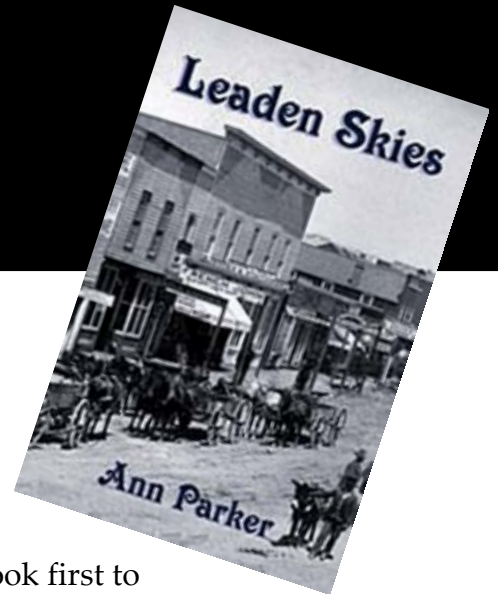


Author's Note for *Leaden Skies*

Ann Parker



Beware all who enter here, for spoilers lurk. So, if you haven't actually read *Leaden Skies* yet (preferring, as I often do, to flip to the back of the book first to see what the author has to say), you may want to reconsider.

Serendipity is a word that well describes the process of writing this particular story. For a long time now, I've wanted to do something with a mapmaker who comes to Leadville. I have copies of "Birds Eye View" maps of Leadville pinned to the walls of my writing room and, of course, have browsed the ever-fascinating Sanborn maps (earliest for Leadville is 1883, not quite early enough for me). But what fired my imagination was a small pamphlet that a coworker, Katie Walter, lent to me about a decade ago. *Fire Insurance Maps: Their History and Applications*, by Diane L. Oswald, introduced me to the backstory of fire insurance maps and mapmaking. Such maps began popping up in urban areas as early as the 1830s. It was in this booklet that I first learned about "trotters," "pacers," or "striders," that is, the itinerant surveyors for the fire insurance map industry. As Oswald notes, "Regardless of where the strider was stationed or how long he was there, he could be assured of taking away at least a few good stories to share with fellow pacers. . . . Surveyors met more than their fair share of interesting characters. They were sometimes treated with suspicion and occasionally their travels led them into danger."

Danger, you say? Good stories? Interesting characters? I thought: I can use this.

Still, it took until *Leaden Skies* for me to finally work my way around to inventing Cecil Farnsworth, surveyor for the entirely fictional Johnson Fire Insurance Map Company. Serendipity insisted that Cecil's sojourn in Leadville should become irrevocably entwined with the national and local politics of the day.

My focus on politics can be blamed on a couple of "a-ha" moments that occurred during my random research and wanderings through the events of 1880. The first of these moments actually goes back to the genesis of *Iron Ties*, the Silver Rush mystery preceding *Leaden Skies*. *Iron Ties* explores the coming of the first railroad, the Denver and Rio Grande, to Leadville in the summer of 1880. That first D&RG train brought no less a celebrity than former U.S. president and Civil War general Ulysses S. Grant into Leadville (fact). At the end of *Iron Ties*, I knew there was more story to tell. *Iron Ties* brought Grant into Leadville; *Leaden Skies* covers the five days of his visit. While Grant's shadow looms large in the story, the twists and turns play out on entirely fictional John Quincy Adams Wesley, a young man with high political aspirations, who unfortunately draws the attention and ire of the very real Horace Austin Warner Tabor, Leadville's home-grown millionaire and Colorado's Lieutenant Governor from 1878 to 1884. Horace and his wife, Augusta Tabor, were very much present in Leadville for Grant's visit. From books such as *The Legend of Baby Doe* by John Burke, *My Search for Augusta Pierce Tabor* by Evelyn E. Livingston Furman, *Augusta Tabor: A Pioneering Woman* by Betty Moynihan, it's clear that Horace had political aspirations stretching to Washington, D.C., and the Senate.

How, I wondered, would Horace have reacted if faced with a personable, charming younger man, also quite wealthy, who was gunning for the same political ends and who appeared to have a spotless record in the bargain? Would he be tempted to arrange something to get this young whippersnapper out of the

way? Perhaps. Maybe. Why not? But, what would he do and how would he accomplish this? I luckily (serendipity again) stumbled across the tale of the "Morey letter" while researching Grant's failed bid to win the 1880 Republican nomination in a convention that bests some of the worst political wheeling-dealings of today. With the Morey letter, Tabor's fictional path through *Leaden Skies* was clear.

What is this letter? Of course, you can search it out on the Internet, but I'll give you a summary here. October 20, 1880, just weeks before the presidential election between Republican nominee James Garfield and Democrat Winfield Scott Hancock, a letter purported to have been written by Garfield was published in the New York City newspaper, *Truth* (nice bit of irony, that). The letter, written on congressional stationery, implied that Garfield was in favor of increased Chinese immigration. Chinese immigration was a hot-button issue of the day, particularly in the West. Garfield refused to say anything until it was nearly too late. (Sources say he kept silent for so long because, without seeing the actual letter, he wasn't completely sure he hadn't written it.) The Democrats took full advantage of this and nearly sunk his presidential aspirations. Finally, Garfield allowed a real letter by him to be compared to the Morey letter, and the difference in handwriting cleared him.

The Morey letter was the genesis of the damning packet that fortuitously lands on the doorstep of my imaginary Leadville newspaper, *The Independent*. Of course, I couldn't just leave it as a letter supporting Chinese immigration, although I liked this angle a great deal: Leadville's 1880 census has no Chinese at all amongst its 15,000 souls (a number hotly contested at the time by local press and others who placed the total number closer to 40,000). So in marched the women's suffrage movement, circa 1880. I had been reading about the suffrage movement in Colorado and was particularly interested in Caroline Nickols

Churchill, publisher of the *Colorado Antelope* (later renamed the *Queen Bee*), Denver's earliest women's rights newspaper. A fascinating woman, Churchill liked to brag that she "single handedly performed the duties of editor, publisher, reporter, printer, and hawker." Readers of *Leaden Skies* will find echoes of Churchill in my fictional suffragist Serena Clatchworthy.

And what about Leadville's local police and politics? The year of 1880 was a tumultuous one, according to Eugene Floyd Ireys's PhD thesis (1951), *A Social History of Leadville, Colorado, During the Boom Days, 1877–1881*, and *History of Leadville & Lake County, Colorado*, by Don and Jean Griswold. Leadville's city government spent more than it had coming in and was in danger of becoming insolvent. The gathering of taxes, licenses, fees, and fines was pretty haphazard, to the point that much of the money never made it to the city's coffers. Early in 1880, the city council created the position of city collector and appointed a member of the police force to the position. The city collector was instructed to go forth and collect fees, particularly from the saloons. (The major source of the city's revenue, as it turns out, came from the licenses of billiard and gambling halls, saloons, and bawdy houses.) However—and here's the catch—it wasn't until October 1880 that the city council passed a resolution that "the several officers collecting moneys for the City be required to account for the same . . . and that they make a monthly report of the same." (Ireys, pg. 219) The force had its own problems, including corruption. Leadville's *Daily Chronicle*, June 11, 1879, described the typical Leadville officer as "numbered and branded with a star and turned loose. . . . He is amenable to nobody nor nothing. Makes arrests when he feels like it, and sometimes tries and discharges his own prisoners. If there is one place in the city where he can find more comforts than another, that place will be well watched." This and more provided a very plausible door for the imaginary Hatchet to bully his way into my story.

To continue down the darker side of State Street . . . For information about drugs, drug use circa 1880s, and poor Lizzie's fate, I turned to *Chloroform: The Quest for Oblivion* by Linda Stratmann, *Ether Day* by Julie M. Fenster, *Menace in the West: Colorado and the American Experience with Drugs, 1873–1963* by Henry O. Whiteside, *Buried Alive* by Jan Bondeson, and the ever-responsive and genial D.P. Lyle (author of *Murder and Mayhem: A Doctor Answers Medical and Forensic Questions for Mystery Writers*). As for prostitutes in the Old West, well, they are a slippery bunch when it comes to facts, despite all the books written about them. However, among those that continue to give me much food for thought are *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West 1865–90* by Anne M. Butler; *Hell's Belles: Denver's Brides of the Multitudes* by Clark Secrest, and *Gold Diggers & Silver Miners* by Marion S. Goldman. I particularly recommend the last, which has a succinct section exploring the relationship between lawmen and the prostitutes on the Comstock Lode from the mid-1860s through the 1880s. Much of what is said here applies to Leadville as well. I'll just quote one enticing bit from page 107: "Most of the local legislation regulating sexual traffic indirectly encouraged police corruption in their interaction with prostitutes. . . . Police had the option of enforcing the law at their own discretion, and a friendship or a bribe could shut their eyes to misdeeds, while a rebuff might open them."

Now, as to what is real and what is fiction in *Leaden Skies*. One of the pleasures of writing historical fiction, I've discovered, is to slide my fictional characters and their doings into the "shadows" of actual historical events. First, Leadville is real. Two marvelous books about the city and its fascinating history are *Leadville: Colorado's Magic City* by Edward Blair and *History of Leadville and Lake County, Colorado* by Don and Jean Griswold. Second, the really bad weather that storms through *Leaden Skies*, making life generally miserable for my characters who must slosh through it all with or without galoshes, waterproofs,

and bumbershoots, is no fiction. Leadville's *Evening Chronicle*, July 26, 1880, notes that during Grant's visit "the skies were a nasty medley of rain, hail, and fog nearly the whole time." Grant's Leadville itinerary is, for the most part, straight from the newspapers of the time. The midnight procession from train to downtown is real, but not the assassination attempt. A persistent "firebug" (the culprit was never found) did indeed torch the marshal's home while the fire companies were in the procession, and for a while, it was feared that State Street would go up in smoke. Of course, Frisco Flo's brothel is an invention of the mind. Grant and his associates indeed toured Leadville's mines, but not the Silver Mountain Mine as that, dear reader, is made up. Though the various banquets, dances, and speeches really happened, Grant never stopped in at the Silver Queen nor played poker with Inez Stannert as both saloon and saloon owner exist only in the fictional realm.

Finally, a word about the ending. I suspect some folks may want to throw the book against the wall for the last few sentences. However, after several futile attempts to write a different conclusion, I finally accepted what I knew all along in my heart: The book. Ends. Here. The tale of *Leaden Skies* is over, but Inez's story goes on.