

171 County Road 401, Cuchara, Colorado 81055



Centuries before cabins appeared in the Cuchara Valley, this mountain corridor was an untamed expanse of pine forest and open meadow. The Mouache and Capote bands of the Ute Nation hunted here seasonally and regarded the twin summits of the Spanish Peaks as sacred landmarks. Over time, explorers, settlers, and governments each claimed and redefined the land, leaving layers of cultural and political history that still shape the region today.

Five Flags Over Cuchara

Long before Pinehaven cut roads into the mountain, this land lay within the seasonal hunting and sacred grounds of the Ute, Apache, Comanche, and Puebloan peoples. The Mouache and Capote bands of the Ute considered the Spanish Peaks sacred, and even today arrowheads surface in the soil after rains, reflecting their long presence. In the late 1500s, Spain claimed the region as part of New Spain, governed from Santa Fe, leaving a cultural imprint in language, faith, and architecture that endures in southern Colorado. When Mexico gained independence in 1821, the land shifted again, though Mexican influence in the remote frontier was limited. From 1836 to 1845, the Republic of Texas claimed the Cuchara Valley in its northern reach, though it never exercised effective governance here. After the Mexican-American War, the United States claimed Colorado in 1848. By 1876, Colorado became the 38th state. The Cuchara Valley had already passed under five different flags, each shaping its evolving identity.

Homesteading the Future

One of the earliest documented chapters of Pinehaven's story began with Union Civil War veteran John L. Powell. Born in Pennsylvania in 1834, Powell served with the 8th Kansas Infantry. In 1896, he and his family arrived in the Cuchara Valley by wagon. In 1905, under the Homestead Act of 1862, he secured 160 acres just north of Cuchara. The Act required settlers to reside on and improve the land in exchange for ownership. Powell fulfilled those requirements, establishing a homestead that would later form the foundation of Pinehaven's development. He died in 1920, leaving the land to his children.

The Birth of Pinehaven

In 1943, Powell's son Charles sold the family land to John C. Vories, who envisioned a mountain retreat community. Vories named the land Pinehaven and began subdividing lots along what would become Road 402. Health challenges eventually required him to leave Colorado, and he transferred the project to Steve Pierotti. Pierotti, a Huerfano County native and experienced businessman, purchased Pinehaven for \$3,700. Through persistent effort, he marketed lots and encouraged construction, transforming Pinehaven into a viable cabin community. He remained connected to the area throughout his long life, passing away in 2017 at the age of 99.

Building a Community

Under subsequent leadership, including that of Bob Pierotti, Pinehaven expanded thoughtfully. Roads, utilities, and infrastructure improved over time, including integration into the Cucharas Sanitation and Water District. The establishment of the Pinehaven Homeowners' Association formalized shared stewardship of roads and common areas. The Pierotti Pavilion became a central gathering place, reflecting Pinehaven's transformation from isolated lots into an organized mountain neighborhood. Today, Pinehaven remains a close-knit community shaped by layered history and careful management.

History of Ownership

According to records maintained by the Huerfano County Clerk and Recorder, the property now known as 171 County Road 401, legally described as Lot 3, Block 11 of the Pinehaven Resort subdivision, traces its origins to the earliest phase of Pinehaven's development. The land first appears in county records in 1948, when John Vories acquired acreage from homesteader Charles R. Powell as part of an effort to establish what would become the Pinehaven Resort subdivision.

Block 11 is among the earliest sections of the development, representing some of the first lots offered for sale and marking the initial formation of the Pinehaven community. In the early 1950s, ownership of the Pinehaven Resort holdings was transferred to Steve Pierotti, who continued the subdivision's development and sale of individual parcels.

In 1958, Lot 3, Block 11 was conveyed to Richard and Roberta Smith, who became the original builders of the cabin that remains on the property today. Their acquisition and subsequent construction reflect the mid-century pattern of second-home development that shaped Pinehaven. The property remained associated with the Smith family for several decades before being sold in 1997 to Edmund Orsini, the current owner of record.

Ownership Timeline

- John L. Powell (original homesteader), September 11, 1905 – 1920
- Charles R. Powell (son of John L. Powell), 1920 – 1943
- John C. Vories (Founder of Pinehaven), 1943 – 1947
- Steve Pierotti (Pinehaven visionary and individual lot sales began during Pierotti's ownership.), 1947 – 1958
- Richard and Roberta Smith, 1958 – 1997
- Edmund Orsini, 1997 - Present

Smith Family Ownership (1958-1997)

The cabin at 171 County Road 401 stands as a representative example of early Pinehaven development in the mid-twentieth century, reflecting both the personal initiative of its builders and the broader pattern of family-centered recreation that shaped the Cuchara Valley.

Richard and Roberta Smith of Overland Park, Kansas were the owners and builders of the cabin, acquiring the lot in 1958 and beginning construction in 1962. Their decision to build in Pinehaven was not sudden but grew out of earlier family connections to the valley. As early as the 1920s and 1930s, members of the Smith family had traveled from Holly, Colorado to the Cuchara area to gather wild berries, establishing a tradition of seasonal use and familiarity with the landscape.

Following World War II, extended family members constructed a shared cabin south of Cuchara along Highway 12. This earlier structure became a gathering place for a growing family network and introduced the Smiths to the idea of establishing a place of their own. The concept remained aspirational until 1958, when a chance detour during a business trip brought Richard Smith into Pinehaven itself.

At that time, Pinehaven was still in its early stages of development. The road network was limited, consisting largely of a single dirt road with few side routes. Drawn by the setting, particularly the evening light on West Spanish Peak, Smith identified a preferred homesite and marked it in a practical and memorable fashion by fastening a note to a tree indicating his intent to purchase. The lot was subsequently secured through contact with local property owner Steve Pierotti.

Initial construction efforts encountered setbacks. Plans called for a 30 by 40 foot stone foundation, but early work completed in the owners' absence resulted in an incorrectly sized 30 by 30 foundation and damaged materials. Personal circumstances, including a death in the family, delayed further progress. Construction resumed in earnest in 1962 under the direction of local mason Charlie Keating, who rebuilt the foundation and constructed a substantial stone fireplace.

The fireplace became the architectural centerpiece of the cabin. Built from stone gathered on the mountain, it rose approximately twenty-eight feet in height and served both structural and functional roles, including forming part of the interior wall of the bathroom. The remainder of the cabin utilized interlocking log construction, with large picture windows designed to frame the surrounding forest and mountain views.

Construction extended beyond contracted work and became a family effort. The Smiths, their son Dean, and visiting friends contributed to finishing the interior, while skilled tradesmen were brought from Kansas to complete electrical and plumbing systems. Like many Pinehaven cabins of the period, the structure evolved incrementally rather than reaching full completion, reflecting both distance from primary residence and the seasonal nature of work trips.

Over time, the cabin became a regular summer residence. While Richard Smith remained employed, visits were limited to extended weekends and periodic trips from Kansas City. After retirement, the Smiths spent full summer seasons in Pinehaven, establishing deeper ties within the local community. They participated in civic and social life, including involvement in the Cuchara Hermosa Club and leadership roles within the local chapel board.

The cabin, which the Smiths named the “Garden of Eden,” functioned not only as a private retreat but also as a shared gathering place. Family members, friends, and subsequent generations made regular use of the space. The design accommodated this use, with multiple sleeping areas including a loft arranged dormitory-style to host large groups.

The Smiths’ experiences reflect common patterns of mid-century mountain recreation. Their recollections include visits to local establishments such as George’s Restaurant, Charlie’s Grocery in La Veta, and Sunday meals at the Timbers. Community events such as art fairs, craft sales, and Fourth of July celebrations formed part of the seasonal rhythm, while the interdenominational chapel served as a central social and spiritual gathering place for residents and visitors alike.

The family’s long association with the cabin came to an abrupt close due to health considerations. At approximately 8,500 feet in elevation, the Pinehaven environment proved difficult for Richard Smith following the onset of cardiac illness. A sudden decision was made to leave the property, with only limited time to gather belongings. Shortly thereafter, he underwent triple bypass surgery, marking the end of the family’s active use of the cabin.

By the time of Roberta Smith’s written historical account in February 2003, the Pinehaven years were understood as a distinct and meaningful chapter in the family’s history. The cabin remained associated with decades of seasonal living, community participation, and multi-generational memory making.

Orsini Family Ownership (1997 - Present)

In 1997, ownership transferred to Edmund Orsini Jr., marking the first transition beyond the original builders. In the fall of 1999, Ed married Christine Robinson, marking a new chapter in the life of the cabin as it began to serve a growing family who would come to share in its setting and traditions. Since that time, the cabin has been maintained with a deliberate emphasis on preservation. Rather than undertaking extensive modernization, the structure has been kept largely as built, allowing its original design, materials, and construction methods to remain clearly representative of the late 1950s period.

Interior features continue to reflect mid-century craftsmanship, including hand-built elements and rustic finishes that define the character of the space. The cabin has consistently served as a place of short-term retreat, typically used for brief stays rather than extended residence. This pattern aligns with Pinehaven’s longstanding role as a destination for respite from urban environments.

The surrounding landscape of Huerfano County reinforces this function, offering forested terrain, seasonal variation, and a level of isolation not found in metropolitan settings.

Environmental conditions have played a defining role in the cabin's experience over time. Winter snowfall, often accumulating deeply around the structure, highlights the seasonal extremes characteristic of the region. The cabin's location within a forested environment also places it in close proximity to wildlife, underscoring its connection to the surrounding natural landscape.

One recorded encounter illustrates this relationship with particular clarity. The owner, Edmund, rode his motorcycle down one weekend, stopping by Charlies Market to pick up some meat to barbeque, putting the meat in the helmet bag just behind the rider's seat. It started to rain, so he parked the motorcycle by the side porch, just below the stairs, and went inside to grab a jacket and the propane lighter. When he came out to the porch to light the BBQ, there was a large bear standing behind the motorcycle, gently and carefully opening the helmet bag, following the scent of the meat. Ed grabbed a broom and waved it at the bear, at which the bear looked like, "Really!" and dropped down on all fours to amble off as slowly as possible. He had unzipped the bag, examined it, and yet there was not a trace of damage! Good bear!

The episode reflects the cabin's placement within an active wildlife corridor and demonstrates the routine presence of large mammals in the area.

Despite broader changes within the Pinehaven community, the cabin itself has remained largely unchanged. Maintenance efforts have focused on preserving its original condition rather than introducing substantial alterations. This continuity provides a direct link to the late 1950s phase of Pinehaven's development. It also reflects a clear intention that the cabin continue to serve future generations as a place of refuge from city life, consistent with its longstanding purpose.

* This summary condenses five centuries of history; full research notes, sources, and citations. For additional historical context and related research, visit www.CabinInThePines.org

Historical Photos

