

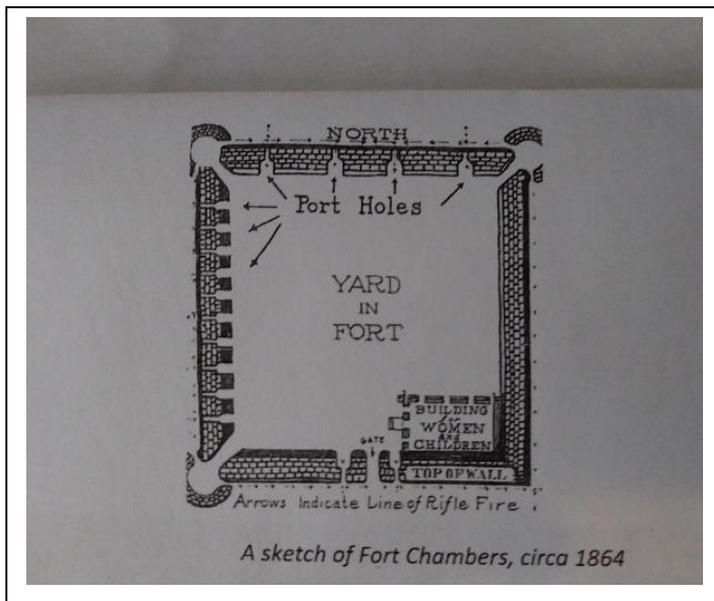
Fort Chambers

A Call for Boulder to Reckon with our History and Build Right Relationships with Indigenous Peoples Today

Across our country, people are re-thinking how we should memorialize our history. Whose voices, stories, and images have been erased or denigrated? Whose stories have been sanitized and mythologized? In our public spaces, how can we reckon with the terrible injustices and legacies of slavery, genocide, colonization, and racism? How can we bring all our peoples and their histories together with a common commitment to truth, respect, and justice?

Boulder has a unique opportunity to do this now. In 2018, the City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) purchased a 110-acre property on 63rd Street between Valmont and Jay roads. This land lies just north of Valmont Butte, a sacred site to many Indigenous nations. For more than 14,000 years their ancestors hunted, traded, held ceremonies, lived and died on this land.

Euro-American settlers came to Boulder Valley as miners in 1858. At that time Chief Nawath (Left Hand)'s band of Arapaho people were living here in their ancestral home, under the Fort Laramie treaty of 1851. The miners violated this treaty and forced the Arapaho out of the Boulder Valley. Settlers built sod stockades anticipating resistance from Native people. One such stockade was Fort Chambers, built on the 63rd Street land that recently became City of Boulder Open Space.



In 1864, the territorial governor, John Evans, recruited settlers as “Indian fighters” specifically to kill Native people and further white settlement. Boulder-area recruits mustered into service, drilled, and trained at Fort Chambers. Col. John Chivington led Boulder’s regiment to Sand Creek where they carried out the grisly massacre of over 230 Cheyenne and Arapaho people -- mostly women, children, and elders -- who were peacefully encamped under protection of the Union flag. Chief Nawath died of his injuries there. A congressional investigation determined it to be a military massacre.

The Cheyenne and Arapaho people who survived the Sand Creek Massacre were forced out of Colorado to reservations in Oklahoma, Wyoming, and Montana where most of their tribal members live today.



This is a section of a painting on elk hide by Northern Arapaho artist Eugene J. Ridgely, Sr., depicting the Sand Creek Massacre. Photo courtesy of Museum of Boulder.

In 2016, the Boulder City Council passed Indigenous Peoples Day Resolution #1190, which acknowledges this history and states that “Boulder has benefited directly from Indian removal policies that violated human rights, broke government treaties and forced Arapaho People from their homeland.” The Resolution “directs [the] City Manager to work with City departments, Native Americans and historians to correct omissions of the Native American presence in public places, resources and cultural programming.”

To help the City carry out this Resolution, Right Relationship Boulder initiated dialogue with Southern and Northern Arapaho people and invited them to participate in a series of meetings and Indigenous Peoples Day events in Boulder. At the invitation of OSMP, Arapaho delegates visited the Fort Chambers site at 3902 63rd Street. Solemnly, they prayed and sang memorial songs, and they asked that this land be preserved as a place to teach the history of Indigenous peoples in the Boulder Valley, to honor the 1851 treaty, and to welcome the Arapaho people back to their homeland. Right Relationship Boulder is committed to honor their request and make their vision reality. We must act together now, before this crucial opportunity is lost.

OSMP is developing a management plan for the Fort Chambers site. Right Relationship Boulder is urging OSMP to recognize the unique historical, cultural, and spiritual value of this site to the Arapaho and Cheyenne people and to follow the direction of Indigenous leaders during the planning process. **Let’s transform a site of racist violence into a place of remembrance, learning, dialogue, reparations, and right relationship.**

What you can do now: Share this information with your family, school, faith community, civic organizations, etc. Request a slide presentation about Fort Chambers from Right Relationship Boulder (contact paulaRpalmer@gmail.com or christie.yoshi@colorado.edu). Sign up for the Right Relationship Boulder e-newsletter at RightRelationshipBoulder@gmail.com and follow us on Facebook. Learn about the Arapaho people, the Sand Creek Massacre, the history of Boulder.

Resources: [Northern Arapaho](#); [Southern Arapaho](#); Margaret Coel, [Chief Left Hand](#); [City of Boulder’s Indigenous Peoples Day Resolution](#); [The Horrific Sand Creek Massacre will be Forgotten No More](#); [Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site](#); [Indigenous Land Reparations](#)