

PH0363049

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED AUG 31 1976

DATE ENTERED OCT 8 1976

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

~~The Big Ditch~~ or Smith's Ditch ^{irrigation}

AND/OR COMMON

The City Ditch

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Washington Park

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Denver

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

— VICINITY OF

STATE

Colorado

CODE

COUNTY

Denver

CODE

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

City and County of Denver

STREET & NUMBER

City and County Bldg., 1437 Bannock Street

CITY, TOWN

Denver

— VICINITY OF

STATE

Colorado

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Office of County Clerk and Recorder

STREET & NUMBER

City and County Building
1437 Bannock St.

CITY, TOWN

Denver

STATE

Colorado

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Colorado State Inventory of Historical Sites

DATE

December 22, 1975

— FEDERAL STATE — COUNTY — LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

State Historical Society of Colorado, 200 E. 14th Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Denver

STATE

Colorado 80202

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Today the City Ditch (named the Big Ditch originally) begins where water is discharged into it from Chatfield Dam. The City of Englewood controls the first 15 miles of the ditch as it flows through open land, industrial, residential, and park areas. The ditch is a combination of open canal and pipeline reaches. Englewood receives a portion of its municipal water supply from City Ditch.

At Harvard Gulch near S. Downing Street and East Harvard Avenue, the Denver Water Department assumes control of the ditch, and receives water from Englewood through agreement. The ditch is essentially an enclosed pipeline from this point to City Park Lake some eight miles to the north; however, where the ditch flows through Washington Park, it is still an open channel, as originally designed and constructed. It is here that thousands view the ditch annually, enjoy the trees, flowers, and grass that are made possible by its water, and the recreation associated with it. It is for these reasons this reach was felt to emulate the original spirit and purpose of the ditch, and for which this nomination was made.

The Big Ditch was surveyed and constructed between 1860 and 1867. It was an open unlined ditch, three feet wide on the bottom, seven feet wide at the top, with steep sides. Horse drawn plows and scrapers as well as hand labor were used to construct the ditch. Soon after water began to flow through the ditch, generous numbers of shrubs and trees were planted along its course, and found sustenance from its water.

Except for the first 4 miles of ditch which have been inundated by Chatfield Reservoir, and those portions now in pipelines, the ditch is today marked by abundant vegetation. The approximate 6000 acre feet of water flowing through the ditch during an average year purposefully supports two major city parks (800 acres), a golf course, and a substantial portion of the population in Englewood, Colorado.

How it evolved to this role is a story in itself, a story that unfolds in following paragraphs.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Community Devel. Recreation
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

AGRICULTURE - The City Ditch Water is used for agricultural and livestock purposes for areas south of Denver.

ECONOMICS - The City Ditch has watered trees, gardens and lawns thus improving the value of property in the Denver area. The Ditch has enabled farmers to irrigate their crops thus sustaining their livelihood.

ENGINEERING - The City Ditch is an artificial channel that is 27 miles long. Due to the hydraulic design of the canal, the entire system is of gravity flow, thus eliminating power costs related to pumping.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT - Has enabled Washington Park to flourish to its present state of beauty.

RECREATION - Because it has enabled Washington Park to flourish, countless citizens take advantage of the Park for a variety of recreational activities.

The City Ditch (or Big Ditch) Denver's first water canal, is an authentic link with Denver's early development and growth and can be considered as one of the primary factors for Denver's success as a community in those harsh early years.

The Capitol Hydraulic Company was organized to bring water to Denver City, Auraria, and Highlands from the South Platte River. The incorporation date of this company was filed on February 21, 1860, when this area was still recognized as part of the territory of Kansas.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Arps, Louisa Ward - DENVER IN SLICES, Sage Books, copyright 1959.
 Mosley, HISTORY OF THE DENVER WATER SYSTEM 1858-1889, Denver Board of Water Commissioners
 DENVER MUNICIPAL FACTS, Volume 1, June 12, 1909, p. 10. The Story of Denver's Famous Old City Ditch.
 Smiley, J. D. - HISTORY OF DENVER - 1901. The Times-Sun Publishing Co.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Under one acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	13	50,213,15	43,951,00	B	13	50,2174,0	4,3195,10,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	13	50,218,60	43,945,05	D	13	50,2131,5	4,3194,5,00
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION 4393 4393

That portion of the City Ditch within the boundaries of Washington Park.

- These being:
- To the north--Virginia Ave. (1300-1600 blocks)
 - To the south--Louisiana Ave. (1300-1700 blocks)
 - To the west--South Downing St. (500-1300 blocks)
 - To the east--South Franklin St. (500-1300 blocks)
 - Arizona Ave. (1200-1300 block)
 - South Gilpin St. (1200-1300 block)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

December 22, 1975

ORGANIZATION

Denver Board of Water Commissioners

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

144 West Colfax Avenue

TELEPHONE

222-5511

CITY OR TOWN

Denver

STATE

Colorado

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL (144) STATE LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Stephen W. Ward

TITLE

SHPO DATE 7/29/76

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Acting

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

10/8/76

ATTEST:

DATE

10/7/76

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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"On November 28, 1860, the ditch company acquired the second right to the water on the upper part of the South Platte River." However, the company stopped work on this particular ditch in early 1861, when less than one third of its projected length of ten miles had been completed.

"In 1865 John W. Smith, one of the most eminent businessmen of early Denver," agreed to construct a new ditch for the sum of \$10,000 and one half the capital stock of the company. Construction on the ditch was completed in May, 1867. "Later, when courts established the official order of water rights in Colorado, this company, known by then as the Platte Water Company, was awarded right number 1 in District 8 of Division 1, a position it still holds today."¹

The City Ditch carried water from a point approximately six miles above Littleton to Browns Bluff, a spot far east of Denver at that time, but which is now known as Capitol Hill. The Ditch was constructed for irrigating purposes alone.

¹/ The Story of Denver's Famous Old City Ditch - Denver Municipal Facts p.g 10, Vol. 1, June 12, 1909.

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Louise Arps in her book, *Denver in Slices*, maintains that originally "an entrancing system of small streams flowed from the bluffs east of town. On the flat, the water was directed down each side of the streets towards the Platte River. One authority stated there were 1,000 miles of lateral ditches watering what is now downtown Denver. Thirsty dogs and horses were delighted. Trees grew, gardens flourished and lawns were praised for their greenness all summer long, as they are in Denver today."

In 1875 the ditch was acquired by the City of Denver, believing it would be cheaper in the long run to buy the ditch. So, the city paid \$60,000 to acquire the ditch and from that time on has been known as "The City Ditch." (Up to this point in time the ditch had been variously known as the Big Ditch and Smith's Ditch.)

The length of the City Ditch from its headgate to City Park is 27.25 miles.

However, "These small streams brought trouble as well as water. Mothers scolded small boys who waded in them on hot summer days despite the broken glass. The boys loved to make wheels and would sometimes divert the streams to private projects not appreciated by

2/ Louise Ward Arps, *Denver In Slices*, Sage Books, copyright 1959, pg. 68

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property owners farther down the street. Drinking water being scarce, some grown people drank ditch water and swelled the ranks of typhoid patients. This despite the fact that the streams were often choked with litter."³

These and other problems forced the city to hire a water commissioner, whose duty it was to superintend the distribution of water. The commissioner had "water police," who tried hard to control the use of the laterals and to keep them reasonably clean, but the task proved too difficult. These small ditches were eventually filled up and only the City Ditch was allowed to remain.

The City Ditch, today, still furnishes water for farmers south of Denver, fills Washington and City Park lakes, provides water for the colorful electric fountain in the middle of City Park lake, and water for the trees and grass. The City Ditch is also used for various recreational activities. Two popular events are Huck Finn Day, which is sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Rocky Mountain News, and the Fishing Derby, sponsored by the Denver Post. Both events are annual occasions at Washington Park which attract thousands of people.

3/ Ibid. pg. 68.

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Smith's lake, which is fed by the 30 mile long City Ditch, has enabled Washington Park to flourish to its present state of mature beauty. A pleasant combination of water, vast green lawn, majestic trees and a myriad of colorful flowers, make Washington Park the focal point of southeast Denver.

The popularity of this park can be seen daily in the variety of activities that take place there. Bicycling, baseball, fishing, football, tennis, walking, picnicking are but a few of the recreational aspects of this park.

Washington Park, back in 1906, had encountered water problems. It was decided by the Park Superintendent to use the water in Smith's lake to irrigate the lawns and trees. Today, Washington Park is a favorite spot for gardeners, botanists and others interested in growing plants. The original plan for the park included many unusual varieties of trees. Most of these have grown well, and today one can see mature specimens of such trees as the Kentucky Coffee tree, Black Cherry, Golden-rain tree, Horse Chestnut, Red Oaks and many others.

"Anyone in search of an authentic link with early Denver need only to walk along the open ditch in Washington Park. Large willows and

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old cottonwoods will give the searcher shade. This is the same ditch that has enabled parts of Denver to have trees and lawns since 1867 when water first started to flow in Smith's ditch from the South Platte River."⁴

⁴/ Ibid., pg. 71.