



Colorado Springs
PIONEERS MUSEUM

Evidence: Finding the Facts about General William Jackson Palmer

Primary Source Analysis Activity

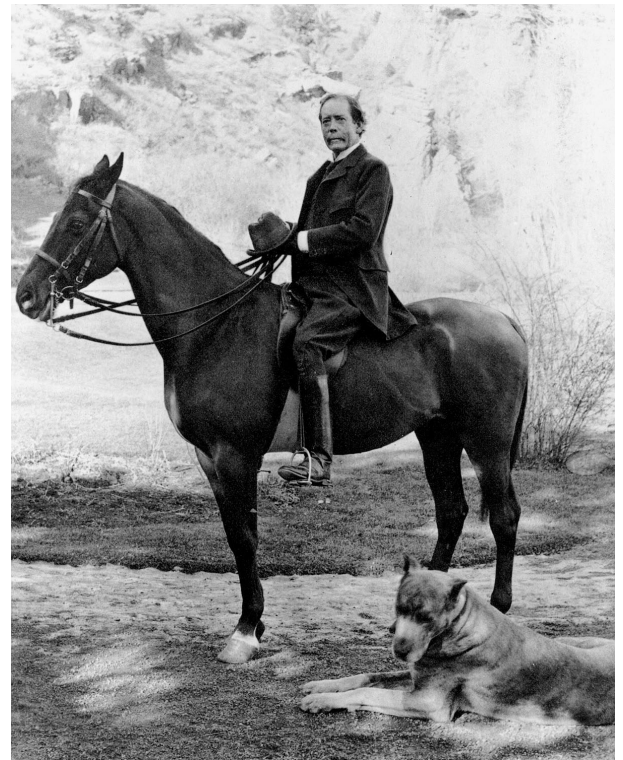


Evidence: Finding the Facts about General William Jackson Palmer

By Leah Davis Witherow, Curator of History

It is imperative to look closely and accurately at the people and events in our past. Yet, we often find ourselves repeating familiar stories but never stop to ask, “How do we know if this fact is really true?” **The *Evidence* exhibit is dedicated to debunking persistent myths about General Palmer and his family by inviting visitors to examine evidence firsthand.** By doing so, viewers will come away with a deeper and more meaningful understanding of our city founder’s unique story and our community’s history.

Evidence will encourage critical thinking, foster historical analysis and provide a “behind the scenes” look at the work of historians and archaeologists. How do we know what we know about the past? How does this change over time? How can we tell fact from fiction? The answer is evidence! In the case of the Palmer Family and estate employees, we have never had more evidence than we do today.



General William Jackson Palmer

Thanks to donations of letters, diaries, photographs and artifacts over the past two decades, we have a deeper understanding of the day-to-day life at Glen Eyrie. Combined with over 60,000 archaeological artifacts discovered in a long buried trash pile near the Palmer Estate at Glen Eyrie, an even clearer picture emerges. In many cases, new evidence negates commonly held misconceptions and reveals a more interesting and complicated story.

For instance, General Palmer’s handwritten letters describe how he fought in the Civil War because of his Quaker faith – not in spite of it. Although Colorado Springs was a “dry town” that banned liquor, General Palmer was not a teetotaler. Archaeologists found approximately 50 intact food, medicinal and liquor bottles. Both archival and archaeological evidence indicate increasing wealth at Glen Eyrie over time, debunking the myth that Palmer was a Philadelphia “blueblood.”

Finally, an exploration of personal items, including Elsie Palmer’s diary, a metal corset fragment, a locket with strands of hair, a pair of shoes and even a tube of toothpaste, reveal close connections and intimate details of daily life. What do these objects tell us about the people who used them? What does the evidence tell us about the past? What does the evidence tell you? What are new stories we can tell based on facts?



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HOW DO HISTORIANS USE EVIDENCE?

We asked Historian Katherine Scott Sturdevant, Professor of History at Pikes Peak Community College, to help us answer this question:

Historians study evidence of the recorded past in order to organize and interpret that past. It is a path strewn with mysteries to solve, characters to portray, and meaning that inspires across centuries. Imagine setting out to apply historians' knowledge and skills to a new project! It is exciting when a new source appears, you being the first to recognize its significance. The trained historian brings a body of knowledge and skills to each new challenge.

As a field or discipline, history sits between humanities and social sciences. Historians rely on these fields for information and methods. The historian weaves statistical analysis with literary skill for effective storytelling.

Primary sources are history's raw materials, created at the time or original to historical participants. Any original diary, letter, document, record, photograph, or artifact is a primary source. So are the artifacts that archaeologists dig up. A later memoir, autobiography, or interview is a primary source, even though it documents an earlier time. Memory is a different perspective, but still primary. The historian is privileged to study primary sources. Past people shared windows into their lives.

Secondary sources are later accounts that narrate and evaluate history. A well-trained historian bases a secondary source on many primary sources. That historian checks and balances new discoveries and interpretations against what historians already wrote in their secondary works.

Facts matter. Context fosters understanding. When a historian researches a new project, that expert must know the agreed-upon truths of that historical time, place, and people. Those truths form the context of lives. Just as you use context to understand human motive and behavior today, the historian must use it to understand past behavior. Balancing ethics and biases is a critical challenge for historians. The historian must check one source or interpretation against another for "the truth." The historian strives for objectivity and balance, to trust and be trusted.

Revision is constant. Some accuse historians of "revising" history inappropriately. To do so is against the historian's ethic. Historians "revise" because they find new sources and contextual interpretations. For example, when historians recognized we lacked women's history, they looked closer at women's private writings and records to help construct narrative analysis. This kind of "revision" is simply casting history's nets wider to be more complete.

Historians create new sources. Until the 1970s, historians resisted treating oral history as a valid primary source. Today, historians record oral history interviews. They also collect oral tradition (stories handed down) to save the experiences of those with less written history, such as Native Americans, former slaves, women, and poorer classes. Historians seek to discover and interpret the past ethically and accurately, to help all of us connect with our heritage, understand our present, and prepare for our future.



MYTH #1: PALMER WAS BORN WITH A SILVER SPOON IN HIS MOUTH

BACKGROUND

Born on September 17, 1836, William Jackson Palmer grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania amidst the cultural, political, and financial turmoil of the antebellum era. At the time, Philadelphia was the second largest city in the country after New York, and the fourth largest in the world. It was also the heart of industrial America and home to the gas lighting industry, the Baldwin Locomotive works, and the powerful Pennsylvania Railroad. Teeming with industry and immigrants — Philadelphia was an exciting place to be.

Palmer's father Jonathan and mother Matilda married in 1833. The couple had four children in evenly spaced intervals: Ellen in 1834, William in 1836, Frank in 1838, and Charles in 1840. Unfortunately, John struggled to support his wife and four children. Philadelphia City Directories list his occupations as teacher, tailor, clerk, "victualler" (one who provides food or drink), merchant and tea trader. John Palmer was frequently in debt and declared bankruptcy multiple times. Among the family papers are letters documenting his indebtedness, "Whereas John Palmer, Tailor of the city of Philadelphia having by sundry losses and disappointments in his business become unable to meet his payments promptly — Therefore, we the subscribers, creditors of the said John Palmer do hereby agree to extend to him additional time and settle with him as follows...

William was the second child and oldest son. He attended the Friends' School, Zane Street Grammar School and Central High School of Philadelphia. Founded in 1836, Central High sought to promote economic and social opportunity through free universal schooling for deserving students. Their stated goal was to prepare, "young people for life both as citizens in a republic and as competitors in the marketplace." At age twelve, William passed a series of rigorous oral and written examinations and provided several letters of recommendation to enter the elite school.

The curriculum at Central included: modern languages, natural sciences, elocution, trigonometry, surveying, navigation, and bookkeeping. William attended for four years but left prior to graduation to become a clerk at a local firm. In 1853 he obtained a position with the Hempfield Railroad Engineer Corps and embarked on his future. Intimately aware of his father's financial struggles, William assumed the role of breadwinner for the Palmer Family as a teenager.

After returning from travels abroad to study coal and locomotives, William stated that he was eager to find employment as quickly as possible in order to pay off his own debts and to help support his parents. In April 1860, William helped John and Matilda Palmer purchase a home in Germantown, Pennsylvania by paying half their mortgage. He was twenty-three years old. Without a family fortune, but extremely talented and ambitious, Palmer rose to leadership roles in the United States Army, the Kansas and Pacific Railroad, and the Denver and Rio Grande Railway among other enterprises.

MYTH #1: PALMER WAS BORN WITH A SILVER SPOON IN HIS MOUTH

EVIDENCE #1: 1860 Germantown, Pennsylvania Census Listing for John Palmer and Family, Historical Society of Pennsylvania

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SCHEDULE 1—Free Inhabitants in 22nd Ward in the County of Philadelphia State of Penn enumerated by me, on the 18th day of July 1860. Wm. H. C. Asst. Marshal

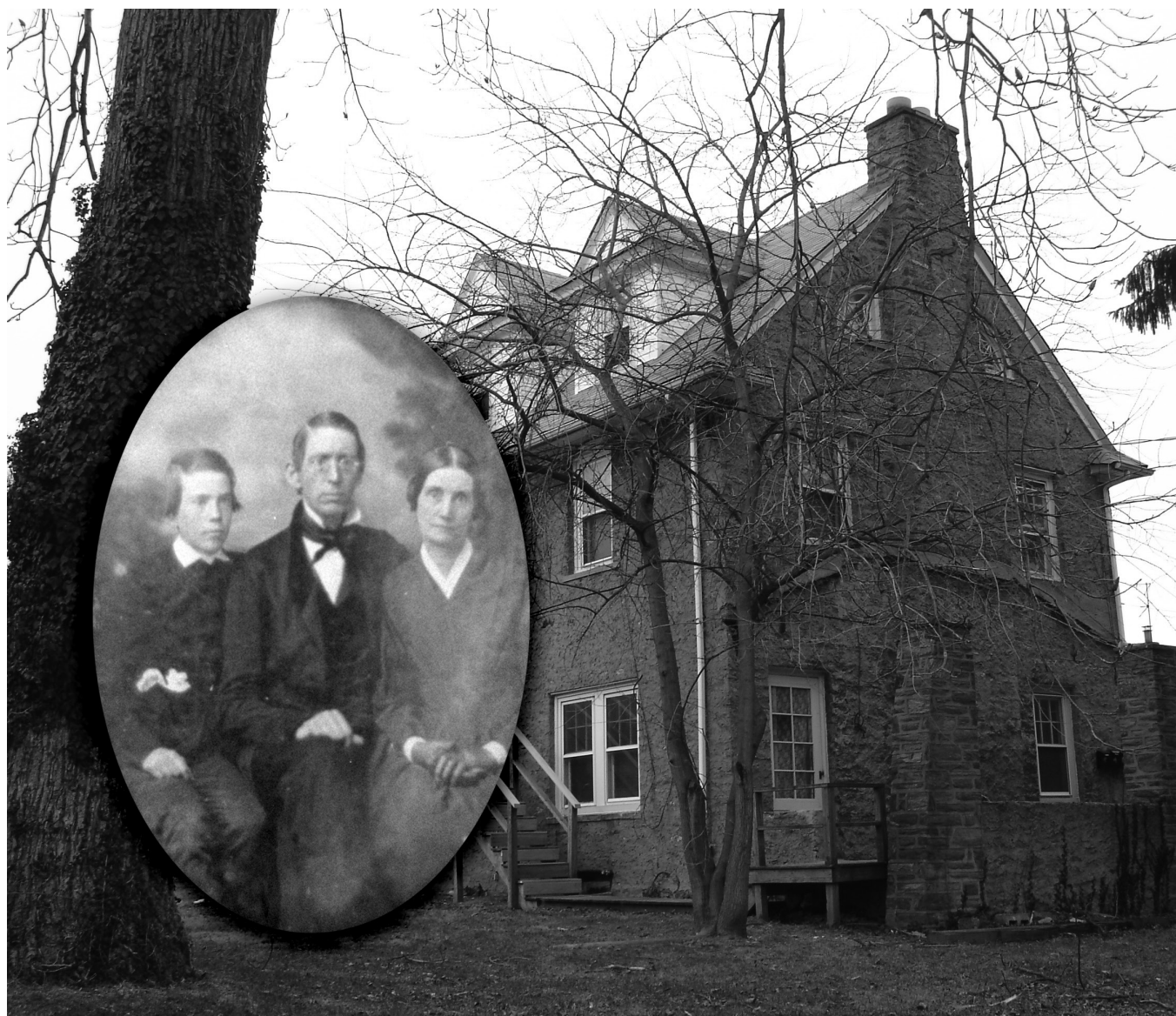
Post Office Germantown

The name of every person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1860, was in this family		Description		Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each person, male and female, over 15 years of age	Value of Estate Owned		Place of Birth, Naming the State, Territory, or Country	Married within the year	Abroad within the year	Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1507	1471	John T. Barber	40 m		Carpenter	17,000	300	Penn					
		Matilda	32 f					do					
		Edw. C. H.	6 m					do					
		Mary A.	5 f					do					
		Geo. A.	3 m					do					
		Kate H.	2 f					do					
1508	1472	Bridge Morrow	40 f		Domestic			do					
		John Jones	43 m					do					
		Ann M.	35 f					do					
		Thomas	7 f					do					
		John B.	5 m					do					
		Samuel M.	3 m					do					
		Edw. C. M.	1 m					do					
		Ann M. H. H.	28 f		Domestic			do					
		Maria L. H.	15 f					do					
1509	1473	Samuel M. Jones	38 m					do					
		Edith C. J.	73 f			4,000	10,000	do					
		Ann	43 f					do					
		Thomas	33 m					do					
		Ellen	11 m					do					
1510	1474	Margaret Campbell	25 f					do					
		Samuel Magarge	45 m		Farmer	20,000	1,000	do					
		Thomas	46 f					do					
		Lucyanna	22 f					do					
		Thomas	35 m		Gardener			do					
		Carrie	32 m		Cabinet Maker			do					
		Rebecca	27 f					do					
		Thomas	24 f					do					
1511	1475	Sarah Doyle	34 f					do					
		J. G. White	41 m		Gentleman			do					
		John	28 f					do					
		M. T. Browning	71 f					do					
		M. T. do	27 f					do					
		M. T. do	47 f					do					
1512	1476	Kate M. Quinn	15 f		Domestic			do					
		John Palmer	55 m		Tea Trade			do					
		Matilda	55 f					do					
		Wm. J.	22 m		Clk			do					
		Francis H.	21 m		Tea Trade			do					
		Ellen M.	19 f					do					

No. white males, 16 No. colored males, 0 No. foreign born, 5 No. blind, 0
 No. white females, 24 No. colored females, 0 No. deaf and dumb, 0 No. insane, 0
 No. paupers, 0 No. convicts, 0

John Palmer, 55, m, Tea Trade
 Matilda, 55, f
 William, 22, m, Clerke
 Francis, 21, m, Tea Trade
 Ellen, 19, f

EVIDENCE #2: Photo of the Palmer Family Home



MYTH #1: PALMER WAS BORN WITH A SILVER SPOON IN HIS MOUTH

EVIDENCE #3: Letter - John Palmer to William in 1855, giving his son career advice

...We poor people are frequently driven to take that path which leads us to bread and meat & clothing the soonest; that is which makes us the quickest returns; it is with us practically word dog or die, or rather as dogs won't work, "root pig or die". Now it seems to me that thee is in this very predicament; Thy choice seems to be, to prepare thyself for a mining engineer after as thee observes, having made enough to enable thee to do it.

I do not pretend to know anything about mines or mining and think the plan thee has laid down a very good one; because it gives thee plenty of time to correct and modify it before entering into any arrangements regarding it. We have a few mines in Pa (Pennsylvania) where I suppose a competent mining engineer may be essential; but in the most of our country a man that can dig a hole is the best engineer required...

MYTH #2: EVERYONE KNOWS QUAKERS DON'T JOIN THE MILITARY!

BACKGROUND

The Quaker religion (also known as the Society of Friends) was founded in seventeenth-century England by George Fox. Members hold both community and individual conscience sacred. Quakers meet in community and remain silent until God speaks directly to them through the Holy Spirit or inner or inward light. As a result, Quakers embrace a variety of different beliefs but share a general set of principles, called testimonies. According to the Friends General Conference, "Some commonly recognized testimonies include peace, integrity, equality, simplicity, community, and care for the earth."

A fundamental tenet of Quakerism is that everyone is equal in the eyes of God. Therefore, Friends generally object to military service in their opposition to harming or killing others. Historically, many Quakers have been conscientious objectors during times of war, practicing a commitment to nonviolence. However, the decision is left up to the individual and some Quakers have followed their conscience and served in the military, while others performed non-combat roles in the ambulance service or worked in conscientious objector camps.

Due to their deep-seeded belief in equality, many Friends were leaders in the Abolitionist and Women's Suffrage movements. Famous nineteenth-century reformers Lucretia and James Mott were close friends of the Palmers, and both families were Hicksite Quakers. In 1827-1828, the Society of Friends in America suffered a schism and broke into two separate groups: Hicksites and Orthodox. Taking their name from Elias Hicks, a Quaker minister from New York, Hicksites shied away from strict adherence to scripture, routinely questioned authority, and placed a priority on behavior over belief. As Lucretia Mott noted, "...my convictions led me adhere to the sufficiency of the light within us, resting on truth as authority, rather than taking authority for truth." Young William was taught to act according to his conscience (his inward light) and to respect the inherent equality of all individuals.

Palmer believed that slavery was a greater evil than war; as a result he acted within his faith and according to his conscience when he volunteered for service in the Civil War. In the summer of 1861, Palmer recruited fellow Pennsylvanians to join his newly organized "Anderson Troop," in honor of U.S. Army Major Robert Anderson of Fort Sumter, South Carolina. The troop was later enlarged to become a regiment known as the Fifteenth Pennsylvania Cavalry, composed of many other Quakers including Major Henry McAllister, Captain Charles S. Hinchman, and Lieutenant Colonel Charles M. Betts. When asked after the war to account for his military service General Palmer stated, "I believe that the principle of obedience to conscience is more essential even than the principle of non-resistance."

MYTH #2: EVERYONE KNOWS QUAKERS DON'T JOIN THE MILITARY!

EVIDENCE #1: Young Palmer Photograph



EVIDENCE #2: Palmer's Medal of Honor



MYTH #2: EVERYONE KNOWS QUAKERS DON'T JOIN THE MILITARY!

EVIDENCE #3: Letter - William Jackson Palmer to boyhood friend and fellow Quaker Isaac Clothier

To Isaac Clothier

April 19, 1867

...I have been thinking a great deal over the subject which the Committee of Friends have written me about, and intend as soon as I can sit down calmly and reply to their communication to do so. I have every desire to retain my connection with the Society, and hope they will look upon my case in that liberal and charitable spirit which I think distinguishes them from most other sects and which is one of the strongest incentives in my mind towards remaining a member of the Society.

I think my views on the subject of Peace can hardly differ in essential points, from those of our Meeting...Of course under the same circumstances as existed in the Summer of '61 I would act as precisely as I did then, and I do not understand that Friends desire me to think and say otherwise — as they would be the last to believe that principle should be compromised for the sake of avoiding troubles. They might say however that they would not sacrifice one principle for the sake of another — but in regard to this it seems to me that one of the most essential principles of Friends is obedience to conscience — much more essential than a belief in non-resistance.

I do not ask more than that my case should be treated in that light. I think that Peace is holy and should be encouraged constantly — and that an unjust War is only legalized murder. But the inner light made it very plain to me in the Summer of '61 that I should enter the army.

Yours,
Wm. J. Palmer.

MYTH #3: PALMER WAS A CAPITALIST, NOT A CONSERVATIONIST

BACKGROUND

Born in rural Delaware and raised in urban Philadelphia, General William Jackson Palmer acquired a life-long love of nature. He reveled in days spent riding horseback through the Allegheny Mountains while working for the Pennsylvania Railroad, and traveled thousands of miles as a cavalry officer during the Civil War. Throughout his life he never tired of being outdoors. Writing to boyhood friend Isaac Clothier, Palmer declared, “Man has to go to the mountains for health, and he must also go there if he would get the true insight into things.”

In 1865, Palmer joined the Kansas Pacific Railway as Secretary and Treasurer. Two years later, Palmer left his executive position to command a KP survey party exploring railroad routes through the southwest. The party surveyed over 4,000 miles of potential routes. Afterwards, Palmer became the chief engineer of the KP, overseeing completion of the railroad into Denver in 1870. He was never again completely content away from the west. Writing from Washington D.C. in 1868, “The weather is quite exhausting here, and I long to be once more in the Rocky Mountains. I often find myself doubting that a kind Providence ever intended man to dwell on the Atlantic slope.”

General Palmer was both a capitalist and a conservationist. After founding Colorado Springs on July 31, 1871, he led the effort to acquire and manage water rights, oversaw thousands of trees being planted and created a system of parks which we still use today. He encouraged cultivation of local flowers, shrubs, and gardens and hired a forester to protect native trees. He employed Scottish landscape gardener John Blair to beautify parks, plant trees and shrubs, and design a series of roads and boulevards providing residents access to and from parks throughout the city. He and Dr. Bell donated 10,000 acres at Manitou Park to establish the state’s first school of forestry at Colorado College.

During his lifetime, General Palmer donated over 2,000 acres of parkland to the residents of Colorado Springs. Notably, Monument Valley Park was constructed on a former trash dump. The beautiful park featured an arboretum of native tree and plant species. After purchasing a large portion of Austin Bluffs, Palmer had scenic drives, trails, and other improvements built before donating the park in 1902. Believing firmly in the physical and emotional benefits of fresh air and moderate exercise, Palmer sought to insure local residents had access to the region’s natural amenities for years to come.

MYTH #3: PALMER WAS A CAPITALIST, NOT A CONSERVATIONIST
EVIDENCE #1: Flower Pot & Photo of Glen Eyrie Greenhouse



**One of many flower pots
found in the Palmer trash pile**

Glen Eyrie Greenhouse



MYTH #3: PALMER WAS A CAPITALIST, NOT A CONSERVATIONIST

EVIDENCE #2: Gazette Newspaper Article - August 3, 1901

Colorado Springs Facts 8/3/1901, Vol 8. No 18/19, pg. 30:3

The purchase of the Otis property at Austin Bluffs by General William J. Palmer is one of the most important real estate transactions that has taken place in this city. It is important and interesting on account of the value of the property transferred, but it has a peculiar interest for the people of this city because General Palmer intends to present to the city the surface rights of the attractive portion of the tract for a public park. The property includes a thousand acres. Much of it is wooded and several picturesque canons intersect the mesa. It contains also many peculiar rock formations and the beauties of nature can be much enhanced by improvements which will be made in converting it into a public resort. From the bluffs a magnificent view is obtained of Colorado Springs and the mountains in the background, while to the south the peaks on the extreme southern border of the State are visible on clear days. The suitability of the Austin Bluffs for a public park has been recognized and urged for some time. The news that this end is to be accomplished through the generosity of one of Colorado Springs' foremost citizens will be welcomed

MYTH #3: PALMER WAS A CAPITALIST, NOT A CONSERVATIONIST

EVIDENCE #3: William Jackson Palmer's Obituary

GEN. PALMER DIES LEAVES MILLIONS

Founder of Colorado Springs and
Prominent in Western Rail-
road Building.

DEATH WAS DUE TO A FALL

Back Broken Two Years Ago by Fall
From Horse—Served Through
Civil War—Well Known Here.

Lafayette News Bureau Special.
COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo., March 14.—General William J. Palmer, founder of Colorado Springs, died at his country seat, Glen Eyrie, west of the city late yesterday. Death came as a result of a fall from a horse in October, 1906, which resulted in breaking his back. General Palmer, who was widely known in the East, had often been called the foremost citizen of Colorado. He leaves an estate valued at \$15,000,000.

William Jackson Palmer was born in Kent county, Delaware, on September 18, 1836. He received his education at a private Quaker academy in Philadelphia, becoming a commercial clerk at the age of 17. He was appointed rodman, under Charles Ellet, chief engineer of the Hempfield railroad in 1853. It was in this position that Palmer got his first knowledge of railroading, and with the financial assistance of Mr. Ellet he was enabled to make a tour of Europe the following year to study railroad conditions and also mining there.

Upon returning to this country in 1856, Mr. Palmer became secretary and treasurer of the Westmoreland Coal Company. He resigned the following year to become private secretary to

the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. Mr. Palmer served in this capacity until the outbreak of the civil war, when he organized the Anderson troop and served under General Buell in the army of the Cumberland until the end of that campaign. He went back to Pennsylvania then and organized the Fifteenth Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiment, serving in command of that regiment until the close of the war. He was then mustered out of service with the rank of brigadier general.

On the conclusion of the war General Palmer, at the request of several Pennsylvania railroad officials, was elected secretary and treasurer of the Kansas Pacific Railroad Company, whose road was then the eastern division of the Union Pacific. In this capacity he acted as manager of all the new construction and extensions of the road. He succeeded in extending the road from Sheridan, Kan., to Denver, Colo. He also was connected with the building of the Denver Pacific Railroad from Denver to Cheyenne between 1869 and 1870.

General Palmer was elected president of the Denver & Rio Grande Railway in 1870, and ten years later he also took up the duties of president of the Mexican National Railway Company. In 1883 General Palmer resigned from the presidency of the Denver & Rio Grande to give greater attention to the Mexican railway enterprise. However, he took up at the same time the presidency of the Rio Grande Western Railroad, extending from Grand Junction to Salt Lake City. He kept up both these positions until 1901, when he retired to private life.

General Palmer was one of the chief founders of the Colorado Springs Company, and of the city which bears its name. He formed the plans for the city and the first stake in the township was driven in 1871.

General Palmer was well known in New York City, both socially and financially. He was a member of the Metropolitan Club of this city, and also a charter member of the City Middy Club. He was married in 1870 to Mary Lincoln Mellen, a daughter of William was one of Secretary Chase's assistant solicitors of the treasury department during and after the Civil War. He leaves a widow and three daughters.



MYTHS: CONCLUSIONS

MYTH #1: PALMER WAS BORN WITH A SILVER SPOON IN HIS MOUTH

NOT TRUE

William Jackson Palmer's parents were Jonathan and Matilda Palmer. Jonathan married Matilda Jackson in 1833. The couple raised their four children in Philadelphia where Jonathan was employed variously as a teacher, tailor, clerk, and tea trader. Jonathan went bankrupt and struggled to support his family. As a result, William assumed the role of breadwinner as a teenager. At twenty-three years old, William helped his parents purchase a home in April, 1860, by paying half the mortgage.

MYTH #2: EVERYONE KNOWS QUAKERS DON'T JOIN THE MILITARY!

IT DEPENDS

Quakers believe that everyone is equal in the eyes of God, and generally object to military service in their opposition to harming or killing others. Historically, many Quakers have been conscientious objectors in times of war, practicing a commitment to nonviolence. However, the decision is left up to the individual. Quakers William Jackson Palmer, Henry McAllister, Charles Lamborn and many others followed their conscience and served in the Fifteenth Pennsylvania Cavalry during the Civil War.

MYTH #3: PALMER WAS A CAPITALIST, NOT A CONSERVATIONIST

NOT TRUE

Palmer was both a capitalist and a conservationist. He donated over 2,000 acres of parkland, directed thousands of trees be planted, and encouraged cultivation of local flowers, shrubs, and gardens. Palmer and Dr. Bell donated 10,000 acres at Manitou Park to establish the state's first school of forestry. Among many other gifts to the city, Monument Valley Park was constructed on a former trash dump and featured an arboretum of native tree and plant species.