

# The History of Tuberculosis in Colorado



Nordach  
Sanatorium,  
Austin Bluffs  
Colorado.  
1909

(From Pike's  
Peak Library)



One of the most famous tuberculosis patients in Colorado was John Henry "Doc" Holliday, the famous gunslinger, gambler and occasional dentist. In 1882, Doc Holliday escaped murder charges for his involvement in a shootout at the O.K. Corral and headed towards Colorado. He stayed in the state not for his crime, but for the sake of his lungs. When he was 15 years old in 1866, his mother died of tuberculosis, and it is likely that he contracted the disease from her. It lay dormant for years, until he was around 21 years old and started to lose weight and developed a nagging cough. His Uncle Dr. John Holliday diagnosed him with pulmonary TB and gave him about 6 months to live. He was known to drink heavily to suppress the cough and use opium for the pain! It was said that Holliday, who was "one cough away from the cemetery", went to Glenwood Springs in 1887 to seek treatment for his tuberculosis. There he had hoped that the inhalation of the resort's "Sulphur vapors" might affect a cure for the respiratory illness. He settled into a room at the Hotel Glenwood Springs. Doc Holliday's final 57 days of his life were spent in bed, at times he was delirious for weeks on end. As he lay dying, it is reported he asked for a shot of whiskey, turned to an attendant and uttered his last words "This is funny." He closed his eyes and died on Nov. 8, 1887 at the age of 36.

# The "White Death"

Tuberculosis (TB) was the top killer of Americans in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Tuberculosis is also known as consumption, white death/plague, and phthisis. Tuberculosis is not a modern disease. Evidence of the infection in humans has been found in Neolithic remains from 9,000 years ago.

Evidence has also been found in Egyptian mummies dating back between 3000 and 2400 BC. By the 19th century, tuberculosis had killed one in seven of all people that ever lived, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control. There was no vaccine or antibiotic available to fight the disease.

Throughout much of the 1800s, consumptive patients sought "the cure" in



sanatoriums, where it was believed that rest and a healthy climate could change the course of the disease. It was not until 1882 when Robert Koch discovered that the disease was caused by a bacteria tubercule bacillum and was not genetic but rather highly contagious.

In the 1800s, there was a flood of TB patients arriving into Colorado.

Tuberculosis became an important role in the history of Colorado. At its peak, an

estimated one in three Colorado residents suffered from tuberculosis. An estimated one third of all Colorado deaths were from tuberculosis. The national average tuberculosis deaths was one in ten.

The physicians in the 19th and 20th century believed Colorado's high altitudes and abundant amount of sunshine, along with its fresh air could cure all kinds of ailments. Denver's first facility for tubercular patients was

built in 1860, just two years after the city of Denver was founded. Colorado Springs and Boulder also began creating treatment facilities. People were buying one way train-tickets to Colorado in hopes to cure their disease. With so many suffering from TB, there were sanitariums everywhere throughout the Rocky Mountains.

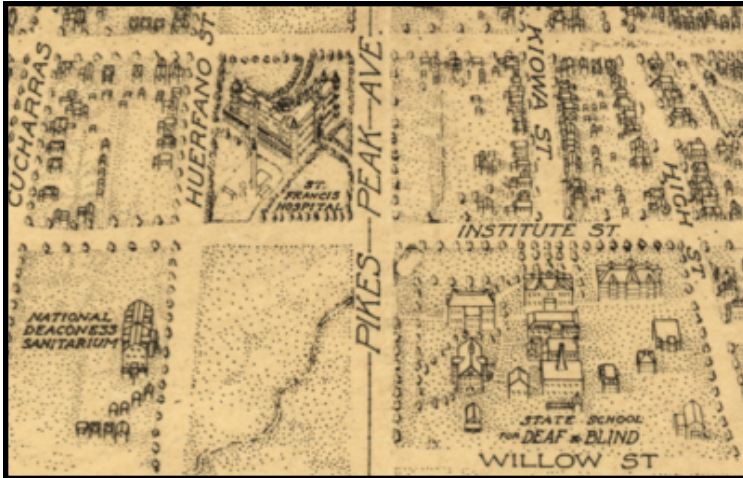
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Do you remember the tuberculosis epidemic when you were young?  
Did you know anyone that had tuberculosis?  
Do you think Doc Holliday spread the disease over his short lifetime?

# The Greatest Sanatoriums

Colorado had a large influx of tuberculosis patients moving here in hopes of a cure. Colorado became a TB mecca, often called the "World's Sanatorium" with the specialized hospitals across the state. Many patients succumbed to the disease but many improved and continued to stay in Colorado starting



businesses and contribute to communities. In 1871, Colorado Springs gained a widespread reputation as a health resort for invalids. Promotional pamphlets declared the region "the world's greatest sanatorium" and described the area's unique climate conditions and natural attractions. Many were resort-like spas where they could relax, rest and often die. In Colorado

Springs, there were houses located on the old North end district that had large sleeping porches for the consumptive boarders. Many large houses were turned into boarding houses for people with tuberculosis. Not everyone could afford the plush resorts, some stayed in a collection of tents and backyard cottages. This area became known as "lungers row".

Colorado Springs adopted a European tuberculosis treatment approach, including rest, open-air and "disciplined gluttony". Patients ate twice as much food as they would normally eat and would gain up to 50 pounds while in treatment. Quality of care depended upon how much you were able to pay.

The lower end of society might stay in open-air tents, some sanatoriums costs \$7 per week and the luxury accommodations could be up to were \$50 per week. Boulder's most prominent sanitarium allowed guests to relax with health spa-like diets, view intricate oil paintings and enjoy music from live orchestras. The health hotels



featured large porches on which wealthy guests could enjoy the sun, fresh air and the view of the Rocky Mountains. Hygiene House in Hygiene Colorado (community in Boulder county) offered it patients mineral water, thought to have curative properties. Guests ate rare plants and sat outside for 10 hours a day. Even during blizzards!

What do you think about the treatments the tuberculosis patients received ?

# Famous Sanitariums

1890 – **Glockner Tuberculosis Sanitarium** in Colorado Springs. Patients



*Glockner Sanatorium in 1902*

were charged \$1 per day. It had 200 beds. It has now been transformed into the Penrose Hospital. The hospital preserved one of its historic tuberculosis huts and the early 20th century furnishings used by the people who came to the Colorado Spring's area to cure their tuberculosis.

1903 – **Battle Creek Sanitarium** in Colorado Springs.

1874 – **Cascade Villas** founded by Dr. Thomas G. Horn. He became the president of the Colorado State Medical Society.

1892 – **Colorado Springs Sanitarium**. A mansion located in downtown Colorado Springs.

1906 – **Cragmor Sanatorium** in the Austin Bluffs area . Founded by the leading tuberculosis specialist Dr. Edwin S. Solly. It had 25 beds and treated patients with tuberculosis and related diseases. A 3.5 mile trail was built through the Austin Bluffs that was called



*Craigmor Sanatorium*

the "happy walk". Cragmor was a place where millionaires, musicians, artists, dancers and poets came to get well. It was known for its luxury, easy rules, parties and sexual affairs among the patients. The Cragmore Sanatorium complex became the University of Colorado Springs campus.

1912 – **Idlewold**. A facility that had 10 rooms with sleeping porches, and treated patients with tuberculosis. The house is now the Ronald McDonald House.

1895 – **Montcalm Sanitarium** in Manitou Springs. Built by Father Francolon and his two brothers, it had electricity and indoor plumbing. The first patient arrived in 1895. They offered good food, clean lodging to patients who were not severely ill. In 1907, the sanitarium burnt down due to an electrical fire.

1890 – **The National Deaconess Sanitarium.** The Eleanor home run by 30 women began caring for patients before the building was even built in 1888. The doors opened in 1890 with five tents. In 1900 it became the National Deaconess Sanitarium sponsored by the Methodist Church. It has evolved into the Memorial Hospital.

1926 – **National Methodist Sanatorium.** Built on 29 acres. In 1943, the City of Colorado Springs bought the complex and the Sanatorium became the Ent Air Force Base. The former site is now home to the United States Olympic Training Center.



1901–1903 – **Nordrach Ranch Sanitarium.** The Nordrach Ranch Sanitarium was Colorado's first open-air sanatorium in which patients stayed in tents on the ground of the facility.

*Nordrach Sanatorium*

1887 – **St. Francis Sanatorium or St. Francis Hospital.** This was Colorado Springs first hospital. It treated tuberculosis patients and other health issues. The first building was a small building, used as a clinic for the Colorado Midland Railway. After a train accident injured 60 people and killed several others, there was a need for a larger building which became the new St. Francis hospital. It cared for employees of the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway. It also provided medical services to the public. In 1929, another building was built as a sanatorium for TB patients. It provided private rooms with sun porches and lots of sunlight. A crematorium was located nearby for the dead bodies of people who died of tuberculosis. The hospital complex was renamed St. Francis Health Center and merged with Penros Hospital in 1989.

1892 – **Union Printers Home.** The initial patients were members of the union who had tuberculosis and black lung from breathing in carbon-based ink that was used in the printing process. The home raised pigs and chickens. On the grounds were vegetable gardens, 200 acres of wheat and a dairy farm. Patients resided in tents for open-air treatments.

What do you think life was like living in some of these sanitoriums?  
What would it be like living in an open-air sanatorium? Even during the winter months!?

1909 – **Woodman Sanatorium**. Located North of Colorado Springs, the facility treated tuberculosis patients from 1909 to 1947. The sanatorium had 80 patients in 1909, but at its peak, the open-air facility accommodated 180 people. It was open-air throughout all seasons and patients might find themselves in snow. Its members received treatment free of charge. From 1909 to 1947, the facility cared for 12,000 patients. The octagonal, green and white huts were just big enough for one person. When the hospital shut

down in 1947 due to low number of patients, the huts were sold and became tool sheds and toy houses.



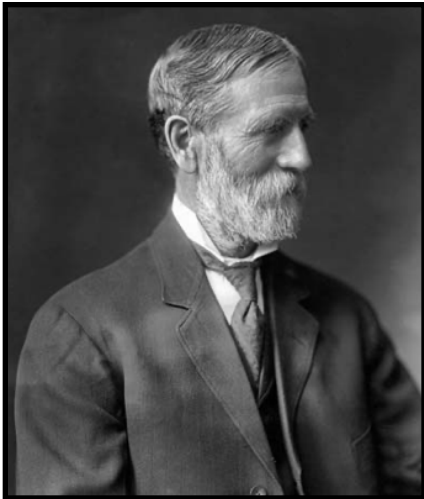
## The Cure

The tuberculosis epidemic came to an end in 1940s. Selman Waksman discovered a compound in 1943 that acted against tuberculosis, called streptomycin. The first human patient to receive the treatment was in 1949 and the patient was cured. It was noted that some patients who received streptomycin improved only to become ill again because the tubercle bacillus had developed resistance to the drug. It was not until the development of additional anti-tuberculosis drugs that truly effective therapy became a reality. A chemical related to aspirin, another chemical called isonicotinic acid hydrazide (INH) and the streptomycin compound that was released by fungus-like microbes (that inhibited other organisms from competing with it) were all discovered between 1943 and 1951. Using all three of the drugs together given to TB patients, the cure rates jumped to 80–90%. Treatment would last 18–24 months. New drugs were discovered decades later in 1990 that could cure TB within 6 months. Unfortunately the human non-compliance of taking what medication was prescribed resulted in rising levels of resistance to these medications. Not taking the complete dosages, the TB mutated making the drug resistant. New resistance drugs need to be discovered that are not resistant to TB.

The Colorado legislature in 1906 debated a law to require TB patients to wear bells around their necks!

"No other locality in the known world has a climate equal to that of Colorado Springs. Our air is pure and bracing, and is entirely free from all malarial influences. Persons suffering from chronic consumption are likely to live longer and more comfortable by residing in Colorado". The Colorado Health Resorts 1883

## Stanley Hotel



A well-known businessman who traveled to Colorado due to his tuberculosis was F.O. Stanley, creator of the Stanley Steamer automobile and builder and owner of the Stanley Hotel. He had traveled to Estes Park on orders from his doctor to cure his disease. As his condition dramatically improved, he built the famous Stanley hotel in 1909 and promoted it for a refuge for physical and mental benefits.

## Engaging Questions

1. Do you think your family would have allowed you to stay with them if you had tuberculosis?
2. What do you think it would have been like living with tuberculosis in the early 1900s?
3. What do you think physicians in the pre-1900s thought caused tuberculosis?
4. Tuberculosis is still found active in the world today. Why do you think that is the case when there is a cure?
5. Do you think Colorado would be the same if we didn't have the history and influx of tuberculosis patients?



Curious Dragonfly LLC  
www.curiousdragonfly.com  
Trina Terrell  
303.903.5319