

Playing the Past: Becoming Julie Penrose



PENROSE HERITAGE
MUSEUM

A PROGRAM OF EL POMAR FOUNDATION

Julie V. L. Penrose



Julie Villiers Lewis Penrose (1870-1956) was a dedicated advocate for the Pikes Peak region. Through her philanthropy - the goodwill shown to people in a community - she significantly contributed to the well-being of the people of Colorado by supporting arts and culture, education, and healthcare. Her remarkable generosity was

inspired by her father, a Detroit mayor and civic leader who instilled in his children the importance of serving their community. In 1906, she married Spencer Penrose, business entrepreneur, mining engineer, and fellow philanthropist. Their combined efforts continue to benefit the people of Colorado Springs to this day.

Julie was fortunate to grow up in a privileged environment, which she leveraged to give back to her community and support those around her. She founded Penrose Heritage Museum with the vision of connecting people to the history of coaching and showcasing the carriages of the Penroses' collection. Today, the Museum serves as a cultural link to the Penrose legacy, offering visitors the opportunity to learn about their lasting impact on the region. This booklet provides an opportunity to further explore Julie Penrose's contributions and legacy through various activities.

Growing Up in the Late 1800s

Julie came from a large family and was one of eight children to survive to adulthood. She and her sisters were considered the “belles” of Detroit society, with Julie often acknowledged as the loveliest. Her father Alexander Lewis was known as the “First Gentleman of Detroit” and left a lasting impression with his courtly manners. An immaculately dressed and devoted civil servant, he greatly enjoyed driving his prized black horse, Beauty, through the streets of Detroit in his sleigh, often accompanied by one of his daughters.

Upon graduating from finishing school, seventeen-year-old Julie embarked on her first, but certainly not last, trip through Europe. This journey inspired many of her lifelong interests in art, culture, and travel. After a year immersed in European culture, she returned home and married one of Detroit’s most eligible bachelors.



Julie's Marriages



When Julie married James “Jim” McMillan in 1890, they moved down the road from their childhood homes and their parents. The couple had two children, Gladys and Jimmie, in 1892 and 1894, respectively. Julie supported her husband’s decision to enlist in the military to fight in the Spanish-American War in Cuba in 1898, where he assisted victims of yellow fever.

Unfortunately, he returned home in 1900 after developing pulmonary tuberculosis (TB). The family moved to Colorado Springs later that year for Jim’s health. Tragically, in 1902, Julie’s young son and her husband passed away within a month of each other. These profound losses later inspired her visionary philanthropy and motivated her to help others through her charitable support.

Though widowed at the age of 32, Julie did not intend to stay unmarried. In 1906, she married up-and-coming entrepreneur Spencer Penrose. The couple spent the next 33 years traveling the globe, finding inspiration for their future hotel, The Broadmoor, and enjoying the finer things in life. While on their honeymoon in Europe, the idea of The Broadmoor was conceived, and the couple began their lives together with grand ideas and high hopes for a brighter future.





Diary Entry: Travel

Thursday, July 4, 1918 (Julie's age: 48)

Prompt: Julie and Spencer Penrose enjoyed attending grand parties and events, often staying at 4-star resorts and immersing themselves in the local social scene. Write about what it might be like to experience celebrating a holiday at a prestigious resort in 1918. Describe the atmosphere of the ballroom and the grandness of the food.



The Penroses' appreciation for culture and a life of luxury inspired them to build a grand resort in Colorado Springs. They also spent long weekends in Colorado enjoying the majestic beauty of the mountains and all that the state had to offer, including stays at Hotel Colorado in Glenwood Springs, shown above.

Living a Reflective Life in the 1900s



Julie and Spencer Penrose inspired change throughout the Pikes Peak region by using their resources to support the community. The couple had no children, so much of their care and attention was directed towards the people of Colorado. Julie was a pioneering philanthropist in the arts, education, healthcare, and religion, earning her the nickname “Queen of Colorado Springs.”

After Spencer died from cancer in 1939, Julie continued to work hard in leadership roles overseeing the organizations they created together. She also made some of her biggest philanthropic contributions to Penrose Hospital and Central City Opera.

In her later years, Julie did anything but slow down. She continued to support many organizations and always found time to help those in need even while continuing to travel to Europe to see her family.



An Enchanting Journey: Fashion of the Early 1900s

Julie grew up during the Victorian period (1837-1901) and lived through several changes in fashion, including the Edwardian era (1900-1910), which heavily influenced her famous style. Corsets and long skirts were still common from the Victorian period, and a wardrobe was not considered complete without hats, gloves, and often a parasol, or umbrella.

The style was opulent and formal, showcasing expensive materials to express a sense of wealth. Dresses were often embellished with extensive embroidery using metallic threads in swirls and floral patterns, giving the illusion of precious stones and gems adorning the gown. Lace and richly patterned silk and satin fabric was used to complement the embroidery and create an elegant gown for evening attire such as dinner parties.



Julie had many rich gowns and outfits for every occasion. Her trademark look always included her favorite strands of pearls. Penrose Heritage Museum has several items from Julie's wardrobe on display. Can you find her gloves and hats in the Heritage Gallery?

A Lesson in Giving: Julie's Philanthropic Nature

Philanthropy isn't limited to the wealthy. Anyone who donates time, money, or resources to help others is a philanthropist.

Julie passionately cared about the Colorado Springs community and supported many organizations, including the Broadmoor Art Academy, Fountain Valley School, Glockner Hospital, Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, and Girl Scouts. She also supported humanitarian causes in Europe and Asia, even providing aid during World War I to war-stricken towns in Belgium, where her daughter Gladys was living. Can you find evidence in the Heritage Gallery of her charitable works?

In addition to supporting organizations through monetary support, Julie contributed in other ways. She donated her house to the Sisters of Charity for use as a spiritual retreat center for women. As a community leader she served as Chair of Central City Opera Board of Directors (1950s), President of El Pomar Foundation (1939-1956), and President of The Broadmoor (1939-1956).

We can honor and emulate the legacy of Julie Penrose by practicing generosity, compassion, and kindness towards those in our community.



A Lesson in Giving: Julie's Philanthropic Nature

ACTIVITY:

Julie supported many organizations and helped create opportunities for the people in the Pikes Peak region. Explore the Culture exhibit in the Heritage Gallery and answer the questions below.

The Arts - What are a few ways Julie supported the arts in Colorado for young performers and artists? Do you have any artistic skills that you can share with someone?

Education - People learn in different ways, whether through reading, writing, doing, listening, or seeing. Can you name an organization Julie supported that provides educational opportunities for people? What is something you know a lot about that can you teach someone?

Healthcare - Julie survived the loss of many loved ones, including her second husband to cancer. In what ways did her philanthropic nature improve the healthcare community of Colorado Springs? Caring for people who are important to you can manifest in different ways. What supportive acts can you do for your loved ones?



Old-Fashioned Fun: Musical Theater & the Opera

Julie's adventures in Europe as a young girl led to an appreciation of arts and culture. She loved the opera and showed her support later in life by providing financial contributions to the Central City Opera House.

An opera is a theatrical art form that combines music, singing, drama, visual arts, and dance to share a story with the audience. There are seven common voice types that you may hear in an opera. The three most common voice types for women are Soprano (highest), Mezzo-Soprano (lower than soprano), and Contralto/Alto (lowest).

Watch the video of *The Barber of Seville*, which first debuted at Central City in 1941. *The Barber of Seville* is a funny and exciting opera by composer Gioachino Rossini. It tells the story of a clever barber named Figaro who helps his friend, Count Almaviva, win the heart of a beautiful girl named Rosina. Can you pick out the different vocal ranges of the actors? Imagine you are sitting in the audience in 1941 watching this for the first time. What emotions does the scene evoke?



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFx-eod3PH3I&ab_channel=CentralCityOpera



Sharing the Story

Life in the early days of horse-drawn carriages and automobiles may have looked different in the ways people dressed and how they got around, but the act of giving and being kind is the same.

Gather with your group and share what you learned. What aspects of Julie's life do you find interesting?

Is there an organization Julie supported that you were surprised to learn about today?

How has learning about Julie's life inspired you to connect with your community? What acts of service can you practice this week?

Think about how the act of giving feels today. Do you think it was different in Julie's life? How is it the same?



Learn more about Julie Penrose by watching the documentary *A Grand and Giving Life* created by the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame.



<https://www.cogreatwomen.org/project/julie-villiers-lewis-mcmillan-penrose/>