

District Identification

Historic Name: Five Points

Current Name: Welton Street Cultural/Historic District

Proposed District Name: Five Points Historic Cultural District

Historic Use: Originally residential; transitioned into a business district just prior to the turn of the century.

Current Use: Commercial and Residential

District Boundaries: intersection of the alley between California and Welton at 24th Street, northeast along alley to 30th Street; southeast along 30th Street to alley between Welton and Glenarm; southwest along alley between Welton and Glenarm to 26th Avenue; west on 26th Avenue to Washington; south on Washington to property line of 2500 Washington Street; around property at 2500 Washington St. to 25th Avenue; west on 25th Avenue across Washington and 26th Streets to south property line of 2563 Glenarm Place; along south property line of 2563 Glenarm Place to alley between Glenarm and Welton; southwest along alley to 24th Street; west on 24th Street to intersection at alley between California and Welton.

Zone District: B-8, B-4, & B-3; one PUD

Historical Data Summary

Period of Significance: Prior to and including 1964

This was the historical period of African American business and cultural development within the Five Points neighborhood along the Welton Street Corridor.

Designation Criteria

The district meets one criterion in the following categories:

History(c)- *Have direct and substantial association with a person or group of persons who had influence of society.*

Geography (a)- *Have a prominent location or be an established, familiar, and orienting visual feature of the contemporary city*

Statement of Significance

Historical Importance:

Following the Civil War, many freed slaves migrated to the west looking for work and opportunity. The African American population in 1870 numbered only 237. During the 1870s, the African American population of Denver was relatively small and scattered throughout the City.

The arrival of the railroad in 1870 and Colorado statehood six years later brought increased economic activity and population to Denver, the state capitol. Between 1880 and 1890, Denver's African American population nearly tripled. By 1890, Denver's population had reached 106,713, with the city's black population numbering 3,254 or 4% of Denver's total population. By 1900 the black population in Denver had grown to nearly 4,000. Due to segregation, a majority of this population lived north of downtown (lower downtown), particularly along Larimer and Blake Streets, and further east in what was later known as the Five Points Neighborhood. Many early social, educational and religious institutions for African Americans were established in or near these areas.

First established as a residential street, Welton Street began to develop as a commercial corridor with the establishment of Anglo-owned businesses in the late 1880s and 1890s, including Deep Rock Artesian Water and Bottling Company, founded in 1898 at the corner of 27th and Welton; and the Macklin Baking Company, founded before the turn of the century at 29th and Welton (now home of the Five Points Media Center). Many of these white-owned businesses were managed by African Americans and served the surrounding African American community. Other retail service businesses followed as the neighborhoods flourished.

In the early 1900s, many of the more prosperous members of the black community began moving eastward from downtown toward the Five Points intersection, centered on the intersection of Welton Street, Washington Street, 27th Street, and East 26th Avenue, and on Welton Street from 22nd to 29th streets. As the population of the Five Points Neighborhood grew in the late 19th century, public services also expanded, including Fire Station No. 3 at 2563 Glenarm Place which in 1893 became the first African American run fire company in Denver. By 1910, the black population of Denver had reached 5,426, with the majority of this population residing in the subdivisions immediately surrounding the Five Points intersection.

The area's population boom coupled with black exclusion from most public businesses, recreational facilities and entertainment venues led to growth of African-American owned businesses and an increased need to provide services and entertainment for the Five Points community. Thus, the 1920s began the development of the "Points" as the heart of the city's African American commerce, later dubbed "Harlem of the West." As in other parts of the city, the development of small business districts providing for the needs of residents in the immediate

surrounding area. In the decades following World War I, Anglo and African American businesses established themselves in existing late 19th century commercial brick buildings in Five Points.

After the First World War, the African American population in Five Points increased with an influx of African-Americans from the south, the movement of Anglo-Americans to Capitol Hill, and policies and practices which reinforced racial segregation and Jim Crow practices in the city. By 1929, Denver's African American population was around 7,000. Approximately 5,500 of the city's African Americans were in the Five Points Neighborhood, roughly bounded by 32nd Street and East 31st Avenue on the north, High Street on the east, E. 20th Avenue on the south, and 20th and Larimer streets on the west. A few housing developments were built to accommodate this population growth, such as the 1924 Alta Cousins Terrace built by African American developer and businessman Charles Cousins, Sr.

A number of small businesses provided important social, cultural, and recreation activities for the community. Ben Hooper's Ex-Servicemen's Club at 2623 – 2627 Welton Street was described as "the hottest jazz spot in the West" with musicians gathering there until the wee hours of the morning exchanging musical ideas. The Atlas Drug Store opened in 1911 in an 1889 brick corner commercial building at 2701 E. Welton Street, becoming a fixture in the neighborhood until 1963. Many African Americans remember the business fondly as the only Anglo-owned drug store in the city where they could sit and receive fountain service. A block away at 2601 E. Welton Street/605 26th Street was Radio Pharmacy, also housed in a late 19th century brick corner commercial building. The 1912 Baxter Hotel, 2650 Welton, located at the Five Points intersection came into black ownership in c. 1929, when H.W. Ross, a realtor and former Pullman porter and janitor, purchased the property. The renamed Rossonian Hotel was the hub of the Five Points night scene, with many well-known black entertainers, such as Duke Ellington and Count Basie, performing and finding accommodation there.

Local institutions in Five Points also expanded in the decades following World War I, including a YMCA, a public library branch, a day nursery. The city commissioned a new Spanish bungalow style firehouse for Fire Company No. 3 (Denver Landmark #235), completed in 1931.

Display advertisements for the 1938-39 periods reveal the number and variety of small retail and service outlets owned by and serving the Denver African American community at the time. Most of the businesses that placed advertisements were located on Welton Street, with a few on Downing Street, and the remainder scattered on other nearby streets. Many of the smaller businesses along Welton Street operated out of front yard storefronts grafted onto existing residences. These businesses included restaurants, tailors, real estate agencies, saloons, doctors, dentists, undertakers and the like. Restaurants and cafes appeared to be the most numerous advertisers, including the Harlem Bar-B-Q Inn, the Red Front Restaurant, the Blue Front, Mammy's Shack, Yuye Café, and the New Orleans Creole Kitchen.

Local African American businessmen were considered role models for neighborhood children, with their enterprises symbolizing success and stability.

The African American population of Denver nearly doubled during the decade of the 1940s, reaching 15,059 by 1950. The city's black population doubled again during the 1950s, with 30,241 blacks recorded in the 1960 U.S. census. Pride in the African-American community resulted in celebrations such as Juneteenth and Shriners' Parades along the Welton Street corridor. As the Five Points neighborhood continued to grow following World War II, the area became the cultural mecca for jazz music in Denver. By the 1950s, African American and Anglo citizens alike came to the jazz clubs along Welton Street, including the Rossonian and Rice's Tap Room and Oven. Big name bands would play after hour shows in the clubs along Welton Street, inspiring the locals to keep the jazz scene alive when big name bands weren't performing at larger venues downtown. The Simpson Hotel, located on the second floor of 2801 Welton Street, provided five-star accommodations for those enjoying jazz entertainment in the Five Points neighborhood.

The tremendous growth in African American population coupled with continued exclusion of Blacks outside the prescribed Five Points area placed a significant strain on the area. Pressure for desegregation in city housing practices met with limited success in the decade following the end of World War II, but eventually did expand the area where blacks could live east to York Street. The 1959 Colorado Fair Housing Law created additional momentum, leading black residents to move into the newer, more stylish Park Hill neighborhood across Colorado Boulevard for the first time.

Federal legislation in the 1960s created a watershed era for black residents in Denver. Two keynote pieces of legislation, the National Civil Rights of 1964 and the National Fair Housing Act of 1968, were critical in affording African Americans new employment and housing opportunities in Denver. With African American residents now moving to other parts of the city, the once essential black commercial center of Five Points and Welton Street declined.

In recent years, the area has begun to turn around, stimulated partially by the revitalization of the adjacent Curtis Park neighborhood, but also by expanding public and private investment in housing developments and new businesses in the area. The relatively modest commercial buildings of Welton Street may not architecturally compete with the high brow architecture of downtown Denver, but the Five Points commercial area conveys the city's multi-layered story of African American discrimination, resilience and optimism.

Prominent African Americans of Five Points:

Clarence F. Holmes, Jr. Clarence F. Holmes, Jr. known as the "father of integration in Colorado." He practiced dentistry starting in 1920 for fifty-two years at 2602 Welton Street. Holmes was a Denver native born in 1892. His

parents moved to Denver in 1890 from Washington D.C., where his father had been a waiter in the House of Representatives dining room. Holmes graduated from Manual High School and received a bachelor's and dental surgeon degrees from Howard University. In 1915, he joined the first college chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

Charles Lilburn Cousins. Charles Liburn Cousins was a railroad worker who moved to 2448 Lafayette in the Whittier Neighborhood from Globeville in 1917. Cousins worked as a Pullman porter for thirty-three years, raised a large family, and accumulated extensive property holdings in Whittier and Five Points. In spite of only completing six years of formal education, Cousins became one of the wealthiest black residents of the state. His business philosophy was to save ten percent of every dollar he made.

Cousins began his real estate acquisitions by buying an old building in need of repair and improving it on his own during days off from his railroad job. Cousins walked from his home in Globeville to his building site. When the building was renovated, Cousins rented it at moderate rates. With the proceeds from his rental unit, he acquired more property, always remodeling his acquisitions himself. Cousins studied the work of carpenters, bricklayers, and others in the construction industry in order to obtain the necessary skills to repair his buildings. Cousins taught his son and other young men in the neighborhood who worked on his building projects construction and repair skills. Cousins was an acknowledged leader of the African American community in Denver until his death in 1962. The Cousins family continues to own property he developed on Welton Street.

Ben Hooper. Known as the "Mayor of Five Points," Ben Hooper operated a business at 2626 Welton during the 1920s. Hooper reported that after World War I it seemed that blacks were prohibited from facilities all over town. He acquired property on 2623 – 2627 Welton Street with the assistance of Mayor Benjamin Stapleton and started the Ex-Servicemen's Club. The establishment included a hotel, ballroom, pool hall, and recreation center. The club became a focus of social life in Five Points. During the Depression, Hooper gave away lamb, rabbit, and pigs feet stew to the poor and held Christmas parties for poor children.

Oglesvie L. Lawson. Oglesvie L. "Sonny" Lawson operated a drug store at 2601 Welton in the Five Points business district for fifty years. Lawson was born in Denver. After graduating, he returned to Denver, where he initially worked for Western Chemical Corporation and then worked as a clerk in the county assessor's office. In 1924, Lawson established a drug store, Maxwell and Lawson, in partnership with Hulett A. Maxwell. In 1932, the firm was renamed the Radio Pharmacy, operating under that name until 1963. Lawson was one of the civic leaders of Five Points, serving on the board of directors of the YMCA and the library commission. Lawson was also known as a political leader for helping

young African American men, including George Brown, Elvin Caldwell, and James Flanagan establish political careers. The city park at 23rd and Welton Street is named in his honor.

Elvin Caldwell. Elvin Caldwell, Sr., a Denver native who graduated from East High School and the University of Colorado, participated in protest marches for civil liberty and equality from an early age. He became a successful accountant, and served three terms in the Colorado Legislature from 1950-1955. Caldwell was the first African-American elected to the Denver City Council in 1955, serving a total of 28 years (seven terms). Widely respected, he was elected City Council president by his peers five times. While serving on the Denver City Council, Caldwell advocated for an end to institutionalized discrimination that marginalized African-Americans in civil service positions and was a potent force for social justice, helping to establish both the Eastside Neighborhood Health Center and the Five Points Community Center while on the Denver City Council. Caldwell was also one of the founders of the Equity Savings and Loan Association, the only all-black financial institution in Colorado. In 1980, Caldwell vacated his City Council seat to serve in Mayor William McNichol's cabinet as Manager of Safety, the first African American in Denver to hold such a post.

Otha Rice. Otha Rice was a native of Texas, born in 1915, who migrated to Denver at a young age. Rice graduated from Manual High School and attended Chicago South Side Jr. College and Prairie View State College in Texas. Rice worked for the Union Pacific Railroad, the U.S. Post Office and was a business owner on Welton Street. Rice is responsible for bringing the Juneteenth Celebration, the holiday celebrating the announcement of the abolition of slavery in Texas, to Denver in the 1950s, and hosting the event until 1966 when the Five Points Business Association took over.

Geographical Importance:

The name "Five Points" came into use in 1881 to describe the intersection of Welton Street, Washington Street, and E. 26th Avenue. The term was popularized by the Stout Street Herdic Coach Line, who coined the name "Five Points" to identify the five-pointed intersection at the route's terminus. Its negative association with slum areas of other cities, such as New York City, caused some initial displeasure among local residents. However, Five Points soon became a popular name used by many businesses and the surrounding residential neighborhood.

During the era of institutionalized segregation in Denver from the early 1900s through the early 1960s, African Americans lived, shopped and recreated in the Five Points neighborhood. This area was roughly bounded by 32nd Street and East 31st Avenue on the north, High Street on the east, E. 20th Avenue on the south, and 20th and Larimer streets on the west. Five Points and the Welton Street corridor

between 22nd and 29th Streets became the focal point of business and recreational activity for African Americans in Denver until the early to mid 1960s.

As the historic center of African American activity and life in Denver, Five Points and Welton Street attracted notable businesses that were owned by and/or served African Americans. This included hair salons, barbers, restaurants, bars, billiards halls, drug stores, etc. Five Points and Welton Street were also the location for many local events, such as parades and festivals. The most distinctive building of the Welton Street business district, the Rossonian Hotel, anchors the Five Points intersection.

Contributing Buildings

The Rossonian Hotel (2640 Welton Street, c. 1911-1912). This three story building located at the heart of the Five Points is perhaps the most visible symbol of the neighborhood. Originally built as the Baxter Hotel it came under black ownership and was renamed the Rossonian for owner H.W. Ross, in about 1929. Ross was originally listed in city directories as a Pullman porter and janitor after coming to Denver from Ohio. By the early 1920s, Ross was shown as a realtor with the Metropolitan Investment Company, which he founded. Ross was also active in the all black White Elephants baseball team. Quentin Harrington who operated the Rossonian in the 1920s, recalls saving rooms in the hotel for visiting entertainers, such as Paul Robeson, Duke Ellington, the Harlem Globetrotters, and Count Basie, who were denied accommodations in downtown hotels.

Atlas Drug Store (Bean Foundation) (2701 Welton Street, c. 1889) Opened in 1911, Atlas Drugs operated for over fifty years in this building. During the early decades of segregation in Denver, it was the only white-owned drugstore in which African- Americans were welcome. The drug store was located in an 1889 brick commercial building, and was a fixture in the neighborhood until 1963.

Radio Pharmacy-Wise Harris Building (605-609 26th Street/2601 E. Welton Street, c. 1889). Founded by African-American Oglesvie L. "Sonny" Lawson and his partner Hulett A. Maxwell as Maxwell and Lawson Drug in 1924, and renamed Radio Pharmacy in 1932. This drug store was located in the heart of the Five Points neighborhood and remained in operation until 1963. The pharmacy was housed in a late 19th century brick corner commercial building, featuring a chamfered corner entrance with decorative awnings and a large neon sign.

Alta Cousins Terrace (521-539 25th Street, 1924-1925). African American developer and businessman Charles L. Cousins, Sr., built this apartment building at the corner of 25th and Welton Streets in 1924-1925 in honor of his wife and as a legacy for his family. This project was unusual for its time, creating well-built high-quality affordable housing for African Americans in the Five Points

neighborhood. The stately Classical Revival style eight unit apartment building features red brick construction, four shared raised entry porches, and three triangular pedimented bays facing onto 25th Street. The building was rehabilitated in 2011.

Hose Company #3 (2563 Glenarm Place) Built in 1888, this fire station was originally staffed by an all-white company. In 1993, a black fire company under the command of a white captain was installed, the first and only all black fire company in Denver's history. The shift to an all-black fire company resulted largely from population shifts in the Five Points area, and black citizens' lobbying efforts for an all black fire company there. Decommissioned as a fire station in 1931 when the new fire station was constructed nearby, the original station was repurposed in the 1940s and 1950s first as a Community Vocational Center and Soldier's Recreation Center, and then as a Recreation Center. Assisted by federal Works Project Administration funding, the City constructed an addition and completed other alterations to the building in 1943 in order to accommodate the building's new uses.

Fire Station #3 (2500 Washington Street, c. 1931) This Spanish Bungalow style firehouse, designed C. Francis Pillsbury, was placed into service on April 30, 1931. From its dedication to desegregation in 1958, the department was an all-black facility. In April 1943, in celebration of the station's fifteenth anniversary, the station received new fire truck that necessitated the reorganization of the company as Hose No. 3. Elvin Caldwell stated "if you wanted to be a fireman, were black, and there wasn't an opening at Station No. 3, you just had to wait until a vacancy occurred." Responding to the American civil rights movement, the Denver Fire Department, including fire station #3, was desegregated in 1958. Designated a Denver Landmark in 1994, Denver Landmark #235 (designation includes historical and architectural criteria)

Douglas Undertaking Building (2745 Welton Street, c.1890s/façade 1915) Originally constructed prior to 1892 as a residence, the building's current 1915 façade was designed by architect Merrill H. Hoyt in the Neo-Classical style for the Douglass Undertaking Company. Rumored to be founded by L.H. Douglass, son of abolitionist Frederick Douglass, the company relocated here in 1916 when a number of African-American business began to establish themselves in Five Points. The Douglass Undertaking Company occupied the building until ca. 1944, and was one of three undertaking establishments on Welton Street serving the African-American community. During the 1940s and 1950s, the building housed a series of service related uses. Beginning in 1957 and for several decades to follow, the building was occupied by a billiard parlor. Designated Denver Landmark in 1993, Denver Landmark #206 (designation includes historical and architectural criteria).

Metropolitan Investment Company -Equity Savings and Loan-Cousins Building (2559-2563 Welton Street, c. 1925). Originally home to a series of retail store fronts; the building quickly became associated with numerous real estate investment companies, beginning in 1935. Prudential Savings Building and Loan Association and later Metropolitan Real Estate Investment Company, founded by H.W. Ross, were located here from 1935 to the mid 1940s. In 1957, in response to African Americans being unable to obtain home loans Elvin Caldwell founded Colorado's only all black financial institution, Equity Savings and Loan Company at this location. Equity Savings and Loan Company would remain in business until 1965. Historic photographs of the building demonstrate alterations to the storefront of the structure.

This two story red brick building, located at the corner of 26th Street and Welton, reflects popular Commercial architectural elements of the early twentieth-century. The structure features blocky masonry construction, a corner-entry, large storefront windows and openings on the ground floor, punched window openings on the second floor, a flat roof concealed with a parapet, and minimal ornamentation limited to the building storefront, decorative cornice and stepped parapet. The cornice features simplified modillions and dentils. These include removal of a recessed storefront entry on the Welton Street (southeast) façade of the building, removal of the transoms, original storefront windows and doors along the entire storefront, and installation of a new storefront on the 26th Street façade which original featured punched window openings and three secondary entry doors with transoms above. The new storefront is a historicized storefront with decorative pillars provided divisions of the storefront window bays. Additionally, the upper story windows have been modified from one-over-one windows to two-over-two windows; the historic stone sills have been retained. This historic neon corner "Equity and Savings" sign has been removed and replaced with a wall mounted sign reading "Cousins Building" on both the Welton Street and 26th Street façade. Gooseneck lighting has been added to illuminate the entire ground floor of the building. Fascia signs for "Wells Fargo" are located on the storefront sign band. Today the building is owned by the Cousins Family and has a branch bank on the lower floor and offices above. The building has been restored and reinforces the character defining features of the district.

Rice's Tap Room and Oven-Simpson Hotel-KC Lounge (2801-2807 Welton Street, c.1895/ façade c.1940s). 2801 Welton Street contributes to the African American history of the district, historically housing a social club, restaurants and hotels serving the black community. During the 1920s the structure was home to Smith Lewis Billards. By the 1940s, the African-American Yuye Café was located at 2801 Welton Street. In 1951, Otha Rice opened Rice's Tap Room and Oven on the ground floor and Simpson Hotel on the second floor. Rice's Tap Room and Oven was a popular jazz establishment and home to Denver's Juneteenth Celebration from the 1950s to 1966. The Simpson Hotel on the second floor of the building provided the African-America community a

convenient lodging space in, as Otha described it, close to “their jobs and places of entertainment.” Rice founded the Simpson Hotel to provide first-class accommodations, which he found lacking in the Five Points neighborhood, to the African-American community. Although he was not a proponent of segregation, Rice understood that the African-American community needs a place to call their own in the neighborhood. In the mid 1960s, Rice sold Rice’s Tap Room and Oven and the Simpson Hotel and the restaurant space became known as KC Lounge. The Simpson Hotel remained on the second floor. The structure remained an important cultural institution for the African American community up until the 1970s.

This two story commercial building located at the corner of Welton Street and 28th Ave. is representational of large-scale corner commercial development along the corridor, in the Five Points neighborhood. Historically, this building featured a chamfered corner entrance, punched storefront windows and punched window openings on the second floor. Building permits for this structure indicate that the building was stuccoed in the late 1940s. A flat roof is concealed with a decorative cornice with ornate modillions and dentils. Currently, the windows in the upper floor are casement windows, although building permits do not indicate when this change occurred, historic photographs of the structures from the 1950s show a similar configuration. Additionally, the corner entry has been enclosed and stuccoed over sometime after the late 1970s.

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Contributing Building Photographs

Rossonian Hotel, 2640 Welton Street



Rossonian Hotel, image date unknown. Courtesy of the Black American West Museum **PLACE HOLDER UNTIL PHOTO REQUEST ARRIVES**



Rossonian Hotel, c. 2013.

Atlas Drug, 2701 Welton Street



Atlas Drug, image date unknown. Courtesy of the Black American West Museum
PLACE HOLDER UNTIL PHOTO REQUEST ARRIVES



Atlas Drug, c. 2013.

Radio Pharmacy, 2601 Welton Street



Radio Pharmacy, c. 1945-1955.
Courtesy of Denver Public Library,
Western History Department,
Clarence F. Holmes Collection



Radio Pharmacy, c. 1945-1955.
Courtesy of Denver Public Library,
Western History Department,
Clarence Holmes Collection



Radio Pharamcy, c. 2013.

Atlas Cousin Terrace, 521-529 25th Ave



Atlas Cousin Terrace, c. 2013.

Hose Company #3, 2563 Glenarm Place

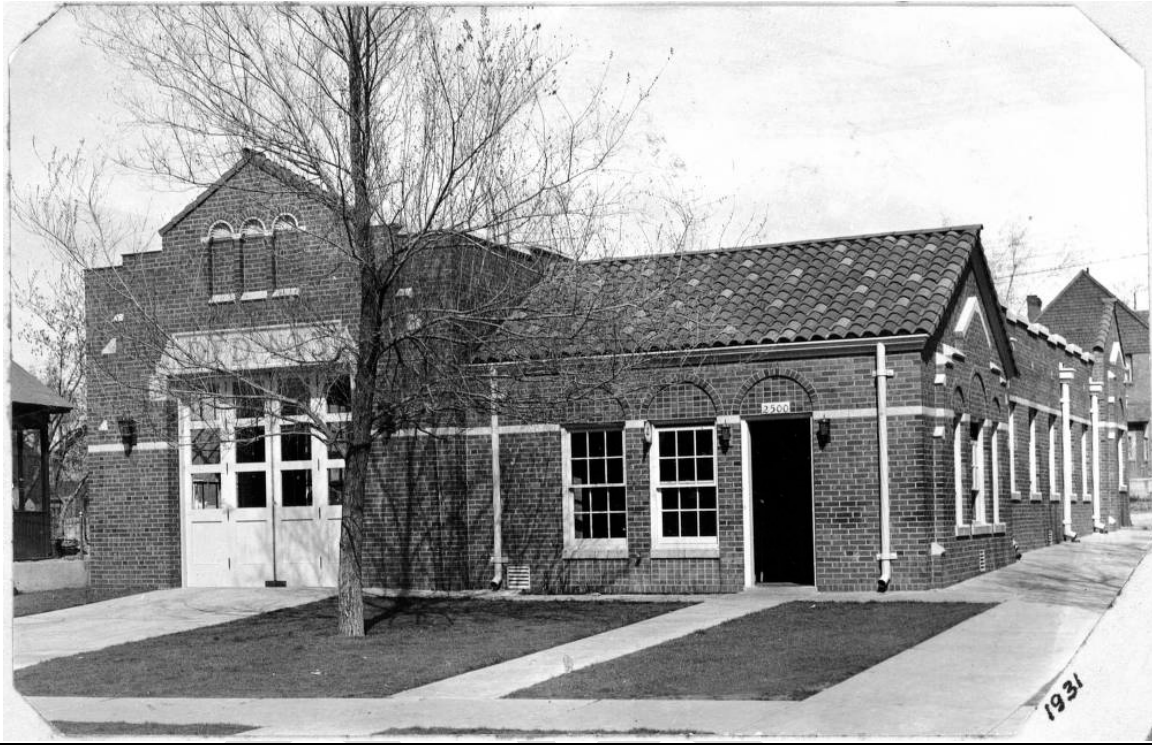


Hose Company #3, c. 1890.
Courtesy of The Office of
Archaeology and Historic
Preservation, History Colorado.



Hose Company #3, c. 2014 **Google Image PLACE HOLDER until our photograph can be taken**

Fire Station #3, 2500 Washington Street



Fire Station #3, c. 1931. Courtesy of Denver Public Library, Western History Department, C Photo Album 111. Denver Fire Department



Fire Station #3, c. 2013

Douglass Undertaking Company, 2745 Welton Street



Douglass Undertaking Company, 1981.
Courtesy of Denver Public Library,
Western History Department, Tom
Noel Photograph Collection, notebook-
Welton-Wynkoop Street



Douglass Undertaking Company, c. 2013.

**Metropolitan Investment Company - Equity Savings and Loan-Cousins Building,
2559-2563 Welton Street**



Equity Savings and Loan Association, c. 1950-1960. Courtesy of Denver Public Library, Western History Department, Burnis McCloud Collection



2559-2563 Welton Street, c. 1952. Courtesy of Denver Public Library, Western History Department, Burnis McCloud Collection



Current Images of Equity Savings and Loan, c. 2013-2014

Rice's Tap Room and Oven-Simpson Hotel-KC Lounge (2801-2807 Welton Street,



Rice's Tap Room and Oven, 1953. Courtesy of Denver Public Library, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, Otha Rice Collection. **PLACE HOLDER UNTIL PHOTO REQUEST ARRIVES**



KC Lounge, c. 1978. Courtesy of Denver Public Library, Western History Department, Tom Noel Photograph Collection, notebook-Welton-Wynkoop Street.



2801 Welton Street, c. 2014.

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