

Way We Were

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Not PC in PC: A curious local geographic name

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The official renaming of Negro Bill Canyon near Moab last year received plenty of publicity. Far less known, unless you are prone to careful reading of topographic maps, is that Park City has its own similarly named spot. The area identified on the Park City resort trail map as the Treasure Hollow ski run was once known as, and is still identified on official topographic maps as, "Negro Hollow." In common usage, the Hollow (as I will refer to it) had a more objectionable name that you can probably imagine.

Long before the ski resort, the Hollow was a popular refuge from the city, and was often the site of outdoor gatherings of boy scouts, fraternal and church groups, and other organizations. Children frequently played in the area and sometimes tried to sneak into an old water tank located in the Hollow for a swim on hot summer days.

All that activity in the Hollow was not always welcome, however. The Nelson family, who owned the Hollow, often chased away kids playing on their property. In 1921, "Miss Lila Nelson" placed an advertisement in the Park Record stating that "Notice is hereby given that no further 'pic-nicing' on the premises known as [N-word] Hollow will be permitted."

Interestingly, the Park Record apparently had no problem printing the more objectionable common name for the Hollow, even into the 1970s, when local writers reminisced about their adventures in the area or when reprinting stories from 20-50 years earlier describing social events held in the Hollow.

So the obvious question is how did the Hollow get its name. The reference is certainly old, as it appears in mining and geology publications from the early 1900s. Gary Kimball, in his 2013 book, "Life Under China Bridge & Other Stories of Minorities in Old Park City," explains that there were very few blacks living in Park City in its early days. He does note that a member of the Nelson family had commanded a troop of black soldiers while serving in the Union Army during the Civil War. Kimball theorizes that might be the source of the Hollow's name, though he admits that it is a "slender, and possible coincidental, connection."

Sam Raddon, Jr., who grew up in Park City in the late 1800s, wrote a column about the Hollow in the Record in 1944, suggesting that it may have been named for "an old Negro known as Uncle Tobe" who he recalled from his youth as living near the mouth of the Hollow.

What we do know is that in 1962, the U.S. Department of Interior changed official references to the "N-word" in geographic names to "Negro." A year later, the Treasure Mountain Ski Resort (renamed Park City Ski Area in 1966) opened and understandably chose a different name, Treasure Hollow, for the ski trail running through the Hollow. However, the prior name still appears on topographic maps, and perhaps in the memories of those who lived in Park City in earlier days.



Photo ID: 1984.11.23 (1986.29.9/1999.17.301/2000.17.312/2000.17.315/2002.26.153)
Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Kendall Webb Collection
Caption: The Crescent Tramway, pictured here in 1891, crossed the Hollow on its route.