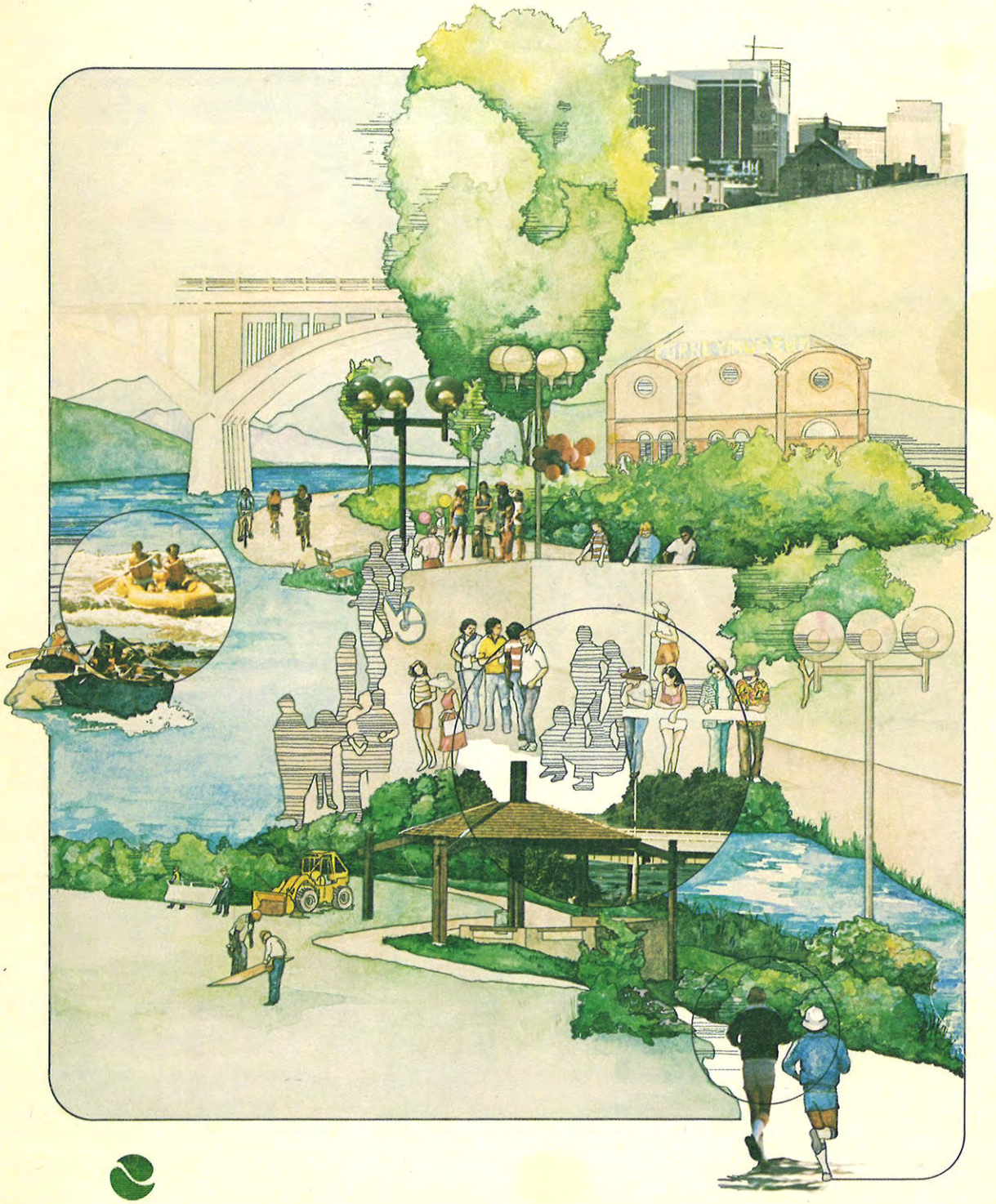
RETURNING THE PLATTE TO THE PEOPLE



By JOE SHOEMAKER with Leonard A. Stevens

RETURNING

THE PLATTE

TO THE PEOPLE

A story of
a unique Committee

**THE PLATTE RIVER
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

By
JOE SHOEMAKER
with
Leonard Stevens

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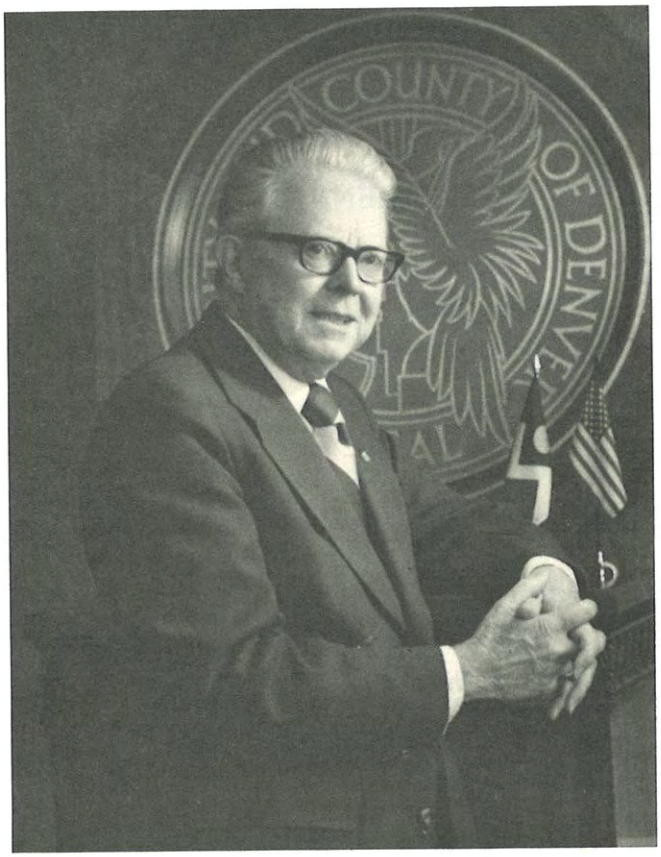

MAYOR WILLIAM H. McNICHOLS, JR.

MAYOR WILLIAM H. McNICHOLS, JR.

For more than a decade William H. McNichols has served as the Mayor of Denver, a city of over 500,000 people who have been blessed with good mayors. In 1974, after I, a Republican, had unsuccessfully opposed McNichols, a Democrat, for the post he held, the Mayor unhesitatingly asked me to take on the job of restoring the South Platte River through Denver. I agreed and he made me Chairman of his Platte River Development Committee to which he then appointed eight Denver citizens, primarily of my choosing. He turned over $1.9 million of revenue sharing funds to the new Committee, gave us a green light to do the assigned job, and fully supported our efforts from then on. This action and support by Mayor McNichols was the key to returning the Platte to the people. It grew out of his love for Denver and the city's greatest natural resource. This book is the story that was initiated by Bill McNichols, the story of the transformation of the "sad, bewildered, nothing of a river" flowing through his city. In the past couple of years we have named many people as Friends of the River. At the head of the list, where he will remain as the best friend of all to the South Platte, is the name of Mayor William H. McNichols, Jr.

Joe Shoemaker

February 28, 1981

FOREWORD

DERRELL P. THOMPSON*

The similarities between getting men to the moon and creating a city closer to the heart's desire . . . are impressive. As truly as a spaceship, a city is a product of men's thinking that can be overhauled, rebuilt, and improved.

Science and The City, Report of the Department of Housing and Urban Development

Among God's creatures, man is unique in his ability to modify his environment—often for better, but sometimes for worse. Nowhere has this been more apparent than along the waterfronts of American cities. Ever since 1620 when our forefathers landed at Plymouth Rock, the founding and growth of urban America has been linked to the water's edge. As the pioneers moved westward across the arid plains and over the Rockies, those communities which were founded on a river took root and endured—for water was vital to survival.

For a time, these waterfront areas flourished, not only as the centers for commerce and industry but also as the hub for social and recreational pursuits. Gradually, Americans turned their backs on these waterways. While still serving certain utilitarian purposes, these once vibrant and beautiful resources became little more than man's polluted waterways. We had acquired a bad habit that had to be be broken.

The will power to do just that began to surface in various cities a few years ago, and today some 50 cities have completed waterfront rivitalization projects. Another 50 are underway. It was an idea whose time had arrived. During 1978, the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (formerly the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation) studied a sample of waterfront projects in an attempt to identify those factors that led to success. Although no magic recipe was found, certain key ingredients were almost always present. Heading this list of ingredients was an

*Regional Director, Mid-Continent Region, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

individual or small group of private citizens who were totally committed to revitalizing their urban waterfront.

This book, by one such citizen, is much more than the story of the South Platte River through Denver, Colorado. It is more than the story of its transformation from forgotten sump to a source of pride. It is a story of the people who did it; and more important, the details of how they did it—how the absence of an inflexible Federal policy on urban waterfronts became an asset by allowing these dedicated citizens to work freely and decisively with public administrators; how the lack of specific, delegated authority really meant they had full authority to act quickly and boldly.

In short, this book contains the formula which eluded our agency in its broad survey. We looked for laws, policies, regulations, and governmental programs; whereas the real elements consisted of people, ideas, and dedication. Such a formula could only be understood and documented by those few people who have successfully applied it to a Detroit, San Antonio, Tulsa, or Denver.

Gradually, Americans have come to a better understanding of the flood plain. No longer is it regarded as an area to be compressed and encroached upon with structural developments that are lost when the river flexes its muscles. Here, the opportunity exists to work in harmony with nature, not only to allow the river its right of movement, but also the opportunity to relax and enjoy a bit of green space or ride a bicycle. Historic buildings, often associated with the waterfront, can be preserved and adapted for modern commercial enterprises vital to the economy of urban America. Such is the South Platte riverfront in Denver today.

Joe Shoemaker, as the driving force behind the Platte River restoration, was ideally situated and qualified to write this book. As an Iowa farm boy, he learned the values of good land stewardship. As a graduate of Annapolis and a naval officer, he learned the principles of command. As a State Senator, practicing attorney, and long-time city dweller, he was well acquainted with the problems and the system. Above all, Joe was and is a man of vision and boundless energy. Based on his intimate knowledge of the project from start to finish, he has much to offer the readers. *Returning the Platte to the People* should be required reading for all who wish to revitalize the waterfront in their town.

I

A WHITE WATER TRIP DOWNTOWN

Early one lovely Monday morning in June, I left home in southeast Denver to join several colleagues on an all day river trip in a ten-man inflatable raft. We were certain to get wet because we were headed for a great deal of white water, so I wore a pair of old sneakers, blue jean shorts and a tennis shirt. The Colorado Rockies, dominated by Long's Peak, were beautiful in the morning sun as I drove to my destination. The mountains were brilliantly white, for their snowpack was deep this year. The rising temperatures of late spring were causing a heavy snowmelt, which increased the white water we would navigate during the day. It was to be an exciting, exhilarating trip. I was anxious to get onto the river.

The drive to our launching site took less than fifteen minutes, and I never left the city of Denver. Indeed, during the entire day's boat ride we would remain in the city limits. We would be floating down the South Platte River, embarking where it enters Denver from the south and following it through the city to where it flows off to the north at Franklin Street. Our voyage would cover some ten miles.

I stopped at Frontier Park, near the city line, and crossed the street to the river where several of my fellow sailors had already inflated our raft. One of them, Joan Mason, came forward to greet me.

"Have you seen this?" she asked, holding out a page clipped from the *Rocky Mountain News.* The piece titled, "The Greening of the Platte," had been published while I was out of town, so I hadn't read it. The author was PeterWarren, a professor at the University of Denver and member of Mayor William McNichol's Commission on the Arts.

"Much has been said about what cannot be done about Denver," the long

article began. "Yet we have in our backyard one of the most remarkable examples of urban revitalization in the United States. In a brief space of five years, the Platte Greenway Project has transformed a blighted, degraded river—little more than an open sewer—into a major amenity for Denver."

Joan and I were delighted with the piece. Both of us had worked hard at the transformation of the Platte, she as a member of the project's three-person staff, I as Chairman of a nine-member citizens' Committee appointed by Mayor McNichols in 1974 to bring about the river's improvement. Also, knowledge of our experience could be valuable to dozens of communities where disreputable, repulsive rivers could be restored and returned to the people.

Now, I only had time to scan Warren's piece, but I noticed that he had caught onto how our unusual Committee had worked: "...a fascinating prototype... operating outside the creaky city bureaucracy, without mandated powers or limits, the Committee has been able to act quickly and effectively."

At the raft I was greeted by Kenneth R. Wright whose "water-oriented" engineering firm, Wright-McLaughlin, was responsible for designing and supervising construction of a great many of the projects that were turning the blighted Platte into an amenity. Ken was wearing a fabulous straw hat he had brought back from a business trip to southeast Asia. Behind him, on his knees fitting out the raft, was William C. Taggart, a young Wright-McLaughlin engineer. He had been the firm's man most directly responsible for its work on the river.

"Three thousand c.f.s., ten times the normal flow," said Ken, referring in engineering parlance to the cubic feet of water per second rushing down the Platte. I stepped out to the bank and saw a churning torrent of water.

"Hope you're ready for a good ride, Joe," said Bill, who would serve as our helmsman while the rest of us paddled to his commands. "I've checked a number of the roughest spots. We'll have a few portages, but I think we'll do okay."

As I greeted the other passengers who were assembling, I was suddenly distracted by a great white truck lumbering toward us.

"Hey, hey, what do we have here?" I asked Ken, well aware that both of us knew the answer.

The vehicle was a large tank truck from Denver's Waste Water Management Division, and I assumed it was full of some potent liquid. Moreover, I guessed that the driver was hoping to discharge his load into the South Platte, probably at our launching site. The truck, as white as it was, made me see pure red. For a half decade we'd enjoyed a lot of success shutting off discharges of pollutants into our river, but still there were those who kept on seeing the Platte as Denver's receptacle for anything they wanted out of sight, out of mind. Most disturbing, this philosophy was still prevalent where it should be found least of all, in certain city agencies. It was lodged there like the instincts of an animal: "If you have something to dump, down to the river it goes!"

The truck driver sensed my perturbation as I hailed him to stop. "What's in there?" I asked.

"Water and 'stuff', vacuum pumped from the city's storm sewers," he explained. The man's discomfort became most evident when I asked where the load was going, but instead of answering he drove on down the street. He stopped in about fifty yards and studied us in his rearview mirror.

"He's waiting for our departure," said Ken.

"Sure and then into the river it'll go," I added. "Let's talk to him."

The driver made a U-turn and crept back toward the city. I stopped him again and asked where his load was going. He admitted the river was in his mind.

"It's just water," he said. "Won't hurt anything."

"Then why don't you dump it right there in Frontier Park?" I said. "The grass can always use water."

"Well, no, it would smell," the driver replied, then demanded to know who I was.

"You'll find out when you hear about this from your boss," I replied. The driver shoved his truck into gear, and it soon disappeared, as I memorized the number stenciled on its side.

Shaking my head I returned to our group of boaters. Our last three passengers had arrived. One was Pat McClearn, a new member of our Committee who is with the University of Colorado at Denver and well known for her work with "Trees for Today and Tomorrow," an organization that distributes and plants trees throughout Denver. Finally, there were the other two of our three-member staff, Rick Lamoreaux and Robert Searns. Both young men are intensely committed to the improvement of the Platte.

As we were about to board the raft, I looked around to see Denver's Manager of Safety, Elvin Caldwell, arrive in his car. He had officially closed the river through the city to boating because of the high water, but had issued a special permit for our trip, which was organized to check the impact of the currents on our various projects. Caldwell's visit pleased me, for it seemed symbolic of an ongoing change in the feelings of politicians for the river. Not long ago many had treated the Platte virtually as abandoned territory.

In a few minutes the seven of us had bid Caldwell goodbye and were bobbing on the turbulent water in the large, bulbous raft. Everything that could suffer from getting wet, from wallets to cameras, had been stowed in waterproof pouches lashed to the raft's inflated crossmembers. Bill Taggart was on the stern giving instructions to the rest of us sitting sidesaddle on the gunwales. He quickly defined the orders he would be calling out—to paddle, backpaddle or hold—and immediately began issuing the commands that kept our craft on the course Bill was plotting from his intimate knowledge of the river.

"I can't think of anything I'd rather be doing," I told Ken Wright sitting in front of me. "I really and truly love this!"

Ken knew me well enough to realize this expression was not vacuous sentimentality. He knew that my work on the Platte had become one of life's most rewarding experiences. That included the frequent opportunity to get into the river itself

where I could sense the differences we were making in behalf of one of our most precious, but long neglected resources. Furthermore, a raft trip was a lot of fun.

In short order the vigorous cold currents were carrying us past the first of a series of parks that our Committee had built or improved on the river. Before the day's ride was over, we would see nearly a dozen and a half parks with various sizes and facilities that were dressing up the river in scarves of green growth.* This park that we were passing was Pasquinel's Landing, named after James Michener's pioneer character, Jacques Pasquinel. In the best seller, *Centennial,* the colorful Pasquinel opened the west paddling his birch bark canoe up the South Platte. Here on a three-acre site beside the river, we built a park with playground equipment, picnic tables, parking area and a boat launching ramp. Our new park complements an older city park across the river, Ruby Hill Park, laid out around a high bluff which offers one of the best panoramas of Denver, the mile-high city graced with magnificent views.

Just beyond Pasquinel's Landing I caught a glimpse of an early morning jogger, a middle-aged man heading north from the start of our Greenway trail. If the fellow's stamina and energy allowed him to run the entire length of the trail, it would take him some ten miles through the city. He would always be a few feet from the river, as the trail parallels or bridges the waterway. When it was completed, the trail became a major attraction for bringing Denverites back to their river. It returned the rich citizen to mingle with the poor, the old with the young, walking, running, biking, roller skating, or riding in baby carriages or wheelchairs.

"First portage!" announced Taggart. "We'll pull off to the right and land down here by the Florida Avenue dam."

Following his orders the starboard passengers backpaddled slightly. We were approaching the first of ten check dams constructed to make the river flow more evenly, as well as to back up water so it could be more easily pumped out for various purposes. In due time we will have all these dams "notched" so boat chutes can be installed allowing vessels such as ours to ride down over the obstructions. But the dam at Florida Avenue had no chute, and with the high water we dared not go over it.

As we maneuvered the raft slowly toward the shore, we passed another of our parks, Overland Pond. It was once a fenced off quarry barred to the public except where used as a golf driving range. We reshaped the quarry into two ponds and opened up most of the area. However, a part of the six acres was left for a native wildlife habitat. Also, we planted the area with indigenous vegetation which requires no irrigation, in contrast to expensive bluegrass landscaping.

Going down the Platte, Overland Pond offers the first of several examples of an

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*The Denver Greenway map on page 10 identifies and locates these parks—some previously developed by Denver's Parks and Recreation Department, e.g. Frontier, Ruby Hill, Vanderbilt, Valverde and Rude Parks—the remainder developed by our Committee.

unusual approach our Committee took to finding park sites. Instead of always turning to pretty places, we looked to some of the most unsightly areas along the river. Halfway through our trip we would pass Frog Hollow, a small green park, popular for picnics, and resting place for bikers and joggers, and a launching point for small boats. Not long ago Frog Hollow was a typical highway maintenance yard piled with salt and sand, encumbered with metal buildings and filled with trucks and road equipment. Working with our State Highway Department, we had the maintenance yard moved to a more practical site, and Frog Hollow replaced the mess.

Just after our portage the raft took us under the first of six wooden bridges that we built across the Platte, leading the Greenway trail from one bank to the other. These structures, with walkways eight feet wide, were designed literally to ride out floods instead of standing and fighting until battered to pieces. The bridges, which were prefabricated in Oregon, were set in sections on concrete piers so they could actually float off in a flood. If this happens, however, the wayward sections are tethered by cables to the riverbank piers, and they simply float on the floodwaters a few yards downstream. When the flood recedes, the sections can be towed back to the piers and re-set. These innovative bridges, which now cost $90,000 apiece, were perfect for our continuing effort to make flood resistant our projects in reply to an obvious question from our potential donors: with the Platte's history of flooding, aren't your projects just going to wash away? The answer: No!

When we stepped ashore during the portage, wet bottoms and backs attested to the white water we had already encountered. Now after passing under the wooden bridge, we were soon in more rough water, and then we came to the best white water experience so far. We purposely rode down over a selected spot on the second check dam. It was a low structure, but at the bottom, the hydraulic back-wash turned the raft into a rambunctious sea serpent.

With the roiling water astern, the sailing smoothed out as we passed another of our parks, Habitat. This park is another example of a bane turned to a boon. Once a city dump, the six-acre park is now one of the longest sections of green on the Denver stretch of river. In time Habitat Park will contribute to our schoolchildren's knowledge of the natural world, for it is slated to become an outdoor classroom amidst a number of restored natural environments.

As we sailed by Habitat Park, all on board were distracted by a great flurry in the trees on the opposite bank. Our presence had agitated a large nest of blue herons, and the great, beautiful birds were taking to the air. None among us was more excited than Pat McClearn or Joan Mason. Both nature lovers are thrilled that our efforts have made the South Platte amenable to wildlife, as well as people. Downstream we would see more signs of improved fauna—which, in one case, is a mixed blessing. We planted hundreds of trees to dress up the Platte, and the increasing numbers of beaver have been most appreciative. We know this from all the trees—our trees—they have gnawed down.

Late in the morning, Bill Taggart ordered a turn to port into Weir Gulch Marina where we were greeted by an excited, curious group of Chicano and Vietnamese

children racing around the grassy banks. Weir Gulch is one of three small streams entering the Platte in Denver, flowing down from the front range of mountains to the west of the city. When the Committee first came along, Weir, like the other gulches, was an odoriferous disaster—old auto tires, garbage, dead Christmas trees, decrepit refrigerators, on and on. The little mountain stream was destined to flow through a concrete canyon, planned for flood control. We got rid of that plan and instead, made a small green park, equally capable of sustaining a flood. The neighborhood citizens, many of whom helped us build the park, now enjoy a grassy pocket around the creek, instead of an ugly, cement closure that would be filled with cultch.

On one side of the pretty little park a marvelous mural was painted on the wall of an otherwise drab industrial building. The colorful painting—125 feet long, 20 feet high—became one of six on the sides of buildings overlooking our waterways. Local artists did the pictures using paint, an average of $3,000 worth per mural, donated by the Colorado Paint Company. The Weir Gulch mural was by artists Manuel Martinez and Carlos Sandoval and nearly 100 neighborhood children, each assigned to paint a square in colors designated by the muralists. Their picture represents the emergence of the modern Mexican as he still clings to his native culture.

Ken Wright suggested we give the bright-eyed youngsters a raft ride, so while we watched from the shore, Captain Taggart piloted the kids around the marina pool. Afterwards we paddled back out to the river, while the tickled children ran out to our Greenway trail and waved and waved goodbye. In this area the trail is on a wooden deck, cheek by jowl to a railroad track (we had passed under both entering and leaving Weir Gulch). The cantilevered deck, a half mile long, was built to keep the trail hugging the river.

My enthusiasm for the greenery we've added to the South Platte may inadvertently convey the image of a river engulfed in parklands. Actually, rafting through Denver is also a marine tour of city industries. For example, that morning we had already passed the large Gates rubber factory, as well as numerous smaller industries located right on the waterway. Some of these businesses became our most enthusiastic, early supporters. Indeed, our first big donation, a $780,000 gift, came from the Gates Foundation, a tax-exempt organization using Gates funds for public purposes.

Downstream from Weir Gulch we approached one of the Public Service Company's large, in-city generating plants, and there between the shores is an inflatable dam, a "fabri-dam," made of tough rubberized fabric inflated with water. The dam backs up a large pool used for industrial cooling. Of course, our Committee originally saw the structure as a barrier for boaters. But then the Public Service Company obligingly helped us deal with the problem, and the result was a special boat chute designed by Bill Taggart. The chute, weighing thirty-five tons or so, rests on the inflated dam and provides an exciting six foot drop—a great experience for kayakers and others, with white water at the bottom.

In a few minutes, with Bill issuing more paddling commands than I could follow, we

were shooting the chute down over the fabri-dam, and then hanging onto the bucking, tossing raft as we ran the white water below. Our backs and bottoms got wetter than ever—but who cared with all the excitement!

Drifting on down the Platte we moved closer to the heart of Denver, as well as into some of the most difficult territory to convert from blight to amenity. For example, the transformation of Lakewood Gulch, entering the river at Colfax Avenue, took us three years to complete. Now it connects with Rude Park and the hike-bike trail built by the Denver Parks Department to the west city limits. Here also, the problems, like the city's vast, unattractive railroad yards, are bigger, more deeply entrenched, more costly to solve. But then in this area an improved river holds the greatest potential for influencing other city improvements, making our efforts doubly worthwhile.

Close to noon we drifted past a 13-acre strip of riverfront that we had already named Gates-Crescent Park—yet it was anything but a park and turning it into one was becoming a difficult political effort. Currently the site was an elliptical eyesore, a storage area for Denver Public Works sandwiched between the river and heavily traveled I-25. It contained all that such yards usually display, from salted-sand mountains to grubby asphalt paving machines. At the moment we were urging the city to earmark $825,000 in Federal funds to relocate the facility back away from the people's river. We already had a quarter million dollars from the Gates Foundation (and soon to receive another quarter million from the Piton Foundation) as a starter for building the park. Mayor McNichols was with us, but serious resistance was surfacing from City Council members eyeballing the Federal money for their own districts. So we had a battle coming up, and that afternoon as I finished paddling we had to go politicking. We intended to see that Denver's own degradation of the Platte would soon be moved in favor of a new, green piece of the city with many advantages for nearby neighborhoods, as well as for the hundreds of thousands attending Mile High Stadium next door.

At noon we pulled into Fishback Landing, a two-acre park that literally came out of the blue one day when we were approached by the trustee of the late Hermes Fishback whose business had been located in this area by the river. The trustee wanted something done in Fishback's name, and the result was a $53,000 gift to construct improvements on land we had already acquired for a delightful vest-pocket park that we named Fishback Landing. As we docked there, the park was populated with people who worked in the neighborhood, and had come to the park to relax and have lunch. We joined them with our lunch delivered to the park by Mary Lou Wesemann, the staff secretary. Later we visited our Greenway headquarters located in an old paint warehouse a few yards behind the park.

When it was time to go, Bill Taggart announced that the river being so high, his vessel had to proceed by truck for a short distance to avoid one of the most precarious stretches of the Platte, practically in downtown Denver. We were to take the Greenway trail on foot to a designated rendezvous.

The brief walk, shared with noontime joggers, bikers, skaters and perambulators,

took us over and around our most intensively developed section of the river, near the city's business center. From one of our bridges, we looked down on the short, but precipitous piece of river too rough for rafting. Actually, we were looking at the largest of our boat chutes—or better put, the nation's first, permanent man-made urban white-water run. Here a kayaker can zoom down across an old dam, trying to follow a tortuous course marked with slalom poles, as on a ski slope (except our poles dangle from cables stretched above and across the watery run).

Nearby on the river we could see our impressive brick plaza with broad, gracious steps leading down to the water. Behind it are two old brick buildings, beautiful structures, survivors from Denver's past (the Forney Museum and the H. H. Post Building). The plaza was our Committee's first big project, built with seed money from the city. This great beginning set us in motion and provided momentum for the continuing improvement of the South Platte. The area was named Confluence Park, it being at the point where Cherry Creek (Denver's second largest stream) joins the Platte.

From the trail we could also see the amphitheater across the Platte from the plaza. When our Committee was formed by Mayor McNichols, this spot was a disaster—just like the entire area. It was marred by broken concrete dumped haphazardly with twisted old iron and timbers from the Lord knows where. Now we looked at a grass-covered amphitheater constructed from the rubble, piled up and packed in earth. On summer evenings people, who were once repulsed by the terrible mess, now sit on the grassy promontory built on the rubble and listen to musicians perform on the stage below.

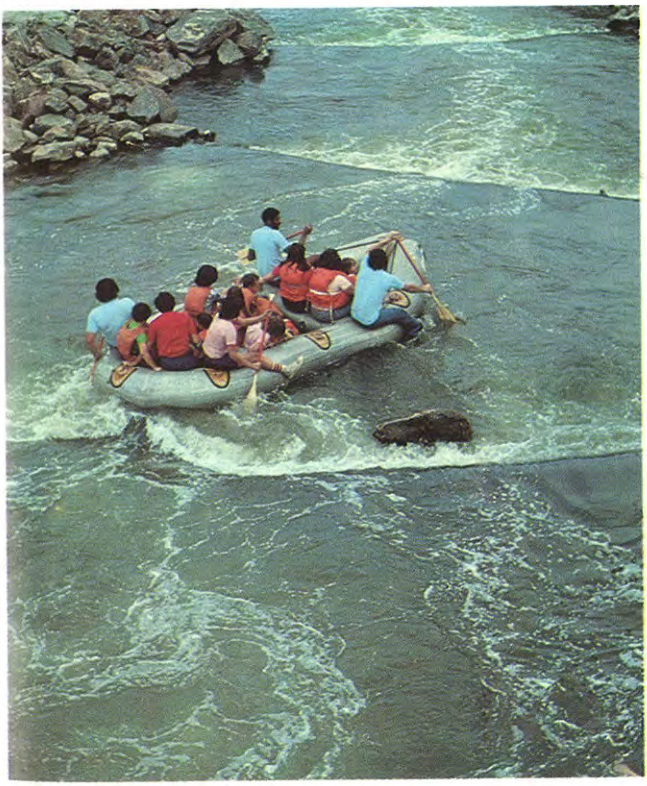
At one point I noticed Rick Lamoreaux contemplating this scene of our most concentrated accomplishments. A lot of this young man's exceptional creativity had gone into the doing of what was before us. As the Greenway's Executive Director he had found a surprising challenge in the river. Rick once said:

"When I came to this job, I had a hard time reconciling the South Platte in Denver with my feelings of what a river was all about. But then I recognized what a real challenge it was to do something for the river, despite all the constraints imposed by the past neglect and abuse."

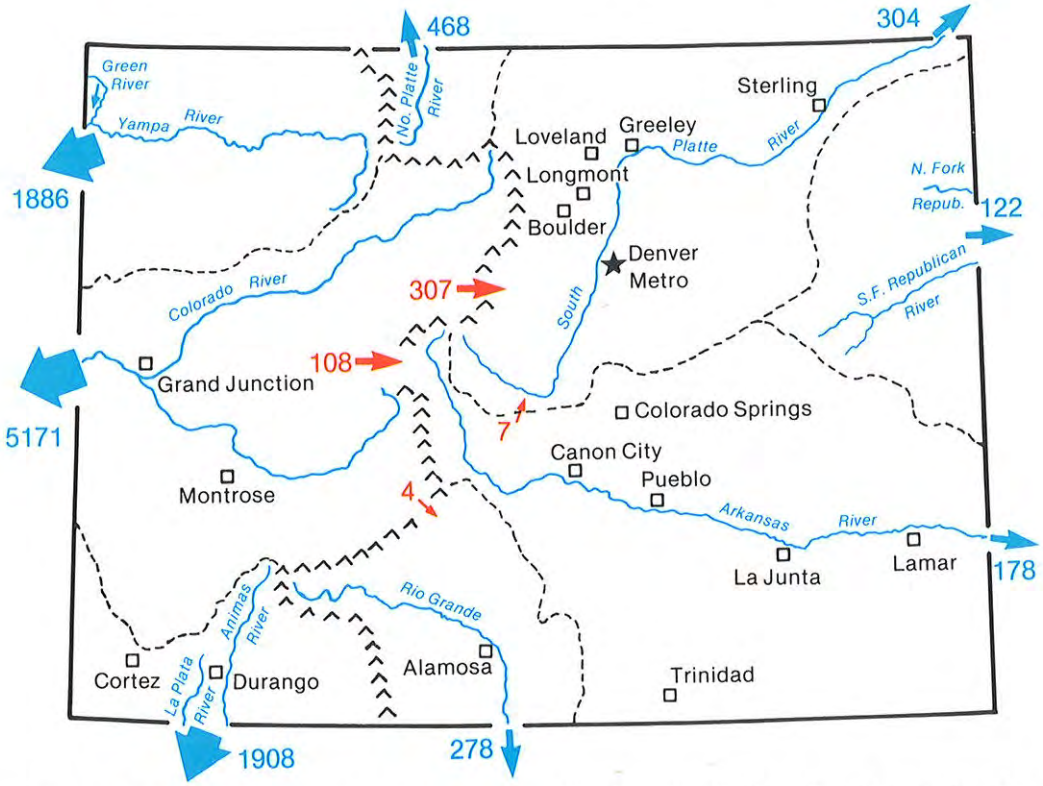
As we resumed our walk, we looked back along the river to a site that will soon become another piece of our downtown complex—and again will consign to bad memories one of the valley's worst assaults on the senses, an automobile wrecking yard that spewed auditory, visual, olfactory, pulmonary—you name it— pollution. We now saw a vacant 6.3 acres to be called Centennial Park minus this environmental blitzkreig, our Greenway organization having purchased the land. Soon it will have four tennis courts and the first velodrome (bicycle racing arena) between Illinois and the west coast.

Remaining in the confluence area, we took a brief sojourn up a side trail along Cherry Creek for a look at that stream. Had we walked its length, the trail would have led us to downtown Denver and the Auraria Higher Education Center. With financial help from the Center, we built the walkway to make the South Platte ac-

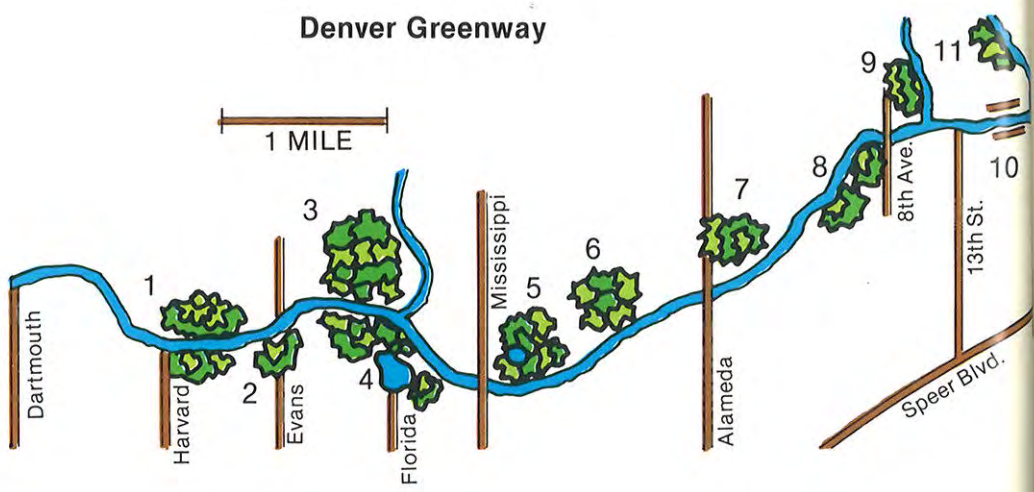
Passengers in rubber raft ready to head down the South Platte River.

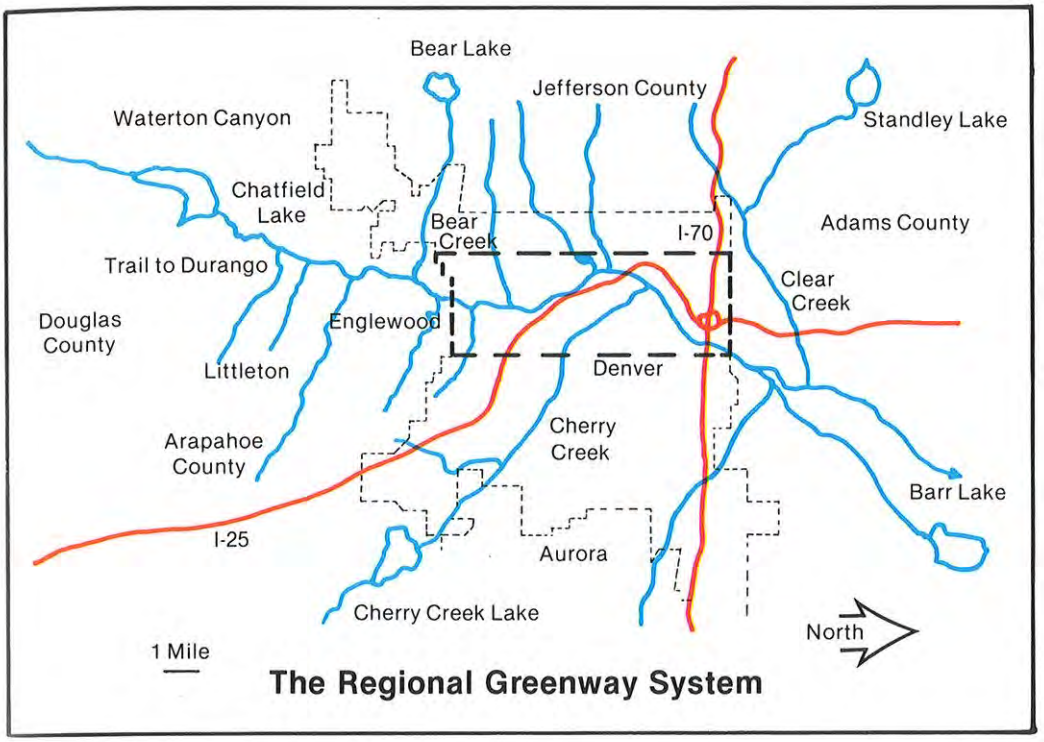


Another ten person rubber raft (but carrying twelve on this voyage) traversing the boat chute at Confluence Park.

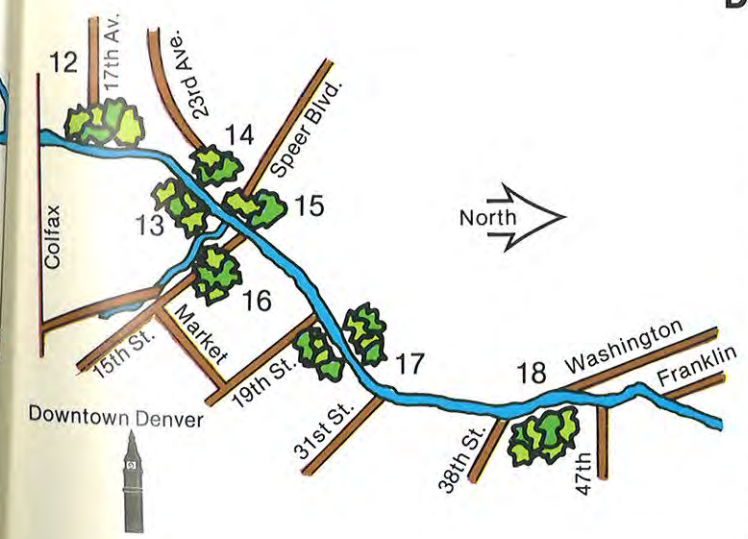


Map of Colorado, showing various river basins, including the South Platte through Denver. Figures by arrows explain state outflows and diversions in thousands of acre-feet.





Map of Denver region showing various creeks and gulches tributary to the South Platte through Denver. Chatfield, Bear, Cherry Creek and Barr Lakes are state recreational facilities.



DENVER'S GREENWAY

1. Frontier Park
2. Pasquinel's Landing
3. Ruby Hill Park
4. Overland Pond
5. Vanderbilt Park
6. Habitat Park
7. Valverde Park
8. Frog Hollow
9. Weir Gulch Marina
10. Zuni Whitewater Chute
11. Lakewood Gulch/Rude Park
12. Gates-Crescent Park
13. Centennial Park
14. Fishback Landing
15. Confluence Park
16. Cherry Creek Park
17. Riverfront Park
18. Globeville Landing

One of several boat launching ramps built by Committee, this one at Globeville Landing.

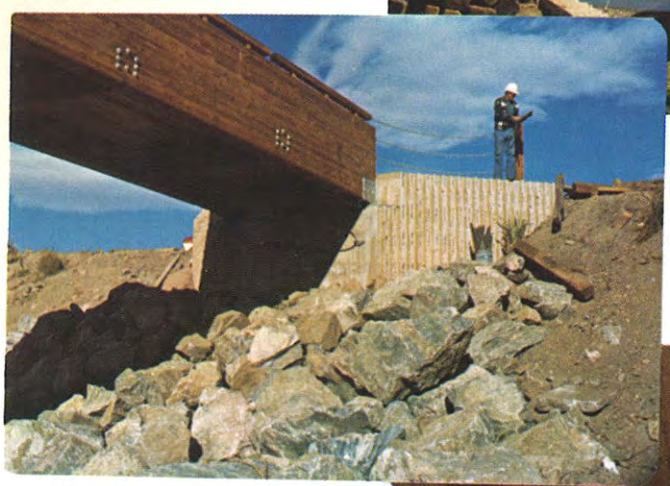
Joggers and hikers on eight foot wide typical running trail section of Greenway. 16th Street Viaduct, 15th Street bridge, and Confluence and Cherry Creek Parks in the background.

View of Overland Pond, center, taken from atop Ruby Hill Park. River is to the left; Florida Avenue and Overland Golf Course are to the right.

Frog Hollow Park, where State Highway Maintenance yard, piled high with salt and sand, was located. River alongside, with 6th Avenue bridge in the background.

One half of wooden bridge located north of Florida Avenue being lifted into place.

Same bridge in place on three piers.



River embankment pier, showing cable which holds one section of the bridge to the bank of the river if flooding causes sections to float off the center pier.

Close-up of cable attachment.

School children at Habitat Park, viewing a pair of Canadian geese. The opposite bank, where blue heron nest, is inaccessible to pedestrians.

Before and after section of river bank connected to hike and bike trail. Small wooden bridge allows storm sewer outlet to flow beneath the trail and stop erosion of the river bank.

125 by 20 foot mural by artists Manuel Martinez and Carlos Sandoval, painted on side of industrial building at Weir Gulch.

Artists receive assistance from neighborhood children.

Weir Gulch, north of 8th Avenue, before improvements.

Weir Gulch after improvements by Committee.

Lakewood Gulch, looking west from the river, as it appeared before the Committee went to work.

Lakewood Gulch, with hike-bike trail of warm-tone concrete, flood resistant, after development.

West bank of river between 8th and 13th Avenues before improvements.

Same section of river after cantilevered deck was built between railroad track and river.

Zuni boat chute, resting on Public Service Company's fabri-dam at 13th Avenue.

The way the plaza area looked before the Committee went to work. Forney Museum is in the background.

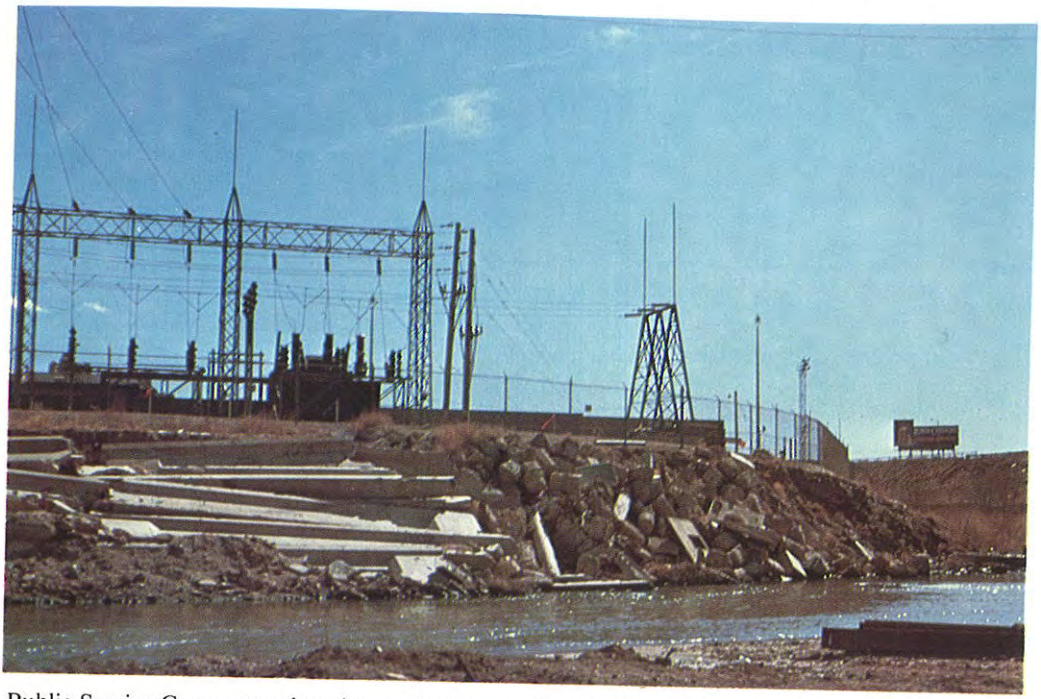
The plaza after construction, with the Forney Museum and the H. H. Post buildings in the background. The brick landings and terrazo steps have been inundated a few days each spring since 1975 with no damage.

Cherry Creek trail from Confluence Park to Auraria Higher Education Center and beyond. The trail passes beneath six railway and Speer Boulevard bridges.

Trail Ranger sweeping up broken glass and stickers from river-type weeds so bikers may enjoy an uninterrupted ten-mile biking experience.

Labor Day 1975 celebration at Confluence Park—the first of many.

Globeville Landing, with gazebo, trail, and 38th Street bridge over river. Downtown Denver and Colorado Rockies are in the background.



Public Service Company substation at Confluence Park before improvements.

Public Service Company substation after improvements by Company and by Committee (restoring riverwall, trees and grass).

cessible by foot to some 25,000 Auraria students. Without it a direct stroll to the river could have been a flirt with suicide, for it would have required crossing sixteen busy railroad tracks. The trail was to be extended by the City inside the walls of Cherry Creek to the country club in the center of Denver. The Parks Department had previously constructed a trail inside the Cherry Creek channel from the country club to Cherry Creek Lake.

"Hey! There's one of our rangers," announced Bob Searns, as we returned from the Cherry Creek Trail. We looked ahead to see a young man on a bicycle towing a small, two-wheeled trailer with a wire basket containing various tools. "They're at work again this season and doing a good job," Bob added.

Our Greenway Rangers, a group of five young people, ride our ten-mile trail system, late spring, summer and early fall, keeping our projects clean, doing routine maintenance, reporting on the trail's condition, answering people's questions, whatever comes along. They were around for the second year, and I was glad of their success.

Bob Searns, who helped develop and is in charge of the Ranger program, also came to our river project in its earliest days. The young man with the black, bushy hair is from Buffalo, New York. "That's where I was exposed to many of man's abuses of the environment," he says, "and it helped me decide to commit myself to outdoor water recreation, especially in cities. I believe in people living in cities, but then I mean cities that are clean and beautiful. For that purpose clean, natural water becomes important."

Bob is a jack-of-all-trades, which he needs to be as our Project Director: planning, administration, public relations, celebrations, maintenance, safety, anything required. Above all Bob has won my gratitude for bringing all of our projects in at budgeted costs—except for one, Weir Gulch, where he did not have budgetary authority.

When we arrived at the plaza, Bill Taggart was there ready to launch the raft from the lowest step and we were soon aboard drifting downstream again.

Passing under the 15th Street Bridge just off the plaza I was reminded of how many little things added up to make our Greenway work rewarding. One of them was visible to our left, where the Greenway trail runs along a shelf of the viaduct abutment. There one see a long, colorful panel of more than 400 hand-painted tiles mounted on a wall. Each tile, six inches square, was decorated by a Denver citizen and set in place by artist Barry Rose, who was compensated by the First National Bank of Denver.

As our raft drifted lazily along the river beyond the 16th Street Viaduct stretch of white water, we saw a patch of the riverbank that had sustained serious damage in the past few months, and not by nature's hand. Again our own city employees were responsible. Truck drivers from Public Works had selected an accessible stretch of riverbank as a dump site for snow plowed up with salt, anti-freeze, oil and all else one finds in a modern street. That was bad enough for the water, but then their choice of dump site coincided with where we had planted trees to

beautify the Platte. The trees were now dead, and the scene of their demise raised my temperature enough to boil blood.

"I brought it to their attention," said Rick Lamoreaux, "and they promised no more dumping."

"But a little late for those trees," added Ken Wright as he snapped pictures of the blighted bank.

Helmsman Taggart grew uneasy as we approached the 19th Street Bridge, and then announced, "I think we ought to pull ashore. We really should look at the white water beyond the bridge before going ahead. It's pretty rough."

Taggart, Searns, and Mason left the raft and walked down the trail to take a look at the river. The stretch of water ahead, even though well within city limits, is said to be one of the finest pieces of white water for kayaks in the nation. It might be too much for a big, lumbering raft like ours, especially with the high water, but I trusted our inspectors' judgments. Joan is a lover of water recreation who has seen rough water all over the country. Bob is also an expert, having had his baptism in boating in the Canadian wilderness.

Returning, they recommended that we proceed—unless someone preferred to walk the trail past the white water. Like the others, I rejected the invitation to walk, but swallowed hard in doing so. Off we went and the pudgy raft was soon twisting, bucking and tossing its passengers all around the craft. At one point I saw Bob Searns astraddle the forward gunwale on my side—but against the sky— and Ken Wright was between us. When the raft flattened out from that powerful flap, Bob was in Ken's lap and I had hold of the latter's belt to keep both men aboard. Pat McClearn (another experienced river hand), Joan Mason and Rick Lamoreaux were firmly in place on the port gunwales, as if nothing had happened. When finally we were free of that cauldron of foam, the remainder of the trip seemed like sailing on a glass sea, and we got back to inspecting our river.

"I can never pass here," said Joan Mason, "and really believe a sidewheeler plied the same stretch."

"Whatever became of it?" asked Ken Wright.

No one knew, but I wished it were still around. She would make a great antique reminder of how people once used their river. In 1887, before the Platte had become too foul to visit, all Denver enjoyed River Front Park (which we had passed soon after negotiating the last stretch of white water). There for a short time, a person could buy a 50-cent excursion ticket on the steamer to Brighton, about 20 miles north, until some tricky sand bars spoiled the idea. The entrepreneurs then dammed the Platte at 19th Street, making a lake back to 15th Street, and there on summer evenings the steamer, with the oompah of its brass band echoing across the city, took passengers on abbreviated excursions in and out of John Brisben Walker's amusement center in River Front Park.

In mid-afternoon Bill Taggart directed us ashore just short of the Franklin Street Bridge and the city line. By now we had rafted nearly ten miles through the center of Denver and had taken a look at the last of our parks, Globeville Landing, and were

ready to go home and dry out.

"Joe! Look, there's your friend!" shouted Ken Wright as he and Taggart were deflating the raft. He pointed to a big, white tank truck coming toward us across the bridge. I hurried to the street for a closer look at the stenciled identification.

"He's followed us all day, poor man," said Joan Mason, jesting. "Still trying to dump in the river."

"Don't kid yourself!" I said. "You could be right! But you have to admit, we're making progress."

Joe Shoemaker

Ted Bendelow

Harold "Potts" Berglund

Dana Crawford

Hiawatha Davis, Jr.

Marjorie Hornbein

Pat McClearn

Philip Milstein

Daniel R. Trujillo

John Zapien

II

NINE NEW AND DIFFERENT TRUSTEES

One day in June, 1974, I walked into the expansive offices of the Mayor of Denver, unannounced and without appointment. I was greeted by Wilma Jewel, secretary to Mayor William McNichols, and I asked her if I might see him for a few minutes. She thought so and went to find out. I wanted to discuss something that had been in mind for some time.

At the date of the visit I had finished an unusually strenuous session in the Colorado Senate where I had served my first term as Chairman of the Legislature's Joint Budget Committee (JBC) with which I had become so publicly identified. As satisfying as the work had been, I felt frustrated as spring rolled around. It seemed that I was spending my life indoors in beautiful Colorado which is associated so much with the great outdoors. I was longing for some kind of challenge to deal with that frustration. Then in early May my wife, Penny, and I happened to visit San Antonio, Texas, where we were both impressed by how the San Antonio River had been restored and magnificently blended into the city life and business. I came back to Denver thinking that we should be doing the same with the South Platte.

I was well acquainted with our river and its disastrous condition. I had been the city's Manager of Public Works from 1960 to 1962, and the Platte was, or should have been, one of my concerns. I certainly saw the sad plight of the river, but was too busy with routine problems of public works to address those of the Platte. But then in the summer of 1965 everyone in Denver had to pay attention to the river when we suffered one of the worst floods in the city's history. The dirty, neglected waterway dealt us a $325-million blow and stirred up a great flurry of committees,

studies and plans for remedying the Platte, but nothing happened. In 1971, I made an issue of the continuing neglect of the river when I ran for Mayor, and I intended to act on the problem if I won—which I didn't. However, I was able in 1969 to do something for the Platte in the Legislature where I was instrumental in passage of legislation establishing the Urban Drainage and Flood Control District to help prevent the kind of flood disaster of 1965.

But let's go back to that day I visited the Mayor.

"The Mayor says you should go right in," announced his secretary.

In his office I shook hands and came directly to my business. "I've been wondering if you have anything in mind for the river," I asked.

Bill McNichols looked surprised. "It's funny you should ask," he said. "Ben Bezoff [his Executive Officer] and I have just been looking over a list of names with the idea of forming a Committee on the Platte."

"You mean to improve it?"

"Oh yes! We've got $1.9 million in revenue sharing funds that I can devote to the river. Everyone on our list—there are thirty names—is someone who has expressed interest in upgrading the river."

"Is my name. . .?"

McNichols interrupted with a question: "Joe, would you take over the Committee? You know, the chairmanship?"

"Well, yes," I replied, cautiously, and mildly surprised. "But shouldn't I know who's on the Committee?"

"No one's on it yet. This list of names is all we have." He slid it across his desk to me. "Ben and I had decided on a Committee of nine. If you're willing to chair it, I'd be delighted. I'd like to make a couple of choices. Let's see, Marjorie Hornbein and Jack Shapiro. The other six can be your choice."

"To choose from this list?" I asked scanning the names.

"Oh, not necessarily. You name the members you'd like and I'll appoint them."

I agreed and immediately started reviewing the list with the Mayor and Bezoff who joined us. It had some names that I recognized but right away I thought of someone who was unlikely to be on the list.

"There's one man who's interested in the river and isn't here," I said and watched for the Mayor's reaction when I gave the name. "Ted Bendelow. I'd like to have him."

McNichols looked displeased, as I expected. He saw Bendelow as a burr in his saddle. Following a 1973 flood the Mayor had worked hard to replace the Fifteenth Street Bridge, and Bendelow had fought it.

"What do you want him for?" the Mayor asked.

"Several reasons: I've worked with him in the Legislature; he, a Democratic leader in the House, me, a Republican leader in the Senate. He can keep things bipartisan. I came to respect him. I could work with him. Does what he says he'll do. Sure, he's an activist when it comes to the river. You found that out! But after

all, his own neighborhood is on the Platte, and he's devoted to getting things done there. Then we're both attorneys. Anyway, I'd like him right on the Committee where we'll have things out in the open, instead of his beating at us from the outside."

Ted Bendelow

In this explanation there was a large kernel of what I feel about developing a useful, effective committee. My ten years in the Legislature had taught me a lot about how groups can get things done. I learned that the most effective committees usually make a lot of noise because they are arguing out divergent points of view. With a mixture of ideas a group can truly grapple with all sides of an issue and if possible reach a solution accommodating the various viewpoints. Silent committees populated with people of like thoughts risk making lopsided decisions that may not work because of missing viewpoints.

This need for diversity applies very much to socioeconomic levels. I really learned that truism in the State Capitol. A group that's all white, well-to-do, male, middle-aged, etc., etc., may be inclined to see today's complex world as if through a mailing tube, when actually the broad perspective of a fisheye is needed. In working on legislation for the poor, for example, I realized that I absolutely did not know what it felt like to be poor, and if I were to deal effectively with problems of the poor, my committee had to include people who knew the feel of poverty.

Likewise, a river committee had, in my mind, to reflect the diversity of the people along the river. The South Platte in its sweep through the city touches all kinds of people. It passes the factories and businesses of the rich. It comes through neighborhoods of the poor who have suffered the stench of the river for generations. The river's potential for good or bad influences the young and the old. And while its use and quality is generally determined by a few people, the water really belongs to all the people. No question about it: the Committee had to represent a broad cross-section of Denverites.

When I left the Mayor's office I still had only three of the eight people we needed, and my choice, Ted Bendelow, was the only one I knew. The Mayor simply explained that Marjorie Hornbein would be valuable for her historical knowledge of the river and that Jack Shapiro was a businessman who had been active in promoting upstream dams on the Platte. I carried the list back to my office and then home in the evening. By bedtime I had picked five more candidates, and I felt they satisfied my principle that in diversity one can find vitality and effectiveness.

First, I wrote down the name of Daniel R. Trujillo, a young man, half Mexican and half Russian-German. I had heard a lot about him. He was then head of the Westside Action Center established in 1967 to provide counseling and community organization for low-income residents of West Denver. Trujillo's part of town was on the South Platte near the confluence with Weir Gulch. I knew he was a

person capable of making himself heard loudly and clearly in behalf of his neighborhood. He could speak well and understood how to go to the newspapers to inform the public of what his neighborhood needed. Without question I wanted Dan Trujillo.

Daniel R. Trujillo

Later, as I knew him better, I was sure that the choice was a good one for the River Committee. He was born and raised in Denver near the Platte. His family included a grandmother who had come to the city in 1888 at age five. As Dan and his childhood friends were growing up, they learned that the river was a "No! No!" It was a dumping place, a spawning ground "for pack rats that migrated to the residential areas." Dan recalls his family and friends asking, "Who set this plague on us?" He never dreamed he would be part of doing something about the plague.

"Non-minority people never came to that area of the river," Dan recalled. "So how would we expect them to care enough to do something for the river?"

Philip Milstein

The Mayor's list had another name that I promptly transferred to my roster. He was a contrast to Trujillo, although he, too, was a person capable of capturing Denver's attention in order to get things done. He was Philip Milstein, an urbane businessman, who had long been associated with the interests of downtown Denver. He had been a member of the City Council and Chairman of the Denver Planning Board. I was especially interested that he was the Chairman of the Board of the Auraria Higher Education Center, for I had a feeling that such an association with an educational institution would be a valuable asset. I put Phil Milstein's name on my list.

This choice also turned out to be a wise one. Phil remembers the South Platte and its sad plight from his earliest years. Indeed, his memory of the river goes back to age three when, with his parents, he engaged in a ritual on the Jewish High Holiday, Yom Kippur. At the end of the day, after attending services in their synagogue on West Colfax, the members of the Milstein's temple walked to the river, stood on the bank and emptied their pockets into the water—the very dirty water, Phil recalls. The mess that was the river remained that way, as Phil grew up and became a prominent citizen of Denver.

"The river was always a nothing," he explained, "and it never meant anything to the people of Denver. Actually, it was a dividing line between rich and poor, instead of the unifying force it might have been."

In recent years, with his interest in refurbishing downtown Denver, Phil recognized the need for upgrading the Platte. He saw that all over the nation communities were becoming concerned about their waterfronts, whether they bordered rivers, lakes, or oceans. He felt the same concern for Denver.

As I further surveyed the Mayor's list, the name, Hiawatha Davis, Jr., drew my attention. Davis, a young black with a meticulously groomed Afro and given to nice clothes, was then head of the Eastside Action Movement, another of the city's service centers for the low income neighborhoods. He had asked me to speak at his Center when I ran for Mayor, and he had impressed me during the meeting. From this and other contacts with Hiawatha, I recognized him as a reasonable, fair and very effective community leader committed to making things happen. Furthermore, his neighborhood with twenty to thirty thousand people, many of them poor, bordered a stretch of the South Platte. He would be a plus for my Committee, and I added his name to my list.

Hiawatha Davis, Jr.

Later, after I was still better acquainted with Hiawatha, I learned he, too, was a native Denverite. He grew up in the Cole neighborhood near the South Platte which, as bad as it was, had to serve the area's black children as one of the few places for noninstitutional, outdoor recreation. Unlike the families of Denver's more affluent citizens, Hiawatha's childhood friends seldom, if ever, could enjoy the great outdoors in the Rockies, although the mountains were easily seen from the city.

"I remember the river," says Hiawatha, "as a place where kids from the neighborhood went swimming and sometimes drowned. It was really too dirty for swimming, but it was there and of course kids used it."

He also expresses the feeling that doing something about the river will make a human contribution because "it can have something to do with how we feel about ourselves."

Dana Crawford

With four of my six choices settled, I had no trouble deciding on the fifth when it dawned that Dana Crawford, one of the thirty names on the Mayor's list, was the woman behind the remarkable restoration of Denver's Larimer Square. She had been the force that changed it from an unsavory skid row to a marvelous collection of shops and restaurants that have become one of Colorado's best tourist attractions. Dana, as I learned subsequently, is a sophisticated lady from Salina, Kansas, who graduated from the University of Kansas and later from the Harvard-Radcliffe program of business administration. She came to Denver in 1954, married geologist John Crawford and began raising four sons. Then joining a few investors with some $400,000, she started to acquire the Larimer Square block of late 1800 buildings for restoration and commercial revitalization. By 1978 the block was valued at $4.5 million. Meanwhile, Dana received nationwide recognition for what she did, and she began traveling widely, both as a consultant and a member of various

organizations committed to historical restoration.

If she could do all that with a skid row, and if, as her name on McNichols' list indicated, she was concerned with our skid row of a river—no question about it, I wanted her on the Committee.

John Zapien

My final choice was also a person I had not met, but whose name, John Zapien, rang memory bells when I saw it on the list. I remembered he was a striking young man sometimes called "Mr. Globeville." He had acquired the title by being the one person who always spoke out, loudly and forcefully, for Globeville, the low-income neighborhood at the north end of the river in Denver. Globeville, which Zapien once described as "the armpit of Denver," seemed, indeed, like the downstream culmination of everything bad about the South Platte. The old Volga-Deutsch Polish neighborhood, consisting of small, but well-maintained homes, is beset with railroads, a sewage treatment plant, abandoned packing houses, super-highways, heavy industries—whatever fate could find to make the nearby homes less pleasant places to live. The neighborhood as a residential area had been forgotten, but in the early '70's Zapien, a large, dramatic Mexican-American with long, black hair, reminded city hall that there was, in fact, a Globeville. He had become an outspoken activist committed to the protection and preservation of his neighborhood. And he realized the low state of the Platte had a lot to do with conditions where he lived.

"The river was not generous to us," he says. "If there was a flood of any kind, we got it. The river environment attracted whatever was bad, and we got it. The river returned nothing to us. The least of all it might have offered was some recreation, but that was out of the question. Globeville recreation was left pretty much to the local taverns."

Marjorie Hornbein

I didn't have to meet Zapien to decide I wanted him on my Committee. As my recollections of him came together, I realized he was an activist for a neighborhood that had everything to gain and nothing to lose from improvement of the river. My choices were completed when I wrote down John Zapien's name, and the next morning I delivered my list of six to the Mayor's office so he could extend invitations to sit on the new Committee.

I still didn't know much about two people who would work with me—the two selected by the Mayor. However, it wasn't long before I knew them well.

Marjorie Hornbein brought an important perspective to our group. She was a Democrat, a native Denverite whose lineage extended back to Nineteenth Century

Colorado. Her grandfather was a member of the Colorado Legislature in 1892 — a "Republican!" she likes to tell me. Her father was Judge Philip Hornbein, who had been a distinguished attorney in Denver, as is her brother today, Philip Hornbein, Jr. Marjorie, whose diminutive figure hides an abundance of energy, is a performing pianist and a person known for her interest in the history of our state and city. The interest is demonstrated by numerous articles she has had published in historical journals of Colorado and other western states. Marjorie also came to our Committee with the experience of working on boards and committees in the rough and tumble of the public business. She served on the Denver Planning Board and was chairperson of the Board of Appeals relating to decisions of the City and County of Denver's Building Department. And she had been on the Community Education Council, which had the difficult job of implementing court decisions on school busing. As I was to discover, this lady, given to wearing large hats, truly knows how to work with people of divergent views. The Mayor had understood what he was doing when he chose her for the Committee.

Bill McNichols' second choice, Jack Shapiro, accepted, but then had to withdraw immediately for personal reasons. In his place the Mayor appointed Harold "Potts" Berglund, a neighbor and acquaintance of mine. Potts was a building supply dealer who had to be interested in the South Platte. His business was at its mercy for he owned Denver Wood Products, located right on the river. In the 1965 flood his inventory went down the stream with everything else. Before that event Potts had remained out of public life, but the flood convinced him he should start doing something about the river. He had served on an earlier committee whose plans for the Platte never materialized, but his interest remained. The Mayor knew it and appointed him to work on our new effort. The choice also turned out to be a valuable one.

Harold "Potts" Berglund

The first meeting of the Committee was called by the Mayor in his office at 11:15, Friday morning, June 14, 1974. At the meeting I looked over the people we had mustered, a diverse lot if ever I had seen one. There was diversity in denomination, haircuts, birthright, temperament, apparel, affluence, occupation and color. If there was a sameness at all, it was political; most were Democrats, and that made me and Phil Milstein, Republicans, happy. We were unlikely to suffer from politics.

Some members there that morning were comfortably at home in the Mayor's office. Others were ill at ease, especially those who had thought of the premises as enemy territory. It was familiar ground for Phil Milstein who had spent years in public service that had often brought him to see the Mayor. But John Zapien, as he later confessed, feared he had been enticed into the group to be tamed. He had beat upon the Mayor for so long he couldn't understand why he had been tapped for this Committee. He wondered if

he hadn't been taken by "the old Irish political trick" of reducing the heat from your enemies by putting them to work.

The assembled group did have two important features in common. First, no one was a bureaucrat—and for that I thanked the Lord and Bill McNichols for not insisting that we include any. The Mayor wanted us to use the city agencies, and he had the heads of the four relevant ones there to meet us: Alan Canter, Planning Director; Joe Ciancio, Parks and Recreation Manager; Harold Cook, Public Works Manager; and Max Zall, City Attorney. At the same time he had the great sense to leave us free of the worst that bureaucracy can connote. I think he and I understood the past neglect of the river could be laid to a great extent on bureaucratic lethargy. I certainly felt that way, for in the past years on the Legislature's Joint Budget Committee I had learned my lessons about the debilitating effects of bureaucracy at any level. If our river Committee had been saddled with a large component of bureaucrats—as so many such groups just naturally are—we could have spent the unproductive majority of our time tangled up with all the things we *couldn't* do for the river, leaving little time for what we could do. The absence of bureaucrats, indeed, became a key factor in our future.

Second, every Committee member had some stake in the river's improvement. Some saw it as a boon to their neighborhoods. Others felt it would enhance the development of downtown Denver to which they were committed. All believed that to revive the greatest of natural resources within the city limits could set a new millieu for all of Denver.

Bill McNichols had a name for us, "The Platte River Development Committee." He said that we were now in charge of a "paramount project for the city," that the "future of the Platte River is indeed the future of the city." He pledged the complete support of all departments in the city; he promised to give whatever staff was necessary; and he confirmed that the money, $1.9 million, had been set aside for the project.

"What authority will we have?" Marjorie Hornbein asked.

"Plenty!" said the Mayor—and the future would demonstrate that he meant it.

One half hour after it began, our first meeting ended, but the new and most important chapter had opened in the history of the South Platte.

III

THE FORGOTTEN NILE OF NORTH AMERICA

If ever a Denver newspaper published a "ho-hum-what's next?" editorial, the readers of the *Rocky Mountain News* found one in their copy of Monday, June 17, 1974.

"Every so often," the editorial began, "we become encouraged by the news of progress in planning a cleanup and facelifting of the South Platte River as it meanders through far-from-scenic lower downtown Denver.

"Trouble is the planning seems to run on and on, somewhat like Old Man River himself. When do we get to the cleanup part, Denverites are prone to ask?"

The piece went on with a yawn to explain that Mayor McNichols had come up with another committee "to study the situation" and "recommend and push development of the valley." Pointing out that I was the Chairman, the editorialist implied that I should know better than to think this latest of many committees would work.

"Shoemaker," the article chided, "should understand the manner in which the redevelopment project gets hung up in committee studies. . ."

Finally, the editorial, laden with sorrow for our infant group, said, "We don't intend to demean the work the new committee will be doing in Platte Valley planning. But we hope that at long last this much talked-about and long delayed project will actually get off the ground and Denverites will be able to see some improvement in the debris-strewn river valley which, to many visitors coming to Denver on Interstate 70 and Interstate 25, is downtown Denver's front door."

Initially my reading of the editorial was equivalent to a bucket of the polluted Platte in the face, but then I had to agree with the newspaper. The history of the

South Platte was a sorrowful saga of a city turning its cheek to the ruination of one of its greatest natural resources, then pretending to deal with the degradation by studying it to death—but really accomplishing nothing.

Historically, the South Platte suffered from a fractured personality, one time a joke, another a serious waterway of commerce; once a playground for Denver citizens, later an unsightly void dividing the city; one day, a piddling trickle difficult to locate in its wide bed of sand; another, a monstrous flood changing geographic, architectural and political structures.

In 1864 Artemus Ward, the American humorist, who was on assignment from the Cleveland *Plain Dealer,* took a look at our waterway and wrote, "The Platte would be a good river if set on edge!" Henceforth the stream was a target for humorous descriptions characterizing it as a paper thin river meandering around —as one Isabella Bird described—"a shingly bed six times too large for it." Or as one Charles Strobie portrayed—"too thick to drink, too thin to plow, too shallow to sail on, too broad to shoot a rifle across." And such jocularity continued to the present when author James A. Michener recast history's various tilts at the Platte in his bestseller, *Centennial,* and referred to Denver's main watercourse as "a sad, bewildered, nothing of a river...a mean pestiferous bother...a mile wide and an inch deep—too thick to drink, too thin to plow."

But while many were poking fun at the South Platte, others in early Denver saw the river as the "Nile of North America," and some entrepreneurs seemed to think that the Platte could practically turn the city into America's great mid-continent maritime metropolis, right on the arid lap of the Rockies. Indeed the first issue of the *Rocky Mountain News,* April 23, 1859, carried what might have been construed as shipping news, reporting that in the past three days several boats had embarked from Denver carrying "emigrants bound for the States," mostly unsuccessful seekers of gold who were returning to their homes. "May they have a prosperous voyage down the Platte," the *News* declared, but then added a late bit of intelligence as a postscript, stating, "Since writing the above we learn that two of the above boats have been upset, their freight lost and their passengers returned to try their fortunes in the mines again."

As that summer of 1859 was ending, the *Rocky Mountain News* had settled into the real lingo of shipping news, and on September 9 announced departures of the scows "Ute," "Cheyenne," and "Arapahoe," the first two for the mouth of the Platte, the third for New Orleans. Eight days later the paper reported: "Boat departure: Sailed on 14th, Clipper Pittsburg, Captain J. Steiner. 8 passengers and baggage to St. Louis."

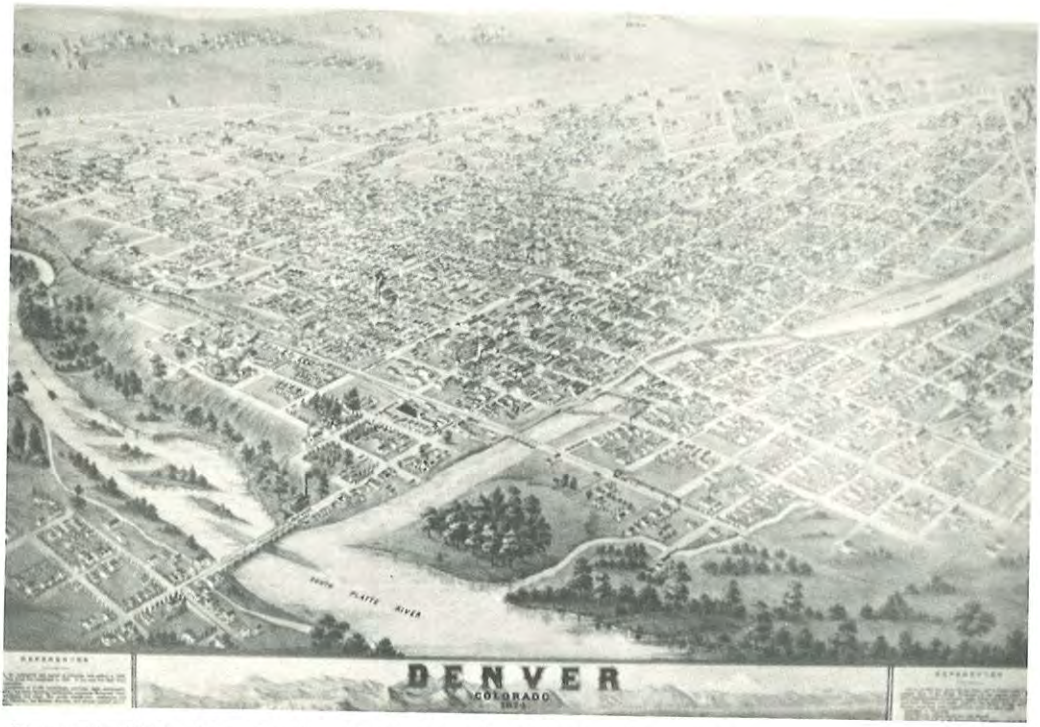
But the river was far from gentle with these sailors out of Denver, for the Platte's white water—such as we experienced in the 1980's riding our ten-man raft—battered their vessels and piled up their losses. In June 1859, Henry Villard, who was to become a distinguished journalist covering the Civil War, filed a story from Denver for the Cincinnati *Daily Commercial* with the bad news that a boat had been wrecked thirty miles out of the city, losing botanical and geological

An early representation of Cherry Creek joining the South Platte River. On the left is the site of Auraria, on the east bank of the creek, Denver City. To the north and west of the river, the Highlands Community site.

specimens worth a thousand dollars. Stories like this subjected shipping on the South Platte to the wagers of the Denver City's and Auraria's gamblers who would give odds in certain months of the year that this or that vessel would never finish the seven-day run to the Missouri. The catch in this game was trying to find out what had happened to a boat once it left the city limits and never returned.

Hazards be damned, the South Platte's nautical promoters still saw it as a navigable waterway. The most remarkable venture—mentioned in Chapter I—was a sidewheeler, the steamer which had River Front Park as her home port in 1887. But the thin, unpredictable South Platte was clearly no Mississippi, and its vessels dwindled down to canoes, kayaks, rubber rafts, and the like. One of the river's most publicized embarkations was on February 1, 1957, when two sixteen-foot canoes with four men left Denver's 23rd Street bound for Old Town, Maine, 5,000 miles away. They arrived in late November.

But the history most relevant to the Platte River Development Committee in 1974 was not that of diminishing navigation, but of diminishing quality, both of the water and the adjacent land. When John Simpson Marsh, trapper and trader with his Sioux wife, Wapoola, settled on the site of Denver in the autumn of 1857, they could draw their drinking water directly from the South Platte or Cherry Creek. But purity



Denver in 1874, about the time that indoor plumbing was first supplied.

deteriorated fast. The following summer a Georgian, W. Green Russell, found traces of gold in the sands of Cherry Creek and the baneful impact of settlement upon water was underway. Rival communities blossomed on both sides of the stream near its confluence with the Platte (Auraria on the west bank; St. Charles, soon to become Denver, on the east shore). In no time the new settlements had befouled their streams and the settlers were looking for clean water. They first turned to privately dug wells, or in the case of the more affluent, particular citizens, to peddlers who carried water by tank wagon from out-of-town sources guaranteed to be pure.

By 1872 Denver had its first indoor plumbing supplied by pipes from Irishman James Archer's Denver City Water Company. The source was the underground flow of Cherry Creek lifted out by what was known as a "Holly" pump made in New York. But in no time there was insufficient "Holly water," and Archer reached out for his supply to the Platte three miles south of Denver where he claimed the water would forever flow pure. For a time it did, and kitchen faucets occasionally spouted stray but healthy fish. However, the outreach continually needed to be extended, until, as we know, Denver had to go out and through the Rockies by great tunnels for enough pure water to serve the burgeoning population.

Meanwhile, the South Platte and Cherry Creek, initial providers of fresh water,

became the unfortunate recipients of Denver's wastewater. By 1886 the city had a public sewer collecting the discharge of 3,050 water closets and 3,226 kitchen sinks, serving about 54,000 people. The sewer lines carried raw wastewater down the Platte near 27th Street. That initiated the conversion of the thin, little river into the open sewer we inherited a hundred years later. If there were a benefit to the river's unpalatable fate, it was a backhanded advantage delivered to downstream farmers who depended on the South Platte to supply irrigation water for their crops; with sewage added, their irrigation now came complete with Denver "night soil," adding fertilizing nutrients to the water, although the recipients were loath to speak of it on the public record.

As with most rivers in America, the choice of the South Platte as the "water carriage" for human waste rapidly changed the image of the 400 or so acres making up the river and its valley running through Denver. Instead of a place to stroll on Sunday afternoon or listen to a band aboard a steamer on a summer evening, the Platte became territory that particular folks avoided. With that psychology settling into the public mind, the annihilation of the Nile of North America was rapid and all inclusive. The stream and its valley became a place for slaughter houses and railroad yards, stormwater discharges and trash discards. The pall over the valley became thicker and heavier as people forgot that the South Platte once offered Denverites the amenities of a clean river with its refreshing, running water. Instead of attracting people, the putrification of the Platte repelled our citizens.

I must confess that my thinking suffered from this downbeat psychology of the river when I served as Denver's Manager of Public Works. I went along with the policy that the South Platte was the place when we had something to dump. Off to the river we went with salt-laden snow from the downtown pavements. Street sweepings, with all that mixture may harbor, were consigned to the river. When excess stormwater flooded our sewage treatment system, no problem, we simply engaged in "bypassing," which meant opening the gates around the purification equipment, allowing raw sewage to flow directly to the Platte.

I recall one September when a premature winter storm dropped a blanket of heavy, wet snow, overburdening tree limbs still foliated, and a million broken branches littered the streets. Truckload upon truckload were dumped in the South Platte—unacceptable on the public thoroughfare, no one cared about the public waterway.

The appearance of our beggar of a stream meant nothing because those who might have been offended by her looks had long stopped coming to see. I was responsible, as were my predecessors and successors in Public Works, for dumping thousands of tons of street rubble along the banks of the South Platte. When old pavement was broken up to be replaced, the great, jagged chunks were used to line the river to prevent erosion of the banks. We thought it was a good idea. That it simply looked like hell made no difference because no one cared. When such rubble was not available to check a sudden piece of erosion, we turned

to the automobile junkyards for ballast and decorated the river with one, two or whatever number of wrecks were needed to check the deterioration. Their visual pollution was so horrid that in comparison street rubble looked like oriental tapestry.

The most prominent automobile mortuary in town was on the 6.3-acre site mentioned in Chapter I. It was located, naturally, smack on the river, and close to downtown at that. It voraciously chomped up old family heaps, reducing them to a metallic sort of grain for rail shipment to a steel plant. While great multicolored stacks of Detroit-born wrecks awaited their inevitable hours of final execution in Denver, the vehicular guillotine lacerated, smoked, banged and ripped metal, frightening off any innocents who might have had the silly notion it would be nice to take a noontime stroll down by the river.

Meanwhile a downstream piece of riverbank was receiving a daily drenching in old, black petroleum. When diesel locomotives on the railroads needed oil changes they were driven to a yard beside man's favorite dump, the South Platte, and the dirty lubrication was released like a flood onto the ground. When the soil and substratum were fully saturated, the horrid gunk oozed sideways, out of the banks and into the river.

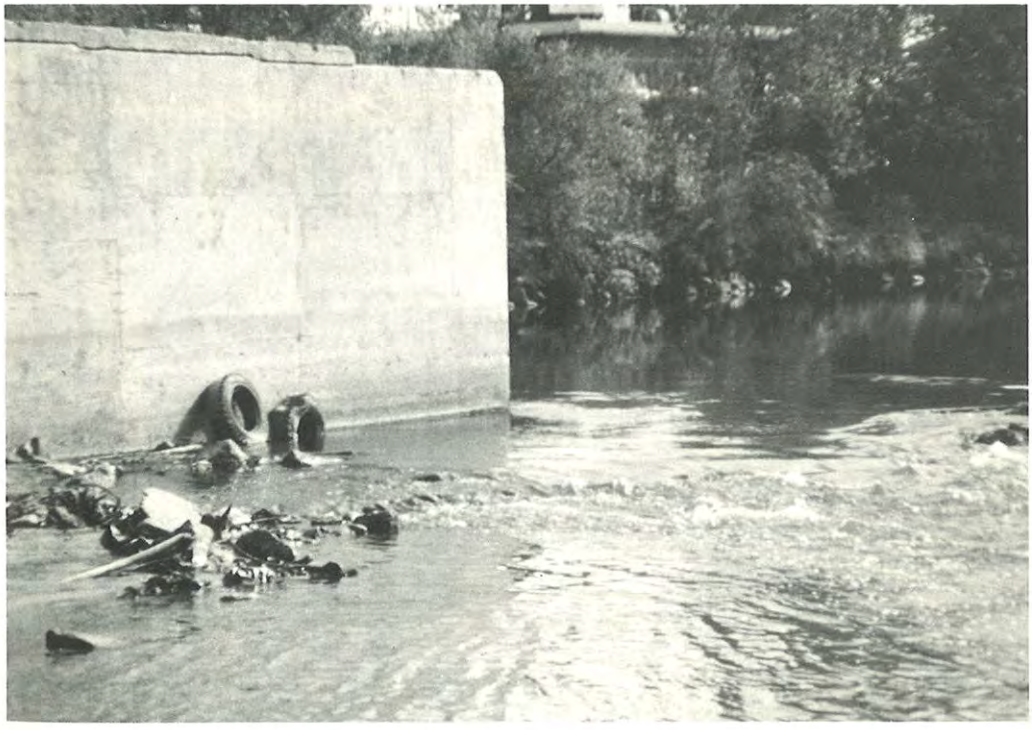
At another point along Denver's ten miles of Platte, a ready-mix concrete plant found a convenient cleaning site for its mixer-trucks. At day's end they backed them up to the river, stuck water hoses into the mixers, flushed out the remaining concrete, and down the river it flowed like lava, turning the water velvety gray. A hard mantle of cement formed and got thicker and thicker where vegetation should have been greening up the river.

Whatever item you could think of, chances were you could find one or a thousand discarded in the South Platte—old mattresses, refrigerators, grass clippings, dishwashers, lawn mowers, stoves, TV sets—anything that people threw out. At one point the river even carried a layer of discarded feathers from a pillow factory. But as many feathers as there were, they were unlikely to outnumber the most plentiful item of all, rubber tires. They were spread along the shores, bounced and tumbled in the white water, and suspended on bushes and trees beside the river. If the supply ever dwindled, a good rain seemed to flush tires out of the hillsides, and the South Platte's staple in rubbish was quickly replenished.

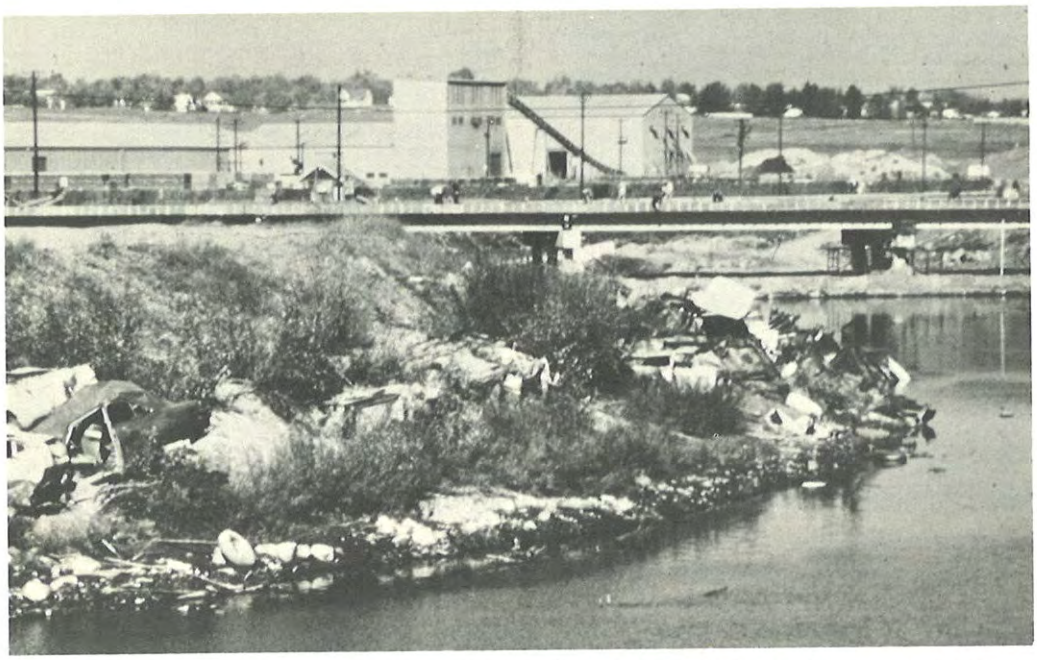
Obviously, Denver's river had no constituency, unless the multitudes who misused it were counted as such. In city government no one agency or official had jurisdiction over the South Platte, nor did anyone care to have it. Empire building, the preoccupation of many a bureaucrat, was not practiced on the Platte. The Denver watercourse truly had nothing going for it. If my street became too dirty or potholed, I could call someone in city government about it. But there was no one to call about the Platte. Things of any significance to government have budgets. The river had no budget.

As if striking back at Denver's disdain, the South Platte let us have it on June 16, 1965, with an unmercifully damaging "one-hundred-year flood" (so called

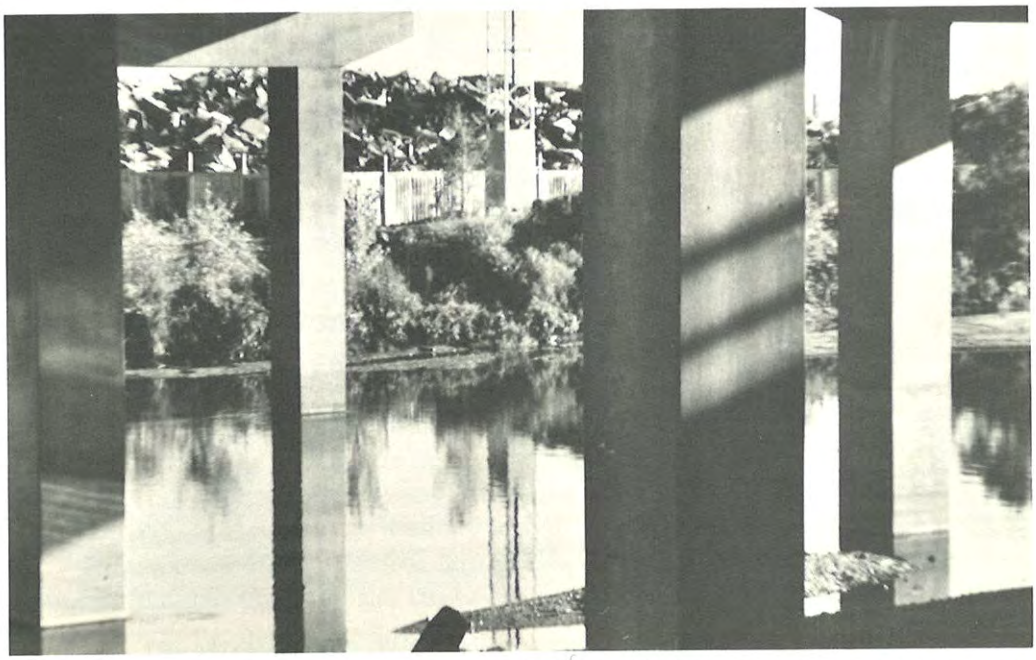
Mountains of dirty snow, full of salt and other waste material from streets, dumped on river banks at 16th Street Viaduct. New trees being pushed over in photo on left, died.



Tires, tires, everywhere! Together with non-descript rubble, usually dumped into the river.



Car bodies, rubber tires, broken concrete and other forms of rubble line the bank of the river at 31st Street.



Smashed automobiles, stacked 20 feet high, await the "vehicular guillotine" at what is now the Centennial Park site. View is from under Speer Boulevard viaduct, looking west toward Auraria Higher Education Center.

1965 flood aftermath, showing debris clogging the 8th Avenue bridge.

because the chances are 100 to 1 against a flood of such magnitude occurring in any one year). It began when more than fourteen inches of rain fell in a few hours on the Plum Creek watershed in Douglas County. The water soon overtook the South Platte and a raging flood went through Littleton, Englewood, and Sheridan, immediately upstream from Denver. When the great, swollen tide entered the city, it inundated the southern half of the metropolitan area along the waterway. Instead of the normal 300 cubic feet of water per second, or the 3,000 that we called exceptionally high water on our raft ride described earlier, the raging South Platte hit us with the astonishing flow of 150,000 cubic feet per second. By the time the flood was in the center of the city it had damaged every bridge in its path from the south, and the tide was gathering an increasing load of debris—trees, sides of buildings, entire mobile homes, telephone poles trailing wires, an armada of old and new automobile tires, operable and junked cars, entire lumber yards, fences, tanks loaded with the Lord knew what. And as it was all swept into the city, debris piled up against bridges forming massive dams. As they held back the water, it spread out like a sea across the city. The deluge knocked out two major power plants, leaving wide areas of Denver without electricity. The water severely damaged the Columbine Golf Course, burying greens and fairways in tons and tons of silt. The same befell the Centennial Race Track. Twelve feet of water stood upon they city's expansive railroad yards, while

the remnants and contents of warehouses and other industrial facilities floated by. Two bridges went out, others were badly weakened and one more collapsed two days after the flood.

With a massive stroke the South Platte, the funny, forgotten, nothing of a river, remembered itself to everyone. In passing, the flood left a calling card with that unforgettable $325 million bill for damages. A century of disrespect and disregard had been revenged in a few unforgettable hours. Neglect and apathy were abruptly reversed.

The response to the devastation was as you might guess, a study—a super study. Headed by Mayor Tom Currigan, assisted by funds from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, the study took up the redevelopment of the Platte River Valley through Denver. It was carried out in a hurry by throwing money and people at the job. Responsibility for administration of the study project went to the twelve-person Denver Urban Renewal Authority, which retained a twelve-member staff, which used four consulting firms, all of whom were guided by five advisory committees with fifty-two people and by twenty-six participating local, state and federal agencies. The result was a large, 10-by-14-inch booklet with eighty-nine pages entitled *In Reponse to a Flood.* At the front of the booklet the reader found a double-page painting of a bright white and green new Denver with a sparkling blue South Platte set in beds of greenery and flowing between more than a dozen high rises, all thin and flat, facing the river. The artist conceived a dreamland with the river free of industry, railroads, trash and foul air. Eighty-four pages later the study, which cost $680,000, showed the reader the price tag for the new Denver: $630 million in the next twenty years.

The figure was stunning, so stunning that none of the beholders revived long enough to put it together. If the size of the booklet was supposed to make it impossible to file, it didn't work, because that's where the study ended—in the files. While city officials with mud still in their eyes from the flood rushed into the grandiose study, they ended up with no more than that, a study. Still another committee was formed to implement the plan, the South Platte Area Redevelopment Committee, SPARC, but unlike the expensive planning it was to bring into the real world, it had no funding. SPARC just sort of sputtered out. Phil Milstein who had served on two of the study's advisory committees was also invited to be a member of the redevelopment committee. A few years later he was hard put to recall just what happened to the organization.

In any event, the river went back to being its old dirty self, except that action was taken to prevent another such flood. The large, new Chatfield Dam upstream from Denver was built, and it, together with the already in place Cherry Creek Dam and, later, the Bear Creek Dam, drastically reduced the likelihood of another such disaster as that which struck Denver on June 16, 1965. However, the idea of refurbishing the South Platte and its environs remained stagnant for nearly a decade, until that day in June, 1974, when Mayor Bill McNichols decided to give it another try with his $1.9 million of revenue sharing funds and his Platte River Development Committee.

IV

A BIG FAST BEGINNING

Three weeks and three days from when our brand new Platte River Development Committee was greeted by the *Rocky Mountain News'* "ho-hum" editorial, another appeared in the *Denver Post,* and it gave us a hurrah: "At last, we're moving!" The editor had decided that finally something was going to happen "along the littered and neglected South Platte in Denver."

"The mayor's new Platte River Development Committee has turned out some ambitious and impressive plans in a short time," the piece began, and then explained that we had already developed a program of four demonstration sites on the river and the Mayor had approved them. Then in a sentence of super-optimism, the editorial announced that "All work is expected to be under contract by September 1."

The writer had foreshortened our contractual expectations by several months, but I was delighted, for he had obviously been infected by the same bug gestating in our nine collective bonnets. In our first three weeks of life we had groped, disagreed and groped again, and out of it we had come to the consensus that our studying and planning for the river should be short and to the point—the point being that we were now to *do* something for the river. What, where and how were not completely clear, but we had no question about when: As soon as possible!

We convened our first meeting on only the second business day after our initial coming together in Mayor McNichol's office, on June 14, 1974. All members of the new Committee were present, except Potts Berglund who still hadn't had time to be notified of and accept his appointment. There was also a small flock of city officials who would serve as an advisory group. And two young men from the

Denver Planning Office, Jay Geiger and Rick Lamoreaux were on hand to act as our staff. Geiger was, for all intents and purposes, to be our first Executive Director.

After unanimously electing Ted Bendelow as Vice Chairman, we established some operating rules—anyone can bring up whatever he wants; meetings always open to the public; proceedings tape recorded; and Roberts rules. Then I distributed copies of the downbeat editorial from the *Rocky Mountain News* published only the day before.

"Ouch!" said Dana Crawford, the remarkable renovator of Larimer Square. "They don't expect much."

"Have to agree that we're starting ten yards beyond the end zone," I said. "We're in a ball game where nobody will believe another committee will do anything until something is done on the river and can be seen."

I then threw out a charge to the Committee, outlining what I felt should be the general thrust of our mission. I said that we ought to brief ourselves on the river, past plans, present plans, problems, whatever anyone in the city had to tell us in as short a time as possible, then we should immediately decide what we were going to do.

"We'll have to decide if we are going to try solving everything there is to solve on the river," I said, "or shall we pick a particular section to work on. Or what else do we want to do? This Committee has got to start making priority decisions—short range, long range, but decisions—voting things up or down."

The group was quiet, and I wondered what they were thinking. I had made a name on the Colorado Legislature's Joint Budget Committee for being a tough chairman. "Am I sounding too tough for this group?" I asked myself.

"Now, I have a personal feeling for what we should do," I continued. "I think we ought to take one section of the river and develop it. Show 'em what we can do. I'm for starting on the area right down closest to where the most people are, from Colfax Avenue to the confluence at Cherry Creek, and doing what . . . "

"Don't agree!" said a loud voice from the midst of my new group. It was Mr. Globeville, John Zapien, the Mexican-American with the long black hair from the "armpit of Denver" as he called his neighborhood.

"Oh!" I replied, reminding myself that I had assembled this diverse group hoping for dissent. "What don't you agree with?"

"Wrong point on the river to start!" answered Zapien.

"And where would you suggest!" I asked needlessly, for I knew the answer.

"North end, Globeville. Needs it much worse than down there."

Hiawatha Davis, the quiet spoken member with the meticulously groomed Afro, said he was for priorities, but he would like to hear various officials and groups tell us what they had in mind, each within a time limit set by the Committee.

For the next hour and forty five minutes my Committee and visitors ranged all over the river and its recent history, and slowly it became evident that we all need-

ed something terribly fundamental if we were to carry on our task effectively: a good look at the South Platte and environs. All of us had seen it in dribs and drabs, but not as a whole.

Jay Geiger offered to give us a tour on the following Monday, and Dana Crawford volunteered her Larimer Square bus to help. Everyone agreed, and the group was ready to adjourn. It was two minutes to five.

"But wait!" I said, already worrying that we were falling into the pattern of all study but no projects. I held up the ho-hum editorial. "They've made a point," I declared. "We'll be lucky if we come up with something we can implement. But the only way is to thrash out our differences in the open so we can get together on something. We should not get bogged down on studies. We've got to come up with something that the largest number of people can benefit from, at the earliest possible time within a financial framework that we can hack."

Less than a week later our Committee with its city advisors and a number of media people boarded the Larimer Square bus at 9:00 a.m. for an all-day inspection of the entire South Platte in Denver. As it turned out, we were more on foot than on the bus, but as a result the tour, an intimate look at the river, was one of the most important events in the Committee's history. It confirmed what I had learned as legal counsel for the Urban Drainage and Flood Control District. When I wrote legal opinions concerning the various gulches tributary to the South Platte, I found I couldn't do a good job until I had walked the streams in question. Our Platte Committee returned from the tour far more aware of the problems we faced. In one swoop we had seen the sad state of the Platte on its course through our city. It was not a pretty picture. It was truly an elongated dump of rubble and rusty, twisted iron, an artery of rubbish and dirty water. Not only had we become firsthand witnesses to the ten-mile mess, the tour had given us the opportunity to question responsible city officials on the spot. For example, we had a close look at many of the potent discharges entering the Platte and had the chance to ask Denver's Public Works representatives why specific pollution sources hadn't been eliminated.

At our next business meeting a week later, I wouldn't have been surprised to see the Committee put up its collective hands and quit, feeling their job was too formidable, but instead they were more ready to start work than ever.

The staff came to this meeting with the idea of dividing the river into eight segments, averaging just over a mile apiece. Each Committee member would be assigned to a segment and thus become responsible for its restoration. I felt this would make our responsibility too fractured and suggested the eight be reduced to three segments. The Committee then split over the idea of segmenting our task at all. Opponents to the idea argued we should be treating the river as a whole, not dealing with it in pieces. I felt the river-as-a-whole approach was too much for us to chew, and I became more firmly convinced that if we were to demonstrate progress within a year, we had to pick specific areas of improvements and go to work on them.

This second business meeting of our history lasted two and a half hours and it ended with us voting to start on four specific project areas spaced along the river. We had also selected four design engineering firms to explore the work to be done, and each segment was assigned to one of the firms. I had also conferred the development responsibility for each segment to two Committee members. Beginning upstream and proceeding north, Potts Berglund and Phil Milstein had the first, or south, segment, with the firm of Frasier and Gingery; Dan Trujillo and Hiawatha Davis were assigned the second stretch, the south-central segment, with McCall-Ellingson and Morrill; third, the area around the Cherry Creek confluence with the Platte was called the north-central segment and given to Dana Crawford and Ted Bendelow, with Wright-McLaughlin; and finally the north segment, including Globeville, went to Marjorie Hornbein and John Zapien, with Oblinger-Smith. Each group had been alloted $200,000, except for the longer Globeville segment which would have $250,000.

I scheduled the next meeting for two weeks hence and asked that in the meantime everyone write down his long-term goals for the organization. I also wanted all four of the two-person subcommittees back in two weeks with their engineers and their ideas for short-term plans in their respective segments. With the division of labor agreed upon, we adjourned, and I left the City and County Building full of anticipation of what the subcommittees would come back with in the short time I had allowed.

At this point the Platte River Development Committee was only two weeks and five days of age. It had been a busy infancy, getting the group into motion to demonstrate progress in as short a time as possible.

"We'll never get anywhere," I said, "if we operate like a bureaucracy. Once the bureaucrats decide on the project, they design it one year and get around to building it in the next two or three years. If we take that kind of time to get something in the ground we'll be blown out of the water before we've even started. We need something to show for ourselves by next spring or summer."

I heard rumblings in the Committee about "things running pretty fast," but then all eight members got behind the idea of momentum being the key to success, and they were off. The reaction confirmed what I had learned about getting a committee to work. Especially in the Colorado Legislature I had found that a group will produce if it has something put in front of it for a vote followed by personal action by the membership. If this doesn't happen, vacant talk can take over, nothing is accomplished, morale sinks and the committee's chance of success dwindles. Our four-segment approach provided these vote-and-act elements, and the impact was a psychological upsweep.

But in these exciting, opening days of the Platte Committee, its high morale over the river stood in sharp contrast to the pessimistic, nothing-can-be-done psychology I encountered elsewhere. The disreputable image of the river, solidly implanted by a century of misuse and neglect, was heavy baggage when it came to convincing people that we were going to reverse the trend. It was most difficult

when I dealt with city agencies that were only involved with us because Mayor McNichols had directed them to help.

"I don't think you can do anything down there," said one official, "and if you do, who in hell is going to use it, except bums and hoboes?"

That fellow was part of the large body of negatives who could only be convinced by being shown. "Wait and see," was all I could reply.

"That's down in the flood zone," said another. "So what on earth are you doing planning to dump money into projects in a flood zone? Ridiculous!"

"Nothing's to be done unless it's flood resistant," I answered, advancing one of the criteria that I had already decided we should require of all projects.

My own track record in city and state government served me in good stead when it came to upholding a positive view of the river's future. As Denver's Manager of Public Works I had been a member of city government and intimately involved in the building of public projects, such as city streets and the control tower and runways at Stapleton International Airport. I had liked building projects and had personally overseen this work for the Department. On the Joint Budget Committee of the Colorado Legislature my budgeting work was often closely involved with governmental building projects, large and small. So when I brought this background to the chairmanship of the Platte River Development Committee, the doubters were confronted with considerable plausibility as I argued that we really *were* going to revive the river. They could hardly brush me off as a flaky do-gooder.

In addition to my knowledge of building and budgeting, I came to my river chairmanship with considerable understanding of the bureaucratic mind. While I had become the "big, bad bane of bureaucrats" on the Joint Budget Committee, I had gained a great deal of insight into their hopes, fears and survival techniques. Their general negativism over what we proposed to do was no surprise. Here we came, outsiders, called in by the boss of the bureaucrats, the Mayor, and asked to do a job that any tax-paying neophyte might rightfully ask, "Why aren't the city people doing it?" The bureaucratic answer almost had to be a negative slice at the possibility for success—unless the job was consigned to a bigger, more richly budgeted bureaucracy than had been brought to the task to date. So the idea that a small citizens' committee with a tinker's budget could have any impact on the ruined river had to be scoffed at.

This kind of psychology was dangerous. It could prevent us from receiving the governmental help we would need. It could undermine the public support we would require. And worst of all it could sour the essential optimism of my own Committee. I decided to prevent such damage, and while my eight colleagues worked up their ideas for returning the Platte to the people, I began the long process of building confidence and support for what we were doing, both in and out of city government. Of course, I had a powerful ally, Mayor William McNichols, who remained behind us and expressed his confidence in us from the day of the Committee's inception.

A walking tour, one of many, to show governmental leaders, businessmen, and potential donors what a difference the improvements make.

One thing I did was to invite the relevant city agencies into our development process. I insisted that agency representatives attend our meetings and involve themselves in what was happening. I wanted our bureaucrats right where they could see they had nothing to lose because of what we were doing—face included. They could be part of the process and take credit due. Sitting with us, the agency representatives could also reckon with a very real fear, namely that our developments would add to their perennial maintenance woes. The public is often gung-ho over building new projects, but when it comes to maintaining them, the enthusiasm may even have turned to hostility over the added cost. Being party to our decisions the city officials could insist on our dealing with this common problem.

In my continuing effort to fight negativism, I became a sort of roving ambassador for the river and our upgrading of it. I lost count of how many people I escorted down to the river, trying to get them to see the possibilities for converting our major water resource from a dumping place to an amenity for the city of Denver. The noon hour was my favorite time for these ambassadorial jaunts. Enroute to the river I would stop at a local Burger King, pick up box lunches for me and my guests and head for the Platte to fire up enthusiasm for our Committee

while my guests munched their hamburgers. I took a large percentage of the Colorado Legislature down to the river. All manner of businessmen were treated to the Burger King lunch and spiel. I was host to newspaper editors who ate from their cardboard boxes amongst the rubble and tried to envision what I foresaw for the future of the sad waterway. The daily parade of one, two or three guests began that summer as the Platte Committee was still figuring out what to do, and it continued for several years. Slowly this program with hamburgers and shoe leather had a positive impact upon the negativism that might have discouraged us before we even started.

As I was developing my attack on the downbeat factor, I was also working at the problem on another flank. I was well aware that the cleaning and greening of the Platte would take more than positive thinking; it would require money and lots of it. The Mayor's $1.9 million was but a seed, albeit a potent one for what we would really need to make the significant changes that were coming to our collective minds. So early in the summer of 1974 I decided that the Mayor's money should, in fact, be recognized as seed money for the growth of larger funds to raise our morale and make possible the impossible.

By late July, I was looking everywhere for potential money to match the city's revenue sharing dollars. By August, I had my sights set on a source that might double the $850,000 that we had allotted for our four segments. I learned that in Washington, D.C., the Secretary of the Interior—then Rogers C.B. Morton—had a contingency fund which was five percent of the total funds of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR). Of the fund, which was some $15 million, about $1.0 million had been allotted to our region. There, I decided, was the source to go after. Jay Geiger and Rick Lamoreaux did the research and prepared a grant application for a sum to match the $850,000 we proposed to spend on the four segments. I came to our August 27 meeting with a copy of the application and, based on what the staff and I had learned, I arrived as a bundle of optimism that we could land the grant. I told the Committee, "We have a real good chance of picking up these extra funds, giving us double-the-money, or $1.7 million instead of $850,000. After the application goes through local and state levels, I'll walk it through our BOR regional office and if necessary I'll fly to Washington for a presentation to the Secretary."

I also gave the Committee a copy of a letter that Mayor McNichols and I had jointly signed and mailed to Secretary Morton, urging that he help us obtain the funds.

"Man's influence on the river's environment," we wrote, "has, up until now, been focused on exploitation and degradation. In order for improvement efforts to succeed and to endure the test of time and of man's future influence, the restoration of a natural environment—approaching that of an 1876 ecosystem—must be a primary goal. Thus it can be seen that the Platte River improvement project seeks to greatly enhance a unique metropolitan environment, the quality of which could undoubtedly influence cities elsewhere."

As we followed the application through channels, our optimism increased to the point of our feeling the engineering design teams could aim at larger projects commensurate with twice the original money. That required additional design funds, all of which were approved at our meeting of September 24.

With me beating down pessimism and promoting optimism that summer of 1974, my eight colleagues became the world's busiest volunteers. While the four subcommittees worked on their respective segments, I unmercifully called on them for more and more. For example, as August arrived, they found themselves assigned to four more subcommittees to start working on what I called the river's "furnishings." As the general ideas for the river were crystallizing, we recognized that projects would require a great many furnishings, such as benches, lights and signs. They needed to be standardized from one end of the river to the other, and the individual items had to be well designed. At our July 30 meeting I again divided the Committee into four pairs and with the help of city advisors and our engineers each new subcommittee was assigned (1) lighting, (2) trash cans and other disposal facilities, (3) benches and markers, and (4) trails and trees.

At this same meeting we started considering the Committee members' ideas for our long range goals. As this subject was sorted out, we soon settled on four criteria that would be applied to everything we would do on the river. These criteria, we agreed, would be woven into our contracts for the major development work along the South Platte. Essentially they called for making the river and its immediate environs (1) boatable, (2) hikable and bikable, (3) capable of handling floods, and (4) accessible to other Denver public facilities as well as providing places to picnic or just to sit and relax.

As these criteria were being formulated, our segment subcommittees, their design engineers and our two-man staff were already developing plans. The two northern segments were moving fastest, and on July 30 their subcommittees made the first reports.

Dana Crawford and Ted Bendelow said that they had met several times with Ken Wright of Wright-McLaughlin to explore ideas for the downtown area of the river around its Cherry Creek confluence. They were thinking about an outdoor amphitheater with a band shell for concerts located on the river near Denver's "Niagara Falls" (an old rubble dam). They were also taking aim at the obnoxious car crusher and automobile yard nearby. Dana and Ted were intent on its removal, and in its place they were considering building a man-made recreation lake. Water for the lake would come from a pool in the river formed by an inflatable dam to be located just above the ersatz Niagara Falls.

Marjorie Hornbein reported that she and John Zapien had been walking through their northern segment. "This is the most difficult area," said Marjorie, "simply because it's the ugliest. It has problems with the water, the land, the air, everything. It is deficient in parks and recreation facilities."

The Hornbein-Zapien subcommittee had been working with Ed Moery of the Oblinger-Smith landscape-architecture firm, and he reviewed some specific prob-

One of many "tubers" who enjoy Denver's ersatz Niagara Falls. Pedestrian footbridge and Speer Boulevard bridge in background span the 160 foot wide South Platte just above Confluence Park.

lems that needed solution if our northern segment was to be improved: obtaining land from the Burlington Railroad, moving an asphalt plant and dealing with city plans for a large new sewer main which could further degrade the river if set above ground along the banks.

However, Moery and the subcommittee were beginning to work out their improvement plans, primarily a trail for biking and hiking with access to the neighborhoods. They were not yet talking of a new park, but they discussed the possibility of a public fountain with flowers.

At the end of that meeting Ken Wright said he wanted to inspire us with a set of colored slides he had brought along. We then saw some pictures of rivers in several European cities and of an American river, the San Antonio, that had initially fired me up for what we were doing. I went home more inspired than ever, not only by the pictures, but by my Committee's devotion to carrying out the "impossible" job we had tackled.

One of many Committee meetings in Room 31, City and County Building, to decide courses of action for River development. Phil Milstein, Potts Berglund, Hiawatha Davis, Dan Trujillo, Ted Bendelow, Marjorie Hornbein (behind Ted), and Dana Crawford. John Zapien beyond picture on left and Chairman beyond picture on right. City officials, engineers, and interested citizens behind Committee.

V

KEEPING UP THE MOMENTUM

If I were to pick a date when the Platte River Development Committee arrived on course and stood full speed ahead, it might very well be November 12, 1974, just two days short of five months from the day of our organizational meeting in Mayor McNichol's office. At our meeting that November afternoon two things happened to establish long-term staff leadership and the direction we would follow.

First, we learned that Jay Geiger was leaving the city government for a job in private business. We officially thanked Jay for a fabulous job in getting us started and then heard from his replacement, Rick Lamoreaux, with whom we were now well acquainted. Rick introduced Robert Searns of the Denver Planning Office who had been assigned to fill out the two-man staff. As it turned out, both men were to remain with us, eventually moving from city government to the private foundation we were to establish. As a team the two young men were to demonstrate that their joint efforts made for productive chemistry that would have a great deal to do with our success on the South Platte. Both were generalists with the right mixture of interests for our purposes.

Rick Lamoreaux

Rick Lamoreaux, from Salt Lake City, received his bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Utah and a masters in civil engineering and environmental design from Stanford. He was graduated *Magna Cum Laude* and was entered into the Phi Kappa Phi honor society. But Rick's educational record said little about his wide ranging capabilities; for that one had to look at his ex-

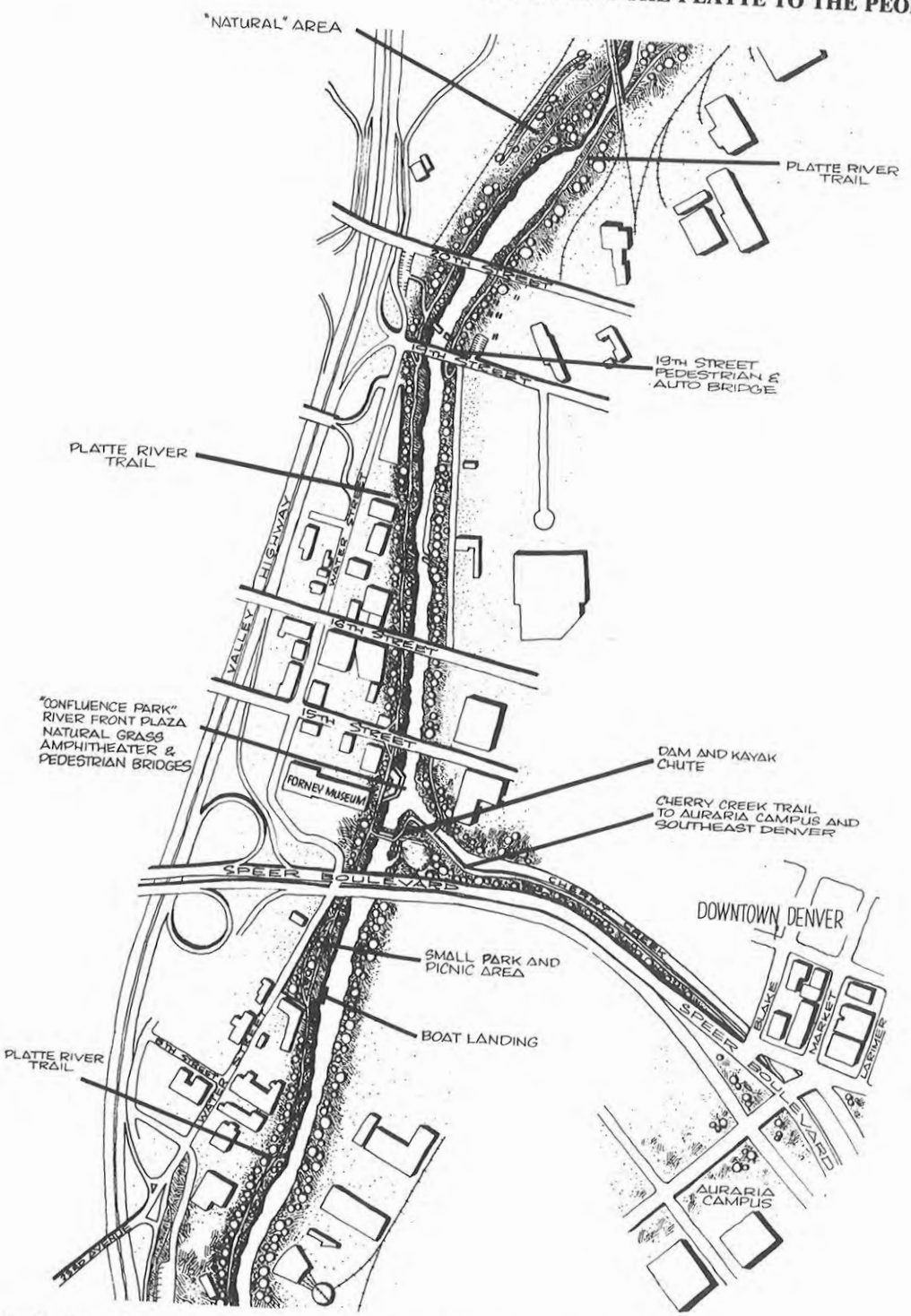
perience. He was a professional ski patrol director, therapist for emotionally disturbed children, a jazz performer and composer on the flute, vibes and saxaphone, carpenter, avalanche buster, highway painter and ranch hand. This jack-of-all-trades was to find his niche on the Platte Committee where our diverse membership needed diverse talents. As we were to learn, Rick was good at writing, preparing grants, administration, budgeting, producing multi-media presentations, accounting, public speaking, organizing environmental impact statements, negotiating and preparing contracts, and biking, hiking and rafting the river. All of these talents would help him as our Executive Director.


Bob Searns

Bob Searns turned out to be another generalist with a range of talents that broadened and complemented the diverse talents brought to the Committee by Rick. A year older than his colleague, Bob received his bachelor's degree in economics and a masters in architecture, both from the University of New York. He grew up in Buffalo, but eventually found in the Canadian wilderness that his interest was in outdoor recreation, especially water oriented. He loved canoeing, kayaking, backpacking and skiing. At the same time Bob developed skills in landscape photography, furniture design and the restoration of vintage houses. Back in Buffalo he had been involved with the Niagara River and the implementation of a waterfront plan for the city. With our Platte Committee, as Project Director, he was to do a remarkable job of insuring that our work was done properly, on time and within budget. But then Bob was to demonstrate that he could turn his hand to most any of the other hundreds of tasks involved in renovating Denver's river. Both he and Rick were to reveal a great capability and a key to our success. With their remarkable creativity they could conceive of ideas for the river, but equally important, they could translate and communicate these ideas to engineers who helped turn them into reality.

The second thing of future significance to happen at that November 12 meeting was passage of a resolution to accept engineering designs for the four segments of the Platte that I had assigned to subcommittees at our second business meeting. During that summer of 1974 the subcommittees, staff and consulting engineers had crystallized their ideas for improving the river, and we had then given the engineers only sixty days to turn the ideas into plans for bids to be obtained by the City Engineer. They were done for approval at the November 12 meeting and then went to Henry Van Fleet, the man in city government who had to see them properly bid out. In the process Henry became the city official most acutely aware that I could be an unmerciful pest. I wanted no time lost in getting to the bids, so I bugged Henry by the day until he would have loved to swat me like a housefly. But he had to understand I was so excited by what our four subcommittees had produced that I wanted no time lost in getting it into the river.

Starting at the upstream end, with the south segment assigned to Potts Berglund



North Central segment of Greenway conceived by Dana Crawford and Ted Bendelow. South Platte River flows from south to north, joined at Confluence Park by Cherry Creek on the east.

ing areas'' on opposite banks of the river. One of them, 1.7 acres, would be established on the site of a junkyard. The two sites would be connected by a pedestrian bridge across the Platte. Finally, some 7,600 feet of banks along the river and beside the two connecting gulches were to be planted with native grasses, shrubs and trees.

A short distance downstream, around the confluence of Cherry Creek and the South Platte, the Dana Crawford-Ted Bendelow subcommittee had translated their ambitious downtown plan into a complex but exciting design. Again it would provide links to the river-long trail system, but it also contemplated additional trails and a pedestrian bridge tying together some seven acres of intensively landscaped area. The plans provided for an ultimate connection with the Cherry Creek recreational trail system with access by foot to Denver's downtown business district.

The Crawford-Bendelow design outlined two large, imaginative projects at the heart of the north-central segment, one for each side of the river around the confluence.

On the east side of the Platte, the plan laid out an ingeniously conceived amphitheater. It would be essentially a grassy hill on which people could sit overlooking a level area below on which various of the performing arts could be accommodated: concerts, dance, plays and so on. But as the plan was put together, no such hill existed on the site. Where would it come from? At the time Ken Wright was working with an innovative designer from Chicago, Dr. John R. Sheaffer. Among Sheaffer's extraordinary accomplishments he had to his credit the well known Mt. Trashmore of Wheaton, Illinois. It was built from the urban region's solid waste packed in earth, planted with grass, shrubs and trees, and turned into a marvelous recreation area. Sheaffer had now pointed out that we had the makings of a small Mt. Trashmore. Take all the rubble and junk from the confluence area, he suggested, pile it into a hill, pack it with earth, plant grass and there we had the main ingredient for the amphitheater.

Across the river, in view of the trash-filled hill, the designers called for construction of a beautiful plaza next to the historic Forney-Colorado Transportation Museum. The plaza, to be paved in brick, would have gracious, sweeping steps leading down to and actually into the Platte when the water was on the high side.

The Crawford-Bendelow contribution was, indeed, the most sophisticated and expensive of all the segment designs, but still it only discussed briefly the extensive work that would eventually be done for boaters in the north-central area. The plan described an inflatable dam and a bypass enabling boats to get around Denver's so-called Niagara Falls, an existing dam of rubble just upstream from the Cherry Creek confluence.

This subcommittee estimated that their segment would attract 31,000 visits a year by hikers and bikers, and another 72,000 visits of boaters.

The fourth and last segment proceeding downstream started about a mile and a half beyond the confluence area and ended at the northern city line. Its subcom-

Artist's rendition of confluence area, including plaza, pedestrian foot bridge, boat chute, amphitheater and trail connection to Cherry Creek.

mittee, Marjorie Hornbein and John Zapien, presented plans for about a mile and a half of concrete trail, which was to become the last stretch of the full, city-wide trail. Because of heavy industrial developments through which this riverside stretch would proceed, the design specified extensive reshaping of the landscape along the way. Also, considerable attention was to be paid to greening up this north segment with native shrubs, trees and grasses.

The Hornbein-Zapien plan also included a park of approximately seven acres near the Denver Coliseum. It was to be what Marjorie described at one of our meetings as the "prettiest park in Denver," even though it was near that "public monstrosity," the Coliseum. The park, which would have a shelter and picnic facility with a seventy-foot boardwalk leading down to the river, would be accessible to the Globeville area for various kinds of active and passive recreation. Furthermore it would be connected by a concrete trail to the Coliseum's extensive parking facilities.

In addition to the trails and park, the north segment design had two boating facilities. A boat launch would be built at the upstream end of the area, and a landing would be constructed at the downsteam end near the city line.

The four design plans approved at our November 12 meeting had a number of features in common. They specified, for example, that all concrete would be of a warm tone to blend with the natural Colorado environment. In all projects, provi-

sions would be made for the handicapped to use improvements. Wherever possible broken concrete rubble and rip-rap would be replaced by natural Colorado stone. Extensive care would be taken to preserve existing vegetation. New plant ings were to be left to volunteer help as much as possible.

I knew this four-part package which was approved for bids at that November meeting would be a large financial mouthful at best, but I was still very optimistic that we would receive the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation grant, easily giving us enough funds for the whole job. We still had most of the $1.9 million with which Mayor McNichols had launched our Committee. To date we had spent only $220,000 for a headquarters, an old paint warehouse and two acre site near the Platte not far upstream from the Cherry Creek confluence. Still, I was certain we would need the additional BOR funds to take on what we had approved to go to bids.

My optimism, however, took a rapid dip in the next few days. On November 20 I learned from the *Rocky Mountain Journal* that our application for $850,000 had been placed "in limbo," according to Florine Burke, the Colorado project officer at the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. We had fallen victim to criticism from a Denver citizens' group, the Platte Area Reclamation Committee (PARC).

The history of PARC could be traced back to the expensive river plan developed after the 1965 flood. As revealed earlier, a citizens' committee was formed to bring the grandiose plan, estimated at $630 million, to life. The work of that organization, the South Platte Area Redevelopment Committee (SPARC), never got off the ground and the group had sort of faded out by the early 1970's.

In 1973 several of SPARC's environmentally oriented members joined Ted Bendelow and another legislator, Representative Dennis Gallagher, to form PARC. Bendelow became chairman. The group's aim was to commit Denver to a huge park in the South Platte central valley near the center of the city.

When our Platte River Development Committee was formed by Mayor McNichols some members of PARC saw it as a political ploy to remove the heat they were putting on the city. After Bendelow came with us, he resigned from his chairmanship in PARC and soon quit the organization.

As our Committee developed, the conflicting philosophies of development became evident. While we were for dealing with the whole ten-mile stretch of the river, a segment at a time, PARC pushed for the big central-valley park idea. It would have been costly and difficult to pull off. One of the biggest nuts to crack would have been removal of Denver's vast railroad yards from the center of the city to somewhere else.

Three members of the PARC group, including its new chairman Dwight Filley, came to our meeting of September 10, 1974, and told of their opposition to our approach. They stated their desire to see a 600-acre park in the central valley, and criticized us for "a piece-meal job, not well planned, without sufficient flood plain and other background studies."

"I agree that we're doing a piece-meal job on the river," said John Zapien in

reply. "But that's the way we'll get something done. PARC's plan is also piecemeal, but I'm not so sure it'll get done."

Phil Milstein countered the PARC criticism, saying, "Our Committee is not charged with planning the central valley. The city's authorized Planning Office is charged with that in its planning for the City and County of Denver. This Committee's charge is to look to the river. We're not to get beyond the river, as PARC would have us do."

Someone asked one of the PARC representatives, Jack Anthony, what the large central valley park would cost. He estimated $54 million.

It became clear that PARC's leaders feared our work would be the rug puller for their proposal. Their opposition hardened. When they heard of our grant application to the BOR, they went after it, accusing us of taking a much too narrow view of the Platte Valley.

"I am afraid for the status of our BOR grant," I said at our November 26 meeting. "PARC's gotten the federal people nervous, and it has stalled the application."

Dan Trujillo made a motion that we ask Dwight Filley, PARC's chairman, to withdraw from BOR PARC's letter of criticism, and that we invite Filley's organization to come to us and explain their concept for the valley more carefully. The motion passed.

At our next meeting, December 17, the PARC Chairman gave us an elaborate slide presentation. Filley stuck to his organization's thesis that the city should be giving priority to the park development. He believed that $50 million could be found from state and federal sources to buy the land. That action, he said, would get the project started.

"Why, Mr. Filley, does PARC object to our application to BOR for $850,000?" I asked him point blank.

"We object to proceeding with your planned four projects," he replied, "before there is a comprehensive plan for the central valley."

"Is there any chance of your withdrawing your objections to the BOR?" I asked.

"Not until there's a city commitment to a larger project," he answered. "We're not willing to withdraw our objections at this time."

Nine enviromental organizations lead by Dean Hall, President of the Colorado White Water Association, tried to get PARC to recall its letter to the BOR, but failed. By the first of the year, 1975, PARC had decided to force the city into a referendum of its plan. We then were told the citizen group would withdraw its objections from the BOR if we would publicly support them on the referendum. At best that couldn't be decided until our next meeting, January 14.

Meanwhile, the bidding process on our plans was completed, and Ted Bendelow and I were shown the figures which we discussed and brought to the meeting of the 14th. The city had estimated our four projects at $1.3 million. The lowest bids added up to $2.0 million!

I can now see how the Committee members who spent hours and hours developing the four projects might have dropped dead at that meeting. The projects had come in at almost double the expected cost, and our BOR grant, if it could be revived, was well in the future. It was a discouraging development. Returning to the drawing board would have set us back a year in having something to show on the river. In that time we could have been out of business, or as I kept saying, "Blown out of the water!"

Ted and I had come to the meeting with an alternative. We recommended rejecting the bids for the south and south-central segments and keeping those for the north-central and north sections. This much we could afford, BOR grant or not, and we would have something on the river by spring or summer. We would do the two southern sections later.

Our idea was put to a motion, and it passed. The vote was one of the most important the Platte River Development Committee would take.

One of numerous events planned for "showing off" the Greenway. I presented Mayor McNichols a Platte River T-shirt after Phil Milstein, to the left of Mayor, introduced Colorado poet Thomas Hornsby Ferril, to my right, who dedicated his poem "Two Rivers" to the Greenway. Bronze plaque behind Mr. Ferril contains his poem. The brick plaza, "Niagara Falls," trail, amphitheater and pedestrian footbridge are in background.

VI

COME SEE WHAT WE'VE DONE

Motorists and pedestrians looking down on the South Platte from Denver's 15th Street Bridge on the cold, bright morning of February 3, 1975, were surprised to see a small group of well dressed men and women gathered in the rubble on the riverside in front of the Forney Transportation Museum. Their assemblage was obviously newsworthy because television cameramen were stumbling around the broken concrete to record the event. The members of this group included the Platte River Development Committee, its staff and engineers, members of the city council and functionaries from various of Denver's public agencies. They were grouped around Mayor William McNichols who held a shovel ready for a traditional ground-breaking ceremony—a misnomer in this case because the potential for breaking the shovel was as great as breaking the earth buried in concrete and iron debris. But the Mayor scraped up a symbolic portion of frozen ground over which he said a few words about our Committee's fast, vigorous move to renovate the Platte. The frost from his breath, as he delivered the last word of his message, was still in the air when the actual work commenced.

Fred Watts, the low bidding contractor, was on hand for the ceremony, and nearby were several pieces of his heavy equipment waiting for us to get out of their way. As the ceremonial group stepped back, a bulldozer, a front end loader, a dragline and some trucks moved in. Watts had agreed to build our new plaza in 120 days, and he wasted no time getting to it. At the moment we were even hoping to have a public celebration on the completed site for Memorial Day, or at least the Fourth of July.

The construction at the confluence would clearly become our big public foot in

the door for the clean up of the South Platte, and in the winter and spring of 1975 we all pushed hard to get that symbolic foot in place. At the same time the effort had a positive psychological impact on ourselves and everyone associated with us. We were now truly on the way, and I could feel momentum building in our own ranks.

The week after the ground-breaking we held the first of our "spartan" meetings. Not only was it convened at 8:30 a.m., instead of late afternoon, it was held in the old paint warehouse that we had purchased, but had yet to fix up for a headquarters.

"My sense of how we feel," I said, "is that the Plaza construction is really our number-one priority and that we go all out to get it done by June. Meanwhile the north side project will be number-two priority, but we start pushing on it immediately. Then as soon as our financial situation allows we'll go back for new bids on the south and south-central sections. That will add up to the first phase of our job."

Rick Lamoreaux came to the meeting prepared to talk about phase two of our project. He had outlined it in order to file a new funding application with the BOR, which we continued to pursue despite PARC's opposition. In the outline Rick talked about preliminary designs for segments inter-connecting the four we had already selected for development. If these links were included we would then be dealing with a corrider through Denver some 9.8 miles long.

This same meeting was also important because we first discussed soliciting private funds for the river's renovation. In attendance that morning were a number of a growing corp of volunteers whose work would make a major contribution to our efforts. First we heard from Courtney Taylor, a talented young woman who had been assigned to us by a federally funded organization of volunteers called Action. She and a young man from Action, Bob Dwight, were augmenting our small staff. And with them was Liz Bravo, a University of Colorado intern, who had also come to work for us without cost to the Committee. Courtney showed us the outline of a proposed mailing brochure the volunteers had worked up to raise private money for the river from organizations and individuals. We asked that they complete the publication for final approval at the next meeting.

Pat McClearn

We then heard from another volunteer, Pat McClearn, who would eventually become one of our Committee members. Pat, representing another citizens group, Park People, told us the organization had established a tax-free fund to which people could contribute toward plantings along the river.

Despite the initial setback on the BOR money, I had returned to my state of optimism that we could fund the river development with a great deal of private matching money. I had learned, for example, that we could probably qualify for

financial help from the Colorado Centennial-Bicentennial Commission. After all, we were restoring the very spot on which Denver had been founded a hundred years earlier.

"In the next five years," I ventured, "we'll need a good $10 million for what we're talking about. Of that sum, I'd say $5 million can come from public money based on our matching it, dollar-for-dollar, from other sources."

My optimism was being fired up by what I saw on the river itself during my noontime tours. By the end of March, 1975, nearly $200,000 worth of the construction at the confluence was completed. A great deal of the concrete was in place. Some of the pilings for the new plaza had been set, and the perimeter wall was on the verge of completion. The foundation and footings for the foot bridge that would connect the plaza with the amphitheater were completed. The beginnings of the trail that would eventually stretch all through the city had been poured, and the grading was complete for more of the initial foot and bike path. And the boat chute down over the old dam by the confluence had been started.

At our March 31 meeting we heard from Bill Wells of the city budget office who was organizing major volunteer work using the National Guard. He had been rounding up heavy equipment and operators for three weekends in April. They would start moving the rubble that would serve as fill for our hillside amphitheater. Bill reported that he was organizing other volunteer units for May to continue the job.

With this kind of progress our Committee members were as optimistic as I, and they decided we should definitely plan an opening celebration to herald our first big renovation project on the South Platte. They voted to hold the grand affair on the completed site of the plaza. We would have a day-long event with entertainment, a concert, fireworks, kayak races and ethnic dances. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of Denverites would be attracted to the little nothing of a river to celebrate the start of returning the waterway to the people. I assigned Dana Crawford and Phil Milstein to oversee the affair, and they, our staff and volunteers went to work on the event.

While Fred Watts' construction company worked full force to complete his plaza-area construction on time, the National Guard became only one component of an amazing volunteer effort that developed in the spring of 1975. On April 26 over a thousand people, lead by Bev Fleming of Keep Colorado Beautiful, Inc., showed up in response to a call for volunteers to help clean up the Platte. The Sigman Meat Company of Denver did its share, and then some, by providing lunches for the volunteer army. From this turnout came a list of people who were willing to continue their volunteer labors on the river. In May they were to plant some 1,500 willow sprouts provided by the Colorado Forest Service. By our meeting at the end of May the greening up of the confluence area was progressing, with the National Guard and other volunteers working every weekend. But at this meeting Bill Wells had to report that the Guard was now headed for summer duty and had been unable to complete enough of the amphitheater to have it ready for

the Fourth of July celebration. It was a setback because the plaza construction seemed in fact to be on the way to completion. Two spans of the pedestrian bridge were in place, and the boat chute was coming along, so that engineer Bill Taggart felt the plaza, bridge and chute would be done by the Fourth. We talked of postponing the celebration, but the Committee's concensus was to proceed.

Meanwhile new bids had come in on the north segment of river development assigned to Marjorie Hornbein and John Zapien. The low bid, $519,000, came from a relatively new minority construction company, Colorado Curb and Gutter. We were happy to contract with this firm. It would help them get established in the city.

In mid-June I think we realized that in our effort to get something in place in the river as fast as possible our optimistic eyes had failed to count how few days there are in a springtime and how much we were expecting of the contractors and volunteers. We were not going to be ready to celebrate on the Fourth, and we wisely moved the event to Labor Day. We all caught our breath and went back to work on a more realistic schedule.

That summer construction on the north-central segment was complete enough that the Labor Day Celebration became a firm commitment, and all of our energies were concentrated on the festivities. In this period I learned how important a celebration could be to upgrading the river, and this one for Labor Day, 1975, became the first of many such events. A celebration, I found, was great for sharpening everyone up, focusing on a deadline, which was the day of the event, and getting public attention for what we were doing. As with the first celebration of 1975, work on the river made giant steps forward for each of the ensuing affairs, and the Platte became better and better known as being what we call a "people place."

The Labor Day festivities began at 1:00 p.m. with Mayor McNichols dedicating our new plaza. A half hour later entertainment began on the plaza and continued all afternoon. Performers included the Rocky Mountain Repertory Theater and three bands entitled The Denver Grass, The Free Dirt Band, and the African Band. And finally there was a group of Mexican dancers.

At 2:00 p.m. an "old-fashioned bicycle parade" left Larimer Square and proceeded down Fifteenth Street to the new plaza. The non-motorized vehicles of various descriptions all carried costumed riders. An hour later a boat float parade was scheduled with entries by both individuals and businesses. Fantastic floats were launched which had taken days to build. Historic Denver, Wright-McLaughlin Engineers and a Boy Scout troop (involving two of my sons, Jay and Jim) provided some of the entries in the crowd-pleasing river parade.

The event at 4:00 p.m. had turned into something of a political media event for me, and it nearly led to the drowning—or at least dunking—of the chairman of the Platte River Development Committee. Someone decided it would be great fun with a news twist to match me—I was then head of the Colorado Legislature's Joint Budget Committee—with Governor Richard Lamm, in the kayak compo-

Mayor McNichols cuts the ribbon from the new river wall as I cut it from a rubber raft on Labor Day 1975.

nent of a bike-boat-and-on-foot relay race. The Governor, a Democrat, and I, a Republican, were seen by the press as adversaries, with him presenting budgets and me cutting them. There was also talk of my running against Dick Lamm in the next gubernatorial election. For me to race him in politics was one thing, but to pair us up in kayaks was another. While I had a fighting chance in the hustings, there was no contest on the river. The Governor was an expert kayaker. I couldn't recall ever having sat in one of the tipsy vessels.

But following our new policy of doing whatever was necessary to bring people down to the river, I accepted the challenge. To lose the race as badly as I was certain to do, it would bring the Governor and a lot of extra spectators to the river.

"What am I going to do about the race?" I asked Dean Hall ten days before the event. Dean was an expert kayaker. "I don't know how to kayak—and in that kind of white water, I *really* don't know how—No Way!"

"Well, I guess you better start training immediately!" he responded.

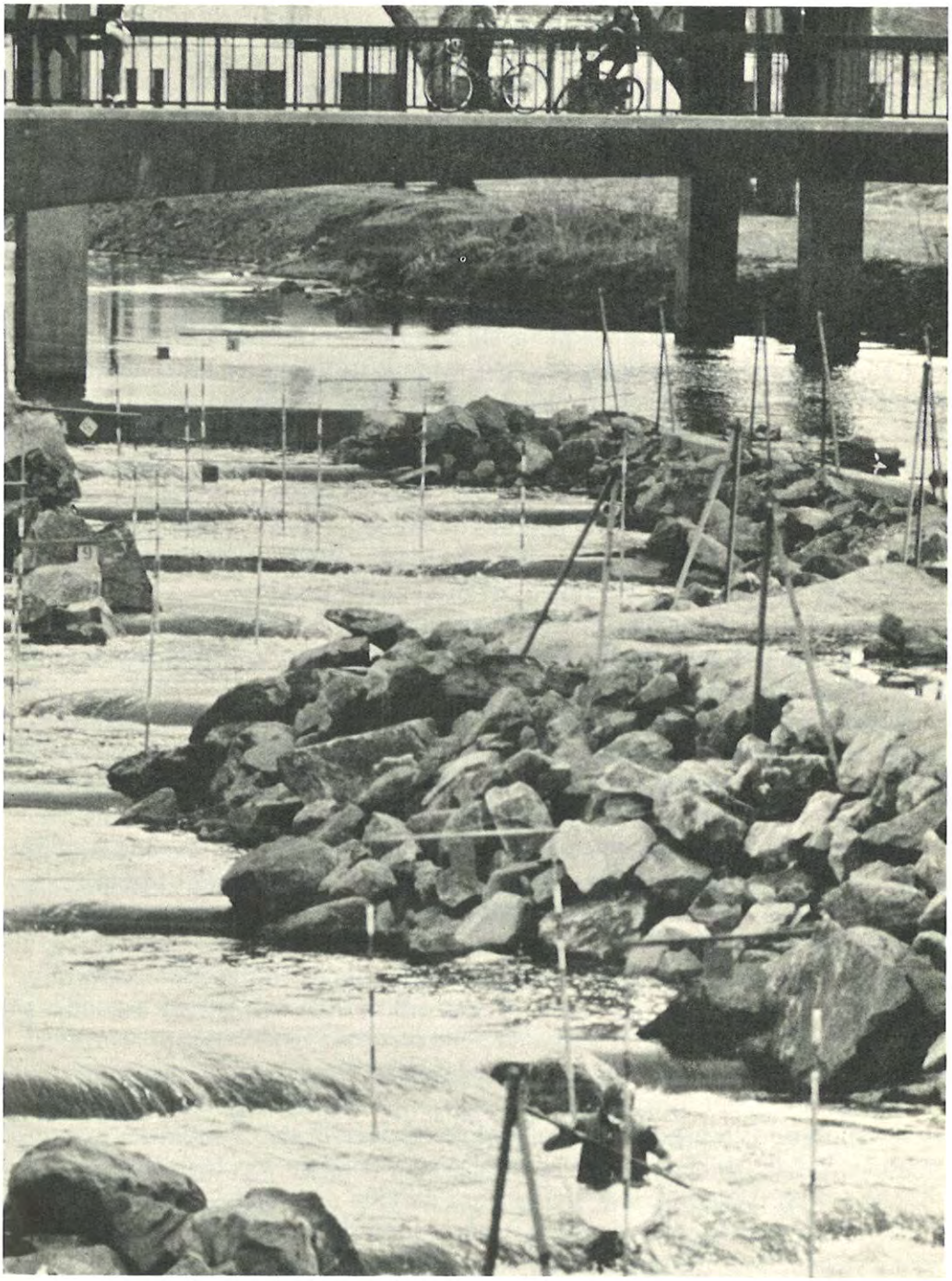
"With whom?"

"I'll do my best to teach you. At least I may be able to keep you from getting dumped."

For more than a week Dean had me out on the river daily, and by Labor Day I had the rudimentaries of the kayak partially in my head. I was still no match for Dick Lamm, but I now had a little hope for getting down through the treacherous stretch of white water by the 16th Street Viaduct.

These experts are maneuvering *upstream* in one of the best urban white water courses in America.

Just keeping right side up made me happy.



The Confluence boat chute has a series of ten drop structures that provide the exciting white water experience for amateur tubers and rafters and expert kayakers like the one shown in the ninth drop structure.

The Governor and I were two of fifty entrants in the race, and at the scheduled hour we were lined up in the jam of bumping kayaks at the confluence. The entire lot of racers was divided into teams. The gubernatorial team included Ted Bendelow and Representative Douglas R. Wayland. They called themselves "Team Geritol." My two teammates from the JBC were Representative Morgan Smith and Senator Paul Sandoval. But the media, watching the wiggling mass of boats ignored the teams and tried to concentrate on the Governor and me.

Bang! The starting gun! And I found myself practically alone in front of the cheering crowds on the shores. The great majority of boaters, including the Governor, disappeared downstream as I was trying to point my kayak in that direction. Finally, I got started and using every bit of Dean Hall's training, flopped and bounced down the Platte. As I made it to the white water by the 16th Street Viaduct I was thrilled. I wasn't quite the last boat in the race. I could see from around my helmet that someone was behind me.

But then came the rough water, and it threw me all over the river. Nothing Dean ever said meant anything. I simply prayed to remain upright. In one gyration of the boat, I somehow caught a glimpse of my wife, Penny, our sons and our neighbors on the riverbank. They were cheering. "What for?" I wondered as a twist of the kayak nearly unscrewed my head at the neck.

In any event, I miraculously arrived at the finish line right side up. Someone told me I was 48th, just barely ahead of two ladies who also lacked kayaking experience.

"How'd the Governor do?" I asked, but no one was sure. He'd arrived well ahead of me in the main crush of boaters. Later I found a *Denver Post* account headlined, "Lamm Team Paddles, Bikes, Walks Over JBC Also-Rans." After explaining how that happened the last paragraph said:

"But what about Lamm and Shoemaker? 'We didn't bother to time the also-rans,' a race official said."

At the end of that Labor Day—regardless of who won the race—the South Platte River was off to a new and hopeful start in its history.

VII

THE BLOSSOMING AUTHORITY

By the first of May, 1976, the Platte River Development Committee, two years old on the 14th of June, was doing very well in remaking Denver's all but forgotten waterway. The river that had been ignored for so long had in a short time gained in public prominence, and those who cared about the watercourse were rapidly growing in numbers.

On May 5 of that spring, a headline in the *Rocky Mountain News* complained: "Billboard Rising at Platte Beauty Site." Above the confluence, where we had worked hard to impress Denver that the disastrous Platte could be revived as a beautiful part of the city, an advertising firm was building a 60-foot-high billboard. The *News* quoted our volunteer staffer, Courtney Taylor, as saying,

"So now you'll sit on the plaza or down on the river bank and there'll be this big billboard staring you right in the face."

Courtney, the rest of our staff and our Committee members were incensed over the rising structure. The impact of our work at the confluence to date had led the area's neighbors to upgrade their properties in keeping with the new look on the river. For example, Public Service of Colorado had changed its powerline plans because a proposed new line would have been out of keeping with the river's new look. The company had then built an expensive new architectural wall screen to hide one of its unattractive substations from the confluence area.

Now the large billboard was obviously a tilt in the opposite direction, toward, not away from visual pollution. On May 6 a *Rocky Mountain News* editorial pointed out the disparity, saying, "It would be a terrible and costly joke on the Platte River Development Committee and others who have labored so hard to

clean the river's water and banks only to have the adjacent skyline polluted with towering billboards."

The editorial said, "We would have hoped that the National Advertising Company would have had the esthetic sensitivity and common courtesy not to build such a sign within a block of the community park."

Clearly the advertisers had picked a bad spot for their latest signboard. The initial advertising of itself was certainly counterproductive, for it prompted a chorus, and even a demonstration, against its erection. What a change had occurred in twenty-four months, from when the river valley had been characterized as a dumping place! Now an honest advertiser learned that the river was not to be blemished by so much as a billboard. One week after it started construction, National Advertising graciously took down its structure. I wrote the company a letter of thanks as I thought to myself that the billboard incident illustrated how our Committee had acquired a unique mantle of authority that was unanticipated. It was now serving us and the river in a number of important ways.

From our inception as a citizens' Committee our members and supporters worried about whether or not we had sufficient authority for our assignment. What rights did we have to the water, to clean it and to use it? What rights did we have on the land, to clean it and to plant and build upon it? These were fundamental questions for improving the South Platte in Denver, as they would be for most any river anywhere.

The answers were not to be found in the lawbooks. They sort of evolved along with the Platte Committee. The fact that no specific authority had been conferred to us turned out to our advantage rather than disadvantage. Since no one had formulated our authority we moved as if we had all the authority we needed. With no restrictions we assumed we could do whatever was necessary. If someone defiled the river we simply moved to stop him. Ted Bendelow said we were working under "Shoemaker's Law," in which no authority was interpreted as all authority. I think the three best examples of this principle were water pollution, water rights, and property rights.

When the Platte River Development Committee was established, our state and national laws contained the legal wherewithal to clean up the nation's serious water pollution in relatively short order, the Platte included. All that was needed in most cases was someone to make use of the laws, essentially to identify sources of pollution and see that they were stopped, by legal means if necessary.

At the top of the heap was the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972, a most ambitious piece of legislation designed to attain "zero discharge" of water pollutants and thus the goal of clean water across America by 1983. In addition to this federal legislation, state pollution laws administered by the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission were as stringent as the Amendments of 1972 administered by the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). And finally, Denver, both as a city and county and as an incorporated community in the State of Colorado, had its own legal teeth for cleaning up the

public waters. City law is administered by the Denver Division of Environmental Health and is by far the best available legal means for cleaning up the city's public waters.

But the law be damned, the South Platte, like hundreds of other American rivers, remained dirty. The stumbling block had been recognized by the framers of the Federal Amendments of 1972, which were passed after the most comprehensive hearings on water pollution imaginable. From it all the Congress recognized that the law could only work if the administrator (EPA) could cultivate public participation right down at the water's edge. Indeed, language supporting this idea was written into the law. If, in fact, there was to be clean water in America the goal would be attained largely because citizens close to the nation's lakes and streams saw to it that the stringent measures provided by the lawmakers were invoked.

The clean water goal still remains elusive because many lakes and streams have not found their friends, people who recognize that they have the authority to act. But after 1974 the South Platte in Denver did find its invokers of the laws in our citizens' Committee. Oddly enough the great body of available law was hardly needed at all. It turned out that the real need was the presence of people who cared enough about water quality to assume the authority to act against polluting the river. Once that happened a great many successful anti-pollution measures were taken without legal persuasion.

From the day our newly formed Committee and its advisors walked the river, the question of clean water moved to the forefront of our effort. It was self evident that no one would care to boat on, fish in, picnic beside, or bike or hike the length of a river that stinks. And on that day of the river walk Committee members, and in particular Ted Bendelow, began asking why the Platte hadn't been cleaned up. As our new staff and I subsequently looked for the answer it became clear that no one had pressed hard enough for that cleanup to happen. I appointed Ted to carry this ball and he moved with purpose and alacrity.

When he started looking for the pressure points, he found them quite easily. He began with the Denver Department of Health and Hospitals Environmental Health Division, which was supposed to deal with local water pollution. Tom Peabody was assigned to address the questions that we asked, and he came to the Committee with obvious enthusiasm for having found in us and particularly Ted, an effective ally. Tom, in a presentation to us on October 8, 1974, pointed out that his agency had a system for water pollution control, but it badly needed help. He brought a map of Denver on which were indicated some five hundred discharges into the South Platte around the city. The agency could sample only about two hundred of them on a regular basis. Tom knew there were a lot of violations that his division simply couldn't monitor for lack of funds and personnel. Many illegal discharges could be easily recognized, he said, and he called upon us to report on those that we were certain to encounter.

At this time we also learned that in 1973 the State Water Quality Commission,

responding to federal EPA regulations, had set minimum water quality standards for the Denver stretch of the South Platte. The river had been given a "B" classification. This meant that when the standard was met, the water could be used for "secondary contact recreation," fishing and boating, but not swimming. The upper southern quarter of the Platte in Denver had already met the standard, but the northern three quarters had not. (The Platte flows south to north in Denver.)

We not only decided that the Platte's quality should be better than that. We hoped to upgrade the water to where it could qualify for the EPA's category "A," allowing "body contact recreation" (swimming). We felt we should attain the "A" level if our program to bring people back to the Platte was to succeed in full.

But our goal was not to be easily achieved. We made progress and the quality of the Platte improved a great deal but the attaining of top quality water turned out to be a long difficult task. Our most serious frustrations often resulted from pollution caused by city agencies that should have been working the hardest to stop it.

Shortly after our first meeting with Tom Peabody, we were able to raise $86,000 in state funds for an expanded monitoring program of the South Platte. With this financial assistance and our continued support, Tom and his assistant, Larry Durlin, began a fabulous job of testing the Platte's water quality on a regular basis and running down sources of pollution. It became a remarkable detective job of finding one polluter after another and asking each to cease his water-damaging activity. Most did so upon request, but the few who didn't were forced to desist by official cease orders.

One report for an eighteen month period contained three dozen private water pollution sources that had been found and stopped. Only eight required official cease orders. The sources showed a great many automobile and truck washing activities with the residue discharged into the city's storm sewers. The polluters also included the overflowing grease trap of a Chinese restaurant, numerous waste runoffs from construction jobs, a battery cleaning operation, a boiler cleaning service, a bakery and a paint company all releasing potent wastes to storm sewers. Our pollution detective work even led us to three homes on one street where the plumbing was discharging raw wastewater into the nearby storm sewer instead of the municipal sanitary sewage system connecting to the city's treatment plant. When these polluters became former polluters, we expressed our appreciation by a letter which I co-signed with Dr. Douglas McCluskie, Director of Environmental Health Service at the Denver Department of Health and Hospitals, and Frank Rozich, Director of the Water Quality Control Division of the Colorado Health Department.

But as we searched the city for one relatively small polluter after another our effort was occasionally nullified by the biggest polluters of all, the City and County of Denver itself, and upstream neighboring communities. For example, in one two-week period Denver's Wastewater Management Division pumped some two million gallons of raw sewage into Cherry Creek at its confluence with the South Platte. Meanwhile these city officials broke the law by failing to notify the Col-

The discharge by local treatment plants, such as this by Lakewood Sanitation District at 9th Avenue, requires constant monitoring and testing to upgrade water quality.

orado Health Department. The problem was a blocked sewerage line. The city had a choice of piping the blocked wastewater through a temporary surface line to another part of the sewerage system or letting it go directly into the river. The latter alternative was chosen because the former meant interfering with traffic in a downtown alley and thus inconveniencing some businesses. Mayor McNichols issued a stern order that no such violation of the river should be allowed in the future. But he had said this before, only to find that gaining respect for Denver's main water resource by mayoral order was slow going. Just eight months earlier the city Water Department had evidently been responsible for a major fish kill on the South Platte. Only hours prior to the deaths of thousands of fish on one stretch of the river, Water Department employees in the same area had flushed out a huge conduit with heavily chlorinated water and released it to the river as reported in the *Rocky Mountain News* on December 6, 1978.

While Platte water quality was at the mercy of Denver's bad habits, it could also suffer from the sewage treatment practices of at least three nearby communities. On the South Platte, upstream from Denver, the incorporated towns of Littleton and Englewood and the Lakewood Sanitation District were treating their sewage to the secondary level and discharging to the river. These secondary treatment plants, which are designed to partially clean wastewater, at the same time reducing but not eliminating disease organisms, were the primary reason for our river

receiving a "B" instead of an "A" rating for minimum water quality. While the secondary effluent, well diluted in the natural flow of the river, would allow "secondary contact" recreation under EPA regulations, it would not permit "body contact" recreation.

But even so, the best secondary treatment comes with a large size "if." Only *if* treatment systems are properly maintained and operated will they work as designed. And this "if" became part of our struggle with water quality: making sure our neighbors are properly treating their wastewater. Therefore our detective work on polluters had to reach out to upstream neighboring communities to make certain they were living up to state and federal water pollution control laws. Downstream, Denver's Metropolitan Sewage Disposal Plant presents the same challenge to the people of Adams County where that plant discharges its effluent.

Despite such setbacks, our intensified monitoring program and steady diminution of pollution sources quickly brought up and held the Platte at its designated level of quality, allowing boating and fishing within a year from when our Committee began work. The best sign of better water was the return of fish that had been missing from the river. The most common specie for the Platte was channel catfish whose numbers increased with the upgraded water. Meanwhile, other species that hadn't been seen for uncountable years of dirty water reappeared. They included carp, bass and trout. We were most excited when a fisherman casting his line into the area of the confluence came up with a catch of trout. We also became aware of Vietnamese families from neighborhoods around Weir Gulch and the Platte making carp and catfish caught in the river one of their staple foods.

But as safe as such fare may be, as long as we hold the Platte to its "B" classification, moving the river up to the swimmable "A" became a leap more difficult than some of us originally assumed. The stumbling block remained the upstream discharges of secondary effluent from the neighboring wastewater treatment plants. As we improved and developed the Platte, attracting more and more people to the river, we considered numerous alternatives to overcome the problem and make the stream legally swimmable (although hundreds of swimmers make use of the River each summer at the confluence).

The first, most discussed alternative would be extremely expensive, but effective. The towns involved would have to improve their wastewater treatment to the "tertiary" level. This form of "advanced wastewater treatment" might be done with an intricate mechanical-biological-chemical system, such as the one protecting Lake Tahoe, or it might use a "land treatment" system where secondary effluent is percolated down through soil on plants on croplands, such as the successful system at Muskegon County, Michigan. Either way the treated municipal wastewater would be completely cleaned up before discharge to the Platte. But the installation of either kind of system would require immense political and financial efforts that have yet to occur on the Platte.

While tertiary treatment would probably be our best alternative, other efforts

The river at Confluence Park is a favorite swimming place during the months of July and August, some two miles downstream from the nearest discharge.

were considered. One would be to pipe all the upstream secondary effluent around Denver, discharging it downstream of the city, thus relieving our stretch of the Platte of sewage effluent altogether. Or it was suggested that we might develop some special swimming ponds along the river by borrowing river water, cleaning it completely and using it for the ponds. Another idea was to pipe large quantities of clean water into Denver from the river above the sewage treatment plants. The imported water would then be used to dilute river water at selected points to make it safe for swimming. But as Doug McCluskie of Denver's Environmental Health Division said, these would be "heroic efforts" that might be possible, but not plausible. The difficulties remained, and at this writing, the swimming goal has not been reached, but on the other hand, it has not been abandoned by any means.

Water pollution was an involved, complex problem, but I found another that was equally baffling, that of "water rights." I had reason to know this was a complicated, perplexing subject, for my law partner, State Senator Robert Wham, was an expert in water rights. As I addressed the problems for the Platte Committee's purposes, Bob helped tremendously.

The Constitution of Colorado says that the waters of the state belong to the people; however, the meaning that the framers of the document had in mind has always suffered in a swirl of controversy. In practice the ownership of water

became a property right to be owned chiefly by irrigators. Thus a given irrigator on the South Platte would own the right to use a certain amount of water in a given time. But unlike real property, water which is subject to a water right had to be used or be lost down the river. Colorado annually loses 304,000 acre feet of water on the South Platte to Nebraska.

The origin of the oldest water rights on the Platte may be traced back over a century with each successive owner buying his rights from a predecessor. Actually the waters of Colorado have been overappropriated; therefore, in times of low flow the fulfillment of rights can be a critical business when it comes to apportioning available water to the rightful owners. The ability to apportion the South Platte irrigation water improved when the large Chatfield flood control dam was completed upstream from Denver in the early 1970's. Subsequently, an engineer at the dam could release due amounts of water when required by various downstream irrigators holding bonafide water rights, in addition allowing a predetermined minimum flow of water to move downstream.

As the Platte River Development Committee worked out its future plans for the river, we obviously owned no water rights. However, it quickly became evident that we, in behalf of recreation for Denver's citizens, especially boaters, would at times require more water than the river would normally carry—unless extra flow could be released from Chatfield Dam. But with no water right whatsoever, we couldn't expect to call for and legally receive the supply we wanted and needed for boating. We'd be borrowing water belonging to irrigators who, if they were not ready to use the flow, would lose it downstream. This was a serious matter, especially when it came to planning celebrations with boat races, colorful floats and other water activities. I first addressed the problem as we scheduled our initial festivities on Labor Day, 1975, but that was only the start, and water rights will occupy us into the future. Here we were faced with the non sequitur of bringing the Platte back to the people who theoretically owned the water but had no rights to it.

Once again unbothered by the hamstringing that comes with official authority, we set off to find ways of providing sufficient flow in the Platte for recreation. Of course, a solution might have been to find and purchase water rights for use by the river itself—as odd as that might seem—so we could order additional flow whenever it was needed. But water rights for sale are scarce commodities and, consequently, high priced. We would be junior, junior, junior in any line to obtain our own rights, and then, we discovered, the price for sufficient water to meet our needs could cost between $3 and $5 million.

At one point in our early history, the Committee considered literally digging up our own water for the river, and Ken Wright investigated the feasibility. The idea was to drill wells somewhere upstream of Denver so we could lift ground water from the sands and gravels adjacent to the river and augment the Platte's surface flow through the city. Ken's study considered pumping 12,000 gallons a minute from the subsurface supply for two days a week during the normal periods of low

flow on the Platte. This procedure, which might have been used 12 weekends a year, would have added 27 cubic feet of water per second to whatever other flow was going down the river. At the time of the study the augmentation would have cost us $14,000 a year. This possible solution is still under consideration.

Meanwhile, other investigations led us to the owners of water rights and to the officials who released the water. I had decided that essentially we would have to work with the holders of the rights, so they were the ones to deal with first. This led me to numerous meetings with users and the ditch companies that supplied them downstream from Denver. I also met with the big right holder in the city, the Denver Water Board. In sum total these users were the people who could make the South Platte flow when we most needed it. The problem to a certain degree was a matter of timing, but as we explored the possibilities, various users found that by adjusting their patterns of use, especially for crop irrigation, they could make our river flow in the summer when we most needed it for recreation, especially on weekends and definitely when we had special water events on the river.

We found another potential source of flow augmentation when we turned to the U.S. Corps of Engineers and the Colorado State (Water) Engineer, who are responsible for actually controlling the flow of the Platte. In these officials we discovered persons who were willing to work to administer the flow of water called for by water owners in ways that would also help us.

For example, the Colorado Division Engineer, because of evaporation factors involved in administering the water, has some discretion in maintaining a minimum flow in order to actually get the right quantity of water to the first irrigator downstream from Denver.

We also discovered that water added to the engineer's supply by heavy local rains around the Chatfield reservoir gave him still more flexibility toward helping us meet our needs for river recreation.

And finally we learned the Division Engineer had a certain amount of flexibility as to when he released water down the Platte in response to calls from irrigators. He might, for instance, open his gates after midnight on a given day as opposed to 5:00 p.m., so the "slug" of extra water would be passing through Denver during the middle of the day, when recreationists could enjoy it the most.

Working at all these potentials with water users and the government controllers of the Platte we became better and better at improving the flow for our purposes, all without owning a single water right. Again, we had no authority in the matter, but as we proceeded and gained respect for the Committee and for the river, we found we had officials who would do their utmost to help us solve this complicated problem. I am sure our Committee will continue to seek an annual supply of water for boating, a completely nonconsumptive use of water. Unlike irrigation and many industrial uses where water evaporates and never returns to the stream, boating doesn't diminish the water supply.

My third example of no authority turning into full authority comes from our dealing with the matter of property rights on the South Platte. Early in the ex-

A part of railroad yards looking west across the river to Gates—Crescent Park (where the Children's Museum will be located). Mile High Stadium and McNichols Arena are in background.

istence of the Platte River Development Committee we decided we had to know who owned and controlled the land in and along the river. This question as it pertained to the channel and immediately adjacent areas was easy. The city attorney quickly gave us his opinion. The power to control improvements to the channel and its edges belonged solely to the City and County of Denver, with one major exception: the U.S. Army's Corps of Engineers held the right to make improvements on the channel for purposes of reclamation, navigation and flood control. But beyond the liquid center to our elongated province, property rights were not so clear. During the many years the river remained in disrepute the precise boundaries of who owned what had become fuzzy. But the Platte Committee with its ideas for trails, parks, pedestrian bridges and boat landings needed to know the details of ownership. If for no other reason, the donors of federal funds for this or that project refused to give until they knew the exact ownership of the sites involved.

This essential need led to a truly heroic effort by our two-man staff, Rick Lamoreaux and Bob Searns. Working in the dull, dry assessor's records for the City and County of Denver, Rick and Bob painstakingly determined the ownership of every square foot of the South Platte River Valley from city limit to city limit. They defined the official channel of the river and what was considered its embankments. In a thirty-five page compilation of owners, addresses, acreage and

frontage the staff covered every foot of the South Platte. In some cases their survey even revealed that private ownership extended out into the official channel.

The largest property owner was beyond question the railroads. In total the city's five railroads owned some four hundred acres along the river valley, including the large Rice Yards near the center of the city. For years the disposition of those yards—assuming they would eventually be moved out of town—was a matter of speculation and controversy. It remains so, but certainly the improvement of the Platte will make a favorable difference as to the kind of development likely to emerge when the fate of the railroad yard is finally settled.

However, the railroad property that most concerned the Platte River Development Committee was not the land within the huge yards, but a long strip carrying a single track down the west bank of the Platte—indeed right upon the bank for most of some six miles from 23rd Street to Ruby Hill Park. As our Committee came on stage, we entered amidst a major controversy over this west bank C&S (Colorado and Southern) trackage. It had been a utilitarian, once a week freight line servicing industries along the river. But now the B&N (Burlington and Northern), owner of C&S, proposed turning this minor line into its north-south mainline through Denver. However, the decision depended on the city agreeing to alter certain bridges to accommodate the faster, mainline trains. This in turn was pretty much the Mayor's choice.

It took no time for the Platte Committee to realize that such a change in the track usage would ruin our chances of turning the river into the Greenway that it became. A slow freight once a week we could live with, but several trains a day barrelling along the Platte at forty miles an hour, no thank you. I opposed the idea and let the Mayor know, and he sat on the bridge decision. When railroads then came to us trying to affect a change in mind, I told them they should forget the west bank mainliners. Meanwhile, we commissioned a study by an engineering firm, Stearns-Roger, which showed how the mainline could proceed down the east side of the river, even if the big Rice Yards were developed for business and housing. However, the railroads didn't give up, until one day I had lunch with John W. Terrill, President, Colorado and Southern Railway Company. When he heard the case I had to make for the river—well, he said very little at the luncheon table, but subsequently the pressure for the west bank line subsided. The slow freight remained, but C&S finally permitted us to build our Greenway trail in the few feet between the railroad track and the Platte—including places where the track was so close that we had to cantilever a deck over the water to accommodate the trail.

In a sense this kind of semi-official but undefined jurisdiction over the Denver section of the Platte made the Platte Committee the river's ombudsman. As we gained in knowledge and authority over the nothing of a water course, we acted more and more forcefully in its behalf. We used this informal power to request abusers of the stream to cease and desist. If they didn't we could turn to a powerful persuader and ally, the news media, which, acting in our behalf, would often

deliver a public scorching that frequently brought results. This kind of persuasion was most effective with city officials offending the river in conflict with their own laws. Headlines like "Denver Pumps Sewage Into Cherry Creek" or "Denver Helps Deface Its Greenway Project" could do more to stop the sewage flows and defacement than any legal action.

In fact, I soon concluded that our informal, semi-official status with unconferred, but self-acquired authority was one of our most valuable assets.

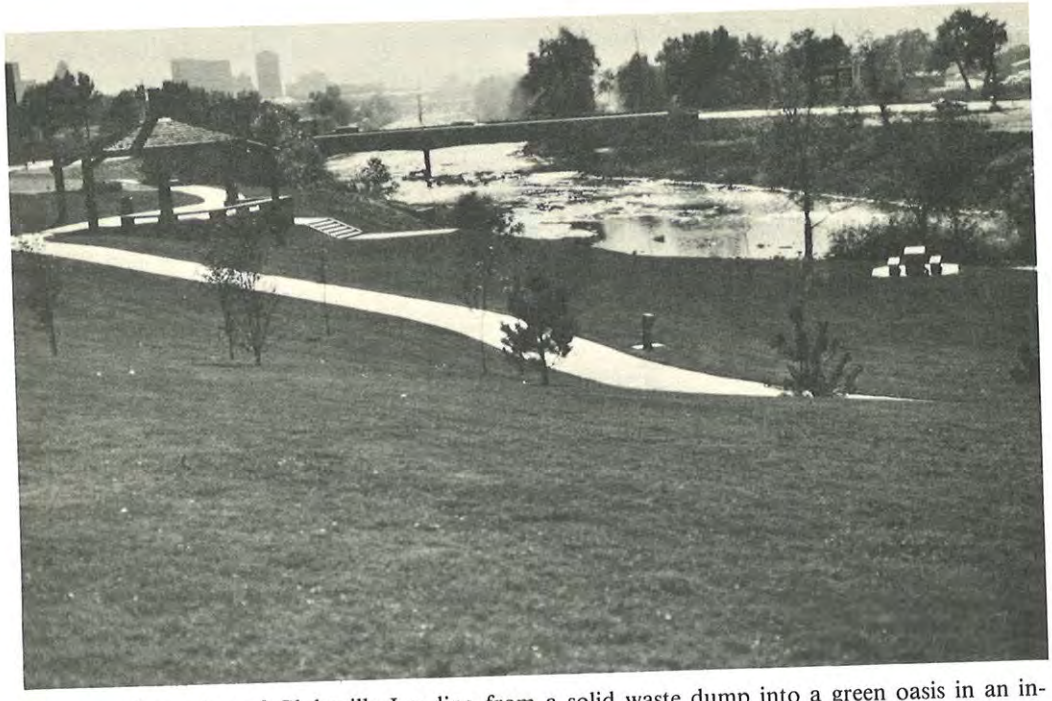
VIII

GREEN ALL THE WAY

On busy 14th Street in New York City there used to be a large sign which read "Keep 14th Street Green! Bring money!" We had no such blatant sign on the South Platte in Denver, but in 1976, the nation's bicentennial and Colorado's centennial, the primary color and message of the Platte River Development Committee were the same as in the New York message. We had labeled the former dump of a river a "Greenway" and the green of the new growth in the Platte Valley was made possible by the green of a great many people's money, plus the time and effort of a lot more citizens.

The Committee's technique of show and tell—of build, demonstrate and celebrate—was successful beyond anything I had imagined. Our downtown showplace—the new plaza, pedestrian bridge with the beginnings of a city-wide trail, and the start of an amphitheater—was proof in place that the river was not hopeless, that the Mayor's new Committee with his seed money had certainly demonstrated its capability for refurbishing the waterway for the return of Denverites to the banks and channel. With all that was in the ground, the Mayor's $1.9 million seed had definitely germinated. By 1976 it was sprouting in grand style.

Around that time the Committee realized that the river's improvement need not depend only on public funds, but that we could expect a healthy flow of private money. The first major contribution came from Jim Gooding, owner of the Pepsi Cola plant located in the river's north segment that I had assigned to Marjorie Hornbein and John Zapien. I helped Gooding work out the purchase of an acre and a half of land from the city, which he had wanted for some time yet couldn't



The transformation of Globeville Landing from a solid waste dump into a green oasis in an industrial area. Looking south towards 38th Street Bridge and downtown.

get resolved. The arrangements included his making a sizable contribution to the development of the Platte for the Globeville community. Gooding agreed to donate up to $50,000 for trees and grass for Globeville Park, across the street from his plant, to be matched against money raised for additional trees from Denver's schools.

As we began to see the possibilities for private funds, it became evident that it would be advantageous to donors if we established a non-governmental, tax-exempt foundation to receive the money and use it on the Platte. From this came the incorporation of the Greenway Foundation whose board of directors consisted of the members of the Platte River Development Committee. The new organization, under its charter, would still keep its quasi-official association with the City and County of Denver.

We had barely incorporated when the biggest private contribution we were to receive headed our way from the Gates Foundation. It was also the largest gift that organization had ever made: $780,000. The donation was contingent upon our receiving matching grants from other sources, as well as the physical removal from the river of the State Highway maintenance yards at 8th Avenue. I knew we could meet these contingencies, but there was a catch that could hold up the big grant for an unpredictable length of time. As yet, our new Foundation had not even applied for its tax exemption, which had to be obtained before Gates could make the donation. That could be bad. From what I'd heard the government

could be dreadfully slow in conferring exempt status.

Full of fears I headed for the Denver office of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, practically ready to fall to my knees and beg for fast treatment. It wasn't necessary. I presented our problem to the section chief in the tax exempt organization division who, to my extreme delight, knew about our efforts and was tremendously excited to think that the city's river was being restored to good health. I then realized he was as intent on getting our exemption as we were, and all but filled out the forms for me.

"Can you fly down to Dallas?" he asked me as we were going over the application.

"Well, yes, I guess so," I replied, puzzled. "But why?"

"That's our regional office, where the application will have to be approved. If you can personally take it down there, I'll make some phone calls so they'll be waiting. That's the way to get it through in a hurry. Kind of unusual, but I'll talk to them about what's at stake."

In no time I was on my way with the signed application. The right tax men were waiting for me at the Dallas office, and following their instructions, I walked the forms through the application process. I flew back having received the usual provisional exemption to be followed by a permanent status after a probation period. In the meantime the Gates Foundation could proceed with the grant. On leaving my plane at Stapleton Field I jumped into a phone booth and delivered the news to Charles Froelicher, Executive Director of the Gates Foundation, who had been instrumental in arranging the donation.

In these days the fund raising capability of Rick Lamoreaux was developing and it was bringing more and more green to the Greenway. Rick, on the one hand, was really proving he had talent for writing grant applications. On the other hand, we saw him apply his artistic capabilities to the advantage of fund raising. He and Jane Kent, then his wife, assembled a remarkable multi-media production entitled the "Platte River Greenway, a Creative Process." The show was made with colored slides presented on a dual production system and keyed to taped music and narration that they had composed. The film did a marvelous job of defining what we were doing on the South Platte in taking the river from its sad, neglected condition to a major amenity for the city. The picture show soon played all over town, from service clubs to such important engagements as the one before the Trustees of the Gates Foundation. Not only did it raise public enthusiasm and money for what we were doing, it also had a hypermetric effect on the pride we as a Committee were naturally taking in our growing accomplishments.

Before our organization's third birthday in 1977 the Mayor's original seed money was on the way to tripling. While Denver's City Council itself had come up with another $850,000, other money had been received or was coming from numerous state, federal and private sources. From the State of Colorado: the Conservation Trust Fund, the Centennial-Bicentennial Commission, the State Parks Board, the State Trails Committee and the Auraria Higher Education

One of the many signs which describes the Greenway Parks and then sets forth the distance to next park. Greenway logo at top left hand corner of sign.

Pre-cast concrete picnic table, bench foundations and trash receptacle at Fishback Landing.

Board. From the federal government: the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Community Development Fund, and the Highway Urban Systems Fund. We even, after much to-do, received the grant from the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, which the citizen's organization, PARC, had tried hard to put down, although the amount, $300,000, was far short of the $850,000 we had originally thought we could obtain. Incidentally, the PARC generated referendum, which might have led to a new river bureaucracy, backfired and the organization soon faded from the scene.

Contributions from the private sector were not easily measured, for they were received in a mixture of dollars, goods and personal effort. There were big dramatic donations like the one from the Gates Foundation and a $105,000 gift from the Boettcher Foundation for improvements at Overland Park. Of lesser dollars but equally impressive was the $53,000 which came unsolicited from the Fishback Foundation Trust so that we could improve land for a pocket park (Fishback Landing) in the name of the late Hermes Fishback.

Then one of downtown Denver's leading banks, The First National Bank of Denver, worked up a cooperative advertising program offering that for anyone depositing $200 or more in a new or existing account the bank would pay for a tree on the Platte in the depositor's name. The promotion produced nearly $30,000 for us.

The money contributions of individuals added up to tens of thousands of dollars, a very important, impressive amount, but just as important was the labor contribution to the South Platte by more people than possibly could be counted. The spring cleanup mentioned earlier continued to bring hundreds of volunteer workers to the river to clean the banks and keep them clean.

The Colorado Education Association working with the Denver Classroom Teachers' Association developed a remarkable school program with teachers and students helping "to recycle the Platte River." They raised money, bought trees and shrubs and went to the river and provided the labor to plant the new growth. For one small example of many, the pupils at Denver's Remington Elementary School raised $80 selling popcorn, bought two Russian olive trees, took them to Confluence Park on the river, planted them and with buckets hauled river water for the trees' initial irrigation. By mid-1976 some 2,000 children, including handicapped youngsters, from over twenty-five schools in the city had planted countless trees which will remain as monuments to their youthful enthusiasm for bringing their river back to life.

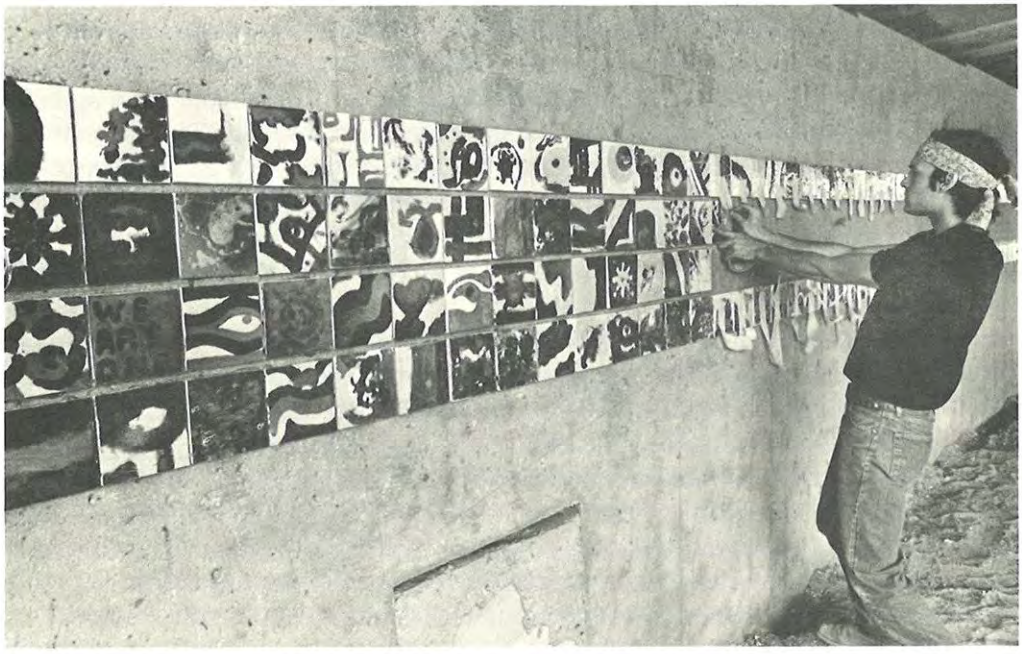
One of the most impressive contributions was the mural of hand-painted tiles on the abutment wall of the 15th Street bridge. The mural, located beside our trail where the path leads beneath the bridge, was a cooperative venture of Colorado Artists-Craftsmen, Art in Action, and The First National Bank of Denver. The tile mural was made under the direction of Barry Rose, a director of Art in Action. Many of the tiles were painted by visitors to a crafts fair at The First National Bank. Rose invited artistic contributions from anyone who cared to try his

Remington Elementary School children planting trees under direction of Wendell Keller, Parks Department supervisor, at 19th Street Bridge area. Youngster "pulls water" in time-honored fashion from the useful river for the trees.

hand at painting a tile. All sorts of visitors gave it a whirl, and Rose had a large percentage of the mural done right there in the bank. It was finished later by invitations to people of various ages who came to the Art in Action studio. When the job was done, Rose had 440 tiles. He arranged them for the best artistic effect, and then cemented the squares to a section of the bridge abutment, making a panel two feet high and fifty-five feet long. The cost was about $1,000 which was funded by the Bank and Colorado Artists-Craftsmen.

These contributions, which I frequently tick off as the "little things" for the river, piled up into an immense conglomerate of a contribution. A small memorial company offering a semi-circular slab of granite for a commemorative plaque; a man donating thousands of yards of fill for our construction; one of our design engineers from Oblinger-Smith became so excited about our effort that the firm donated thousands of dollars worth of his time; individuals buying a foot of trail; others purchasing park benches, waste receptacles and bike racks; the National City Bank providing $3,000 worth of secretarial services; an oil company giving over three hundred native trees; William Condit, a professional artist, doing watercolors of the South Platte, prints of which go to donors of $500 or more; other donors giving $1,000 to buy a water fountain or the restoration of five hundred feet of river bank; dozens of kids working out their Saturdays helping artists paint the great murals on the sides of buildings along the Platte—more and more

Denver citizens painting each of 440 ceramic tile.



The tile being cemented to the 15th Street Bridge pier by artist Barry Rose.

little things than I can remember, all in behalf of turning the Platte back to the people.

As the Greenway Foundation got underway our Platte Committee contracted for the services of Rick Lamoreaux and Bob Searns who left their city employment and went to work directly for us. Shortly thereafter they were joined by Joan Mason who had helped us on a volunteer basis, but was now ready to raise funds as a member of the Foundation staff. The three staffers were at the operational center of a rather massive effort that had mushroomed out of our relatively small demonstrative beginnings. We went to meeting after meeting to hear Rick, Bob and Joan report on the progress of the expanding Greenway project. We looked at and approved designs which then went into the city's bidding process. We evaluated the bids, tried to fit them into our tight budgets and then watched them become reality on the river.

Joan Mason

I shall always remember Marjorie Hornbein urging, "You must come see what we're doing in the north section." She was extremely proud of the green oasis that she and John Zapien were developing in one of the oldest and most industrialized parts of town. So we did a lot of walking and looking. One time we had a walking press conference on the river. All of us were taking more and more visitors to the Platte to show off what we had wrought. One day Ted Bendelow and I had the privilege of taking visiting author James Michener down to the confluence to surprise him with our work. When Michener had researched his book *Centennial* several years earlier, he had visited the confluence and been appalled by what the descendants of Denver's early settlers had done to the stream he was to describe as "a sad,bewildered, nothing of a river." With Ted and me, Michener was obviously amazed at how the downward trend of the river's condition had been reversed in such a relatively short time.

We indeed had a lot to brag about as the Greenway came together. After the confluence area (the north central segment assigned to Dana Crawford and Ted Bendelow) we pushed forward on the Hornbein-Zapien segment to the north. Then we moved south with designs, bids and contracts for the south-central segment under Hiawatha Davis and Dan Trujillo. The last segment to receive our attention was the one on the south end of the river presided over by Potts Berglund and Phil Milstein. They were both anxious to get moving, but to their credit they waited patiently, recognizing that in view of the social-economic patterns along the river, the downstream sections, which had suffered the most from the long-term degradation of the Platte, should have first call on improvements. This trademark of the Committee—support by individual members of sections of the river other than their own—was a great positive factor in the overall success of the Committee's work. Indeed, it was early 1978 before a contract was awarded to the Pascal Construction Company to build the south segment, including an

8,000-foot piece of the hiker-biker trail, a cleanup of the river with the banks regraded and landscaped, and development of two river-front parks.

With that job we were emerging from phase I of the overall Greenway project and entering phase II. Up to this point the Committee had somewhat inadvertently used an old technique of highway builders. When a highwayman couldn't get public funding for an entire stretch of new highway, he would use available funds to build pieces of the new thoroughfare, leaving gaps that still had to be traversed by the old road. Soon motorists, getting a taste of the new construction, would scream to the politicians for funds to fill the gaps, and it would happen. At the end of phase I we had segmented the Platte with intermittent lengths of the hiker-biker trail and boatable stretches of the channel. Bikers would head down a piece of trail, suddenly come to its end and have to detour off through city streets to reach the next segment—so they'd quickly become promoters of the Greenway's completion.

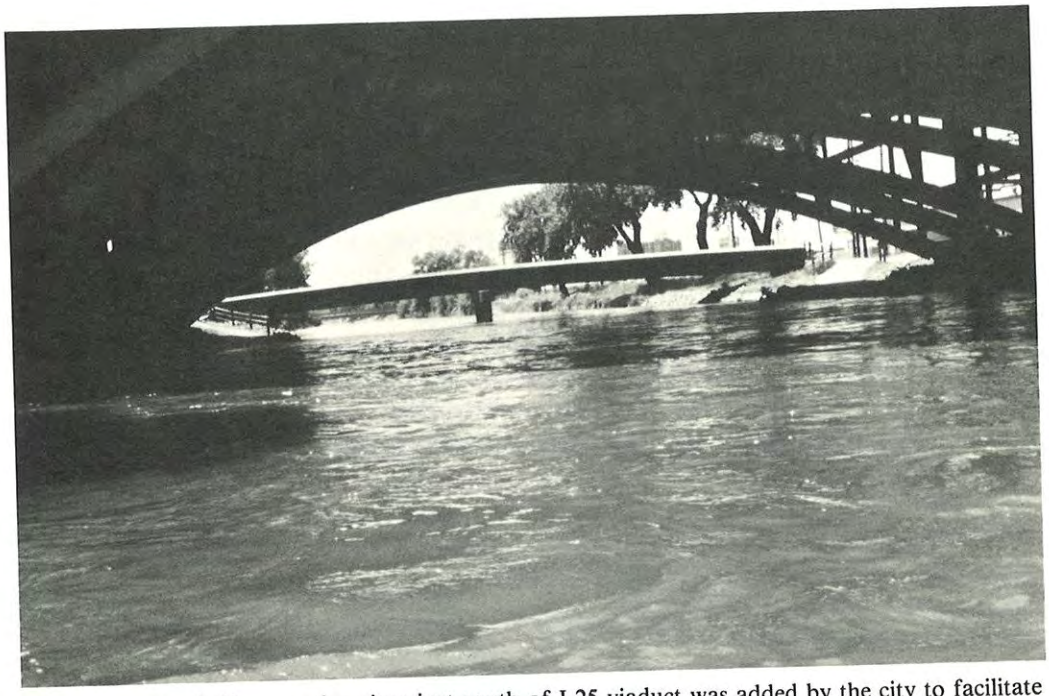
Of course, the Platte Committee was totally for that, and the public pressure was all to the good for completing our job. Meanwhile, we continued embellishing upon the finished sections of the Greenway—removing an eyesore here, landscaping a piece there, adding a bridge, building a parking facility, fitting out a park with tables, benches and toilets, lighting a stretch of trail—and so on, detail upon detail, pulling the whole thing together, not only in terms of construction, but in raising funds a few chunks at a time, large and small.

In February, 1978, Rick Lamoreaux sent a letter to "Friends of the Greenway," and excerpts from it point up how the 400-acre ten-mile project was being pieced and financed together. He wrote:

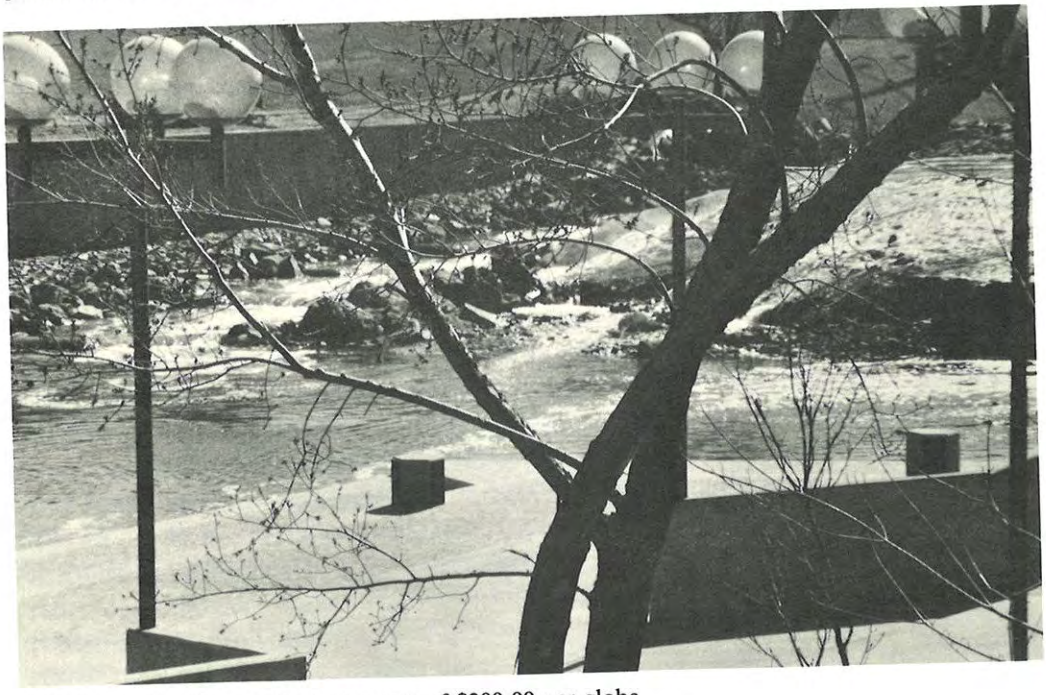
"North of Overland Lake, the concrete trail crosses the river on another arching, wooden, breakaway pedestrian bridge and meets the next project at Mississippi. This segment, running to Alameda (Avenue), is now under construction with completion expected in about two months. This project is also funded by grants from the Gates Foundation and Colorado Trails with help from EDA (the federal Economic Development Administration) under the Local Public Works program.

"A major attraction of this area . . .Habitat Park . . .a river oriented park featuring exhibits of native Colorado plant material is being created. Herb Gundell (Denver Extension Agent) is providing his professional guidance, and the National City Bank is contributing a share of their '78 advertising budget to help the planting program along. And speaking of banks, First of Denver just contributed some money to match Johnson Foundation resources in order to construct the river and neighborhood graphics system for the Greenway. Many of these signs will be placed later this spring."

"From Alameda north, there is pretty clear sailing—and . . .Only a wooden footbridge is missing from there to 8th Avenue and it is scheduled for delivery next week. Excellent cooperation from the City and State Highway Department in using Federal Urban Systems money has led to a successful project which many



Bronco wooden bridge crossing river just south of I-25 viaduct was added by the city to facilitate pedestrian access to Mile High Stadium for Bronco games. Greenway trail in place on west bank.



Lighting at Confluence Park at a cost of $200.00 per globe.

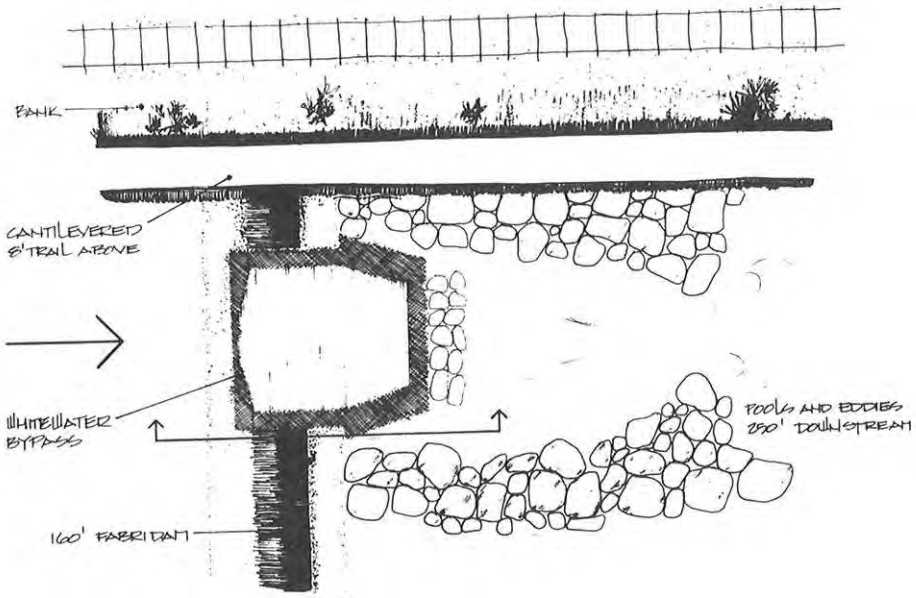
thought too difficult to accomplish—that of putting an aesthetic and functional trail alongside the Valley Highway on a near vertical slope. A new four-acre park area between 6th and 8th Avenues has also been created, again resulting from great intergovernmental cooperation in the relocation of a State Highway maintenance yard to a nearby city-owned area."

Certain parts of the project stand out when I think back on the kaleidoscope of large and small events that went into the job of pulling together the Greenway.

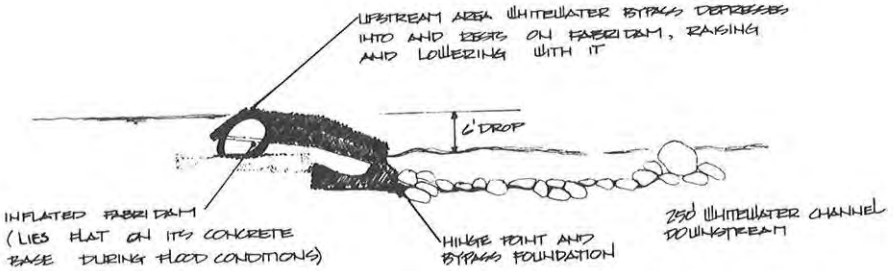
Our Committee meeting of February 24, 1975, was convened at the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Hydraulics Laboratory at the Denver Federal Center. We were there to see a marvelous model of a white water chute which we hoped to superimpose on and below the inflatable fabri-dam at the Zuni Plant of the Public Service Company. The chute was designed by the Bureau of Reclamation and Denver architect Ron Mason, who was a nationally-rated white water competitor. The chute would contain carefully built-in obstructions to the water flowing through its sloping channel, all of which would replicate white water found in a natural stream. The designers had studied white water systems developed in England and Germany, and their chute, five hundred feet long and twenty-five to forty feet wide, would sweep a kayak over the course at velocities of three to fourteen feet per second. It was a remarkable job, estimated at $200,000 for completion in the river and we were excited to build it. But when the bids came in, we were badly jolted with the lowest bid not far from a half million dollars. We couldn't justify that sum for the relatively few users of a white water course.

But during the commiseration for ourselves another boating enthusiast in our midst, Bill Taggart, was asked to try to design a less ambitious chute that could be constructed for much less money. Bill's efforts produced a small chute that could rest upon the fabri-dam and run out onto a course of carefully selected and located boulders. His design was a compromise that would allow boats to go down over the Zuni dam, but at the same time offer a white water experience. Its construction cost was just under $150,000, so we went ahead with the project.

Other successes that stand out in my mind include the Auraria Trail. As our river renovation was getting underway, the Auraria Higher Education Center, a $60 million project, was nearing completion on a 169-acre campus where some 25,000 people were to attend daily classes all day and into the night. The Center, a co-mingling of Denver's Community College, Metropolitan State College and University of Colorado at Denver, was adjacent to downtown and Cherry Creek, but it was cut off from the South Platte and our new river complex at the confluence by the expansive Rice railroad yards. Working closely with our Committee's Phil Milstein, who was chairman of the Auraria Board of Directors, we developed a trail inside the walls of Cherry Creek from the river to the new educational center. Not only did it open the way for students to walk or bike, easily and safely, to the river, it also offered access to the Platte from Dana Crawford's revitalized Larimer Square, as well as from the heart of the city's downtown.



PLAN



SECTION

ZUNI WHITEWATER BYPASS

SOUTH PLATTE RIVER GREENWAY AT 13TH AVENUE

There are a great many other innovations within the pattern of memories from the Platte developments:

*The discovery of the innovative foot bridges that will simply float on any possible flood, to be towed back into place when the water returns to normal, and thereby prevent the usual obstruction to flow by clogged bridges.

*The difficult problem of providing conventional toilets requiring expensive water and sewage connections for all the people coming to the Greenway—and seeing the difficulty solved by Bob Searns' suggested use of the Clivus Multrum, a waterless, self-composting Swedish toilet—ours the first application for a public restroom in the nation.

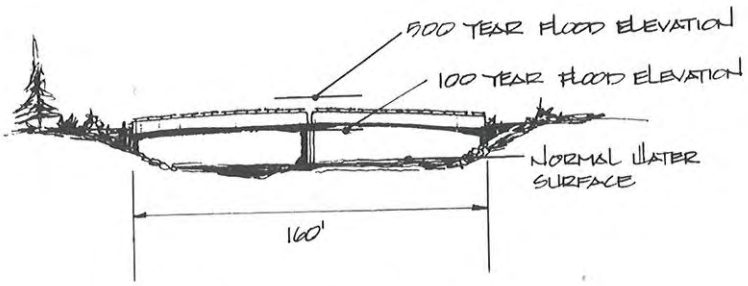
*The Greenway Trail Rangers, an innovation of our Committee, with trail maintenance patrollers all along the river, traveling by bicycle pulling wire basket trailers containing their tools.

*The creative use of the river's despicable rubble to bolster the trail system as a buried foundation that makes the walk-and bikeways flood resistant.

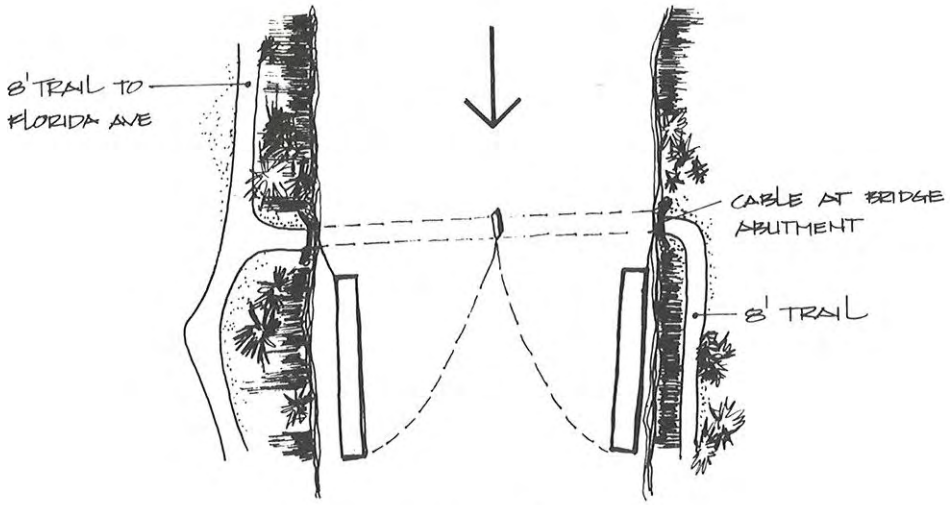
The most remarkable of all that came together to improve the South Platte in Denver was the Committee itself. Its flexibility and cohesiveness provided a unique stability to an ever-changing river scene. The Committee remained intact through everything, except for Potts Berglund who survived a very serious automobile crash in 1978, but suffered physical problems that caused him to leave us to be replaced by Pat McClearn. The minutes of the Committee's many meetings, kept accurately by Edna Doyle, one of the Mayor's secretaries, reflected numerous heated arguments followed by split votes, but the group continually stuck together, supporting the majority view.

And perhaps most remarkable was how the Platte River Development Committee carried out its task, creating few public waves of controversy as it proceeded. Our evolving technique was to move toward some goal and continue if there was no substantial resistance. If too much resistance occurred we backed off and turned to another of the many possible things to do in the Platte Valley. But then we would return to the problem we had dropped and give it another try. Following this procedure we devoted our energies to completing the work at hand instead of scrapping over what we wanted to do.

As I write, there's an example at hand. For several years we talked about a 13-acre park, which would be the largest on the Greenway. We even had it named before it was a certainty: Gates-Crescent Park. For some time we had a $250,000 challenge grant for the park from the Gates Foundation. We also had a site in mind, the Crescent Street Storage Yards where sand and gravel was stockpiled for city streets. It was on the river near Denver's Mile High Stadium—hardly a place for an unsightly maintenance park but there was political resistance to the city's expenditure of federal grant money to move the yard. Mayor McNichols was for the move, but the resistance was in the City Council. Instead of pushing and causing negative feelings, we backed off. Meanwhile, we talked publicly about some of the amenities that Gates-Crescent Park would offer the city. For example, we



ELEVATION



PLAN

FLOAT-AWAY WOODEN BRIDGE SECTIONS TETHERED TO BRIDGE ABUTMENTS DURING FLOODS GREATER THAN 100 YEAR STORM

OVERLAND PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

SOUTH PLATTE RIVER GREENWAY AT FLORIDA AVENUE

Dedication by Mayor Bill McNichols and Jack McCandless of the Gates Foundation of Gates-Crescent Park during Earth Day Celebration of 1980. Chairman at the left.

negotiated with the Children's Museum which badly needed new quarters and agreed in 1979 that they would relocate in Gates-Crescent Park, which was still a storage yard. We pushed some more, receiving some timely assistance from Ed Sullivan and Larry Borger of the Mayor's staff, as well as the Piton Foundation ($250,000). Finally, in July of 1980, two key opponents on the City Council withdrew their opposition "after talking to constituents and listening to proponents' arguments." The storage yard will soon be moved and the Platte River Greenway will convert one more large piece of the river from an unattractive maintenance yard to a great, green place by the Platte for the people.

By 1980 the once forgotten river was well remembered. It had a great many friends, and we began officially to recognize them with a new Friend of the River award. Mayor McNichols was the first to receive the award, which was presented by Governor Richard Lamm. The others in the first contingent of what I know will become a long list of Friends were:

PLATTE VALLEY AWARDS
Gene Armstrong/General Air Service and Supply
Potts Berglund/Denver Wood Products
Brannan Sand and Gravel
Colorado and Southern Railway
Public Service Company of Colorado

SERVICES AND SPECIAL EFFORTS
First National Bank of Denver
Grant Junior High School
Keep Colorado Beautiful
Partners, Inc.
Ken Valis/Colorado Paint Company

GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES
Colorado Department of Highways
Denver Environmental Health Service
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
City of Littleton
Urban Drainage and Flood Control District

Governor Dick Lamm presenting Friend of the River Award to Mayor Bill McNichols at Earth Day Celebration in 1980.

IX

MAKING IT LAST

Many years ago the mayors of the City and County of Denver were concerned that sometime in the future the citizens of their city would be shut out from the beautiful Rocky Mountain areas visible from various points in the mile-high metropolis. Private and public ownership of these scenic highlands, the mayors reasoned, would eventually exclude Denverites, unless they, too, owned property in the mountains. Out of this came the purchase of land for Denver's twenty-six Mountain Parks totalling some 13,600 acres, mostly in the foothills of the Colorado Rockies. Besides buying the land, the city provided funds for certain park facilities, like picnic tables and fireplaces. The Mountain Parks were a great idea, a tribute to the vision of our early mayors—except for one key omission: future maintenance.

Denver's Mountain Parks are disasters. I haven't been there for a long time because on my last visit I vowed to stay away. The picnic tables had been chopped up for firewood. The fireplaces, which were falling down, were filled with half burnt rubbish. Tin cans, old bottles and glass, plastic bags, cardboard containers—you name it—littered the parks. They were unpalatable, revolting messes. The problem came from a universal failing in government at all levels. Public officials, legislators and their lobbyists are great for buying and building, yet neglecting to provide for care of what they've acquired and created. This was the fate of Denver's Mountain Parks. The land was purchased and the public facilities were built, but no one provided for maintaining the parks, this unglamorous job of policing and cleaning the sites off in the mountains. As time went by, the neglect remained, and Denver's Mountain Parks deteriorated so much they were practically useless.

The word "maintenance" lacks the glamour of "build." But without assurance of maintenance, the purchase and construction of public works might as well be forgotten in many instances. That should be a general rule of government, but it isn't, and the officials responsible for public works continually suffer the consequences.

My tour as Manager of Public Works for Denver had introduced me to the maintenance problem, to the difficulties of ever finding enough funds to take care of what the city had acquired, say nothing about taking on anything new. So the necessity for future maintenance was on my mind from the start of the Platte River Development Committee's efforts. Here we were with the exciting prospect of rehabilitating the river with plazas and parks, trails and boat chutes, but hardly anyone was inclined to ask how they would be cared for. There was one major exception, Joe Ciancio, Denver's excellent Manager of Parks and Recreation. He (or his Deputy, Pat Galavan) was at most of our meetings, and I could see Joe was fearful that we would build projects on the river which he would have to eventually maintain as we turned the completed improvements over to him with a budget that was forever stretched too thin for what he already had.

"Don't give me more," I could imagine he was repeating to himself prayerfully, as we sat before him dreaming up ideas that could turn the South Platte into a ten-mile city park.

"Look, Joe," I would say after the meetings, "I'll do everything that I can to solve the maintenance problems. I recognize what you face. I promise you to work at it."

It was not an empty promise, because I really wanted no part of building on the river without provisions to maintain what we constructed. Otherwise, there would be no real, lasting victory over the downbeat psychology that had spoiled the river's chance of recovery for decades. We might attract people back to the Platte, but then let them encounter unmown banks, broken check dams, beat up benches, eroded river banks, overflowing trash receptacles, silted maintenance trails, boat launchings blocked by old rubber tires, polluted water, unworkable water fountains and plugged up restrooms—and the public psychology that had turned upward would soon be back on the way down. After all, the fundamental problem of the river that we inherited was one of there being no care for the water or the banks enclosing it as a natural resource, an amenity to our citizens. We simply couldn't let the same neglect afflict the projects that we brought to the river.

From the time the first of these projects was completed—the one at the confluence of the Platte and Cherry Creek including the plaza—I worked with Joe Ciancio to develop a maintenance force especially for the river. The initial help came from the federally funded program known as CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act). Soon we had a contingent of ten CETA workers doing maintenance on the developing Greenway. Ciancio assigned Wendell Keller from his agency to oversee the Greenway, and he also hired a former Public Works employee, Louis Calvaresi, to supervise the CETA workers. They took

Greenway Trail Ranger on bike with two-wheel cart for tools to clean trail, keep noxious weeds under control, and generally maintain river from trail to water's edge. C & S railroad track to left of trail.

care of the expanding trail and park system down to the water's edge, but were never expected to maintain anything in the river itself. As the Greenway developed, was accepted and recognized by the city budget-makers, the ten CETA jobs were taken over by seven permanent city employees.

Still these were park maintenance workers who were neither expected nor classified to deal with problems beyond the water's edge—and, of course, such problems became more and more numerous, ranging from supermarket carts dumped in front of a boat landing to assorted junk and rubber tires cluttering up a check dam and its boat chute. The need for maintenance in the stream itself led us to develop our own maintenance crew, especially to get into the river, but also to supplement the city's seven workers on the shore. In 1979 the Platte Committee budgeted $20,000 for a pilot project which established the Greenway Trail Rangers who would travel the river by bikes with trailers. Staff responsibility for developing the new maintenance program went to Bob Searns. He directed five Rangers, young people, each covering approximately two miles of the Platte in Denver. They worked from May until November. Besides augmenting the city employees' work along the shores, the Rangers ventured out into the river by wading or by boat to remove debris or fix any of our structures requiring maintenance. When necessary, the Rangers leased heavy equipment to deal with major clean up jobs in the water.

As this program started, I saw the possibilities for establishing it permanently

through the Urban Drainage and Flood Control District which had been set up for the South Platte and its tributaries in 1969. The District is an independent form of local government set up by State law to offer one service: drainage and flood control. Its enabling legislation provided that the District help local governments with recreational and park facilities in its drainageways, the largest being the Platte. I discerned here in State law we had the basis for a continuing program to maintain the Greenway, but at the time the State Legislature had not provided funds for this facet of the District's legislation.

In 1979, Wally Toevs, Chairman of the District's Board and a County Commissioner from Boulder County, and Cathy Reynolds, Vice-Chairman (later Chairman) of the Board and a member of the Denver City Council, working with Scott Tucker, Executive Director of the District, and backed by Mayor McNichols, began an intensive lobbying effort to obtain state approval for a mill levy for maintenance of drainage facilities including the recreational and park facilities within the drainageways of the District. They succeeded and the Legislature amended the statutes to permit the District to levy up to four tenths of a mill to provide maintenance for these local facilities within the District's boundaries from 1981 through 1983. While this would cover tributaries of the South Platte, the Denver stretch of the river itself now had by far the greatest number of park and recreational facilities. This meant that from 1981 the District will have a $2.5 million annual maintenance program for approximately 300 miles of drainageways.

Meanwhile, in 1980 the District drew some $90,000 from its construction funds and contracted with our River Committee for an expanded pilot maintenance project using our Trail Rangers to keep the river channel free from debris and other obstructions. The contractual arrangement was in keeping with a policy, established by the District's Board soon after its inception, of acting chiefly as a contracting agent.

Of all the many Friends of the River, the Urban Drainage and Flood Control District stands out for recognizing the great importance of the future care of the now rejuvenated river. The District Board truly knows that it is one thing to finance and build river improvements but it is something else to adequately maintain those same river improvements.

In 1979 and '80 our Rangers proved that the maintenance program was a good idea. The young maintenance people, identified by T-shirts announcing they were Greenway Trail Rangers, gave us an important start towards maintenance of the channel of the South Platte. The Ranger job itself became highly competitive. For the five positions in 1980 we had over one hundred applicants, though the pay was less than $5.00 an hour.

With the two pilot years proving their value, the number of Rangers were increased for 1981, thus providing approximately one person per mile of water. They will continue to work alongside the city park employees who will remain primarily responsible for the land maintenance of the fifteen parks adjacent to the river channel.

With this joint maintenance program off to a healthy start, I feel that the most important mission of the Platte River Development Committee, after renovating the river—that of maintaining the river for the people—has a solid basis for lasting. We found the Platte in a sad state of neglect. We will not be leaving it to the city's Parks and Recreation Department that way.

Gazebo at Globeville Landing, viewing west bank of river that once had been littered with feathers but cleaned by volunteers. Featherworks company eventually allowed artists to paint mural on the wall of company plant facing river. Maintenance of river bank here is no longer a problem.

The Greenway Foundation leased a sweeper in 1980 to facilitate keeping the ten miles of 8 foot wide Greenway Trail free of litter. Rangers operate it and provide "broom treatment" where necessary.

Section of concrete trail, ready for sweeping, looking downstream (north) through 16th Street Viaduct toward 19th Street Bridge and 20th Street Viaduct.

X

THE ESSENTIAL PHILOSOPHY

One day while this book was being planned, Ted Bendelow and I met with Rick Lamoreaux, Joan Mason and Bob Searns in the crowded, busy offices of the combined Greenway Foundation and Platte River Development Committee.

"As I have been gathering material for and thinking about the book," I said, "I have been looking for the key ideas related to what we've been able to do on the Platte in the past six years. Hundreds of American cities and towns grew up around rivers, and the histories of those rivers reflect the kind of neglect we found here in Denver. So, as we all understand, we've succeeded in solving what amounts to a universal problem in America. There has to be a lot of interest in understanding the key to this success. But what is it? Getting right down to essentials, what did we learn that could help other cities with their river problems?"

The discussion prompted by that question was wide ranging. It began with some of Bendelow's ideas.

"I feel we found a way of working with, but not becoming a part of bureaucracy," said Ted. "You would think that the kind of thing we've done on the river would be the job of the city, but it never works out. They never get it done because they get caught up in their own rules. There are so many minds in a bureaucracy concerned with preserving paychecks by blindly following regulations that they get trapped in the web of rules and never get anything done. We came along—essentially a group of citizens with no paychecks to worry about—and we went ahead without getting all tangled up in the rules. Of course, as a group, we were more than just laymen. Some of us understood the bureaucracy and how to work with it while at the same time working around it.

Getting that mixture in a river committee would be important anywhere."

Rick Lamoreaux picked up on this thought, and spoke about the diversity and freedom he found in both the Platte Committee and staff. "It's been a great mixture of people," he said. "The staff has reflected the diversity and freedom of the Committee. And somehow this has produced the chemistry we needed. Our efforts never got all caught up in the red tape of the city and state, but then we still remained in touch with the people in government, as well as the citizens who live with and use the river. In this chemistry I found there was a lot of freedom to speak, to get down to the real problems of the river, without fear of reprisal."

"In that respect," I interjected, "we were careful *not* to form a bureaucracy of our own. We purposely stayed small and flexible."

"That's true," Rick continued, "by remaining small, we as individuals had to do everything. If we didn't know how to do something we had to learn it. This being the case, everyone on the staff and Committee knew everything that was going on."

In a moment we went back to Bendelow who addressed one of his pet topics: the problems of too much professional planning.

"We had the big advantage," said Ted, "of not being stuck with a published, grandiose plan for the river. Of course, there was the one after the flood of '65, but by the time we came along it was securely relegated to the files. So we had no big plan that we had to defend and defend so much that we never got around to carrying it out. Instead, we simply started with a concept well-thought out, but not detailed or rigid. We pushed and if things moved, we proceeded. Then we'd try another pressure point. If we couldn't deal with that one, we let up and eventually came back to try again."

I added my thoughts to Ted's about grandiose plans. "We became so sensitive about the failures of the professional planners' big plans," I said, "that we avoided the word 'planning' altogether. Instead of plan per se, we followed a process which unfolded meeting by meeting. That became our blueprint, the series of demonstration projects that developed session by session—and they were only guided by our original four-point criteria for what we generally wanted to see on the river: boatable, hikable-bikable, flood resistant and accessible to other Denver facilities."

"I've put it another way," said Bendelow, "that we sort of did our job out in the streets and neighborhoods, outside of the system. It may have frustrated some of our bureaucratic friends, but we saw to it that ordinary citizens who were interested in the river were heard at our open meetings and were included and given a chance to do something where they hadn't been able to do so before. Then we never turned anything over to the system until it was done, all complete."

Bob Searns added his thoughts: "By piecing the projects together, we created movement, both for ourselves, and the public. We'd get something in place, and everyone would be asking, what's next. So there was the feeling inside the Committee and out in the public of suspense: 'Hurry up, complete it so we can see it

and enjoy it!' That was a useful and important psychology."

And Joan Mason reminded us that we also benefitted from having an idea whose time had arrived in more ways than one. "People are becoming more and more conscious of physical fitness, jogging, biking, hiking, just getting out," she said. "So we fitted right into that pattern, which has emerged all over America. Then hand-in-hand with that pressure came the growing energy crisis. Less and less will people be able to go off in the family car to the mountains. So it's good that they can turn to in-town recreation. There's no better resource for that than the river."

As we ended the session, I was reminded of the many important principles we'd found and tried in rehabilitating the South Platte, but I was still not fully satisfied we had put our combined finger on the most fundamental concept of all. I went back to my office still groping for that *one* point of many that would characterize what we had done on the Platte and serve as a common denominator for all such rivers running through our cities and towns. I felt that if I could put it in words it might help other communities do what we did. Actually, it was several weeks before I had sorted out what had been in the back of my mind for some time. It was the philosophy of our Committee, and it went as follows:

The public view of most city-bound rivers has often been restricted because of the rigid viewpoints of many public servants who are considered the overseers of our waterways. In their narrow-mindedness the officials more often than not have considered only one of the two possible sides to the streams they tend. They have thought of rivers only as utilitarian water courses and drainageways and have forgotten, indeed rejected, the classic notion that urban watercourses might also be amenities for people. This hidebound official view has consigned urban rivers to serving as water carriages for disposal of city sewage wastes, drainageways for stormwater runoff from streets and parking lots, sources of cooling water for electrical generators and other industrial machinery and, in the west, lifelines for agricultural irrigation. With this outlook firmly set by the passage of decades, it has long been forgotten that the same rivers may even serve *cultural* roles, purposes pleasurable and satisfying to the people—places to boat, sites for riverside picnics, lovely parts of communities for walking or biking, backgrounds for concerts and other performing arts, natural places for gardens and parks, indeed, pleasant refuges inside the very noisy city itself where one may find a quiet place of ground and greenery amenable to thinking.

When Mayor William McNichols appointed the Platte River Development Committee we did not accept the common official notion that our river could serve only utilitarian purposes. From day one our Committee, in the face of considerable derision, held to the idea that there was this *cultural* (and recreational) side to the river and we were going to shove, push, and do whatever was required, to demonstrate that this quality could be re-established on the Platte.

Mayor McNichols and our Committee soon recognized that the pleasurable side of the Platte had some powerful friends, namely the people, the real owners of the

river, who would be the ones to enjoy it as an amenity. So if there was any secret to success, it was our early recognition of the river's duality, and the public nature of and support for the side we decided to champion.

So I would say that any other community wishing to return its urban river to the people might benefit from our philosophy when it comes to organizing those to do the job. First a river committee should be quasi-official, established by a mayor or other such top executive. Being only partly official would allow the group to work with the bureaucracy, even to have some indirect power over it, yet remain free of government's debilitating procedures and restraints. This means choosing at least a part of the committee from people who know, but are not party to, these official methods and restrictions. In other words, it would probably be well not to include city officials at all. But undoubtedly the most important component of a river committee would be that diverse mix of persons in touch with and sympathetic to the public weal, especially to that part of the citizenry in neighborhoods closest to the river. While the mix should draw from business, cultural and educational circles, I know it is equally important to include representatives of citizens on whom the river has a direct physical impact—and that means they are likely to come from poor, minority neighborhoods. In any event, the guiding principle for the organizer of a river committee should be the recognition that the group will primarily serve as the people's representatives on the waterway but will have the advantage of being quasi-official. Once constituted, the organization may remain simply a citizens' committee, or, as with the Platte Committee, it could consider becoming a tax-exempt organization, which may enhance the opportunity for wider public participation and commitment.

I see the Mayor's Development Committee eventually completing its work and terminating. But I also see the Greenway Foundation remaining on the job indefinitely. In a sense I feel the Platte should have its citizen trustees—much as does a museum, zoo, library or symphony orchestra—to preserve and maintain the cultural, amenity side of the river. The idea of such a trusteeship appears to be spreading to the other communities in the South Platte River system. Meanwhile, I feel certain that the philosophy of returning the Platte to the people (''Making the Platte a People Place'')—cultivated by Mayor McNichols' original idea and continued support, and aided by the remarkable efforts of the people he appointed to do the job, their staff and the countless volunteers who contributed heavily to success—will spread and lead to the return of many other urban rivers to the people who own and deserve to enjoy them.

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