John Elitch was a restaurateur, businessman, actor, zookeeper, and the original owner of Elitch Gardens and the Elitch Theatre. Elitch was born in California where he met his wife Mary Long. They had the same infatuation for theater and vaudeville-style shows. They ran their own vaudeville show, with an unsuccessful end.

In early 1881 John hiked across the Conejos Range in Colorado to reach the booming town of Durango, CO before the train tracks were laid. He opened a very successful restaurant that he sold to later open other restaurants in Denver, CO.

In 1884 he played a key role in the founding of the Denver Athletic Club. After five years of searching he purchased a 16-acre farm in the western Denver Highlands. Although the farm was intended to supply his restaurants with fresh produce, instead John and Mary decided to follow a dream to transform the land into a magical cultural resort with a zoo, plants, flowers, musicians, and a theater. Three years later, on May 1, 1890 they opened the gates to Elitch Zoological Gardens.

After the first season of the Elitch Gardens was over, Elitch left Denver for a winter tour of the west coast with a vaudeville troupe.

On March 10, 1891, Elitch died of pneumonia, with Mary at his side. Mary went back to Denver and opened the gates of Elitch Gardens in memory of John.

Located in N1/2 of Lot 63, Block 5.