

“Women of Inspiration” Mural

by Artist Frank Garza

Historical Background by Robin Kring



The “Women of Inspiration” mural is a project of the Brighton Cultural Arts Commission, and its Brighton Public Arts Committee (BPAC), honoring and celebrating the women who inspired Brighton. The mural is located on the north exterior wall of the H&R Block building at 66 S. Main St., in Brighton, Colorado, and was made possible with funding from Brighton Lodging Tax Grants.

In the *Women of Inspiration* Mural, the distinct style of strong symbolism and realism of Artist Frank Garza has captured a creative historical expression of Brighton’s *Women of Inspiration*. The young girls in the forefront, open the pages of Brighton’s past and reflect on Brighton’s *Women of Inspiration*. Appearing in the background, each grouping highlights a representative of the many Brighton women embodying a unique symbolic group of inspiration including:

[*The Strength & Vigor of Brighton’s Women of Industry*](#), [*The “Sugar Sweet” Impact of Brighton’s Women*](#), [*The Pioneering Spirit of Brighton’s Women*](#), [*The Enriching Cultural Heritage of Brighton’s Women*](#), [*The Artistic Heart of Brighton’s Women*](#), [*The Charitable Benevolence of Brighton’s Women*](#), and [*The Championing Spirit of Brighton’s Women*](#).

Another group of girls in the background, anxiously await in line to decorate the Community Christmas Tree with hand-made ornaments, inspired by those hung by community members throughout the years with expressions of Brighton and its *Woman of Inspiration*.

[*The Community Christmas Tree*](#)

[About the Mural Artist](#) [About the Historical Background Author](#)

[About the Brighton Cultural Arts Commission](#)

Please Note: We hope the following women of inspiration convey a representation of many women. Each group of women in the mural, represents a Woman of Inspiration category, as shared in the following pages. The artist has selected a pictorial representative women's group from history to convey each category and their stories are told in this document, along with some additional women's stories. However, even together, these Women of Inspiration stories are not a comprehensive portrayal, but rather a representation of many individuals and groups — including those not specifically mentioned by name. We hope the stories presented may also help to honor and celebrate women you may know that embody one of these symbolic groups in the mural, too.

We invite you to [Contact the Author](#) with any new Women of Inspiration stories or ideas for considered inclusion in future revisions of this document and/or other articles.

Brighton's Community Christmas Tree



The mural's tree is inspired by a 15-foot Community Christmas Tree, which was displayed each holiday season, between 1979 and the mid-2000s, in Brighton City Hall (now Historic City Hall). Each year Emi Chikuma, and several women from the community, would gather together to hand-make ornaments for decorating the tree, as an expression of community and friendship. The tree became, and remains in many memories, a symbol representing many facets of Brighton's culture and personality. The first tree was decorated with more than 1,200 ornaments made by Emi, Peggy Burroughs, Bernice Dittmer, Dottie Goddard, Polly Nelms, Sharon Jaeger, Carole Rice, Flossie Spring, and Shirley Wall. Faces of the makers changed over the years, as Emi's enthusiasm and love for decorating trees spread. Shelley Phelps Whitfield

shared that her mother, Rajean Phelps, was one of these ladies and they met every Wednesday to make ornaments. Laurie Maier remembered the women placed beautiful ornaments on the tree in a methodical process starting from close to the primary tree trunk outward on each branch until each branch was filled with a beautifully created ornament.

Emi's Trees Were Legendary

Many describe Emi's trees as "legendary in the community," exquisitely decorated with each ornament meticulously positioned the full length of each limb. Her family once wrote her passion was her Christmas tree, and the happiness it brought to all that saw it. Her collection of ornaments would eventually total over 2,500 ornaments, which she rotated as her tree could only support the weight of approximately 1,000. The collection started from a favorite her husband, John, bought her early in their marriage. The couple would continue to search together for the perfect ornament, whenever they traveled, and friends and family brought her ornaments from their travels, too. Each ornament in her collection was carefully labeled.

Emi loved spreading the joy a Christmas tree would bring. She and the other women would decorate trees for other organizations, as well, including an all-sports theme tree for the Brighton Recreation Center and festive trees for the Adams County Museum and its historic schoolhouse. I remember visiting the City Hall tree and seeing one decorated with the "B" of Brighton's Centennial logo. When I first saw the tree, I was personally touched by the sentiment that each was made by a Brighton community member.

Deko Shibao taught the local Niesi Women's Club how to make miniature Japanese umbrellas from cigarette package wrappers and Emi started to place these on her tree. One of the girls in the mural is depicted holding one of these. Another holds a straw folk-art ornament, built to resemble the first schoolhouse built on the Aichelman farm. Many of Emi's ornaments were sometimes designed with local history, herself a historian for the local Brighton Japanese American Association (BJAA) and the Brighton community.

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Women of Inspiration, The Strength and Vigor of Brighton's Women of Industry and Business



The Women of the Kuner Pickle Bottling Room represent the strength and vigor of Brighton's many women of industry and business, whose hard work and steadfast attention to quality helped Brighton's center of industry prosper. Their work in the dairy, canning, and beet sugar factories helped create Brighton's proud reputations as the "Little City of Pickles" and the "Rocky Mountain Canned-Vegetable Leader." Brighton's women would work in a variety of the town's early factories, including the Northern Dairy Company, Midland Cereal Company, and Marvel Mills. Brighton women also brought strength and vigor to important roles in business management and entrepreneurial endeavors.

The Kuner Pickle Bottling girls worked with strength and vigor as production line workers, wearing factory-issued wooden shoes to protect them from corrosive brine and other pickling agents. The rest of the uniform was adopted to carry out the Dutch theme of the wooden shoes and included a Dutch-style cap and a light-colored apron. The forelady wore a dark-colored apron to distinguish her authority.

The girls each earned \$4 a week and were responsible for the strict quality assurance set by founder and owner, Max Kuner. Their tasks included sorting, cleaning, preparing raw ingredients, and performing quality assurance inspections. After pickles were grown locally, they were received in various receiving stations, where they were stored in brine until packed. The women sat at a large table and meticulously inspected and sorted the pickles by size, then placed them in different barrels. Their wooden shoes protected their feet (and provided an

option for keeping leather shoes away) from the corrosive brine. All pickles at this time were hand-picked “fancy” and pickles not meeting the high standard were made into relish. The women’s attention to detail was crucial in maintaining the Kuner quality product standard and the “Straight Goods and a Square Deal” was met. This motto was personified in the large “K” product brand Max designed himself. Quality attention to every detail was made. Even the “K” label had to be hand-applied precisely, so it laid perfectly in line with the embossed “K” on the bottle’s neck.

As the company added new and larger varieties of products, the women learned to process them, which included: chow-chow (a type of pickled relish, often made with tomatoes, bell peppers, and onions), peanut butter, chutney, Worcestershire sauce, apple butter, peach butter, sauerkraut, chili sauce, apple sauce, horseradish, spaghetti, salad dressing, vinegar, mustard, and pork and beans. This included learning to run machinery, as needed. The Brighton women applied the same attention to quality for new product lines and continued to work diligently until the Brighton plant closed in 1984. Although no longer family-owned, the Kuner brand, its quality exemplified by Brighton women, still stands on today’s grocery store shelves (under nationwide distribution by Faribault Foods, Inc.).

Strength & Vigor Produce a Forelady

Kuner women, like Alberta M. (Fields) White, known as May, worked as the order desk “city girl,” who took orders by telephone and in person, then picked and packed the orders in wood boxes. She added tissue paper around the bottles to protect them during delivery. May first started working for the company at the Denver plant in 1904 (peeling onions, like her mother before her). By 1911, she was promoted to Forelady, a position she held until she retired in 1952 (after working 48 years for the company).

From Factory Worker to Company President

Brighton women also brought their strength and vigor to other factories and businesses, which included the creameries and canneries. Marguerite Frink Counter, called Daisy, started working in her father’s creamery and later helped in its operations. Eventually, after she served as secretary, and then treasurer, Daisy assumed presidency of the company under its new name, the Ft. Lupton Canning Company (located in Brighton). Daisy’s mother, Junietta Patience (Peckham) Frink (also called Etta or E.P.) was another Brighton business manager, who helped her husband run the creamery and dairy businesses. Etta independently ran the creamery for several months, when the family first arrived in Ft. Lupton, and her husband, O.E., remained in Denver to close business affairs.

The Vigor of Business Management and Entrepreneurial Endeavors

Other Brighton women were leading the way by serving in important roles in business management and entrepreneurship. The Dolton Sisters (Mabel and Maude) owned and

operated the Ladies Toggery, established in 1915. Maude left the shop in 1918 and Mabel ran it until 1942 when she retired. Its reputation as a fine, upscale ladies' clothing shop lived on under the same name with two subsequent owners.

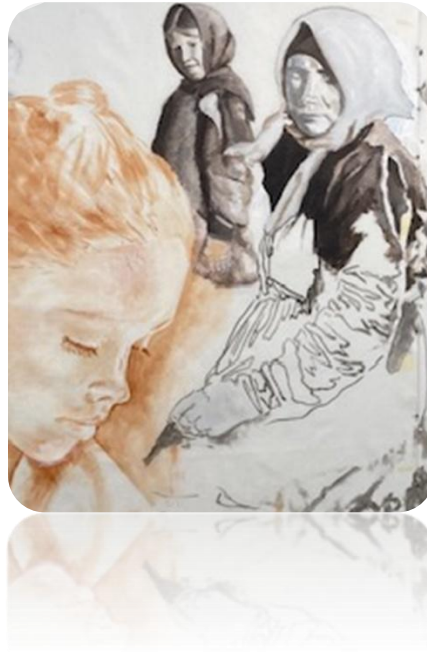
In 1944, after her husband Archie's death, Josie Leffingwell assumed management of the Leffingwell Mercantile Company. As the proprietress of the Brighton landmark, it remained a profitable hardware, harness, and furniture company and upheld its reputation as one of the most solid in the county. She managed the company until she died in 1958.

Mary Lou Johnson, who in 1992 with her husband Richard, started Johnson Auto Plaza, manages one of the largest automotive dealerships of a variety of makes and models known throughout the Denver Metropolitan area.

Two of Brighton's women entrepreneurs, with their husbands, opened specialty businesses celebrating Latino cultural foods. Gregoria Chavez opened Tortilleria Cuauhtémoc, with her husband Pilo, in 2003, manufacturing and selling homestyle flour and corn tortillas, and tostada chips. The business was located at 311 North Main St., where Gregoria also offered a room of Latino food specialties. In 2004, Maria Alvidrez, and her husband and Jesus, opened Tortilleria Chihuahua at 118 Strong St., manufacturing and selling fresh tortillas. Maria learned her craft from her family's longtime Longmont business. Tortilleria Chihuahua also offers an abundant stocking of Mexican food specialties and groceries, from dairy products to laundry detergent to colorful and fun piñatas. Today, the enticing aroma of fresh tortillas still permeates a successful and active business.

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Women of Inspiration, The “Sugar Sweet” Impact of Brighton’s Women



The German Russian Sugar-Beet Women represent all the women of various cultural heritages who contributed to the “Sugar Sweet” impact of Colorado’s Beet Sugar Industry, often referred to as “White Gold,” as it proved more profitable and environmentally sustainable than the gold and silver metals of the State’s mining industry. The new industry also generated a profitable local economy from the grower’s lucrative cash crop (earning an unprecedented net profit of \$2,625 per acre) and factory jobs at Brighton’s Great Western Sugar (GWS) Company. It also created opportunities for Brighton’s women to work in its laboratory and boosted local agricultural and other retail and service businesses. Beet sugar even helped establish Denver and her nearby communities as the “Candy Center of the Entire West,” with the rise of candy makers such as Baur Confectionary, Jolly Rancher, Enstrom Candies, Rocky Mountain Chocolates, and Russell Stover Candies.

Small Mom-and-Pop candy stores were popular in rural communities, too, including several Brighton confectionaries like Main Street’s Palace of Sweets and the Sugar Bowl. Many women used beet sugar to make sweets and cakes at home, and even in the GWS laboratory. Ginger Fulmer told a story in *Brighton’s “Sugar Sweet” Times* about her mother, Regina Schmidt, making candy from beet syrup in the GWS laboratory during her work breaks, as a treat to her co-workers and daughter waiting at home.

The German Russian Sugar-Beet Women

In the mural, a German Russian Sugar-Beet woman (holding a sugar beet) and a young girl (each clad in a traditional babushka headscarf) represent the many multi-cultural groups, who worked

as arduous stoop laborers to grow sugar beets. Whole families were contracted to work the fields, with women and children as young as 6 years old working side-by-side with the men (each paid a separate rate). Working in the sugar beet field was an arduous task of stoop labor, where she worked on her knees and stooped and bent over close to the ground planting, weeding and thinning, and harvesting (pulling and topping) sugar beets.

The women also cared for their babies while working in the field. She may have placed them in a nearby basket or a shaded structure. Although she worked full days from sunrise to sunset, she still prepared meals for her family, including breakfast before leaving for the field, dinner upon return, and a portable mid-day meal. Child caretaking and household chores were also waiting for her at home.

German Russians Come to America

German Russian refers to those Germans who had first immigrated to the Volga River and Black Sea regions in Russia from Germany, at the invitation of Catherine the Great to escape religious strife and political chaos. Between 1873 and 1914, earlier granted self-governance and military service exemptions were rescinded. Many found themselves facing poverty and danger once again, and approximately 115,000 Volga Germans immigrated to the United States, with the largest concentration in the Great Plains and Western states.

Colorado beet-sugar processing factories actively recruited German Russian families, who had gained a reputation for being hard-working field laborers and highly skilled at dry farming and sugar-beet cultivation, to help local growers meet the staggering amount of field labor needed to cultivate and harvest sugar beet crops. By 1904, industrious for land ownership, most of the families working the sugar beet fields had begun to purchase land. In 1910, three-quarters of Volga Germans living in Colorado owned their own home totaling 5,000 acres with 75 percent of the farms located between Sterling and Denver.

German Russian Families Arrive in Brighton

German Russians have lived in Brighton since the time of its earliest days around founder Daniel Carmichael's first plat filing in 1881. Attracted to Brighton by its small rural community and rich farmland, German-Russian families continued to gradually settle in the Brighton area throughout the years, where they could apply their agricultural lifestyle and maintain the language and cultural traditions of their German-speaking ancestors.

In 1892, a young German Russian girl Anna Marie Lutz from nearby Barr City, who came to the town to work for Herman Reuter at his Main St. Bakery and Restaurant, married Herman Delventhal, an earlier Brighton immigrant. She persuaded her parents, siblings, and several family members and friends to relocate to Brighton.

Local farms produced sugar beets for nearby GWS Factories and for a short time between 1906 and 1907 for Brighton's (ultimately unsuccessful) Keyes Syrup Factory. Between 1910 and 1912,

Roman Catholic Volga Germans from the Bergseite Colony of Marienfeld Russia settled in Brighton and Ft. Lupton. The majority had moved from Denver. In 1914, The *Brighton Blade Newspaper* reported that 22 German Russian families arrived in Brighton within 10 days. German Russians moved to Brighton at an increased pace with the opening of the GWS Factory in 1917.

Their First Church, a Borrowed Pastor and Room

After toiling in the fields throughout the week, the German Russian woman and her family dedicated their Sundays to worship and church-sponsored events. The Evangelical Zion Lutheran Church was founded in 1900 by 10 charter members, including Anna Marie Lutz's husband Herman Delventhal. The group first met in Reuter's Main St. Bakery and Restaurant, where on alternate Sunday afternoons they would eagerly await the sound of the arriving Denver train whistle to meet their "borrowed" pastor from St. John's Lutheran Church. The group would then quickly walk together down the street to a rented room in the Opera House where he would begin the worship service. In support of their strict beliefs in maintaining their cultural traditions, the service was conducted in their native German language. Seating was traditional as well, with the men sitting on the left side of the room and women on the right. Children sat on the floor at the front.

Soon they purchased the former one-room schoolhouse on South First Ave. (which used to stand just south of what is now the 1886 Church). The congregation continued to grow and a new church building and school were built, and then another. In 1918 English language services were offered in addition to German, and by 1942 all services were given in English. The church and school are still active today, worshiping in the last church building built at 14th and Skeel Streets.

A Community Enriched with Multiple Cultural Heritages

Many other diverse groups who also settled in Brighton to work as sugar-beet field laborers, establish farms, and work in the factory, would enhance the Brighton community with an enriching multicultural heritage. Their stories are shared in the [Women of Inspiration, The Enriching Cultural Heritage of Brighton's Women](#) section.

The "Sugar Sweet" Impact Continues

The "Sugar Sweet" Impact of Brighton's women would reach out over the years past the boom of GWS sugar days. Patty Murray lives on Centennial Farms, which her husband Glen's family established the same year as the GWS Factory in 1917. The family once farmed sugar beets and now farms over 1,000 acres of corn, wheat, and alfalfa. Patty's accounting firm is an excellent example of the many service and product businesses that continue to thrive with a "Sugar Sweet" spirit, beyond the days of the town's GWS days.

Robin Lauer-Trujillo opened and operates the Brighton-based Lauer Krauts Restaurant. Known for its homemade Krautburger, a German Russian pastry pocket filled with hamburger, cabbage, onion, and “Lauer-Kraut” (a special sauerkraut recipe by her Dad). Not only are these a local favorite, but they have been featured and endorsed by a national cooking show celebrity. Both Robin’s parents are German Russian and she learned to cook from her Mom and four aunts, whose dishes appear on daily menus. Robin credits her maternal grandmother Margaret Schreibvogel’s inspiration for the restaurant’s recipes.

Eloise and John (Harry) Weingandt, bought and settled on a Brighton sugar beet farm in 1946. Eloise and her husband built the house on the farm themselves, in what her husband wrote was a “pay as you go” basis. Eloise was the “pay” and John was the “go.” She worked for the Union Rural Electric Association (REA), a power supplier to the area during the 1940s to 1960s. Her family says she was proud to contribute and often said that without the rural cooperative, there would be no family house, nor corresponding support to the economy of the Brighton community.

The couple’s son John (William) is the 4th generation Weingandt to raise sugar beets from a family descending from German Russians first farming in Norka, Russia. He is a member of the consumer-owned Western Sugar Cooperative, which owns and operates a sugar refinery in Fort Morgan, Colorado. The refinery was formerly one of 13 Colorado GWS factories, the only one still operating today. John (William) Weingandt owns and operates the last sugar beet farm in Brighton.

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Women of Inspiration, The Pioneering Spirit of Brighton's Women



In the mural, Carrie Lulubell Blundell stands tall and proud with her hand on her hip and dressed in a ground-length calico day dress, sometimes called a “wash dress” because of its simplicity and practical washability. Carrie was the granddaughter of a gold miner and one of the first homesteading families in the Brighton area, James Blundell and his wife Mary Laura. Carrie represents the many women homesteaders and growers who helped transform the dry plains into fertile farmlands, which would culminate in Brighton becoming the “Garden Spot of Northern Colorado.” Today, the eclectic agricultural area continues to shine as a gem of the “Historic Splendid Valley.” The Pioneering Spirit of Brighton’s women is also represented by the many Brighton women of education and government, who helped shape the education of its children and lead the way as governmental leaders and pioneering advocates.

Brighton Area’s First Pioneer Women

The first Pioneer Women of Brighton, Mary Laura Blundell, Laura Aiken Donelson, and Anne Elizabeth Hazzard arrived in the spring of 1860 by wagon train with their husbands, who had traveled back to Wisconsin to bring their families to their new Colorado home after staking claims and building cabins in an area south of present-day Brighton in 1859. Their husbands, James Blundell, Thomas Donelson, and William Hazzard, had first arrived in the area in May 1859 with William’s brother George Hazard and Andrew Hagus to follow the Colorado Gold Rush, the second largest mining excitement in U.S. history after the great California Gold Rush a decade earlier. Two other men would later join the homesteaders, George Griffin and Frank

Aichelman. Both unmarried at the time, they would later marry and their wives Lucelia Griffin and Mary Aichelman would join the group of Brighton's pioneer women.

While the men continued prospecting for gold the women farmed the claims. Andrew Hagus also remained on the farm where irrigation transformation enabled farming in the dry climate of the Plains. They raised livestock and grew hay, grain, and garden crops.

The women also raised vegetables and tended gardens for family consumption and selling. Small farms, such as these, were essential to the continued existence of Denver and mining camps, which supplied necessities that otherwise would have to be shipped in from the East. Life on the homestead was hard work and long days, as the women also canned to ensure a steady supply of fresh produce. Homesteading women performed household chores, cooked for their families (and neighbors during busy seasons), washed clothes (a labor-intensive process that often took two days), and reared children and young animals while managing other household tasks. She often raised chickens for family and market benefits. Ranch (farm) women were also sometimes working alongside men in haying, threshing, and branding. They may have followed the plow, harrowed fields, and helped harness and unharness horses.

[Discovering the Real Gold — Rich Valley Farming](#)

Although the men prospected for gold from time to time, they always returned to their most abundant "gold discovery" — rich valley farming. Even Aichelman, who struck the most gold prospecting success panning about \$100.00 a week and naming his claim "Galena Gulch," found gold-seeking conditions were too hazardous to his health and turned to full-time farming. He contracted inflammatory rheumatism panning in frigid waters and had to be rescued from a fire while immobilized in bed with pain too severe to move.

Aichelman worked together with the owners of two adjacent properties, Andrew Hagus and George Griffin to open a ditch out of the South Platte River for irrigation to raise livestock and grow vegetables, grain, and beets. Because these men never legally filed claims for their ditch, the first official ditch company in the area was the Brantner Ditch, dug by brothers Samuel and Jonas Brantner to divert water from the South Platte River to their farms (located south of Brighton in the area once known as Henderson Island). The Brantner Ditch was formally appropriated in 1860 with the first claims belonging to the following women and men: P.W. Snyder, Margaret Brantner (wife of Jonas), Samuel Brantner, Maggie McCool, A. R. McCool, William Murray, and William S. Lee.

Andrew Hagus and George Griffin, who had earlier worked with Aichelman, incorporated the new Fulton Ditch Company in 1865 with Walter Craig. Both the Brantner Ditch Company (now the New Brantner Ditch Company) and the Fulton Ditch Companies have been extended many times and still exist today. The Pioneer ditches continue to serve as an essential component of the agricultural industry in Colorado's northeastern plains.

The Shaping of a Community

Community and education were a priority for the women homesteaders. They held annual “Fifty-Niner” Reunion Picnics (for at least 40 years) and in 1870 the Pioneers built their first schoolhouse on the Aichelman farm, as symbolized in the mural by the straw tree ornament held by one of the young girls. The ornament replicates one made by one of the ladies gathering with Emi Chikuma in modern days to decorate the Community Tree.

The actual one-room frame structure schoolhouse had tall narrow windows and a door. Inside it was equipped with slate blackboards. The first teacher was Mary Ross of the No. 10 school, as it was called (not to be confused with the District #10 Pleasant Plains School District est. in 1891). Previously, some pioneers sent their children to the subscription-based Independence School located between Brighton and Ft. Lupton (before it was legally organized as District #23 in 1873). But the No. 10 schoolhouse building on the Aichelman property would be the homesteader’s own community school.

Brighton’s Education Pioneers

Modern-day schoolchildren got the chance to step back in time and experience the days of the one-room schoolhouse, with the fun and educational tours of the Prairie Rose School on the grounds of the Adams County Museum, by former teacher Gloria Candall. She was also active in working after school with Brighton’s children of the Good Luck 4-H Club. Judy Kreutzer’s “mobile scrapbook” school bus was another example of educational creativity pioneered by Brighton’s women of education. Over the years, Kreutzer decorated the inside of her school bus with hundreds of art creations made by the elementary school riders of her bus, as well as articles and certificates of their accomplishments. She would also hang special mementos to honor her riders.

Brighton women have served in many educational associations to help ensure excellence in education, such as Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), Adams County Educational Association, Colorado Education Association, Eastern Division, and more. There have been numerous talented administrators and teachers, each dedicated to providing quality education, and many pioneers in their fields. Wilma Rose worked as a Brighton 27J Schools Inclusion Specialist for 17 years and was elected in several leadership positions in the Colorado Classified School Employees Association (CCSEA), including CCSEA/AFL President for two years, State CCSEA/AFL Vice President for three years, and Secretary for two years. Rose served as a City Council member for eight years and her visionary leadership has inspired and motivated many women in education, art, and public service. She has been an integral leader in the Brighton Cultural Arts Commission (BCAC), serving through the years as president and Vice-President, as well as the Chair of its Brighton Public Arts Committee (BPAC). Rose was recognized in 2021 with the BCAC Visionary Excellence in Arts Award.

Bertha Heid, an Adams County resident, was elected as Superintendent of Adams County Schools in 1948 (and reelected several terms through 1971). She received many Brighton Awards for her contributions to excellence in education, including “Woman of the Year” in 1956 by the *Brighton Blade* and in 1959 by the Professional Women’s Club of Brighton. Mrs. Bobbie Jo Unruh was hired in 1983 as the first female principal of Brighton High School. Miss Nora Vaughn is noted as the first kindergarten teacher and Mrs. J.N. Counter (May T.) the 1913 school board president.

Brighton’s Public Service Leaders

Brighton is proud of its many women who have led the way as governmental and advocacy leaders. In 2001, Jan Pawlowski became Brighton’s first female mayor in the city’s then 114-year history. Other women leaders inspired the community with their public service on the Brighton City Council, Adams County Board of Commissioners, and the Colorado State Senate.

Brighton’s women have worked together for legal reform, such as those who joined the Colorado Suffragette movement in the late nineteenth century and helped secure voting rights for Colorado women by state referendum on November 7, 1893. The movement’s success made Colorado the first state to enact women’s suffrage by popular referendum. In 1894, Mrs. W.R. Armington, “Emma,” who was an active Suffragette, became the first woman in Brighton to vote in a regular election.

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Women of Inspiration, The Enriching Cultural Heritage of Brighton's Women



The Brighton Nisei Women's Club (BNWC) represents Brighton's many Women of Inspiration enriching lives with cultural heritage. In the mural, two BNWC women wearing kitchen aprons prepare to greet guests at one of their popular Shrimp and Chow Mein Dinner events. With them, a young girl holding a teacup is pictured ready to serve tea.

The Brighton Nisei Women's Club was organized in 1948 for 2nd Generation immigrants from Japan born in the U.S. (Nisei), whose parents were immigrants from Japan (Issei). The club was initially formed in 1948 by five or six original members, as a social group to get together just for fun and talk. Social opportunities within the larger community, even in Brighton, were limited after World War II. The group grew into a more formal, member-based club structure and they drafted a formal constitution "To promote the welfare and culture of the area's Japanese Americans."

The ladies met once a month at Saturday-morning classes where Japanese culture was shared through presentations of Japanese cooking and crafts. They held fund-raisers with craft bazaars and bake sales in the community, which featured their skills. After catering luncheons for their husband's business and association networks, the BNWC was approached by additional local organizations to cater luncheons and banquets. The delicious and elegant affairs became so popular, that the club's recipes were published in a cookbook. It was expanded and revised in 1974. (As of 2013, over 8,000 copies had been sold.)

In 1952, the women held a bazaar at the Brighton Buddhist Temple, attended by over 600 shoppers and raising \$1,700 for bleachers and restrooms at a new baseball park planned by the Brighton Japanese American Association (BJAA) on land purchased near the corner of N. 12th Ave. and Longs Peak St. That was also the year the ladies held the "Brighton Nisei Women's Club Oriental Bazaar," where a dinner of Shrimp and Chow Mein was served for the public at the American Legion Hall. The men of the BJAA group helped at the event. It was later renamed the "Shrimp and Chow Mein Dinner" and was so successful and popular that it became the defining annual event of BNWC (who later, in 1991, combined into one group with the BJAA). The public was treated to delicious food and Japanese culture that created an atmosphere of community and friendship, that grew year after year. The event included an opportunity for take-out or seated dinner, as well as a bake sale. Attendance grew year after year so that the event was eventually hosted in a hall at the Adams County Fairgrounds. Proceeds were donated to the new hospital and later to various community non-profits, including: Meals on Wheels, Eagle View Adult Center, Almost Home, Pennock Center for Counseling, and the Platte River Medical Center 1. In March 2024, after 72 years, the BJAA thanked the public for their years of support and announced the event "would not be scheduled for the year or in the foreseeable future. BJAA is looking for new and creative ways for our fund-raising events."

[Celebrating Other Brighton Cultural Heritage Groups](#)

In 2016, the BJAA partnered with the Adams County Historical Society and Museum to celebrate the Japanese American contributions to the community, at its annual Heritage Day, which spotlights various cultures heritages in the community. The celebration included expressions of traditional Japanese music and dance. These included a special performance by Denver Taiko Drummers, cultural speakers, and BJAA displays of traditional instruments, kimonos, samurai attire, fans, and more. One popular display featured WWII memorabilia from the U.S. Army 442nd Regiment, best known as the most decorated in U.S. military history and as a fighting unit composed almost entirely of second-generation (Nisei) American soldiers.

The museum's Heritage Day has also celebrated the many other multi-cultural heritages of Brighton's women and families, including the area's Italian American heritage with educational speakers and displays sharing the rich Italian-American heritage of local growers and a celebration of Italian food, dance, and music.

The museum celebrated Germans from Russia Heritage Day in 2018, which included speakers discussing German Russian heritage and their contributions to the area (such as German Russian Sugar Beet Women), a concert featuring a German Dutch Hop Band, German food, and a traditional beer garden.

In 2023, Fascinating Ladies from the West's Past were portrayed in period costumes by the Legendary Ladies performance group, including: Anne Evans (Cultural Pioneer); Jessie Benton Fremont (Adventurer and writer, and wife of explorer John C. Fremont, who once camped at the present site of Brighton); and Prairie Rose Henderson, a bronc-riding Rodeo Star.

CultureFest

Helen Rodriquez created and produced CultureFest for the City of Brighton, a favorite festival of the community for many years celebrating its diverse cultures, including its rich Hispanic heritage culture with music, dance, and food. Local Restaurants were featured, from booths with food samples, giving attendees an opportunity for a "Taste of Brighton."

One such restaurant showcased at the "Taste of Brighton" booths was Santiago's, founded in Brighton in 1991 by Carmen Morales. She named the restaurant not after herself, but after a Saint "knowing we all need help we get." (sic.) The menu is based on her mother, Rachel Morales's, recipes. Her Green Chile is a favorite and has been purchased by the gallon to take across the U.S. The restaurant is not only a favorite of the locals but consistently draws people from miles around. So much so, that Morales added 28 additional locations around Colorado.

The City of Brighton has renamed the event to SummerFest and attendees can still sample foods from the likes of Brighton's local growers, like Jade Sato, who launched Minoru Farm in Brighton, Colorado, in 2020. Sato, who named the farm in honor of her grandfather and her family's Japanese-American legacy in agriculture, grows Asian varieties of vegetables and sells them at local farmer's markets and festivals.

Cultural Plans and Organizations

Many women of cultural inspiration are behind the formation and leadership of several Brighton cultural planning teams and organizations. Cultural heritage has been at the forefront of their objectives, programs, and events, along with visual arts, performance arts, and literary arts.

Helen Rodriquez led a community team to survey the public and produce the *2015 Cultural Strategic Plan for the Brighton Cultural Influence Area*. The Brighton City Council approved the plan for the team's implementation of the community's vision to provide local access to arts, culture, and heritage for enhancing the lives of our community in the Brighton Cultural Influence Area. It includes specific goals, strategies, and objectives, such as the following objective: "Affirm culture, identity, and heritage while encouraging the development of a shared forward-looking community culture."

The Brighton Cultural Arts Commission (BCAC) has awarded grants for such cultural heritage events as the opening reception for a *Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) Art Exhibit* at the Brighton Armory Performing Arts Center held in 2022, and again in 2023. The cultural exchange included Aztec dancers, flamenco-guitar music, Day-of-the-Dead face painting, and sugar skull making. Guests were treated to Mexican tacos and spiced hot chocolate. Elena Guerra, a member of BCAC and the event organizing committee, read her poetry and decorated an ofrenda, a colorful and personalized display to honor the soul of a loved one(s). Guerra has also set up ofrendas in the City of Brighton Museum. The event was sponsored by the Brighton Cultural Arts Commission, Chicano Humanities & Arts Council, Science and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD), and Brighton Lodging Tax.

In 2023, Adams County introduced *Festival Latino*, a day of color, culture, and celebration of rich Latino cultures, traditions, and contributions that have shaped the community. Visitors experience a folkloric celebration bursting with vibrant and captivating performances, music, food, and art (including various colorful parade-size paper mâché women representing women coming together from different cultural heritages).

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Women of Inspiration, The Artistic Heart of Brighton's Women



The Armington's Ladies represent those women involved in Brighton's cultural arts, including the visual arts, performing arts (theatrical, musical, and dance), language arts (writers and poets), and natural history.

Four of Armington's Ladies, members of the W.R. Armington Theatrical Company, are shown in the mural gathered by the Community Christmas Tree, each preparing to help decorate the tree. The painting is inspired by a promotional photograph taken around 1900 by W.R. Armington, Director, Producer, and Professional Photographer, to promote his theatrical productions. In the original photograph, the ladies stand in an elevated pyramid, propped up on the steps of a tall ladder. Several of the ladies each hold a fancy hat and one holds an umbrella, while they all react to the stream of "water" pouring down from a watering can held by a lady standing on the top apex of the pyramid. The mural artist Frank Garza has included some of these same details in the mural, including the watering can. Some historians believe that one lady in the scene, although not identified, is Emma Armington, the wife of W.R. Armington.

The Armington's Ladies were part of a theatrical company, which performed often at the Brighton Opera House and Brighton Armory around 1900. The playbills advertised productions, such as "Won at Last, a thrilling Comedy Drama at the Armory, to be given by local talent." Today, the theatre arts remain at the heart of Brighton women. Although the Brighton Opera House and its 1,100-seat theatre were destroyed by fire in 1955 (and later razed), the Brighton Armory has resurfaced once again as a showcase of theatre, music, dance, and programs. It was revived from abandonment and renovated in 2008. It now operates as a vibrant arts and cultural center, owned by the City of Brighton. Its stage reflects the artistic heart of several Brighton women, who are active in the Platte Valley Players theatre company, which includes a

female artistic director, stage manager, and costume designer—as well as many local women who perform as actors and artists in its productions.

Ladies of Today's Theatre

Unique theatre is also at the heart of Brighton's women. Dolly Garcia has directed the Silver Tongue Players, a Reader's Theatre production, for several years at the Eagle View Adult Center (EVAC). Actors present a dramatic (non-memorization) reading, using only scripts and vocal expression. Some groups, such as the EVAC players add minimal props and costume accessories to the performance. Another woman of the unique theater arts was Lois Burrell, a popular Brighton storyteller. Starting in the mid-1990s she perfected her professional storytelling as a member of Rocky Mountain Storytelling. Burrell traveled throughout Colorado (and even beyond), sharing tales of old and new, including stories of multi-cultural storytelling arts and Colorado biographies.

The Sound of Brighton's Music

Women of Brighton have also inspired the community with music, dance, and song. One of the oldest groups was the Euterpean Society, formed in 1931 to promote music in the community, including sponsoring a City Music Week and a yearly student music scholarship. The society's women included accomplished musicians in a wide variety of piano (and organ), wind, brass, and string instruments. Brighton women have also belonged to several local orchestras and musical performance groups throughout the years, some of which have featured music composed by local musicians.

Harpist Nancy Brace performed regularly in the Platte Valley Medical Center lobby, bringing soothing music as a diversion to patients, medical staff, and visitors. Marcie Demchuk and Katie Boemecke, were co-directors of the new and innovative "Healing Arts" program. Also introduced was Continuous Ambient Relaxation Environment® (C.A.R.E.), the premier relaxation programming for healthcare settings by Healing Healthcare Systems designed to comfort patients, families, and staff with televised programming combining peaceful scenes of nature with beautiful music.

Women Sharing Their Musical Hearts

The musical heart of Brighton's women can also be found sharing the gift of music with Brighton's children. Many talented music instructors have taught thousands of K-5 students. Linda Bauer taught drama, dance, and music for 40 years. She was recognized for her contributions to youth with the BCAC "Excellence in Arts Award for Youth in the Arts" in 2016.

Several women's dance companies and schools have provided entertainment, fitness, and cultural education throughout the years with classical dances of ballet, tap, jazz, and even hip-hop. Cultural exchanges of heritage, such as traditional Japanese dances, were shared by the Brighton Nisei Women's Club. Ballet de la Tierra learned and performed traditional dances of

various regions of Mexico. Some of Brighton's festivals often feature traditional Irish dance performances, and the girls and women of Brighton's earliest eras would practice a "melting pot" of step dances brought to the area from the Appalachians to the Russian gypsies and African Americans who passed through the area, as well as the Cherokee Indians.

Women in the Visual Arts

Women in the visual arts—as painters, sculptors, photographers, jewelry makers, crafters, and more— have been a prominent inspiration to Brighton. The community of artists join together often in non-profit organizations, such as the BCAC, to support and grow arts and culture to enhance the lives of the community. Main Street Creatives (an artist's cooperative, gallery, and academy), promotes the arts by exhibiting, teaching, and encouraging art in the community. Artist Judith Dickinson founded the cooperative in 2003. A renowned painter herself, her commissions have included paintings of Colorado State Governor Bill Ritter and Federal Judge Phillip Fig. Her commissions have also included celebrities Judge Judy and Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Brighton Women Who Write

The writings of several women in Brighton have served to inform, educate, entertain, and inspire the community. These women have included journalists, authors, poets, historians, publishers, and librarians. Several collaborated in the mid-1990s to form the Brighton Writer's Group to support authors of local fiction, non-fiction, and poetry writers. These, and multiple other Brighton women, have had their works published. One such author is Joe Elizabeth Pinto (who also writes as J.E. Pinto), whose two of several publications include *The Bright Side of Darkness, a Novel* and *Dancing with the Seasons: A Year of Simple Verse*. Pinto was recognized with the Master of Fine Arts Excellence in Arts Award by BCAC in 2021.

Trailblazing "Cowgirl" Publishers of the Plains

Mary Isham trailblazed as the first editor and publisher of The Brighton Blade newspaper in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Five other women served as editor of the newspaper through 1987, including: Joan Isham, Irene Nunemaker, Lucille Hastings, Dorothy Brose, and Kathy Thomas. In Sept. 2004, Allison Lockwood, would publish the *Local Color Magazine*. She worked with her husband, Mark Humbert, who served as Editor to celebrate Brighton by sharing news and information about the community. Today, the print magazine has transitioned to the online *Daily Post*.

In 2007, siblings Laurie, Lisa, and Brian Reid started publishing *The Showtimes* junior livestock magazine that by 2012 reached a national subscription of 10,000 subscribers in 47 states, and found international success when adding subscribers in Canada and Australia. They consistently received the Best of Barn Publication award for the years 2014-2019, as well as awards for Most Innovative Graphic Designer in 2016 and 2017, and Photo of the Year in 2017. Their innovative

publishing strategies have included smart phone apps and a U-Tube video which has been viewed 250,000 times. Their latest publishing innovation is a new Showtimes Phantom aerial camera and video camera that covers shows from a new height, a Judge's Vision ring cam, and Showtimes show sticks.

Brighton had its own “Lois Lane Reporter,” too. Lois Cress was a *Denver Post* journalist and freelance journalist. She started writing for the Women’s Page at a time when women’s page journalists were an impressive group from a variety of backgrounds, but sometimes confined to “lighter” women’s and social topics. Many, like Cress, never married, but were able to successfully support themselves with their writing. As the *Denver Post* Club Editor, Cress’s articles ultimately helped the needy, by enabling fund-raising for charitable and benevolent projects, in a time where many professional women’s club dues supported united efforts against poverty and injustice. She traveled to other countries for her stories, like Sweden, to write about the country’s Lucia Festival. Cress also sought out leading-edge stories of thought-provoking topics, such as her 1963 article, “Women Engineers: We Need More.” Cress advanced to the position of Senior Staff Writer. In 1970, she collaborated with a writing and editing team to produce an award-winning children’s social services series.

[Women of Brighton Help Tell Brighton’s Story](#)

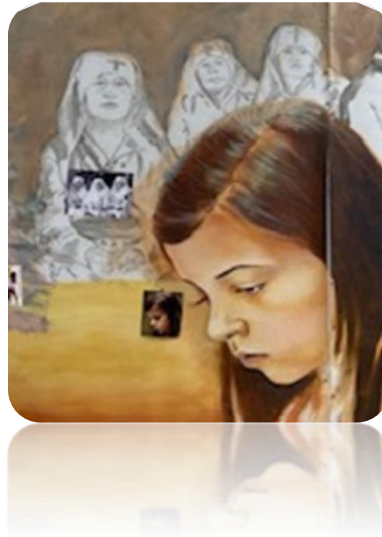
The writings and collections of Brighton Women have made significant contributions to documenting Brighton’s local history through a large body of work they leave behind. Maude Linstrom Frandsen (Butler) wrote several Colorado history books, including *Our Colorado* (1953) and *High in the Rockies Enrichment Stories About Colorado* (1957). Most notably, was Linstrom’s *All the way: an account of the development of a city and a church* (1962). It has served as a major foundation of Brighton’s history. Additionally, Publisher Laurene Dorr’s *The Brighton Blade*, purchased with her husband Carl in 1947, has reported Brighton news and featured history articles and publications. Pat Reither’s local history research and writings were also integral in recording Brighton’s history. Reither was a local historian, historic preservationist, and history column author for *Local Color Magazine*. Its publisher and frequent author, Allison Lockwood, has also contributed as a local historian and historic preservationist. Emi Chikuma has documented histories of the City of Brighton, Brighton’s Parks & Recreation, genealogies of local Nisei families, the Brighton Nisei Women’s Club, and the Brighton Japanese American Association histories.

The Brighton Genealogy Society, co-chaired by Billie Schmer and Pat Reither, worked with a large group of women and men to write and publish *The History of Brighton, Colorado and Surrounding Area*, in 1987. (The Brighton Historic Preservation Commission re-published the book in 2006.) The 698 pages of local family genealogies and Brighton history essays still remain a valuable and indispensable reference to Brighton’s history. Jody Sanchez, Anythink Librarian (formerly Brighton Library) and 2016 recipient of the Brighton Historic Preservation Brick Award has researched and shared early Brighton history archives of the library. Without these women

and their published historical writings, it just wouldn't be possible — for contemporary historians like myself and others — to continue discovering, clarifying, and expanding Brighton's story.

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Women of Inspiration, The Charitable Benevolence of Brighton's Women



The Women of Cruz Azul Mexicana de Brighton represent Brighton's many benevolent women, who joined together in various faith-based and other organizations to assist the poor and disadvantaged of the area. In the mural, three women wear striped sashes and light-colored uniforms with veils (similar in style to nurses and Red Cross volunteers of the 1920s) as inspired by a photo of the charitable organization, that played a significant role in aiding low-income Mexican families in Brighton, Colorado. Although Cruz Azul Mexicana wasn't explicitly religious, its commitment to charity and community service exemplified a spirit of compassion and care. The organization was established as a women's brigade (Brigada No. 68, Division 3) of the all-male Comision of Honorifca Mexicana de Brighton. The Mexican Consulate organized the comisiones across the United States, and in particular rural areas, in response to a call for assistance from Mexican immigrants when the 1920-21 recession hit. These organizations focused on assisting low-income Mexican families residing in the area, to help alleviate economic hardships and help uplift vulnerable community members, during a challenging time of nativist movements and marginalized communities (groups of people who experience social, economic, and/or political exclusion or discrimination). Actively engaged in charitable work, and offering aid, relief, and support to those in need, the Cruz Azul Mexicana de Brighton made a lasting impact on the lives of many families and as women of inspiration.

Faith-Based Women's Groups

Another organization serving Spanish-only speaking migrant workers, and newly-relocated families who farmed in and around Brighton, was the House of Neighborly Service. It was started in 1925 by the Home Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church and conducted out of a N. 9th Ave. location. Their goals were not only to provide spiritual nourishment, but physical and social welfare for the hard-working group, as well. Brighton Women, including Lile Dillon,

Marie Wright, Luty Hauge, and Elsie Klingman conducted English language courses and courses in cooking and homemaking.

Some other faith-based women's groups, founded in area churches to perform benevolent works, are still active today—although, schedules and activities may have adjusted somewhat to changing needs and modern lifestyles. The Ladies Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church has a long history, that started when several women gathered on Apr. 9, 1896, in the home of Jennie Leffingwell to form the society. The women raised funds to apply to the minister's salary, to purchase an organ for the church, and to aid the poor and the sick. An additional group was also formed, known as the Helping Hands Society, to care for the grounds and graves of Elmwood Cemetery (before it was purchased by the City and perpetual care was offered with plot sales).

The Altar and Rosary Society of St. Augustine Catholic Church was organized in 1929, and at first mainly anticipated themselves as a social group, as they washed and ironed vestments and altar cloths, and cleaned the church. However, the women would become the most active and dominant organization of the church with their creative fund-raising and outreach programs that served both the church and the community. These included spaghetti dinners and BINGO parties for the community and a popular bazaar table of homemade goods and candy. Through the years, the women's fund-raising proceeds were used to provide significant church-building improvements and donations to the Brighton High School Fund, the Brighton swimming pool, and the Brighton Community Hospital.

Power of Collective Compassion

Several other Brighton women's groups and clubs have also demonstrated the power of collective compassion through the years with their many charitable and benevolent projects, performed as auxiliary but significant undertakings to their organizations' prevalent missions. The women of the Fort Vasquez Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) of Brighton have helped migrant workers with naturalization classes, aided a displaced family, and volunteered for the Meals on Wheels program. The DAR women have organized Red Cross blood-bank drives and volunteered at the Fitzsimmons Army Hospital, the Veterans Hospital, and Platte Valley Medical Center. Similarly, the Brighton Woman's Club, American Legion Auxiliary, the P.E.O. (philanthropic and education organization) Sisterhood, the Brighton Nisei Women's Club, and the Mini-Mamas miniatures club (and many other Brighton women) have collected items and raised funds for the Brighton Hospital, the local Battered Women's Shelter, educational scholarships, library books, gifts for veterans in the Veterans Hospital, food baskets for the needy, and various other benevolent works.

Inspiring Social Reform

Several of the clubs were members of a larger body of professional women's clubs, where a portion of membership dues were united in efforts against poverty and injustice, a time-

honored mission originally inspired by Colorado's first women's clubs formed to provide charity to the poor. In the mid-1950s, nearly 10,000 women belonged to one of Colorado's 250 federated women's clubs. Although these clubs continued to emphasize charity to the poor, their missions also targeted the root causes of poverty and other reforms. These clubs were at the forefront of advocating for public libraries and promoting literacy. They were also known to start initiatives such as kindergartens and juvenile court systems. Over the history of women's clubs, causes ranged from the temperance movement to child labor reform, initiation of Juvenile Court Law, the Pure Food and Drug Act, prison reform, environment protection, and women's suffrage.

But by 2009, the number of women's clubs in Colorado's Federation of Women's Clubs (formed in 1895) had declined to 21 clubs and 350 members. This has been attributed to changing social norms affording women more diverse opportunities and roles beyond traditional club memberships. Women's priorities shifted over time and opportunities for social networks changed. Although the number of organized clubs has declined, the remaining clubs and organizations along with new ways to effect social change introduced with urbanization and technology, Brighton's Women continue to inspire us with their charitable benevolence.

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Women of Inspiration, The Championing Spirit of Brighton's Women



The “All Star” Softball Team of the Nisei Women’s Athletic Association (NWAA), represents the many Brighton women and girls embracing team sports, inspiring a championing spirit of community and opening the way for others. In the mural, Nancy Ito (who was later inducted into the National Softball Hall of Fame), kneels with her teammates from Brighton behind two crossed bats. Fellow teammate, Mary Etsuko Nishida, may be one of the young women pictured. Nishida, who graduated from Brighton High School in 1953, played on this team and in the Nisei Women’s Basketball League during this timeframe.

In the years following WWII, Brighton’s Nisei women had to travel to Denver to play competitive softball. They would join the “All Star” Softball Team of The Nisei Women’s Athletic Association (NWAA), which was formed in 1946 to create a league of Denver-area young women to play other teams in Colorado and give them access to Denver-area softball fields and basketball courts.

Competitive Play for Women

Although rare, women had formed recreational and tournament baseball teams and even played team basketball in floor-length Victorian dresses since the *Rocky Mountain News* reported the first Colorado game of women’s baseball team was played in 1892. However, it wasn’t until after WWII that women’s leagues were formed to play competitive and professional ball. Kindled by the enthusiasm and success of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (portrayed in the 1992 feature film *A League of their Own*), women’s professional baseball was born. The team was organized in 1943 to fill ballparks left empty by young men drafted into the military.

Brighton women on the Nisei “All Star” baseball team had the opportunity to play competitive ball, albeit they had to travel to Denver. And, they were very dedicated to the game. Fellow teammate, Nancy Ito, was an outstanding defensive catcher with a strong throwing arm, who

was later inducted into the National Softball Hall of Fame, Women's Fast Pitch, in 1982. The organization reports her career record as a named 13-time All-American. She played 10 years in Colorado, before moving (with a job transfer) to the Orange, California *Lionettes*, making only 10 errors in 1,401 chances in 222 games in the Pacific Coast Women's League from 1967-1974 for a fielding percentage of .993. Her record states she made only one error per season (over five seasons), and in 1972, she completed flawless handling of 134 chances.

Dedicated to the Game

The late Brighton author, Dan Blegan, wrote a charming story of another player of "serious" dedication, in *Our American Journey: A History of the Brighton Nisei Women's Club and the Brighton Japanese American Association*. Dedicated to the game and her team, one Brighton player, Rosa Sato, postponed her honeymoon (after marrying just the day before) to play the last nine innings of the season.

Iva Lape Wilson spent her life dedicated to the game of basketball and saw many changing trends in women's basketball over the years. She reminisced about her school day uniforms in a Brighton genealogy essay sharing how her mother objected to her junior-high basketball team (early 1900s) wearing "bloomers." Her mother insisted they each wear an accordion-pleated skirt over her bloomers and later she made bloomers using five yards of material for each girl—two and one-half yards for each leg. Long black stockings were also essential to prevent skinned knees on the only available outdoor courts. Wilson also told of all-day Saturday travels by horse-drawn vehicles to games with other schools. There weren't any school buses. By Wilson's college days, she played on her first indoor court and wore a uniform made with less material, along with an added "colored midi" for team identification. After college, she taught at a small rural high school in Ohio, and as part of her many duties coached the girls' basketball team. Despite "her girls" never having played in a gymnasium, Wilson's team made the finals of their 1924-1925 county tournament (only one point away from the championship). Basketball for girls gradually appeared in Brighton schools, including a Brighton High girls' basketball team in the 1920s.

Women of Brighton participated in a variety of sports, including golf. The Riverdale Women's Golf Association (RWGA) was established in 1964 to promote interest in golf among women and to provide social activities for its members, with a goal aimed at motivating its members to improve their golf skills and enjoy the sport in a friendly and supportive environment.

Kay Dreyer played organized baseball in the late 1960s, starting when she was only 13. She traveled with a women's team and was reported to be the highest-rated fast-pitch baseball pitcher in Colorado. One woman made a career of her favorite sport — flying. Cindy Bellmar became a commercial pilot in her second career, after joining a flying club as a recreational sport while working full-time as a junior high teacher. She was hired by Frontier Airlines as the second-only female pilot and later flew commercially for Continental Airlines.

Championing of School Children Spirit

Many Brighton women are active in team sports, including volleyball, softball, and pickleball. Brighton mothers and teachers also help encourage an interest in team sports in their children. Moms, and other family members, promote enrollment in school and community sports programs and support them by attending sports events, providing refreshments, and running and supporting team fund-raisers. Brighton's women teachers have actively coached elementary and high school students since the city's early history (the majority volunteering hours from their own time) and even before some local schools had their gymnasiums.

Ward and Lelia Fagan, (Principal/Teacher and Substitute Teacher) supported the Henderson School girls' basketball team after Ward organized an athletic league (for both girls and boys) with Barr Lake, Hazeltine, Pleasant Plains, and Independence Schools. Practice sessions were held outside the school at noon or during recess. Basketball and Softball Games were held at other schools on Friday afternoons and Saturdays.

Gymnasiums were added to schools throughout the years along with many baseball and softball fields, basketball and tennis courts, and bicycle trails. The Brighton Youth Baseball & Softball Association (BYBSA) registered as a 501(c)(3) non-profit in 2012 and provided opportunities for girls and boys between the ages of 4-18 to play both recreational and competitive league baseball and softball. The BYBSA competitive baseball teams participate in the Rocky Mountain Junior Baseball League (RMJBL). All BYBSA softball teams participate in the Indian Peaks Girls Softball Association (IPGSA). In recent years, facilities for skateboarders, inline skaters, and BMX bikes, have been added to city parks.

Earlier in the 1990s, the city built the Brighton Recreation Center and a youth sports complex. The sports complex was later renamed the Norm and Jan Pawlowski Park in Nov. 2018 to honor the couple's passion for and contribution to Brighton sports. Jan is one of many Brighton women, whose service to the City has been instrumental in building sports resources. Jan's example in city leadership roles has inspired many women to make lasting differences in both women's and men's community sports in the community. Her roles included service as Brighton's first female mayor (2001-2009), a current and previous member of the Brighton City Council and the Brighton Parks and Recreation Board, and service as a former Adams County Commissioner. Jan, with her husband Norm, also established and ran Varsity Sports for approximately 30 years, which started selling sports shoes and later sported a trophy shop and embroidery services for sports clothing/accessories. The business even offered indoor batting cage activities at one time.

The Cheering Spirit

The championing spirit of Brighton's women was also exemplified by cheering team members and spectators. Shirley Sandoval, Sally Abeyta, Rebecca Martinez, and Nina Morales were cheerleaders for the Brighton Rams, the 1950s and 1960s team in the Rocky Mountain Semi-Pro

League, also known as the Sugar Beet League. The league was particularly popular among the Spanish-speaking sugar beet field laborers in Colorado. It represented a significant part of the golden age of American semipro baseball, which was prevalent between the world wars when nearly every town in Colorado either had its own team or aspired to have one.

The Brighton Ram cheerleaders, along with cheering family members and friends, all turned out for those games. The players' wives packed picnics and the spectators were as bustling as the game play. Writer and Editor Kristen Hannum painted this vivid description in a *Country Life Magazine* article (retrieved Apr. 30, 2024), "It was like a church picnic, a school fair or a family reunion every Sunday all summer long. Babies slept on blankets in the sun and grandparents lounged in the cars. Families cheered and honked car horns."

The women also supported the league by raising money for the baseball teams to help pay for uniforms and equipment. One popular event was the Box Social, a fun and popular event in earlier days. The women would make a special lunch and oftentimes wrap it decoratively to attract the highest bidder, who would then eat the lunch with its owner. Fund-raising dances were also hosted. The Greeley Grays also hosted a beauty pageant, followed by a dance, in the Salon of the Greeley community house donating half the proceeds to Greeley Grays and the other half to the winning pageant contestant, who was also crowned Queen for the year. Contestants included young women representing several northern teams. A representative of each sold votes for 5 cents each and the pageant winner was determined by the team selling the most. The pageant winners, like the 1961 Queen Lori Sadler of the Greeley Grays and her runner-up Annabelle Garcia Canzona of the Rocky Grays, also had the honor to participate in awarding trophies in the upcoming league tournament.

[Championing Spirit of the Sugar Beet League](#)

Jody Lopez and her husband Gabriel, who authored the previous league stories and more in their books, *From Sugar to Diamonds* and *White Gold Laborers*, have truly championed the spirit of the Sugar Beet League. The Lopez's have also curated a traveling exhibit of uniforms, gloves, baseballs, trophies, and more to tell the story of the Sugar Beet League and farm workers who lived in GWS la colonias. Their exhibit, which has previously been recognized by and loaned to the Smithsonian Institution for their 2016 project "Latinos and Baseball," will be shared with the Brighton community in a 2024 City of Brighton Museum exhibition.

The Sugar Beet League started with the Greeley Grays, The "Spanish Colony of Greeley" baseball team, later renamed, the "Greeley Grays." The Great Western Sugar Company (GWS) workers lived in one of 13 la colonias, the second GWS residential area built in northern Colorado with available lot purchase or lease (and provided building plans) opportunities available from the company at a minimal cost. Six days a week, the men of la colonias worked in arduous sugar-beet fields, from dawn until dusk, and one day a week, they found relief and recreation on the baseball field. Starting in 1925, they traveled to other colonies and towns to play other teams, including the Brighton Rams and Brighton Japanese American teams from the Young Buddhist

Association (YBA) and Young Men's Association (YMA) leagues. In 1945, the Greeley Grays played semi-pro with the Rocky Mountain League, inspiring the "Sugar Beet Leagues."

Opening the Way for Others

The many sports opportunities, created and supported by Brighton's women, have helped build numerous social opportunities, team-building, and health benefits, for Brighton's youth. Additionally, academic and career opportunities have been generated. Brighton High School alum Rachael Lopez and the rest of the women's cross-country team at Colorado State University-Pueblo qualified for the NCAA Division II national meet. Lopez, who is from Fort Lupton, finished the national qualifying race in a time of 25:05. She is a junior at CSU-Pueblo.

In 2014, Former Brighton High School track standout Kayla Mescher won the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference Championship in the indoor 800-meter run and set a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) provisional qualifying time in the process.

Brihanna Crittendon from nearby Riverdale Ridge has been named the 2024 Ms. Colorado Basketball, after leading the school to their first Class 4A championship title, showcasing a season's dominant performance of 28.9 points.

In 2021, Brighton High School added a trap-and-skeet shooting team to its program. Just three years later, the team's 60-plus enrolled members made it the largest team of its kind in the state and second only to the football team in their school. The girls are the champions in this new sports program winning all of the individual state medals, and producing the first-ever trap scholarship recipients for Brighton team members Leah Vanosdoll and Taylor Madsen.

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About the “Women of Inspiration” Artist, Frank Garza



Loveland-based artist, Frank Garza, has been creating public art installations in Colorado since 1999. Specializing in architecturally integrated pieces, he strives to make each project unique. Frank uses several mediums including wood, steel, aluminum, porcelain, glass, polycarbonate, fabric, integrated LED lighting and clay. His works convey community, cultural, and historical themes. His municipal projects are on display throughout the front range including city buildings in Denver, Thornton, Louisville, Greeley, Evans — and now Brighton. In 2021, Garza also created “The Hand that Feeds,” a bronze sculpture for the City of Fort Collins, representing the back-breaking work by the Hispanic and Mexican people who came to work and settle in the beet fields. Although known for public art, Garza also creates gallery work and often creates up to four distinctly different bodies of work simultaneously. He doesn’t believe an artist must develop a single style and become that. This “no confinement” approach has helped the artist maintain a balance based on both impulse and strategy.

"I would consider Frank Garza one of the top 100 Most Influential Artists of Northern Colorado ... in 2015" — *Frank's Mom*

Find out more about the artist, including photos of his art at Frank-Gaza.com.

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About the Author of the Mural's Background History, Robin Kring



Robin Kring is a local historian and author of 8 books, 100 magazine articles, and numerous print and online publications. Kring's thematic marketing books and publications have sold worldwide to professional planners of Disneyland Hotel, MGM Grand, Harvard Business School, NBC, and TV Guide. Passionate about the intriguing characters and places of her Brighton, Colorado home she shares with her husband, Kring has spent recent years sleuthing and writing stories of the town's characters and places of intrigue. She is a local history speaker, museum docent, and a frequent tour guide presenter. Kring served on the Brighton Historic Preservation Commission (two separate terms), and led the Colorado Preservation, Inc. Most Endangered Places Team for documenting and photographing the historic Brighton Great Western Sugar Factory. The Brighton Historic Preservation Commission (BHPC) awarded Kring the Historic Preservation Brick Award in December 2023 in recognition of her efforts to encourage interest and preserve Brighton's history and treasured places, helping to generate community pride and heritage. Kring is also a former member of BCAC and served on the 2015 Brighton Strategic Cultural Plan Team. In 2023, Kring wrote the Background History for the BCAC mural by Hans Joseph Geist, "Historic Brighton at Founders Plaza" and is now excited to share the history behind those featured in the 2024 "Women of Inspiration" mural by Frank Garza.

Find out more about the author, including her Brighton stories of yesteryear, mystery, and intrigue on her Brighton History Detective® Blog at clearcreekpub.com.

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Acknowledgments and Citations

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Other helpful references included: *The History of Brighton, Colorado and Surrounding Area*, by the Brighton Genealogy Society (1987), *Our American Journey: A History of the Brighton Nisei Women's Club and the Brighton Japanese American Association* by Daniel Blegen (2013), *Footprints in the Sugar: A History of the Great Western Sugar Company* by Candy Hamilton (2009), and *From Sugar to Diamonds: Spanish and Mexican Baseball 1925-1969* by Jody L. and Gabriel A. Lopez (2009).

The author, Robin Kring, has included several excerpts from her own previously-published books and materials, including: *A Stroll through Elmwood: Brighton's Stories Told in Stone* and *Brighton's "Sugar Sweet" Times — Memories of our Sugar Beet Days and Great Western Sugar Co., Colorado's "White Gold" — Beet Sugar*, and several *Brighton History Detective® Investigation Reports* and *Cemetery Chats* blog articles.

A complete list of references cited in this document is available from the author by contacting Clear Creek Publishing, 90 N. 4th Ave., Unit 314, Brighton, CO 80601. The author also welcomes any additions or corrections to this published material.

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About the Mural Project by The Brighton Cultural Arts Commission



The Brighton Cultural Arts Commission (BCAC) commissioned the “Women of Inspiration” mural by Frank Garza, honoring and celebrating the women who shaped Brighton. The mural was installed in May 2024 on the north exterior wall of the H&R Block building at 66 S. Main St., in Brighton, Colorado. The mural is a project of BCAC and its Brighton Public Arts Committee (BPAC) and was made possible with funding from Brighton Lodging Tax Grants.

The Brighton Cultural Arts Commission was incorporated in 1996, and established by the Brighton City Council. The Brighton Cultural Arts Commission (BCAC) is an art, culture, and humanities 501(c)(3) Corporation. Its charitable mission is to promote cultural arts. The BCAC operates exclusively for charitable purposes, supporting educational, cultural, and scientific programs. The mission of the BCAC is to provide support for the production, presentation, exhibition, advancement, and preservation of art, music, theatre, dance, language arts, zoology, botany, and natural history for the City of Brighton. The BCAC receives funding from the SCFD and Brighton Lodging Tax to support exciting programs, activities, and long-term art.

BCAC offers arts and cultural resources for supporting creative organizations and individuals. These include creatives in the fields of visual arts, performing arts (theatre, musicians, entertainers, and public speakers), writers and poets, outdoor activities, and cultural heritage and history creatives. Learn more about the BCAC and its many projects at BrightonCulturalArts.org.

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