

western end of the Grand Valley. While there, he explored the area, and decided the land about twelve miles west would make an excellent location for a new agricultural town. He bought eighty acres of that land, had a town platted on it, then bought more than a thousand acres around it, and began selling lots for building and farming in May 1884. The five- and ten-acre farm tracts were tended by the town company for their first year and came pre-planted with some 300 guaranteed fruit trees of about thirty varieties, about 350 vine fruits, like grapes, and 1000 strawberries. Potatoes and vegetables were also planted.

In this way, Fruita became the epicenter of the industry that was to dominate Mesa County for the next several decades.

In the early years of the twentieth century, before California's dominance of the industry, fruit and produce from Mesa County traveled by train throughout the nation, with apples from Fruita being shipped at least as far as France. In 1909 and 1910, net annual income per acre in Fruita was

the equal to or better than that of any farmland on Earth. In 1911, the value of Mesa County's fruit crop exceeded one million dollars. But right as the industry's success was reaching its zenith, about 1910, the codling moth began to eat away at it. Literally.

The infestation of the codling moth, whose larvae leave only about two thirds of each apple edible by humans, became the worst the USDA had ever seen. By 1921, to stop the pests, all of the apple trees in Mesa County had been pulled up by their roots. Peaches aren't affected by codling moth, and the peach industry was actually expanded in Palisade, but Fruita's apple orchards were never to return. Potatoes, which had been planted since Pabor first opened Fruita to farming, sugar beets, which had been planted there since around the turn of the century, tomatoes, and onions next became Fruita's staple agricultural products, while cattle ranching, long a part of Fruita life, and later sheep ranching, became even more dominant.

Fruita's farmers, orchardists, and ranchers needed supplies, banking, churches, schools, and the other amenities town life had to offer, and the many businesses located on the eighty-acre townsite in the years since the town's founding endeavored fully to fulfill those needs. It is to a few of the buildings built by those who ran those businesses that this walking tour brochure will guide you. Many descendants of Fruita's original pioneers still live in the area, and we are proud to share with you this small glimpse into our ancestral past.

— Steve Hight

FRUITA HISTORY WALKING TOUR



Circa 1895, the Orpheus Band, Fruita's first, directed by H.C. Wagner, posed on the bandstand in what would later become Circle Park.

The early days of Fruita, Colorado

William E. Pabor, the founder of Fruita, was a regularly-published national poet, newspaper editor, and postmaster before he came to Colorado in 1870 to be the secretary of the Union Colony (later Greeley). The job suited him, and he wrote the first official history of Greeley, continued writing poetry, and began his additional career as a land speculator there. He was hired by General William Palmer to be the secretary of the new Fountain Colony, and in the promotional materials he wrote, renamed it Colorado Springs. Thereafter, he and General Robert Cameron bought the vacated Camp Collins from the U.S. Army and established Fort Collins. For the next decade he continued writing and editing several newspapers and agricultural magazines, promoting Colorado and its agricultural promise, while becoming an expert on irrigation and fruit growing. He wrote two books on the subjects: *Fruit Culture in Colorado* and *Colorado as an Agricultural State*.

He came to Grand Junction in 1883 to reorganize the stalled Grand River Ditch project that was to irrigate the

17. 126 S. Park Square. One of the area's earliest settlers, Steve Nicholls, arrived in what would soon be Fruita with his father and younger brother, John and James Nicholls, in 1883. Steve posed with his young son astride a horse in front of one of his businesses, the Nicholls Livery Stable, also known as the White Horse Barn, in this 1913 photo.



1. Circle Park was originally square. Wagon traffic on Park Square soon rounded the park's corners, and concrete curbing made the park officially round by 1910. A bandstand stood at the park's center for decades.

2. 199 E. Aspen. Built around 1900 of red brick, in 1912 this mercantile building was extensively remodeled in yellow brick to be the new home of the First National Bank of Fruita, which was in business there until 1937.

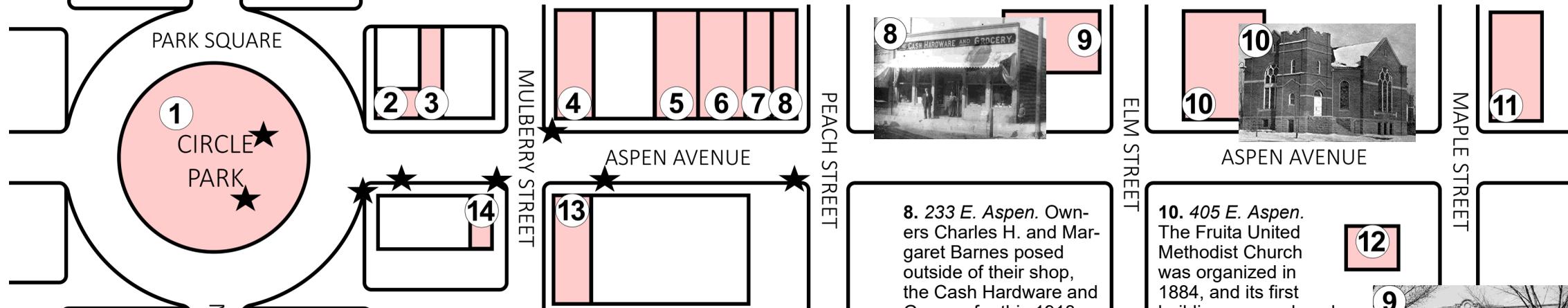
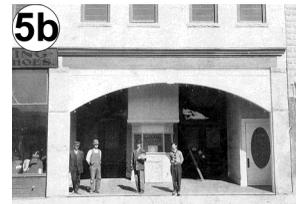
3. 127 E. Aspen. The Fruita Mercantile had three shops in Fruita when this photo was taken of the dry goods branch in 1913. This branch sold clothing, stoves, canned goods, flour, dishes, and other bulk and dry goods.

4. 201 E. Aspen. The Beach Block was built of yellow brick in 1910 by the Hesperia Masonic Lodge, which still owns the building. At the time of this 1913 photo, Oscar J. Bolinger operated Bolinger Hardware & Supply Co.

5. 217 E. Aspen & 219 E. Aspen. The Majestic Building was built of yellow brick in 1910 to house the Majestic Theater in its eastern half (5b) and a retail shop in its west (5a). Loeffler's Clothing, operated by Morris Loeffler, and which sold men's "furnishings," occupied the west side when the 1913 photo on the left was taken. Pearl Roach took the photo on the right of the Majestic Theater in 1911. Under other names, the theater operated there for more than fifty years.

6. 225 E. Aspen. This 1913 photo (Minnie Hiatt took all of the 1913 photos in this brochure) depicts the farm implements branch of the Fruita Mercantile, which sold hay, wire, tractors, fencing, feed, tools, and other farming needs.

7. 229 E. Aspen. The Union Trading Company operated several general stores in the Grand Valley when this photo of Store No. 6 was taken in 1913 as part of project to photograph all of Fruita's homes and businesses.

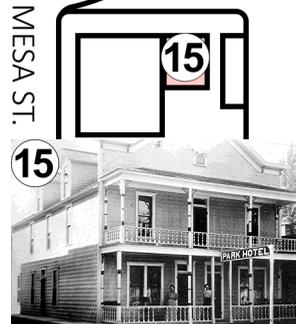


★ = Location of a history plaque.

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16. 168 S. Park Square. The First Bank of Fruita opened in 1904 and remained in business until 1927. This molded concrete block building with its impressive sculpted marble arch topped with the word "BANK" imposingly carved in it, seen in this 1913 photo, remains very much unchanged despite having housed dozens of businesses in the decades since.



15. 150 S. Park Square. The Park Hotel was opened around 1900 by Mae Pollock, who ran it until 1915. The hotel itself stayed open until the 21st century.



14. 136 E. Aspen. Built in 1900 for the Farmers and Merchants Bank, this yellow brick building retains most of its original appearance, including the iconic carved sandstone "BANK" sign over the original door.



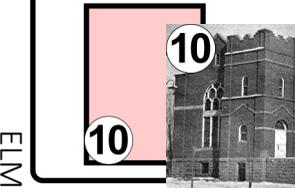
13. 202 E. Aspen. Albert B. Timmerman, his family, and staff stand in front of A.B. Timmerman, Furniture and Undertaking, circa 1910. This building is the only one from that era still standing on this block.



8. 233 E. Aspen. Owners Charles H. and Margaret Barnes posed outside of their shop, the Cash Hardware and Grocery for this 1913 photograph.



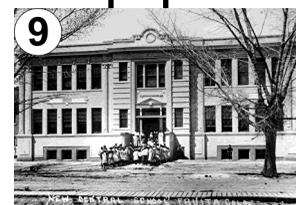
12. 432 E. Aspen. WPA employees built this stone structure in 1938 to house the Fruita museum, incorporating interesting rocks, minerals, and fossils in the walls.



10. 405 E. Aspen. The Fruita United Methodist Church was organized in 1884, and its first building was replaced in 1908 by this one.



11. 503 E. Aspen. Sacred Heart Catholic Church was built of sandstone by Grand Junction's Italian immigrant stonemason Nunzio Grasso in 1922.



9. Built to augment the existing grade school in 1912, the yellow brick New Central School at Elm and Aspen couldn't replace the old school entirely until additional wings were added by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935. Today it is Fruita's Civic Center.