

# Colorado Adventure Guide--Heritage and History

## Colorado Springs, Colorado

### **General William Jackson Palmer Founder of Colorado Springs and the D&RGR**

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<http://www.coloradovacation.com/history/colorado-springs-william-palmer.html>

Colorado Springs was founded in 1871 as a resort destination for tourists visiting the American West, almost at the foot of Pikes Peak, and close to the Garden Of The Gods, Cave Of The Winds, and Seven Falls. "America The Beautiful" was inspired by this region, and was written here.

Founder General William Jackson Palmer was a Civil War hero who also was the engineer-in-charge of building a railroad line for the Kansas Pacific Railroad from Kansas City to Denver (he would later found the narrow-gauge Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad, a critically important part of Colorado's history).



In 1870, Palmer bought 10,000 acres of land in the vicinity of a wild frontier town named Colorado City (now just a neighborhood named Old Colorado City), and a year later Colorado Springs was born. He outlawed saloons, gambling, and alcohol, and went on to build The Antlers Hotel. Other resort facilities soon followed, including golf courses and polo fields.

Colorado Springs attracted hordes of wealthy sightseers from "back east", as well as many international travellers; Pikes Peak, nearby Manitou Springs, and the Garden Of The Gods were extremely popular, and the town became known as "Little London" because of the many British visitors. Mansions and tall trees became a common feature in the city.



Part of the allure was the dry climate and high altitude. In those days, the disease tuberculosis was a real killer in the U.S., and dryness & thin air helped many TB sufferers live much longer. Colorado Springs was successfully marketed as a destination for tuberculosis patients.

Katharine Lee Bates, an English professor from the eastern U.S., visited the top of Pikes Peak. She stayed at The Antlers afterward, and wrote "America The Beautiful". "Oh purple mountains majesty above the fruited plains" refers to the Rocky Mountains of the Pikes Peak region, and at the time, irrigation was supporting orchards and agriculture in Colorado's arid plains to the east.

Palmer made many grants of land to the community while he developed and eventually sold off his Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. These include Colorado College, the

International Typographical Union's Printers Home, Colorado School For The Deaf And Blind, and a tuberculosis sanitarium that eventually became the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (UCCS).



General Palmer also built his dream home here, a castle designed for his beloved wife and daughters called Glen Eyrie, just north of the Garden Of The Gods. Palmer met and married Mary Lincoln Mellen in 1870--she was only 20. He called her Queen, and it was on their honeymoon in England that he saw and realized the advantages of narrow gauge railroad, leading development of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad.

But the D&RGR is another story.

Queen Palmer founded Colorado Springs' first public school in 1871, she was 21 years old.

In 1880 Queen suffered a mild heart attack, and her doctors advised her to move to lower altitudes. Queen moved east and eventually to England with the three Palmer daughters. Palmer visited them once or twice a year, and she eventually died at age 44.

General Palmer not only founded Colorado Springs, he stamped it with his personality and wishes. For example, his adamant opposition to alcohol and wild living kept Colorado Springs alcohol-free until the end of prohibition in America in the 1930's.

Just across Monument Creek to the west from his 10,000 acres, Colorado City (Colorado's first territorial capital) was a typically wild western town. Palmer's "Limit Street" marked the western edge of Colorado Springs, and marked the border between the genteel resort town and the wilder mining town...to the miners and hustlers of Colorado City.

Colorado City eventually got *really* wild, after gold was discovered in Cripple Creek and Victor, and the gold ore poured out of the mountains...but that's another story.



Palmer brought his wife's remains and his daughters back from England in the mid 1890s. He sold his Denver & Rio Grande Railroad after a Supreme Court decision in 1901 denied him right-of-ways to extend to Mexico, and spent his last years enjoying being a popular man, and a benefactor to Colorado Springs. He suffered a bad fall from a horse in 1906 and died in 1909 at age 72.

Other early philanthropists and developers like W.S. Stratton and Spencer Penrose helped make Colorado Springs the city it is today.

A bronze sculpture of General William Jackson Palmer on his beloved horse dominates the intersection of Platte and Nevada in downtown Colorado Springs.