

Places from the Past

The "Swiss Cottage," Mt. Morrison Casino, Pine Haven

The "Swiss Cottage" was one of three stone buildings constructed in Morrison by George Morrison in the 1870s.* An early destination, the three-story structure was built of native sandstone for former Governor John Evans and occupied Block 15 on Morrison's original plat, all of which was owned by Evans.

The building dominated most views of downtown Morrison for more than a century. It was demolished in June of 1982, over the protests of historians and preservationists. The "Swiss Cottage," just one of its many names, is now remembered by an ever-dwindling number of Morrison residents.

**Elements of style suggest George Morrison was the builder; other evidence suggests that this building was built by another company. It is often cited as "built by Governor Evans" as in the next article. We believe Evans was the source of funds for the building. It is also possible that Morrison built other buildings in town. — Ed.*



Swiss Cottage in the 1880s

Building the "Swiss Cottage"

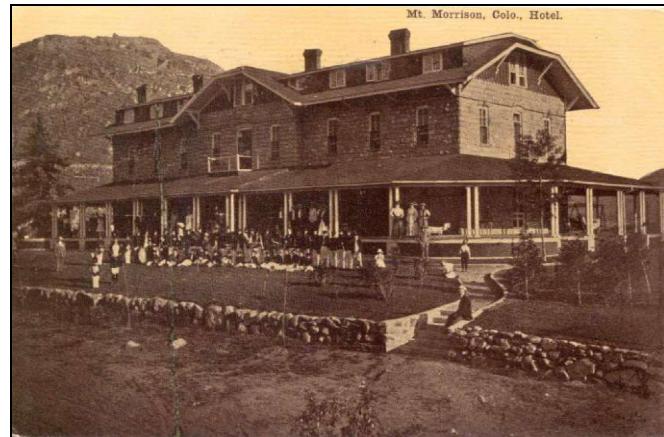
The population of Morrison at this time was about twenty or twenty-five, and a tent or two and four or five little houses comprised the town. Governor Evans, selecting a site on a bluff overlooking the town, proceeded to erect the "Swiss Cottage," using the white and red sandstone in its construction. The hotel is two stories and a roomy attic in height; has forty-two handsome rooms, finely furnished; a billiard room, parlors, and other things that go to make up a first class hotel, and add to the comfort of the guests. A broad verandah encircles the front and ends of the building, giving opportunities for promenades during which the view of the surrounding scenery is unexcelled, and the management of this holstery [sic] is liberal and exceedingly good.

At the foot of the eminence upon which the hotel is built has been erected the dancing pavilion, with an excellent floor of sufficient size to hold comfortably a great many couples. A fine grove of trees is clustered about the pavilion, and Bear Creek gurgles melodiously but a few feet from it. With these improvements visitors began to pour in, and families from Denver and other points, both in and out of the state, came to Morrison and spent the hot months. Others came and settled, and now the population is said to be about five hundred, and quite a bustling little place has grown up.

— *Denver Daily Times, July 9, 1881*

The Resort Decades

- Opened September 2nd, 1874, as the **Evergreen House at Morrison**.
- As the **Evergreen Hotel**, in 1875, the property and grounds offered more than 50 guest rooms, as well as a billiard room and bowling alley. Croquet was available on the spacious grounds.
- In 1877, the Hotel hosted H.C. Beckwith and **Arthur Lakes**, who discovered Morrison's dinosaurs on the hogback in the spring of that year.
- A brief stint as a sanitorium in 1884 made good use of "medicinal springs" on the property.



Mt. Morrison Casino in its resort heyday, 1910s

- From 1884 to 1888, the building was owned by the Jesuits, who developed it into **Sacred Heart College**.
- Tiring of frontier life and long commutes, the College relocated to land near Berkeley Park in Denver, received in an exchange with John Brisben Walker. The new location became known as **Regis College**.
- **John Brisben Walker** initiated the **Mt. Morrison Casino**, born to serve his dreams of promoting foothills splendor.

- In 1916, the **Mt. Morrison Casino** became the headquarters of the **Denver Motor Club**, and foothills touring was in its heyday.
- As **Hillcrest Inn**, the venerable building continued the tradition of hospitality through the 1920s-30s.
- **Tom and Mabel Cavanaugh** ran the livery stables for Hillcrest Inn from 1934 to 1943.
- As tourism declined into the war years, **Hillcrest Inn** struggled and faded, but **Hillcrest Stables** continued to provide riding horses for forays into the foothills.
- As a result of gas rationing during the war and its effects on travelers, the Inn closed in 1943. The nearby stables began taking on the hospitality role, as Hillcrest Guest Ranch.

A Period of Public Service

- The once-grand building fell into vacancy in the early 1940s, and its mortgage was acquired by Frank Kirchoff in 1943.
- Kirchoff turned the building over to the Poor Sisters of St. Francis. This order of nuns operated it as St. Elizabeth's Retreat until 1952, when it again lapsed into vacancy.
- Sold again in 1957, the building was operated as **Pine Haven Manor Nursing Home** until about 1973. Pine Haven continued in use, becoming a Guest Home, with rooms rented out, until the building was closed for good in January 1978.
- In 1977, a brief attempt at cultural revival occurred, as the Morrison Historical Society and Spring Street Theatre attempted to salvage this public landmark as a performance venue. The effort failed.



As Pine Haven Manor, 1976

Decline and Ruin

- Defenders continued to fight for preservation, even as Pine Haven Manor moved to new quarters on the grounds in 1974. Rooms in the old building were rented to "hippies."
- Morrison residents remember the hippie residents smoking a little weed on the grounds while enjoying the sun. "You could get high just walking by," one reports.
- The former Nursing Home administrator, Shirley Barnes, reports encountering an "apparition" once when checking on the building. It looked, she says, like Teddy Roosevelt, wearing a coat and tails. Could it have been old J.B. Walker himself?
- Soon, the crumbling landmark was home only to vagrants and stray cats, and was deemed a public nuisance.
- A proposal for refurbishing it for use as the Town offices, at a cost of \$800,000, was made in 1980, but the property owners refused.

- About this time, the Town could have purchased the building, its grounds, AND the profitable Nursing Home operation, for about two million dollars. But the Town itself was broke then, so the deal was declined.
- In about 1980-82, the Jefferson Co. SWAT Team used the building for training exercises.

The Secretary at the Nursing Home participated one year. She was asked to enter the building; when she did, the trainees put down their weapons and approached her, whereupon she pulled a gun on them! They were soundly reprimanded by their instructor. "Trust no one," he said.

- Demolition came in June of 1982, ending the long story of Morrison's proud landmark and turning it into a pile of rocks and rubble.



Carefully shaped building stones, now a pile of rubble, 2002

See also: [Jesuits in Jefferson County](#), *Historically Jeffco* magazine, 2004, p 30-34.