

## Pine Valley Ranch Park Historical Background

Gold seekers followed dreams of riches up Pine Valley on their way to Leadville, first on foot or mule, and later on the narrow gauge railroad. In the early 1860s ranchers began homesteading in the area, while other settlers quickly turned to cutting timber and building sawmills. The timber industry, although not as glamorous as discovering gold and silver, was a significant force in Colorado's frontier development. By 1870 the Pine Valley area had 11 sawmills and eagerly supplied Denver's growing demand for lumber and railroad ties.

A town was established in August 1866. The Denver, South Park & Pacific, a 3-foot narrow gauge line, first arrived in Pine Grove from Denver in 1878. That summer, both passenger and freight service began and continued for 59 years, after which the right-of-way reverted to ranches along the line. Pine Grove was the first fueling station west of Denver, and was the base of operations for several helper engines and their crews. Helper engines were attached to heavily laden trains to help push them up the steep mountains and over the passes. Upon reaching the pass, the helper engine was uncoupled and returned to its base to await the next train.

The 42-mile trip from Denver to Pine Grove took 2 ½ hours and cost each passenger \$1.50. After delivering all the picnickers and fishermen to local resorts like Pine Grove and Crystal Lake, the train veered off onto a temporary spur for an occasional stop at Pine Valley Ranch. This train stop was named "Hildebrand" after the original homesteader. When the Baehr family purchased the ranch in 1925, they named their stop "Baehrden," and the depot's large black and white sign hung above the tracks near the river.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century J.W. Hildebrand, Thomas Busher, and the Liming family homesteaded Pine Valley. In 1908, Charlie Eggert, owner of the Eggert Ice Company of Denver, purchased the property to be used for harvesting ice from the many nearby lakes, most of which he had built and owned. Eggert's ice operations in the Pine area continued well into the 1920s, and ice cutting was a major industry, employing many people in the Pine area.

William B. Baehr, president of Chicago's North Continent Utilities Company, a major electrical, natural gas and hydroelectric company, vacationed in Colorado in 1925. Baehr visited the Pine Valley area, fell in love with what he saw, and decided it was the ideal spot to build a summer home for his family. Baehr had visited Europe where he admired various Bavarian hunting lodges, and dreamed of a lodge of his own. Pine Valley was the perfect setting for his dream, and Baehr soon bought the Pine Valley property.

Along with a dream, William Baehr had influence and money. Baehr hired Jacques J. B. Benedict to make his dream a reality. Benedict was Colorado's first Beaux-Arts trained architect, and had travelled widely, including architectural schooling in Paris. Benedict had a thriving urban architectural practice, and had completed several private mountain lodge-like residences and several projects for the Denver Mountain Parks, including

Chief Hosa Lodge in 1920. Benedict continued as one of Denver's leading architects until 1940.

Baehr Lodge's quality of construction is the result of Benedict's attention to detail and rigid, direct control over contractors and workers. His closely supervised crew of 60 skilled workmen, working around the clock for 90 days, completed construction during the summer of 1927, at a cost of \$1.5 million.

Baehr Lodge is a 27-room lodge, complete with wrought iron fixtures (forged on site), arched ceilings, hand etched log paneling, railings and balconies. Two distinctive octagonal roof towers, tall stone chimneys, and multiple steeply pitched gables create Baehr's desired image of a Bavarian hunting lodge amid the Colorado Rockies.

Conrad Johnson began working for William Baehr on the 4-L Ranch, as it was named when Baehr purchased it, in the late 1920s, as a chauffeur, handyman, gardener, and maintenance man. Johnson became foreman in 1930, and launched a building improvement program which included construction of: concrete bridges; a new garage; the powerhouse including installation and maintenance of the Kohler gasoline-powered light plants; equipment sheds; a 10,000 gallon water tank; a water wheel to pump the water to the tank, an irrigation system; a gardener's house; and miles of new fences around the ranch.

William Baehr was passionately interested in astronomy, so in 1937 Johnson and his children built an observatory, and in 1939 a Japanese-style pagoda was built on an island in the river, where Mrs. Baehr enjoyed picnicking and sharing afternoon tea with friends.

Baehr and his wife, Mabel, had only two children, a son, William, and a daughter, Irene. Baehr's daughter, Irene Baehr Eklund, at age 93, is still living near Chicago. According to Baehr's great nephew, Herb Allen, who spent his eighth summer at the Baehr Den, William Baehr was a man who loved to be surrounded by his extended family and friends, and always brought some of them with him to spend their summer on his ranch.

Following William Baehr's death, Pine Valley Ranch was sold in 1956 to a private group of wealthy Denver families, among them Francis Van Derbur, Helen Bonfils, William Boyd, and Dr. James Rae Arneill, Jr. They used the property as a vacation spot and fishing retreat until 1975, when they sold Pine Valley Ranch to the Winegard Realty Corporation of Burlington, Iowa.

New cabins were built, a swimming pool, sauna and dining room were added, and the ranch operated as a conference center and family resort for about 11 years. Pine Valley Ranch was purchased by Jefferson County Open Space in February, 1986, for \$2.35 million. Development of the park was delayed for a number of years by the proposed construction of the Two Forks Dam. About \$1.5 million was spent to construct amenities prior to opening Pine Valley Ranch Park in July 1994. On June 10, 1998, Baehr Lodge/

Baehr Den of the Rockies was listed in the State Register of Historic Properties in recognition of its contributions to the heritage of the State of Colorado.