

What Should we do with the South Platte Hotel?

West Jefferson Middle School 8th Grade Student Historic Preservation Project

by Dennis Dempsey with Frank Reetz

Located at the confluence of the North Fork of the South Platte and the South Platte River stands what is left of the South Platte Hotel. Originally constructed in 1887 by Charles Walbrecht and his wife Millie, the hotel is a rare example of a working-class resort hotel. In its day, the hotel offered 14 rooms to stagecoach passengers and train passengers on the Denver, South Park and Pacific Railroad narrow gauge line. It also operated in this small settlement as a post office. By 1900 the town, with a population of 40, included the hotel, railroad-related businesses and a general merchandise store. Five years later the Walbrechts expanded the hotel to include a saloon. The South Platte Hotel has a very rich and colorful history. According to legend, the original hotel was set on fire and burned to the ground in 1912. It was replaced with the structure that is still standing today. Over the years the hotel has fallen into neglect and disuse. The front porch has deteriorated, and it may not be safe to walk through the interior of the building. The fate of the South Platte Hotel is unknown.

Page 59: View overlooking the Colorado and Southern Railway Depot and tracks, South Platte, Colorado, undated

Denver Public Library, Western History Photographic Collection, X-13616

South Platte Hotel, circa 1910

Denver South Park & Pacific Historical Society

Why the South Platte Hotel? Why this site?

Frank Reetz, a teacher at West Jefferson Middle School in Aspen Park, Colorado, became involved with the area near the South Platte Hotel when he started looking for sites in the mountain school area in need of historic preservation. During the 2012-2013 school year, Reetz and his core team of students embarked on a project to restore the Billy Westall Monument located along the North Fork of the South Platte River. This project was successfully completed in 2014 and recognized at the Jefferson County Historical Commission's annual Hall of Fame Awards Ceremony with the Norman and Ethel Meyer Award for Historic Preservation.

The South Platte Hotel sits just down the road from the Billy Westall Monument. It became a point of interest for Reetz as a potential place for his next project. The hotel offered the opportunity to continue to involve students in the process of protecting historical sites that can so easily be forgotten in today's society where what is useful today, is obsolete tomorrow.

According to the teacher, the project's driving questions proposed to the students were:

What scientific, historical, cultural or technical issues compel you to pose questions, read and research widely and put forth probable solutions? And who will care?

Eighth-grade students are deep thinkers who are learning to express themselves. Given the right academic challenge, they can think critically, collaborate, research and communicate effectively. This project offered the opportunity to apply their reading and writing skills to a real-world problem. Students were asked to consider the fate of the South Platte Hotel. Through research and site visitation they constructed varying possibilities. They realized there is no right or wrong position. Their opinions are unique as well as insightful. Following are summaries of the 11 student position papers on the destiny of this historic icon, in their own words.



To Preserve or Not to Preserve

by Isabel Cloutier

The confluence of the North Fork and the South Platte holds a historic gem that many have no idea about. This precious jewel is the South Platte Hotel. A stunning landmark, it is full of rich history that few are aware of. Those who do know it, though, think it should be restored back to its former glory. But, their claim is one of little knowledge. The best option for the hotel's future is to spread the knowledge of the site and make the surrounding area a picnic spot for families.

Partial Renovation of a Historic Structure

by Cole Dunivan

The South Platte Hotel is a historic, worn down structure that has an importance to the community around it. Most people don't know about its values and how the building was a large contributor to the South Platte confluence. But the problem is, the hotel is being consumed by the natural elements. It will not remain stable unless it is refurbished. However, there isn't money just laying around to pay for it, because some people who don't

know the historic meaning don't want to waste their time.

The Importance of History

by Tom McInnes

The confluence hotel is an essential part of Colorado history and must stay maintained but not fully restored. The most important fact about this is that being at an actual location has a greater impact on the learner than simply reading about it, so keeping this location intact is crucial. Alternatively, but just as essential, completely restoring the location and repurposing it would have a negative effect on people interested in the history. A full restoration would remove the feeling of actual history and take away from the overall learning experience. A slightly weaker argument is that the local residents wouldn't appreciate their historic lands being altered by outsiders, but this point is still completely valid and relevant.

Why Should We Care?

by Ryan Moore

Although I grant that there are not very many people that the South Platte Hotel matters to, I still maintain that there are lots of "bits and

pieces" of value and an overall charming character held in such a historic building. Of most importance, this hotel has been standing in the same place for over 100 years, and so because of that, it has accumulated lots of interesting history throughout those years. Similarly important, the hotel also has an old and spooky sort of vibe to it, making it fun and creepy to walk past, knowing that that very hotel had held victims of a shooting, and even been burned down then rebuilt.

Destroy, New, or Help?

by Nico Ortiz

Hidden along the South Platte River there is a secret treasure, overflowing with history. This is the South Platte Hotel. From fires to shoot-ups, the hotel has a colorful past. Quietly aging in his little alcove surrounded by trees, new attention has been brought to the hotel. Differing opinions have arisen, some people want to completely destroy the building, some want to restore the building back into a fully functioning hotel and others support a partial renovation. A partial renovation is what should be done to the hotel.



The South Platte Hotel Doesn't Need to be Changed to Keep the History Alive

by Ryan Roccanova

The South Platte Hotel doesn't need to undergo reconstruction or renovation to keep its history important. The history of the building itself will never die. The only problem is, the majority of people are uneducated or unaware about the hotel and all it has to offer. A common misconception about the hotel would seem to be that the only way to bring people to the hotel, and the land surrounding it, would be to restore the hotel to its former glory, or possibly something else, such as a museum. This, however, is false. The biggest argument is that other things in the confluence land are already bringing people to the land around the hotel; these include fishing opportunities and surrounding homes and neighborhoods.

Building New, Keeping the Old: South Platte Hotel

by Marina Cadilli

The South Platte Hotel has been left to rot. This needs to be changed. The question is: what do we do with it? Some people think we should just leave it until it falls apart, and save the work. Others think we should tear it down and rebuild something in its place to fit modern standards, but the latter hasn't stopped to think about what will happen to the history and nostalgia of the building itself. I think

we need to do something to keep the hotel from falling down without destroying the structure and the history.

A Bad Change

by Grace Troxler

In a small town in the state of Colorado named Pine, there is a river with a lot of trees and a spot to hike. In that same place there is also an old and out-of-use hotel, called the South Platte Hotel. There has been a debate on the uses of the hotel. In recent discussions of the South Platte Hotel, a controversial issue has been whether to change it or not. Some argue that it should be razed, others argue that it shouldn't move an inch. The view of this paper is that we should use it for a better purpose.

The Confluence: Protect, Defend, Preserve

by Justin Stiles

This place of confluence is historical, spiritual and meaningful to this area. Any additions or changes to this place that we make we must be aware of these three reasons: history, meaningfulness and the ecosystem. We must protect this historic space from the forces of nature. We cannot let the destruction of this area, it is spiritual and special to the community.

South Platte Hotel

by Ella Payne

To be able to keep the South Platte Hotel (located in South Platte, CO) historic, we have to keep the ideas

subtle but make a difference. If someone doesn't take charge the building it is going to end up in a bunch of pieces. When people

just sit and see the historic building they don't notice that there is danger hazards that could make the building collapse if something major happens. If the building falls down who is going to be there to enjoy it? Sure, you could make a huge change to the South Platte Hotel but the history behind the building should stay, not go away.

Environment and the South Platte Hotel

by Parker Liebaert

Defenders of demolishing the hotel can't only think of their problems. Their assumption that destroying the hotel will not affect the environment is contradicted by the way the ecosystem coexists with the hotel. This means that destroying the hotel will not help the environment because the ecosystem works with the hotel to survive. The popularity of the hotel can bring people to help both the hotel and the river it's next to. Bats that live in or near the hotel keep bug populations down, so the South Platte area is more popular. People concerned for the hotel make the area around it more habitable for the animals around it. Some people think the ecosystem doesn't need the hotel, while other don't think of the environment of all. The South Platte Hotel is important in more ways than just history, and it benefits the ecosystem in the area.

The South Platte Hotel is located on land owned by Denver Water. Frank Reetz and his students had multiple discussions with representatives from Denver Water on the fate of the old hotel. Denver Water seemed open and interested in the students' essays and opinions. The hotel is part of the North Fork of the South Platte National Register Historic District. ☺

South Platte Colorado, undated

John Manley

