18 July 2013

Matthew McCullor  
US Army Corps of Engineers  
Omaha District  
CENWO-PM-AB  
1616 Capitol Ave.  
Omaha, NE  68102-4901

Project:  Larimer County Canal No. 2  
Fort Collins, CO  
Level II Documentation

Dear Mr. McCullor,

Tatanka Historical Associates has completed its Level II documentation of a segment of Larimer County Canal No. 2 adjacent to College Ave. and the Foothills Mall in Fort Collins, Colorado. This work was undertaken to meet US Army Corps of Engineers and Colorado State Historic Preservation Office requirements as specified in a recent Memorandum of Agreement between the agencies and the property owner.

Accompanying this report are the required medium-format black and white photographs with an accompanying photo log, and measured drawings of the ditch segment. All of these materials have been prepared and printed in an archivally stable format to comply with the guidelines found in OAHP publication #1595, entitled "Historic Resource Documentation."

Sincerely,

Ron Sladek  
President
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INTRODUCTION

This project originated in May 2013, when Tatanka Historical Associates Inc. (THAI) was engaged by James Enterprises Inc. to complete Level II documentation on a segment of the historic Larimer County Canal No. 2 that is adjacent to the Foothills Mall in central Fort Collins, Colorado. The linear resource is located on privately owned acreage associated with planned redevelopment of the Foothills Mall and its outlying pad sites. Site preparation will include demolition of most of the buildings along the canal segment and the construction of new buildings in this area. Prior to that, the canal needs to be relocated and placed into a box culvert.

Planning for this major urban renewal project triggered the need for a Class III Cultural Resource Survey of the canal that was completed by James Enterprises Inc. in April 2013. During the course of the study, it was determined that the segment supports the eligibility of Larimer County Canal No. 2 as a whole. The proposed undertaking was also found to constitute an adverse effect to the eligible canal. Following review by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Colorado State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), a Memorandum of Agreement was prepared between these agencies and the property owner, Walton Foothills Holdings VI, LLC. This stipulated the completion of Level II documentation prior to the commencement of construction.

On 1 July 2013, staff from THAI visited the site to record field notes, take medium-format black and white photographs, and to make measurements of the canal segment. This report and the accompanying photographs and drawings fulfill the Level II submittal requirements of the BLM and SHPO.

PHYSICAL DETAILS

The Larimer County Canal No. 2 segment documented here is located in the center of Fort Collins, a growing northern Colorado city of almost 150,000 residents. It is found in the southwest quarter of Section 25, Township 7 North, Range 69 West, at an elevation of 5,030’ above sea level. This corresponds to the vicinity of S. College Ave. and E. Monroe Dr. (see Figure 1)

Running through the commercial area east of College Ave. and southwest of the Foothills Mall, the urban terrain through which the canal passes is completely developed with driveways, parking lots, and commercial buildings. The oldest of these features date back to the early 1970s. Aside from the mall, the area’s small buildings are primarily occupied by restaurants and boutiques. Although the canal segment passes behind and between several of these commercial buildings and parking lots, it is fully accessible to the public. (see Figure 2)
The arcing canal segment, about 1,300 feet in length, runs from north to south and is mostly an earthen channel with a flat dirt bottom and angled banks covered with a thick growth of grass. It is almost seven feet deep and has a floor width of approximately 16'8". *(see Appendix 1)* Mature evergreen and deciduous trees line the segment a short distance back from the top of the canal. A few large cottonwood trees have also been allowed to grow from the western bank behind the Corner Bakery (3300 S. College Ave.). An earthen berm supports the eastern side of the canal along its northern length. From the top of this berm, the ground slopes down toward the mall parking lot. The northern two-thirds of the segment are most intact in terms of the canal’s original materials and appearance.

At its northern end, the canal segment passes from the west through a concrete box culvert that runs underneath S. College Ave. This was completed in 1972, with the date stamped into the culvert’s flat top. Also mounted in this concrete is a bronze benchmark, stamped 1971, that was placed there by the US Coast & Geodetic Survey. The box culvert has concrete wingwalls and is topped by a short Armco guard rail. From that point, the canal arcs toward the southeast as it passes between the Corner Bakery and the mall parking lot. Along the southern half of this stretch, just east of the Corner Bakery, the tops of the canal banks hold two small concrete abutments that face one another. These appear to have been intended for a pedestrian bridge that was never installed.

Halfway along its length, the segment passes several mature cottonwood trees that are growing along the west bank behind the Corner Bakery. It then travels under a bridge that supports an east-west drive. Constructed in 1973, this concrete bridge with metal pipe railing and concrete wingwalls provides access from College Ave. to the mall property. From there, the canal continues arcing to the south and then southwest toward E. Monroe Dr. It first passes under a pedestrian bridge with an open wood plank rail. This dates from around 1975, and provides access from Tres Margaritas (3400 S. College Ave.) to the boutique shops to the east. South of that, the canal passes underneath another bridge with an open wood plank rail. It carries vehicular traffic between the boutique shops in the area, and appears to have been constructed in the mid-1970s.

South of the bridge, the canal’s west bank is shored up by a concrete wall. It then enters another box culvert that carries it underneath a small pedestrian plaza between the boutiques along the north side of E. Monroe Dr. These small commercial buildings and the plaza were all constructed around 1976. South of the plaza, the canal is open again for a short distance. In this area, the west bank continues as a vertical concrete wall. The canal then disappears into a box culvert as it passes underneath E. Monroe Dr. and arcs toward the southwest.

South of E. Monroe Dr., the canal emerges in a small triangular area framed by E. Monroe Dr., S. College Ave., and The Square shopping center. In this space, the canal has a weathered concrete floor and is framed by tall concrete walls that support metal pipe rails and a short Armco guardrail along College Ave. The
concrete side walls were originally lower than they are today. These have been capped with additional concrete that raised them to their current height about 24" above the original concrete wall. Mounted along the southeast wall at the bottom of the canal are four metal slide headgates, one larger than the other three. The larger one is stamped as manufactured in Denver by Armco, and the other three are products of Calco, a division of Armco. All appear to date from the 1920s. While the headgates are intact and fixed in the closed position, their manual control mechanisms have been removed and they are no longer operable. (see Appendix 2)

Finally, the Larimer County Canal No. 2 segment disappears underneath S. College Ave. as it enters a concrete box culvert that was constructed in 1972. As on the northern culvert under S. College Ave., this date is stamped into the culvert’s flat top.
Figure 1
Canal Segment Location
USGS 7.5’ Topographic Quadrangle Map
Figure 2
Segment Diagram
Larimer County Canal No. 2
HISTORY OF
LARIMER COUNTY CANAL NO. 2

The history of Larimer County Canal No. 2 is tied to Colorado’s 19th century settlement by American pioneers and the resulting expansion of the farm economy between the late 1800s and mid-1900s. These broad trends were substantially aided by the development of irrigation systems large and small that over time reached across the state’s semi-arid northeastern plains like a network of blood vessels. Together, the ditches conveyed the most precious commodity in a dry environment -- water that acted as the lifeblood of settlement and long-term development.

During the 1860s, the Colorado frontier experienced an influx of Anglo-Americans drawn west by reports of a gold strike and vast tracts of land to be homesteaded. While most Gold Rush arrivals sought their fortune among the alpine mining camps, others saw opportunity in the river valleys below. As the years passed and mining proved to be a difficult way to make a living, an increasing number of pioneers resettled on lands adjacent to the rivers that emerged from the eastern flanks of the Rocky Mountains. There they found rich soils but little precipitation in the dry climate of the high prairie. Determined to build thriving farms, some began to construct small irrigation ditches to bring water to their crop fields. Many of these efforts proved successful, launching an age of irrigation that has continued through the present time.

Modest pioneer ditches that brought water to the lowlands along the rivers were excavated by hand and horse. Many of these individually owned and developed farm ditches traveled short distances to water nearby fields for the small-scale production of food crops and hay for livestock. Some were eventually extended, receiving improvements that allowed them to irrigate much larger areas. Mutual ditches emerged from this environment, jointly owned by groups of farmers and operated for their common benefit. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, many but not all of northeastern Colorado’s irrigation ditches remained modest in length but provided an ever-growing population of pioneer farmers with much needed water for their fields and livestock.

Between 1860 and 1890, it is estimated that the number of irrigated acres in Colorado rose from 35,000 to more than one million. By 1900, Colorado had more acreage under irrigation than any other state in the nation. Fifty years later, the state held around 17,000 miles of irrigation ditches and canals. (Holleran, 2005) Before long, irrigation systems of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came to be viewed by capitalists and entrepreneurs as profit-making opportunities in much the same way as railroads, electrical grids, and oilfields.
Larimer County Canal No. 2 dates back to the settlement of the eastern plains, particularly the prairie lands surrounding the small town of Fort Collins and the Cache la Poudre River. After the fort closed in 1867 and the federal government opened the former military reservation to settlement in 1872, pioneers began to flood the area eager to claim homesteads and establish farms. Most settled close to the river bottoms, where access to water was convenient. Beyond this riparian corridor, the soils were rich but the region’s arid climate made irrigation a necessity if farms were to succeed. The first farmers along the Cache la Poudre realized that river water needed to be transported to their fields, and that the surrounding countryside could be settled if ditches were built.

Throughout the 1860s, early settlers continued to construct relatively short ditches running from the Cache la Poudre River to their nearby fields planted with hay, grains and vegetables. However, the labor-intensive work and high cost of developing more substantial irrigation systems made it impossible for individual farmers to expand their ditches beyond their small farms. Groups of farmers banded together in some cases to form mutual ditch companies, essentially non-profit operations dedicated to serving the irrigation needs of their members.

Irrigation in the Cache la Poudre valley soon entered a new age driven by entrepreneurs, capitalists and stockholders, with irrigation company managers making business decisions. Lawsuits arose in this climate, where disputes over water rights had to be settled in the newly formed courts. The infusion of investment capital, some from wealth made in Colorado mining and mercantile enterprises and much from East Coast investors, provided the fuel for larger irrigation systems to be constructed starting in the 1870s.

Efforts were underway by the early 1870s to develop longer ditches and canals that would bring irrigation water to cultivated lands more distant from the Cache la Poudre River bottomlands. Experienced agricultural colonists, in some cases backed by eastern capital, brought a number of these larger irrigation projects to the area. In a number of cases, ditch companies acquired earlier water rights and some of the short pioneer ditches. They either constructed new ditches or enlarged the earlier ones into more substantial conveyances capable of carrying water great distances across the arid prairie.

After the fort closed, men from the Union Colony in Weld County formed the Fort Collins agricultural colony to promote the settlement and development of Fort Collins as a frontier community. All were eager to reap the financial benefits of founding a new town, and by and large their efforts proved to be successful. Incorporated in 1872, the colony operated under the name Larimer County Land Improvement Company. The company soon laid plans to construct a lengthy irrigation ditch that would divert water from the Cache la Poudre River upstream, bringing life to farms on the higher ground west and south of town.
Designated Larimer County Canal No. 2, construction commenced in early April 1873 and continued into the spring of 1874, ultimately costing $15,000 to complete. Although there were other attempts to bring water to higher ground in the area, Larimer County Canal No. 2 was the first to successfully irrigate the benchlands and higher prairie south of the Poudre River valley.

Benjamin H. Eaton, John C. Abbott and Jack Dow were engaged by the Land Improvement Company to plan for and supervise construction of Larimer County Canal No. 2. The first two men also oversaw development of the Lake Canal, which was started in 1872 and ran through the agricultural lands north and east of Fort Collins. Benjamin Harrison Eaton was an Ohio native who settled on an Iowa farm in 1857. He struck out for the Colorado Territory in 1859, joining a party of Iowa men who crossed the frontier in search of Rocky Mountain gold. Making his way through the mountains, Eaton ended up in New Mexico, where he farmed for two years and experimented with irrigation. After serving with the New Mexico Volunteers under Kit Carson, Eaton returned to Ohio in 1864. Two years later, he and his wife Rebecca homesteaded in western Weld County, Colorado.

Eaton became a founding officer of the Union Colony (later the City of Greeley) and began acquiring large tracts of land, with much of the acreage coming from the Union Pacific Railroad. He eventually amassed holdings of 25,000 acres in Weld and Larimer counties, and secured water rights along the Cache la Poudre River. In addition to farming and raising livestock, Eaton launched a business constructing irrigation ditches. Beyond Larimer County Canal No. 2 and the Lake Canal, Eaton built the Larimer & Weld Canal, also known as the Eaton Ditch, whose construction started in 1879.

During his lifetime, Benjamin Eaton was credited as being one of the first pioneers to recognize that the establishment of reliable and sophisticated systems of irrigation canals and water rights distribution would serve as a strong economic basis for the growth of Colorado. In 1872 and again in 1875, Eaton was elected to the territorial legislature. He later served as governor of Colorado from 1885 to 1887, and his administration focused upon advances in the areas of farming and irrigation. The town of Eaton near Greeley was named in his honor.

John C. Abbott was born in Illinois in 1841 and moved west to the Colorado Territory in the 1860s to settle in the Union Colony. There he became a butcher and farmer, and an early proponent of irrigation along the Cache la Poudre River. Abbott associated with Benjamin Eaton and the two men constructed the Lake Canal, which they started in 1872. The following year they launched work on Larimer County Canal No. 2. During the 1870s, Abbott moved to Fort Collins, where he took up farming and became involved in community affairs. Later that decade, he secured the contract to build the Pleasant Valley & Lake Canal, which initially watered the Bellvue area and was then extended out onto the plains west of Fort Collins. In the mid-1880s, Abbott served as state auditor.
The third person involved in the construction of Larimer County Canal No. 2 was Jack Dow. A civil engineer, Dow arrived in the Fort Collins area in the 1860s. In 1867, the year the fort closed, he surveyed the first plat of the town parallel with the river. In 1873, Dow was engaged by Eaton and Abbott to design and survey the canal, and was involved in supervising the project. He was elected county surveyor in 1874 and continued to work on area irrigation projects, including the Arthur Ditch and the Pleasant Valley & Lake Canal. Dow moved to Wyoming around 1880, where he laid out the original Sheridan townsite and served on the state Board of Control for water issues.

When completed, Larimer County Canal No. 2 reached a length of more than thirteen miles and was capable of carrying irrigation water to almost 11,000 acres of cropland south of the river and west and south of Fort Collins. Water was first turned into the canal around the first of May 1874. Fifteen feet wide at the base, the earthen channel carried water to a depth of four feet. It had an average fall of 5.2 feet per mile and a diversion of 175 cubic feet per second, with an estimated velocity of two miles per hour. The *Fort Collins Standard* (6 May 1874, p. 3), hailing the canal's completion, wrote that

“The immense wealth which will naturally be added to this county through the construction of this and other large canals can scarcely be estimated. They render the barren plain fertile, and render the land heretofore useless except for grazing, the most valuable agricultural land in the world.”

The canal’s water rights were adjudicated in 1882, when the District Court determined that Larimer County Canal No. 2 held priority 56, with its initial construction dating to 1 April 1873.

In March 1878, articles of incorporation were filed for the Larimer County Canal No. 2 Irrigating Company. The group of men involved in founding the ditch company included notable members of the Fort Collins farming and business community. Among them were Franklin Avery, John Abbott, A. L. Emigh, Joseph Mason, and W. C. Stover. The new entity assumed the Larimer County Land Improvement Company’s ownership and management of the canal. Capital stock in the company totaled $16,000, divided into 160 shares valued at $100 each. These were distributed among the shareholders and a board of trustees was appointed to manage the company’s business. The irrigating company’s corporate life was extended for additional twenty-year periods in 1897 and 1918. In 1938, the shareholders voted to renew the life of the corporation in perpetuity.

By the mid-1890s, the canal was supplying irrigation water to more than 8,600 acres of cropland. The most common crops grown on these fields around that time were wheat, oats, potatoes, barley and alfalfa. More than 18,500 acre-feet of water was transported by the canal and used in 1894 alone. (Boyd, p. 51) As water became available on higher ground and at greater distances from the Poudre River, pioneers laid claim to previously unusable lands and the countryside around Fort Collins filled with farms.
The original headgate of Larimer County Canal No. 2 was located about three-quarters of a mile downstream from where it is today, close to where Overland Trail meets the Poudre River. From there it ran due south for about one-half mile before turning to the southeast and running parallel to and north of the New Mercer Ditch. Around 1906, a more substantial headgate was constructed near the town of Laporte along the south bank of the Poudre River just north of Bingham Hill. This point was about four miles northwest of the town of Fort Collins. At this new location, it shared a diversion dam and was situated close to the headgates of the New Mercer Ditch and Little Cache Ditch. The Larimer County Canal No. 2 and New Mercer Ditch headgates sat adjacent to one another, and the ditches ran parallel for much of their lengths, each serving a different group of farmers (their maximum separation was about one-half mile).

In addition to providing water for crop fields along its route, between 1906 and 1916 Larimer County Canal No. 2 leased the old city ditch that supplied the 1882 Fort Collins Waterworks Plant on Overland Trail. Municipal use of the canal’s water triggered the change in its diversion point and construction of the new headgate. During this period, the Waterworks facility acted as a backup to the new Poudre Canyon filtration plant that was completed in 1905. Passing through the old Waterworks Plant as needed, the canal water ensured that the town maintained a reliable source of filtered and pressurized water for domestic and firefighting use at times when the filtration plant was out of service.

The City of Fort Collins retained ownership of shares in the canal for decades afterward. These were used to offset and supplement other needs for municipal water supply. In 1905 and 1907, the city and the ditch company acquired water rights from the John R. Brown ditch (priority 14, dating back to 1 May 1865), which were split evenly between the two entities. Following a petition made by the ditch company, the water court in Larimer County allowed it to divert its share (4.0 cubic feet per second) through the Larimer County Canal No. 2 headgate.

From the Waterworks Plant, the canal snaked through the countryside on its southeast course, irrigating numerous farms west of Fort Collins. As it approached the town, it wrapped around the west side of Sheldon Lake, a former farm pond that is now part of City Park. Continuing on a southerly route, the canal passed west of the Colorado Agricultural & Mechanical College (now Colorado State University) and then snaked its way to the southeast past Spring Creek. South of today’s Drake Rd., it approached the Colorado & Southern railroad tracks and College Ave. as it worked its way through the agricultural fields south of town.

As the canal approached the county road that is today’s Horsetooth Rd., four small metal headgates were mounted in concrete along its eastern bank. The headgates released water into the Dixon Lateral Ditch. Incorporated in December 1885 by a small group of area farmers, the Dixon Lateral Ditch Company was established to draw irrigation water from Larimer County Canal No.
No. 2. The corporation had an initial capital stock of $1,000 divided into forty shares valued at $25 each, and its office was located in the Harmony School. One of the company’s founders was prominent area farmer and irrigation promoter Nathaniel C. Warren, the son of pioneer Charles Warren.

The headgates of the Dixon Lateral Ditch remain in place today in the small triangular segment of the canal that is located on the southeast corner of S. College Ave. and E. Monroe Dr. For decades, these drew water from the canal and transported it to the southeast through the open fields that extended toward Warren Lake. After running along the lake’s northern shore, the lateral continued for several miles to the southeast, irrigating numerous farms throughout the Harmony District. In 1976, the ditch and all of its associated rights-of-way, easements, headgates, pipes, flumes, land and other features in Sections 25 and 26 were transferred to the Warren Lake Reservoir Company. Around that time, the lateral went out of use as the farmlands it served were coming under development with commercial buildings and residential neighborhoods.

South of the current Horsetooth Rd., another lateral ditch left Larimer County Canal No. 2 along its east bank. From this headgate, the lateral headed east and then north toward Warren Lake and the 320-acre farm of Charles Warren. This lateral was the lake’s primary inlet channel, and remains so today. Together with the development of irrigation ditches, water storage reservoirs began to emerge throughout the countryside around Fort Collins in the late 1800s. The reservoirs were designed to store spring runoff for use during the hotter, drier months later in the growing season. With water available at times when the rivers ran low, farmers were then able to diversify, adding cash crops such as alfalfa, sugar beets, and potatoes that matured later in the season and needed to be irrigated throughout the late summer.

The Warren Lake Reservoir Company was founded in 1879 for the purpose of constructing and operating a “reservoir for the storage of water for irrigating and piscatorial purposes.” (Articles of Incorporation) The primary person involved in this effort was Charles Warren, a New York native who had served in the Civil War. In 1873 he settled in Fort Collins with his wife and children. There he operated a lumber business before establishing a farm several miles southeast of town. During the 1890s, the farm passed to his son Nathaniel when Charles assumed management of the Harmony Mill and moved into Fort Collins.

Water for Warren Lake was derived from the Cache la Poudre River and transported there by Larimer County Canal No. 2. To accomplish this, Charles Warren excavated a feeder canal to fill the natural basin that occupied part of his farm. By the spring of 1879, the lake covered about 120 acres and was twenty feet deep. Fish also traveled from the river down the canal and into the body of water. Over the following decades, the dam and reservoir were enlarged several times, raising its capacity from approximately 91,000,000 to 126,000,000 cubic
feet of water. To accomplish this, the water supply was augmented by additional flow from the New Mercer Ditch and the Pleasant Valley & Lake Canal. (Sixteenth Biennial Report of the State Engineer, 1913)

As the first storage reservoir built in Larimer County, the lake also gained the distinction of being the first of its kind in northern Colorado. According to Ansel Watrous’ 1911 History of Larimer County, Warren Lake “has paid for itself a hundred times over…saving millions of dollars’ worth of crops from burning and bringing them through to maturity which could not have been saved had it not been for the water held back for use in time of need.” Centrally involved in the construction and management of both the Dixon Canyon Lateral and Warren Lake, Charles and Nathaniel Warren developed the means to irrigate an extensive area of cropland for decades to come. None of this could have been possible without the earlier completion of Larimer County Canal No. 2.

Beyond the Warren Lake lateral headgate, Larimer County Canal No. 2 continued south for another half mile. It crossed underneath another east-west county road, later known as Harmony Rd., and then terminated in Mail Creek and the parallel Mail Creek Ditch. From there, water from the canal traveled through the agricultural district for miles to the southeast, irrigating numerous farms and eventually ending up in Fossil Creek Reservoir. Measured from the headgate along the Cache la Poudre River to Mail Creek, the canal was 13.3 miles in length but served a much larger area through its system of laterals and reservoirs.

Starting in the 1960s, accelerated development of the Fort Collins urban growth area caused a substantial reduction of the amount of farm acreage previously watered by Larimer County Canal No. 2. By the late 1960s, the City of Fort Collins owned 4.03 shares of Larimer County Canal No. 2, which it continued to use for municipal purposes. This number increased to 32.50 shares in the canal by April 1978, along with 4.80 shares in the Dixon Canyon Lateral and 36.38 shares in Warren Lake. Much of this municipal water was used only for the irrigation of parks and golf courses, with any excess sold back to area farmers for irrigation. Despite urbanization of the agricultural districts through which it passed, primarily by the development of residential subdivisions on former crop fields, the canal remained in use into the early 21st century.
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Canal Cross-Section

Larimer County Canal #2 cross-section
view N
not to scale

S. Slaughter, J. Roberts
6/27/13

Note on depth of canal: depth was taken at bridge, not cross-section, although measurement is comparable.