



120 Years of Innovation & Community

1905: The Boulder Commercial Association is Born

The Boulder Commercial Association (now the Boulder Chamber) is founded by a group of business owners with a like-minded vision: promoting Boulder's up-and-coming economy. Its first headquarters opened on the 1500 block of Pearl Street.

Beginning in the early 1900s, Boulder saw a population increase driven mainly by the mining industry and the establishment of The University of Colorado. Realizing a need to lay a solid foundation for Boulder's up-and-coming economy, The Boulder Commercial Association buckled in and got to work.

1908: Albert A. Reed Suggests Name for Hotel Boulderado

Albert A. Reed, founder of Hutchinson Black & Cook, was also serving as President of the Boulder Chamber in 1908. During this time, he suggested the name for Boulder's historic Hotel Boulderado---to remind tourists of their visit to Boulder.

1909: Hotel Boulderado Welcomes First Guests

In 1906, the Boulder Commercial Association envisioned a plan to attract more visitors, businesses, and potential investors to Boulder --- constructing a first-class hotel. There was one notable kink in this plan, however: There simply wasn't enough funding to bolster such a remarkable idea.

So, the Boulder Commercial Association devised a brilliant solution: a stock subscription campaign that encouraged residents and investors to purchase shares in the project. The heart of this campaign rested in the fact that The Boulderado would be owned by the community, and its success would have a direct impact on Boulder's economy.

The campaign was a major success, with the community raising approximately \$100,000 (~\$3 million today). Following two years of construction, Hotel Boulderado opened its doors on New Year's Day, 1908.

1931: The Chamber Advocates for First Bus System

During the Great Depression, the City of Boulder, along with support from the Chamber, introduced the first public bus system. Initially, bus systems around town were owned by private companies until the city took control of the operation. The Chamber supported this development, understanding that the system was a fantastic way to improve access to local businesses, tourist attractions, and residential areas. The last streetcars in Boulder would be retired on June 1, 1931, and replaced with four "Mack" buses. Streetcars had traveled 150,000 miles since 1899.



Although the motor industry had been booming in the decades prior, the economic circumstances of the Great Depression made it so that fewer people could afford personal vehicles, making Boulder's first bus system a much-needed service to residents facing financial hardship.

The introduction of Boulder's first bus system paved the way for continuous development and investment in Boulder's public transportation sector for nearly a century to come.

1939: Boulder Chamber Sets its Aim on Tourism

In the mid-to-late 1930's, the Chamber made tourism a key initiative. The New Deal, enacted by the then United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was a series of public works projects and financial reforms to curb the effects of The Great Depression.

This legislation had several positive impacts on Boulder's infrastructure and economy. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) funded various improvements to public buildings, roads, and recreation space --- The Boulder Canyon Dam being one. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in Boulder began developing parks and trails, including improvements to Flagstaff Mountain. The Public Works Administration (PWA) constructed new transportation networks, making it easier to travel throughout Boulder.

With improved infrastructure brought by New Deal Programs, Boulder was better suited to host tourists and increase investor appeal. The Boulder Chamber capitalized on these advancements and began to promote tourism like never before through vigorous advertisement and tourist-centric event planning.

1947: Boulder Star First Lit on Flagstaff Mountain

The Boulder Star is a beloved tradition in Boulder, dating back to 1947. Meant as a Christmas gift from the city of Boulder to its residents, symbolizing hope and joy during the harsh winter months. The history of the star is nothing less than fabled, having been subject to multiple pranks from rivaling universities, to politically motivated stunts, and even legal disputes --- Boulder residents have continually fought for this tradition in an unprecedented way.

In a move to better align with Boulder's spirit, the star has recently been updated to be more environmentally friendly; the bulbs have been replaced with more efficient LED lightbulbs and the electricity used to light the star switching to wind generated power. The Chamber is honored to be the caretaker of this unique custom.

1949: Chamber's "Progress Campaign" is a Success

In the late 1940s, Boulder faced challenges creating jobs for its 20,000 residents, with only two major companies employing a combined 200 people. Francis Reich, the ambitious manager of the Boulder



Chamber of Commerce, made job creation his top priority. Under his leadership, the Chamber launched the "Progress Campaign," which spearheaded several initiatives to boost the local economy.

One of the campaign's early successes was attracting *Esquire* magazine to Boulder. Reich and 175 businesses raised \$75,000 to bring the influential publication to the city, creating 180 jobs when its offices opened in July 1949. Another milestone was the construction of the Denver-Boulder Turnpike, a toll road championed by Reich and the Chamber that shortened the commute to Denver by seven miles, improving accessibility and regional connectivity.

The campaign's most transformative achievement came in 1949 when the National Bureau of Standards sought a new site for its Central Radio Propagation Laboratory. Concerned about nuclear threats during the Cold War, the U.S. government prioritized decentralizing research facilities. Boulder, with its strong university and minimal radio interference, became a contender among many cities.

Reich traveled to Washington, D.C., that fall to promote Boulder as the ideal location. Armed with photographs, films, and answers to officials' questions, he highlighted Boulder's potential. The effort paid off, and on December 15, 1949, Boulder was chosen as the lab's new home—a pivotal moment that solidified the city's future as a hub for innovation and research.

1951: Boulder's New Role as a Research Mecca Begins

Thanks to Francis Reich's tenacious lobbying for government labs in Boulder, as a part of his "Progress Campaign," our city was chosen as the location for the government's Central Radio Propagation Laboratory.

The Chamber of Commerce located a 208-acre plot of land for the lab, and the land was subsequently donated by the people of Boulder.

The 208-acre parcel, located west of what is now Broadway and extending to Boulder Open Space, marked the southern boundary of Boulder. In just one week, 296 individuals, businesses, and organizations raised \$90,000 to purchase the site. The Chamber of Commerce offered the land to the National Bureau of Standards (NBS), now known as NIST, which accepted the proposal and chose Boulder as the location for the new Radio Propagation Lab. Construction began in 1952, and in 1954, President Eisenhower visited to dedicate the new facility.



1953: Junior Chamber's "Light A Bumper"

The "Jaycees" (Junior Chamber of Commerce) hosted and participated in many fundraising events and community campaigns throughout the mid-20th century. One of them being the "Light a Bumper" campaign, an effort to encourage road safety in the city.

Bumper lights on automobiles would not become nationally mandated until 1968, so it's fair to say that the Boulder Jaycees were ahead of their time in thinking about auto-safety.

1956: Boulder Chamber Hosts "Teacher Picnic"

Two young brothers enjoy a meal at the Boulder Chamber's 1956 picnic, dedicated to Boulder area teachers.

1961: Chamber Sponsors 23rd Annual Glacier Hike

Hikes at the Arapaho Glacier were held for a number of years. The Boulder Chamber of Commerce organized the hikes annually on the second Sunday in August from 1939 through 1976. Laurence Paddock, a longtime Boulder community journalist, noted that "over the years, more than 14,000 persons from carried infants to 80-year-olds took part, with the only two injuries reported in 1954."

1967: Boulder-Denver Turnpike Becomes U.S. 36

In 1941, the Highway Committee of the Boulder Chamber of Commerce began pushing for a direct road between Boulder and Denver. After World War II, a dedicated committee was formed to focus on the project, overcoming obstacles and skepticism about toll financing.

In July 1950, \$6.3 million in bonds were approved, and the Denver-Boulder Turnpike opened in January 1952. It was the first highway of its kind in Colorado, predating the Interstate Highway System it later resembled. Remarkably, the bonded debt was paid off 13 years ahead of schedule, and in September 1967, the turnpike became a free public highway.

1977: Boulder Chamber Hosts a "Visitor's Van"

The Boulder Chamber's Visitor and Conference Bureau, now known as Visit Boulder, had many unique ways of drawing the attention of Boulder tourists. Among their many quirky tactics was the mobile visitor information center pictured above, in June of 1977.

1986: Boulder Chamber Opens New Office

On January 1, 1986, the newly built Chamber headquarters began operations at the new 2440 Pearl Street location. Previously, the Chamber's office resided on Canyon Boulevard. Today, the Chamber still



works out of its Pearl Street location, and its construction was a symbol of the Chamber's dedication to development and relevance.

2005: Boulder Chamber Celebrates 100th Anniversary

2005 marked the Chamber's centennial year serving the Boulder community. In summer of 1905, a group of thirty businessmen got together and deemed it necessary that a commercial club was an immediate necessity. Thus, the Boulder Commercial Association (now the Boulder Chamber) was born on August 4, 1905. This association's purpose was to see Boulder as a properly advertised city, rather than a "semi-rural market town." A multitude of committees formed around the BCA with the common goal of transforming Boulder into a destination city. As decades passed, the BCA would be renamed the Boulder Chamber of Commerce, slowly becoming a more formidable voice for the Boulder community. 100 years later, in 2005, the Chamber was as dedicated as ever to the City of Boulder and its people.

2021: Boulder Chamber Integrates Boulder Transportation Connections

Boulder Transportation Connections, Boulder's non-profit transportation administration merged with the Boulder Chamber in April of 2021. This partnership follows years of collaboration between the two organizations. This merger is seen as a significant boost by helping the Chamber to, "[...] more effectively implement the vision of a sustainable transportation system, promote diverse mobility options for the local workforce and residents, and support the region's economic vitality," explains John Tayer, CEO and President of the Boulder Chamber.

Since the merger, Boulder Chamber Transportation Connections (BCTC) has worked tirelessly in its advocacy for more efficient, sustainable transportation in the Boulder area. For example, BCTC has effectively promoted legislature at both the state and local levels, helping to direct funding and publicity to cleaner, safer, and easier transportation.

2024: Boulder Chamber Integrates Commercial Brokers of Boulder

Early in 2024, the Boulder Chamber and Commercial Brokers of Boulder united efforts with the purpose of providing stronger aid to brokerages and business/property owners. This partnership ensures that both entities are better equipped to confront new challenges in the commercial real estate sector post-Covid.

By fostering this collaboration, the Chamber can leverage CBB's market expertise, while brokers benefit from the Chamber's intensive community insight. A key focus of this partnership is addressing office vacancies, which have plagued some sub-markets in the city, namely on Pearl Street. The Chamber's operational support provides significant administrative efficiencies for CBB. This integration has the potential to enhance awareness of pertinent issues as well as contribute to the development of more effective commercial real estate policies.



2024: Boulder Chamber Unveils Refreshed Brand Appearance

Over the last century, Boulder Chamber has continued to build what’s “next” for the Boulder region through an ever-broadening scope of business support, policy advocacy, and economic vitality. In preparation for our 120th anniversary, stakeholders may have noticed a subtle, yet refreshing, change in the Chamber’s branding. Along with new branding, the Boulder Chamber implemented a strong shift in member support software system, resulting in an enhanced Member Center and an improved website.

“While our look and service may adjust with the times,” said Boulder Chamber President and CEO John Tayer, “Our milestone anniversary will serve as an opportunity for the Boulder Chamber to highlight our steadfast commitment to supporting local businesses, strengthening our economy, and lifting the community we serve.”

2025: Boulder Chamber Integrates Boulder County Film Commission

The Boulder Chamber announced strategic merger with the Boulder County Film Commission, approved in October of this past year. With this merger, the Chamber welcomed Bruce Borowsky—a seasoned filmmaker and the current Boulder County Film Commissioner—who has been active in Boulder’s film industry since 1990. This integration will undoubtedly strengthen the city’s film and creative industries, while paving the way for incredible opportunities—like bringing the Sundance Film Festival to Boulder. Regardless of if the Sundance Institute chooses Boulder as its new host city, the union between the Boulder Chamber and Boulder County Film Commission is integral to the support of Boulder’s unique film industry.

John Tayer, CEO and President of the Boulder Chamber notes that, “With this collaboration, we’re not just supporting filmmakers — we’re boosting an entire creative ecosystem that touches every corner of our local economy.”