

# The Sullivan Mausoleum

Illy Auerbach

HP Studio I

Debora Barros, Andrew Dolkhart

October 5, 2022

## Introduction

The Sullivan Mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery serves as the resting place for two generations of the Sullivan family. This site is the eternal home of Dennis, his wife Sarah Jane, and their children: John Arthur, Edith Field, Thomas R., and Robert Barry.



*Figure 1. Front Elevation, Sullivan Mausoleum, Woodlawn Cemetery. Findagrave.*

Dennis Sullivan was born in December 1838 in New York. His parents, Thomas and Mary Sullivan were Irish immigrants from Cork who settled in Rensselaer County, New York, where they lived for the rest of their lives. Dennis grew up in modest circumstances: the 1860 census

records indicate that his father, Thomas, was working as a Day laborer.<sup>1</sup> Very limited information exists on his mother, Mary.

In 1866, Dennis married Sarah Jane. Information on her is similarly limited, although census records indicate that both Sarah Jane and her parents were born in New York<sup>2</sup>.

The family's rise to prominence was marked by Dennis's wide range of business interests, and over the years, the couple significantly enhanced their financial standing.

During his lifetime, Dennis substantially impacted various enterprises, including the Denver National Bank, the Mylo group of mines in the Ten Mile District, the Holly Sugar Company, and the Denver Water Company. Despite their business successes, the family life was marked by tragedy. Dennis and Sarah Jane outlived all four of their children.

The couple's first child, John Arthur, was born in 1867 but passed away at the age of two. Edith Field, their second child, was born in 1871 but passed away just a year later. In 1873, they welcomed Thomas R. into their family, who survived into adulthood but died at the age of 25.

The couple's last child, Robert Barry, was born in 1878, but also died young, passing away at the age of 29.

---

<sup>1</sup> US Census, *1860 New York*, P-1116.

<sup>2</sup> US Census, *1900 Denver Colorado*, P- 5.

## Colorado

Dennis Sullivan, as reported in his obituary in the New York Times, relocated to Colorado in 1866, the very same year he married Sarah Jane.<sup>3</sup> Initially employed as a manual laborer in the mines, Dennis's exceptional talents and sterling character propelled him to higher positions, eventually leading to his appointment as a manager responsible for overseeing the work of others. It was from this juncture that he began to diversify his interests and gradually amass his fortune through various business endeavors.<sup>4</sup>

As his financial resources grew, Dennis expanded his ownership to include various mines. In 1881, he, along with two others, acquired the Mylo group of mines located in the Tenmile district<sup>5</sup>. Another notable addition to Dennis's mining portfolio was the Dead Pine mine in Victor, Colorado, which he purchased in 1895. By this time, Dennis had amassed sufficient wealth to embark on exploratory entrepreneurial ventures. Three years later, he dispatched the mine superintendent, Joseph W. Phillips, on a year-long exploration expedition to Mexico in pursuit of promising mining properties<sup>6</sup>. Beyond Mexico, Dennis's mining interests further extended beyond the borders of the United States to British Columbia, as evidenced by his obituary in The Baltimore Sun ( Figure 2).

---

<sup>3</sup>"Obituary Dennis Sullivan." *The New York Times* , October 11, 1915. P. 9

<sup>4</sup>MacCarthy, James Philip. *Political Portraits*. United States: Gazette Publishing Company, 1888. P.54-60

<sup>5</sup>McGrath, Maria Davies. *The Real Pioneers of Colorado*. United States: n.p., 1934. P.182

<sup>6</sup>Baker, James Hutchins., Hafen, LeRoy Reuben. *History of Colorado*. United States: Linderman Company Incorporated, 1927. P. 204

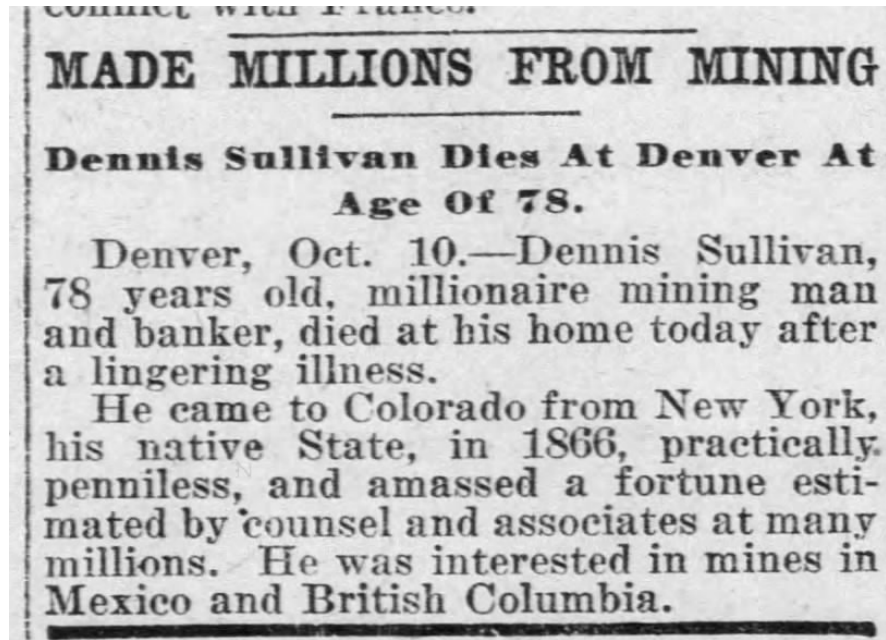


Figure 2. Dennis Sullivan Obituary. *The Baltimore Sun* (Baltimore, Maryland), October 11, 1915.

Dennis also had an interest in water management. In 1889, during a time of rapid organizational change and expansion in Denver, he was elected President of The Denver Water Company as the new city administration began its term. Up to that point, the Denver Water Company functioned as a fully private service provider. However, following franchise negotiations, the municipality signed a long-term contract with the company, with Dennis as its president, to meet Denver's growing infrastructure and water needs<sup>7</sup>.

Dennis Sullivan's political career was extensive, marked by active involvement and generous contributions to the Democratic Party. In an 1888 political portrait penned by James Phillip MacCarthy, he is portrayed as “the most powerful politician in the state”<sup>8</sup>. MacCarthy also remarked that Mr. Sullivan held the distinction of being “the best-looking man connected with

---

<sup>7</sup>Mosley, Earl L. . 1969. *History of the Denver Water System, 1858-[1919]*. P. 68-69

<sup>8</sup> MacCarthy. *Political Portraits*. 54.

politics in the state”.<sup>9</sup> MacCarthy's profile further expounds on Dennis's political approach, characterizing it as subtle, prudent, and well-conceived. Dennis operated in a manner such that only close observers of political influence could discern the underlying strength of his methods. MacCarthy also showered praise on Dennis's character, describing him as someone with an exceptionally good nature, resilient in the face of adversity, and one who learned from setbacks rather than allowing them to define him. A person who makes strong friends and does not cultivate enmities.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to his political pursuits, Dennis was not above engaging in local spectacles and drama. An interesting anecdote from Ward, a small mining town in Boulder County, possibly apocryphally attributed to Dennis, states that at 1891, Dennis, known as a local socialite, organized an extravagant funeral for a local cat.<sup>11</sup> This event featured an ornate satin-lined casket, a musical band, an adorned funeral procession, and a passionate speech. This spectacle greatly angered the cat's owner. She hatched a plan for retaliation, and several years later, when her husband was elected to the city council, he successfully pushed through a law prohibiting the operation of saloons on street corners. At that time, Dennis owned the only saloon on a street corner in Ward.<sup>12</sup>

Subsequent records reveal that Dennis ventured into the banking industry, becoming one of the founders of the Denver National Bank. In 1905, he ventured into the sugar industry by providing

---

<sup>9</sup>MacCarthy. 55.

<sup>10</sup>MacCarthy. 54-60.

<sup>11</sup> This story might be attributed to a different man named Dennis Sullivan that was also involved in the mining industry in Colorado at the same time.

<sup>12</sup>Dallas, Sandra. *Colorado Ghost Towns and Mining Camps*. United States: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985. P. 214

banking support to the Holly Sugar Company factory in the Rocky Ford territory, marking another milestone in his multifaceted career and business endeavors.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout their lives, Sarah Jane and Dennis amassed substantial wealth. The last available census record of the couple dates back to 1910. This census snapshot provides a glimpse into the affluence that Sarah Jane and Dennis had achieved by that point in their lives. At that time, they had a total of four servants in their household. These servants included two individuals of Swedish origin, one of Irish descent, and one hailing from Kentucky. It is perhaps notable that all of them were of white ethnicity<sup>14</sup>.

Sarah Jane Sullivan passed away at the age of 68 on October 11th, 1913. Just under two years later, on October 10, 1915, Dennis also passed away after a prolonged illness.

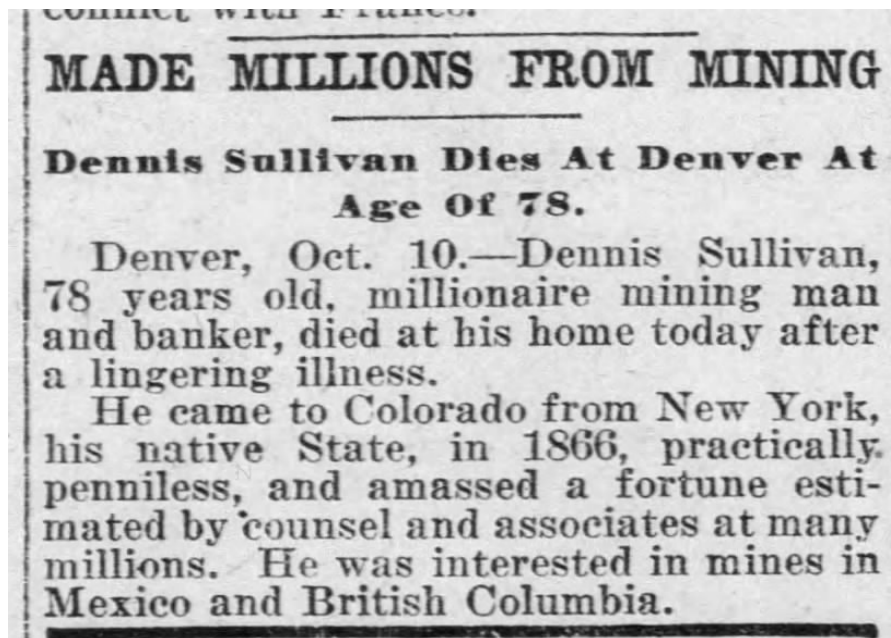


Figure 3. Dennis Sullivan Obituary. *The Baltimore Sun* (Baltimore, Maryland), October 11, 1915.

<sup>13</sup>Markoff, Dane S. . "A Bittersweet Saga: The Arkansas Valley Beet Sugar Industry, 1900-1979." *Colorado Magazine*, 56 (summer/fall 1979) P. 168

<sup>14</sup>US Census Bureau, *1910 United States Federal Census*, 7

## Woodlawn Mausoleum

On May 4th, 1909, a few months before Sarah Jane's passing, Dennis made arrangements for the construction of a family mausoleum designed in the Greek temple style, featuring a pointed roof, a pediment, and four Ionic columns (Figure 1). It is perhaps notable that, even after so many years in Colorado, Dennis chose to have his family buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in New York. The mausoleum was commissioned from H. K. Keller, a monument dealer renowned for its large establishment near Woodlawn Cemetery<sup>15</sup>. Notably, the design of the mausoleum appears to have been selected from a catalog, referred to in the contract as "Mausoleum #26"<sup>16</sup>. The contract also provides details about the materials used in the construction of the mausoleum. The exterior is crafted from light Barre granite, while the interior features light and dark Tennessee marble. Bronze was chosen for the door, window, ornamental rosettes, and vents. The window itself is composed of cathedral glass and is painted with roses ( Figure 4). It's worth noting that according to some folklore symbolism, roses have been an ancient symbol of secrecy, perhaps - in light of Dennis's life - adding a layer of symbolism to the mausoleum's design<sup>17</sup>.

---

<sup>15</sup>"Says Siwanoy members beat him on way home: H.K. Keller Was Attacked in a Mount Vernon Street. His wife was with him Grabbed a Hat for a Clue -- W.H. Irwin, Arrested, Refuses to Tell Names of Others." *The New York Times*, New York, July 17, 1905.

<sup>16</sup>Dennis Sullivan, *Major Monuments Folder*, *Woodlawn Cemetery Archive*, Avery Library, Columbia University, New York, New York. Drawer MM 4.1 Folder 49

<sup>17</sup>Lehner, Ernst., Lehner, Johanna. *Folklore and Symbolism of Flowers, Plants and Trees*. United Kingdom: Dover Publications, 2003.P. 79



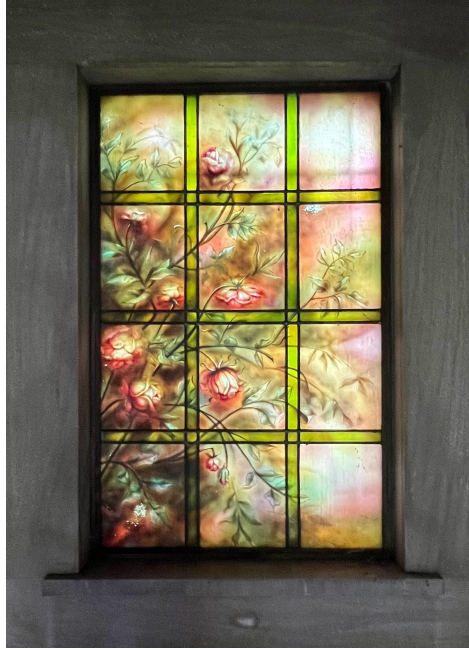


Figure 4. Dennis Sullivan Mausoleum, painted window.

## **Sullivan Gateway**

The Sullivan Gateway, constructed in 1917, stands as a memorial to Dennis Sullivan in Denver<sup>18</sup>. It serves as the eastern gateway to the City Park and is deeply rooted in the principles of the City Beautiful movement, which sought to enhance urban aesthetics and functionality. This striking gateway comprises two expansive terra cotta walls that stretch for 300 feet each, featuring two imposing sculptures atop Doric columns that rise 40 feet high. These sculptures symbolize the early agricultural and mining endeavors in Colorado, represented by two women and two men, respectively. The gateway was crafted by the New York artist, Leo Lentelli. At the heart of the gateway lies a substantial central fountain, positioned within a semi-circular plaza ( Figure 5). Flanking this central feature are two smaller lionhead fountains, seamlessly integrated into the

---

<sup>18</sup>Bretz, James. *Early Denver*. United States: Arcadia Pub., 2012. P.44

curved walls of the gateway. The Sullivan Gateway was financed through the generous contributions of John Clarke Mitchell, who dedicated the funds in honor of his dear friend and colleague, Dennis Sullivan. In 2018, the Sullivan Gateway was declared a SAVE project by Colorado Preservation Inc. due to its serious deterioration, this declaration let its restoration.<sup>19</sup>



*Figure 5. Sullivan Gateway. Colorado Preservation Inc.*

---

<sup>19</sup>Colorado Preservation. *Sullivan Gateway*.  
<https://doi.org/http://coloradopreservation.org/programs/endangered-places/sullivan-gateway/>.

## Bibliography

Baker, James Hutchins., Hafen, LeRoy Reuben. *History of Colorado*. United States: Linderman Company Incorporated, 1927. P. 204

Bretz, James. *Early Denver*. United States: Arcadia Pub., 2012. P.44

Dallas, Sandra. *Colorado Ghost Towns and Mining Camps*. United States: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985. P. 214

Dennis Sullivan, *Major Monuments Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive*, Avery Library, Columbia University, New York, New York. Drawer MM 4.1 Folder 49

Lehner, Ernst., Lehner, Johanna. *Folklore and Symbolism of Flowers, Plants and Trees*. United Kingdom: Dover Publications, 2003.P. 79

MacCarthy, James Philip. *Political Portraits*. United States: Gazette Publishing Company, 1888. P.54-60

Markoff, Dane S. . "A Bittersweet Saga: The Arkansas Valley Beet Sugar Industry, 1900-1979." *Colorado Magazine*, 56 (summer/fall 1979) P. 168

McGrath, Maria Davies. *The Real Pioneers of Colorado*. United States: n.p., 1934. P.182

Mosley, Earl L. . 1969. *History of the Denver Water System, 1858-[1919]*. P. 68-69

"Obituary Dennis Sullivan." *The New York Times* , October 11, 1915. P. 9

"Says Siwanoy members beat him on way home: H.K. Keller Was Attacked in a Mount Vernon Street. His wife was with him Grabbed a Hat for a Clue -- W.H. Irwin, Arrested, Refuses to Tell Names of Others." *The New York Times*, New York, July 17, 1905.

"Sullivan Gateway." Colorado Preservation. Accessed October 4, 2023.

<https://doi.org/http://coloradopreservation.org/programs/endangered-places/sullivan-gateway/>.

US Census, 1900 United States Federal Census, Denver, Colorado, P. 5.

US Census, 1910 United States Federal Census, Denver, Colorado, P. 7

US Census, 1860 United States Federal Census, Rensselaer, New York, P. 1116.