

County Historical Commission Celebrates “40”

By Margaret T. Chapman

Even when choosing only the “nuggets” of 40 years of activities by the Jefferson County Historical Commission (JCHC), there is just too much to “mine.”

The stimulus for formation of a new group was the approaching national Bicentennial and Colorado’s Centennial. The Arvada Historical Society, the Jefferson County Historical Society, the Golden Landmarks Association, and the Wheat Ridge Historical Society collaborated in asking that the County Commissioners create a new organization to coordinate activities, but also be “an on-going group to inventory county historical sites, set up a reference library, and work with the schools.”

Kicking off the centennial at Jeffco Fairgrounds March 2, 1975. The county’s big Centennial-Bicentennial event was held July 4, 1976, also at the Fairgrounds.

From a JCHC scrapbook



“In 1974 a need was felt for an umbrella group to coordinate the historical activities of the County and to act as a liaison with National, State, and local historical organizations,” wrote Dorothy Lombard in her President’s Message for the 1988 summer edition of *Historically Jeffco*.

The Historical Commission (now known as JCHC) has varied in size through the years, but today consists of 11 members appointed by the

Jefferson County Board of County Commissioners, two from each Commissioner District and five at-large. Over the years, dozens of dedicated volunteers have worked to uncover and promote the fascinating stories of our county’s past. As we celebrate this anniversary and the 2014 Dana Crawford Award that recognizes JCHC’s 40 years of efforts, we remember the commitment of founders such as Jane Gardner, Hazel Humphrey, Gene Childs, Connie Fahnestock, Francis Rizzari, Sandy Crain, Elmer Wyland, Marjorie Clement, Mary Binder, and Naomi Olson—all of whom served among the very first JCHC appointees and made many other contributions.

A premier JCHC event in the early days was organizing and sponsoring the Festival of the West, a giant carnival celebrating Jefferson County. The first event was held in 1975 as a “dress rehearsal for the big July 4, 1976, Centennial-Bicentennial birthday party.” JCHC continued its management of the Festival through 1980, when a nonprofit organization was formed to take over the project. JCHC members continued support, with Vi Hader often seen staffing the booth each Fourth of July at the Fairgrounds.

The Jefferson County Hall of Fame was originated in 1979. Each year since then, honors are bestowed upon two Jeffco residents who have made outstanding contributions to its history. One honoree is living and the other is deceased. Today the images and tributes to these movers and shakers of the county’s past can be viewed in the hallway near Commissioners’ Hearing Room 1, a Who’s Who of accomplishment in county politics, business, and history.

Through JCHC efforts, many places have been recognized for their historic value. In 1976, 25 sites were designated as “Centennial Sites.” JCHC members have helped pursue recognition for historic properties on the National Register of Historic Sites, and 40 sites, most privately owned, have been designated County Landmarks since that program began in 2003.

In 1985, JCHC published “From Scratch,” a history of Jefferson County produced after years

of work by members. Three years later, the first edition of the *Historically Jeffco* magazine was produced, a small printed report that grew out of an earlier newsletter. In 1998 the magazine took on a new image, as a glossy, well designed publication of more than 40 pages. Beginning in the 1980s, JCHC also undertook to create and manage a Placenames database that now has more than 3,000 entries.

In July 1999, JCHC celebrated its 25th Anniversary. “UCD History professor Tom Noel recounted Jefferson County’s history with slides from the greatest natural landmarks to recent structures including the County courthouse and ‘the Taj, that someday will be treasured like the Eiffel Tower or the dome of Monticello.” In this 1999 edition, Noel was quoted that *Historically Jeffco* was the only magazine published by a county historical commission in Colorado.

May 14, 2005, marked the first annual JCHC Symposium, held in Morrison, as an opportunity for members of historical groups to share information. Attendees learned about the function of JCHC, historic themes in Jefferson County, the Most Endangered Places Program of Colorado Preservation, Inc., the Cultural Resources Survey, the North Fork Historic District, and the Civilian Conservation Corps. JCHC congratulated the community of the former Pine for its success in getting its historic name – Pine Grove – restored. Ten symposiums have taken place, hosted by JCHC in cooperation with historical organizations around the county.

The Cultural Resources Survey was a multi-year grant-funded project intended to identify significant historic resources in unincorporated areas. Initiated in 1999, the project created an inventory of historic (pre-1951) properties, evaluating each in the field to determine its architectural integrity. Out of 4,000 properties surveyed, about 500 were deemed significant resources.

Comparable to the nation’s and Jeffco’s Bicentennial celebrations was the celebration of Jefferson County’s Sesquicentennial – a party so big that it lasted three years –2009-2011. JCHC started the celebration in 2009 with members and friends marching in parades throughout the county, including the parade for 150th Anniver-

sary of Golden. Costumes ranged from gamblers and merchants to Annie Oakley and ladies in hoop skirts. During 2010, the Commission continued participating in events and parades with some new characters – a miner, a farm wife and a Victorian lady. Starting in 2009, the annual Hall of Fame Ceremony was changed to an evening reception. This tradition is now on-going.



The capstone event of 2011, the Sesquicentennial Gala held Nov. 18 at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds, was a great success by any measure. It was a mild, beautiful late autumn evening that reminds us of just why we live along Colorado’s Front Range. Approximately 500 attendees, many in costume, feasted on barbeque, enjoyed entertainment by the volunteer Civil War band, and perused displays of county history and artifacts collected for the time capsule.

On April 13, 2012, the Time Capsule—marking the Sesquicentennial—was buried on the back patio of the Jefferson County Administration and Courts Facility. This “message to the future” is to be “rediscovered” in 2061, just in time for the county’s Bicentennial. ☺

Learn more about JCHC’s history online:
<http://jeffco.us/planning-and-zoning/historical-commission/publications/>
<http://jeffco.us/placenames/>
<http://historicallyjeffco.org>

JCHC members present a sign designating Lutheran Medical Center a “Centennial Site” in 1975.

From a JCHC scrapbook