

*THE HISTORIC STRATER HOTEL PRESENTS*

# ROOM 221: TURNER FAMILY

## THE TURNER FAMILY, TRUE COLORADO PIONEERS\*

(\**PIONEER*: "One who goes before to prepare the way for another")

### JOHN CHARLES (JACK) TURNER

In the mid-1800s few knew or even dreamed of the vast potential of the Colorado Territory, an area initially disregarded as unsuitable for settlement because of its severe winters and unforgiving terrain. Fewer still could imagine that the Colorado Territory would become the state of Colorado and that southwestern Colorado would grow and develop to such a dizzying degree. But some courageous and enterprising pioneers, like John Charles (Jack) Turner, had the vision and drive to not only imagine it, but to live it.

### IN THE BEGINNING

Jack was born in England on March 10, 1834, and came to America with his parents John and Martha in 1844. When his father, who was a Pinkerton detective, died in the line of duty in 1858, Jack joined a wagon train heading west, ending up in the Colorado Territory. While there he heard thrilling tales about Charles Baker's quest for gold in the San Juan Mountains. This was an era in the west that fired the imaginations of young men and in 1860 he left to join Baker and become a prospector. Known as the Baker Party, the group eventually reached Baker' Park, the future site of Silverton. They spent the winter of 1860-1861 at Baker's Bridge north of Durango, enduring dismal winter storms and Indian attacks. At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, many of the men left to enlist, including Jack who joined the Union Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Colorado Cavalry Unit. He fought in a number of battles,

including Glorieta Pass and Sand Creek. After the war, he moved around the west and "struck gold" in New Mexico when he met and married the beautiful 19 year old Emma Stephens. They lived in Colfax County, NM, a raucous town where he was elected sheriff. He had to stand up to notorious desperados who did not respect the badge of sheriff, like Billy the Kid, Clay Allison and Ike Stockton. When he heard that the Ute lands in the Animas Valley had been opened for settlement, he remembered the beautiful land he'd seen while with the Baker Party and he made a momentous decision.



John Charles Turner & Emma Stephens Turner  
Photo courtesy Rod Turner

***"IT WAS RAW LAND –  
NO AXE HAD EVER  
CUT THE TIMBER  
AND NO PLOW HAD  
EVER TURNED THE  
SOIL"***

Jack and Emma packed up their children and set out by covered wagon for the Animas Valley to file for a homestead. With them came 3 horses, a cow, and some farm equipment. (In

the journal he always kept, Jack recorded that by 1881, they had 5 horses and 21 cows.) Their homestead, filed on March 10, 1876, was 160 acres of land five miles north of Durango on the east side of the Animas River, fertile and promising. Jack and Emma welcomed the births of the rest of their children and "carved a home and security out of the wilderness," their son "Papo" would remember many years later.

Jack entered politics. He was elected Road Overseer and later La Plata County Sheriff. He was well suited for the job of sheriff. "He was just, stern, kind and his reputation with a six-shooter was not exaggerated." Jack was a renown shot – he'd hammer a nail part way into a tree, take thirty steps back and finish driving the nail in with a bullet! Contrary to other less scrupulous lawmen,

## The Turner Family Story - “Papo”Turner

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Jack died on May 20, 1902, from a broken neck after falling off a hay wagon. A former deputy wrote a tribute describing him as “Square in business, liberal in principals, kind and brave. He was an ideal man.” Jack Turner, the very definition of a pioneer, was buried in the Animas City Cemetery, near the townsite whose founding he had witnessed so many years before.

### JOHN WILLIAM (PAPO) TURNER

Jack would have been proud to know his family would carry on the Turner family tradition of courage, resourcefulness, entrepreneurship, civic mindedness and toughness that he had established as the patriarch of the family. His son Papo, representing the second generation of Turners, helped establish the financial and cultural infrastructure of the growing town of Durango

Papo was born September 16, 1877, in a log cabin in Durango. At the age of seven he lost his leg after a shooting accident, but got around well using crutches, and later with a prosthesis. He worked as a printer for famed Durango Democrat publisher David Day. He married Josie Hillman and in 1902, when his father died he and Josie took over the ranch and the care of his younger brothers.

His impact on Durango’s financial community was to be significant. In 1904 he founded the Turner Investment Company dealing in real estate. Five years later he added the Gallotti real estate business to his company. The business thrived and changed its name to the Turner investment Company, one of the first established businesses in Durango. They eventually moved their offices into the Strater Hotel where the Diamond Belle is now. Then, he added automobile financing to the business.

Papo was Director of the Chamber of Commerce, Director of the Colorado-New Mexico Fair Association, a member of the City Council member, the Odd Fellows and the Colorado Association of Finance Companies. He was elected La Plata County Treasurer and later founded Silverstate Securities which handled home building.

### ***“A MAN NEVER GETS ANYPLACE WITHOUT BORROWING MONEY”***

In 1935 he and others put up \$500 each to establish radio station KIUP-AM (“The Voice of the San Juan Basin”), the first in the area. Its first broadcast was from the Strater Hotel. He was appointed to the Board of Mercy Hospital and helped raise funds for a new hospital wing. Later expansions and consolidations of his businesses in 1955 created the Turner Industrial Bank which provided small business, livestock and car loans. He once said “A man never gets anyplace without borrowing money.”

When Papo died in 1962, people remembered he was a “forward looking man, and a real builder of the area. His word was his bond. He possessed a keen business sense and knowledge of human nature.” Because of his financial bril-



Papo Turner & Wife Josie  
Photo courtesy Suzanne Turner Belt

## The Turner Family Story—”Dick” & “Nick”

### **RICHARD WILLIAM (DICK) TURNER, SR.**

Representing the third generation of Turners in Durango, Dick Turner carried on the financial wizardry of his father. He was born June 10, 1902, in Durango. When he was young and wanted a new bicycle he knew how to go about it – he sold newspapers and delivered groceries. He joined the Turner Securities Company as a bookkeeper until he joined the Army Air Corps as a pilot during WW II. After the war he continued to fly, taking hospital patients from Durango to Denver and Albuquerque. Together with his father he established the Turner Industrial Bank of Durango (which later became the Wells Fargo Bank), and acquired the Bank of Ignacio. He incorporated the Bank of Durango and became its Director in 1968. Generations of Turners worked together at the bank: Papo was president, Dick was vice president, Dick’s son, Nick Turner, was cashier, and Dick’s wife Claudine was treasurer. At his death in 1987 he was still serving as president of the Turner Investment Company.

### **RICHARD WILLIAM (NICK) TURNER, JR.**

Nick was born June 6, 1927, in Durango and started his career with the Turner Investment Company in 1947 as a bookkeeper. After serving in the Navy Air Corps, he returned to the family business joining his father and grandfather in the Turner Industrial Bank. He was named “Young Man of the Year” by the Colorado Association of Finance Companies.

Like other Turners before him, Nick was the consummate financial entrepreneur. He was involved with the Easy Credit Corporation, Easy Loan, Turner Securities, Turner Insurance, Silverton Industrial Bank, Bank of Ignacio, and the First Industrial Bank in Pagosa Springs. He helped persuade the D&RG Railroad not to abandon the line between Durango and Silverton. It is an understatement to say that this had an incalculable affect on both Durango and Silverton. Nick worked to pass legislation exempting licensing for boats on private lakes in the state, including Electra Lake. After years of effort, Nick was responsible for converting Fort Lewis College from a two year to a four year college. He helped form the Durango Industrial Foundation which raised money to establish Bodo Industrial Park. Nick developed the complicated financing necessary to expand the Purgatory ski area. In his honor, Purgatory added a new trail named “The Bank.” Nick secured a collection of historic weavings called the “Durango Collection” which is archived and regularly



Nick Turner & his father Dick fishing at Columbine Lake. Photo courtesy Suzan Turner Belt

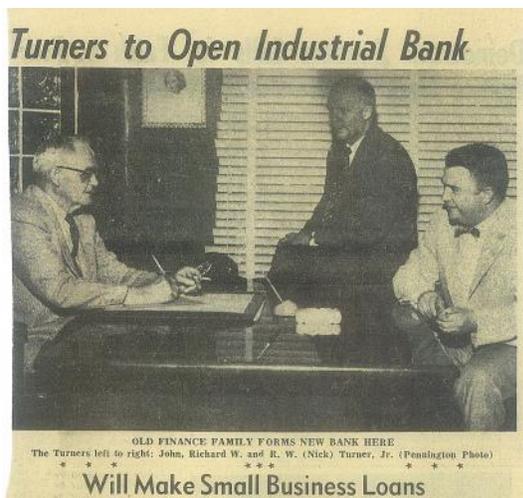
exhibited at the Center of Southwest Studies, and at museums nationwide. He was on the Mountain Bell Board of Advisors, the Colorado Tramway Safety Board, and the Fort Lewis College Foundation. He was president of the Colorado Insurer’s Association and was chosen “Man of the Year” by the Colorado Finance Association. The Colorado Insurer’s Association selected him “Insurer of the Year.” In 1992 he received an award from the Department of Commerce for supporting minority enterprises.

## The Turner Family Story - “Rod” Turner

### RODERICK LEWIS (ROD) TURNER

Rod was born on September 12, 1931, in Durango and as a youngster earned money by raising chickens and rabbits, selling eggs, and like his father by delivering newspapers “all over town.” He loved to fly and joined Durango’s Civil Air Patrol. He enlisted in the Coast Guard where he was a radar operator and a radio operator fluent in Morse Code. When he returned to Durango he went to work with his brothers, father, and grandfather in the Turner Insurance Company, and later in the Turner Industrial Bank and Ignacio State Bank. He established the Southwest Data Institute and the Rod Turner Real Estate Company dealing with commercial and residential real estate. He bought and sold land, including 800 acres which his family had purchased in a land deal and he helped develop that land into one hundred carefully thought out home sites now known as the Falls Creek Ranch Subdivision.

Rod is a member of the Elks, Lions Club, the Electra Lake Sporting Club and the Hundred Club which provides funds to families of firefighters and law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty. He donated \$10,000 to establish the Durango Discovery Museum and has donated land to the Open Space Conservancy. His generosity to both the community and to his family has benefitted many people. He has supported those with dreams of starting their own business, opened his home to those in need, lent money to those turned away by others, and done it all quietly with no fanfare. At the age of 83, he still has dreams and is excited about life. In fact, he wakes each morning thinking to himself “I wonder what will happen today?” Rod considers himself “the luckiest guy in the world.”



## A Family Story

### TO BE CONTINUED...

With such deep roots in the community, Rod and his brother Nick represent the fourth generation of Turners. The Turner tradition continues to be carried on with spirit and creativity by the next generations of Turners. Hopefully, *their* story will be told someday in the years to come..

**Rod Turner’s children:** Laurel Turner Waller manages the family’s residential and commercial real estate business. David Turner owns and operates a computer firm. Jack Turner is in the ski industry creating children’s safety programs. Jim Turner is the maintenance manager of the Turners’ rental properties and is a licensed real estate broker.

**Nick Turner’s children:** Suzanne Turner Belt is the author of “The Turner Tradition” and is a mule trainer. She is proud that she is the first person to ever get a mule accepted into the United States Dressage Federation. Jayne is a retired elementary school teacher. R. W. “Pete” Turner III is an outdoorsman and a retired outfitter and guide. Gene manages rental properties in the Boulder/Lafayette area. Sally is a musician (guitar) and a fine artist.



Original Turner Homestead.  
Drawn by child, depicted above, “Papo” Turner.  
Photo courtesy Rod Turner