

Historian's Corner

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Early Days: A Colorado/Littleton Snapshot

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For this issue of the newsletter, I thought a glimpse of the early days of Lockheed Martin in Colorado/Littleton would be fun....how the company came to Colorado/Littleton and some of the changes Littleton subsequently went through. In 1955, what would become Martin Marietta and later, Lockheed Martin was the Glen L. Martin Company (GLM). I will refer to GLM in this article. My thanks to the history department at the United States Air Force Academy for their assistance.

Coming to Colorado

The Air Force Academy was established in 1954 in Colorado Springs, CO upon the recommendation of the Stearns-Eisenhower Board formed in 1948. Dr. Robert Stearns and Gen. Dwight [Ike] Eisenhower were the chairmen. The board recommended the Colorado Springs location for the new Air Force School after the Air Force was established as a separate service in 1947. Although the geography of Colorado Springs was paramount due to cold war considerations of the time; it probably did not hinder the selection process that Ike had married Mamie Geneva Doud in Denver on July 1, 1916. The Doud family home was located at 750 Lafayette Street (shown below).



Mamie, through visits home to her family in Denver, introduced Ike to Colorado. Ike saw Colorado's possibilities for national security, and he also enjoyed Colorado's great climate and overall quality of life.

Meanwhile, GLM was looking for a new site from which to build and test its new Titan Inter Continental Ballistic Missile. Since the company had critical contracts with the U.S. Air Force, being in close proximity to the customer would be a plus when selecting a site.

Coming to Littleton

GLM decided upon Waterton, a part of Littleton CO; as their location for the satellite facility. The site was selected based upon its hog-back protection, remoteness, land availability, nearness to the burgeoning Air Force Academy, and other considerations which were in accordance with the concerns of the time. My father, Richard B. Cossaboom Sr. was on the Littleton City Council at the time GLM addressed the city council for required zoning. Thankfully, Dad voted for the zoning change to allow for construction of 'the little city'. (The City of Littleton does envelop some of Jefferson and Douglas counties besides Arapahoe).

Construction of the Waterton facility provided jobs for both local and out of state contractors and construction workers, many of whom stayed in Littleton after the project was completed. By 1956 we

see that the Engineering Building and the Factory appear to be well under construction (as shown below).



Economically, GLM had a profound impact on Littleton. An immediate impact came in the early years when the establishment of this major employer brought a 'population boom' to Littleton which precipitated housing construction, major road work, and the transformation of Littleton from a sleepy bedroom community of Denver to a major suburb.

The population of Littleton in 1955 was about 3,000. Up to that point, the major employers in Littleton were the C.A. Norgren Company (still in existence at 5400 S. Delaware St.) and Marathon Oil (formerly in the 7400 Block of South Broadway). At the beginning of construction, local newspapers published estimates that the plant GLM was building was described as 'massive' - would eventually employ 18,000 people within 5 years. By 1965, Littleton population had increased to an estimated 9,000 or about triple the population of just 10 years earlier.

After legal requirements were in place, things began to happen - for both GLM and the City of Littleton. Among the first was a motel on South Santa Fe Drive, named the Titan Manor, constructed so that visiting executives from GLM headquarters in Baltimore MD could shorten their commute to the project, instead of having to stay in Denver proper. Today, this motel gives the appearance of being in disarray, located on the west side (of a less than desirable stretch of S. Santa Fe Drive. Most people passing by would not even bother to look at it, much less entertain staying there. But next time you go by, look for the sign to the motel and remember its purpose for being built and it's 'glory days'. I believe it still has a Titan Rocket on the sign.

While the plant was being built, GLM began transferring employees from Baltimore and hiring employees in the Denver area. The current location of the Arapahoe Community College Art and Design Center, at the corner of Alamo and Prince in downtown Littleton, was the temporary site until the plant was ready for occupation. The Coleman Company held most of the land and buildings, and GLM apparently leased the site from Coleman. There was an underground tunnel between the North and South buildings, and the cafeteria (which I am told served the best chili and hamburgers) was located across the street at the current location of the Littleton Light Rail Station. In fact, it was not unheard of that workers would give their home packed lunches away so that they could go across the street to the cafeteria! There were also direct rail lines into the Prince Street facility which assisted the GLM move. Of course there have been many modifications. (See below for a current site picture of the Prince Street location.)



I remember being at the stoplight of Prince and Alamo with my mother during this time-frame and the plant 'letting out' first shift. All of a sudden, the street seemed packed with people. "Who are all these people?" I exclaimed. Mother told me that they all worked for the 'Martin Company'. I was amazed at the 'masses of people exiting the facility.

As the Waterton facility progressed, so did changes within the Littleton community. For the most part, Littleton proper had confined itself east of the Platte River (Santa Fe Drive). The decade following the mid-50's saw expansion occur on the West side of the river. "Happy Homes", a housing development bordered by Bowles Avenue on the south, Lowell Blvd. on the west, and Santa Fe on the east, are solid brick homes dating from about 1962 which were built to accommodate the influx of residents to Littleton. "Columbine Valley" was developed from the "Columbine Country Club" and was incorporated in 1955 in time to provide a golf course and higher priced homes for GLM executives. The area began incorporation with 17 homes, and now there are 500 homes in the valley. The first home was occupied in 1956.

By 1965, "Normandy Estates" was another burgeoning upscale community (the first in Littleton to offer covenants) which attracted many GLM employees. "Normandy Estates" is located on the West side of Platte Canyon in an area between Bowles and Ken Caryl Ave.

"Woodlawn Shopping Center", located at the corner of S. Windermere St. and Littleton Blvd., started in earnest in 1955. This shopping center would include clothing, jewelry, produce, ice cream, a drugstore, a movie theatre, and other retail establishments to serve the growing population of Littleton. The shopping center celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2006. My grandfather, Arthur Johnson was known affectionately as the 'Mayor of Woodlawn' in his obituary written by 'House' Waring, publisher of the Littleton Independent/Arapahoe Herald in 1973.

The Centennial Race Track, dubbed the "Santa Anita of the Rockies" opened in 1950 and provided horse racing entertainment to many of the new residents of Littleton. The track closed in 1983. Members of the "Keep Denver Dumb Club" (a Littleton euphemism for those who were seemingly opposed to growth, modernization, and knew what was 'good') opposed the track. But the track did flourish. The track was located on the east side of Federal, between Belleview and Bowles. (See below).



Along with the "Santa Anita of the Rockies" came a new restaurant/lounge to Littleton, located on S. Santa Fe Drive. The "Santa Anita Lounge and Restaurant" was among the first 'modern' building Littleton had seen! The Santa Anita had a sloping roof and almost floor to ceiling windows. The restaurant served good meals in a modern atmosphere and was favored by GLM employees. Never a 'dive' or a 'bar' the Santa Anita offered employees a relaxed atmosphere in which to wind down or continue business discussions.

Littleton had one high school (Littleton) in 1955. By 1963 the need for a second high school (Arapahoe) was necessary, in part because of the influx of GLM employees to Littleton.

Littleton had and would continue to prosper through the 'good' and 'lean' times of GLM. GLM and Littleton have made a good partnership throughout the 50+ years that GLM has been in our community. Good businesses build other good businesses. The number of service industry businesses that GLM brought to Littleton cannot be underestimated. GLM has been an influential partner to Littleton providing not only business opportunities, but leadership in the community from city council members, state legislature representatives, and community volunteers. Maybe more on that in a future issue.

If you have any favorite memories of the early days of GLM and Littleton, please forward them to me, so we can generate a more complete history for posterity.