
CREATIVE HISTORY – THE MAIN EVENTS

Sometimes when you hear the same story over and over again, you begin to ask questions about what *really* happened during a particular event. The tale of the 1894 Boulder flood was one I needed to question. Not because I lacked belief in the numerous renditions, but I wanted to know *more* about the people, what happened to them, how the town struggled to rebuild, and what happened to the mountain towns after the destruction of the railroad.

There are times when all it takes to develop a local history project is the desire to know more about something you see or hear about on a regular basis.

The case study presented here is based on my originally published 2001 article “Good Baptist Weather”: Boulder County and the Flood of 1894” in the Colorado Historical Society's quarterly, *Colorado Heritage*. Click the introduction link below to begin the journey faced by Boulder citizens over a century ago.

Introduction

Put the events of the flood into perspective by getting a sense of what was happening around Colorado in May 1894.

Before the Flood

The day prior to the flood was full of Memorial Day preparations and quite typical, except for the heavy rain.

31 May 1894

The water unleashed its full power in the early morning hours, turning central Boulder into a lake by midday.

Cleaning Up

After evaluating the damage, the citizens of Boulder and the mountain communities faced a long process of cleaning up before rebuilding could begin.

Rebuilding

Personal and financial struggles made rebuilding difficult for everyone, but unfortunately some faced greater sacrifices and one was pushed past the brink of sanity.

INTRODUCTION

At the height of the flood of May 31, 1894, Colorado governor Davis Waite could not be found. The flood washed out railroad tracks all along the Front Range, and the governor's

train, bound from Florence to Cripple Creek, got stranded at an unknown location in the mountains. His absence was particularly alarming because of an active miners' strike at Cripple Creek; armed union men patrolled the mountains, and there was no telling what kind of danger the governor might have fallen into. Not to worry; Waite resurfaced, unharmed, the following day when the tracks were cleared.¹

The episode illustrates how seriously the flood disrupted travel and communications in Colorado. In Pueblo, the Arkansas River inundated the train depot. Floodwaters washed out train sidings and irrigation ditches at Florence, while Fountain and Ruxton creeks rose to unprecedented levels at Manitou Springs. The waters submerged mine shafts in Idaho Springs, collapsed a dam in Loveland, and destroyed several bridges in downtown Denver. A group of Coxeyites there encamped at the city's riverfront, preparing for a voyage down the South Platte to prove it a navigable stream. They got more than they bargained for when the flood destroyed their staging ground and sent them packing.²

Despite all the havoc the disaster inflicted, the state government was in no position (quite literally, in Governor Waite's case) to offer aid. Nor was it inclined to do so. Disaster response in the late nineteenth century was generally considered a local matter; communities looked after their own victims and repaired their damage, using as much money and resources as they could muster from their own citizens and businesses.

In the flood of 1894, no community illustrated this ethic of self-reliance more strongly than Boulder. Like Governor Waite, the city temporarily went missing in the deluge — an entire population unaccounted for, cut off from the outside world. The waters swelled Boulder Creek into a rushing river, washing out bridges and train tracks in every direction and bringing down telegraph and telephone lines. It is a measure of how isolated the city was that newspapers in Denver, just thirty miles away, reported almost no news of the wreckage in Boulder until about sixty hours after the event.

During those long hours of isolation, the people of Boulder had no one to fall back on but themselves. The same held true in the weeks and months after the flood, after contact with the outside world was restored. No disaster-relief structures or protocols existed; no officials from the Federal Emergency Management Administration, or Red Cross volunteer task force would arrive to take charge of the situation and assist in community rebuilding. Boulder could not even count on help from the Colorado National Guard; it was on duty in Cripple Creek helping Governor Waite negotiate the labor strike.

¹ *Denver Times*, 1 June 1894; *Daily Camera*, 1 June 1894.

² *Denver Republican*, 2 June 1894; *Daily Camera*, 2 June 1894.

It was up to the people of Boulder to rescue their own community. “Boulder must provide for her own,” the editors of the *Boulder Daily Camera* wrote the day after the flood. And in that spirit, the community set about the task of rebuilding.³

BEFORE THE FLOOD

Despite the persistent rain on May 30, 1894, Boulder attempted Memorial Day celebrations in typical fashion. Parades and marches to the cemeteries were called off because of the weather, but festivities were brought indoors to the courthouse and everyone still had a good time. The Boulder University Club gamely attempted to complete its scheduled baseball game against the Denver Athletic Club, but after Boulder grabbed a 14-2 lead in the bottom of the second inning there was no point in continuing. Still, good spirits prevailed; farmers enjoyed a respite from their springtime work, and miner received a rare Wednesday off.⁴

The University of Colorado’s commencement proceedings heightened the holiday mood. The university’s first class of medical students received their degrees the previous evening, and the general body of graduates would receive their diplomas the following day. On graduation eve, a packed house enjoyed a special concert by Madame and Signor Sobrino and Professor Paul Stoeving.⁵

In the mountains above Boulder, mining towns marked the holiday with equal relish. Jamestown (affectionately known locally as Jimtown), riding the success of the Golden Age mine, took on “quite a metropolitan look,” and now boasted its own dressmaker shop, bakery, laundry and ice cream parlor. On the farmland east of Boulder, the spring rains promised a good start to the growing season.⁶

But there was something different about this rainstorm. It went on steadily through the day and into the night, saturating the ground and choking streams that, after heavy winter snows, were already swollen with spring runoff. At around ten o’clock, some folks noticed that Boulder Creek was quickly rising, and with the rain still coming down the threat of a flood became serious. Some worried whether the Beasley Ditch headgate of would hold the rising water.⁷

³ *Daily Camera*, 1 June 1894.

⁴ *Daily Camera*, 30 May 1894.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ J.B. Hiskey, diary, 30 May 1894, J.B. Hiskey Diary, 22 May 1891-1 June 1901, Boulder Historical Society Collection. Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado.

31 MAY 1894

That night, Boulder, Four Mile, Left Hand, and James Creeks all rose out of their banks carrying huge boulders as the flood gained momentum in the canyons above town. Water tore through the canyons decimating mines, railroad bridges, and settlements along the way. By daybreak water poured out of the narrow canyons and spread out onto the flats, crashing with such force that “the earth seemed to tremble.”⁸

Early that morning, Harvey Poole and a friend stood on the 6th Street bridge as Boulder Creek surged rapidly under their feet. A sudden loud crash and tearing sound caused both men to leap for the north bank of the creek as the bridge broke in half behind them. The current pulled the twisted wreckage about a hundred feet downstream where it lodged against the bank. A short time later a man named J.B. Andrews had a similar narrow escape downstream on the 12th Street Bridge. Nailing up a sign to warn teamsters not to cross the structure, the bridge broke apart under Andrews forcing him to make a desperate jump to the creek bank.⁹

High school student Harriet Harmon came upon the shattered 6th Street bridge while walking her usual route to class that morning. Stranded, she walked back and forth on the north side of the stream as crowds of people gathered looking on in disbelief. Boulder Creek, normally thirty feet wide, had widened to an angry river several hundred feet across. The rubble-strewn waters battered the city all morning, tearing down telegraph and telephone poles, crashing into creek-side buildings, and ripping up the railroad tracks.¹⁰

Beasley Ditch, a small irrigation channel for local farmers (later known as Boulder and Whiterock Ditch), now “unreasonably assumed the function of Boulder Creek.” The current obliterated the headgate and tore apart the farmland and homes adjacent to the ditch. The effect was devastating in “Poverty Flats,” or Culver’s Flats, a subdivision housing many of Boulder’s poorer families and immigrants. Bordered on the north and south by Water (Canyon) Street and Valley (Arapahoe) Road, respectively, and on the west by 17th Street, this low-lying area accumulated approximately six feet of standing water by the end of the day.¹¹

⁸ Charles Cobb, *Charles F. Cobb’s Life* (Boulder, CO: by the author, 1941) 57.

⁹ “Flood of 1894,” Unsigned and undated eyewitness account, Vertical File: Natural Disasters-Flood-Boulder, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado; *Daily Camera*, 31 May 1894.

¹⁰ Harriet Roosa to City Council, Boulder, CO, January 1960, Letter in Vertical File: Natural Disasters-Flood-Boulder, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado. Harriet’s maiden name was uncovered in entries in the Carnegie Library’s Online Card Catalog while searching for her married name.

¹¹ *Daily Camera*, 2 June 1894; J.B. Hiskey, diary, 31 May 1894, J.B. Hiskey Diary, 22 May 1891-

A crowd gathered at Water and 12th (Canyon and Broadway) to watch the water hammer away at the foundation of Jacob Faus's house. A well-known blacksmith, Faus lived on the west side 12th Street, just southeast of the 11th Street railroad bridge. As the flood hit early in the morning, debris clogged up the bridge forcing the water to change course to the south, right towards Jacob Faus's house. The family escaped their home and made it safely to Frank Weisenhorn's house. The powerful water ate away at the creek bank, and around noon succeeded in removing Faus's house from its foundation, allowing it to float across the street and "sail grandly down the muddy stream." The house lodged against the bank approximately two hundred yards down stream and was quickly reduced to kindling by the force of the current.¹²

In the midst of the destruction, some Boulderites took heroic steps to rescue the stranded. Boulder police officer Ed Knapp came to the aid of one of Boulder's more infamous citizens, Madam Kingsley, by wading to her island bordello near 10th and Water Streets and carrying her—and her two pug dogs—out on his shoulders. Unfortunately, the officer could not heft another heavier-set occupant of the bagnio; she had to wade her own way to safety. Officer Knapp later tried to persuade Marinus "Marine" Smith from his house near Water and 16th, but Smith, a prominent Boulder pioneer, refused to leave his home. His house nearly half underwater, Smith holed up on the second story and refused to budge, ranting that enemies were out to get him and would take his house if he left.¹³

In Culver Flats, and other areas threatened with submersion, twenty men with teams and wagons ferried people to higher ground. As the water rose and the roads grew muddy, they set the wagons aside and carried their passengers on horseback, one by one. Some homeowners hauled away heavy furniture before the floodwaters could get it, while others moved goods out of threatened storerooms. One woman carried a 100-pound sack of sugar from her cellar up two flights of stairs to dry safety. Joe Monroe, a fireman for the railroad, foolishly tried to save his chickens and fell into the rushing water. Those who saw the water carry him away gave Monroe little chance of survival, but he somehow grabbed some driftwood and pulled himself to safety. Town Marshal, Frank Metcalf, was rumored to have drowned while assisting residents near Culver Flats, but he turned up later safe and sound.¹⁴

1 June 1901, Boulder Historical Society Collection. Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado.

¹² *Daily Camera*, 31 May 1894; Anna M. Grant, "Four," Interview with Katherine Faus, Newspaper Clipping, ca. 1936, Jacob Faus Family Papers, Boulder Historical Society Collection. Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado.

¹³ *Daily Camera*, 31 May 1894.

¹⁴ *Daily Camera*, 31 May, 1 June 1894.

As the flood raged, two of Boulder's prominent photographers, Lawrence Bass and "Rocky Mountain Joe" Sturtevant scrambled to document the catastrophe as best they could. Unfortunate for Sturtevant, he lived south of Boulder Creek near 8th and Marine streets, and with all the bridges washed out could not reach his studio on the north side. The Boulder *Daily Camera* kept track of their competition, noting that Bass "will have some good views of the weird scenes of the flood" and, thanks to Sturtevant's bad luck, "will have a scoop." Rocky Mountain Joe eventually crossed the creek to his studio and helped record the disaster and its aftermath.¹⁵

J. B. Hiskey, a well-known grocer and mining supplier whose house stood along the path of destruction, wrote in his diary that day:

*There is a flood on and a terrific one. The Farmers ditch headgate went out in the night and the whole course of the Creek seemingly carried down the ditch. The whole portion of 4th ward south of the ditch is flooded from one to 6 ft deep and great distruction [sic] is being done. The Narrow Gauge Road is washing out the Freight depot is surrounded by water. . . The Rolling of Huge Boulders in the Creek Carried the waves to mounds up 6 to 10 ft. high.*¹⁶

His erratic writing captures a sense of confusion and panic that was probably felt by everyone.

Those same feelings overtook C. S. Thomas and Judge Hallett as they attempted to keep their speaking engagement at the University of Colorado's graduation ceremonies. Hallett, a newly retired U.S. district judge and the founding dean of the university's law school, must have been particularly anxious to appear. The two gentlemen boarded a train in Denver but were turned back by washed-out tracks. Believing the podium would stand empty without them, they rushed from one rail station to the next in a frantic search for transit to Boulder.¹⁷

But there was none to be found. The flood washed the city right off the map, taking every road, railroad, and bridge with it. "All telegraph and telephone communication was cut off," the *Denver Republican* would later report, "and there was no egress in any

¹⁵ *Daily Camera*, 31 May 1894; *Bensel Directory Company's Boulder County Directory, Colorado Business Directory and Annual Register* (Trinidad, CO: Bensel Directory Co., 1892) Sturtevant, Joseph B. listing. The entry gives Sturtevant's home address as "Marine cor 8th." Four years later the *Boulder County Directory* (Publisher unknown, 1896) provides the address of 744 Marine.

¹⁶ J.B. Hiskey, diary, 31 May 1894.

¹⁷ *Daily Camera*, 1 June 1894.

direction.” Boulder became an island, hopelessly cut off from its neighbors—and completely alone.¹⁸

CLEANING UP

The morning of June 1 brought sunny skies, making the flood’s toll painfully clear. The 6th, 9th, 12th, and 17th street bridges over Boulder Creek were completely gone, and the raging force of the creek twisted the 4th Street Bridge into a sagging semicircle. The loss of these spans left Boulder cut in half, with the north and south sides completely isolated from each other. The train depot stood under at least three feet of water, and one narrow-gauge engine stranded helplessly in the deluge. The Union Pacific Denver and Gulf Railroad, which connected the state capital to Boulder, suffered extensive damage, not only in town but also on the prairies to the east. Surprisingly, for all the damage the flood wrought in Boulder, it did not kill a single resident of the city.

Farmers faced the destruction when surveying their fields the morning after. The floodwaters fanned out as they moved downstream, forming a lake a mile wide (according to one report) between Boulder and Valmont. They left behind a thick layer of sand, rocks, and branches that thoroughly covered the fertile soil east of town. Beasley Ditch was a total loss; the many farmers who relied upon it for irrigation now had to wonder if their whole crop was lost.¹⁹

Despite the damage in town, the devastation in the mountains exceeded even that of Boulder and the farming regions. Some reports claimed that the water came down the canyons in a wall ten to twelve feet high; it is a wonder any of the towns on Boulder, Left Hand or James Creeks survived at all. Jamestown was “practically wiped of the face of the earth,” and the hamlets of Crisman, Glendale, and Springdale sustained severe damage.²⁰ Many of the houses and stores in Crisman were gone, and the town’s lifeline—the narrow-gauge railroad—disappeared down the river. Many of Glendale’s buildings were swept away, the main road was completely washed out, and three people lost their lives. Little remained of Springdale, a small resort town along James Creek known for its mineral springs. Its main tourist draw, the famous Seltzer House Hotel, went tumbling away in the froth. Ni-wot resident Frank Bader even reported that part of the Springdale bowling alley turned up near his home.²¹

¹⁸ *Denver Republican*, 2 June 1894.

¹⁹ *Daily Camera*, 1 June 1894

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Calvin Schnucker, *Glendale: Jewel of Left Hand Canyon* (Boulder, CO: Autsy Press, 1983) 60; *Daily Camera*, 2 June 1894. There is some confusion regarding the Ni-wot reference. In addition to the current town of Niwot, about four miles northeast of Boulder, the now defunct town of Altona at the mouth of Lefthand Canyon also went by the name of Ni-wot between 1872 and 1879. In order to verify which town the newspapers were referencing, it is necessary to locate Frank Bader’s home in 1894.

Before people could even begin to think about rebuilding, Boulder and its satellite communities had to think about survival. With roads and bridges out, deliveries of essential materials—food, fuel, water, and medicine—could not get through. In Boulder, residents of the south side, which lacked a commercial district, stood in particular need—and local residents stepped up to meet that need and ensure that nobody went hungry. The offers of assistance came as early as five o'clock on the afternoon of the flood, when Mr. W. H. Allison, manager of the Sternberg Mills, pledged fifty sacks of flour to families suffering deprivation. The following day the Lockwood Trading Company sent two hundred loaves of bread to the south side, and the Boulder Brewery on the south bank of the creek near Arapahoe and Ninth, sent much-desired beer across the stream in exchange for much-needed bread, which it distributed to hungry neighbors. A rancher named Billy Martin provided meat from one of his freshly slaughtered calves to help people in the area of Boulder hardest hit by the flood.²²

Moving these supplies across to the south side required a bridge of some kind. Boulder alderman, Edwin J. Temple solved that problem by rigging up a rope and pulley system between some cottonwood trees near 6th Street. Using this precarious conveyance, people and goods could shuttle back and forth across the still rampaging stream. The *Denver Republican* reported that University of Colorado president James H. Baker and a team of students raised a second rope bridge at 12th Street. Though somewhat flimsy, these homemade connections at least put the stranded south siders back into contact with the town and provided a short-term solution to one major problem.²³

Boulder officials spent the day after the flood assessing the damage to the area's infrastructure. Fred Kohler, chairman of the county board of commissioners, found a way into town and toured the city. A water commissioner examined the water works and declared them badly damaged, with at least a month's worth of repairs in order. The major roads were in even worse shape, and the railroads incurred so much damage that rumors were already afoot that they would not be rebuilt.²⁴

A daunting picture emerged. The flood took Boulder County's railroads, mines, and farms—three pillars of the regional economy—out of commission. Thousands of workers in those industries were idled and their jobs stood in jeopardy. The communication and especially the transportation networks lay in tatters. Most of the small farming towns around Boulder needed supplies, and the mountain towns were completely cut off and desperate for help. In Longmont, the Electric Light Company ran out of coal and had to

²² *Daily Camera*, 1, 2, 4, 6 June 1894; *Denver Republican*, 2 June 1894.

²³ *Daily Camera*, 1 June 1894; *Denver Republican*, 3 June 1894.

²⁴ *Daily Camera*, 31 May, 1 June 1894.

borrow from private bins; six days later, still waiting for a coal shipment, it prepared to shut down.²⁵

On the evening of June 1, state senator Fred Lockwood presided over a public meeting at the district courthouse. Calm prevailed in the packed room as local leaders discussed their predicament and weighed various options for how to respond. Before the meeting adjourned, eleven men volunteered to serve on an ad hoc “committee of ways and means” to coordinate the relief effort. Their responsibilities, the *Daily Camera* reported, were “to raise funds, confer with city and county authorities, and to do all things necessary” to facilitate reconstruction. Eminent physician H. O. Dodge chaired the committee, which also included Senator Lockwood; university regent R. H. Whiteley; merchants George McClure, H. N. Bradley, J. B. Hiskey, and S. C. Brown; the Reverend R. A. Chase; mine owner Ezra T. Carr; old-timer Luther Hixon, a one-time representative to the territorial convention; and L. M. Glimm.²⁶

The day after the meeting in the district courthouse, the *Camera* published an impassioned call to duty from Senator Lockwood:

*If energy, brains and action were ever in demand in the affairs of city and county, now is the time. Our mining camps have been visited with disaster; our city has been swept with the raging waters, and the farms in the valley have suffered immeasurably. These are the facts, briefly told, and now, what shall we do? First of all, the roads to our mountain camps must be put in a passable condition without delay so that the toilers in the mines will be able to market their product. The best brain possessed by our legal fraternity must be used to guide our county commissioners in devising ways and means to raise money to pay for the vast amount of work which must be performed. . . [A]n immediate effort in the direction of rebuilding roads would be doubly beneficent inasmuch as the labor needed in such enterprises will give to every citizen who is in need an opportunity to earn, at least, a living, rather than to become an object of charity. . . The public has large responsibilities too, which must not be overlooked, and the sooner it realizes that unity of purpose and of action is essential to success . . . just that much sooner will an improvement be apparent.*²⁷

An unsigned *Daily Camera* editorial echoed the theme of self-reliance in the same day’s edition: “There will be, should be, little or no dispensation of charity. What is demanded is work for those who will be unemployed and there will be ample work for all such upon

²⁵ *Daily Camera*, 7 June 1894.

²⁶ *Daily Camera*, 2 June 1894.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

the public high ways which must be reconstructed, the houses to be rebuilt, the water works system to be repaired. . . Let the order go forth that none but Boulder county men shall be employed in restoring roads and bridges lost and much our great loss shall have been mitigated by remunerative labor given to our own people." ²⁸

The response was swift and widespread. Knowing it would take some time for the ways and means committee to get organized, citizens immediately took the initiative and started rebuilding on their own. On June 2 a group of men set out to force Boulder Creek back into its normal banks. A brigade of men filled sacks with sand and tossed them into the creek at the Beasley Ditch headgate, closing off that outlet. Another group of men cleared away the mass of debris blocking the main channel, using dynamite when necessary to blast obstructions clear. ²⁹

At four o'clock the next morning, however, the whistles at the Boulder Brewery sounded, signifying trouble. About one hundred yards of stream bank on the south side of Boulder Creek gave way, taking an entire block of vacant home lots with it. The cave-in left several houses teetering precariously on the shaky banks, which were stabilized by a group of men who heeded the brewery's alarm. Similar "aftershocks" occurred periodically over the next few days. ³⁰

Since the miners could not work in the flooded shafts, they turned out in force to help rebuild the highways. "Every healthy man has left his employment and gone onto the roads," the county commissioners reported on June 4. One group headed east, working under the supervision of Commissioner Kohler, while several other contingents labored to reopen the roads to the mining camps. In just four days, they made enough general repairs to allow the Jain Brothers' stage line to resume service between Ward and Boulder. Another one hundred men were hard at work repairing the road to Jamestown, and doing so without pay. The workers asked only that the commissioners provide them with food, along with a pledge to pay wages as soon as the county had the money. ³¹

The farmers east of Boulder did not sit idle either. A week after the flood, about fifty of them came with their horse teams and cleared the debris out of Beasley Ditch. The piles were so high in places that it was simply easier to plow out a new stretch of ditch. As sandbags held the water back where the headgate used to be at 12th Street, the Beasley Ditch Company was already drawing up plans for a sturdier headgate and devising a better water overflow plan. ³²

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *Denver Republican*, 3 June 1894.

³¹ *Daily Camera*, 4, 5, 6 June 1894.

³² *Daily Camera*, 7, 9 June 1894.

Maintaining contact between the north and south banks required constant vigilance. Erosion and shifts in the current forced alderman Temple to abandon his rope bridge at 6th Street after only one day; he and another alderman, William W. Wells, reassembled the apparatus at 4th Street on June 2. “A hero named Chambers,” reported the *Camera* that day, “carried a rope across the creek at 12th Street this morning. He lost his feet repeatedly but manfully stuck it out and got to the south shore with the rope.” Eventually the city built more reliable footbridges to provide at least minimal correspondence between shores until permanent structures were built.³³

On June 2, two days after the flood, the Union Pacific Denver and Gulf attempted to restore service between Denver and Boulder. Repairing the extensive track damage took time, but as a stopgap the railroad tried sending a train around the flood and into Boulder by a northern route through Brighton, Greeley, and Fort Collins. This circuitous route put every possible connection to the test, but to everyone’s great disappointment the train still had to turn back. “Three days and no papers or letters from the outside world,” the *Daily Camera* sighed. “It seems an age.”³⁴

In addition to their labor, the people of Boulder gave their money to help during the crisis. The committee of ways and means raised \$230 on the first night of its existence, and over the next couple of days two committee members alone—the Reverend Chase and H. N. Bradley—pulled in close to \$1,000. Citizen groups such as the Merry Milk Maids and the Sisters of Charity staged fundraisers for flood victims, while the Sobrinos and Professor Stoeving—stranded in Boulder after their commencement-evening concert—gave an impromptu recital to support the relief effort. Performing with only two hours’ notice, they still managed to raise \$33.25.³⁵

Judging by the newspapers, Boulderites kept their sense of humor throughout the crisis. The *Camera* probably raised a few eyebrows when it referred to the nonstop rain as “good Baptist weather.” Noting the deployment of troops to contain a mining strike in Cripple Creek, someone joked that “the flood might have been put down if Governor Waite would have sent the National Guard.” Many lamented the plight of poor Dan McAllister, stranded on the south side while “his best girl lives on the other side.” And defiant of the floodwaters, Dr. Jay waded into Water Street and successfully caught a seven-inch trout. If nothing else, these types of editorial comments relieved stress and kept morale from sagging too low.³⁶

³³ *Daily Camera*, 2 June 1894.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Daily Camera*, 2, 4, 6 June 1894.

³⁶ *Daily Camera*, 31 May, 1 June 1894.

Here and there, bits of good news elbowed their way through all the bad. A week after the downpour, two brothers named Andy and John Gunn decided to take another look at some mining prospects they ignored for some time. To their amazement, the floodwaters washed away a great deal of soil in a gulch, exposing a huge mass of gold-tinged ore. The Gunns would not estimate a dollar value for the lode they named McGinty, but they expected it to be very high.³⁷

Boulder's spirits rose again on June 4 when the University of Colorado held graduation ceremonies for the Class of 1894, only three days behind schedule. Given all the disruption to the town, it was a remarkably short delay. The celebration was appropriately subdued, but one important milestone was unfortunately overshadowed: Jeanette B. Dunham became the first woman in Colorado to earn a law degree.³⁸

That afternoon, Boulder finally received its first mail delivery since the flood. "For the first time in five days," the *Denver Republican* noted, "the people of this place have felt as if they were getting out of the wilderness." Even greater joy greeted the resumption of train service; although the first arriving locomotive only got to the outskirts of town, the sight of it brought a chorus of shouts and hurrahs. Construction was already underway on a temporary bridge to bring the trains into downtown. Normal life seemed to be making its way back into Boulder.³⁹

Two days after the flood, Marinus Smith was finally removed from his house. Rescuers waded neck deep in water to reach him on the second floor. Smith went kicking and screaming, a scene that shocked and saddened the town's residents. A prominent pioneer, farmer, and philanthropist, Smith fostered the growth of both Boulder and the university; his contributions included the donation of 25 acres of land for the campus. Marine Street, near the university, was named in his honor.⁴⁰

Smith refused to leave his house during the flood and planned to remain there for the long haul, surviving only on oyster crackers and sugar, which he rationed into seven piles. His rescuers took him to the city jail and put him in the "insane cell." After two days Smith became lucid enough to talk to a reporter. "I did a foolish thing when I broke a window in my house," he said nervously. "You see, I thought I had brought all this flood down on Boulder."⁴¹

³⁷ *Daily Camera*, 7, 10 June 1894.

³⁸ *Daily Camera*, 1, 5 June 1894.

³⁹ *Denver Republican*, 5 June 1894.

⁴⁰ *Daily Camera*, 2 June 1894; Christine Whitacre and R. Laurie Simmons, *Boulder Survey of Historic Places: Goss-Grove Neighborhood* (Boulder, CO: Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, 1986) 14.

⁴¹ *Daily Camera*, 2, 4 June 1894.

REBUILDING

Digging out from the disaster was enough to make anyone go crazy. Although the community made some strong initial steps and registered much progress, it still faced great burdens: debris to clean up, roads to reconstruct, ditches to repair, bridges to rebuild. More mundane infrastructure matters such as sidewalks and sewers also demanded attention.

The road damage was most serious upstream in the canyons above Boulder to the mining camps. The task of repairing the highway up Boulder Canyon, from Boulder to Salina, fell to Charles Cobb, a well-known freighter who lived in the foothills. Cobb quickly recruited sixty-five men for the work. He approached the construction very efficiently by having men work on specialized tasks, and his strategically timed dynamite blasts made the process move quickly. Cobb lit the fuses himself during each day's noon break, so that his men were eating lunch at safe locations when the rocks flew. Cobb proudly stated that no one on his crew was ever hurt. He and his crew, with the help of some volunteer road builders, needed only a month to get a road open for hauling supplies to and from Salina.⁴²

Progress came slowly, particularly in more isolated areas such as Four Mile Creek above Salina. For almost a month, volunteering miners performed all the road repairs in that district, with no help from the county. Frustrated leaders of the mountain communities threatened to pull their business from Boulder and Longmont if these towns did not push harder to finish the road repairs. The miners were more than happy to take their business to Denver if the valley towns would not share the financial burden.⁴³

But Boulder County could not spend money it did not have. From the very start, the committee of ways and means resolved (and the county commissioners agreed) to hire only Boulder County men to do the work of rebuilding. However, the immense cost involved left the county unable to provide appropriate wages for all the laborers. The commissioners finally offered twenty cents per hour for basic labor, and thirty-five cents per hour for a man with a horse team. The editors of the *Camera*, however, warned officials not to use poverty as an excuse for inactivity: "If the commissioners assume the ground that they have no money and can do nothing until money comes to them through regular channels, they will be declared incompetent, incapable men from every sensible point of view. . . Men are idle. Roads need rebuilding. Employ the men and give us the roads."⁴⁴

⁴² Cobb, *Cobb's Life*, 57.

⁴³ *Boulder News*, 21 June 1894.

⁴⁴ Boulder City Council Minutes Ledger, Vol 5, 5 June 1894, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado; *Daily Camera*, 4 June 1894.

At times patience was as hard to come by as funding, but on the whole Boulder's population took their hardships in stride. When the water finally receded, the trains began running again, and normal routines and work patterns slowly returned. A hopeful symbol that life was regaining its usual ebb and flow came on June 19, when the ditch company finished installing its new headgate near 12th Street. The sandbags were finally removed, the headgate was lifted, and water—once again a benign force, bringing growth rather than destruction—ran freely down Beasley Ditch.⁴⁵

It was July 20 before the city of Boulder finally hired a contractor to rebuild the 12th Street Bridge. The construction firm, the Wrought Iron Bridge Company of Canton, Ohio, did not finish its work until November 8, about two months overdue. The new 9th Street bridge was not ready for traffic until January 3, 1895, nearly seven months after the flood, and it—along with the new spans across 17th and Arapahoe streets—appears to have been plagued with defects until well into the spring.⁴⁶

However long it might take, Boulder and its inhabitants were getting back on their feet. Unfortunately in the mountains, time did not heal all wounds. Some of the mines eventually opened back up and resumed production, but many of the supporting stamp mills were destroyed. Also, the flood occurred immediately after another disastrous event for the mining towns—the Silver Panic of 1893, which devastated Colorado's silver industry. Approximately sixty percent of Boulder County's ore production was in gold, but the gold camps were struggling nonetheless. Now, to make matters worse, the Union Pacific Railroad announced it would not rebuild its narrow-gauge Greeley, Salt Lake and Pacific (GSL&P) line up Boulder and Four Mile canyons.

The railroad had little choice. The flood destroyed all but two of the fourteen miles of track. The line crossed Boulder and Four Mile Creeks fifty-one times in that fourteen-mile span, with sixty-six bridges and trestles totaling more than three-quarters of a mile. Although some of these were constructed of iron, most were made of wood, which splintered easily under the power of the rushing water. With such heavy damage it made no sense to rebuild, and the remaining stretches of tracks were eventually removed.⁴⁷

The loss of the railroad must have been a crushing blow to the small mining towns. How would they bring their ore down from the mountains? How would they survive? For more than ten years the GSL&P made the mountain economies work. Prior to the railroad, it cost \$3.50 per ton to ship ore (via freight wagon) from Ward to Boulder. This meant only the highest grade ore could be mined profitably. The train enabled businesses in Boulder

⁴⁵ *Daily Camera*, 19 June 1894.

⁴⁶ Boulder City Council Minutes, 20 July 1894; *Daily Camera*, 4, 22 December 1894; *Boulder County Herald*, 3 January 1895, found in Sanford Charles Gladden, *Improvements in Boulder, Colorado Through 1900* (Boulder, CO: by the author, 1984) 515.

⁴⁷ Forest Crossen, *The Switzerland Trail of America* (Boulder, CO: Pruett Press, 1962) 27, 30.

to ship higher quality goods to the mountains, in higher quantities, and for greater profits. Its importance cannot be overstated. The mountain towns in particular benefited from the train, which eased access and mobility within a remote area. One resident lamented in a 1941 interview: “It seemed like something went when it was washed out during the big flood of 1894.”⁴⁸

With the railroad abandoned, the rebuilding of roads into the mountains took on more importance than ever. The process cost staggering amounts of money—an estimated \$1,000 to \$1,200 per mile of road. At those prices, residents in some of the more isolated camps believed they would see several winters before they saw a road. The survival of towns such as Gold Hill, Sugarloaf, Copper Rock, and Balarat hung in the balance.⁴⁹

Charles Cobb, who helped rebuild the road from Boulder to Salina, resumed his freighting service and did a brisk business hauling coal to mountain mines and homes. Since the journey to Boulder was now an arduous task, people often asked him to do chores for them on his frequent trips into town. He cashed paychecks, bought groceries, took shoes in for repair, and even shopped for fabric and thread (which he matched to the samples women sent with him). In his autobiography, Cobb joked that he “became the chore boy for every woman in camp.”⁵⁰ The personal errands often took up more of his time than the hauling, but Cobb—reflecting the same generosity that had prevailed ever since the disaster—never charged anyone for these services.

The mountain towns along Boulder and Four Mile Creeks did without a railroad until 1898, when the newly formed Colorado and Northwestern Company laid new tracks up both canyons to Ward and areas west. By this time Gold Hill was booming again, and Eldora was showing signs of promise, but the damage was already done to the smaller camps. In Four Mile Canyon, communities such as Sunset, Copper Rock, Wall Street, and Crisman (which once claimed to have the richest mine in the country) hung on for many years, but they never recovered from the flood and the ensuing loss of roads and railroads.

Further north, the towns along Left Hand and James Creeks faced similar outcomes. The citizens of Jamestown rebuilt as much as they could, and although some of their mines reopened, many of the mills, such as the Golden Age, were completely destroyed. Floods plagued Jamestown for many more years, and the town never truly got back on its feet, though it remains inhabited today. Towns such as Balarat and Springdale could not survive in any form. Balarat, which was difficult to reach by road even before the flood, was mined periodically over the years, but never recovered and was abandoned.

⁴⁸ Crossen, *The Switzerland Trail*, 35, 66.

⁴⁹ *Daily Camera*, 13 June 1894.

⁵⁰ Cobb, *Cobb's Life*, 58.

Springdale, the mineral springs resort town along James Creek, might have had a great future, but the citizens never totally rebuilt after the flood, and a fire in July 1903 finished most of the town off. Nothing of the town is left today.⁵¹

Marinus Smith became another long-term casualty. His behavior remained erratic and he made several trips in and out of the local “insane cell,” although some believed his children simply wanted him out of the way to take over his property. After court proceedings to determine his state of mind, a judge decided to send Smith to the State Insane Asylum in Pueblo. After spending nearly two years there, Smith returned to Boulder to live with family members until his death in 1901, albeit in dubious mental health; the 1900 Boulder census listed him as “insain” while living with his daughter Estelle and son-in-law, Henry Drumm.⁵²

On the day after the flood, a headline read: “The windows of heaven opened and Boulder was submerged.”⁵³ It must have felt that way to the people who lived through it. But, relying on its own resources and the good will of its citizens, the community fought its way back to the surface. The flood affected every individual on some level. Some only faced inconveniences such as the inability to travel or the lack of mail delivery. Others lost jobs, homes, businesses, or entire farms. But whatever their individual circumstances, most Boulder citizens regarded the recovery as a community problem. They never lost sight of larger-scale issues such as the reconstruction of roads and bridges and the resumption of railroad service—and they pulled together to make sure the work got done.

The consequences of the flood were felt for a long time, and not all of them were happy, but as a community, Boulder made a full recovery. Its citizens found ways to solve problems together, and to do so with determination, resourcefulness, and even a bit of humor. A *Daily Camera* editor said it best when reflecting on a proverb:

*One touch of Nature makes the whole world kin,” and so surely is it true that one great common affliction makes all men neighbors and brothers. One pleasing reflection of the flood will always be that there were hundreds of willing hands and open homes to relieve every case of distress.*⁵⁴

⁵¹ Robert Rosenberg, “Ballarat,” Boulder County, Colorado Historical Sites Inventory, May 28, 1977, Boulder Historical Society Collection. Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado; *Fort Collins Weekly Courier*, 15 July 1903.

⁵² *Daily Camera*, 2, 4, 6, 12-14 June 1894, 12 January 1901; *Boulder County Herald*, 20 October 1896; Henry A. Drumm household, 1900 U.S. census, Boulder County, Colorado, population schedule, town of Boulder, enumeration district 161, supervisor’s district 217, sheet 14, dwelling 301, family 335, National Archives micropublication T623, roll 121.

⁵³ *Daily Camera*, 31 May 1894.

⁵⁴ *Daily Camera*, 1 June 1894.