

The Old North End

A civic and historical guide to one of the largest historic preservation districts west of the Mississippi

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1. History

In late July 1869, General William Jackson Palmer — a former Union cavalry officer and Medal of Honor recipient — was traveling through southern Colorado when the scenery at the base of Pikes Peak struck him. He resolved to build a new city on a low, broad mesa east of the Garden of the Gods. Colorado Springs was founded in 1871, quickly earning the nickname "Little London" for its popularity with English tourists and health seekers drawn to the high-altitude, dry climate.

Palmer's wife, Mary Lincoln Mellen Palmer — lovingly known as "Queen" — opened the first school, hosted the first Christmas celebration, and suggested naming the north-south streets after mountain ranges: Cascade, Nevada, Sierra Madre, Wahsatch, Tejon.

The Cripple Creek Gold Boom (1890–1910)

Everything changed with gold. The discovery at Cripple Creek and Victor turned Colorado Springs into a mining capital. More than 400 mining companies and three mining exchanges were established. The Colorado Springs Mining Exchange became the most active in the world. The city's population doubled between 1890 and 1900.

Cripple Creek gold turned Wood Avenue into "Millionaires Row." By 1900, more than 50 millionaires lived in the Old North End. The 1200 and 1300 blocks of Wood Avenue became the site of grand mansions built by mine owners — Nelson B. Williams, James Ferguson Burns (who built the Burns Theater downtown), and O.C. Townsend among them. But the neighborhood was not exclusively for the super-rich: stock brokers, mine managers, doctors, and judges all built Victorian homes that define the district today.

The Tuberculosis Era

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, tuberculosis sufferers came to Colorado Springs for its high altitude and dry air. Marie Gwynne Glockner opened the Glockner Tuberculosis Sanatorium at 2200 N. Tejon in 1890 as a memorial to her husband Dr. Albert Glockner, who had died of TB at age 31. It evolved over decades into Penrose Hospital. A fully restored TB tent cottage with period furnishings is preserved at Jackson Street and Cascade Avenue.

WWII and After

During World War II, apartments were created in garages, basements, and entire houses to provide residences for military personnel stationed at Camp Carson and Peterson Field. The neighborhood has remained stable through the 20th and 21st centuries due to Colorado College, Penrose Hospital, downtown businesses, and the courts.

2. National Register of Historic Places

Metric	Value
Original NR Listing	December 17, 1982
Expansion	September 2015 — renamed to "Old North End Historic District"
Total Buildings	1,001 (exclusive of outbuildings)
Contributing Buildings	903
Period of Significance	1885–1965
Colorado State Register	5EP.333
Distinction	One of the largest historic preservation districts west of the Mississippi

3. Architecture

The Old North End is a museum of American residential architecture spanning 1885–1965:

Style	Era	Key Features
Queen Anne	1880s–1900s	Asymmetrical facades, wraparound porches, turrets, decorative shingles
Colonial Revival	1890s–1950s	Symmetrical facades, classical columns, dormers
Tudor Revival	1890s–1940s	Half-timbering, steep roofs, prominent chimneys
Mission Revival	1890s–1930s	Stucco walls, red tile roofs, arched openings
Craftsman	1905–1930s	Low-pitched roofs, wide eaves, exposed rafters, built-ins
International	1930s–1960s	Flat roofs, minimal ornamentation, ribbon windows

Thomas MacLaren (1863–1928)

Scottish-born, considered the "premier architect" of Colorado Springs. He worked in the city from 1894 to 1928, producing designs for more than 200 buildings — including City Hall, City Auditorium, Grace Episcopal Church, and the Patty Jewett clubhouse. Up to 80 of his designs still stand in Colorado, 12 on the National Register. A public charter school is named for him.

Notable Houses

Property	Details
McAllister House Museum	423 N Cascade Ave. 1873. First permanent residence. Tours Thu–Sat. \$10 adults. 719-635-7925
Williams Burns Mansion	1315 Wood Ave. Grand mining magnate residence, later converted to apartments
Lennox House	Built 1900 in Mission Revival style. Now part of Colorado College campus
Tutt Alumni House	Uintah & Cascade. Donated to CC by Charles L. Tutt Sr.
TB Tent Cottage	Jackson St & Cascade Ave. Fully restored with period furnishings. Public viewing

4. Politics & Preservation

City Council District 1. Current rep: Dave Donelson, elected April 2025. Something of a maverick — previously censured by council in July 2024 for "false accusations of unethical behavior" and removed from committees.

Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ)

The Old North End has robust historic preservation protections. The HPOZ was applied in 2000. Design standards were enforced for two decades but — in a discovery by city staff — were never formally adopted by City Council. In February 2021, the council voted unanimously to uphold them. Only three appeals out of hundreds of applications had ever occurred, suggesting the rules work well. Solar panels are notably allowed.

No traditional HOA. The Old North End does not have a homeowners association with binding covenants. Preservation is enforced through the city's HPOZ overlay and Historic Preservation Board. The neighborhood association (ONEN) is a voluntary advocacy organization, not a governing HOA.

The 2022–23 Zoning Battle

Colorado Springs undertook its first comprehensive zoning code rewrite in three decades (RetoolCOS). The city initially proposed more housing density; the Historic Neighborhoods Partnership and ONEN pushed back, fearing destructive redevelopment. The final Unified Development Code (effective June 2023) preserved the existing zone district and created a new design-standards overlay tool — a compromise between density advocates and preservationists.

5. A Progressive Pocket

Colorado Springs is one of the most conservative cities in the American West. Five defense installations employ approximately 60,000 people. Focus on the Family relocated from Pomona, CA in 1991. Colorado's 5th Congressional District has never sent a Democrat to Congress.

The 42-point spread. The west side of Colorado Springs (near the Old North End) runs roughly D+15, while the northeast runs R+27 — a 42-point spread within the same city. The Old North End, with its Colorado College faculty, physicians, and creative-class workers, is a distinctly progressive pocket. COS had the largest swing against Trump of any metro area in the nation between 2016 and 2020. Paradox: despite its evangelical reputation, only about 20% of COS residents attend church regularly.

6. The July 4th Parade

Started by Donna Guthrie in 1981. Now in its 45th year. Bikes, strollers, and walkers start promptly at 9 AM at Wood Avenue and Washington Street, walking the flag-lined parade route back to Boddington Field for treats. A grassroots tradition that became the neighborhood's signature community event.

ONEN (Old North End Neighborhood Association) was founded in 1957 by Jean Szymanski and Ruth Shaw, who organized neighbors to oppose hospital construction. They lost that battle but succeeded in forming the neighborhood association. ONEN is now focused on historic preservation advocacy.

7. By the Numbers

Metric	Value	Metric	Value
Population	9,315	Median Age	36
Median Home Value	\$1,012,821	Owner-Occupied	43%
Renter-Occupied	57%	Contributing Buildings	903
NR Listed	1982	Period of Significance	1885–1965
City Population	~490,000	Congressional District	CO-5 (R+9)
Military Installations	5 (~60,000 employed)	Founded	1871

Key insight: The 57% renter rate is very high for a neighborhood of million-dollar homes. This reflects Colorado College student rentals, WWII-era conversions of large homes into apartments, and proximity to downtown attracting young professionals.

8. Key Figures

Person	Role	Connection
Gen. William Jackson Palmer	City founder	Founded COS 1871; donated Monument Valley Park
Mary "Queen" Mellen Palmer	Palmer's wife	Named the streets after mountain ranges
Thomas MacLaren	Architect	200+ buildings; premier architect of COS (1894–1928)
Spencer Penrose	Entrepreneur	Built The Broadmoor (1918); El Pomar Foundation
Henry McAllister	Army Major	Built first permanent residence (1873); now a museum
Marie Gwynne Glockner	Sanatorium founder	Opened TB sanatorium 1890; evolved into Penrose Hospital
Donna Guthrie	Community organizer	Started the July 4th Parade in 1981
Robert D. Loevy	CC Professor	Wrote the definitive history of the Old North End

9. Notable Spots Near You

Spot	Details
Switchback Coffee	330 N Institute / 909 E Moreno. Your neighborhood roaster. Pay-what-you-can drip.
Good Neighbors Meetinghouse	Coffee, sandwiches, all-day waffles, wine list, house-made syrups.
Four by Brother Luck	321 N Tejon. Celebrity chef. Southwestern 4-course tasting + vegan option.
Stir Coffee & Cocktails	Coffee by day, cocktails by night. Literature-inspired interiors.
Tasty Freeze	Neighborhood institution since the 1950s. Dipped soft serve, sundaes, burgers.
Sasquatch Cookies	Fresh-daily batches. Snickerdoodle, chocolate chip, macadamia. People drive from miles around.

Monument Valley Park	2-mile linear park along Monument Creek. Palmer donated land + \$750K (1904–07).
Acacia Park	First park in COS (1871). Uncle Wilber's Fountain. Free summer concerts.
Colorado College	Founded 1874. Private liberal arts. Distinctive "Block Plan" — one course at a time.
McAllister House Museum	423 N Cascade. 1873. First permanent residence. Tours Thu–Sat, \$10.

Sources

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