



11-15-1996

The Lake that Grew Out of a Well, Denver 1861

Susan Richardson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview>

Recommended Citation

Richardson, Susan (1996) "The Lake that Grew Out of a Well, Denver 1861," *Westview*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 1 , Article 30.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol16/iss1/30>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Westview by an authorized administrator of SWOSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.



THE LAKE THAT GREW OUT OF A WELL DENVER 1861



Imagine a man, Mr. Sloan, waking up one day,
the day Sloans Lake was born,
thinking he still owned the land on which he lived.



Proud of it. Lifting his spade from the corner
of his shed, hefting it onto his shoulder to keep
the sun, just come up, out of his face,



whistling down the brown slope where the well
should go, gauging with his eyes the best spot,
and cutting in, lifting up that fresh ground.

And lifting up some more.
Pitching it over his side.
Building a sizable pile.



Soon water bubbles up, hesitant.
The next morning, a lake pool.
Mr. Sloan stands near its wobbly edge,

scratching his wonderstruck head.
And scratching it some more.
Over the weeks, the lake grows, gently—



The underground spring waiting eons for an outlet
finds one in the slice of a spade.
And takes its time, not wanting to turn to shock

what it must have known would be at least surprise.
To watch a well become a giant lake.
To watch a wide depression, previous buffalo stomp,



track where Indian ponies raced, long last stretch
of stagecoach line, fill up its bowl-rimmed sides.
Mr. Sloan vacates his house before the water

laps its porch. With his pioneer humor sense,
he relents, giving up to higher purpose the land
he thought he owned, though all he might envision

ILLUSTRATION BY HENRY MUENCH

would be rowboats or canoes, a swimming hole,
skating in winter, eventual stocked trout,
not steamboats, amusement parks, theaters, zoos,

acres of picnic grass, summer concerts, concessions,
even brothels and saloons. Still he's more willing
to attach his name to a lake

than to a piece of land sown in beans or wheat
likely to be wiped out every other year
by hords of locust or by drought,

to something sprawling, less contained
than a brick-walled well, lake constantly tapping
its changeable edge. Mr. Sloan, no longer farmer,

follows the lake's example, expanding himself
like a hot-air balloon. He harvests the lake's ice,
chunking it out during the cold winter months

and storing it, large sawdust marshmallows,
in a shore-built ice-house. Those cubes end up
in breweries as far as Cheyenne, besides cooling off

the local folk. Had he lived, old Sloan may have become
a geological surveyor or celebrated pastry chef.
As it was, he could only stand on the sandbar

dividing Cooper Lake from the lake of his own name
and dream of marrying up those sister waterways,
broadening Sloans, creating an island

for a permanent colony of then-migrating ducks,
ducks the kids could fatten with dried out bread,
year-round harvest, roasted and succulent.

by Susan Richardson

