



Boulder Sanitarium front view. Photo courtesy of GC Archives (Glass Slide Collection)

Colorado Sanitarium (AdventHealth Avista)

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Colorado Sanitarium, also known as Boulder Sanitarium, was an Adventist health facility in Boulder, Colorado that continues to exist today as AdventHealth Avista in nearby Louisville. It was the third Seventh-day Adventist

health institution to be founded in the denomination. A nursing school connected to the sanitarium that during its heyday produced some of the best trained nurses in the region. Today the medical facility offers comprehensive medical, emergency, and Level III trauma care.

Beginnings

Discussions about building an extension of the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Colorado north of Denver had begun in 1890.¹ But it was not until 1893, when John Fulton wrote a letter to J. H. Kellogg urging him to build a branch of the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Colorado, that definite moves were made to build such a sanitarium. The Colorado Conference pledged to support the efforts.² By the end of the year, a fledgling health work began at a private dwelling on University Hill located at the intersection of Euclid and 14th.³ Mr. and Mrs. Louis Kuester who had trained and worked at Battle Creek Sanitarium, initially ran the health work there.⁴ Mrs. Fulton became the first matron of the sanitarium, and by 1895, Dr. O. G. Place was sent from Battle Creek to expand the work.⁵ Place was supported initially by Dr. George W. Burleigh (1868-1899), a pioneer Adventist missionary to Africa who became a physician at the [Battle Creek Sanitarium](#).

Place in 1895 organized a “sanitarium company” and bought land adjacent to a peak, later named Mt. Sanitas, after the sanitarium. Ground was broken on June 10, 1895, on a 90-acre site on Upper Mapleton Hill. The plan initially was to erect a building 190 by 70 feet, four stories high. The top floor was to have lots of windows, and the kitchen and dining room was to have “a magnificent view of the surrounding country.” They also planned to erect six cottages.⁶ The General Conference and other denominational entities invested \$70,000 but ended up building a smaller four-story brick structure, 96 by 45 feet, with two cottages. The main building could accommodate 50 to 60 patients, and each cottage had 14 rooms. While the main building was under construction, patients from University Hill were moved into the East and West Cottages.⁷ Joseph Hartman, a nurse, became the first business manager, and Place the first medical superintendent. Even before the dedication of the sanitarium took place, Place was called to serve as a missionary to India, but he was quickly replaced by Dr. W. H. Riley. The sanitarium was officially dedicated on July 1, 1896.⁸

In December 1896, [O. A. Olsen](#) reported that the facility had to turn away patients because every room was full.⁹ Many of the young denomination’s physicians, including [Kate Lindsay](#), W. F. Hubbard, G. W. Burleigh, and Eva Read, helped establish the sanitarium.¹⁰ The beauty of the location nestled at the foot of the Rocky Mountains was a major selling feature for the institution. The weather in Colorado was also hoped to help patients suffering from tuberculous.¹¹ One visitor to the institution, W. S. Hyatt, commented on the beauty of the Colorado Sanitarium, observing that “Our eyes will never tire in beholding the wonderful works of God.”¹²

Health Legacy

From its inception, Colorado Sanitarium was envisioned as an outreach ministry to treat illness as well as educate the local community on healthful living.¹³ Despite its full patient rooms, the institution struggled financially: its building projects landing it in debt. Ellen White cautioned against accruing more debt and chastised Kellogg for spending so much money.¹⁴ But she saw the value of the institution, stating that “God wants us to never to do such a thing as to part with the Boulder Sanitarium.”¹⁵ To clarify management, in 1905 the institution was renamed the Boulder-Colorado Sanitarium, and the Colorado Medical Missionary Association was formed to operate the sanitarium with Howard F. Rand as the president.¹⁶

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the institution continued to grow and expand. Dr. J. D. Shively conducted operations along with Dr. Kate Lindsay (who made this her primary base of operations until 1920) and Dr. J. O. Stowe.¹⁷ By 1910 [A. T. Robinson](#) reflected on the “some-what checked history” of the sanitarium in terms of its ownership. The lack of clear jurisdiction meant that it was difficult to establish who really was responsible for the institution. In May 1910 the General Conference Council voted to recommend the reorganization of the Colorado Medical Missionary Association to make the Boulder-Colorado Sanitarium a Central Union Conference institution. The constituency met for this purpose July 18-20, 1910, in Boulder and voted in a new board which included A. T. Robinson as president, Dr. L. L. Jones as vice-president, and Meade MacGuire as secretary-treasurer.¹⁸ A food factory and a retail store selling health foods were also operated by the sanitarium.¹⁹ On December 4, 1910, H. A. Green arrived to serve as medical superintendent and chief surgeon, a post he held until 1937. From 1937 to 1941 Boulder-Colorado Sanitarium was operated under joint management with Porter Sanitarium, Denver, with R. J. Brown managing both.

Nursing Education

The sanitarium also had an attached nursing school which had a strong mission focus.²⁰ Within three months of opening the Colorado Sanitarium, a training class of 22 nurses were making “progress.” In the beginning, the two-year course included hydrotherapy, massage, laundering, waiting on tables, and cooking. Classes graduated each year, except one, between 1898 and 1944.²¹ In 1909, F. M. Wilcox, who had previously worked at the sanitarium, attended the commencement exercises for the school. He noted the strong missionary focus of the school which resulted in its alumni serving in many places around the world.²² In 1929-1930, a three-story nurses’ residence was built northwest of the main building. In the early 1940s, a joint School of Nursing was established with Porter Sanitarium and Boulder-Colorado Sanitarium. After World War II, the two health institutions partnered with Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska (now Union Adventist University) to establish the first collegiate nursing program in the Adventist denomination, with the academic and science courses taken in Lincoln, and the clinical experience offered at the Boulder and Porter facilities. On January 15, 1955, Boulder dropped out of this arrangement. After the professional nursing school was discontinued, the nurses’ residence was converted into a senior citizens’ center.²³

Transitions and Maturation

In the 1950s, the sanitarium transitioned into a modern healthcare institution. A major gift of \$500,000 from John Lamb, along with an additional gift from the Campbell Trust, allowed the hospital to modernize just when they needed to most. The institution's name changed to the Boulder-Colorado Sanitarium and Hospital in 1956. The original sanitarium was razed, and a new, modern building erected in 1957. A new obstetrical wing and operating rooms were added in 1958.²⁴

In 1962, the name was changed to Boulder Memorial Hospital. In 1969, the sanitarium sold 210 acres to the city of Boulder for open space and completed a new million-dollar three-story east wing. A new entrance and offices were added to the east wing in 1972. A completely new radiology department was also added. In 1973, the obstetrical service was closed, and in its place a strong pediatrics service developed. Some of the early natural remedies and hydrotherapy were expanded into a full physical medicine and rehabilitation program in the early 1970s. By the early 1980s, the hospital was considered to have the best rehabilitation service in Colorado.²⁵

Despite steady growth during this time, competition arose between area hospitals, most notably Boulder Community Hospital. This health facility, begun in 1922, competed with Boulder Memorial Hospital (the former sanitarium) by the 1960s and 1970s. The Adventist facility suffered an identity crisis as all employees and medical staff had been Adventist in its early decades, but by the 1970s, the institution struggled with this idea of mission. To discourage competition, the two medical institutions tried to share medical staff and services, but despite the best of intentions, the two hospitals ended up duplicating services and competing with one another. Boulder Community Hospital was given obstetrics and emergency services, but once again, these plans were not viable long-term for both hospitals.²⁶ In addition, the mountains that initially drew people to the sanitarium became a barrier to providing their health ministry because the people they needed to reach were living further and further away from their location on the edge of the mountains.²⁷

Hospital services at Boulder Memorial shifted to include a top rehabilitation program in Colorado, with a therapy pool, but once again, having two hospitals so close to one another and with the historic Adventist health facility located much closer to the mountains made it less convenient for patronage. Therefore, although it had a positive reputation for its medical services, people increasingly chose not to patronize the hospital for its services.

New Beginnings

During the early 1980s health insurance companies came up with contracts for exclusive services from hospitals. In exchange for such an exclusive contract, they offered a better reimbursement rate. This created a situation where hospitals competed on prices even if they offered shared services, and some employees worked at both Boulder Community and Boulder Memorial hospitals. A feasibility study found that of the three area

hospitals, Boulder Memorial was in last place in the market and its income was declining. Plans were developed to build an extension of the Adventist hospital which would allow them to offer obstetrics in one of the areas near Boulder where the population was growing, especially around Louisville, a former coal mining town that was rapidly growing to the south of the city of Boulder. Warren Clark, CEO, allowed two of his junior executive members, Rob Ferguson and John Sackett to develop a plan for an extension while he continued focusing on the main campus in Boulder.

This growth opportunity became bittersweet. A number of healthcare executives in the Adventist healthcare community opposed giving them any money to develop a new campus believing that expanding to a new campus would not work. The junior healthcare executives at Boulder Memorial pitched the idea to Don Welch, the president of Adventist Healthcare/US, who stopped to review the possibilities during a vacation to Estes Park. Clarke suggested to Sackett that they look for a potential location. They located some land that had access to the Boulder-Denver Turnpike, but it was not for sale. Initial overtures were rebuffed, so Sackett talked to the owner, Mr. Harold Spicer, personally. His children had been born at the old sanitarium. As he considered the possibility, he shared with Sackett that none of his children would need the land and he would like to have children born there. Sackett had raised \$1 million dollars for the expansion, but the 72 acres of land appraised for \$3 million dollars. An irrevocable trust with an annuity was established allowing Spicer along with his relatives to have a tax write-off while still earning money from the principal.²⁸ When Welch came out to visit, he supported the plan of the new executives, but to their surprise, in his report, Welch wrote that he didn't believe the hospital could support two campuses. At the same time, he recommended that they move the entire hospital to the new facility.

The mounting financial losses necessitated change. The old facility was sold for \$18 million dollars to Boulder Community Hospital on March 9, 1989, and they in turn agreed to hire many of the employees, especially some of the physicians, who worked for them while the transition took place. This was a difficult time as long-standing hospital employees at the sanitarium, as well as church workers, wrestled with the hospital's future. Ultimately, they determined, mission was more important than the geographical location. The hospital board selected John Sackett to be the new CEO who, despite some reluctance, worked to facilitate the transition to Louisville. He worked with David Rhyme, to build a 49-bed facility, with an adjacent medical personnel building. The two facilities were connected by a 70-foot atrium giving the appearance that the hospital was larger in size than it actually was. Like its predecessor, it had a beautiful view of the front range.

The hospital needed additional financing to complete the project. Their local bank financed the loan based on their long history of never defaulting and their honest reputation. A developer built a new golf course with new homes nearby to attract physicians to move to Louisville. The new Avista Hospital officially opened May 7, 1990, and by the third year the hospital finally broken even. Cash flow continued to increase; by the fifth year the hospital started to make a profit. Although smaller in size, the hospital administration focused on excellence and achieving the highest levels of patient satisfaction. The hospital began to win the prestigious Phoenix Award in

clinical healthcare outcomes. The new hospital proved profitable.

The name of the original facility in Boulder was changed to the Mapleton Center, offering sports medicine and outpatient rehabilitation services. In 2014 the property was purchased by Mapleton Hill Investments, LLC, to develop a retirement community. The facilities, formerly part of the Boulder Community Hospital, were demolished in 2019.²⁹

In 1996, Adventist hospitals in Colorado participated in a joint operating venture with the Catholic hospitals to increase their purchasing power. The combined entity was branded Centura Health, and the hospital was renamed Centura Health Avista Adventist Hospital. When Centura health broke up, Avista was partnered with St. Anthony's Hospital. This partnership did not last long, and the hospital was merged into the Adventist Health System and then became AdventHealth Avista. In 2022, the new Avista Adventist Hospital briefly closed due to the Marshall fire that burned over 1,000 homes nearby. The fire raged within yards of the flammable liquid-oxygen tanks outside the building. Employees used water buckets and hoses to beat back the flames, and the hospital reopened soon afterward.³⁰

Present

Avista Adventist Hospital continues the healing ministry of this institution as a 114-bed hospital owned and operated by AdventHealth with a staff of over 250 physicians and 400 employees. The original register of the Boulder Sanitarium resides in the archives of Union Adventist University.³¹ The local Boulder Historical Society also retains a significant collection of archival materials related to the sanitarium.

List of Names

Colorado Sanitarium (1895-1905), Boulder-Colorado Sanitarium (1905-1956), Boulder-Colorado Sanitarium and Hospital (1956-1962); Boulder Memorial Hospital (1962-1989), Avista Hospital (1990-1996); Centura Health Avista Adventist Hospital (1996-2023); AdventHealth Avista (2023-present)

Leadership

Medical Superintendents: O. G. Place (1895-1896); W. H. Riley (1896-1902), Kate Lindsay (1902); H. F. Rand (1902-1906); J. D. Shively (1906-1910); L. L. Jones (1910); H. A. Green (1910-1937); Myron S. King (1937-1938); H. A. Green (1939-1939); C. C. Prince (1939-1942); Ralph F. Waddell (1942-1945); R. T. Smith (1945-1948); Russell H. Hanson (1948-1956).

Managers: Joseph Hartman (1895-1901); F. M. Wilcox (1902-1909); Meade MacGuire (1909-1910); C. E. Rice (1910-1912); E. J. Baker (1913-1918); H. B. Steele (1918-1920); F. R. Eastman (1920-1925); L. V. Roberson (1925-1926); R. J. Brown (1926-1941); C. L. Torrey, 1941-1942); P. L. Williams (1942-1943); L. F. Bohner (1943-1945); H. A. Young

(1945-1951); H. E. Rice (1951-1957).

Administrators: H. C. Hartman (1957-1960); J. R. Shawver (1960-1963); Warren M. Clark (1963-1969); I. E. Hamilton (1969-1972); Warren M. Clark (1973-1987); James C. Culpepper (1987-1989); Donald L. Hanson (1990-1993).

Avista Administrators: John Sackett (1990-2013); Dennis Barts (2013-2017); Jillyan McKinney (2017-2019); Isaac Sendros (2019-2023); Mark Smith (2024-present).

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NOTES

1. See the gossip pieces in *Fort Collins Courier*, January 2, 1890, 1; *Fort Collins Courier*, December 18, 1890, 4.
2. "Colorado Conference Proceedings," *ARH*, October 24, 1893, 672.
3. "Personals," *ARH*, November 27, 1894, 752; "Items of Interest," *ARH*, May 14, 1895, 320. For a description of the work at this location and plans for its future, see the discussion under "Publishers' Department," *Good Health*, November 1894, np.
4. "Publishers' Department," *Good Health*, December 1893, np.
5. Mrs. J. H. Clemons, "History of the Boulder Colorado Sanitarium" (unpublished manuscript, Cornerstone Laying Ceremony, 1958), 1, <https://localhistory.boulderlibrary.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A55944>; "News Notes," *The Latimer County Independent*, November 16, 1893, 5. For rather rapid shift in scale for the sanitarium, see *Fort Collins Courier*, September 28, 1893, 3. For patients, see *The Kansas Worker*, July 4, 1894, 5.
6. See under "Colorado" in the *Omaha Daily Bee*, June 17, 1895, 5; *The Lamar Register*, May 25, 1895, 2.
7. "Our Colorado Sanitarium," *The Home Missionary*, November 1895, 229-230.
8. O.A. Olsen, "East and West," *ARH*, July 14, 1896, 429.
9. W. S. Hyatt, "The Colorado Sanitarium," *The Kansas Worker*, January 20, 1897, 1.
10. W. H. Riley, "The Colorado Sanitarium," *New York Indicator*, October 7, 1896, 1-2.
11. See, for examples, A. E. Place, "Notes by the Way," *New York Indicator*, August 26, 1896, 2; "Publishers' Department," *Good Health*, January 1896, np; "Our Colorado Sanitarium," *The Home Missionary*, November 1895, 229-230; see ad in *The Gospel of Health*, February 1897; J. H. Kellogg, "Air Starvation," *Good Health*, November 1897, 657-668.

12. W. S. Hyatt, "The Colorado Sanitarium," *The Kansas Worker*, January 20, 1897, 1.
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15. Ellen G. White, 20LtMs, Ms72, 1905,
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17. F[rancis] M. Wilcox, "Among our Training Schools," *ARH*, January 13, 1910, 17-18; *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* [1996], 10:142-143, 222-224.
18. Ibid.
19. A. T. Robinson, "The Boulder-Colorado Sanitarium," *ARH*, August 11, 1910, 15. For a thirty year anniversary overview of the institution, see R. J. Brown, "The Boulder Colorado Sanitarium," *Central Union Outlook*, May 8, 1928, 1-2.
20. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1905), 107.
21. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), 10:142-143, 222-224.
22. See the announcement of one of their graduates heading to India in *ARH*, March 3, 1910, 24.
23. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* [1996], 10:142-143, 222-224.
24. Oral History Interview with John Sackett, Dave Smith, and Tammy Smith, by the author, July 23, 2025.
25. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* [1996], 10:142-143, 222-224.
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