
CREATIVE HISTORY – A CLOSER LOOK

This section goes into more detail about some of the people, places, businesses and industries profiled in the 1894 flood narrative. Special attention is given to discussing the historical process of each topic. Use these case studies in conjunction with Keys to Local History to evaluate challenging research questions and learn how particular problems were solved. Think about how some of the solutions might apply to your own research.

People

Get to know some of the people featured in the Main Events. Discover how and when they came to Boulder and their continued rolls within the community

Communities

Uncover more about Boulder's early history and additional information about a few of the mountain mining towns.

Local Industries

Discover the large industrial bases that drove Boulder's nineteenth-century economy, along with some locally owned businesses.

LOCAL INDUSTRIES

Every town needs a viable economy to survive. By learning about your town's beginnings and early businesses you can better understand how certain industries played vital roles in the formation of your community. You might also discover how and why your town developed as it did. Some of the key industries Boulder relied on in its earliest years are listed below. An emphasis is made on two businesses mentioned in the flood case study that made significant contributions to the town's economy.

Agriculture

Learn more about how Boulder's agricultural community started and what products were grown to supply the town with food.

Mining

Central to Boulder's beginning, uncover the different types of mining that made pivotal contributions to the area's economy.

Railroads

A necessary industry for mining, the Boulder mountain railroad system was a difficult venture plagued with financial and environmental problems. Discover more about the ups and downs of one of Boulder's key transportation industries.

Boulder Brewing Company

Discover how photographs and maps help to tell the story of two German families who were part of a long-standing tradition of brewing that still survives today.

Boulder City Flour Mills

Find out more about one of Boulder's many grist mills, and how you can piece together a company history from only a handful of sources

AGRICULTURE

The Beginning

In early August 1859, three brothers from Pennsylvania, Henry, Luther, and Sylvanus Wellman arrived in Boulder. They saw the area's farming potential and claimed 640 of land about two and a half miles east of Boulder along the creek, near what is now the northeast corner of Arapahoe and Foothills Parkway. Despite the late start they still sowed an acre of turnips with hopes to sell them to the mining communities at the end of the season. However, luck was not on their side. About one month later, a swarm of locusts rained from the sky, and the reported foot-deep pile of insects quickly devoured the young plants that were Boulder's first planted crop. The following season the Wellman's sowed the first wheat in the county and brought forty-five bushels at harvest.¹

Over the years the brothers continued to cultivate their land harvesting up to forty acres of wheat in addition to hay, grains, and vegetables. Gradually other farmers planted more varieties of grains and crops such as oats, barley, hay, and alfalfa.² These grains were not only for human consumption but also to feed all the pack animals necessary for work around town and in the mines.

Irrigation

Very quickly settlers realized that in order for Boulder and the mining towns to survive, the community would need to supply its own food. To succeed in farming, especially in the dry climate of Colorado, water was essential. In October of 1859, Marinus Smith and William Pell dug Boulder's first irrigation ditch to supply water to their fruit and vegetable gardens. By the end of the year there were a total of four ditches supplying water from Boulder Creek to area farms.³

Fruits and Vegetables

Within the first ten years local gardeners and horticulturists grew an amazing variety of

¹ *History of Clear Creek*, 386, 701.

² *History of Clear Creek*, 701. *Leading Industries of the West* (Chicago: H.S. Reed and Company, 1883) 46-47.

³ *History of Clear Creek*, 389; William R. Kelly, "Some 'Fifty Niners' Dug Irrigating Ditches," p. 2, A.A. Paddock Scrapbook. Boulder Historical Society Collection. Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado.

vegetables and fruits such as asparagus, beans, cauliflower, corn, tomatoes, turnips, winter squashes, cherries, currants, grapes, gooseberries, huckleberries, peaches, pie plant (rhubarb), plums, raspberries, and strawberries. Marinus Smith was the first to experiment with vegetable and fruit varieties to find ones that worked well in the dry climate and occasionally short growing seasons. His work paid off as his high-quality produce brought him accolades at the first annual Boulder County Fair in 1869 making him, and his fruits and vegetables, well-known throughout the county.⁴

Grazing and Stock

The early settlers quickly found the upland meadows and plains were natural areas for grazing and growing stock. Grasses were found in all areas of the county, and even at high elevations animals could enjoy the native rye, wild oats, and timothy grasses. With the introduction of irrigation, the dry plains were transformed and usable acreage expanded to support more herds of cattle, horses and sheep.⁵

EARLY MINING IN BOULDER COUNTY

Mining inspired Boulder's creation, but there was more to mining than just gold. Discover how one industry expanded broadly to include precious minerals, products for industrial purposes, sources of power, and building materials.

Gold

The desire for gold and quick riches brought the first wave of easterners to the plains and mountains of what later became Boulder County. Found on January 15, 1859 in Gold Run (near Gold Hill), Boulder's first gold discovery became one of the key strikes beginning the "Pikes Peak" Gold Rush of 1859. It was said that the first season yielded over \$100,000, with some claims producing \$80 per day, with no other techniques used other than panning or the use of hand rockers.⁶

Over the next decade hundreds of mines scattered the mountaintops, gulches, and canyons above Boulder. As communities grew around the early camps, towns formed and mining districts were designated around these towns. Districts such as Gold Hill, Sunshine, and Salina, proved to be some of the most consistent gold producers in the county. In 1896, thirty-seven years after the first gold was found, estimates revealed that these three districts alone extracted nearly five million dollars worth of gold.⁷

⁴ *History of Clear Creek*, 390-391; *Boulder County News*, 19 October 1869.

⁵ *History of Clear Creek*, 391.

⁶ *History of Clear Creek*, 382.

⁷ Newspaper *Daily Camera*, 24 Jan 1896. Article with monetary corrections came from M.M. Anderson's compiled "Collection of Local Newspaper Clippings Organized by Topic." Original Articles and Transcriptions. Copies of some of these personal research papers were obtained directly from author 7 July 2005.

Silver

Boulder County's second mining boom began with the discovery of silver during August of 1869 in what became the town of Caribou. News of the discovery traveled fast and within one year Caribou was built in sight of the Continental Divide at 10,500 feet above sea level, housed about 460 people, and boasted more than thirty-five mines.⁸

For ten years the largest mine, the Caribou, kept the town's momentum going, but problems began surfacing for both the Caribou mine, and the silver trade itself. After several changes in ownership, R. G. Dun bought the mine in 1879 only to face flooding mineshafts and nationally declining silver prices.⁹ The promise of a booming economy led railroad builders, bankers, mine owners, ranchers, and farmers to increase their investments, often to the point of over-extension. Bankruptcies, overproduction, overgrazing, and crop failures plagued the economy through the 1880s and 1890s. The silver industry kept producing, but demand for the metal was limited. Colorado's economy was teetering on disaster.

Throughout the nation's history gold and silver were the bases for the country's coinage. The volume of gold extracted during California's 1849 Gold Rush gradually reduced the price of gold, making it more affordable and a favored metal for coinage. Interest in silver declined, and so did its cost. The Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890 helped stabilize the silver trade as the United States government was required to buy a certain amount of silver bullion every month for the production of the nation's coinage. This boosted the silver price to \$1.05 an ounce in 1890, but it did not last long.¹⁰

The Panic of 1893 began when large businesses and foreign investors became nervous that a lesser-valued silver dollar might replace the gold dollar. By early June silver decreased to eighty-three cents an ounce, dropping only a few weeks later to sixty-two cents. As the price of silver plummeted businesses and banks closed. One month later people stampeded banks with hopes to retrieve their savings, only to be turned away and watch twelve Denver banks close in four days.¹¹ The Panic did not discriminate. Anyone unlucky enough to miss withdrawing his savings, be it the average person or multi-millionaire, became penniless overnight.

The repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act in 1893 echoed through Colorado. The country resumed the gold standard, the purchase of silver was no longer guaranteed, and

⁸ Smith, *A Look at Boulder*, 49.

⁹ Smith, *A Look at Boulder*, 53.

¹⁰ Leonard and Noel, *Denver*, 103.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

silver prices remained below seventy cents and ounce. Producing almost sixty percent of the country's silver, Colorado's silver mining industry collapsed taking a large portion of state's economy with it for many years to come.¹²

Tellurium

The discovery of telluride ore at the Red Cloud Mine at Gold Hill in 1872 brought with it another wave of miners to the region. The "worthless" dark-grey quartz discarded onto the tailing piles was reexamined as miners hoped to uncover new riches. In the 1870s only two other locations were known to have tellurium deposits: the Transylvanian district of Rumania and Kalgoorlie, Western Australia. Almost overnight camps such as Sunshine, Crisman, Salina, Balarat, and Summerville sprang up bringing hundreds of new miners to the mountains. News of the tellurium boom quickly revived the county's mining industry prompting railroad companies to build extensions to Boulder in 1873.¹³

Tellurium's value lies in its use as an alloy agent. Adding tellurium to lead increases its strength and decreases its susceptibility to sulfuric acid. It can also be combined with stainless steel and copper for easier to machining and milling; added to copper, tin, gold, or silver for use as a semiconductor; used in ceramics and glass as a coloring agent; and is a key ingredient in blasting caps.¹⁴

Quarries

Not only were minerals mined, but the county also had abundant stone resources, such as sandstone and limestone, which were quarried for a variety of building materials. The great supply of sandstone prompted a writer in 1880 to characterize the amount of material as "enough within the limits of [the] county to build all the cities in the world."¹⁵

Looking around Boulder today, it is easy to see the evidence of the sandstone used for building. It is not clear if the quality of limestone was good enough for building purposes, but the limestone outcrops along the foothills were extracted and burned to produce quicklime for cement.

Other quarried materials included granite, marble, and clay. The clays were suitable for use as building bricks, fireproof bricks, and for pottery.¹⁶

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Anderson, *Salina and Summerville*, 4; Smith, *A Look at Boulder*, 54-56.

¹⁴ Steve Gagnon, "It's Elemental – Tellurium," *Jefferson Lab*, [http://education.jlab.org/its elemental/ele052.html](http://education.jlab.org/its%20elemental/ele052.html) (accessed 2 August 2006).

¹⁵ *History of Clear Creek*, 385

¹⁶ *History of Clear Creek*, 386.

Coal

The 1880s proved Boulder to be one of the most productive coal-mining counties in Colorado, and a majority of the coal used in Denver came from the mines around Louisville, Marshall, and Lafayette. According to 1882 numbers, these mines dug out approximately 257,000 tons of coal valued at \$642,500. In the late nineteenth century Boulder valley was quite stark with its lack of trees, and coal provided an inexpensive heating source for home use and proved incredibly important for all kinds of industrial use.¹⁷

To learn more about different types of mining and minerals go to:

Mining at ThinkQuest.org.

[<http://library.thinkquest.org/05aug/00461/mining.htm>]

California Notes by Charles B. Turrill at The Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco

[<http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist9/turrillgold.html>]

BOULDER'S MOUNTAIN RAILROADS

The stories of Boulder's railroads are quite lengthy and complex. Over the decades different companies operated varying rail lines around the county. Because rail travel for both economic and recreational purposes affected a huge number of companies and individuals, the history of Boulder's mountain railroads provided below is very brief. Due to its rich history there are a number of topics about the railroad that could be researched in more detail. Newspapers, diaries, and oral histories would be a great place to develop more personalized projects about what the railroad meant to those living along its route.

For additional reading about the companies and people of the Boulder's mountain railroads, along with the death and rebirth of the trains after the 1894 flood, see Forest Crossen's book *The Switzerland Trail of America*.

In 1873, fourteen years after the founding of Boulder, train service arrived in town by means of the Colorado Central, Denver and Boulder Valley railroad. While Boulder benefited from the trains, the mountain towns continued to rely on horse-drawn freight wagons to haul ore and supplies to and from Boulder.¹⁸

Gold and silver booms quickly made Colorado the leading ore producer in the country bringing "railroad fever" to Boulder County in 1881. Work began on the county's first narrow-gauge railroad, the Greeley, Salt Lake and Pacific (GSL&P) with a proposed route up Boulder Canyon, north along Four Mile Canyon to Salina, then west to

¹⁷ *Leading Industries of the West*, 46.

¹⁸ Crossen, *Switzerland Trail*, 13.

Pennsylvania Gulch (later renamed Sunset). Plans stated that on the route up the trains would deliver coal to mining towns to replace the expensive wood burned in the mill boilers. Then on the return trip ore would be transported more cost-effectively down the mountains to the processing mills.¹⁹

It took workers almost one year to grade the railroad bed up the canyons from Boulder to Sunset. Materials for building bridges and the tracks arrived in June of 1882 and in November the line's first narrow-gauge engine arrived, but the tracks were not close to being ready. Waiting for the workers to lay track just in front of it, the engine gradually moved up the mountain. Five months later, almost two years after it began, the first train of the GSL&P traveled from Boulder to Pennsylvania Gulch (Salina) on April 6, 1883.²⁰

Noting the train's increase in passengers, the small mining communities along the route quickly began catering to tourists, businessmen, and overnight visitors. Businesses such as restaurants, grocery stores, and boarding houses opened up near each station hoping to cash in on the train's popularity. The following year the little rail line proved a success and there were hopes of the line continuing to Caribou, across the Continental Divide, and on to California, but those dreams were never realized.²¹

Despite periodic train derailments and rumors of the line shutting down, the GSL&P continued its daily routes until the spring of 1894. After experiencing a snowy winter and enduring a wet spring, the mountains above Boulder could not accommodate the sixty hours of continuous rain. During the early morning of May 31 a wall of floodwater rushed down many of the canyons around Boulder, destroying nearly everything in its path, including the railroad tracks of the GSL&P up Four Mile Canyon.

Railroad activity in the canyons remained quiet until another gold mining boom in the mid 1890s. Once again railroad executives were inspired to look at Boulder's canyons. It took four years before another train chugged up Four Mile Canyon, this time under the company name of Colorado and Northwestern (C&N). June 1898 marked the opening of the new railroad, with one exception, an additional 12.8 miles and nearly 2,000 feet in elevation to Ward. The C&N Company quickly adopted a Switzerland theme for their newspaper advertisements inviting the public to experience the "Switzerland of America." Reaching Eldora in 1904 the "Switzerland Trail" was finally complete.²²

¹⁹ Crossen, *Switzerland Trail*, 13-15.

²⁰ Crossen, *Switzerland Trail*, 21-26.

²¹ Crossen, *Switzerland Trail*, 27, 30.

²² Crossen, *Switzerland Trail*, 82; Smith, *A Look at Boulder*, 127.

Once again becoming the key source of transportation for ore to the mills, the C&N trains also became a very popular tourist attraction. Chautauquans organized daily excursions into the mountains with routine stops at the Mount Alto pavilion for lunch, snowfields for summertime snowball fights, and upland meadows for wildflower picking. Railroad handcars for six people were also available for rental. Although a strenuous job, men took turns working the handcar up the tracks for the ultimate payoff of the fast coast down at the end of the day.²³

Even with the success of the Switzerland Trail's tourism, the railroad faced financial challenges, and a 1907 railroad switchmen strike compounded what was already a difficult situation. During the strike a freight car filled with 2,400 pounds of dynamite was left at the freight depot at 10th and Water (Canyon) streets. A drunk and disgruntled striker set fire to some of the freight cars eventually causing the dynamite-filled car to explode, killing three men. The blast was so strong that it flattened the freight depot leaving a large crater, blew out many windows around town, and damaged near-by buildings.²⁴

Two years later continued financial pressure forced the Colorado and Western to reorganize as the Denver, Boulder, and Northwestern Railroad. For nearly ten more years the trains continued operations while company managers debated its fate. Despite a tungsten boom during the mid 1910s, discussions of shutting down the railroad were an ongoing process until the summer of 1919. A heavy July rainstorm caused a flash flood down Four Mile and Boulder Creeks, ripping up significant portions of tracks and bridges between Boulder and Crisman. The following month the company ordered the Switzerland Trail to permanently stop all operations and all rails to be scrapped. The Switzerland Trail would be no more.²⁵

For more information about railroads check out:

Boulder County Railway Historical Society

[<http://www.boulderrail.org/>]

Colorado Railroad Museum

[<http://www.crrm.org/>]

National Railroad Museum

[<http://www.nationalrrmuseum.org/>]

Railroad Maps at American Memory/Library of Congress

[<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/rrhtml/rrhome.html>]

Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum [<http://www.cprh.org/>]

²³ Smith, *A Look at Boulder*, 127.

²⁴ Crossen, *Switzerland Trail*, 178; Smith, *A Look at Boulder*, 127.

²⁵ Crossen, *Switzerland Trail*, 260, 267; Smith, *A Look at Boulder*, 127.

BOULDER CITY BREWERY

Conducting research for business histories can be difficult work, especially for local companies that have not existed for nearly a century. Over the decades official company records move or disappear, which can make available public documentation about a company scarce or non-existent. The brief histories of Boulder City Brewery and Boulder City Flour Mills are examples of two significant businesses that operated into the early twentieth century but have very little documentation, or even buildings remaining. The following company history demonstrates how even with a small collection of sources you can develop a sense of how the company operated and contributed to the community.

In 1875 brothers-in-law, Frank Weisenhorn and Charles Voegtle came to Boulder with their sights set on brewing beer. Frank might have been familiar with the area after two years of mining in Colorado (possibly Central City) during the early 1860s. Additionally, he gained at least six years of brewing experience in Montana and Portland, Oregon before finally settling with his family in Boulder. Charles, who married Frank's sister, moved his family from Quincy, Illinois.²⁶

The two Germans saw great potential for a brewery in Boulder and purchased two and a half acres of land from Marinus Smith on the south side of Boulder Creek on October 1, 1875.²⁷ The property, located at 10th Street between Valley Road (Arapahoe) and Marine Street, was conveniently located near the creek that would provide the brewery with the fresh mountain water to make beer. A few weeks later, *the Boulder County News* reported Weisenhorn's and Voegtle's building plans, stating:

*They are now engaged in erecting a very substantial brewery. There will be expended on the establishment, not less than twenty thousand dollars. The main building is to have a 70-foot front – the basement to be of stone, and the superstructure of brick. On the terrace above, commanding a complete view of the town, the fine residence of the owners is to be built next season.*²⁸

Six months later the Boulder City Brewery was fully operational, though it would take another five months to finish the pipe installations to run water from the creek through the entire building. Marketing their first batches of beer, the owners took kegs to the town newspapers for taste tests. Delighted writers sampled the brew and expressed publicly that they could “speak from actual knowledge when we assert that it is the best ever presented to this market.”²⁹

²⁶ *Leading Industries of the West*, 60; *Historical and Descriptive Review*, 160.

²⁷ Gladden, *Improvements*, 96. Gladden transcribed the article about Weisenhorn and Voegtle from the *Boulder County News*, 22 October 1875; Boulder County Deed Index, Book 33: 281.

²⁸ Gladden, *Improvements*, 96.

²⁹ *Boulder County News*, 31 March, 23 August 1876.

Weisenhorn and Voegtle continued developing their property by retaining more daily brewing functions on sight. Over the next decade the brewery complex expanded to include a twenty-five by sixty foot malt house, a power house, bottling works, ice house, cooperage, stables for horses and beer wagons, a boarding house for unmarried employees, and a beer garden. The brewery's capacity also grew over time, producing nearly 3,500 barrels of beer in 1882, 8,000 barrels in 1883, and by 1893 they had the facilities to brew up to 10,000 barrels a year.³⁰

Boulder City Brewery's lager and bock beers earned excellent reputations in the region and sales quickly grew. Kegs and barrels were shipped via freighter to the mountain mining towns; the brewery's horse teams delivered to Boulder's ten saloons and other plains towns such as Eire, Lafayette, Superior, Louisville, and Marshall; and they even made local house calls, delivering bottles to front porches around town.³¹

As the business expanded so did Boulder City Brewery's local business contributions. Nearly all of the grain used to make the malt, an average of 12,000 bushels per year, came from local farmers, and after Marinus Smith dug a pond in his grove in 1881, Weisenhorn and Voegtle struck a deal to cut ice from it each winter. 600 tons of ice were cut 1882, increasing to 1000 tons the following year. Used in the huge concrete cellars, ice kept the lager beer cold during the fermentation process and helped with long-term storage. To make ice harvesting more cost-effective Weisenhorn and Voegtle eventually spent \$30,000 in the mid 1880s constructing an ice pond and icehouse on site.³²

The brewery owners also made contributions for the community's benefit. Townspeople enjoyed the brewery's public beer gardens where they could relax in an atmosphere surrounded by "shade trees, grape arbors, and trout-filled ponds." Another popular recreational spot was located at Weisenhorn Lake a few miles east of Boulder near Valmont. Frank Weisenhorn owned the grazing land for his cattle, but he also improved an area along the lakeshore. The small dance pavilion and picnic spot that he built became popular for local parties and holiday outings.³³

Charles Voegtle retired from the brewing business around 1891, prompting Frank to incorporate the company in August 1891. Weisenhorn ran the company for several more years, but financial problems forced him to sell the brewery to the First National Bank in

³⁰ *Leading Industries of the West*, 60.

³¹ *Historical and Descriptive Review*, 160; *Boulder County News*, August 1876.

³² *Leading Industries of the West*, 60; Gladden, *Improvements*, 336, 460; *Historical and Descriptive Review*, 160.

³³ Jane Barker, "Over the Shoulder – There Once was a Brewery in Boulder," *Daily Camera, Sunday Focus*. 12 March 1978, p. 20.

1897. Frank and his family moved to Denver where the following year he became one of the brewers at Zang's Brewery.³⁴

Samuel Pell bought the large brewing facility around 1900, changing the name to the Crystal Springs Brewing and Ice Company. Pell ran the business until 1916 when prohibition went into effect in Colorado forcing the brewery to close its doors. Remaining empty for several years, the buildings finally succumbing to a fire in 1921. Nothing of the brewery remains today except for the company house at 952 Arapahoe where the Weisenhorn and Voegtler families lived for several years and many employees boarded.³⁵

BOULDER CITY FLOUR MILL

Conducting research for business histories can be difficult work, especially for local companies that have not existed for nearly a century. Over the decades official company records move or disappear, which can make available public documentation about a company scarce or non-existent. The brief histories of Boulder City Brewery and Boulder City Flour Mills are examples of two significant businesses that operated into the early twentieth century but have very little documentation, or even buildings remaining. The following company history demonstrates how even with a small collection of sources you can develop a sense of how the company operated and contributed to the community.

In 1872 the Sternberg brothers, both of whom were farmers and millers, moved to Boulder with a vision of building a flourmill. DeKalb Sternberg and his family had been operating their own 340-acre farm north of Denver for two years before his brother Jay arrived from Iowa. Jay was already familiar with the area after mining during the initial 1859 Gold Rush. Out of the towns the brothers knew in Colorado, the small mining supply town of Boulder offered the best potential for growth. They purchased six acres on the south side of Boulder Creek about one mile southeast of town near what became 24th and University Streets.³⁶

³⁴ *Historical and Descriptive Review*, 160; Jane Barker, "Over the Shoulder – The Boulder City Brewing Co.," *Daily Camera, Sunday Focus*, 2 February 1975, p. 7; Frank Weisenhorn household, 1900 U.S. census, Arapahoe County, Colorado, population schedule, Denver, ED 31, sheet 5A, dwelling 102, family 110, National Archives micropublication T623 roll 117. The Weisenhorn family lived at 2649 California Street in Denver and Frank worked as a brewer. The only source that mentions Weisenhorn working at Zang's is a note with a photograph of Frank and Teresa Weisenhorn. More research needs to be done, as the photograph found in a three-ring binder showcasing Boulder individuals is the only current source, Boulder Genealogical Society, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado.

³⁵ Jane Barker, "There Once was a Brewery in Boulder"; Clarence L. Spears, compiler, *Boulder Colorado, in 1883. An Experiment, and a Beginning, in Local History* (Boulder, CO: by the author, 1939) 375. Spears references an article in the *Boulder News and Courier*, 5 January 1883.

³⁶ "DeKalb Sternberg," *Portrait and Biographical Record of Denver and Vicinity, Colorado* (Chicago: Chapman Publishing Company, 1898) 680; *History of Clear Creek*, 685; Gladden, *Improvements*, 618, from *Boulder County News*, 9 June 1876. Gladden transcribed numerous newspaper articles in reference to the Boulder City Flouring Mill. Following notes from this source will indicate pages from Gladden publication along with the newspaper name and date.

Working quickly, the brothers completed their 30- by 53-foot, three-story, wooden mill in late August 1873, and named their venture the Boulder City Flouring Mills. Installation of three sets of millstones created a planned production capacity of ten tons of flour, or two hundred sacks every twenty-four hours. This optimistic capacity fell short for the first two years since they only averaged seventy-five sacks a day, and it would take several more years until they would get close to reaching the full two hundred sacks per day.³⁷

Within the first year the mill gained an excellent reputation for all three grades of flour. Some believing the mill's lowest grade product was better than any of the high-grade flour shipped from the eastern states. During 1875 and 1876 the brothers made several improvements. The first addition was the installation of a forty-horse-power steam engine. Prior to steam power, they could not work during the winter because the supply of water became problematic when Boulder Creek froze. Now they had the capability to work all year round relying on waterpower in summer when the creek was high. In addition to the steam engine, they purchased an extra set of millstones to increase their production capacity.³⁸

By 1878 the flour mill consistently producing close to 180 sacks per day and the brothers added a fifth set of stones to grind corn and oats. Their products were shipped to towns and major markets across the state. Even Cheyenne, Wyoming (almost 100 miles away) enjoyed Sternberg's "Premium" and "Patent" flours. As the company grew, their supply base expanded benefiting the regional economy. In addition to buying their wheat in Colorado, the company began purchasing corn from farms in Kansas, and oats in Nebraska.³⁹

Just as the company began gaining wider success, DeKalb stepped down from his position and sold all his interests in the mill in 1879. It is not known why he resigned, but he and his family remained in the area buying 160 acres about a mile and a half east of Boulder near Valmont to develop a farm and grow fruit. It might have been during this ownership change that Jay switched the company name to Sternberg Flouring Mill.⁴⁰

³⁷ Gladden, *Improvements*, 616-617, from *Boulder County News*, 29 August 1873, 5 March 1875.

³⁸ Gladden, *Improvements*, 616-618, from *Boulder County News*, 22 May 1874, 5 March 1875, 9 June 1876.

³⁹ Gladden, *Improvements*, 619, from *Boulder County News*, 11 January 1878; *Leading Industries of the West*, 52.

⁴⁰ *Portrait and Biographical Record*, 680; *Boulder County Directory* (Publisher unknown, 1896) D.K. Sternberg listing.

On his own, Jay Sternberg kept the company competitive when he invented a crucial piece of machinery that set his mill apart from others in the state. Around 1880 he developed what he called the Centennial Separator. Used during the final step of the cleaning process and just prior to milling, the Separator removed the last bits of excess dirt, gravel and other small objects from the raw wheat. Removing the potentially damaging gravel saved time and money by keeping the grinding stones and rollers operational, and it created a cleaner and superior tasting product. Many other mills within Colorado offered large sums of money for the use of Sternberg's patented machinery, but he refused. By only selling the Centennial Separator to mills in states such as Utah and California, he secured his place in the Colorado market through tough competition.⁴¹

On a late March evening in 1889, burglars entering the mill's engine room broke into the office. Even though the engine room fires had been put out to clean the boilers, it was believed some stray embers set the room ablaze around 8:30 p.m. and quickly spread through the mill. The fire department arrived promptly on the scene, but the structure was just beyond the reach of their equipment. This forced a hook and ladder company to use buckets to battle the flames. The fire could be seen from all over town, and it was said that the color of the fire reflected in the Boulder courthouse's windows nearly a mile away. Even the people in Marshall, the coal-mining town five miles south, "were out in the streets, wondering what was going on in Boulder."⁴²

Within two hours, the \$60,000, four-story wooden mill, its supplies, stock, and equipment burned to the ground. Even some new machinery that had not yet been installed lay in the embers. Only a few tools were salvaged from the smoldering wreckage, but luckily the company's account books, though charred, survived inside the partially melted company safe.⁴³

Two days later, head miller Charles Rowland reflected on the disaster to a *Boulder County Herald* reporter, "I stand upon the ruins of the walls yesterday and see what was left of the mill and of every piece of machinery which I had known for almost seven years, knowing just where it had stood and what work it had done. It was all I could do to keep the tears back, so attached had I become to everything connected with the mill."⁴⁴

This fire not only affected the mill owner and employees, but the entire community, because the Sternberg Flour Company was one of the most important industries in Boulder. Approximately \$120 in weekly wages was lost, farmers lost a daily wheat buyer, and town businesses lost the consumer dollars that went back into the local

⁴¹ *Leading Industries of the West*, 51-53.

⁴² Gladden, *Improvements*, 620-622, from *Boulder County Herald*, 29 March 1889.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Gladden, *Improvements*, 621, from *Boulder County Herald*, 29 March 1889.

economy. Boulder's business community quickly realized the importance of constructing a new mill as soon as possible.⁴⁵

Despite financial setbacks and the slow process of insurance adjustors, a man by the name of S.A. Giffin took matters into his own hands and motivated the community to help out. So that the flourmill could rebuild quickly, Griffin encouraged owners of property around 11th and Front (Walnut) Streets to donate land to the mill. The close proximity to the freight depot made the location ideal. Three weeks after the fire the new Sternberg Milling and Elevator Company organized, and only six months later the new and improved mill was up and running, ready for a grand opening.⁴⁶

Jay Sternberg owned the Milling and Elevator Company for nearly one more decade before he retired. In 1898 he stepped down and the company was renamed the Boulder Milling and Elevator Company. Shortly thereafter Jay moved with his family to southern California where he died in July 1912. DeKalb remained in Valmont until his death only two months before his brother in May 1912. The mill continued operation until it went bankrupt in 1923. The Boulder Valley Mill Elevator and Cereal Company attempted to resurrect the property, but only stayed in business for a short time. The buildings stood vacant for several years until they too succumbed to fire in 1931. Nothing remains of the buildings today.⁴⁷

Check out the following links for more information about how mills work and historic mills around the country.

Old Sturbridge Village - Mills and Water Power

[<http://www.osv.org/education/WaterPower/index.html>]

Grist Mill

[<http://www.osv.org/education/WaterPower/Grist.html>]

Mill Pictures

[<http://www.millpictures.com/index.cfm>]

⁴⁵ Gladden, *Improvements*, 622, from *Boulder County Herald*, 29 March 1889.

⁴⁶ Gladden, *Improvements*, 624-627, from *The Colorado Banner*, 23 October 1889, *Boulder County Herald*, 30 October 1889.

⁴⁷ Details about the fate of the Boulder Milling and Elevator Company came from "Boulder Milling and Elevator Company Photographs, 1898-1921," BHS 207-19-23, Carnegie Branch Library Online Catalog, <http://nell.boulder.lib.co.us/search/dBoulder+Milling+and+Elevator+Company+%28Boulder%2C+Col/dboulder+milling+and+elevator+company+boulder+colo/-3%2C-1%2C0%2CB/frameset&FF=dboulder+milling+and+elevator+company+boulder+colo&11%2C%2C16> (accessed 4 June 2006); Gladden, *Improvements*, 627.