

The Two Stories of Brainard Lake

By John Wallack



BRAINARD LAKE FROM A NOVEMBER BRAINARD CABIN WORK PARTY. JOHN WALLACK.

Sitting around the fire at the Brainard Cabin celebrating Wooden Ski Day, the talk turned to the history of the cabin and Brainard Lake area. When was the land designated National Forest? Who owned the old chimneys that haunt the junction of the CMC South and Little Raven trails? Who was Brainard?

After some research, I would have to say that the Brainard Lake area has an interesting history indeed. As Paul Alford, the South Zone Archaeologist of the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests points out in his paper “Historical Context of Brainard Lake and the Civilian Conservation Corps,” the area has been influenced by both mining activity and public lands development. This place of stunning natural beauty is, in fact, a man-made lake and was only transferred to the National Forest in 1949 as part of a land swap with the Utica Mining, Milling, and

Reservoir Company. But I am getting way ahead of myself. The stories of both mining development and recreational use go back much earlier.

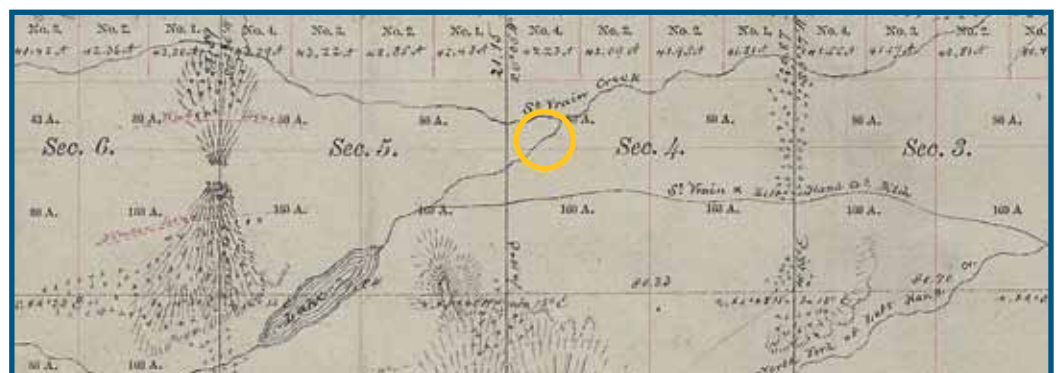
Colonel Wesley Brainerd (Brainard) and Mining Development

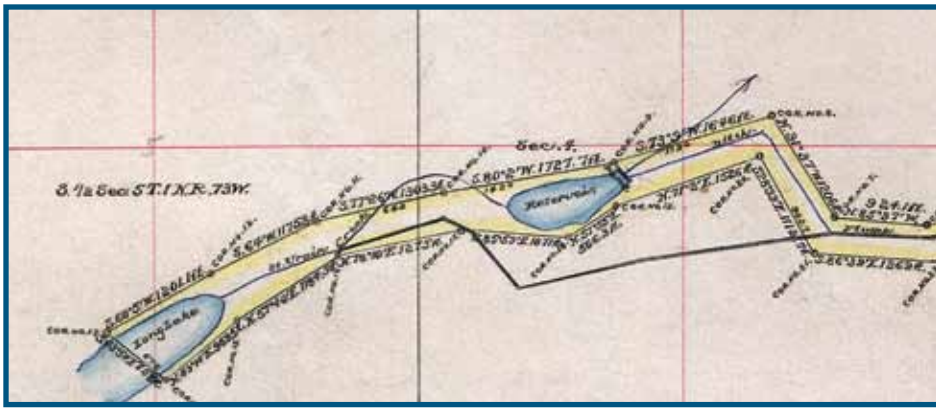
As you are skiing up the CMC South Trail from the Red Rock Trailhead to the Brainard Cabin, you may notice that for several long stretches the route follows a series of old ditches. The ditches are signs of the mining activity that pre-date the Roosevelt National Forest. The online history of Ward describes the two mining booms. The first rush started in 1860, when Calvin Ward discovered gold in Left Hand Canyon. The

mining camp that formed took his name. Placer mining gave way to stamp mills to process ore. The second mining boom began in the 1870s, as the extent of the Columbia Lode was realized. This vein was 8 feet wide, 1,000 feet long, and as much as 500 feet deep. By 1900, more than 50 mines operated in the Ward Mining District. The following year a fire devastated Ward and started its decline.

One of the companies formed in 1876 to mine in Left Hand Canyon during the second boom was the Chicago and Colorado Mining and Milling Company. It was financed by Lyman Gage and the president and manager of the company was the man for whom Brainard Lake is named. This

1875 SURVEY MAP WITH NO BRAINARD OR MITCHELL LAKES. CIRCLE IS FUTURE LOCATION OF THE LAKES. PLAT_175259_1. COURTESY OF BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, EASTERN STATES OFFICE, WWW.GLORECORDS.BLM.GOV.





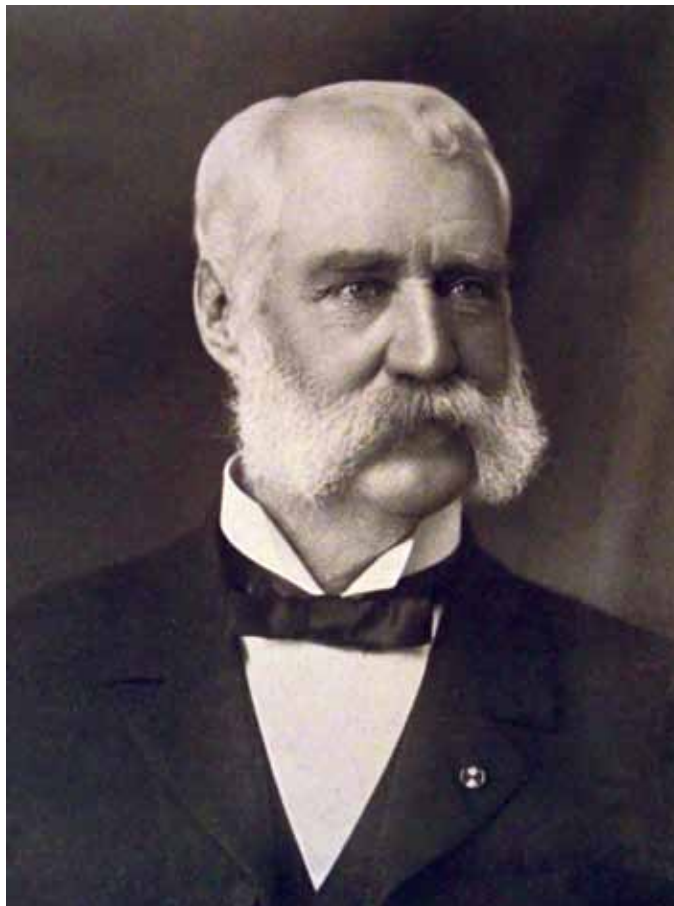
1895 ST. VRAIN PLACER CLAIM FILED BY JOHN REID, ET AL. RESERVOIR BECOMES BRAINARD LAKE. THERE WAS EVENTUALLY A LAND SWAP FOR THIS PROPERTY IN 1949 BETWEEN NFS AND THE UTICA MINING, MILLING, AND RESERVOIR COMPANY. PLAT_254122_1 ST. VRAIN PLACER, COURTESY OF BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, EASTERN STATES OFFICE, WWW.GLORECORDS.BLM.GOV

man was Colonel Wesley Brainerd, born September 27, 1832, in Rome, New York. A relative of Wesley, Lucy Abigail Brainard published *The Genealogy of the Brainerd-Brainard Family in America, 1649–1908* and used both spellings, because both spellings were used by different lines of the family. As early as 1881, the Boulder County map shows W. Brainard in “Talcot” and lists W. Brainard as the Superintendent of the Chicago and Colorado Mining Company in the Ward District index. As late as 1926, the lake was designated as “Brainerd’s Lake” in Drumm’s Wall Map of Boulder County. A short biography of Wesley Brainerd is available online in *Portrait and Biographical Record of Denver and Vicinity, Colorado*,

Chapman Publishing Company, 1898.

Brainerd was educated at the Rome Academy and continued his education as an apprentice at the Norris Locomotive Company in Philadelphia. Locomotives were the high-tech industry of the day, and Norris, as the leading U.S. manufacturer, produced 1,200 locomotives between 1832 and 1866. Brainerd completed his apprenticeship as draughtsman and locomotive builder and continued to work for Norris, starting new locomotives in the United States and Canada. In 1858, he took a position of master mechanic for a railroad in Georgia, but when civil war seemed inevitable, he moved back to Rome.

In Rome, Brainerd raised a company of 18 men and he was commissioned as captain. Much of Brainerd’s story has been preserved as part of the Voices of the Civil War Series: *Bridge Building in Wartime—Colonel Wesley Brainerd’s Memoir of the 50th New York Volunteer Engineers*, edited by Ed Malles. Brainerd was promoted several times for bravery, and by the close of the war he commanded 950 engineers and 750 dismounted cavalry to construct fortifications, repair bridges, and set pontoons near Richmond, Virginia.



WESLEY BRAINERD, CIRCA 1898. COURTESY OF PORTRAIT AND BIOGRAPHICAL RECORD OF DENVER AND VICINITY, CHAPMAN PUBLISHING COMPANY, CHICAGO, 1898, (P. 304), DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY.

Left Hand Canyon Prospecting

After the Civil War, Brainerd moved to Evanston, Illinois, where he operated a lumber company. In 1873 he managed the Brighton Smelting Works, which kindled his interest in mining. Two of the proprietors of Brighton were Lyman Gage and Mancel Talcott. Both had previously lived in Rome, New York. Talcott, a veteran of the California gold rush, traveled with Brainerd to investigate Georgetown, Boulder, and other mining districts. They bought the Moltke Mine near Ward. In 1876, Brainerd, Gage, and others formed the Chicago and Colorado Mining and Milling Company. Brainerd moved to Camp Talcott, located below Ward in Left Hand Canyon, to manage the operations.

Brainerd’s mechanical and civil engineering background soon came into play. As he toured the base of Mount Audubon, he saw the potential of the available water power. In 1884, Brainerd worked with John S. Reid, the manager of the Utica Mine, to construct a flume to carry water five miles through the Utica Mine in Ward and on to Camp Talcott. The upper flume from the St. Vrain Creek to the Utica Mine required 350,000 feet of lumber, while the lower section to Camp Talcott required 150,000 feet of lumber. A sawmill was set up in the mountains to provide the necessary lumber. The lower flume emptied into 2,700 feet of steel pipe to a powerhouse to drive four generators. Power was controlled by telephone communication to multiple mines to hoist and haul ore using electric motors. In the July 24, 1896, *Boulder Daily Camera* article “Electricity in Mining” the reporter wrote “that is living”, as he was able to read the newspaper by the glow of incandescent lights in Brainerd’s cheerful home.

The area prospered. According to the *United States Geological Survey Bulletin 1463* (1980), “Through 1970, Boulder County had produced base and precious metals and tungsten valued at about \$45 million. Of this, gold accounted for \$25,056,350; silver,



CMC MEMBERS (GAYLE WALDROP ON THE LEFT)
IN FRONT OF THE NEWLY BUILT BRAINARD CABIN.
COURTESY OF JANET ROBERTSON.

\$8,633,303; lead, \$854,900; zinc, \$4,583; and tungsten, \$10,613,754.” Train service was provided by Colorado and Northwestern (C&N) through Gold Hill on to Ward in 1898. One of the stops was the Brainerd Camp. Wesley Brainerd retired to Point Loma, California, in 1906, and died there four years later. He is buried in the Gage family plot in the Rosehill Cemetery in Chicago. The train service to Ward continued until 1919. When the train service stopped, the last of the mining came to a close.

Public Lands for Recreation

When you look out the Brainard Cabin window at Navajo Peak, you are looking at the western boundary of the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. The United States bought the land between the Mississippi River and the Continental Divide from France for 3¢ per acre. Based on various geographic references, the land was surveyed and divided into 36 square-mile townships, each further divided into 1 square-mile sections. The cabin and the present-day Brainard Lake are located in Section 4 of Township 1N Range 73 West of the 6th Principle Meridian. The original 1875 survey map shows Long Lake, but no Brainard or Mitchell lakes! Taking this 1 square mile section of land through its various designations from the time of Jefferson to the present, it outlines how the United States developed its National Forests.

In 1891, the National Forest Reserves were established. President Benjamin Harrison signed a proclamation creating 15 Reserves totaling 13 million acres. President Grover Cleveland added 15 more Reserves totaling 25.8 million acres. During his presidency, Theodore Roosevelt brought the total up to 162.8 million acres! Today the 155 U.S. Forests total 188 million acres. One of Roosevelt’s Reserves of 1902, the Medicine Bow, was initially within Wyoming. Then on May 17, 1905, Proclamation 557 annexed the current Roosevelt National Forest into Medicine Bow. Our R.73W.T.1N Section 4 was within the boundaries of the annexation. In 1905 Gifford Pinchot was named the first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, and in 1907 the Forest Reserves were renamed National Forests. The Colorado portion of the Medicine Bow Reserve was renamed the Colorado National Forest in 1910 and then, in 1932, was renamed by President Herbert Hoover to honor President Theodore Roosevelt.

As mentioned, one of the questions that arose during our discussion about the history of the cabin was “who built the old chimneys along the CMC South and Little Raven trails?” In 1905, Pinchot’s priorities for the Reserves were the management of logging, grazing, and water. With increasing urbanization and the introduction of the automobile in the decade prior to the First World War, recreational use of Na-

tional Forests soon became a priority. The 1915 Term Occupancy Act permitted summer home construction on National Forest lands for up to 30-year terms. Initially, the National Forest Service encouraged such structures to reduce fire danger from transient camping and give citizens a vested interest in the forests.

The Forest Service permitted the construction of nine summer homes around Brainard Lake in the 1920s. The Denver Boy’s Club built Camp Audubon and the CMC built the Brainard Cabin. In *The Front Rangers* (1971), Janet Robertson details the first 50 years of the CMC Boulder Group, from 1920–1970. In the 1920s, getting to the mountains was more difficult than today and having a base for mountain outings had great appeal. On April 5, 1927, Professor Van Valkenburg, CMC Boulder Chair Elect, proposed that the Group build its own cabin. Credit for the project was given to CMC members “Van”, Gayle Waldrop, and Charles Hutchinson. Dr. Francis Ramaley chose the “mosquito-free” site. (*Front Rangers*, 10)

The only written details of how the cabin was constructed were supplied by “Van’s” son, Horace Van Valkenburg III. He remembered that the builder was Joe Stapp . . . Joe’s carpenter for the cabin was a C.U. student named Theron Fry. . . [Joe] had strong practical ideas about how to

SKIS IN FRONT OF BRAINARD CABIN.
COURTESY JOHN WALLACK.

construct a really tight cabin. Accordingly, he had logs, six inches thick and flat on two sides, slabbed at a sawmill in Peaceful Valley. These logs went by truck up to Brainard Lake, and then by horse-drawn wagon up to the cabin site. . . A 1 X 4 was placed between each log and the next to provide a minimum wall thickness of 4 inches . . . (*Front Rangers*, 10)

The cabin was finished in the summer of 1928 and the kitchen was added in 1930 for \$45. "The U.S. Forest Service fee for the use of the site was raised from \$15 to \$25 but eventually in 1934, the Club signed a fifteen-year lease for a \$20 a year fee." (*Front Rangers*, 10) "Within a rather short time the Brainard Lake Cabin was the real home of the Boulder Group. 'House Parties' were held there during every season of the year. For hundreds of people through the years this structure was a beloved place, a place completely associated with a perfect mountain day among friends." (*Front Rangers*, 11)

As detailed in Alford's paper, during the Great Depression, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) made significant recreational improvements in the area. The Brainard Lake Dam was reconstructed in 1934. In 1937, the CCC Work Plan included the Red Rock Lake and surrounding ski



trails. In 1956, the National Park Service initiated a 10-year plan, "Mission 66", to renovate the Parks. In response, the National Forest Service initiated its own "Operation Outdoors" in 1957. The Brainard Lake development plan was significantly changed as a part of this initiative. In addition to revamping campground and picnic areas, it was decided that the day-use of the area outweighed the private permitted use. So the residence permits were allowed to expire by 1970. Most of the structures were purchased by locals and moved to Ward, but the chimneys still stand. Because

the Brainard Cabin provides service to the general public, the CMC has been able to renew the Special Use Permit.

If you are visiting the Brainard Lake area for skiing or for summer outings, look around and imagine the miners setting up their flumes and digging the ditches. Check out the old chimneys and signs of Camp Audubon. Let's hope the CMC can continue to provide a friendly place, open to the public, for some shelter on a winter ski tour. Also, mark your calendars: February 8, 2014, will be the second annual Brainard Cabin Wooden Ski Day! Δ



BRAINARD CABIN TODAY.
COURTESY JOHN WALLACK.