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FROM HARLOTS TO HARLEM

TOURISM

BY PATRICK NAYLIS

For anyone interested in the unusual and less talked about side of Denver, Patrick Naylis suggests a few uncommon tours.

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO A NATIONAL NEWS TALK SHOW asked a local resident why people should visit Denver. He replied, "We have the biggest laundromat in the world." He was speaking of Smiley's Laundromat on Colfax Ave. and Downing St., which makes the claim. The comment had then Mayor Hickenlooper bent out of shape enough to write an editorial about what Denver had to offer. Sure Denver has award-winning art and natural science museums and offers excellent dining and shopping experiences. But what about for those who want to experience something different? Denver presents the tourist with many opportunities for a more authentic experience, something that veers from the trampled path.

"I think you should experience something completely different to be closer to something real and tangible. Otherwise, what's the point? You are going to come back with a bunch of pictures that nobody's going to care about," said Dave Pennington, a Denver writer and contributor to UnseenDenver.com. "I think that's what makes it so great is that if you take a vacation here you don't know what you're going to get," said Pennington.

And it's true. There are plenty of different angles from which to view the city.

Consider these four elements of the city to get a different view of Denver.

THE SEEDIER SIDE OF DENVER

One unlikely destination in Denver were houses that offered "horizontal recreation." According to Dr. Tom Noel, CU professor and author of numerous books on Denver and Colorado history, "Brothels made Denver a great tourist and convention city." Noel is the author of *Brothels, Bordellos, and*

Bad Girls: Prostitution in Colorado 1860-1930. He says one of the more famous brothels was Mattie Silks' Red Light House at 1942 Market St. Miners from the mountains and farmers from the plains came to Denver in search of commercial companionship. In 1892, "They actually put out a little red book advertising these bordellos," said Noel. The book was passed out at conventions, enticing conventioners. In 1912, progressive reformers cleaned up Market St. and since then Denver has been without a red light district.

Although Denver's brothels no longer exist, Tom Noel conducts tours of the former red light district. Actresses playing many of the notorious Madams and working girls tell the stories of Denver's debauched past. The next tour takes place Tuesday, June 21st. For information and reservations contact History Colorado at 303-866-4686.

GRAVE ESCAPES

Not everyone favored brothels and they're not exactly where you would take your out of town guests, but everyone loves a picnic in a park. Unlike today, though, at the turn of the century Denver suffered a paucity of parks in which to picnic, having yet to establish a park system. For many families, the solution was simple: cemeteries. Cemeteries were a great way to spend time with both present and departed family members. Two of the more elegant cemeteries, Fairmount and Riverside, were popular destinations for Victorian families. The shady trees and lush grass made for a beautiful and serene park setting. Today, Fairmount is still well known for its lush and verdant surroundings. Visitors can see hundreds of plants and animals while they picnic or walk through the cemetery.

Mattie Silks and many of her best customers are buried at Fairmount.

The Fairmount Heritage Foundation (FHF) offers tours of two of Denver's pioneer cemeteries, Riverside and Fairmount. Tom Morton of the FHF provides an intriguing, historical and humorous tale of famous people from

HARLEM OF THE WEST

Five Points jazz clubs were another major destination in Denver. In its heyday, Five Points was known as the Harlem of the West. Joints like the Rossonian at 26th and Welton served both blacks and whites with keen tastes. "It was a great source of income for artists," said Noel. Jazz musicians such as George Morrison, Jr., Duke Ellington, Cole Porter and John Coltrane passed through Denver. "A lot of them would be driving or taking the train from Chicago to L.A. and say, 'While we're here in Denver we may as well do a gig,'" said Noel.

Today El Chapultepec is still standing as a great, authentic Jazz venue in Lower Downtown Denver.

JUNETEENTH

Juneteenth marks the day—June, 19 1865—slaves in Texas learned they were emancipated. The first major celebration occurred the following year and became a state holiday in Texas. Colorado also honors Juneteenth as a state holiday. For thirty years, the Five Points neighborhood has celebrated the holiday with a parade, live music, entertainment and food. The festival begins Saturday, June 18 at 10:00 A.M. with the annual parade beginning at Manual High School. •

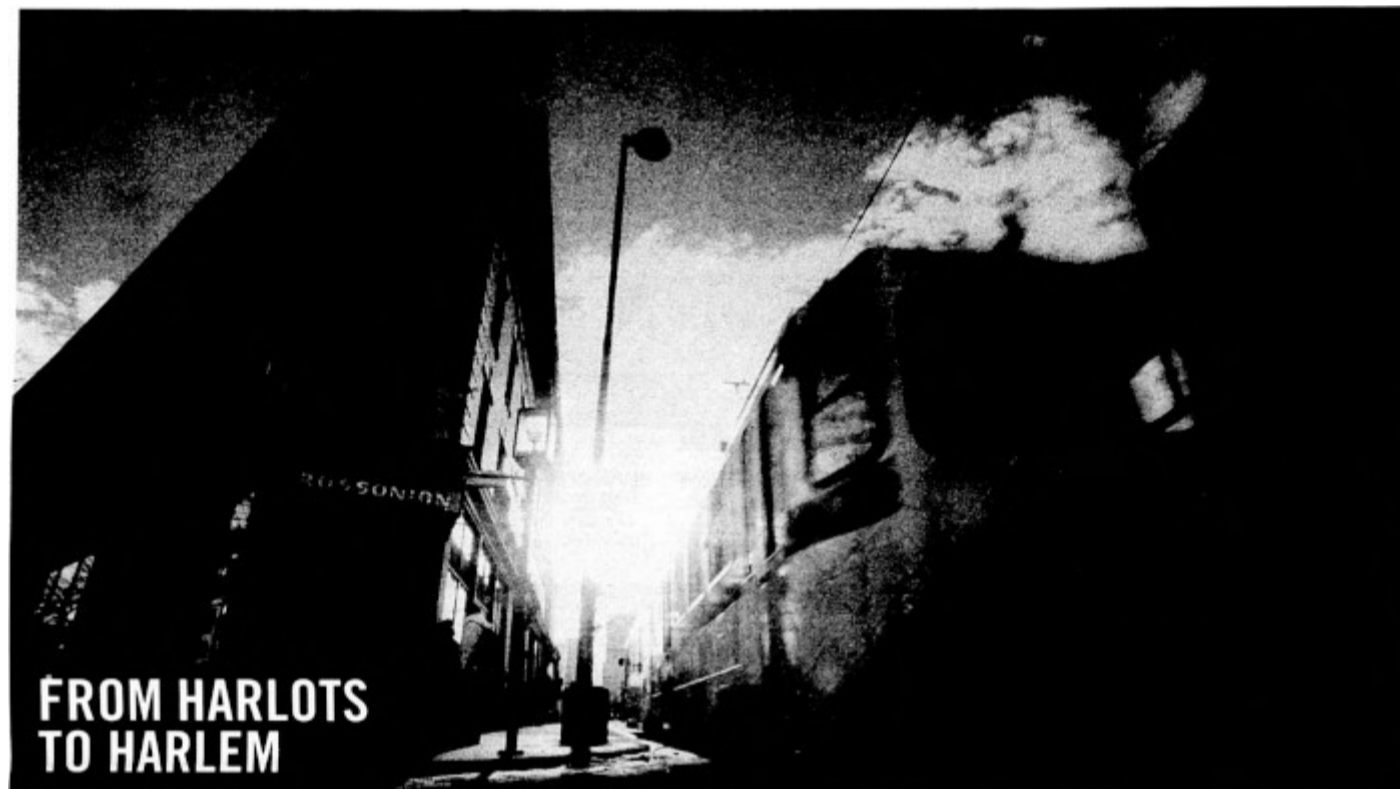


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