

Fort Chambers / Poor Farm: Listening and Learning

Unique Ideas and Themes from Story Submissions

Between March 10th – 30th, 2025, through the city’s Be Heard Boulder platform, the public was invited to share any stories they think should be interpreted along the Healing Trail. Some stories were also collected at the public workshop hosted on March 21, 2025. The following are unique ideas proposed by members of the public, with relevant snippets of their submissions included. Full submissions can be found in the Input Compendium document.

Indigenous Perspectives and Connection to Sand Creek Massacre
<i>Theme: Indigenous History</i>
<u>Indigenous people and colonial settlement</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "It seems appropriate that in addition to commemorating the actions around the Sand Creek Massacre, that we acknowledge the people, the cultures, occupations and traditions that existed on the site before the arrival of white settlers/colonists. There must have been hunting and living encampments on this land for hundreds and thousands of years."• "The indigenous people in the area: Arapaho, Cheyenne and Ute, lived so in balance, that it appeared to be a wilderness and uninhabitable until settlers moved in with their christian religious beliefs and cultures and decided this wild beauty was to be killed and tamed in order to physically and spiritually feel safe by following a god separated from the earth."
<u>Land acknowledgment</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "At the very least, the City of Boulder should acknowledge that this land is not ours. "The City of Boulder acknowledges the city is on the ancestral homelands and unceded territory of Indigenous Peoples who have traversed, lived in and stewarded lands in the Boulder Valley since time immemorial. ..."
<u>Chief Niwot’s Curse</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "This is the quotation: "People seeing the beauty of this valley will want to stay, and their staying will be the undoing of the beauty." Reportedly, Chief Niwot was saying this to the first prospectors he encountered. The native population had not destroyed the beauty by staying, so why would Chief Niwot say this to the white folks seeking gold there? Was he jealous? Trying to scare them off? It seems to me that it would make more sense that he had observed a contradiction in the things that the colonizers desired and the way of life they led. I would like to suggest that, rather than relating a curse, Chief Niwot was giving meaningful ethical guidance."

Theme: Context surrounding injustices to Tribes

History of harms done to Indigenous people (First Nations) across the country

- "...continue the truth-telling including the near-extirmination of the American Buffalo, the oppression, violence and death of children at Indian Boarding Schools, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives and stealing of land that continues..."

Highlight juxtaposition of sacred Valmont Butte site adjacent to Fort Chambers

- "Again, let me iterate the importance of the ironic and seminal connection between the desecration site of Fort Chambers and the sacred site of Valmont Butte...all on historically the same land. The Valmont Butte site has erroneously been seen by some as an Indigenous decisional site - fortunately the EPA is currently recognizing settler responsibility at that site and is demanding coal ash cleanup. Fort Chambers site needs to acknowledge this extraordinary temporal and spatial juxtaposition of genocide and sacred praxis on the landscape."

Theme: Contemporary Indigenous Perspectives

Current lifestyle/opinions of Arapaho and Cheyenne members

- "How do [the Arapaho and Cheyenne] live today? How would they like to relate to the land and people of the Boulder Valley? What presence would they like to have here?"

How non-Native people can support Indigenous-led initiatives

- "include what visitors can do to support Native-Indigenous-led initiatives to return to Right Relationship with ourselves, all beings including the Native-Indigenous steward of this land, and this sacred land herself..."

Highlight parts of Re-membering event (2022)

- "Maybe even include the rough tape of the Re-membering at the Dairy that is on the City website? But please not until the credit and name-spelling mistakes at the end have been corrected and the Arapaho and Cheyenne translations of the Songs added..."
- "Caroline Goodwin's poem "I Will Not Say", that she read at the Re-membering, should have a special PLAQUE, with her identity as Evans' great-great granddaughter and the signatories other family members highlighted. She has just confirmed her pleasure and approval re. this submittal suggestion."

The Land and Ecosystem at the Fort Chambers/Poor Farm Site

Theme: Nature's beauty and destruction

Views on nature and humans' relationship with it

- "Colonizers loved the beauty of this land, it stands out as special and particular, even among the gorgeous surroundings. However, the way of life that the colonizers bring is destructive. It does not respect the intrinsic value of the beings whose interdependence weaves the beauty that attracts the colonizers. The animals, plants, people, and the land

itself exist together. By devaluing any part of the intricate web of relationships, treating it as a mere resource to be plundered, something to possess rather than a being in its own right, the colonizer works to destroy the beauty that they claim to love.”

Fort Chambers, Company D, and Connection to Sand Creek Massacre

Theme: Events of the Sand Creek Massacre

Boulder County officials took place in the massacre: take responsibility

- “I have not seen a statement from the County acknowledging its historical involvement in the massacre....i found out on the Carnegie website that George W. Chambers was a COUNTY COMMISSIONER at the time of the massacre!!! Not a random farmer as I had been told :). This is highly significant...Nichols was the County Sherrif and stepped down to be in the regiment. All this governmental involvement needs to be clearly covered at the site.”

History around Silas Soule, Morse Coffin, Cramer

- “Before the attack, Soule told other officers “any man who would take part in [such] murders, knowing the circumstances as we did, was a low lived cowardly son of a bitch.” [7] ... His company did not follow the orders given to them to enter the creek bed leading to the settlement but moved up and down the banks and observed the slaughter.”
- “Written by Morse H. Coffin in a series of articles to the Colorado Sun, 1879...’I now desire to mention a few things in order to make plain the general opinion among the people at that time regarding Indian killing, and thus account in some degree for the scalping indulged in at Sand Creek, and which is now condemned by many good persons...”
- Cramer’s letters to Wynkoop

Aftermath for the Tribes

- "At Fort Chambers, more than 100 Boulder men trained and drilled and then joined Col John Chivington's Volunteer Cavalry in committing the Sand Creek Massacre. What are the outcomes of this massacre for the Arapaho and Cheyenne people...What happened to the Arapaho and Cheyenne people? How have they suffered as a result of the actions of the Boulder settlers?"

Theme: Misinformation and false narratives

Misinformation as a tool to incite fear, justify violence

- "When entering the Fort Chambers site people should encounter things that lead them to reckon with the difficult past that took place here. This includes to greed for land and power on the part of some settler/colonizers and the false information they spread to create fear in the local settler/colonizers. Fear an effect way to control people, This dynamic still plays out in our country, and telling the truth about our past is one way to keep this from happening again."

False narrative around the Third Regiment's formation & purpose

- "In August, the Rocky Mountain News published an appeal by Governor Evans to establish civilian militias to fight 'the merciless savages.' To back that up, the News published its own editorial... "A few months of active extermination against the red devils will bring quiet, and nothing else will." (Aug. 10, 1864)."

Use stone marker to educate

- "Another part could be re-installing the stone marker with an explanation that as recently as the 1960s people were still referring to an "Indian uprising" in the area that never actually happened"

Perpetuation of positive John Evans narrative

- "In 2022 before the October Re-membering at the Dairy, there was a state archive website with language literally describing Evans in terms of "Glory". This should be in a display educating people about the accepted patterns of earlier settler society... Today i found a more recent entry that is at best ambiguous about Evans. This should also be revised."

Poor Farm and Early History of Boulder

Theme: Early Settlers

Demographics/history of early 'settlers'

- "Who were the Euro-American people who settled in the Boulder Valley in the mid 1800s? What were their ethnicities, religions, genders, social class? Where did they come from?"

Settler/indigenous relations

- "What were their attitudes about Native peoples, Manifest Destiny, the treaties (and violating them), land ownership? How did they relate to Chief Nawath's band of Arapaho who lived in the Boulder Valley? What drove them to join the US Cavalry and commit the Sand Creek Massacre?"

Do not focus on early settler history

- "...we have a long road to creating trust and making the space, both literally and figuratively, to bring native voices to the storytelling process, should they desire it. That should be the focus of this effort- we have celebrated the Homesteaders enough. This should be the catalyst for sharing a broader history of land that can only be shared authentically by native people."

Theme: Queen Anne House / Poor Farm

History and lineage of people who lived there

- “Farm and historic Queen Anne House first came about and the stories of both the people who served there and were helped there as well. Where are their descendants now? Are they still in the area? Do they have stories to share? What were the conditions like back then?”

Theme: Agriculture

Share history of Agriculture on site

- “Emphasize that the Native Americans and the early settlers practiced sustainable environmentally/toxic chemically free agriculture.”

Do not focus on agriculture on site

- “... It is clear to me that by far the most important thing to deal with here is this land’s relationship to one of the worst atrocities in US history. There are plenty of other opportunities to talk about our food systems (and some of the other similar comments I saw) that do not dilute and attempt (intentionally or unintentionally) to erase the most important aspects of its history.”

Other Ideas

Theme: Reflection on white privilege / continued benefits to Boulder residents

- “And so the greatest potential I can imagine for this site is that non-Native visitors learn the truth-- that this was a staging ground for the massacre-- and reflect deeply on how they're connected to it. You don't have to be a direct descendant of the volunteer militia men who staged here to have benefited from the events of Sand Creek, and the white supremacy culture that fueled this history and continues to dominate Boulder County today”
- "How have the people of Boulder prospered since the massacre? How do people of Boulder feel today about what happened 160 years ago? How do people of Boulder feel today about the relative life conditions of the Cheyenne and Arapaho and the current residents of Boulder? How would the people of Boulder like to address the disparities? How can we start?"

Site and Project Suggestions

There were also suggestions about the physical site and overall project, rather than stories to be shared through interpretive design. This feedback was categorized similarly and is paraphrased below:

<p><i>Indigenous Perspectives suggestions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Portion of site should be exclusively for Tribal-led events, with infrastructure to support needs• “Healing Trail” is presumptuous; should be renamed
<p><i>Land and Ecosystem suggestions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restore native vegetation• Concerns about returning buffalo to site, as suggested by some
<p><i>Fort Chambers/Company D suggestions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have a representation/recreation of Fort Chambers structure• Do not recreate Fort Chambers structure
<p><i>Poor Farm/Early Boulder History suggestions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All agriculture should be organic• Finished site should not retain ‘Poor Farm’ name• Finished site should retain ‘Poor Farm’ name• Repurpose the Queen Anne House to support Indigenous visitors/uses• Restore Poor Farm house and structures• House should have caretaker• Farm should be museum• Historical gardens should be restored

Unique Ideas and Themes from In-Person Event

On March 21st, 2025, an in-person workshop was held with participants invited to rotate through five facilitated stations, sharing stories and hopes for the site. The following are unique ideas and themes pulled from this engagement opportunity. All comments are available in the Input Compendium document.

Prompt: Indigenous Perspectives and Connection to Sand Creek Massacre

Exploring Indigenous identities

Several comments noted a desire to explore Indigenous identities through the site and the ways that narratives about the site are told, including defining "Indigenous" in the context of this project, using the site as an opportunity for cultural exchange, and Indigenous folks representing themselves and their information in cultural resources (such as recording audio/video of Indigenous people sharing their stories).

Quotes:

- *Represent ourselves, our information in: Books, film, cultural information, etc!*
- *Clarify the "who" and "what" the city means by Indigenous perspectives*
- *Capture voices to play stories - hearing Real voices*

Developing the site prioritizing Indigenous representation and use

Comments included having signage with Cheyenne and Arapaho language and creating a space for community events and knowledge sharing. It was also suggested to have a Tribal cultural resource preservation officer (THPO) survey the land for significance. Show both the potential historic value of the land to tribes as well as create a space of value for the current Indigenous community.

Quotes:

- *More than just "signage" - space for community events and knowledge sharing*
- *Signage that identifies all Native plants and their usage in food and medicine and sacred rituals*

Exploring regional Tribal history, colonization, and the Sand Creek Massacre at the site

Tribal history and where there are now North and South Cheyenne Arapahoe Tribes due to settlement in the Front Range. Themes that Sand Creek and Colonization did not have to happen if "we could have treated people like people" and the names and/or other information on each Cheyenne and Arapaho person killed at Sand Creek.

Quotes:

- *Tribal history and where there is now a North and South Cheyenne Arapahoe Tribes. Would it be worth discussing how the settlement of Cherry Creek split the Arapaho tribe north/south*
- *Names and/or other information on each Cheyenne and Arapaho killed at Sand Creek. Even if it just identifies them as "unknown child"*
- *Acknowledge what was done and our own involvement - the story of how citizens are here*

Prompt: Indigenous Perspectives and Connection to Sand Creek Massacre

"Healing" at a different site:

Several comments spoke to the challenge of healing at a site with direct military history and connection to the Sand Creek Massacre. Commenters shared that this land holds too much pain, that people should not be soothed by this site, and that healing feels incongruous at this site - perhaps remembrance is a better framework.

Quotes:

- *Healing should be on a different piece of land - this land holds too much pain*
- *Healing seems incongruous here. Maybe remembrance? So it isn't erased.*
- *Plants and healing, but at another location*

Prompt: The Land and Ecosystem at the Fort Chambers/Poor Farm Site

Agriculture and native plants on the site

Several comments highlighted the desire for maintaining active agriculture on the site and using that agriculture to demonstrate edible landscaping, organic practices, native plantings, and Indigenous food ways. Some comments noted that Indigenous people may consider any food from these parcels of land inedible.

Quotes:

- *Bring back native products*
- *Indigenous plants/native plantings, teaching respect for lands and other beings we share it with*
- *Edible landscape opportunities?*
- *Recognize that indigenous may consider any food from these parcels of land inedible +2*

History through agriculture on the site

Several commenters noted using agriculture as a lens to explore the history of the site, such as water rights dating back to June 1862 for the first ditch in Boulder County. A comment also noted that settlers replaced indigenous plants and animals with European crops on the site and across the region.

Quotes:

- *Recognize that settlers replaced indigenous plants and animals with European crops etc.*
- *Water rights are part of our history. Water rights back to June 1862 for the first ditch in Boulder County, 340 shares/5600, honor this part of the property*
- *Raise the animals that were there ago*

Prompt: Fort Chambers, Company D, and Connection to the Sand Creek Massacre

Reinstalling the monument

Several comments recommended reinstalling the historic stone monument on the site. Comments discussed the stone marker as a piece of the lineage of the site and demonstrated the narrative about the Sand Creek Massacre told through the 1960s and a piece of Boulder history.

Quotes:

- *Important to include the stone monument to show that this falsehood was perpetuated through the 1960s*
- *Put the marker back. Installed during Boulder Centennial paid for by Chambers Family descendants.*

History and narrative about Fort Chambers, Company D, and the Sand Creek Massacre

Comments suggested including historical accounts relevant to the Sand Creek Massacre including a detailed list of Company D members, where streets, institutions, or other public entities hold the names of Company D members, and where Company D members benefitted from resources such as land, water, railroads, and minerals. Other comments emphasized highlighting where other County and State involvement can be found related to the Massacre and highlighting the period narratives of westward expansion. Other comments noted the settler/soldier histories are closely linked as often one person was both.

Quotes:

- *Reckoning needs to come before healing*
- *There needs to be a list of all Company D members, where they've been valorized, and how. A physical list including street names, institutional naming, etc.*
- *Nichols was County Sheriff, stepped down to lead Company D. Emphasize the County gov + State gov connection to the fort.*

Prompt: The Poor Farm and Early History of Boulder and Valmont

History of the Poor Farm and farmhouse

Several comments discussed wanting to show history of the Poor Farm and the farmhouse at the site. Comments referenced the Poor Farm as a means of removing “unwanted (poor, mentally ill, etc) people from society” or “Poor farms as warehouses for divorced/widowed women.” Other comments referenced the need for farmhouse restoration and concerns about security and/or vandalism of the farmhouse following greater public access.

Quotes:

- *Protection and appropriate use of house? Museum & historic farm buildings – interpretation honor farming & agriculture*
- *Farming presence on site, building preservation*

Prompt: The Poor Farm and Early History of Boulder and Valmont

Early settler/agricultural history

Some comments referenced the importance of showing the broader history of agricultural settlement in the Boulder area through all the layers of history of the site. This includes relating the themes of westward expansion and Fort Chambers, agricultural settlement of the area, and the relationship between land, agriculture, and wealth. Other comments referenced specific historians and storytellers as potential resources for information.

Quotes:

- *Blending of history of ag in the history of Fort Chambers > Economic benefits, compounded/inherited wealth of the land*
- *Demonstrations of sustainable, historical practices*
- *Could the input of a professional historian enrich the settler narrative or might it inadvertently limit community perspectives?*

Prompt: Other Ideas

Note: Several themes collected at the "Other Ideas" station were covered in other categories, including Poor Farm history, relocating the "healing" aspect of this project, and highlighting organic farming practices.

Rotating stories/historic focuses at the site

One commenter suggested rotating historic focuses displayed at the site due to the volume of relevant history related to the site. By highlighting all stories and aspects of history at once that might dilute all stories told. Another comment suggested separating the Poor Farm and Healing trail.

Quotes:

- *Separating Poor Farm from Healing Trail stories (Withe) Both benefit from healing*
- *...maybe doing like exhibits that could focus on company D, poor farm, etc*

Native American dance and song/ programming

A comment suggested integrating Indigenous dance/song programming or events.

Funding, oversight, and insurance

Some comments offered consideration of long term funding and stewardship for the site and liability insurance for public events.

Quotes:

- *Long term funding and oversight for the site and the build environment*
- *Concern about vandalism at site, there needs to be security, concerns about people starting fires*