

The Warhorse Inn: Proud Parker Landmark

By: The Town of Parker Historic Preservation Commission

One of Parker's most colorful landmarks is what has been known since 1983 as the Warhorse Inn, a rustic western dining establishment owned and operated by Stevan Strain. Today's guests are reminded of Parker's past and present by a large statue of a horse perched above the main entrance and by the worn wood floors, suggesting decades of rancher boot abuse. During its long existence on the town's Mainstreet, the building site has served in many different capacities: feed store, auction house, electronics and Western wear store, blacksmith's shop, creamery, auto repair shop, automobile dealership, gas station, personal home, and finally, a restaurant. The building still stands after three major fires.



Originally donated by George W. Parker, the land on which the original building stood was used to erect a creamery so that local dairymen would have a distribution point and separation station for their daily supplies of non-pasteurized milk. The Littleton Creamery of Denver gave impetus to the local economy and became a symbol of a trade that would last for well over a hundred years in Douglas County. It daily transported an entire box car of dairy products to Denver. Because of the creamery, farmers were able to sustain a regular, dependable income when otherwise distribution of their product would have been problematic. The Littleton Creamery began operation in 1897 and furnished a market for local farmers and customers until 1912. Eventually the buildings were purchased by Royal Woodbury, and the overseer's house was remodeled into a home.

In 1908, Will Duray purchased Rich Hawkey's blacksmith shop and converted it into the Parker Creamery. The Parker Creamery, like the Littleton Creamery, was a distribution center for dairy products, but Duray eventually purchased a separator and pasteurizer, allowing his business to succeed on a grander scale. The Parker Creamery was a busy place in its time when milk demanded immediate distribution. Milk was kept overnight in cool water tanks in the milk houses and then conveyed into town to the creamery. On any given morning, local dairymen brought their product to be processed. Wagons lined up on the ramp to the creamery dock to deposit their loads of full milk cans from the previous night and early morning milkings. Farmers were paid by the creamery for their milk and cream. It was then made into butter or cheese or shipped as it was by train and later by truck, to Denver.

By 1914, Royal Woodbury purchased the Littleton Creamery Buildings, except for the creamery itself, and the land it was on. He later extended his ownership to include the creamery and its land. In 1916, local bankers, E.B. Hood and Addison J. Senter, sold Fords at the location. Ernest Dekoven finished the construction of the garage and turned it over to the owners, Woodbury and the Davis brothers, Walter and Marvin, who successfully operated the auto-repair shop and retail automobile outlet. By 1917, Woodbury and Davis had purchased a tank wagon to transport gasoline from Denver to meet the needs of local car owners. A unique pump system was installed, making the establishment one of the first gas stations in the area. Their thriving business was cut short by an extensive fire that started in the

workshop of the Parker Motor Company in 1923. Since no one was in the shop at the time, the origin of the fire remained unknown.

Unbelievably, six years later the establishment was burned again, this time to the ground. By then the garage was owned by Art Crater and under lease to Simon Flierl. The explosion of a gasoline engine caused that fire which seriously injured Flierl, who sustained severe burns on his hands and face. The building was a total loss. Six cars, three tractors, and one big truck were destroyed. Due to the diligence of local firefighters, other town businesses were not affected. Flierl continued to operate the garage until 1944, when he retired due to wartime labor shortages that made it difficult for him to find trained mechanics.

After the fire in 1929, the building was rebuilt by the Charles O'Brien Construction Company, using the old brick and plans similar to the original. The building changed hands numerous times until 1944, when it was bought and turned into a feed store. It remained a feed store until the late 1960's and then was converted into a tack shop. The tack shop remained open till 1981. By then, the structure had been made into a restaurant. Then in 1988, as it housed the Warhorse Inn, the building experienced another fire. When the structure was rebuilt, the original windows were exposed and restored.

Strain, the present owner, chose the Warhorse Inn name to symbolize the old West, which is still a theme of Parker's ranching and horse communities. The Warhorse statue above the entrance displays authentic Native American Indian markings. The circle around the horse's eye suggests keenness of sight in battle while the hand marks are proof of ownership and the rings around the rear leg identify the number of battles the horse has experienced. On one flank is a small bugle denoting a cavalry man killed in battle.

Like a ghost of times past, this proud structure stands today as a reminder of Parker's volatile past and its present distinctive equine culture and rancher-empowered grit, stamina and resilience.