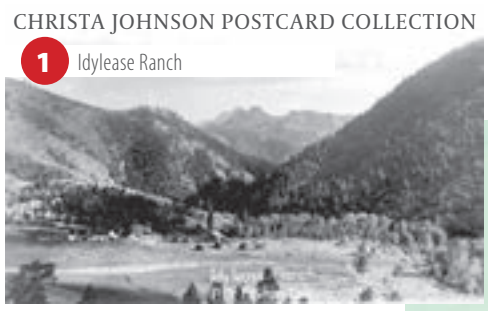
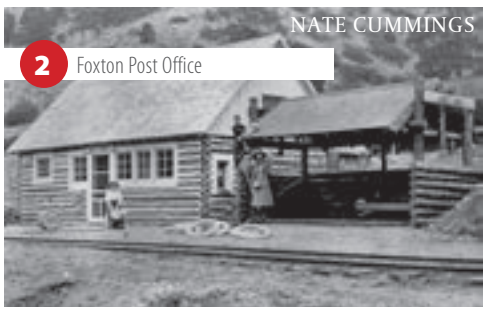
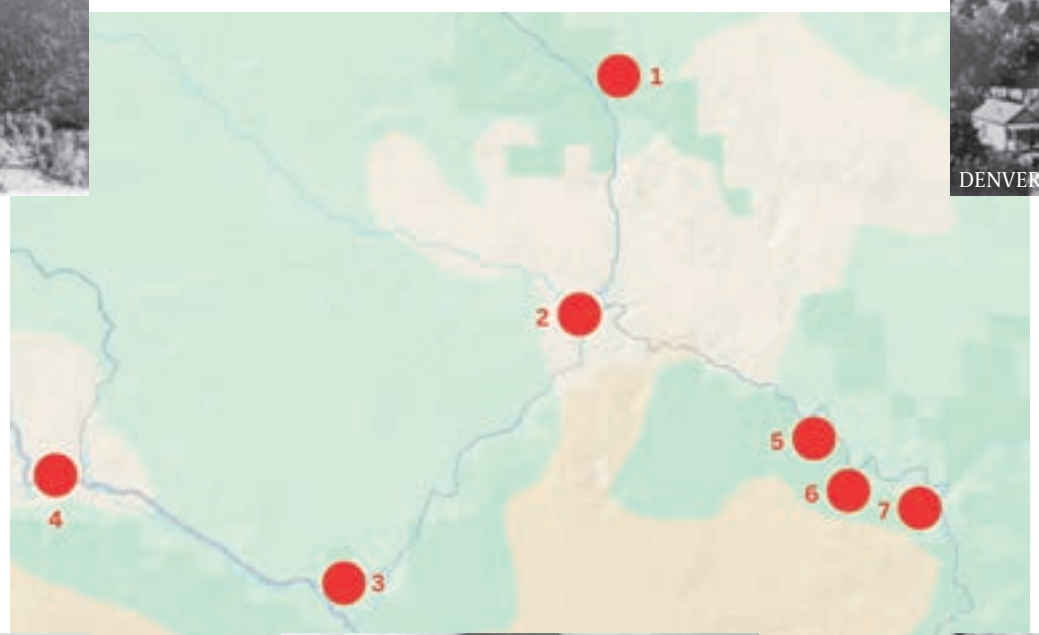
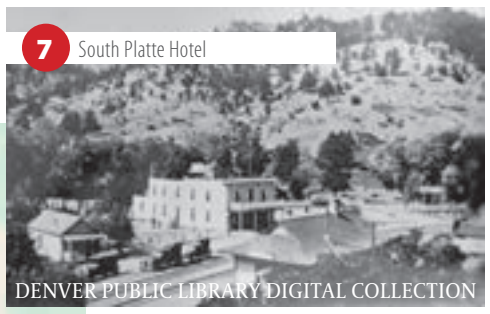
connection to **the past**

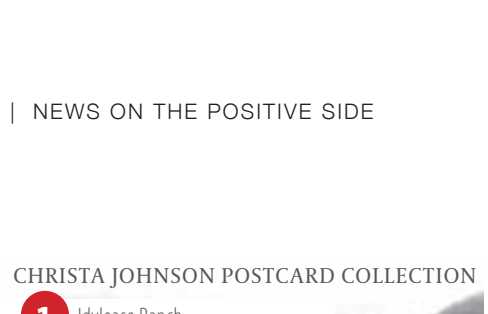
















CONIFER HISTORY TOUR

BY CHRISTA JOHNSON | CONIFER HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

Part 2 of 2

It's the perfect time of year for a Conifer History Tour!
There's nothing quite like traveling the local roads, wondering what the area looked like 100 + years ago, while following a tour route of historic places from your car or in your mind.

FOXTON ROAD AND WEST ON PLATTE RIVER ROAD

1 IDYLEASE RANCH

From the junction of 285 and Foxton Road, drive 5.8 miles to Reynolds Park Open Space, park in the campground parking lot on the left and hike the beautiful ranch.

Originally the Reynolds homestead, this property was later expanded with land from the Rutledge and Shepperd homesteads. It was named "Bar Lazy T Ranch" and then "Idylease Ranch" when it operated as a dude ranch, accommodating 40 guests with 14 cabins and a lodge (the family home). Visitors enjoyed fishing, horseback riding, croquet, hiking and tennis. It is now Reynolds Park Open Space on Foxton Road. The original cabins are no longer there, but the home serves as the park manager's residence.

2 FOXTON POST OFFICE

Continue down Foxton Road, turn right on Platte River Road and drive 1.1 miles to the post office on your right. You cannot enter the post office, but barred windows provide a glimpse inside.

The town of Foxton was established in 1876 and was initially known as Park Siding due to the park-like nature of the area. Its name was changed to Foxton in 1909, the same year that its post office was built. That structure is now listed on Colorado Preservation Inc's Most Endangered Places list, but some stabilization has been done. Foxton was a stop on the Denver, South Park and Pacific Railroad line that followed the South Platte River, and its access to the railroad contributed to development of the area. The road that passes the post office was once the railroad track bed.

3 J.W. GREEN MERCANTILE

From the Foxton Post Office, drive 3.5 miles farther on Platte River Road to the mercantile on your left. Walk through the historic building, pick up some ice cream, check out the old post office still in use today and view the collection of historic photos on display.

This store, located along the North Fork of the South Platte River, was the largest in the greater area and carried nearly anything—dry goods, groceries, clothing, boots and shoes, queensware, glassware, paints, oils—and also housed the post office and was adjacent to the train depot. It was originally built of wood in 1883 but burned in 1897 in a fire that destroyed many buildings in Buffalo Creek. Although the Greens owned two lumber mills, they were convinced to rebuild with granite in 1898, and it's survived ever since. The granite, cut into 18" squares, came from the Geddes & Serrie Stone Company, four miles away in the former town of Argyle, which also supplied the granite that built the Brown Palace in Denver.

4 PINE EMPORIUM

From the mercantile, turn left on Pine Valley Road and drive 3 miles to Pine Grove and the emporium on your right, where you can browse for vintage treasures and antiques and view historic pictures of Pine Grove.

Built by Pine Grove Founder Charles Dake in 1898, the store was originally known as the Pine Mercantile. It sold hardware, feed for area livestock and gear for Elk Creek fishermen who arrived on the "Fish Train" from the South Park Line of the railroad. Fruit, vegetables and meat were also sold—kept cool with ice cut from Crystal Lake. After Charles' death the store was run by his son Albert and daughter-in-law Pearl, and later by Warren and Ginny Larson. Today it sells vintage and antique items, and limited edition Bucksnort posters.

FOXTON ROAD AND EAST ON PLATTE RIVER ROAD

5 WESTALL MONUMENT

From the intersection of Foxton Road and Platte River Road, turn right and drive 2.5 miles to the stone monument located in a pullout on the right. The plaques are faded, but they will be restored soon.

This monument erected by the Ancient Order of United Workmen (AOUW) and plaques created by Conifer schoolchildren are dedicated to a brave railroad engineer who sacrificed his life in 1898 to save 450 passengers traveling on the South Park Line. The story says that during a trip back to Denver he discovered the tracks were blocked by sand and gravel and slowed the train to minimize the impact of the collision. He was pinned in the wreckage and died later that night, quoted as saying, "Tell my wife I died thinking of her," leaving behind a wife and 6 children. The crash occurred approximately 1 mile west, and the monument was erected here to create easy access to train passengers stopping at Dome Rock.

6 DOME ROCK STATION

After the Westall Monument, continue on Platte River Road for approximately 1 mile and look for the dome rock formation on your right across the river. Bring carrots for Ethel.

A rail station was located in this vicinity along the South Platte River and the South Park Line that ran from Denver to Gunnison. This popular stop along the "Fish Train" had a footbridge that led to a grassy area for picnicking and a viewing deck on the mountainside. The bridge was actually close to the Westall Monument. Today, the Dome Rock neighborhood remains, with a number of cabins and a well-known donkey named Ethel. Although the tracks, bridge and deck are gone, the rocks remain spectacular.

7 SOUTH PLATTE HOTEL

From Dome Rock, continue down Platte River Road for approximately 1 mile to the hotel on your right and a parking lot on your left. The hotel is not accessible to the public, but you can hike or fish at the confluence.

Built in 1887 by the Zang Brewing Company, the South Platte Hotel was located along the South Park Line at the confluence of the north and south forks of the South Platte River. It had 14 rooms, and the surrounding town included a post office, train platform and later a full train depot and saloon. Rail visitors came for day trips, fishing excursions and escapes from the summer heat. The original building burned in 1912 when a stagecoach driver went on a rampage, shot several people and set fire to the hotel. After being caught by a posse, he shot himself; the hotel (the current structure) was rebuilt in 1913 and remained open to the late 1960s.



Conifer History Tour

Part 1

If you would like to revisit *Conifer History Tour* Part 1, from our January edition, or any article from a past publication, visit our website at **www.yourmtnconnection.com** and download the PDF.

Thanks to Christa Johnson and the Conifer Historical Society and Museum for providing this month's Connection to the Past article.
The mission of the Conifer Historical Society is to share the region's legacy by collecting, preserving, and exhibiting historical and cultural materials.
www.coniferhistoricalsociety.org