

SUNNYCREST

The Story of the Cheyenne Canyon Inn

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June 28, 1999

THE BEGINNING OF SUNNYCREST: 1871-1904

The scenic beauty is breath taking where the Great Plains meet the majestic boundary of the Rocky Mountains beneath the towering heights of Pikes Peak. Such an awe inspiring setting impressed General William Jackson Palmer so much that he founded the Fountain Colony resort settlement at the foot of this spectacular backdrop in Colorado Territory in 1871. Fine scenery, clean air, and abundant natural springs were the resort attractions he promoted to a number of well heeled Americans and Europeans.

General Palmer was also the driving force behind the building of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad, a unique miniature narrow gauge rail system that people called the "baby train". Eventually, the D&RGW would expand throughout the rugged Colorado Mountains, connecting the emerging gold and silver mining camps with the outside world. As the railroad grew, the colony prospered and expanded into a small city. The Fountain Colony name was dropped and changed to Colorado Springs in order to capitalize on the main resort amenity.

Economic growth in Colorado Springs really began to flourish after major gold deposits were discovered at nearby Cripple Creek in 1891. Cripple Creek was destined over the next several decades to evolve as the fifth richest gold strike in the world, producing almost 433 million dollars of the precious metal and at least twenty-seven millionaires. Most of these newly rich mine owners had originally been plain men who were employed as plumbers or carpenters before they took their chances at prospecting. Once they hit pay dirt though, much of their newly acquired wealth was lavished on Colorado Springs.

Around the Turn of the Twentieth Century, Colorado Springs enjoyed world wide recognition as a fashionable address for millionaires of all sorts. Many of their homes were large Victorian mansions, or grand English Tudor and French Louis XIV country homes and castles. In fact, the English influence was so great, and the popularity of serving afternoon high tea was so common, that the city acquired the nickname "Little London". This affectation acted as a lure to attract even more wealthy residents and tourists who came to enjoy Colorado's healthy climate and use the resort spas for medicinal purposes.

A real estate boom accompanied this growth. It was especially desirable to locate a permanent house or summer cottage along one of the pristine streams flowing out of the mountains. As a result, residential development edged further

and further up Cheyenne Creek closer to where the main stream splits at the junction of two beautiful canyons. This is where the first Sunnycrest structure was built in 1889, just outside the Colorado Springs city limits near the entrance to North Cheyenne Canyon. At least this was the year that the county tax designation changed from being vacant land to an improved property.

Apparently, an old photograph that is now lost showed that the original Sunnycrest was a simple two-story building with wood siding. It was located on the hillside rather than along the creek bottom in order to get more sun. The name "Sunnycrest" was chosen because this high spot was the last place to receive sun during the shortest day of the year, getting approximately two hours more than any other Cheyenne Canyon residence did.

SUNNYCREST BECOMES A RESORT HOUSE: 1904

The first owner of Sunnycrest probably sold the property in the early 1900's to Lillian Casey. She was the eldest daughter in the Casey family that boasted nine children consisting of five girls and four boys. The youngest child was Grace, born in 1899. According to living relatives, Grace moved into Sunnycrest when she was five, which means Lillian bought the house in 1904. This is also the same year that Sunnycrest was listed as a "Resort House" in the Colorado Springs Register. In order to pay the bills, Lillian most likely rented rooms to tourists and also supplied them with meals. With nine children to feed, however, the Casey family was already running its own inn.

Lillian made a wise business decision to turn Sunnycrest into a resort house. Its location appealed to tourists because two years earlier in 1902, the Colorado Springs & Interurban Railway completed a brand new electric trolley line to the Stratton Park Meadows Station located directly across the street. This was a popular destination to access the canyons, picnic along Cheyenne Creek, or listen to one of the bands that played at the park pavilion. More adventurous sightseers used the terminal as a jumping off spot to visit the natural wonders at Seven Falls in South Cheyenne Canyon, or take the trails through North Cheyenne Canyon where there were plenty of dramatic rock formations and other picturesque waterfalls. Making the pilgrimage to Helen Hunt Falls, or her primitive log cabin and the nearby grave where she was buried were particularly favorite places to go. Helen Hunt was the author of "Ramona", a contemporary best-selling romantic novel about Indians.

Colorado Springs was fortunate to have such a good public transportation system, which began in 1887 when the first horse drawn trolley ran along Tejon Street between Costilla and Cach La Poudre streets. In 1890, electric cars replaced the horse drawn ones. However, it wasn't until 1900 when Cripple Creek's first millionaire, Winfield Scott Stratton, purchased the entire interurban

railway for \$350,000 that major improvements took place. Within the next two years, he spent another two million dollars upgrading the rolling stock and building new lines. Besides the one that stopped across from the Sunnycrest resort house, other branches now reached the Broadmoor, Manitou Springs, Prospect Lake, and Roswell. Overall, there were forty-one miles of track.

The trolley system was well managed and was regarded as one of the best anywhere in the world. Around 1911, though, ridership began to decline. In 1919, the big trolleys were replaced with smaller ones, but times were changing. Riding the trolley steadily lost favor as automobiles and buses replaced its usefulness as a means of transportation. Finally, on April 30, 1932, after 45 years of operation, the interurban railway shut down for good. On that last day, some 40,000 people turned out to take their final streetcar ride.

Following the demise of the trolley system, the tracks were removed and the Stratton Estate sold Stratton Park Meadows and the trolley station. There are still a few signs of the old trolley route left, however. One is the steel streetcar bridge that spans Cheyenne Creek at the entrance to the terminal area. Another is the outline of the driveway around the station, showing where the trolley tracks once circled the building.

The Stratton property that lay directly west of the terminal became part of a 10,000-acre park that contains much of the scenic beauty found in South and North Cheyenne Canyons. Today, the Starsmore Discovery Center sits between the entrance to each canyon. It's use as a nature and visitor center introduces people to the network of roads, trails, and natural features found in the park. As in the past, the center is also located just footsteps from Sunnycrest, now the Cheyenne Canon Inn.

A UNIQUE WAY TO ACQUIRE PROPERTY: 1904-1918

Family stories passed down through generations tend to distort the truth. In this case, the collection of kindred rumors suggests that Lillian may have acquired Sunnycrest in 1904 with misappropriated money. If there is any truth to this, she may also have used a portion of these funds for investment in another questionable enterprise later on. For the time being, however, she was focused on the welfare of the Casey family. Lillian's decision to redirect someone else's money was clearly illegal, but her reason for doing such a deed was probably based on her perception of frontier justice rather than performing a criminal act.

Such providence began after the Casey family moved from Mount Vernon, Illinois, to the Colorado community of Florence, located about 30 miles south of Colorado Springs. Florence thrived economically as a smelter town and supply center for the Cripple Creek gold mines. Jobs were plentiful. Mr. Casey and

Lillian, who was a smart girl with a college education, found employment at a prosperous sawmill. Although Mr. Casey's position there is not known, his job was not working out. The sawmill owners treated him unfairly, even though he continued on as a loyal employee. Lillian on the other hand, reacted differently. She must have had an office job that allowed her to handle money, making it easy to deposit unaccounted for cash into her own account and vindicate the unjust treatment she thought her father was receiving.

No record exists stating that the sawmill owners suspected any wrongdoing, nor is there any accounting of how much money Lillian may have taken. Most likely, she used some of the sawmill money to buy Sunnycrest with, but any additional funds would have come from the Casey family. In any event, it was a good purchase. Lillian had accomplished her goal of moving the family to a better place where they would all be together in their own home and could operate their own business.

The resort house business did have a few peculiarities, however, that affected how the Casey family lived in their new home. Since the summer tourist season generated the highest income, it was probably necessary for them to move into a neighboring cottage so the resort house could operate at its maximum capacity during these months. During the winter when business was slow, everyone moved back into Sunnycrest.

BUILDING A GRAND SUNNYCREST: 1918-1921

The Casey family was evidently well off financially, but they were not wealthy. As time went on though, Lillian and Grace shared unique ways to create the impression that they were rich. Money bought education and culture, two objectives the family willingly invested in to improve their social position. Lillian already had a college degree. Teenage Grace took piano lessons in Colorado Springs and was sent to finishing school for a little while back East. By the time she was a young lady in her early twenties, she had acquired enough polish to be an established name in the Colorado Springs Social Register.

Income from the Sunnycrest resort house was sufficient enough to pay for Grace's upbringing as well as generate the money Lillian needed in 1918 to build a brand new grand Sunnycrest. This was also the same year that the wealthiest of the Cripple Creek millionaires, Spencer Penrose, began construction on his world famous Broadmoor Hotel a half mile away, and within sight of the proposed new Sunnycrest. Lillian's decision to build, however, was based on more than smart timing to coincide with the economic spillover the completed Broadmoor Hotel would create for neighboring resort houses. It was necessary. Lillian's Sunnycrest resort house had accidentally burned down.

Construction of the new Sunnycrest took three years because there wasn't enough money to build the house all at once. Cheyenne Canon Inn founder John Starr suspects that the original Sunnycrest was located just west of the new structure due to his discovery of the charred remains of an earlier house located underneath what is now the manmade stream and water fountain near the entrance to the inn. While working on other outdoor projects, he also uncovered the ruins of a smaller two-story house that was built to the north of the inn, as well as the water pipes and other remnants of a dilapidated cottage that once sat on the northeast corner of the property. Perhaps this is where the Casey family lived and housed any guests while the new Sunnycrest was being built.

Once the new Sunnycrest was completed, it was obvious that Lillian had chosen her site well. Her dream house was prominently displayed high above Cheyenne Boulevard where everyone could see it. It even appeared grander when visitors ascended the stone steps from the street to the covered entrance porch. Along the way, they could admire the grounds and views by sitting on one of the stone benches built into the hill or congregate around the water fountain that bubbled on another landing just below the porch. A narrow lane, later named Oak Way, connected the house to Cheyenne Boulevard a little further to the east. It was mainly used for delivering supplies like coal and groceries to the rear of the house. The new Sunnycrest became officially recognized on the county tax role in 1921. This time there was a substantial jump in property values.

Many of the Colorado Springs bluebloods also jumped when they saw the new Sunnycrest. Indeed, it was a big enough house to be worthy of the neighborhood, but it was shockingly modern, a distinct departure from the standard Victorian and Little London architecture commonly built throughout the Colorado Springs area. Lillian had championed Mission Style, an architectural offshoot of the Arts and Crafts trend that would be made famous throughout America by such maverick architects as Frank Lloyd Wright, John Morris, and Gustav Stickley. The new Sunnycrest was regarded as either an eye opener or an eyesore.

Regardless of what anyone thought about the exterior appearance, the new Sunnycrest was an elegant and spacious showplace inside. Every one of the ground floor living rooms was large, with an open floor plan that enhanced roominess. The tasteful placement and choices of furniture were selected for comfort and opulence. Oriental rugs and other luxurious floor coverings complimented the rich artwork and textures decorating the walls. Sunnycrest was also fully wired for electricity. There were many elegant light fixtures that could be turned on by pressing one of the numerous silver plated wall switches. Matching silver chandeliers, a potpourri of designer floor and table lamps, and stylish wall sconces shaped to resemble candles provided a soft, warm, provocative atmosphere.

A thickly carpeted runner laid down on the hardwood risers of the grand staircase connected the main floor with the suite of bedrooms on the second level. Every bedroom was equipped with a silent buzzer that rang in the kitchen and alerted the staff where service was needed. Many of the bedrooms had a private balcony that faced canyon views or looked towards the Broadmoor. Some even had a private bathroom outfitted with the latest fixtures. Altogether, there were seven bathrooms in the new Sunnycrest, a fact that enhanced its stature in an era when many of the other Cheyenne Canyon resort houses did not yet have indoor plumbing. A final amenity was the large coal furnace in the basement. This insured that every room would have constant heat and there would be lots of hot water.

A NEW BUSINESS FOR SUNNYCREST: 1921-1928

Although the new Sunnycrest was a grand house, it turned out to be a different kind of home. By now most of the Casey family had grown up and began to leave. Two of the sons moved to California and one returned back East. The fourth son stayed in Colorado to work at a sawmill, but not the same one where Lillian and her father were formerly employed. Even Lillian's life changed. She got married to the sheriff of nearby Manitou Springs and changed her name to Lillian Kniffen. The rest of the girls presumably got married, or younger ones like Grace, were still being raised at Sunnycrest. Whatever happened to the Casey parents by 1921 is unknown.

Because the family structure was breaking apart, Lillian Kniffen constructed the new Sunnycrest to operate as something other than a high-end resort house. It would be an upscale bordello catering to the rich people coming to the Broadmoor. Since a house of prostitution was illegal, being married to the Manitou Springs sheriff was a definite advantage in dealing with the law. As a precaution against a surprise police raid, the roof of the Sunnycrest bordello was crowned with a third story lookout tower. Part of the panoramic tower view faced west towards the spectacular mountain scenery in North and South Cheyenne Canyons. The manicured grounds of the Broadmoor spread to the south. Most importantly, an observer could look for three unobstructed miles to the east down Cheyenne Canyon Boulevard to the plains and downtown Colorado Springs, the direction from which the police would be coming. Today the tower is part of the "Lookout Room". The eastern view is now partially filtered by tall trees that have grown up, but the other directions looking towards the Broadmoor and the canyons are as gorgeous as ever.

The fact that the Sunnycrest bordello was located outside the conservative Colorado Springs city limits provided another favorable advantage since it made operating a bordello a little more acceptable. The close proximity to the Stratton Park Meadows trolley station was also a boon. The trolley brought clients within

convenient walking distance to the house where there was often an excellent view of the goods offered. It would have been easy to ogle at any of the high-class hookers that might be languishing for a customer on the second story balcony. The balcony has since been closed in to enlarge existing rooms and create the hot tub spa.

Operating a bordello was a risky business. Even though there was promising opportunity to make more money than a high-class resort house would generate, one's reputation and the likelihood of going to jail and losing everything needed to be considered. Lillian solved this dilemma by leasing the business to outsiders in return for a good income and the promise of turning a blind eye. The Sunnycrest bordello operated only during the summer tourist season, and returned to being a somewhat normal home during the winter. Some of the cottages located directly east of the building were used to house the lineup of working girls, while the cottage now called "Petite Maison" was the madam's residence. Presumably, Lillian, her husband, and any siblings she cared for also lived close by.

The surrounding neighborhood probably knew what was going on but kept quiet. One young boy who lived on Oak Way was quite naïve, however. Many years later when he visited Sunnycrest after its conversion to the Cheyenne Canyon Inn, he had this to say about the beautiful ladies that lived up the street. "At the time I thought Sunnycrest was being rented by a rich man who brought all his pretty nieces to live with him during the summer. Those girls sure were pretty, but it never occurred to me what was really going on and what the nieces really were".

Another recollection comes from Sara Huffman Miller, who grew up at Sunnycrest during the 1980's, and also wrote the first history of the house as an eighth grade school project. The mother of one of her friends told Sara that each prostitute had their own chauffeur. The mother and her other girl friends knew about the prostitutes and what was going on. Even so, they were proper young ladies who were attracted to the handsome chauffeurs that they dated.

For those clients who knew exactly what to expect, the Sunnycrest bordello provided them with a discrete means for entering and leaving the premises. This was especially useful for anyone arriving by trolley. A disembarking passenger could pretend to be taking a walk up the road towards North Cheyenne Canyon like any other tourist. However, if you knew about one particular path, it left the tourist route to climb through the forest on the hillside below the bordello to a big rock where a secret tunnel was located. From there, it was a short underground walk through the tunnel to a door that opened into the basement in the southwest corner of the house.

Signs of the old path through the forest are still faintly visible, although the tunnel is now blocked at both ends. Hillside rubble has covered it at the big rock, and a

new retaining wall constructed in the late 1970's to repair the southwest corner foundation prevents entry into the house. However, a portion of the tunnel was accidentally rediscovered in the mid 1990's by John Starr during a landscaping project. He was removing rocks while constructing a new patio near the southwest corner of his Cheyenne Canon Inn when the pry bar he was working with nearly disappeared down a softball size hole. Further inspection revealed that this was the old tunnel. Due to its deteriorated condition though, he noted its location for posterity, and then covered the patio hole and sealed it with a concrete slab.

There is a false rumor that the tunnel into the Sunnycrest bordello was dug all the way to the Broadmoor. Even though this is not true, it's easy to ponder such a possibility considering that the Colorado Springs area was a favorite haunt of the Cripple Creek mining camp. In fact, the early Colorado Springs community of Colorado City, whose abundant saloons and bordellos catered to miners, employed them to construct several tunnels under both sides of the town's main street. These tunnels offered a convenient means for slipping from one type of establishment to another without being seen, or a handy means of escaping from a slippery situation.

One of the oddest novelties ever built into Lillian's Sunnycrest bordello was a section of the Brookside Water Company's main water pipeline. The Brookside Water Company owned reservoirs in North Cheyenne Canyon and piped the water stored there to Colorado Springs along their right of way that happened to cross the new Sunnycrest building site. Instead of moving the pipeline away from the house, it was kept in place and incorporated into the basement. This probably saved some construction expense and seemed like a good idea at the time. However, shortly after opening the Sunnycrest bordello, Lillian regretted making that decision. The sound of constantly running water was irritating and the leaking pipes filled the basement with water. The pipes were also difficult to move around and took up valuable space. Lillian's frustration resulted in her making another poor decision. She sabotaged the pipeline, causing the Brookside Water Company to sue her for damages. They won and she was forced to pay for rerouting the line behind the house. All that now remains of the pipeline is the telltale outline of where they made their entry and exit through the concrete foundation walls.

The Sunnycrest bordello operated as a successful business until sometime in the summer of 1927 when Lillian and her tenants had a falling out. In order to evict them, a police raid was necessary. Whether Lillian arranged this is not known, but when the police finally arrived at the property line, she was there to meet them and plead her case as an innocent landlord who would cooperate in removing any illegal business. The police accepted her story. Shortly afterwards, the bordello closed down and the problem tenants were removed.

In 1928, Lillian sold her new Sunnycrest to her youngest sister Grace and moved away from Colorado Springs. Ironically, she invested in a sawmill that was supposedly located close to the one she and her father had formerly worked at. Unfortunately, Lillian was financially overextended when the Great Depression arrived in the 1930's and had her sawmill ~~also~~ repossessed by the bank. Whatever became of Lillian afterwards is unknown. She was a remarkable woman whose energy and resourcefulness shaped a family and established the rich legacy of Sunnycrest.

GRACE CASEY AND THE DIXELAND CASINO: 1928-1941

Grace must have learned a lot about survival and the art of keeping up appearances from her older sister. After the bordello closed, Grace and a sister named Edith Williams were the only Casey family members still in residence at Sunnycrest. Grace occupied what is now the "Lodge Room" on the southwest corner of the second floor, while Edith slept in what is now the "Tea House Room". The remaining rooms were rented out in order to pay the bills. It was the late 1920's, a period of decline for the formerly rich Cripple Creek gold mines, but life continued to be prosperous and lively in Colorado Springs.

One of the popular social events that enriched the Sunnycrest pocketbook was the weekend dancing that took place at the Stratton Meadows Park dance pavilion. The most popular bands attracted as many as five thousand people at one time. Naturally, many of these merrymakers stayed overnight at Sunnycrest. To keep up with the flow of guests, a pretense of servants and workmen were kept busy, preserving the façade that Grace and her sister were well off. In reality, the two ladies did a lot of the necessary upkeep by themselves. They sewed and hung the lush curtains that covered the windows. Under the cover of darkness, they maintained the large gardens surrounding the house, or painted and repaired the exterior. It was enough to survive.

On October 29, 1929, the stock market collapsed, ushering in the beginning of the Great Depression, the greatest economic downturn every experienced in America. Life at Sunnycrest changed once again. As income from room rentals dropped, Grace embarked on a bold new venture that would have made her older sister Lillian proud. Sunnycrest was converted into the Dixieland Casino. Even though gambling was no longer legal inside Colorado Springs, the police tolerated it outside the city limits. Grace also played it safe by using the same business practice incorporated by Lillian during her bordello operation. Sunnycrest was leased to someone else who assumed the risk of running the casino while Grace and Edith moved into a nearby cottage where they enjoyed the rental income and turned a blind eye to gambling.

There is no record that any successful police raid was ever made on the Dixieland Casino. The third story tower was still an effective lookout, and the secret tunnel provided a convenient exit or hiding place whenever any police may have shown up. Since the casino operated during part of the Prohibition years when drinking alcohol was illegal, the police either ignored or missed finding the booze supply hidden on the premises. It was kept in the basement behind a false wall on the southwest corner close to the tunnel door. The tunnel probably provided an easy way to smuggle alcohol into the Dixieland Casino without creating any suspicion.

In the beginning, the casino business flourished. After all, gambling was a popular pastime in Colorado Springs, especially among the rich people who flocked to the nearby Broadmoor Hotel Casino. As in the past, the Dixieland Casino only operated during the height of the summer tourist season. Most of the gaming took place on the main floor, especially in the cheerful great room with all the windows that opened up to the southwest corner of the building. A few Cheyenne Canyon residents say they have seen photographs taken of Broadmoor owner Spencer Penrose and some of his hotel's famous movie star guests gambling inside the Dixieland Casino. However, these rare photos belong to a private trust established by Penrose that are being held by the El Pomar Foundation until they can be opened in the year 2000. Even then, they may not be available for public viewing.

One photograph of the outside of the Dixieland Casino that is in print was taken by the owners of Seven Falls in 1931 when a flood inundated Cheyenne Boulevard. The photo shows two Dixieland Casino signs posted on the hillside in front of the house. According to John Starr, he found the remains of one of these signs but was unable to salvage it. It was painted on the rocks that were part of the back wall of a dilapidated three-car garage built into the hillside at the street level sometime after the casino was no longer operating. However, the sign was buried by rubble when John removed the garages and built a new retaining wall.

There is one more interesting fact that is also revealed by the flood photo. A mechanical hillside elevator had been installed to carry casino patrons from Cheyenne Boulevard to the front porch entrance. This would have been a great improvement over having to walk up the steep stone steps. It is unknown when the elevator was removed.

The Dixieland Casino came to a natural end as a result of hard economic times during the Great Depression and the beginning of World War II. For the most part, the 1930's was a period when personal incomes and tourist dollars dwindled in Colorado Springs. Many residents left to move to California where they thought there were better work prospects. Even the rich people who still had lots of money to gamble with adopted a more serious perspective as the depression years wore on. Being seen at the Dixieland Casino was not as fashionable as it once was, nor was it easy to keep one's anonymity. Taking the

trolley and walking up to the casino had once provided this. After the demise of the trolley system though, most gamblers arrived by driving their personal automobiles, which would be parked on the street in full view of any passerby. This made it easy for any snoop to recognize who was inside. When Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941, and the United States entered World War II, there was little excitement for gambling as the community and country geared up for war. The Dixieland Casino embraced the war effort by closing its doors.

A SECRET ROMANCE AND MARRIED LIFE: 1940's

The residential complexion of Cheyenne Canyon changed greatly during the 1940's. It was now a mature neighborhood showing its age. Things were quieter and there were considerably more run down properties. Many of these were defunct tourist houses that were eventually sold and converted into sanatoriums. A charming shabbiness attracted artists and others who set up small shops and summer fruit stands to cater to the visitors that still frequented the unspoiled canyons at the foot of the mountains. Cheyenne Canyon had become a quaint, peaceful place to live. This must have suited Grace. She was glad to part company with the casino and return Sunnycrest to its traditional use as a residence and guesthouse. Army officers stationed at Camp Carson, now Ft. Carson, were the primary boarders during the war years. Others, like John W. Brink, whom she called "Brinsky", took on a much different role.

Grace was totally infatuated by Brinsky from the moment they were introduced, even though their ages were separated by quite a few years. She was still a girl and he was a young man working in the insurance business. Evidently, they kept close track of one another for quite some time before becoming romantically entwined. Their secret love affair lasted for many years before they got married in the 1940's, even though it must have been obvious to anyone that was close to Sunnycrest. Brinsky became a permanent tenant, residing in what is now called the "Villa Room". Since his room was located on the opposite corner directly across from where Grace slept, it was easy for the two lovers to share a clandestine rendezvous without much notice from anyone else. Once they married and their secret romance was revealed, Grace changed her name to Grace Casey Brink and quit claimed Sunnycrest to Brinsky. They remained married until he passed away in 1966.

THE KIDNAPPING: 1950's

A kidnapping may have taken place at Sunnycrest sometime in the 1950's. Exact details of what happened are unclear because the case was kept quiet and the police records are closed.

The most accurate testimony about the event claims that gangsters kidnapped a young who was hiding out at Sunnycrest and abducted him to Minnesota for safe keeping. Apparently, the victim owed the gang money. In order to collect, the hoodlums contacted the young man's father, a well known Colorado Springs car dealer, and demanded a \$250,000 ransom for his son's release. The father agreed to the terms, procured the money, and traveled to Minnesota where he paid the ransom and collected his son.

QUIET YEARS FOR SUNNYCREST: 1961-1993

Even though a hushed up kidnapping with a happy ending is exciting stuff, life at Sunnycrest was generally routine and quiet. Grace continued renting out rooms. Some of the more glamorous boarders were young ice skaters, Olympic hopefuls training at the Broadmoor Ice Arena. These athletes were some of the last people she rented rooms to. Both Grace and Brinksy were getting older. It was time to consider selling Sunnycrest.

Exactly when and to whom Grace sold Sunnycrest is a little fuzzy. Public records show that Annabel Spangler bought the property in 1961, but John Starr's research indicates that there may have been another sale in between. Regardless of this anomaly, the sale brought an end to the long ownership tenure started by Lillian and Grace fifty-six years earlier. These two women took unusual chances to make Sunnycrest more than a mere home and business. They made it a lasting part of Colorado Springs history. When Grace and Brinksy left, Sunnycrest was still a grand house. It had been well cared for on the inside, and the outside grounds were dutifully tended.

Upkeep was apparently not a priority in the Spangler family. Annabel purchased Sunnycrest to be used as a house for her husband and herself, and their two children. Neighbors that were interviewed by John Starr in the early 1990's said the house changed dramatically while the Spanglers lived there. Outside, the Dixieland Casino signs and awnings that Grace and Brinksy left were removed, and the beautiful gardens and landscaping were neglected. Retaining walls began to crumble and the flowerbeds turned into weed patches. This is also when Oak Way was blocked off as an access.

Shocking changes also occurred in the inside of the house. The Spanglers owned a drapery and carpet business, but they had a different idea about how to

decorate. Instead of using new materials that were available through their store, they recovered the floors and windows with the odds and ends of job scraps. The formerly elegant interior was transformed into a hodgepodge of eclectic leftovers. Fortunately, the original heating fixtures, all the bathroom fixtures, the original silver wall switches, and many of the permanent light fixtures remained in tact.

In 1980, Dr. David Huffman and his wife Lois purchased Sunnycrest as their family home. However, there were some intervening years between their arrival and the Spangler's departure when the house stood vacant and suffered some damage to the southwest portions of the roof and foundation. Rainwater eventually leaked through the rotting roof, staining some of the interior walls and floors, while puddles of water and snowmelt weakened the foundation enough that a new concrete retaining wall had to be built. When the new wall was constructed, it closed off the secret tunnel forever. Some vandalism and theft also took place. The silver chandelier hanging in the entry foyer was stolen, but a smaller one above the stairway and all the silver light switches were spared. This probably happened because the chandelier had become so tarnished and the wall switches had been painted, disguising what lay underneath.

➤ The Huffman household included several children that grew up at Sunnycrest during a thirteen-year occupancy. Sara Huffman Miller was mentioned earlier as being responsible for writing the first history about Sunnycrest. One of the most valuable parts of her research was an interview with 84 year old Grace Casey Brink prior to her death on July 20, 1984. Grace was 85 years old when she died. According to Sara, she was still very alert, but suffered from paranoia about her involvement with the Dixieland Casino.

SUNNYCREST BECOMES THE CHEYENNE CANON INN: 1993-PRESENT

Sunnycrest made a full circle in its lodging history in August 1993. That was the date when John and Barbara Starr acquired it with plans to refurbish the house and turn it into a distinctive nine room bed and breakfast with an adjacent cottage. This was also the year that the Sunnycrest name changed to the Cheyenne Canon Inn in order to make its location more prominent and identifiable to guests.

Thanks to John and Barbara's vision and lots of hard work, Cheyenne Canon Inn visitors enjoyed the same high standards of comfort and ambience that would have made Lillian and Grace proud. As part of the refurbishing, John and Barbara restored or replaced many of the original wall and bathroom fixtures. They remodeled all the second floor bedrooms and added two more on the third floor. Each bedroom now had its own private bath and a distinctive decorating scheme based on an "Around the World" theme.

Downstairs, the main level living rooms and dining room were furnished with appropriate antiques and period pieces. In order to modernize the building, a new furnace was installed, the electrical system was completely rewired, and the kitchen was remodeled. Outside, the grounds were improved by initiating an extensive landscaping plan that included driveway and parking improvements, the addition of an entry fountain and rocky stream, and the rebuilding of fallen down retaining walls and stairways. Most importantly, the gardens were replanted and a new lawn was laid down behind the house. This has indeed beautified the outside and added to the presentation of the new entrance that is on the west side of the house that faces North Cheyenne Canyon.

John and Barbara were rewarded for their work when the Cheyenne Canon Inn received the highest accommodations rating from Triple A, a Four-Star bed and breakfast designation. This impressive achievement is indeed a worthy reminder that the former Sunnycrest was also a first class establishment.

Following a short change of ownership in 1998, the next level of hospitality and bed and breakfast excellence occurred in March 1999, with the arrival of SilverStar Inns. This current ownership group brings years of experience from the Western Slope of Colorado where they own and operate the San Sophia Inn in Telluride. The San Sophia is a luxury inn recognized as one of Colorado's most distinctive properties. It has been featured in several magazines, guidebooks, and on national television. SilverStar Inns is dedicated to providing the highest quality of service and accommodation experience to all guests who stay at either the San Sophia or the Cheyenne Canon Inn.

In conclusion, part of the charm and challenge that makes the Cheyenne Canon Inn a worthy project, is the chance to participate in its rich history and share this with all the others who pass through its doors. The story of Sunnycrest is complete for now, but it will continue to grow. Anyone who spends even one night in this special house located at the sunniest spot in Cheyenne Canyon will be able to say they are now part of the legacy started by Lillian and Grace. The end.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This latest version of the Sunnycrest history would not be possible without the assistance and direction of the following people and institutions.

I give many thanks to Sara Huffman Miller who wrote the first Sunnycrest history and granted me an interview. Her father, Dr. David Huffman, helped me contact his daughter. John and Barbara Starr who started the Cheyenne Canon Inn added more to Sara's history by sharing their extensive research on Sunnycrest. Mitsy Romenilli who has worked for all the owners of the Cheyenne Canon Inn and is the current manager for SilverStar Inns in Colorado Springs provided me with the memories of her interview with Grace Casey's niece and grand niece when they visited the inn in the spring of 1998. Unfortunately, these two ladies could not be located to comment on the stories written about their relatives Lillian and Grace. Ruby Olson and Nancy Kowalski from the Swan-Law Funeral Home were able to provide me with the birth year and date of death for Grace Casey Brink. This helped establish a true time line for the earlier history of Sunnycrest. The Pioneer Museum located in the old El Paso County Courthouse in downtown Colorado Springs is a wonderful place to find old photos showing North and South Cheyenne Canyons and the old trolley system that ended at the Stratton Park Meadows below Sunnycrest. Pioneer Museum Archival manager Lea Witherow and her assistant Kelly Murphy were very helpful in finding these photos and answering other questions. The other best research place I found is the main Penrose Library on Cascade Avenue. It offers an incredible genealogy section where I found Grace Casey Brink's obituary and more old photographs of the Cheyenne Canyon area. Local Cheyenne Canyon resident Raymond Forst provided me with several history books about Colorado Springs and Cripple Creek that were an important source for understanding what occurred in the past. I was able to find out about the Stratton Park Meadows Trolley Station by visiting with the ladies at the Macintosh School that was located in the former station. June McKenna who has worked in various historic Colorado Springs libraries and is now with Dain Raucher gave me lots of direction on who to contact and where to go to do my research. No acknowledgement would be complete without mentioning my friend John Tutt who lives in Telluride. He has extensive knowledge about the Broadmoor Hotel and the development of the area surrounding it. Keith Hampton, who also lives in Telluride and is the primary innkeeper and an owner of SilverStar Inns, is responsible for asking me to take on this project because he felt the story about Sunnycrest is exceptional. Finally, I want to thank my wife Andie for coming along on these research trips and assisting me with the information collecting.

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