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General William Jackson Palmer

Founder of Colorado Springs

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William Jackson Palmer was born September 17, 1836, to a Quaker family. He spent his childhood in Delaware and Pennsylvania. When he was a little boy, William was fascinated with trains. He did not know he would later own a railroad company. In fact, his adult life would be filled with adventure as the future founder of Colorado Springs.

#### Military Experience

When Palmer grew up, he was going to have an unexpected turn in his life. He agreed to join the Union Army during the U.S. Civil War. This was a radical idea for a Quaker, who firmly believed in non-violence. However, Palmer fought willingly and bravely because he always thought that slavery was truly violence.

He had a stellar military career, and was promoted to General of the Union Army. After the war, he received the Medal of Honor. One of his major victories was during the Battle at Red Hill, Alabama. There he defeated the Confederate forces, despite challenging circumstances. He never lost one man, and even took 100 prisoners.

#### Railroad Experience

After the war ended, his life turned towards his boyhood interest in trains. He decided to join the Kansas Pacific Railroad. By 1870, this railroad company had completed their goal to lay tracks to what is now the city of Denver,



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Colorado. Soon after working for the railroad, he decided to start his own railroad company. He and his partner Dr. William Bell called it the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad. They worked together and laid tracks from Denver to the Pikes Peak area. At that time, it was a boomtown for mining. Consequently, a railroad was a welcome means of transportation.

### Founding Colorado Springs

Palmer founded the area known as Colorado Springs as a 10,000 acre city where people could find rest and healing. At that time, people believed that the fresh mountain air could help with tuberculosis and other diseases. Palmer actually designed this area to offer resort-type living for those who needed medical help.

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## Family life

In 1870, William married Mary Lincoln Mellen, who was nicknamed “Queen.” They had three daughters, Elsie, Dorothy, and Marjory. Because of a heart condition, doctors recommended to Queen that she live at a lower elevation, so she and her daughters moved to England. General Palmer visited them as much as possible. Sadly, Queen died at the young age of 44.



## Legacy

In 1910, William Jackson Palmer had a tragic accident on his horse and was paralyzed. He ended up in a wheelchair, and eventually died from complications related to the accident. He was a great contributor to Colorado

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history, and specifically Colorado Springs. Some of his great contributions were establishing the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind, founding the University of Colorado, and funding for the creation of the Colorado College. Today, in downtown Colorado Springs, there is a statue of him on his favorite horse, Diablo. It shall always remind us of William Jackson Palmer and his great influence in our city.