

THESIS

MAKING MEANING IN A MODERN WORLD:  
PLACE AND IDENTITY IN LEADVILLE, COLORADO

Submitted by

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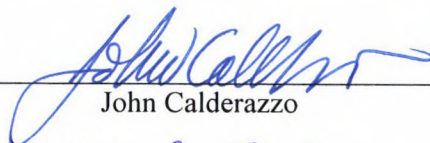
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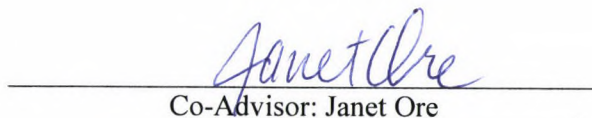
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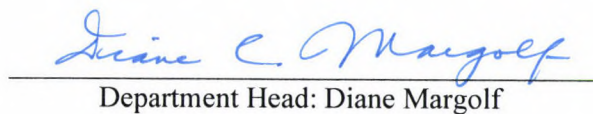
WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY JENNIFER HAWK ENTITLED MAKING MEANING IN A MODERN WORLD: PLACE AND IDENTITY IN LEADVILLE COLORADO BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### MAKING MEANING IN A MODERN WORLD

### PLACE AND IDENTITY IN LEADVILLE, COLORADO

Leadville, Colorado is one of many former mining towns significant to not only the state of Colorado, but also to the history of the West as a whole. Part of the larger history of the extractive industries on which the Western United States was founded, mining towns like Leadville provide a postindustrial landscape through which to study the ways in which individuals and communities rely on their history and memory to maintain a stable identity in a modern world that no longer accommodates the kind of economic structure that they most strongly identify with. This thesis consists of three parts, two of which offer a more traditional historical study of the ways in which Leadville residents use their past to mitigate the realities of life in the modern world. The third portion, a non-fiction essay, reflects on my own experiences with both Leadville and with the nature of modern life.

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## INTRODUCTION:

*“Without memory, life would consist of momentary experiences that have little relation to one another...without memory, we could not have the sense of continuity even to know who we are.”*

Elizabeth F. Loftus

Leadville, Colorado—once the site of one of the greatest gold and silver mining booms in the world and home to more than thirty thousand people—now sits serenely in the middle of the Arkansas Valley, a town of three thousand people at most.<sup>1</sup> Standing in the middle of town, visitors feel connected to the surrounding environment in a way that is no longer common in a world where the built environment tends to overwhelm the natural. This far into the Rockies, mountains rise up on all sides of town, their tops barren of trees, their grey rock exposed in patches where the snow has been blown away by the harsh winds that also sweep through town each winter. Overlooking the Twin Lakes not twenty miles from Leadville stand Mount Elbert and Mount Massive, the two tallest peaks in the state of Colorado. Major landmarks for Leadville locals, these peaks have

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<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau, Population Division, “Table 4: Annual Estimates of the Population for Incorporated Places in Colorado, Listed Alphabetically: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2003” <http://www.census.gov/popest/cities/tables/SUB-EST2003-04-08.pdf>, accessed December 6, 2009.

also become a part of the town's appeal for outdoor recreation seekers in summer and winter alike.

I first experienced Leadville on a camping trip to the Twin Lakes during my sophomore year of college. Because my friend's mother had grown up in Leadville, and because none of us were avid outdoorswomen, we drove into town during the daytime to see what it was like. Knowing that Leadville was far from overrun by commercial development, my imagination had conjured idyllic images of a town frozen at some unspecified point in time, allowing visitors a uniquely authentic glimpse of the past. In reality, what we found looked to me like a city sincerely trying to recall something that it once was. Its historic buildings had been faithfully preserved to house gift shops and bookstores targeted primarily at tourists, and the town itself seemed to promote its connections to the past at every turn through museums and advertisements as well as abandoned mining and smelting sites.

Confronted by the effects of time on this small former mining town, I became fascinated by the idea of what it would have been like fifty years before, when what is now a gift shop would have housed a catalog or appliance store and mining fueled not only the town's economy but also the culture of its daily life. I wondered what the old middle school looked like before it became the National Mining Museum, what scary stories the kids would tell about the old brick hospital building that was recently divided into condominiums. While it may be possible faithfully and sincerely to preserve the past, no town or community can truly avoid the effects of the passage of time. Vacant buildings quickly deteriorate; structures that are restored and reused take on new meaning; people



move out of town as new residents arrive; old appliances become obsolete; and old commercial systems change over time, resulting in the flight of the local grocer in favor of a newly constructed and comparably massive corporate-run grocery store. The physical and cultural landscape of a town cannot remain static any more than the modern community can remain untouched by the social networks that exist outside of the town's geographical boundaries.

Indeed, the propensity of the modern world to undergo rapid change, as well as encourage movement and frequent interaction with ever larger populations of people would seem to disrupt community in irrevocably destructive ways. In addition to the physical movement caused by those commercial and state structures, which move families around the country in search of new jobs or military postings, many individuals live and work in two different cities. The time spent at work and in commuting absorbs twelve or thirteen hours in a day, making it difficult to do the kinds of ordinary activities that create a sense of community. As a result, activities that can contribute to the establishment of community, whether they be attending high school sports games, organizing town meetings, or simply running into neighbors at the grocery store, are no longer as common as they once were.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the highly globalized world of television and Internet simultaneously encourages connectedness to a larger world and isolation from the smaller, more concrete environment of towns and neighborhoods.

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<sup>2</sup> Jim Morrison, interview by author, 7 November 2009: Morrison explains that "You lose so much of a real community sentiment when the people living within that community don't work within that community...they leave on a daily basis, like I do, and they're gone a minimum ten hours...you're not here to pick up your kid after school; you're not here to be a part of school functions."

In the fragmented and mobile world of the present, individuals search for a sense of place, of the past, and of community in order to create for themselves a more concrete identity in the present. On this, David Jacobson argues that not only are concepts of “home” and “place” intrinsic to human nature, they are also a part of an important process of orienting oneself in space and time in order to give meaning to the present.<sup>3</sup> That is, in an attempt to cope with a fragmented sense of self and sense of place, individuals look to the past to make the present moment more lasting, or at least more meaningful.

This act of orienting oneself in both space and time is not done in isolation. Individual memories and identities form as part of a larger dialogue with others and in relation to the surrounding influences of environment and community.<sup>4</sup> Over time, each of us develops a unique perspective, framed by our memories of home, family, community, and culture, as well as the various memories passed down to us by family and community members. This framework of memories and experiences, then, becomes essential to the ways in which each of us views and interprets the world around us.<sup>5</sup> Through this process of memory, individual and community identity and sense of place become mutually dependent, and as a result, become just as central to the formation of communities as communities are to the formation of these memories and identities in the

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<sup>3</sup> David Jacobson, *Place and Belonging in America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 127.

<sup>4</sup> David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Translated and edited by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 43: Halbwachs argues that memory cannot exist outside of the existing framework of collective memory within a community.



first place.<sup>6</sup> Memory, for example, can provide the context in which individuals conceptualize their own identity, and thus their place within the community.<sup>7</sup> This concept of an individual's place within the community, then, becomes key to that person's sense of place.

The problem, posed by the challenges of a modern, mobile world is one of constructing a sense of place out of an often fragmented sense of memory and identity. Taking the lead of Benedict Anderson with his theory of "imagined communities," David Glassberg has argued that "a shared history—elements of a past remembered in common as well as elements forgotten in common—is the crucial element in the creation of an 'imagined community' through which disparate individuals and groups envision themselves as members of a collective with a common present and future."<sup>8</sup> Thus, the problem that contemporary communities now face is the question of how individuals situate themselves both temporally and spatially at a time when the very ideas of community and place have increasingly uncertain boundaries and shared memories are less and less common.

Despite these challenges however, people are, by and large, not *placeless*. Rather, they try in different ways to assemble pieces of the past, their identity, and their community into a sense of place. Through its current relationship to and use of the past as

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<sup>6</sup> Glassberg, 116. "The collective memories attached to places," Glassberg argues, "emerge out of dialogue and social interaction, as individuals discuss their different perceptions of place with one another and discover common ground."

<sup>7</sup> Halbwachs, 43. According to Halbwachs, "No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections." See also David Thelen, "Memory and American History" *The Journal of American History* (Mar. 1989): 1119. Thelen further elaborates on this concept that "memory, private and individual as much as collective and cultural, is not made in isolation but in conversations with others that occur in the contexts of community, broader politics, and social dynamics."

<sup>8</sup> Glassberg, 11.

both a commodity and a basis for its contemporary identity, the small, former mining town of Leadville, Colorado makes clear the persistence of place-based identity and community in a modern world. Like any other place, Leadville is subject to change over time and the potentially fragmenting realities of modern life. Its residents move and change, work in areas outside of the town's boundaries, interact with visitors and part-time residents who bring with them new cultures and ways of life, and make daily decisions about the economic future of their town that force an acknowledgement of the town's present needs. Still, though, Leadville residents feel an attachment to their town and its heritage that has fueled a sense of community that has persisted through decades of both prosperity and hardship. Even after the loss of more than half of its population with the closing of the Climax mine in the late 1980s, and a recent influx of vacation-home owners and new residents who live in Leadville but work in the surrounding counties, the town's community remains intact.

What historians need, then, is not only an examination of the significance of *place* to community and identity formation, but also a redefinition of the meaning of *community* within this context. If community is defined as a static social structure apart from the realities of historical change, it would indeed be "atomized" by the "mere fact of moving," or migrating, peoples.<sup>9</sup> Rather, a new definition of community is needed in order to consider the possibility that change does not necessarily equal the destruction of community. In order to account for the pressures of the modern world, we must think of community not just as a social unit based in place, but also as an experience.<sup>10</sup> By

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 92.

<sup>10</sup> Bender, 16.



viewing community in this way, as a particular kind of human interaction or experience rooted in, but not entirely dependent on, place, we can allow for historical circumstances and change over time within that community. In this way, community has the ability to outlast the patterns of modern life that undermine traditional ideas about community as a relatively constant social, cultural and location-based construct.

Because of explorations like this—of community, memory, and sense of place—the Leadville that I’ve come to know is different from the one that I experienced years ago. Now my perspective is colored by both memories of local residents and ideas about what historians like to call the “cultural landscapes” and the “adaptive reuse” of its built environment. In this light, Leadville has accomplished something incredible in its resistance to development in the form of resort tourism, and in its conscious and unconscious efforts to preserve its physical and cultural heritage. The memory of mining lives on in Leadville, and not necessarily just for its value as a tourist attraction. Thus, in setting out to try to reconstruct for myself what Leadville once was through the memories of the individuals who lived that history, I came across something I had not anticipated. Where I expected to find vivid, nostalgic reminiscences about cultural landscapes and buildings that once were, I instead found a more general sense of place and a community given meaning not by a defined collective memory but by a general sense of this place’s meaning and heritage.

To reflect this layered perception of a place that many people never experience as more than the sign that marks their exit from I-70 as they head toward the giant Copper Mountain ski resort, I have attempted to do several things. One is to explain the

persistence of community in Leadville despite the sometimes merciless cycle of boom and bust. Along with this question of how and why community has been so resilient in Leadville, I ask why outsiders are drawn to a community feeling, resulting in the heritage tourism upon which the town's economy now depends. Further, I attempt to demonstrate the unique ways in which Leadville's insistence on holding on to its heritage reflects larger issues of place, memory, and identity in a somewhat fragmented modern world. In this discussion of the role of heritage in modern identity and community, then, I seek also to explore the meaning and purpose of historic preservation as an integral part of community identity formation and also an instinctive reaction to the change and displacement brought about by modern economic and social structures. Built and natural environments, the combination of which make up the cultural landscape, are inherently dynamic. As cities, economies, and social systems change, so do cultural landscapes and the communities that form in relationship to them.

In this, Leadville proves an interesting example of the ways in which communities mitigate change, for in many ways the town still embodies the image of the mythical West of the early twentieth century. It revives the idea of an unspoiled land of opportunity in which risk leads to reward and this spirit of independence and self-reliance draws tourists seeking refuge from the modern conveniences and fast paced cities of today's world. This longing for a simpler time certainly is not unique to Leadville, nor is it unique to western mining towns in general. That longing is the reason that contemporary painters like Thomas Kincaid are able to exploit the image of the idyllic country cottage in paintings and on greeting cards. It is why so many tourists seek out



towns like Leadville in an attempt to appreciate the so-called authentic past of the nation. Not only is there something pervasive about this desire to preserve—or at least reconstruct the past out of the fragments of days gone by that have survived into the present—there is something important about the continued existence of a community in Leadville whose foundation lies in the combination of social structures, collective memory, and a preserved physical and cultural heritage. Finally, then, I conclude with a nonfiction account of my own experience in Leadville and through it, a description of my encounter with the problems of modernity.

This study does not claim to be any kind of definitive narrative of the history of Leadville. In a traditional sense, it is not really about the history of Leadville at all. What it is about are the ways in which memory shapes the foundations of our daily lives in the present. It is about the endurance of community and of the real and perceived past connections that communities feel, and it is about the journey that historians take when we enter into both the study of a place and a relationship with the community that lives there. I have attempted to see Leadville's past through the eyes its people, and in doing so hope to reflect not just on the nature and struggles of life in a postindustrial economy but on the ways in which place and the past continue to shape the present.

When I undertook this project, I did so with the expectation that my interactions with Leadville would shed light on the nature of change in the modern world and the ways in which individuals and communities that seemed to cling to the past coped with the intrusion of new layers of meaning on their comfortable images of the past. As a result, the framework that guides this narrative is heavily theoretical in nature. At times,

the conceptual approach that I attempt to follow exceeds my ability to provide as much grounded evidence of these ideas as I would like. Were the project to continue, I would have to conduct more research on residents' memories in relation to written and physical evidence. Furthermore, I would conduct more interviews, including interviews of a broader variety of town residents. As it stands, however, this thesis attempts to provide a framework in which to analyze not only what happened in the past, but the ways in which that past is remembered, and the significance of that remembered past to one former mining community in Colorado.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### LIVING IN THE CLOUD CITY

Alternately called the Cloud City, the Magic City, and the Greatest Mining Camp in the World, Leadville was once the focus of a great deal of local and national attention, and indeed, these titles were not unearned. But the town's history is more than a series of nostalgic reminiscences about hard-won mining wealth or sensational stories of gunslingers and saloons; it has become a part of its present identity. Pamphlets and souvenir books sold throughout town give accounts of simpler, happier times—of the grand, lively days gone by. These books, written for curious tourists anxious to gain a sense of this mining boomtown's past, paint pictures of times long past, of grand adventure and massive wealth, of the nation's attention centered on Leadville as its population boomed from just three hundred residents in 1878 to more than thirty thousand just over two years later.<sup>1</sup> Primarily written by longtime Leadville residents, the books communicate an obvious pride in Leadville's past and future, detailing the highlights of the town's history, from H.A.W. and Baby Doe Tabor to Easter parades and the construction of the famous 1896 ice palace.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Blair and E. Richard Churchill, *Everybody Came to Leadville* (Leadville: Timberline Books, 1971), 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Particularly illustrative of this pride of place are Edward Blair's *Palace of Ice: A History of the Leadville Ice Palace of 1896* (Leadville: Timberline Books, 1972) and Blair and Churchill's *Everybody Came to Leadville*.



In addition to the draw of a sensationalized past, there aren't many places in the country more beautiful than this one—as evidenced by the town's second place ranking in the "Most Scenic Dump" competition<sup>3</sup>—but living at 10,200 feet comes at a price. Winters here are long and hard; once the snow comes, it stays, piling high on either side of the town's main street, Harrison Avenue. Winter can last anywhere from October or November through May, and the snow, ice, and wind that accompany it can make travel to and through town downright unpleasant.<sup>4</sup> The altitude, too, can take its toll on residents' bodies, and some families eventually choose to leave the mountain city to take care of loved ones whose medical problems make life at ten thousand feet impossible.<sup>5</sup> In part because of its environment, Leadville always has experienced higher than average migration, both to and from town, as the promise of mining wealth drew in hopeful prospectors and the biophysical reality of mining work and mountain life pushed them back out. Even at the height of gold and silver's fortunes, turnover rates in town were high; longtime resident Howard Tritz recalls that miners' wives often refused to remain in Leadville, leaving men to choose either the mine or marriage.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Bob Hartzell, interview by author, 12 November 2009: In the interview, Bob Hartzell explains that while he was on City Council, there was a contest for "Most Scenic Dump." He remarks offhandedly that after finding out about the contest, "I went out to our landfill, the dump, and I took a picture so you knew it was a dump, but there was the Sawatch Range in the background and sent it in and we took second place. First place went to a dump in Alaska. [This is] just such a neat place."

<sup>4</sup> Christian J. Buys, *Historic Leadville in Rare Photographs and Drawings* (Ouray, Colorado: Western Reflections, 1997): This famous photo of Leadville shows the town blanketed in ice, enormous icicles hanging at an angle from rooftops as they had formed in the persistent wind.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Fuchtmann, interview by author, 14 July 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Howard Tritz, interview by author, 12 November 2009: In this interview, Tritz describes the "120 percent turnover rate" at the Climax mine—"We would hire a young metallurgist just out of the School of Mines and you would move him up the ladder as time goes on...[but] his wife says I can't stand this place...I don't want to stay here anymore...we'd just hire and hire and hire, and most of it was because they couldn't handle the winter." See also Jim Morrison, interview by author, 7 November 2009: In this interview, Morrison describes the first years of his own marriage after moving back to Leadville having attended college in Denver—"it was touch and go there for awhile" because his wife, having come from the city, couldn't see what there was to do in Leadville or why anyone would want to live there. Now, he says, it's the opposite.



However, despite the many reasons to pack up and head to lower altitudes, or at least to a place where snow accumulation will never be such that your second story porch multitasks as a front door, Leadville has maintained an incredibly persistent sense of place and community over the course of the more than one hundred years. With its picturesque views and quaint, colorful Victorian houses, Leadville revives a certain nostalgia for a lost, idealized past in which life was somehow not only simpler but also happier. Indeed, because it has this ability to revive the memory of the past in such a vivid way, Leadville is uniquely positioned to shed light on the impact of memory on the process of community and identity formation. Here, memory and nostalgia have the power to connect community members to their history in a way that transforms this idea of the lost past into a concrete, living history that shapes residents' perceptions of their individual identities, and influences the formation and persistence of local community.<sup>7</sup> By preserving the town's connections to the so-called authentic past, through family or community structures and through the maintenance of a strong mining heritage within the culture of the community, Leadville manages to remake itself time and time again, reassembling the fragments of its former self after each boom and bust.<sup>8</sup>

This cycle of boom and bust, which has been a consistent part of life in Leadville since its founding in 1877, always has made life somewhat unpredictable. In addition to being devastated by the Silver Panic of 1893 after the repeal of the Sherman Silver

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<sup>7</sup> Patricia Nelson Limerick, "The Gold Rush and the Shaping of the American West" *California History* (Spring 1998): 33-34. According to Limerick, nostalgia and memory are "at work in every sphere of our lives," including the shaping of life and culture in the West.

<sup>8</sup> Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late Nineteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), xiii. In *Authentic Indians*, Raibmon discusses the work that ideas about authenticity, as well as memory more generally, do in the formation of individual and group identities. In her preface, she quotes Timothy Findley, saying "We *are* what we remember."

Purchase Act, Leadville saw repeated crisis and recovery throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.<sup>9</sup> For example, having diversified its mining interests after the price of silver bottomed out in 1893, Leadville again saw the effects of economic downturn when the metals market in the United States dried up in 1907. A mere three years later, however, recovery made its appearance with the discovery of zinc carbonates.<sup>10</sup> Further, the discovery of molybdenum—then used primarily as a hardener for steel—during World War I caused both boom and bust in rapid succession with the formation of the Climax Molybdenum Company during the war and its subsequent closure in 1919 when the demand for steel drastically dropped after the war's end.<sup>11</sup> Following that devastating downturn, Leadville would not see another economic boom until the massive influx of workers to the town with the construction of Camp Hale on behalf of the US Army in 1942, as well as the increase in demand for molybdenum that accompanied U.S. entry into World War II.<sup>12</sup> After the war, molybdenum production continued with varying degrees of success, reaching the height of its prosperity in 1982, just one year before the mine began to shut down the majority of its operations, resulting in the loss of almost three thousand jobs and a local unemployment rate of around eighty percent.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Kristen Iversen, *Molly Brown, Unraveling the Myth: The True Life Story of the Titanic's Most Famous Survivor* (Boulder: Johnson Books, 1999), 102.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Blair, *Leadville: Colorado's Magic City* (Boulder: Fred Pruett Books, 1980), 214.

<sup>11</sup> Blair, 223.

<sup>12</sup> Blair, 234.

<sup>13</sup> Jason Blevins, "Leadville: Many ready to again embrace old path to prosperity," *Denver Post*, 9 December 2009. See also Jason Starr, "Climax owners want to reopen: Mine of Fremont Pass could be operating again by 2009," *The Mountain Mail*, 5 April 2006.



Longtime resident Sharon Bland, who now owns and runs the famous Tabor Opera House, recalls growing up in this boom and bust economy. “There were times when we had a bowling alley and times when we didn’t,” she says, “and [there were] times when we had the movie theater and we had Saturday morning movies for the kids and if you had seven milk bottle tops you could get in for free.”<sup>14</sup> Several years ago, the bowling alley shut down again and now sits empty across from the Safeway just east of town, its sign still standing but its peeling, faded siding evidence the building’s years of disrepair. More than twenty years after the Climax mine shut down the bulk of its operations, Leadville residents are left to hope that the most recent company to acquire the mine, Freeport-McMoRan, will restore operations and bring back the kind of prosperity that only mining can offer a town like Leadville.<sup>15</sup>

Still, despite the challenges of boom and bust, and the marginal chance that it will ever see a return of great mining wealth, Leadville remains persistent in its desire to stay true to its industrial heritage. It is one of the few Colorado towns untouched by gambling and resort tourism, and its residents continue to resist any development that would alter its historic fabric. Bordered by Summit and Eagle counties, which house ski resorts like Vail and gambling towns like Central City, Leadville residents remain proud of the town’s original buildings and hard won mining heritage. Unlike resort towns like Vail, which have manufactured a sense of place by constructing beautiful new buildings that are meant to look old but yet contain all of the luxuries of life in a late twentieth century

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<sup>14</sup> Sharon Bland, interview by author, 12 November 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Blevins, “Leadville: Many ready to again embrace old path to prosperity,” According to this Blevins, Freeport-McMoRan acquired the mine in 2006 when it bought out former owner Phelps Dodge.

town, Leadville has held on to its past in part through the structures that house its current businesses and homes.<sup>16</sup>

Walking north on Harrison Avenue, you pass such landmarks as City Hall, a square brick building with a steeply pitched roof that sits somewhat isolated at the end of the street. Because of its position next to the modern fire station, it is unattached to the continuous row of red brick buildings that occupy the rest of Harrison Avenue. Built in 1905 to house what was then the town's post office, the building remains true to its nineteenth century construction as part of Leadville's National Historic Landmark district. Further down Harrison sits the Golden Burro Café—the “Brass Ass”—which was built at the end of the nineteenth century to house Leo A. Klein Pianos and Organs but now proudly displays its neon, 1950s diner-style sign, topped with a weathervane on which sits a metal donkey. Continuing north along Harrison, you see the Delaware Hotel, a beautiful red-brick corner building that was constructed in 1886 at the height of the silver boom by Delaware merchants William, George and John Callaway. Just across the street is a building which now houses the Silver Dollar Saloon. Once Hyman's Saloon, it retains its historic wood-lined entrance and dark wood exterior, and locals know it as the building in which Doc Holliday *shot* but did not *kill* his last man. Other landmarks in town include the Tabor Opera House, where Oscar Wilde spoke, Houdini performed, and John Phillips Sousa conducted his band; the Tabor Grand Hotel, which upon its construction in 1885 boasted the first hydraulic elevator in Leadville; and Ice Palace

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<sup>16</sup> Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 235. Here, Rothman traces Vail's beginnings, declaring it to be the “first truly one-developer, integrated resort in postwar Western skiing.” It had only one purpose: “to create an environment where people could enjoy the experience of skiing” while the businesses there made their profits.



Park, which is now entirely grass but was once the site of the famous Leadville Ice Palace of 1896.

All of these buildings, excluding those destroyed by fire in the early twentieth century, are original to the “early days” when H.A.W. Tabor walked the streets of Leadville and the West was a land of pure, wild opportunity.<sup>17</sup> Contributing to this consistency are both the strong presence of the past itself and the sense of pride of place that is pervasive within the everyday life and economy of the town. A gigantic concrete wall just south of town reads: “We love Leadville—Great Living at 10,200.” Just north of town on the same road stands a large, old-fashioned wood sign that reads: “Here on the roof-top of the nation flourished about 1877 the most famous silver mining camp in the world.”

Though opportunities abound for visitors to read and experience Leadville’s past, residents are also happy to tell the story of the people who came to live at this altitude, as well as why the town has endured for so long. As the story goes, “Leadville’s history began just before the Civil War when five rugged prospectors entered a gulch south of the headwaters of the Arkansas River.”<sup>18</sup> It was at this time that the famous Abe Lee discovered gold in what became known as the California Gulch—so named in reference to the 1849 California gold rush, as Lee is rumored to have exclaimed something like “I’ve got all of California in this here pan.”<sup>19</sup> With the discovery of silver in and around California Gulch, the settlement expanded from its roots in the original town of Oro City

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<sup>17</sup> More information about each of these buildings can be found in the “Leadville Historic Walking Tour, 2009,” a Special Publication of the *Leadville Herald Democrat*.

<sup>18</sup> Pamphlet, undated, published by the Leadville Chamber of Commerce: “If you miss historic Leadville, you miss Colorado.”

<sup>19</sup> Howard Tritz, interview by author, 12 November 2009.

to become what is now Leadville, the last Oro residents moving down to Leadville around 1926, although Leadville flourished on its own long before that date.<sup>20</sup>

Afterwards, the city thrived, massive wealth flowing in and out of it daily until the Sherman Silver Purchase Act was repealed in 1893 and the price of silver bottomed out, bringing on the town's first major "bust" years.

A well-known story from Leadville's early days concerns H.A.W. and "Baby Doe" Tabor. After providing a seventeen dollar grubstake to a team of soon to be successful prospectors, August Rishce and George Hook, H.A.W. Tabor began a life of incredible fortune.<sup>21</sup> His legacy is seen throughout Leadville in structures like the Tabor Opera House, the Tabor Grand Hotel, and most famously, the Matchless Mine in which his mistress Baby Doe lived out the last years of her life. However, with the repeal of the Sherman Act in 1893, he and Baby Doe went bankrupt.<sup>22</sup> After Tabor's death in 1899, Baby Doe lived the last thirty years of her life alone and penniless in the cabin next to the Matchless Mine. Myth has it that before he died, H.A.W. Tabor told Baby Doe to "hang on to the Matchless, for it will make millions again when silver comes back."<sup>23</sup> Whether or not Tabor actually told her to "hang on to the Matchless," Baby Doe became Leadville's eccentric relic of the silver boom's great wealth, guarding her cabin at the Matchless with a shotgun in hand and only occasionally taking trips into town, her feet wrapped in burlap sacks.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Jim Morrison, interview by author, 7 November 2009: Morrison explains that his grandparents were the last of the residents of Oro City to move to Leadville in the 1920's. He dates their move to 1926.

<sup>21</sup> Blair, 46-48.

<sup>22</sup> Blair and Churchill, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> National Mining Hall of Fame and Museum, Matchless Mine tour, recorded by author, 12 September 2009. See also, Bill Shuster, interview by author, 23 November 2009.



These stories and others like them are directed at tourists visiting Leadville through pamphlets, souvenir books, museums and historic sites, but the town's history is not just a commodity to market to curious tourists; it is also a part of the culture of the community. Whether the mines are in operation or not, Leadville has always been, above all else, a mining town, and this heritage has become part of the vocabularies, and even identities, of its residents. Very few explanations of the town's past and current character fail to mention the past and present price of molybdenum, or the Climax Mine's recent acquisition by Freeport-McMoRan, which until recently was renovating the old mill structures at the mine with an intent to resume production.<sup>25</sup> Despite setbacks to these renovations and then the "mothballing" of the project when the 2008 economic recession began, Leadville residents speak hopefully of the mine's future. They are constantly tracking the current price of molybdenum, or as they somewhat fondly refer to it, "moly," in search of some indicator of the mine, and the town's, future. Residents still orient their stories on a general timeline by using phrases like "back in the Climax days," as if to indicate that the mine represented a set time period in Leadville's past.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, variations of the often-repeated phrase, "If you can't grow it, you have to mine it," can be found in daily conversation, as well as on the wall of Mining Hall of Fame director Bob Hartzell's office. Both are signs of the importance of mining in residents' lives, vocabularies, and in their town's heritage. Thus, the mine both explains Leadville's past and gives hope for its future, and so finds itself at the center of the community consciousness there.

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<sup>25</sup> Howard Tritz, interview by author, 12 November 2009: According to Tritz, County Assessor, Freeport-McMoRan now sets estimates for resumed operations at the Climax Mine to be at least five years.

<sup>26</sup> Howard Tritz, interview by author, 12 November 2009.

In the 1970s, when Climax was at its highest levels of production and employment, life in Leadville was heavily shaped by the shared culture of the mine, and by the perception that “everybody here worked at Climax.”<sup>27</sup> In an interview with the *Denver Post*, Sam McGeorge, then executive director of the National Mining Museum, stated, “mining is our history. It’s why we’re here...Climax is where everyone’s dad and grandfathers worked. It’s a part of us all.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Leadville’s mining past continues to affect its current development. Almost all of the town’s older residents—those who lived there before 1980—have at least one family member who worked at Climax, and all of the so-called “old timers” are descendants of the men and women who came to Leadville during the original “boom days.” In addition to the cultural heritage of mining and its everyday influence on peoples’ lives, then, this genealogical heritage has also been central to Leadville’s development and character over the years.

Because wealth from mining and smelting had such wide appeal, the community in Leadville was a diverse mixture of ethnic groups from the beginning. The initial discovery of gold in California Gulch and the silver rush that followed it brought European immigrants primarily from Germany, Ireland, and Slovenia, two of which shaped would impact not only the cultural, but also the geographic layout of the city.<sup>29</sup> Residents recall their own as well as their parents’ childhoods during which the community found itself divided, not necessarily racially, but certainly culturally, by Harrison Avenue. On the east side lived the Irish, and on the west lived what they called

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<sup>27</sup> Jim Morrison, interview by author, 7 November 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Blevins, “Leadville: Many ready to again embrace old path to prosperity.”

<sup>29</sup> Edward Blair, *Leadville: Colorado’s Magic City* (Boulder: Fred Pruett Books, 1980), 58-61.



the “Bohunks,” or Slovenians. Resident Howard Tritz says that this ethnic diversity created a “real nice population” when he was growing up in the 1950s—“they lived on the west end and had their own church and school, and the east enders had their own church and had their own school. And it wasn’t racial, it was just on different sides of the avenue.”<sup>30</sup> Jim Morrison agrees, stating that there wasn’t necessarily tension between the two sides of town—they got along with one another, but there were definite differences between the two. He fondly recounts that his dad used to “escape” from the east side to the “Bohunk” side where his grandmother lived; the reason for this, he saw, was that Irish cooks were so bad that they could “ruin boiled water.”<sup>31</sup> This separation gave the town a distinct character, but it also gave immigrant cultures the unique opportunity to develop their distinctiveness as separate communities while still coexisting and interacting.

Possibly as a result of this, the cultural heritage of these communities remains in events like Leadville’s annual “Practice St. Patrick’s Day Parade” each September at which the town not only can “get participation from pipe bands that normally are booked during the real St. Patrick’s day on March 17,” but also have “an opportunity to celebrate St. Patrick’s Day without snow.”<sup>32</sup> In addition, the legacy of Leadville’s ethnic past remains in its current diversity, with the recent influx of Mexican immigrants becoming an increasingly prominent part of daily life in the community, and Mexican restaurants and Spanish speakers becoming almost as common as the “Bohunks” and Irish once were. Thus, this population diversity has always been accepted as a part of life in

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<sup>30</sup> Howard Tritz, interview by author, 12 November 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Jim Morrison, interview by author, 7 November 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Leadville Historic Walking Tour pamphlet, a publication of the *Leadville Herald Democrat*, 2009.

Leadville. From the very “early days” on, an array of European immigrants and Americans from different parts of the United States came to Leadville to investigate the promises of wealth. In addition, the town has always been subject to the endless cycle of boom and bust, which brought additional population pressures into play. Leadville has adjusted to its population’s tendency to fluctuate in size and ethnic composition, and it has become very protective of its cultural, historical, and ultimately mining-centric heritage.

In addition to their passive protection of the town’s cultural and historical heritage, Leadville residents actively resist intrusions by outside influences. Residents are proud, not only of the town’s history and its presence in everyday life, but also of their resistance as a community to the resort town lifestyle. Whereas cities like Vail and Breckenridge have manufactured a sense of place by constructing a “main street” meant to give tourists a feeling of being in a charming old ski town complete with all of the convenient amenities and gift shops of a twenty-first century tourist town, Leadville has resisted this push of development in favor of keeping its original buildings and hundred year old plumbing. During Jim Morrison’s term as county commissioner of Lake County, he experienced this resistance first hand. “The thing I always heard when I was a commissioner,” he says,” was ‘we don’t want another Aspen, we don’t want another Breckenridge, we don’t want another Vail.’”<sup>33</sup> This resistance to developing a more distinct commercial base around Ski Cooper is not just a fear of change, though; it is an

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<sup>33</sup> Jim Morrison, interview by author, 7 November 2009.



unwillingness on the part of Leadville residents to alter the town's character in a way that would sacrifice its authentic past for the sake of commercial and economic development.

This resistance to development that would alter the existing character and culture of the town shows that just as memory can be shaped by the perception of what a place *is*, individuals' sense of place can also be shaped by a sense of what that place is *not*.<sup>34</sup>

Leadville is a town that has undergone massive changes in the last century—changes that did not stop with the closing down of the Climax mine in the 1980s. The original gold mining boom saw an influx of immigrants before the town was even an established community, and ever since Leadville has accepted the inevitability of change and the necessity of adapting to new circumstances along with the relentless cycle of boom and bust. While what the community *is* may be a shifting entity, then, residents have a very clear idea of what they do not want to become that helps to ground their present identity.<sup>35</sup> For example, while Leadville still sees many new full and part-time residents who are drawn to its location for recreational reasons, and does have its own nearby skiing at Ski Cooper, it does not have the kind of commercial development at the base of the mountain like Aspen or Copper Mountain, nor do residents necessarily want this kind of development. During Morrison's term as county commissioner, he tried to arrange an exchange that would allow Leadville to give up some of its land for some of the land

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<sup>34</sup> The idea that communities define themselves based on their difference from others is not a new concept in the historical profession. See for example Nancy Shoemaker, *Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth Century North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), in which she discusses not only cultural definition based upon difference, but also based on some of humanity's most basic commonalities.

<sup>35</sup> Martina Martinet, "Thanksgiving 2009" *Leadville Herald Democrat*, 25 November 2009. Each year, the Leadville Herald Democrat publishes a Thanksgiving article listing various things that the town is thankful for. This year, after noting that the economic downturn in 2008 cause the Climax Mine to defer its opening, it concluded with the following: "Maybe we're most thankful that Leadville knows how to deal with adversity. We said last year that despite everything, the community still has hope. That's not gone. We still have people who care about those less fortunate. We still believe in helping one another. The boom will come."

surrounding the base of Ski Cooper, which is currently administered by the U.S. Forest Service. The initiative stalled, however, with insufficient support from Leadville residents and concerns on the part of the Forest Service about natural resource protection.

Furthermore, when gambling was brought to the ballot in Leadville, several years after Blackhawk and Central City saw their local economies brought to life by gaming revenue, local residents voted the measure out.<sup>36</sup> On this resistance to both gambling and resort development, Sharon Bland notes, “we’re a stubborn people for what we think is right. And we do a lot of arguing and bantering around but I think the motives are good, when it gets down to it.”<sup>37</sup> Leadville does rely heavily on tourism revenue to survive, and its residents have made their history into a commodity in many ways. But townspeople remain insistent on doing so in a way that does not alter the existing landscape and culture.

This stubborn perseverance and resistance to landscape-altering change manifests itself in another very distinct element of Leadville’s unique relationship to both its past and its present. That is, through all of the economic and population changes brought about by the cycle of boom and bust, Leadville endures for an important reason: A steady core of long-term residents has maintained the culture of this mining town in such a way that the current community remains centered on the traditions of the old. For example, since the late 1940s the community has hosted a “Boom Days” celebration each August that includes, among other things, a parade, mining competitions like single and double jacking, and a twenty-five mile burro race. The burro race, in particular, is meant to recall

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<sup>36</sup> Jim Morrison, interview by author, 7 November 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Sharon Bland, interview by author, 12 November 2009.



the town's mining past. Bob Hartzell explains that "back in the days, so to speak, miners would be up on the east side of town and they'd have to come down for supplies every once in awhile. So generally they'd come down at a prescribed time...all of the miners would line up with the burros and say ok...the last one down to the Silver Dollar has to buy the first round," and so the burro races began.<sup>38</sup> While Boom Days is only one small manifestation of the town's capacity to persevere and keep tradition alive, it is an important reminder for residents and non-residents alike of Leadville's long and complex experience with mining.

In addition, while the Colorado Historical Society does manage the historic Healey House on the north end of town, the majority of the historic preservation projects going on there come from within Leadville itself. Sharon Bland, for example, currently runs the Tabor Opera House, which was purchased by her mother, Evelyn Furman, in 1955. For years, Furman worked to preserve the Opera House, having taken an interest in Baby Doe Tabor's story after moving out to Leadville from Minnesota when she was in her twenties. Bland recalls her mother's love of the Opera House—"she'd be up there, even in her seventies, spreading tar on the roof and tryin' to stop the leaks."<sup>39</sup> More recently, Sharon Bland and her husband have started to raise money to rennovate the Opera House, beginning this year with plans to restore the front of the building while still giving tours and hosting theater performances on the old stage.

Another effort at preservation that comes from more or less within Leadville is the work done on the part of the National Mining Hall of Fame and Museum to preserve the

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<sup>38</sup> Bob Hartzell, interview by author, 12 November 2009.

<sup>39</sup> Sharon Bland, interview by author, 12 November 2009.

history of the Matchless Mine, famous for being Baby Doe's home during the last decades of her life. Bob Hartzell, the director of the museum, is trying to purchase more land that would allow the museum to preserve some of the famous mining sites just north of the Matchless Mine. He is constantly considering new ways to interpret the history of the area, including a proposal to set up summer hikes that take visitors through the sites of the Old Pittsburg and Chrysolite mines.<sup>40</sup> Thus, a number of Leadville residents have taken an interest in protecting and interpreting the history of their town, and this focus on the town's past has played a huge role in shaping its present. Many museums and preserved historic sites in town, along with celebrations like Boom Days, do more than just bring revenue into the town through tourism; they also help to solidify Leadville's mining heritage in the community's collective memory.<sup>41</sup> The preservation of these memories of how the town "used to be" is significant to the creation of a sense of place and town identity, because they create for Leadville residents a strong sense of the town's current identity by publicly displaying chosen elements of its history.

The town residents' determination to wait out the hard times for the good compliments the prominent role of memory in crafting their community identity. Longtime Leadville residents—the descendants of the "early days" of mining—identify themselves in part by referring to their family genealogy. Where many Americans identify themselves based upon how many generations of their family have lived in the United States, many Leadville residents instead refer to themselves based upon how

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<sup>40</sup> Bob Hartzell, interview by author, 12 November 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Patrick Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), 79, 105. Hutton argues that collective memory is not only a "living memory of the past," but also a very selective memory, holding on to only the most memorable features of the past.



many generations of their family have lived and stayed in Leadville. For example, when asked how long he had lived in Leadville, Howard Tritz responds that yes, “I’ve been here all my life, seventy-three years, and I’m fourth generation. My great grandfather came here in 1878...from Germany.”<sup>42</sup>

This connection to the past through family members is common in Leadville, and serves as yet another tie that binds at least the older members of the community to one another in the face of a rapidly changing modern world. Jim Morrison, too, expresses a strong sense of the connections between his family’s history and the town’s. He relates that his great grandparents moved into Leadville from Oro City, pointing to the wagon in which they traveled and which he still has in his backyard, as well as the 1927 Dodge Touring Sedan in his garage that his grandmother bought soon after moving to Leadville. Morrison also refers to his children as fifth generation— “They’re fifth generation but the older I get the more I don’t want to be here because it’s not the easiest environment to live in.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, even when contemplating leaving Leadville due to its tough climate, he retains the tendency to tie ideas about family to the history of the community.

Thus, through all of these things—the pervasiveness of the past in daily life, the preservation of a strong mining heritage, the community’s perseverance through boom and bust, and the ties to the community that are made through family structures—Leadville is constantly assembling something new out of the fragments of the old. It is a town that has had to reinvent itself to a certain extent after each mining boom and bust, and particularly so since 1987 when the last of the Climax operations shut down. And

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<sup>42</sup> Howard Tritz, interview by author, 12 November 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Jim Morrison, interview by author, 7 November 2009.

although it is a place that lacks any kind of homogeneous culture or dependable population, it has established a sense of history, place, and community that town members readily share with tourists and visitors. Even Howard Crowell, a non-native to the community, quickly establishes his ties to Leadville when talking to visitors in the Leadville Hostel, a colorful establishment on the east side of Harrison Avenue which he took over when his brother, “Wild Bill,” retired several years ago. By showing visitors the newspaper article clipping that features his mother in the summer Boom Days parade, and by bringing out various albums of old photographs of the town during the famed “early days” of mining, Crowell establishes his own sense of belonging. His mother, too, has established herself solidly within the community; having lived in Leadville for less than a decade, the only obvious marker of her difference from the “old timers” as she voices her opinions at the local Lion’s Club meeting or participates in various town activities is her heavy Southern accent. Thus, with community and individual identities firmly rooted in the context of mining’s past, Leadville residents remain unusually open to whatever else may come their way in the future, whether that be the reopening of Climax or simply the entrance of new and culturally diverse individuals into the community.

Still, it is not just the memories that have been preserved that are important to Leadville’s development as a community. Also important are the things that have been lost, or forgotten along the way, both in terms of mining’s history and of the town’s past. For example, there was a time when the current brick sidewalks of Harrison Avenue were just concrete slabs, huge cracks showing through because the concrete was meant to be



lifted up and coal waste dumped under them. Jim Morrison tells the story of how one of the kids in town once tried to convince his teacher at St. Mary's school that his homework had been swept away by the wind and disappeared into one of the cracks in the sidewalks, though a search of the spaces underneath the concrete found no evidence of the paper.<sup>44</sup>

Beyond this, because of the pollution generated by the mine, Leadville was a generally dirtier place before 1990, though few people remember it that way. Asked to describe the differences between the present community in Leadville and the community they had while Climax was still operating, Jim Morrison was the only one to mention mining's downsides. He describes the Climax days as a time when absolutely anyone who needed a job came to Leadville. They were "out here living in these shacks that quite honest should have been burned down," he says, "...it was a rough crowd that was coming here...anybody that had a heartbeat at that time it seemed like they were hiring, and they were living in absolute horrible conditions."<sup>45</sup> Even considering this, Morrison feels a certain amount of nostalgia for the community in Leadville when everyone's parents worked together and thus knew each other. He remembers high school football games attended by the whole community and a time when kids walked down the street knowing that if they didn't behave, someone would see them and call their parents by the time they got home.

In addition, when asked to describe her general memories of Leadville's past, Sharon Bland remembers a similar sense of community, though the time she talks about

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<sup>44</sup> Jim Morrison, interview by author, 7 November 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

was twenty-five years earlier. She describes Leadville as she remembers it during her childhood in the 1950s, recalling that “it was a nice community...if the kids got in trouble or they were doing something they shouldn’t do...the police or other parents would just tell the parents and they would take care of the problem...I [also] remember we’d never lock our doors.” Sharon Bland also describes childhood memories in which she and her best friend would ride off into the mountains on horseback. “We used to be able to go out and never run into anybody all day long, but you just can’t do that anymore,” she says.<sup>46</sup> This idea of safety, nature unspoiled by development, and a friendly, close-knit community forms part of many Leadville residents’ nostalgia for the past. While Bland remembers her father losing his arm in a mining accident when it got stuck in the ore crusher, she harbors no negative feelings toward Climax or mining in general as a result. Where mining could become a dangerous and destructive force in Bland’s life, instead she remembers it for the positive impacts it had on Leadville—for the feeling of safety and security that existed in Leadville during this time of prosperity.<sup>47</sup>

Howard Tritz, too, remembers the positive side of mining. In reference to the current community, he says that “it’s a whole different group of people here than what we had before...a lot of people say well that’s good, because you don’t have those gross miners...but that’s not really true...they were very law abiding.”<sup>48</sup> Like Sharon Bland, Tritz has a feeling of nostalgia for simpler times past—the kind of times when young

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<sup>46</sup> Sharon Bland, interview by author, 12 November 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Jared Farmer, *On Zion’s Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008): Using the example of Mount Timpanogos in Utah, Farmer argues that the cultural and historical landscape of a place are affected just as much by what people remember as by what they forget.

<sup>48</sup> Howard Tritz, interview by author, 12 November 2009.



people were happy just to have a vehicle, and “the only thing we had to do [with it] was drive up and down the avenue, honking at each other.”<sup>49</sup> Though Tritz worked in the Climax mine for thirty years as a mill manager, he mentions no negative memories of mining accidents or a “bad crowd” of people working there. Further, he expresses hope that Leadville’s future will include the Climax mine once again, confident that this time it will not repeat the mistakes of the past. Unlike the old mine, for example, he hopes that the newly restored Climax will be able to better regulate the molybdenum market, as well the number of people it employs and the turnover rate of these employees, with the two modern mills that Freeport-McMoRan has installed. Thus, for Howard Tritz and so many other Leadville residents, the Climax mine represents the good old days of the town, not just because of the wealth it brought, but because of the community that they remember existing along with the mine and the cultural ties of that community to the “early days” of Leadville.

This feeling of experiencing the continuing history of a town is what so many tourists come to towns like Leadville to find. They want to take a break from the rapid pace of the modern world, from the cities whose largeness actually creates the perception of isolation, and venture into the foreign culture of a preserved past.<sup>50</sup> Because of the way that Leadville has kept alive its mining heritage and sense of community, the town in many ways embodies the sense of place that resort tourism has tried to produce. Walking the streets of Leadville is like attempting to live in the remembered past at a time when

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<sup>49</sup> Sharon Bland, interview by author, 12 November 2009: Here, Bland is talking here about how they were happy just to have a car, even though they didn’t really have anything to do with it in such a small town.

<sup>50</sup> Rothman, 200. In a discussion on the growth of resort tourism, Rothman elaborates on the kind of “nostalgia for a disappearing way of life” that drives many people to participate in tourism in this way.

time when history tends to disappear as quickly as it is made. In this nostalgic environment, fragmented memories of the hardships of boom and bust, and of the danger and difficulty of work in the mines, fall away and what remains are the stories of gold in California Gulch, H.A.W. Tabor, and the continuing legacy of mining and the community it created in what was once the highest incorporated town in the world.



## CHAPTER TWO:

### HISTORIC PRESERVATION AS A MEDIATOR OF CHANGE

Each Thanksgiving, Leadville's main newspaper, the *Herald Democrat*, publishes a spirited article addressed to the local community that details some of the town's reasons to be thankful. One of the more concrete expressions of its existence as a living, changing community, the article projects a kind of community vitality that could not exist were it a town preserved in stasis as an unspoiled tribute to mining's heritage. Reminiscing about the concerns of the past year, this year's article lightheartedly referred to the government's fears that the Leadville Mine Drainage Tunnel would loose floodwaters across the town, remarking that "Last year we were grateful that we hadn't all perished in a huge gush of water....As of this writing, it appears even less likely that this will happen, and we can safely maintain our attitude of thankfulness. Not that the problem is solved, but we can put away our life jackets." The article went on to remark that despite the deferral of the opening of the Climax mine due to the declining national economy, the town remained "grateful for the mining company's presence and involvement in our community, despite the fact that the mine is not operating." Perhaps more important, though, is the article's conclusion, which states that "maybe we're most thankful that Leadville knows how to deal with adversity. We said last year that despite everything, this

community still has hope. That's not gone. We still have people who care about those less fortunate. We still believe in helping one another. The boom will come."<sup>51</sup>

The *Democrat's* closing remark, "the boom will come," is indicative of the community-wide tendency in Leadville to root its hope for the future within its seemingly stable grasp of the past. Although the effort to keep the town's community economically functioning by keeping its past alive through the preservation and promotion of that past is a common part of the transition from industrial to post-industrial economies in small communities, the town's passive preservation of its past differentiates it from other localities that now survive by marketing their pasts.<sup>52</sup> Part nostalgia and part faith placed in the power of the town's heritage to revive its former lifestyle, this tendency to base not just the community's economic future but also its identity within the past speaks to the nature of community within Leadville. By using the past as both a mediator of change and a method for economic survival, the community has created a lifestyle that is uniquely reflective of the modern questions faced by postindustrial communities across the United States—of how to survive in the present while preserving the memory of the past, of how to maintain an economically productive community, and of how to do both of these things without reducing the past to a simple commodity.

Vernacular cultural landscapes like Leadville's—that is, the "multiple layers of time and cultural experience" that manifest themselves in the natural and built landscapes of the town as they have been shaped over time by some combination of human, natural, and industrial forces—are increasingly being preserved and promoted in the name of

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<sup>51</sup> Martinet, "Thanksgiving 2009."

<sup>52</sup> Chris Wilson, *The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 3, 8.



“heritage” and perhaps more importantly, “heritage tourism.”<sup>53</sup> Documenting the increasing significance placed on heritage landscapes and in particular, the “historic building fabric of America” that is housed within them, Richard Francaviglia notes that heritage tourism has “become big business as well as a popular pastime in America,” replacing agriculture and industry in many areas of the country as the region’s primary source of revenue.<sup>54</sup> Not just a matter of commodifying the past, though, heritage landscapes exist as an important vehicle through which to experience the past as it begins to seem more and more remote. As a result, heritage landscapes exist as important elements in, and indicators of, Americans’ search for identity in the modern, post-industrial world.<sup>55</sup> These places contain various cultural and emotional meanings for individuals from diverse backgrounds, and as a result, remain centers for tourism and preservation in the United States.

The idea of “heritage” finds its significance within the individual and community memories of both residents of towns like Leadville and a diverse variety of outside populations. Once a matter of taxation and probate law, heritage is now something on which Americans rest their identities and their evolving senses of the past and present. Tracing this transition, David Lowenthal notes the ways in which heritage is summoned to combat the pressures of the modern world—market forces that “swiftly outdate most things now made or built,” migration that uproots millions of individuals from their childhood homes, and new modes of transportation and media communication—which

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<sup>53</sup> Arnold R. Alanen and Robert Z. Melnick. *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>54</sup> Alanen and Melnick, 45. See also, Rothman, 9, in which he discusses the particular tendency of the Western United States to market place and heritage.

<sup>55</sup> Alanen and Melnick, 10.

combine to “magnify the past’s remoteness.”<sup>56</sup> While the past was once continually integrated into present life, it is now increasingly separated, perhaps artificially, as modern society becomes more and more anxious to designate events and commodities as matters of the past.<sup>57</sup> Because it serves to clarify the past made more opaque with time, then, heritage performs an important task in modern societies that perceive themselves as being increasingly remotely connected to this common past.

Indeed, while no problem can even approach the designation of “universal” in the postmodern milieu of historical thought, modernity itself, as well as the anxieties that come with it, neither originated with nor ceased with the rapid technological change and cultural globalization of the last fifty years. Further, these anxieties represent more than a simple resistance to change; they are ultimately a part of the larger cultural and political movements that temporarily leave individuals and communities feeling displaced by dramatic changes in their daily social, economic, or political landscapes. Individuals are then left to negotiate these changes, whether they be small or more drastic. In response, communities begin a process in which they reconcile old systems with new developments, and in the process, change in significant ways the framework from which they engage with the ever-changing world around them.

Sometimes delineated simply as the rise of the nation-state as a political unit of organization, modernity brings with it far more baggage than this explanation initially implies. It encompasses the rise of a consumption-driven economy and culture,

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<sup>56</sup> Randall Mason and Max Page, *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 23-24.

<sup>57</sup> David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 13: Lowenthal notes that “heritage car” is now a designation given to any car made after 1970.



improvements in transportation that lead to unprecedented mobility, and a revolution in communications technology that facilitates the circulation of ideas and culture around the globe. Ultimately, though, modernity is shaped by our perception of what it is to be modern. That is, individuals' changing conceptions about what it means to be successful, whether or not a cosmopolitan life of travel and diverse experience is desirable, and contemporary anxieties about the place of family and community within these new frameworks, are both constitutive and revealing of modernity's meanings.

Further implicated within this process of negotiating what it means to be a man or woman in contemporary culture are the daily implications of this modern lifestyle. The mobility, consumer culture, and the circulation of new ideas and customs that are now accepted parts of daily life contribute to the disruption of human relationships, community, and sense of place. For example, the ever more common task of migration uproots individuals from their communities and dislocates the sense of identity that was once rooted within this community framework. In addition, ever-increasing life-spans combined with the tendency of the modern media to "magnify the past's remoteness" work to increase the imagined gap between past and present, cutting individuals off from their own pasts.<sup>58</sup> Thus, individuals are left displaced in both space and time as migration removes their physical connections to place and the rapidly changing world constantly replaces the old with the new, continuously expanding the distance between the past and the present. In addition, the faith in progress that once pervaded society's attitudes

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<sup>58</sup> Mason and Page, 25.

towards modernity are increasingly corroded by corrupt politicians, violent global conflicts, and media intervention in life.

In response to these dislocations and the loss of the unerring confidence that modernity brings with it only positive change, David Lowenthal suggests that “we keep our bearings only by clinging to remnants of stability” that are increasingly found in the nostalgic notions of the past.<sup>59</sup> Heritage, which encompasses not only the literal reality of the past but also the meaning that the past imparts on individual and community identity, has the ability to make this connection across the ever-widening gap between past and present.

In keeping with these ideas, Colorado’s statewide preservation plan emphasizes the importance of preserving the “full spectrum of Colorado’s heritage, including the interpretation and protection of our physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual connections to the past,” and furthermore, of retaining those connections to the past by saving important places from the past that can serve as “physical connections to the activities, traditions, and people who once occupied these places.”<sup>60</sup> The plan also emphasizes the dangers that rapid growth and rapid changes in the economy, technology, and local governments pose to the state’s historic resources. Particularly in Colorado, which originated in American westward expansion and extractive industry, the preservation of mining landscapes like Leadville’s is a priority.

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<sup>59</sup> Lowenthal, 23, 26.

<sup>60</sup> “Colorado Preservation 2010: Enriching Our Future by Preserving Our Past, Statewide Historic Preservation Plan,” created May, 2006, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, CO.



Also involved in this negotiation of heritage identity are those individuals who, in reaction to change and displacement, visit communities like Leadville. As a part of this process, heritage tourism has seen considerable growth in the last century as individuals seek meaningful connections to an imagined past. Cathy Stanton has suggested that the process of visiting and interacting with historic places offers one method of coming to terms with the ruptures, or dislocations, of the larger postindustrial world. This process allows tourists to make an “imaginative connection with what is lost, past, or unknown in their histories,” thus making them “more fully able to determine where they fit in the present.”<sup>61</sup>

In addition, heritage tourism allows postindustrial towns like Leadville an alternative method of economic subsistence, so much so that the state of Colorado built the promotion of heritage tourism into the state historic preservation plan. That is, the plan includes a provision for “Colorado heritage tourism enhancement,” with heritage tourism defined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as the act of “traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present.”<sup>62</sup> Further, the document stresses the importance of this tourism to both local economies and local communities within Colorado, as it provides both revenue and a way to increase the connection of communities themselves to their pasts.

Beyond its economic significance, then, the smaller connections that individuals make to the past through this kind of heritage tourism are formed in two primary ways.

One of these consists of the interactions between the tourist and the physical place,

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<sup>61</sup> Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Post-Industrial City* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 171-173.

<sup>62</sup> Colorado Preservation 2010, 9-10.

including the built landscape of a place and the decisions that members of that community have made about the physical preservation of their past. The other consists of tourists' interactions with various cultural interpreters, which can include shop owners, museum curators, tour guides, and local residents who collectively convey their own senses of place to visitors.<sup>63</sup>

Both of these interactions contain particular significance within the example of Leadville, in that the town strives to maintain its physical connections to the past through the preservation of the historic landscape of its built environment, as well as its more abstract connections to the past through the preservation of its cultural landscape and the collective memory on which the community bases its current identity. Neither of these efforts to preserve the town's heritage exists in isolation. Rather, they are constantly remade and reinforced through interactions with tourists, surrounding communities, and new residents, just as they in turn impact each of these groups of people. However, the root of this growth of heritage based identity and tourism—that is, the existence of this kind of unsettlingly rapid change—is not unique to Leadville, the West, or anywhere else in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

For example, far removed from Leadville's own history, protestors in the nineteenth century clanged noisily through the fashionable center of Westbourne Grove, London, targeting what initially seemed to be an unusual suspect. In this case, the demonstrators were intent to show their distaste toward William Whitely, a linen draper gone successful entrepreneur who was quickly expanding his small, independent shop

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<sup>63</sup> Stanton, 175.



into what would become London's first department store.<sup>64</sup> In doing so, Whiteley was not only defying the norms set out for the small local shopkeeper; he was also stirring fears within the community of the dangers that could be provoked by the unrestrained mixing of men and women of every class and "moral" status.<sup>65</sup> Local residents feared that Whiteley's refashioning of the local economy would provide women with "indulgent freedoms and improper power," and that the logical end of this rampant consumerism would ultimately be prostitution.<sup>66</sup> More than a decade later, Westbourne Grove now sits at the center of London's famous Notting Hill, the proud site of boutiques, designer stores, and one notable flagship from the past—Whiteley's. Once the cause of unsettling change and the target of a community's fear, the department store has become a sign of the stability brought about by the presence of the past in a rapidly changing modern world.

Thus, and perhaps appropriately, change is nothing new; it is neither unique to any particular location, nor is it particular to the present moment. However, while the dynamic world of the present is nothing new, the ever-increasing media attention to these changes and the more recent effects of migration on individual identity magnify the perceived effects of this already fast-paced change. As a result, heritage increasingly becomes both a reaction to this perception of change and a coping mechanism to deal with the effects of that change. By bridging the perceived gap between past and present, heritage—or the ways in which individuals feel this emotional connection to the past—

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<sup>64</sup> Erika Rappaport, "'The Halls of Temptation': Gender, Politics, and the Construction of the Department Store in Late Victorian London" *The Journal of British Studies* (Jan. 1996): 58.

<sup>65</sup> Rappaport, 61.

<sup>66</sup> Rappaport, 69, 76: Rappaport argues that residents' anxieties over this rapid growth of consumerism would, among other things, ultimately lead to the "individual turned commodity."

the past for future generations but also creating a perceived niche of stability within this changing, and therefore seemingly unstable, world.<sup>67</sup> Heritage and the defense of that heritage through historic preservation, then, provide a method through which postindustrial communities can maintain their connections to the past as well as stabilize their economies.

In Leadville, this desire to hold on to heritage and look to the past as a stabilizing force has been tremendously successful. Seemingly bypassed by change, the town's contemporary identity is still very much centered on its former identity as an industrial, mining community. Several of its historic structures, including the Healy House and Dexter Cabin—managed by the Colorado Historical Society; the Matchless Mine—overseen by the National Mining Hall of Fame and Museum; and the Tabor Opera House—run by local resident Sharon Bland and her husband, are the subjects of active preservation and interpretation. In addition, the National Park Service designated the buildings along the town's main street to be a National Historic Landmark district in 1966, after completing its Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings there.<sup>68</sup> Because of this National Register designation, the town's zoning laws include a provision that prevents the demolition or external modification of the historic structures along Harrison Avenue, though they encourage the "viable reuse" of those structures within the historic district.<sup>69</sup> Aside from these zoning laws, however, Leadville itself has relatively few active historic

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<sup>67</sup> Mason and Page, 37. In his essay therein, "The Heritage Crusade and Its Contradictions," David Lowenthal traces the ways in which the American preservation movement is rooted in the human tendency to cling to heritage as a force for stability within a rapidly changing world.

<sup>68</sup> "Secretary Udall Declares 43 more sites eligible for Historic Landmark Status," Department of the Interior, National Park Service Press Release, 4 July 1961, Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Compass online records, accessed 20 May 2010.

<sup>69</sup> Leadville, Colorado, Zoning Laws, Title 17, Section 17.44.010.



preservation measures in place. As a result, most of Leadville remains privately owned and much more passively preserved. Because the town is reasonably remote and lacks the budget to demolish old buildings in favor of contemporary ones or even renovate buildings in such a way as to destroy their historical integrity, it exists at the intersection of a number of factors that aid the passive preservation of the built environment.<sup>70</sup>

Still, even these efforts to preserve the town's historic resources, limited by budget restraints and the practical limitations of a largely grassroots preservation effort, cannot shield Leadville completely from the effects of change on the built and cultural landscapes of the town. Empty storefronts, as well as the scattered remains of former mining sites—many of which have been severely burned by teenagers with little grasp of the importance of the town's historic resources, display the effects of time on Leadville's economy, community, and daily life. Even homes, viewed from the street at night, show the effects of the massive population changes brought on by the closing of operations at the Climax mine in the 1980s. Driving around town at night, some three quarters of homes lay undisturbed and completely dark, their signs of decay visible during the day, but the darkness granting these buildings the appearance not of abandonment, but of temporary stillness, as if the homes' owners are merely away on some kind of extended vacation.

While the ways in which individuals and communities cope with this environment of rapid change and the physical and emotional displacement that it causes may be subject to analysis within any number of historical contexts, this tendency to use memory

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<sup>70</sup> Alanen and Melnick, 51.

and heritage as a foundation for modern identities is particularly relevant in light of Leadville's experience adapting to modern life. By using Leadville as a local lens, we can more clearly see the ways in which individuals, as well as communities, *use* the past to cope with the rapidly changing modern world. In Leadville, which faces the challenge of adapting its economy from one dependent on mining's profits to one equipped to handle post-industrial life, this use of the past is multifaceted. On one hand, it is practical, in that the town's economy now depends on the heritage tourism made possible by its preservation of its past; on the other, though, the town is involved in the more existential matter of its identity, both on individual and community scales. In Leadville, the past is not just something to preserve in stasis and cling to in an effort to resist the modern world. It is the foundation of the town's present identity and hope for the future: "The boom will come."



## CHAPTER THREE:

### PEACE, LOVE, AND SUBARU

It is the last day of the ski season at Winter Park and I am on a lift, heading up the mountain towards my first run of the day. Still fairly new to the world of winter sports, I'm not exactly looking forward to getting off of this lift, which never seems to go very smoothly for me, but I am comfortable. Next to me sits my intrepid friend and guide, who first taught me to snowboard at the beginning of this season. The sky is overcast, a light breeze picking up as snow falls serenely around us. On this lift, the world is quiet in a way that I never could have imagined. As snow falls gently around me, my mind is full of the kinds of hopeful daydreams in which the clouds give way to sunshine as I effortlessly coast down the kind of light, fluffy snow that explodes in a small cloud—vaguely reminiscent of the flakes inside a snow globe—when you crash into it.

My day began early this morning as I picked up my friend Cory, squinting through the darkness to find him waiting next to his car in the parking lot of his apartment complex. Tired, but happy to have the chance to take the day away from Fort Collins and school, we drove up the familiar roads into the mountains. But my real

journey with this place began long before today's trip, with my decision more than a year ago to make the small community of Leadville the focus of my thesis research. Since then I have spent a fair amount of time outside of the admittedly very small box in which I am personally comfortable, and today's trip—my last before my graduate school career ends and the summer begins—seems like the end of a long journey through this now familiar mountain landscape. One year ago, I set out to try to understand how the community in Leadville searched for and found meaning in a modern world that doesn't necessarily seem to change for the better, but in the process I became a subject of my own study, searching for my own meaning in life through this place. So today, feeling confident and full of enthusiasm about this last episode in my encounter with this landscape, I rest my left foot inside the back binding of my snowboard and glide off the lift and into the day.

With the exception of a couple of somewhat eccentric, mechanical engineer-type friends of mine, no one drives I-70 just for the fun of it. This trip is about the destination—ski resorts, casinos, campgrounds, Buffalo Bill's tombstone—and the road is likewise filled with numerous RVs, small cars adorned with roof racks full of skis, and many industrial-sized pickup trucks. Some cars, as well as their drivers, fair better than others on this hike into the Rocky Mountains, and after dozens of trips up here, I feel somewhat irrationally as if I know them all personally. There is always that driver, glued to the right lane, hazards on as she plugs along in her little but beloved old car with a cute name like



“Millie” or “Potsie,” while that other driver in her giant SUV charges past with eight pairs of skis strapped to her roof rack, and yet another driver cruises along nervously in a rented RV that he is clearly not yet comfortable driving. No matter who you are, though, chances are that after a couple of drives up and down this road, you’ve long since abandoned your romantic, Willie Nelson-inspired images of the open road in favor of the childhood classic, “Are we there yet?”

Though we all come to the mountains for different reasons, we all seem to come for *a* reason. I lived in Colorado for almost six years before I drove into the mountains to go skiing, but by that point I had made more trips up I-70 than I could remember on hiking and camping trips, not to mention numerous weekend drives to Leadville. Although my central Arizona upbringing still leaves me somewhat lacking in snow and mountain driving experience, I have gradually become comfortable with the idea that frozen moisture may find its way onto these roads that have more runaway truck ramps than I’m comfortable thinking about. With the exception of Saturday mornings spent in ski traffic and the combination driving plus altitude headache I inevitably develop somewhere east of Georgetown, I might even say I have grown to appreciate this drive, or if not the drive itself, at least the opportunity to take in the mountains’ incredible beauty from the heated shelter of my car.

However, despite my recent attachment to the geologic perk that is the Rocky Mountains, Coloradans’ fondness for these same mountains seemed to be nothing short of ridiculous to me when I moved out here six years ago. Not only were the mountains all anyone seemed to talk about when I mentioned that I wasn’t from here; they were also on

also on the state's quarter, its license plates, and countless bumper stickers—all of which bothered me perhaps more than they should have. I wondered how it could be possible for a state to have so little going on that it found its mountains worthy of memorialization. It wasn't as if Colorado were the only state to contain mountains, I reasoned. If Wyoming could find something more exciting to put on their state quarter, why not Colorado? And while we're at it, aren't there other ways to remember your cardinal directions? The sun still sets in the west, regardless of what landforms are or are not in its way. But the longer I live here, the more attached I become to the very object that caused such irritation when I first arrived, and not just because they remain a permanent part of our skyline, or because of any hiking, skiing, or camping opportunities they may present. Don't get me wrong; like any hiker I look forward to fourteener season every summer, and like any skier, I look forward to a winter full of fresh snow and the incredibly odd experience of sailing down the same mountains I work so hard to climb during the summer. But, somewhere along the line, the mountains became more than a curious fascination or a pretty picture to send to my parents. They became part of my identity, part of what I imagine to be the culture of Colorado, and something that I find that I inexplicably miss when I leave the state.

Despite a ten-year stay in Arizona as a child, I had never felt exceptionally attached to any particular place until coming to Colorado. As historians, we talk about "sense of place," this amorphous concept that exists where place and identity intersect. It is the attachment we feel to a place, the way that place shapes the way we imagine ourselves and the world around us, and the way that the physical landscape of a city can



become part of our ideas about that place and its culture. One place can have a different set of meanings for different individuals, and as a result, the place that we identify with is not necessarily the one in which we live. For me, Colorado is the land of peace, love, and Subaru, a place where people are friendly and I feel entirely comfortable. But for others, it is quite the opposite. For some of my out-of-state friends, Coloradans are anywhere from only marginally friendly to downright rude. Lacking an attachment to the place in which they live, then, these individuals may remain attached to past places of meaning—childhood homes or family vacation spots—or they may even feel a connection to an iconic place they’ve always wanted to visit, like San Francisco or Manhattan, which for whatever reason they feel is better suited to their personality and identity.

This sense of place is part of what has always drawn me to Leadville. It is the reason I started coming here years ago, soon after my roommate’s mother recommended that we try camping at the Twin Lakes, where she had gone on mini camping vacations as a child. Even those who move away from Leadville feel a kind of attachment that is heavily shaped by their memories of life there. In the minds of its residents, the town seems to be frozen in time, its mining heritage still very much at the center of its current identity, despite the fact that the majority of the mining industry shut down almost thirty years ago. Longtime residents maintain a community based upon this sense of place-based identity, incorporating the new into what they already know of the old as they are faced with fresh residents and tourists who bring with them new languages and cultures. Confronted by a world that values rapid change and the ever forward march of

“progress,” Leadville residents hold on to the stability to be found by maintaining these kinds of connections to the past.

Never having lived in anything approaching a “small” town, I find myself fascinated by Leadville’s calm pace of life and strong community feel, not to mention the concept that people do knowingly choose to live in a place where your decision to go to the grocery store in sweatpants, hair pulled up into a frazzled ponytail on top of your head, never fails to go unnoticed. Having only lived in places where I can walk around town on a daily basis enjoying the comforts of relative anonymity, I find myself a bit flustered even when I run into a coworker on campus, as two artificially separated areas of my life suddenly converge upon me. At the outset of my project in Leadville—a place that is quite wary of the kind of anonymity that I value—I questioned my ability to navigate this kind of intimate local culture, and whether it would even be possible to get to know this place from my own outsider status. But, at the very least, it seemed worth a try.

And so it happens that I find myself here, parked in front of the Lake County Courthouse in the center of town, unsure of what to expect from my day. After a long afternoon in the car, coaxing my little blue Toyota up I-70’s steep inclines with monster-sized trucks roaring past me, I take a moment to look again at the list of phone numbers and appointments that I gathered before heading up this morning, having come up to Leadville today to interview a couple of people who know I’m coming, and hopefully also a couple who don’t.



As I climb out of my car on this elusively sunny November afternoon, I am reminded for what must be the hundredth time that higher altitudes always mean colder temperatures. In a long-sleeved shirt, down vest and jeans, I consider myself well prepared for temperatures that linger somewhere in the fifty to sixty degree range. A quick glance around me reveals several things, one of which I read on one of those digital signs that only banks seem to have, which alternately announce the time and temperature —11:04am, thirty-eight degrees. A man in worn khaki shorts and a tan windbreaker walks casually on the sidewalk beneath the sign. Having spent the majority of my childhood in a suburb of Phoenix, Arizona, where my friends and I broke out our hooded sweatshirts when temperatures dipped below a crisp seventy degrees, I realize that my perception of cold is somewhat skewed, but I still want to hand this man a warmer jacket. It seems that living in a place where snow accumulation can reduce traffic to one lane in the center of the road changes people's perspective on what constitutes "cold," but this knowledge has yet to change my own perspective.

Feeling chilly, I hurry toward the heated Courthouse. My first meeting is with Howard Tritz, the County Assessor for Lake County, an older man whose office is full of old photographs documenting the very memories that I have come here to collect. Old-time jazz plays softly in the background, its clarinet-driven melodies making me nostalgic for a time I never lived through. As he tells me the story of Leadville's early days of gold and silver mining, I feel like I'm listening to my own grandfather tell me stories of his childhood. I realize as he talks that within his memories lies an earlier Leadville, when cars were the latest technology and community life revolved around a

workday fashioned by the mining industry, and this glimpse of Tritz's Leadville makes the drive today worthwhile. As graduate students we often feel like the best we can hope to do is imitate the scholars around us—taking on their language and methods in the hopes of convincing some unknowing reader that we do in fact know what we're doing—but today, recorder in hand, I feel for the first time like an actual, capable historian.

Oddly enough, it is this title, “historian,” that will get me in the most trouble in my attempt to get to know the people and places of this town. In the coming months, I will introduce myself many times as a graduate student in the history department at Colorado State University, hoping to lend myself some legitimacy as I ask people to let me into their homes or places of work and tell me all about their memories. As it turns out, though, people more or less immediately shut down when they hear the word “history,” unable to think of themselves as being a part of the town's history, or imagining that history to be only Leadville's most distant past in placer mining and gold speculation. Immediately they become nervous, naming any number of relatives who know Leadville's “history” better than they do, as if I'm about to quiz them on the names and dates associated with the town's past. Over the past few months I have been treated as a tourist, asked—in the middle of winter with several feet of snow on the ground—if I was here to hike, and most oddly, questioned by several residents as to whether or not I was with the real-estate office, but somehow none of these identities raise more red flags in town than that of “historian.”

Still, more comfortable being identified as a “history grad student” than as a “random curious stranger,” I've stuck with this introduction and have by necessity



more comfortable with explaining the nature of my project and my desire to get to know the town through its residents' memories, rather than through canonical books about Baby Doe Tabor and the olden days of mining fame. My explanation is not always well received, nervous looks lingering as I ask residents to tell me about what seem to them to be inconsequential details about their childhoods. Quite frankly, I don't blame them; until my second year of college, I had never considered that history could be more than a set of unchanging facts, uncovered and placed in textbooks for us to memorize blankly as potential identification terms or the subject matter of true or false questions, and I quite liked it that way. I had no idea that I would someday read about the ways in which livestock contributed to the colonization of North America, nor would I have considered the possibility that anyone in their right mind could consider a landfill to be not just a legitimate, but a really quite fascinating National Historic Site. But here I am today, armed with perhaps naive enthusiasm for any and all things history, hoping that people will humor me and tell me about their pasts.

It is now November, but aside from the month, little has changed since I was here last—this high in the mountains, not even the trees show the passing of time. I've been coming up here for years, and have seen only a handful of new stores—an ALCO just on the outskirts of town that has the appearance of being perpetually under construction, and a new store on the town's main street that sells seeds and supplies for high mountain

gardening, of all things. The last time I was here must have been mid-October, at which time some of the other residents of the hostel in which I stayed including a British couple on vacation, heading out to navigate the rocky slopes of the early season in order to ski while they were in Colorado. I wondered at the time whether the place ever saw more than a couple of visitors. With a room full of washers and dryers and a summer-camp sized kitchen, I reasoned that it must have been crowded once, although evidence of that was nowhere to be found. That weekend the hostel was empty with the exception of myself, my roommate, the British skiers, and the friendly if slightly eccentric proprietor, whose opening line was—perhaps appropriately—“My name’s Howard, but you can call me crazy.” I had spent several anxious months avoiding making a trip to Leadville, unsure of who to talk to or how to introduce strangers to my project. Finally, though, I had landed at the Leadville Hostel, seeking a room for the evening and individuals willing to talk to a well-intentioned stranger.

Despite my chosen course of study these days, I have never been a particularly outgoing person. From a young age, my mother cultivated in me the idea that to ask questions of friends and strangers alike was to intrude upon their lives in a way that was somehow both invasive and impolite. While this general strategy allowed me to develop into what I’d like to think was a polite, respectful child, I’ve recently found its general principles to be less than useful—a discovery that my mother also seems to have made, since she now knows not only every person on her floor at work but, judging by the dozens of people I’ve never seen before who wave out their car windows at her as we stand in front of the house, also a good portion of our neighborhood. In retrospect, it’s



possible that she merely wanted to raise children who knew enough not to approach strangers outside of school or run screaming around public places, but either way, it's taken time for me to realize that far from feeling hopelessly intruded upon, most people are more than happy to talk about their lives when it so happens that someone cares enough to ask.

Indeed, despite having spent much of my life not asking these questions, it has never been for lack of interest. I remember sitting in the car as a child, obsessed with the destinations and motivations of the individuals in the cars around me. I wondered whether these cars' inhabitants were on a road trip across the country, or if they were simply taking a trip to the grocery store. I wondered what these men and women did for a living, whether or not they had families. I wondered whether they were happy, healthy, what they were thinking about, and whether those thoughts affected their current destinations. Although I was never one to act on these curiosities, they have become a consistent part of my personality, guiding some more—and some less—well-formed notions about my future.

For one, out of this curiosity came what I thought was a love of travel. In fact, full of idealistic dreams about seeing the world and uncovering these kinds of truths, my very first serious career aspiration was to become a truck driver. My family used to take road trips every year, driving an enormous conversion van that my brother and I knew as “the big van” from our home in Arizona to our extended family's home in Michigan. Too young to be anything but along for the ride, I would spend hours looking out the window at the passing scenery, eventually arriving at this conclusion: Jennifer Hawk, Age 10;

dream job—truck driver. I loved seeing new places, the soothing bumpiness of the ride as we chugged along in the family van, and the fascinatingly unusual mixture of people that loitered in truck stops. I wanted to see the world and all of the people in it, and in my ten year old mind, truck drivers did just that. Of course, my seventh grade “career report” reflected more appropriately that I wished to be a veterinarian, but I remained stubbornly convinced of my true dreams for many more years.

My romantic images of long-haul trucking, as I now know it, were shattered at age 18, when the pesky reality of what it actually felt like to drive nine hundred miles in one sitting finally sank in with my first road trip to college. No less practically, my illusions about my love of travel are repeatedly shattered each time I fly cross country to see one of my parents. Not only do I not enjoy being smashed into a seat next to any number of very nervous, young, or long-legged individuals, I deeply dislike being in new places. I hate being lost, but also have no desire to reference maps, which to me feel more like a giant game of Where’s Waldo? than a directional tool. While residual romantic illusions about travel lurk within me whenever I see someone come back from a grand adventure backpacking across Europe, I now realize that what I wanted was never to travel through what we historians think of as “space.” Despite my history degree, I have also never been particularly interested in traveling through what we would consider to be “time”—not in a Hollywood-inspired, *Back to the Future* kind of a way, but in a Colonial Williamsburg, museum-visiting kind of a way. Rather, what I really wanted all along was to travel through minds, to see the world through constantly changing perspectives, to speak new languages, to think in new ways.



History is many things to many people. For some, it is a hobby, weekend afternoons spent watching the history channel or reading any number of books written by any number of “popular” historians—a label to which we academics often assign a negative connotation, peering over our glasses at those who choose to facilitate the study of history merely “for fun.” For others, it is a matter that is purely academic; it is day after day spent crafting theories and seeking to discover globally significant connections and provide path-breaking analyses of the past. For yet others, it is a matter they have quite literally left in their past—a dry, straightforward sequence of events, of “facts,” to be memorized and not questioned, a subject altogether abandoned as soon as possible after all high school or college history requirements are finally complete. But for me, history is this phenomenon that I first observed in the car as a child, and the reason that I remain fascinated by the idea of being able to take on the language and experiences of others, despite my decision to abandon my childhood career goals. For me, history is the incomprehensible series of events and influences that somehow make their way together in incalculable, unpredictable ways. It is the ways in which our personal, individual memories combine in unique ways to create our identities, and even communities, the knowledge of what came before irreversibly shaping our knowledge of what is now.

As it turns out, all of these things somehow combined to land me in Leadville with a general goal of getting to know the patterns of daily life there, as well as how they

were shaped by what came before. This in mind, I arrived at the Leadville Hostel that October weekend with what I thought was a lack of preconceived notions about what I would do and what it would be like, although it was immediately nothing like I had unknowingly expected it to be. An old but standard-looking sign outside that reads “The Leadville Hostel” is about the most typical part of this establishment. The stone path leading up to its entrance begins with one of those latticed archways that people sometimes grow ivy-like plants on, though this particular arch is covered in white twinkle lights. The front yard also features an interesting collection of decorations which includes a sculpture made of glass bottles and a sign that reminds me of the television show *M\*A\*S\*H*, with wood planks in the shape of arrows pointing the various directions and distances to far away locations.

Because I arrived late, or at least late in Leadville’s general framework—somewhere around seven o’clock in the evening—the whole place was dark, with only one lamp lit in the living room at which sat my soon to be roommate. After some searching I located the office door, knocked tentatively, and then waited for what felt like several minutes before yelling into the loft above, searching for some kind of direction as to what to do, or at least where to sleep. A friendly though worn voice answered and the man who I came to know as Howard—a former cotton gin worker and generally content wanderer—treaded leisurely downstairs to meet me.

Howard himself is as eclectic as the rest of this place appears from the outside. He wears what looks like a permanent sunburn, his skin having the sort of rough, flushed quality generated by years of daily sun exposure. The next morning, I learn that he moved



here to live near his brother eight years ago when business in his home state of Mississippi “dried up.” His entire immediate family—mother, brother and sister-in-law, and himself—now lives in Leadville, having moved out from Mississippi at various times and for various reasons. In addition to spending a good portion of his life working the cotton gins up and down Texas, in his lifetime Howard has driven trucks, worked on off-shore oil rigs, farmed, hauled food to mountain resorts, and been a cook, among other things. He seems happy just to live his life, going wherever the proverbial wind may take him, which is fitting in this place which earns its living by welcoming strangers to come stay the night, the week, or the month as their needs may be. Howard seems to watch the place while his brother and sister-in-law—identified as Cathy and “Wild Bill,” proprietors, on various signs throughout the house that tell you where to put your sheets when you leave or how to use the recycling system—are out enjoying retired life. As he shows me to my room, gesturing towards the darkened basement staircase, Howard explains that times outside of the summer and winter are the hostel’s off-season, with less visitors looking for a place to stay while enjoying the mountains, but at that moment I couldn’t imagine what the place would even look like during one of the busy times.

With just the four of us staying that evening, the whole place was incredibly silent, the rushing air of the ceiling fan above me the only thing standing between me and utter silence. My roommate, a middle-aged, unfriendly-looking woman, was still out in the common room when I settled into our room. I had seen her when I walked in, flipping quietly through one of the hostel’s books of old photos of the town, seemingly content as she sat in the near dark of its spacious living room. I wondered briefly how she found

herself here in Leadville, which is thirty miles from the nearest major highway and not exactly the largest tourist draw amid the dozens of ski resorts that surround it. I decided pointlessly that she must be on some sort of existential journey across the country, perhaps spurred by divorce or the death of a friend, the idea furthered by the book that sat on her bedside table—*The Tao of Inner Peace*.

I came to find out that my roommate was from New Jersey, but had been “on the road,” as they say, for about a month. Having driven straight through Kansas, out to California to visit relatives, and then back through Las Vegas for a fiftieth birthday party, her destination appeared to be Fort Collins, where she lived twenty years ago and was now returning to live with several friends, though she did not seem to be in any real hurry to get there. In a way, I admired her complacency as she sat reading, patiently taking in the quiet stillness of the place. The cross-country traveler would remain my only roommate that evening, though our pale yellow, country style room contained two sets of unusually large bunk beds, each with its own set of home sewn floral curtains meant to shelter the bottom bunk of each bed. Opting for the bottom bunk of the bed opposite my roommate’s, I closed the bed curtains, gaining some sanctuary from the unfamiliarity of the place but also shutting myself off from the room’s only light fixture. At 8:02pm, sleep did not seem to be a particularly appealing option, but feeling hermit-like, I decided to read by what light did shine through my curtains until my roommate returned to shut off the light for the evening. I did some research the next day, visiting the Lake County library and having a long conversation with my ever-friendly host, Howard Crowell. But otherwise I managed to maintain my hermit-like stance for the remainder of my weekend



visit, observing but not asking too many questions of my surroundings. Still, I look back on that particular trip fondly, partly because of my current knowledge of what it is like to sleep in a hostel that is *not* empty, and partly as the beginning of a long journey through this place of which I have become so fond.

I have become comfortable with Howard Tritz as I sit listening to him recount some of the details of his seventy-three years of life in Leadville. When I tell him that I became interested in Leadville because of my roommate's family connections to the town, he asks about her family, happy to learn that her grandfather is a very old friend of his. I find out that Tritz went to college in Denver to study dentistry, but left school midway through the program when he realized that spending his life looking into people's mouths was not his ideal pastime. He had been slated to work for the dentist up in Leadville when he got out of school, but went to work at the Climax mine instead, working on management there until the mine shut down in the 1980s. Like most of the other "old-timers" I will meet and interview, Howard describes himself as "fourth-generation," his family roots in Leadville just as important as the number of years he has himself spent in this place.

After some conversation, we head down to the Silver Dollar Grill, one of the town's historic structures and lately, the meeting place of the Leadville Lion's Club. Its wood-paneled walls are covered in pictures of just about everything from painted

landscapes and portraits to cartoon illustrations. Once solely a saloon, the Silver Dollar now has a kitchen that makes it more visitor friendly, and we each order lunch from a miniature menu, a copy of which sits on each of the tables, which was most likely designed with the Lions Club in mind. Having only partially moved past my picky childhood eating habits, I decide there is little chance that I can go wrong with a tuna sandwich, and order accordingly, feeling tentative and somewhat out of place in this close community of people. After some conversation with Tritz and a couple of others at our table today, the meeting opens with the Pledge of Allegiance, which I have not recited since elementary school. True to elementary school form, one of the Lions holds up a United States flag and we each put our hands over our hearts, the words that have so long lain dormant in my memory coming to mind more easily than I would have expected. On the agenda today are matters of correspondence—a Christmas card from a town member—and various volunteer and fundraising activities. The Lions are involved in numerous, sometimes unusual elements of life in this town, the most recent of which is the upcoming Christmas tree sale. At the time, the group was raising volunteers to harvest the trees from the mountainside adjacent to the Climax mine.

Although the Lions have formed clear bonds with one another, this meeting is the first of only a few times in Leadville that I've ever been treated with anything less than genuine friendliness. My friendship with Leonard Fuchtman's daughter and granddaughter gains me a few friends, but here, I am very clearly an outsider in a space where insider status has been earned. In a way, the Lions quite literally represent the core of the Leadville community, their interactions with one another sustaining the kind of



memory of the past that they believe the community to be founded on. As new members come in, they are introduced into this very small circle of memories and relationships, creating a new generation of Leadville residents within the traditions of the old.

Despite my somewhat uncomfortable position as the outsider in this close-knit group, I gain a few new acquaintances, all of which were good friends of Leonard Fuchtmann's and undoubtedly less wary of me as a result. One of these is Bob Hartzell, the director of the Mining Museum in town and one of the people who I had already planned to meet today. Another is Sharon Bland, who has inherited the job of maintaining the old opera house from her mother, and who agrees to meet with me later that day. When the meeting closes, I feel uneasy once again as I leave the comfort bubble that I have established with Howard and contemplate my upcoming interviews with Bob Hartzell and Sharon Bland. Reminding myself why I came here this weekend, I say goodbye to Howard and accompany Bob Hartzell on his short drive back up to the Mining Museum. As we drive up the hill to the museum, the jazz music that I first noticed in Howard Tritz's office plays in Hartzell's bright yellow Jeep.

Unlike the others, Hartzell is not a native of Leadville, or even of Colorado. Having spent several years as a teacher in Minnesota and then Wisconsin, he came out to Colorado more than thirty years ago because of his interest in skiing. At the time, he wanted to live in a place that was within fifty miles of two ski areas, and even then, Leadville fit that description. As a non-native and outsider to Leadville's longstanding mining tradition, Bob has moved around jobs in this town with somewhat fascinating fluidity. In addition to teaching at the local high school, he delivered dynamite for a brief

period of time at the Climax mine, worked seasonally as the assistant manager at Ski Cooper, taught business at Colorado Mountain College, and took a job at the nearby ski resort at Copper Mountain, all before being offered his current position as the director of the National Mining Museum. Although he came into his work at the museum with very little knowledge of either mining or public history, Hartzell has used his time at the museum to become extremely familiar with both, as well as with the community in which he operates. One of the few people I know who identifies as having “always wanted to live in an old mining town,” Hartzell seems like a native though he didn’t move out here until he was in his thirties. Like Howard Crowell, my first acquaintance in Leadville and the Hostel’s caretaker, Bob Hartzell is able to move easily through life, content to make use of whatever comes along, effortlessly becoming a part of whatever place and community he finds himself in.

As we walk around the museum, performing small maintenance tasks on its exhibits and talking with various visitors to the museum, Hartzell tells me about the current redevelopment going on up at the site of the Climax mine, as well as the museum’s current projects and plans for the future. The town has converted the building that we are in from an old high school—the one that Hartzell came here to teach at—into not only the National Mining Museum, but also a facility for meetings and conventions. It seems fitting to me that this building has become a community center, its old gymnasium hosting everything from the National Mining Hall of Fame induction banquet each year to Colorado Mountain College’s graduation and the Lake County High School prom in May. Whether or not they mean it to be, this creation of a community center within the



National Mining Museum is oddly familiar to the days when the Climax mine provided the cultural center of the community. Standing in the middle of the museum's half-darkened ballroom, I imagine a candle-lit space filled with circular tables occupied by mining's biggest proponents, honoring the industry's long history more than a century after the death of the likes of Horace Tabor and Chicken Bill.

It is a short walk to Sharon Bland's House from the National Mining Museum—quite literally less than one block. She and her husband live in one of Leadville's larger Queen Anne style houses, a colorful, Victorian building with a large bay window out front that is currently filled with an incomplete scene—Sharon and her husband appear to be in the process of dressing up two manikins, possibly to illustrate some kind of Christmas theme, though for whatever reason they've stopped midway, leaving the manikins partially dressed and just plain odd looking in the window. Her husband greets me at the door, assuring me that Sharon will be home soon. He is under the impression that as a non-native, his knowledge of Leadville does not qualify him to talk to me, providing the usual disclaimer that his wife knows “the history” much better than he does. We make small talk about the house and Sharon's mother, who bought the historic Tabor Opera House that they now take care of more than fifty years ago. Their foyer is currently filled with dozens of large, heavy looking cardboard boxes, which I come to find out contain the new heating units that they plan to install in the opera house this

month. He seems at ease talking to me, but leaves immediately when Sharon comes home, mentioning again that her memory is far more complete than his.

As with Howard Tritz, I feel comfortable talking to Sharon as she tells me the story of her mother's life and how she came to own the opera house. She has happy memories of her past in this place, memories you would expect to come out of 1950s television shows like "Leave it to Beaver" and "Father Knows Best." Before she was born, Sharon's parents had lived in a mining cabin above Leadville's famous Matchless Mine and, adjacent to it, Baby Doe Tabor's cabin. Feeling her own attachment to the Tabors' history as a result of these years as Baby Doe's neighbor, her mother couldn't see the Opera House destroyed when it came up for auction more than twenty years later. Making the purchase with borrowed money, Sharon's mother ran a furniture store out of its entry level and sold Maytag washing machines door to door to pay off the debt. Sharon's memories paint a picture of life in the perfect small town of the 1950s, sitting quietly and obediently in schoolrooms and skipping down the streets on the way home; riding horses into the mountains, sack lunch in hand; driving down main street for no real reason while waving to your friend who is doing the same thing. She has seen the town go through numerous transitions during good times and bad, and like the others I've talked to today, still feels an incredible sense of attachment to this place.

The sun has long since set as I walk out of Sharon's house, the already subdued town quieting down for the night as the cold evening temperatures prompt tourists to head back to their hotels. My objectives reasonably accomplished, I look forward to my long, solitary drive home.



Several months after my first stay at the Leadville hostel, I find myself back again, though this visit I find myself in an entirely different environment. The television in the living room is on this time, with several men gathered around it watching various Olympic sports and chatting with one another as if they've met before. I come to find out that they are part of a larger group of men and women that has come up to Leadville to go backcountry skiing. They appear to be hikers by summer and snowshoers and backcountry skiers by winter, and several of the men and women present recount the year's adventures, which between them include any number of hikes in California, Utah, and Arizona. It seems that they meet this time each year to take advantage of the area's massive mountains, which, in addition to their abundance of ski resorts, also contain miles upon miles of open terrain for the more adventurous or experienced among them.

When I walk into the hostel, I am greeted as warmly as anyone else, though with some degree of curiosity. After asking for the details of my visit—how long I will be staying, whether I need any towels, etc.—Cathy, whose name I became familiar with when I last visited, shows me to my room. This time I am taken to one of the basement rooms that I had wondered about the last time I was here, interested to see if they are just as homey as the upstairs rooms or if they merely serve as overflow housing when necessary. As it turns out, the hostel's basement is no less personalized than its main floor. Its common room contains a pool table, a wrap around sofa that faces a television

that, like the upstairs, is currently tuned to the Olympics, and a variety of colorful touches. A neon-rimmed clock hangs on the wall, complementing the tube-lights strung around one of the basement's support poles and giving the place an approachable, non-denominationally festive feel.

The room that Cathy shows me contains six brightly colored, homemade quilts that are placed on each bed, matching the colors of the curtains around each of the bottom bunks. Like its first floor, the hostel's basement contains various decorative touches. The room that Bill and Cathy call the "women's dormitory" has pink and yellow bunk beds, a white wicker dresser and mirror, and various cartoon-themed bedspreads. While I don't know for certain that this is unique to the women's dormitory, I have to assume that since the men's dormitory plain white quilts and bunk curtains in subdued shades of plaid, there are no *Barbie* pillowcases to be found in there. Back in the women's room, the *Little Mermaid* pillowcase on my bed is accompanied by matching sheets on which Flounder and Sebastian swim happily. As I look across the room at the Strawberry Shortcake pillowcase on one of my roommate's beds, I wonder whether Bill and Cathy have children who used these sheets.

Upstairs, everyone I see appears to have been here before, whether to ski, snowboard, or otherwise. Having run this business for many years, Bill and Cathy seem to know most of the men who are currently milling around the living room, as well as the majority of the visitors that have come in since I arrived. There is even a dog wandering around the hostel, and I find out that he belongs to one of the guests when the owner, whose voice I do not recognize as Cathy's, shoos him out of the kitchen, commenting to a



friend that he usually learns quickly where he is allowed and not allowed to be. As I wonder what kind of person travels enough with a dog to know this kind of information about him, I realize that I admire these people, who are so comfortable traveling around, so willing to accept whatever new adventures come along. I sit for awhile at the larger table in what I can only describe as the dining room, preoccupied with my computer but also watching as a man in a brightly colored beanie and long-sleeved shirt bearing the name of one race or another talks to a friend about his drive to Leadville and the hitch-hiker gone Cajun cook he picked up along the way. For him, the hitch-hiker's Louisiana background and cooking skills remain the most notable part of that particular experience.

“Hey Cathy, Disco and Prince of Darkness are here!” shouts Bob.

“Oh great!” responds Cathy genially.

Aside from being perhaps unusually welcoming, Bob and Cathy have an excellent sense of humor as they chat with and enjoy their guests. Everyone seems to be drinking, whether boxed wine or warm beer, and when the beanie-wearing man offers Bob a beer, he easily accepts as if it is the most natural encounter in the world for him. It is as if they are truly hosting a party in their home for their closest acquaintances and I, along with another man who is reading an artistic looking book, have stumbled in unknowingly and are left to observe it from the fringe. I will see Howard, my host from the last time I was here, in the morning, indicating that he is still involved with the operation of the hostel, although Cathy and Bill have moved back into the house since I was last here. Their guests express surprise to see the couple back at the hostel, possibly because they have spent a good portion of the last year driving across the western United States in an

attempt to hit all of the major natural landmarks and as their own personal celebration of retired life.

In the morning, Bill and Cathy cook breakfast and mingle with their guests once again. It continues to amaze me that they can interact so easily with everyone here, some of whom they likely see only once or twice a year. I seem to lack the kind of social fluency that Bill and Cathy seem to take for granted. Although they extend multiple invitations to have breakfast with the group, I decline, feeling as if I have failed a crucial test by doing so. Nervous about my first solo snowboarding trip and anxious to get on with it, the prospect of facing a table full of strangers for the indefinite period of time that is “breakfast” seems exhausting to me. As I make my solitary walk to my car, I am aware that it would be a good chance to get to know more about the people I had just spent the day and evening with, but I am relieved to be alone once again.

As a result, I leave with only guesses about many of my companions—Maria in the bunk below mine, who I dubbed pneumonia-lady for the coughing I listened to all night and would remember repeatedly several days later after waking up with a rousing cold; Cindi, who was with the ski patrol and remained largely mysterious because of her extremely early departure; the man I knew only by his beanie, who appeared to be from Montana and was part of the large group of back-country skiers—as I leave the hostel I am aware that all of these people will remain distant strangers, but after a long night listening to my bunk mate cough up what seemed to be the entire contents of her lungs, I am anxious to get out on my own once again. Leaving the warm comfort of the hostel, I head out towards my second encounter with winter sports, driving towards the snowy



slopes of Leadville's ski resort and the site of the famous Tenth Mountain Division's training during World War II: Ski Cooper.

Like Leadville, Ski Cooper sits in the middle of a massively developed, resort laden region, with Copper, Vail, Breckenridge, and Keystone all within easy driving distance. With its five lifts, in comparison to Copper's twenty-two, Ski Cooper is relatively small, though on this particular day it contained crowds of young skiers who came to participate in a race sponsored by Bill's Sport Shop, Leadville's local outdoor gear store. Less crowded than the ski areas around it, Ski Cooper provides an ideal place to learn, which for me is appealing as the sensation of being strapped to the board beneath me is still frustratingly unnatural. Leadville residents, too, are proud of this place for its difference from surrounding resorts. Less crowded, at a higher base elevation—which locals always enjoy advertising as a mark of their uniqueness—and originally designed to accommodate the training of the Tenth Mountain Division, Ski Cooper holds for locals a certain amount of legitimacy over the manufactured ski resort towns around it, and has remained much the same for more than thirty years.

As I climb out of my car at Ski Cooper, I deeply miss my trusty friend and snowboarding teacher who on my last trip into the mountains served as a kind of translator between myself and the unfamiliar landscape of ski slopes, with their accompanying network of lifts. But despite this, there is no place that I would rather be than in these mountains, existing as they do at the intersection between the place-based identity that I have inadvertently developed in Colorado and the desire to understand and experience this environment in the way that current Leadville residents consistently do.

In a way, being at Ski Cooper is much like being in Leadville itself. Aside from the surprisingly intricate panda that someone has sculpted out of snow next to of the resort's two large buildings, very little here is different than it has been at any other time during at least the last twenty years. At some point, I ride Cooper's main, two-person wide lift with a skier who tells me that this is part of this place's appeal in comparison to the relentless development and commercialization of some of the other resorts in the area. A kind of shelter from the pressures of growth and change that press down on the rest of the world, Cooper is not just a cheaper alternative for skiers, but an appealing chance to slow down for a moment and relax on the mountainside without having to evade the crowds of families, tourists, and recreational skiers and snowboarders found elsewhere.

Despite the best efforts of Leadville and neighboring Ski Cooper to evade the inevitable passage of time, though, change is, quite literally and unavoidably, everywhere. In fact, it is so pervasively advertised these days that it's almost redundant. It is on commercials—BNP Paribas, “The bank for a changing world”; plastered across billboards—“Say NO to Piñon County expansion”; in presidential campaigns—“Change we can believe in”; and lurking in ever popular end-of-times movies that capitalize on these same fears that unrestrained change and development will someday lead to disaster of apocalyptic proportions. Bombarded with more or less ominous daily reminders that we live in a “modern,” “rapidly changing” world, we belong to a generation obsessed with the idea that after today, the world will never be the same again. The villains in this story are readily identified as fossil fuels, video games, the media, the government,



technology—all these more or less lumped together under the ever colorful umbrella that we historians call “modernity.”

In fact, the whole matter of modernity—a concept that I had never before given much thought—is apparently so pervasively unsettling that much of my first semester of graduate historical study was spent dwelling on this idea, which as it turns out, consistently proves its ability to deeply trouble historians. Gone are the days when “modernity” meant “progress” and “change” was merely a part of the ever forward march of “civilization.” While we try to keep the virtual minefield of scare quotes from overtaking our lives and our scholarship, it’s hard to consider using the word “modern” without qualifying it in some way, and perhaps for good reason. Obsessed as we are with both change and continuity over time, the modern world proves particularly complex entity, as both of these things appear repeatedly, side by side.

Here, Leadville attempts to hunker down, safe within the comfort of its attempts to make its memories of the past a present reality while just thirty miles down the road Copper Mountain joins the march of commercialization and convenience, its lei-sporting outdoor tiki bar employees conveying the comfortable notion of a world apart. While it seems impossible to truly outrun change or time, though, Leadville certainly isn’t the only American town willing to put up a fair fight, nor is it the only town to capitalize on the heritage tourism industry that has been created out of this uncomfortable relationship between the present and the past in modern life. It is a place like any other that struggles to mitigate the effects of inevitable change the only way it knows how—by quite literally using its past.

I am back on the lift that I started my day on mere hours ago at Winter Park, ironically named the “Zephyr,” after the Greek god of the warm, west wind. This time I am alone. Not wanting to bore Cory, who has been snowboarding for a decade, and always full of the potentially misguided confidence in my abilities with which I was raised, I’ve done my best to assure him that he would be better off on his own. Though he seems to be under the impression that I need a constant companion, Cory has finally agreed to do the last couple of runs of the day without me. But as I ride the lift to the top of the mountain, I realize that I do not, in fact, have any desire to do this alone. The snow falling much harder than before, I am cold and wet, and now that I’ve wiped out a couple of times, I’m *really* not looking forward to getting off of this lift. Now alarmed by the strangely complete silence of the mountainside, I look out at the unnatural metal structure that carries us up the mountain as I listen to the water that drips from the metal frame above my head, hitting the vinyl seat cover with a rhythmic drip, drip, drip. As I listen, I feel the uncomfortably soggy texture of my gloves and realize that water has somehow managed to soak all the way through their water resistant exterior.

Naively fond of Colorado’s mountains, I have once again forgotten that above 10,000 feet, there aren’t exactly guarantees on things like weather. I try not to think about the warm, dry sweatshirt that I know is waiting for me in the trunk of my car and instead focus on getting off of this lift, which completes the first step of my journey back to



warm, dry safety. My trip down the mountain will be not be pleasant, with jagged little frozen snow pellets assaulting my face as visibility becomes progressively worse, but it will also not be my last. Even as I trudge through the miniature ponds of melted snow and ice at the base of the mountain, I begin to look forward to the return of the snow next winter, though I will be back long before then.

My story—today or this year—failed to take the path that I had expected. I did not emerge on the other side of my experiences, the triumphant protagonist who has overcome the forces of life and the challenges of my own personality. But for me, this seems fitting. I may still view this landscape of lifts and alternating clear and forested patches as unnaturally foreign, and I may still feel uncomfortable when the woman next to me on the bus strikes up a conversation, but I do choose to travel into this unfamiliar territory. I'm sure that at some point during my childhood, some motivational speaker or perhaps even one of my parents said something like "life isn't about the destination, it's about the journey," and I realize more clearly now this isn't just something people tell young children who don't know any better. I have come to embrace the relentless movement and at times uncomfortable change that drive the world, and I realize that my journey to and with this place and the people in it may never be over. At the end of the day, as I wind my way out of Berthoud Pass and back toward my home in Fort Collins, I construct my next episode of encounter with this mountain landscape, my mind running over all of the possibilities that it offers.

## CONCLUSION

Believed to be the world's largest, highest-grade and lowest-cost molybdenum deposit in the world, Leadville's Climax Mine has a kind of local, national, and global historical significance that is unmatched in the region's recent past. At the height of its production, the mine employed more than 3,200 people, a number greater than the entire current population of Leadville, and with its decline in the 1980s, took with it a tremendous segment of both the town's population and economy. Retired mining engineer and longtime Leadville resident Bob Elder records that after the mine closed, "So many people had to leave the community....A lot of us felt lost. There was no life left here for quite a while."<sup>71</sup> Within five years of the closure of the mine, the assessed value of property in Lake County went from 258 million dollars to 44 million dollars, devastating locals and launching Leadville into what seemed to be a new era of postindustrial economic stagnation.<sup>72</sup>

However, with the acquisition of the mine by Freeport-McMoRan's international Climax Molybdenum Company, which itself takes its name from the Climax railroad station that once existed at the top of the Continental Divide as a way-station between

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<sup>71</sup> Dan Frosh, "Mine Water Poses Danger of a Toxic Gusher" *Leadville Journal*, 28 February 2008.

<sup>72</sup> Jason Starr, "Climax Owners want to reopen: Mine of Fremont Pass could be operating again by 2009" *The Mountain Mail*, 5 April 2006.



Denver and Leadville, hopes within Leadville for a return of prosperity were renewed.<sup>73</sup> Speaking for Leadville residents, Public Utilities Commissioner Carl Miller expressed his hope in 2007 that the reopening of the mine would bring jobs, tax revenues, and economic stability.<sup>74</sup> In addition, Mayor Bud Elliot, a non-native to Leadville, expressed his own hopes that the mine's return would resurrect a lost way of life, saying that Climax's reopening "gives us our identity back as a mining community."<sup>75</sup> Still, though, Freeport McMoRan estimates that even with renewed operations at Climax, the company would only employ around 350 people, a fraction of its workforce in the 1980s.<sup>76</sup>

Even more, there is no consensus in support of mining. With an increasingly diverse population of immigrants, some residents are less than pleased with the negative effects that mining has on the landscape. Lake County Commissioner Mike Bordogna, for example, worried recently that the current Leadville Citizen's Advisory Group, designed to safeguard the town's historic resources, didn't necessarily represent this newly diverse population. When the EPA proposed a new cleanup of the old mining tailings piles surrounding the town, for example, old-timers and newcomers were split in their opinions about whether to protect the tailings as a historic resource or clean them up in an effort to keep toxic substances from draining into the town's water supply.<sup>77</sup> This sort of division raises larger questions about the cohesiveness of opinion within Leadville surrounding other issues of historic preservation and the future economic direction of the town. How

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<sup>73</sup> More information about the history of Freeport-McMoRan's Climax Molybdenum Company can be found at the company's website, <http://www.climaxmolybdenum.com>.

<sup>74</sup> Marcia Martinek, "It's a go: Climax Mine will reopen" *Leadville Herald Democrat*, 5 December 2007.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Katie Redding, "EPA Proposes new clean-up plan for Leadville: Wary superfund site residents still guard mine-town geography" *Colorado Independent*, 4 August 2009.

much meaning can we gather from old-timer's memories of the past? How different are the perceptions of newcomers who have never been exposed to life with an operational mine? Can Leadville have a future that both preserves its heritage and moves into a future that may or may not keep that heritage alive?

At the moment, it seems that while some Leadville residents hold tightly to the idea of the mine's reopening, they also remain open to the idea of diversifying the town's economy to include the earning potential brought by outdoor recreation seekers. For example, new developments like the Mineral Belt Trail, which provides a 12 mile paved pedestrian loop around the old mining sites surrounding the town, are an attempt to illustrate that reuse of the older mining landscape can be functional.<sup>78</sup> Old-timers hope that developments like this can put a positive spin on environmental cleanup by both protecting the health of community members and highlighting the town's mining past. Thus, despite potential divisions within the town, one thing remains clear: Leadville old-timers may be hanging on to their own version Baby Doe Tabor's Matchless Mine through their consistent hopes for Climax's future, but they are also doing much more to adapt to the realities of a diversified population and economy, and the idea of a future in which postindustrial life may be here to stay.

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<sup>78</sup> United States Environmental Protection Agency, "Leadville, Colorado: Moving Beyond the Scars of Mining, Integrating Remedial Design and Site Reuse" [http://www.epa.gov/superfund/programs/recycle/pdf/cal\\_gulch.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/superfund/programs/recycle/pdf/cal_gulch.pdf).



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