

Cranmer Park's Sundial and Terrace

In the early 20th century, Denver Mayor Robert Speer's decided to create an extensive network of parks and parkways, modeled on the City Beautiful movement. As part of this plan, a site on the then eastern boundary of the city, noted for its incredible view of the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains, was set aside to become a park. It was first named Inspiration Point, then renamed Mountain View Park, and in 1959 its name was changed again to Cranmer Park, honoring the many contributions of George Cranmer to Denver's parks system. Cranmer was the Director of Parks and Improvements in the Mayor Ben Stapleton administration, which was far-sighted in planning for a municipal airport, for area transportation needs, and for creating a mountain parks system to encourage city residents to escape the hot summer weather by traveling in their new automobiles to the nearby, cooler foothills.

As Cranmer focused on building out Denver's parks, he found a number of creative methods in the post Great Depression economy. Park land was added through the purchase of properties for unpaid taxes, and the federal works programs – the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) – provided the manpower to build several Denver parks projects.

Cranmer Park's historic flowerbeds and the sandstone terrace on which the iconic sundial rests were designed by the WPA. Over time, the fragile sandstone terrace fell victim to the ravages of Denver's freeze/thaw weather cycles. As neighbors became concerned, they met with City Councilwoman Mary Beth Susman for guidance on encouraging the city to refurbish this much-beloved neighborhood feature. In 2013, Colorado Preservation, Inc. named the Cranmer Park Sundial and Terrace to its Most Endangered Places list. This recognition helped spur the formation of the Save Our Sundial (SOS) Committee and its partnership with The Park People, a long-standing non-profit organization with a mission of enhancing Denver's parks. The SOS leaders met with Denver's Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) staff to determine the best course of action to restore the Sundial and Terrace to its original glory while making sure the project would be sustainable for future generations to enjoy.

The large sandstone terrace was designed as a viewing platform for park visitors to enjoy the 150-mile panoramic view of the Front Range. Cranmer, who had built his residence on the eastern edge of the park, donated a six-foot diameter equatorial sundial as a focal point of the terrace in 1941. The local firm, Erickson Monuments and its employee, Stephen A. Ionides, an amateur astronomer, created the sundial. It was installed on the terrace parallel to the equator and is set at an angle of 50 degrees and 43 minutes. The gnomon – a 7-foot stainless steel bar – pierces the sundial at an angle of 39 degrees and 17 minutes. Because the meridian for Mountain Standard Time lies along Navajo Street, to the west, the time indicated on the sundial is accurate to within 17 seconds. Cut into the sundial on the north face are the words "In Summer On This Side And..." and on the south face "In Winter, Here I Mark the Hours." In 1965, the sundial was blown up by teenage vandals using dynamite. It was replaced by a community effort.

The western edge of the terrace features a colorful terrazzo mosaic of the mountains visible to the west. Notable peaks are featured, as is another of Cranmer's accomplishments, Red Rocks Amphitheatre. Historic marker stones are inlaid in the sandstone terrace to commemorate early pioneers for whom

some of the Colorado peaks are named. For example, Pikes Peak, Longs Peak, Grays Peak and Mount Evans are among those featured.

An August 2014 concert in the park kicked off the fundraising and rallied the community to the SOS committee's efforts to raise funds to augment those designated by DPR for a \$1.8 million restoration project. With a City policy of all funds needing to be available before a project can be started, the SOS committee worked diligently over the next two years to raise the necessary funds. Two more neighborhood events in the park, generous lead donations with matching grant challenges to the community, combined with extensive public relations work, allowed the committee to raise the funds.

A groundbreaking ceremony in October 2017 celebrated the project start. Immediately following the groundbreaking, the sundial itself was removed from the plaza to be restored during the construction of the plaza, once again by Erickson Monuments. The demolition phase began shortly thereafter, and the project proceeded on schedule with the cooperation of mild winter weather. Using modern engineering solutions, the sandstone terrace was built without mortar – thereby eliminating the previously catastrophic effects of the freeze/thaw winter weather cycles. With the sandstone cut in rectangular pieces of various sizes (to best reflect the original) placed very close together, water now seeps between the stones to a hidden drainage system that carries the water under the terrace to outlets on the western side. Construction was complete and the sundial was returned to its original location in August. The community gathered in early October 2018 to celebrate the completion of the project.

The Sundial sits atop its new terrace ready to welcome visitors once more.