



W. Bart Berger's Acceptance Speech
Dana Crawford Award

Colorado Preservation, Inc.
Dana Crawford & State Honor Awards
May 13, 2019

...I am incredibly honored to receive this award. Not only because of my admiration for Dana but also for my deep respect for the fine work that CPI accomplishes for the cause of Historic Preservation. At the outset, I want to thank Frank Kugeler and Fabby Hillyard who put me on two really major paths- Frank who suggested I might join the Colorado Historical Society board, and Fabby, along with whom I embarked on the Denver Mountain Parks journey; then Sandy and Laura Sanborn at the Sanborn Camps, who gave me Freedom of the Outdoors and the guidance to instill a deep, abiding passion for Nature. All of this, then, is layered over a family history that was never not relevant to me. All my life, I have known and appreciated the commitments my forebears were willing to make, and the impact that their community service has made on Denver and the State of Colorado. But being fourth generation doesn't mean spit unless I'm willing to follow their examples. I have endeavored to do that, and I think I have passed a similar civic awareness on to my two amazing children, Charlie Berger and Leanna Berger Elf, who are here tonight. I can't guarantee anything, but I'm reasonably sure it will continue from there.

It is delightful to see so very many friends here tonight, too. Apparently you all understood what "Mountain Formal" means. I knew you would. Thank you for supporting me - and tonight- supporting CPI.

I have to say that my brother Bill Berger once said that a guy ought to be worried when given something that looks like a Lifetime Achievement award - maybe I better think twice about buying green bananas!

I gotta tell you, I feel a serious case of "Imposter Syndrome." I don't feel that I have really done much remarkable - I have merely tried to maintain an awareness of

what opportunities there are to make things better, and along the way pursue a series of things that needed to be done.

What I have been doing, I suppose, is what you all call "Preservation." I guess I'm a "preservationist," but I don't see myself as just a "Fix the Fountain/Save Old Buildings" type. Maybe I'm a **Preemptive Preservationist**. Sure, there are buildings that are at risk, but I think Colorado in total is what is endangered.

Somehow I think that if we can care for preserving what IS, we'll spend less time fixing things. Like the shelters in the Mountain Parks - they should never have gotten to the state they were in. This feeling that Culture is expendable is an American malady. I'm less interested in chasing the *symptoms* of the malady than finding and working on this underlying Malady itself: which I believe is Historical & Cultural Ignorance, Apathy and Indifference. Colorado can - and must - be different.

It's hard in a place like Colorado which is a place in a constant State of Change. I understand that every generation wants to put its own stamp on the world, and seize the opportunities at hand. That's fine. Without change, there is no "History."

My own family goes way back in Colorado. So we're not strangers to this.

My Father's mother told me about the buffalo wallow that became Smith Lake in Washington Park. The tallest building in Denver was four stories when my father was borne and he died with the towering 32 story Security Life building dominating the skyline.

My Mother's mother, born in a house at 17th and Stout Street, married the son of Governor Adams and moved to a vibrant Pueblo. Then watched it fade into the economic shadow of Denver. As that area grew she watched it turn an indifferent, if not callously opportunistic, eye to much of Colorado. With annoying but effective regularity she admonished me not to develop "Denver-itis." That still rings in my ears. (It is ironic that one tunnel sucking water from the Western Slope is named Alva B. Adams, after her own husband.)

My personal witness of these generational transformations begins with a 1960 Rocky Mountain News headline announcing Colorado had reached one million

people. Today it's well over 5 times that, and by 2030, we are expecting Denver to exceed 800,000 and the Front Range itself to host over 6 million. This is a crucial juncture.

The antidote, our JOB, is to promulgate an understanding of our underlying Colorado ethos and imbed it in all the decisions we make as we go forward.

The old fogey in me recoils from so much of what I see going on, overwhelmed by newcomers and profligate progress which ignores and threatens the legacy you and I cherish. So the Proactive Preemptive Preservationist in me- looks to preserve the essential **Colorado-ness** the **Denver-ness** that underlies all of it- and works, amid the fray of this impending development and growth, to communicate what it is. The best application of my personal effort is to accept growth, but not let it come at the expense of the basic social values that enabled it in the first place. In fact, it's something we can capitalize on- because it makes us special.

So what is it? What defines us?

Maybe I'm overthinking this. Maybe it's simple. Because our mountain bikes are worth more than our Subaru? I suspect it's more than that.

I saw a sign at Winter Park that said: "In Colorado, Courtesy is Contagious." Well, that's part of it.

Many years ago, when Wellington Webb said: "Norm that's not the way we do things in Denver," and this simple statement resonated with the voters and propelled him into office. That's part of it, too. Wellington also accurately told his staff - who were looking for guidance from the work of other cities- that other cities actually look to US for that.

Amid this lack of self-awareness, how do we find ourselves?

For me, looking at the historical threads- the stories of our relationship with the land and each other- is the key. Knowing, keeping alive and visible to the public the drama written by the cavalcade of characters that precede us informs us and guides us. They've woven something special out of Whole Cloth and we can learn about our historic legacy from that. If we'll look.

Good and bad, we are the sum of our accomplishments AND our mistakes. We do not learn from the past if we regret it, or seek to close the door on it.

And, watching the fits and starts of our progenitors can be hilarious, too. Watching us get scammed by Soapy Smith or Bill Riley- that's fantastic. But we usually run 'em out of town eventually.

So, Coloradans are easy-going and gullible- but only to a point.

I think it's all about relationships. It's about how Colorado people and places interrelate, how we respect each other, even like each other, and how that comes to define, uniquely and wonderfully, our Colorado culture.

I do hope that in my time at the Colorado Historical Society that we demonstrated how these stories have come to show the kind of people we are- Statewide. With Ed Nichols at History Colorado, that was a major focus of our work. And I know that Steve Turner and the State Historic Fund continue to be instrumental in reestablishing some of those intramural relationships that had grown a bit tattered.

And, it's about our relationship with our landscapes, our very unique landscapes.

Our astounding natural environment goes a long way to define us, and we absolutely cannot carelessly lose our respect for our land and our open spaces. This is not just parks, but tracts of land that connect people with nature in unstructured, accessible and equitable ways. Included in this is the preservation of viewsheds and vistas. We cannot lose these- no amount of money can get them back.

I have a collection of Denver cityscapes taken about twenty five years apart. My 2019 panorama is nothing but steel and glass. Denver's elected City Councils (not the Mayors) have done a dis-service to its citizens over the years by not protecting its visible Front Range backdrop and not tenaciously enforcing its Viewplane Ordinances. This, like the deterioration of Mountain Parks shelters- need not have happened. For a city with mountains on its flag- I say shame on you. But... we let them do it.

That said- the people of Denver finally did vote for a sales tax supporting parks. Yippee. Now, I implore you all to be vigilant and not be (or let the City be) Urban-

Centric about that. Too long the 14,000 acres of mountain lands that Denver provides for its citizens languished without municipal support because we let it happen.

Denver has an obligation to make those regionally relevant resources available to The People and to those for whom an interrelationship with the natural environment can be life-changing and societally beneficial. No other major metropolitan city can do the same.

This is one of the goals of the [Denver Mountain Parks Foundation](#). At long last, with the invaluable help of Mayor Michael Hancock, Scott Gilmore [Deputy Director of Parks and Rec.] and the dedicated Mountain Parks staff, I think the City has legitimately rekindled its understanding of the Mountain Parks, and it looks like (assuming, please, no change in administrations!) we may be able to finally weave them irreversibly into the recreational and educational fabric of the City. Now, working with Towny Anderson and our partnership with [HistoriCorps](#), ensconced at the Red Rocks CCC Campus, the future seems even brighter.

Let me emphasize that Public/private partnerships are crucial going forward. In the Mountain Parks, educational programming in collaboration with the Denver Zoo is already underway. This is the foundation of Cultural Sustainability. Brian [Vogt], with your leadership, we are glad to see this forthcoming with the Botanic Gardens and Denver's other Nature-based Cultural institutions.

I believe that in the collection of community activities that I have enjoyed, I have attempted to pay a reasonable rent for the time I have been able to spend on Earth. An old friend of mine once told me when I was beginning to take myself too seriously: "Bart, Just have Fun with it." And so I have come to think that a person may indeed be a success who wakes up in the morning and goes to bed at night- and in between does what he loves.

You are under no obligation to do more than know that this is what I think. You can do what you want. But I do think that by looking through the long lens, we can save a lot of time and effort. We can make every citizen, every developer, every kid, every politician a Colorado Preservationist.

If we work on the Malady, we can alleviate the Symptoms. And if we are steadfast in our effort, the values we cherish will be perpetuated.

Joni Mitchell may well sing: “You don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone,” but I say: “If you recognize what you have and protect it, then it won’t be an issue.”

For me- that’s Preservation.

Thank you for this award.

W. Bart Berger
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