

Downtown Arts & Entertainment Walking Tour Notes
June 2010
Starting Location: Kress Cinema, 817 8th Avenue

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.

Kress Building, 817 8th Avenue

History

Constructed in 1929, the S.H. Kress & Co. variety store operated here until 1966 when it closed. “A Guide to Building Records of S.H. Kress and Co. 5-10-25 Cent Stores at the National Building Museum” provides a brief description of the Greeley store: “The facades, with double entrances on one street [8th Ave.] and a single entrance on another [9th St.], are brick with terra cotta cornice and trim. The interior had pilasters with acanthus-leaf capitals and an ornate dentil crown molding with floral and chevron patterns.” The Kress retail chain was founded in 1896 and, by 1929, had stores in about 200 American communities. The stores carried a wide variety of inexpensive items (4,275 different articles in 1934). The finely crafted, brightly lighted interiors encouraged customers to linger and provided an escape during the Depression of the 1930s. The chain went out of business in 1981.

In 1970, Fashion Bar department store incorporated the old Kress store in their redevelopment plans for the northwest corner of 8th Avenue and 9th Street and the southwest corner of 8th Avenue and 8th Street. Denver architect Richard L. Crowther of Crowther, Kruse, McWilliams designed the project. This 11,500 square foot women’s store opened in August 1970. The location to the north at 8th Avenue and 8th Street was converted into a fashion center for men and boys.

Fashion Bar was established in the early 1930s by Hannah Levy and had operated a store in Greeley since 1936. By 1970, the chain had eighteen stores in several Colorado communities. During the 1990s, Fashion Bar began closing stores, renamed others as Stage outlets, and eventually went out of business. This building was rehabilitated in 2003-04 with an entrance reconfiguration completed in 2007-08. [PT Barnum](#)

Phineas Taylor (PT) Barnum

This savvy business man that created the “Greatest Show on Earth” had a connection to Greeley and Arts and Entertainment in Downtown Greeley. He may have come to Greeley originally to visit his cousin. He hailed Greeley as a model town for its commitment to temperance and realized the potential to bring in business

Between 1870 and 1872, Barnum purchased land in Greeley. His first purchase was a lot on 6th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues on which he built a 150 room hotel. The hotel lasted until 1910, when it was deemed too damaged to save. Another lot that Barnum

purchased was the block of 8th Street between 8th and 9th Avenues. On the corner of this lot he constructed the Park Building which housed Barnum Hall on the 2nd floor.

His circus came to Greeley Aug. 7th, 1880. Barnum passed up the crowds from Cheyenne and Denver opting to go through Greeley on the way to Salt Lake City. Two trains long, it featured acts included “Zazel in her great ariel dive being shot from a cannon” and “Tom Thumb Celebrated Little Man.” Animals included Jumbo the Elephant, 20 trained stallions and performing oxen. Such a large crowd showed in Greeley that there was a shortage of housing accommodations and food.

Aside from the circus PT Barnum was always an honored guest at local churches speaking on the topic of temperance.

Jackson Theater (707 8th Avenue as listed in 1892 city directory)

The Jackson Theater was built in 1883 and was fitted with dressing rooms and 400 chairs. The first event was the First Fireman’s Ball and the first grand concert featured violinist Edward Remenyi. By 1908, 707 8th Avenue housed Park Merchandise Company, with the Jackson Theater above.

SD Hunter Opera House, 722 8th Street (SE corner of 8th Street & 8th Avenue)

SD Hunter was a local cattleman who wanted to build the “finest theater north of Denver.” In 1886, he constructed the SD Hunter Opera house for \$85,000. It housed 800 spectators. Programs contained theater rules such as: not using feet to applaud, not spitting tobacco on the floor, not eating peanuts in the hall and not standing on chairs or rushing the doors before the curtain drop. In 1909 the theater sponsored Madam Schuman-Heinke, worlds greatest contralto. People came from everywhere to pay \$2 per seat for the show, which sold out.

Electric Theater Company (first moving picture show)

Joe Goshert started the first moving picture show venue, the Electric Theater Company. It was located at 704 8th Avenue and burned in 1908 or early 1909. The *Tribune* reported in 1911 that Joe had left his picture show business to set up a hamburger and lunch stand that traveled with the Campbell Brothers Circus.

Orpheum Theater

Contractor and builder Fred F. Gordon built a pool hall on 7th Street and 8th Avenue, and then the Orpheum Theater next to it on 8th Avenue. William Gordon, son of Fred Gordon, managed the Orpheum, which showed movies. It had a stage and hosted many vaudeville acts. It burned in 1910 and was rebuilt, likely re-opening in 1911.

Rex and Chief Theaters (SE corner of 7th Street & 8th Avenue)

In 1912 Jim Lynch acquired control of the Orpheum, eventually remodeled it into the Rex Theater, which later became the Chief. The Rex entrance could be identified by the inlaid sidewalk plaque of red stone that read “Rex.” It featured movies such as *Frankenstein* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Twenty cents would pay for a double feature. This was the first motion picture theater in Greeley with a sloping floor.

The Rex became the Chief by 1934 and the facade was covered up. The Chief Theater closed in 1973. The Chief was torn down in 1984.

According to a newspaper article, two open-air theaters in downtown entertained with movies: the Orpheum Airdrome, located at 908 8th Avenue, and one on 9th Street, a little west of the middle of the 800 block, which showed movies during the summer.

Several other small theaters occupied upper stories of buildings in downtown.

Kiva Theater, 806 8th Street

Kiva Theater operated here from the 1930s until it closed in March 1953. In 1945 a newspaper report noted that the newly decorated Kiva Theater was to reopen. It then featured an auditorium with wall murals featuring Mexican themes painted by Walter Jancke, manager of the theater. The Kiva offered second run motion pictures. A 1953 article reported that the Kiva, then part of the Westland theater chain, was to close permanently. Theater equipment was removed from the building, with the seats given to local churches. The building, owned by Harry Hibbs, a Greeley businessman, was sold to Cyril Litchmann of Los Angeles, California. The Park Theater had closed four months earlier, reflecting a decline in small theaters due to rising costs.

Walk through walkway to alley to 9th Street – point out mural on side of Hawes Building

Arts & Entertainment site to note on 9th Street: Union Colony Dinner Theatre, 802 9th Street

Point out ghost signs on sides of 813 9th Street and 806 9th Street - and mention there is a large one on the side of George's at 825-27 7th Street.

Park Theater, 817 9th Street

Ira I. Sides obtained a permit for a two-story brick building in 1918. In 1919 E.R. Evans received a permit to “rearrange interior” for Ira I. and Maud M. Sides, the owners. In 1920-22, the first story housed a music company with rooms above. From 1922 to 1953 the Park Theater, which had originally opened at 916 9th Street in 1910, occupied the main space of this building. The upper story of this building had an office and a room during the theater era. An article on Greeley movie theaters notes that the Orpheum Theater burned in 1910 and the Park subsequently opened (perhaps as a “stopgap” theater). The Park closed in December 1952.

820 9th Street – Brunswick Alleys (ca. 1901-06) (now Florio's)

The building was erected between 1901 and 1906. From 1906 through 1909 city directories indicate that the building housed the Brunswick Alleys, a bowling facility. The upstairs space was occupied by Abbott & Evans, electricians. In 1910, the C.M. Johnson Pool Hall and Bowling Alley operated here, with Dr. Shields occupying the upper floor. In 1913 the Peterson & Sons Bowling Alley was listed at this address, while the upstairs offered rooms. During 1918 through 1922 a billiard parlor was housed here,

while Philips-Jansson, Inc, was here in 1926 and the upper story continued to offer rooms.

Sterling Hotel and Theater (900 block of the west side of 9th Avenue; occupied a portion of the block south of the Weld County Courthouse)

In 1910 the Sterling Investment Company constructed the Sterling Hotel and Theater for \$100,000.00. They constructed to be “absolutely fireproof.” Investors said the building could be emptied within 2 minutes because of the multiple exits. Wayne Patterson designed it to be constructed with “special” bricks from Ohio. In 1911, the 1200 seat theater became the location for the Greeley Philharmonic Orchestra’s first concert. The theater owner C.T. Perria donated the space.

Though the Orpheum Theater hosted most of the Philharmonic concerts in 1912, a lengthy relationship had begun with the Sterling, lasting until 1930. Within this time, the Philharmonic established itself as Greeley’s premier cultural organization.

When movies (sometimes known as “flickers”) began to replace the traveling shows, the theater and opera houses of Greeley evolved to accommodate large screens for the movie going public. In 1931 or 1932 the Sterling Theater underwent a major remodel in order to create better accommodations for motion pictures. In 1932 the balcony ticket cost was raised to match that of the floor ticket cost in order to keep the theater on the “first run list.” The price jumped from 35 cents a ticket to 50 cents a ticket.

By 1956, the Sterling had been relegated to second runs due to the opening of the Colorado Theatre, which would later become Foundation Hall and the building was razed in 1969.

Lincoln Park

Lincoln Park is a ten-acre space occupying two blocks bordered by 9th and 10th Avenues and 7th and 9th Streets. Surrounded by a mixture of public buildings and a business district, Lincoln Park has always marked the center of downtown Greeley. Over its 126 year history, it has been the home of a multitude of memorials, gardens, sculptures and public structures. Eighth Street bisected the park from approximately 1972 to 1984.

Originally Lakes Luna and Auricular, named for their shapes, occupied the south and north halves of the park. During the winters, Lake Luna was used for ice-skating. Both lakes were drained after a few years due to problems with mosquitos and flooding in near-by buildings.

In 1885, Greeley drilled its first artesian well in the center of the park’s south half. In 1907, after Greeley’s waterworks were constructed, the Pioneer Fountain replaced the well at a cost of \$500. Designed by Normal School professor Richard Ernesti, the fountain consisted of stone from Colorado Springs, sea shells from Maine, a petrified snake and other assorted items. The contractor was Thomas Gibbeon. The Greeley Tribune sponsored train excursions to the mountains in order to help raise money for the publicly-funded project.

In 1906, Greeley philanthropist J.M.B. Petrikin donated Greeley's first drinking fountain. Located at the corner of 8th Street and 9th Avenue, this "handsome and useful ornament" boasted six places to drink: four for people and two for dogs. The fountain is now located at Centennial Village Museum.

Lincoln Park acquired a new bandstand when the original was moved to East Side Park in the Germans from Russia neighborhood.

In 1943, the Weld County Honor Roll veteran's memorial was built in the southeast corner of the park. It remained until at least 1976. Another veteran's memorial was built in the southwest corner in 1972. In 1990, Allnut Funeral Services and the City of Greeley sponsored a garden memorial in the colors and shape of an American flag.

Other notable additions include "The Promise of the Prairie," a bronze statue of a pioneer family placed in 1993, modern abstract sculptures, and a playground. (Source of information for this section is Memo from Ben Fogelberg to Historic Preservation Commission Re: Request for Certificate of Designation for Lincoln Park, August 12, 1996.)

John F. Sanborn drew the first plan of Greeley in April 1870, including a two-block park in the central part of town. The First Annual Report of the Union Colony of Colorado states that, "A plaza or square of 10 acres was laid out in the center of town and two miniature lakes, one called Luna and the other Auricular, from their respective shapes, were constructed and filled with water. Trees from Phoenix Nurseries at Bloomington, Illinois, were set out in the plaza and through the public streets." By 1882, the young park was bordered by Greeley High School, the Baptist and Congregational Churches, a business district and a few homes.

In 1871, the Union Colony deeded to the Town of Greeley all of its holdings within the town limits, including Lincoln Park. In a Greeley Tribune editorial twenty years later, J. Max Clark alluded to an "express understanding" that the land be set apart forever for "specific purposes." An unidentified newspaper clipping further illuminates the intentions of the Union Colonists by stating that, "New Englanders (the majority of the colonists were from New England) were not content without a "common" or park in the city, and everyone agreed that it must be handy and not too far from the business part of the city."

In 1872, the land-use controversy began. At a Town Board meeting, a resolution was introduced to cut a 100-foot wide street through the park. Some argued that a road would provide easy access to the business district from the residential areas west of the park. The *Greeley Tribune*, a perennial supporter of the park, countered by stating that, "Several persons are making desperate efforts to have the street divide the park that they may more easily get the rest of it laid off into town lots. These eager, selfish land speculators, totally indifferent to adorning the town must not be allowed to destroy what

little beauty it now possesses.” Eight street bisected the park from 9th to 10th Avenues, but the park was not divided into lots.

In 1910, after Lincoln Park had firmly established itself in the hearts of Greeley citizens who gathered there for band concerts, harvest festivals and sports, the city again considered dividing up the land for business lots. One angry citizen, a self-described member of the “Old Guard,” wrote a colorful letter to the Tribune. “If anyone should seriously propose [to dispose of the city parks], I think there are enough of the old guard left to hang him next morning.” He further reminded “anyone with enough influence [Greeley’s] affairs worth considering... should look to the tenure of the title by which the city holds the parks.” The attempt to sell off the park was again abandoned.

During the park’s centennial year, Greeley’s Downtown Renewal Committee contemplated using a strip along the park’s east side to alleviate the “parking crunch.” True to form, the Tribune attacked the proposal, citing alternate parking solutions. Summing up its opinion, the Tribune stated, “The plan [for additional parking] must call for development without reducing the size or beauty of Lincoln Park. The park was left to this generation as an open space within a bustling city and we must be forever on guard against encroachment in order to be able to pass it on to future generations.”

In 1984, the city completed the final phase of a \$5.2 million downtown renovation project. This phase included the removal of the block-long stretch of 8th Street which bisected the park. The area was re-landscaped and the center gazebo rehabilitated. Lincoln Park’s inclusion in the ambitious project symbolized the city’s realization that the park is a vital and necessary component of Greeley’s downtown.

Various annual events and activities also contributed to the park’s history. In the early 1900s, band concerts were held, featuring local musicians. During the World War II era, Greeleyites could be found playing serious games of checkers on make-shift tables. Arts Picnic is the largest and most popular of recent events. Held each July, it features fine arts, crafts, entertainment and multi-ethnic foods. Intermittently through the park’s history, Easter and Memorial Day services have also been held.

Park renovations have recently been completed. The gazebo columns were replaced, the roof was rebuilt and replaced, the west basement entrance was closed off, and new stairs were installed on the south side. All asphalt paths were replaced with reinforced concrete walkways. Two trellises were installed to provide other focal points in the park. The words etched into the concrete located at the trellis’s and the gazebo reference the seven core principles that have guided this community since it’s beginning with Nathan Meeker: temperance, religion, education, cooperation, agriculture, irrigation, family values. The pioneer fountain was reinforced and a new spray fountain mechanism was installed. The base of the rock formation was re-sealed for a more efficient recycling fountain. New trees, shrubs and ground cover were included in the plan for re-vegetation of the park. Lights were also added to the south path for security reasons.

Art in Downtown

Look around for art in downtown. Find a mural on the west wall of 810-12 8th Street (along the walkway), art over the walkway, sculptures, mosaics on north wall of Greeley History Museum at 714 8th Street, ghost signs (faded painted signs on the sides of some brick buildings, also known as wall dog art).

Downtown Greeley is an Arts & Entertainment District.

The goal of the district is to promote and coordinate all of the current arts and entertainment activities and to help recruit and build a stronger, more interesting and entertaining downtown. Benefits include bringing people downtown, attracting more foot traffic, helping businesses, increasing revenue and sales, and improving Greeley's reputation. Overall it assists in economic revival.