

Island Grove Park Walking Tour Notes
June 2009
Meet at CV parking lot

Please contact the Greeley Historic Preservation Office at 970.350.9222 for questions, more information or if you would like to duplicate or use these tour notes.

The following includes notes on selected sites from the June 2009 Island Grove walking tour.

Monfort House

The house is associated with the Monfort family, who has contributed to Greeley and Weld County in agriculture, business and philanthropic efforts toward education and medicine. Charles and Pella Monfort and their only child, Warren, moved to Colorado and bought 80 acres northwest of Greeley. Warren was about fourteen years old when they arrived in Greeley in approximately 1906. Warren attended college in Greeley and taught social studies and history for several years at schools in Weldona and Sterling. Warren met his wife Edith while teaching. He served in the Army in World War I and returned and married Edith, moving to his parents' farm north of Greeley. His parents sold the original farm and bought the land where the cattle feeding operation grew north of Greeley.

Warren and Edith lived in a smaller farmhouse until Kenneth was born in 1928, when they moved into this house. They had three children, Richard, Marjorie and Kenneth. Richard was killed in World War II. Warren began a small cattle feeding operation with his father in 1930 to help pay off the farm mortgage.

Warren contributed to cattle feeding with several innovations, including “creating the first feeder trucks which still can be seen in refined form scurrying around the feedlots. He also invented a caterpillar manure loader and was the first in the county to put corn silage in the ground for storage.” (Qtd from Spotlight on Warren Monfort article, July 27, 1972, from Museum Scrapbook #27 page 162.)

The original cattle feeding operation grew to become Monfort of Colorado, the world's first 100,000 head cattle feedlot. Warren and Edith lived at the farm in this house until their deaths in 1978 and 1972, respectively. This makes the house significant for association with the Monfort family and their contributions from the time of construction in 1907 through the time of Warren's death in 1978.

Their son Ken took over and expanded the business, introducing several new concepts. “He introduced the concept of slaughtering cattle at local plants, including his own in Greeley, instead of shipping animals by railroad to cities such as Kansas City, Mo., and Chicago. That radically altered the economics of the beef business. He also devised the concept of ‘boxed beef,’ meaning butchered meat that is trucked to wholesalers and retailers in sealed packages. Now an industry standard, boxed beef replaced the shipment of whole beef carcasses; it improved meat quality and food safety for consumers. Monfort also changed the beef industry by combining several operations – beef feeding, slaughter, meatpacking, sales and distribution – into a Fortune 500 company that, along with a few others, grew to dominate the industry

nationwide.” (Qtd from Denver Post article, 03/11/2001, “Monfort home to become monument.” by Coleman Cornelius.)

Warren and the cattle feeding business took off during World War II, although the main growth came after World War II with the American economic boom and a high demand for beef from returning GIs. A major contribution to the national cattle industry was locating the packing plant in Greeley instead of relying on stockyards in Denver, which saved money and gave the Monforts more control, and which became a national trend. (source of info: Joe Ambrosio, “Monfort of Colorado”, 2004, pages 14-17.)

Ken Monfort served in the Colorado General Assembly and was president of Monfort of Colorado during the merge with ConAgra in the 1980s. He also undertook major philanthropy efforts, including for the University of Northern Colorado Business School, the Union Colony Civic Center, the Birth Center at Northern Colorado Medical Center and the Monfort Children’s Clinic. The National Western Stock Show recognized him with the “Citizen of the West” award in 1991. He also received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Bravo! Entrepreneur program in Fort Collins, presented by the Northern Colorado Business Report and local chambers of commerce and economic development agencies.

Architectural Significance:

The property is an example of a vernacular farmhouse that reflects values and changes of the Monfort family.

This vernacular farmhouse is an irregular-shaped, two-story, wood frame structure with an asphalt shingle, gabled roof. Roof features include a main side-gabled roof with intersecting front and rear gables and eave returns. It has a concrete foundation and vinyl siding over the original siding. The main facade (south elevation) has a centered entrance. The one-story stoop has a gabled pediment with rounded decorative brackets. The concrete stoop has a wrought iron balustrade rail with decorative detailing. Windows are eight-over-one light double hung windows with vinyl storm windows and decorative shutters. There is a two-story bay window on the north addition. Sliding windows are on the one-story northeast addition. The two brick chimneys were removed when the house was moved and were not rebuilt.

Vernacular does not mean it is not significant. It is not meant to be compared to stylistic architecture, those properties which characterize a particular style. “Vernacular structures are significant for historical and cultural associations and for their construction methods, uses and relationship to the built environment.” (Qtd from Historic Preservation Office report on 1475 A Street Monfort House) Farmhouses often evolve architecturally as the families living in them evolve. The house evolved between 1907 and 1978, with additions and alterations to make the house more livable but not extravagant, which reflects their values.

The University of Northern Colorado Monfort College of Business website also has a story about how Ken Monfort was not extravagant. “A friend of Ken Monfort’s once bought a new pair of alligator shoes and showed them off to the cattleman. Monfort, who dislikes neckties and wears a turtleneck under his dinner jacket, wasn’t interested in the reptilian footwear. ‘Money is wasted on you, Monfort,’ the friend said. But years later, when the friend called with

congratulations on the new name of the University of Northern Colorado's Business School, Monfort told him, 'I could do this because I didn't buy alligator shoes.'"

The house and additions are significant for reflecting the Monfort's prudent lifestyle. The vinyl siding, removal of the chimneys, and relocation affect the architectural integrity of the house. However, because the house is significant for association with the Monforts from the time of construction in 1907 through Warren's death in 1978, the additions become significant because they reflect the evolution of the house and family. For example, there are original windows on the 1907 portion of the house on the north side, 1940s windows on the two story 1940s addition on the north side and 1970s or 1980s windows on the kitchen nook on the west side. The alterations since 1978, including the vinyl siding, removal of the chimneys and relocation of the house, adversely affect the integrity, but since the vinyl siding is reversible, the structure retains enough overall integrity to convey significance as a vernacular farmhouse associated with the Monfort family.

Island Grove Hospital & Pest house

Two new hospitals opened on January 11, 1904. The "Greeley Hospital" opened at 16th Street and 11th Avenue. The Island Grove Hospital replaced the "county house" east of town. This two-story with two one-story sections, wood frame hospital was larger than the Greeley Hospital. The facilities included an operating room, nurses' room, women's ward, women's sitting room, bathroom, store room, office, children's sitting room, men's ward, private rooms, dining room, kitchen, steam heating plant and a large cellar in the basement. It provided regular hospital services and indigent care. A *Greeley Tribune* article referred to the first patients as "inmates" and "unfortunates."

Several husband and wife pairs worked here during the history of the hospital. John Knutson and his wife Emma served as superintendents of the facility. John served from 1902 to 1908 and Emma was superintendent from 1908 to 1928 to 1932. John Knutson came to the United States from Sweden in 1880. He worked as a cabinetmaker, his father's trade, then in a laundry business. He came to Colorado because of ill health. He spent six months in Denver before coming to Greeley to work as superintendent of County Hospital. He and Emma had nine children. Dr. J.W. Fuqua and his wife Elizabeth both worked here. Elizabeth served as superintendent from 1932 to 1944/45. Dr. J.W. Fuqua was a doctor there until his death in 1941. Finally, Superintendent Byrd C. Burroughs worked here from 1946 until 1954 and his wife Louise worked there as a Registered Nurse from 1950-52.

Several long term employees include Mrs. Robert (Pauline) Bohm, a laundress from 1923 to 1952 who also served as cook in 1933; Myrtle Rants worked as an attendant from 1926 to 1942; and Lester Beers who worked at the hospital from 1930 until 1972. Lester lived in a house at the back of the hospital. He picked up nurses to take to work and took them home at the end of their shifts, and he did whatever jobs that needed to be done, worked as a gardener, and delivered groceries and provisions to poor people living in outlying areas of Weld County.

The hospital had several outbuildings. The "Pest House," a small, one-story, brick building was located northwest of the hospital, was a quarantine location for people with severe contagious

diseases such as small pox. It was razed in the mid-1980s. A brick laundry building was located north of the hospital.

Eunice Anderson West, who lived near the hospital growing up on a farm where Centennial Village is located today told several stories about living near the hospital. Their neighbor's goat ate the orange flag (warning of smallpox patients inside) hung on the door of the Pest House. Another time Greeley Insurance Agent Mr. Flood came to the Anderson home. The goat jumped onto the hood of his car, saw its image in the windshield, butted it and broke the windshield.

Rozene Meeker, Nathan's eldest daughter, was a patient there for four years prior to her death in 1935.

The building was used as a hospital until 52 patients moved to the Weld County Nursing Home at 11th Avenue & 16th Street, which was remodeled from the Greeley Hospital for use as a nursing home between 1953 to 1954. The Weld County Welfare Department moved into the south part of the Island Grove Hospital by July 1954. It is unclear what was located in the Island Grove Hospital from 1956-1973. In 1974, the Alcohol Recovery Center, operated through the Weld County Health Dept, located here. It later became the site for 40 minimum-security prisoners participating in a work-release program.

History of Arenas

The area is significant for celebrations including Spud Days, which started in 1906, and fourth of July celebrations. There was a 250 seat grandstand at Island Grove. The original arena was constructed in approximately 1911 and hosted the first professional rodeo in 1925, when Jack Elliott brought his Cheyenne Frontier Days performers and stock to town and attracted top cowboys and big crowds.

Four boys playing with matches caused a fire that caused \$225,000 in damage, destroying the original arena in August 1977. New grandstands were started in 1979 to 1980 and were completed by 1984. ARIX designed the current arena, which has 10,000 seats (a multi-year development), stock pens, chutes, parking lots, restroom and concession facilities. Cornerstone Builders completed the south grandstand section first.

Monfort of Colorado packing plant (on N 8th Ave)

The Monfort of Colorado packing plant started as Capitol Pack, Inc. meat processing. Phelps Construction Company of Greeley began construction 1959 and operations started by May 17, 1960. Construction cost \$2 million. Ken Monfort was President of Greeley-Capitol Pack, Inc. in October 1960. They hired 250 to 300 people and processed 600 head of cattle and 2400 head of lambs daily. The plant was believed to be one of the most modern packing plants in the U.S.