

Manassa: Colorado's most perfect town?

Manassa is a surprising sight on maps and satellite photos. It seems too square to be true, but there it is: Streets and corners are laid out in an 8-by-8 grid to form a town that measures almost a mile on every side. And it's also platted to the cardinal points: North is true north, no compass required.

Small but mighty, this southern Colorado community has produced a U.S. congressman (John Salazar), a secretary of interior (his brother, Ken Salazar) and a world heavyweight boxing champion. Just 16 miles from the New Mexico border, a mix of adobe structures, a brick opera house and other low-slung buildings line streets with no stoplights. The childhood home of Jack Dempsey, "The Manassa Mauler," was moved to the town park and now serves as a museum in the center of town.

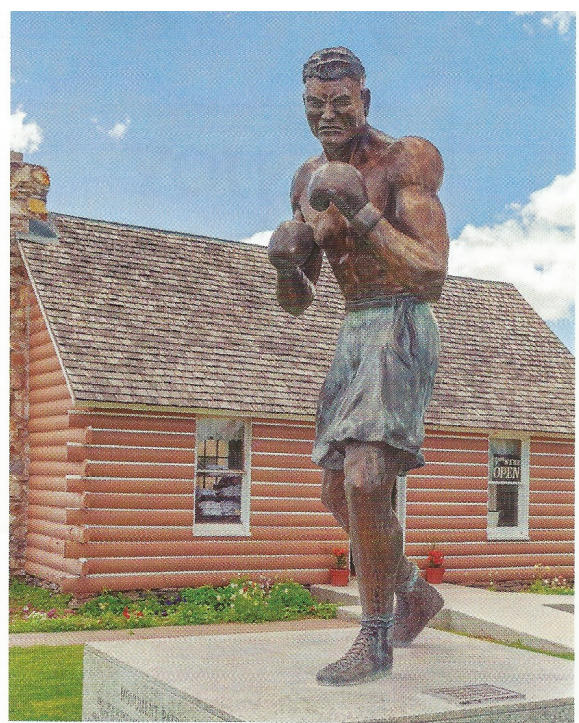
The area was initially settled by the ancestors of Spanish colonists who established ranches near the Conejos River following the Mexican land grants of the 1800s. After Colorado ceased to be part of Mexico in 1848, Anglos joined the settling of the San Luis Valley in the late

1870s. This diverse history is important; Manassa is part of the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area – an area designated by Congress for its rich cultural and historical resources and deemed worthy of protection.

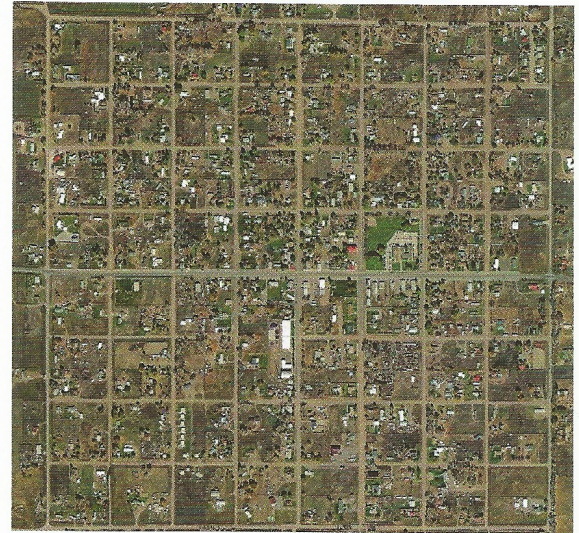
But why the perfect grid to create a perfect square? It's a testament to the town's 19th-century founders, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who wished to show piousness even in city planning. This streetscaping, known as the Plat of Zion, was used in Mormon settlements throughout the West. But none are so true as the 64 quadrants that make up Manassa. Even the name is reverent, inspired by the Old Testament story of an ancient tribe from Israel.

About 1,000 people live here, though the population increases tenfold during Manassa Pioneer Days – a festival, this year on July 19 and 20, that celebrates those early pioneers. If you pay a visit, try to find some vintage turquoise from the long-closed Manassa King Mine; this gorgeous green stone with golden flecks is a rare gem, just like this perfectly platted town.

– Leah M. Charney



Joshua Hardin



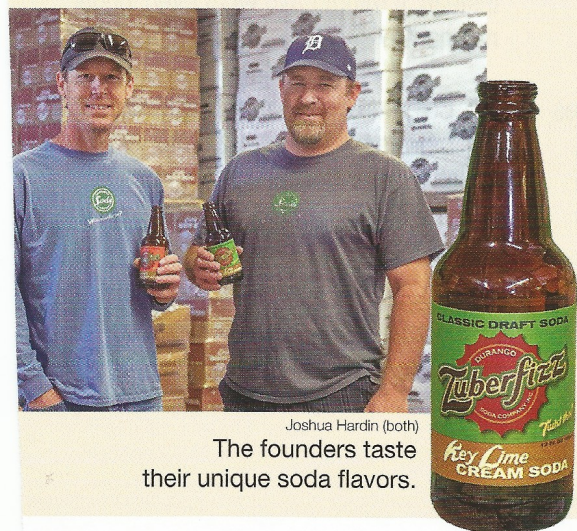
U.S. Geological Survey

Manassa, childhood home of Jack Dempsey, was laid out by early settlers to conform to an almost-perfect 8-by-8 grid.

Durango's Dynamic Craft Soda Duo

Banden Zuber and Dan Aggeler thought their home-brewing hobby as college roommates would lead them to a microbrewery career in their hometown. Durango didn't need another brewery, so in 2002 they started a craft soda venture called Zuberfizz. They decided to do pop differently by forsaking high-fructose corn syrup for pure cane sugar and bottling in traditional glass bottles with twist-tops. (Collect all the letters under the caps to spell "Z-U-B-E-R-F-I-Z-Z" to receive a free T-shirt).

Zuberfizz flavors range from fresh takes on familiar standbys like Original Cola, to creations like Key Lime Cream Soda and Coco Fizz, a collaboration with another successful Durango business, the Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory. Once only sold at the Durango Dairy Queen that Zuber's father owned, Zuberfizz now produces 40,000 bottles of craft soda per week, available in markets across the U.S. – Joshua Hardin



Joshua Hardin (both)

The founders taste their unique soda flavors.