



1800 Plaza Drive, Louisville, Colorado

According to the Boulder County Assessor's website, the property at 1800 Plaza Drive is owned by Michael Schonbrun & Susan Juroe and occupies "Lot 3 Louisville Plaza 2" in Louisville. The County Assessor's records state that the house was built in 1910. This date has been corroborated by other sources.

The photos and map included in this report are from the collection of the Louisville Historical Museum.

Northern Colorado Coal Mining Strike of 1910-1914 and the Construction of this Building

The building at 1800 Plaza Drive was constructed in 1910. Because of the purpose for which it was built and what it was used for, this structure represents a significant historic period in Colorado and labor history, as it was at the center of events during the Coal Wars in Colorado. It is also one of the last remaining mine structures (that is not a mining camp house) from the coal mines of northern Colorado, of which there were 163.

This building is discussed in, and photos of it appear in, the book *Once a Coal Miner: The Story of Colorado's Northern Coal Fields* (Pruett Publishing, 1989) by Phyllis Smith; the book *The Louisville Story* (1978) by Carolyn Conarroe; and the film *Louisville* (1994) about the history of the City, produced by the City of Louisville. This report draws extensively on these sources for information about the labor conflict that relates to this building.

Smith writes that in 1910, coal miners in Colorado's Northern Coal Fields, which extended from Marshall to Firestone in Boulder and Weld Counties, earned only about \$3.10 a day and the exact amount was determined by the tons of coal that they actually mined. After months of tension and negotiations, during which the union's demands for a pay increase were turned down, a strike was called in April 1910. It has been estimated that 2700 miners in the Northern Fields went on strike.

Smith goes on:

Thus started the longest coal strike in Colorado history – four years and eight months. . . . [F]or the northern field, most union men were out of work for almost five years. During that time, street fights, knifings, and sudden gunfire became commonplace. There were mysterious explosions and unexplained fires. Picket strikers fought with children of scab workers. At the end, almost five years later, the full-scale industrial war would be discussed by United States citizens and would finally come to the attention of such absentee mine owners as the reclusive businessman . . . John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

(Smith, 106-107)

Mine owners resisted unionization and refused to buckle under. They began to bring in strikebreakers, or scabs. Many of these men were recent immigrants, some from Eastern Europe.

As described in the film *Louisville*:

Mine operators brought in hired guns from back East to protect the non-union workers and by 1910 had built stockades around their properties, turning their mines into armed camps. Company housing was built and strikebreakers were urged to live on site for their own protection.

The Hecla Mine in Louisville, located at the northeast corner of South Boulder Road and Highway 42, was at the center of this labor war. In 1910, it was one of Louisville's oldest mines, having been in operation since 1890.

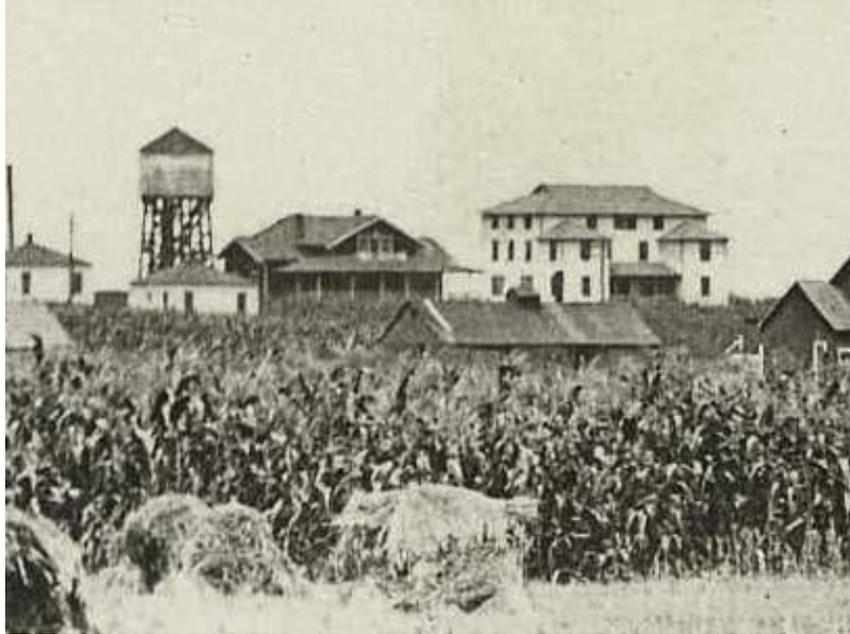
By the summer of 1910, the owner of the Hecla Mine constructed buildings for the strikebreakers inside a fenced compound. The purpose was to keep the strikebreakers on the premises so that they would not have a reason to leave and thereby risk their lives. This effort represented the company's decision to dig in for a long strike. The buildings that were constructed for the strikebreakers were a large boardinghouse for about 75 men; about twenty-six mine camp houses that were called "Hecla Heights"; and a "Casino" for entertainment and gambling. The building that is now at 1800 Plaza Drive was the Casino. According to Smith, "The gambling hall became a great financial asset to the operator who, after paying Hecla workers on Friday afternoon, got the money back over the weekend . . ." (Smith, 108-09)

The accompanying map, obtained by author Carolyn Conarroe from the files of the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company, shows the location of the Hecla compound buildings. (The top of the map represents the direction east.) The mine camp houses at Hecla Heights were at the very corner of South Boulder Road and Highway 42. The Casino was just to the east of



Another photo and a close-up of it show the Casino in the distance. This photo was taken from the vicinity of what is now the Harney-Lastoka Open Space south of South Boulder Rd. The view is looking northeast. The Rex #1 Mine is in the foreground on the right.





The Hecla Mine compound was the site of sustained violence between strikers and strikebreakers in the days following the Ludlow Massacre in April 1914 in southern Colorado, where a strike had also been in effect. The Ludlow Massacre refers to the deaths of 20 people, some of them women and children, by the Colorado state militia. The news inflamed striking coal miners along the Front Range. By April 1914, their strike had been going on for four years. The UMWA immediately issued a call to arms for Colorado striking miners. The governor then ordered law officers to confiscate machine guns and searchlights from coal mines. However, gunfire broke out near Louisville before this could be done. The Hecla Mine and the town of Louisville itself were subject to about fourteen hours of nearly continuous gunfire between the strikebreakers who were at the Hecla and the strikers. Several men were injured and one died of his injuries. The state militia was brought in to establish peace, then federal troops were called in. The federal troops set up camp just east of Louisville. When the violent conflict had ended, bullet holes covered some of the buildings in the Hecla Mine compound.

Two recent *Louisville Historian* articles show the extent to which the Casino building was at the center of events taking place during the Coal Wars in Colorado.

The Winter 2014 issue of *The Louisville Historian*, viewable online at <http://www.louisvilleco.gov/home/showdocument?id=1132>, extensively described the strike events and activity at the Hecla in a lead article written by Ron Buffo. He wrote the article in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the strike violence in 1914, and he also led a driving tour in April 2014, of historical sites relevant to the strike violence, that included a stop by the Casino building.

The lead article of the Fall 2014 issue of *The Louisville Historian*, viewable online at <http://www.louisvilleco.gov/home/showdocument?id=4030>, was entitled “Keeping the Peace in Louisville, 1914-1915” and described the circumstances under which President Woodrow Wilson in May 1914 sent federal troops to bring stability to several mine strike hot spots in Colorado where violence had occurred. Louisville was one of the locations, and the federal troops in Louisville ended up staying for eight months. One of their first orders of business was to collect firearms. The *Denver Post* reported that among the weapons that they collected was a machine gun and fifty rifles from the Rocky Mountain Fuel Co., which owned and operated the Hecla Mine. The *Daily Camera* reported that by the time that the troops left Louisville in January 1915, between 700 and 800 firearms had been confiscated from both sides of the conflict and it was believed that there were many more that miners had not turned over.

In December 1914, the strike ended, but there were few improvements in working conditions or pay for the miners.

Period After the Hecla Mine Closed, 1920-1952

The Hecla Mine closed in 1920. Jacob Williams, who had been the Superintendent of the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company, which owned the Hecla at the time, purchased the property on which the mine had been located.

According to an August 14, 1991 article in the *Daily Camera*, Williams purchased it as farm land. Due to the lack of specificity in the Boulder County property records with respect to the legal descriptions of land located outside of platted towns, the exact boundaries of Williams’ property could not be determined. However, it is strongly believed to have consisted of a quarter section of ½ mile by ½ mile, or 160 acres, minus a part owned by the DiGiacomo family.

Jacob Williams was not only a mine superintendent for numerous mines in Boulder and Weld Counties, but he also bought and sold properties in Louisville and the surrounding area. After he passed away in 1929, his wife, Jane, continued with the management of his properties, including this one.

During this time, the Hecla Casino building was established as the main residence for the farm. There is some indication that Jane Williams rented the property to tenants who farmed it and who resided in the home.

Clifford and Monica Foster Ownership, 1952-2007

In late 2006, Clifford Foster contacted the Louisville Historical Museum and asked to be interviewed for the historical records of the Museum. The Museum Coordinator conducted an oral history interview with Foster on January 22, 2007. It is this interview, which was recorded, that provided much of the following information about the use and history of this property from 1952 on. Cliff Foster passed away in June 2007.

Cliff and Monica Foster and their family moved to Boulder County from South Dakota in the early 1950s. Cliff was a mechanical engineer. Their family story goes that Monica spotted the farmhouse and asked about its availability. The Fosters purchased the farm, which was still close to, if not exactly, 160 acres in size, from Jane Williams.

When the Fosters purchased the farm, the foundation of the water tower was by the rear door of the house (the Casino). This is consistent with the arrangement of buildings shown on the map included in this report.

Foster said that the main mine shaft had had trash dumped in it (something that was frequently done after the mines in Louisville closed). He said that he had it filled with concrete.

There were still remnants of the Hecla powder house.

Cliff Foster stated that he thought that the house may have been used as a brothel during the time that it was the Hecla Casino. This is because the upstairs was painted red when the Fosters purchased the building in 1952. (Other older residents in Louisville have also told the Museum staff that they had heard that the building had been used as a brothel.)

The Fosters improved the house during their ownership of it, including having it rewired and putting in a furnace. Cliff Foster continued with his career as a mechanical engineer, while also working the farm. He grew corn and wheat, doing the work himself.

The aerial photo of the farm is believed to have been taken in the 1950s. The Hecla Casino building, still the home for the farm, was located at the end of a drive that went directly north from South Boulder Road.



Monica Foster passed away in 1976. Cliff, who either pursued the development of his land or was open to a proposal, sold the part of his farm that is on the corner of South Boulder Road and Highway 42 for the construction of Louisville Plaza. Cliff was in his seventies when this took place in 1991. The proposed development included the land under the Hecla Casino building, which was still the Foster residence. For this reason, in 1991 the Foster family had the house moved a short distance away to the northwest, onto land being retained by Foster. A new basement was built first and the house placed on top of it.

1870 Plaza Drive, next to the Casino building at 1800, was the home of Karen Foster Mulholland, the daughter of Cliff and Monica Foster. That house is believed to have been constructed in 1979 at the approximate current location of Subway (formerly the location of Blockbuster) at the Louisville Plaza, and was also moved in or around 1991. 1900 Plaza Drive was the site of Karen's in the Country Restaurant and contains in its floor some of the bricks from the Hecla powder house.

Location of Hecla Mine Landmarks Today

According to Foster, the Hecla Casino building at 1800 Plaza Drive was originally located just south of what is now the entrance to King Soopers Grocery Store at Louisville Plaza.

When the house was moved a short distance away, it was placed in the vicinity of the original tipple and mine shaft for the Hecla Mine. According to Cliff Foster, the cement and brick structure by the tree near the gates of the driveway to 1800 Plaza Drive once held the chains to hoist the coal cars out of the mine shaft. The location of the main shaft, which would have been dug by hand in 1890 when the Hecla opened, is by what is now the driveway to 1800 Plaza Drive.

The preceding research is based on a review of relevant and available books, online County property records, census records, oral history interviews, Louisville directories, and Louisville Historical Museum maps, files, and obituary records.