

740 Front Street History (Updated May 25, 2012 & Feb. 3, 2016)

Legal Description: Lot 1, Block B, Original Louisville

Year of Construction: 1904 (see discussion below)

Architect/Builder: Fischer Family

Previous addresses used to refer to this property: 253 Front, 221 Front (under Louisville's old address system that ended in the late 1930s); 744 Front; 742 Front.

Summary: This historic saloon building, the only one of Louisville's Front Street saloons to still be in operation as a bar establishment, has strong ties to themes of Louisville's history relating to saloons and restaurants, Front Street businesses, immigration, and Italians. The building is believed to have been constructed by Louisville's Fischer family for the owner, E.J. Di Francia, who was an early Italian businessman in Louisville. It was owned by two related Italian families for over forty years, then had a series of shorter term owners from the 1940s to the early 1970s. It has been in operation under the names of at least the following: DiFrancia's Saloon; Francia's Saloon; Front Street Café; Colorado Café; Ferrbello's Restaurant; Primrose Bar; and the Old Louisville Inn.

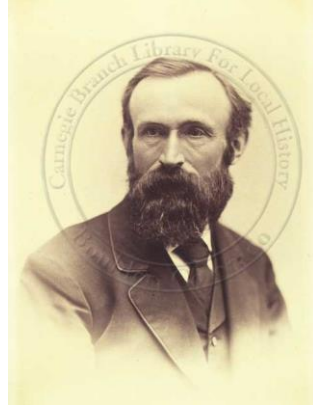
Earliest Ownership

Not long after the town of Louisville was founded and officially platted in October 1878, Rebecca J. Darrow purchased this lot and the lot next to it, as well as other lots, from Louis Nawatny, effective in 1878. Rebecca Darrow was the bride of Charles C. Welch, who was the prominent Coloradan who played a major role in the founding of Louisville. Evidence strongly suggests that Louis Nawatny worked for Welch.

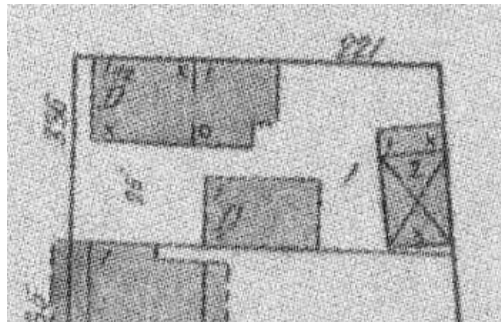
The exact chain of ownership for the next several years couldn't be located, possibly due to unpredictable variations in the spellings of names, but picks up again with the purchase of the property in 1886 by H.L. Visser from Johanna and P.C. Nielson. In 1890, Visser sold the lot to S.A. Lemon. This was a reference to Samuel A. Lemon, who was a Louisville blacksmith. Lemon sold the lot to Elizabeth Strickland in 1891. She sold it to Robert Birkett in 1893, and he in turn sold it to Isaac Bond in 1901.

Isaac Bond was a prominent businessman in Boulder and served as mayor of Boulder from 1891 to 1893. Born in Massachusetts in 1841, he is stated to have come to Colorado in 1871. An 1898 biography states

that Bond organized the Boulder Electric Light Company, assisted with the organization of the Boulder National Bank and was its vice president, had extensive mining interests, and was an irrigation farmer who built ditches in the area. The following photo from the Carnegie Branch Library for Local History shows Isaac Bond in what is believed to have been the 1880s. He died in 1924.



The 1893 and 1900 Sanborn insurance maps show a different building on this corner that predated the current structure. It was a dwelling, as indicated by the letter “D,” and was of wood frame construction. The following image is an excerpt from the 1893 map (with the 1900 looking almost identical with respect to this southeast corner of Front and Spruce) that shows the earlier structure on Lot 1 on the corner:



Given Isaac Bond’s residence in Boulder and extensive property investments throughout Boulder County, it is believed that his ownership of this lot likely represented an investment. Also lending support to the theory that this property wasn’t a personal place of residence or business for Bond is the fact that at the time that he sold the lot to Eusebio Di Francia in January 1904, Isaac Bond was living in San Bernardino County, California, and signed the warranty deed from that location.

Di Francia/Fenolia/Zarini Related Family Ownership, 1904 - 1945

Related Italian Catholic families by the names of Di Francia and Fenolia (including Christine Zarini, who was a Fenolia) owned this building for over forty years.

This lot was purchased by Eusebio Joseph Di Francia in January 1904. He was often referred to as “Joe” or “E.J.” The Di Francia name has had such different spellings and usages as DiFrancia, deFrancia, Di Franzia, Di Frangia, Di Frangio, DiFrenchy, Francia, and Franzia. Some called his saloon “Frenchie’s.”

E.J. Di Francia was born in Italy in 1863; he is believed to have come from Carovilli di Castiglione, Isernia, in Italy. He came to the U.S. in 1883 and married Marie Di Domenico, who was a young widow, in 1890. She was born in Italy in 1869 and immigrated in 1880.

E.J. and Marie Di Francia had seven children (one son and six daughters) who grew to adulthood. In the photo of the family from the collection of the Louisville Historical Museum, shown below and taken in circa 1914, at the rear, left to right, are: Margaret, Nicholas, Rose, and Theresa; in the center is Philomena; and in the front are Caroline, mother Maria, father Eusebio, and Catherine.



It is believed that E.J. Di Francia did well for himself and his family, as they had an unusually large and attractive home at 1045 La Farge Avenue in Louisville. It was one of the few brick buildings in town at the time.

E.J. Di Francia appears to have been living in Louisville by 1891 and first operated at least one other saloon in Louisville. In 1891, he purchased Lot 3, Block B, which is just two lots to the south from Lot 1, and soon began to operate a saloon there. To put this in context, people of Italian heritage purchased property in Louisville for the first time in 1890. E.J. Di Francia was clearly one of the very first Italian

business owners in a town that later became dominated by businesses owned by people of Italian heritage and was one of Colorado's Italian colonies.

According to the *Boulder Daily Camera* (June 16, 1893), "Mr. Francia is building a two story block on First street that will make a fine appearance." The following photo from the Carnegie Branch Library for Local History is believed to show this building with the name of "E.G. Francia." "E.G." would have been the correct initials in Italian for his name (Eusebio Giuseppe, Americanized to Eusebio Joseph).



Although the building in the photo appears at first glance to say "1898" at the top, upon close examination, another possibility is that it was the year "1893" that was painted on the building, particularly since the last digit looks slightly different from the "8" that is the second digit. The date of 1893 for this building would also be consistent with the 1893 *Daily Camera* article about Francia's two story saloon being constructed on First Street (today's Front Street).

The man standing in the doorway raising a glass of beer is likely Di Francia himself, particularly given his resemblance to E.J. Di Francia in the photo showing the Di Francia family.

A saloon owner at this time would have been affiliated with one primary brewery. Di Francia's saloon was affiliated with the Union Brewing Company, which later merged with the Tivoli Brewing Company in 1901 to form Tivoli-Union Brewing Co.

On June 1, 1896, the *Boulder Daily Camera* reported that "Joe Francia, the well-known saloon keeper of Louisville, has sold his bar fixtures, etc., to his brother-in-law and rival, Fabrizio, and his lot and buildings to the Union Brewing company of Denver and started yesterday afternoon for Italy on a three months' trip."

Louisville directories from 1900 and 1903 show Di Francia again operating a saloon. However, it is thought that he likely leased and didn't own a saloon building at that time (and leases were not necessarily recorded with the County).

In 1904, Eusebio Di Francia purchased Lot 1, Block B, which was just two lots north of his previous saloon. It appears that he had the current building at this location of 740 Front constructed in the same year, 1904. According to information the Fischer family of Louisville, it was built by the Fischer construction business, which was responsible for the construction of many downtown structures. The following aerial photo from the 1930s, from the collection of the Louisville Historical Museum, shows the relationship between the two saloon buildings. (The two story saloon building on the right, which was later owned by the Mossoni family, was torn down in the 1970s or 1980s.)



The architectural and historical survey of 740 Front that was conducted in 2000 raised the question of just what this saloon was been called. It has been found from a review of newspaper articles that it was referred to as “Francia’s Saloon” and “Di Francia’s Saloon,” and this was in accordance with common saloon naming practices of the time in Louisville.

Di Francia continued his affiliation with the Union Brewing Company that had started with his other saloon, and in the meantime it had become the Tivoli-Union Brewing Company.

Front Street was the location of saloons and blacksmiths, and historically was a male-dominated area where most women didn't venture. Carolyn Conarroe, in her book *The Louisville Story*, stated that the town allowed saloons to be located only on Front Street, and that at one early time there were thirteen or fourteen saloons in a three block area of Front Street. It should also be noted that due to sometimes frequent changeover in ownership and operation, there were actually many more saloon businesses than just thirteen or fourteen known to have been operated in Louisville over many years. On Front Street, the Old Louisville Inn building is the only one still in operation as a bar. (Another historical saloon, which was Lackner's Tavern, is still in operation close by, but has a Pine Street address – Casa Alegre, at 1006 Pine).

The following photo from circa the 1910s shows Front Street looking south, with an arrow indicating the location of what is today 740 Front Street. Steinbaugh's with its distinctive roof can be seen just to the north of it.



Saloons were an important early business in Louisville for several different reasons. One reason is it was legal to purchase alcohol in Louisville both before and after Prohibition, but the towns around Louisville, including Boulder, were dry for long periods of time, so Louisville was always able to draw people to its bars and restaurants. Also, Louisville owed its very existence to coal mining, and miners provided steady business for the saloons. Some saloons provided additional entertainment for the men by also supporting and following local sports teams. Bachelor miners may have had extra time to spend in saloons, but even Louisville's married men with families were customers, particularly since it has been often reported that, after work, they would send their children to the saloons to have their miners' lunch pails filled with beer and brought home to them. Also, the location of this saloon so close to the railroad tracks, and just a short walk from the Railroad Depot just to the south side of Pine Street, no doubt was a draw not only for railroad men but also for men just getting off the Interurban passenger train that operated in the early 1900s.

Last, saloons in Colorado are known to have played a vital role in the assimilation of new immigrants, and this was certainly true in a town of immigrants as Louisville was. Italian saloons such as Di Francia's and Fabrizio's provided informal assistance to new Italian immigrants, while Balent's saloon would have attracted Slovaks and Lackner's drew German speaking residents. A *Denver Post* newspaper article dated January 18, 1896 reported on the incorporation of a company by Eusebio "de Francia," Antonio "Fabrizzio," and Pompeo Costrilli to be called "Minatori Garabaldine di Louisville Colo." This translates as "Garibaldine Miners of Louisville, Colorado," with "Garabaldine" referring to Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Italian general who was one of the unifiers of Italy. Recently located information from the *Denver Post* shows that the Garibaldi Society of Louisville marched in Denver's popular Columbus Day Parades in at least 1907 and 1908. The October 12, 1908 edition of the *Denver Post* described Louisville's parade entry in this way:

The Garibaldi Society of Louisville, Colo., completed the first division. Fifty men marched behind the uniformed officers, and the blouses of brilliant red, turbans of the same color, and the red, white and green banners made a combination that did not fail to win applause. E.J. Franga, the president of the society, was in command The uniforms were exact reproductions of those worn by the famous Italian soldier, Garibaldi. The society has been organized eleven years and is one of the best drilled in the state.

The high level of organization of this group, which marched in front of large crowds in Denver, is a testament to E.J. "Franga's" leadership role with respect to Italians in Colorado in the early 1900s and to the strong feelings of both American patriotism and Italian pride that Louisville's Garibaldi Society surely felt.

The following photo from the collection of the Louisville Historical Museum shows the interior of what may or may not be 740 Front Street. It was identified on the reverse as showing Di Francia's saloon, and the distinctive bears a resemblance to the back bar currently in the building, but the ceiling of this room is low (unlike that of the current building) and the back bar does not appear to be identical. It is in the realm of possibility that this photo shows E.J. Di Francia's earlier saloon, or shows a saloon located in Superior that is known to have been operated by a different Di Francia. (The bartender in the photo has not been identified, but the photo states that the other men are made up of City attorney Walter Muir, smoking a cigar; "Rattlesnake Dick"; Joseph Porter; Frank Measure, a dry goods man; Hugh McAllister; and J.B. Corrigan.)



This photo from the Louisville Historical Museum shows the exterior of Di Francia's saloon. This was taken in the early 1900s and was stated as showing Henry Steuble working on digging a basement for Steinbaugh's just to the north.



E.J. Di Francia passed away in January 1918. His children were between the ages of about 10 and 27 at the time of his death.

The following photo from the Louisville Historical Museum shows the 1918 funeral of E.J. Di Francia in front of the Di Francia home at 1045 La Farge. The relative grandness of the house and the very fact that the photo was even taken both speak to the prominence of Di Francia as a Louisville business leader and as a leading member of Louisville's Italian community.



Di Francia's death in 1918 came soon after the beginning of Prohibition in Colorado in 1916. This undoubtedly placed a financial burden on his widow and their children, six of whom were daughters. The operation of the Di Francia saloon would have been deeply impacted by the advent of Prohibition followed by the death of its owner. Directories show that by 1920, son Nick Di Francia had taken over the business' operation and it had become a pool hall and place for soft drinks. Some other saloon operators in Louisville similarly changed their businesses to pool halls during the Prohibition years (while

others gave up their businesses entirely), and some of them in all likelihood served alcohol to their regular customers.

Nicholas Di Francia was born in 1891 as the first child of E.J. and Mary Di Francia. He married Mary Fenolia, who had grown up nearby at 920 La Farge Avenue. She was born in 1892 to Battista and Louise Fenolia. She died in August 1916 after giving birth to twin boys.

Nick Di Francia operated the building as a pool hall until later in the 1920s, and possibly around 1928, when Marie Di Francia, his mother, conveyed ownership of the property at 740 Front to a close relative: Nick Di Francia's brother-in-law, Tony Fenolia. It was also at around that time that Nick Di Francia, his twin sons, and his mother moved to Denver. Nick Di Francia died in 1931 at the age of 39 and his mother, Marie, died in 1957.

Tony Fenolia was the brother of Nick Di Francia's wife, Mary, who had died in 1916. Fenolia was born in 1883 and was one of the members of the Louisville Bachelor Club looking for wives described in an article in the Winter 2012 issue of *The Louisville Historian* based on a *Denver Post* article written in 1908 about the Bachelor Club. The following photo from the Louisville Historical Museum shows Tony Fenolia when he was part of the Bachelor Club in 1908:



Tony Fenolia never married. He primarily worked as a coal miner. Although he was the legal owner of 740 Front from 1928 until his death in 1936 at the age of 53, no records could be found that would indicate whether he personally operated a business from 740 Front. He died of pneumonia and his obituary stated that he was "widely known and popular."

Prohibition ended, nationally, in 1933, and it was at that point that two other relatives began to operate a tavern business out of the building again. Tony Fenolia's sister, Christine, and her husband, Charles Zarini, started to manage the business under the name "Front Street Café," a name that would be used for over around ten years. Charles Zarini's obituary states that after Prohibition, he and Christine Zarini "reopened the Colorado Café," which suggests that it may have been closed towards the end of Prohibition and after Nick Di Francia had moved to Denver.

Christine Fenolia was born in 1890, and Charles "Chas" Zarini was born in 1887. It is thought that the Fenolia and Zarini families were neighbors in Marshall and that both families then came to Louisville. In fact, Charles Zarini's father is believed to have been the first Italian to purchase property in Louisville

when he bought 824 La Farge for their home. The following photo from the *Louisville Times* (August 17, 1978) is from the time of their marriage in 1908:



The August 17, 1978 Centennial issue of the *Louisville Times* stated that before operating the Front Street Café, Charles Zarini operated such businesses as a skating rink in Redmen’s Hall at Grant and Walnut and a confectionary store on Main Street next to the Rex Theatre. He also sold popcorn at ball games at Miners Field on Sundays. Chas and Christine Zarini also operated a liquor store on Main Street following their ownership of the Front Street Café. Their children were Virginia, Charles, and Marie. Chas Zarini died in 1963 and Christine Zarini died in 1971.

According to the *Times* article, when the Zarinis owned and operated the Front Street Café at what is today 740 Front, “[t]hey served lunches to the train crew at noon when the train stopped on the railroad track behind the café.”

Property records indicate that following the death of Tony Fenolia in 1936, 740 Front became part of his estate and was inherited by his Fenolia siblings and nephews, of whom Christine Fenolia Zarini was one. Christine and her husband continued to operate it as the Front Street Café until sometime between 1940 and 1943.

George W. Morgan, Sr. began to operate the business while it was under the ownership by the Fenolia family. It was under his management that it was first called the Colorado Café, it is believed. He is listed in the directory for 1943 as being the operator of the business. He was born in New York State in 1883 and died in 1949.

Tottenhoff Ownership, 1945 – 1946

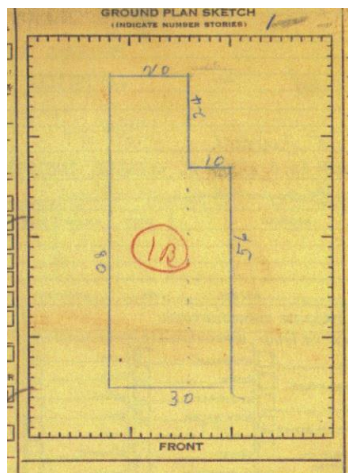
Harry Tottenhoff (1909-1982) and Kenneth Tottenhoff (1913-1979) owned the building from 1945 to 1946.

Bishop Ownership, 1946 – 1948

Joe and Clara Bishop owned the building from 1946 to 1948 and managed it under the name of the Colorado Café, as indicated in two different 1946 directories.

La Salle/Squier/Ontis Ownership, 1948 – 1949

In 1948, Johnny P. La Salle (1916-2003) and Alean M. La Salle (1920-1988) purchased the building. It was during their ownership that the Boulder County Assessor took a photo of the building and completed an Assessor’s card on the property. The photo and an image of the ground layout from 1948 are shown here:



In July of that year, the La Salles sold it to Robert Squier and Lena Ontis, who sold it back to the La Salles in December 1948.

It is not known how Squier and Ontis were related to one another, other than being business partners in this short-lived venture. Robert Squier was married to Charlene Squier. Lena Kofsky Ontis (1899-1985) was a widow whose son, James Ontis Jr. (1921-1967), is listed in the 1949 directory as being the bartender for the Colorado Café. He had served in the Marines during World War II and his wife was Lois Ontis.

Varra/Lanke/Messmer/Cordell Ownership, 1949 – 1962

In 1949, Albert and Elizabeth Varra purchased the building at 740 Front.

Elizabeth Gillis Varra was born in Arkansas in 1912, married Albert Varra of Louisville's Varra family in 1929, and died in 2008. He was born in Italy in 1902 and died in 1973. Together, they owned Varra's grocery store on Main Street as well as the Colorado Café. Elizabeth also operated a florist shop in Louisville.

Elizabeth Varra is credited with painstakingly removing the dark varnish of the wooden bar to reveal the natural grain of the wood.

The Varras did not own 740 Front continuously from 1949 to 1962. Property records indicate that it was acquired in 1951 by Zigmont and Verda Lanke, and that they transferred it back to the Varras in 1952.

The 1953 directory states that Albert Varra and Albert Varra, Jr. managed the Colorado Café that year.

Also, in 1955, Otto and Marguerite (“Peggy”) Messmer acquired 740 Front from the Varras. The 1955 directory lists Otto and Peggy Messmer as being the operators of the Colorado Café. The Messmers transferred it to Ed L. Cordell later in 1955, and the 1956 directory lists him as being the operator of the Colorado Café that year. The 1956 directory was the last one in which the name “Colorado Café” appeared. Legal ownership went back to the Varras in 1959.

Next, a restaurant at 740 Front opened under the name of “Ferrbello’s” Restaurant and was open for a year or two during the late 1950s. Michael and Mildred Ferrera operated this Italian-themed restaurant that served pizza and homemade spaghetti. Mildred “Millie” Lannon Ferrera was the official manager, but her husband, Michael, is also remembered as being involved in the operation. Millie Ferrera had previously been a waitress at the Blue Parrot. Michael Ferrera continued with his job as a postal carrier in Louisville even while they managed the restaurant. They were in partnership with Pasquale Colabello, who was the Italian-born stepson of Michael Colacci, the owner of the Blue Parrot (hence the name “Ferrbello’s). In other ties to the Blue Parrot, Michael Ferrara and Pasquale Colabello both were managers of the Blue Parrot at different times. Pasquale Colabello also went on to have a restaurant, “Pasquale’s,” at 809 Main Street.

In 1962, Albert and Elizabeth Varra sold the property.

Dunbar/Conkwright Ownership, 1962 – 1967

In 1962, Alberta Dunbar and Jean Conkwright purchased 740 Front. It would have been under their ownership that the business was operated under the name “Primrose Bar.”

In 1965, a quit claim deed transferred all of Conkwright’s interests in the property to Dunbar. Alberta Dunbar (1905-1989) sold the property in 1967.

Grosso Ownership, 1967 – 1971

Charles and Evelyn Grosso purchased 740 Front in 1967. Directories indicate that it was they who first began to use the name “Old Louisville Inn” for the business.

Charles later owned the Track Inn Beer Garden, formerly Lackner’s Tavern, currently Casa Alegre, at 1006 Pine Street.

Handon Ownership, 1971 – 1973

In 1971, Kenneth Handon (1923-1988) and Elfriede Hapgood Handon purchased 740 Front and continued to operate it as the Old Louisville Inn.

Ken and Elfie Handon are remembered as changing the restaurant from a tavern with a somewhat rough clientele and bar image to a more family friendly restaurant. The Handons served Mexican food.

McKenzie Ownership, 1973 – 1992

Hugh McKenzie purchased the Old Louisville Inn by a deed recorded in October 1973, and owned it until 1992. McKenzie worked at Ball as an aeronautical engineer for his career, having moved from southern California to work for Ball, and worked in Boulder the entire time that he operated the Old Louisville Inn. He has told the Museum staff that he had never before operated a restaurant. Ken and Elfie Handon stayed on for a time in order to show Hugh McKenzie and his wife, Virginia, how to manage it. Virginia McKenzie did much of the cooking.

An OLI worker who is remembered as having started with the Handons and continued with the McKenzies was Louis Lorenzi (1921-2004). A veteran of World War II, he worked as a line cook for the McKenzies at the Old Louisville Inn for about eighteen years.

Torelli Ownership, 1992 – 1994

In 1992, Tina Torelli purchased 740 Front and continued to operate it as the Old Louisville Inn with her husband, Enzo.

Clover Clan Limited Ownership, 1994 – present

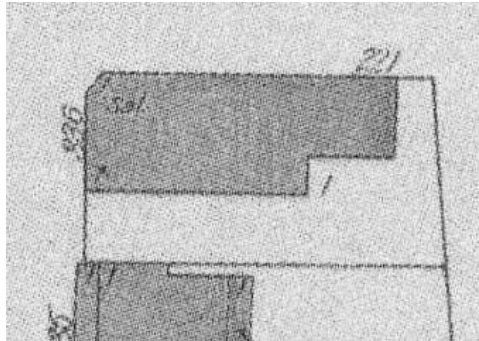
In 1994, Clover Clan Limited Ownership purchased the Old Louisville Inn. Principal Garrett McCarthy performed the first major restoration of the building in over forty years. This led to the Louisville Downtown Business Association’s selection of McCarthy to be the first recipient of the Louis Nawatny Award for preserving the character of downtown or beautifying the historical core of the City, according to an unidentified newspaper article from October 2000.

Today, under McCarthy’s management, the Old Louisville Inn has an Irish-themed menu and is the site of a community celebration annually on St. Patrick’s Day.

Date of Construction

At the time of the 1893 and 1900 Sanborn fire insurance maps (as noted above), the building on Lot 1, Block B was a different building. It is indicated on these maps as having been a wood frame dwelling.

The 1908 Sanborn fire insurance map of this corner, however, clearly shows the current building with its angled corner entrance:



This means that the building at 740 Front was certainly constructed between the years of 1900 and 1908. All three surveys done of this building agree with this.

Boulder County gives two different dates of construction for this building, and it should be noted that the County has frequently been found to be in error with respect to the dates of construction of historical Louisville buildings. The 1948 County Assessor card gives the date of 1900, while the County website states it to have been constructed in 1906.

The 1982 survey form on 740 Front that was completed for the State gave the year of 1904 as the date of construction. The 1985 and 2000 survey forms also completed for the State, however, went with the year of 1906 because that was the date provided by the County.

A review of the evidence suggests that the year of 1904 is the closest that we can come in ascertaining the year of construction. It was in January 1904 that Eusebio Di Francia actually purchased this corner lot, giving him time to still construct that building later that year. Also, new evidence that was not previously considered is that the Fischer family of Louisville has provided a list of Fischer construction projects to the Louisville Historical Museum in which the family stated that it was the Fischers who constructed the saloon at 740 Front Street in the year 1904. (H.H. Fischer and his sons constructed a number of downtown Louisville commercial buildings.) For these reasons, 1904 is the best estimate of the year of construction, given the information available at this time.

Aspects of the Building's Colorful History

The history of the Old Louisville Inn building has several notable aspects.

- The Bar: The bar, including the back bar, is a distinctive part of the interior of the Old Louisville Inn building. A *Longmont Daily Times-Call* article dated October 30-31, 1976, stated, "Something to see is the antique bar, one of the most ornate and oldest in the state, which extends the full length of the restaurant-lounge of the Old Louisville Inn." The bar is believed by many to have been part of the building dating back to the early years of the saloon. While this report is meant to focus on the overall social history of the building and not to examine the age or origins of the bar itself, there is no question that it is a unique and treasured aspect of the building and of

Louisville history. As noted above, it is said to have been restored by Elizabeth Varra under her ownership. The following is a photo of the bar from the 1976 newspaper article:



- The Basement Elevator: The business owners over the years used a hand-cranked elevator system, which is still there, to bring kegs, ice, and boxes of bottles down into the basement for storage.
- The Tunnel and Brothel Rumors: Some longtime residents believe that rumors of tunnels connecting buildings under the commercial district can be attributed to the prevalence of coal mining tunnels under the downtown, or due to the existence of basement coal rooms whose doors have been blocked up. This is a topic that has caught the public interest not only in Louisville but also in other Colorado towns where evidence of the existence of tunnels is being sought. The Historical Museum staff and volunteers are continuing to seek historical information and oral histories in order to try to determine if there were tunnels connecting buildings in downtown Louisville, and if so, to try to also determine which business buildings may have been connected. Similarly, the Historical Museum will continue to try to document whether the building at 740 Front was ever a brothel, and if it was, during what time period this would have taken place.
- The Paintings: Paintings by an itinerant painter named “Cheyenne” are a part of the lore of the Old Louisville Inn. According to the December 4, 1977 issue of *The Denver Post’s Empire Magazine*, Cheyenne’s real name was not known and he was a drifter who painted Western scenes in local taverns. This was apparently done in exchange for food, drink, and a place to sleep. In addition to leaving paintings at the Old Louisville Inn, he also did so in the 1940s at the Screwball Inn in Firestone, Colorado, and in the 1940s or 1950s at the Wagon Wheel Inn (now the Union Jack Liquor building) in Louisville. Some of his paintings have been destroyed over the years. As the article’s author, Lee Overstreet, wrote: “Was Cheyenne an artist who failed or fell from grace? Or was he, as it is said, only an old cowboy who happened to draw some pretty fair pictures when he was drunk? A drifter without family, fame or fortune, Cheyenne was a nobody,

a bum who came from nowhere. His paintings are forgotten or vanished, for they seemed, after all, only the drunken doodlings of a derelict. But Cheyenne has become a charming mystery.”

- The Mayhem: Louisville’s saloons were the sites of many brawls over the years, some of which were reported in newspapers. And it is remembered that during one memorable Labor Day celebration in Louisville in the early 1970s, someone even rode a horse into the Old Louisville Inn.

There is even one murder known to have taken place at this building (notwithstanding the lighthearted story about a ghost named “Samantha.”) It was reported in the *Denver Post* on June 21, 1908 that Carlo Tomoro (or “Tomorrow,” or “Tamoro”), an Italian coal miner, killed his unmarried brother-in-law, Mike Martello, at “Franzia’s saloon” in Louisville. They quarreled inside the saloon and then stepped out of the rear door. Four shots were heard, then Martello ran out of the alley into the street to the front of the building, where he collapsed and died. Bystanders saw that Tomoro also emerged from the alley, crossed the street, and disappeared into another alley going in the direction of his home six blocks away. He apparently was not seen again. As the articles states, “The cause of the shooting is not known. Some say the men quarreled over the walkout of the union miners yesterday, while others intimate that the treatment of Mrs. Tomorrow at the hands of her husband was the cause.” It was further reported in the next day’s *Denver Post* that “Tomoro has a violent temper and he has been in trouble before.”

- Gambling: While this building is not one of the primary Louisville structures that was associated with high stakes gambling, it is remembered that gambling took place in the basement of the building. In particular, the popular dice game of barboot was recalled by Norm Mossoni as having been played in the basement. Mossoni believed that this particular location was never raided, and no news items of gambling raids at this location have been found.
- The Food and Clientele: Older Louisville residents recall ways in which the food and clientele would change depending on who was managing the business at 740 Front. It was sometimes operated more as a rowdy bar, and sometimes more as a family-friendly eating place. The Historical Museum is making an effort to solicit donations of past menus from this business and collect stories about it through the Museum’s oral history program.
- The Building as a Residence: Directories from the 1940s and 1950s indicate that some of the people who operated the business at the time, some just for a year or two, also resided in the building.

Past Surveys and Statements of Significance

- Summary of 1982 State Survey of 740 Front by Steven Whissen:

Special Features/Surroundings: "Varied window sizes and spacing; entablature style top window mouldings on north side; one of only three existing commercial buildings with a corner entrance; decorative dormer-type gables on north and west; massive interior bar with carved Corinthian style columns."

Architectural Significance: "Represents a type, period or method of construction."

Historical Significance: "Associated with significant persons" and "Contributes to the significance of a historic district."

"This original saloon is representative of the refinements attending commercial frame architecture during the first decade of the twentieth century. The popular use of the false front was passed over in this instance for a gabled roof with a complex intersection of pitches above the corner entrance. Decorative brackets, (removed but slated for replacement), and a dentil motif band above the entrance added further elaboration."

"The building reflected the overall profitability of the saloon business and the fact that its original owner, Eusebio DiFrancia, had become successful by the early 1900's to not only construct this structure but also his imposing house at 1045 LaFarge in the same year."

"The high ceiling is rounded at the wall intersection. Perhaps the major attraction through the years has been the elaborately carved bar which has been restored. Its origin has become a matter of debate and deserves further research."

The 1982 survey form for this building noted that it has been altered in that "brackets under the eaves have been removed (c. 1978)." The form gave a year of construction which is believed to be accurate (1904).

- Summary of 1985 State Survey of 740 Front by Steven F. Mehls, Carol Drake Mehls, and James E. Fell, Jr.:

Architectural description: "This is a wood frame nineteenth century storefront with an 'L' footprint. It has a brick foundation on the west (Front St) side. Building is approx. 1-1 1/2 stories in height. Roof is combination hip and gable with two dormers. Present windows, doors are smaller than originals. Original locations still highly visible as dark trim around present windows."

Significance: "Represents a type, period or method of construction", "Associated with sig. events / patterns."

Statement of significance: "This bar has locational integrity and also retains a sense of historic "feeling." ... Within Louisville it is 1 of 2 saloons from the turn of the century still in operation

(Track Inn is other). This building addresses the following RP3 concerns: clarifies the role of ethnic groups in Colorado's coal industry since it was owned and operated by an Italian; provides correlation between coal mining activity and other pursuits (recreational); provides information on physical form, time, place and economic functions since Louisville required all saloons to be located on the street directly west of the railroad tracks."

The survey reported minor alterations consisting of "Lower 1/2 of windows boarded over; door lines changed." It should be noted that this survey relied on information that Nick Di Francia had been the primary person associated with the building and that he was an actual owner, which is now believed to be inaccurate, and the survey may have given an erroneous year of construction (1906).

- Summary of 2000 State Survey of 740 Front by Carl McWilliams:

Statement of significance: "The Old Louisville Inn is historically significant relative to National Register of Historic Places Criterion A for its association with Louisville's socioeconomic development during the first half of the twentieth century. One of a number of saloons built on Front Street in the 1890s and very early 1900s, the building was an important part of Louisville's social and commercial fabric for many years. Architecturally, the building is an excellent example of a wood frame commercial building dating from the early twentieth century. For this reason it may also be regarded as eligible for the National Register under Criterion C."

Assessment of historic physical integrity related to significance: "Although this building has undergone several facade changes over the years, there have been no additions to the original structure. Overall it displays a high degree of historical integrity, relative to National Park Service and Colorado Historical Society guidelines."

Applicable National Register criteria: "Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history" and "Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction."

Area of Significance: "Commerce; Ethnic Heritage / European."

Level of Significance: Local

It should be noted that the 2000 survey may have given an erroneous year of construction (1906).

- Louisville Landmark Designation by Louisville Historical Commission, 1984

In 1984, the Louisville Historical Commission included 740 Front on a list of fifteen Louisville downtown buildings that the Historical Commission designated as Louisville landmarks, according to a *Boulder Daily Camera* article dated March 21, 1984. The article stated that the list of fifteen structures would be submitted to the State for possible selection for placement on the National and State Registers of Historic Places. Ultimately, five commercial buildings in Louisville were selected for placement on the National and State Registers, along with seven historical residential buildings, and 740 Front was not selected to be one of the five. The exact reasons for its exclusion are not known.

Additional Photos of 740 Front

This newspaper photo shows the Old Louisville Inn building in the background at the time that Steinbaugh's lumber and hardware business burned down in 1974. Today, this area is a City of Louisville parking lot. A statue of John Breau is situated where Spruce Street once extended towards the railroad tracks.



The following photo from the Louisville Historical Museum showing the Old Louisville Inn is dated 1984:



This photo is dated 1999:



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

Bridget Bacon, Louisville Historical Museum
May 2012