

*Philip D. Armour*

111 Places  
in Denver  
That You Must  
Not Miss

*Photographs by Susie Inverso*



emons:

# Foreword

For my mother Christina. She crossed the ocean.

I've lived in the Southern Rockies since 1996. To create this book, I happily retraced my steps through Denver, allowing the city's gold to pull me this way and that. This glorious maw of streets was definitely designed for automobiles, but a generous system of bike paths snakes through parks and declares that Denver is worth slowing down for. This city is suffused by the high desert. No matter what urban, industrial, or wild place I find myself, I always feel a distinct quiet in the air, a piercing clarity to the light.

Hemmed by the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains, the city holds its place within and against the wilderness. The fertility of the South Platte River sprouted Denver exactly, right here. I've long felt the draw, and it's energizing. My family lives in the foothills about an hour west of Downtown. One recent winter, we watched from inside the house as a mountain lion killed a deer and ate it – guts first. Moose, elk, bears, and foxes are regular visitors, too. Denver is special like this.

Denver is the region's only major city between Canada and Mexico, the economic and artistic metropolis in a vast mashup of bioregions. Small, funky mountain towns and light snow lured me here originally, but love and friendships have kept me here. Reporting this book, I was blessed by many people's generosity and vulnerability, like Mickey Mussett of Ghost Rider Boots, who laid bare his personal journey of transformation. Charleszine "Terry" Nelson, a librarian at the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, touched me with her story of growing up in Five Points and her community's pride and resilience.

It's prototypically Western to make something out of nothing, and Denver is a living testament to this spirit. Denver self-selects for practical yet dreamy people – people who wear flip-flops and snow boots on the same day. I'm a better person for knowing this city.

Philip D. Armour



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## 20\_\_ Buffalo Bill's Grave

*Wild West Show ringmaster rests in peace, mostly*

William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody was America's first entertainment superstar. He promoted himself relentlessly and became "famous for being famous," setting the mold for modern celebrity. His *Wild West Show* was an entertainment spectacle on a scale no one had ever seen. The rollicking performances captured people's fantasies of the West, with dangerous heroes and sympathetic villains. Cody's cast of animals, vehicles, and equipment was so massive, the US Army actually studied his methods for efficient loading and unloading of the freight from train cars.

He toured the globe with *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show*, expertly selling the American myth to millions, including the Queen of England. The settling of the West was a violent clash of indigenous cultures and modern land lust, and Cody was Zelig-like in his associations. An alleged buffalo hunter, Pony Express rider, Army scout, and Indian fighter, Cody was present as Europeans plowed west to realize Manifest Destiny. His life spanned – and came to symbolize – an era of unprecedented change.

Cody went on to found the town of Cody, Wyoming, where the hotel he built and named after his daughter Irma operates to this day. When Buffalo Bill died in Denver in 1917, he lay embalmed for six months until a proper road could be constructed to his requested burial spot on Lookout Mountain. But Wyoming residents wanted him buried in the Cowboy State, and a rumor circulated that Cody's body had been stolen from the mortuary and replaced with a vagrant. Cody's grave here is ringed by black wrought iron and covered in tons of concrete to deter theft.

The adjacent Buffalo Bill Museum is packed with clothes and gear that belonged to the famous ringmaster. The peace pipe owned by Sitting Bull is particularly moving. The playbills and dime novels are full of hyperbole, on which Cody gladly capitalized.

**Address** 987 1/2 Lookout Mountain Road, Golden, CO 80401, +1 (720) 865-2160, [www.buffalobill.org](http://www.buffalobill.org) | **Getting there** By car, take I-70 west to Exit 256. Turn right at the top of the ramp, and then an immediate left. Turn right on Lookout Mountain Road. | **Hours** See website for seasonal hours | **Tip** The Mines Museum of Earth Science houses actual moon rocks, plus the Colorado minerals and fossils that define the state (1310 Maple Street, Golden, [www.mines.edu/museumofearthscience](http://www.mines.edu/museumofearthscience)).



## 43 Fairy Doors

*Gateways to another world*

It says something about a city when the mayor challenges city council members to compete on beautification projects and makes funds available for local artists to work their magic. This is what Mayor Michael Hancock did with the Imagine 2020 grant program. One result is *Fairy Doors of South Pearl Street*, Platte Park's whimsical set of tiny entrance façades to the homes of fairy folk.

Three dimensional, with little awnings, windows, and ornate entrances, the fairy doors inspire a kind of reverence. People leave tokens (pennies, flowers, shells, or “anything shiny”) to please these guardian spirits. There's a map online that shows where to locate the doors, and the local merchants encourage this frivolity. You can see a total of 17 fairy doors scattered throughout the South Pearl Street shopping district.

There's even a fairy door on the Denver City & County Building across Civic Center Park from the State Capitol (see ch. 65). Many are designed to look like the businesses they adorn, like the one at Duffeyroll Bakery Café. Others are more fantastical, and all are completely charming.

The belief in the *tompte*, a mercurial little gnome, is particularly Scandinavian. Old-school Swedish farmers still place bowls of porridge in their barns to keep the creatures happy and out of mischief. Usually invisible, these gnome-like beings are associated with specific places and regarded as a kind of ancestral protector spirit. Thanks to the many Scandinavians of the Upper Midwest, this folklore has taken root there. Fairy doors first showed up in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in the early 1990s before spreading west to Colorado.

If your South Pearl Street fairy hunt stirs an appetite, beeline for Park Burger (1890 Pearl Street) or Platt Park Brewing Co. (1875 Pearl Street) across the street. Both are excellent eateries and host adorable fairy doors, of course.



**Address** S Pearl Street, Denver, CO 80210, [www.spearlstfairydoors.weebly.com](http://www.spearlstfairydoors.weebly.com), [spearlfairies@gmail.com](mailto:spearlfairies@gmail.com) | **Getting there** Bus 12 to S Pearl Street & Louisiana Avenue | **Hours** Unrestricted | **Tip** Stella's Gourmet Coffee & Such slings the attitude and exceptional coffee from a lovely old brick home. There's a hidden fairy door there too (1476 S Pearl Street, [www.stellascoffe.com](http://www.stellascoffe.com)).

## 80 Riverside Cemetery

*Dead men do tell tales*

Founded in 1876, Riverside is Denver's oldest cemetery still in operation. There were nondescript "boot hills" prior, with pitiful grave markers for the anonymous, but the local elite wanted to be remembered with proper headstones. The notable dead here include early pioneers and civic luminaries, and because the West has always attracted immigrants, many graves here mark foreign-born Denverites. Chin Lin Sou (1837–1894) was a Chinese community leader who founded six companies. Park Hee Byung (1871–1907) was a Korean-born political organizer.

One of the more heartbreaking graves is that of Silas Soule (1839–1865). You may see flowers and mementos on the resting place for this principled hero in section 27 among Colorado's Civil War dead. Soule was an abolitionist and a "conductor" for the Underground Railroad in Kansas, helping people escaping enslavement to travel between safehouses to freedom. His political advocacy and prison breaks put his life in danger, so he moved to Colorado where he joined the Colorado First Regiment and helped repel a Confederate invasion at the Battle of Glorieta Pass (1862). Soule was promoted to Captain in the Colorado Cavalry for his cool under fire. He went on to become police marshal of Denver.

Soule tried to avert the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864, lobbying against the military expedition from Denver and ordering his troops not to fire on the peaceful encampment of Cheyenne and Arapaho. But John Chivington, the leader of this unprovoked attack (derisively known as the "Butcher of Sand Creek" until his death), was enraged by Soule's insubordination. Two gunmen tricked Soule into a Denver alley one year later and gunned him down. He was just 26 years old and had been walking home with his wife, whom he'd married three weeks earlier. Chivington was suspected to have ordered the assassination, but nothing was ever proved.



**Address** 5201 Brighton Boulevard, Denver, CO 80216, [www.friendsofriversidecemetery.org](http://www.friendsofriversidecemetery.org) |

**Getting there** Bus 48 to 48th Avenue & York Street; Light Rail to Brighton National Western Center Station (N Line) | **Hours** Daily 9am–5pm | **Tip** A plaque in Skyline Park marks the spot where Silas Soule was killed. It's a hard reminder of his heroic stand for justice and the ignorance that underpins hate (15th Street & Arapahoe Avenue).