

The Wilkin Cabin History

20 County Road 406, 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 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

County property and deed records trace the ownership of 20 County Road 406 through several families and legal transfers, revealing how the property passed from its earlier owners to those 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 under whose ownership individual lot sales began), 1947–1984
- Popejoy Properties (builder and owner), 1984-2003
- Kenneth and Nan Wilkin, 2003 - Present

Wilkin Family Ownership (2003 - Present)

Some cabins are chosen in an afternoon. Others seem to wait until the right family has traveled far enough to recognize them. The cabin at 20 County Road 406 belongs to the second kind. Sheltered among the trees of Pinehaven, it stands on Lot 7 of Pinehaven Filing No. 2, where the forest creates privacy and the upper loft opens toward a memorable view of West Spanish Peak. For Ken and Nan Wilkin, the cabin was not simply a real-estate purchase. It was the end of a long search for a place where the air felt cooler, time moved more slowly, and family life could gather around something enduring.

The house took shape in the mid-1980s. Huerfano County records identify 1986 as the year of construction, while the Wilkin family has long understood the cabin to have been completed in 1987. That slight difference is common in property histories, where assessment and final completion may not fall within the same calendar year. What is clear is that the cabin emerged while Pinehaven was maturing into an established community of all-season homes. Its wooded setting, spacious design, and generous interior suggest that it was intended from the beginning to be more than a small weekend shelter. It was built to hold people, seasons, and memories.

Donald and Susan Popejoy were the cabin's early owners and are remembered by the Wilkins as the people who built it. The Popejoy name carries a special place in Pinehaven history because Don and Susan were among the community-minded residents who helped shape life beyond their own property.

Before retirement, Ken and Nan began imagining a second home with a climate noticeably different from North Texas. Summers in the Dallas-Fort Worth area could be relentless, and they wanted relief that was beautiful but still close enough to reach by car. They did not settle for the first mountain town or available cabin. Instead, they devoted two weeks to crossing Colorado, driving several thousand miles in search of the right combination of scenery, accessibility, cool climate, and community. When they reached the small village of Cuchara and found the Popejoy cabin for sale, the long journey suddenly made sense.

The house had been on the market for some time, but to Ken and Nan it contained nearly everything they had hoped to find. It was large enough to welcome children, relatives, and friends. Natural pine paneling, matching cabinetry, vaulted ceilings, and the warmth of wood gave the interior an unmistakable mountain character. Four bedrooms, two and one-half baths, multiple levels, a finished basement, a garage, a broad balcony, and a deck provided room for togetherness and

retreat. The surrounding trees softened the view of neighboring properties, while the loft offered a dramatic reminder that the cabin belonged to the high country.

On December 8, 2003, Ken and Nan purchased the property, and the timing could hardly have been more fitting. They moved in during December with several family members and celebrated their first Christmas there beneath a Colorado winter sky. Snow transformed the forest, quieted the roads, and gave them the white Christmas that mountain cabins seem designed to provide. That first holiday established the spirit of the place. The cabin would not be maintained merely as an investment or occasional lodging. It would become a setting for family traditions, shared meals, faith, rest, and unhurried conversation.

From the beginning, Ken and Nan loved the cabin at first sight, but their attachment deepened through use. They discovered that life there felt calmer than life at home. Traffic faded. Schedules loosened. The forest seemed to absorb the pressure that followed them from the city. At Pinehaven, they could breathe more deeply and live, as they described it, almost as though they had stepped back in time. The cabin became their seasonal getaway, but “getaway” never fully captured its meaning. It was a retreat in the truest sense: a place that restored perspective and returned the family to what mattered most.

Nature became one of the cabin’s greatest gifts. Three generations of the Wilkin family have explored the valley and the landscapes surrounding Highway 12. Some outings reached toward Colorado’s fourteen-thousand-foot peaks. Others followed easy trails at a slower pace, allowing children and adults to notice wildflowers, changing light, birds, and wind moving through the trees. Nearby lakes offered another kind of beauty. These experiences required no elaborate entertainment. Their value came from being shared. The cabin gave the family a home base from which the mountains could be encountered together.

Over the years, familiar traditions gave the house its rhythm. Thanksgiving brought turkey dinners and a table filled with family. Christmas brought trees, decorations, and attention to the deeper meaning of the season. Summer brought the Fourth of July, the Cuchara parade, and the cheerful energy of a small mountain community. Between those events were quieter moments: morning coffee on the deck, visits with friends, evenings beneath vaulted ceilings, conversations that lasted because no one was rushing away, and the pleasure of watching weather change across the trees.

The cabin also proved versatile. It served as a hunting base and as a place of preparation for a through-hike on the Appalachian Trail. Those uses added adventure to a house already shaped by the outdoors. Antiques placed throughout the cabin, along with several pieces of handmade furniture inside and on the deck, gave the property character. These furnishings did more than decorate the space. They reinforced the sense that the cabin belonged to a slower, more deliberate way of living, one in which useful things were kept, stories accumulated, and craftsmanship still mattered.

In 2021, the cabin entered one of the most unusual chapters in its history. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ken and Nan sold their home in Heath, Texas, and moved to Cuchara in June. What had long been a seasonal retreat became, for a time, their primary refuge. The mountain setting offered distance from crowded places and a measure of security during that unsettled time. That winter they renovated the cabin, investing fresh labor and care into a house that had served them for nearly two decades. They remained until they found a new home in Denton, Texas. The experience confirmed that the cabin could do more than host vacations. It could shelter them through transition.

The Wilkins are determined to preserve the cabin as a living family legacy, a place where their children and grandchildren can return, make new memories, and carry its story into the generations yet to come. They are in no hurry to surrender the summers, friendships, and mountain days ahead, but they have begun protecting the cabin as a family inheritance rather than a possession with only present value.

That future matters because the cabin was found through effort and sustained through love. Ken and Nan searched tirelessly for a place large enough to hold the people they cared about. They purchased it, maintained it, renovated it, and filled it with traditions intended to outlast them. They want the traditions and bonds formed there to endure.

The friendships formed in Pinehaven have become part of that legacy. Over more than two decades, Ken and Nan have met neighbors, visitors, and friends of friends who became part of the cabin's larger circle. Pinehaven offered them more than scenery. It offered community in its best sense: people connected by place, shared experience, mutual welcome, and affection for the valley. Those relationships expanded the meaning of family without replacing it. The cabin became a doorway through which new friendships entered and old ones deepened.

Today, the cabin at 20 County Road 406 stands as the result of several intertwined stories. It is a mountain home built in the 1980s by early owners who helped shape Pinehaven. It is the destination Ken and Nan discovered after crossing Colorado in search of a cooler, quieter life. It is the place where their family celebrated a first white Christmas, where three generations encountered the mountains, and where holidays, adventures, renovations, and difficult seasons became shared history. Most of all, it is evidence that a cabin's true value cannot be measured only in square footage or assessed worth. Its deepest value is found in the lives gathered inside it.

In summary, this Pinehaven cabin has grown from a carefully placed mountain home into a multigenerational family refuge. Through the stewardship of the Popejoy and Wilkin families, it has provided beauty, shelter, friendship, tradition, and room to breathe. Its next chapter has not yet been written, but its purpose is clear: to remain a place where family returns, love is practiced, and the mountains continue to draw one generation toward the next.

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