

## SIDE STREETS: The man behind the canyon

[BILL VOGRIN](#)

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Since the first pioneers laid claim to it in 1866, Red Rock Canyon has been viewed as a cash cow — valued more for the financial wealth it represented than for its wealth of wildlife and natural beauty.

Large, deep scars across rock outcroppings are vivid reminders of the 19th-century quarries that chiseled and hauled away huge chunks of the canyon's stunning 320 million-year-old red sandstone.

Trails crisscross it. Some are remnants of guided horseback tours that operated in the canyon for decades, others are old railroad beds.

Foundations of old factories are buried along the 789-acre property's eastern edge, reminders of early 20th-century gold milling operations.

Chimneys vent methane gas from a 53-acre landfill, which operated from 1970 to 1987, at the south end of one canyon.

Bare dirt pads of two dozen mobile homes recall its most recent life as a trailer park.

Despite the disturbances, Red Rock Canyon was considered a huge prize by open space advocates who last year persuaded the city to buy it for \$12.5 million, forever ending the threat of development.

Today, the canyon — a geologic extension of nearby Garden of the Gods — is retired. It is being transformed from private business to public wilderness.

### **BIGGER PLANS**

The city has welcomed hikers and climbers to Red Rock Canyon since Oct. 29, letting them explore the new park.

Outdoor enthusiasts have responded by filling its temporary parking lot on West High Street off U.S. Highway 24 at Ridge Road.

A few years ago, they would have been met by armed guards and brusquely turned away. Maybe even shot at.

That was the long-standing order of the man who made the Red Rock Canyon Open Space possible: John G. Bock.

The park wouldn't exist without Bock, who worked for decades to piece together the property, remove the rusting steel vestiges of its industrial history and preserve it.

In the process, Bock created a crown jewel rivaling Garden of the Gods.

Of course, Garden of the Gods came to the city by a much different path: It was given to Colorado Springs in

1909 by the children of railroad magnate Charles Elliot Perkins to honor his wish that it always be open to the public.

Bock and his sons had a different vision for Red Rock Canyon. They saw the canyon as a payday, as had the pioneers who mined the canyon and built factories there.

For decades, it supported the family horseback riding business. They turned it into a trailer park and a dump.

But the Bock had bigger plans. They wanted to build a resort, golf course, homes and businesses. Towering buildings. A world trade center.

It was a grand vision.

And it almost happened.

### **'A WHOLE NEW CITY'**

Hidden in a dark, musty old bomb shelter built against a canyon wall, amid moldy furniture and other junk, sits an architect's model of a sprawling city, resort and golf course.

Miles away in an apartment in Scottsdale, Ariz., among old photos and a nine-volume business plan translated into six languages, sits Richard Bock youngest son of John G. Bock.

From a distance, Richard Bock has watched developers struggle for years to get the public approvals — mainly the annexation, water and utilities — to build in the canyon.

Among those who considered the idea was The Broadmoor, which took an option on the property in 1999 only to drop the idea.

The final attempt was by John Yates and Zydeco, his New Mexico development company. Yates gave up in frustration in 2002 after lawsuits failed to pry a water line from Colorado Springs Utilities.

It was old news to Richard Bock, who says the city and, ironically, The Broadmoor, blocked his idea years ago.

What did he have in mind?

Go into the bomb shelter, plug in the architect's model and rub the dust off its Plexiglas cover. It's all there.

The golf course. The shopping center and office complex. The 20 futuristic apartment towers. The resort hotel.

Flip the toggle switches and turn on the miniature lights that illuminate the 70 or so featured items on the huge model.

Bock had it all figured out decades ago.

"I designed a whole new city," said Richard Bock, 81. An architect, Bock said he worked 12 years on the project. The model and the drawings that line the bomb shelter reflect his efforts.

Faded and stained architectural renderings line the walls. Large aerial photos from 1965 lean against a wall. So do large poster boards — remnants of public presentations to government officials touting the "Red Rock Canyon Project."

He designed parks, homes, a university site. About 8,000 people would live there, and it would take 12 years to build, generating \$20 million a year in construction income.

"We hired the best surveyors, photographers, engineers," Bock said, and he planned to integrate each structure into the rugged landscape using native stone and other materials.

His plan called for 800 hotel rooms, 3,600 residential units in three-winged towers, some 36 stories tall, resembling the Satellite Hotel on South Academy Boulevard. There was a shopping center of 1 million square

feet, convention center and sports arena. He planned a fine arts theater, museum and a nightclub. A medical research center, communications tower, an industrial park and underground parking.

Bock also planned a dozen lakes — the model shows tiny sailboats on them — while preserving open space.

“In my design of the project, only 25 percent was to be developed,” he said. “The rest was to be natural. Golf courses, lakes and things.”

Bock worked on the project through the 1960s, hoping to capitalize on Colorado’s efforts to land the Olympic games.

He said he had an agreement to buy water from the Twin Lakes Reservoir south of Leadville. He won a designation for the site as the Rocky Mountain World Trade Center, affiliated with the World Trade Center in New York and others across the world.

It would have surpassed The Broadmoor in size and scope, Bock said, and that’s one big reason it never was built. “They were the kingpin,” he said. “They didn’t want anybody else to build unless they OK’d it. We always had a feeling they were behind all the problems.”

Bock also blames voters, who in 1972 rejected hosting the 1976 Winter Olympics.

“If Colorado had won the Winter Olympics, a lot of firms were going to jump on it,” he said. “Instead, nothing happened.”

### ***PRESERVING HISTORY***

Bock has no sentimental regrets that his plan would have forever changed the place he spent his childhood.

“We hunted and fished there,” he said. “It was wilderness, full of bear, deer, lions, foxes, coyotes.

“We used to play hide-and-seek in there. We took moonlight saddle rides in the mountains. Had cookouts. I was one of the guides. We’d go up to ‘robber’s roost,’ where the bandits used to hide. And to the big cave.”

Bock grew up in the canyon with his brother, John S. Bock, after his parents, John G. and Sylvia Bock, settled there the year he was born.

His father had left Philadelphia in 1907 and taken a train to Colorado Springs.

In his autobiography, “In Red Rock Canyon Land,” the elder Bock wrote of a life working on ranches across the West and prospecting before returning to Colorado Springs in 1923 as a disabled World War I veteran to sell real estate.

He bought a house near the entrance to Red Rock Canyon at 31st Street and Colorado Avenue — where the family home would remain until 1965 — and explored the canyon.

“What a place!” John G. Bock wrote. “Everything was rack and ruin. Steel rails. Railroad ties rotting away here and there. The big derrick, was still standing; thousands of dollars in iron lay scattered about. The old boiler room; piles of debris and rock from the big quarry.”

The Colorado Midland Railway ran tracks deep into the canyon. A station was built, along with a post office, blacksmith shops and other buildings.

He wrote of towering wooden derricks and huge steam boilers that had powered large stone cutters and drills.

Derricks lifted rock cut in 6-foot-square blocks onto flat rail cars. The stone helped build Colorado College, Bock said, the First National Bank in Colorado Springs and the Brown Palace hotel in Denver.

Ultimately, the stone was deemed too soft. The gold rush in Cripple Creek and Victor ended. The railroad pulled out. The mills closed.

The rusting remains are what Bock found when he explored the place in 1923. Instead of junk, he saw opportunity. He started Roundup Stables and began leading tourists on canyon horseback rides.

He also began buying land in the canyon, spending \$7,100 to piece together 650 acres.

He removed the steel and built dams to stop washouts. He planted grasses and trees. The Bock Canal diverted water to the gold mills and to Colorado Springs neighborhoods.

He continued his stable business, often with his sons leading tourists on trips — three hours for \$1.

### ***FAMILY FEUD***

During those years, Bock fought with the city and the railroad to access and develop his land. The battles left him angry and bitter.

In the 1950s, he announced that his health forced him to move to Arizona, where he'd spent his early years. He divided his time between Arizona and Colorado Springs, even after selling the property to his sons in 1962. He campaigned against taxes and never stopped trying to develop his land.

Meanwhile, his son Richard settled in Scottsdale in 1958. "I wanted to get out of the cold weather," he said. But each summer, Richard Bock returned to work on his Red Rock Canyon project. That is, until about 1978. The project had failed and the family splintered.

"I had sold my share in the property to my brother," Bock said. "My brother ran the roost.

"We had a falling-out in the family. My mom finally moved to Arizona. My brother stayed in the canyon. That was 25 years ago. I never came back."

The family schism followed a similar split between the Bocks and the community. It surfaced in a declaration by John G. Bock in a 1964 newspaper story.

Bock talked of being ignored by civic leaders in 1949 when he urged preserving the Midland railroad right of way up Ute Pass. He then watched as the state paid millions to build U.S. Highway 24 along the same route years later.

Bock expressed frustration that the city wouldn't help build a road through the canyon to connect with The Broadmoor. He lamented the march of "progress" and construction of the highway, including destruction of a red sandstone bluff at the entrance to his canyon.

Then, Bock announced he was developing a shopping center at 31st and Colorado — where his home and stables had stood. It would be the region's largest Safeway.

He also declared that "by an act of law, Red Rock Canyon is closed to the public."

It stayed that way for 40 years. Only residents of two dozen trailers and a few rental homes were allowed in.

John S. Bock hired armed security guards to patrol the park. He tried repeatedly to sell the land to developers for \$15 million.

But, like his father, he was stalemated and, those who knew John S. Bock say it left him bitter, too.

The stalemate ended in March 2002 when Bock died and his widow, Joan Bock, cut the property's price, making it feasible for the city to buy.

In 2003, the city — acting on a voter mandate to preserve open space — paid \$12.5 million for Red Rock Canyon.

### ***GRATEFUL CITY***

Whatever one thinks of developing the canyon, it's impossible to deny the significance of John G. Bock's efforts to assemble and preserve the property, said Matt Mayberry, the city's cultural services manager.

"The citizens of Colorado Springs should thank John Bock," Mayberry said. "He is the reason we have this park."

Although Bock's legacy needs to be sorted out, Mayberry expects his name will endure, just as the names of city founder Gen. William Jackson Palmer, Broadmoor founder Spencer Penrose and gold magnate/philanthropist Winfield Scott Stratton did.

"I'm not sure he's the equivalent of Palmer, Penrose or Stratton. But the Bock name will survive many, many decades," Mayberry said.

"He'll be remembered because he and his family put together this property and it came in one piece to the people of Colorado Springs."

Although it's not a new city, Richard Bock is satisfied with the future of Red Rock Canyon. And he still loves the property he left so long ago.

"I always liked the canyon. It's my favorite place," he said. "I'd like to have gone up there again."

Then, he paused.

"I think a park is nice," Bock said. "Of course, I'd like to have seen the project built. It would have been a great thing for Colorado. It was a very important project."

"But a park is nice."

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