

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS | VIII

PREFACE

James X. Kroll | XI

IMAGINING A BOOK

Diane B. Wunnicke | XIII

THE ART OF HERNDON



PEOPLE | 15



PLACES | 177

CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION

Thomas J. Noel | **XV**



HERNDON RICHARD DAVIS: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Craig W. Leavitt | **3**

DAVIS



OTHER WORKS | **265**

NOTES | **276**

BIBLIOGRAPHY | **277**

ABOUT THE AUTHORS | **278**

INDEX | **279**

“Oh yeah, wasn’t he that guy who painted *The Face on the Barroom Floor* up in Central City at the Teller House Bar?” Few people realize that Colorado artist Herndon Davis was much more than that. He captured the people and places of the Old West transitioning to modern times. His fascination with the human face is epitomized by that lovely visage on the floor of what is now called the Face Bar. Probably a million people have stared into her big brown eyes.

Herndon painted her in 1936 when the Central City Opera House Association commissioned him to do a series of portraits. The face supposedly belongs to Herndon’s wife, Juanita, who looks a little skeptical about being the model. But her visage has become legendary and even launched a popular one-act play, *The Face on the Barroom Floor*, which the Central City Opera House Association first produced in 1978 and occasionally repeats to this day.

Miraculously, the face on the saloon floor survives, although much of Davis’s painting is gone. His murals in the Tea Room of the Denver Dry Goods Store are no more, although the building, restored, still stands. Also vanished is A. B. Wade’s Keg Bar on 18th Street, where Davis painted faces of prominent Denver folks on the seats so bar flies could sit on their faces. Vanished as well are the murals once in the Hilltop neighborhood basement of the Ritter home that inspired Diane Wunnicke to make this book happen. Diane at least rescued some photos of the Ritter murals included in this book.

Diane conceived of and financed this project. The bulk of the research and writing fell on the strong shoulders of Craig W. Leavitt, a star fellow at the Center for Colorado and the West at the Auraria Library. Operations there are ably led by Dr. Mary M. Somerville, chief librarian and financial wizard.

At History Colorado, photo archivist Melissa Van Otterloo and staff photographer Jay DiLorenzo aided our attempt to locate and procure reproductions of every Herndon Davis work that could be found. Jay provided considerable time, trouble, and expertise to capture the many endangered photos in the basement of the former Denver home of Davis patron Fred Mazzulla. At the Western History and Genealogy Department of the Denver Public Library, a haven for researchers that is also a great center for local art, Manager Jim Kroll spent days digging out Davis’s work and guiding us through those well-preserved treasures. DPL’s photo librarian Coi Gehrig likewise did heroic work in aiding our search. Hugh Grant at the Kirkland Museum of Fine and Decorative Art, which does a fabulous job of collecting and celebrating Colorado artists, lent a hand. So did Thomas Smith at the Denver Art Museum and Alan Kania, historian of the Denver Press Club.

Who knows how many other walls were or perhaps are still adorned by the work of Colorado’s most ubiquitous artist. Fortunately, you can still find his portraits of important founding fathers of Colorado in the Sage Room of the Oxford Hotel at 17th and Wazee Streets. These worthies were salvaged from the Windsor Hotel at 18th and Larimer Streets on the eve of its 1960 demolition.

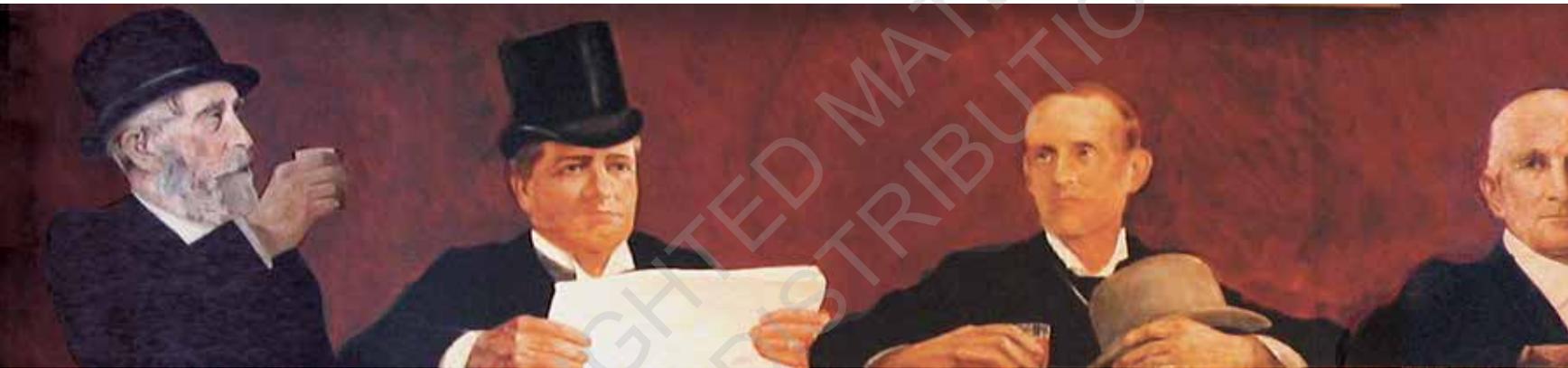
The Denver Press Club at 1330 Glenarm Place still treasures Davis's work on its basement poker room walls. That large mural depicts the 1940s Press Room of the *Rocky Mountain News*, a place Davis frequented and where he worked. Among the immortals whose heads Davis painted on the outer edges of the mural are longtime favorite *Rocky Mountain News* columnist Lew Casey (editor of the book *Denver Murders*) and *News* photographer Harry Rhoads (the most famous and ribald of the press photographers, whose work is preserved in a biography and in the Western History and Genealogy Department of the Denver Public Library). On that same Denver Press Club mural, look for Gene Fowler, the *Denver Post* reporter who graduated to the big time and national fame in New York City. Among Fowler's many books is one of the liveliest accounts in Denver literature, *Timberline: A Story of Bonfils and Tammen*. More than just a history of the founders of the *Denver Post*, this is a colorful, if not always factual, history of Colorado. It portrays in print the wild, funny, vividly colorful good old days that much of Herndon Davis's work captures. Presumably, the Denver Press Club Davis murals are safe. That fortress claims to be the oldest continuous surviving press club in America and is a designated Denver landmark. And its inner sanctum's most treasured relic is the Herndon Davis mural.

In numerous projects, Davis gave faces to famous western characters, creating alternative images to the scant black-and-white photos extant for many important characters and structures. Davis often revived faces and places in full color, basing his portrait on the black-and-white photos available or on the person or place if he knew them. His memorable watercolors of Denver's fading Tabor Grand Opera House and the former Mattie Silks bordello, for instance, captured their sad decline. With unflinching realism, Davis includes the automobiles, the clothing, the background pedestrians and signage that make his cityscapes unforgettable, colorful period pieces.

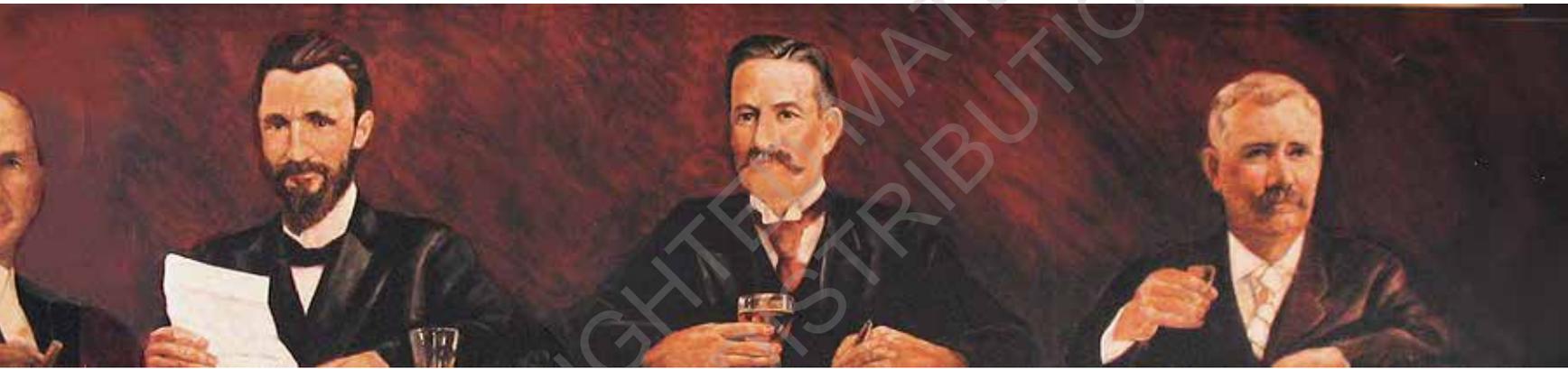
In at least one case, Davis gave a face to a theretofore faceless hero. John H. Gregory, a key figure in the 1859 Colorado gold rush who discovered the first mother lode. An experienced gold miner from Georgia, Gregory knew the placer gold everyone else was fishing for in rivers and creeks had come from underground veins upstream. On May 6, 1859, he opened the Gregory lode along what is now Gregory Gulch, which flows between what quickly became Central City and Black Hawk. After making that discovery, which saved a sputtering gold rush, Gregory mysteriously disappeared. Not even an image could be found until Davis, using historical written descriptions, produced a portrait of a shaggy miner with a beard thick enough to hide mice.

As this book's superb biography of Davis by Craig W. Leavitt reveals, he was far more than the tipsy artist who painted *The Face on the Barroom Floor*. Somehow, Davis has never attracted artistic scrutiny or been the subject of any biography longer than a newspaper article. Yet he captured better than any other artist the many faces and places most notable in Colorado history. Art historians may dismiss his work, but anyone interested in Colorado history should rejoice in this gifted artist who resurrected so much of our past with his pencils, brushes, and pen and ink.

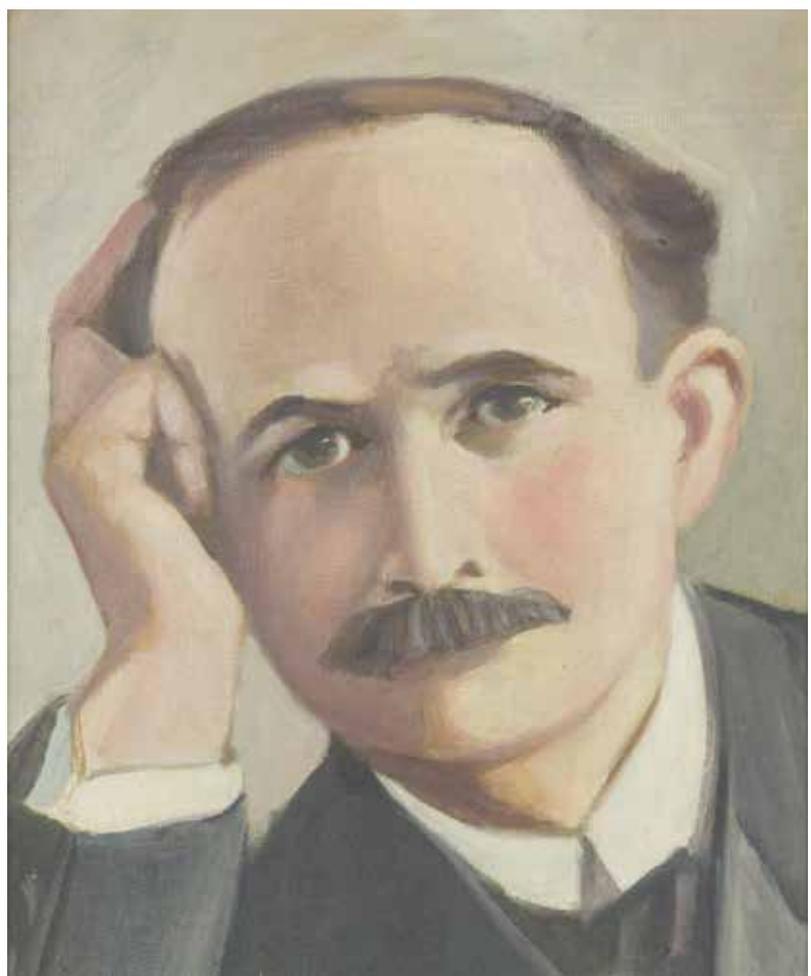
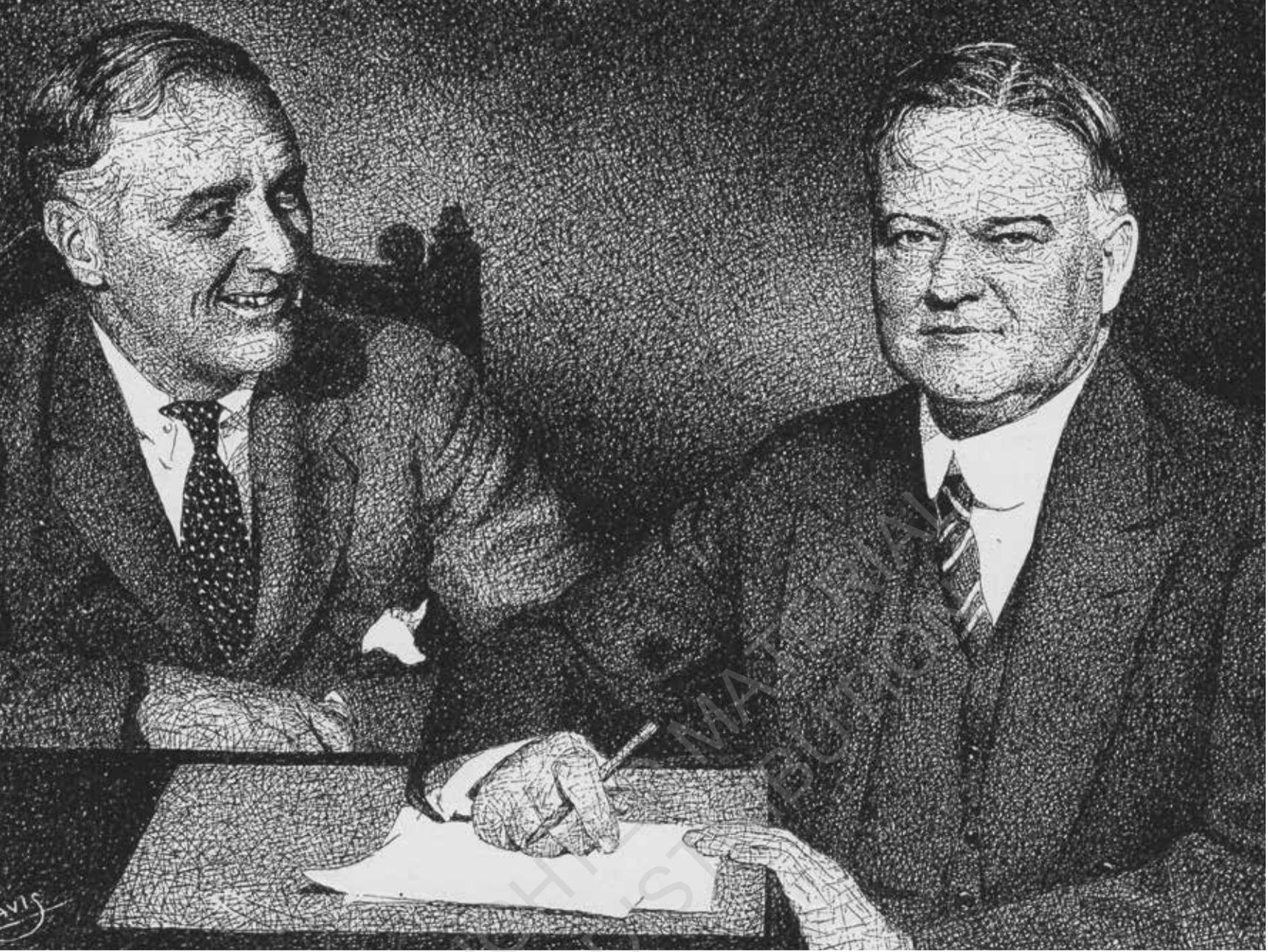
THE ART OF



HERNDON



DAVIS



PEOPLE



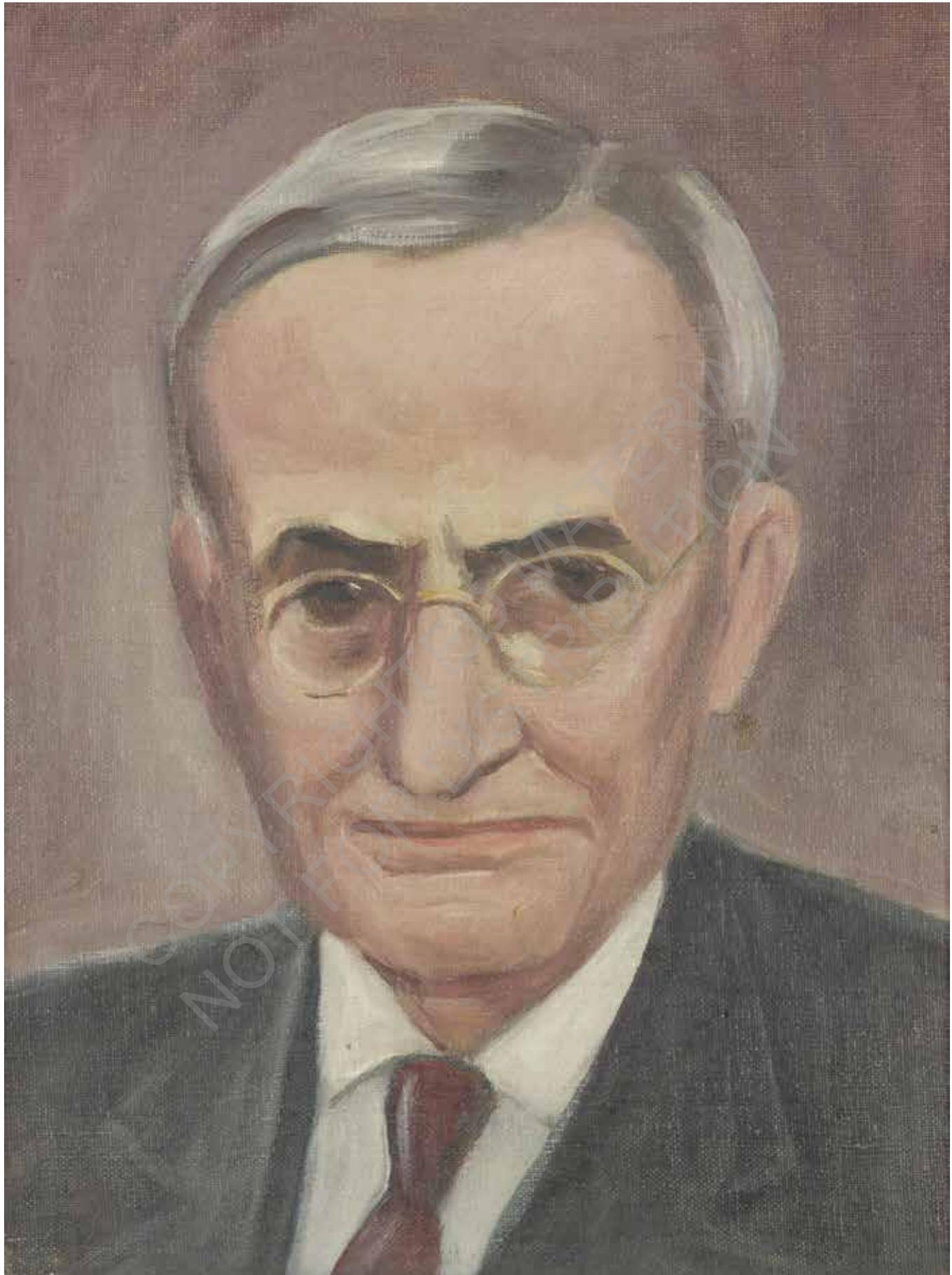
WILLIAM “BILLY” ADAMS

PAINTING, HISTORY COLORADO

William Herbert Adams (1861–1954), better known as Billy Adams, governed Colorado from 1927 until 1933. Born in Blue Mounds, Wisconsin, Adams moved to Alamosa, Colorado, at age seventeen. He gradually climbed the ranks of city and then state government, serving at different times as Alamosa city treasurer, mayor of Alamosa, Conejos County commissioner, state representative, and, beginning in 1888, state senator. He held his seat in the senate for thirty-eight years, before winning election as governor of Colorado in 1926.

Adams was no reformer. His administration was characterized by economy and conservatism. He dealt sternly with a three-month coal strike that started in late 1927, forming a State Law Enforcement Agency under the command of a veteran of the Ludlow Massacre. Eight workers were shot down by Adams’s agency between November 1927 and January 1928.

Politics ran in the Adams family. Billy’s older brother, Alva Adams, also served as governor of Colorado, from 1887 to 1889, from 1897 to 1899, and in 1905. Billy’s nephew, Alva Blanchard Adams, was a US senator from Colorado from 1923 to 1925 and from 1933 to 1941. As a Colorado state senator in 1921, Adams pushed through a bill to create the Alamosa State Normal School in Alamosa, Colorado. The college’s name was later changed to Adams State Teachers College to honor Governor Adams. It is now known as Adams State University.





ETHEL BARRYMORE

PEN AND INK DRAWING, 1931, DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY
WESTERN HISTORY AND GENEALOGY DEPARTMENT.
PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 8, 1931, IN THE SUNDAY NEW
YORK HERALD TRIBUNE.

Ethel Barrymore (1879–1959) debuted as a New York City stage actress in 1894, captivating audiences with her soulful dark eyes and distinctive voice. Breakthrough roles included working with English great Henry Irving in *The Bells* (1897) and *Peter the Great* (1898), as well as in the Clyde Fitch play *Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines* (1901). Leading roles in *A Doll's House* (1905), *Mid-Channel* (1910), and *Trelawney of the Wells* (1911) sealed her popularity as a star of the American stage. Although the stage was always her first love, Barrymore also appeared in film and television, but her screen stardom never matched that of her brother John Barrymore. This characteristically intricate Herndon Davis pen and ink illustration captures Barrymore in a 1931 revival of *School for Scandal*.

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CARLOS BEAUBIEN

WATERCOLOR, 1961, DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY
WESTERN HISTORY AND GENEALOGY DEPARTMENT

Québécois-born Carlos Beaubien (1800–1864) figures prominently in the history of New Mexico and Colorado. He first came to New Mexico by way of St. Louis with a party of French fur trappers, including fellow pioneers Ceran St. Vrain and Antoine Leroux. Beaubien became a Mexican citizen and a prosperous trader. He acquired interests in what came to be known as the Beaubien-Miranda Land Grant in 1841 and the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant in 1844. Both straddle the border between present-day New Mexico and Colorado. When war came between the United States and Mexico, Beaubien switched allegiance, serving under the US New Mexico governor Charles Bent as a territorial supreme court justice. When the Taos Revolt erupted in January 1847, Beaubien's son Narciso was killed, along with Governor Bent and many others. Beaubien presided over the trials of the accused killers, earning a reputation for meting out stern justice.



HERNDON
DAVIS

FREDERICK BONFILS

PAINTING, HISTORY COLORADO

Frederick Gilmer Bonfils (1860–1933) turned the *Denver Post* into one of the largest—and least respected—newspapers in the United States. Born in Troy, Missouri, Bonfils entered the United States Military Academy in 1878 but resigned in 1881 to pursue land speculation in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. Bonfils met future partner Harry Heye Tammen at the Windsor Hotel in Denver, where Tammen tended bar. They bought the *Post* in 1895 and made it a financial success by turning to sensational yellow journalism. Their often slanderous attacks also made them their share of enemies. In 1899 Bonfils and Tammen were shot in the *Post* offices by an angry lawyer; the following year they were hospitalized after being horse-whipped by another enemy. Bonfils was known to threaten merchants with exposés if they did not advertise in his newspaper. In 1922 the *Post* questioned sweetheart oil leases granted by the federal government to the Sinclair Oil Company but cut short its inquiry after Sinclair paid off Bonfils and Tammen. At the time of Bonfils's death from encephalitis in 1933, he was pursuing a libel lawsuit against the *Post's* rival and competitor, the *Rocky Mountain News*. His two daughters, May and Helen, strove to improve the family reputation with extensive philanthropic activities.

