

## Alderfer/Three Sisters Park History

Alderfer/Three Sisters Park is composed of multiple land acquisitions. The first transaction occurred in March 1977, when 185 acres (160 acres fee simple, 25 acres gift parcel) of the original Alderfer Ranch were purchased from the Alderfer Partnership. The next transaction occurred in December 1977 and January 1978, when 57.62 acres (54.66 acres fee simple and 2.96 acres gift parcel) were purchased from the Spencer Wyant family. In May 1986, 95.87 acres (91.84 acres fee simple and 4.03 acres gift parcel) of the remaining Alderfer Ranch were purchased from the Alderfer Partnership. In conjunction with the final sale, the Alderfer Partnership negotiated with the State Land Board to assign the 440 acres that the Alderfer's historically leased as part of the park. A recreational lease was finalized between Open Space and the State Land Board in June 1991. This lease was renewed in July 2001 for an additional two years and will be renewed on a "year to year" basis thereafter. In 2004 the State Land Board decided to put the property up for sale instead of leasing the recreational rights. The Patent (8349) for the property was received with all of the final signatures in January 2005, so we now own the 440 acres fee simple. An additional transaction took place in April 1989 when a 5.75 acre "gap" parcel was purchased, which was overlooked in the original acquisition. Evergreen Park and Recreation District lease the ranch house, barn, restroom and a five-acre parcel around these facilities. A transaction took place on January 9, 2002 when Open Space purchased the property known as the Blair Ranch Estate from a Trustee representing William Powell Blair deceased. The Blair Ranch property consists of approximately 323 acres and associated water rights. The property is contiguous with Alderfer/Three Sisters Park. Approximately 7.3 acres of the purchase was assigned to the adjacent property owner Mr. and Mrs. James Chiddix. Costs of the County portion of the acquisition were offset with contributions from the Jeffco Foundation and the Mountain Area Land Trust. See Figure 2.

Hank Alderfer, a son of E.J. and Arletta Alderfer, proposed that Open Space purchase part of Alderfer Ranch in 1974. The 1975 Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) Resolution recommending negotiations for acquisition of the Alderfer Ranch property mentioned the historic uses of the land as pasture for cattle and horses, the importance of the land to wildlife (especially as a migration route for the Mount Evans elk herd), and that the land "would meet the recreational needs of the residents of Jefferson County" (OSAC Res. No. 2-75). Open Space received the final go ahead to initiate the purchase of the Alderfer Ranch on February 17, 1977, when the Board of County Commissioners, passed Board Resolution Number CC77-34. This proposal stated that the Alderfer Ranch: (1) met all criteria stated in the Open Space Ballot Initiative, (2) was in compliance with the Jefferson County Interim Open Space Park Plan, (3) is highly desirable land, and (4) that the acquisition of the property would be in the best interest of the health, safety, welfare, and morals of the citizens of Jefferson County. In 1984, OSAC authorized negotiations for acquisition of the remainder of the Alderfer Ranch Property including the ranch house and outbuildings, and acreage south of Buffalo Park Road. The Resolution noted that it "would be suitable for a community park for the Evergreen Recreation District and could include athletic fields, trails, cultural and community center activities" (BCC Res. No. CC84-1151). Purchase of this land was completed in 1986.

Open Space planned to develop softball and soccer fields on the new acquisition and then lease the fields to Evergreen Metropolitan Recreation and Park District (Hart 1986). There were few

complaints about the prospect of athletic fields at Alderfer/Three Sisters Park until after the purchase was completed in May. A petition drive opposing the plan quickly garnered 279 signatures. Residents complained that athletic fields would be too expensive to build and maintain since blasting would be required to level the surface and a drainage system would have to be installed in the seasonally wet meadow. There were concerns about aesthetic issues, the loss of wildlife habitat, impacts on trail users, and increased traffic (see Open Space File 84-10). The Evergreen Recreation District voted in favor of the plan in 1986, but public opinion eventually prevailed and athletic fields were not developed.

Evergreen Recreation District, in cooperation with Jefferson County Open Space and the Jefferson County Historical Society, commissioned the development of a master plan for the property in 1988. Public input was solicited prior to developing the master plan. Three alternatives were presented for the park: 1) passive Open Space park, 2) teaching/research ranch, and 3) living historic park. The master plan advocated the second alternative that "the Alderfer Ranch should be managed as an interpretive Open Space Park" providing "typical passive open space and trail related experiences in combination with interpretive and educational programs." However, Evergreen Recreation District could not afford to pursue the preferred alternative. Jefferson County Open Space has retained control of Alderfer/Three Sisters Park. Open Space Park Naturalists and volunteers conduct interpretive programs at the park.

The Blair Ranch property was operated as a "gentleman's ranch" by Colonel William Powell Blair until his death in the 1980's. The land was placed in a trust as a life estate with his second wife Isabelle with the stipulation that the land could not be sold or developed during her lifetime. The trust broke upon her death in May of 2000 and the property was transferred to his children Victoria Powell Blair and Frank Howard Blair. The property was perceived as a magnificent acquisition since it would connect Alderfer/Three Sisters with Denver Mountain Elephant Park and Bear Creek. The Evergreen Parks and Recreation Board of Directors passed a Resolution on June 20, 2002 that requested and encouraged Jefferson County Open Space to acquire the property. The property was acquired for open space purposes, including the preservation of wildlife habitat and riparian areas and for passive recreation uses.

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The dominant features of Alderfer/Three Sisters Park are the rock outcrops known as "The Three Sisters" and "The Brother." These rock formations have been landmarks for Evergreen residents since the first pioneers settled in the area. James T. Hester homesteaded the Alderfer/Three Sisters Park area in 1873. The Hester house and outbuildings were located at the foot of the rocks (near the current location of the park's Homestead Loop Trail). The original Hester house burned down in 1894. That same year, George Dollison built the present house in the meadow. E.J. and Arleta Alderfer moved into the ranch house and remodeled it in 1946. The Alderfer's added 45 acres to the original 240 acre homestead and also leased additional lands in the area, including the 440 acres of State School Land that is now leased by Open Space. Hay was cut annually on the ranch except during the driest years. For many years, Angus cattle were the mainstay of the Alderfer Ranch. The family also had a silver fox farm, but after the popularity of fox furs declined, the remaining foxes were released. Pasturing of horses became the dominant land use in 1970. The Alderfer's also operated a sawmill on the ranch, but the ranch was not

commercially logged. Evidence of the sawmill operation (sawdust piles) can be seen near the Wild Iris Meadow Loop Trail.

The ranch property was used for recreation by neighbors and Evergreen residents, as well as the Alderfers. Picnicking, hiking, and camping occurred on the property. There were three miles of horse and hiking trails. There was a cross-country skiing course and the Alderfers operated a towrope for downhill skiing. A rock-climbing club used the property for practice. High school classes used the property for the study of ecology. With the family's permission, the Evergreen Naturalists Audubon Society put up a trail of bluebird nests in the Alderfer meadow in 1975. As is evident, Alderfer Ranch was providing valuable recreation opportunities to county residents prior to the Alderfer proposal that Open Space purchase the land.

The earliest land patent associated with the Blair property was issued on August 24, 1896 to Henry Venable. This land patent encompassed the southern 160 acres of the property. Halsey P. GABRIEL homesteaded the northern 160 acres of the property in 1903. The ranch became the property of Victoria Blair sometime in the 1920s. She lived in the main house that has a log house core. It is believed that this structure could be the original Venable homestead. This structure was converted into a caretaker's residence. Victoria's son, Colonel William Blair Jr., is most commonly associated with this property. He spent most of his life in the United States Army.

Colonel Blair resided for most of the year at his ranch in Sterling, Colorado, and used the Blair property as a summer retreat. Sometime in the 1940s Colonel Blair built the structure known as Victoria's Cabin. It is said that the structure was built for Colonel Blair's second wife Isabelle, but it was most likely constructed before they were married. Isabelle lived in this structure until the mid 1990s, when failing health forced her to move back to her husband's home in Sterling

Arleta Alderfer was raised in Denver and moved to the mountains with her husband in 1936. The fur business had sprung up on a commercial scale in Colorado about 1920, and by 1930 had become a fairly stable industry. The Alderfers first bought a property on Floyd Hill, near Beaver Brook. Immediately before and after World War II (WWII), everyone who wanted to live in the mountains bought 10 acres and raised silver foxes, and so did the Alderfers. Silver fox was a highly profitable undertaking – a mating pair of silver foxes cost \$3-4,000; a single first-quality pelt sold for \$1000. Typically silver fox pelts came from Scandinavia, which kept the prices high, but after WWII Russian fur pelts glutted the market and prices plummeted.