

*This page and facing: After sustaining severe damage from the floods of September 2013, the historic Elkhorn Lodge in Estes Park received emergency grant funds from the History Colorado State Historical Fund.*

# FLOODED WITH OPPORTUNITY

## *The Power of Collaboration in the Face of Disaster*

BY CLAIRE L. LANIER

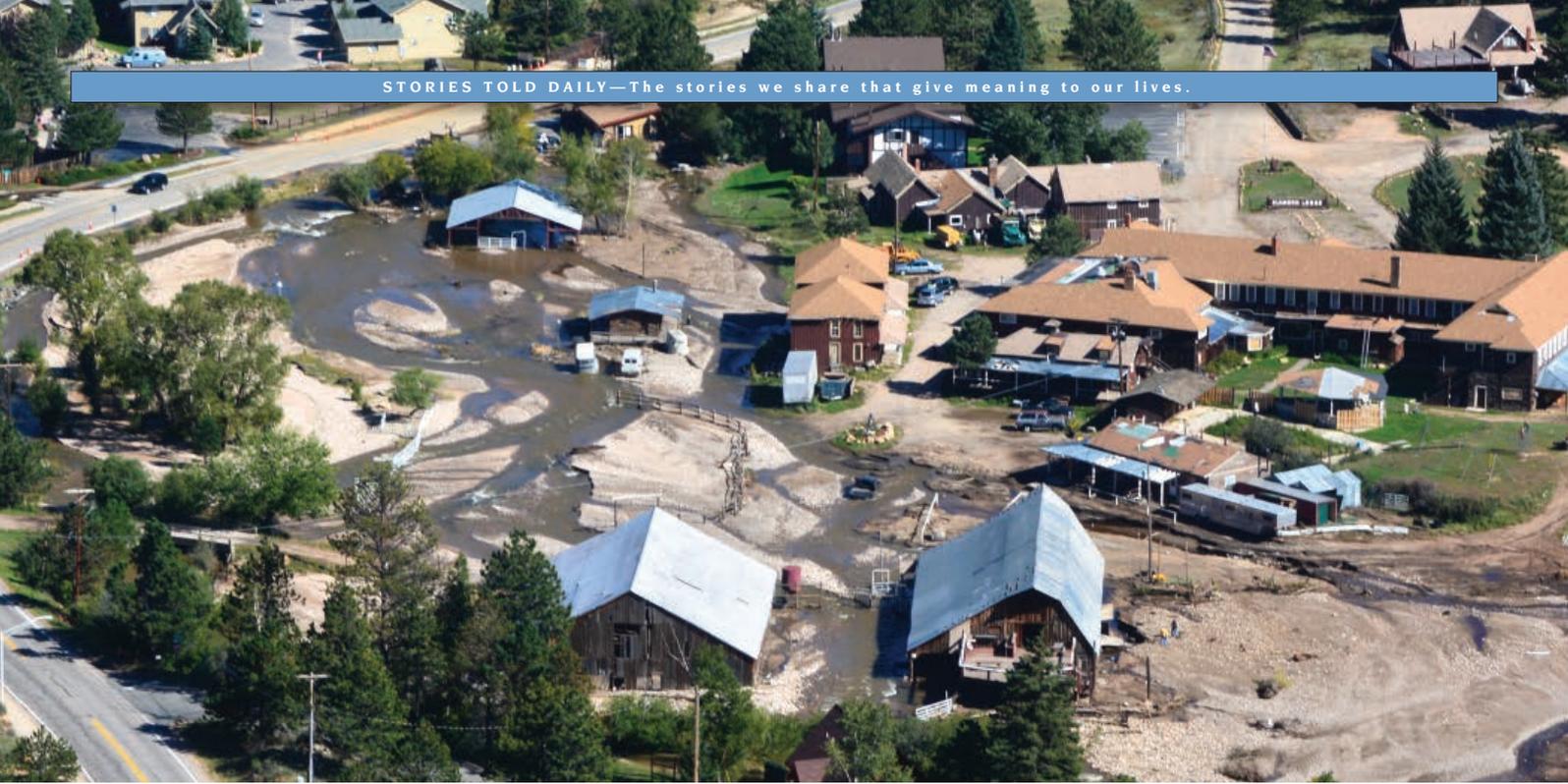
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“There’s a river in my barns,” said the caller. I paused. “Excuse me?” “There is a river running right through the middle of my barns,” the caller repeated. I was shocked, but I knew he wasn’t exaggerating—I’d already seen too many devastating photos of flood damage from the storms on September 13 and 14, 2013—and I thought how strange it must have been to watch a raging current form on dry land, transforming two historic barns into seemingly floating wooden masses.

Calls like these to History Colorado were not unusual following the massive floods that left hundreds without power, heat, or road access and destroyed historic properties in Boulder and Larimer Counties. Perhaps the only narrow silver lining on an aggressive, cumulonimbus cloud is the partnerships that formed as a result of disaster response and the subsequent innovations that have emerged for future

disasters, which are setting a national model for recovery. An unprecedented modern disaster, the 2013 floods united History Colorado, local nonprofits, the state’s emergency networks, and countless federal agencies to swiftly assess and repair the damage to historic properties and local infrastructure.

History Colorado has been providing direct flood support through the State Historical Fund (SHF) emergency grant program, which provides funding for temporary stabilization of disaster-affected historic properties. Since September, SHF has funded emergency projects at the Elkhorn Lodge and the Baldpate Inn, both in Estes Park, and the Little Church in the Pines in Salina, where flooding destroyed literally half the foundation. SHF funded installation of support pads, steel posts, and wood cribbing under the crumbling church to ensure its survival. “The chapel was near destruction, and our stress was enormous,” says Marti Anderson of the



Little Church in the Pines, “but all that changed because the SHF grant application process was simple, the staff was compassionate, and the funds arrived quickly.”

At Baldpate Inn, the floods ravaged the inn’s foundation and roof. After unsuccessfully looking for funding from insurance and several federal agencies, owner Lois Smith had to close the inn during its most profitable season. “Everyone thinks damage is the problem, but it’s the financial piece that really makes you worry. It seemed like every door was smashed shut,” says Smith, “so History Colorado was a breath of fresh air. I can’t tell you what an emotional uplift it was to receive the grant.”

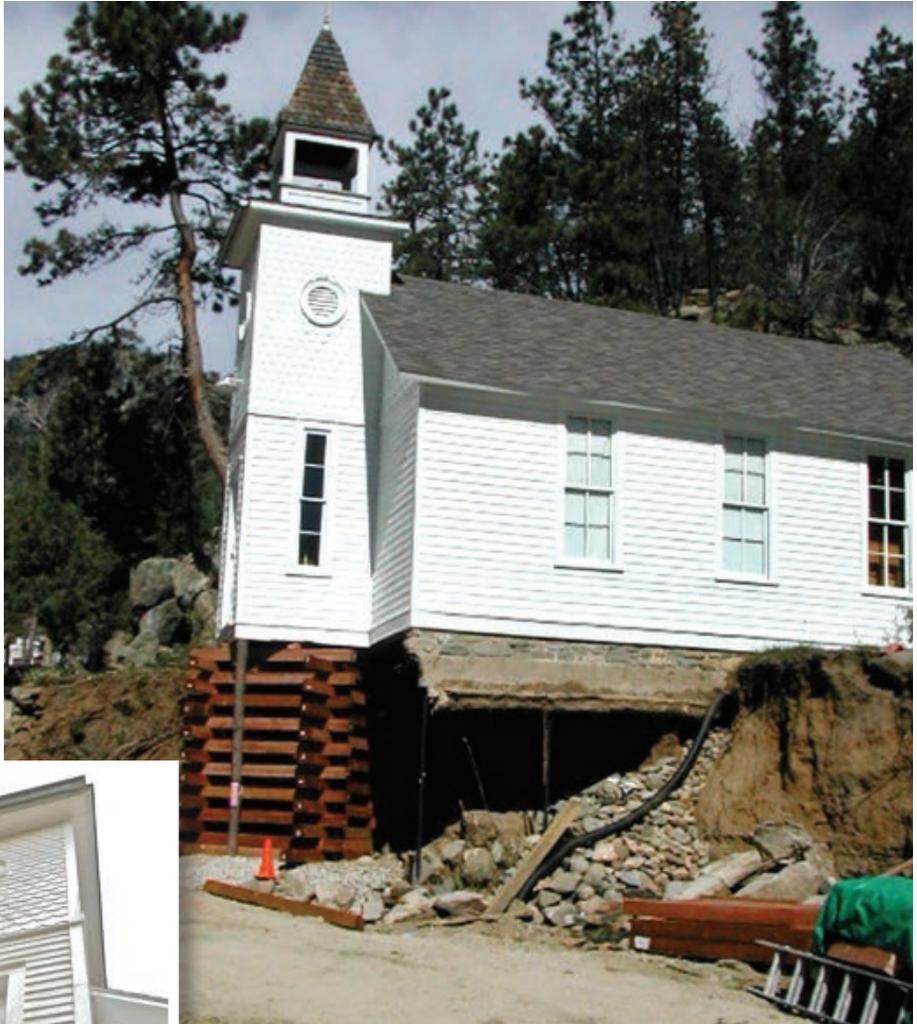
Though Baldpate is an ineligible applicant—SHF cannot directly fund private businesses—Colorado Preservation, Inc., a Denver-based preservation nonprofit, offered to serve as grant recipient on behalf of the inn, affording Baldpate a financial opportunity it otherwise would have missed.

Leading other recovery efforts at History Colorado is Dan Corson, Intergovernmental Services Director. Corson’s team upholds Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which requires federal agencies to consult with the State Historic Preservation Office before performing work that may affect historic properties. During flood response, when numerous federal programs are working with historic homeowners, this process can get complicated.



*Early days at the Baldpate Inn.  
Photo by Charles Mace.*

“One issue has been interpreting emergency provisions of different agencies because not all are the same,” says Corson. “We work primarily with FEMA, USDA Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Colorado Department of Transportation, and the Federal Highway Administration, and each has its own jurisdiction, but often they overlap, which can cause confusion.” As a direct result of the September Colorado floods, FEMA has initiated the Disaster Unified Response Team (DURT) in an effort to streamline the recovery process and avoid duplicate efforts. Proactive measures such as these will create a model for how agencies throughout the country can work together on future disasters.



*This page and facing: State Historical Fund emergency dollars enabled stabilization of Salina's historic Little Church in the Pines after floodwaters ripped away half the foundation.*

Externally, History Colorado has been working with several national and local organizations, such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation. “The good news is that Coloradans have learned to build on high ground, so fewer historic properties were affected,” says Amy Webb of the

National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Western Field Office. “Many areas were immediately aware of the needs for their historic properties. But in other regions, the response was, ‘I don’t know if we have any historic resources,’ so the floods revealed the need to encourage stronger local preservation efforts.”

History Colorado has been working with the relatively new Colorado Cultural and Historic Resources Alliance (CCAHR), a network of local, state, and national organizations that assist cultural and historic resources in Colorado during disasters. “CCAHR brings a team to the State Emergency Operations Center to identify resources in jeopardy, share the information on our listserv, and locate subject matter experts,” says Leslie Williams, co-founder and co-chair of CCAHR. “We worked with Colorado Preservation, Inc. to locate an engineer; we worked with the U.S. Department

of the Interior to find a post-and-beam construction expert from the National Park Service; we worked with FEMA and their environmental officer to coordinate volunteer efforts.”

Moreover, CCAHRA has trained community members to assess historic properties and recommend what might be improved to better withstand a disaster. “It’s really put people on the front lines of their community,” says CCAHRA’s Dana Echohawk. CCAHRA in its sheer existence demonstrates what collaboration can achieve immediately following a disaster, both for historic properties and for individuals.

Similarly, one of the more comprehensive collaborations born of the floods is the emergency Colorado Preserve America Youth Summit to be held in January. A nationally recognized program, the Youth Summit challenges middle and high school students to find creative methods to boost heritage tourism, economic development, and community involvement through historic preservation in Colorado communities. The SHF-funded program in January will unite History Colorado, Colorado Preservation, Inc., the National Trust for Historic Preservation, CCAHRA, and other local organizations that will connect students to post-flood issues. “Many youth across the state know little about the damage,” says Legacy High School senior Simon Hafner, a

Youth Summit alumnus. “And we are even less knowledgeable about the emergency response. All in all, we are not accustomed to large-scale flooding, so this is a teachable moment for youth preservationists in Colorado.”

The partnerships that formed as a result of the September floods are setting a precedent for disaster assistance and revealing how local, state, and federal collaboration presents opportunities that will only enhance our recovery capabilities in the future.

When the owner of the Elkhorn Lodge told me about the river running through the barns, I reflected on what “place” really means. I thought about how long those barns had been there and how many harsh rains they’d already withstood. I thought about how all the owners and employees of the lodge over the years might have looked at those old barns with affection and comfort; how they might have thought of them as *their* barns, and no one else’s. I thought about how our historic places make us feel proud of who we are and what we do in our communities.

Then I remembered that it’s only together that we can save places; I got back to work. “I’m so sorry, sir. How can we help?”

