

History of the Castle Rock Star



Castle Rock after Starlighting, 1997. #1998.003.0004.0023

Castle Rock is named for a large geological formation which looked to early travelers to the area like a castle on a hill. A special tradition has been observed in the town every Christmas since 1936. It has a 45 foot tall electric star which lights up the night in the town from the week before Thanksgiving until the end of the National Western Stock Show in January. The star has been a symbol to people in Castle Rock for over 60 years.

In 1936, the United States was experiencing the Great Depression. Millions of people were out of work. There was also a drought in those years which became known as the "Dust Bowl". Farms throughout the middle part of the country saw their crops dry up and their soil blow away. In Castle Rock, the Douglas County Fair, the community's main annual festival, had been held only sporadically since 1930. Like people throughout the country, the citizens of Castle Rock were losing hope because of the poor economy, and the town was badly in need of a boost. Someone heard that people in nearby Palmer Lake were talking about building a star. Community leaders in Castle Rock jumped on the idea, thinking that the star would draw travelers' attention. They hoped people would stop in town on their travels along what was then busy Colorado Highway 85-87.



Christmas Star at Castle Rock, Colo. c. 1940. #1993.005.0002

George P. Stewart owned "The Rock" in 1936, and he was happy to donate the land on which the star could alight.



Starlighting Parade, 1965. #1994.011.0008

Men from the Works Progress Administration, who may have been staying at the local Civilian Conservation Corps Camp designed the star. Both the WPA and the CCC were federal programs designed to put Americans to work during the Depression. Forty foot steel rods were ordered from Denver and paid for with donations from the Town Council. Volunteer firemen carried the rods up Castle Rock (no mean feat, there was no road or trail up the 290 foot tall rock then) and welded them together with gas donated by two local businesses. The manager

of the local electric company donated some poles and helped string the electricity with wire donated by the Mountain States Telephone Company. When they were finished, the forty foot



North side of Castle Rock with the Star, 1975.
#1993.018.0009

tall star with nearly 100 light bulbs shone from the top of Castle Rock. The star was lit around 5 pm and extinguished at midnight every night throughout the Christmas season, and burned all night on Christmas and New Year's Eves. The star was lit every year from 1936 until 1941.

In 1941, the country was committing all its resources to win World War II, and the star was a luxury Castle Rock could no longer afford. Rationing of electricity did not allow the star to be lit, but the structure remained on top

of the rock, a symbol of the sacrifices that everyone in the country was making. On August 14, 1945 the war was finally over. That night, the star was converted into a "V" for victory as people celebrated into the night at the fire station.

The star was lit on December 7th of 1945, and it has been lit every Christmas season since. The star was completely rebuilt in 1949 in an effort to make it safer and sturdier, and there have been other repairs made to the structure in the succeeding years.



Reindeer at the Castle Rock Starlighting, 1997.
#1998.003.0002.0012

In 1965, a new group of community leaders, led by Mrs. Anne McConnell, started a ceremony for lighting the star. The programs included speakers from the Town of Castle Rock, choirs from the Air Force Academy and local churches, and a parade. In 1966, Mrs. Helen Lowrie Marshall, a Denver poet, wrote a poem called "The Star of Castle Rock" to commemorate the star. The poem was read at most of the starlighting ceremonies and published in the local newspaper throughout the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's.

During the early 1970's, the energy crisis briefly threatened the star lighting, but the tradition continued. For about 11 years, the ceremony was held at the Douglas County Courthouse. In 1978, the courthouse was destroyed in a fire. The starlighting was then held for a number of years on the "courthouse square", where a new administration building for the county was constructed.

In 1999, the starlighting moved to the steps of the new police station on Perry Street in Castle Rock. After both the 1998 and the 1999 Super Bowls, the lightbulbs in the star were replaced so that they showed blue and orange in celebration of the Denver Broncos victories.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the star was lit for several weeks. The organizers of the Starlighting Ceremony chose a patriotic theme for their celebration, complete with flags on all the advertising for the event.