

54 County Road 405, Cuchara, Colorado 81055



What if you stood in the Cuchara Valley centuries ago? The air would still smell of pine, but no cabins or roads would break the silence. You might see Ute hunters on horseback, Spanish explorers pushing north, or maybe hear the distant clink of miners' tools — depending on which flag was flying that decade. If the mountains could talk, they'd tell stories no textbook ever could.

Five Flags Over Cuchara

Long before cabins and roads dotted the Cuchara Valley, this land lay within the seasonal hunting and sacred grounds of the Ute, Apache, Comanche, and Puebloan peoples. The Mouache and Capote band of the Ute considered the Spanish Peaks sacred, and even today arrowheads surface in the soil after rains, whispering of their long presence. In the late 1500s, Spain claimed the region as part of New Spain, governed from Santa Fe, leaving a cultural imprint in language, faith, and architecture that endures in southern Colorado. When Mexico gained independence in 1821, the land shifted again, though Mexican

influence in the remote frontier was limited. Lawlessness and conflict marked the era. From 1836 to 1845, the Republic of Texas claimed the Cuchara Valley in its ambitious northern reach, though it never truly governed here. Still, the ties with Texas remain—many Texans still own land and cabins in the valley, escaping summer heat for mountain air. Finally, after the Mexican-American War, the United States claimed Colorado in 1848. By 1876, Colorado became the 38th state. The Cuchara Valley, with its Spanish Peaks rising above, had already passed under five different flags, each leaving fingerprints on its evolving identity.

Homesteading the Future

One of the earliest written chapters of Pinehaven’s story began with Union Civil War veteran John L. Powell. Born in Pennsylvania in 1834, Powell marched with the 8th Kansas Infantry through the hardships of the war. Afterward, like many veterans seeking renewal, he moved west. In 1896 he and his family arrived in the Cuchara Valley by covered wagon. In 1905, under the Homestead Act of 1862, Powell secured 160 acres just north of Cuchara. The Act required settlers to live on the land, cultivate it, and build a home; in return, they received ownership. Powell’s homestead fulfilled these requirements, and his perseverance planted the seed of what would one day become Pinehaven. He lived out his years in La Veta until his death in 1920, leaving the land to his children.

The Birth of Pinehaven

In 1943, Powell’s son Charles sold the family land to John C. Vories, who dreamed of transforming the rugged property into a mountain resort. With vision but limited resources, Vories named the land “Pinehaven” and began designing cabin lots along what would become Road 402. He saw the forest as “heaven among the pines,” and his plans laid the foundation for the community’s identity as a retreat in the high country. Health challenges eventually forced Vories to leave Colorado, but before he did, he passed his dream into capable hands.

That man was Steve Pierotti, a native of Huerfano County and close friend of Vories. Pierotti had grown up tough—an orphan by nine, managing a service station as a teenager, and later working in the coal mines. His tireless work ethic made him one of the largest coal dealers in the county. When Vories offered him Pinehaven for \$3,700, Pierotti borrowed from a friend and seized the opportunity. Through sheer determination and charisma, he sold lots, encouraged building, and helped bring Vories’ dream to life. Under Pierotti’s influence,

Pinehaven became a thriving cabin community. Steve lived there until his death in 2017 at the age of 99, and his family remains part of Pinehaven today.

Building a Community

From Powell's homestead to Vories' vision and Pierotti's energy, Pinehaven grew from wilderness into a neighborhood. Steve Pierotti's son, Bob, carried his father's vision forward by leading Pinehaven's expansion up the mountain and ensuring its growth was both thoughtful and sustainable. With steady leadership, he guided the development of new roads, utilities, and infrastructure, while championing compliance with modern standards. His pivotal role in integrating Pinehaven into the Cucharas Sanitation and Water District secured reliable water and sanitation for generations to come. From community planning to the creation of the Pierotti Pavilion, Bob's quiet dedication laid the foundation for a resilient mountain community whose strength endures to this day.

Cabins rose among the trees, families returned each summer, and traditions took root. Eventually, homeowners organized formally, creating the Pinehaven Homeowners' Association to care for roads, shared spaces, and community life. The Pierotti Pavilion, named in honor of Bob's contributions, became a gathering place where neighbors celebrated the very community he helped establish.

Today, Pinehaven stands as more than a scattering of mountain cabins. It is a close-knit community, bound together by its layered history, its natural beauty, and its people's love for the land. The Spanish Peaks still tower over the valley, silent witnesses to centuries of change, from the passage of flags and empires to the persistence of families who found here not just land, but home.

History of Ownership

The land that became Pinehaven began as a 1905 Homestead Act grant to John L. Powell and remained in his family under his son Charles. In 1943, John C. Vories purchased the property and envisioned a mountain retreat community he named "Pinehaven," but poor health led him to sell it in 1947 to Steve Pierotti. Under Pierotti's leadership, the area developed into a growing cabin community, culminating in its formal incorporation in 1978, when Pinehaven Incorporated began managing lot sales and guiding its continued development.

From that foundation, the specific parcel within Pinehaven Subdivision No. 2 followed a traceable chain of ownership through recorded deeds in Huerfano County. Early financing activity appears in 1976 involving Robert C. Read, Jerrie L. Read, and Ernest and Dorothy Barbari, reflecting the initial development phase of the lot. In 1979, Pinehaven Incorporated

conveyed the property by warranty deed to James D. Stebbins and Sarah A. Stebbins, establishing the long-term private ownership that would define the cabin's early history . Through the following decades, the Stebbins family maintained control of the property, with internal transfers in 1993 and 1994 extending ownership within the family to Dan Lee Stebbins and later to Mark Alan Stebbins, indicating generational or estate-related conveyances rather than a full change in ownership .

By 2016, the property had been placed into the Jim and Sarah Stebbins Revocable Trust, from which it was conveyed to the Welch family following a warranty deed transfer that marked the first major ownership transition outside the Stebbins family since 1979 . The Welch ownership was relatively brief, and by September 24, 2020, the property transferred again by warranty deed from the Patricia L. Welch Trust to Sandra Ryan, establishing the current ownership of record . This succession reflects a pattern common in Pinehaven, where long-held family cabins eventually pass into new hands, continuing the legacy of seasonal retreat and mountain living established decades earlier.

Land Ownership Timeline

- John L. Powell (original homesteader), September 11, 1905-1920
- Charles R. Powell (son of John L. Powell), 1920-1943
- John C. Vories, (Founder of Pinehaven) 1943 –1947
- Steve Pierotti, (Pinehaven Visionary) 1947-1978
- Pinehaven Incorporated (1978-1979)
- James D. Stebbins and Sarah A. Stebbins (1979-2016)
- Patricia L. Welch Trust (Welch family), 2016-2020
- Sandra Ryan, 2020-Present

Our Cabin

Tucked quietly among the pines, 54 County Road 405 reflects both intention and evolution. Built in 1980 by Jim and Sarah Stebbins, with respected local builder Bob Pierotti bringing their vision to life, the cabin was deliberately placed low on the lot. Against conventional advice to build closer to the road, the Stebbins chose privacy over convenience. In doing so, they created a setting that feels removed from the world, yet still holds a framed view of West Peak through the trees.

The original structure carried the character of a classic Pinehaven retreat, anchored by a stone fireplace likely sourced from nearby terrain. Over time, the cabin expanded, including

an addition completed in 2004 by Paul Neldner. Through these changes, the cabin maintained its identity as a place designed for quiet, seasonal refuge.

For more than three decades, the Stebbins family held stewardship of the property. Then, after a brief ownership by the Welch family, the cabin entered a new chapter in September 2020 when Sandra Ryan purchased it. The timing marked both transition and renewal. The home required significant work, and what followed was a complete transformation of both interior and exterior between 2020 and 2021.

The first Thanksgiving in the cabin remains one of its defining moments. Renovations were still underway. Furniture was sparse. Mattresses lined the floors. Yet the cabin was full. Family gathered, meals were shared, and memories were formed not despite the conditions, but because of them. It was a beginning rooted in resilience and togetherness.

In the years since, the cabin has grown into a place of tradition. Thanksgiving and spring break have become annual rhythms, drawing children and grandchildren back to the mountains. What began as a construction project has become a multigenerational anchor.

The surrounding forest continues to shape the cabin's story. One morning in June 2025, a quiet walk turned into a vivid reminder of the wildness that still defines Pinehaven. A bear emerged from the trees, crossed the road, and paused to look back before disappearing again. For those who witnessed it, the moment left a lasting impression, especially for a young grandson whose trembling legs told the story better than words ever could.

Inside the cabin, details carry personality and connection. A handmade bed, carved by artisans from Saguache, stands as both furniture and craftsmanship, linking the home to the broader culture of southern Colorado. Each element contributes to the sense that this is not just a structure, but a lived space shaped by hands, memory, and care.

Over time, the cabin has also adapted to changing needs. Originally intended for summer use, it has been modified into a year-round retreat. This transition reflects a broader shift within Pinehaven itself, where seasonal cabins increasingly serve as full-time or extended-stay homes.

The cabin's place within the community is equally important. Its story is intertwined with family connections, beginning with a brother's nearby purchase and growing into a deeper attachment to the people and place of Pinehaven. Neighbors are not distant figures here; they are part of what makes the experience meaningful.

What defines 54 County Road 405 is not a single event or feature, but the accumulation of moments. It is the decision to build low among the trees. It is the sound of laughter during a

makeshift holiday meal. It is the stillness of a mountain morning and the sudden presence of wildlife. It is the steady return of family, year after year.

In every sense, the cabin represents what draws people to Pinehaven in the first place. It offers space to slow down, to reconnect, and to experience the mountains not as visitors, but as participants in an ongoing story.

Conclusion

From its thoughtful placement in 1980 to its renewal in the present day, this cabin reflects both continuity and change. It stands as a reminder that places gain meaning not simply through time, but through the people who gather, return, and remember.

* This summary condenses five centuries of history; full research notes, sources, and citations can be found at www.CabinInThePines.org.