order to improve the downtown experience. Business owners were actually against the idea. In 1972 Aspen’s downtown suffered from traffic congestion, air pollution and treacherous streets. A group of high school students spearheaded the effort to mall the downtown area.

Aspen voters approved a 1 percent sales tax for the mall in November 1972 raising $78,000 for construction and maintenance. The permanent mall, including streams, playgrounds, fountains, trees and historic bricks, replaced the temporary mall in September 1976.
Let's start by getting a few facts straight. Sal was very fond of calling himself “The Electable Lizard,” but he was most definitely not “electable.” He was never elected to anything. Most of the time, votes for Sal were not even counted. To begin with, there was the (silly) bureaucratic quibble about the fact that he wasn’t human. As if humanity ever counted for anything in politics. Oh sure, Sal sprang from the pen of Aspen Times cartoonist Chris Cassatt and came to life in the pages of the newspaper; but if our little lizard was nothing but printer’s ink and wood pulp, most politicians are fashioned of far slimier stuff — materials too vile to list here.

Another fact that needs to be made clear: Although Cassatt eventually changed his name to Sal A. Mander, in order to get Sal listed on the ballot, the Not-Quite-Electable Lizard was most definitely not Chris Cassatt’s alter ego. Sal was actually modeled on one of Cassatt’s pals, a slightly pot-bellied, sleepy-eyed reporter on the Times staff. (No names will be mentioned, but he knows who he is.)

But before we get mired in politics, we need to note that Sal started life in the mid-1970s as just one more Aspen ski bum, lying on a rock in the sun, getting high, drinking beer and displaying an unique Aspen brand of sunny cynicism. Assisted by his semi-sleazy buddy Turkey Murphy, Sal focused his sharp eye and sharp wit on Aspen, where there certainly was (and still is, darn it) an overwhelming supply of swollen egos and bizarre absurdities in desperate need of puncturing. Sal took on developers and politicians, the Aspen Skiing Co. and, when appropriate, skiers too. (What? Skiers have outsized egos? Oh my gosh!)

But then, like others before him, Sal found that his outrage demanded action. And so his political career was born. As we have noted, it was a career unsullied by anything as tawdry as “electability.” After running (with a brilliant lack of success) for Pitkin County sheriff, Aspen mayor and governor of Colorado, Sal decided to get serious: He took on the local district attorney, whom he drove, first, to distraction and, then, out of office.

As a member in good standing of Aspen’s young crazy ski generation, Sal (often portrayed smoking a hand-rolled cigarette of dubious origin) had been outraged by District Attorney Chuck Leidner’s support for undercover drug investigations. When Leidner ran for re-election in 1980, Sal jumped into the race with both feet (Paws? Claws? What do lizards have at the end of their little legs anyway?). Trying to ignore the fact that he was attacking the man in charge of local law enforcement, Sal charged ahead fearlessly with the slogan, “It’s your choice: the Lizard or the Snake.”

The campaign cartoons were savage. The posters were brilliant. And one radio ad featured the voice of God saying the world was wonderful until he created the snake ... who escaped from the Garden of Eden and got Continued on next page....

Sal A. Mander Cartoon, 1980, AHS Collection, donated by Lauren Cassatt (Chris Cassatt Estate)
Sal A. Mander cont.
elected district attorney in Aspen. Leidner won reelection. Of course. He was running against a cartoon. But shortly after that sullied victory, he resigned from office and left for parts unknown.
One major big-city newspaper ran an editorial suggesting that, just as “gerrymandered” had become a standard political term for redrawing district lines to ensure a party’s long-term supremacy, so “salamandered” should become the word for “being driven out of office by ridicule.”
Some might call Sal a failed politician, but those who understand know that he was brilliantly successful: He kept his integrity, chased his opponent out of town — and never had to serve a single day in office. Or, for that matter, in jail.

Colorado Says “No” to the Olympics
Colorado voters rejected a tax initiative in 1972 to fund the Olympics, becoming the only chosen site to ever turn down the games. In 1970 the International Olympic Committee awarded Colorado the 1976 Winter Olympic Games. Aspen was proposed as the alpine ski racing venue. While many Coloradans rejoiced, others feared the growth and environmental issues that came with hosting the Olympics. Between 1950 and 1970, Colorado’s population increased 51 percent. During the same time period, Pitkin County grew by 385 percent, from 1,600 residents to 8,200 residents. Add hundreds of seasonal residents as well as thousands of tourists and it’s no wonder arguments erupted over growth, land use and Colorado’s future.
In November 1972, Aspen and Pitkin County struggled with growth issues. Campaigning with the slogan of “Tame the Growth Gorilla,” Aspen’s newly-elected 28-year-old mayor, Stacy Standley, implemented innovative growth management policies such as height limits, building setbacks, and employee housing. Those who’d lived in Aspen long enough to witness the long struggle towards prosperity opposed these restrictions and supported hosting the Olympics. Younger Aspenites who did not wish to see more growth joined the Olympic opposition.

“No Olympics” Poster by Thomas Benton, 1972, AHS Collection, donated by Arthur Rock. Artifact adopted by Barbara Platts

Colorado Winter Olympics protest, Aspen Skiing Co. offices, January 1972
Aspen Society for Animal Rights
by Bill Stirling, former Aspen Mayor, 1983-1991

Spotted large cats — tigers, leopards, cheetahs and jaguars — became endangered because of an insatiable appetite for fur garments. The need to make a statement of status and wealth by wearing the fur of animals has also decimated millions of other creatures in the wild, and on fur farms, where inhumane methods, such as anal electrocution, have been used to kill the caged minks and beavers.

In Aspen, where we are at the cusp of human and wild animal habitats, a group of citizens banded together in 1989 to organize an effort to ban the sale of fur in the town. This ballot initiative galvanized national and global attention on the cruel and inhumane practices in the fur industry. The Aspen Daily News noted that the fur ban vote appeared to be “the biggest single event in Aspen since developer Walter Paepcke squinted up at Aspen Mountain in 1945 and said, ‘Yeah, we could sell lift tickets here.’” Just as Aspen had been the first community in the United States to ban smoking in public spaces, Aspen was again in a position of breaking new trail — legislation to ban the sale of fur had never been proposed before.

Katharine Thalberg, the founder and operator of Explore Booksellers, was a brilliant and fearless pioneer in advancing animal rights. She formed the Aspen Society for Animal Rights (ASFAR), to take action to protect animals, to expose the cruelty and brutal practices inherent in the fur industry and to change the status attached with wearing the fur of an animal. ASFAR was instrumental in organizing support for the ballot initiative to ban the sale of fur in the town.

Continued on next page....

No More Plastic

In an effort to reduce waste and help maximize the estimated remaining 20-year life of the Aspen landfill, the Aspen City Council banned single-use plastic grocery bags on October 11, 2011 and placed a 20 cents fee on paper bags. Aspen has also tried to limit plastic bottle use by installing tap stations throughout town and giving out free reusable water bottles. These are the latest of many measures implemented in Aspen in order to help preserve this beautiful town.

City Market Disposable Plastic Bag, 2014, AHS Collection, staff acquisition
Katharine Thalberg’s husband, Bill Stirling, was mayor of Aspen from 1983-91, a leader in this effort courageously spearheading the ballot initiative. He and the city council had already passed a law in the mid-1980s, banning the use of the controversial and inhumane lethal leg-hold trap inside the city of Aspen. Mink and beaver are prevalent around Aspen, and the traps set to catch wild animals for their fur had also been trapping domestic animals.

In the spring of 1989, during his third effort to win re-election, Mayor Stirling announced in a campaign debate that he was planning to propose a ballot initiative to ban the sale of fur in Aspen. It would not be illegal to wear fur, but the sale of fur in the city would be banned. He wanted the citizens of Aspen to know in advance of voting for him that this was part of his re-election agenda.

In December 1989, after winning re-election, Mayor Stirling presented the ballot issue with a draft of the law to ban the sale of furs in Aspen. At the time in Aspen, there were several shops which exclusively sold fur products and a number of other clothiers and ski shops that sold winter outfits that included fur. Some of these shops alerted the Fur Information Council of America, and they assigned one person in Aspen to work fulltime to organize the resistance to the proposed ballot issue.

The discussion quickly heated up. The ballot issue attracted attention around the nation and the world. Ted Koppel’s “Nightline,” “Good Morning America,” People Magazine, the New York Times Magazine and many other media devoted major programs and articles to the issue, putting a huge spotlight on the inhumane practices in the fur industry.

Aspen’s proposed ban on selling fur drew high-profile support — includ-}

“Many locals saw the fur ban as a violation of their freedom of choice. And many other locals viewed the fur ban as an appropriate and necessary action to dramatize the need for more humane treatment of fur-bearing animals.”

Although the ballot issue was defeated at the polls 3 to 2, exit polls showed the majority of voters would never wear or buy a fur garment. Mayor Stirling had indeed risked his political career — he was faced with a recall vote, which he narrowly overcame. The fur ballot initiative is part of Aspen’s history of being at the cutting edge of issues. The national and international debate around the ballot initiative to ban the sale of fur raised the consciousness of people everywhere about the inhumane treatment of animals in the fur industry.

ASFAR Sweatshirt, 1989, AHS Collection, donated by Bill Stirling
Don’t Drink the Water

by Anne Marie McPhee, Water Rights Attorney

Balancing the health of the Roaring Fork River against other uses didn’t just become a concern in recent years with the environmental movement. Beginning in the summer of 1898, ranchers began complaining that their cattle were being poisoned but they couldn’t determine the cause. At the same time, Glenwood Springs hoteliers were protesting that the dirty state of the river was affecting tourism. When a young child in Carbondale died in the fall of 1898 with symptoms of arsenic poisoning and several adults were hospitalized, the river was found to have high levels of arsenic. Eyes soon turned to the Smuggler Zinc/Lead Concentrator, a new ore processing plant, which was dumping mine tailings with a large amount of arsenic directly into the river.

Ranchers and businessmen in the lower end of the valley combined forces and began legal efforts to stop the concentrator’s operations. The newspapers in Aspen, where mining was still king, however, were not sympathetic. Editorials warned of economic disaster if the mines were shut down, accusing the protestors of trying to “kill the goose that laid them the golden egg” and “wipe Aspen off the map.” Ultimately, lawsuits were filed to shut down the concentrator but by 1900, the suits were dismissed as no longer necessary. Devastating to those in Aspen at the time, the collapse of the silver-mining industry and shuttering of most of the mines may have inadvertently saved the present-day Roaring Fork Valley and the natural beauty for which it is known from disastrous environmental damage.
Aspen without Trees?
A Clear-Cut History of Aspen’s Forests
by Jamie Cundiff, Forest Programs Director, Aspen Center for Environmental Studies

Imagine Aspen’s iconic ski slopes devoid of trees. Bare dirt. Stumps as far as the eye can see. Is this something out of “The Lorax”? Quite the contrary.

Following Aspen’s silver mining boom in the late 1880s, what had been a more transient mining camp rapidly transitioned into an urbanized industrial center. With this growth in population and prosperity came great demand for natural resources. In his book “Aspen: The History of a Silver Mining Town 1879-1893,” Malcolm J. Rohrbough writes of the demand for timber:

“Into the Eden-like valley of the Roaring Fork came all the by-products of late-nineteenth-century American industrial life [including] ... the systematic cutting of timber on the sides of the mountains to meet the ravenous appetites of the mines that left the surrounding hillsides as bare as a stretch of arctic tundra.”

The construction of the underground access tunnels of the Smuggler Mine alone consumed 100,000 board feet of timber per month. This rapid rate of consumption quickly rendered Aspen’s iconic slopes barren. As difficult as it is for Aspenites today to picture a treeless Ajax, that was the reality faced by early residents. While today’s residents and visitors are back to skiing amongst the firs on Aspen Mountain and mountain biking through the pines of Smuggler, these ecosystems are still reeling from Aspen’s mining era.

Here’s the problem: Because our local forests were logged for timber in a relatively short time period, the majority of Aspen’s modern-day forests are all the same age. Ski past a lodgepole pine stand on the lower flanks of Aspen Highlands and you’ll notice that all the trunks are a similar size. Foresters refer to this phenomenon as a lack of age class diversity. Ecologically speaking, a forest that lacks age class diversity is more susceptible to widespread mortality from insects and disease.

Given that many of Aspen’s local forests are even-aged, one may wonder why this area was spared the severity of the mountain pine beetle epidemic faced by other regions of Colorado over the past few decades. The answer lies in species diversity.

An excellent analogy of the benefits of species diversity can be drawn from the agriculture realm. If a farmer maintains an orchard of exclusively peach

Continued on next page....
trees that is infested by fruit flies, the entire crop may be lost. But if the farmer had planted a diversity of crops, the loss would have been limited to a fraction.

The same is true for forests. Consider the example of the mountain pine beetle, which favors lodgepole and ponderosa pine trees. Other forests composed exclusively of these two species are at a much higher risk of mortality from the beetle. Here in the Roaring Fork Watershed, only 7 percent of our forests are lodgepole pine, which spared us from extensive mountain pine beetle mortality.

Lack of species and age class diversity caused by clear-cutting and other human interventions such as fire prevention and development can trigger ripple effects throughout the ecosystem. For example, an even-aged lodgepole pine stand growing close together prevents any sunlight from reaching the forest floor. This results in an ecologically barren understory that makes it difficult for many foraging animals to survive.

Fortunately, Aspen Center for Environmental Studies’ For the Forest program is helping land managers to take steps to restore our local forests to more diverse, pre-mining conditions through select mechanical thinning and, where appropriate, prescribed fire. Such treatments aim to create a more patchy forest landscape where different species and ages of trees can thrive. Healthy forests do more than look good. They sequester carbon, purify our air, and store our drinking water. Simply put, a healthy forest means a healthy Aspen.
The winter of 1899 saw snow amounts never experienced in Colorado’s brief documented history. Snow was so deep that the inhabitants of Independence were forced to evacuate when their supplies ran out. Using lumber from cabins, they made skis to escape down the valley to Aspen. Residents joked that the prize for winning this mandatory ski race was a ham sandwich. A Colorado Midland train became stranded in the deep snow on Hagerman Pass. Passengers were evacuated after several cold days but the train remained on the pass for 77 days causing the Colorado Midland to cease operations to Aspen. During this time, The Aspen Times ran out of newsprint for the paper so they were forced to print on the back of unsold 1893 Aspen Bird’s Eye View maps.
Reintroduction of Elk

Due to overhunting by miners and ranchers, the native populations of elk, deer and even marmots were nearly wiped out. In 1913, the local chapter of the Elks Lodge (BPOE #224) paid to ship elk from Jackson Hole, Wyoming, to reestablish the local elk herd. Deer and marmots were able to make a natural comeback.

Elk Antlers, 1985, on loan from Jim Hancock

Interior of the Bowman Musee on Cooper Avenue, circa 1895. The walls are covered with elk, deer, bighorn sheep and antelope.

Elk from Jackson Hole, Wyoming, being released on Smuggler Mountain, 1913.

Preserving the Wilderness

The Wilderness Workshop was founded in 1967 with two goals: securing congressional designation for the Hunter-Frying Pan and Collegiate Peaks Wilderness Areas, and doubling the acreage designated within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Area. These goals were accomplished with the passage of the 1978 Endangered American Wilderness Act and the 1980 Colorado Wilderness Act. Wilderness Workshop, and in particular, co-founders and “Maroon Belles” Connie Harvey, Joy Caudill and Dottie Fox, played a pivotal role in bringing about these pieces of legislation, which together secured nearly a half-million acres of wilderness in the White River National Forest.

Maroon Bells Quadrangle, U.S. Geological Survey Topographical Map, 1987, AHS Collection, staff acquisition
Stuart Mace and the Stewardship of the Castle Creek Valley

The upper Castle Creek Valley, once over-grazed and weed-infested, now shines with unspoiled beauty. Stuart and Isabel Mace moved into the valley in 1949 with their young family and built Toklat Lodge from recycled and scavenged materials, including foundation stone from the Washington School in Aspen, logs from an abandoned coal mine and marble left behind after the quarries closed. The Maces operated Toklat, their dogsledging business, lodge, restaurant, art gallery and mail-order food business — anything to make a living and stay in the Castle Creek Valley. Mace’s environmental ethic showed in his stewardship of the valley. Through his efforts the vegetation slowly returned to its natural state. Hikers were strongly discouraged by Mace from trampling vegetation in the reclaimed meadows. Mace also help found the Aspen Center for Environmental Studies.

Husky Fur Hat and Yarn, circa 1965, AHS Collection, donated by Lynne Mace. +Artifact adopted by Kate McBride and The Other Side Ranch+

Fracking with Nukes

The Rulison Underground Nuclear Test was a 40-kiloton detonation along the Colorado River west of Glenwood Springs on September 10, 1969. It was part of Operation Plowshare, which explored peacetime uses of the nation’s nuclear weapons. The aim of the Rulison test was to determine if natural gas could be easily liberated by blasting. The test succeeded in delivering large quantities of natural gas, however the resulting radioactivity left the gas contaminated.

Anti-Nuclear Pollution Day Poster by Tom Benton, circa 1970, AHS Collection, donated by Joan Lane
Urban Place, Rural Space
by Janet Urquhart, Stewardship Outreach Coordinator, Pitkin County Open Space and Trails

A handhold in the grass along the riverbank brings my canoe to an easy stall. The slow water breaks around the craft with barely a ripple in the quiet of a morning still warming to the filtered streaks of sunlight. Ahead, I spy the great birds, impressively balanced in their lofty, incongruous perches. The great blue herons, with their elegant, curved necks, head plumes and stilted legs, look better suited to the tropics than the piles of sticks they’ve woven into the needle stubs of giant conifers or tops of cottonwoods, high in the Rockies.

I float this placid stretch of the Roaring Fork River once each early summer, an effort in logistics that I find worthwhile only once my canoe steadies in the cold, meandering current. The water has come crashing out of the mountains only to crawl through this stretch, as if the river, too, is taking in the scenery. This particular open space property cost City of Aspen and Pitkin County taxpayers $6.75 million to acquire, but the experience, as they say, is priceless. Perhaps that’s why Pitkin County Open Space and Trails, the first such program on the Western Slope of Colorado, saw its most recent property tax measure pass with support from 72 percent of the electorate.

Many taxpayers will never float past the heron rookery at James H. Smith Open Space; grind a mountain bike up and over Sky Mountain Park, where the views live up to the name; stand on the Hummingbird Lode and admire the breathtaking Hunter Creek Valley from a perch that could have been the spacious, off-limits patio of an ill-placed mansion; or know the thrill of a rainbow trout lunging at a well-cast fly deep in the shadows of the Roaring Fork Gorge, but they consistently rate open spaces as important. Seventy-five percent of surveyed Pitkin County households believe they benefit from the property tax dollars spent on open spaces and trails.

In a county that is comprised of roughly 88 percent federal land — an impressive collection of unparalleled scenery, wildlife habitat and recreational playgrounds — key pieces of the remaining 12 percent have been the focus of an open space program that marks its 25th anniversary in 2015. Its 19,620 acres of purchased or conserved lands include wildlife corridors where few humans ever walk, historic ranchlands and vistas that passersby enjoy without realizing the nature of their preservation. Among the program’s roughly 70 miles of trails is the Rio Grande, where back-and-forth trips per day at Stein Park average more than 500 during the summer months.

On the bustling Rio Grande Trail, alone on a river or admiring the scenery from a car window, open space supporters find common ground.

“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.” — John Muir

North Star Preserve Photograph, 2010. Photo Pitkin County Open Space and Trails
LEAVE THE SKY ALONE
Say NO to Cloud Seeding in Aspen

Leave the Sky Alone

By Christmas 1976 there was not enough snow in Aspen to open the ski lifts. Desperate merchants and the Aspen Skiing Co. embraced the idea of cloud seeding (weather modification by dispersing potassium iodine into clouds in order to encourage precipitation). In 1977 the Prospector Lodge’s newsletter claimed that cloud seeding “practically guaranteed a good snow year.” Once considered fringe science, cloud seeding is still occurring in the skies over Colorado, funded by California and Arizona water interests, the Denver Water Board and ski resorts Vail, Breckenridge and Winter Park. Aspen no longer participates in cloud seeding programs.

D.R.C. Brown, Aspen Skiing Co. President, at the bottom of Little Nell on Aspen Mountain, Nov. 25, 1976

Of Helicopters, Ptarmigan and Mountain Goats
by Sheryl Sabandal, Environmental Intern, Aspen Skiing Co.

Next time you’re skiing the Snowmass Ski Area about to face the Headwall, or carve gentle turns down the Rocky Mountain High run, you’ll see a ski lift that looks like someone plopped it down out of the sky. It’s a bit odd; you’d expect panoramic views, fresh air, ptarmigan, and maybe mountain goats above treeline, sure. A ski lift, not so much.

In part, the Cirque poma did come from the sky — by helicopter. The groundwork involved environmentally conscientious construction, favoring manpower over horsepower to avoid disturbing the fragile tundra. Instead of bulldozers and dump trucks, workers carried 50-pound supply loads up 750 vertical feet. They never took the same path to avoid scarring a trail.

Aspen Skiing Co. only used backhoes to dig the tower foundations that were six feet deep, and then only on snow-covered ground in April and May to protect the plants below. The holes were covered so unsuspecting animals wouldn’t be trapped during the three-month pause recommended by a wildlife specialist in order to respect critical mating and nesting periods.

In 1997, Aspen Skiing Co. made the first wind power purchase in the ski industry, contracting with Holy Cross Energy to purchase wind-powered electricity equivalent to the lift’s usage through one of the first green power pricing programs in the country. The Cirque lift gives Snowmass the nation’s longest lift-served vertical rise (4,406 feet), and highest lift-served ski terrain.

Cirque Poma with Platter, 2015, on loan from the Aspen Skiing Co.
Drill Till You Drop

How can you tell who is the best miner in Aspen? Match up hand drillers head to head and see who can sink the hole the fastest! From the 1880s through the 1930s, rock-drilling contests were popular across the American West. Often challenges were issued with money to back people’s claims and every year Aspen held a contest on the Fourth of July as part of the celebrations. According to The Aspen Times, Aspenites placed fifth in a Denver contest in 1891 and Aspen drillers proved to be the best in 1936 when they beat the world’s record by 47 seconds for drilling a five-foot hole.

Play Ball!

The newly formed populations of Ashcroft, Aspen and Independence all had baseball clubs that played against each other regularly in the early 1880s. In 1889, Aspen’s club was invited to open the new ball grounds in Denver and by the 1890s, Aspen had its own baseball park with a grandstand for the popular game near what is now the roundabout. And in 1912, Mayor Charles Wagner had what is now Wagner Park cleared and made into a ball field, giving Aspen two places for the citizens to play ball.
Torture on Two Wheels

Racing bicycles in Aspen began long before the USA Pro Challenge started in 2011. From 1898 until 1914, a race from Emma to Glenwood enticed local young men. In 1899, the Aspen Tribune stated “over 1,000 people witnessed the race, which was spirited and fast.” Racing over dirt roads, contestants had to finish within 20 minutes of the leader to be recognized. The Colorado Midland Railroad chugged alongside the racers offering $1.50 round-trip tickets for spectators.

In 1965, the first North American Championship, “a two-day torture on wheels” according to Sports Illustrated, was held in Aspen. The 190-mile bike race left Aspen to Glenwood Springs, over Tennessee Pass and returned to Aspen via Independence Pass.

The 1975 Red Zinger Classic (becoming the Coors Classic in 1980) began as a three-day stage race that grew to a two-week long tour, the fourth largest race in the world. One recurring stage near Snowmass, took place on “Suicide Hill,” a road so steep that it was heated in the winter (a.k.a. Snowmelt Road).

Because this race had a women’s component, it is credited by the Tour de France for spurring its addition of a women’s division.
Run-Back Remembrance by Tony Vagneur, AHS Board Member

The face of Aspen Mountain was postcard-perfect: golden aspen leaves shimmering against a backdrop of cobalt blue autumn sky, but there wasn’t time to notice as the elongated pigskin tumbled toward me, end over end in a high curving arc, totally absorbing my every fiber.

“If it’s in the end zone, just catch the ball and down it,” the coach had said in reference to the kicking ability of Roaring Fork Ram Bob Walsh, a 7-foot-tall player with enough leg to stick the ball deep in the end zone on kickoffs.

My only thought was to catch the ball — what could be more embarrassing than to fumble a kickoff? — but once it was caught and cradled tight against my chest, the psychological part of my being that could sometimes cause nightmares for the coaching staff took over.

Wagner Park — in the days before rugby replaced the goalposts and the high school was still in the Red Brick building — was lined on both sides with enthusiastic football fans, the home team and half the town claiming turf on the east side, with visitors on the west.

The defenders weren’t closing that fast, it didn’t appear, due to Walsh’s long leg, and the overwhelming urge to run the ball up the field took over. Hard to the right I went on legs seasoned by years of running after cattle and elk in the high country. Most of the defenders were pulled my direction, moving along hard at me, undoubtedly thinking they could trap me between them and the sideline, and I kept going, going, until the very last second and with one move, cut hard left and went the opposite direction diagonally across the field.


The impossible was suddenly unfolding before me and my heart pounded, both with exhilaration and acceleration. Two guys left to beat and a stiff arm to one and a high-stepping knee to the other’s face mask and I was behind the defense. Run, my God, run, run like I was being chased by a grizzly bear.

As a sophomore, that was the first kickoff I had ever run back for a touchdown, but it wasn’t the last, and it was the one I will never forget. The pattern was set that day, the thrill embedded in my psyche, and Friday or Saturday afternoons became those days when I hoped to run at least one kickoff or punt back for a touchdown. Sometimes I got my wish.

The grass now in Wagner Park has been adapted to rugby games, trampled by wine and food tastings, stirred by dogs and their walkers, and ruffled by winter polo. But whatever goes on there, the memory still lives in my mind of those glorious football afternoons, the spectacular fall weather, and the ability to kick loose and run like hell.
**Ski Racing is in Aspen’s DNA**
by Christin Cooper, 1984 Olympic Silver Medalist, Giant Slalom

Aspen’s Roch Cup was always more than a ski race. From its first running in 1946, it was a celebration of skiing as an economic and spiritual engine of Aspen. The annual event helped breathe new life into this scruffy, post-World War II mining town.

The Roch Cup was named for André Roch, a Swiss mountaineer and avalanche expert hired in 1936 to develop a ski area near Aspen. Roch’s influence was far-ranging. In a single season, and with infectious enthusiasm, Roch managed to mobilize an entire community around the sport of skiing. He gave free ski lessons to the locals, co-founded the Aspen Ski Club and laid out Aspen Mountain’s first ski run, the Corkscrew.

The Roch Cup has been awarded for all skiing disciplines over its 60-year history, and today it is the longest-running perpetual award for a high level race in the history of U.S. skiing.

To host the annual Roch Cup races, a broad swath of Aspen society donated time, beds, meals, muscle and their legendary hospitality in support of the races. From merchant to matriarchs, everyone stepped up. Aspen’s volunteer ethic was key, but so too was the single-minded resolve of Ruth Whyte; for 30 years the Aspen Ski Club race secretary and feisty Aspenite who refused to let the Roch Cup fade away on her watch. She badgered World Cup officials relentlessly through the 1980s to present the Roch Cup (or Bingham Cup, for women) to World Cup winners. As a result, the historic cups are prized today among World Cup racers, who are awed by the long list of champions engraved on their sides.

“The way Aspen supported and loved ski racing was amazing,” says 1972 Olympian Terry Palmer. “Everyone who ever raced the Roch Cup remembers that support. It had this tradition. It was built by people who loved the sport — hard-working, regular folks who had skiing in their blood. Families put us up, restaurants would feed us, the town just opened up for us. This is what skiing should be and this is what a ski town should be.”

“Everyone was really proud of this race,” adds Peter Greene, whose Golden Horn restaurant was an early Roch hangout. “If it snowed, the whole town showed up. It was a super community effort. We didn’t have grooming equipment or a paid race department [in the 60s]. We just went and did it.”

There was a moment, though, when escalating costs were making Aspen’s scrappy, gather-round-the-campfire approach to staging international ski races look quaint and obsolete. The town was compelled to modernize, or lose its classic race. Two FIS World Cup conditions were nonnegotiable: the Aspen Skiing Co. must take over race operations from the Aspen Ski Club (which it did in 1981) and the venerable Roch Cup name must be surrendered, if necessary, to satisfy World Cup sponsors.

Later on there would be more hoops: snowmaking, water-injection and modern safety criteria; construction of the Berlin Wall (an engineering marvel that widened the run for safety). There would be European griping that the food was unsatisfactory, the lodging unacceptable, the air too thin, the snow too soft. But for Aspen, staging the races was always the thing and, it ends up, hard-wired into the town’s DNA.

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Aspen Ski Club Bib, circa 1970, AHS Collection, donated by the Aspen Valley Ski and Snowboard Club. © Artifact adopted by the Gorsuch Family ©
“Shortees” Skis, 1971, AHS Collection, donated by the Mountain Chalet

S-Ski, 1992, AHS Collection, staff acquisition

Homemade Ski, circa 1885, AHS Collection, donated by Dick Allen + Artifact adopted by Ray E. Dillon, Jr. +
Graduated Length Method (GLM)

The Graduated Length Method (GLM) of ski instruction was based on the premise that beginning skiers should “graduate” to longer skis as they became more proficient. GLM allowed beginners to completely skip the “snow plow” and go straight to parallel. Clif Taylor, the face of GLM, even developed his own brand of skis, “Shortees,” that he sold in conjunction with the program. But long ski snobbery proved difficult to overcome. The Aspen Skiing Co. did not adapt GLM for its ski school although Aspen Highlands offered GLM as part of its ski school starting in 1971 for more than 20 years.

GLM (Graduated Length Method) ski school class at the base of Highlands, circa 1975

“Designed in Aspen, Custom-Made in Austria”

Aspenite Ivan Petkov had the first patent on shaped skis. Petkov was a former Bulgarian child movie star turned national ski team member turned national champion windsurfer. He moved to Aspen in 1987 and spent his winters teaching skiing and his summers windsurfing. At the time, the ski industry was struggling to cater to its aging skier base and snowboards were taking a bite out of the younger market. Petkov got the idea for a shaped ski while watching custom sailboards being carved. Shaped skis made turning easier and carving a turn something that every skier could do. In 1992, Petkov contracted with Atomic to create the S-Ski, a 187-centimeter ski with a 113-61-91 profile, and received the patent based on geometry. “We couldn’t find a wide enough base material but they also made water skis so we got some blue polyethylene and cut the base out of that,” said Petkov in a 2005 interview. Two years later 1,200 S-Skis were sold. But the secret was out and many other ski manufacturers jumped into the market, eventually driving S-Ski out of business.

S-Ski, 1992

Homemade Skis

Skis, or “Norwegian snowshoes,” were popular means of transportation during Aspen’s early prospecting days. There were no mass-produced skis at the time so each pair of skis reflected the ingenuity of the maker. This ski (pictured left) includes wired tips, leather straps and an elevated heel base.

Miners skiing, possibly at Crystal, circa 1900
On Labor Day weekend in 1972, Howard Ross and Gordon Whitmer from Newport Beach, California, decided to host a volleyball tournament for their friends. The co-owners of the Motherlode Restaurant needed a volleyball “fix.” They set up courts in Wagner Park, brought a keg of beer and a grill, and played. Little did they know that their 14-team tournament would become one of the largest pro-am beach doubles volleyball tournaments in the country.

In the early years of the tournament the bartenders at the restaurant took the registrations; one waiter helped organize it and another waiter was in charge of the T-shirts. By 1981, the Motherlode Volleyball Classic supplanted Boulder’s Colorado Open as the largest event in Colorado. It was getting too big for the restaurant to handle. They hired local volleyball aficionado Leon Fell to handle the event. The Motherlode Volleyball Tournament now has over 700 teams that come to Aspen to participate and celebrate what Volleyball Magazine called “the social event of the outdoor volleyball season.”
Winternational

Aspen’s first World Cup ski race was held during the circuit’s inaugural year of 1968. The World Cup began annual visits in 1981 and, just as Aspen did for the Roch Cup races, the community rallied to host a world-class event. America’s Downhill starts at the top of Ruthie’s Run on Aspen Mountain, glides over the flat section of Zig Zaugg and dives into the steeps of Aztec and the airplane turn in Spring Pitch then down Strawpile to complete one of the most difficult downhill courses on the World Cup tour. After a several-year hiatus, in 2003 the races switched from a March men’s speed event to a November women’s technical event. Aspen is scheduled to host the World Cup Finals (top 30 competitors in each discipline) in March 2017.

Winternational Knit Hat, 1981, AHS Collection, donated by Gerry and Roz Hewey
Aspen Mountain Snowboard Ban

In 2001, only Aspen Mountain and three other resorts in the country did not allow snowboarding. Aspen Highlands embraced snowboarding as early as 1983, but Aspen Mountain continued to hold out. Although snowboarding was allowed on Buttermilk, Snowmass and Highlands, the ban stoked the ire of snowboarders. Finally, on April Fool’s Day 2001, Aspen Mountain allowed a two-week trial period for snowboarding and permanently lifted the ban with the 2001-2002 ski season.

NASTAR

NASTAR came from a French tradition in which ski instructors were rated by the percentage they lagged behind the time recorded by the fastest French ski instructor. John Fry, editor of Ski Magazine, believed the program would be applicable to recreational ski racing in the United States and adopted the universal handicap scoring system. The National Standard Race called NASTAR, was introduced in 1968. Handicaps were based on a national standard established each year by the fastest member of the U.S. Ski Team.

Prodced and promoted by Aspenite Bob Beattie, a former U.S. Ski Team coach and TV commentator, the program has grown to over 100 resorts attracting close to 1 million ski racers annually. Beattie also cofounded the ski racing World Cup as well as the Pro Tour, a professional ski racing tour that operated for over 10 years. NASTAR courses are available on Snowmass and Aspen mountains.
X Games: What’s the Point? by Mick Ireland, former Aspen Mayor, 2007-2013

Like most special events sponsored by the community at great expense and considerable inconvenience to the locals — bike races, World Cup, music fests — the X Games do not produce a tangible bottom-line boost.

Measuring just the increase in sales tax and lodging, eating and retail sales, most special events do not cover the outlay in community resource subsidies. In particular, the X Games don’t draw the big spenders that make local four-star restaurants rock and high-end lodging hum. The games, after all, are “free” to the public and a very young following with varying degrees of supervision by parents who are not quite as excited about Taco Bell foam hats, 14-year-old halfpipe superstars and standing in the cold and dark waiting to see someone match their adrenaline rush against the laws of physics.

Most locals know a few hours of wandering the venues and cheering at the base of the mountain pretty much covers it. Like pro football, the fans at home see much more and have a better grip on how a Double McTwist 1260 plays out after watching the replay a few dozen times from the comfort of home. Go ESPN!

A lot of the same can be said about the USA Pro Challenge, World Cup and other sponsored events that can clog parking, block access to retail stores and, in the case of the X Games, provide full-moon-lighting effects miles away when it’s overcast. It’s easy to be cranky about things most of us don’t do or want to do. I mean really, stand in the cold for a quick view of someone flying through the air? Easy to lampoon, just as our parents could have laughed off hot dog skiing and big air contests a generation ago. Many of us were ski bums, more bumming than skiing and surely never likely to make Aspen a better place.

But we did.

Still, if it doesn’t produce a hit to the bottom line, why bother, Aspen? In the economics of today’s world, government and private expenditures are always supposed to be instant winners, right?

As a matter of community or public policy, the real justification for these events has to do with the oft-mentioned and seldom explored notion of “sustainability.” Usually, that word is reserved for environmental considerations. A community’s “sustainability” rests on economic and human conditions as well as the environment. While Aspen and Snowmass are enjoying an economic boom, that boom rests mostly on return visits from an aging tourism and second-home base. Getting the next generation to know and remember Aspen when it is old enough to contribute to the “unfree” activities that sustain Aspen means connecting on their terms, not ours. Perhaps we came here for mountain culture with its outdoor, athletic adventures. Perhaps we came for the arts and culture. For a lot of us, that may have meant finding a home in a campground or couch surfing. In any event, why we came and why we returned or stayed are not always for the same reasons.

My belief is that the X Games, the bike races, the World Cup, the music fests and the rest are an important means of exposing the next generation to what we love here. Yes, it’s inconvenient at the time and it costs some money but it does help sustain the spirit here a little bit and the economic heart quite a bit. We may not be around when some now 14-year-old and later adult pulls the Taco Bell hat or the X Games mug off the shelf and decides to come for a visit or to live, but chances are that will happen.

A Chinese philosopher once said: “A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.” See you at one of these events where we will all be planting a little fun for the next generation to grow.
How the World’s Oldest Profession Helped Finance Aspen

Aspen’s first tax-generating business was not mining, freighting, dry goods or even saloons; it was prostitution. The City of Aspen ordinances adopted in 1880 set aside a special area near the railroad depot for cribs and “female lodging” in order to confine the “trade” to a few blocks and to keep tabs on the disreputable businesses for tax collection. The ladies of the night only accepted cash, unlike most of the other businesses in town so they were the first “businesses” able to pay their taxes.
Aspen’s Best Booster

Jerome B. Wheeler was the largest single investor in mining-era Aspen. A decorated Civil War veteran and former president of Macy’s Department store, Wheeler came to Aspen in 1883 and immediately began investing in the burgeoning mining camp. After purchasing several promising mining claims, Wheeler saw that Aspen’s pressing needs were a smelter and other mining infrastructure such as tramways and a railroad. He bought the unfinished North Texas Smelter on Castle Creek to concentrate the silver ore to be transported by pack train. But burros could not carry Aspen’s mining economy on their backs. Wheeler knew that if Aspen was going to be successful, the city needed a railroad to haul ore to the Front Range for processing. He became a principal investor in the Colorado Midland Railroad coming out of Colorado Springs. By 1893 he had developed or invested in the Mollie Gibson Mine and Mill, the J.B. Wheeler Banking Co., Aspen Mining and Smelting Co., the Aspen Public Tramway and built the Hotel Jerome, the Wheeler Opera House, and the Wheeler Mansion that now houses the Wheeler/Stallard Museum.

Jerome B. Wheeler, circa 1900

Jerome B. Wheeler’s Civil War Cavalry Sword, 1864, AHS Collection, donated by Jerome Dummer, great nephew of Jerome B. Wheeler. *Artifact adopted by David & Rosalie Wood*
Courtroom Mining
by Larry Fredrick, AHS Volunteer Historian

Reviewing his Aspen mining experiences, David Hyman wrote: “Having a knowledge of law and litigation I can say truthfully that no litigation equals a mining litigation in its intensity and bitterness.”

The mining law of 1872 was the direct result of mining practices established to fill a lack of regulations previous to the California Gold Rush of 1849. The essence of the mining law was to protect original discoverers and establish treatment of claims in a perfect setting where mineral veins were continuous — which, given the nature of geology, seldom occurred.

Under ideal conditions a claim was laid out where a vein cropped out of the ground at its “apex.” Holding the “apex” entitled the claimant to follow that particular vein even if it should cross the “sideline” of the original claim to an adjoining claim. Hence the “Apex Rule.” This regulation resulted in the highly profitable occupation of Courtroom Mining and no mining camp or district avoided this phenomena.

Aspen had its share of courtroom drama and indeed one of the more notable cases in Colorado took place between the Aspen Mine, owned in part by Jerome B. Wheeler, and the Durant Mine, owned in part by David M. Hyman.

In 1884 lessons working on the Aspen Mine tapped into a particularly rich vein, which despite some movement from faulting, clearly originated on the adjacent Durant Mine, which had the Apex. To protect his interest, David Hyman sued Jerome Wheeler and his partners.

The ramifications to the Aspen Mining District were significant. Aspen’s two major investors were now in a protracted legal dispute that affected all of Aspen’s mines. Bitter legal wrangling, including jury tampering, jury sequestering, and newspaper payoffs, lasted a bit more than two years with several trials. In each case David Hyman (the Apex) won. But there was a cost. Monetarily it is estimated that the two litigants spent nearly $1.5 million (1884). Hyman stated his share was $600,000.

Prior to yet another court appeal, a compromise was reached and hence the establishment of the Compromise Mine. While mining activity was somewhat crippled throughout the district during the litigation, it also proved the obvious value of the minerals at stake. The success of the Aspen Mining District was now assured and annual production eventually surpassed all other districts in the U.S. during the years 1891-1893. It is estimated that the Compromise Mine contributed $11 million of silver before the crash of the market and the repeal of the Sherman Silver Act in the fall of 1893.

“Having a knowledge of law and litigation I can say truthfully that no litigation equals a mining litigation in its intensity and bitterness.”

— David M. Hyman, owner Durant Mine
Mining by the Numbers

Aspen’s seven original mining claims were the Durant, 1001, Monarch, Iron, Hopkins, Mose and Steele on Aspen Mountain, and the Smuggler on Smuggler Mountain. From these humble beginnings the Aspen Mining District became the sixth-largest producer of silver in the United States with net production of $9.2 million in 1892 alone ($235 million today). Pitkin County maintained 225 mines supporting 2,500 working miners. The Mollie Gibson Mine was the largest-producing mine in the United States and the largest silver nugget ever mined in the United States came out of the Smuggler in 1894. At the height of the mining boom in 1893, Aspen was the third-largest city in Colorado with a peak population of nearly 13,000. It boasted eight churches, six newspapers, three schools, two railroads, an opera house, a hospital, electric lights and a street car system.

The Silver Panic of 1893

The price of silver determined the economic welfare of Aspen. Since 1878, the federal government had been required by law to purchase $2 to $4 million worth of silver for coinage annually, which inflated the price of the white metal. But in 1892, as economic depression swept the country, President Grover Cleveland threatened to end the silver subsidy. Silver interests banded together to defend their livelihoods.

The citizens of Aspen sent the Silver Queen statue to the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair to publicize silver mining in Colorado. Holding a cornucopia of silver coins mixed with gold, the Silver Queen represented to the world that silver and gold could coexist as metal standards.

But on July 1, 1893, Aspen’s Rocky Mtn. Sun proclaimed “THE CRISIS IS AT HAND – The dreaded emergency is now upon us ... the once flourishing mining camp of Aspen is now badly prostrated by a crushing blow to its great industry.” Overnight Aspen’s workforce went from 2,250 employed miners to 150. The blow did indeed turn out to be crushing. The mines eventually reopened on a much smaller scale with reduced wages, however Aspen’s mining economy never fully recovered.
Brooks and Bethune Smelter Ingot Mold, Ashcroft, Colorado, circa 1880, AHS Collection, donated by USFS; Farwell Ore Mill, Independence, circa 1915

They Didn’t Last

Only a small percentage of mining camps became successful municipalities. Of the five camps established in the Roaring Fork Valley, only Aspen survived. Many factors contributed to their failure. Because of shallow ore deposits, extreme high altitude, isolation and lack of investors, Ashcroft, Tourtelotte Park, Highland and Independence fell short. By 1899 all but Aspen were deserted. Boom and bust are part of the mining economy.

Race to Aspen

In order for Aspen to survive, it needed a railroad to haul silver ore from the mines to smelters on the Front Range. The Colorado Midland Railroad and the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad competed to get to Aspen first. The prize: tons of stockpiled silver ore, mined but too expensive to haul to the smelters on the backs of mules. Greeted by a cheering crowd, the first train to Aspen was the Denver & Rio Grande, arriving on November 4, 1887. The Aspen Mining District boomed with the new rail infrastructure in place, becoming the sixth-largest producer of silver in the United States.

Colorado Midland Railroad Poster, printed before railroad reached Aspen, 1887, AHS Collection, donated by Ad Rucker; First Train into Aspen, Oct. 27, 1887. Photo Denver Public Library
Immigrants and Migrants
by Lisa Hancock, Curator, Aspen Historical Society

Since 1879 Aspen and the Roaring Fork Valley have enticed migrants by offering economic opportunity, quality of life, or even a hideout from the "real world." Originally lured by mining, people thronged to Aspen from all across the United States and the world. Large-scale mining only lasted for 14 years but the population soared to nearly 13,000 by 1893. Interestingly, most of the miners were migrants from the U.S., not from overseas. The foreign-born population of Pitkin County was 26 percent in 1893.

After the bottom fell out of Aspen’s silver industry in 1893, Pitkin County began a steady decline in population. By 1910 the percentage of immigrants was similar to 1893 but their countries of origin had completely changed. During the mining era, Germans and English represented the largest immigrant groups but in 1910 northern Italians and Austrians were the largest groups. Ranching became the economic mainstay for the valley and immigrants from the mountains of Europe understood how to make a living off the land at high altitude.

A new energy came into the community in the late 1940s when Aspen hosted the Goethe Bicentennial Convocation and then the FIS Alpine Skiing World Championships. Aspen quickly became a cultural and ski attraction. A new wave of immigrants arrived as European skiers descended on the valley. Equipped with a summer and winter economy, Aspen grew rapidly. By 1960, Pitkin County had 2,400 residents, a population increase of 45 percent from 1950. Aspen and the Roaring Fork Valley attracted another wave of people in the late 1960s and 1970s. Pitkin County averaged an unbelievable growth rate of 17 percent per year. Aspen became "the IN place to be," and John Denver’s “Rocky Mountain High” created a mystique about living in the mountains. The massive influx of new residents was created by a universal need to escape from a nation in conflict, a conflict between generations as well as between countries.

Trunk, used by donor’s family when coming to Aspen in 1880, circa 1875, AHS Collection, donated by Dorcas Conforti

Traveling by wagon on Independence Pass, circa 1890
Don’t Give Up Hope

After the Silver Panic of 1893 collapsed Aspen’s silver mining industry, it struggled along for years. Most people involved in mining believed it would return to profitability at some point. They hung on as best they could, waiting for recovery. When silver nitrate film was in demand for the fledgling film industry, the price of silver rose enough to make mining profitable again. The Smuggler Mine expanded operations to flooded lower levels but closed down after only six months. Aspenites pursued several other mining ventures such as the Hope Mine and the Midnight Mine but these mines were never big money makers.

Carbide Miner’s Lamp, circa 1915, AHS Collection, donated by Tony Popish

Ranching in the Roaring Fork Valley

by Margaret Reckling, AHS Board Member

It’s the 1880s and you are a travel-weary European who has left your home and family behind in search of work and a better life in the American West. The long journey abroad and then deep into the vast unsettled frontier of the Rocky Mountains has brought you to the wild and beautiful Roaring Fork Valley. If you are a member of the large contingent of northern Italians who first arrived here, this Colorado valley reminds you of your mountain home in Val D’Aosta. Or you may have hailed from Ireland or Scotland, as some early homesteaders reflect.

While the image of the American West has taken on a romanticized and legendary air, these early ranch homesteaders faced a harsh struggle for survival in the unforgiving mountain climes. From their sheer determination to carve out a new life for their families, their self-sufficiency was born out of necessity. Their will to survive is reflected in their ingenuity, foresight and successful life here in the Roaring Fork Valley; many of the descendants of these hearty settlers still reside here today.

The original ranches of the Roaring Fork Valley ran livestock including horses, cows, pigs, chickens and ducks. The pioneering ranchers also supplemented their diets with plentiful wild game such as elk, deer, rabbit, grouse.

Calf Weaner, circa 1920, AHS Collection, unknown donor.

+Artifact adopted by Kate McBride and The Other Side Ranch+
and turkey. They raised hay and oats to feed their livestock through the brutal mountain winters. Vast vegetable gardens were usually found on homesteads and any surplus produce was in high demand in the nearby towns that housed increasing populations. Potato crops thrived in the loamy, volcanic soil making potatoes a leading cash crop from 1900-1950.

The Silver Boom Era that took place from 1879 and into the 1890s created a strong market for area ranchers and farmers to sell their excess fruits and vegetables, livestock feed, dairy products, beef and poultry. In the early 1890s, Aspen's population was said to have grown to 10,000-14,000 people. Providing ample food for so many people and the mining industry's working livestock (burros, mules and draft horses) kept local farms and ranches working at capacity. This demand enabled ranchers and farmers to turn some profits, which were usually reinvested into improved farm machinery, livestock purchases or building materials.

The farming and ranching families of the Roaring Fork Valley occupy an important niche in the history of this area. Without their early presence and capabilities the course of history here may have included many more stories of starving miners and their animals lying dead in the deep snows. Original ranch owners' names read off like an Aspen valley history roll call: Arbaney, Bariller, Bourg, Clavel, Cerise, Duroux, Gavin, Gerbaz, Grange, Gray, Kittle, McLean, McClure, Montover, Letey, Natal, Smith, Trentaz and Vagneur.

The resurging interest in locally grown foods and the "farm-to-table" movement that highlight the awareness of food quality help ensure a continued importance of farm and ranch practices in the Roaring Fork Valley.
The Hardest Time

Economic depression hit Aspen years before Black Monday and the Great Depression affected the rest of the country. The crash of the silver market in 1893 mirrored Wall Street’s crash 36 years later. When the Great Depression began in 1929, Aspen had already been in a steady decline for decades. Pitkin County’s population dropped from nearly 13,000 in 1893 to just 1,700 in 1930. Those who stayed ranched the land and depended on each other to survive.

Homemade Wheeler Diner Poster, circa 1930, AHS Collection, donated by John Olson Builders, found when clearing out the Motherlode Building in 2005

Hyman Avenue during Depression, circa 1935; Highland Bavarian Lodge, Feb. 27, 1937

The Beginnings of Skiing in Aspen

Aspen’s first ski resort was the Highlands-Bavarian Lodge located in the Castle Creek Valley. It opened on December 18, 1936. Olympic bobsledder Billy Fiske and entrepreneur Ted Ryan wanted to develop an American ski area to rival European resorts. The partners developed the Highlands-Bavarian with the help of Aspenite Tom Flynn and Swiss mountaineering expert Andre Roch. He declared the skiing “superior to the Alps.” Roch designed most of Aspen’s early ski infrastructure. He cut Aspen’s first ski run and gave free ski lessons to the locals. He drew up extensive plans for the Highland-Bavarian that rose from Castle Creek to the top of Mt. Hayden, but it was never fully realized due to the advent of World War II.

Andre Roch Oil Painting, Skiers and Mt. Hayden, 1936, AHS Collection, donated by Tim Willoughby
Paepcke and the Aspen Idea

A distinguished Chicago businessman showed up in Aspen at his wife’s extolling, and the town's trajectory changed course in a few short years. Elizabeth Paepcke brought friends to ski Aspen Mountain in 1939 — pre-chairlifts — and encouraged her husband, Walter, to return to the Rocky Mountain retreat. Together, they saw potential to implement the Aspen Idea of “Mind, Body, Spirit for the benefit of others.” Aspen is a place “for man’s complete life … where he can profit by healthy, physical recreation, with facilities at hand for his enjoyment of art, music, and education,” Walter Paepcke is quoted as saying.

Paepcke cofounded the Aspen Skiing Co. in 1945, debuting Lift One, the world’s longest chairlift, in December 1946. He then created the Aspen Institute, after hosting a slew of international thinkers and artists at the now-famous 1949 Goethe Bicentennial Convocation. It may have seemed peculiar to invite world luminaries — Albert Schweitzer, Jose Ortega y Gasset, Thornton Wilder, and Arthur Rubinstein among them — to the remote destination that is Aspen. But, whatever magic elixir they found in mountains worked, and it paved the way for seeking inspiration at elevation.

The founding of the Aspen Music Festival and School and International Design Conference quickly followed, putting Aspen on the map as a cultural destination in the summer and winter. Paepcke employed influential Bauhaus designer Herbert Bayer to work in Aspen, and his creative touch can still be seen throughout town and the Institute’s campus in the West End. Without the Paepckes, Aspen wouldn’t be the place it is today.

Aspen, The World’s Longest Ski Lift

The Aspen Skiing Co. was formed in 1945 by a group led by Walter Paepcke and Friedl Pfeifer. Paepcke knew that Aspen needed a winter economy to go along with his vision of a summer cultural center. He also knew that Americans were looking for fun and adventure after the grim years of World War II. Sun Valley built the first chairlift in 1936 and now that the war was over, the Aspen Skiing Co. needed to invest in a proper chairlift. To span the 3,267 vertical feet to the top of Aspen Mountain, two single chairs were installed. With a riding time of 45 minutes, Lift One (combined with Lift Two) was the longest chairlift in the world when it opened on December 14, 1946.
Why Goethe? by Steve Wickes, Director (retired) Society of Fellows, The Aspen Institute

Many important meetings and conferences have taken place in Aspen. Certainly the best (as defined by having the most long-term impacts) was the 1949 Goethe Bicentennial Convocation and Music Festival. It was a magical convergence of a philosopher's birthday, a planet very much in need of repair, and a town very much ready for a renaissance. Without question it marked the rebirth of Aspen, as we know it today.

The year 1949 was the 200th birthday of humanist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; many cities, universities and libraries around the world held Goethe revivals that year with good reason. This German poet, scientist and philosopher who lived at the dawn of the industrial revolution predicted — with unnerving accuracy — the state of affairs in 1949. Goethe predicted an age characterized by its obsession with materialism and technology and by its political brutality. He predicted an age that would need — more than anything — a renewed reverence for human dignity.

While Aspen was not the only place to hold a Goethe celebration in 1949, it was certainly the biggest and the best. A cover story in Time magazine and a feature story in Life magazine about Aspen's festival insured that Goethe was a household name (for an unfortunately brief period), and it put Aspen, Colorado on the map. Aspen is also the only festival venue that has continued its Goethe celebration every year since 1949, in the guise of the Aspen Institute.

The idea to hold an international Goethe convocation was born at the University of Chicago. It was decided that this serious contemplation on the state of the planet should not be held in Chicago, however. A meeting this important should last three weeks, and there would be too many distractions in a large city. The best venue would be somewhat remote, and to truly honor Goethe, it should be in a place where an appreciation of the natural world is front and center. But where?

The chancellor of the University of Chicago, Robert Hutchins, invited one of his board members (and his good friend) Walter Paepcke to lunch in 1947 to discuss possible venues. We can only imagine Paepcke's reaction when asked if he had any good ideas about where to hold an international festival. "Somewhere remote, somewhere accessible by train ... somewhere beautiful."

Walter first visited Aspen during Memorial Day weekend in 1945. Encouraged by his wife, Elizabeth, to come see this odd, frozen-in-time, almost ghost town, Walter felt an immediate attraction. In the two years leading up to his meeting with Chancellor Hutchins, he and Elizabeth purchased several homes and commercial buildings and

Albert Schweitzer, Keynote Speaker at the 1949 Goethe Bicentennial Convocation. Photo Ferenc Berko
began renovating the Hotel Jerome. While the Paepckes had several vague and ambitious visions of what the future might hold for Aspen, the 1949 Goethe Bicentennial Convocation provided serendipitous clarity.

No proper celebration of Goethe would be complete, Walter Paepcke contended, without great music. So he brought the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra and its famed conductor, Dimitri Mitropoulos, to town for the festival. Many of the best musicians alive, including Arthur Rubinstein, Nathan Milstein and Gregor Piatigorsky were among the soloists. Thus, in addition to giving birth to the Aspen Institute, the 1949 Goethe Convocation also gave birth to the Aspen Music Festival and School.

The Goethe Convocation Organizing Committee, chaired by President Herbert Hoover, managed to attract an “A-list” of speakers, 30 intellectual luminaries from 11 countries. The venerable Albert Schweitzer came from the jungles of inner Africa; this was Schweitzer’s one-and-only trip to the United States. Other notable Goethe speakers included Jose Ortega y Gasset (Spain), T. M. P. Mahadevan (India), Barker Fairley (Canada), Halvdan Koht (Norway), Gerardus Van der Leeuw (Belgium), Ernst Simon (Palestine), Willy Hartner (Germany), and Thornton Wilder (U.S.).

Goethe Bicentennial Convocation Poster, 1949, AHS Collection, donated by Robert Grube

For the three weeks of the convocation, the businesspeople, artists, intellectuals, poets and musicians played their music, recited their poems, read their dissertations and debated philosophy not only in the tent, but also at the Paepckes’ home (Pioneer Park), by the Hotel Jerome swimming pool, and of course, at the Hotel Jerome bar! The Paepckes’ love of Aspen was met by skepticism — and occasionally incivility — by local townspeople. More than once they returned to Aspen to find the windows in their home broken by rocks. The arrival of so many out-of-towners in the 1940s and 1950s was “the worst thing to ever happen in our little town,” many muttered. Today, as we consider that the Paepckes started the Aspen Institute, the Aspen Music Festival and School, and the Aspen Skiing Co., it may be appropriate to say that their first visit to Aspen was one of the “best things” to ever happen to this little town.
The World Comes to Aspen

The first FIS Alpine Ski Racing World Championships ever held outside Europe were in Aspen in 1950. Dick Durrance, president of the Aspen Skiing Co. and former Olympic ski racer, conceived the idea to promote Aspen. Ski racers from around the world flocked to Aspen for the event, including Norwegian Stein Eriksen, Swiss Dagmar Rom, American Andrea Mead Lawrence and men's overall champion, Zeno Colo from Italy. It quickly spread that Aspen had wonderful skiing and the World Championships proved to be key to Aspen's future success as a ski resort.


Aspen as a Brand by Lisa Hancock, Curator, Aspen Historical Society

"In the small towns and big cities where we lived, we heard of a mythical wonderland called Aspen."

— Nellie Blagden, 1975

The word was out: Aspen was paradise, Shangri-La, the ultimate escape. "Beautiful people" — celebrities and artists, hangers-on and hopefuls — swept into Aspen, their glitter and glamour captured by national media against the backdrop of the stunning Rocky Mountains. Ski bums, draft dodgers, college dropouts, and hippies streamed into town along with record numbers of tourists seeking the "Rocky Mountain High" immortalized in John Denver's song.

The nation was fascinated with Aspen's high-altitude lifestyle. The media, from the nightly news to magazines like Time, National Geographic, People, Sports Illustrated and Outside, were only too happy to feed that fascination. Aspen itself became a celebrity. Locals knew the media had the facts right, but they didn't tell the full story of Aspen's community.

Other towns studied Aspen's success, hoping to replicate it, and argued over the wisdom of doing so. As Aspen's reputation for world-class skiing and ideal living grew, so did the problems that came with rapid growth. Ongoing publicity reinforced Aspen's image as a party town. When scandal and crime hit — when singer Claudine Longet killed her lover, ski racer Spider Sabich, or when serial killer Ted Bundy murdered Aspen visitor Caryn Campbell — the media was as happy to sensationalize Aspen's troubles as they had been to glorify its beauty. To many in the outside world, it was all part of the myth — Aspen, the beautiful, alluring, outrageous place in which normal rules don't apply.
Aspenopoly

Top-notch culture, the growth of skiing, affluent residents, and dreams of a utopian lifestyle all contributed to Aspen’s change from rundown mining town to opulent resort. Seekers of snow and culture began flocking to Aspen in the late 1940s. Real estate was so inexpensive at the time, homes could be purchased for $150. Roy and Kay Reid came to Aspen in 1952 and started one of Aspen’s first real estate offices since the mining days. They witnessed the changes in Aspen’s real estate scene from old miner’s cabins used as vacation homes to the first condominiums to today’s mountain mansions. Many speculate that Aspen’s current economy is driven by real estate more than tourism because Aspen has one of the country’s most expensive real estate markets.

Real Estate sign at 1001 E. Cooper Ave., 1979

Aspenopoly Board Game, 1986, AHS Collection, donated by Tom Sharkey
Confections and Connections

Julius Berg, a German immigrant, musician and candy maker, was one of the first settlers to cross over Independence Pass into Aspen in 1880. He came with his most precious belongings: a cow and a zither. The cow was imperative for his candy-making business and his zither allowed him and other German immigrants to stay connected to their traditional music and folkways.

Julius Berg’s Zither, circa 1875, AHS Collection, donated by the Louise Berg Estate

Julius and Marie Berg with unidentified man outside the Berg Confectionery, circa 1895
What does the Wheeler Opera House Mean to Aspen?
by Mary Eshbaugh Hayes from “The Story of Aspen,” edited by Lisa Hancock

Built by Jerome B. Wheeler as a bank and office building, the Wheeler Opera House opened in 1889. Wheeler decided to add a three-story opera house because Aspen needed a grand theater. The first production hosted by the Wheeler was “The King’s Fool,” a light and happy comedy about intrigue and romance in a Spanish castle. Victorian-era Aspenites enjoyed the theater productions but also gathered at the theater for political speeches about women’s suffrage, the Populist Party and free coinage of silver.

To Mrs. Fleeta Lamb, the Wheeler Opera House was a place to show off her lavish clothing. Lamb would always arrive late so her attire could be admired by the crowd as she made her entrance. To Elizabeth Callahan and Bede Harris, who were children at the turn of the century, it meant going to performances for just a few pennies. It meant sitting in a section under the balcony that was fenced and had bleacher seats just for the kids. “The Pig Pen, we called it,” said Elizabeth.

To pre-World War I Aspenites, it meant sadness as two fires left the Wheeler a burned-out shell (a burned timber has been left exposed after the latest renovation). To Red Rowland who grew up in Prohibition-era Aspen, the Wheeler was just a home to pigeons. The damage was so severe that, although the first two floors were still in use, the theater was in ruins.

To those who lived here during the post-World War II era, the Wheeler meant community, fun and music. Walter and Elizabeth Paepcke had the roof repaired and put in simple bench seating. The improvements allowed the community to use the Wheeler Opera House once again. To Celia Marolt it meant hearing Burl Ives sing his famous folk songs. “There wasn’t a very big audience,” remembered Marolt, “so he came down off the stage and sat among us.” Marolt also remembered Lowell Thomas giving his national news broadcasts from the Wheeler stage. Music festival students used to practice in the Wheeler. “As you walked down the street, music was just coming out from everywhere,” she said.

To ski bums of the 1950s, the Wheeler meant Wintersköl talent shows. Steve Knowlton was the master of ceremonies, Sam Caudill would play his bagpipes, Fred Iselin would perform in his own zany way and visiting Hollywood celebrities like Lana Turner, Gary Cooper, Danny Kaye and Dan Bailey would add their talents.

To the hippies of the 1960s and 1970s, the Wheeler Opera House was the place for avant-garde films. Jon Busch acted as the host for Thursday night films for decades, introducing the film and explaining its significance. Aspenites had their favorites, which played almost monthly such as “Harold and Maude,” “Fritz the Cat,” “King of Hearts,” “Sleuth” and “The Rocky Horror Picture Show.” With the 1984 renovation, the Wheeler returned to its Victorian grandeur and no longer hosted “messy” films like “The Rocky Horror Picture Show.”

To modern Aspen, the Wheeler Opera House has meant a quality theater space for community productions, film festivals and national performers. Former Mayor Bill Stirling put it this way: “The Wheeler ... symbolizes the town’s commitment to the arts and culture.”
Aspen in My Heart

Hildur Hoaglund Anderson, daughter of Swedish immigrants who ranched near Snowmass, became a beloved Aspen teacher and musician. Hildur began teaching at the Snowmass Creek School in 1925 and taught in one-room schoolhouses throughout the valley. She saved her small teacher’s salary to purchase an accordion in 1934 and used it to entertain at barn dances and social events. After she married, she performed with her husband, Bill, who played the fiddle. Hildur was a delightful Aspen advocate: “I have lived all my life in Aspen right at home in the house at the bend in the river... I’ve never seen any place that I liked better. I must have Colorado in my heart.”

Herbert Bayer, Aspen Inspired

by Lissa Ballinger, Art Registrar, The Aspen Institute

Walter and Elizabeth Paepcke asked Herbert Bayer to move to Aspen to use his Bauhaus-informed expertise in design and architecture to help transform Aspen from a quiet, nearly forgotten, ranching town into an intellectual and cultural retreat. Paepcke envisioned “…a community of peace … with opportunities for man’s complete life… where he can earn a living, profit by healthy physical recreation, with facilities at hand for his enjoyment of art, music, and education.” Bayer quickly embraced his adopted mountain town and did not waste time when he arrived. He was a man of diverse artistic talents and his influence on the city is varied, extensive and lasting. Soon after his arrival, he created the Aspen leaf logo to market and promote the nascent ski town; he designed the first octagonal Sundeck warming hut atop Aspen Mountain at 11,300 feet; and he went to work restoring the Grand Dame of Aspen’s cultural life — the Wheeler Opera House — which had fallen into total disrepair after years of neglect and several fires.

While newspaper accounts from Bayer’s arrival indicate that many townfolk of Aspen were aware of his renown in the art world, his presence in Aspen was not initially met with great enthusiasm. For instance, Paepcke offered free paint to Aspen homeowners in an effort to freshen up some of the Victorian homes. But lore has it that all but one home rejected the offer, as they saw it as a way for Paepcke to promote the colors that Bayer deemed to be acceptable. One reporter noted: “If the royal family had a prime minister, he was Herbert Bayer.”

Furthermore, Bayer’s popularity did
not improve when he painted the red brick of the landmark Hotel Jerome white with "Bayer Blue" window arches (which came to be known as 'eyebrows'), and painted the Paepcke's grand West End residence (Pioneer Park) a bubblegum Pepto-Bismol pink color.

Yet, Bayer had a deep affection for Aspen, and he viewed the town, and more specifically the Aspen Institute of Humanistic Studies, as the perfect place to create the culmination of his Bauhaus principles by creating a total, all-encompassing human environment. He was deeply inspired by the mountains and the natural world that surrounded him, and his buildings and architecture are homage to this magnificent topography.

In the 1950s, along with Walter Paepcke and architect Fritz Benedict, Bayer devoted his work to the creation of the Aspen Institute campus, which remains his greatest legacy in Aspen. He designed the Seminar Hall (now the Koch Building) with its Kandinsky-inspired Sgraffito wall mural (1953), the Aspen Meadows Guest Chalets (1954), the Reception Building (1954), the Health Center (1955), Grass Mound (1955, arguably the first earthwork), Marble Garden (1955), the Walter Paepcke Memorial Building (1962), the Institute for Theoretical Physics Building (1962), the second Music Tent (1964, the first tent was built by Eero Saarinen), and Anderson Park (1970).

The longer he remained in Aspen, the more the residents of the town of Aspen accepted him and his simple, approachable, Bauhaus aesthetic. He was very social and was friends with many locals as well as ski legend Friedl Pfeifer and actor Gary Cooper, with whom he shared a common love of wildlife and owls in particular. A 1955 Rocky Mountain News article stated, "Even in competition with millionaire tycoons, best-selling novelists and top-ranking musicians, Herbert Bayer is Aspen's most famous resident."

In 1975, after suffering two heart attacks, Herbert Bayer finally left his beloved mountain home and moved to Santa Barbara where he lived until his death in 1985. Bayer's impact on the town of Aspen endures today, not only in the impressive Aspen Institute campus, but also in the town's acceptance and integration of an ever-changing contemporary aesthetic existing in harmony with the historic Victorian style.
Chicago industrialist Walter Paepcke dreamed of transforming the picturesque and sleepy former mining town of Aspen into a place where people could develop in body, mind and spirit. In 1949, he organized the Goethe Bicentennial Convocation and Music Festival, which gave rise to the Aspen Institute and the Aspen Music Festival and School (AMFS) — an organization that has flowered into one of the world's top classical music festivals and training grounds for young musicians, and helped make Aspen as much a cultural destination in the summer as it is a snow enthusiast's paradise in the winter.

For nearly 70 years the AMFS has hosted an array of the world's finest performing musicians, including many that are alumni of its prestigious educational program. These include violinists Joshua Bell, Sarah Chang, Robert McDuffie, and Gil Shaham, cellist Alisa Weilerstein, bassist Edgar Meyer, singers Renée Fleming, Barbara Hendricks, and Dawn Upshaw, conductors James Conlon, James Levine, and Leonard Slatkin, composer Philip Glass, and many more.

With more than 600 music students in residence each summer, and more than 100 artist-faculty drawn from the country's top orchestras, opera companies, conservatories, and music schools, the AMFS creates and presents a full musical world each summer. Performing regularly are five full orchestras, an opera company, chamber ensembles, and soloists. Also on the program are panel discussions, lectures, and children's events. Altogether there are more than 300 events in eight weeks.

The result is a town completely energized by and infused with wonderful music. Concerts take place daily in the AMFS's 2,050-seat Benedict Music Tent and 500-seat Harris Concert Hall; fully-staged operas are performed in the Wheeler Opera House; and students busk all throughout town and on top of Aspen Mountain. The expansive programming each summer provides world-class entertainment options for locals and draws in thousands of tourists, adding up to more than 70,000 people who attend the AMFS's events over the course of the season.

Aspen audiences tend to be as enthusiastic as the visiting performers and students, and this very special ecosystem has certainly given rise to a tradition of "firsts" and "bests" over the decades. Many of the festival's star alumni had "firsts" here that have shaped them throughout their artistic careers. Renée Fleming, in 1983, sang her first Countess Almaviva in Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro," a role that went on to have huge importance in her career. In 1962, Metropolitan Opera Music Director James Levine conducted his first opera while a student in Aspen.

There have been personal firsts, too. For example, violinist Sarah Chang learned to drive in the parking lot by the music tent. And former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, as a 17-year-old piano student who had studied seriously since she was 3, first realized that she wasn't going to be a concert pianist. Rice has commented in interviews that there were 11- and 12-year-old pianists in Aspen that could sight-read what it had taken her a year to learn. She came home from her summer in Aspen and found a new major; the rest is, literally, history.

As for "worsts"? Well, no organization is without its hiccups. There was, for example, the time when Igor Stravin-
The Aspen Institute

Who knew that the celebration of the 200th birthday of a German poet and philosopher would turn into one of the country’s prominent think-tanks and a facilitator of big ideas? Walter Paepcke did – or at least banked on a dream it would.

In 1949, the Chicago businessman, president of Container Corporation of America, launched a 20-day gathering in Aspen to honor Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. It featured prominent intellectuals and artists like Albert Schweitzer, Jose Ortega y Gasset, Thornton Wilder, and Arthur Rubinstein, along with members of the international press and more than 2,000 attendees.

Paepcke’s vision for Aspen was to transform the town into a place for dialogue. He had previously participated in Mortimer Adler’s Great Books seminar at the University of Chicago, and wanted to bring this style of analytical group thinking to a serene setting in which people – both visiting executives and local residents – could be inspired.

Shortly after the Goethe Bicentennial, he founded The Aspen Institute. Today, the organization is headquartered in Washington D.C. and has outposts in Aspen and on the Wye River in Maryland. Its education and policy studies span a far-reaching network and have global impact.

To the Pointe

Professional ballet has a long history in Aspen, starting when Utah-based Ballet West began a summer residency program in Aspen in 1970. Then, in 1991, longtime Aspen local Bebe Schweppe founded a permanent ballet school in Aspen, which was the seed of a greater vision. In 1995, Schweppe coaxed Jean-Philippe Malaty and Tom Mossbrucker into leaving then-New-York-City-based Joffrey Ballet to come to Aspen, where they took over the school and created Aspen’s first professional ballet company, starting with six dancers. Aspen Ballet broke new ground again when it established a dual-city residency with Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 2000, becoming Aspen Santa Fe Ballet. The internationally known company is currently one of the few existing ballet companies with a dual-city residency.
Build a Better Mouse Trap by Lisa Hancock, Curator, Aspen Historical Society

The International Design Conference in Aspen (IDCA) began as an offshoot of the Goethe Bicentennial Convocation held in 1949. For 54 years the IDCA attracted world leaders in the fields of design, architecture, science, business, art, politics and education and gave them the opportunity to exchange ideas, be inspired and learn from each other. The theme of the first IDCA in 1950 was “Design – A Function of Management.” Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the IDCA grew in popularity, becoming one of the hottest tickets in town. Locals would line up to volunteer in order to attend some of the sessions for free.

The 1983 IDCA theme was “The Future isn’t What it Used to Be.” Conference attendees gathered to discuss the future of design as well as to provide some ideas, on which to build perceptions about the future. A time capsule was buried containing attendees’ extrapolations about the future. Computer entrepreneur Steve Jobs was a speaker at the 1983 IDCA. He conveyed the underlying perception of the conference that, in the future, technology would play an ever-increasing role in daily life. “Computers would become the predominant means of communication, taking over from television” and “people are going to spend two to three hours a day interacting with their computers,” according to Jobs in his 20-minute speech. He also predicted the internet, mobile devices and tablets. Jobs felt that computers and society were on a “first date” in 1983 and he wanted help from the design community to make computers compatible to people’s everyday lives. “[Computers] are new objects that are going to be in everyone’s work environment, educational environment and home environment.” Jobs had Apple’s Lisa computer with him at the conference to run his slide show. He contributed the computer mouse (then a new technology) from the computer to the time capsule that was buried at the closing event of the conference. The Aspen Historical Society now houses the contents of the time capsule, including the Lisa mouse, as part of its collection.
Mountain Music Scene

For such a small town — about 3,000 full-time residents in the early 1970s — Aspen generated a significant influence on the national music scene. John Denver’s 1972 hit, “Rocky Mountain High,” became the siren song that lured thousands of young people to Colorado.

“In 1973 I was driving down the Ventura Freeway in Los Angeles when ‘Rocky Mountain High’ came on the radio. I knew in that moment that I wanted out of the rat race. I visited Aspen first, then moved here ‘just for the season,’ but I never left,” said Aspen resident, Tom Egan.

Denver may have been the most famous Aspen entertainer living in Aspen in 1975 but he wasn’t alone. Jimmy Buffett, known for his island escapism music, had a house in Old Snowmass, his neighbor was Glenn Frey of the Eagles and Don Henley, also of the Eagles, lived up Woody Creek. When the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band burst on the scene with its bluegrass hit “Mr. Bojangles,” most of the band members lived in Aspen. Visiting musicians also found inspiration in Aspen. Stevie Nicks wrote her hit songs, “Landslide” and “Rhiannon” while staying in Aspen in 1974, just before joining Fleetwood Mac.

Wine, Why Not?

Starting with a backpack full of sandwiches and two bottles of wine, Gene Reardon and other “hosts” began putting on a wine party on Aspen Mountain for their friends in 1961. The guest list for the party grew to a massive 1,200 people by the mid-1980s so spinoff parties were started on Snowmass. Now the event is the centerpiece of a weeklong celebration of Aspen spirit and lifestyle including daily parties, roasts and nightly bashes.
Aspen's Hospitals

Aspen Valley Hospital has a rich and colorful history, one that started during the silver mining days of the 1880s. A committee — The Citizens' Hospital Committee of Pitkin County — was tasked with all aspects of the development of Aspen's first hospital. It would have 20 patient rooms along with rooms for the doctors and nurses. Committee members agreed to "...get out among the people and raise funds."

The hospital was budgeted at $16,000 and fundraising efforts were immediately successful. The Rio Grande and Midland railroads each gave a donation of $3,000, an anonymous donor gave $1,000, and $2,000 was given by both Pitkin County and the City of Aspen. By the summer of 1890, construction was well underway. However, funding was still $7,000 short of the goal, so they began an intensive campaign, saying, "No man who has employment should fail to give a day's wages ..." or $3.50.

By fall of 1891, Aspen's first hospital, "the finest on the western slope," was finished. Located between Red Mountain and Smuggler Mountain, it was the pride of the town and would serve the community for the next 70 years.

Unfortunately, a near-crippling blow fell only two years after the hospital opened its doors: the repeal of the Sherman Act and the demonetization of silver. By the end of the year, 80...
percent of Aspen’s enterprises were bankrupt, and thousands of suddenly destitute Aspenites moved on. The hospital struggled to remain open.

Gradually, in the late ’30s, the winds of change began to blow over Aspen as a few hearty mountaineers discovered skiing. Then, industrialist Walter Paepke made his first visit. Enchanted with Aspen, he immediately bought property and set about creating his dream of a serene and exclusive cultural and intellectual enclave. All this meant people, and people, for the hospital, meant patients.

New doctors were recruited, and eventually the reins of the hospital were turned over to Pitkin County. It was renamed Pitkin County Hospital. By 1957, in spite of a rising census and revitalized staff, it became clear that the 65-year-old hospital was woefully inadequate. Yet another fundraising campaign was embarked upon, and Aspen’s second hospital was completed in 1962 – located in almost the same location as the first and with a new name: Aspen Valley Hospital.

The new hospital had twice as many beds as its predecessor, but as the ski industry brought more and more visitors, there was soon the need for a larger hospital. No one had anticipated the incredible population surge that hit Aspen. By the early ’70s, the hospital was hopelessly overcrowded.

In July 1973, the hospital board recommended that a new site for yet another new hospital be selected. Land was acquired on Castle Creek Road, and a hospital district was formed to issue bonds for financing the bulk of the new building. The Aspen Valley Medical Foundation raised additional funds to help with construction. The fundraising theme was “Join the ’91ers,” echoing the request in 1891 for contributions of a day’s pay to Aspen’s first hospital.

In 1977, the new 49-bed hospital was dedicated at its home on Castle Creek Road. Since then, Aspen Valley Hospital has endured many changes within the healthcare industry. A shift from inpatient to outpatient care, new technologies and new services created challenges within the physical plant. Over time, fewer inpatient rooms were needed, and consumers demanded private rooms. New technologies required more space. Small expansion and remodel projects addressed pressing needs, but with the approval of a master facilities plan in 2009, major renovations and expansion began in 2011 and are still underway – all with the support of the community through taxes and philanthropy.
Aspen Volunteer Fire Department
by Rick Balentine, AVFD Fire Chief

Fire trumpets were widely used by volunteer fire departments, beginning in 1752. This included the Aspen Fire Department, formed on November 5, 1881. The chief on a fire could easily be identified as the man with the bugle hanging from his neck. Fire officers’ ranks were to become identified with the bugle over time. The more bugles on your collar, the higher your rank. This symbol is still in use today in fire service across the nation with the chief having five crossed bugles as the highest-ranking officer of the department. Fire bugles had other handy uses. They were popular with the ladies at the taverns as a drinking vessel after a cork had been inserted into the mouthpiece.

Just as the fire bugles of the early days in Aspen have been replaced with more modern forms of communication, so too has everything relating to firefighting tactics, equipment, protective gear and fire codes. They have made huge advancements that have helped to make today’s modern Aspen firefighter safer and more ready than ever to accomplish the motto and mission adopted by the Aspen Fire Department so many decades ago: “We Strive to Save.”

One thing that has not changed much in the past 134 years is that the Aspen Fire Department’s firefighting force is still comprised of all volunteer firefighters who are selected from community-minded, brave men and women who all live and work within the Aspen Fire Protection District boundaries. This model has proven to be successful for the Aspen Fire Department, and also very cost effective for our taxpayers, as Aspen has the lowest fire protection district tax mill levy in Colorado while also protecting the most property per volunteer firefighter in the state, an astounding average of about $500 million of property value per volunteer firefighter. From house fires to fireworks, the fire department is a cherished part of this community.

Fireman’s Trumpet, circa 1895, AHS Collection, unknown donor;
Fire Chief and future Mayor
Charles Wagner, circa 1890
Aspen Brotherhoods

Fraternal orders offered fellowship to miners and a safety net for members fallen on hard times. The 1893 City Directory lists 35 “Secret and Benevolent” societies in Aspen. The Masonic Order had four different chapters, the Odd Fellows had five lodges, and the Grand Army of the Republic had three posts and two women’s auxiliaries. The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (B.P.O.E. #224) held its first meeting on December 27, 1891. The Fraternal Order of Eagles (F.O.E. #184) was established in 1901 and, along with the Elk’s Club, continues to provide Aspenites with community services today, including college scholarships for seniors graduating from local high schools.

First Auto to Town

Ted Cooper brought the first automobile to Aspen. Cooper bought the 1906 Buick Model F in Denver for $1,350. It took three days for Cooper, Tom Flynn and a hired chauffeur to make the trip to Aspen. Cooper telegraphed his father along the drive complaining about the rainy weather and difficult roads. His father telegraphed back “sell vehicle, come home.” The two young men drove the 22 horse-power automobile into Aspen on August 4, 1906. The Aspen Democrat-Times crowed “Watch for the automobile today and reach over and pat yourself on the back as Aspen is becoming metropolitimized!”

Receipt for 1906 Buick Motor Car, on loan from Buzz Cooper

First Car to Aspen, Aug. 4, 1906 on Hyman Ave.
A Flu Season to Never Forget by Roger Marolt

I imagine three Marolts, potentially my great aunts and uncle, in the prime of their lives, just kids really, in the summer of 1918. It had to be beautiful, as summers always are in Aspen; perhaps more so than usual for them, considering their strength of youth and nothing going on other than a continuation of the Quiet Years.

Louis was 14 and probably engaged in a lot of carefree messing around with his friends. Pauline was 22 and Mary 26, spending their days doing what they were doing under blue skies and cotton-ball clouds that delivered a refreshing afternoon shower as reliably as the sometimes sidetracked milkman set his bottles on the front step. All were of a good age, time, and place to be optimistic. Yet, of the three of them and the town they lived in, only one would survive to see the New Year and, to many of its citizens, its ultimate survival likely felt tenuous.

What killed the three Marolts in the late fall and early winter of 1918 found even this quietest of forgotten towns that many probably considered safely hidden between the bustles of a silver mining boom that was and a skiing revolution that would be. The killer came silently and unseen, but by fall you can bet there wasn’t an Aspenite who didn’t feel it approaching.

On October 23, 1918, the Aspen Democrat-Times proclaimed, “The crest of the Flu epidemic has been passed and we are now on the upgrade to health and happiness.” By that evening, the virus had killed five more citizens. In the ensuing three weeks, 47 more would fatally succumb. In the final official tally, there were 74 official deaths from the flu recorded in Red Butte Cemetery records. The toll was likely significantly higher as many who died were interred on ranchlands or in the surrounding woods.

By November 12 people were scared. In the Democrat-Times, the local health board was called out for being “far too lax in their enforcement of quarantines.”

“Down in Carbondale,” the paper pointed out, “just as soon as the Flu showed up there, the town council put on the lid and put it on right and are keeping it on. No one is permitted to go into or leave the town; no visiting is permitted under any circumstances; if a person goes to a home where there is a case of Flu he or she stays right there until released by a physician.”

Similar drastic measures were implemented to the south in Gunnison.

Keep in mind that the population of Aspen was about 1,200 people in 1918. Considering this, the local death rate from this Spanish flu was astonishingly higher than its appalling norm. Climbing towards claiming one out of every 10 citizens, the death rate was multiples higher than the state or national rates. This was not uncommon for Colorado’s mountain towns. The Silverton Standard listed the names of 146 dead in its December 14 edition and, later, a total of 833 cases of the flu in the tiny town. High altitude and susceptibility of miners’ lungs to infection were thought to be significant contributing factors.

In the end, our nation suffered over a half-million deaths due to the flu pandemic of 1918; more American lives than were claimed by both World Wars combined. Estimates are as high as 21 million deaths worldwide. Far from being insulated, Aspen suffered proportionately worse.

The lethal flu pandemic of 1918 is a historical tragedy that we can now choose to grieve over when it is convenient or if we are in the mood for sorrow. Not causing deep pain, it proves that, even in Aspen, the human condition exists. In that, we might even find relief. The reality is that we, Aspenites, do suffer. We will die. If nothing else about this place does it, these two facts connect us soberly to the rest of the world.

The escape we have manufactured is just that — made by us for a finite period of use. I don’t imagine recalling this episode in history will cause any of us to lose sleep, but to the Aspenites who lost so much in an inescapable tragedy almost a century ago, I’m sure it changed their perspective profoundly. Say what you will about the 1950 World Championships or the hatching of the Aspen Idea, it may have been in that period of intense common suffering and fear that this community’s soul was truly formed, even if it was pushed out of memory.

Ice Collar, circa 1900, AHS Collection, donated by The Thrift Shop of Aspen
Hotel Jerome and the Elisha Family by M.J. Elisha

According to Sistie Blanning, a resident with her three boys at the hotel in 1943, “The Hotel Jerome was a wonderful place to live. The Elisha family who owned it, made it that way. Laurence [Elisha] was the bartender and manager, his mother Lulu did the cooking and his wife Svea did just about everything else.”

Aspen life revolved around the Hotel Jerome during the Quiet Years. It acted as meeting hall, event center, community dining hall and boarding house. Many Aspenites found it easier to live in the hotel than keep their own home. Considering that most of the old miner’s cabins had outhouses and were heated by coal stoves, the bathrooms and steam radiators at the hotel were very inviting. The 1920 census lists 49 residents at the Hotel Jerome. Old miners like the Whispering Swede (Gus Nelson) boarded there when he wasn’t working his claim up in the mountains. Prominent Aspenites also called the hotel home. Dr. Twining and his wife lived at the hotel since it was centrally located.

Mansor Elisha, Laurence’s father, bought the Hotel Jerome in 1911 and kept it up through the lean years. The Elisha family leased the Hotel Jerome to the Paepcke-owned Aspen Company in 1946. Today, three renovations later, the Hotel Jerome continues to fill a niche at the center of the community.

“Down in Carbondale, just as soon as the Flu showed up there, the town council put on the lid and put it on right and are keeping it on. No one is permitted to go into or leave the town; no visiting is permitted under any circumstances; if a person goes to a home where there is a case of Flu he or she stays right there until released by a physician.”

– Aspen Democrat-Times, November 12, 1918

Mary Ella’s Story

Mary Ella Patterson traveled from New York by steam train to Aspen in 1890, and opened “Patterson’s Dress Shop” in the frame house she rented near Fifth and Main. She married Edgar Stal- lard in 1895. In 1905, they moved into the Victorian at 620 W. Bleek er Street built by Jerome B. Wheel er. Mary Ella was a dressmaker and gardened along with raising their three boys. She was even able to purs ule a hobby. She loved photography and set up a darkroom on the second floor. After Edgar’s death in 1925, Mary Ella took in her great nieces, Louiva, Marie and Ruth after their wid owed father remarried.

Over the next 20 years, she closed off one room after another until finally she was living in the front parlor with the rest of the house boarded up. She sold the home, which eventually became the Aspen Historical Society’s Wheeler/Stallard Museum, in 1946, two years before her death.

Mary Ella Stallard’s Sewing Machine, circa 1890, AHS Collection, unknown donor. +Artifact adopted by Jody and Andy Hecht+

Louiva, Ruth and Marie Wilcox, grand nieces of Mary Ella Stallard in the front parlour, December 1926

Albert Stallard on the front lawn of the Wheeler/Stallard Museum, 1907
Stella’s Story

by Mary Eshbaugh Hayes from “The Story of Aspen,” edited by Lisa Hancock

This beautiful quilt tells a sad story. Stella’s Crazy Quilt is one of the most fascinating pieces in the collection at the Aspen Historical Society. It is made of satins and velvets, scraps of this and that, all pieced together with fancy embroidery stitches. Let’s tell the story of Stella’s Quilt. It is the story of Vestella Caloso Yeoman Timberlake, the woman who made the quilt. Into the quilt she sewed her story, the story of one family as well as the story of Aspen during the silver mining boom days. Stella, as Vestella was called, worked in a hotel in Rosita, Colorado, and there she met Willetto Timberlake, a well-educated man who came from a family that owned a plantation in Mississippi. Will was a bookkeeper and worked in mining offices. However, he was a gambling man. This made the marriage stormy because Stella had been raised in an old school Baptist home. Despite the gambling and drinking, the couple loved each other. This was reflected in the letters Will wrote to Stella as he moved from mining camp to mining camp. He would move to a new location, find housing then send for Stella. They finally settled in Aspen and had two sons, Earl and Charlie.

Stella’s sister, Abbie, meanwhile married John Barrere, a professional gambler, and they also lived in Aspen. When Johnny was winning at cards he bought Abbie lovely clothes of velvets, brocades and silks. He would give her expensive jewelry. When Johnny had a losing streak, he would pawn her jewels and dresses to stake him at the next card game. Stella began gathering pieces for the quilt during her Aspen years. There were pieces from Abbie’s lovely dresses. There is a hat band of Will’s with his initials embroidered on it. There is an “Excellence in Spelling” ribbon that Earl won in school. There is a piece marked “Lucy” from Stella’s Aunt Lucy’s wedding dress. The black velvet cross was from Stella’s mother’s dress. “Nan” on the steel silk was from Stella’s friend, Nan Crystal. There are dance programs (printed on ribbons) and a Southern flag with 13 stars. Willie Gooche’s necktie is on the quilt. “To CH Timberlake from Mama” is embroidered in the center of the quilt.

Both Will and Johnny eventually died of gunshot wounds suffered in quarrels over cards. Stella and the boys moved to Leadville where Stella married John May, a brakeman on the railroad. Leadville is at high altitude and it’s cold there. Both Earl and Charlie died of pneumonia in Leadville. Eventually Stella and John May and Abbie all moved to Glenwood Springs where they lived out their days. The quilt went to a niece, Marie Hall. Marie gave the quilt to the Aspen Historical Society because she felt it belonged in Aspen. The quilt tells Stella’s story. And in the quilt lives Stella’s story.
Ski Racing Comes to Aspen

In 1937, a group of Aspenites and Works Progress Administration (WPA) workers led by Swiss Andre Roch, a renowned mountaineer and avalanche expert, cut the first run on Aspen Mountain, now called Roch Run and Corkscrew. With the help of brothers, Frank and Fred Willoughby, Roch also formed the Aspen Ski Club. The trio gave lessons to local residents so Aspen could become a town of skiers. The Ski Club sponsored its first race in 1939 and has continued hosting ski races ever since.

In the years after World War II, the Aspen Ski Club really took off. Tenth Mountain Division troops returned to Aspen and started the Aspen Skiing Co. and Aspen Ski School. Ski Club member Steve Knowlton raced in the 1948 Olympics. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Ski Club hosted the Roch Cup races, which also doubled as the U.S. National Championship most years.

The mid-1970s to the early ‘80s were the club’s golden years, according to former coach Peter Looram, as racers Jill Carter, Andy Mill, Ned Ganz, Belinda Brownell, Dave Stapleton, Mike Farney, Kelly Swales, Whit Sterling, Terry Morse, Beth Madsen and Mark Tache were regulars on the U.S. Alpine teams.

Today, the Aspen Valley Ski and Snowboard Club serves more than 2,100 young people in the disciplines of alpine, nordic, freestyle/freeride, telemark, snowboard and adaptive, making it the largest local winter sports club in the country. Seventy-seven years later, the club’s core values remain the same: commitment, teamwork, and integrity.

Getting “Snuffed” is a Good Thing

Artist Thomas “Snuffy” O’Neil developed a fondness for Aspen as a 10th Mountain Division trooper. He was best known in Aspen for drawing caricatures of locals, many of which graced the walls of local bars like the Red Onion for years. O’Neil contributed to early editions of ski magazines, which unlike most sports periodicals, featured cartoons in every edition.

Twenty-one O’Neil works are in the Aspen Historical Society’s collection. They include caricatures of many notable Aspenites such as Red Onion owner Werner Kuster and ski legends Dick Durrance and Fred Iselin. He also painted signs for skiers riding Lift One. Snuffy O’Neil’s cartoons captured both the fun and the humor of skiing and the era.

Snuffy O’Neil Caricature of Fred Iselin, 1966, AHS Collection, donated by John Litchfield

Snuffy O’Neil drawing a caricature of Countess Zasha Sontivang at the Sundeck, 1947

Aspen Ski Club Pin Collections, various dates, AHS Collection, donated by Ruth Whyte
Freddie Fisher by Su Lum, Co-Editor of “Fisher the Fixer,” Available Free Online

When Freddie “Schnickelfritz” Fisher arrived in Aspen in 1952, he opened a Fixit shop and ran ads in The Aspen Times saying, “DON’T take your things to the city dump — bring them here direct. Fisher the Fixer.” The Fixit shop was on Main Street next to the Jesse Maddalone’s gas station and looked like a dump annex. Freddie could fix everything, but that was just one of many talents.

Fisher was a world-class musician who still played gigs around town. In his heyday he outranked Glenn Miller on a billboard at the Paradise Room in New York City, but he gave up the music business and hung his fixit sign out in Aspen — rumored to be one step ahead of the IRS.

He wrote letters to the newspaper that were so funny one lady papered her bathroom walls with them and many people clipped and saved them. Typical Fisherisms were “I’m not a dirty old man, being pretty well washed up,” “I’m as serious as I can get,” and, of skiing, “I’m too poor to go up and too smart to come down.”

He drank copiously, had a keen sense of humor, paid no attention whatsoever to personal grooming (in this painting, artist Bert Cross cleaned him up considerably, probably as a joke), was a talented writer and played the hell out of the clarinet. He also invented a way to electroplate aspen leaves (and feathers or anything else that took his fancy). “See what happens when God leaves off and I take over,” he wrote in his ads. Some say the secret ingredient was his own urine — whatever he used, his leaves were so natural that if you saw them on the ground you’d go for a rake.

Aspen back then was so chock full of “characters” that it was difficult to rise to the top, but Freddie Fisher — who could have been elected mayor or voted the town drunk — was the uncontested top dog, our best loved character. Freddie was the real thing, blunt as a sledge hammer. Asked how he had fathered such a lovely daughter he replied, “Well, lady I didn’t do it with my face.”

Every now and then someone will lament the absence of Freddie Fisher. “Oh, if only Freddie were here — he’d straighten up this town.” Wrong. Twenty-first century Aspen would have no part of Freddie Fisher. If he showed up today he would be shunned. He stank, he smoked (messy Bull Durham hand-rolled), he cursed vividly, he was rude, he was usually schnookered, he was crass, he was a walking pig pen, he hated pretention and, if those weren’t enough strikes against him, he despised dogs.

Dubbed “The Pundit of Pitkin” by Pete Luhn — another character now gone — Freddie wrote of himself, “All the things I’ve ever learned in school I’ve never been able to put to use, and all things I learned that have done me some good I had to learn from books that I had to smuggle into school.”

Freddie Fisher in the 1960 Winterskol Parade protesting water diversions

Bert Cross Painting of Freddie Fisher, circa 1960, AHS Collection, donated by Bette Oakes. Artifact adopted by Kay Bucksbaum
Bayer’s Remorse?

“Notice! Are you painting your house this summer?” In an attempt to freshen-up town, the Aspen Company put on a “Paint-Up and Clean-Up” campaign in June 1946. Free color consultations with Bauhaus artist Herbert Bayer were encouraged and “suitable” paints were made available. The Hotel Jerome was painted a crisp white to demonstrate the effect of a refreshed building. In 1955, the Hotel Jerome was given another facelift when cerulean blue “eyebrows” were added to highlight the brick arches over the windows. The controversial look remained until 1985 when all the paint was removed from the hotel.

A Toast to Winter

“Why Wintersköl? No real reason at all. But winter’s too long not to have a few days in the middle of it dedicated to all-out craziness.” —Andy Stone, 1975

When Wintersköl was created in 1951, January was a slow time in Aspen. The annual toast to winter or ‘Wintersköl’ became a local’s party that attracted tourists, too. The celebration reflected the changes that occurred in Aspen from year to year, especially the parade. Floats were satirical commentary on life in Aspen. Other events were just plain fun, such as the Snow Motocross, the Ski Splash, the Costume Slalom and Ski Joring.

Culture with a Twist

Mead Metcalf opened the Crystal Palace Theatre Restaurant in July 1957. Joan Higbie (soon to be Metcalf) joined the fun in 1958 and turned the solo dinner show into a duet. Soon the servers joined in and the repertoire went from duets to full-blown renditions of Broadway show tunes and biting social and political satire pieces.

Over the following five decades, the Crystal Palace became a “must see” while in Aspen. Visitors would book a year in advance to guarantee a spot for their next vacation. The Palace also hosted many parties and events for locals, making it a community treasure. After 51 years in business, Metcalf retired and the Crystal Palace Restaurant Theatre closed in April 2008.
Children in the Wild
by Griff Smith and Mike Flynn, Longtime Aspen Middle School Teachers

In 1968, a principal, supported by the school board, superintendent, a small group of teachers, and the eighth-grade class of the Aspen Middle School, began a journey, which would change expectations for a public school system and a community. The resulting program, 8th Grade Outdoor Education, remains powerful to this day. This journey changed direction but not philosophy when we joined with Colorado Outward Bound as a facilitator in 1969. The singularity of the program became evident when interested groups throughout the state and the country asked our school to make presentations on outdoor education. The following is a description of the 8th Grade Outdoor Education program as of 2015:

Stepping off a 150-foot cliff seems to be a long way from the eighth grade classroom, but that is exactly what every Aspen Middle School eighth grader has done for over 45 years.

The program begins early in the school year with a multiday hike in small patrols on four to five different routes from Aspen to a base camp near Marble. Along the hike the students spend 24 hours confined to a small area with a self-made shelter. In this “solo experience” the students are allowed no food and only a liter of water. They are encouraged to write in their journals and to reflect upon their friends and family.

After the hike and solo the patrols set up camp at the Marble basecamp and dedicate the rest of the week to interpersonal and intrapersonal activities designed to develop self-image and group cooperation. These activities include rock climbing, rappelling, a confidence course, and survival and wilderness skills.

While the outdoor education program is based on an outdoor experience, its main mission is to develop interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

We wanted the students to be faced with daily challenges, challenges that they think are insurmountable, but can be overcome with perseverance and group cooperation. These are great lessons in life.

Ask Aspen School District alumni about their middle school years, and they will invariably relate their outdoor education experience.

Since 1968, the philosophy of “outdoor education” has grown dramatically to incorporate every grade level in the Aspen School District, to spawn similar programs throughout the Roaring Fork Valley, and to stimulate similar private education adventures. Every student, every administrator, every teacher in the Aspen School District has contributed to the evolution of outdoor and experiential programs within the school system today. Forty-seven years of commitment has led us to a program that is now both a community asset and a community treasure.
The Woman Behind “Around Aspen”

In loving memory of Mary Eshbaugh Hayes, 1928-2015.

Mary Eshbaugh Hayes moved to Aspen in 1952 and spent the next 62 years regaling the community with her delightful stories, books and photographs. She married Jim Hayes, an Aspenite renowned for his silversmithing, and raised five children. Joining the staff at The Aspen Times soon after her arrival as a photographer and reporter, Mary eventually filled the roles of associate editor and editor-in-chief.

She is the author of several popular books about Aspen, including “Aspen Potpourri,” a collection of Aspen recipes and ideas. The book combines local recipes and “idea recipes” with Mary’s notable photography. Included are recipes for everything from Gerbaz Venison (Judy Gerbaz) and Serviceberry Pie (Lena Van Loon) to Homemade Live Mouse Traps (Tony Kastelic). In 1996, she published “The Story of Aspen,” a book telling the history of Aspen through the families and characters that make up this unique town.

Hayes is widely known for her society column, “Around Aspen,” which ran in the Aspen Times Weekly for half a century. She covered “society” events; celebrity bashes, gallery openings, fundraiser balls, and afternoon tea parties. She also included births, marriages, travels, graduations and deaths so everyone could stay informed in the age before social media. Mary Eshbaugh Hayes was a fixture on the Aspen social and community scene. Everyone knew and loved Mary.

Jim Hayes’ Aspen Leaf Belt Buckles

Jim Hayes’ iconic Aspen Leaf belt buckles are prized by both locals and visitors. Arriving in Aspen in 1949 after being seriously injured in World War II, Hayes quickly established his jewelry-making business but economic necessity drove him to start an earth-moving business which he ran for eight years. He then returned to his passion for creating art and jewelry and his belt buckles became a must-have Aspen keepsake. Each buckle is handcrafted and as unique as its creator.
Locals’ Tags

ZG license plates branded the vehicle owner as an “Aspenite” or a “local.” For a town with so many transplanted residents, the “local” moniker meant that you were no longer a newcomer. ZG plates became especially coveted when ZP plates were introduced in 1978. County Clerk Loretta Banner noted that during the 1977 arraignment of serial killer Ted Bundy at the Pitkin County Courthouse, the national news media thought the crowd gathered on the steps was there for the legal proceeding but they were actually waiting in line to ensure they got ZG license plates and not the unpopular ZP plates.

The Local TV Station that Could

John Smith started Grassroots TV with the help of Ellie Bingham in 1971. He came from east Los Angeles and recognized during his time in Watts that community members needed to be able to talk to each other about local problems. Smith felt the same need in controversy-filled Aspen. “We announced in an article in the (Aspen) Times that we were starting a community TV station and needed volunteers,” said Smith in a 1975 interview, “and we were on our way.”

Original programming varied from “Say It,” an on-the-street interview program on local politics to “Old Weird Billy’s Garden Show” about alternative gardening. The satirical soap opera titled “Edge of Ajax” included cameos by visiting celebrities and was the crowning glory of the era. Grassroots broadcast everything from high school sports to local political debates. A 1972 segment featured a group of topless women shaving the head of a woman who was bereaved by a recent breakup — controversial even for the 1970s. Now, more than 40 years later, the country’s oldest community TV station continues to thrive.
While relaxing over a beer Al Pendorf looked at me and said, “The freshman class is looking good this year.” It was the fall of 1975 and the Aspen State Teachers College was born. We agreed that academics should not get in the way of education and Aspen was way too much like a college town to not have one. It was a fortunate matchup because Al owned a printing business and I was a photographer who had studied satire.

The irreverent atmosphere of Aspen is what made it work. It was an extremely young town filled with creative and funny people either right out of school, escaping from the city, returning from Viet Nam, fleeing a bad marriage or any combination of the above. They made ASTC succeed along with long time locals who enjoyed our antics because they rekindled the spirit of Aspen from the 1950s.

We knew we needed aliases, so I became Dr. Slats Cabbage, President and Al became Fulton Begley III, Dean of Women and Equipment Manager.

Al’s printing press then went to work printing a handbook and bumper stickers. The handbook described campus life in Aspen, had a campus map and course descriptions:

- Fluid Mechanics 101
  This course teaches the student how to mechanically deal with the elementary fluids of his or her environment; i.e., draft beer, tequila and peppermint schnapps. Lunch not offered during lab time.
- Ski Instructor Accents 222
  This series of seminars will give the student an insight on how to impress his or her ski school class by creatively using either Austrian, French or Scandinavian accent.

People from all over the USA would come to Aspen and tell us that we live in a fantasy land and have no idea what it is like in the real world. Thus:

- Real World History 323
  Designed for upperclassmen who will be graduating and departing Aspen. This course is designed to prepare the student for life in the real world. It begins with a six-day field trip to Grand Junction followed by discussions of urban ethics.

The first bumper stickers said “Aspen State Teachers College” with the logo of crossed skis, an aspen leaf, a beer mug and a broom, our mascot. We then ran a second batch of stickers that said, “Who the Hell is Slats Cabbage?” We put them everywhere. It was our 1975 way to get the names out; today it’s called branding.

Shortly thereafter we opened our Student Store with T-shirts, sweatshirts, student IDs, pennants, mugs, ashtrays, etc. This really made the college look official and people started believing it was real. To many locals it was a great ‘inside joke’ and they played along. Some used their IDs for student discounts on everything including rail passes in Europe.

Within months we were putting out a monthly newsletter “The Clean Sweep” that mocked everything in town and by the fall of 1976 we had a football team getting national attention for defeating top NCAA schools when they didn’t show up for games in Aspen.

We magnified the irreverence of Aspen and had a ball doing it, but even today you don’t have to look very far to see that the spirit is still alive.
The irreverent atmosphere of Aspen is what made it work. It was an extremely young town filled with creative and funny people either right out of school, escaping from the city, returning from Viet Nam, fleeing a bad marriage or any combination of the above. They made ASTC succeed along with long time locals who enjoyed our antics because they rekindled the spirit of Aspen from the 1950s.

The Entrance to Aspen Debate

There have been 26 votes on the Entrance to Aspen and Highway 82 since 1970. Increasing gridlock — both on the road and in political chambers — has yet to break the stalemate. After decades of studies and votes, the Entrance to Aspen still requires a slower pace, both figuratively and literally. The debate over these controversial curves and their impact on Aspen’s quality of life is not finished. In 2008, Pitkin County instituted a bus-only lane, the only one of its kind in a ski resort, to promote mass transit.

Roundabout Halloween Costume, 2005, AHS Collection, donated by Carmen Farr Dowley
The Disenfranchisement of Jim Blanning
by Lisa Hancock, Curator, Aspen Historical Society

While Aspen is a wonderland to tourists and newcomers, longtime locals can become bitter as their hometown changes and leaves them alienated. One extreme example was Jim Blanning. Blanning came to Aspen with his mother and siblings after his West Point Grad father was killed in World War II. He became a charming, athletic, attractive young man who ski raced and was a high school sports star. His mother remembers that he loved talking to the old miners who wintered in the Hotel Jerome and when he was old enough he explored the abandoned mines in the area. Most Aspenites knew Jim loved to party, loved women (married seven times) and loved to dream big. But Blanning could never cash in on his dreams. He began selling mining claims with questionable title chains in the 1970s. By the 1990s Pitkin County officials were closely watching his activities. Blanning continued to have scrapes with the law including chaining himself to the Lady Justice statue on the Pitkin County Courthouse and an indecent exposure citation when he confronted several Pitkin County commissioners in a downtown bar wearing the barest of coverings. Eventually, Blanning’s illegal mining claim dealings landed him a 16-year jail sentence, although he won early release for good behavior. On New Year’s Eve, 2008 Blanning entered two Aspen banks with gift-wrapped packages containing bombs and hold-up notes. The note threatened “mass death.” Downtown was evacuated, shutting down the celebrations at Aspen’s exclusive restaurants, bars and hotels, costing business owners millions of dollars. Blanning’s body was found later that night after he committed suicide on the side of a remote county road. Aspen moved on without him, before and after his death.

Jim Blanning Hold-Up Note, 2008, AHS Collection, donated by Bill Blanning
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ASPER HISTORICAL SOCIETY
CAMPAIGN

Goal: The Aspen Historical Society Campaign will help renovate our Archive Building to best protect our collection. This will allow us to display more of our collections as well as host additional and larger educational programs and lectures. The AHS Campaign will also strengthen our endowment and open our facility, our collections, and our expertise to an even wider audience. These enhancements will support our mission: to enrich our community through preserving and communicating its remarkable history.

Total Campaign Goal: $3 Million

$1 million in capital expenses for the renovation of our Archive Building: a community space for exhibitions, educational programming, and events; a 35% increase in our collection storage capacity; a state-of-the-art climate control system and advanced hazard-protection system to safeguard our collection; additional space for offices.

$2 million to strengthen our Endowment: increases the size and availability of our educational programming, supports research positions, and enhances the use and development of our vast archive collection.

Composition of the renovated Archive Building:

Archival access and preservation of the collection
Operations and office space
Community space for events, educational programs, and children’s activities
Charles Cunniffe Architects is proud to partner with the Aspen Historical Society, and shares its mission to enrich the community through preserving and communicating our remarkable history.

CCA has had the great opportunity to restore many of Aspen’s most treasured buildings. As a steward of Aspen’s future, we fondly reflect on Aspen’s rich history & culture to gather inspiration and guidance.

THANK YOU to the Aspen Historical Society for this wonderful exhibition.