

1883 WATER WORKS INTERPRETIVE CENTER

“The filter at the water works pumping station was put to work on Wednesday sifting the saw logs, railroad ties, tree limbs, toads, wrigglers, and the thickest mud out of the river water before it goes into the pipes....”

- The Weekly Courier in April 1899

OVERVIEW

Historic preservation matters because it addresses a very fundamental need - community. It binds us to one another and to the past. It reminds us that we are not the first generation to face hardships. If our ancestors and predecessors could face great challenges and survive, and even thrive, we can too.

History is our collective memory, a source of wisdom and strength we can draw on when we need it. And we need it now more than ever, precisely because the challenges we face are so complicated and intractable. Perhaps the largest challenge facing the Western US, if not the globe, is water.

Water makes life possible and is essential for economies to function. But, freshwater resources are in jeopardy due to growing demand, pollution and climate change. These pressures create profound risks for businesses and communities. We can't possibly navigate a topic as large as this without some sense of perspective, and some help from the past.



The 1883 Fort Collins Water Works is a direct link to that past. By restoring the 23-acre site and transforming it into a comprehensive Water Interpretive Center we can connect people to their history and water heritage, and empower them to become more informed guardians of their water resources.

Restoring the property and developing a Water Interpretive Center will help ensure that visitors can learn about our most important resource: water.

- The Water Works, especially the original building, is a fine example of 19th century industrial architecture. The Gothic Revival-style pump house was made from sandstone from the Stout quarries and soft brick manufactured locally.
- Native Plants and Trees - At least 200 ground plants have been identified on the property, and 20% of them are native to the area.
- At the entrance to the property stands Larimer County's second-largest cottonwood tree. The tree is believed to have taken root about the time the original buildings were constructed and when the original Larimer County Canal No. 2 ran alongside where Overland Trail road now exists. The tree is more than 130 years old.

OVERVIEW

- Apple Orchard - In the “backyard” of the Superintendent’s House are two rows of vintage apple trees. The trees are labeled with the variety names, some of which are quite rare. The original trees are thought to have been planted in the 1930s.
- The Cherokee Branch of the Overland Trail passed through the Water Works property, as shown on old county road surveys. Several stage companies used this trail, the last of which was Wells Fargo. This road was used 1858 through 1869, and visitors can see old wagon ruts on the site.

Due to its remarkable site integrity, the 1883 Water Works continues to stand as a symbol of the initiative and maturity of early Fort Collins citizens. As the very first Fort Collins public works project, it provides a very tangible link to the past, and perhaps the present Fort Collins wouldn’t exist as it does without this industrial works.

PARTNERS

- City of Fort Collins
- Poudre Landmarks Foundation
- Colorado State Historical Fund



GOALS & OUTCOMES

Goal:

Ensure that our historic river heritage has relevance to 21st-century audiences and learners, and that current and future generations are motivated to share in its preservation, by building a museum that is a powerful and compelling cultural asset to the community.

Outcomes:

- Interpret the significance of water to Colorado’s past, present and future.
- Increase awareness, education and stewardship of the Poudre River.
- Positive impact on local tourism.
- Facilitate pride of place.
- Empower visitors to learn more about history, culture, and historic preservation – particularly related to water.
- Building a connection to history and water, and our ownership of our culture.

BUDGET: \$2,000,000

- \$5,000 – Improve and update existing Water Works web page
- \$10,000 – Produce one video exhibit
- \$50,000 – Construction of one full exhibit
- \$500,000 – Construction of new building space
- \$1,000,000 – Renovation of Water Works