

Background on Donald Fletcher

Donald Fletcher was born in 1849 in Canada and moved to Chicago with his family when he was 17. He moved to Denver in 1879 and worked for the Rio Grande Railroad until 1881 when he realized the expanding city of Denver was a way that he could make money in real estate. His first project was the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Denver and his success led to him being elected to the Denver Chamber of Commerce in 1888. In 1890 he helped found Fairmount Cemetery. His investments brought him considerable wealth and he soon became one of the most influential businessmen in Denver.

Donald Fletcher, Thomas Hayden, Samuel Perry and Frank Perry acquired four square miles on either side of Colfax Avenue. The four businessmen incorporated their new land into the town of Fletcher on April 30, 1891, with 36 residents. The town of Fletcher would eventually change its name and become the town of Aurora in 1907.

One of the biggest problems with incorporating a new town east of Denver was ensuring a reliable water supply. Donald Fletcher attempted to solve this problem by creating the East Denver Water Company to provide water for the new town of Fletcher. The town board purchased the East Denver Water Company system for \$150,000. Unfortunately, the East Denver Water Company did not reliably deliver the promised water supply to the new town.

Donald Fletcher disappeared from the Denver area after losing his fortune in the silver crash of 1893. The entrepreneur attempted to start new real estate ventures in both Cripple Creek and New York but his efforts were unsuccessful. After declaring bankruptcy, he moved to California with his family and passed away in the late 1920s.



TWELFTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES
SCHEDULE NO. 1.—POPULATION.

City or town Aurora State Ill. Precinct 14 Enumeration District No. 371 Sheet No. 6

Population of city, town, or village within the enumeration district 1,400 Population of city, town, or village 1,400 Population of county 1,400

Enumerated by me on the 1 day of June 1900

NAME	SEX	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	OCCUPATION	EDUCATION	RELIGION	COLOR	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	EYES	HAIR	SKIN	TENDENCY	REMARKS
John E. Smith	M	35	Married	Farmer	8	Protestant	White	5' 8"	160	Blue	Brown	Fair	None	
Mary E. Smith	F	32	Married	Homemaker	8	Catholic	White	5' 4"	120	Blue	Brown	Fair	None	
James H. Smith	M	28	Single	Teacher	12	Protestant	White	5' 10"	170	Blue	Brown	Fair	None	
Elizabeth H. Smith	F	25	Single	Teacher	12	Catholic	White	5' 6"	130	Blue	Brown	Fair	None	
William H. Smith	M	22	Single	Farmer	8	Protestant	White	5' 8"	160	Blue	Brown	Fair	None	
Anna H. Smith	F	19	Single	Homemaker	8	Catholic	White	5' 4"	120	Blue	Brown	Fair	None	
Charles H. Smith	M	16	Single	Farmer	8	Protestant	White	5' 6"	130	Blue	Brown	Fair	None	
Elizabeth H. Smith	F	13	Single	Homemaker	8	Catholic	White	5' 4"	120	Blue	Brown	Fair	None	
William H. Smith	M	10	Single	Farmer	8	Protestant	White	5' 6"	130	Blue	Brown	Fair	None	
Anna H. Smith	F	7	Single	Homemaker	8	Catholic	White	5' 4"	120	Blue	Brown	Fair	None	
Charles H. Smith	M	4	Single	Farmer	8	Protestant	White	5' 6"	130	Blue	Brown	Fair	None	
Elizabeth H. Smith	F	1	Single	Homemaker	8	Catholic	White	5' 4"	120	Blue	Brown	Fair	None	

Census Sheet form New York 1900, city of Aurora, Aurora History Museum Archives



***Data from Census form:**

- Donald, Julia and Annie Fletcher lived at 239 55th Street, New York, New York.
- They were lodgers (rented their rooms)

Donald was white, male, born September 1850, 50 years old and married

- He was born in Canada, his mother and father were from Scotland
- He immigrated to the US in 1890, had been living in the US for 10 years and was a citizen
- He listed his occupation as mining broker
- He can read, write and speak English

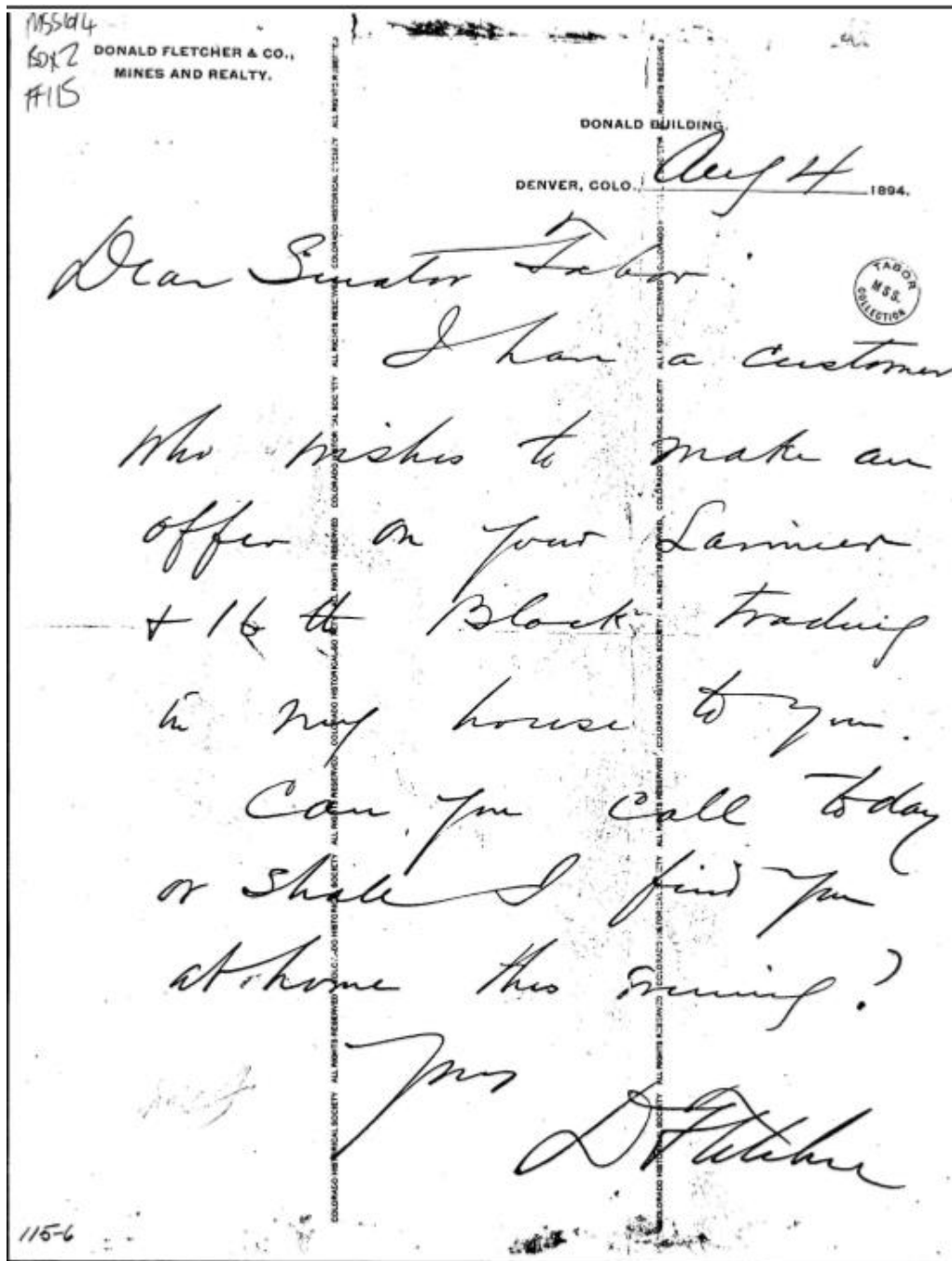
Julia was white, female and born December 1850, 50 years old with 3 children, all are living

- She was born in Canada, her mother was from Canada and her father was from Scotland
- She immigrated to the US in 1890 and has been in the US all 10 years
- She listed no occupation
- She can read, write and speak English

Annie was white, female, born June 1877, 23 years old and single

- She was born in Illinois
- She listed her occupation as artist
- She can read, write and speak English





"Dear Senator Tabor, I have a customer who wishes to make an offer on your Larimer and 16th trading in my house to you. Can you call today or shall I find you at home this evening? Mr. D. Fletcher"

Letter from Fletcher to Horace Tabor about properties 8/4/1894, city of Aurora, Aurora History Museum archives



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115-8
6x2
#16

DONALD FLETCHER & CO.,
MINES AND REALTY.

DONALD BUILDING.

DENVER, COLO.,

1894.

Hon. H. Horace Tabor

Dear Sir

Dear Senator.

My party asks
me to offer my house
with 30000 against it
for your Larimer St Block
with 100 m. against it
As I have not been
able to find you in the office
I mail it to you -
perhaps he might
do still better

Respectfully yours

D. Fletcher

The house is perfect & with the
barn cost me \$111,000
The ground 10 lots cost 45

I would like to show you & your
wife through the house

"Honorable Horace Tabor, _____ My party asks to offer my house with 30,000 against it for your Larimer st block with 100 m against it. As I have not been able to find you in the office I mail it to you. Perhaps he might do still better. Respectfully yours, D. Fletcher
The house is perfect and with the barn cost me \$111,000. The ground 10 lots cost 45. I would like to show you and your wife through the house"

Letter from Fletcher to Horace Tabor about properties 8/14/1894, city of Aurora, Aurora History Museum archives



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ONCE UPON A TIME DONALD FLETCHER BUILT A TOWN

NOTE: Many communities honor their founding fathers with monuments, statues, civic centers, and such. The founder of Aurora, Donald Fletcher, has not been so honored. His name has been mud. What is the true story? With time can perspective shed a kinder light on this man?

1891.....BEGINNINGS

It was 1891 when a little community was begun on the eastern approach to Denver. Real estate developer and speculator, Donald Fletcher chose an area along County Road No. 54 (later named Colfax Avenue) to build a town. Boundary lines extended from Yosemite Street on the west to Peoria Street on the east, from Sixth Avenue to Twenty-Sixth Avenue. Board sidewalks were constructed and two-story homes built along what is now Galena Street. The homes were later rented or sold to many of the workmen. A town council was formed and the little town was named Fletcher, incorporated in May of 1891. The town included 21 buildings and 36 people.

At the second meeting of the town council, a proposal was approved to purchase the Coal Creek Water Company. Many of the first town officials were members of the East Denver Water Company, which had developed the Coal Creek system. The Coal Creek Water system cost \$150,000, with bonds issued by a community of only 36 people. Unbelievable!

The assessed valuation of Fletcher was \$300,000, thus there was a bonded indebtedness of 50%! Today state law allows only a 15% bonded indebtedness, perhaps from unfortunate past experiences.

HIGH HOPES

The Fletcher community had high hopes for boom and progress. However, the silver panic of 1893 dashed forever the dreams of many speculators, who had gambled on growth to continue at its previous rapid pace. Fletcher did not grow. No water came from the Coal Creek system. No one was rushing to Fletcher to buy or invest. The water debt and taxes were a liability. Finally, in 1902 Fletcher had to buy its water from the Denver Union Water Company. Donald Fletcher had long since sold his bonds and moved to Seattle. He was definitely not well thought of by Fletcher residents. They were left holding nothing but promises.

STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

Fletcher struggled on, surviving when other developments such as Barnum, University Park, Berkeley and Valverde could not continue. Fletcher's first annexation occurred in 1895, the Schoonmaker Addition, between 4th and 6th Avenue from Salida (Yosemite) to Warren (Dayton). A school had been built in 1892 at 16th Avenue and Fulton.

In spite of water and money problems, the town council continued to show concern for city progress. In 1904 a system had been worked out for the numbering of houses and placing of signs on street corners, preparing for the early use of rural free postal delivery.

In 1906 a Board of Health had been established. Council acted on May 14, 1906 to retain an architect to draw plans for a new town hall. A sidewalk ordinance had been passed in 1906 for sidewalks on the north side of Colfax, in Aurora, Fletcher. The name Aurora appears several times in the early Fletcher ordinances.

ANNEXATION TO DENVER VOTED

In 1897 a public election was held to determine whether or not the Town of Fletcher should be dissolved and the territory annexed to Denver. Ballots were counted, 22 for dissolution and one against. No further mention of this election was made in the town minutes. It remains a mystery. Perhaps Fletcher was too far from the Denver city limits (Colorado Boulevard). Neighboring Montclair did not annex to Denver until 1902, so the open land area might have been a hindrance.

A NEW NAME.....AURORA

January 14, 1907, following the receipt of a petition signed by 93 citizens, the town council passed a resolution changing the name of Fletcher to Aurora. There has been much speculation about the choice of the new name. Aurora means "the rising light of dawn". Was there a rising feeling of community spirit, which rejected a difficult birth?

In 1906 a newspaper known as the **Aurora News**, and having general circulation in Fletcher, had been adopted as the official newspaper of the town. Also, a Mr. J. L. Cleaves, in a letter written to the State Historical Society, stated that Aurora was the name of the most important subdivision of the town.

NEW NAME.....SAME PROBLEMS

Changing its name did not change the character of the community. Both Fletcher and Aurora were, in the beginning, farming communities best known for cattle-raising, dairies, hay and wheat farms and chicken ranches. A name change did not insure a prosperous future or solve water bond problems. There was, however, a feeling of unity, community identity which continued to grow.



DONALD FLETCHER: PHANTOM VILLAIN OR HERO????

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Donald Fletcher was born in Coburg, Canada, September 29, 1849, where he spent his boyhood. At the age of seventeen his family moved to Chicago, where he attended private schools and later entered the University of New York, graduating with honors. Inglis Fletcher, his daughter-in-law, wrote in 1959, that he was a Presbyterian minister, attending Knox College and Union Seminary in New York. She calls him a brilliant student, speaking seven languages well.

PENNYLESS...POOR HEALTH

In 1879, at the age of 30, Fletcher came to Colorado, chiefly to restore his seriously impaired health. Locating in Denver, and being almost penniless, he accepted the first situation he could find, a clerkship in one of the offices of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, where he remained until 1881. Realizing the opportunities offered by the growth of the city, he opened a real estate office and made the initial move toward independence and ultimate fortune with only a few dollars capital.

CAPITOL HILL...GRAZING GROUNDS

His first venture was the purchase of what is known as Capitol Hill subdivision, an entirely vacant tract wholly outside and beyond the Denver city limits, uninhabited and undisturbed by any transportation lines. This was grazing ground for cattle (Was this land similar to land later chosen for Fletcher?) Hill's *History of Colorado* says, "Mr. Fletcher was the first to aid in populating those grazing grounds for cattle, changing them from primeval condition to one of choice residence lots, a place of lovely homes, adorned with shade trees and emerald lawns.he did not advance from a clerkship to affluence by rapid strides. It was only after years of perseverance, by constantly maintaining his faith in the future of the city and insistently directing attention to the elevated lands he was endeavoring to sell that he succeeded in turning the tide in that direction and in relieving himself from financial embarrassment."

RAGS TO RICHES...SUCCESS

From the beginning of 1886 (only 5 years since his real estate career had begun) his transactions multiplied rapidly and his profits were large. Fletcher was extensively prominent in community activities.

In January, 1888 he was elected a member of the Denver Chamber of Commerce directorate, being named president. In March of that year he was made president of the state Board of Immigration. He was made president of the Colfax Avenue Electric Railway, president of the Fairmount Cemetery Association, was a stockholder in six different manufacturing concerns in Denver, and in seven retail businesses in Denver. Hill says, "His investments in those enterprises were made for the sole purpose of aiding them to successful results."

Fletcher was made president of a railway project known as the California "Short Line" beginning at Leavenworth, Kansas, following a straight line to Denver and then a direct route across the mountains to Salt Lake City and Ogden. The first survey from the Missouri River to Denver was completed and the line located in 1889, the remainder in 1890. Little further was done.



Donald Fletcher

Picture from Western History Dept.,
Denver Public Library

Having amassed large sums of money from sales of Denver property, Fletcher invested heavily in 1889-90 in Pueblo realty. He purchased large tracts adjoining that city, laying out subdivisions and uniting with Pueblo businessmen to build a system of permanent and far-reaching improvements. Much of the subsequent growth of Pueblo was due to the introduction at the proper time of these new influences. Fletcher in his promotion of Pueblo was influential in bringing to Pueblo and Colorado the steel mills, later Colorado Fuel and Iron Company.

The mineral palace erected in Pueblo was in large part due to Mr. Fletcher's efforts, and in organizing a company to build it, he was made its president.

Fletcher, A Man of Sterling Character ???

Donald Fletcher was one of the few men of his day who made a fortune without having any connection with mining. Though his work in building Denver and Colorado was vital to its present development, his name is practically unknown to the people of today. Few people know of his direct connection with the founding of Aurora.

If Donald Fletcher were here today, arguments in his behalf would include: 1. He was well thought of by the citizens he worked with and held many positions of responsibility; 2. In developing a water company, he was doing what many other promoters of the day were attempting; 3. He could not have foreseen that a drought would dry up the source of his water company; 4. The Panic of '93 had reversed his fortunes and he may not have been able to continue with his Fletcher development.

A MAN OF POSITION

Donald Fletcher is mentioned briefly in **Fairmount and Historic Colorado**, written in 1976 by David Halaas. At the March 7, 1890 meeting, the stockholders of Fairmount Cemetery Association elected Fletcher its first president. Halaas says, "There was no doubt that Fairmount's founders and directors were men of capacity and integrity--all of whom were interested and actively involved in varying activities affecting the growth and development of Colorado."

Does it seem reasonable that Donald Fletcher would have been elected to this and many other important positions if his character or motives had been suspect? A newspaper account states: "The cemetery was incorporated at a time (1890) when the growth of Denver and the extension of its boundaries demanded the establishment of a new cemetery at a location far outside the city's boundaries. The soil composition was excellent, consisting of heavy clay, covered with rich loam."

Another newspaper account praises Fletcher in this manner: "Mr. Fletcher has succeeded in building up a business of extensive proportions by his careful and conscientious dealings, and has won the respect of his associates of Denver by his devotion to duty and the best interests of the city."

The article goes on to say, "Mr. Fletcher is a man that the young men may copy, with profit to themselves; his purity, close attention to business and fixed determination to do right for the sake of right and not for policy's sake are qualities he possesses in a large degree; these form the basis on which he has been able to amass a considerable fortune and to establish himself among the leading citizens of Denver."

"As foreman of a recent grand jury, he gave himself to the work with a spirit that attracted the attention of all good citizens, the results of which have already borne fruit in the direction of a better condition of morals in the community."

"He was president of the Chamber of Commerce in 1888, in which capacity he advocated many public measures for the material interests of the state, and worked for them with a zeal characteristic of the public spirited citizen he has proved himself to be."

ELEGANCE TO THE EAST

Fletcher appears to have been known as a man who carried a project to successful completion. In 1890 he was actively promoting the growth of Denver to the east. He had developed Fletcher's Subdivision on Capitol Hill (roughly located from Seventh and Eighth Avenues between Marion and Clarkson). As president of Fairmount Cemetery Association and president of the Colfax Avenue Electric Company, he was actively involved in developing land to the east of Colorado Boulevard.

Another optimist, the Baron Walter von Richthofen, had purchased 320 acres east of Denver and had hopes of developing his estate, Montclair, into a health spa, especially for tuberculosis patients. He planned a 200 room sanatorium. His dreams knew no bounds. Surely Donald Fletcher heard of these grandiose plans.

The Baron constructed a castle at 7020 East Twelfth Avenue. It was open land then. Rumor has spread the story that when the Baron needed water for his development, Donald Fletcher quickly organized the East Denver Water Company. Before his water system could be sold to the Baron, Fletcher found that the Baron had purchased water from the Denver Union Water Company.

ROSE-COLORED OPTIMISM

It must be mentioned that in 1891 there were other persons developing water companies. David Moffat, pioneer railroader, had become involved with a water company that developed Marston Lake. There were many competitors to supply water to the rapidly growing population of the metropolitan Denver area. Donald Fletcher could have been attempting what was a going business at the time.

Speculators had to be optimists with rose-colored glasses. Who else would take a chance that the prairie with wind-blown hills would provide water for Montclair? It is a possibility, remote but possible, that a surveyor's report first made in 1865, influenced Fletcher's optimism. The surveyor, William Ashley, noted a "large sandy creek, Coal Creek, along the course of which good fresh water can be had in abundance by digging from two to ten feet deep." Maps today show this stream is called "Sand Creek". The Coal Creek Fletcher developed was much further south. Coal Creek joins with Murphy Creek to form Sand Creek at the curve where Sixth Avenue turns south, east of Buckley Field. Is it not possible that Fletcher read that surveyor's report and thought he was purchasing ample water?

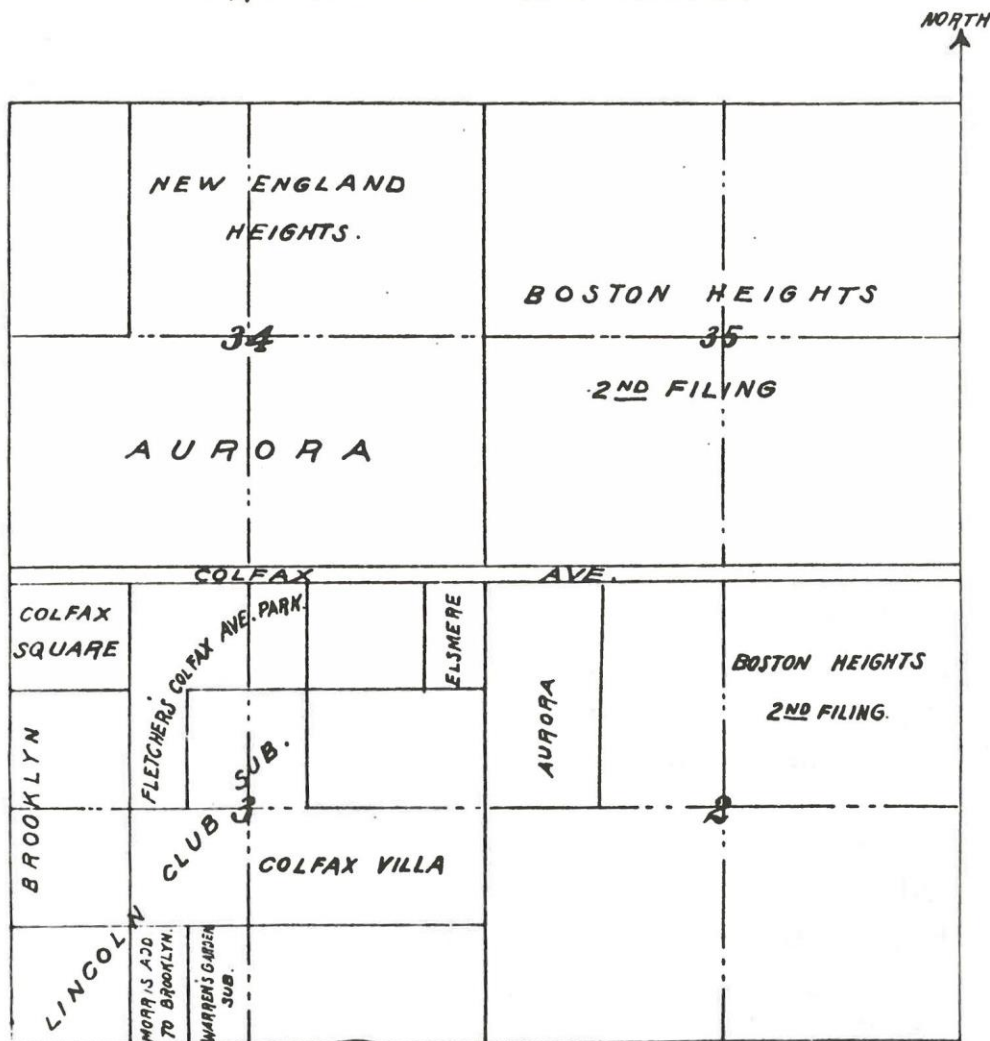
"Once upon a time...Donald Fletcher built a town" July 1976, pages 2, 3, 5, city of Aurora, Aurora History Museum archive



MAP SHOWING THE CORPORATE LIMITS
OF
THE TOWN OF FLETCHER.

Being all of Sections 34 and 35 Tp. 3 S. R. 67 West.
and all of Sections 2 and 3 Tp. 4 S. R. 67 West.

ARAPAHOE COUNTY, COLORADO.



"Town of Fletcher" map, city of Aurora, Aurora History Museum archives



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Donald Fletcher

city of Aurora - Aurora History Museums Photographic Collections



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