

72 County Road 405 - 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 cabins and roads dotted the Cuchara Valley, this land lay within the seasonal hunting and sacred grounds of the Ute, Apache, Comanche, and Puebloan peoples. The Mouache and Capote band of the Ute considered the Spanish Peaks sacred, and even today arrowheads surface in the soil after rains, whispering of 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. Lawlessness and conflict marked the era. From 1836 to 1845, the Republic of Texas claimed the Cuchara Valley in its ambitious northern reach, though it never truly governed here. Still, the ties with Texas remain, many Texans still own cabins in the valley, escaping summer heat for mountain air. Finally, after the Mexican-American War, the United States claimed Colorado in 1848. By 1876, Colorado became the 38th state. The Cuchara Valley, with its Spanish Peaks rising above, had already passed under five different flags, each leaving fingerprints on its evolving identity.

Homesteading the Future

One of the earliest written chapters of Pinehaven's story began with Union Civil War veteran John L. Powell. Born in Pennsylvania in 1834, Powell marched with the 8th Kansas Infantry through the hardships of the war. Afterward, like many veterans seeking renewal, he moved west. In 1896 he and his family arrived in the Cuchara Valley by covered wagon. In 1905, under the Homestead Act of 1862, Powell secured 160 acres just north of Cuchara. The Act required settlers to live on the land, cultivate it, and build a home; in return, they received ownership. Powell's homestead fulfilled these requirements, and his perseverance planted the seed of what would one day become Pinehaven. He lived out his years in La Veta until his death 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

- **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)**, 1947 – 1978
- **Pinehaven Incorporated**, 1978 – 1988
- **Donald and Ruth Hickok**, 1988 – 2018 (Cabin build in 1989)
- **Mark and Lori Bradley**, May 10, 2018
- **Steve & Deidre Downham**, March 22, 2024 to present

Our Cabin

Some places draw people in quietly and never let go. That was the case for Donald Hickok, who, after being introduced to Pinehaven by Donald and Susan Popejoy and a circle of friends with cabins in the area, found himself captivated by its setting. In late 1989, he built the cabin at 72 County Road 405. Its location along County Road 405 reflects Pinehaven's continued expansion into higher elevations as infrastructure improved and access routes were extended.

Ownership patterns for the cabin reflect broader trends within Pinehaven. Rather than remaining within a single family lineage, the property transitioned through private ownership, including a period under Mark and Lori Bradley before its purchase by Steve and Deidre Downham in early 2024. The Downhams identified the property through a public listing and completed their purchase around Easter of that year.

Their first visit occurred under winter conditions, requiring travel through knee-deep snow along County Road 405. This firsthand experience reflects the environmental realities associated with Pinehaven, where seasonal weather conditions directly affect access and use.

Since acquisition, the cabin has served as a quiet retreat, consistent with the long-standing function of Pinehaven properties. The surrounding forested landscape, characterized by dense pine growth and minimal commercial development, creates a setting defined by privacy and isolation.

The owners selected Pinehaven in part for its proximity to their home in Raton, New Mexico, approximately ninety minutes away. Over the past two years, they have made frequent trips ranging from extended three and four day stays to brief single day visits to meet contractors or use the cabin as a staging point for early appointments in Pueblo. During one winter visit, they also utilized nearby Cuchara Mountain Park for skiing, reinforcing the cabin's integration into both recreational and practical routines.

A meaningful moment in the cabin's recent history took place in the summer of 2025, when Bill Hickok, the son of original builder Donald Hickok, visited the cabin with his wife and was warmly welcomed inside. Although limited historical information was exchanged, the visit provided a direct connection between the structure's origins and its present use.

The cabin remains integrated within the Pinehaven community through its location and use, participating in the network of roads, services, and collective responsibilities that support long-term habitation. As Pinehaven continues to evolve, properties such as this one provide a record of its later development phases while maintaining the core characteristics that have defined the area for decades.

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