

# GHOST SIGNS TOUR MAP



For more information please visit [fcgov.com/ghostsigns](http://fcgov.com/ghostsigns)

## BANK

121 NORTH COLLEGE AVENUE

Lower Layer: 1881-1898  
Top Layer: After 1900  
Artist Unknown



In January 1881, Larimer County pioneer Franklin Avery opened the Larimer County Bank in this building, which was then known as the Welch Block. The institution moved across College Avenue into the Avery Block by 1898. In 1900, a new bank, the Fort Collins National Bank, moved in and remained here for decades. There appears to have been a smaller "BANK" sign painted over the original, as evident in the 1978 photograph above.



## NEDLEY HOTEL

130-134 SOUTH COLLEGE AVENUE  
Circa 1909  
Artist Unknown

7

This building was completed in 1909 for Lewis Secord and originally hosted a retail space on the first floor and hotel rooms, known as the Nedley Apartments, on the second. This sign was one of the first electrically illuminated signs in Fort Collins. The lamp standard and fixture are still visible today, but are now dangling rather than fixed in place.

## OWL CIGAR

113 SOUTH COLLEGE AVENUE  
1900-1910  
Curran Bill Posting & Distributing Company



8

This was a privilege sign painted for the Tyler-Lowe Mercantile Company, the first occupant of the Robert Trimble Block (109-113 South College Avenue). The Straiton & Storm Cigar Company was the country's largest domestic manufacturer of cigars in the late nineteenth century. Their iconic owl could be seen on buildings across the country. This sign is unusual due to the fact that it was painted with the natural color of the brick as the background, rather than the typical white or black paint.

9



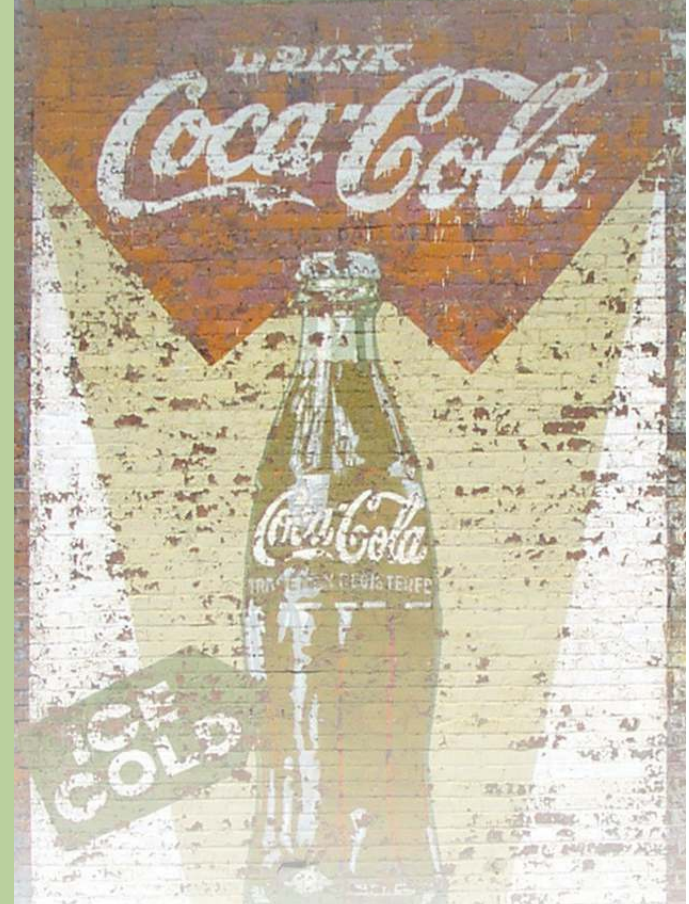
## DAMM'S BAKERY

131 SOUTH COLLEGE AVENUE  
1925  
Stewart Case

Albert Damm, Sr. emigrated to the United States in 1882 from Magdberg, Germany. After selling his original bakery to Frank H. Knemeyer in 1903, he purchased a confectionary shop at this location and combined candymaking with his own business. The business grew to be a family-run enterprise.

# GHOST SIGNS

## A WALKING TOUR OF HISTORIC WALL PAINTINGS IN FORT COLLINS



# HISTORY

Signs are social. They identify, direct, and decorate. In a world full of uniform and unimaginative advertising, "ghost signs" contain the originality and history that others lack. Painted by hand in vivid colors or in bold contrast, these signs were left to the elements and faded with time. The term "ghost signs" came about for a few reasons:



A ghost sign is a painted sign, at least 50 years old, on an exterior building wall heralding an obsolete product, an outdated trademark or a clue to the history of the building's occupancy. However in some cases, such as the Coca-Cola sign, the product being advertised is still a prominent company in today's culture. They are "ghosts" because they appear when the light is just right, when the viewer has stared long enough to see the specter, or are rediscovered following the demolition of a neighboring building.

# PRIVILEGE SIGNS

These painted wall signs were funded in one of two ways, either directly from the owner of the wall or by related advertisers. More often than not, a large company, like Coca-Cola, would finance the sign painting in exchange for a "privilege," whether it be a gold watch, money, or improvements to the building. The company would approach the business inside and offer to paint the business's sign on the wall for the "privilege" of painting their product below. The company who was financing the project usually had a much larger area of the advertisement than the small business owners. For many building owners, the most persuasive privilege was simply a fresh coat of paint over often deteriorating brick.



**COCA-COLA & ANGELL'S DELICATESSEN**  
220 EAST MOUNTAIN AVENUE  
1958  
Don Brown,  
Brown Sign Company

Painted on the east elevation of the J.L. Hohnstein Block, this ghost sign consists of two, possibly three layers. The top layer was advertised the "new, 12 oz., king-sized" bottle of coke. Brown received \$400 for the sign, about 50-60 cents per square foot.

# COLORADO BAKERY & GROCERY

EAST ELEVATION OF  
220 E. MOUNTAIN  
1903-1927  
Artist Unknown



Albert Damm, of Damm's Bakery, opened his bakery and grocery in 1889. It was purchased by Frank H. Knemeyer in 1903, whose name can be seen in the sign. Unlike the advertisement beneath it, this sign appears to be the only one to have ever occupied this location.



**THE DENVER POST**  
BELOW SIGN #2  
1930s  
Curran Bill Posting &  
Distributing Company

The sign located below the Colorado Bakery & Grocery has had three layers. The bottom layer is unclear, however the top two were painted by the same company. An Owl Cigar sign was painted sometime between 1910 and 1930. It was then painted over by The Denver Post sign in the 1930s, when the newspaper had a distribution center here. It read "The Denver Post is Always Fair and Unafraid."



**CHAMPION SPARK PLUGS**  
238 EAST MOUNTAIN AVENUE  
1948-1960  
Artist Unknown

Fred M. Smith moved his automobile battery and electrical service repair shop to this location around 1948 and remained here until 1960. Champion Spark Plugs was an avid user of privilege signs and their logo appears on buildings across America. The top green banner is hardly visible now but it originally read "SMITH BATTERY & ELECTRIC SERVICE / GENERATORS STARTERS SPEEDOMETERS"

# PARAMOUNT CLEANERS

314 EAST MOUNTAIN AVENUE  
1930-1950  
Artist Unknown



This building was originally built in 1907 as an armory for the Colorado National Guard. When they had to move to a larger space, Paramount Laundry and Cleaners moved in around 1930 and remained there till 1994. Around 1970, the wall received a coat of white paint, completely covering the ghost sign and black plastic letters were installed. However, enough paint has peeled away to reveal the monochromatic sign.

# WALL DOGS

This unglamorous nickname for the men who painted wall signs not only reflected the grunt work of sign painting but also their commitment to their art. They worked on the wall and they worked like dogs. These wall dogs had no pre-mixed paints and no electric scaffolding. If they were injured on the job there was no workmen's compensation. The hours were also intense. Veteran sign painter R.E. "Rollie" Nauman remembers "after finishing a wall or barn by headlights, I often wondered how the workmanship looked in the daylight, though I rarely found out. After one job was done we'd head to the next location to get a few hours sleep before sun up."