

# Coming to Colorado for the health of it

By Laura Lee Carter



CARNEGIE BRANCH LIBRARY FOR LOCAL HISTORY, BOULDER HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTION

*Two tuberculosis patients relax with the view of the Flatirons and Green Mountain with a Boulder Sanitarium nurse and a cadet, possibly from Boulder Prep School, in the late 1920s.*

When Robert Frost (HonDoc Hum'39) gave readings in Macky Auditorium during the 1930s, he wasn't just visiting campus as part of a national poetry tour. The revered poet was in Boulder because of tuberculosis — a disease that afflicted his daughter and attracted many intellectuals to Colorado for treatment during the first half of the 20th century.

TB was the leading cause of death in America in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Doctors on the East Coast told their patients to move close to nature at higher elevations with drier climates. In response, sanitariums with screened

porches and outdoor tent cities sprung up in Boulder, Colorado Springs and Denver to accommodate thousands of severely ill Americans who came for a cure — and then stayed.

As part-time Denver resident and circus founder P.T. Barnum observed, "People come here to die and they can't do it."

## Getting healthy in Boulder

The Seventh Day Adventists worked to keep folks from dying in Boulder by establishing a sanitarium in 1894. Starting out as a small dwelling on University Hill, the main building was completed two years later at 4th Street and Mapleton Avenue.

Originally it served patients with "diseases of the digestive system, the nervous system, the eye and ear, the nose, throat and lungs," but by the 1920s the Boulder Sanitarium began to emphasize its changing image as a "non-tubercular" institution with officials promoting it as a "health institution."

The purpose of the "San," as locals called it, was to educate as well as cure, providing clients with vegetarian diet training, lots of rest, hydrotherapy and weekly lectures by physicians. Because it had its own dairy farm, food factory and bakery, it was popular among those unafflicted who wanted the healthy Rocky Mountain lifestyle. Today the

building is a branch of Boulder Community Hospital.

## CU benefits from visitors

Meanwhile, the University of Colorado, founded in 1876, profited greatly from this westward, health-seeking exodus. A number of outstanding intellectuals and scholars ended up at the Boulder campus simply because they or their family members suffered from tuberculosis.

The disease brought Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Frost to the university and Boulder during the 1920s through the 1940s. His frequent visits from his home in Vermont allowed him to spend time

with his daughter Marjorie, a TB patient in Boulder. They also enabled him to create a relationship with the campus. In 1931 he headed the University of Colorado Writers' Conference.

During Frost's visits, crowds filled the recently completed Macky Auditorium to hear him recite his poems, which he punctuated with informal talks. In a Boulder *Camera* article on one Frost talk, he said of the process of poetry, "A poem begins with a lump in the throat, a homesickness or lovesickness. A complete poem is one where an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words."

Sadly, Marjorie, one of his six children, died in 1934 at the age of 29, following the birth of her first child. While Frost continued to visit Boulder until 1947, the memory of one of North America's finest poets lives on at CU.

In 1997 a statue of Frost, who died in 1963, was placed in front of Old Main in honor of the late Bruce Ekstrand, a former CU administrator and psychology professor who loved Frost's poems. Many students, faculty and visitors relax or read beside the life-sized statue.

Along with Frost, tuberculosis brought eminent scholars to campus. Cockerell Hall on the Boulder campus was named for former biology professor Theodore Dru Allison Cockerell. He was an English naturalist who holds a place in history as the top bee expert of the 20th century.

Cockerell traveled to Westcliffe in 1887 seeking relief from a mild case of tuberculosis. He returned to England

in 1890 before moving to Kingston, Jamaica, to pursue his career as a museum curator. When his tuberculosis returned, he moved to Las Cruces, N.M., to serve as a professor of entomology and zoology. A few years later, he became the curator of a museum at Colorado College in Colorado Springs. In 1904 he joined the faculty at CU-Boulder with the whopping salary of \$200 a year. Promotion to zoology professor followed in 1906.

As the greatest bee specialist of his time, Cockerell cataloged more than 900 species in Colorado alone. By the 1930s he had documented the names and descriptions of 5,480 new species and subspecies. He retired from CU in 1936. William Weber, curator emeritus of CU's herbarium, published *The American Cockerell: A Naturalist's Life, 1866-1946* (University Press of Colorado) to memorialize the great contributor to the sciences.

James J. Waring (MD'13) was the first full-time professor of medicine at CU's School of Medicine, which was then on the Boulder campus. He also came to Colorado to recuperate from tuberculosis, interrupting his medical studies at Johns Hopkins University. When he recovered, he continued his medical education at CU, graduating in 1913.

Waring stayed at the university helping establish the Colorado Foundation for Research in Tuberculosis. He eventually served as head of the Department of Medicine from 1933 to 1948. At CU's Health Sciences Center in Denver, the Waring Room houses the Waring Collection on the history of medicine. His life was chronicled in *A Medical Gentleman*:



*Patients and nurses enjoy the Boulder climate at the Sanitarium in about 1910.*

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*James J. Waring, M.D. (Colorado Historical Society) by Patricia Paton.*

## The city TB built

While Boulder benefited from TB patients, Colorado Springs is truly the city that tuberculosis built. From the city's founding, the treatment of TB became its main draw and industry. The city's first sanitarium opened in 1890 and the industry peaked in the 1920s with at least 15 large and many smaller institutions, which basically amounted to tent cities on the outskirts of town. Thousands worked in these sanitariums, whose wealthy residents often brought critical investment dollars to Colorado.

Cragmoor Sanitarium, established in 1905 on a ridge north of town, catered to the wealthy and was sometimes compared to a cruise ship, with opulent parties and its own literary magazine. Originally composed of three pavilions and several small cottages, buildings were added in 1914.

In 1964 Cragmoor was the state's last sanitarium to close. It was renovated, renamed Main Hall and given to the new CU-Colorado Springs campus. Professor emeritus Richard Blade remembers the day when Main Hall first opened. "We actually had to push beds out of rooms to start classes." In 1998 Main Hall was

***In 1895 visitors took their horse and buggy to view construction progress on the Sanitarium near what is now 4th and Mapleton.***

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***An unidentified man views the Sanitarium from a ridge to the west as it was nearing completion in about 1896. Note the tents, which housed the construction crews.***

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honored by listings in both the State and National Registries of Historic Places.

The story of the tuberculosis migration to Colorado at the turn of the last century is a fascinating case of individual misfortunes creating an intellectual and business influx, which greatly enriched the state and university system. Those who took the alternative path to healing and ended up in Colorado left a strong legacy.

As Frost famously penned, "Somewhere ages and ages hence, two roads diverged in a wood and I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." 🐾

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