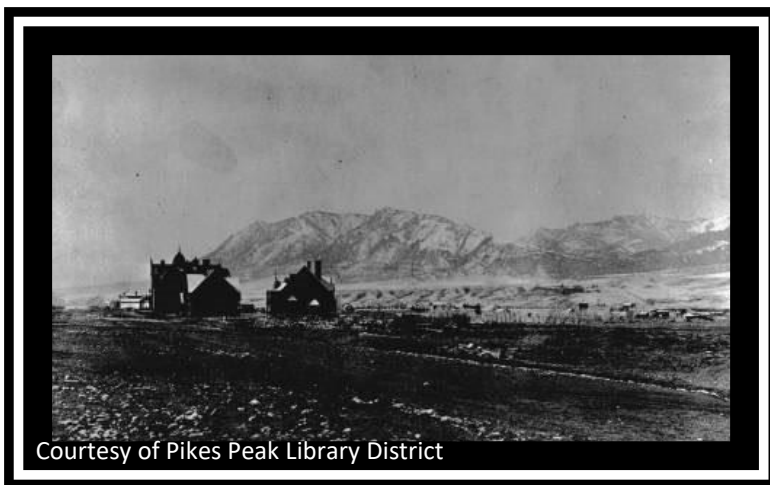


A “Tree-utiful” Vision—

Planning for a City of Parks and Trees

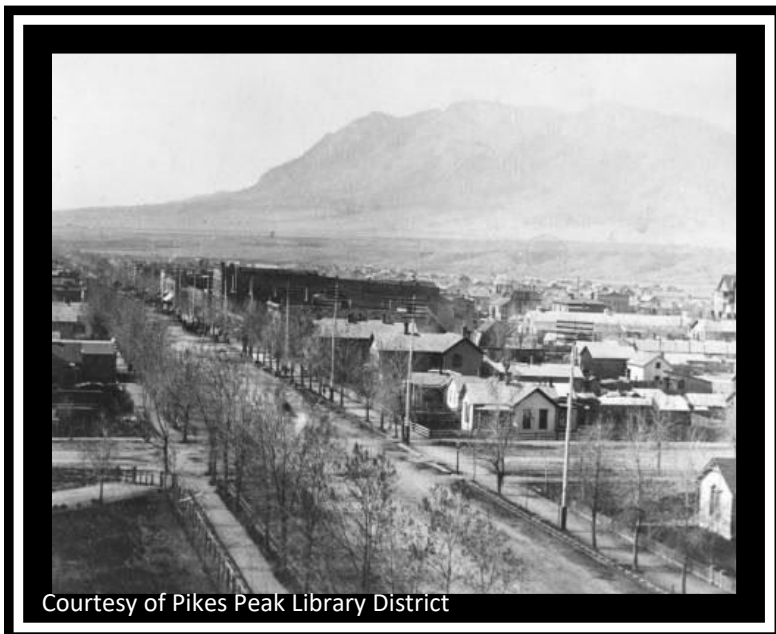
Colorado Springs is celebrating our 150th anniversary by planting 18,071 trees to commemorate the city’s founding in 1871 by General William J. Palmer. The beauty of the Pikes Peak Region is what attracted Palmer to plan for a resort community at the foot of Pikes Peak. At the time, the city could be described as barren, but the mountains provided the beautiful scenery that inspired a future vision of what the city could be. He wrote, “My theory for this place is that it should be made the most attractive place for homes in the west – a place for schools, colleges, literature, science, first class newspapers, and everything that the above imply.”



Courtesy of Pikes Peak Library District

“Cascade Avenue,” (1887).

Notice the lack of trees, the first Antlers Hotel and Cheyenne Mountain in the background.



Courtesy of Pikes Peak Library District

“Colorado Springs Street Scene,” (1897).

Thought to be Tejon St. lined with trees and irrigation ditches. The Antlers Hotel (far right), Acacia Park (bottom left) and Cheyenne Mountain (background).

General Palmer planned for Colorado Springs to have tree lined streets and parks where citizens have access to nature and healthy outdoor activities. Palmer immediately hired the first urban forester west of the Mississippi, and had 10,000 trees transplanted from the Arkansas River Valley. He planned an elaborate irrigation system of holding ponds and ditches to provide water for keeping trees alive in the hot, dry climate of Colorado Springs. Palmer was an old member of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society and was actually elected President of the International Society of Arboriculture in 1902.

In fact, to honor him, the dark, purple colored “General Palmer Lilac” of Colorado Springs, is named after him. Greenhouses were built to grow flowers for gardens, some of these “legacy” greenhouses, can be found in Monument Valley Park (MVP)! Among other legacies in MVP are The “General Palmer Lilacs” that can be found decorating the park border and gardens, the enormous, overbearing cottonwood trees, the elaborate irrigation ponds surrounded by intricate masonry, and historical water spring fountains, that have since run dry, but are the namesake for the “Springs” designation in Colorado Springs.

In 1874, Colorado College in Colorado Springs became the first institution of higher learning west of the Mississippi. College Land Script Funds allowed for the college to own North Cheyenne Cañon, known at the time as Colorado College Park, as a retreat for professors and students. At the time, the park closed its gates on Sundays. This restricted access to the cool shady canyon and as a result caused a public outrage. With a public campaign led by Helen Hunt Jackson, citizens of Colorado Springs voted to purchase North Cheyenne Canon with our city's first bond issue for a public park in 1885. After Palmer's death in 1909, his estate gifted 10,000 acres of parklands to our city including: Acacia, Monument Valley, Antler's, Pioneer Square, Prospect Lake, Palmer Park, Bear Creek Canyon, High Drive and the upper section of North Cheyenne Cañon Park.

In 1913 the U.S. Forest Service began reforesting the Pike National Forest, including North Cheyenne Canon, with 700,000 Ponderosa Pines, Douglas-Fir and Spruce trees. By the time of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency, he had signed an executive order in 1933 that allocated money to "Emergency Conservation Work." This plan created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC is speculated to have planted 3.5 billion trees all around the country known as "Roosevelt's Tree Army." They planted numerous White Fir Trees in North Cheyenne Cañon Park including the "White Fir Botanical Reserve" in the southern part of the canyon.



Planting of the Ponderosa Pines (1925).
Photographer: Harry L. Standley

From Palmer's tree-utiful vision, to FDR's conservational efforts, from being home to the first forester west of the Mississippi, to being deemed Tree City, USA in 1977, Colorado Springs has had such a rich history when it comes to trees. Now we continue the tradition of our country's conservational efforts as well as Palmer's vision! In 2021, aligning with the city of Colorado Springs 150th, Sesquicentennial, North Cheyenne Cañon Park will be planting 30 fir trees and 30 aspen trees in the area of Helen Hunt Falls. These trees will be up for adoption by the general public to continue this tradition while leaving behind their own legacy for future generations!