

History of Mineral Palace Park



Mineral Palace

During the late 1880's plans to build a "Palace" to display and advertise Colorado's mineral wealth were finalized. The Colorado Mineral Palace was to be located on 27 acres north of the Pueblo business district and within a short distance of the Denver and Rio Grande Depot. Even though it was underfunded and difficult to complete, the Colorado Mineral Palace opened with great fanfare on July 4, 1891 with the Cowboy Band of Silverton, Colorado furnishing the music. Without a doubt the Mineral Palace was the most interesting building ever constructed in Pueblo. Its grounds were Pueblo's first major flower gardens.

The world famous Colorado Mineral Palace was considered one of the show places of the West in 1890's. Housing the largest collection of minerals and gems in the world, the Mineral Palace was built as a monument to Colorado's mineral wealth and industry.

Originally the idea of General Cameron of Canon City, the Mineral Palace was the realized dream of William H. "Coin" Harvey, a displaced West Virginian turned real estate operator in Pueblo, and who was William Jennings Bryan's campaign manager for President of the United States. A resident of Pueblo in the 1890's, Harvey was responsible for working out details of the Palace and raising the money for its construction.

Architect and native Puebloan Otto Bulow's design was chosen from plans submitted by architects across the nation. Considered one of the most ornate and magnificent buildings then in existence in the United States, the Mineral Palace was essentially Egyptian in design. The entire façade had a colonnade and at each corner of the exterior was an eight-foot world between the column and roof. The building's principal dome was 72 feet high. It was decorated with female figures, 16 feet in length, representing the various countries of the world. Also in this dome were large paintings done in cameo effect, of eight great Americans. No one remembers who the eminent Americans were.

It was surrounded by 20 smaller domes, 11 feet in diameter that were each exquisitely hand painted on the interior by D.R. Fay, the celebrated New York artist who adorned them with Colorado wild flowers and those of India.

The general scheme of color of the building interior was terra cotta and gold, executed upon relief work in the East Indian style. Entirely around the interior ran a frieze composed of silver dollars encircling coat-of-arms of the various states and territories. Part of the decoration was the use of 2,200 electric lights in the hearts of the painted flowers.

The interior of the Palace was a huge block-long hall with space enough for 3,500 persons for the various grand balls, meetings, plays, and other events held there. Reigning supreme over the hall were Queen Silver and King Coal sitting regally on their thrones. The gift of the Aspen silver mines, Queen Silver was modeled after Mollie Gibson and was embellished lavishly. Her hair was of white glass; her gown beautifully decorated with brilliants and minerals; her scarf sparkled with blue crystals. Her scepter was topped with a 12-inch replica of a silver dollar. The Silver Queen was 16 feet in height. She was transported for exhibition at the Chicago Worlds Fair of 1893. King Coal was 14 feet in height and was donated by the City of Trinidad to represent the area coal industry.

Between the thrones of King Coal and Queen Silver was a huge stage on which many dramatizations were presented. The deep stage was in effect a large grotto, constructed of immense natural stalactites and stalagmites. In its center bubbled a mountain stream and a waterfall from which a mechanical nymph appeared at intervals to grasp sparkling nuggets.

The exterior columns were of stone, 28 feet high and 5 by 7 feet at the base. The building was 134 feet deep and 244 feet long, facing south. The actual edifice was of wood, except the back side. Corrugated iron was used to enclose part of the north side.

More than \$150,000 was raised for the building, to put it in perspective the equivalent of \$3,550,310 now. The building contained the largest mineral exhibit in the world at the time, plus fossils and petrifications from all over the globe. They were displayed in glass cases at the base of the columns and along the side walls. Small anterooms on the sides were reserved for afternoon tea. Crowds of early-day Puebloans and tourists gathered at the Palace for stand-up suppers. Despite signs of "No spitting on the Floor", sawdust was brought in for protection.

Mineral Palace was built before Pueblo had created park districts. By 1895 the Colorado Mineral Palace Company was in serious financial trouble and the City Beautiful Movement was

sweeping across the nation. Pueblo residents began talking about building a magnificent public park that would complement the Mineral Palace and its fabulous collection of minerals from throughout the world. On June 25, 1896 *The Pueblo Chieftain* reported the U. S. Supreme Court had awarded Henry C. Brown of Denver (he built the Brown Palace Hotel and donated the land for the Colorado State Capital building) undisputed title to the land around the Mineral Palace. Brown was interested in selling a portion of his property for park purposes. *The Chieftain* reported he was interested in building 12 houses adjacent to the proposed park and would provide \$10,000 for its improvement.

As soon as the Colorado Legislature authorized the sale of Improvement Bonds the Ladies Park and Improvement Association intensified their efforts to acquire the Colorado Mineral Palace building and surrounding grounds for a public park. On August 3, 1896 property owners approved a bond issue of \$70,000 for development of Public Park Improvement District No. 1 to enlarge the grounds and develop a park with all the finest amenities. In 1897 the organization founding Mineral Palace gave the Palace to the city, and around it the Mineral Palace Park was built.

Trees were imported from many parts of the nation. A lake was created, with a boathouse pavilion, and a bandstand on the lakeshore. The lake was named for Clara Latshaw, who served on the first Park District No. 1 Board of Commissioners and was instrumental in acquiring the land for the park. The boathouse, located on the west side of the lake, provided rental row and paddle boats for park's patrons. The park had zoological gardens with tropical plants and trees. There was an animal zoo and a children's playground.

The Palace was closed in 1935 because of the poor condition of the building. Estimates indicated cost of repairs far exceeded the worth of the structure.



Mineral Palace Park after considerable landscaping had been done. (PCHS photo)