

FIRST DRAFT

FROZEN FORTRESS



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The Leadville Ice Palace as it appeared in early 1896.

Castle was briefly a tourist attraction in 1896 Leadville

In January 1896, one of the largest new buildings in Colorado opened to the public, and people visited it from all over the state. By the end of March, it was disintegrating and abandoned.

The Leadville Ice Palace was designed to look like a Norman castle, with a huge front entrance guarded by 90-foot-tall towers. An ice statue of Lady Leadville stood outside the front entrance, with one arm pointing to the region's mining district.

"Leadville, by her enterprise, has succeeded in turning even her ice into gold and silver," The Daily Sentinel told its readers in early January 1896. "The ice palace ... will no doubt prove [to be] one of the best-paying leads ever developed in that great camp."

It was all part of Leadville's Crystal Carnival, which was created and boosted by prominent Leadville businessmen in hopes of reviving the mining town's beleaguered economy following the silver crash of 1893.

Although it was named for the lead deposits found in the area, silver was what made Leadville a boomtown, beginning shortly after its founding in 1877.

By 1880, Leadville had the second largest population in Colorado and it was among the communities considered as a possible new state capital. In the late 1880s, Leadville's population approached 40,000, but when the price of silver plummeted, so did the population, to less than half that number.

Consequently, by 1895 any ideas to rescue the town's economy were being considered, including the Ice Palace.

Among the businessmen who supported the project were Horace Tabor, one of the first Leadville millionaires, and mine owner J.J. Brown, husband of Margaret Brown who later became famous as "the unsinkable Molly Brown" after surviving the Titanic shipwreck.

But the initial driving force behind the Ice Palace was real estate developer Edward W. Senior, who was convinced that building an ice palace in Leadville and establishing a winter carnival would create jobs and attract tourists who would spend money at restaurants and hotels.

Through the autumn of 1895, the promoters began raising

money to build the ice palace and hired an architect with previous experience with an ice castle in St. Paul, Minnesota, to design it.

They hoped to have the Ice Palace opened by Christmas, but the weather didn't cooperate. Despite the town's elevation of over 10,000 feet, temperatures reached into the 60s in late November. Construction of the ice-block walls stalled, even though the timber-and-steel supporting structure had been built.

At the same time, costs rose. Edward Senior, who refused to seek donations from saloon and bordello owners, quit as head of the project. A local mine manager named Tingley S. Wood, who didn't share Senior's moralistic views on saloons and brothels, took over. By the end of the year, more than \$40,000 of the estimated \$65,000 cost had been raised, and 250 workers were employed on the project.

Much of the ice was hauled by rail from Palmer Lake, between Denver and Colorado Springs, then placed on horse-drawn sleds to be moved to the ice-palace park in Leadville.

Although it wasn't entirely completed, the 100,000-square-foot-plus Ice Palace opened to the public on New Year's Day, 1896. Within the crystal walls were an ice-skating rink, ballroom, restaurant, a curling rink, theater and carousel. There were toboggan runs nearby.

A famous band from Dodge City, Kansas, was on hand for the opening-day festivities, as well as local musicians and numerous dignitaries. A ceremony was held that evening when electric lights embedded in the ice were turned on.

Promoters worked hard to attract visitors from around the state. An article in the Rocky Mountain News on Jan. 1 in-



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ICE PALACE FACTS

- The Ice Palace was 450 long and 320 feet wide, with 90-foot towers at north entrance
- Ice walls were 5-foot thick, built over wood and steel frame.
- Approximately 5,000 tons of ice used.
- Water was poured over ice blocks as they were stacked, to freeze them in place
- Ice cut from ponds near Leadville and Palmer Lake on the Front Range.
- Castle interior included a ballroom, ice-skating rink, curling rink, a restaurant, theater, and a carousel.
- Roses, fish and business advertisements were embedded in the ice walls.
- Cost was approximately \$65,000.
- Admission was 50 cents for adults, 25 cents for children.



The town of Leadville as it appeared in 1909.

formed readers that they could book rooms in a Pullman Car for \$5 a night on a special train that would depart for Leadville on Jan. 3. The cars would be pulled onto a siding, and the visitors could spend two nights in the train cars while exploring the Ice Palace, before returning to Denver on Jan. 5.

Special trains were arranged by both the Denver & Rio Grande and Colorado Midland railroads to serve tourists from all over the state who wanted to visit the Leadville attractions. And special events were held for the Colorado press, Shriners and for residents of communities around the state, such as Denver, Colorado Springs and Pueblo.

Additional attractions were added for different events. There were fireworks displays, skating races, hockey tournaments, curling matches, and rock-drilling contests. Admission was 50 cents per adult and 25 cents for children.

The Sentinel began promoting the notion of a West Slope Day at the Ice Palace, an idea that even its rival newspaper, the Grand Junction News, supported.

That event was held in late February and provided the largest crowd to that point at the Ice Palace, according to the Sentinel, topping events that had hosted people from Front Range communities.

Grand Junction's Silver

Crescent Band made the journey to provide additional entertainment that day, along with more than 100 residents of the city who traveled on an express train provided by the Colorado Midland Railroad.

But things didn't go as well as the newspaper had hoped. "Grand Junction was well represented, but not as it should have been," the Sentinel noted. "The apathy of our businessmen was even more chilling than the frigid walls of the Ice Palace."

Apathy toward the Ice Palace proved to be a significant problem for the Leadville promoters. Despite the special trains and attractions, the palace didn't prove to be the economic boon that Leadville had hoped.

Rumors in Front Range newspapers that the ice walls were melting and there was insufficient food and hotel rooms deterred some visitors, even though Leadville promoters worked hard to counter those stories.

Additionally, many of the tourists who did visit made one-day trips on the trains, brought their meals with them and returned home. They spent little in Leadville other than on admission tickets to the Ice Palace.

The weather continued to be a problem, with a warmer-than-normal March causing the ice wall of the palace to melt. Although the original idea had

been to continue the Crystal Carnival well into April, the last event was held at the Ice Palace on March 28.

Edward Senior's vision for the Crystal Carnival and Ice Palace was that it would be an annual event. The supporting structure of steel and timber would stand through the summer months, perhaps be used to host warm-weather events, then be made into a new ice castle each winter.

But that vision died when most of Leadville's miners went on strike in June 1896, seeking better pay. As the strike lingered into fall, the Colorado National Guard was called up to help quell the strike. Parts of the Ice Palace's permanent support structure were torn down and used to build barracks and other structures for the Guard at a temporary site that was called Camp McIntire. The remainder of the Ice Palace was demolished later that year.

Sources: "Leadville Ice Palace," Colorado Encyclopedia, www.coloradoencyclopedia.org; "The Leadville Ice Palace - A Look Back," Colorado Central Magazine, December 1, 2009, www.coloradocentralmagazine.com; historic newspaper articles from www.newspapers.com and www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org.

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A panoramic view of the town of Leadville from about the turn of the last century.