

University of Denver

Digital Commons @ DU

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate Studies

---

1-1-2019

## Using Repeat Photography to Examine Change in a U.S. National Park Gateway Community: A Case Study of Estes Park, Colorado

Caitlin Lebeda  
*University of Denver*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd>



Part of the [Nature and Society Relations Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Lebeda, Caitlin, "Using Repeat Photography to Examine Change in a U.S. National Park Gateway Community: A Case Study of Estes Park, Colorado" (2019). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1593.  
<https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/1593>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact [jennifer.cox@du.edu](mailto:jennifer.cox@du.edu), [dig-commons@du.edu](mailto:dig-commons@du.edu).

---

# Using Repeat Photography to Examine Change in a U.S. National Park Gateway Community: A Case Study of Estes Park, Colorado

## Abstract

Since the creation of the National Park Service in the United States, tourists from around the world visiting America's national parks are served by gateway communities. Gateway communities are the towns and cities that border public lands and protected spaces. The impact of our visits on these gateway communities is considerable, with many gateways and their residents relying on consistent and ever-increasing visitation to national parks to spur economic growth and development. To better understand the impacts that national park designations have had on their gateway communities, it is important to determine what changes have occurred both physically and culturally in these communities. This research is a case study of Estes Park, Colorado, the gateway community of Rocky Mountain National Park, the third most visited national park in the United States in 2018. This project utilized a repeat photography method to analyze the changes in Estes Park since the establishment of Rocky Mountain National Park in 1915. This analysis suggests that Estes Park has grown considerably around tourism, with new development focused mainly on meeting the needs of visitors and a larger resident population spurred by the creation of the park.

## Document Type

Thesis

## Degree Name

M.A.

## Department

Geography

## First Advisor

Matthew Taylor

## Second Advisor

Helen Hazin, Ph.D.

## Third Advisor

Michael Kerwin, Ph.D.

## Keywords

Estes Park, gateway communities, repeat photography, Rocky Mountain National Park

## Subject Categories

Geography | Nature and Society Relations

## Publication Statement

Copyright is held by the author. User is responsible for all copyright compliance.

Using Repeat Photography to Examine Change in a U.S. National Park Gateway  
Community: A Case Study of Estes Park, Colorado

---

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics

University of Denver

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

---

by

Caitlin E. Lebeda

June 2019

Advisor: Matthew Taylor, Ph.D.

Author: Caitlin E. Lebeda

Title: Using Repeat Photography to Examine Change in a U.S. National Park Gateway  
Community: A Case Study of Estes Park, Colorado

Advisor: Matthew Taylor, Ph.D.

Degree Date: June 2019

## ABSTRACT

Since the creation of the National Park Service in the United States, tourists from around the world visiting America's national parks are served by gateway communities. Gateway communities are the towns and cities that border public lands and protected spaces. The impact of our visits on these gateway communities is considerable, with many gateways and their residents relying on consistent and ever-increasing visitation to national parks to spur economic growth and development. To better understand the impacts that national park designations have had on their gateway communities, it is important to determine what changes have occurred both physically and culturally in these communities. This research is a case study of Estes Park, Colorado, the gateway community of Rocky Mountain National Park, the third most visited national park in the United States in 2018. This project utilized a repeat photography method to analyze the changes in Estes Park since the establishment of Rocky Mountain National Park in 1915. This analysis suggests that Estes Park has grown considerably around tourism, with new development focused mainly on meeting the needs of visitors and a larger resident population spurred by the creation of the park.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Matthew Taylor, Dr. Helen Hazen, and Dr. Michael Kerwin at the University of Denver for their support throughout the completion of this research. I would especially like to thank my direct advisor Dr. Taylor for encouraging me to pursue my interests by completing a project using repeat photography.

I am also grateful for the support of several others who provided me with advice and technical expertise throughout my work on this thesis. First, I would like to thank Ms. Sophie-Min Thomson and Mr. JackCurtis Boaz for providing field work support and fresh eyes that helped me locate several photograph locations I was struggling to find. I greatly appreciate the time and effort they put in to helping me complete this critical component of my research. I would also like to thank Mr. Luke Winters for working with me to design a map of all the photograph locations around Estes Park.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	5
Review of Gateway Communities in the United States.....	5
Review of Photography in Geographic Research.....	10
Chapter 3: A Brief History of Estes Park, Colorado.....	16
Chapter 4: Methods.....	29
Chapter 5: Results.....	37
Downtown Estes Park.....	39
The Stanley Hotel.....	47
Before and After Lake Estes.....	55
Mary's Lake.....	63
Chapter 6: Discussion.....	67
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	76
References.....	79

## LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter Four.....	29
Figure 4.1.....	36
Chapter Five.....	37
Figure 5.1a.....	38
Figure 5.1b.....	38
Figure 5.2a.....	39
Figure 5.2b.....	40
Figure 5.3a.....	41
Figure 5.3b.....	42
Figure 5.3c.....	43
Figure 5.4a.....	44
Figure 5.4b.....	44
Figure 5.5a.....	46
Figure 5.5b.....	47
Figure 5.6a.....	48
Figure 5.6b.....	49
Figure 5.7a.....	50
Figure 5.7b.....	51
Figure 5.8a.....	52
Figure 5.8b.....	52
Figure 5.9a.....	54
Figure 5.9b.....	54
Figure 5.10a.....	55
Figure 5.10b.....	56
Figure 5.10c.....	57
Figure 5.11a.....	58
Figure 5.11b.....	59
Figure 5.12a.....	60
Figure 5.12b.....	61
Figure 5.13a.....	62
Figure 5.13b.....	62
Figure 5.14a.....	63
Figure 5.14b.....	64
Figure 5.15a.....	65
Figure 5.15b.....	66

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Commonly referred to as “America’s Best Idea,” national parks receive millions of visitors a year (National Park Service 2017). Public perceptions of wilderness lead many people out into the parks to experience nature. The federal government further encourages people to seek out nature through campaigns like “Find your Park,” an NPS initiative that promotes wider park visitation. Because of the desire of many Americans to experience national parks, and the federally funded efforts to encourage more visitation, national parks are more popular than ever.

These millions of visitors to the national park system often pass through or stay in towns on the edge of the parks commonly referred to as gateway communities. Gateway communities are not only a place for lodging, but a place where the natural environment and cultural history go hand in hand. Because of the volume of visitors, these communities also struggle with issues pertaining to growth and change. Research shows that residents of gateway communities, whether longtime residents or newcomers, feel a strong attachment to the landscape and character of their town (Howe, MacMahon, and Propst 1997). While they desire a healthy local economy, they also don’t want growth to be at the expense of their natural surroundings or community character.

These communities face a dilemma. Their existence is based on these millions of visitors, which brings economic growth, yet those who live in these places have a strong attachment to the landscape and character of their town, which may be affected by



increased tourism. The U.S. Department of the Interior and local governments consistently struggle to find ways to determine the capacities of the parks and the gateway communities (D'Antonio et al. 2013; Lawson, Newman, and Monz 2017; Turkewitz 2017). To better understand the impacts of national park designations on their gateway communities, it is valuable to document and analyze what changes have occurred both physically and culturally. This study presents a case study of Estes Park, Colorado, a gateway community that borders Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP).

Evaluating the physical and cultural landscape of Estes Park is a valuable exercise in geographic research. Many geographers have focused their attention on “reading” the landscape to understand the complexities of a place (Lewis 1983). Sauer describes how a landscape can be defined in many ways, such as the direction of observation and the altitude, making it difficult to provide a precise description of the landscape as a concrete phenomenon (Sauer 1925). He goes on to say that it is the individual character of a landscape that distinguishes it from other sections of the earth (Sauer 1925).

The findings presented in this thesis provide a reading of the landscape of Estes Park and a visual representation of its own individual character using repeat photography. According to the geographer Steven Hoelscher, “what we see on the landscape... stem[s] from the social, economic, and political ideologies of [its] creators and from their creative exigencies” (Hoelscher 1998). For the people of Estes Park, their social, economic, and political ideologies are at the forefront of their development decisions. They have fundamentally altered their landscape to suit not only the needs of the tourists to RMNP, but to also suit their own needs as residents of the town.

To address the visible changes Estes Park experienced since the designation of RMNP, this thesis provides an in-depth examination of gateway communities. Chapter Two provides a review of relevant literature on both gateway communities and their challenges, as well as a review of the use of photography in geographic research. This literature was compiled from academic cultural and landscape geography journal articles and texts, as well as texts focused specifically on photography within the discipline. A comprehensive understanding of both topics is needed to compile an effective case study of Estes Park.

Chapter Three presents a history of the town of Estes Park, Colorado and its growth alongside Rocky Mountain National Park. Discussing the history of Estes Park provides essential context to this case study, as it is important to understand the town's origins and its progression. This chapter includes several sections that focus on the most important time periods of Estes Park's development, focusing mainly on the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Chapter Four discusses the methods used to complete this study. I utilized a repeat photography method to document cultural and physical landscape change in Estes Park. I chose a series of archival photographs and retook the image to document the changes that occurred at fifteen different locations around the park.

Chapter Five details the results of this study. In this section, I discuss the fifteen repeat photograph pairs, describing both the differences and the similarities between the images. Examining these photographs in depth provides evidence of the changes that have occurred in Estes Park from the date of national park designation until the present. Chapter

Six provides a thorough discussion of these results. I describe the themes of change found in the photographic pairs, focusing mainly on different physical and cultural landscape changes. Finally, Chapter Seven concludes this thesis by providing an overview of the main outcomes of this research.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

For my documentation of changes in Estes Park, background information on gateway communities in the United States and the history of the use of photography in geographic research is valuable. Estes Park is one of the most well-known examples of a gateway community in the United States, aside from locations around Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, such as Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Understanding the role of gateway communities within the larger national park system, as well as their unique economic circumstances, provides needed context for understanding the visual changes I will document and analyze. Additionally, fully understanding the role of photography within geographic research is critical to the method I chose for this project. Recognizing how it has been used previously and the potential pitfalls of the photographic image is important for constructing a method that provides valuable results.

### **2.1 Review of Gateway Communities in the United States**

Gateway communities are the towns and cities that border public lands and protected spaces, such as national parks, national monuments, wilderness areas, national forests, historic spaces, and other types of spaces protected through government action. Known for their scenic beauty and proximity to recreational spaces, gateway communities are not only enjoyed by tourists visiting protected spaces but are also sought after by individuals seeking to leave cities and suburbs in pursuit of a different lifestyle. In

exchange, gateway communities have experienced high population growth rates that pose significant issues for development, as the growth of a gateway community is limited by the protected space they border (Howe, MacMahon, and Propst 1997). Therefore, gateway communities must change in carefully thought out ways, with considerable effort put into planning and town development.

Many gateway communities struggle with this development. For instance, the Greater Yellowstone region, encompassing the lands around Yellowstone National Park and Grand Teton National Park, strives to obtain regional sustainability and prosperity. However, there are currently over thirty federal, state, tribal, and local agencies influencing the same area. This does not include the thousands of private businesses and landowners, as well as the over 175 non-government organizations, that also assert their influence on this region. Hence, managing the Greater Yellowstone region is difficult to manage in a comprehensive way.

Research completed by Ryan Bergstrom and Lisa Harrington illustrates that perceptions of Yellowstone National Park and community proximity to the park directly influences how gateway communities address the challenges brought forth by living so close to a place that receives over 16 million visitors annually (Bergstrom and Harrington 2018). After completing their survey, Bergstrom and Harrington found that residents of West Yellowstone believed that federal agencies had the most control over change within their community, while residents of Jackson Hole cited the community itself as the most influential actor (Bergstrom and Harrington 2018). Therefore, gateway communities have

different ideas of who is most influential to them, and we must evaluate each community on a case by case basis.

Ideas about national parks and monuments have also often been a source of contention amongst the citizens living closest to them (Yung, Patterson, and Freimund 2010; Wade, Theobald, and Laituri 2011; Rossi et al. 2015; Schmitt 2016). Historically, government officials found it difficult to get approval from all citizens to form national parks due to concerns from ranchers, hunters, loggers, miners, and those interested in forming their own separate tourism industries (Morehouse 1996). Additionally, administrators have sometimes established national parks and monuments without the input of local citizens. For instance, as described by Petzelka and Marquart-Pyatt (2013), the Clinton Administration announced the creation of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in 1996 without any advanced warning to the citizens of Utah. Responses from residents of neighboring gateway communities were intense, and the Clinton Administration was inundated with complaints about the lack of transparency in the designation process. Economic activities in this area were centered on timber and agriculture, including livestock grazing on public lands. The designation of Grand Staircase-Escalante left many citizens with a long history of ranching in the area without land to graze their cattle (Petzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2013; Petzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2015).

The designation of Grand Staircase-Escalante also had strong economic and political consequences, as environmental groups were lobbying for increased protection of wilderness areas from mining, while local and federal delegates from Utah were focused

on opening the area to coal mining. This combative situation illustrates two competing views of nature: nature as protected wilderness and nature as natural resource to exploit. In situations like Grand Staircase-Escalante, the desires of those wanting to protect the pristine wilderness present in the area overturned the prospects of those local officials who wished to utilize the local lands how they saw fit. In turn, when it came to personal ideas of nature, local citizens of Utah found themselves unable to trust NPS officials to designate nature areas with their input taken into consideration (Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2013; Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2015). In this instance, it was clear that the newly protected status of the area had a significant impact on neighboring gateway communities, altering how the town could function. This alteration of the space the community could utilize fundamentally changed the ability of the town to function as it once did, requiring significant changes to its economic system.

This type of change is common when dealing with gateway communities, as their health is often tied to the health and status of the protected space that they border. For instance, in October of 2013, the U.S. Federal Government experienced a shut down that halted much of its spending over the course of sixteen days, leading to the closing of many national parks and monuments. The NPS estimated that the shutdown led to a 7.9 million reduction in park visitation that month, as well as a decrease of \$414 million in visitor spending. One town that was significantly affected by this shutdown was Bar Harbor, Maine, a gateway community of Acadia National Park. The government shutdown led to a 76% reduction in visitorship for Acadia National Park, as well as an estimated 13% reduction in tourism-related sales in Bar Harbor. Ultimately, it was estimated that 17% of

potential visitors impacted by the closure of Acadia National Park canceled their trips to Bar Harbor, a substantial response to a short-term closure of the federal government. This significant reduction in visitation and tourism spending illustrates the considerable link between the protected space and the gateway community, with the health and prosperity of the protected space directly affecting the economic success of the people living and working in the gateway community (Gabe 2016).

Other researchers have noted that the effects of policy changes adopted because of federal and state public land protections on the economies of gateway communities has been understudied, with only a limited discussion in scholarly literature (Kurtz 2010). Prior to protected status for the land around them, many gateway communities based their economies on natural resource extraction or agriculture. Once this activity was limited, these communities had to change the way their economies operated, with many switching over to a tourism-based economy (Kurtz 2010). How exactly this switch has affected gateway communities is not well studied or understood, leaving questions to how individuals in the communities have adapted to the changes.

Increased tourism has also posed questions for the character of these communities. For instance, Estes Park previously struggled with issues related to tourism development in the town. Local lawmakers approved a plan to develop a wildlife center in Estes Park that would be located close to the entry to RMNP. There was a swift backlash from the local community about this plan, as they felt that caging animals that were already living in RMNP for an increase in tourism income made little sense. Eventually, plans for the wildlife center were cancelled due to this community pressure (Wondrak 2002). This case



study illustrates the difficulty of balancing the desire for more economic growth within a gateway community and the gateway community's character.

## **2.2 Review of Photography in Geographic Research**

Since the first partially successful photograph was taken in 1816 in France, researchers in a multitude of fields began using images to lend credibility to their work. The discipline of geography is no exception. Geographers have relied on imagery in ethnographic studies, to research urban spaces, and to examine landscapes (Larsen 2008; Latham 2009). Joan Schwartz and James Ryan noted that “photographic technologies expanded human powers of observation and extend the range of observable space” (Schwartz and Ryan 2003, 2). Nineteenth-century European and American photographers, the pioneers of the medium, often discussed their art in geographic terms, stating that through photography, the world was “made familiar,” and that photography became a “functioning tool of the geographical imagination” (Schwartz and Ryan 2003, 2-3).

Geographers were amongst the early adopters of this new technology, using the medium to document their travels and develop kinds of “imaginative geographies” of the Old and New Worlds (Schwartz 1996). Amongst researchers, those most interested in utilizing early photography were human and cultural geographers. These researchers benefitted from the early adoption of photography by anthropologists and the critical eye of artists and art historians. It wasn't until long after photography was used widely in the discipline that human and cultural geographers began developing their own critical perspectives of photography. These geographers found that the use of photography was subjective, socially constructed, culturally constituted, and historically situated. While

photographs are first and foremost visual images, they are also historical documents and material objects that provide a novel way to make the world familiar (Hall 2009; Schwartz and Ryan 2003).

It is also during the nineteenth century that landscapes became a valuable form of study, as while the physical landscape may not change much from year to year, their meanings are neither obvious nor fixed. The use of photography in the construction of symbolic landscapes contributed to the study of national identity, cultural differences, and imperial order, illustrating how the meanings of photographs, often combined with undertones of power struggles during the height of colonialism, were continually negotiated. Early ethnographic photography produced by geographers and anthropologists were taken through the gaze of the colonialist party, imparting their own view of unfamiliar people and places upon the landscape. Therefore, despite the popular consensus that photographs provide a vehicle for truthful depiction, they are in fact dynamic visual representations of the world and much can be learned from them aside from documentary purposes, including how gaze can elucidate prior power struggles (Schwartz and Ryan 2003).

As photography has evolved, geographic research methods have evolved to match. The ease of access to both film and digital photography has opened new avenues of research, while also leading to more questions about how the medium can be used responsibly (Sidaway 2002; Hall 2009). According to Tim Hall, there are certain dimensions that frame photographic research methods. For instance, photography can be used as a discrete research method, or embedded within other methods, while the product

itself can be a realist evidential document or a socially constructed representation. Additionally, the photographs can be theoretically led and framed, or the theoretical insights emerge from the practice of photography itself. Further, when it comes to taking the photographs themselves, they can be solely researcher-produced images, solely informant-produced images, or a combination of the two through collaborative photography (Hall 2009). There are many possibilities for using photography within geographic research, but these possibilities make it important for researchers to thoroughly discuss their methods and intent (Hall 2009).

Perhaps the most common use of photography in geographic research today focuses on studying people's perceptions of place and how those perceptions change over time (Crang 1997; Waitt and Head 2002; Yamashita 2002; Oku and Fukamachi 2006). For example, Waitt and Head examined postcards and their role in disseminating Australian frontier myths. Since postcards are a form of photography that are both popular art and cultural artefact, they prove to be a powerful tool in shaping how both tourists and natives alike view landscapes (in this case, Kimberly, Australia) (Waitt and Head 2002). Additionally, Yamashita considered the perception and evaluation of water in landscape using a Photo-Projective Method, or PPM, to compare child and adult resident perceptions of a river environment in Japan. A PPM asks individuals to take pictures of their environment and record their descriptions of each scene and is often used in local opinion surveys about specific environments. Yamashita's results from this method illustrate how environmental perceptions change with age, and how the age of the population using the environment the most must be considered in landscape planning, with adults favoring mid-

to long-distance elements and dynamic aspects and children favoring short-distance elements, especially water quality (Yamashita 2002).

Aside from photography used on the ground to evaluate the landscape, the advent of remote sensing, satellite imagery, and space photography has given photography an even larger home within the realm of geography, though often at the expense of eye-level photography. Space photography from Apollo Space program of the 1960s and 1970s revealed less cartographic knowledge than it provided significance in shaping aspects of the contemporary Western geographical imagination, revealing our view of global spatial and environmental imagery (Cosgrove 1994). Further, the ease of availability and widespread use of remotely-sensed imagery has made it simpler to engage with imagery that provides a large-scale picture of change over time.

However, some geographers have questioned whether remote sensing provides the same level of valuable information as eye-level photography. Jiang et al., for instance, compared the use of remotely-sensed imagery with eye-level photography in evaluating associations among measurements of tree cover density. Through their research, they found that measures from remotely-sensed imagery fail to represent the amount of tree cover people perceive at the eye-level when canopy cover is medium or high. Therefore, they suggest that the heavy reliance on remotely-sensed tree cover density measurements should be revised to identify strategic spots where eye-level measures of tree cover density should be emphasized (Jiang et al. 2017). Hence, remote sensing is a more powerful tool when strategically combined with eye-level photography.

Another method commonly used as an eye-level photography method in geography is repeat photography. Repeat photography, the process of photographing the same scene as an earlier photograph, is utilized to investigate landscape change over time. This method provides the means to contextualize landscapes, as well as provides the means to uncover unexpected changes that may be missed by using other methods (Bass 2004). For instance, J.O. Joby Bass utilized this method in two separate works. In one titled “More trees in the topics,” published in *Area* in 2004, Bass focused on using repeat photography to determine whether Honduras experienced a growth of vegetation. Through using repeat photography, he found that Honduras has experienced a vegetation increase from 1957 to 2001 (Bass 2004). In another work, Bass assessed modernization in landscapes of Honduras, focusing on transportation infrastructure and accessibility. He found that repeat photography was a valuable method for demonstrating the speed of the changes taking place over time in his study area (Bass 2013). Another notable example of repeat photography comes from Burton, Mitchell, and Cutter in their work on evaluating post-Katrina recovery in Mississippi. These researchers took photographs at over 130 sites every six months over the course of three years and assigned each photograph a recovery score. After mapping and graphing their results, they found that there were significant disparities in the progression of recovery, noting that some communities quickly began rebuilding while others fell behind (Burton, Mitchell, and Cutter 2011). These examples illustrate the effectiveness of using repeat photography to assess landscape change over time.

Repeat photography has also been used previously to demonstrate historical landscape change, lending credibility to my chosen method for this research project. Judith

Meyer and Yolanda Youngs utilized repeat photography to study cultural landscape change in Yellowstone National Park, focusing their efforts on changes in transportation and outdoor recreation in the park over time. Meyer and Youngs asserted that repeat photography can be a powerful tool for human geographers to evaluate changes in the cultural landscape over time. They found that by completing their project, they were able to more closely observe landscape features and actively compare different ways of “reading” the landscape. The authors also stated that repeat photography is a lesson in “doing geography,” one that fosters active learning and an intimate engagement with the landscape (Meyer and Youngs 2018).

The use of photography in geographic research has a long history, nearly as long as the history of photography itself. It is used widely amongst historical, human, and cultural geographers, as well as those interested in evaluating landscapes and landscape change. While photography is certainly valuable as a research method and the possibilities of using the medium are seemingly endless, it is important that researchers consider the ethical and logistical problems that may present themselves through its use. In this thesis, I utilized photography to analyze differences between archival photography and the present day, using my own photography to compare changes in the landscape in Estes Park. Using repeat photography as my main method allowed me to focus on visible changes caused by Estes Park’s development into a tourism-based economy.

### CHAPTER 3: A BRIEF HISTORY OF ESTES PARK, COLORADO

Estes Park, Colorado was founded in 1859 and then officially incorporated as a town on April 17, 1917. The early years of Estes Park belonged to pioneers seeking to make their homes and fortunes in the American West. Estes Park bears the name of Joel Estes, an early settler of the valley, or “park” as these mountain features were often called at this time. Joel Estes, along with his son, Milton, were the first Europeans to settle into what would become Estes Park. Milton would later write, “We did not know what we had found... We were monarchs of all we surveyed, mountains, valleys and streams. There was absolutely nothing to dispute our sway. We had a little world all to ourselves” (Pickering 1999).

Several decades after the arrival of the Estes family, Estes Park would become intrinsically tied to Rocky Mountain National Park, which was officially designated on January 26, 1915. With a crowd estimated to be 2,000 strong and what was referred to at the time as the “greatest automobile demonstration ever seen in Colorado,” the designation ceremony on September 4, 1915, marked a turning point for Estes Park (Pickering 2005, 7-9). Pickering notes that significant changes came to the town and the region, including the consistent presence of the federal government. Though the impacts of their presence were small at first, the trajectory of Estes Park was certainly guided by the federal government (Pickering 2005).

To begin, Estes Park's geologic history is directly related to the geologic history of RMNP. The area occupying RMNP has been uplifted and eroded many times over the past two billion years. The National Park Service states that the oldest rocks of metamorphic schist and gneiss are estimated to be about 1.8 billion years old, and large magma intrusions cooled about 1.4 billion years ago to form a core of crystalline igneous rock, which is mostly granite. About 70 million years ago, the Rocky Mountains began to uplift where this ancient crystalline rock was broken and uplifted. During the Cenozoic Era, the Rocky Mountain Front Range was uplifted as much as 5,000 feet to its current elevation. The final major period of change in RMNP came during the most recent glacial period, where glacial erosion changed V-shaped valleys into U-shaped valleys. Differential movement along faults led to higher mountains and large valleys, including the valley that became Estes Park. Today, RMNP contains significant evidence of this glacial period with many U-shaped valleys, terminal and lateral moraines, and cirques throughout the park (National Park Service 2018).

Aside from the geologic history of the region, its human history begins with several Native American tribes. In the valley's early history, Native Americans used the park for seasonal hunting and camping. Native Americans were responsible for many trails leading from the plains into the valley, including the one Joel Estes would later use on his way into the mountains. Throughout the region, evidence of camps and activity from the Ute, Shoshoni, Cheyenne, Comanche, Arapaho, and others were discovered, especially near Beaver Meadows, Moraine Park, and Mary's Lake. Oldman Mountain, a granite knob at the western end of Estes Park, provided panoramic views of the valley, and artifacts found



on the mountain indicate that it served as a sacred fasting place and vision quest site (Pickering 1999).

Before the arrival of Joel Estes and his son to the park, the area was contested territory of the Ute and Arapaho tribes. The Arapaho were latecomers to the region in the late 1700s when they were forced by the Sioux into areas along the South Platte and the Front Range. The Ute had long resided in the area at this point, and the Arapaho's arrival with their allies, the Cheyenne, led to a short period of war in the mountain parks. Evidence of these conflicts were found in Beaver Meadows, and projectiles have been found throughout the valley (Pickering 1999).

Later in the 1800s, when Joel Estes originally arrived in the area, he mistakenly thought he had arrived at another settlement called North Park, the only area of the Rockies that he was familiar with beforehand. However, after exploring the area, he only found the remains of two old Arapaho lodgepoles and no signs of European settlement, indicating that the valley had been abandoned. Estes decided to settle the park with his family, relocating from Missouri over the course of several years. Estes established a cattle business in the valley, constructing a rudimentary cart road that allowed him and his sons to transport goods to Denver to be sold. This road would be one of the first major established pathways out of the park and connected to a smaller timber road used by settlers of the park for their lumber needs (Pickering 1999).

As the Estes family settled the park, they hired additional help and welcomed visitors to the area. These visitors included William N. Byers, the founding editor of the Rocky Mountain News, and Henry M. Teller, a future United States senator from Colorado.

In the several years that followed, the number of visitors to the park increased, and Joel and Patsy Estes, his wife, strived to make all feel welcome, with several visitors writing extensively of their hospitality. For instance, John T. Prewitt, who visited Estes Park for a hunting trip, wrote:

“We had sent him word we were coming. He was wonderfully pleased to see us. The woman had hot biscuits and plenty of good coffee, and we enjoyed a fine supper...He had some hay for our horses, and good warm stables. After supper we talked and he told us more hunting stories than I ever heard in my life” (Pickering 1999, 12).

Joel Estes and his family would not permanently settle the valley, however. The winter of 1864 and 1865 caused the Estes family to reevaluate their prospects in the valley. Though the growing seasons were always short, the previous winters had been somewhat mild, and they were able to cut enough meadow grass to feed their cattle. In that winter, the snow came early and stuck through most of the season, making any hopes for winter grazing impossible. Estes decided to abandon his squatters' rights and left the valley, leaving behind rudimentary housing structures in search of a more temperate climate (Bancroft 1968).

However, his mark on the valley was made as the settlers there continued to refer to their settlement as Estes Park. There was a period of nearly a decade between the time that Joel Estes and his family left the area and the arrival of the valley's first permanent settlers (Pickering 1999, 18). After Estes' departure, a series of rights swaps followed. He originally turned the park over to John Hollenbeck, who had also been herding cattle on a squatter's claim just west of Lyons. About nine months after, the valley again changed

hands to someone known only as Mr. Jacobs, and then again to another individual only known as “Buckskin” (Pickering 1999).

Finally, the valley would pass to Griffith J. Evans, who arrived in the fall of 1867 and moved into two log cabins on land that would later become Lake Estes. Evans moved to Estes Park under less than ideal circumstances, with only a few pieces of furniture and a gun to his name. However, he was able to make a life for himself and his family by hunting game in the valley and selling the meat and pelts. Like Joel Estes before him, he eventually got into the cattle trade and even expanded on some of the buildings Estes had left behind. By 1871, Evans was overseeing a herd of about six hundred cattle belonging to two Denver businessmen (Pickering 1999).

Evans and his wife were also only too happy to have visitors to Estes Park. They were amongst the first to successfully enter the lodging business in the valley, building cabins, renting out horses, providing fishing and hunting directions, and serving as mountaineering guides. With the start of their business, tourism officially become a major draw of Estes Park. Evans, knowing the value of word-of-mouth recommendations, focused on providing a great hospitality experience and spreading news of his lodgings to newspapers as far off as the *Chicago Tribune* (Mills 1963, 30). Visitors who stayed in his cabins and hotels spread the word of the beauty of Estes Park, and many visitors to the Rocky Mountains stopped in the valley for its fishing, hunting, and other recreational activities. For instance, Isabella Bird, a settler to Estes Park, wrote that Estes Park was “one of the most entrancing spots on earth,” and a place where even “the air is life giving” (Bird 1999, 11).

Like the Estes family before them, Evans eventually sold his squatter's rights, this time to Windham Thomas Wyndham-Quin, the Earl of Dunraven from Ireland, and through extension, Theodore Whyte, who acted in Dunraven's interests when he was not in the park (Carothers 1951). The Earl of Dunraven visited Estes Park on a vacation to America and, like many visitors, he became enamored with the park. Unlike other visitors, he had the wealth to purchase the rights to much of the land. However, at the time, it was illegal for a foreign party to purchase public land in the United States. To work around this issue, Dunraven, with the help of the American Whyte, went on to divide Estes Park into individual landholdings for homesteading. Once the plot was successfully homesteaded and owned by an American, Dunraven could then legally purchase the land from them. This legal gray area led to Dunraven having a stake in much of Estes Park and his cattle ranching business became a dominant industry in the valley (Chapin 1987, Pickering 1999).

Dunraven's ventures into Estes Park led to many other families settling into the area and starting their own ventures. For instance, Abner Sprague and his family moved to Estes Park from Dundee, Illinois in 1914, built a resort space in Estes Park, and led many mountaineering trips into what is now RMNP (Sprague 1999). Sprague and Whyte ran into some significant issues with each other since the resort spaces he was building, along with many other settlers, was limiting the number of plots the Earl of Dunraven could buy. Since many people were led into the lodging business due to increased tourism, they no longer had a reason to sell their land. The Earl of Dunraven would eventually release his landholdings in Estes Park, leaving the available land open to more individuals seeking to

settle the valley (Carothers 1951). Sprague would go on to say that the principal value of Estes Park had very much to do with “its location and its attraction for lovers of the out-of-doors” (Pickering 1999). This attraction continues to the present day.

All these individuals and families, as well as many others, settled Estes Park and set into motion the tourism industry that remains in the town today. During the early years, several famous hotels and lodging resorts were constructed, including the Elkhorn Lodge with its famous piles of elk antlers outside the main lodge, and the Estes Park Hotel, one of the more expensive lodging options in the park (Lindberg, Raney, and Robertson 2004). These early lodgings relied mainly on horse-drawn carriages to bring in guests, as the roads were not well developed. However, this would change as the automobile became more affordable.

The automobile paved the way for the construction of what would become one of the most famous hotels in Estes Park. The Stanley Hotel was constructed by Freelan O. Stanley. Stanley brought a steady supply of money to Estes Park and announced his plans for developing the town by building a first-class hotel and by introducing an auto stage line to and from Estes Park. Stanley’s fortune came from ventures he undertook with his twin brother, Francis, who invented a dry-plate coating machine that greatly increased the productivity of dry-plate photography. The brothers became partners at the Stanley Dry Plate Company, which they later sold to the Eastman Kodak Company. With funds from selling their previous business, the brothers achieved their second great achievement with the steam automobile. While they were not the first to invent a steam automobile, they were the first to produce them in commercially available quantities. After a brief period where

another company owned their patents, they were able to repurchase them and establish the Stanley Motor Carriage Company (Pickering 1999).

Stanley originally came to Estes Park in search of his health, as many did in that time due to tuberculosis. He completed the first truly successful automobile trip into Estes Park with one of his lightweight steam automobiles and settled there during the summer of 1903. He quickly regained his health and decided to settle there more permanently, summering in Estes Park for the rest of his life. Throughout the rest of his time, he focused much of his energy and money on the condition of the roads into and within the park. Through his investments, he made Estes Park more accessible to the automobile and made getting around town much easier (Bancroft 1981). This investment benefitted Stanley greatly as he went on to complete the Stanley Hotel, which remains the largest hotel in Estes Park. People from around the state of Colorado and the rest of the country could now easily access the valley surrounded by the Rocky Mountains and stay at one of the most modern hotels in the west.

Given all the attention on Estes Park due to its tourism, others sought to protect the valley and the mountains that surround it. Enos Mills, a naturalist and owner of the Longs Peak Inn, is singled out as the person behind the “park idea” (Pickering 1999). Mills was granted special attention by state and federal agencies due to his work as Colorado’s official state snow observer and his work as a lecturer for the newly formed U.S. Forest Service. Mills worked for the Forest Service for two years before leaving in May of 1909 to pursue the possibility of a new national park in the Estes Park area (Mills 1963) This idea originated in a meeting in October of 1907 led by the Estes Park Protection and

Improvement Association. The idea was to establish a game refuge where tourists to the area could see wildlife unthreatened by hunters. Many residents of Estes Park were especially fond of the idea as they were concerned about the overhunting of big game in the area and the overall treatment of fish, wildlife, and wilderness. These concerns were well founded, as the area had been so heavily hunted that by 1880, indigenous elk were functionally extinct and had to be reintroduced to the area (Pickering 1999).

Mills became part of a committee with Freelan O. Stanley and the two explored the possibilities for the park. In September of that year, the members of the association unanimously voted to create the Estes National Park and Game Preserve. Mills went on to enlist support for the project by publishing his own proposal calling for a national park, which was endorsed by Robert Marshall of the United States Geological Survey. He did, however, run into issues with several groups of individuals, including the mining and timber industry in the local area, the Front Range Settlers League, who saw the creation of the park as a threat to their property, and from the Forest Service itself, whose policy of preservation through use led to disagreements on how the park should be formed and operated (Mills 1963; Pickering 1999).

Mills' involvement was critical to the development of the park. It took six years of campaigning for the park. Towards the end of his work he wrote, "This campaigning annihilates me" (Pickering 1999). While tediously slow and difficult, he eventually kickstarted the political process. With coaxing from Mills, Congressman Atterson Walden Rucker of Aspen first introduced a bill on February 6, 1913. After three separate park bills and five major revisions, the measure was passed through Congress and signed by

President Woodrow Wilson on January 18, 1915. The official dedication took place months later in September, officially opening the 358.5 square miles of what was formally named Rocky Mountain National Park. While much smaller than the 1,000 square miles that Mills originally proposed, RMNP would be a protected space from that day forward, and his hard work to preserve the wilderness paid off (Pickering 1999).

Pickering described the relationship between RMNP and Estes Park as an interdependent relationship, noting that what happened between them is inherently an “American” story that involved the discovery of western tourism and an “increasingly mobile, affluent, and leisure- and recreation-oriented nation” (Pickering 2005). While Estes Park had always been a popular tourist destination, little could prepare the residents of the town for the influx of visitors drawn to the newly established national park. In 1916, 51,000 visitors entered the park. By 1919, that number reached 170,000. The following year, with the completion of Fall River Road, that number rose to nearly 241,000 visitors (Pickering 1999). With every completed road and passing year, visitation to Estes Park rose, and the tourism increase became a problem for many of the people who called the park home.

The first main issue residents ran into was a debate over a new Park Service concessions policy that related to how RMNP could be accessed. In 1919, the park superintendent at the time, L. C. Way, implemented a new policy that banned rental-car drivers who operated on their own or on behalf of local hotel and resort owners. This move was made without any public discussion and local resort owners quickly protested the new policy, including Enos Mills. While intended to improve service and eliminate confusion,



Way's policy effectively created a monopoly where only one car service could shuttle visitors around RMNP. This policy was not overturned until years after Mills' death and showed how difficult it was to balance the demand for unrestricted park access and the need to preserve and conserve the national park (Pickering 1999).

These kinds of debates still occur today, as Estes Park continues to question how to accommodate growth and its economic benefits while still maintaining the character of the town (Pickering 1999, 239). Much of the decisions made in recent decades have been placed in one of these two ways of thought. There are a significant number of residents in Estes Park who seek to increase tourism, building such attractions as catch your own trout ponds, arcades, miniature golf course, and even a replica of Noah's ark. There are also several new ordinances that have come into play, including zoning standards, housing density restrictions, and rules pertaining to growth control, conservation easement, and affordable housing.

However, even as these debates go on, much of the early history of Estes Park has been removed for different reasons. For instance, many of the tourist attractions of Estes Park have been removed and replaced over the years, like the Riverside Dance Hall, the Phil "Casey" Martin's train ride, and even the Ripley's Believe It or Not Museum. Still, other structures were removed at the behest of the NPS through a desire to return the land to an earlier state. Many of the historical hotels and lodges of Estes Park were dismantled because of this policy, including the Horseshoe Park Inn, the Fall River Lodge, and the Deer Ridge Chalet. Other hotels were unfortunately destroyed by fire and not rebuilt, such as Enos Mills' Longs Peak Inn and the Estes Park Hotel (Pickering 1999, 2005).

The presence of the federal government was also felt after President Franklin Roosevelt approved a finding of feasibility for the Colorado-Big Thompson Project in December of 1937. After a contentious debate between conservationists seeking to protect RMNP from undue harm and the Bureau of Reclamation seeking new sources of water, Interior Secretary Harold Ickes ultimately supported the decision to move forward with the project. The Colorado-Big Thompson Project was the first federally funded inter-basin diversion and one of the largest irrigation and power projects in the bureau's history. The project was described by the *Estes Park Trail* as the "most important factor in the future development of the region" (Pickering 2005, 318). This project was responsible for constructing Olympus Dam, which created Lake Estes, and was responsible for constructing a power plant and two dikes at Mary's Lake. While the physical landscape of Estes Park was seriously altered, the community could purchase significant amounts of water and electricity, and they were quick to utilize the new water body for recreational purposes.

The history presented here demonstrates how even before RMNP was established, people have thought of Estes Park as a tourist destination and the residents of the town have tackled the many issues that come along with it. However, with Estes Park's transition to a gateway community for RMNP, the tourism issues have considerably increased, with many major town development decisions facing questions pertaining to how development will increase tourism while still maintaining the character of the town.

Through my own research, I examined the changes that have occurred in Estes Park since RMNP was established to better visualize them and explore what has been done to

accommodate and aid the tourist. By understanding how Estes Park has developed, residents will gain a better understanding of how their decisions have impacted the town and how increased visitorship to RMNP overtime has influenced those decisions. Having this information provides valuable context the town needs manage changes in the face of increased visitorship, while still maintaining the town's character.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODS

This thesis was a qualitative study that focused on utilizing repeat photography as the main method of research. Repeat photography is a valuable technique for demonstrating landscape change over time, which I addressed in Estes Park, and has been utilized in previous studies to demonstrate physical and cultural landscape changes (Bass 2004, 2013; Burton, Mitchel, and Cutter 2011; Meyer and Youngs 2018). By using this method, I aimed to answer questions pertaining to the towns development over time since becoming a tourist-based economy, mainly how has its focus on tourism altered how the town utilizes its land and how has Estes Park's close relationship with the federal government impacted its landscape?

My research focused on Estes Park, CO, Rocky Mountain National Park's major gateway community. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the town has a total area of 5.9 square miles, with only 0.1 of those square miles being water, and the town has an elevation of 7,500 ft above sea level (United States Census Bureau 2016). The 2010 U.S. Census places the population of the town at 5,858, with current estimates placing the population at over 6,000 permanent residents (United States Census Bureau 2016; United States Census Bureau 2017). Specifically, I focused on the cultural center of the town, as well as major physical landscape features, such as Lake Estes. These tended to be the most commonly

photographed areas of the town and allowed me to compose a valuable evaluation of the landscape.

As described in Chapter Two, repeat photography requires using archival photography to identify sites within an area and provide an historical vantage point. Then, an additional photograph is taken at a point in the present day from the same vantage point. Ideally, successful repeat photography ensures that any subsequent photographs are taken from the same vantage point during the same season and time of day, although this is often difficult or unrealistic to achieve. For my own research, since I had to work with a limited timeframe, attempting to match the season and time of day to the archival photographs was not possible. Given that most of my photographs focused on looking at man-made structures, not having a matching season was not detrimental to the comparisons.

The most successful repeat photography also includes a recognizable, unchanged feature within a scene that provides an easily identifiable point of comparison. Researchers utilizing this method might also attempt to use the same type of camera lens to take the photo, as well as any filters the original photographer may have used on the lens. This will ensure that little is different between the actual composition of the photograph and the main differences seen are the actual differences in the landscape. Attempting to use the same types of lenses and filters for the repeat photographs in this project was not feasible because little information was known about how the original photographs were taken. Also, given advances in camera technology, it was more feasible to utilize a DSLR camera, rather than a traditional analog film camera. I made sure to incorporate as many reference points in the photographs as possible to help ensure the most accurate depiction.

When choosing the archival photographs to use in the repeat comparisons, I looked to local archives held by the Denver Public Library and History Colorado, as these two organizations had the largest collections of photographs taken in Estes Park. I also acquired two images from the J. Paul Getty Museum and one additional image from the Historic Park Theatre. I originally planned on including additional photographs from the Estes Park Museum, but the museum was unfortunately closed for renovations throughout the duration of my research and I was unable to obtain access to their archives being stored offsite.

The photographs I chose to use for this thesis mainly came from the digital collections provided by these organizations. The photographs that I examined that were not part of the digital archive were either difficult to locate within the park, lacked sufficient background to understand the context of the image, or were damaged to the point of being unlikely to reproduce well for this project. I did find, however, that the digitized collection between these two organizations was enough to complete the project, as there were over 800 unique images that I examined to determine the best available images to complete the comparisons. I chose 50 potential images to retake, which resulted in the final fifteen pairs presented in this thesis.

This chosen method of research did come with some limitations. First, as described previously, it was sometimes difficult to locate the archival photography that I needed to successfully complete the project. Even if I knew additional photographs existed in archives held by other institutions, I was not always able to access them. Second, I often found it difficult to locate the exact places where the photographs were taken. If good records weren't kept on the photograph, additional research was needed to determine the

location. At times, this became impossible, as many structures that once existed in Estes Park are no longer there, and the background did not provide enough context to locate the structure's original site. Third, this was a strenuous exercise that required significant field work. Once my sites of interest were determined, I needed to travel to each of these locations personally with somewhat heavy equipment, including a DSLR camera, two additional lenses, including one large telephoto lens, a protective camera bag, and a tripod. To safely capture certain images, I needed individuals willing to accompany me on my trips. These issues limited certain portions of my research to only specific times and places.

To complete the field work portion of this project, I completed a total of ten trips to Estes Park. For the first four trips that I took to the town, I utilized the time to perform preliminary work. Using maps found at the Estes Park Visitor Center, I quartered off sections of Estes Park and dedicated one trip to exploring each section, walking paths and taking extensive photographs. My purpose for these trips was to become familiar with how the town is structured and to identify which areas of the town might be the most photographed. I also utilized these trips to familiarize myself with the topography of the town and the surrounding areas. Having a mental image of the mountains was important as they would likely provide the reference points needed to construct a successful repeat pair of photographs.

After completing these preliminary trips, I examined the photographs I took to see if I could identify any of the areas represented by the archival images I collected. Having these preliminary photographs allowed me to locate the general areas of most of my archival images, as well as gave me clues to the locations of the more difficult images to

locate. The main locations of the photographic pairs were the downtown area of Estes Park, around Lake Estes, and around Mary's Lake, which is in the southwest portion of town.

Once I determined the general locations of my images, I dedicated the next six trips solely to recapturing these archival images. I set a goal of capturing three to four images per trip. I downloaded each archival image on to a tablet for reference and worked from the images to retake the original photograph. Constructing these images required careful framing to ensure each recreation had an easily identifiable reference point in common with the original archival image. I was then careful to include these reference points in as close to the original framing as possible to help reduce any potential for bias and ensure a true comparison. By the end of these six trips, I had successfully captured pairs for all fifteen of the archival images I had acquired. Figure 4.1 is a map of Estes Park that clearly marks all fifteen of these locations.

This exercise proved to be easier for some images than others. For instance, the images taken on Elkhorn Avenue, the downtown street of Estes Park, were the easiest to acquire as they were all within walking distance of each other. However, some images were nearly impossible to retake with perfect accuracy due to the construction of Olympus Dam and the Lake Estes reservoir, which greatly changed the topography of the eastern side of Estes Park. Further still, all images could not be taken exactly as the previous photographer had due to changes in lens construction from the early 1900s to the present and from the move to a DSLR camera from a traditional analog camera.

Having acquired all images needed, I completed minor editing of the repeat images in order to correct for lens aberration. Lens aberration can lead to an undesired vignette of



the image or an issue with chromatic aberration, which is a common error when a camera lens does not focus all wavelengths of light to precisely the same point, leading to colored fringes around some areas of the image. I also completed minor color corrections for the images, so the colors were truer to the original scene. Performing these corrections ensured the repeat images were as close to the original as possible.

Once all the repeat images were edited, I placed them in a document with their respective archival photograph. From here, I focused on identifying the apparent differences between the two photographs, as well as any similarities. Using additional images from my preliminary research and additional archival images, I was able to provide additional context to the pairs I collected and determine why certain changes may have occurred. Altogether, these images provide evidence of significant physical and cultural landscape change in Estes Park.

Given the extent of the photographs I retook for this project, I learned several things about the pros and cons of utilizing repeat photography as a main method of research. A major benefit of using repeat photography is that it helps to make history and culture more tangible. A photograph is something that is frozen in time, helping to illustrate the changes that are described in history. While these repeat photographs do not replace a well-researched history of a place, they do complement that history by providing visual evidence of change. However, using repeat photography is also difficult to do right. It takes months of looking through archival photographs, several preliminary trips to the study site just to get an understanding of where to begin looking, and even then, it may be incredibly difficult to retake an image due to major topographical changes. In my study, this was

beneficial in a way, because it demonstrated how significantly change occurred in certain areas of the town.

Also, using repeat photography limits the work to archival images previously taken. Some bias might be introduced here because the available pictures were limited to areas that previous photographers found significant to photograph. I aimed to limit the amount of bias introduced by trying to work with as many locations as possible. However, I was still limited to popular areas of Estes Park, like the downtown area and the Stanley Hotel. Focusing on these areas is valuable, though it does leave out other areas of Estes Park that were less photographed, like residential areas. If I had the opportunity to engage with this project further, I would aim to include more of the less popular places in Estes Park to get an even better picture of the changes that have occurred there.

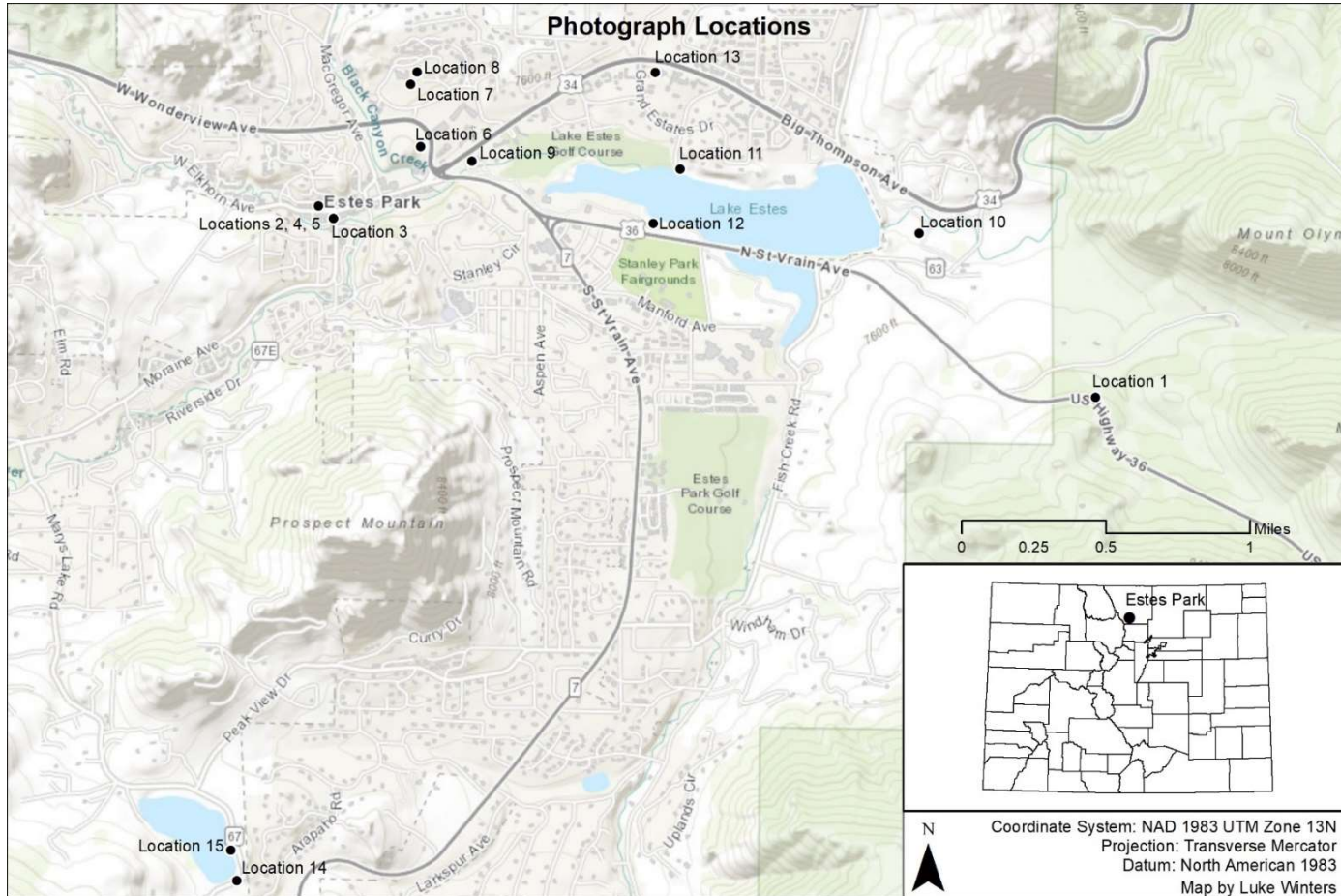


Figure 4.1: Map of Estes Park, Colorado with photograph locations clearly marked. Map courtesy of Luke Winters developed in collaboration with the author.

## CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

In this chapter, I discuss the photographic pairs that resulted from this study. In each of the following sections, I placed the repeat pairs in four different sections, discussing each pair in context with their location. I compare the images to show what locations have seen significant changes, and which aspects of Estes Park show little change over time. The sections focus on downtown Estes Park, the Stanley Hotel, Lake Estes, and Mary's Lake.

We begin by looking at this pair of photographs that visualizes what visitors to Estes Park see as the entrance of the town. In Figure 5.1a, we have a note from the photographer directly written on the image that states "Entrance to Estes Park Colo." In the time period this was taken, there was no established, paved road into Estes Park and people had to guide their horses and wagons over the hill to get into the park. In the modern day as shown in Figure 5.1b, visitors to the park have an established road (Route 36) and "Estes Park" carved into stone to greet you. This stone structure marks Estes Park as a landmark town, a major destination on the way to RMNP. Due to Route 36's construction, the exact same image to the entrance to Estes Park is not possible without stopping in the middle of a busy highway, so I chose to focus this pair on what greets a visitor today.



Figure 5.1a: Photograph titled “Entrance to Estes Park.” Photographed by F.E. Baker. Dated 1890-1900. Courtesy of History Colorado.

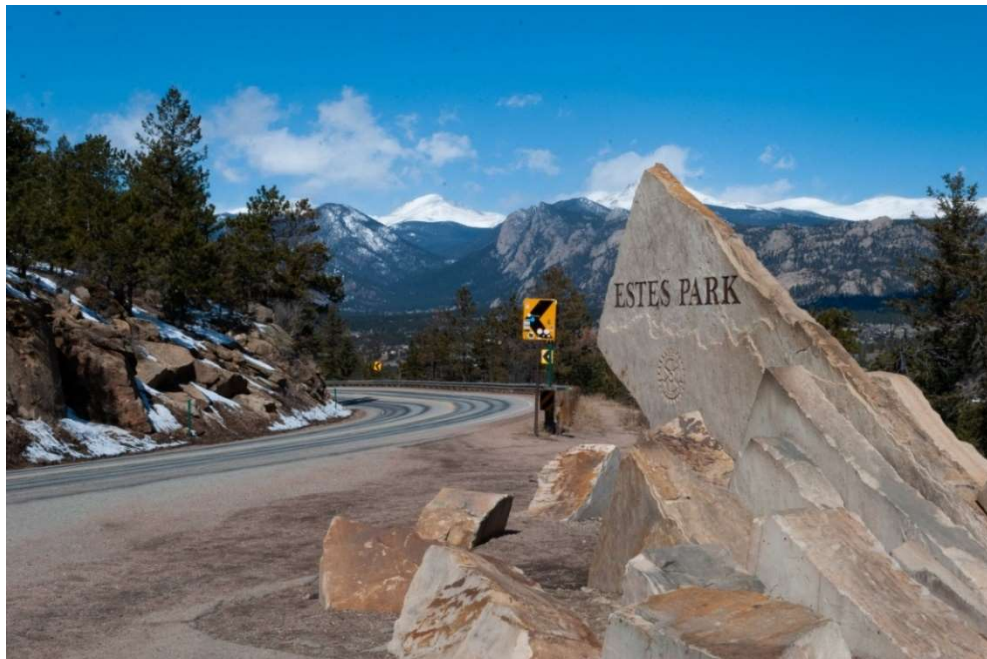


Figure 5.1a: Present day entrance to Estes Park. Dated March 2019. Photograph courtesy of the author.

## Section 5.1 Downtown Estes Park

This image pair was taken on Elkhorn Avenue, the main street of Estes Park. This location is comprised of shops and restaurants. Figure 5.2a was estimated to be taken in the early 1900s and shows a man standing next to a telephone pole with Model T cars parked on the sides of the street. The road appears to be a dirt road with some paved sidewalks. You can make out the general types of businesses in the area, including a general store.



Figure 5.2a: Photograph titled “Street Scene Elkhorn Ave.” Photographed by Fred Payne Clatworthy. Dated June 25, 1927. Photograph courtesy of History Colorado.

To match the archival image with an image from the present day, I used the forested hill in the background as a reference point. Figure 5.2b shows a more highly developed downtown area with new buildings and a newly constructed cross street. There is no longer parking off to the side of the road and there are many more people occupying the sidewalk,

even outside the summer months. Notably, on the left-hand side of the image, there is a sign to indicate a parking if you turn left. This continues a trend throughout the park with an emphasis on pointing visitors of the area to the nearest parking. Much of the changes to buildings in the repeat photograph can be attributed to the Lawn Lake Flood of 1982, which left 177 business in the Estes Park area, and most of them along Elkhorn Avenue, flooded with up to four feet of water (Cordsen 2012). Over 60 percent of affected merchants affected by the flood either lost their business or moved away without rebuilding (Cordsen 2012). Those who did stay to rebuild are responsible for much of the changes visible in this image.



Figure 5.2b: Current view of Elkhorn Avenue. Dated February 2019. Photograph courtesy of the author.

One building that did survive the flood was the Park Theatre. This photographic triplet focuses on the Park Theatre, located in downtown Estes Park off Elkhorn Avenue. The theatre was built in 1913 and is currently the oldest single house movie theater west

of the Mississippi built originally and still operating as a movie theatre (Historic Park Theatre & Cafe). Figure 5.3a was taken in 1926 and is one of the earliest pictures of the Park Theatre after it was fully completed. While the original theatre was built in 1913, the tower we see today was completed in 1922 by Ralph Gwynn, the Park Theatre's owner at the time. He added the tower in honor of his wife and is now known as the Tower of Love (Historic Park Theatre & Cafe). This first image shows the theatre as a standalone building with no side attachments. The middle of the tower was outfitted with neon lighting.



Figure 5.3a: Image of the Historic Park Theatre. Photographer unknown. Dated 1926. Courtesy of the Historic Park Theatre.





Figure 5.3b: Photograph titled “Park Theatre.” Photographer unknown. Dated 1987. Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.

Figure 5.3b was taken in 1987, the release year for the movie *Extreme Prejudice* and served as the reference point for Figure 5.3c. This photograph was taken shortly after the Park Theatre was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, as the building was officially registered in 1984. From this image we can see that an addition was made to the building on the left-hand side. Seating outside suggests that this building addition was a restaurant of some kind. We can also see from this photograph how the wider area has developed, with additional buildings behind the theatre and extensive sidewalks around it.



Figure 5.3c: Present day photograph of the Historic Park Theatre. Taken February 2019. Courtesy of the author.

In Figure 5.3c, much is still the same as the 1987 photograph with some additions. There is now a sign for a café on the building on the left-hand side, indicating that the building is still a restaurant. Interestingly, the lampposts on the right-hand side of the image have changed, even though the look of the newer lampposts evokes images from the past. This image also speaks to how downtown Estes Park tends to combine the old with the new. In the repeat photograph, we see that they are playing *Gone with the Wind*, which was released in 1939, while also playing a more recent film, *Fighting with My Family*.



Figure 5.4a: Photograph titled “Estes Park.” Photographer unknown. Taken June 1987. Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.

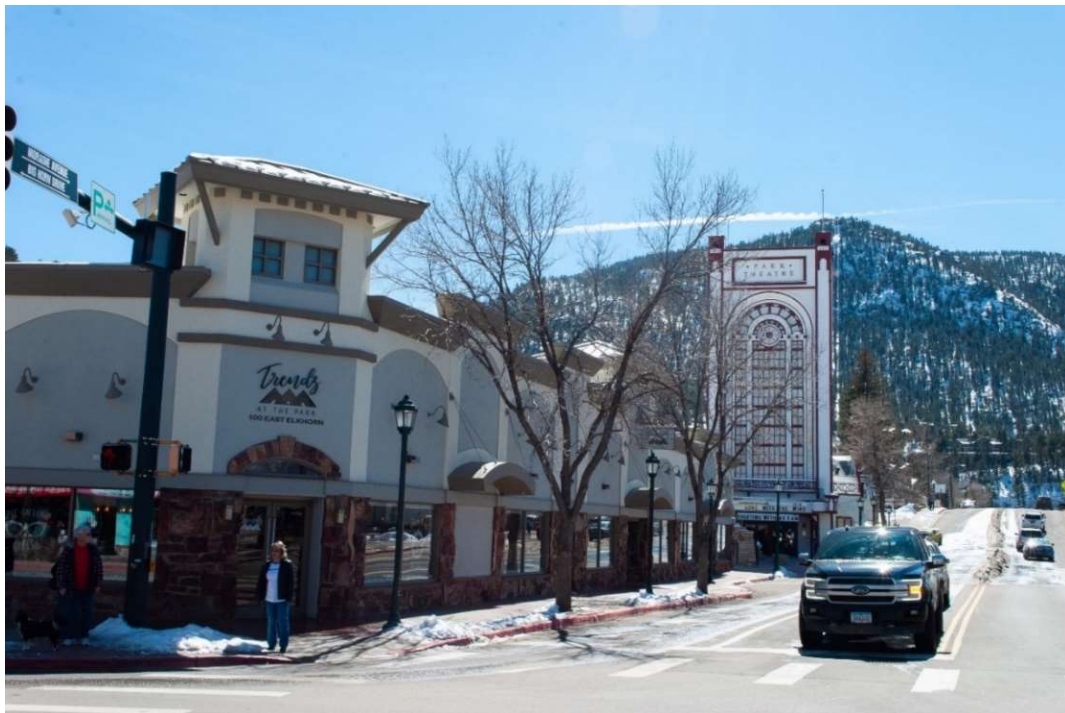


Figure 5.4b: Present day image of the Historic Park Theatre from Elkhorn Ave. Dated February 2019. Courtesy of the author.

Figure 5.4a was taken by the same photographer as the Park Theatre image captured in 1987, suggesting this photograph was taken on the same day. With the Park Theatre and the hill behind it serving as a reference point for this image, the repeat photograph illustrates the changes evident in the downtown area of Estes Park. For instance, the store on the corner, which was originally called Edelweiss, is now a store called Trendz at the Park. From what I can see in the original storefront, Edelweiss appears to have been a store for outdoor clothing, while Trendz at the Park is a houseware and home goods store focusing on a cabin aesthetic. Along with the store changes, there is also a significant change to the façade of the building, with Trendz at the Park adopting a design that looks more like the modern version of other buildings on the street.

Like the Park Theatre images, Figure 5.4b also captures some changes in the design of the lamp posts. The lamp posts in the original photograph have four lamps hanging off from the pole, while the modern-day lamp posts host a singular light and look like lamp posts from an earlier time. Another observation that is interesting to note is the importance put on parking signage in this intersection. In the previous image, the traffic light does not have any signage to indicate parking, while in the present-day image, there is a large sign right on the traffic light providing directions to the nearest parking lot. This is a significant shift in signage over just the past 30 years, which suggests that Estes Park may be needing to direct more people to parking.



Figure 5.5a: Photograph titled “Wednesday Layover Day Parade, Estes Park.” Photographer unknown. Dated July 1956. Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.

This next pair of photographs focuses on another stretch of Elkhorn Avenue. Figure 5.5a was taken in the 1950s during a parade. The exact original angle of this image was difficult to replicate as I believe the original photographer was standing in the street to take this image, which was possible due to the closed roads for the parade. As reference points for the repeat photograph, I focused on the buildings in the image, as well as the hill in the background. The original archival photograph has several neon signs outside the businesses, describing what you can find there. For instance, in this image we have a linen shop, two bars, a jeweler, and a drug store/ice cream store.

Due to a citywide ordinance enacted after the flood of 1982, neon signs throughout Estes Park became illegal and were removed from the store fronts, which led to the plainer signage we see in Figure 5.5b. The storefronts have also changed somewhat, as they include an old-fashioned candy store, an Irish pub, and an additional bar. One half of the tallest of the three main buildings is currently unoccupied and boarded up. This seems to be the trend throughout Elkhorn Avenue, with many of the storefronts focusing on more tourist centered businesses like souvenir shops and restaurants rather than the more functional businesses of the past, like a linen shop or a drug store.



Figure 5.5b: Present day view of Elkhorn Avenue. Dated February 2019. Photograph courtesy of the author.

## Section 5.2 The Stanley Hotel

For this next section, I focused on photographs either of the Stanley Hotel or from the Stanley Hotel property. This pair of photographs focuses on a view of the front of the Stanley Hotel. The Stanley Hotel was one of the largest hotels built in Estes Park with

construction completing in 1909. The foreground area of Figure 5.6a shows wide open spaces with a single road leading to the hotel complex. However, this image was difficult to retake as the topography of the area immediately preceding the hotel has changed somewhat due to additional road construction. The original location on the high point of elevation was also not possible to get to due to extensive fencing around the area.

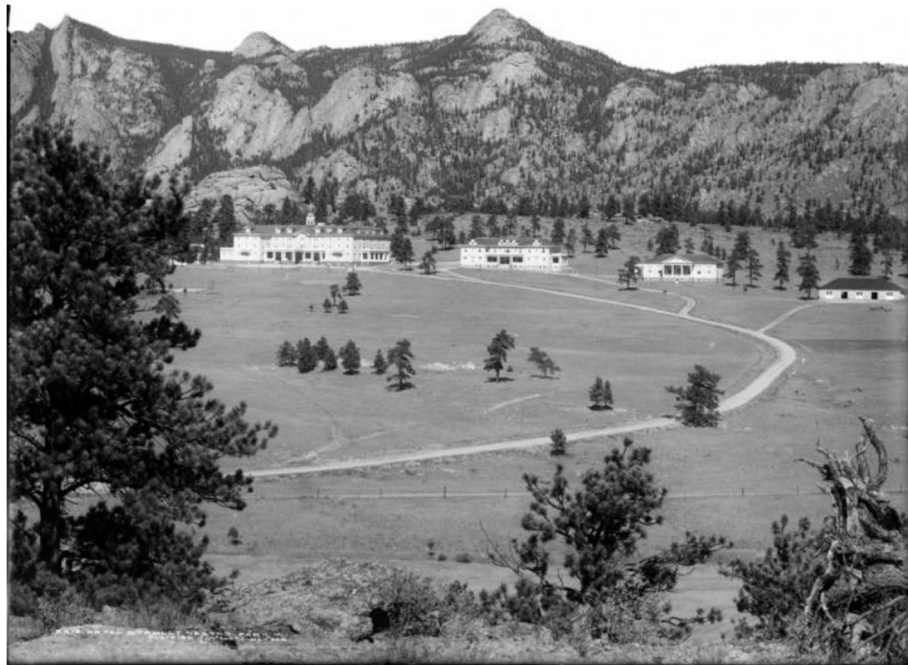


Figure 5.6a: Photograph titled “Hotel Stanley, Estes Park.” Photographed by Louis Charles McClure. Dated 1911-1920. Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.

Even given these limitations with this set of images, it does reveal some interesting landcover changes over the course of the past 100 years or so. Much of the area in front of the Stanley Hotel visible in Figure 5.6b now has more tree growth and development, giving it a fuller look than the previous image. We also have Route 34 leading visitors to the Stanley Hotel, which was not yet constructed in Figure 5.6a.



Figure 5.6b: Present day image of the Stanley Hotel. Dated January 2019. Courtesy of the author.

This next pair of photographs was taken on the Stanley Hotel property, which lies in the northeast portion of Estes Park. For this pair, I used Long's Peak, located in RMNP, as my reference point for framing the repeat photograph. Figure 5.7a was estimated to have been taken in the early 1900s. The original photograph shows three lamp posts bordering a path at the Stanley Hotel, which are apparent in the foreground of the image. Looking closer in the valley below, there are a few structures that look like houses, with some roads visible. Trees are sparse in the valley area and become denser as you head closer to the mountains.



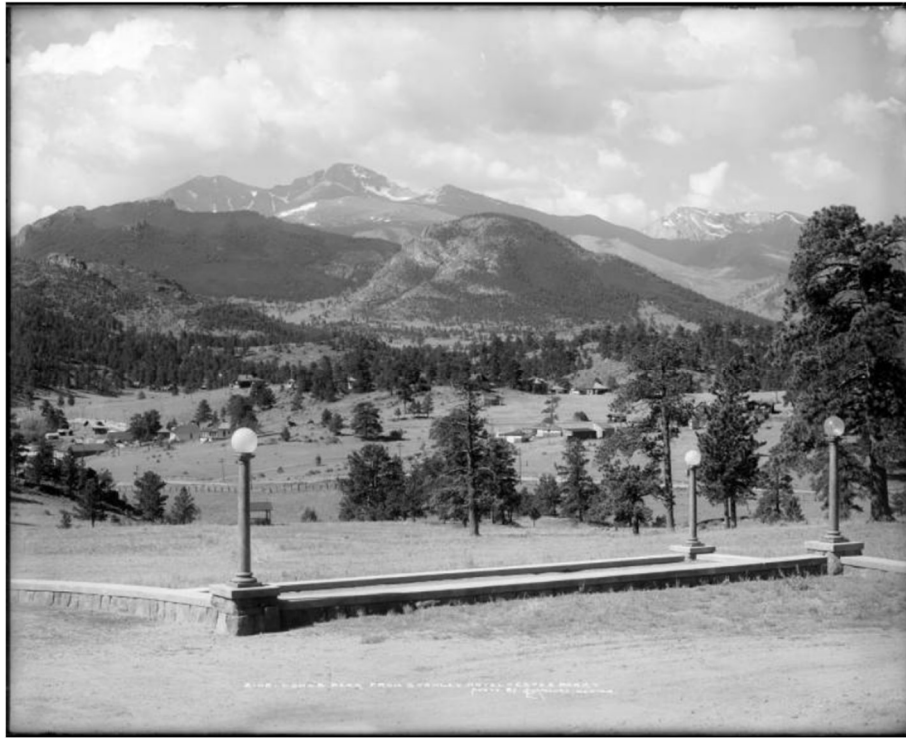


Figure 5.7a: Photograph titled “Long’s Peak from Stanley Hotel, Estes Park.” Photographed by Louis Charles McClure. Dated 1909-1916. Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.

Figure 5.7b includes one of the original lampposts from the archival image. The other lamp posts are now off to the right-hand side of the image, and while they are structured similarly to the original archival image, they are no longer in the same place. I originally attempted to use these lamp posts as the reference point for the repeat photograph but doing so put me at an elevation and angle that did not match the original placement of Long’s Peak, demonstrating that the lampposts were moved from their original position. The area where the lamp posts were originally is now part of the sidewalk and borders on what is now a paved parking lot. There is an additional sidewalk and a fenced area in the image which appears to hold a shed like structure.



Figure 5.7b: Present day view of Long's Peak from the Stanley Hotel. Dated January 2019. Courtesy of the author.

What is most interesting about the changes presented in Figure 5.7b are the changes in the valley. At first glance it appears that the valley has filled in with more trees, as you might expect over the course of a century. However, looking closer you find that there is also new residential and commercial development. To the right side of the image there are more houses. To the left side of the image, you can see the theater, indicating that it is looking at the developed downtown area of Estes Park.

This next pair of photographs shows another view from the Stanley Hotel. Figure 5.8a shows several Stanley Steamers lined up in the parking lot of the hotel with Long's Peak in the background. In Figure 5.8b, we still have the same mountain background, but changes to the parking lot are visible. Parking is now designated to two levels. There is a car in this image, an older car with the Stanley's logo imprinted on the side. While the design of this area has changed drastically, this image demonstrates how the Stanley Hotel still holds on to its historical roots.



Figure 5.8a: Photograph titled “Long’s Peak & Range from Stanley Hotel.” Photographer unknown. Dated March 7, 1926. Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.



Figure 5.8b: Present day image of Long’s Peak from the Stanley Hotel. Dated March 2019. Courtesy of the author.

This final pair of images focuses on a distance view of the Stanley Hotel located in the northern part of Estes Park. Figure 5.9a shows wide open spaces with no structures aside from fencing and roads in between the photographer and the hotel buildings. I utilized the Stanley Hotel and the mountains behind it as the reference point for the repeat image.

Figure 5.9b is quite different from the original archival image. The spot where I was standing is part of the Estes Park Visitor Center, which is centrally located between Lake Estes and the downtown area around Elkhorn Avenue. What was once an empty valley is now filled with commercial development. To the left-hand side of the image, there is a Safeway with a Starbucks, as well as a standalone Starbucks immediately in front of it. In the strip mall by the standalone Starbucks, there are several different business types, including restaurants, pet stores, and chocolate shops. To the right-hand side of the image, there is a modern movie theatre with three screens, which operates in contrast to the Park Theatre located off Elkhorn Avenue.

This section of Estes Park immediately precedes downtown Estes Park. While downtown Estes Park has more historical buildings, this area includes a great deal of newer construction, modern amenities, and commercial chain businesses, including brands that are familiar to visitors, such as Starbucks. It seems that Estes Park has consciously decided to keep the downtown area a more historical district, while the area outside the downtown area is where more of the common commercial buildings are relegated.



Figure 5.9a: Photograph titled “Stanley Hotel.” Photographed by Fred Payne Clatworthy. Dated June 17, 1921. Courtesy of History Colorado.



Figure 5.9b: Present day view of the Stanley Hotel from the Estes Park Visitors Center. Dated November 2018. Courtesy of the author.

### Section 5.3 Before and After Lake Estes

This pair of photographs focuses on the eastern side of Estes Park. My reference point for these two images is Fairchild Mountain in the background of the archival image. Figure 5.10a shows a scene with a horse drawn carriage traveling down a dirt road. Off to the side of the road on the right-hand side, there are fences and parcels of land that appear to be for grazing cattle, a common industry in Estes Park at the time this photograph was taken. Off to the left-hand side of the image, you can see several tall conifers on a hill sloping upwards.

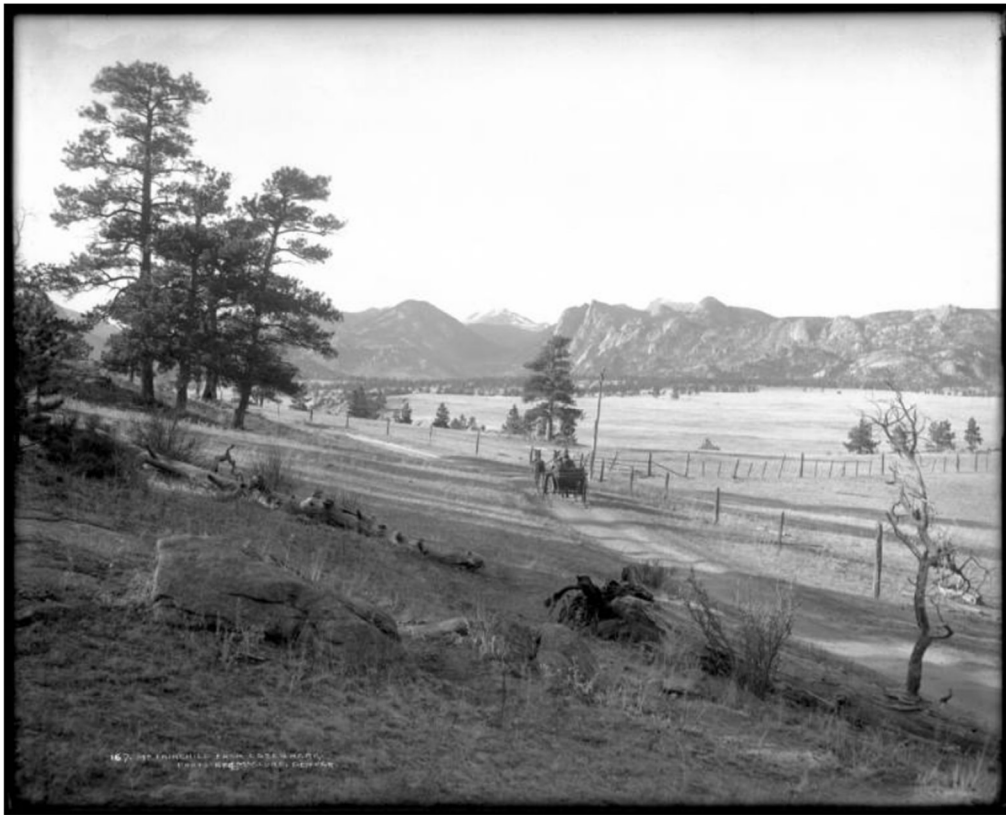


Figure 5.10a: Photograph titled “Mt. Fairchild from Estes Park.” Photographed by Louis Charles McClure. Dated 1890-1910. Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.

Figure 5.10b shows a very different scene. Though the same mountain range is visible and at the same angle as the original photograph, the landscape in front of it appears

to have changed dramatically. There is a building to the right-hand side of the image and a recreational area in the forefront of the scene. Closer towards the mountains, you see that there is an unnaturally level hill covered in what looks like small stones. There is extensive fencing around it, showing that it is a restricted area. There is also concrete visible to the left-hand side of the image.



Figure 5.10b: Present day view of Mt. Fairchild. Dated February 2019. Courtesy of the author.

Since I found that this repeat image was not quite enough to provide full context to the drastic changes evident here, I took another photograph that is zoomed out further, giving a slightly different angle than the original archival photograph. Upon zooming out, you can see Olympus Dam to the left-hand side of Figure 5.10c. This dam was constructed to dam the Big Thompson River and create Lake Estes, the main reservoir for Estes Park.

The level hill in the background is elevated to hold back the water in the reservoir, and any water released is released through the gates of the dam shown to the left of the image.



Figure 5.10c: Present day view of Mt. Fairchild with Olympus Dam visible. Dated February 2019. Courtesy of the author.

This set of images demonstrates how drastically the construction of Olympus Dam and Lake Estes altered the topography of certain areas of Estes Park. What once had a sloping hill is now almost completely flat. The area has also changed function from cattle ranching to recreation, with walking paths, a picnic area, and a parking lot. Part of this area is also owned and managed by the federal government, which originally built and maintains the dam.

This next set of images looks out to the south of Estes Park. Figure 5.11a shows a series of mountains in the background, which were roughly used as the reference point for this pair of images. Due to the topographical changes in this area, I mainly relied on the



feature on the right-hand side of the image, which is the large rock with a smaller rock next to it at a slightly lower elevation. In the archival image there is a valley with trees, as well as what looks like windmills. There is also a structure to the left-hand side of the image which is believed to be the Estes Park Hotel.



Figure 5.11a: Photograph titled “Long’s Peak from Estes Park Hotel.” Photographed by William Henry Jackson. Dated 1880-1890. Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.

The scene drastically changes in the second image. The valley is now filled with water and elevation changes have made it impossible to retake the original archival image exactly. Across the water there is a recreation area visible with picnic areas and a path. Further in the distance there are buildings, mainly comprised of recreational and commercial buildings, as well as some housing and the local high school.



Figure 5.11b: Present day image looking over Lake Estes. Dated March 2019. Courtesy of the author.

The next pair of photographs looks to the current entrance of Estes Park. The mountain to the left-hand side of Figures 5.12a and 5.12b is Mt. Olympus and was used as the reference point for this pair of photographs. Obtaining an exact replica of this image was difficult due to the topography changes in this area of Estes Park, which can be directly attributed to the creation of Lake Estes. Higher points of elevation around Lake Estes are now difficult to reach legally, as much of the land is now private property.

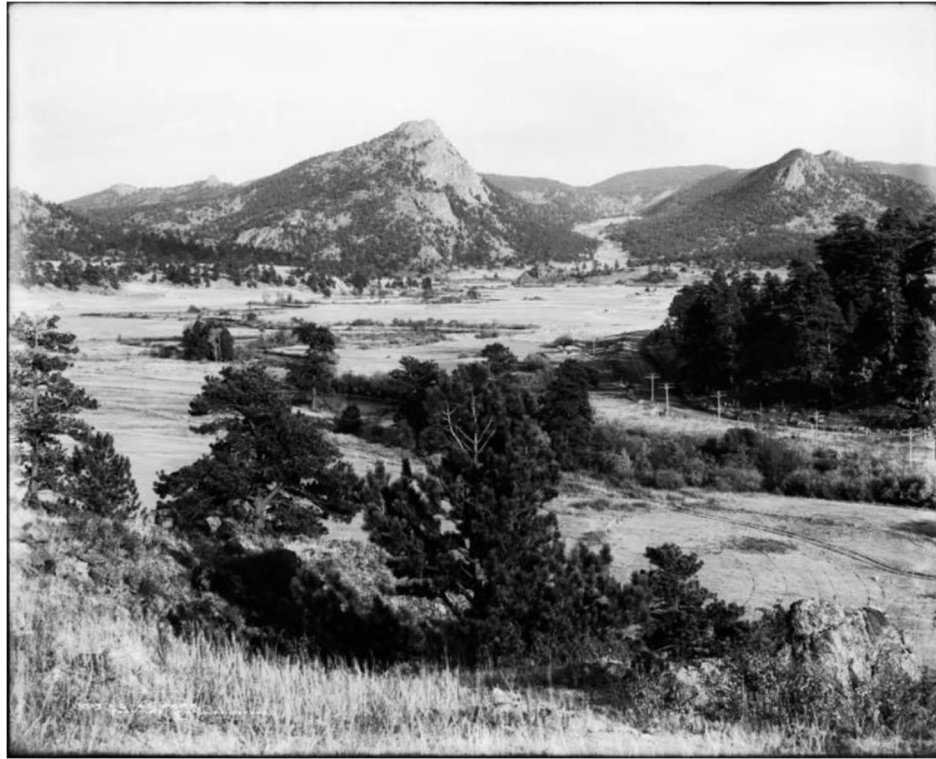


Figure 5.12a: Photograph titled “Estes Park.” Photographed by Louis Charles McClure. Dated 1908-1920. Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.

Lake Estes is one of the more striking differences between these two images, as the reservoir was not yet constructed in Figure 5.12a. What used to be a stream running through a mostly open valley is mostly filled with water with recreational pathways and parking filling the space around it. In the left-hand side of Figure 5.12b, you can see new development in the area, including a visitor’s center and a parking garage. This is now the typical development around Lake Estes, as much of the area is used for tourist spaces like hotels, summer condos and cabins, resorts, and shops catered to recreation, like stores to rent fishing gear, bikes, kayaks, and other water sport equipment.

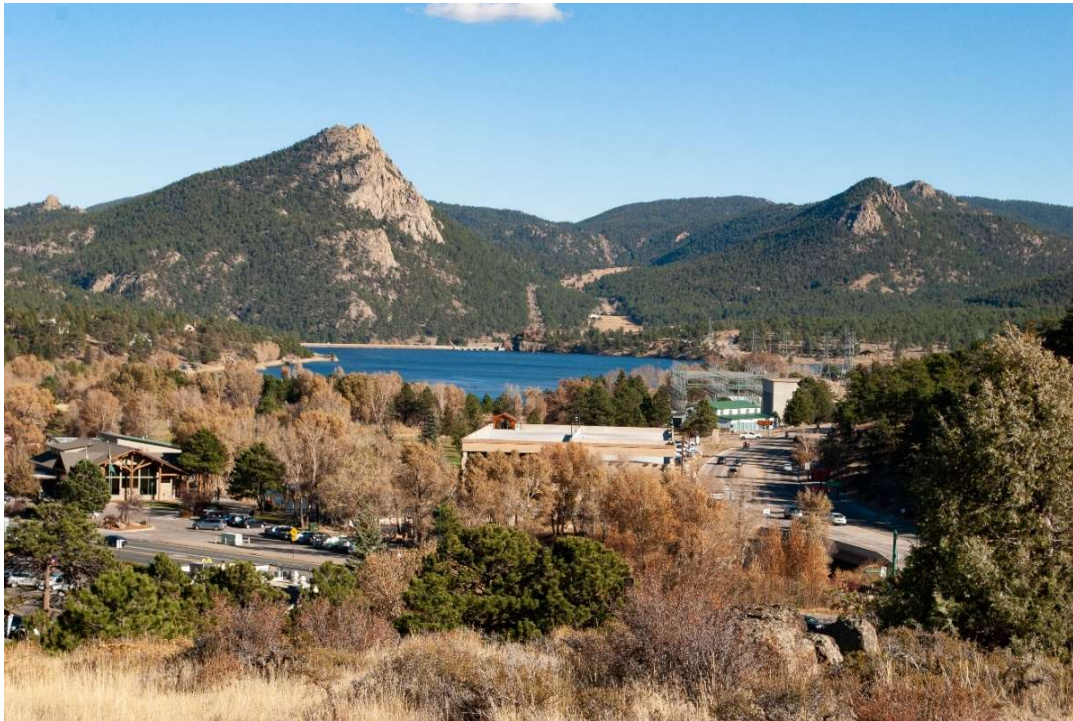


Figure 5.12b: Present day view of Mt. Olympus and the Entrance of Estes Park. Dated November 2018. Courtesy of the author.

These last two images show a comparison of a motel close to Lake Estes. Figure 5.13a was taken in the 1950s and shows a very typical scene for a motel in the park. There are cars in the parking lot and people enjoying the pool. Figure 5.13b shows a very similar scene. The same motel still stands today, and they have kept the pool. They've added in a firepit and some additional concrete in the corner on the left-hand side. There is additional landscaping and a larger shed next to the pool. Many of the lodging options in Estes Park are motels, a holdover from the early days of the Stanley Steamer (Pickering 2005).



Figure 5.13a: Photograph titled “Estes Park.” Photographer unknown. Dated 1955. Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.



Figure 5.13b: Photograph of present-day Blue Door Inn. Dated March 2019. Courtesy of the author.

## Section 5.4 Mary's Lake

This final section focuses on two pairs of images that focus on Mary's Lake, a small reservoir that is part of the Colorado-Big Thompson Project and located in Estes Park. This first pair of images focuses on a view of the mountains to the east of Estes Park with Mary's Lake behind the photographer. In Figure 5.14a, which was taken in the late 1800s, there are no visible buildings in the valley below. It is a mostly untouched landscape with some trees closer to the base of the mountain.



Figure 5.14a: Photograph titled “St. Mary’s Lake, Looking South.” Photographed by Joseph Collier. Dated 1864-1870. Courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum.

In Figure 5.14b, however, there is a lot of development visible. In the forefront of the image, there is a house with a horse stable and fences around the property. To the right-hand side of the image, amongst all the trees, there is quite a bit of housing development. Upon further inspection, I discovered that this is a relatively new area of development in Estes Park, with new housing construction as well as what is being marketed as summer

condos. Even quite far from downtown and amongst residential housing, there are places for individuals seeking only temporary, summer residence in Estes Park.



Figure 5.14b: Present day image from Mary's Lake looking south. Dated March 2019. Courtesy of the author.

This last image comparison looks out at Mary's Lake to the west. Like the previous image pair, Figure 5.15a shows an untouched landscape with no evidence of buildings. The rock structure to the right-hand side of the image served as a reference point for the comparison image, as well as the mountain range in the background.

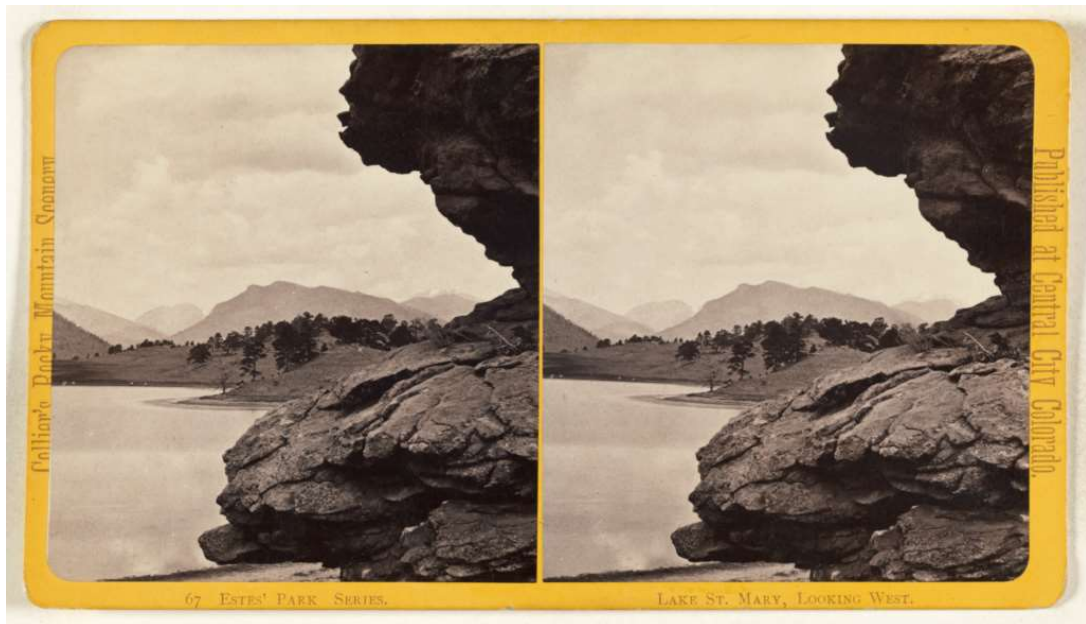


Figure 5.15a: Photograph titled “Lake St. Mary, Looking West.” Photographed by Joseph Collier. Dated 1864-1870. Courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum.

One of the most interesting differences between Figures 5.15a and 5.15b is how much higher the water level is. There has also been some erosion in this area, as the rock feature on the top right is smoother, and the rock feature on the bottom right is completely gone. In the background of the image, you see evidence of buildings, as well as the Estes Park Campground at Mary’s Lake, a recreational site for visitors staying in Estes Park.





Figure 5.15b: Present day image of Mary's Lake looking west. Dated March 2019. Courtesy of the author.

The changes visible here, especially regarding water level, are likely explained by its integration into the Colorado-Big Thompson Project. Mary's Lake now serves as an afterbay for the Mary's Lake Power Plant and helps to regulate water from the project on its way to the Estes Power Plant. Two dikes were also constructed on Mary's Lake to help control water flow.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The pairs of repeat photographs presented in this thesis provide visual evidence for several significant changes in Estes Park from around the time RMNP was designated to the present. These changes can be attributed to common issues that gateway communities encounter as more people visit the towns on their way to visit a national park. With a basis in the tourism industry, these gateway communities face challenges around accommodating both tourists and permanent residents of the town seeking to capitalize on the tourist economy.

One consistent theme present throughout the images of downtown Estes Park was signage for parking. As shown in Figure 5.2a, cars, and the need for parking, have been present throughout the history of Estes Park. Extra parking has been constructed to accommodate the influx of tourists heading to RMNP. In 1916, the year after RMNP was designated, the park saw slightly over 50 thousand visitors (Pickering 1999). This is a much smaller number than the typical rates of visitation seen today—RMNP received a total of 4.6 million visitors in 2018, the highest rate of visitation ever recorded for the park (National Park Service 2019a). Estes Park receives most of these visitors on their way to into the park because it lies at the entrances closest to the Denver International Airport. The Beaver Meadows and Fall River entrances, the two entrances accessible through Estes Park, recorded 1.1 million vehicles entering the park in 2018. The Grand Lake entrance on

the west side of RMNP recorded about 240,000 vehicles and the Longs Peak Entrance to the south of Estes Park saw 44,000 vehicles in 2018 (National Park Service 2019b).

Since the two most heavily used entrances are accessed through Estes Park, and since visitorship rates to RMNP have reached record levels, the need for parking in the town has also increased. To accommodate for more visitors stopping in town before heading to RMNP, there is signage around Estes Park to direct people to several parking lots around the downtown area, as shown in Figures 5.2b and 5.4a, as well as a parking garage located next to the Estes Park Visitor Center. Since there is limited parking along Elkhorn Avenue, it makes sense to direct traffic to around the downtown area.

In addition to more land being used for parking, much of what was previously empty space is now being used for commercial purposes. While downtown Estes Park has been a major location for retail purchases and restaurants, commercial operations are no longer concentrated there. The types of businesses that have been put in outside of the downtown area have focused more on chain restaurants and retail spaces rather than small businesses. For instance, outside of the downtown area close to the visitor center there is a Safeway, a Starbucks in that Safeway, and a standalone Starbucks right in front of that Safeway, as shown in Figure 5.9b. There are also more typical chain restaurants like McDonalds, Subway, and Dairy Queen in the same general area outside of downtown.

More land being used for commercial chain restaurant and business development brings up an interesting question of character for the people of Estes Park. While the downtown area still focuses mainly on independently owned small businesses, more of the new commercial development is focused on chain businesses more familiar to the typical

tourist. These chain businesses are typically only brought into places with a significant enough demand for them, so it is likely that more tourists staying in Estes Park are increasing the demand for these types of familiar businesses.

While Estes Park is focusing much of its development on more modern businesses for the average tourist, it also appears that the community is using its history and cultural roots to its advantage. In the downtown area, quite a few of the buildings have been kept for many years, as evidenced by the historic Park Theatre shown in Figures 5.3a-c, as well as commercial buildings that remain standing even after going through a major natural disaster, as shown in Figures 5.5a-b. Even newer lamp posts in the area are designed to evoke a different time, as shown in Figures 5.3b-c and 4.4a-b. These historical roots are a major draw of downtown Estes Park and certainly attracts tourists to these businesses as well.

Estes Park's historical roots are also evident in the Stanley Hotel property, though this area has undergone significant changes as well. While it is a historic site and Estes Park seeks to conserve the hotel complex as well as it can, the hotel and its grounds have been updated over time to better accommodate changes in traffic to the area, bringing it into the modern era. For example, while the property has kept the same lamp posts in the front of their property, they have been moved to make way for a two-level parking lot which can accommodate more traffic to the hotel. This extra parking is needed as the hotel doesn't just host guests staying overnight, but also visitors interested in historical tours of the property (as well as the occasional ghost tour). Additionally, the Stanley Hotel seeks to

promote its historical roots and pay tribute to its founder, as shown by the automobile on display in front of the hotel.

The Stanley Hotel is an iconic building in Estes Park, and while the building itself hasn't changed very much, its grounds and the land around it have filled out dramatically. The valley immediately in front of the Stanley Hotel shown in Figures 5.7a-b and 5.9a-b has seen a considerable increase in both residential and commercial development. Using the Stanley Hotel as a reference point allowed me to document the immense growth Estes Park has experienced in this area of town over the past century.

Aside from commercial development, other land-use priority changes are evident from these photographs, and much of the topographical changes in Estes Park have been driven by the Colorado-Big Thompson Project. As described in Chapter Three, this project run by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation led to the damming of the Big Thompson River to create Lake Estes, as well as the construction of dikes and a hydroelectric power plant on Mary's Lake. The construction of Lake Estes especially has led to significant topographical changes in the eastern half of Estes Park, with an empty valley now filled with water and hills being smoothed over, leaving flat land behind. Figures 5.10a-c show the direct effects of Olympus Dam and the Lake Estes reservoir in this area of Estes Park.

The reservoir's construction was originally meant to provide water resources for agriculture but was soon needed for an increased municipal supply due to a rising population in Estes Park with greater water needs. The people of Estes Park were also quick to capitalize on its construction in other ways. Much of the area that is now Lake Estes was used as cattle ranching space, which was evident in Figure 5.10a. In the repeat images

shown in Figures 5.10b-c, it is evident that this space is being used for mostly recreational purposes. This is a consistent theme around Lake Estes, as also seen in Figure 5.12b, which shows that the area around the reservoir is lined with walking and biking paths, as well as resort development, including hotels, summer lodgings, and places to rent recreational equipment like bikes, boats, and fishing gear. Even though the priority of Lake Estes was to increase the amount of water available to the town, the tourism industry has also pushed for the space around it to be a recreational draw for visitors to Estes Park, as well as a place for lodging.

Mary's Lake also underwent significant changes due to the Colorado-Big Thompson Project. The lake was integrated in the project as an afterbay, leading more water to be put into the lake than usual. This rose the water levels of Mary's Lake, which is visible in Figure 5.15b. The rock feature to the left of Figure 5.15a is also noticeably different in the repeat image, with the top portion considerably more weathered and the bottom portion completely gone. I suspect that the disappearance of this feature is likely due to the Colorado-Big Thompson Project, as it may have been damaged due to construction around the lake or from erosion from the higher water levels.

Mary's Lake, like Lake Estes, has also seen an increase in development around it. As shown in Figures 5.12b and 5.14b, much of the new lodging development in Estes Park has also focused on the tourist, in both short-term and long-term capacities. With new construction around Lake Estes focusing on resorts, hotels, and motels, and construction around Mary's Lake revolving around high priced summer condominiums and camp grounds, questions arise about the housing situation in Estes Park. With a growing rate of

visitors to RMNP, there must also be a growing number of people willing to live and work in Estes Park to support the growing tourism industry. Much of the new development is not focused on these people, as the town is striving to create more lodging for summer-long visitors, as well as those just staying for the weekend. For instance, the new development close to Mary's Lake as shown in Figure 5.14b is a new condominium community, with signage discussing the mountain and lake views.

These trends in land use change are consistent with findings from previous literature on gateway communities. As described by Kurtz, before the designation of protected spaces, gateway communities often relied on natural resource extraction or agriculture. Estes Park relied on agriculture and cattle ranching before it became a tourist destination. This thesis supports these conclusions by providing additional evidence of gateway community changes from a more natural resource or agriculture-based economy to a tourism-based economy (Kurtz 2010).

The course of development seen in Estes Park followed a typical trajectory commonly seen in gateway communities where the federal government has a hand in the town's development. As described in the research conducted by Bergstrom and Harrington, people living in gateway communities often don't agree on who is responsible for the changes that the town has undergone since the establishment of a protected space (Bergstrom and Harrington 2018). In the case of Estes Park, my results show that it is a mixture of influence from the federal government and the community that has directed the most apparent changes in town. The most drastic topographical changes are directly related to the presence of the federal government, with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's

Colorado-Big Thompson Project leading to the creation of Lake Estes and the changes visible at Mary's Lake. While not specifically involved with the NPS, the already significant presence of the federal government due to park activities made the successful completion of this project easier from an administrative standpoint, with the Bureau of Reclamation co-opting Department of Interior offices that already existed in Estes Park (Pickering 2005).

Additionally, while RMNP is the major driver of visitors and is forcing changes in Estes Park due to increased visitation, the community does have a hand in how this challenge is handled. It is the town of Estes Park, not the NPS, that decides where and when to build additional parking lots or structures. Additionally, it is mainly up to the community what types of businesses it allows to operate in the town. Aside from early pressure from the NPS to remove certain hotels from Estes Park, the community has been mostly responsible for any residential or commercial development within their own borders, and the community deeply cares about what is given permission to operate there (Pickering 1999; Wondrak 2002).

Even though the Estes Park community is responsible for many of the changes driven by tourism, the federal government still has a significant influence. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation still operates in Estes Park as part of the Colorado-Big Thompson Project and the NPS has government offices located in town as well. As Estes Park continues to grow, the needs of these government agencies will likely need to be considered. With how much visitorship to RMNP has grown in recent years, I suspect that the presence of the NPS in Estes Park will likely need to grow as well. This may mean more space in Estes



Park is taken for additional offices and Interior Department operations. In future years, I would be curious to return to see if there are any significant additions to the NPS presence in Estes Park.

Overall, tourism appears to be a main driver of many of the changes seen in this series of repeat photographs. An increase in visitors to RMNP is directly related to an increase in tourists visiting Estes Park and the town has developed accordingly. The proximity of the federal government to Estes Park through the NPS and the Bureau of Reclamation also promotes change within the town, both culturally and physically. The series of photographs presented in this thesis serve as evidence for these changes and provide insights into how the tourism-based economy of a gateway community, as well as its relationship with the federal government, can fundamentally alter its landscape.

Taken as a whole, these results also contribute to landscape ideas set forth by other geographers who studied landscape (Sauer 1925; Lewis 1983; Hoelscher 1998). The photographs present a reading of the landscape of Estes Park and reveal some of the complex changes the town has experienced since RMNP was created. For example, the physical landscape of Estes Park reads differently now than it did before it established a close relationship with the federal government, since the federal government was directly responsible for Lake Estes, the largest topographical change in Estes Park. Additionally, using photographs as the main research method for this project allowed me to provide visual evidence of the individual character of Estes Park's landscape, showing how it distinguishes itself from other places on earth. The photographs show that Estes Park uses its history to draw in tourists to its city center.

The pairs of photographs also suggest that Estes Park's landscape will continue to experience changes. As shown by the increase in parking, Estes Park will likely continue to grapple with additional parking needs from visitors. Given the ever increasing visitorship to RMNP, and the fact that visitors mainly rely on cars to access the park, Estes Park will likely need to construct additional parking lots or garages. Additionally, visitor increases will probably drive further commercial growth in town, as well as additional lodging construction. The town will need to find additional ways to accommodate how tourists travel and experience nature.

While providing insights into the potential future of Estes Park, the pairs of photographs also form the basis for additional inquiries into the town's landscape. For instance, the photographs could be used to inform interviews with Estes Park residents, business owners, planners, or tourists to determine how they experience the changes shown in the images or how they interpret the landscape. Using these images to promote additional discussion with these groups could lead to better planning decisions on the part of residents and town planners and could also provide tourists with an idea of how their visits impact the community. By understanding how they impact Estes Park, tourists might be more mindful of how they travel to and within the town, as well as how they interact with the landscape around them.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

As described throughout this thesis, Estes Park has gone through numerous changes since Joel Estes first settled the valley. What was once a place for mostly cattle ranching, rudimentary cabins, and hunting, is now a town driven by attracting the dollars of tourists on their way to one of the most visited national parks in the United States. While the tourism industry came to Estes Park in the years before the national park was designated, the number of visitors coming through town dramatically increased in a short period of time and has continued to grow. Managing these visitors in a way that continues to support the livelihood of the town, while still maintaining its cultural roots, is a considerable task that Estes Park has undertaken since the designation of RMNP.

The results provided in this thesis are valuable for the people of Estes Park and other gateway communities in the United States because they illustrate how much development occurs due to the tourism industry that these communities rely on. As national parks continue to grow in popularity, so will the gateway communities that border them. While increased tourism leads to greater economic prosperity and increased revenue for business owners within the gateway community, this increase in visitation also leads to limited space being used for more parking lots and garages, which may not be able to account for the entire flow of individuals heading into the parks. It also contributes to real

estate areas being purchased for tourist focused development, such as summer condos, cabins, and resort spaces, as well as commercial development.

This thesis also helps to illustrate the significant impact that the proximity of the federal government has had on the development of Estes Park. Federal government projects in the area have dramatically altered the physical landscape of the town. By creating Lake Estes, the federal government forced considerable landscape change on the people of Estes Park. However, the project provided the community with additional opportunities they would not have had otherwise, such as the ability to promote water-based recreational activities and waterfront properties to tourists and investors seeking to capitalize on visitors to RMNP.

Further, returning to the ideas presented by Hoelscher, my own reading of the landscape of Estes Park through repeat photography provides support to his thoughts on how the social and economic ideologies of a community affects the landscape (Hoelscher 1998). The photographic comparisons I made tell a story of the past and present of Estes Park, while also providing hints about its future course of development. Throughout their history, the people of Estes Park have chosen to promote tourism within their town and have grown around the industry since RMNP was designated. Estes Park appears to be a landscape for play, prioritizing the people able to travel to RMNP. As visitorship to RMNP continues to increase, it is likely that this priority will only be further cemented into the character of the town.

Estes Park's priorities also speak to the priorities many Americans have. Many people in the U.S. seek recreational activities in the nature that surrounds them. The

increasing popularity of national parks in the U.S. indicates that more Americans are seeking time in their nation's protected spaces. The affects that these visitors have on gateway communities demonstrates how their search for recreation involves a desire for both historical value and common commodities the typical American would be used to seeing at home. In Estes Park, these priorities are evident in how the downtown area of Elkhorn Avenue is designed to evoke an earlier time, while the area before entering downtown promotes commercial chain businesses.

This thesis further provides an example of how to effectively use repeat photography in landscape studies. As Meyer and Youngs explained in their own study of Yellowstone National Park, the photo-pairs presented in this thesis serve multiple purposes. The photo-pairs serve not only as a point of study for this thesis, but are now themselves their own cultural artifacts, contributing visual evidence of the attributes of a place at a distinct point in time (Meyer and Youngs 2018). These photographs are research tools that may serve another researcher at another point time to see how Estes Park continues to change. More studies into the effects of the tourist economy on gateway communities like Estes Park are needed to better understand how these communities cope with the demands of increased tourism. My evaluation of Estes Park has shown significant changes throughout the community in terms of how they choose to capitalize on their own space and more changes into the future are likely as the town continues to grow with its neighboring national park.

## REFERENCES

- Bancroft, C. 1981. *Estes Park and Trail Ridge: Their Dramatic History*. Boulder, Colorado: Johnson Publishing Co.
- 1968. *Trail Ridge Country: The Romantic History of Estes Park and Grand Lake*. Boulder, Colorado: Johnson Publishing Co.
- Bass, J. O. 2013. Assessing Modernization In Honduran Landscapes Using Repeat Photography. *Geographical Review* 103:431-443.
- 2004. More trees in the tropics. *Area* 36:19-32.
- Bergstrom, R. D., and L. M. B. Harrington. 2018. Understanding agents of change in amenity gateways of the Greater Yellowstone region. *Community Development* 49:145-160.
- Bird, I. 1999. *Isabella Lucy Bird's "A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains:" An Annotated Text*. University of Oklahoma Press.
- Burton, C., J. T. Mitchell, and S. L. Cutter. 2011. Evaluating post-Katrina recovery in Mississippi using repeat photography. *Disasters* 35:488-509.
- Carothers, J.E. 1951. *Estes Park: Past and Present*. University of Denver Press.
- Chapin, F. H. 1987. *Mountaineering in Colorado: The Peaks about Estes Park*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.
- Cordsen, J. 2012. 1982 flood changed downtown Estes Park. *Reporter-Herald*.
- Cosgrove, D. 1994. Contested Global Visions - One-World, Whole-Earth, and the Apollo Space Photographs. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 84:270-294.

- Crang, M. 1997. Picturing practices: research through the tourist gaze. *Progress in Human Geography* 21:359-373.
- D'Antonio, A., C. Monz, P. Newman, S. Lawson, and D. Taff. 2013. Enhancing the utility of visitor impact assessment in parks and protected areas: A combined social-ecological approach. *Journal of Environmental Management* 124:72-81.
- Gabe, T. 2016. Effects of the October 2013 US Federal government shutdown on National Park gateway communities: the case of Acadia National Park and Bar Harbor, Maine. *Applied Economics Letters* 23:313-317.
- Hall, T. 2009. The Camera Never Lies? Photographic Research Methods in Human Geography. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 33:453-462.
- Historic Park Theatre & Cafe. History. Available from <https://www.historicparktheatre.com/theatre-history>.
- Hoelscher, S.D. 1998. Tourism, Ethnic Memory and the Other-Directed Place. *Ecumene* 5:369-398.
- Howe, J., E. MacMahon, and L. Propst. 1997. *Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities*. Washington, DC: Island Press.
- Jiang, B., B. Deal, H. Pan, L. Larsen, C. Hsieh, C. Chang, and W. C. Sullivan. 2017. Remotely-sensed imagery vs. eye-level photography: Evaluating associations among measurements of tree cover density. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 157:270-281.
- Kurtz, R. S. 2010. Public Lands Policy and Economic Trends in Gateway Communities. *Review of Policy Research* 27:77-88.

- Larsen, J. 2008. Practices and Flows of Digital Photography: An Ethnographic Framework. *Mobilities* 3:141-160.
- Latham, A., and D. P. McCormack. 2009. Thinking with images in non-representational cities: vignettes from Berlin. *Area* 41:252-262.
- Lawson, S. R., P. Newman, and C. Monz. 2017. A systems-based approach to address unintended consequences of demand-driven transportation planning in national parks and public lands. *International Journal of Sustainable Transportation* 11:98-108.
- Lindberg, J., P. Raney, and J. Robertson. 2004. *Rocky Mountain Rustic: Historic Buildings of the Rocky Mountain National Park Area*. Estes Park, Colorado: Rocky Mountain Nature Association.
- Meyer, J., and Y. Youngs. 2018. Historical Landscape Change in Yellowstone National Park: Demonstrating the Value of Intensive Field Observation and Repeat Photography. *Geographical Review* 108:387-409.
- Mills, E. A. 1963. *Early Estes Park*. Big Mountain Press.
- National Park Service. 2019a. Park Statistics. Available from <https://www.nps.gov/romo/learn/management/statistics>.
- 2019b. Traffic Counts by Location. Available from <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Traffic%20Counts?Park=ROMO>.
- 2018. Geologic Activity. Available from <https://www.nps.gov/romo/learn/nature/geologicactivity.htm>.



- 2017. Park Reports. Available from  
<https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/Reports/Park/ROMO>.
- Oku, H., and K. Fukamachi. 2006. The differences in scenic perception of forest visitors through their attributes and recreational activity. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 75:34-42.
- Petzelka, P., and S. Marquart-Pyatt. 2015. Perceptions of Power and Manner of Designation: Impacts on Trust. *Society & Natural Resources* 28:1261-1277.
- 2013. “With the Stroke of a Pen”: Designation of the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument and the Impact on Trust. *Human Ecology* 41:285-297.
- Pickering, J. H. 2005. *America's Switzerland: Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park, the Growth Years*. Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado.
- 1999. *This Blue Hollow: Estes Park, the Early Years, 1859-1915*. Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado.
- Rossi, S. D., J. A. Byrne, C. M. Pickering, and J. Reser. 2015. 'Seeing red' in national parks: How visitors' values affect perceptions and park experiences. *Geoforum* 66:41-52.
- Sauer, C. O. 1925. Morphology of Landscape. *University of California Publications in Geography*. 2 (2): 19-54.
- Schwartz, J. M. 1996. The Geography Lesson: Photographs and the construction of imaginative geographies. *Journal of Historical Geography* 22:16-45.
- Schwartz, J. M., and J. R. Ryan. 2003. *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination*.

- Sidaway, J. D. 2002. Photography as geographical fieldwork. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 26:95-103.
- Sprague, A. E. 1999. *My Pioneer Life: The Memoirs of Abner E. Sprague*. Estes Park, CO: Rocky Mountain Nature Association.
- Turkewitz, J. 2017. National Parks Struggle With a Mounting Crisis: Too Many Visitors. *New York Times*.
- United States Census Bureau. 2017. Annual Estimates of the Resident Population: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017 more information 2017 Population Estimates. Available from <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk> (last accessed September 4, 2018).
- 2016. U.S. Gazetteer Files. Available from [https://www2.census.gov/geo/docs/maps-data/data/gazetteer/2016\\_Gazetteer/2016\\_gaz\\_place\\_08.txt](https://www2.census.gov/geo/docs/maps-data/data/gazetteer/2016_Gazetteer/2016_gaz_place_08.txt) (last accessed September 4, 2018).
- Wade, A. A., D. M. Theobald, and M. J. Laituri. 2011. A multi-scale assessment of local and contextual threats to existing and potential US protected areas. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 101:215-227.
- Waitt, G., and L. Head. 2002. Postcards and frontier mythologies: sustaining views of the Kimberley as timeless. *Environment and Planning D-Society & Space* 20:319-344.
- Wondrak, A. K. 2002. Seen any wildlife? Community conflict and a struggle for the soul of Estes Park, Colorado. *Cultural Geographies* 9:68-94.

- Yamashita, S. 2002. Perception and evaluation of water in landscape: use of Photo-Projective Method to compare child and adult residents' perceptions of a Japanese river environment. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 62:3-17.
- Yung, L., M. E. Patterson, and W. A. Freimund. 2010. Rural Community Views on the Role of Local and Extralocal Interests in Public Lands Governance. *Society & Natural Resources* 23:1170-1186.