

LUTHER KOUNTZE

When: 1842-1918

Where: Born in Ohio, lived in Nebraska and Colorado, settled in New York.

Why Important: Kountze founded the Colorado National Bank. He also helped rebuild Denver after the "Great Fire."



Mrs. Luther Kountze, wife of Luther Kountze.

LUTHER KOUNTZE

Martin Luther Kountze was born in Ohio in 1842. He was one of twelve children born to Christian and Margaret Kountze. Christian Kountze was a successful banker and a merchant who had made a fortune. His sons eventually would all join him in the banking business.

In 1857 Luther Kountze joined his brothers, Augustus and Herman in Omaha, Nebraska where they had opened The Kountze Brothers Bank.

Luther volunteered to expand the business into Colorado and moved to Denver in 1862. He opened the Kountze Brothers Bank, Denver. Two years later the youngest Kountze brother, Charles, joined Luther in Denver. When Charles arrived, Luther had amazing stories of Indian scares, the Cherry Creek flood, and the "Great Fire."

In April of 1863 a lamp was tipped over in the middle of the night and started the "Great Fire." Luther awoke to people yelling "Fire!" and rushed to the bank. Luther was able to save the bank's record book and fireproof safe. By dawn most of Denver had been turned to ashes. But because of Luther's quick thinking, the bank did not lose any money. Because of this, he was able to loan money to many of Denver's businesses which allowed Denver to quickly recover from the fire.

Luther had a reputation for being the safest banker around. In fact, the Kountze Brothers Bank, Denver never had a robbery or a burglary. This was partly because they had a very good safe. When the unbreakable safe was delivered, it drew crowds of people to watch. It weighed 1,800 pounds! It had taken thirty-five days for twelve oxen to pull the safe from Omaha, Nebraska to Denver.

In June of 1866 Luther and Charles converted their bank into the Colorado National Bank. Luther served as the first president. He did business with some of Denver's most elite residents. Because of Luther's reputation for being careful with money, he was elected city treasurer in 1865. He helped fund improvements to the city including a bridge over Cherry Creek and two bridges over the South Platte River.

Charles took over as president of the Colorado National Bank in 1874. Luther eventually moved to New York City with his wife, Annie. He opened a new bank on Wall Street. Luther died at the age of 76 in New York City.

Sources:

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