



A, C, & D. PERRY-MANSFIELD PERFORMING ARTS SCHOOL AND CAMP
County Road 36, Steamboat Springs

Colorado's and the nation's arts and culture have been tremendously influenced by the contributions of two extraordinary women: Portia Mansfield and Charlotte Perry, founders of the Rocky Mountain Dancing Camp, later known as Perry-Mansfield Performing Arts School and Camp, the oldest performing arts school and camp in the nation. In 1914, the women purchased the property that eventually grew to 88 acres on the edge of Steamboat Springs. One log cabin was on the site when the property was purchased so local carpenters were hired to build the main lodge, six cabins, and a dance studio. Portia and Charlotte enrolled in a casket-making school to learn to make furniture for the camp. They built bunks, tables, benches, and chairs, some of which are still in use today. 'The Ladies' period was the time of significance when they managed the camp and set its direction from founding to the winning of many accolades and awards to the transfer of ownership and control to Stevens College in 1966, which continued the dance tradition until 1991, when a group of local citizens formed The Friends of Perry-Mansfield and raised funds and commitments to purchase the camp. Charlotte Perry was one of America's great directors and drama

coaches. Her trademark was incorporating dance movement in drama. She ran the camp, made sets, and sewed costumes while Portia formed national touring dance companies comprised of the young women campers. The camp initiated the Steamboat Springs Square Dance Festival in the 1950s, and more than 800 sets of dancers came from across the country to dance in the streets. Another contribution to the arts in America was the camp's innovation to teach dance in public education programs.

The camp provided unique learning opportunities to study modern dance, the truly American dance form, and eventually provided instruction in other forms of dance as well as classes in drama, equestrian techniques, various sports, fencing, other performing arts, and barnstorming road trip performances, all of which significantly enriched the artistic and cultural life of the community, the State, and the world. Campers came from across the country; performances were held for local residents, visitors, and parents, some of whom came for as long as a month. When horseback riding classes were added to the curriculum, many early campers abandoned their theatrical aspirations and became equestrians under the tutelage of Elizabeth Shannon, the award-winning head of the Riding Department for 35 years. Over the years, the camp has produced hundreds of campers who became theatre and dance performers, teachers, directors, writers, filmmakers, choreographers, and staunch patrons of the arts.

The camp district is comprised of many sleeping cabins, a main lodge, a main studio, classrooms, stables, and other outbuildings, many of which are single-walled, rough-hewn board and batten or log, with plank flooring, exposed rafters, porches or stoops, and unfinished interior walls. Many buildings were originally platforms sided with tenting material that have since been enclosed. Buildings are strewn about, sometimes in clusters, and evolved organically as changes occurred and programs evolved or expanded, but the ambience, historic character, and defining features of the camp remain intact: simple, functional, utilitarian structures, open spaces, and trails, all of which blend with the natural, secluded setting amongst pines and aspens, the aesthetics of the wilderness that contributed to artistic expression. A major rehabilitation project began in the 1970s, when half-sawn log siding was used to face several of the buildings, plumbing was added, electricity upgraded, and foundations restored. All of the structures represent the era in which the camp's development occurred. Sixty-five extant structures, some non-contributing, were surveyed in the early 1990s. The camp continues its heritage to the present day and offers visitors many programs throughout the summer. NRHP: 7-95.