

The Night the Dam Gave Way  
A Diary of Personal Accounts



Published by Castlewood Canyon State Park. This project was partially funded by a State Historical Fund grants award from the Colorado State Historical Society. Writing and research by Sharon Randall, Tracy Dixon and Patty Horan. Design by Jennifer Quezada. Cover: Castlewood dam leaking around 1901. When floods came, water passed through old cracks in the masonry wall and ran down the steps. Cover photo: Colorado Historical Society.





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## Introduction and Acknowledgments

I am pleased to be able to provide visitors to Castlewood Canyon State Park with this historical booklet featuring personal accounts of that fateful night of Aug. 3, 1933 when the Castlewood dam gave way, flooding downtown Denver and killing two people.

Seasonal staff member Jane Kardokos first came up with the idea of asking people to recount their experiences of that fateful time, 64 years ago. The staff at the park have been collecting these memories for the past four years.

Special thanks to the Colorado Historical Society for its generous grant to help us produce the booklet and to Amy Spong, our historic preservation specialist. Much appreciation goes to Debbie Duke and Jennifer Quezada of Colorado State Parks for their design and graphic assistance and to park volunteers Dale Campbell, Tracy Dixon, Sharon Randall, Marilyn Scott and Sandy Whaley for their valuable help. Thanks also to park neighbor and fellow historian Senator Joe Winkler for reading the booklet and writing its foreword.

Of great importance to this project and the park, the ruins of the Castlewood dam are now a state historical site thanks to the efforts of Kathryn Crawford.

Most appreciation, of course, goes to our letter writers who took the time to compile their memories to be shared in this special diary. Your efforts keep history alive.

*Patty Horan*

Patty Horan

Project Coordinator  
Castlewood Canyon State Park  
December, 1997



Dear Reader:

This diary of personal accounts does much to preserve the history of Castlewood State Park and its historic site, the old dam ruins. Appreciation goes to the many interested people who contributed their memories. It is important that we write down the significant events in our lives, so they are not lost or forgotten.

Castlewood Canyon has been a part of my life since I was a small child. The reservoir was only a mile away from the ranch where I grew up. When I was young, my great aunt told me stories of how she fed and doctored the workers who built the dam. My father acquired the canyon property which included the reservoir site some time after the dam gave out. As our family begins a fourth generation of stewardship in the valley we have attempted to allow the Colorado State Park Department to acquire significant portions of the canyon property.

Creating Castlewood Canyon State Park was a vision of George T. O'Malley, a past director of the state parks department, and Mrs. Frances Newton who helped spearhead the initial expansion of the park. Their efforts, and the efforts of the dedicated staff and volunteers of the park, assure that this beautiful and historic site will be preserved for future generations of Colorado citizens.

Now, I also have memories to share. Here are some of my earliest recollections of the old reservoir.

### GONE FISHING, A GREEN HORSE & LAKE LOUISA

As a lad of about five, I was given the privilege of going fishing when my chores were finished. I would set out with a willow pole I had fashioned with some grocer's twine and a hook given to me by someone who had my welfare at interest.

About a mile north of our ranch home was a wooden pier that extended from the roadside into the water of the lake. A true "Tom Sawyer," I walked the mile with my freshly dug worms in a can and sat on the pier with my bare feet splashing in the cool water. This was my daydreaming place. I don't recall what luck I had catching fish, but at the time that was not terribly important.

I enjoyed many summer mornings at waters edge and was always reluctant to check the time. We didn't have digital watches as children, but were taught to tell time by the position of the sun and the length of our shadows. Growing up we were always expected to appear at mealtime, or no lunch or dinner!

When the dam washed out in the flood of 1933, my siblings and I were fast asleep. About daybreak we were awakened by my Uncle John, who was in charge of horses and had been out gathering and feeding them. He called to us in our bedrooms that we should get up to see the "green horse" in the lake. We tumbled out of bed and hastily got dressed and assembled to go see a green horse. We drove north on Castlewood Canyon Road to the reservoir and saw the broken wall of the dam and no water. Nothing remained but a shiny pit of silt in the naked bottom of the lake and not a green horse to be seen anywhere!

Our family has a connection to the construction of the Castlewood dam and reservoir through my great Aunt Louisa Roracher Engel, wife of homesteader George Engel. I grew up listening to Aunt Louisa tell these stories.

As pioneer ranchers, my aunt and uncle sought every opportunity to exist and prosper in an era of limited opportunities. When the dam was being built, the company had numerous workmen and teams on the site. It was a natural challenge to my great aunt to provide services to them. The workmen lived in tents on the site. The labor was intense and there were few amenities. Aunt Louisa contracted with the company to feed the workers and provide hay and grain for the animals. She would hitch up her wagon and take a cold lunch at noon, mostly homemade bread, smoked sausage and often cheese, all products that they made at the ranch. In the evening, after a long day of toil in muddy conditions, the men could look forward to a hot meal of beef stew, chicken or pork. They had a homemade dessert on special days or weekends. My great aunt had a garden where she grew everything from asparagus to strawberries, so the menu was varied



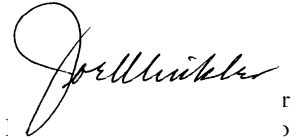


for those isolated workers in an austere environment.

Needless to say, there were many occupational injuries at the site and lucky for the men, my great aunt was also a trained nurse. She had a remedy for all ailments, but the one they liked most was a whiskey flask she carried in her apron to relieve pain.

Besides being the first catering service in Douglas County, Aunt Louisa was also the medical practitioner. On her days off, she laundered and mended the workers' clothes. Aunt Louisa related these stories to me with a sense of pride. She found satisfaction in doing what she could to help others, at the same time providing her an opportunity to benefit financially. Her stories were of a simpler time. When the workers had a day off, she prepared a special meal, enhanced with some chokecherry wine. The men sat around a campfire and a fiddler among the group provided music. The men would join in singing. And they would hold hands and dance circling the fire and keeping time to the music—what Aunt Louisa termed “a miner’s jig.”

When the construction of the dam ended, the workers who had been fed and nursed showed their appreciation to the enterprising woman who had helped make a difficult project reality. They held a ceremony and christened the lake they were creating ‘Lake Louisa.’



## The Story of Castlewood Dam and the Flood it Caused

## with Personal Accounts by Eyewitnesses

## Building the Dam

Many were young children or teenagers, but area citizens remember the night the Castlewood dam gave way and more than a billion gallons of water roared down Cherry Creek uprooting trees, tearing through homes and farms and businesses. They say they remember how the warning came—"without television or video cameras." Instead, "We passed the word along the phone line."

Some remember being hastily dressed by their parents and taken to high ground to watch from safety. Others remember riding their bikes to see the flood disaster for themselves. They saw the "wall of water" roiling into Denver and remember the stench. "The smell of a flood ... you will never forget it." And the debris: Model Ts, porches, uprooted trees, dead cows and horses, tangled pieces of steel bridges. They heard the piercing sound of sirens going "up and down the roads near the creek."

One young boy, helping his grandfather's tenants, stepped in the wrong place and was "submerged in muddy waters—a filthy baptism." A farm friend had to "climb a power pole to escape the waters; a neighbor's car was towed home "packed with drying mud."

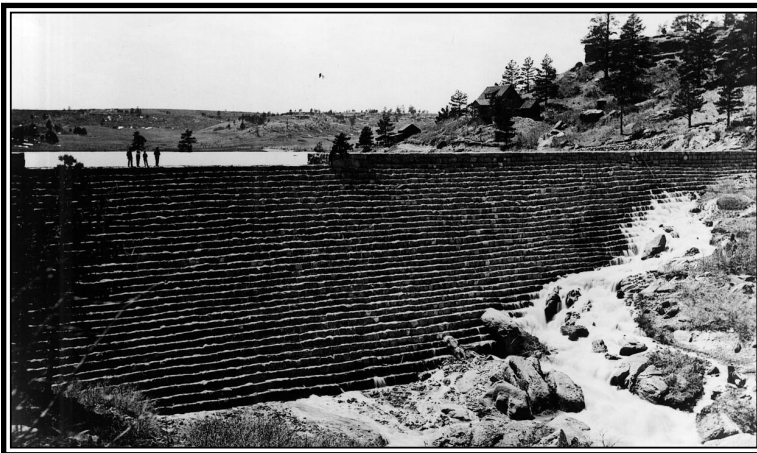
Fortunately, only two lives were lost, but 5,000 people fled the lowlands. "A lot of misery was connected to that flood."

The cause of the Aug. 3, 1933 flood was 40 miles upstream at beautiful Castlewood Canyon. After torrential rains pounded the area for days, the 43-year-old Castlewood dam, precarious for years, finally gave out sending down on Denver one of the worst floods in its history.

Although the Castlewood dam caused much consternation and worry over the years, it was an important source of agricultural water. In the late 1800s and into the 1930s, the land between Franktown and downtown Denver was dotted with prosperous dairy farms, truck gardens, potato fields and orchards. The land was flat, the soil was rich and water was available from the large, man-made Castlewood reservoir.

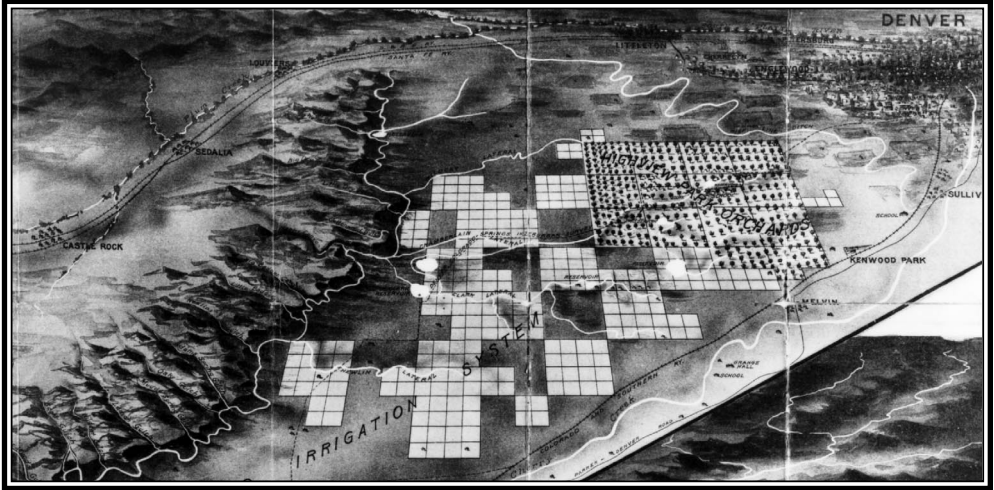
Castlewood dam, a rock-filled structure built in 1890 across a canyon five miles south of Franktown, was the brainchild of the Denver Water Storage Company—a group of eastern investors and local land owners. The reservoir had the capacity of 5,300 acre feet of water, drained from about 200 square miles upstream along Cherry Creek and from the many springs that fed into the creek. Originally, the system was to provide water for some 30,000 acres downstream. The company, which owned 16,000 acres, hoped to sell 40-acre tracts to future settlers who would produce food for the growing city.

The dam, which took 11 months to build, was typical of the period. Built out of the materials available in the area, it consisted of a rock rubble core faced with quarried stone set in cement. With a width at the base of some 50 feet, the core provided the weight to resist the force of the water held behind the dam.



*The dam leaked from the start and while there was much controversy, owners were able to dilute public concerns. The rock filled structure held back a 200-acre reservoir used over the years for recreation as well as irrigation. Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.*

Water from the Castlewood reservoir was an important source of agricultural water, providing irrigation to farms and ranches between Franktown and Denver. Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.



The dam was 600 feet long, 70 feet tall from the floor of the reservoir and 8 feet wide at the top. Its designer and chief engineer was A.M. Welles of Denver, who found himself justifying its worth and safety for the next decade.

According to news reports of the time, some 85 men worked at building the dam, some 250 more (and 180 teams of horses) dug the Arapahoe ditch running down the canyon to smaller storage reservoirs and irrigation canals.

## But is it Safe?

The reservoir was embroiled in controversy from its conception. In its early stages the water project was plagued with financial worries. Welles wrote that the company was short on funds because the company's bonds couldn't be sold at an agreeable price. Investors worried they would be liable if a disaster occurred. Welles said there was "...continued conflict between the company and authorities—city and state." Six months after completion, the dam developed a tiny fissure along the top that had to be patched. Early inspections questioned the structure's safety and in May of 1891, city inspectors and representatives of the construction company debated what the city called a leak and the company called a spring. Within six years, a 100-foot washout caused

serious damage. The next year the dam was repaired and everyone breathed a sigh of relief when in 1900 the dam held through a major rainfall. Apparently, the pressure of the water behind the dam began to affect the dam and its underlying support. Built on a type of brittle sandstone formation, the additional pressure of the water caused constant shifting of the substrata. This is what caused the early cracks.

The battle of words between the companies that owned the dam, nervous downstream citizens and the committee of engineers who questioned the dam's safety continued over the years, right up until the dam ripped open after a week of heavy rain. In "To Tame Cherry Creek," (*Colorado Heritage*, Issue 1, 1987), Paul D. Friedman says Denver's wary



Some 335 men and 180 teams of horses worked 11 months building the dam and the Arapahoe ditch that ran down the canyon to smaller reservoirs and irrigation canals. Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library.

citizens may actually have known more about the dam at Castlewood than company representatives. Those associated with the construction of the dam were too emotionally involved to be objective, Friedman says.

It appears so. Letters to the editors of local papers went round and round, with suspicious Denver residents questioning the dam's safety and representatives of the company defending it. W. F. Alexander of the Denver Water Storage Company called the whole agitation "spite work" and said that even if it did give way no flood would ensue.

*"If the dam were to be obliterated in an instant and all this water released, the flood would have to travel forty-five miles along the sandy bed of Cherry Creek, which is from one-half to three miles wide, before reaching Denver. The water would have to cover 30,000 acres before striking the city. 'The effect,' Mr. Alexander says, 'wouldn't be felt at all.' Furthermore, the dam is built on bed-rock, he says, and couldn't possibly give way as claimed.*

*—The Denver Times, May 16, 1891*

A few years later, a *Rocky Mountain News* headline said "Castlewood is safe," and probably saves "Denver From a Drowning." *The Rocky* was quoting a Mr. Gorham, "in charge of the plant," who said the dam served as "a real protection to Denver as the basin catches the heavy rainfall of the divide region." Then,



*The brainchild of local land owners and Eastern investors, the Castlewood dam was built in 1890 across a canyon five miles south of Franktown. Photo courtesy of U.S. Geological Survey.*

with no apparent concern for Denver's leery citizens, the newspaper went on to say that the water in the reservoir was "deep enough at this time to float the largest vessel of the navy."

By the turn of the century, headlines were again predicting doom. "Castlewood Dam Not Over-Strong: Engineer Ryan Doubts That It Can Withstand A Flood;" "The Annual Scare Over The Big Castlewood Dam;"

*The Denver Times* told readers that "A Committee of the Council May Be Appointed to Go up and Investigate."

*"The men who are familiar with the situation say that Denver is in actual danger of a disaster that would rival the Austin flood, as the dam has been proven to be unsafe and since the last break has had three years to fall into worse condition. The situation is said to be serious enough as to demand an immediate investigation, as hundreds of lives may be in danger and the disaster could be averted by a timely investigation."*

*—The Denver Times, April 11, 1900*

Ten days later the headlines change as inspectors from the state and the city responded. "No Danger from Castlewood Dam;" On April 25, the state engineer was quoted as saying he would inspect the dam but that he did not "consider a break possible." A few days later, an assistant city engineer, Andrew Ryan, again raised fears.

*"I do not want to say anything that will hurt the company and I do not want to frighten the people along the creek, but everything is not as I should like to see it."*—Andrew Ryan

All of this brought a response from A. M. Welles, the dam's unfortunate engineer. Although the dam was to stand up for many more years, Mr. Welles' letter was quoted often after it did burst, for in his letter he promises that the dam will never go out and if it does, no harm will be done to Denver.

*May 1, 1900*

To the Editor of the Times:

My Dear Sir:

It was with exceeding satisfaction and admiration that I read *The Times* statement of yesterday relative to the Castlewood dam.

As the party who designed and constructed it, I have for the past ten years silently and with disgust listened to the prattle of sensationalism, incompetence and vindictiveness, which, in its effects in misleading the uninformed and destroying the value of the undertaking which had so long and loudly been implored on the part of capital, is simply infamous and outrageous. From its commencement it has met with little but sensationalism and conspiracy. It has for ten years withstood every test and attempt to produce disaster, and in the past few days has undergone an ordeal which few dams on earth ever endured and survived. For thirty continuous hours or more the flood has poured over its crest and through the by-pass, with a volume of over 500 cubic feet per second of time, and from latest and reliable accounts not one dollar of damage had been done or the structure marred in any manner. Still it cannot be given credit for all this. But startling headlines must keep up the excitement and misleading impressions by proclaiming "A Crack in the Dam," one of the old list of bugbears that has been employed for the past ten years. The matter now referred to is simply the separation by a little settlement of the lower or loose rock half of the coping, which was set in 1898 under the inspectorship of an inspector appointed by the state engineer, and has no more to do with the dam's stability than a crack in the city hall. It is four feet above the surface of the reservoir when the dam is overflowing. Likewise in seriousness of character is the "bulge" mentioned, which is merely an irregularity in carrying up the outer slope. All of which any painstaking and competent inquirer can determine with little effort if so inclined. The whole is simply a rehash of the ignorant and silly prattle of the past ten years. The Castlewood dam will never, in the life of any person now living, or in generations to

come, break to an extent that will do any great damage either to itself or others from the volume of water impounded, and never in all time to the city of Denver.

Most sincerely,  
A.M. WELLES

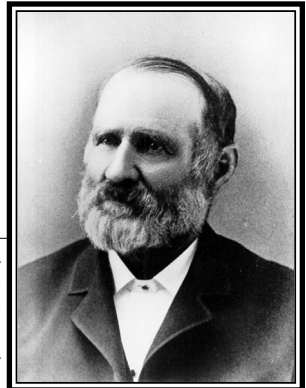
The dam did hold up, for 33 more years. And various owners promoted the irrigation system in numerous investment efforts tied to the rich farm land downstream.

## Early Developers Have High Hopes for Dam Investment

An investor in the dam and irrigation system project was Rufus "Potato" Clark, an early pioneer who arrived in 1859 and was instrumental in Denver's early growth. Potato Clark built a fortune in his lifetime, starting from a 160-acre homestead, growing potatoes and other vegetables to sell to the miners who flocked to the area during the Pike's Peak gold rush.

At one time, Clark owned a huge block of Colorado land, some 20,000 acres. Part of this tract—over 15,000 acres—was part of the Denver Water Storage Company venture. Founded by Clark and W.F. Alexander in 1892, it was known as "Clark Colony." For several years, Clark paid taxes on the property in the colony's name and continued to do so until 1895, when the amount he had invested was returned to him.

Although Clark had recouped his investment from the dam irrigation project, the company didn't grow as originally hoped and in 1901 the Denver Water Stor-



Rufus "Potato" Clark, a Denver pioneer was an investor in the early development ventures of the Castlewood Dam and Irrigation System. Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library.



age Company went bankrupt. The dam went to the largest creditor (\$185,000) the Knickerbocker Investment Company of New York, which soon sold it for \$8,000 to Seth H. Butler of Middletown, Conn.

The next investment plan involving the dam started up in February 1902. New owners, under the Denver Sugar, Land and Irrigation Company, pushed small parcels of land in an 18,000-acre tract downstream, blanketing eastern cities with publicity. The idea was to build a sugar factory and sell small farms to future settlers who would have a ready market for sugar beets. A brochure, "The South Denver Fruit District, under the Castlewood System of Reservoirs," touted water rights from the Castlewood reservoir, an "immense basin" in the foothills of the "Divide mountains." It promised that "every farmer will have all the water he needs, early and late, to bring his crops to full perfection." The fruit district's promotion also addressed the safety of the dam by saying: "Twenty eminent engineers have examined Castlewood dam as reconstructed, and can suggest nothing to make it stronger."

Hoping to lure city dwellers, the 1903 pamphlet promises:

*"Ten acres of this land, in the hands of a man who will work for six months of the year as hard as he would have to work to earn ordinary wages in the city, will return a net cash profit of \$1,500 to \$2,000 a year. Besides this, it will provide a home for the man that owns it, and his family. It will keep them in milk, butter, eggs, poultry, vegetables and fruit. It will give him a team to drive."*

As part of the promotion pitch the brochure lists "Why a Man Should Buy this Land."

*"FOR HIS OWN SAKE. There is no life so healthful, so independent, so care-free as that of a farmer raising high-priced products near a large city. Neither strikes nor lockouts, panics nor troubles in the stock market can take the roof from over his head, the bread from the mouths of his family, or set him adrift to find a new location."*

*He is his own master, working for himself, and getting for himself the full fruit of his labor, intelligence, thrift and forethought. FOR HIS WIFE'S SAKE. What man working for wages or an ordinary salary can lay up enough to provide for his wife in case he is taken by death? But if he leaves a small farm, well fruited, he leaves at once a permanent home and a permanent income. And while both live, a man can give his wife greater comfort, greater health, greater enjoyment of life, more luxuries, more freedom than he possibly can in any town or mining camp.*

*FOR HIS CHILDREN'S SAKE. American history shows that the boy who is brought up in the country has 50 percent better chances of success than the city boy. On a small farm, near a city, your boy can get as good school facilities as though he lived in the most thickly settled town. He gets an open-air life. He has employment for his vacation hours. There is a greater chance for recreation—innocent fun. There is an outlet for his exuberance without doing harm. He is secure from temptation and degrading influences. And the farmer's daughters—are they not the very highest types of American girlhood and womanhood?"*

The venture was short lived. The sugar factory failed to materialize and the promotion was shelved. Then, from 1904 until 1912, new owners, under the Denver Suburban Homes and Water Company, served area farmers with orchards and alfalfa fields. The company planted cherry trees and advertised small plats of land for retirement farming. The venture failed in 1912 and the company went into receivership. For more than a decade, the reservoir and irrigation system was tied up in court over water rights. The orchards fell to ruin.

In 1923, individual landowners started picking up the water rights, and by the early 1930s, a group of 150 farmers and ranchers managed the dam and its water rights under the Cherry Creek Mutual Irrigation Company. The water was used to irrigate about 2,500 acres, mostly for alfalfa, grains and

miscellaneous crops.

The large reservoir, sometimes called Castlewood lake, and the surrounding canyon and forest were a vacation haven for Denver residents who came to camp and canoe and hike. They fished and hunted ducks. Here's what some remember:

## Castlewood Was Nature's Paradise

### Vacationing at Castlewood Dam

We discovered the dam in 1924. I was nine years old and our mother had passed away leaving seven children for my father to raise (I was the youngest).

Due to a very limited income, our only recreation was going for a drive to the mountains in our Model T and later an overland Sedan. If we went very far in the Model T, it meant pushing it most of the way up the mountains.

My father worked for the Denver Union Stockyards in what was called the hog sheds. Farmers brought the hogs to market and Daddy made sure they were penned and fed.

One day a woman came in with some pigs from her little farm in what was called Sullivan, which is southeast of Denver. Daddy got to telling her about taking his children to the mountains and the problems he was having. She asked him why he didn't go above Franktown to the dam. My father didn't drive at this time and we depended on my older sister. A lot of times she didn't want to go.

After Daddy explained this to Ann, she offered to come over the next weekend and take us to the dam. We took a dirt road off Colorado Boulevard that went through Parker, which consisted of a gas station with pump, a little store and about four houses. We went to Franktown, turned west for a ways and then made a left turn into what was the north entrance to the canyon. At the entrance on the left

side, was a little farm house where a German couple lived with their grown son. Later when we got acquainted we would buy milk and eggs from them.

I can't describe the beauty of that canyon. It had cliffs on the east side that were so colorful. The stream coming down was so cold, but the farmers had warned us of quicksand.

Ann said we would plan a two week vacation there and we did. We took our tent and all the camping gear we needed, also first aid and food. It was so wonderful and I gathered a bushel of acorns from the ground that I took to school and the teacher showed us how to make necklaces with them. There were lots of porcupines, which were dead and I don't know why. The farmers told us a mountain lion had killed some sheep and two dogs that he had. He tried to catch the lion, but never could.

There were several small canyons west of the dam and one time we all went to see what they were like. They were too rocky and bushy for us to get into, but one had this cave like hole on top. My brother went to look and found the carcass of a mountain lion. He said the head, eyes and mouth were covered with quills, also the paws where he tried to remove them.

There were hundreds of rattlesnakes, especially on the east side. You could see them sunning themselves on the rocks in the afternoon.

One day coming back from the farmers with milk, I was running in front of daddy and Ann when she ran up and shoved me aside. If she hadn't I would

*The irrigation company not only served area farmers with orchards and alfalfa fields, but allowed area residents to use the reservoir for hunting, fishing and camping.*

*Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.*





have run into a large rattler coiled in the middle of the road.

There were large eagles in the canyon. A pair had built a nest on the top of a huge pine tree which had been struck by lightning.

We used to go up to the dam and sit and talk about it. Often we wondered how long it would last. It was amazing how the big slabs of rock were put together. It was Gods' Country then and about five years later when we stopped going to the dam, it broke my heart. Even the farmer and his wife had left to go back to the old country. It was like saying good-bye to an old friend.

When the dam finally went out, the country lost a grand old landmark. Nobody can ever describe the beauty and love that was hidden in the canyon. When you went into it, it seemed to say welcome back, but please take care of me.

*Mildred Sas  
Broomfield*

### **A Young Man's Adventures**

In the early 1930s, I was going to East High School in Denver. My closest friends and I were strongly attracted by the lore of the West. Our heroes were Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, Kit Carson and the other legends of those exciting times. Naturally we were interested in the guns used by these men, and spent many Saturday mornings visiting the pawnshops and gun stores on Larimer Street where a Colt Frontier six-shooter could be bought for \$10. All of us had been trained by our fathers in the use of firearms and it was easy to find safe places to shoot at tin cans by going a short distance beyond the edge of town, which was then at about 26th and Monaco.

This was also the time when Model T Fords had become obsolete and used ones were selling for \$25. One of my friends had one, and when we could scrape together enough for a little gas at 15 cents a gallon, we extended our range. We discovered Castlewood Canyon and spent time exploring and walking across the dam. From the high rocks on the east side we could look across the lake, which seemed very large. One calm day we decided to see how far our shots would carry, by observing the splashes. I

had a .45 as I recall, its heavy bullet carried about half-way across the lake.

When the dam broke in 1933, I along with just about everybody awoke to the news on the radio of the catastrophe and hurried down to a vantage point to see the debris filled muddy waters choking the course of Cherry Creek and piled up against the bridges.

That fall, having graduated from East, I took a course in anthropology under Dr. E.B. Renaud at the University of Denver. I did not re-enter college until the fall of 1934, but in the meantime, with my friend, Hugh Capps, engaged in some amateur archeological exploration. We identified many sites on the Plains and collected arrowheads, fragments of pottery, bone implements and grinding stones. We also excavated a rock shelter in Red Rocks Park. About mid-summer, I remembered the large cave under the west rimrock of Castlewood Canyon. We persuaded my mother to drive us out there and leave us for three or four days. After carrying our gear up to the cave we made camp and began digging, turning up a patched moccasin as well as the usual potsherds and flint and bone tools, typical of the Plains Indian culture.

In the back of the cave there was a dripping seep from the roof which gave us a supply of drinkable water, which we caught in a pan. The cave seemed to extend some distance beyond this, and I got the idea that a mountain lion might be holed up there, so I crawled in as far as I could go with a flashlight in one hand and my trusty six-shooter in the other. Fortunately, no mountain lion was in residence.

We had heard stories that a group of robbers had holed up in the cave. At one time against the rimrock at the north end of the cave, we found the remains of a roughly built corral.

The work in the cave was hot and dusty, but we found a place in the gouged out bed of the creek where the flood waters had created a waterfall slightly more than head high. The remaining flow was enough to create a perfect shower where we washed and refreshed ourselves in the morning and also after the day's work. Of course to enjoy this luxury we had to climb down the canyon wall and back up again. But it was worth it!

While there, we also explored some of the canyons





to the west of Castlewood, but did not discover another cave to match the one we were living in. We did find a good spring bubbling out of the ground near the entrance to one of the western canyons.

It is my recollection that, at the time I am writing about much of this area, it was embraced in one or more of the “school” sections, land reserved to the state for the support of the schools. A few years later I attended an auction of this land, or part of it. Unfortunately, the bidding quickly exceeded my means.

*Harvey B. Cochran*  
*Denver*

## When the Rains Came

The summer of 1933 brought rain. The heaviest rain fell the evening of Aug. 2, but it had rained earlier and the ground was already wet. Some reports say it had rained for a week. Others mention three days. The heavens were dark. Lightning cracked. Heavy sheets of rain pelted the earth—a cloudburst dumped eight inches of rain in just three hours. The person most worried about the mossy old dam at this time was its caretaker, Hugh Paine, who lived at the site with his wife. He recounted the fateful night in an article in *The Rocky Mountain News*, the day after the flood:

## Dam Watchman Escapes Disaster Dozen Times in 12-Mile Trip

By Hugh Paine

*There was an uneasiness in the air last night and Mrs. Paine and I remarked about it when the rain and lightning storm broke and sent sheets of water and rolls of thunder across the lake.*

*We had thought for years of what would happen if the dam should go, but it had withstood such terrific buffeting in previous years that we felt it was safe.*

*Still – we didn’t know.*

*I had retired but had not gone to sleep when Mrs. Paine looked out the window.*

*It was just about then that we heard the first rumbling of the flood. I dressed hurriedly and, seizing a lantern, ran down to look at the dam. I could tell it was breaking up under a wall of water that was pouring over its top.*

*I tried to telephone, but the wires were out. I notified Ed Hall, a neighbor, and we tried to make it down the canyon. The flood already had crashed down, however, sweeping road, trees and huge boulders before it.*

*We knew residents in the valley and in Denver had to be warned before the main body of the dam went out.*

*We started for Castle Rock by the back route, skirting the edge of the lake. The*

*When the water reached Denver it overflowed the banks, flooding homes and dairies. Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.*



road was slippery, filled with black pools of water and washouts where tiny streams had cut across it.

*We didn't dare take any chances by hurrying because we didn't dare fail in our mission. The 12 miles seemed many times that far. I guess we escaped disaster a dozen times, but we made it and reached the Castle Rock telephone exchange – and that was all that mattered.*

At Castle Rock, Paine called the Denver police and Mr. and Mrs. August Deepe, telephone operators at Parker. Nettie Driskill [Harth], who was soon to become a heroine, worked for them.

## How the Word Got Out

### Telephone Rang in the Night

In 1933, I was a child living with my parents at what is now Leetsdale Drive and Forest Street. Very early in the morning on Aug. 4, while it was still dark, our telephone rang. It was the Sullivan telephone operator with the warning that everyone should go to high ground as the Castlewood dam had collapsed and there was a huge flood coming. My parents immediately got us dressed and we drove to the top of the hill near Forest and Alameda. By this time it was starting to get light and we were able to see the first signs of the flood coming down Cherry Creek. It was carrying debris of all types, as well as large, uprooted trees. The water overflowed the banks and many homes and dairies that were near the creek were flooded.

Somewhat later in the morning, Mother went downtown to do some shopping. Soon she came hurrying back having been warned that another flood, even larger than the first one was coming down the creek. This must have been entirely a wild

*“The loss of Castlewood dam was felt by everyone, just as much by the ones above the dam as the ones below. Friends and neighbors lost property, crops and animals.” This is Colorado Boulevard after the bridge was torn away. Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library.*

rumor, as the second flood never appeared.

*Anna Ruehle Sinton  
Aurora*

### Warning Call: One Very Long Ring

I was born, raised and lived the first 25 years of my life along the banks of Cherry Creek. My father was Dave Gilbert. Our family ranch is what is now 9993 S. Highway 83. The ranch was divided by Cherry Creek and Highway 83. The house and all the farm buildings were on the west side, on high ground. The confluence of Cherry Creek and Crowfoot Creek was on our property so when there was a flood it became much larger in our area.

Floods must have been a frequent occurrence as none of the “old-timers” built close to the creek. All their homes were on high ground away from the creek bank.

The area had a very good warning system to alert the residents to flooding. We were connected by telephone and a series of “switches” in the homes of people living in the East Cherry Creek Valley, Spring Valley, and West Cherry Creek Valley; connecting to Castle Rock and Elbert. When a flood started, the switch operator near the head waters of Cherry Creek put out an emergency call, one very long ring would sound. Everyone got on the phone to see if it was a flood, fire, accident or some neighbor needing help. Whatever the emergency was, it was passed quickly from area to





area. If it was a flood, people would have time to move their farm animals to higher ground. Our switch went as far as the Doepke Ranch, from there Josie Doepke notified Hugh Paine at Castlewood dam. Also, Castle Rock and on to Franktown. The word got out without television or video cameras.

If I recall correctly, we had been having frequent rains and small floods the summer of 1933. When the call came in the evening of Aug. 3, 1933, the report was: "This is a big one." That time of day our animals were all secure. The alarm was passed on. Then, all we could do was watch and wait, hoping our telephone lines were not washed out. We also worried about our many friends along Cherry Creek in Franktown and Parker.

We did not hear that Castlewood dam had gone out until early the next morning when Josie Doepke called us. We passed the word along the phone line.

We heard about the flooding of Denver on our radio. We then began to worry about Dad's brother, Ivan Gilbert, who had a tire store on the corner of 13th and Speer Boulevard. We finally heard from him that everything was all right and he had not suffered much damage.

County bridges were washed out. Telephones were down. Those two items got top priority in our area. As soon as the water went down, repairs were begun.

After the flood, we were unable to cross Cherry Creek for several days. We would go through our pasture and our neighbor's to the south, to get to Greenland Road. We could also go west through the school section and reach Dahlberg Road. These back trails were well defined as they had been used by the early settlers to get from neighbor to neighbor by horse and buggy.

The loss of Castlewood dam was felt by everyone, just as much by the ones "above" the dam as the ones "below." Friends and neighbors had lost property, crops and animals. In spite of the precautions, some people just did not get the word in time.

We all know the result of this flood and the loss of Castlewood dam was the construction of Cherry Creek dam. I am glad my father lived to see it started, even though he didn't live to see it finished. My father was a strong advocate of soil conservation dams which would help prevent such serious flooding in the future.

When we lost Castlewood dam, we also lost our favorite picnic area. It was one of the places we always took our out-of-state visitors to see. The park

is a beautiful place, but it will never be the same to me.

*Elizabeth Gilbert Saunders*  
*Castle Rock*

### **Water at the Steps of the House**

I was on Cherry Creek near Belleview Avenue on the night of Aug. 3, 1933. Our farm was on the west side of Cherry Creek. We were notified by phone that the Castlewood dam had broke. We lived a quarter mile from the creek and the water covered our meadow bottom and reached the steps of our home. The meadow bottom was under 5 foot of water. My friend, Dan Murdock, who had a farm on Cherry Creek at Parker Road and Arapahoe, had to climb a power pole to escape the waters.

*J.E. Stout*  
*Denver*

## **Switchboard Operators Save the Day**

### **Run for Your Lives—the Dam's Broke**

In 1933, I worked for Mr. and Mrs. August Deepe at the Parker telephone exchange and lived in their home. The job paid very little. I made \$10 a month and my room and board. The house was made of cinder blocks. It was just a little in-home switchboard, the plug in type that was answered, "number please." That's how most of the rural offices were at that time. People on the exchange had their own number made up of long and short rings and were part of a party line.

Parker was a very small town. Just a couple of stores and the lumber yard and post office. Nothing compared to what it is now.

It was misty and cloudy that week and we really weren't expecting that much rain, but the night the dam went out it was dark and raining hard. Mr. Deepe received the call from Mr. Paine who worked at the dam. Later I found out he had made it to Castle Rock to make the call. Mr. Deepe went out to explore and see where the water was and I stayed at the switchboard and began calling local subscribers up and down the creek advising them to hurry to

higher ground. Mostly we were warning them that the water was coming so they could get their cattle out and maybe their hay. Not many people lived right on the creek.

The local newspapers and a *Time* magazine article reported that Mrs. Deepe told people to run for their lives and that I said I could hear the water roaring. I don't think we could hear the water from the town but when you got down a little farther toward the creek, it was quite a roar and there was a lot of debris that piled up by the bridge. People went down to that bridge and stood there to watch the water go down toward Denver. I don't remember being afraid for myself. We weren't in that much danger and for awhile we really didn't know where the water was going. Finally somebody came and said the water was being contained in Cherry Creek.

The newspapers came and interviewed me for a write up in the *Denver Post* and for *Time* magazine. They called me a hero and said I ignored my own danger to flash flood warnings to people in the path of the oncoming flood. I don't remember feeling in danger or like a hero. At the time you are doing something like this, you don't realize how many people are downstream from you, or how far the water would travel.

The attention was fun though. It made me quite popular. I married later that month and the *Post* wrote about me and the flood again. It was a fun experience especially once we knew it wasn't dangerous for us.

*Nettie Driskill Harth*  
*Castle Rock*

### **They Warned Families Down the Valley**

Sometime during the late evening of Aug. 3, 1933, Elsie Henderson, the contract manager of the Sullivan Telephone Exchange, received an urgent telephone call from a member of the Sheriff's Department at Franktown. The sheriff told Elsie that the Castlewood dam, just south of Franktown, had broken and flood waters were rushing down Cherry Creek. He asked if she would alert all the farmers and ranchers along Cherry Creek of the impending danger and urge them to move their livestock and farm machinery away from the riverbed

*Parker telephone operator, Nettie Driskill [Harth], shown at the switchboard was featured in area newspapers and even Time magazine. She helped warn area families to get their livestock out of harm's way. Photo courtesy of Nettie Driskill Harth*



to higher ground. The sheriff also asked Elsie to warn all farm and ranch families located in the danger area along Cherry Creek to move quickly to higher ground. Lastly, he asked her to alert the downstream main exchange of the Mountain States Telephone Company, located at 931 14th Street, and have the operators there warn the Denver Police and Fire Departments and radio stations of the approaching waters.

At that time, the Sullivan Telephone Exchange was located in Elsie's home on Holly Street south of Cherry Creek in Arapahoe County. The switchboard was neatly tucked into her front living room. From this exchange, rural telephone lines ran along the Cherry Creek valley most of the way to Franktown. Almost all of the rural telephones were on a "party line," i.e. several farm or ranch homes were on the same telephone line and when the phone rang with the particular ring of one home the phones on that line all rang. However, each farm or ranch had its own "identifying ring." For example, one long and two short rings would alert a family the call coming down the party line was for them. The next farm on that line might be two long rings, etc. However,



The raging torrent got higher and higher as it approached the city. Telephone operators passed information about the progress of the flood waters to authorities in Denver and Aurora. This scene is looking south from the 11th Avenue Bridge. Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.



anyone whose rural phone was hooked on the party line could hear the conversation on the line emanating from all other phones on that same line.

All night long Elsie and her assistant manager Ingrid Mosher [and in some accounts Mrs. Fay Davis] manned the switchboard during these exciting hours and kept checking the party lines to be sure all families had been alerted. During the night they also heard reports from the sheriff's office and from families along the Cherry Creek valley as the flood waters progressed down the valley. Much of this information was passed along by Elsie and Ingrid to farms and ranches farther downstream and to authorities in Denver and Aurora. Thus, they kept current information

flowing ahead of the flood waters.

Elsie and Ingrid stayed on duty at the telephone switchboard all night and well into the next day. As the need required, they kept radio stations informed of the progress of the flood waters, or danger points along the way, dangerous traffic conditions and even kind words of comfort to those individuals who called the operators simply to talk to a living voice on the line.

Only after the flood waters passed through Cherry Creek valley from Franktown through downtown Denver, and only after they felt they had done everything possible to minimize or avert



The Stout and Champa Street steel bridges floated downstream until they "fetched up" against the Curtis Street Concrete Bridge. Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.

*The warning that a “wall of water” was coming down Cherry Creek was accurate. “It actually looked like a wall of water.” Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.*



damage to persons or property, did Elsie and Ingrid seek some well-earned rest. After the flood waters had receded and the danger had passed, Elsie and Ingrid received a well deserved “thank you” from individuals, police, fire, medical authorities, as well as politicians.

*Elsie Henderson and  
Ingrid Mosher  
Denver*

As told to George W. Madsen

**Editor’s note:** Elsie and Ingrid and George Madsen, whose memory of the flood appears later, became acquainted after they retired from Mountain States Telephone. They all belonged to the Cherry Creek Life Member Club of the Telephone Pioneers or its predecessor, The Fredrick Reid Chapter of the Telephone Pioneers. Ingrid and George held offices in the Cherry Creek Club of the Telephone Pioneers. During their retirement years, they often told each other stories of their individual experiences during the flood of 1933 and its aftermath.

## A Wall of Water is on the Way

### The Smell Was Awful

In 1933, there was no TV so you either read the newspaper or listened to the radio.

We heard the news and the warning of a “wall of water” coming down Cherry Creek. We went to West 7th Avenue and Speer Boulevard to watch the flood. It actually looked like a wall of water. Trees, branches, bushes, a dead cow and a dead dog floated by. The smell was unique to a flood and if you ever smell it you will never forget it. Awful! I was 10 years old and was very impressed. Obviously, I have never forgotten the experience.

The water was all over the Sunken Gardens

(Speer Boulevard and 9th Avenue to 11th and Elati Street) and up the lawn of West High School.

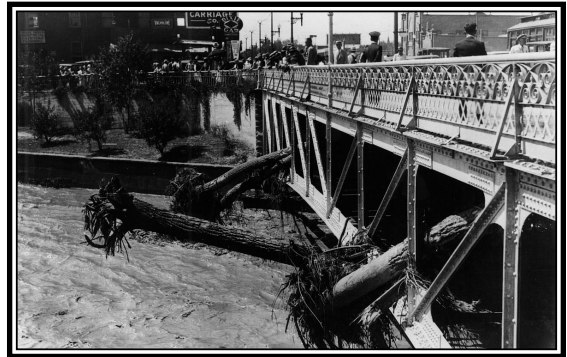
We later drove across the Speer Boulevard viaduct and could see the Platte and Cherry Creek crash together – a huge spout of water. Union Station was standing in water. The underground ramp to the train was also flooded.

Today, it’s hard to convince people of the magnitude of the flood waters. Cherry Creek looks so mild, a meandering stream; but even the Indians would not camp in the river bottoms.

*Leota H. Bostrom  
Littleton*

### It Was Scary, but Fascinating

I was 5 years old and lived on Delaware Street near Cherry Creek. The streets were flooded just west of us. We saw Model Ts floating by and parts of porches



*When the water receded, people gathered on the bridges that were still standing. Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.*



A birds-eye-view of the flooded rail yards near what is now Elitch Gardens amusement park and Confluence Park where Cherry Creek meets the South Platte River. Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library.

from homes up the creek. Sunken Gardens was totally flooded as I recall. It was scary, but fascinating and I was really amazed at the power of that flood.

Pat Heifner  
Denver

### Sunken Gardens Now a Lake

In 1933 my name was Beth Kliss. I was a 12-year-old girl living with my parents at 1484 Eudora Street in Denver. They owned and operated



This demolished business at Speer and Champa Streets shows the power of the frightening flood. Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library.

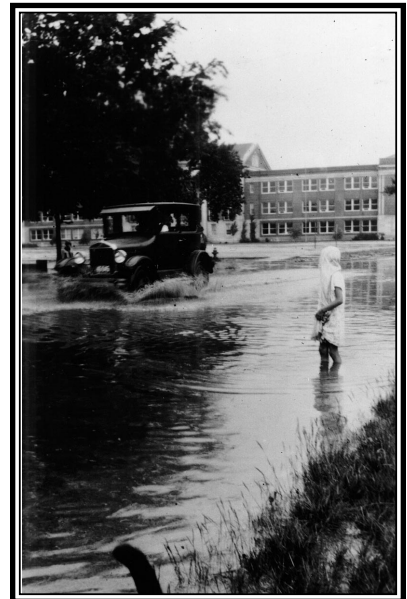
the Kliss Bakery on East Colfax Avenue near our home.

When word came that day in August 1933 the Castlewood dam had broken and the flood waters were rushing down Cherry Creek, my dad wanted to go see what was happening. He chose to go to the point on Cherry Creek at 9th and Elati streets where the creek flowed near the north side of West High School.

Dad asked me if I wanted to go with him. I immediately said yes. We got into Dad's 1929 Buick and drove as close to the school as the flood waters permitted. I just couldn't believe what we saw.

Across Elati Street on the east side of the school, was a beautiful garden called the Sunken Gardens. In it were beautiful flowers, trees, shrubs, bushes and plants of many varieties. Beside the Garden, on the north side, was Speer Boulevard, next to Speer was Cherry Creek.

It was so full of water it overflowed its banks.



As word of the flood got out, families jumped in their cars and tried to get a closer look at the damage.

Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society

Where the Sunken Gardens had been, we could not see any flowers, shrubs or bushes. Instead, a huge lake was located where the garden had been. Near the center of that lake there was a fountain, still operating with water coming out of its spout and flowing into the lake.

When I first observed this scene, it appeared that the lake had been formed by the water coming from the spout of the fountain. Of course, I realized that the flood waters from Cherry Creek had inundated the gardens, forming the lake.

As this was the first flood I had ever seen, I was awed by the sight. After observing the rushing waters in Cherry Creek, and having seen the damage those waters created in the Sunken Gardens, I will never forget that trip to West High School with my dad.

*Beth (Kliss) Bennett*  
*Denver*

**Editor's note:** The Sunken Gardens was a beautiful little park with an artificial lake, a Moorish pavilion, formal flower gardens, a miniature forest and colored twinkling night lights. It was developed by the city from 1910 to 1917 on the site of an old sink hole, part of the original Cherry Creek stream bed.

### **Teacher Late for School**

I had traveled to Palmer Lake on Aug. 3, 1933 with friends. One of them, T.L. Girault, was a teacher at East Denver High School summer school. He needed me to drive his car. Although it rained in Palmer Lake that night, the next day was sunny and we left early to take Mr. Girault to school in Denver.

We drove on the "Colorado Springs" road to Littleton and thence east to South University Boulevard, stopping for gasoline at the University Park Garage near Evans Avenue on University Boulevard. We learned that a flood in Cherry Creek had washed away all bridges and in order to drive to East High School at East Colfax and Elizabeth Street, we would have to go west to Federal Boulevard and cross the Platte River on one of the viaducts. We did cross on the 20th Street viaduct. The traffic that morning equaled the kind of traffic one would encounter today after a Rockies' and a



*The August 1933 flood destroyed the beautiful Sunken Gardens near Speer Boulevard and Elati Street. West High School is in the background. Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.*



*The formal flower beds, trees and shrubs of the Sunken Gardens park were completely flooded by the 1933 disaster. Instead of a beautiful park residents saw only a huge lake. Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.*

Bronco game let out at the same time. Needless to say, Mr. Girault was "late for school!"

I did not see the "wall of water" come through town, but I did see what was left after it passed.

*William Boleack*  
*Denver*

### **Young Men Witness Sad Sight**

Late in the evening of Aug. 3, 1933, George Madsen, a 17-year-old East High School student and his close friend, Paul Miller, were sitting in the living room of the Madsen home at 2518 Eudora





*Bridges across Cherry Creek on Colorado Boulevard, Stout and Champa Streets were completely destroyed. Partial damage was done to the Logan Street Bridge. Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library.*



*People flocked to the bridges to view the damage. The bridges themselves formed "dams" as trees and animals and other debris caught against them. This is the Blake Street Bridge. Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library.*

Street in Denver. George's father, Emil T. Madsen, was listening to the Atwater-Kent radio. The voice coming over the radio was describing the flood caused by the broken Castlewood dam. At that time, the flood waters had progressed past Franktown and were somewhere in the Cherry Creek valley. The voice on the radio urged all people living along Cherry Creek to take immediate action to assure the safety of all of the affected people, their livestock and

anything else which might be in the path of the flood. Since the flood waters were some distance away, George and Paul merely listened to the radio voice describe the events that happened, but at that time they took no action to view the flood.

Very early the next morning, George and Paul again listened to the radio. By that time the flood waters had reached and passed the old bridge which crossed Cherry Creek at Colorado Boulevard. Hearing this, they decided to ride over on their bikes.

When they arrived at the site, the bridge had been turned into a dam. Debris of every kind had been lodged against the bridge—old tree branches, leaves, cardboard boxes, old lumber, driftwood, everything the flood waters could wash up against that bridge was there. The result was that Colorado Boulevard was flooded for quite a distance in all directions from the bridge, but the worst sight that we witnessed was just beginning to happen.

All along that part of the bridge which faced upstream and against which the full force of flood waters was being exerted, we saw calves, chickens, a horse, sheep, dog, several ducks and miscellaneous other animals all crushed up against the "Dam" and all trying to escape to high ground. The noise they made—the bawling of calves, the bleating of sheep, howling of the dog, squawking of chickens, quacking of ducks and neighing of the horse created a din loud enough to be heard above the noise of rushing water.

Each animal and each fowl, in its own way, was trying desperately to escape the force of flood waters and either climb over the bridge or reach high ground at either end of the bridge. But to no avail, each time an animal tried to get away from the debris lodged against the bridge, the worse became its predicament. It was hopeless.

Several policeman and some ranchers arrived. Two of the ranchers were carrying rifles. They consulted each other for awhile, then they asked everyone to move away from the bridge area as far as they could. Paul and I, along with all other observers, withdrew. One of the ranchers moved as close as he could to the animals and fowl lodged against the debris by the force of the water. He raised his rifle and aimed at the horse, still struggling in the water, but did not fire his rifle. He lowered it, wiped his brow, looked at the struggling animal



*Firemen worked for hours, dislodging debris caught against the bridges. And, they often had to destroy animals that couldn't be rescued from the raging water. Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library.*

again, then raised the rifle again, took careful aim and fired. The horse ceased struggling and disappeared under the water. By his actions, we assumed he was the owner of the horse. After the shot was fired, everyone stood very still, not saying a word. The forces of nature had caused a beautiful animal to be put to death. Shortly thereafter, the policemen and the ranchers, one-by-one, shot all the other animals and birds to put them out of their misery. It seemed to us this was the only humane action that could be taken under these awful circumstances, even though we were both deeply saddened to have witnessed it.

About this time, firemen arrived in two or three fire trucks. They tried time and again to dislodge the debris forming the dam in front of the bridge. After several attempts, they did succeed in moving some of the debris from one side of the bridge, allowing the water to flow under it instead of over the top as it had been doing.

We stayed awhile longer watching the firemen who now were assisted by the policemen and several bystanders, in moving the debris and the dead animals out from in front of the bridge. Their efforts met with some success, but not very much. It would all have to wait until the flood waters subsided. We left the scene awed and saddened by what we had seen.

Paul and I will never forget that day—even though it is now 61 years later.

*George W. Madsen*  
*Aurora*  
1994

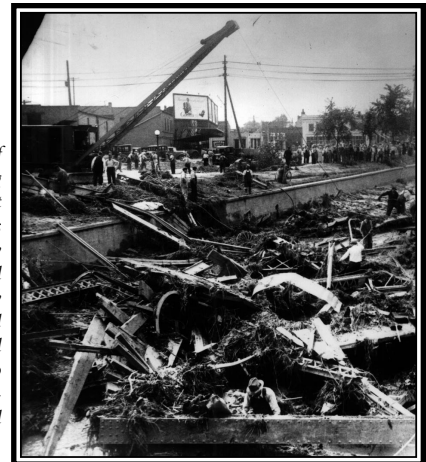
### **A 3-Year-Old Is Disappointed**

In 1933, I was only three years old. I held off writing this down because I could not believe you would give any credibility to the memories of a three-year-old. So I waited until I had an opportunity to verify this with my older brother who was 10 at the time of the flood.

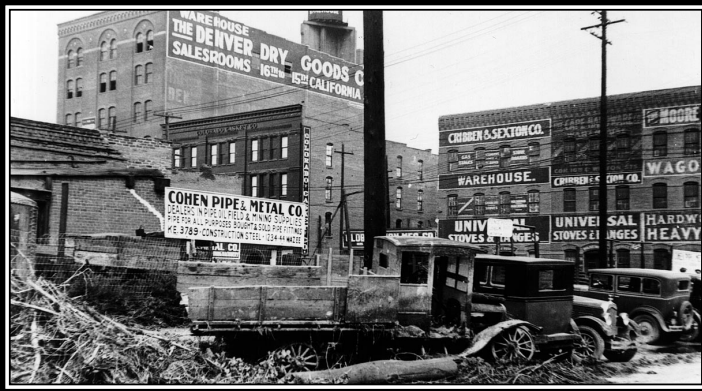
That afternoon, my dad gathered his four children around him and asked if we would like to see a flood. We said "sure." A policeman named Roy Tillett had a big Essex automobile. So we all jumped in the car and headed downtown from North Denver and across the 14th Street viaduct. I could look down off the viaduct into the railroad yards and see a lot of water. But by the time we got across the viaduct, what a disappointment! We could only see water about hubcap deep in lower downtown. No houses with dogs and men and women on rooftops waiting for rescue.

I can remember lying in bed that night thinking "what a bust!" Later I concluded there was mega misery connected with this flood.

A neighbor who lived across the street worked at the railroad terminal. His car was parked at the depot.



*Some portions of the retaining walls that formed the sides of the Cherry Creek Channel through the city were undermined by the forceful flood. Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.*



The Rocky Mountain News reported \$100,000 in losses to warehouses, not counting the hundreds of dollars spent to purchase pumps, dredges and other implements to remove the water and mud. This is at 13th and Wazee. Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.



tis. The building was demolished in the 1960s when the Auraria campus was created for the institutions of higher learning and Speer Boulevard was relocated on the south side of the creek.

My husband would walk from the apartment to the bakery early in the morning because bread, doughnuts and

Several days later, it was towed home, packed with dry mud. After looking at pictures in the *Denver Post*, I saw what a mess the flood had caused. It took months to dig out stockrooms of warehouses in the area.

*Russ Baker  
Colorado Springs*

### Raisins in the Bakery Basement

One summer afternoon, when the heavy dark clouds gathered southeast of Denver, people said this would be the day Castlewood dam would break and flood Cherry Creek and Denver. Then in 1933, the day came. Clouds gathered and the dam broke.

On June 12, 1933 we were married and were living at the Grosvenor Arms Apartments at East 16th and Logan Street. My husband worked at Campbell-Sell Baking Company located at 1125 12th Street, on the south bank of Cherry Creek at Cur-

pastries had to be delivered to grocers and restaurants before they opened for business each day. As he approached the creek, he noticed large groups of people standing around and talking excitedly. "The dam has broken." Rushing across the Curtis Street bridge, he gathered the employees to load all the trucks as quickly as possible and drive them to higher ground.

The waters came and flooded the basement and first floor of the bakery. Unfortunately, the raisins were stored in the basement and you know what moisture does to raisins, especially 100 pounds of them. But the next day with some makeshift operations, it was business as usual.

*Jean Bain  
Denver*



The water raged beneath the trolley wires and lapped at the steps of businesses and apartments. Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.

*Businesses along Larimer Street suffered much water damage, although early warnings prompted some businessmen to move goods to higher floors. Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.*



### **A Mess Around the Store Fronts**

I was five years old and living with my parents, older brother and younger sister in South Denver. My father, Harvey C. Morton, a plumber, said there was a big flood that hit the downtown of Denver. We all piled into his Model A and drove down Speer Boulevard to around Larimer Street. I recall water, trash and a mess around the store fronts. Water was still high.

Later on, I learned the source of the flood—Castlewood dam. In the late '40s and '50s, I picnicked with family and friends seeing for the first time the washed-out land.

*Dick Morton  
Colorado Springs*

### **A Terrible Baptism**

On the night of Aug. 3, 1933, I was a 14-year-old boy entrusted with taking care of my grandfather's rather old residential properties at 1163 Delaware, about one block away from Cherry Creek.

I got there with ropes to string inside the buildings so that tenants could salvage their belongings. Basements were completely flooded. If you walked to the wrong place, you were submersed into muddy opaque waters. A filthy baptism!

*Dirty brown water roared down the creek in great waves. Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library.*



After a week or so the water drained off, leaving a half inch of glorious mud.

When my grandfather returned, he said he was very proud of me!

*Tom Cooper  
Denver*

### **Dairy Caves in to Raging Waters**

My memories of Castlewood are one highlight of my life! In the mid-1920s, my brothers were given an Old Towne Canoe. Looking for a lake to use it on, they found Castlewood. Many happy days and nights were spent there. We had a camp with a boat dock and all we could ask for. Wood for fires, a diving rock for swimming and even picnics for the family, below the dam.



On the morning of Aug. 4, we heard the dam had gone out. It was a sad day. We lived about a mile from the creek. We went out to Steele and Exposition and watched Cambridge Dairy cave in to the raging waters. It took the whole dairy. It was sitting on a sand bank about 10 feet high. Every bridge between Castlewood and University Boulevard was gone. The water on Colorado Boulevard was about a quarter mile wide and rolling rapidly toward downtown Denver. I do not know when it finally returned to normal.

We went out to Castlewood to see the damage. Our camp was gone, the canoe was gone and our hopes were destroyed. But we set up a new camp farther up the canyon high above the creek and had many enjoyable trips for several years.

*R.L. Peterson  
Denver*

### **The Tremendous Power of Water**

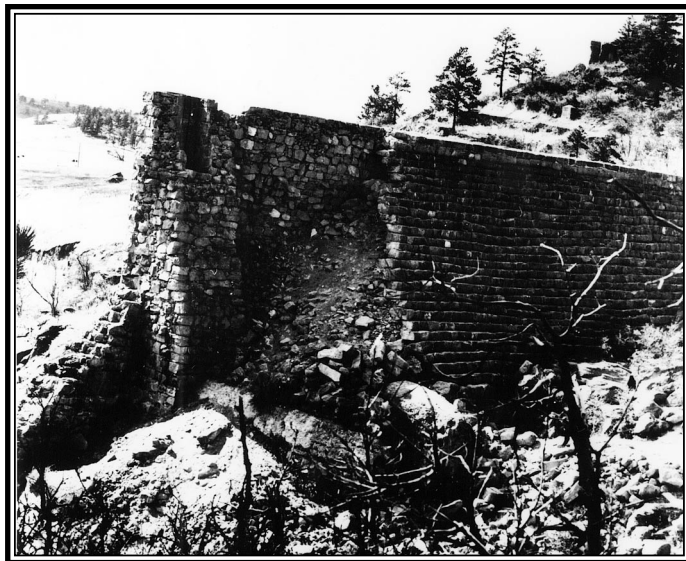
In 1933 I was nine years old. We lived near Washington Park. I remember hearing on the radio that the Castlewood Canyon dam had broken and water was flooding Cherry Creek through the Denver area.

The next morning one of the neighbor men packed his car with children, including his own, and drove us north on Downing Street as near as he could get to the creek. He wanted us to witness and remember an historic moment.

And remember it I do! Dirty brown water was raging down the creek in great waves piling on each other and carrying whole trees and houses with it. It was an awesome sight. It was the first time most of us realized the tremendous power of water.

And to this day as I drive along Speer Boulevard and look at the docile creek I remember how it looked 64 years ago. And when I hike the trails of Castlewood Canyon and see the broken remains of the dam it is hard to believe the damage it caused.

*Mickey Gates Maker  
Arvada*



*“When I hike the trails of Castlewood Canyon and see the broken remains of the dam it is hard to believe the damage it caused.”  
Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society*



## References

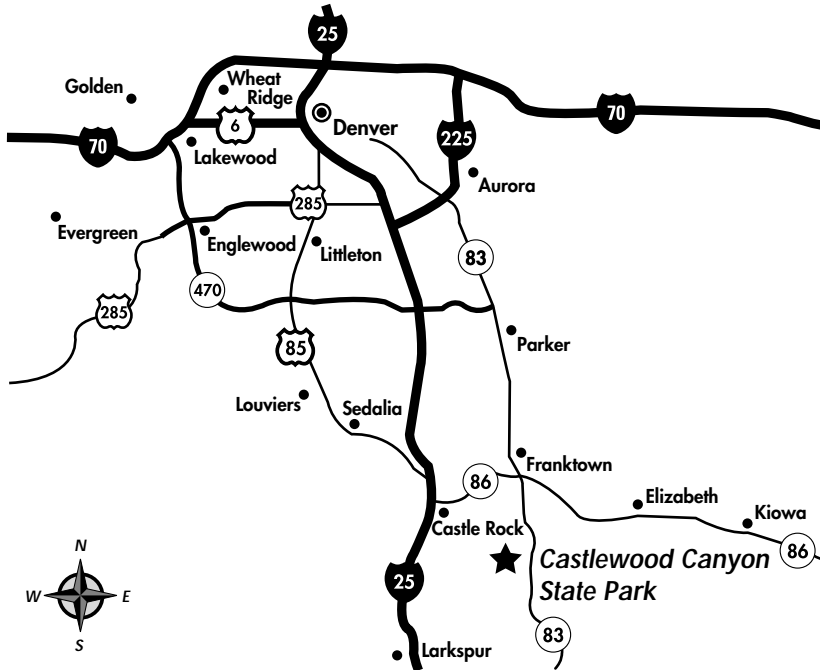
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## HOW TO GET TO CASTLEWOOD CANYON STATE PARK

Castlewood Canyon State Park, a 1,120-acre day use area, offers a variety of activities in an ecological setting. This scenic canyonland of the high plains has a spectacular panoramic view of the Front Range and Pikes Peak. The park preserves a portion of the Black Forest and its vegetative communities and wildlife habitats. Visitors to Castlewood Canyon enjoy hiking, picnicking, rock climbing, nature study and photography. A trail leads to the ruins of the Castlewood dam. Visitors can watch an audio-visual program on the history of the dam and the flood of Aug. 3, 1993 at the Visitor Center.

To reach Castlewood Canyon State Park, take I-25 to Castle Rock, turn east on Highway 86, go six miles to Franktown, turn south on Highway 83 (S. Parker Rd.) and go five miles south to the park entrance.



Castlewood Canyon State Park  
2989 S. State Highway 83  
P.O. Box 504  
Franktown, CO 80116  
(303) 688-5242  
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