

The Howard Cabin History

136 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 band 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 dreamed of transforming the rugged property into a mountain resort. With vision but limited resources, Vories named the land "Pinehaven" and began designing cabin lots along what would become Road 402. He saw the forest as "heaven among the pines," and his plans laid the foundation for the community's identity as a retreat in the high country. Health challenges eventually forced Vories to leave Colorado, but before he did, he passed his dream into capable hands.

That man was Steve Pierotti, a native of Huerfano County and close friend of Vories. Pierotti had grown up tough—an orphan by nine, managing service stations as a teenager, and later working in the coal mines. His tireless work ethic made him one of the largest coal dealers in the county. When Vories offered him Pinehaven for \$3,700, Pierotti borrowed from a friend and seized the opportunity. Through sheer determination and charisma, he sold lots, encouraged building, and helped bring Vories' dream to life. Under Pierotti's influence, Pinehaven became a thriving cabin community. Steve lived there until his death in 2017 at the age of 99, and his family remains part of Pinehaven today.

Building a Community

From Powell's homestead to Vories' vision and Pierotti's energy, Pinehaven grew from wilderness into a neighborhood. Steve Pierotti's son, Bob, carried his father's vision forward by leading Pinehaven's expansion up the mountain and ensuring its growth was both thoughtful and sustainable. With steady leadership, he guided the development of new roads, utilities, and infrastructure, while championing compliance with modern standards. His pivotal role in integrating Pinehaven into the Cucharas Sanitation and Water District secured reliable water and sanitation for generations to come. From community planning to the creation of the Pierotti Pavilion, Bob's quiet dedication laid the foundation for a resilient mountain community whose strength endures to this day.

Cabins rose among the trees, families returned each summer, and traditions took root. Eventually, homeowners organized formally, creating the Pinehaven Homeowners' Association to care for roads, shared spaces, and community life. The Pierotti Pavilion, named in honor of Bob's contributions, became a gathering place where neighbors celebrated the very community he helped establish.

Today, Pinehaven stands as more than a scattering of mountain cabins. It is a close-knit community, bound together by its layered history, its natural beauty, and its people's love for the land. The Spanish Peaks still tower over the valley, silent witnesses to centuries of change—from the passage of flags and empires to the persistence of families who found here not just land, but home.

History of Ownership

County property and deed records trace the ownership of 136 County Road 401 through several families and legal transfers, revealing how the property passed from its earlier owners to the person who hold it today.

- 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 developer), 1947–1973
- Otis B. and Lucille Burke & Elmer and Lucille Trimble, 1973 – 1987
- Wanda Trimble Heisey, 1987 – 2016
- Bob and Lynn Kennemer, 2016 – 2018
- Thomas V. Howard, 2018 – present

Cabin History

The cabin at 136 County Road 401 occupies a prominent location near the entrance to Pinehaven. As one of the first residences encountered when entering the community, it has long served as a visible example of Pinehaven's early residential character. Its history also reflects several broader phases in the development of the subdivision: early construction, long-term private ownership, transfer through adjoining property interests, and extensive rehabilitation under the ownership of Thomas Howard.

The cabin was constructed in 1962 by Pinehaven developer Steve Pierotti. It was reportedly built as a model cabin for the expansion of Pinehaven, placing it among the community's earlier structures. A model cabin was more than an ordinary residence. It demonstrated how a mountain dwelling could be arranged, constructed, and used within the developing subdivision. Prospective property owners could evaluate the scale of the building, its interior features, and its relationship to the surrounding terrain.

The cabin's design included several features associated with mid-twentieth-century mountain construction. Among them were a stone fireplace, an open ceiling, and a loft. These elements provided practical benefits while also helping establish the visual identity expected of a mountain residence. The fireplace served as a central feature of the interior, while the open ceiling increased the apparent volume of the principal living area. The loft allowed additional usable space to be incorporated without substantially enlarging the cabin's footprint.

Although the building was relatively modest in size, its design reflected an effort to make efficient use of interior space. Early Pinehaven cabins were generally constructed for mountain living rather than formal display. Their plans often emphasized common living areas, direct access to the outdoors through decks, and materials that complemented the forested setting.

The cabin was owned for an extended period by members of the Heisey family. Their ownership appears to represent the longest continuous period associated with the property. Long-term ownership of this kind was common in mountain communities, where cabins frequently remained with individuals or families for many years before entering the market again. During such periods, improvements were often made gradually, responding to changing needs, available resources, and the demands of year-round or seasonal use.

The property was later acquired by the Kennemers as part of their purchase of adjoining property. This suggests that the cabin's ownership became connected, at least temporarily, to a larger neighboring landholding. The Kennemers did not remain the cabin's long-term owners. Their acquisition instead formed part of the transition between the property's earlier ownership and its present period of use.

Thomas Howard first traveled through Cuchara in 2017 while on vacation. His visit led to an interest in the area, and in September 2018 he purchased the cabin. Unlike many Pinehaven

properties used primarily as seasonal retreats, the cabin became his full-time residence. This use continued one of the building's most important historical functions: providing permanent housing within a mountain community rather than serving exclusively as a recreational property.

When Howard acquired the property, the cabin required substantial work. Beginning in 2018, he undertook a comprehensive renovation that extended from the foundation to the roof. The project also included improvements to the yard and outbuildings. Rather than focusing on a single room or isolated repair, the work addressed the cabin as an entire property.

This renovation represents a major chapter in the building's history. Historic cabins often survive because later owners are willing to correct structural problems, replace deteriorated systems, and adapt the interior to current living requirements. Such work can substantially alter a building, but it can also preserve its continued use. At 136 County Road 401, the renovation allowed an early Pinehaven cabin to remain an active residence more than half a century after its construction.

Several interior features introduced during the renovation reinforced the cabin's mountain character. Four aspen logs were installed in the main room, and rough-sawn, locally sourced pine was used for the ceiling. These materials connected the renovated interior to the surrounding forest environment while providing a distinct architectural finish.

The installation of the aspen logs required direct assistance from neighboring residents. Because of their size, the logs were brought into the cabin through the kitchen window. Neighbors helped support and maneuver them into place, even though Howard had known some of them only briefly. The episode illustrates the informal cooperation that has often supported construction and property maintenance in Pinehaven. In communities where equipment, contractors, and labor may not always be immediately available, neighbors frequently provide practical assistance.

The cabin's setting exposes it to the environmental conditions characteristic of the upper Cuchara Valley. Howard's first night in the residence was marked by darkness and the absence of ordinary urban noise, but also by the audible presence of wind and wildlife. The property has experienced heavy snowstorms and regular wildlife activity. Bears, mountain lions, bobcats, deer, turkeys, and foxes have all been observed in the vicinity.

Its location near the entrance to Pinehaven gives the cabin an additional community role. Although privately owned, it contributes to the first visual impression of the subdivision. Its appearance reflects both Pinehaven's early period of development and the continuing investment of later owners.

The history of 136 County Road 401 is therefore best understood as a sequence of adaptation. Built in 1962 as a seasonal cabin during Pinehaven's early years, it introduced prospective residents to a practical form of mountain construction. Its stone fireplace, open ceiling, and loft represented the design priorities of the period. Long-term ownership by the Heiseys provided continuity, while later transfers brought the property into a new phase.

Since 2018, the cabin has undergone extensive rehabilitation and has continued in use as a full-time residence. Its foundation, roof, interior, grounds, and outbuildings have all received attention. The locally sourced pine ceiling and aspen-log installation record the latest stage in the building's physical development.

Future understanding of the cabin should include both its current condition and the condition in which it was acquired. The contrast between those two periods documents the scale of the work required to preserve an early Pinehaven structure. Today, the cabin remains one of the community's most visible residences and an identifiable survivor from Pinehaven's formative years.

** This summary condenses five centuries of history; full research notes, sources, and citations can be found at www.CabinInThePines.org.*