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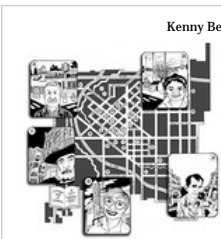
Paint the Town Read

Jack Kerouac's back, and Denver's literary scene is on a scroll.

By **Amy Haimerl**

Published: January 4, 2007

He slipped into Denver unannounced, just another traveler on his way to wherever. No fanfare, no welcome party. A man alone, on his way to identity and destiny.



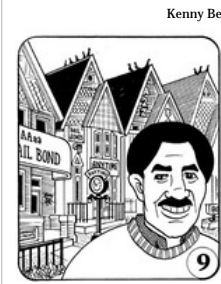
It was a brief stay, just ten days in the summer of 1947, a side note in a journal. But this man wasn't just anyone, and his journal wasn't just anyone's journal. It was Jack Kerouac, crawling through Skid Row, up and down Welton and Larimer and Curtis. Jazzing in the Rossonian, tête-à-tête with Neal Cassady and Allen Ginsberg in the Colburn. All around him, the poetry of the streets, the experience, running through his mind, wouldn't stop, couldn't stop.



It was just ten days, 240 hours, 14,400 minutes, but it forever intertwined the destinies of Kerouac and the Queen City of the Plains. No longer just a cowtown, now an epicenter of the Beat Movement. Something, someplace. Producer of an American original that only a post-war America could embrace. A place to search for identity and meaning. The magnetic pull of 5,280 feet above sea level sucking back the Massachusetts boy in body and mind, covering him with the sense of possibility.



Ten. Again. Ten years after that fateful layover, in 1957, Jack Kerouac finally published the file drawers of his mind, the little black notebooks he always kept with him. *On the Road* was a smashing success, pointing out what disillusioned youth were feeling but couldn't articulate. Are still feeling. Sex, drugs, jazz, the open road, the future,



living and doing for the experience alone, searching out something to give life meaning. A quest. And Denver has a

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AD Index

**Details:**

Visit our [interactive map](#) for a road trip through numerous literary pit stops made in Denver.

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starring role in the existential story.

It took him just three weeks to bang it out. One scroll taped together, 120 feet, no margins, no paragraphs, single-spaced; just a million thoughts and stories running together like one long dispatch from the front. A breakthrough in American Letters. A new style inspired by Denverite Neal Cassady, reflecting the urgency and zest that he felt. That so many felt. The mythic scroll of the prophet. Or so the legend goes.

Kerouac did pound away on his typewriter for three weeks, taping

together the twelve-foot sections to create the scroll spilling over with his thoughts. But there's more to it. Kerouac was a fastidious rewriter, and he'd been composing his thinly veiled autobiography in those black notebooks for years. Scratching out and recasting. Perfecting. Self-edited streamofconsciousness. He spent years preparing for the final Benezdrine-fueled burst of creativity that went down in 1951, six years before the tale would go live, before it would find a publisher willing to take a chance on its experimental writing. And even then, Viking Press demanded revisions of its own.

But now the original scroll is in Denver. Back home. Back where "the air was soft, the stars so fine, the promise of every cobbled alley so great, that I thought I was in a dream." But not a dream. The scroll is on display at the Central Denver Public Library, just down the street from the Denver City and County Building that Ginsberg made famous in his poem "Green Automobile," across the street from the State Capitol, where Kerouac watched the bats circle the dome.

Just like Kerouac himself, it's making a short appearance in Denver as part of a larger road trip that started in 2004, three years after Jim Irsay, owner of the Indianapolis Colts, bought the scroll at a Christie's auction for \$2.4 million. *On the Road* is only staying here from January 4 until March 31, but at least we get the love letter to Denver (and other places) in time for its fiftieth anniversary, before it moves on to Kerouac's home town of Lowell, Massachusetts, and the New York Public Library, where the scroll had resided, unseen, for so long before being sold by the Kerouac estate.

But the scroll is not meant to be out of sight, out of mind. No. In September, a second version of *On the Road* will be published by Viking, leaving in everything from the original mammoth document except what was crossed off by Kerouac himself. And befitting Denver's place in the Kerouac pantheon, one of the four editors preparing the manuscript for publication is based right here in the Golden Triangle. Joshua Kupetz has been in Denver for only seven months -- he transferred in from Dickinson College -- but we'll lay claim to the University of Colorado instructor and Beat scholar. "The *On the Road* scroll is one of the most significant artifacts in contemporary American literature," says Kupetz. "More mythic than real -- and hopefully, with the publication of it, we'll establish it as reality."

But first, some local reality: In honor of *On the Road*'s fiftieth, we've assembled a [>Literary Map of Denver](#), featuring sightings from Kerouac's classic as well as other novels that name-check our city, which has long drawn authors on their own Kerouacian quest. We had a few rules for inclusion -- fiction only, not memoirs (except for Cassady); Denver proper, not Boulder, not the mountains -- and even within these city limitations, found a larger trove of titles than we would have imagined. From Whitman to Twain, Michener to Cussler, Proulx to Didion. Historic novels, romance, Westerns, sci-fi and even some poetry. And the mysteries! Denver is a hotbed of mystery writers -- and attorneys who write mysteries. Living here are John Dunning, Michael Stone, Robert Greer and Stephanie Kane, and several dozen more, including James Crumley and Sarah Andrews, drop by. How they all came to be here is another mystery.

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These pages hold many of our favorite Denver references; more than seventy additional entries can be found online at www.westword.com, starting Friday, January 5. Reading through the excerpts is a fascinating jaunt through the nooks and crannies, old haunts and new places that make Denver the type of town that once did -- and still can -- create a man like Cassidy and entice a writer known as Jack Kerouac.

"I counted minutes and subtracted miles. Just ahead, over the rolling wheat fields all golden beneath the distant snows of Estes, I'd be seeing old Denver at last."

1. Platte River

Roughing It, 1872

Mark Twain

Presently we got under way again. We came to the shallow, yellow, muddy South Platte, with its low banks and its scattering of flat sand-bars and pigmy islands -- a melancholy stream straggling through the centre of the enormous flat plain, and only saved from being impossible to find with the naked eye by its sentinel rank of scattering trees standing on either bank. The Platte was "up," they said -- which made me wish I could see it when it was down, if it could look any sicker and sorrier. They said it was a dangerous stream to cross, now, because its quicksands were liable to swallow up horses, coach and passengers if an attempt was made to ford it. But the mails had to go, and we made the attempt. Once or twice in midstream the wheels sunk into the yielding sands so threateningly that we half believed we had dreaded and avoided the sea all our lives to be shipwrecked in a "mud-wagon" in the middle of a desert at last. But we dragged through and sped away toward the setting sun.

2. Platte River

The First Third, 1971

Neal Cassidy

Where the South Platte River passes beneath the 15th Street bridge of angle iron and squeaking wood, we would climb down a dozen feet to the gravel river bottom. Here was where most of our Sunday P.M.'s were spent, as we strolled to and fro over the several hundred yards of semi-beach between 15th and 17th Streets. My concern was skipping rocks over the water to count the number of times I managed to make them bounce.

3. Champa Street

Specimen Days & Collect, 1882

Walt Whitman

Through the long-lingering half-light of the most superb of evenings we return'd to Denver, where I staid several days leisurely exploring, receiving impressions, with which I may as well taper off this memorandum, itemizing what I saw there. The best was the men, three-fourths of them large, able, calm, alert, American.

A city, this Denver, well-laid out -- Laramie street, and 15th and 16th and Champa streets, with others, particularly fine -- some with tall storehouses of stone or iron, and windows of plate-glass -- all the streets with little canals of mountain water running along the sides -- plenty of people, "business," modernness -- yet not without a certain racy wild smack, all its own. A place of fast horses, (many mares with their colts,) and I saw lots of big greyhounds for antelope hunting. Now and then groups of miners, some just come in, some starting out, very picturesque....

So much for my feeling toward the Queen city of the plains and peaks, where she sits in her delicious rare atmosphere, over 5000 feet above sea-level, irrigated by mountain streams, one way looking east over the prairies for a thousand miles, and having the other, westward, in constant view by day, draped in their violet haze, mountain tops innumerable. Yes, I fell in love with Denver, and even felt a wish to spend my declining and dying days there.

4. 16th Street Mall

Seeds of Doubt, 2004

Stephanie Kane

At a quarter past eleven on a weekday morning, seats were already in demand at the Sixteenth Street Mall. As Jackie threaded her way through the businessmen, construction workers and tourists jamming the pedestrian corridor, she slowed her pace. This was one date she didn't want to be early for.

Once the location of Denver's first crosstown streetcars, department stores and banks, the mall had become a poster child for the excesses of urban blight. Food courts and schlock shops that muscled out the emporiums now covered in the shadow of multimedia complexes and chain coffee bars. Like lemmings, the office workers came. They overflowed the microbreweries and pub-cafes gawking at tourists, lined up at the steam wagons for hot dogs, and tripped over hard hats who had the sense to eat their sack lunches on the sidewalk in the shade.

Jackie avoided the mall.

5. Brown Palace Hotel

A Lost Lady, 1923

Willa Cather

How strange that she should be here at all, a woman like her among common people! Not even in Denver had he ever seen another woman so elegant. He had sat in the dining room of the Brown Palace hotel and watched them as they came down to dinner -- fashionable women from "the East," on their way to California. But he had never found one so attractive and distinguished as Mrs. Forrester.

6. Duffy's

1635 Court Place

Dead Dry, 2005

Sarah Andrews

Memories of my oil-patch days started to flow back as I remembered the offices she and Afton kept in a funny little building in downtown Denver, above an Irish bar called Duffy's. I used to get a green tongue from drinking beer at Duffy's on St. Patrick's Day and danced in the narrow hallways of the offices upstairs, in which a tribe of renegade geologists like Afton held forth.

7. City and County Building

"The Green Automobile,"

written 1953

Allen Ginsberg

Denver! Denver! we'll return

roaring across the City and County Building lawn

which catches the pure emerald flame

streaming in the wake of our auto

8. Downtown

Augusta Locke, 2006

William Haywood Henderson

To the south, the foothills shrank toward Denver. She had walked south more than once, she had caught rides, she had smelled the coal smoke. In that direction the roads angled against themselves, and the buildings stacked high. Echoes died in the false canyons, music from alley doors, shards of bottle glass in the dark pools.

9. Bail Bondsman's Row

The Devil's Hatband, 1996

Robert O. Greer

Bail Bondsman's Row is a block-long assemblage of six aging turn-of-the-century buildings affectionately known as Painted Ladies. The unlikely but enduring cluster of once proud Victorian houses lines the west side of Delaware Street as it turns toward downtown Denver from 13th Avenue North. Darkness never descends on Bondsman's Row. Brightly lit neon signs just from the ornate fascia above weathered wraparound porches, selling freedom to the prisoners across Delaware Street in the Denver County Jail. Blue, red, yellow and green neon tubes shaped to spell OPEN 24 HOURS, BAIL BONDS ANYTIME, and NEVER CLOSED flash gaudy promises of freedom not only to the inmates but to the prisoners' families and friends.

10. Auraria Campus

Strip Search: A Gabe Wager Mystery, 1984

Rex Burns

His old neighborhood, Auraria, was long gone; street after street of frame houses that had been home and kinfolk and shortcuts through neighboring backyards as familiar as his own, all were gone. In its place a university sprawled -- a collection of factorylike buildings as ugly as they were cheap. The whole downtown, following the same path, was becoming an area no one could grow up in: crowded and uncomfortable by day, blank and cold at night. And on weekends the empty streets were dotted here and there with straggling tourists who showed their uneasiness in the face of all the dark, locked doors. If a city had an aura, then Denver's must be totally maladjusted -- torn between the commuter life of nine-to-five, and the rest of the day, which was dead. Even the Colfax strip, with its drifting filthy, was better than being dead, and Wager could understand the need of those who returned night after night to the busy lights and constantly moving feet, even though they did not like the pimps and pushers who jostled them. They were turning their backs on a dying city.

11. East Colfax Avenue

Booked to Die, 1992

John Dunning

I drove out Sixth to Colorado Boulevard, went north to Colfax, then east to the bookstores. This was my turf: I was as much at home along Book Row as I was in the world of hookers and pimps that surrounded it. Colfax is a strange street. It used to be known as the longest street in the world: people with more imagination than I have used to say, in the days before interstate highways, that it ran from Kansas City to the Great Salt Lake. Its actual length is about twenty miles, beginning on the plains east of Denver and dwindling away in the mountains to the west. About twenty years ago, urban renewal came in and ripped out old Larimer Street, and the whores and bums who lived there landed on Broadway south and Colfax east. Lots of whoring goes on on East Colfax Avenue. It starts at the statehouse, where they know how to do it without ever getting in a bed, and works its way through the porno shops between Broadway and Colorado Boulevard.

12. Denver Art Museum (North Building)

Hidden River, 2005

Adrian McKinty

Most people don't know Denver. Maybe they came skiing here once, or went to a conference. Drove in from the airport, stayed downtown, went to the mountains. Maybe they live here in the white 'burbs. But even they don't know it. They don't know the Denver of Kerouac and Cassidy [sic], of the hobos getting off the freight trains at

the biggest intersection in the West. They don't know because the bums have been pushed off the streets, the downtown has been regenerated, lofts, wine bars, trendy eateries and coffeehouses instead of dive bars and diners. John Elway's toothy grin on the posters for his auto dealerships. But the old Denver still exists out on Colfax Avenue where they never go. Or on Federal or in the black section north of the city center.

Colfax for us. Desperate-looking motels, armored liquor stores, Spanish restaurants and bodegas. Prostitutes, pushers, hangers-on at the corners. What are they selling? Is everyone still on crack in this country, or is heroin coming back?

We turn on Broadway past two of the ugliest buildings I've ever seen. One is a tall windowless slab the color of baby puke, the other a demented Lego assemblage of blocks and pyramids.

"Art museum and library," the cabbie explains....

13. Santa Fe Drive

Dead on Her Feet: A Stella the Stargazer Mystery, 1999

Christine T. Jorgensen

The Magic Circle Theater was located in a renovated theater on Santa Fe Drive. This area is made of two neighborhoods, Baker and Lincoln Park, distinct from each other but sharing history.

These were among the original neighborhoods of nineteenth-century Denver, but by the 1960s both time and poverty had eroded them, leaving the large houses subdivided into tiny apartments and the once comfortable brick homes overrun with woodbine. The little bungalows burst at the seams, and plastic flowers grew in the dust.

In the last fifteen years, however, Baker and Lincoln Park had caught restoration fever. Many of the cottages were brightened with new paint, the woodbine cut back. Slowly the subdivided homes had been restored to gracious living behind strong new security doors. They were jumbled together with the tumbledown, time-scarred elements that stubbornly held out behind weed-filled yards and dingy windows.

14. Gates Plant

Plainsong, 1999

Kent Haruf

After that she didn't know what to do with herself. She had made a sudden turn. She was seventeen and carrying a baby and she was alone most of the day in an apartment in Denver while Dwayne, this boy she met last summer and wasn't sure she knew at all, went to work at the Gates plant.

15. Chubby Burger Drive-In

1231 West 38th Avenue

Brown-on-Brown, 2003

Manuel Ramos

I grabbed a bean and beef special and a couple of large Cokes at the Original Chubby's and had my late breakfast in the parking lot, along with several other customers who ate in their cars in the traditional Chubby's manner. While I ate I read the newspaper account of the jailhouse riot. I belched green chile and carbonation all the way to the hospital and Fermin Santos. The hangover that I told Rosa I never suffered eased up a notch.

16. Cheesman Park

New Mercies, 2005

Sandra Dallas

So the two of us cashed in most of our stocks in the spring of 1929 and invested in real estate. I bought the Cardwell, the three-unit apartment building on Humboldt Street where David and I lived and which continued to be my home after he moved out, and two other buildings just across Cheesman Park.

17. Washington Park

Sight Hound, 2005

Pam Houston

She decided she'd been hiding out too much at the ranch and so we rented a tiny apartment in Denver, which, let's face it, is not Prague, and yet we found beauty in it together.

The early snow on the not-yet-fallen leaves on our morning walks through Washington Park. An evening walk downtown, a stop into the Body Shop to buy cranberry lotion that made her skin sparkle, a short dip for me in the man-made waterfalls along Cherry Creek, a single scoop of sweet cream ice cream at Josh and John's with a peanut butter cookie on the side. Some nights she'd take in a hockey game, buying only one ticket, which I thought especially brave.

18. Cherry Creek

That Old Ace in the Hole, 2002

Annie Proulx

"Bob! These look like your size, ten double E. Try em on. In a bag of stuff from some Cherry Creek fat cat. Probably the maid dropped them off."

19. Union Station

Leave It to Beany, 1950

Lenora Mattingly Weber

Sheila's train was late.

As Beany came hurrying into the station, with only five minutes to spare before train time, an official was standing in front of the schedule board.

20. Stapleton International Airport

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey Into the Heart of the American Dream, 1971

Hunter S. Thompson

I was asleep when our plane hit the runway, but the jolt brought me instantly awake. I looked out the window and saw the Rocky Mountains. What the fuck was I doing *here*? I wondered. It made no sense at all. I decided to call my attorney as soon as possible. Have him wire me some money to buy a huge albino Doberman. Denver is a national clearing house for stolen Dobermans; they come from all parts of the country.

Since I was already here, I thought I might as well pick up a vicious dog. But first, something for my nerves.

21. Denver

Sky Bridge, 2005

Laura Pritchett

"Listen to this. Old Spirit died right next to where that new banker built his house, and the banker's wife called, and she said she was so happy to finally be out of Denver and they sure loved it out here and they had such a nice view, but you know, there was a horse carcass out there with the birds picking off the flesh and their little dog --

one of those little yippy things -- came home one night with a chunk of dead horse there and could it be moved."

"You know what my dad said? He said, 'Eh-huh, that's part of the package. You city folk want to come in here and have us provide a free view. I'm not in the business of free views. I'm in the business of managing a ranch, and sometimes that includes dead horses.' And he hung up on her.

"So then the banker calls and says, well, something has to be done. And Dad said, 'Your ugly house has ruined my view. Your ugly house is equivalent to *my* dead horse. Only I'm a better neighbor, because mine is temporary. Now we're even.' Isn't that hilarious? I think that's hilarious."

22. Denver Rescue Mission

Totally Dead, 1999

Michael Stone

Now, opening the huge wooden front door directly beneath a broken neon Jesus Saves sign, Streeter turned around to see his partner walking toward him on the sidewalk.

23. D.F.D. Station 4

1890 Lawrence Street

"Uptown Downtown Rhapsody"

Big City Freight Train Blues: Denver Poems, 2005

Gregory O'Toole

...20th Street west to Larimer, joyous half-sorority girls on cell phones

singing on the sidewalks, drunk to their minds, smoking Marlboros

boys playing tag-a-long will you get me in bed games

hero status blue shirt firemen on dim-lit drive in front

of the shiny chromaly monster red machines on lawn chairs tipping

back watching the Saturday night freaks and drunkards passing by.... [full poem online]

24. 1916, 1942 or 2009 Market Street

Breath and Bones: A Novel, 2005

Susann Cokal

If only she could sit and catch her breath and wits, she could devise a course of action. It was not as if she could go into the next building -- the bright blue tiles on the doorstep spelled out M. Silks --and ask for advice. Indeed, she saw only men passing through that elaborately carved door, and with a quick suspicion of what the place was, she walked briskly on until she could turn a corner.

[Madam Mattie Silks had houses at each of these addresses.]

25. Welton Street

One Day I Saw a Black King, 2003

J.D. Mason

"Next stop, Twenty-third and Welton," the automated voice said over the train intercom. Urban renewal had

crept in subtly and the changes that had taken place seemed to Connie to have appeared out of nowhere. This part of Denver seemed to be having an identity crisis going on and was confused as to what its role should be. Was it the hood, or a yuppie, buppie haven? Good or evil? Light or dark? Right or wrong?

26. The Rossonian

2640 Welton Street

I Got Somebody in Staunton: Stories, 2005

William Henry Lewis

The gig is at The Rossonian. In Denver. On Five Points. Where Welton meets Washington. Come night, the people are there, roasting ribs and frying catfish, domino games in front rooms, Cadillacs angled to the curbs like Chriscrafts. Five Points, where it has been and is. It's not Beale Street or 18th and Vine, but it wants to be.... The Rossonian: oasis in jazz nowhere on the way to jazz somewhere.

27. Sonny Lawson Field

2300 Welton Street

On the Road

Jack Kerouac

Down at 23rd and Welton a softball game was going on under floodlights which also illuminated the gas tank. A great eager crowd roared at every play. The strange young heroes of all kinds, white, colored, Mexican, pure Indian, were on the field, performing with heart-breaking seriousness. Just sandlot kids in uniform.... Oh, the sadness of the lights that night! The young pitcher looked just like Dean. A pretty blonde in the seats looked just like Marylou. It was the Denver Night; all I did was die.

For a full schedule of events related to the *On the Road* scroll, visit www.denver.lib.co.us. A special thanks to Fred Ramey at Unbridled Books, Janis Frame at Book Buffs, Rich Grant at the Denver Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau, and everyone at the DPL for their enthusiasm and help with this project.

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