

Downtown Historic District

Designated in 1999

Downtown Boulder's Pearl Street Mall is considered to be one of the most successful pedestrian malls in the nation and is central to the Downtown Historic District. The southern boundary of the district generally runs along Walnut Street, while Spruce Street marks the border to the north and extends from 10th Street to 16th Street. The district also shares a border along Spruce Street with the Mapleton Hill Historic District.

The Downtown Historic District is situated within the Boulder Original Townsite which was established by the Boulder City Town Company on February 10th, 1859. The Town Company consisted of 54 prospectors who had come to the area in search of gold. Silver was discovered at Caribou in 1869 and gold at Gold Hill in 1872. These discoveries, along with the selection of Boulder as the site for the state university in 1876, provided a foundation for steady growth and the construction of substantial business blocks in the commercial center of town. By 1883, Pearl Street was the heart of Boulder and was the city's main thoroughfare. The mining camps depended on Boulder for goods and supplies, and Boulder's early fortunes rose and fell with those of the mining camps. The commercial area included enterprises such as restaurants, groceries, saloons, liquor stores, lumber yards, drug stores, dry goods stores, hardware stores, feed and flour stores, barbers, paint shops, tailors, fraternal lodges, and the county courthouse. Many of the buildings from which these businesses operated still exist today.

Following World War II, the increased population of the automobile led to the creation of new shopping areas further from the city center. To compete with those shopping centers, the modernization of historic storefronts occurred, which typically meant the application of metal panels and precast screens to exterior facades. To further ensure the area's continued viability, property owners formulated a redevelopment plan. The Pearl Street Mall was created in 1976, prompting the return of many businesses and the restoration of historic buildings.

In the 1980s, the area was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. However, a National Register listing provides limited protection and between the years 1980 and 1996, roughly 15% of the buildings in the district were demolished. To better protect the area's historic integrity, the area was designated as a local historic district in 1999.



Barter's confectionary shop at
1143 Pearl St., 1892.



Phoenix Iron Works at
1011 Walnut St., c. 1907.



Mid-century storefronts along
Pearl St., c. 1972.



Construction of the
Pearl Street Mall, 1975.



1500 block of Pearl Street,
c. 1889.

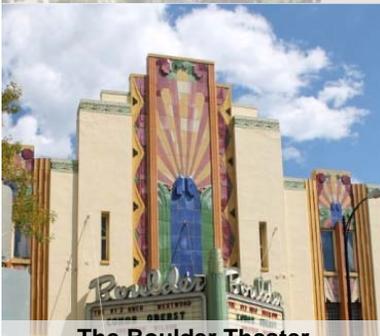
Historic District Highlights



The Pearl Street Mall, 2013.



The Boulder County Courthouse, 2014.



The Boulder Theater at 2032 14th St., 2014.



The Boulderado Hotel at 2115 13th St., 2014.

- The Downtown Historic District is the largest and most architecturally significant group of commercial buildings in the city, representing architectural styles from the 1870s through the early twentieth century. The earliest and most prolific style represented is the nineteenth century commercial style, often referred to as “Italianate.” The district’s period of significance is from 1858-1946.
- Although the economy slowed during the Great Depression, a few buildings were constructed in downtown Boulder. The most significant was the Boulder County Courthouse, having replaced the original courthouse that burned down in 1932. Boulder County labor was used exclusively for the project due to the high unemployment of the depression. It was designed in the Art Deco style by Glen Huntington in 1933.
- The Boulder Theater was built in 1935. The Art Deco style of the County Courthouse nearby influenced the design of the theater’s façade. During the Great Depression, the Boulder Theater provided employment and entertainment to the community, activities that were very important during the 1930s.
- Built in 1907, the Hotel Boulderado was to help fill the need for an adequate hotel in Boulder. Its design is closely related to the Brown Palace Hotel built 1889 in Denver. Early Boulder newspapers credit Otto Wangelin for the “splendid contribution” of the name “Boulderado,” although one letter to the editor feared that Wangelin “was sleeping on his back and dreaming of a college yell.”



Changes to designated properties including individual landmarks and those located within a historic district require review and approval through a Landmark Alteration Certificate. The alterations must meet the City of Boulder’s *General Design Guidelines* and district-specific guidelines, if applicable. For more information please visit our website at www.bouldercolorado.gov/historic-preservation, or contact:

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Information provided by Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board Memorandum dated April 21, 1999, and the Boulder Carnegie Library for Public History.