



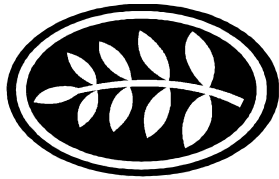
SPECIAL EDITION

The Louisville Historian

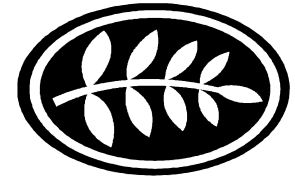
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How Louisville Grew Up: 1880 to 1900



By J. Peter Lindquist

The autumn of 1879 was a heady time in the fledgling town of Louisville. Positive energy and optimism were rampant because the thick coal seams over which the town was being built promised growth and prosperity.

The future could not have appeared brighter, and people throughout the town were confident that they would benefit. Colorado's population was exploding and would nearly triple in the next twenty years. Coal was needed to support the growth, power the rapidly expanding railroad system, and facilitate the state's transition to an industrial economy. Sitting in the middle of Colorado's northern coalfield, Louisville was perfectly positioned to thrive.

The Welch coal mine is working to its full capacity. About one hundred and fifty men are employed. A new and large working shaft is to be sunk as soon as the machinery arrives, which will increase the output of coal to six or seven hundred tons a day. The men are drawing large pay and seem well pleased.¹

To top all this off, Louisville had recently gained what appeared to be a competitive advantage over many other coal towns in the state. In 1879, Jay Gould took control of Colorado's northern railroads and purchased the rights to the Welch Coal Mine as well. Gould came with a reputation as a ferocious competitor and monopolist, and everyone knew he would make sure that his own mines were successful. Since he had repeatedly been successful in driving his railroad and coal mining competitors out of business, residents expected Louisville to prosper. New coal mining competitors would be discouraged from entering the market, and existing independent mine operators would probably have to deal with discriminatory transportation rates, shortages of railroad cars to haul their coal, and the risk of being driven into bankruptcy.

In 1880, journalist Amos Bixby summed up Louisville's extraordinary possibilities as an emerging farming and mining community:

The surrounding farming lands are of the best in the State, and now supplied with water by three irrigating canals. Wheat fields over coal mines, and over the wheat fields, the charm of clear sky touched by the grandeur of the great mountains—can a spot of earth be better utilized, or be more beautiful for homes?²

But looks can be deceiving. Future events would not unfold as people anticipated at the start of the 1880s. As it turned out, while coal may have been Louisville's greatest hope, it was also her greatest curse. It was because of coal that Louisville was founded, but coal played a central role in the major difficulties the town would face in the years that lay ahead.



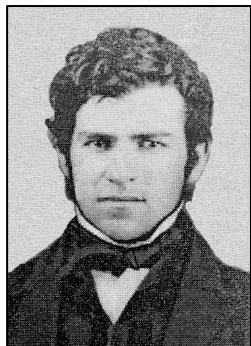
During the early years, Louisville was either growing or hoping for growth. (Photo courtesy of Louisville Historical Museum)

Recent activities confirmed the optimism. After only two years of operation, Louisville's Welch Coal Mine (one half mile east of the railroad off of Empire road) had grown to become the largest coal mine in the state. The miners were skilled craftsmen and were well compensated. Their relationship with management had been favorable enough that from the inception of the mine they had not felt a need to strike. The miners had a common bond, with more than 75 percent having grown up in English speaking countries. The *Boulder News & Courier* reported:

Jay Gould
“A man hard as iron and as cold.”³

Jay Gould (1836-1892) did not spend much time in Louisville, but he had a profound influence over the town’s early years. Gould was one of the most brilliant and successful of the 19th Century robber barons. By age seventeen, he had clearly defined his goal: “I am going to be rich. I’ve seen enough to realize what can be accomplished by means of riches and I tell you I’m going to be rich.”⁴

At the end of the Civil War, the opportunities to achieve that goal mushroomed. A contemporary author, William Howells, observed, “There’s no doubt but money is to the fore now. It is the romance, the poetry of our age.”⁵ In this atmosphere, many businessmen were more than willing to take unethical shortcuts to success. In their view, even the intellectual tenets of the period justified a more lenient moral code. British philosopher Herbert Spencer adapted



Jay Gould at age 19.

Charles Darwin’s concept of natural selection and proclaimed that an individual’s drive for “survival of the fittest” was appropriate in social affairs. Social Darwinism became a creed that meshed nicely with the desires of John D. Rockefeller, Jay Gould, Andrew Carnegie, and others. From their perspective, winning at all costs was one of the new rules of the game. Thus, bribery, dishonesty, and intimidation became acceptable whenever they were deemed necessary. And while accumulation of money was the primary measure of success, there was an added level of satisfaction when competitors in the game were defeated and the victor had proven to be the “fittest.”

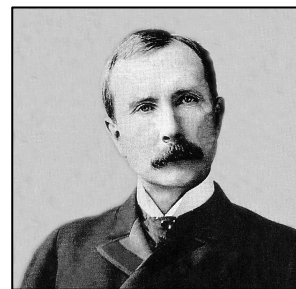
In 1865, at the age of twenty-nine and after five audacious years on Wall Street, Gould concocted his grand strategy. He would become a monopolist:

I believe that consolidation will prove both essential and inevitable for a score or more [rail]roads in the coming decade. Far better than mere cooperation is tight coordination, close vertical integration, unwatered economy-of-scale, and unchallenged market domination wherever possible.... We are at a moment where there is a particular, inevitable future waiting to be made. I see things very, very clearly. I feel inspired with an artist’s conception. Divine inspiration? I cannot say. But my road is laid out before me in the plainest of ways.⁶

Rockefeller and Gould were cut from the same cloth. In 1868, when Gould controlled the Erie Railroad, he “hatched a secret deal with Rockefeller” that provided Rockefeller’s refineries with “a staggering 75 percent rebate on oil shipped through the Erie system.” This put Rockefeller’s competitors at a huge disadvantage and played a pivotal role in his drive to conquer the oil industry. It helped Rockefeller generate the cash flow

he needed to buy out most of his small competitors. Rockefeller said that Gould was the “greatest businessman he had ever met,” and Gould responded that Rockefeller had “the highest genius for constructive organization in America’s economic history.”⁷

On Wall Street, “Jay Gould was better than any other man alive at selling for very high prices financial paper that he acquired at very low prices.”⁸ And after heading the Erie Railroad, he had become proficient at railroad operations. By 1873, he was prepared to make the Union Pacific Railroad (UP) the cornerstone of his own monopoly.



John D. Rockefeller - oil monopolist and the wealthiest American in U.S. history. (Photo courtesy of Rockefeller Archive Center)

Completed in 1869, the UP’s portion of the first transcontinental railroad had been unscrupulously built with a dizzying array of governmental incentives, borrowing, greed, bribery, insider-dealing, shabby management, and litigation. Thus, it was not surprising that the Panic of 1873, which resulted in the failure of nearly 25 percent of all U.S. railroads and national unemployment of 14 percent, put the Union Pacific at risk and presented Gould with the opportunity to seize control. But he didn’t stop there.

Gould further expanded his railroad empire by purchasing or leasing several other western railroads (including the Colorado Central, which ran through Louisville). And he also set his sights on the western coal industry, as explained by David Wolff:

Gould wanted to control rail transport in the mountain West, but he also hoped for an ever-expanding fuel monopoly—one that would extend from the Pacific Coast through Nebraska. With a much larger railroad, he needed to open new mines to meet the demand; and as the railway expanded, he wanted to acquire any coal mines that might defy his plans for a monopoly.... To eliminate competitors and find more fuel for the domestic market, the company began leasing and buying coal mines in Colorado and Utah. None of these mines produced the large tonnages of the [UP’s] Wyoming operations, but they seemed necessary as the railroad sought complete control.”⁹

The hoped-for benefit of having Jay Gould as owner of the Welch Coal Mine, however, turned sour almost immediately. The UP required its miners to sign an early form of the “yellow-dog” contract, which stipulated workplace regulations and prohibited organizing activities and work stoppages—actions the miners adamantly opposed. But that was only the beginning.

At the time, miners in Colorado's northern coalfield received \$1.25 per ton, while those in southern Colorado, central Colorado, and Wyoming ranged from \$0.50 to \$1.00. Believing that he would be able to obtain coal supplies elsewhere and withstand a strike at his new Louisville and Erie mines, in 1880 Gould moved to set his miners' wages in the northern coalfield below his competitors. The Welch Coal Mine's first strike quickly followed, but because of strong demand for coal and miner solidarity the UP acquiesced shortly thereafter—as they did again following brief strikes in 1881 and 1882. The miners would not forget, however, that it was Jay Gould and the UP that assumed a leading role in opposing unionizing efforts and cutting wage rates.

The principal reason that the UP readily settled coal strikes in the early 1880s is that the Colorado economy was surging. The Leadville silver boom starting in 1878 magnified the rebound from the Panic of 1873. Coal operators scrambled to serve the expanding market. From 1880 to 1882, Colorado coal output increased 50 percent per year, and for a time demand outstripped supply. In those circumstances, labor costs were relatively unimportant, and through 1883 strikes in the northern coalfield were infrequent and quickly resolved. But explosive growth never lasts.

Western coal mining had seemingly come of age by 1883, but just as prosperity seemed assured, another downturn hit. The coal industry began to feel the pangs of overexpansion as the economy slowed. The newly expanded companies tried to adjust—most often at the expense of workers—and in the process they ushered in an era of labor upheaval.¹⁰

Falling demand meant overcapacity, and mine operators either had to close mines, stimulate demand, or cut costs. Since closing mines was the least attractive option for individual operators, price-cutting was typically the initial response. But in a weak economy, this hardly ever worked. Thus, the operators resorted to cutting production hours (many mines worked only two or three days a week) and cutting the miners' tonnage rates. This resulted in labor turmoil throughout the northern coalfield, and among miners there was unusually strong resentment toward the UP—the largest producer and the most vocal opponent of labor's rights.

Miners, however, were not the only group to feel mistreated by the UP. The company operated in an environment with little oversight from federal or state regulators, and independent coal operators were irate over the way they were blindsided. In June 1883, the *Boulder News & Courier* reported:

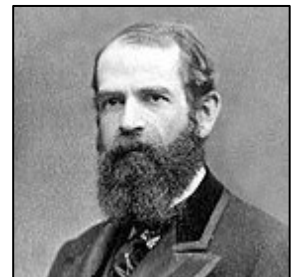
On account of the enormous discrimination in freight charges against the coal mines in Boulder county by the Union Pacific Railway, the Marshall Coal Company has been compelled to suspend the shipment of coal to Denver. The injustice of this discrimination will be seen by a glance at the figures. Freight charges on coal per ton

from Louisville and Erie to Denver is 25 cents, while in Marshall...it is \$1.40, five and a half times as much. This discrimination is accounted for by the fact that the Union Pacific Company owns the mines at Erie and Louisville, while they cannot control the Marshall mines, and take this method of keeping that coal out of the Denver market.¹¹

In addition to offending his workers and competitors, Gould even managed to take advantage of his fellow shareholders. His cunning and skills were wide-ranging and were particularly notable when it came to feathering his own nest. He expanded his operations aggressively, even recklessly, but he always seemed to figure out how to profit from his ventures.

Gould's drive for railroad supremacy seemed wise, as it ensured the strength of the Union Pacific. Some acquisitions helped the Union Pacific, such as the Oregon Short Line; others, however, were unwise. The Kansas Pacific held little value for the Union Pacific. In reality, Gould had reverted to his old trick of manipulating securities. He had personally purchased the Kansas Pacific's nearly worthless securities, pushed up their value, and then had the Union Pacific absorb the line. The Union Pacific did not need this road, but Gould profited handsomely.¹²

As the economy and demand weakened, Gould deferred maintenance on the UP's tracks and equipment, while maintaining high dividend distributions to the UP shareholders, most of which went to him. This had the advantage of propping up the price of the UP capital stock even as the company's profits eroded and financial condition worsened. By early 1884 when the industry outlook had further declined and with the UP becoming increasingly vulnerable, he sold a large portion of his stock to the public, surrendered control of the railroad, and talked of "going into quiet retirement."¹³



Jay Gould - brilliant and self-serving maneuvers made him the eighth wealthiest American in U. S. history.

Because of the UP's monopolistic advantages, sales of Welch coal remained strong well into 1884, while competitors not affiliated with the UP suffered. But in October 1884 a coal strike that would last nearly three months was called, and the true legacy of the Jay Gould era became apparent. His policies had created ill will throughout the region. The UP was heavily in debt, meaning that the railroad would have difficulty maintaining its lines, purchasing new equipment, and serving its customers. Labor relations at both the railroad and in the coal mines were in shambles. At the Welch Coal Mine,

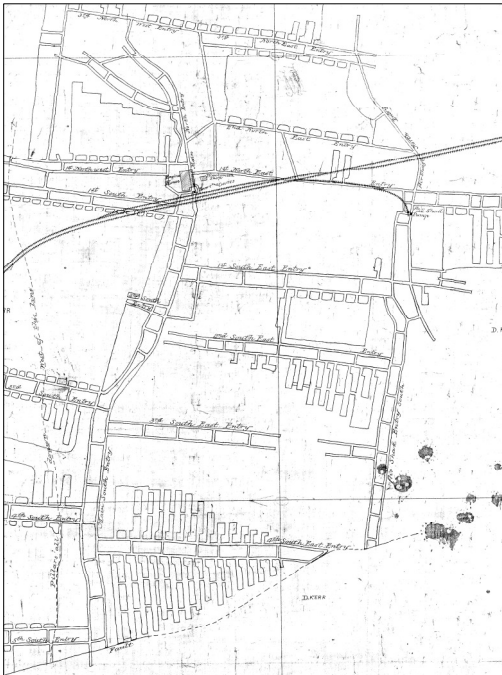
Louisville's primary employer, there was widespread animosity and great uncertainty about the future. The town of Louisville and the coal miners had each been played like pawns in Gould's game of "survival of the fittest."

When Jay Gould had first appeared on the Louisville scene in 1879, the community was infused with optimism; after his departure five years later people felt abused and nervous. But, above all, they were defiant!

Coal Miners Rule A brotherhood of pride

It was considered an honor to be a coal miner. Coal mining dates back hundreds of years in Great Britain, and underground mining had developed its own culture, traditions, and values. British miners were accustomed to working independently, making their own decisions, setting the pace of their work, and controlling the workplace. They took pride in their profession, which required specialized knowledge, apprenticeships, a strong work ethic, courage, and teamwork. More than 37,000 of them brought that pride and heritage with them when they immigrated to the United States in the 1850s.

After the discovery of gold in Colorado in 1858, many miners moved west to try hard rock mining. When their luck failed, as it often did, they returned to coal mining. Thus, the British mining culture was instilled in the early Colorado coal mines. At first, their camaraderie and independence were endorsed by the mine operators, who hired the miners as independent contractors and paid them a tonnage rate based on their production (rather than paying them as employees by the hour or day). Coal miners provided their own tools, received no fringe benefits, and paid for their own blasting powder and medical services.



This 1884 underground map of a portion of the Welch Mine shows the room-and-pillar excavation method. (Courtesy of the Louisville Historical Museum)

Early coal mines in northern Colorado used the room-and-pillar excavation method. Pairs of men created long narrow

rooms at right angles to the mine tunnels as they removed the coal. The rooms were about 24 feet in width and hundreds of feet long. The walls separating the rooms were the pillars that supported the roof of the mine and the pillars were supplemented with timber posts to prevent cave-ins.

The mining teams used hand picks to chip out narrow horizontal channels at the base of the coal seams and then drilled holes into the seams and inserted tubes of black powder. The fuses were lit, the powder exploded, and chunks of coal dropped. The coal was then loaded into cars, pulled to the entry shaft by mules, and lifted up the shaft to the surface for weighing and transfer to railroad flats. Miners and operators battled almost continuously over the fairness of the coal weighing methods used.

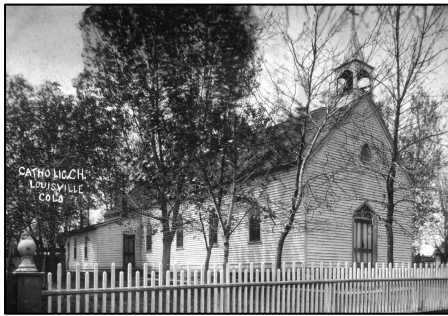


Before electric lamps, early coal mining caps used live flames to provide light in the mines. (Photo courtesy of Louisville Historical Museum)

The miners in the northern Colorado coalfield commanded high tonnage rates in the early 1880s, in part because of the shortage of skilled miners in the region. This initial preferential treatment created an expectation that northern coalfield miners would continue to receive comparatively high wages, and this expectation was reinforced in several ways. Local coal mine operators depended on sales to commercial and domestic customers in Denver. They could not afford strikes that would provide their customers with the opportunity to switch to other suppliers. As a result, the northern miners had relatively strong bargaining power, and this hardened the attitudes they held after decades of working to unionize the British coalfields. The miners were also convinced that since their craft was dangerous they deserved higher compensation than workers in less risky occupations. In addition, the miners' unity was supported by their belief that coal was the fuel of the industrial revolution and that society was dependent upon them for its continued prosperity. Northern Colorado coal miners were, indeed, a proud lot, and they viewed with contempt any effort by coal operators to impose changes in their workplace.

In Louisville the conviction was particularly strong. In several Colorado coal camps, the coal companies owned the land and established the local laws and regulations. By contrast, Louisville miners generally lived in their own homes or in privately owned boarding houses. They participated in a democratic community life that was not controlled by a coal company, and Louisville developed a unique character that inspired unity. The miners had a vested interest in their properties and their town, and this sense of community increased their desire to fight for what they saw as justice.

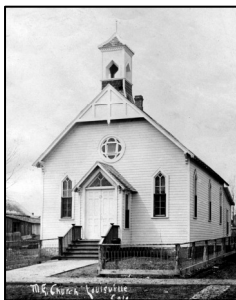
Not that they all agreed on everything! Single men and married men tended to have different visions for the town, but this difference was less pronounced than that between men and women. For many men the center of the social scene was Front Street, the home of the local saloons. There they drank, smoked, gambled, played pool, bowled, argued, and brawled. Since chewing tobacco was common and spittle often missed the spittoons, the premises were unkempt and considered unfit for most women. It was acceptable for men to appear drunk, but never for respectable ladies. Instead, the women flocked to church, which was the center of most women's social lives in the 19th Century.



Louisville's first Catholic Church, located on the southwest corner of La Farge and Walnut, was built in the early 1880s. (Photo courtesy of Louisville Historical Museum)

The Catholic Church was the only church in town in the 1880s, but the Methodists held services in the building used by the grade school. Women often found the men's behavior detestable, especially when drunkenness led to family abuse. The women's desire to reform the men bolstered a temperance movement that steadily gained strength. But for the most part, in the early 1880s the opposing sides simply tolerated each other. A February 1882 issue of the *Boulder News and Courier* reported:

The temperance movement in Louisville is a good one on the part of those who began it. There is plenty of timber for the work and between thirty and forty members are numbered on the enrolment [sic] list. There seems to be no conflicting movement on the part of those directly engaged in a business opposed to it, but a disposition to let the people do as they please.¹⁴



Louisville's Methodist church was built in 1892 at the southwest corner of Jefferson and Spruce. (Photo courtesy of Louisville Historical Museum)

For women, attending church was an escape from the drudgery of daily life: cooking (often for boarders as well as family members), cleaning, rearing children, gardening, canning, sewing, laundry – it all seemed endless. For some, singing in the choir and enjoying the church community were their only relief from their demanding lives.

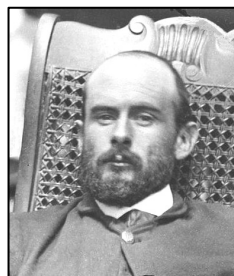
Since the coal mined in the northern coalfield deteriorated rapidly after it was brought to the surface and was not preferred for use by the railroads, coal mining became a seasonal occupation for most Louisville miners. The town's population declined during the summer months when some miners left to prospect in the mountains, work as farm hands, or pursue other activities. As a result, the summertime economy was shaky. To survive, miners' families relied on odd jobs, family gardens, and credit extended by local merchants. One news item from 1881 gives a flavor of the times:

As a freight train approaches Louisville, several women can be seen with sacks or baskets, standing beside the track, peering into the open cars. And while the train is in motion they will gather up their skirts and throw themselves into the cars, sweep up every bit of waste grain, and jump out again before the train reaches the depot.¹⁵

Thus, although the Louisville coal miners were both proud and relatively well paid in the early 1880s, they were far from wealthy. Seasonal shutdowns and production cutbacks when the economy weakened were ongoing challenges. And there was another issue that posed an even greater threat. While poor relations between miners and mine operators were common throughout Wyoming and Colorado, no miners were more headstrong than those in Louisville. They longed for a new era in which they could more completely impose their power. Pride may be a wonderful quality, but the Louisville miners would prove it can also be self-defeating.

Charles Francis Adams, Jr. and the Lost Years Beware of what you ask for.

After Jay Gould gave up control of the UP, Charles Francis Adams, Jr. (1835-1915) was the logical choice to take over as president. Adams was hard working, bright, and an avowed railroad reformer who detested what Gould stood for and the corrupt practices he had promoted. The grandson and great grandson of former U.S. presidents, he was highly regarded for his integrity. In 1869, he had published a scathing indictment of Gould's mismanagement of the Erie Railroad, ultimately leading to his own appointment as one of two government directors of the UP. When he became UP's president in May 1884, he was totally committed to transforming a company that had been run for the profit of its insiders into a responsible modern transportation system.



Charles Francis Adams, Jr. – grandson and great grandson of American presidents and an accomplished academician, but a disappointing railroad president.

It was a tall order! In the first half of 1884, the UP was facing increased competition from new transcontinental railroads, declining revenues because of a shrinking economy, plunging

earnings, a weakened financial condition, an antagonistic federal government that was pressing for increased debt repayments, and a negative public image because the UP had abused its monopoly power and overcharged its customers. The UP's coal mines were in no better shape. In response to the declining demand for coal, the northern coal operators cut the miners' tonnage rates, and poor labor relations deteriorated even more. When a new labor union, the Knights of Labor, appeared on the scene it was warmly greeted by the miners. The Knights of Labor pushed for a more aggressive stance against the coal mine operators, and particularly against the UP.

In an attempt to remedy the situation, Adams brought in new managers, cut expenses, stopped paying dividends, pleaded with Congress for a loan extension, and increased debt repayments to the government. But since the UP was financially weak and Adams' team feared the growing union movement, they were unwilling to make concessions to the coal miners. When an October 1884 strike was called against all coal operators in the state, most mines in the northern coalfield settled after only ten days, but the UP held out for an additional ten weeks before falling into line.

The Louisville miners had just gone back to work in January 1885 when a series of explosions and fires in an abandoned section of the Welch Mine closed the mine for several weeks. Shortly after they returned to work, yet another strike was called, and the relations between the Louisville miners and the UP management seemed to have reached an all-time low. This, however, was merely a prelude to the event that would drastically change Louisville's coal mining business.

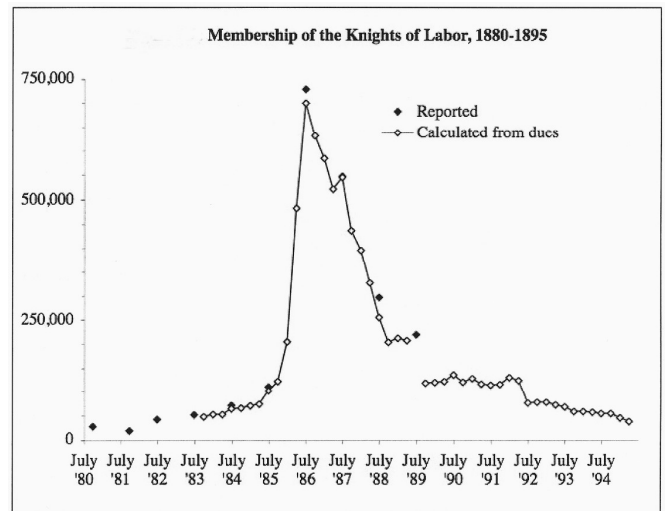
Ten years earlier, Jay Gould had introduced Chinese coal miners into some of the UP's Wyoming mines because they agreed to work for a reduced tonnage rate. Bigotry against minority ethnic groups was prevalent across the west, but no group endured more wrath than the Chinese. In September 1885, a quarrel between white and Chinese miners in Rock Springs turned into a massacre in which 28 Chinese were killed, 600 others were chased into the desert, and 100 homes were burned to the ground.

The Knights of Labor organization was careful to distance itself from the killings, but they decided to use the situation to build solidarity among white miners. They called upon Colorado miners to strike in sympathy with the white miners in Wyoming and refuse to work until all Chinese miners in Wyoming had been dismissed. Coal miners at locations across Colorado rejected the Knights of Labor appeal, except in Louisville where they went out on strike and demanded "a general settlement of Rock Springs grievances." This was ill-advised, as noted in the *Rocky Mountain News*:

It is reported that 500 white coal miners at Carbon, Wyoming, and 200 at Louisville, Colorado, have quit work because the Union Pacific Railway company retains Chinese miners at Rock Springs, Wyoming.... [W]e cannot help thinking that the white coal miners have made a great mistake in striking without sufficient cause at the beginning of

winter. No Chinese miners have ever been employed at Carbon or Louisville, and there was no probability that this form of competition need be feared at those mines. The supposition that the railway company can be coerced into permitting the Knights of Labor or any other outside organization to control its affairs is absurd. The road can get all the coal it wants whether the mines at Carbon and Louisville are worked or remain idle indefinitely. The strikers will lose the wages they might earn by minding their own business, and it is not improbable that many of them will be refused re-employment when the strike collapses, as it will some day.¹⁶

For Louisville, this was the greatest of miscalculations. Since taking over as president of the UP, Adams had objected to the UP being in the coal mining business. He felt the mines distracted managers from focusing on the railroad, which was in dire need of their full attention. In addition, the northern Colorado mines were unprofitable and produced coal that was an inferior source of fuel for railroading. The miners there had fought the company and its policies ever since the UP had acquired the mines, and now the Louisville miners were so hostile they were even striking over issues that had no direct effect upon them. UP management concluded that the company was in a no-win situation. They decided to close down the Welch Mine and exit the northern Colorado coal business.



The Knights of Labor union grew rapidly in the mid-1880s, but was soon replaced by the United Mine Workers of America. (Prepared by Michael Biggs, Department of Sociology, University of Oxford.)

At the time, a syndicate headed by David J. Moffat, Jr. and J. B. Chaffee was purchasing and reorganizing the coal mines in Marshall under the name Marshall Consolidated Coal Mining Company (Marshall Consolidated). Adams and Moffat came to an agreement under which Marshall Consolidated would also operate the UP's Louisville and Erie mines. But the relationship between the Louisville coal miners and Marshall

Consolidated turned out to be no improvement because Marshall Consolidated fought to bring their mining costs into line with other coal mines in Colorado and Wyoming. Over the next three years, strikes repeatedly interrupted Louisville's operations.

The toll on Louisville was huge. From 1885 through 1888 annual coal production in Colorado rose 42 percent from the level achieved in 1883 and 1884. During the same time, coal production in Louisville dropped by nearly 60 percent. Louisville's share of the Colorado coal market fell from 7.2 percent to 2.2 percent, and many miners moved to other locations. The Louisville economy suffered tremendously. Employment at the Welch mine plummeted, population declined as many miners moved away, and some homes and businesses stood empty. One example of the depressed conditions: During the four-year period from 1885 through 1888, when Charles C. Welch was attempting to sell the 163 lots he owned in Jefferson Place (Louisville's first addition), he was only able to close on six properties. For Louisville, these truly were lost years.

Adams and the UP did not fare any better. As a result of discriminatory rates, rebates, and preferences offered by various railroads across the country, in February 1887 Congress created the Interstate Commerce Commission to oversee the railroad industry and prohibit unlawful behavior. Thus, railroads became the first U.S. industry subject to federal regulation. The following month a newly constituted U.S. Pacific Railway Commission was charged with investigating the books, records, and methods of railroads that had received financial aid from the U.S. government. The resulting report brought a sharp rebuke of the UP, including its president, Charles Francis Adams, Jr.:

A bargain was made between Mr. Charles Francis Adams and the Marshall Consolidated Coal Mining Company by which the entire coal business of the Union Pacific Company in that State south of Greeley, Colo., was practically transferred to the Marshall Company....

The practical application of the scheme was to advance the freight rates of the [UP] at the same time that the Marshall Company reduced the price of its product at the mouth of the mine; and as the Marshall Company was receiving a rebate of 40 cents per ton it could sell at the mine for 40 cents less than its competitors. The effect was to destroy the business of the other mines in Northern Colorado....

The Union Pacific Railway Company has failed to fulfill the obligations imposed upon it by the interstate commerce law.... It has discriminated between connecting lines; ... it charges more for the short haul than for the longer haul; it participates in agreements to maintain rates which are unreasonable, and also violates that part of section 1 of the

act...which requires that all charges for transportation and service shall be reasonable and just.¹⁷

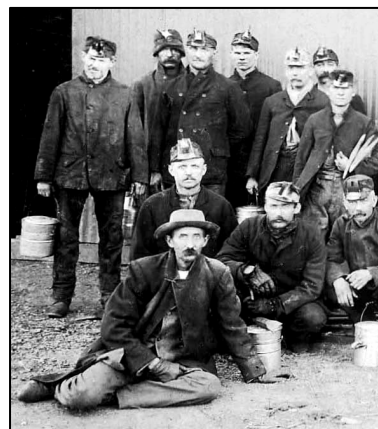
The UP was corrupt when Adams had taken over, but despite his good efforts, instead of reforming the company he had succumbed. As Michael Kazin observed:

Adams scorned the venality of his fellow railroad bosses. "Our method of doing business is founded upon lying, cheating and stealing — all bad things," he remarked. But such high-mindedness did not prevent Adams from playing the game as ruthlessly as his competitors, albeit not as effectively. When the Union Pacific neared bankruptcy in 1890, Adams had to resign his post.¹⁸

For Louisville, federal involvement in the railroads produced a remarkable surprise. Breaking the unchecked power of the UP and introducing governmental oversight to the railroads led to a rebirth of the town. For ten years following the founding of the Welch Mine, no competitive mines had opened in Louisville because competing with the UP was deemed near impossible. During the eight years following the enactment of the Interstate Commerce Act, eight new mines opened in or near Louisville and an additional twenty-two opened in the northern coalfield. After four years of local depression, Louisville boomed—for a while.

Life Was Like That Louisville in the 1890s

The transition started in 1888. Marshall Consolidated closed the old Welch Mine and opened a new shaft nearby (known as Louisville Mine #2, later Hecla #2, and finally Rex #2). Late in the year, the Acme Coal Mining Company opened a mine near the current corner of Hutchinson and La Farge. A new railroad line was put in between Louisville and the farm that soon would become Lafayette, where two new mines (the Simpson and the Cannon) were gearing up. In Louisville, three other mines followed two years later: the Ajax (in the green space between east and west Lois Drive), the Caledonia (east of the railroad tracks at Short Street), and the Hecla (northeast of South Boulder Road and 96th Street). 1890 also saw three more mines opening in Lafayette (the Gladstone, Excelsior, and Willoughby).



In 1896, a few of the Rex miners pose with their lunch pails. (Photo courtesy of Louisville Historical Museum)

Newspaper reports detail the recovery:

[Louisville] has taken quite a jump in the right direction. Nearly all the houses that have been vacant for several years are now occupied and several more are being erected. Louisville will shine yet....¹⁹

It seems good to hear again regularly at night and morning the musical whistle at the shaft of the Marshall Consolidated Coal Mining Co. This company has one of the finest plants in this part of the state and is now doing some development work [on a new mine], running entries and otherwise preparing for extensive output in the near future as they have already reached a fine body of coal. The Hecla shaft has also reached a fine body of coal. The Ajax is preparing also for fall work. The Acme and Caledonia are doing a fair business for summer and we are shipping an average of twenty-five cars of coal a day.²⁰

The new mines brought an invasion of miners, and by 1890 Louisville's population had rebounded to 600, the level first achieved in 1881. Continuing growth led to new Louisville subdivisions (Caledonia Place and Johnson's First Addition) and a fresh vibrancy to the business community. Lockwood Trading Company, the largest mercantile company in the state outside of Denver, opened a Louisville store. Lyman Andrews and John Chambers, who organized the Acme Coal Mine, also expanded their general merchandise business. New saloons, two new gristmills, and two livery stables were added, as was a cheese factory and creamery south of town. By the end of 1891, telephone service was available to five Louisville businesses, but the only public phone was located at the Lockwood Trading Company.

The new mines also brought about a change in the ethnic makeup of the town. In 1879, A. G. Langford, manager of the original Marshall Mine six miles west of Louisville, had hired nearly one hundred Italian immigrants to break a strike. The Italian miners eventually became solid supporters of the growing union movement, and when the new wave of mining activity started in Louisville they were an increasing factor in the local workforce. By 1900, more than 200 Louisville residents were of Italian descent. A portion of the Caledonia Place subdivision became known as Little Italy, and over time, Louisville developed a reputation as an Italian enclave.

The bigotry that characterized the west in the late 19th Century was reflected in insensitive newspaper items that disparaged the Italians. Examples from the *Daily Camera*:

During a Dago row Sunday night a man with an unpronounceable name was severely cut in the fracas and in nearly every other part of his anatomy. It took Dr. Clayton three hours to sew him up to make him resemble a man.²¹

Two new saloons will be opened in Louisville.... Mickey McNyland and an Italian will be the proprietors. The big coal camp will have after these are opened, no less than seven saloons—one less than Boulder.²²

Louisville had its regular Saturday night matinee. The performers were two or three white men with billiard cues and some half dozen Italians.²³

Different ethnic groups usually patronized different saloons, and cross-cultural skirmishes were common. Whiskey was appreciated, but beer was the drink of choice among Louisville's thirsty coal miners and railroaders. Some men drank throughout the day. It was not uncommon for ministers to imbibe before sermons, lawyers before trying cases, and miners before descending into the mines. Nights of drinking often ended in brawls or choruses of "Here's to good old whiskey, drink'er down." Chewing tobacco was widely used, with cigars reserved for special occasions. Hand-rolled cigarettes increased in popularity in the last two decades of the 19th century.

While the on-going lewd behavior of many men further promoted the local temperance movement, newspaper columns remained flippant:

The Salvation Army struck town Thursday and have not yet decided which town they will chase the devil out of first, Lafayette or Louisville. We would advise them to tackle Louisville first as it boasts of more railroad men than Lafayette.²⁴

Beyond the saloons, sports played a central role in the lives of the miners. A spirited rivalry existed between the two local baseball teams, the Fat Men and the Hand-Me-Downs, with the Fat Men usually coming out on top. Miners often spent their Sundays playing ball, fishing, hunting, attending horse races, or gambling. Well-attended matches kept everyone apprised of the local reigning champions in boxing and wrestling.



Louisville's Kid Band, led by Charles Taylor, was a source of local pride. This photo was taken in front of the Miners Trading Co., located at what is today 701 Main Street. (Photo courtesy of Louisville Historical Museum)

It was a male-dominated community, but favored family social events included singing by the fireplace at the end of the day, county fairs, evening hayrack rides, sleighing, picnics, traveling circuses, roller skating at the local rink, parades, fishing parties, banquets, masquerade balls, dances (that often lasted until dawn), and brass band and orchestra performances. At various times, Louisville had a Miner's Band, a Kid Band, and an Opera House Band.

Home life continued to be a challenge. There was no indoor plumbing or electricity. Food was still preserved by drying, salting, canning, or smoking, as iceboxes were just beginning to come into vogue. For most families, baths were generally taken only once a week in a tin tub that was hauled onto the kitchen floor and filled with hot water from the stove or fireplace. Bathing in the winter was discouraged because there was a widely held belief that baths caused colds and other illnesses. Small children slept together, often two, three or four to a bed.



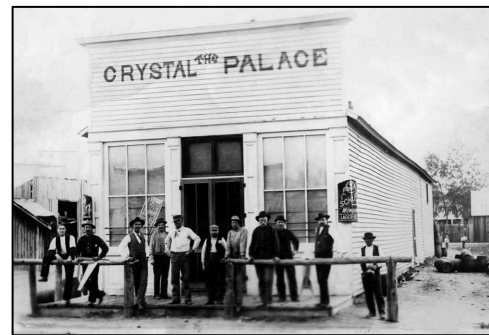
The Louisville Schoolhouse opened in 1881 on the northwest corner of Jefferson and Spruce. (Photo courtesy of Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder, CO)

In 1890, the commitment to providing a good education for Louisville's youth exceeded that in many other Colorado coal towns, although adequate funding was always a concern. At school, children learned Christian values along with the academic regimen. Consistent with parenting methods at home, corporal punishment was employed to ensure discipline. Special attention was given to holiday celebrations and student performances that often doubled as fund-raisers. As a result of poor compensation, teacher turnover was reluctantly endured.

Secret societies with their ornate regalia and mysterious ceremonies played an increasing social role in the 1890s. The Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Woodmen, Knights of Maccabee, and Red Men (modeled after the perpetrators of the Boston Tea Party) all launched men's lodges in Louisville. Many women became affiliated with the Rebekahs, Rathbone Sisters, or the Degree of Pocahontas. These organizations provided fellowship, community services, and parties throughout the year.

The social activities in Louisville in the early 1890s were captured in *Daily Camera* columns written by local correspondents, most notably Fireman Wilson, also known as "The Society Man." Wilson kept readers attuned to the activities of his favorite local personalities whom he dubbed Bull Frog Pete, Old Dude, New Dude, Shorty, the Drum Major, Beetpicklenose, Old Rattlesnake Oil, Starchy, and Boka Bill. Samples:

Last Sunday morning about 3 a. m. when the drum major and new dude stared the bar tender at the Crystal Palace in the face with the imprints of a light money market, he reached forward and grasped them by the back of the neck, turned them around and planted a ... shoe squarely and fairly at the base of their spinal column landing them out the back door against the old rubbish.



For years, the Crystal Palace was a favorite hangout for Louisville locals. Note the substantial hitching posts. (Photo courtesy of Louisville Historical Museum)

Mr. Kane [Bull Frog Pete] is a polished and highly intellectual brakeman and a man of immense capacity—for beer.

The Beetpicklenose man and the old dude were seen the other evening at a late hour running a foot race, and the dude now wears the old yellow coat as a trophy.

Society is unusually lively in spite of the dog days and 26 fights, some more or less bloody, are recorded. Old Rattle Snake Oil put on the finishing touches as referee.

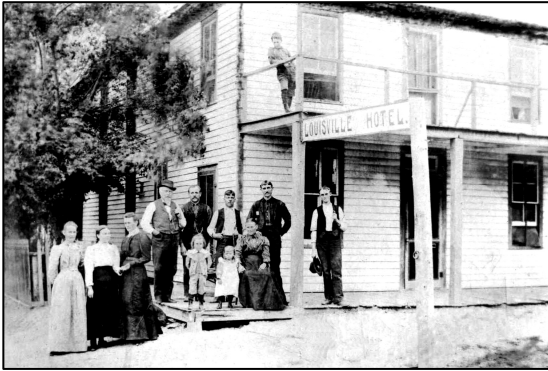
Thieves broke into Autrey's meat market Sunday night. They tore the money drawer off and got thirty five cents and some dried beef. The butcher says if they will let him know the next time they are coming he will leave two or three dollars for them and leave the drawer open to save trouble.

Herbert Fardin, better known as Starchy, in getting his old musket in shape for a hunt Sunday morning, tried to see how near he could come to his fingers without hitting

them, and result, he now wears two game fingers.²⁵

The Society Man occasionally made the news himself:

Our Society Man got into trouble Tuesday, he had a misunderstanding with one of the boarders at the hotel and when the smoke cleared away he was out on the sidewalk and the hotel needed a new window, and now a fine point of law presents itself. Is a person liable for what damage he does while he is in the hands of another?²⁶



Newspaper articles indicate that the Louisville Hotel was operating as early as 1882 and had a good reputation for the food it served. It is uncertain whether this is the hotel where the Society Man was thrown through the front window nine years later. (Photo courtesy of Louisville Historical Museum)

Quagmire An intractable problem

After the turmoil of the 1880s, Louisville faced yet another surprise. In the early 1890s everything seemed to be going well: The demand for coal in Colorado was growing 15 percent per year, and coal miner strikes were a rarity. The number of coal mines was increasing. The population was in a growth spurt. Louisville's business community was thriving. And the UP was no longer able to impose its monopolistic power the way it had in the past. But these positive trends did not result in prosperity for the coal mine operators. In fact, unless they could make changes in their industry some producers would soon face bankruptcy, and the others would struggle to survive.

Throughout the 1880s, many landowners in the area had suspected that they owned marketable coal on their properties just like David Kerr, who had leased his mineral rights in 1877. Yet Kerr was collecting coal royalties and getting wealthy, while they were forced to wait on the sidelines—because the UP controlled the Welch Mine and new competitors had no realistic chance of success. After the UP came under the watchful eye of the federal government, landowners and syndicators got together. By the end of 1891 more than a dozen new coal mines opened in the northern coalfield, and investors believed that they would finally be able to realize their economic dreams. Before long coal supply outstripped demand, and on top of that some mines in the

northern coalfield were unable to fill their orders because the UP was so financially strapped it could not provide enough railroad cars. A price war broke out. As in prior cases of over-production, mine operators again attempted to cut the miners' tonnage rates.

Understandably, the miners blamed the coal operators for being ruthless and selfish. The miners opposed wage cuts, promoted the unionization movement, and rejected the use of mining machines that would reduce production costs. From the viewpoint of the individual operators, the price war was beyond their control; it was a reality of the marketplace and they were forced to deal with it. Their choices were to go out of business, cut costs, or work together to control coal production so that higher prices could be maintained. Between 1892 and 1895, eleven coal mines in the northern field were forced to close, but the total number of mines did not decline because new producers kept entering the market.

Two of the independent mine operators became the leaders in the attempt to bring supply and demand into balance: John H. Simpson and James Cannon, Jr. Both had strong Louisville ties.

John H. Simpson (1843-1909) was an English-born coal miner and natural leader who in the 1870s had become the first engineer at the Welch Coal Mine. He was also the first Justice of the Peace in the Louisville area, and, with his younger brother William, the first person outside Charles Welch's family to purchase a lot from Louis Nawatny, after whom the town was named.

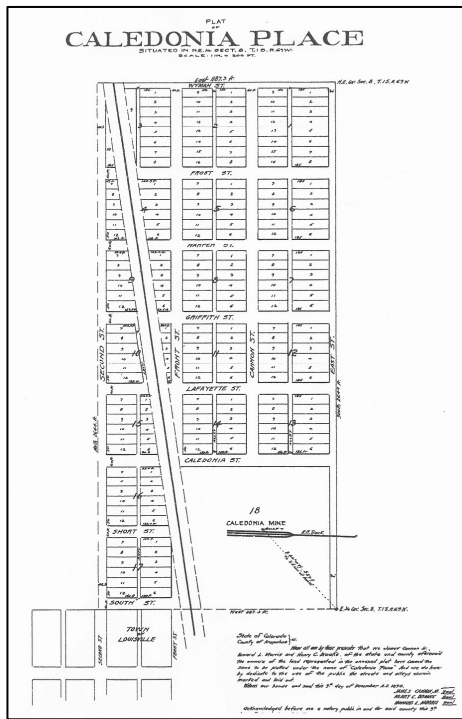


John and William built a successful general merchandise business, and in 1882 John was elected Louisville's first mayor, gaining the support of 100 of the 102 votes cast. But Simpson's long-term goal was to operate his own coal mine, and in 1883 the Simpson brothers sold their store. John moved to his farm northeast of Louisville and started searching for coal mining opportunities. He opened the first coal mine in Lafayette, which he owned in equal parts with his father, James Simpson, Sr., and Charles L. Spencer. After the railroad line from Louisville was placed into service in 1888, the Simpson mine became the largest producer in that section of Colorado's northern coalfield.

John Simpson with a grandchild - a coal tycoon and the first mayor of Louisville, he died nearly penniless. (Photo courtesy of Wayne Arner)

Like Simpson, James Cannon, Jr. (1860-1906) had a coal mining background, but he evolved into a controversial, hard-nosed businessman who generated both praise and contempt. Born in New York, by age twenty-five he operated his own small coal mine in Douglas, Colorado. Three years later, Cannon was in the upstart town of Lafayette opening the second coal mine in the area. However, he was intensely driven to succeed on a much larger playing field. In 1890,

Cannon sold the Cannon Mine in Lafayette, formed a syndicate that opened Louisville's Caledonia Mine, platted Caledonia Place (the third subdivision in Louisville, which has two streets named after Cannon), and started investing in other opportunities as well.



In 1890, James Cannon, Jr. filed the Caledonia Place plat, the third subdivision in Louisville. (Provided by Boulder County Clerk & Recorder)

In 1891, Simpson and Cannon were both struggling to figure out how to deal with the coal mining industry's over-production and price war. After all their planning and hard work, their mines were unprofitable. Something had to be done. Joining together, they formed the United Coal Company (United) to end the cutthroat competition, guarantee profits, and control labor costs. The owners of four coal companies (including Simpson and Cannon) swapped the capital stock in their companies for newly issued stock in United. Simpson, who lived in Lafayette and was one of the largest shareholders, was an expert coal man and became United's general superintendent. Cannon, who lived in Denver and was more financially astute, became its president. In order to gain control of the market, during the following year United secured contracts with all its northern Colorado competitors to purchase their entire output, which was fixed at the level shipped during the previous year. Under this arrangement, United would allocate orders and control the pricing of all coal shipped from the northern coalfield.

This agreement was unfortunate news for Louisville, as reported in the May 18, 1892, issue of the *Daily Camera*:

As all the mines could not be run at a profit, it has been decided to shut some of them down. The Fox at Langford, the Marshall mines at the same place and all the Marshall properties at Louisville will be closed and the owners paid for keeping shut down for five years, which is the time the contract runs. The United coal company will control

absolutely the price of coal in Denver and Northern Colorado.²⁷

Despite closing the Marshall Mines, Louisville's economy remained healthy well into 1893 because the combined sales from the Acme, Ajax (renamed Leader in 1893), Caledonia, and Hecla continued to grow enough to offset the lost revenue.

By mid-1892, there were growing differences between Simpson and Cannon about the future direction of United. After intense negotiations, Simpson was surprised when Cannon came up with enough cash to purchase his interest and force him out. Although he was no longer an owner, Simpson was entitled to royalty payments, and he continued on as United's superintendent. Going forward, however, United was guided by Cannon, a bold, young man with a big vision similar in many respects to the one contrived by Jay Gould more than twenty-five years earlier.

In the near-term, Cannon had some pressing difficulties to attend to. The scheme to solve the problem of over-production faltered after United fell behind on its payments to coal operators. Several mines (including the Marshall) withdrew from the combine. To strengthen his hand, Cannon arranged to issue \$500,000 in bonds to fund operations and expand the business. A portion of the proceeds from the bonds (\$90,000) was used to purchase the Acme. Cannon's aggressive management decisions were emboldened by the successes he was enjoying in his other investments, most notably his ownership interest in the gold and silver bonanza known as the Scotia Mine near Summerville in Four Mile Canyon west of Boulder.



James Cannon, Jr. - his obituary said he was admired and respected, but the Colorado Supreme Court called him a fraud. (Published by Representative Men of Colorado)

The following year, Cannon, United, and Louisville itself were rocked by another reversal. Overexpansion of railroads across the country led to a series of bank failures and the Panic of 1893, which was even worse than the Panic of 1873 and was considered the most severe depression in the U.S. before the Great Depression. Nationally, more than 15,000 businesses and 500 banks failed. In Colorado, most silver mines and narrow-gauge railroads were closed, the economy collapsed, and in 1894 coal shipments dropped by 31 percent. Once again, Louisville suffered disproportionately; Louisville's coal shipments in 1894 declined by 71 percent, and they would not return to the level that had been achieved in 1893 for five years.

The coal business was turning out to be extraordinarily volatile and challenging for all parties associated with it. The period of relative peace between the coal miners and coal

operators came to an abrupt end, and the strikes that followed were not over wage rates or weighing methods. There was an even larger problem; the miners objected to the failure of the operators to meet payrolls for work performed. In defense, the operators complained their customers were not paying their bills. Once again, Louisville's population declined, home sales cratered, and the local business community struggled. In April 1894, when United was unable to pay its creditors, one of the creditors alleged wrongdoing by Cannon, and United was forced into receivership:

The complaint charges that president and general manager of the company, Mr. Cannon, had secretly pledged the credit, money and securities of the company for his own private use and that of other companies in which he is interested, and that he has without consent of the directors extended large credits to himself, and that his account on the books of the company was overdrawn more than \$8,000 and that he had been fraudulently diverting the moneys and assets of the company to his own uses.²⁸

Cannon stood accused of following in Jay Gould's footsteps. The case was appealed all the way to the Colorado Supreme Court, which concluded that Cannon was, in fact, guilty of fraud:

James Cannon, Jr., was the president and managing officer of the United Coal Company, and while occupying that relation he organized...the Oak Creek Coal Mining Company.... Cannon fraudulently influenced the United Coal Company to sell, and the Oak Creek Company to buy, the leasehold interest in the Oak Creek mine.... As president, and in his capacity of manager of the United Coal Company, he, also, improvidently conducted its affairs, and was guilty of other acts which tended to injure its creditors.²⁹

For nearly a year, a court appointed receiver took over the management of United, but the company's plan of reorganization brought Cannon back in as president. It was not a popular decision, as reflected in this item from the *Daily Camera*:

The United Coal company should be closed out. It is a cheat, conceived in iniquity, perpetuated by bare faced robbery and oppression and deserves the final blow at Judge Johnson's hands. The receivership has lost \$40,000 already and many honest coal miners are suffering by reason of the refusal of the United to conform with what operators of other mines and everyone who has looked into the case believes to be the miners' just demands.³⁰

A week later, the *Daily Camera* reiterated: "The United company is a rotten thing, has been managed by rotten men and more rotten methods and deserved to be stopped in its wild career as a trust without credit or financial character."³¹ In 1898, United finally went out of business, but by then Cannon had already joined forces with others and formed the Northern Coal and Coke Company to continue his effort to consolidate the industry and restrict supply.

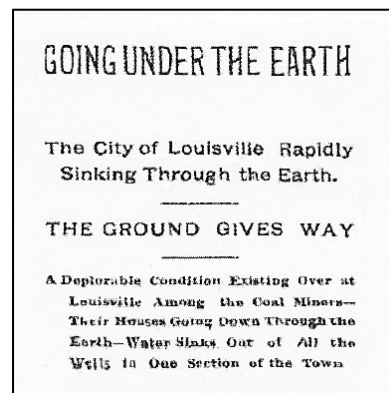
[A] deal was consummated whereby the Northern Coal Company becomes the absolute owner of eighteen of the larger coal mines in the northern part of the state, and at the same time controls the balance of the mines in that district, excepting the Enterprise. Arrangements have also been made whereby the same company controls the tonnage and prices on the output of the many mines in the southern part of the state.... As a result of the consummation of the deal, which involves \$1,000,000 of eastern money, the price of northern coal advances from \$2.75 per ton to \$3.50....³²

But the same problems persisted. After early indications of success, Northern Coal endured a strike that lasted until May 1901, which started the company on a downhill spiral. Shortly after that, Louisville's adventure with Cannon and Simpson came to an unflattering end. Cannon drifted off into early dementia, which according to the *Rocky Mountain News* was brought on by paresis. He died in 1906 at the age of 46. Simpson died three years later, and his obituary concluded that one of the most monumental mistakes he ever made was going into business with the United Coal Company. At the time of his death he was frail and nearly penniless.

Bumps and Bruises Adversity at every corner

Between 1880 and 1900, the boom-and-bust cycle of the coal industry determined the rhythm of life in Louisville. But coal played a central role in other community problems as well.

In the late 1880s, the land to the east of downtown Louisville started to sink as a result of subsidence caused by underground coal mining. No great harm was done because there were few buildings in the area, although the railroad bed had to be reconstructed to raise the tracks. In October 1893, however, subsidence attacked downtown Louisville with devastating results.



**October 12, 1893
Headline in the Daily
Camera**

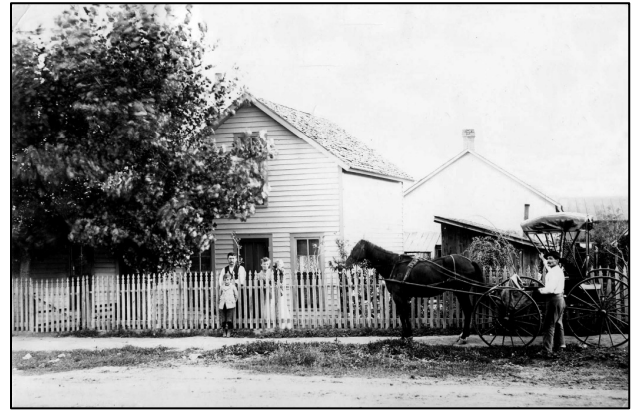
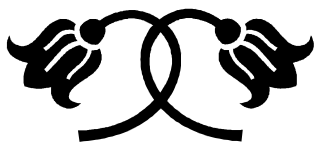
After years of inactivity, the timbers in the old Welch mine gave way and caused the land to settle. In the middle of the night people were startled awake by collapsing floors and cracking walls in their houses. In some areas, the ground sank by two to three feet, and homes were partially or totally destroyed. The town's water supply was disrupted when new cracks in the earth caused the water in the wells to run down into the old mine workings. As serious as this was, it was compounded by uncertainty about the future. People felt unsafe and were nervous about when and where other instances of subsidence would occur. The *Daily Camera* reported:

[A] number of damage suits may be commenced against the company for improperly providing against results of the kind, for portions of the town are reported to have been entirely destroyed for residence purposes, as the beautiful...yards fringed with shrubbery and ornamental trees are now turned into ravines which, when the storms of rain and snow come, will be turned into duck ponds and make the town unfit for habitation.³³

Fear about future occurrences was justified. Another episode, two years later, was even worse:

The citizens of Louisville are becoming very anxious as to their future location and what shall become of their homes. For a year or two the operators of the Acme coal mine have been working under the town of Louisville and lots and residences have been affected by this work as the mine is not a very deep one. During the last few months the residence lots of quite a number of citizens have commenced to cave in.... Some property has already sunk down three or four feet and it would seem that the people would soon find themselves without homes and their property destroyed unless heroic action is taken.³⁴

An occurrence in 1896 caused some streets, businesses, residences and the Louisville post office to sink by as much as six feet, and the subsidence events continued to haunt Louisville well into the 1900s. Over time, the properties were restored by hauling in thousands of wagonloads of dirt, but the costs were exorbitant. Two lawsuits against Charles C. Welch and others demanded damages of \$50,000, but because of incomplete records the total number of cases and the amount of the out-of-court settlements is unknown. In addition to creating immediate hardships for Louisville residents, the subsidence issue resulted in declining property values and negative publicity for the town.



In the 1890s, when Louisville homes and yards had matured, residents feared destruction by subsidence. (Photo courtesy of Louisville Historical Museum)

As bad as subsidence was, it caused no personal injuries or deaths. The same cannot be said for the mines themselves. Between 1880 and 1900, at least seventeen coal miners lost their lives working in Louisville's coal mines. Hundreds more had injuries of varying severity. Under latter-day norms, mine health and safety standards were crude and inadequate. There were many reasons for this, but none was more powerful than prevailing social attitudes. The Social Darwinist ethic that drove the robber barons was evident in commercial circles around the country. Businessmen were insensitive to their workers' welfare because they believed that it was each business owner's right to offer jobs under terms and conditions of his choice, and it was each individual worker's right to either accept or reject the jobs as offered. Every individual was responsible for looking out for his own wellbeing, and the most successful would rightfully rise to an elevated position. Unions and strikes were anathemas because as they violated this widely accepted premise of individual rights and responsibilities.

The coal miners' support for high wages, union recognition, impartial coal-weighting methods, and timely payment of earnings reveals a united self-interest that conflicted with that of the mine operators and other businessmen. But, surprisingly, during the 1890s there is little to indicate that miners viewed mine safety as an issue to be raised with the operators.

From the initiation of the first western mines, miners felt that they alone should control the underground working conditions, and they could live with the risks involved. This view was consistent with their status as independent contractors who were paid based upon their productivity, which might be adversely affected if new safety regulations were imposed. In none of more than thirty-five *Daily Camera* newspaper articles dealing with coal miner strikes in the 1890s are mine health and safety mentioned as a cause of concern to the miners.

There were, however, other health issues that did cause considerable turmoil and notoriety. Nineteenth century coal towns that were heavily populated with young, single, unwashed, hard-drinking men were not paragons of health-

consciousness. And Louisville measured up! In March 1882, the *Boulder County Herald* reported:

Unless some measure is adopted this coming summer Louisville will be a mere pest hole, as at present time the streets are literally covered with old rubbish, tin cans, bone and all sorts of incumbrances, which when the hot weather comes will breed all sorts of diseases, and furthermore, just across the railroad are dead pigs, cats, and dogs, on which putrefication has already set in and is making the air very foul even at this early date.... Let us have a town that will stand second to none in the state for cleanliness and freeness from disease.³⁵

The incorporation of the town in May 1882 brought about some progress, but it was not until after the turn of the century that there was a concerted national effort by public health agencies to bring about improvements in housing, sanitation, hygiene, health education, waste disposal, and water chlorination. As a result, Louisville was subjected to bouts of typhoid in the 1880s and diphtheria in the 1890s. While a few deaths resulted from the typhoid epidemics, diphtheria caused greater anguish in the community because there were many more deaths—and most of its victims were children. The local authorities were heavily criticized for failure to intervene and for exposing surrounding communities to unnecessary risks:

Several deaths have already occurred and the authorities appear to be too dumb and stupid to grapple with the alarming situation. Children by the score have been stricken with this dreadful disease and medical assistance has been called in from Boulder and elsewhere to assist Dr. McClane and Dr. Boyd, the local physicians.³⁶

The authorities and citizens have not been in accord with reference to sanitary matters and disease has been allowed to spread. It is suggested that the salvation of the community lies in cleaning up the premises, and [limiting] the movements of parties who should be quarantined. Boulder and surrounding towns may be made sufferers in common by reason of neglect of these provisions.³⁷

Crises like this added to the prevailing negative attitudes Boulderites held toward Louisville. Boulder was the county seat and home of the state university, and its citizens felt a confident superiority over the east county coal towns, which in the 1890s were largely populated by immigrant coal miners with thick accents and limited education. Boulder and Louisville had little in common, and the residents of Louisville were deeply offended by the condescension and lack of respect. One issue was particularly aggravating, and Boulder offered no relief.



Medical care improved after Dr. Charles Wolfer and his wife, Flora, moved to Louisville in the wake of the town's initial bout of diphtheria. Their home, located where the State Mercantile building now stands, sank several feet because of subsidence. (Photo courtesy of Louisville Historical Museum)

Louisville was located on the main railroad between Denver and Boulder, but the road had been constructed in 1873 with thirty-foot long iron rails that “were bolted together with fishplates, causing a clickety clack sound as wheels passed over the joints.”³⁸ In 1886, an upgraded alternate route to Boulder was completed through Superior and Marshall. By 1890, the rails, roadbed, and ties on the older line could no longer sustain regular traffic, and the financially weakened UP was in no position to invest the \$45,000 necessary to make repairs. Boulder residents had never been fully satisfied with the original line because through-trains bypassed their town, coming only as close as the ARA Junction (east of 30th Street near Pearl Street). From there, Boulder-bound trains backed into downtown Boulder. Thus, Boulderites were pleased when, in 1890, the UP made the decision to abandon the old Louisville-Boulder line and redirect passenger traffic through Marshall. Trains could then enter their town by crossing the Colorado University campus and proceeding down the hill south of today's Boulder High School football stadium.



The local division of the Union Pacific was reorganized as the Colorado & Southern Railway in 1898. (Photo courtesy of Colorado Railroad Museum)

This, however, was a serious affront to Louisville. The loss of traffic negatively affected the economy. Local residents had to take the Lafayette-Louisville bobtail train to Louisville Junction three miles south of town and wait to make connections to either Boulder or Denver. Because of scheduling issues, it became more convenient to go to Denver than to Boulder. Appeals to Boulder for support in reinstating direct passenger traffic between the two towns received little sympathy. And the UP either would not or could not help. Louisville felt isolated in a way it had not previously experienced, and there was no remedy for more than ten years—until after the turn of the century.

In the midst of so many slights from beyond its borders, Louisville developed a defensive pride. A local scribe in the *Louisville Advance* penned a tongue-in-cheek piece to bolster the town's dignity:

All the gambling fraternity have left town, on account of the notices which were posted up, informing them that the town ordinances in regard to gambling would be enforced. That is to say the fraternity from Denver were trespassing upon the soil that is the peculiar province of the local fraternity. The law and the custom both demand that the local sucker be left to the tender mercies of the local plucker. It's a good law and a better custom. A man should not be robbed by a stranger. He should know his robber. If he is a neighbor, it is all right, for the money remains in circulation within the four walls of Louisville. Patronize home industry.³⁹

**Light at the End of the Tunnel
Nothing remains as it was.**

Growing up is difficult, and that was particularly true for Louisville. During the last two decades of the 19th Century Louisville was like an at-risk teenager—craving respect but unable to command it. The coal that was supposed to bring growth and prosperity often brought disappointment instead.

Louisville faced repeated bouts of adversity and invariably seemed to be dealing from a position of weakness. Threats came from all angles: higher quality coal from other coalfields; Jay Gould; a volatile economy; coal miner overconfidence; Charles Francis Adams, Jr.; poor railroad service; James Cannon, Jr.; subsidence; health crises; bigotry; and social rejection. No matter the source, Louisville was the perennial underdog.

In 1900, the outlook was for more of the same. By all appearances, coal would continue to define the town and limit her path to prosperity. It was not until coal mining was discontinued in 1955 that the town would be able to escape its past and begin a transformation. And it took another fifty years before a redefined town that was built on pride in her heritage and a willingness to embrace new opportunities would be named the “Best Place to Live in America.”⁴⁰

- ¹ *Boulder News & Courier*, January 30, 1880.
- ² Amos Bixby, *History of Clear Creek And Boulder Counties*.
- ³ *Boulder News & Courier*, February 11, 1881.
- ⁴ Renehan, p. 31
- ⁵ Rugoff, p. 42.
- ⁶ Renehan, p. 87.
- ⁷ Chernow, p. 112 and 113.
- ⁸ Chernow, p. 192.
- ⁹ Wolff, p. 70.
- ¹⁰ Wolff, p. 79.
- ¹¹ *Boulder News & Courier*, June 15, 1883.
- ¹² Wolff, p. 71.
- ¹³ Wolff, p. 71; Renehan, p. 276.
- ¹⁴ *Boulder News & Courier*, February 24, 1882.
- ¹⁵ *Boulder News & Courier*, August 26, 1881
- ¹⁶ *Rocky Mountain News*, October 3, 1881.
- ¹⁷ *Report of the U.S. Railway Commission*, 1887.
- ¹⁸ Michael Kazin, *How the Robber Barons Railroaded America*, New York Times Book Review, July 17, 2011.
- ¹⁹ *Boulder County Herald*, May 5, 1888.
- ²⁰ *Daily Camera*, July 17, 1890.
- ²¹ *Daily Camera*, August 28, 1891.
- ²² *Daily Camera*, October 13, 1892.
- ²³ *Daily Camera*, October 20, 1891.
- ²⁴ *Daily Camera*, June 20, 1891.
- ²⁵ Society quotes are from the *Daily Camera* issues between July 24 and September 16, 1891.
- ²⁶ *Daily Camera*, October 9, 1891.
- ²⁷ *Daily Camera*, May 18, 1892.
- ²⁸ *Daily Camera*, April 10, 1894.
- ²⁹ *International Trust Company, trustee, v. United Coal Co., and Bishop as Receiver, etc., et al. Colorado Supreme Court*, March 5, 1900, No. 3939.
- ³⁰ *Daily Camera*, June 10, 1896.
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- ³² *Colorado Transcript*, November 10, 1897.
- ³³ *Daily Camera*, October 12, 1893.
- ³⁴ *Daily Camera*, July 22, 1895.
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- ³⁶ *Daily Camera*, May 15, 1892.
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- ³⁹ *Daily Camera*, February 25, 1895.
- ⁴⁰ *Money Magazine*, 2009 and 2011

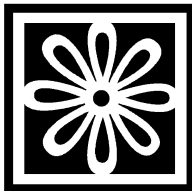


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J. Peter Lindquist wrote “The Untold Story of Louisville’s First Years” for the Fall 2010 issue of *The Louisville Historian*. Before retiring, he owned Quist Financial, a business valuation and securities analysis firm in Boulder, Colorado.



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