

## Crown Hill Park Historical Background

When early settlers first came to Colorado they were often drawn by the lure of riches to be found in the towering mountains to the west. The California gold rush of 1849 brought tens of thousands of men, many of them previously farmers, to the west. Many prospected on their way through Colorado. Often their dreams of riches ended in dust, and the disappointed miners returned to the plains to resume their former way of life – farming.

A number of small farming communities grew up on the rolling highlands west of pioneer Denver and Auraria. The area offered rich soil that, with irrigation, yielded abundant crops of wheat and vegetables. As its name reveals, the town of Wheat Ridge was built on a highland area that was soon covered with wheat farms. To its north the Clear Creek valley was soon filled with orchards and became known as Fruitdale. Further north, beyond the valley, other farmers built Arvada.

Henry Lee was born in Iowa, Oct. 31, 1841, to English immigrants. He became one of the best known Denver and Colorado pioneers. Henry came to Denver in 1864 from Iowa, following his elder brother, William, who arrived in the Denver area in 1845. William Lee had acquired extensive farming property between Wheat Ridge and Golden, just south of Clear Creek. The road to William's farm later became known as Lee Street. For the first few years Henry Lee earned his living by peddling vegetables from William's farm to miners in the mining camps of Gilpin, Clear Creek and Park counties.

William Lee served as a member of the First Colorado Constitutional Convention in 1859, representing Jefferson County. He also founded the first grange in Colorado and was a prominent member of the Colorado Pioneer Society. William Lee died on January 21, 1911, at the age of 74.

Jennie Paul Lee was born in Iowa City, Iowa, on March 8, 1850. She married Henry Lee in 1873, and moved to Colorado in 1875, where they settled on Henry's farm. The Lee's had three children, two sons, Murray and Robert Paul, and a daughter, Jessie.

Always a public-spirited citizen, Henry Lee took a great deal of interest in politics. He represented Jefferson County in the House of Representatives Third Assembly and served two terms in the State Senate for the Fifth and Sixth Assemblies.

While a member of the Third General Assembly and chairman of its committee on public lands, Henry Lee introduced a bill providing for the sale to the City of Denver, at a nominal price and without competition, of two sections of school land for park purposes. One of these sections comprises what is now Denver's City Park. Lee was generally acknowledged as the father of the Denver park system, and served as Park Commissioner under both Mayors Johnson and Speer.

Over time Henry Lee acquired considerable land in Jefferson County, and at one time owned a whole section of what is now known as Edgewater and a large portion of Wheat Ridge. Crown Hill Cemetery is part of his old farm. Lee sold 180 acres of land to the

Crown Hill Cemetery Association in 1908 for \$47,000. In 1914 Henry Lee still owned 300 acres of the finest land in Jefferson County.

Henry Lee's involvement in irrigation and water-related problems led to the construction of Denver's first pumping station and the founding of the Agriculture Ditch Company. Henry served as secretary from the time the company was organized until his death. To support their extensive farming business, Henry and William Lee built the Lee and Brothers Lateral Irrigation Ditch, which ran along Middle Golden Road, now known as 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. William Lee also ran the Lee Sand and Gravel Company along Youngfield from 38<sup>th</sup> Avenue to North Golden Road (now known as 44 Avenue).

Henry Lee was a partner in the Pioneer Seed Company of Denver, and also owned Henry Lee's Seed and Farm Implements, selling seeds and farm equipment, and designing and selling farm and market wagons, road carts, spring wagons, surreys, and carriages. He had originally brought farm implements and seeds from Iowa to start his prosperous business.

In 1908 Crown Hill Associates also purchased land from the Union Pacific Railroad, which was adjacent to the property purchased from William and Henry Lee. With this last purchase of land, the Crown Hill Associates' total holdings included 290 acres. Located on the property was the "Old Morgan House." Henry Lee had purchased the Morgan (also recorded as "Margan") Jones homestead in 1900. The portion containing the house, barns and other outbuildings, which are no longer standing, were contained in the land sold to Crown Hill in 1908.

On March 11, 1914, Henry Lee was the victim of one of Denver's first auto-pedestrian accidents. Henry Lee died on March 24<sup>th</sup> from his injuries, and was buried at Crown Hill Cemetery.

Jennie Lee continued to help run their farm until their son, Murray, died in 1939. Jennie Paul Lee died in November of 1943 at the age of 93.

The two water bodies on the park property today were natural ponds. Waters stored in Crown Hill Lake originate in Clear Creek and are transported via the Crown Hill Agricultural Ditch to Crown Hill Lake. Most of the water in Kestrel Pond is seepage from Crown Hill Lake.

The farming communities of Wheat Ridge and Lakewood gradually grew. Local residents were becoming increasingly concerned about the loss of their country lands. When the citizens of Jefferson County created the Open Space Program in 1972, Crown Hill's neighbors began to urge the two cities to find a way to preserve one of the last large parcels of undeveloped land in what was then the most populous area of Jefferson County. In 1978 the Cities of Lakewood and Wheat Ridge joined the County in purchasing 168 acres next to Crown Hill Cemetery and including Crown Hill Lake, creating Crown Hill Open Space Park.