

Staunton State Park Saves Historical Ranch Lands

National Register of Historic Places

by Bonnie E. Scudder

The year was 1903. Archibald “Archie” Staunton, a physician from Charleston, WV, arrived in the young city of Denver on a train bound for California. He was seeking a drier climate. During his brief layover in the Mile High City, he discovered dry air and ground in Denver ... in February. Rachael, his wife who was also a physician, joined him; they decided to “remove” or relocate to Denver.

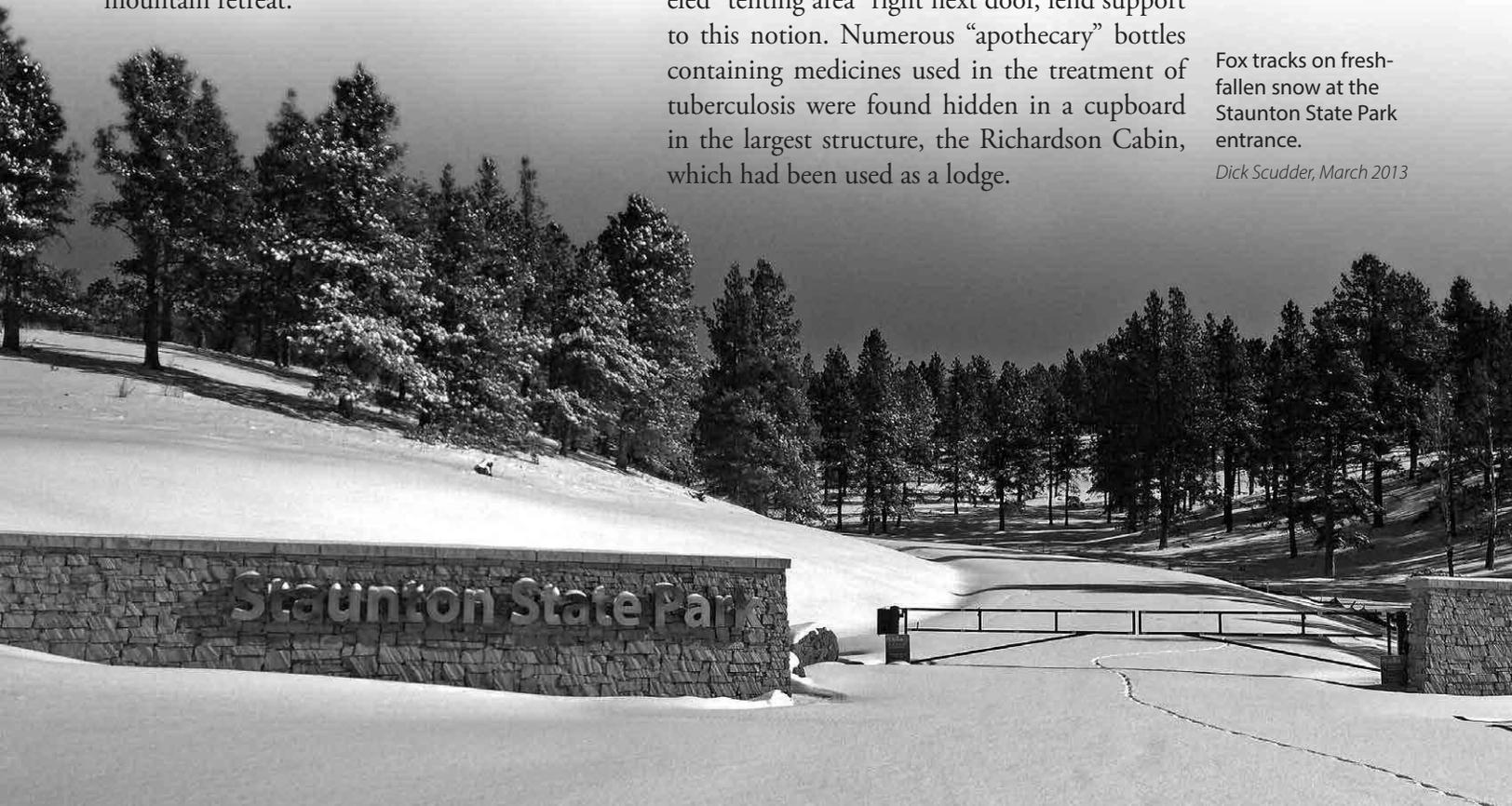
In 1906, Drs. Rachel and Archie set up their medical practices and moved into a home in Denver’s Capitol Hill neighborhood. A few years later, the Staunton family, including their young daughter, Frances, began venturing into the mountains west of Denver. On a visit to the summer resort community of Glen Elk (around 1912), Dr. Rachel and Frances met a Norwegian, John Jensen, who had a ranch near the beautiful Elk Falls. Jensen took visitors and Glen Elk residents to Elk Falls for picnic lunches. The Stauntons were hooked! They began renting cabins from Jensen for about a dollar a day to spend time during the summers in the beautiful Elk Creek Valley in Pine. After several summers, the Stauntons decided that they needed their own mountain retreat.

In 1918, Dr. Archie bought 80 acres of land with a cabin from Jensen’s neighbor, Stephen Blaine. He then started applying for homestead patents and within a few years “proved up” more than 600 acres of homesteaded land. Dr. Rachael lived on their ranch, fulfilling Homestead requirements by raising crops and livestock for seven months each year for five years. Between 1918 and 1930, the Staunton Ranch grew to include 1,720 acres of rugged, beautiful land. The ranch included cabins, sawmills, and a bunkhouse. Black Mountain Creek flowed through the property before joining Elk Creek to the south.

During Dr. Rachael’s early years at the ranch, she treated local patients, including some remaining Ute Indians. She also delivered the babies of nearby residents. There is evidence that patients suffering from tuberculosis were treated at the ranch during the warmer months, most likely during the 1920s and possibly into the early 1930s. Many stories from local residents mention a tuberculosis sanitarium at the Staunton Ranch. The presence of a “Shower House” in close proximity to several cabins, as well as a leveled “tenting area” right next door, lend support to this notion. Numerous “apothecary” bottles containing medicines used in the treatment of tuberculosis were found hidden in a cupboard in the largest structure, the Richardson Cabin, which had been used as a lodge.

Fox tracks on fresh-fallen snow at the Staunton State Park entrance.

Dick Scudder, March 2013



Logging definitely took place at this ranch up until the 1940s. An unusual cable that transported timber across a canyon can still be observed at the northernmost part of the ranch.

From the late 1930s to the mid-1950s, the Staunton Ranch was known as the Lazy V Ranch. Summer camps for boys and girls were popular at that time. The Girl Scouts started their Flying G Ranch at the Lazy V during the late 1930s. This was followed by the Lazy V Camp for Girls and the Lazy V Camp for Boys. In the 1950s, the Mount Marian Camp for Catholic Girls operated at the ranch. The Stauntons enjoyed hosting their friends and relatives during the warmer months, and they ran a summer vacation rental business for many decades as well.

Drs. Archibald and Rachael were said to have been excellent physicians. They truly loved their mountain retreat, as did those who visited there. Rachael was an invalid the last seven years of her life; and her devoted daughter, Frances, took care of her. She passed away in 1946 at the age of 71. Archibald and Frances lived together in the Denver home and at the Ranch until Archie passed away in 1958 at age 90. Frances was extremely close to her parents.

Although she had a scholarship to the Julliard School in New York, Fran-

ces left after only one year because she was homesick. In the mid-1920s, Frances sang solos and duets on KOA Radio, and she received great praise for her talent. In the 1940s, she sang in two Verdi operas, "*Rigoletto*" and "*Il Travatore*". In both, she had the mezzo-soprano lead and received much praise. She attended the University of Denver, receiving her BA in 1932, and her MA in music in 1945.

Frances did not marry and had no heirs. After her father's death, she wrote her "Last Will and Testament," bequeathing her family's homestead ranch to the State of Colorado to be developed into "Staunton State Park" for all of the people of Colorado to enjoy. The 1,720 acres was transferred to the State in 1986, three years prior to the passing of Miss Staunton in 1989 at the age of 89.

Although Colorado received the Staunton Ranch in 1986, there were a number of obstacles to overcome before the state park could be developed. A main concern was access to the park, as it was necessary to drive through a subdivision to reach this property. In 1999, the State of Colorado was able to purchase around 2,000 acres from two adjoining ranch properties, to address this concern. Much of the Elk Falls Ranch and the majority of the Davis Ranch were acquired using Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO)

funds. In 2006, 80 acres belonging to the family of playwright Mary Coyle Chase were added, bringing the total acreage of the park to approximately 3,800 acres. With the addition of the Chase and Davis properties, it was possible to create an entrance from South Elk Creek Road to provide parking and picnicking areas and to develop a comprehensive trail system throughout the park.

The Staunton Ranch buildings received designation as a "National Rural Historic Landscape" on Dec. 4, 2012. The application on behalf of Staunton State Park was completed by Elizabeth Held, M.A., University of Colorado at Denver, in Architecture and Historic Preservation based on manuscripts in the Staunton Collection at the History Colorado Center's Stephen H. Hart Library, with assistance from other historians.

Staunton State Park opened to the public on May 18, 2013. Phase One of the park offers picnicking, hiking, rock climbing, fishing, horseback riding, and mountain biking. Eighteen miles of trails cover the park. Lion's Head and the spectacular Elk Falls are included in the acreage, although trails to these landmarks are slated for later development. Camping is also planned in later phases. 🏡

Biography:

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The Staunton homestead cabin, called "Wildwood" by the family, is a two-story structure, 20 feet by 40 feet, with a large porch. The building has a large fireplace of local stone, as well as a kitchen and living room.

Bonnie Scudder, 2011

