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MAGAZINE

150

1876-2026



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OUR AMERICAN INHERITANCE

The United States is both a tangible place and an idea. We are a nation forged through shared values not defined by shared ancestry. Our genealogies are constitutional, which is how someone like me, a descendant of twentieth-century Italian and Croatian immigrants, can share a national heritage with George Washington.



The documents that bind us and preserve those values—the Declaration, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights—are not dusty irrelevant parchments but active and dynamic elements in our lives. They play a role in some of our most essential rituals. For example, soldiers, elected officials, and new citizens all swear allegiance to the Constitution. They are also part of everyday American life. Ordinary people, not just legal scholars, regularly quote the Declaration, cite the Bill of Rights, or defend elements of Constitutional amendments.

These ideals are more than abstractions; they are the thread that binds us together as a nation. American soldiers have sacrificed their lives for them. While we certainly do not always agree on definitions and meanings, we are hardwired with a fierce protective reverence for our nation's foundational covenants that everyone is created equal and endowed with unalienable rights such as "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." We are so invested in these originating ideals that, through the last 250 years, we have activated subsequent amendments designed to more fully realize them.

It is for all of these reasons that History Colorado was deeply honored to host some of our nation's most essential documents as part of the National Archives Freedom Plane initiative. For seventeen days, we had documents on view, such as: a draft of the Constitution, a draft of the Bill of Rights, the iconic Stone engraving of the Declaration of Independence, and the oaths of allegiance for Washington, Hamilton, and Burr. The loveliness of these authentic artifacts is that they will also bear evidence of their human creators and their humanity—with handwriting, draft suggestions, imperfections. And, at the same time, we can contemplate the intentions of authors, like Thomas Jefferson, who penned prose of liberty while also enslaving more than 600 people.

Milestones, like this year's dual anniversaries, offer time to reflect on our history and reaffirm our commitments to our formational values—a nation articulated in the language of human rights and dignity. It was a truly once-in-a-lifetime reverential moment, to witness the foundational and aspirational documents that embody our nation and connect us as Americans.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dawn DiPrince".

President/CEO & State Historic Preservation Officer

We acknowledge that the land currently known as Colorado has been the traditional homelands of Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. We are grateful to work in partnership with the fifty-one sovereign nations who continue to call this land home. Together, we plan exhibits; collect, preserve, and interpret artifacts; do archaeological work; and create educational programs to share the history of Colorado.

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A Fourth of July fireworks show at Denver's Lakeside Amusement Park in the 1980s. History Colorado 85.328.2

On the cover: (Left to right) Miners at Primrose Coal Mine, Huerfano County, 1910–1930. History Colorado, 20004918; Denver, about 1864. History Colorado, 10027124; Colorado State Capitol, Denver, taken by William Henry Jackson, 1895–1900. History Colorado, 10025127; Arapaho and Sioux delegation, about 1875. Standing are interpreter Joe Merrivale, Spotted Tail (Sicanju) and Antoine Janis. Seated left to right are Touch the Sky [*sic*] [Clouds] (Minneconjou), Sharp Nose (Arapaho), Black Coal (Arapaho), and Friday (Arapaho). Courtesy of the Brady-Handy Collection; Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division LC-USZ62-13459.

Cover design by Thomas Lusk

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THE FORUM

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READERS SHARE APPRECIATION

Readers of The Colorado Magazine and The Weekly Digest have been writing in to share their appreciation for History Colorado's publications! We're flattered by and grateful for the compliments, it's a privilege to do what we do!

Your publications online (as well as in print) are SOOO well done! Thank you and congratulations!

—Margie Contigulia, via email

I would like to compliment the *Colorado Magazine* for the excellent content. I greatly appreciate the true dedication to excellence.

—Daniel Liguori, via email

FOLLOWING UP

Readers have been writing in with their own favorite historical connections to Weekly Digest stories and articles from the last issue.

I've lived in Northern Colorado for more than forty years, and I've walked past masonic buildings countless times without knowing the stories behind them. This article was a wonderful reminder that history is found all around us—it's built into

the places we pass every day.

—Thomas Witaker, via email

I was shocked to learn that Ms. Carlotta Walls LaNier lives here in Denver! So much of the time, Coloradans think that our state is not connected to the history of the rest of the country, particularly the less-than-pleasant aspects like racial discrimination. Thank you to Acoma Gaither for this informative and interesting article.

—Charlotte Jackson, via email

Just a note following the [*Weekly Digest*] story about the discovery of gold in Colorado in 1859. Because of this event, Abraham Jacobs and his friend Benjamin Wisebart came to Colorado from Cincinnati to sell supplies to gold miners. Being Jewish, they could not invest in the mines but they decided to mine the miners. When Abraham returned to visit he met and married Benjamin's sister Frances Wisebart, who contributed so much to Denver's poor and sick with her charities. She was one of four people who founded a Charities Organization Society, which became the nationwide organization United Way. Because of the gold rush, many

women followed husbands and fathers and then contributed to the history of Colorado. Time to honor the women!

—Susan Malmstat, via email

History Colorado Responds:

Thank you all for the kind words! Readers above were responding to Sam Bock's Weekly Digest lede from May 5, 2026; Sean Nelson's article "Strings of Stone," and Acoma Gaither's story about the life of Carlotta Walls LaNier, one of the Little Rock Nine.

THE COLORADO MAGAZINE

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THE OTHER CENTENNIAL YEAR

From the rejected Winter Olympics to objections to Bicentennial commercialism to the American Freedom Train, an undercurrent of skepticism ran through Colorado in 1976.

BY JIM ENGLAND

Colorado's commemoration of its Sesquicentennial (150 years since statehood) and of the nation's Semiquicentennial (250 years since the Revolution) is here. The recent appearance of the Freedom Plane's historic documents at History Colorado called to mind an appearance of a similar document-bearing vehicle fifty years ago when the nation's Bicentennial similarly coincided with the State's Centennial. And that led, in turn, to an exploration of an alternative history—a “what could have also happened” here during that eventful year of 1976, and the contrasting roles then played by two influential, but vastly different, Coloradans: Dick Lamm and Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales.

The “could-have-been” event that was intended to coincide with Colorado's Bi-and Centennial celebrations was the 1976 Winter Olympics, which had been awarded to Denver and the Colorado mountains. Local supporters of the Games expressly promoted the attractiveness of that coincidence. The Colorado Committee of 76, chaired by then-Governor John Love, placed newspaper advertisements listing its beliefs: “We believe in Colorado. We believe in our Centennial in 1976. We believe in our Nation's Bicentennial in 1976. We believe [in] the Winter Olympics, [to be] held in Colorado in 1976.”

But those supporters faced an unexpected backlash. Early opponents emerged from Denver's Black and Chicano activists, who protested the

lack of minority representation in the Games' planning and insisted that the Games must be preceded by the building of affordable urban housing. Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, a leader in Denver's Crusade for Justice, called for a rejection of the Games unless Denver's Chicanos “get a piece of the pie”: conversion of abandoned buildings in Denver's Chicano barrios to schools and public places.



A 1976 Denver Olympics patch, made to celebrate games that were never held. History Colorado, 2012.36.1

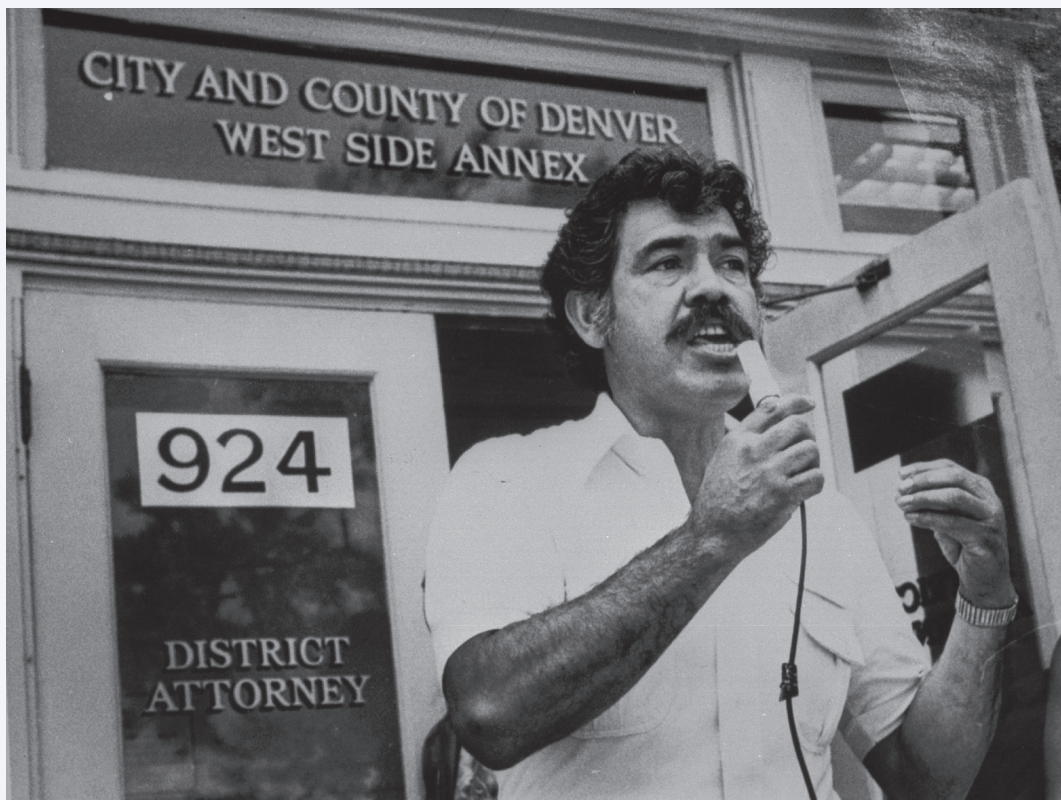
A more politically entrenched group of Olympics opponents was led by a thirty-six-year-old state representative named Richard “Dick” Lamm. Although much of these opponents' focus was on the economic and environmental impacts caused by all the infrastructure requirements and visitors, there was a

growing perception of a fundamental lack of transparency in all the planning. In the words of CSU History Professor Michael Childers, “Colorado voters grew increasingly disillusioned at...an elitist organization of business interests making decisions behind closed doors, decisions that greatly affected the economics and environments of their communities throughout the state.” The Olympics quest ended in 1972 when Colorado voters rejected public funding for the Games.

When Colorado entered its Centennial year in 1976, former Representative Lamm was then Governor Lamm. When he addressed the Colorado Legislature in January of 1976, at its newly-convened “centennial session,” he brought forward and expanded the themes that he had used in opposing the Denver Olympics. His pronouncement that Colorado, “this seasoned, old weather-beaten and well-loved commonwealth of free men and women,” was sound, was followed by some ominous warnings:

“The first century of Colorado history was the century of unlimited growth. The century ahead must be one of managed growth....Colorado must think of growth in new terms and re-examine some of its earlier assumptions.”

Colorado legislators heard a slightly different version of this warning two months later when they were addressed by author James Michener, who spoke at Lamm's invitation. Michener had just



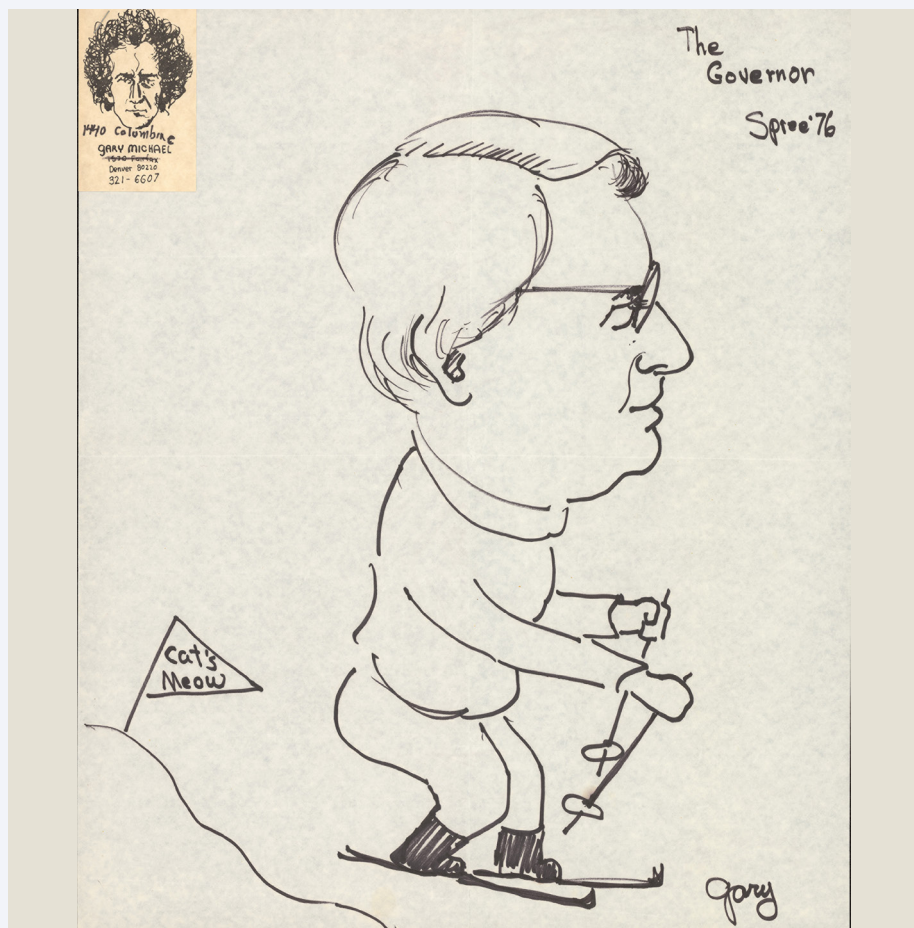
Corky Gonzales speaking outside a City and County of Denver building, photographed in 1980 by Dave Buresh for *The Denver Post*. History Colorado, PH.PROP.652



John Denver (left) and Dick Lamm (right) during Lamm's campaign for governor in 1974. History Colorado, 86.407.12.3



A poster advertising Loveland Ski Area, focusing on the connection to the planned Winter Olympics. Illustrated by Gene Hoffman.
History Colorado, 91.566.45



A caricature of Dick Lamm skiing, titled *The Governor Spree '76*. Illustration by Gary Michael. History Colorado, 87.55.400

recently published his novel of historic fiction, *Centennial*. Like Lamm, he also implored the legislators to keep pace with the state's unprecedented growth. "The time will come when if one wants to see the glories of Colorado he will have to go to Wyoming," he said. At the time of Lamm's and Michener's warnings of imminent statewide growth, the total population of Colorado was about 2.6 million, only about 40 percent of its current six-million figure.

But Michener was also then a member of the national Bicentennial Commission and addressed that upcoming event, which he said would be clouded by the aftermath of both Watergate and the Vietnam War, and by a general "heart-searching" over what should be the nation's values: "In the midst of all this we're being asked to hold a barn dance."

As the state's sitting governor about to preside over a host of statewide Centennial events, Lamm was in no position to offer similar concerns

or criticism. But Corky Gonzales occupied no such conflicted position. His Chicano Crusade for Justice organization joined forces with the American Indian Movement (AIM) and other Native activists to protest what they viewed as skewed presentations of national and state history. On July 4, 1976, Gonzales delivered a speech in Colorado Springs attacking the commercialized and consumerist thrust of the "Buy-Centennial."

Later that month, AIM issued a statement addressing the Colorado Centennial celebration specifically, noting that Native people wanted to know: What is there for them to celebrate, given that massacres and forced removals were part of Colorado becoming a state?

On August 1, 1976, the centennial anniversary of statehood—Colorado Day—Gonzales and other Chicano, Native, and Black activists held a protest rally on the State Capitol grounds. Just a

few dozen yards away, Governor Lamm read aloud from the 1876 Colorado Constitution and passed out servings of a Colorado birthday cake. Nationwide opposition to the commercialization of the Bicentennial, led by the People's Bicentennial Commission, objected to the kitschy schlock some saw as a crass attempt to commercialize and profit from patriotism. When the American Freedom Train, a traveling ten-car exhibition of historic documents and cultural artifacts, arrived in Colorado Springs (Denver officials having declined to pay its expenses), the PBC announced plans to protest it, largely because it had been subsidized by large national corporations.

While it's important not to overstate the level of widespread distrust Coloradans had for the 1976 Bicentennial (especially in comparison to the fierce opposition to the '76 Olympics plans), it's impossible to deny the undercurrents of public skepticism towards these large events in those years. A lesson, even if a small one, Coloradans may want to look back on in this, our Sesquicentennial year. 🇺🇸

Jim England is a retired trial lawyer who has lived in Colorado since 1979. Most of that time has been in Boulder County, where he was Board Chair of the Museum of Boulder. Since 2022, he has volunteered with History Colorado's Publications department.



A Colorado Centennial patch from 1976. History Colorado, 88.339.74.B

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Finding Roots: Creating the Pueblo Chile

The Mosco chile is a staple of Colorado cuisine. But the story of its journey from Oaxaca to Pueblo reveals a deeper story of agriculture and migration that shaped the Colorado we know today.

BY GABE TOTH

Mike Bartolo had just started working for Colorado State University at the research facility in Rocky Ford in 1991 when he inherited a bag of chile seeds. His uncle, Harry Mosco, had passed away and Bartolo's father was helping to clean out Mosco's garage. He gave Bartolo a

bag of seeds that he found in the process.

"I had no intention of being a plant breeder, but I just had room in my test plots that year and I grew out some of that seed," said Bartolo.

Those seeds were local chiles that grew upward, a strain known as Mirasol ("looking at the sun"). A single, unique

chile plant stood out as he walked the rows of peppers in the test garden during the summer of 1992. The plant was a higher-yielding specimen, and the peppers were thicker and meatier than the Mirasol plants around it.

"It's hard for me to describe it, just something about that plant I liked. I don't claim to be a plant breeder and I didn't really intend to go down that road, but it was just something that I saw," Bartolo, who has retired to a status of "manager/research scientist emeritus" at CSU, said in late 2025. He added that there was a significant aspect of luck involved, as well. "If I would've not walked down that row that day, who knows what happens?"

Out of curiosity, Bartolo saved the seeds from that plant and grew them next year—the beginnings of the same selection process that his family had been doing for several generations, choosing the best plants and collecting seeds from them for the next year's crop.

"My dad describes my grandfather going out and he would tie a ribbon or a string around it and he'd tell everybody, 'Do not pick this plant. This is a really full plant, we're going to save it for seed next year.' And they would do that every year," Bartolo said. "And so when you start doing that over, you know, thirty, forty, fifty years, then it becomes very in sync with your environment."

It wasn't just Bartolo's family who did this, of course. Local farmers in Pueblo County had been selecting seeds this way since the early 1900s, gradually adapting the Mirasol into a local variety. This process of very localized selection leads to varieties of chiles and other plants



Chile de Agua, brought back from Oaxaca by Dan Hobbs. Like Colorado's Mosco variety, these chiles grow upwards as if reaching for the sky, showing why this group of chiles was given the name Mirasol. Courtesy of Dan Hobbs

that are adapted to a specific climate and location. These varieties, called landraces, will consist of a similar but not entirely homogenous genetic makeup, which encourages some variation from generation to generation, and the varieties that thrive in a particular combination of climate, soil, and other factors will be selected for seed the next year. Over generations and even centuries, these landraces can continue to diverge and become more unique the longer they are grown separately from other varieties of the same crop.

“Over time, you're always selecting the best and saving the best. And over time they become really super-localized and adapted to that particular region,” Bartolo said.

It took seven or eight years of saving seed, growing the next crop, and selecting another single plant until Bartolo had a stable, uniform variety. He called it the Mosco, in honor of his uncle. He started to build up seed and shared it with farmers in the early 2000s, and his new variety of chile soon became one of the most popular in the region.

From that one progenitor, Bartolo has continued to select for new or improved characteristics, releasing a hotter variety called the Giadone. There's also the

round Pueblo Popper, as well as some ornamental varieties in the pipeline. As of fall 2025, he had seventy different lines of chiles growing in his garden in Rocky Ford.

“From that one single chile I've made hundreds of selections,” Bartolo said. “I'm always crawling around on my hands and knees, looking at stuff at the ground level. Sometimes the most fascinating things are right in front of you and you just have to stop and look at it. You don't have to go to the Himalayas or the mountaintop to find it; it's right there, down the row in front of you. That was always my philosophy.”

That eye for detail is what allowed him to identify a single plant with remarkable traits, refining it, nudging the needle a little bit every year, until he had the Mosco—the foundational Pueblo chile in the twenty-first century.

Of course, the lineage of the Pueblo Mirasol goes back even farther.

CROSS-BORDER ROOTS

The evolution from Mirasol to Mosco and beyond may be the result of Bartolo's love of plants and that fateful stroll he took in his garden that warm summer of 1992, but where did his uncle's seeds—the seeds that are the

ancestor of almost all modern Pueblo chiles—come from? The history of the landrace that had become a staple of the southern Colorado palate and the Pueblo agricultural community is less clear and often shrouded in history.



Mike Bartolo in his workshop
Courtesy of Dan Hobbs



Mike Bartolo in a field holding a Mosco chile, in about 2022. History Colorado, 2022.11.1

Mirasol chiles have been grown in the area for more than a century and have long been a cornerstone of the local culinary experience. As far as Bartolo can trace back, largely through family and other oral histories, the Mirasol started being grown in Pueblo County in the early 1900s. But prior to that, the history of the Mirasol is uncertain, dotted with hints and possibilities.

“Pueblo in itself is a multicultural city where you've got Hispanic culture and Italian and Eastern Europeans coming to work. And then a lot of those traditions got fused and melded

together,” Bartolo, himself a descendant of Italian immigrants, said. “With my family, too, they just incorporated these foods. We used the Mirasol chile when we made sausage, and it was the most revered ingredient for this sausage other than the pork itself. It was common on our tables to have pastas and Italian food, but then we also had green chile too, so it was kind of weird to have meatballs and green chile. That's just what we did.”

Bartolo had a conversation many years ago with an anthropologist out of Mexico City University, who noted the existence of a very prominent landrace

from the Oaxaca region that resembles the Colorado Mirasol chile—suggesting that the Mirasol may have originated far from Colorado, in southern Mexico.

In 2003, Bartolo provided DNA samples of local Mirasol chiles to researchers at New Mexico State University (NMSU), led by Paul Bosland. They found the closest genetic match was indeed a variety from Oaxaca. How the variety leaped from Oaxaca to Pueblo County is a matter of some speculation, and Bartolo emphasized the “gaping holes” in different theories.

One possible avenue is through a legendary figure in New Mexican chile lore.

Fabián García joined the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts in Las Cruces (now New Mexico State University) in 1906 as a professor of horticulture, later becoming the first director of the college's agricultural experiment station. García spent decades working to improve and standardize the local chile pepper, releasing many varieties in his decades there. Among them was the predecessor to the modern Hatch chile pepper, which García called New Mexico #9.

Bartolo has seen century-old listings in the Burrell Seed Growers catalog, a Rocky Ford institution that still sells seed, for a plant called the “New Mexico Chile Improved.” He suspects that could be an early name ascribed to the Mirasol chile. He also has noted what appear to be chile pepper plants on the cover of a 1908 publication by García entitled *Chile Culture* with peppers growing upward—a telltale feature of the Mirasol. Bosland, who oversees the chile breeding and genetics research at NMSU, dismissed this as an “optical illusion.”

“The fruits are actually pendant. Someone moved the fruits to the upright position,” he commented.

Due to a lack of continuity in the research at NMSU, Bosland is unable to verify or refute the presence of Mirasol chiles in García's research. However, the fact that Pueblo's Mirasol varieties are more closely related to the Oaxacan



A poster advertising the 1992 Cinco de Mayo celebration in Pueblo, which commemorated the 130th anniversary of the Battle of Puebla. The image of a chile is centered proudly as an icon of Hispano and Chicano culture, and the identity of Pueblo County as a whole. History Colorado, 92.276.5



A Puebloan woman sitting in front of ristras of chile peppers, around the late 1800s to early 1900s.
Photo by Joseph A. Imhof. History Colorado, 2022.57.34079



Ray and Rocco Valente picking peppers in their farm plot just outside Denver, about 1937. While the Mosco variety Coloradans know and love today had not yet been developed, landraces local to Colorado were grown, eaten, and sold across the state by people of all backgrounds, including Italian Americans like the Valente family.
History Colorado, PCCLI2161

chiles than to those varieties known to have come out of NMSU's breeding program suggests that the Pueblo stock might not have originated with García.

Another possible clue may lie in the archives of early Colorado trader and politician Joe Doyle. The Doyle Settlement was founded in 1859 on the Huerfano River, southeast of Pueblo and south of the St. Charles Mesa, where a number of the area's most prominent chile growers are now located. It became home to a mixed community of white, Native, and Hispanic residents. The settlement featured ranching, farming, one of the first flour mills in the state, and a school. It later hosted a post office once Colorado became a US territory.

Bartolo—while underscoring the unreliable, thirdhand nature of the possible Doyle connection—said he had been told by a historian who has since passed away that a report or journal entry from the settlement mentions a chile that grew upward.

"I don't know if that's the original Mirasol, or there may be other types that grew that way that were brought in from the Santa Fe Trail. It's hard to say what is true without that documentation," he said. "I don't doubt that there may be people bringing seed in from who knows where along the Santa Fe Trail, or early settlers or early pioneers in the area growing a chile that may have had that appearance."

However it arrived, the ancestors of the Pueblo chile made the leap from southeastern Mexico to southeastern Pueblo. Whether through a focused, dedicated research endeavor, tucked away in a migrant worker's pocket, or a happy accident, the Mirasol reached southern Pueblo County, and eventually became something uniquely Colorado.

AS PEOPLE MOVE, PLANTS MOVE

Charles Havlik of NMSU works with the unique landrace varieties in many of the small, traditional Hispanic and Native communities that dot New Mexico—including the famous Chimayo



An irrigated farm in Pueblo County, around 1900-1915. Small farms like this, where each family hand-selected which seeds to plant next year and allowed cross-pollination with neighbors' fields, were key to the development of the thousands of landraces of every crop we still grow today. History Colorado, 96.69.268



The Pueblo County display at the 1982 Colorado State Fair, proudly promoting the chile products of the county's farmers. Pueblo City-County Library District, ph-p-247-05_002

chile. Part of his work involves preserving the traditional landrace chiles that have evolved in various local communities.

Breeders such as Bosland will work to prevent the genes of their trial plants from getting crossed with other chiles, because the chile flowers will

both self-pollinate and cross-pollinate. However, Havlik noted the reality of growing crops, especially in a traditional setting, is very different.

"You have to realize that people move and people intermarry and people bring their seeds with them. People trade

their seeds with each other," he said. "It wasn't until recently that people started worrying about seed purity and stuff like that."

Bartolo noted that the original Mirasol plant he singled out, which eventually led to the Mosco chile, may have been the result of some unrecorded—and unintentional—crossing. "Why that pepper was unique in that population, it probably outcrossed with a jalapeño or something else. So if you looked at it, it might have genetics from who knows where."

Havlik likes to say that he's never seen a chile plant point out a border on the map, and southern Colorado and northern New Mexico are very culturally aligned. Nonetheless, he hasn't seen any strong tradition for upward-growing, Mirasol-type chiles in New Mexico. "They're here and there. They do pop up every now and then, but usually the fruit hangs (down)," he said.

To Dan Hobbs, founder of Pueblo Seed & Food Co., the likelihood of a migrant worker bringing their favorite

varieties of chiles and other plants makes the most sense. Hobbs farmed in the same general area as the Doyle settlement and has heard of a Mexican workers village that grew up around the settlement. He acknowledges that the García and NMSU connection is possible but, like Havlik, also hasn't



Experimental Pueblo chiles from the home farm of Mike Bartolo. Photo by Mike Bartolo

seen any tradition of Mirasol-type chiles being grown in New Mexico.

"As a seedsman myself, knowing how these seeds travel and trade, I wouldn't be surprised if somebody in Doyle's Mexican (community) there, one of his workers, came up from Oaxaca with a pocket full of seeds and grew them out," he said. "Seed history is lost in a second, but these things travel around. They get passed from person to person. And there were a lot of people working up there, a lot of Mexicans out of New Mexico and out of Old Mexico."

Hobbs himself brought chile seeds back from Oaxaca a few years ago, one of which is an upward-growing type. He said they don't call it Mirasol in that part of Mexico, but rather chile parado—the "standing up" chile.

(He noted that the term may make the local Oaxacan women blush, because it can also have a non-food, bedroom connotation.)

Hobbs was familiar with Swanson's research, including the Mirasol's ties to Oaxaca, so he asked around during a trip to Mexico in 2020 where he was studying growing and cooking traditions of corn.

"We went to a seed bank right outside of Oaxaca city, and we saw the different

accessions of corns and squashes and chiles," he said. "And then, the cuisine is just so amazing in Oaxaca, so we just kind of ate our way through the city over the course of a week or so, trying different mole sauces and chile recipes."

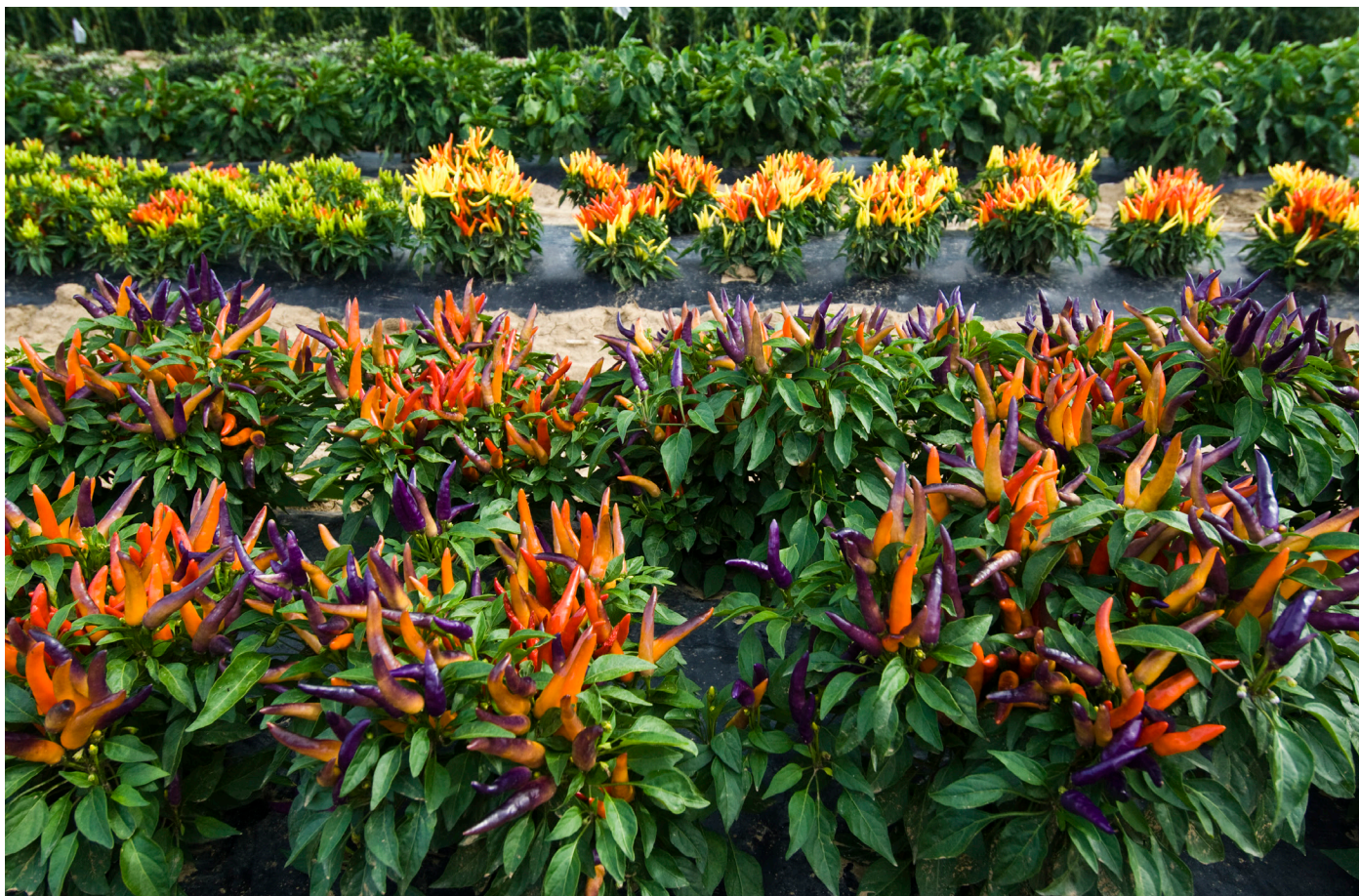
He eagerly returned to Oaxaca in spring 2023, and met with farmers to take a deeper dive into chile peppers. He sourced seed for five types of peppers used in various moles—rare heirloom varieties, or chiles Oaxaceños.

One of those varieties is the Chile de Agua, a landrace that has a lot in common with the Pueblo Mirasol. While it ripens from a limey green to orange to red, compared to the Mirasol which doesn't have an intermediate orange stage, it also grows upwards, reaching towards the sun.

"The stature of the pepper, the length and the width and the fact that it grows upright are all real similar, which led me to theorize that maybe they were related," Hobbs said. "I don't know if I would go so far as to say the Pueblo chile was descended from that one, but it looks like they're certainly cousins to me. The interesting thing about that Chile de Agua, in the field, is that it matured two weeks faster than the Pueblo, which is



A field of chile plants at the Colorado State University Research Farm in Rocky Ford, Colorado. Photo by William Cotton, courtesy of Mike Bartolo



Ornamental chile pepper plants at the Colorado State University Research Farm. These plants display the vibrant variety of chiles.
Photo by William Cotton, courtesy of Mike Bartolo

really important when you're working in dry conditions."

The Chile de Agua, which Pueblo Seed & Food Co. has started selling seeds for this year, was traditionally planted under dryland conditions. They would go into the ground in June, just before the rains would come, and then race to grow and ripen with only a couple of additional rains. The plants grow a little more "landrace-y," Hobbs said—thinner flesh, more foliage, occasional stubby, blunt ends like a bell pepper rather than tapered tips.

"The flavors are kind of tropical and citrusy and really unique, and it's a little thinner than a Pueblo chile. So I feel like it's sort of a crossover chile, in that you can roast it but you can also dry it more easily. The Pueblos are just so thick that it's clearly a roasting pepper, it's pretty tough to dry them. Really different than all these chile nativos from New Mexico.

They're real thin and you can dry them on your roof top or on ristras. So the Chile de Agua, I think, has the best of both of those."

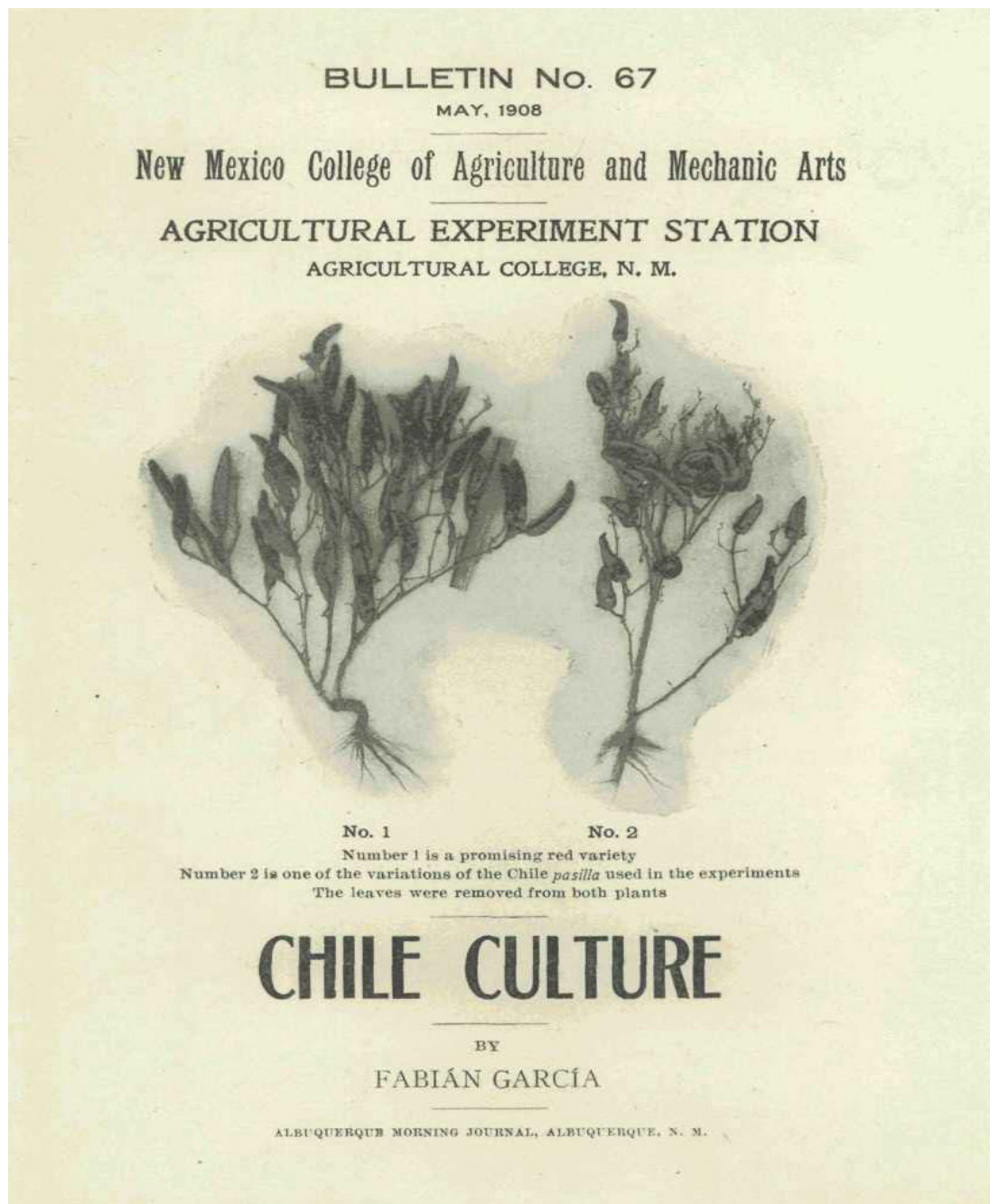
There is another type of chile grown in Mexico which is sometimes called Mirasol, but while Pueblo's Mirasol chiles tend to be roasted, the Zacatecas Mirasol is a thin-fleshed variety bred for drying. Rather, it is known as one of Mexican cuisine's primary dried chiles, the guajillo. Before modern technology like canning and refrigeration, thinner-fleshed chiles such as these would have been a better fit for preservation, noted Havlik. While dried red chiles are more widely known, green chiles would sometimes be roasted, peeled, and then dried to produce chile pasado, offering a different flavor profile compared to fresh-roasted green chiles or dried red chiles.

Hobbs relocated his growing operation to Cortez about five years

ago, and has enjoyed the slow process of starting to adapt some of the Oaxacan stock to southern Colorado. He said almost nobody in that part of the state had experienced Pueblo chiles, and it's been fun to grow and share it with the community.

The green chile rivalry between Colorado and New Mexico has been, at times, heated, but at the end of the day, the Mosco and other Mirasol chiles are simply a different family of plants than Hatch-style green chiles. How they arrived in southern Colorado may still be a matter of speculation, but they've grown into a beloved local crop that adds to the overall diversity of the chile palette.

"I have no ill will towards Colorado," Havlik said. "Dan (Hobbs), if I run across him at the right time, will give me a big bag of his Mirasol chiles. I don't have any complaints. I think (the sense of rivalry) is humorous."



The cover plate of *Chile Culture* by Fabián García, published in 1908 by the New Mexico College of Agriculture. This short publication was an early investigation into the many varieties of chile peppers in the Southwest, the traditional methods of growing and preparing them, and plans to expand production in New Mexico—and it might be the first historical evidence of the Mirasol variety in the United States. Courtesy of New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts

Bartolo, not an aficionado of spicy food himself, is also one to celebrate the differences rather than try to elevate them into an interstate competition, noting that the Pueblo Mirasol and the New Mexico Hatch are long-diverged—separated genetically by centuries if not a millennium. “It doesn’t make one better than the other. It just makes it different

and adds to the whole allure of growing chiles and the affinity we have for them because they’re associated with our time and place and our traditions,” he said. “People say, ‘Well, you must like Pueblo chile better.’ No, I just like it all. I think they’re wonderful plants. I love the plants and I love the farmers and I love the reasons that it was developed.” 

Gabe Toth, M.Sc. is an accomplished distiller, brewer, and industry writer focusing on the beer and spirits worlds. He holds brewing and distilling certificates from the Institute for Brewing and Distilling, a master’s degree from the Rochester Institute of Technology, where his graduate studies centered on supply chain localization and sustainability, and a bachelor’s degree in journalism from CSU-Pueblo.

WESTWORD MOVEMENT

Patricia Calhoun covered fifty years of Denver history as it unfolded.

BY DAWN DiPRINCE

Denver loves an underdog that has good ideas,” explains Patricia Calhoun, describing the iconic mayoral victories of Federico Peña’s “Imagine a Great City” and Wellington Webb’s “Sneaker Campaign.”

An underdog with a good idea also happens to be the perfect description for Denver’s fifty-year affection for *Westword*, the alt-weekly newspaper Calhoun has edited, owned, and gifted to her chosen city. The first *Westword* was printed on September 1, 1977, and only a few weeks later, the *Rocky Mountain News* declared it “debatable” whether the newspaper novices “will be publishing a year from now.” But, in 2026, *Westword* persists both online and in print form, is locally owned, still has an office in downtown Denver, and can be picked up at about 2,000 physical distribution points across the metro area.

Journalism is known as the first draft of history. And, a sense of Colorado history—with equal parts timing, geography, and swagger—helps explain the longevity of *Westword*. Calhoun, with early partners Rob Simon and Sandy Widener, pooled 40,000 dollars of their own money and some borrowed funds from friends and family to launch a free newspaper in late-1970s Denver. Undercapitalized, unaware, and unfettered enough to go for it. They ended up with most of the first issues undistributed in Calhoun’s garage, but there was enough grace in the economy and enough hustle in their business plan to figure out what they needed to learn. They also had the gift of timing.

The 1970s were an amalgamation of economic fractures, supersized

generational shifts, and evaporating cultural norms. Colorado had an influx of new youthful adventurers lured by the lyrics of John Denver and, according to Calhoun, impressed by the state’s anti-growth audacity when it spurned the Olympics. (Hard to ignore the irony of anti-growth energy attracting new residents.) She explains, “There’s like an influx of people and it’s not like people are coming here because the Chamber of Commerce is luring them. It’s not like their tourism campaigns. People are just coming here because they hear how beautiful it is. A lot of people were inspired. And it did help us: the whole turning down of the Olympics. Dick Lamm made it an interesting state.”

With bravado enough to match their baby-boomer demographics, younger Denverites—both locals and newcomers—were carving their own pathways culturally and economically. The larger 1970s economy was infamously stark and inflationary. But as Calhoun describes, in spite of or maybe because of it, there were “so many new businesses starting up. Young people starting businesses, and just creating their own. Their own economy, you know?” The new energy was optimistic, inclusive, and undaunted by entrenched rules and hierarchies. Consider the other creative endeavors founded around this same Denver moment, such as Su Teatro and Cleo Parker Robinson Dance, which also recently celebrated fifty years.

According to Calhoun, the “old silk stocking Post” wasn’t going to report on the entrepreneurial endeavors of this younger generation. “The *Post* and *News* wouldn’t write about gay clubs. It

was pretty easy to see your market, let’s just say that,” and Calhoun continues, “It was a fun partying town but it was also an underground economy. It was just that the other news wasn’t paying any attention.”

Westword met the moment and economic opportunity by being the newspaper of this new economy, reporting on the cultural and event news and the bar and club scene. They made sport out of reporting on the local media standards. And, they also became the preferred spot for respective advertising of their generation, including commercial advertising, classifieds, and



A group dressed as characters from *The Wizard of Oz* at a late-1970s People’s Fair in Denver. It was this kind of alternative scene that Calhoun and her partners at *Westword* knew that the “silk stocking” *Denver Post* wouldn’t write about. Denver Public Library Western History Collection, WH1016



ERAS TOUR

You can map the trends of a city by where creatives locate—on the edge of where things are happening but that they can still afford.

Westword's geographic movement overlaid with the different eras, defined by Calhoun, of the last fifty years weaves together a fascinating spatial storytelling of Denver.

1977–1984:

Colorado—best-kept secret for creatives, entrepreneurs

Westword geography:

basement of rental on South Gaylord, 1439 Market Street, 16th and Wazee

1985–1991:

Incubator for imagining a great city

Westword geography:

15th and Platte

1992–2007:

Becoming a great city, sometimes despite itself

Westword geography:

18th and Wynkoop

2008–2019:

After the 2008 Democratic National Convention, the secret's out

Westword geography:

10th and Broadway

2020 TO TODAY:

Incubator for navigating hazards of success

Westword geography: 13th and Lincoln (moved during Covid)

personal ads. As an alt-weekly, they weren't breaking the news, but over the years, *Westword* honed two of their specialties: "Holy S---t Stories" and "Magnificent Obsessions."

According to Calhoun, the Holy S---t Story hopes to have everything: "corruption that is affecting you and probably your money and may even have sex and public officials." She cites one such story, in September 1992, when *Westword* broke the "The Secret

Story of the Rocky Flats Grand Jury," launching decades of reporting of the Justice Department cutting a secret deal with a Grand Jury. But, she notes that *Westword* readership found that "just as important was the Magnificent Obsession story, which is: people who have a dream and really want to do something cool in Denver." One such Magnificent Obsession story was a man who believed he didn't need food to live, just needed to breathe—a breatharian.

Calhoun carved a path sometimes by writing the stories that others wouldn't, breaking longstanding unspoken rules around things you shouldn't print. She broke some taboos around reporting scandals involving sex and powerful men and scandals involving fellow journalists. She honed an intuitive ethical framework to weigh her journalistic obligations and options. And, while she didn't break the Gary Hart Monkey Business story (the 1987 scandal that

ended the frontrunner's presidential run and involved rumors of adultery, a luxury yacht named *Monkey Business*, tabloid news photos, and a Colorado candidate), she notes how after that, the overall mainstream media landscape became less protective of the powerful and their transgressions.

In its fifty years, *Westword* has met economic evolution with adaptation. Interestingly, being a free print newspaper

protected them from a number of the wounds that standard papers faced from online news. *Westword* had a website as early as 1992 and Calhoun appreciates that the Internet offered a way to report breaking news for the weekly print paper.

The Internet didn't hit their core business hard until Craig's List took over as the de-facto place for personal ads. Alt-weeklies, like the *Village Voice*, were well known for the personal ads that filled

their back pages with a safe, inclusive, countercultural dating community, and also were a reliable funding stream. Within the teetering boom-and-bust dating technology, answering machines and voicemail caused the personal-ad business to soar just before the Craig's List crash. "All that stuff disappeared, and then people had to figure out how to really sell ads," Calhoun states, "because you still weren't getting department stores. You weren't getting big money."

The legalization of medical marijuana in Colorado in 2000, and then ultimately the full legalization of marijuana in 2012, softened the economic blow from tech volatility. (A strange side note befitting *Westword*: Joe Rogan, famed podcaster, once applied to be the paper's weed reviewer.)

HISTORY'S FIRST DRAFT

Calhoun has had a front row seat to history as it was made. She is the perfect primer of foundational Denver knowledge—at least for its last fifty years.

While she will be retiring-ish from the business and editing parts of her job, she will continue to write for *Westword* or exercise her bigger writing muscles with her new-found time. She aims to focus on telling those stories, with historical background, that explain our

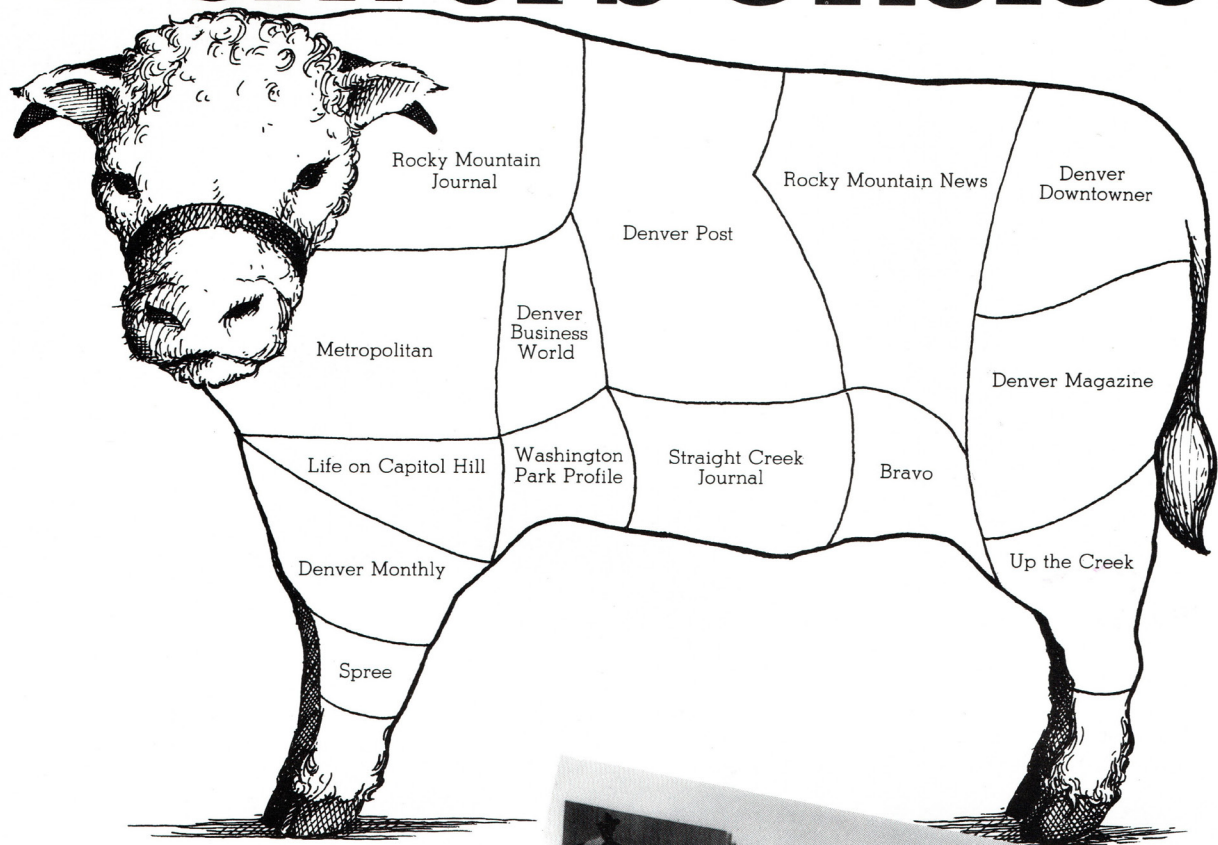


A group of environmentalist students protesting Denver's air quality outside the State Capitol in 1978. Even in the post-Vietnam era, mainstream news sources didn't often cover the issues younger Americans felt were the most important. Denver Public Library Western History Collection, WH2129-2022-278



An aerial view of Denver with the Auraria Campus in the foreground, taken in 1977. Denver Public Library Western History Collection, WH1288

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A typical sidewalk on Denver's 16th Street in 1978, before the Sixteenth Street Mall. *Westword*'s first office would have been just down the street from this scene. Denver Public Library Western History Collection, DPL-DENVER-348

world today—but with all the nitty-gritty details that only come from lived experience.

One such story is: “No one knows why we have DCPA” (Denver Center for Performing Arts), which is also local media history. Donald Seawell, longtime lawyer of Helen Bonfils (*Denver Post* owner and fellow theater buff), helped Bonfils defend the *Post* from hostile takeovers for more than a decade. She appointed him as the *Post*'s president and CEO and eventually chairman and publisher; Seawell carried the newspaper forward after Bonfils's death in 1972. With the threat of takeover, a wobbly economy, and languishing new business, Seawell sold the paper for 95 million dollars to the *Times Mirror* in 1990 and ensured the legacy funding of DCPA, the second-largest performing arts center in the nation.

Other core Denver or Colorado knowledge she plans to write and share: TABOR, gambling, Rocky Flats, Coors Field, Denver International Airport, Dana Crawford and preservation, Columbine, Olympic rejection, Cherry Creek Mall, the Democratic National

Convention, and the Poundstone Amendment, just to name a few. If you really want to know what happened, Calhoun is exactly the colorful time travel tour guide you want.

Her passion for journalism, media, and the reason for its existence is palpable in both her power-punching stories and in what she calls her *Magnificent Obsessions*: She notes Velvet Elvis, a local impersonator who performed for more than a decade, or Jim Bishop, the one-man builder behind the spectacular Bishop's Castle in Custer County.

Magnificent Obsessions fill Calhoun's headspace, including the World's Wonder View Tower in Genoa on the eastern Plains that she has worked to resurrect with other creative preservationists. She loves to buy handmade arts and crafts pieces in prison gift shops created by incarcerated people, who earn income from the sales.

But mostly, Calhoun's truest co-obsessions have been her chosen city of Denver and *Westword*. She is a believer. Her close study of journalism's evolution over the last fifty years isn't just meta media navel-gazing as the shifts are and



Patty Calhoun. Courtesy of Patty Calhoun and *Westword*

have been consequential. For example, Calhoun notes that when she started there were more than 600 reporters across two newspapers in Denver and now there are less than fifty.

The alt-weekly news medium, Calhoun mourns, really only held strong in the media market for a few decades. It was born, in form and content, to antagonize authority while bringing people together through personal ads, event listings, and sometimes political organizing. While she will still have a byline, *Westword* will continue without Calhoun at the helm and hopefully continue to defy the disappointing trends of megacorporate media consolidation fraying protections of a free press and misinformation. In this 250-year anniversary of our nation, Americans are often reminded that a healthy democracy requires an authority-resisting news media that is more locally based and helps to connect us to each other. 🇺🇸

Dawn DiPrince serves as History Colorado's CEO and our state's historic preservation officer.

History Colorado



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STATEHOOD SPECIAL ISSUE



COLORADO AT 150



HOW (AND WHEN) DO WE THINK ABOUT STATEHOOD?

BY SAM BOCK

MANAGING EDITOR OF *THE COLORADO MAGAZINE*

With a little intuition and a few scoops of his shovel, John H. Gregory changed the trajectory of Colorado's story forever. It was May 6, 1859—the day the famous prospector discovered one of the richest gold deposits in the state.

Reports of gold flakes in Colorado's streams were not new by the time Mr. Gregory made his discovery. Other prospectors were already panning along the Platte River and Cherry Creek. But Gregory's discovery and the hard-rock gold mining industry he helped create launched the Colorado Gold Rush, sending thousands of hopeful argonauts on a trek across the plains and sparking a swift (and often violent and wrenching) transformation.

It's rare to encounter a time in history when so much change can be pinned to such a specific moment. But that single day was the inflection point for Colorado, informing everything that came after. It's the moment that set us on the path towards joining the Union, and on a trajectory to grow into the state we are today.

That road to statehood was bumpy and indirect. It took five tries over nearly twenty years for our territory (variously called Jefferson and then Colorado) to be accepted into the Union. And at many times, it wasn't even clear it would happen for us. The Colorado we know was only one possible outcome.

Indigenous nations, European empires, and enterprising settlers (among many others) all experienced different versions of this place and had plans for what they wanted it to become.

For most of the people who have lived in what is now Colorado, their plans for the future probably didn't include statehood. Often their statehood stories are ones of cultural erasure and horrifying violence. But surely theirs are Colorado stories, too—even if they are difficult to hear, or were told before 1876.

It's those stories, I think, that make this commemorative year such a compelling opportunity to expand our sense of statehood. That's why, when I was thinking about how this century-old magazine should commemorate the moment, I turned to four experts in Colorado stories. I'm lucky and grateful that they answered the call.

In this special commemorative issue, Katherine Mercier, a historian and exhibit developer at History Colorado, explores the shifting incentives, rival factions, and evolving power structures that eventually steered us toward the Union. Our 2025–2026 Colorado State Historian, Dr. Susan Schulten, examines how Euro-Americans' evolving—and occasionally flawed—grasp of our geography and environment was etched into their cartography. Their assumptions ultimately shaped the geographic, social, and political contours of the state.

Dr. Nick Saenz challenges us to look beyond Gregory's 1859 strike and past statehood, asking how our identity might shift if we trace Colorado's origins to a deeper past. Finally, Dr. Jared Orsi revisits the legacy of "America the Beautiful," revealing how the anthem's verses track the seismic cultural and economic upheavals reverberating around an industrializing Colorado as the state found its footing.

The Colorado I see in these reflective essays is a product of so much more than 150 years of chance and change. It is one that is bigger than our borders. One that can encompass all of the good and the bad—the heartwrenching violence and the crushing greed, but also our gumption, our determination, and our love for family and this incredible place.

Such a big picture helps us see that statehood was not confined to the Gold Rush, the drawing of maps, or that moment on August 1, 1876, when President Grant signed a piece of paper. It was a process all of us—even those who lived here before this land was called Colorado—shaped along the way. 

Sam Bock is the Director of Interpretation and Publications at History Colorado, and the Managing Editor of *The Colorado Magazine*. He did his graduate work at the University of Colorado Boulder, and is the author of several books and articles about his favorite state.



Colorado's legislature made the columbine, photographed here by John Fielder, our state's flower in 1899. The enduring symbol of the state is illegal to uproot on public lands across Colorado. History Colorado, 2023.1.6323

SEVENTEEN YEARS TO STATEHOOD

People and communities not included in four failed statehood attempts became as consequential as those who were.

BY KATHERINE MERCIER

Denver celebrated loudly on July 4, 1876. Voters had approved the Constitution for the new State of Colorado on July 1, almost exactly 100 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Colorado was about to become the Centennial State, and celebrations were combined with 4th of July festivities. Thirty-eight guns, marking Colorado's entrance to the Union as the thirty-eighth state, were fired into the sky. "Sleep was out of the question after daylight," observed the *Denver Daily Times*.

Thousands of people crowded Denver's streets, jostling for the best

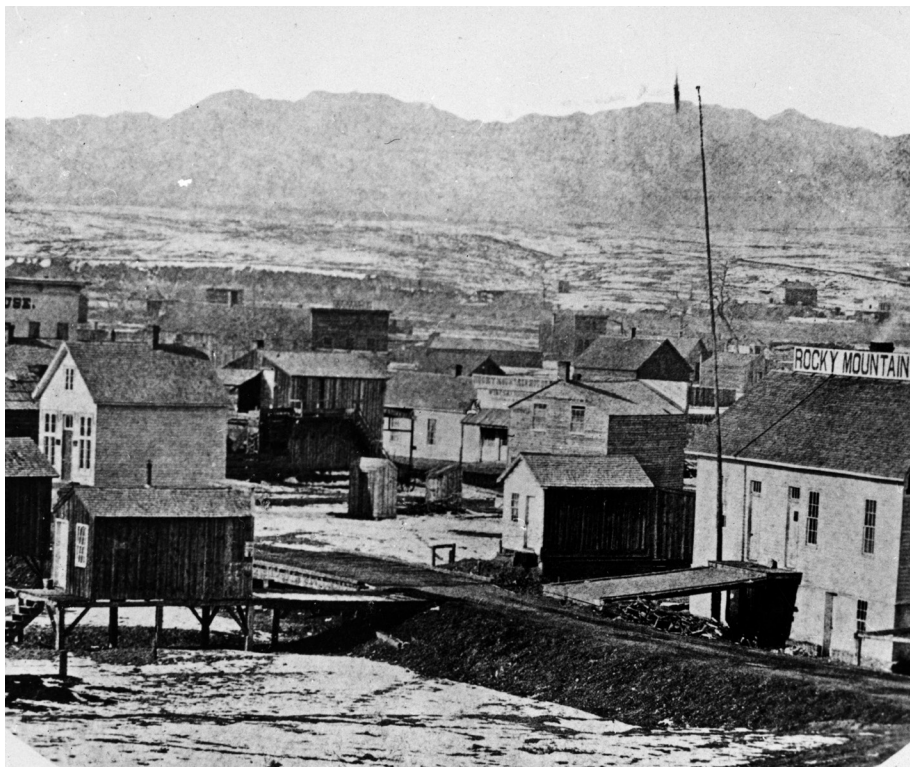
views of a grand parade. Bells rang and whistles blew as an enormous number of groups filed by: mounted police; thirty-eight women representing each of the states; the Governor's Guard; Denver Turnverein dancers; the Denver Typographical Union; Masons; early gold miners; French Americans wearing powdered wigs; firefighters; politicians; Knights Templar; Scandinavians; Irish Americans; a temperance society; a German social club; and singing members of the Handel and Haydn societies advanced through the streets.

Not to be outdone, cities from Pueblo to Boulder hosted their own large

celebrations and parades. "Everybody was happy," remarked *The Rocky Mountain News* on July 6, 1876. "Twice happy, in fact. It was a double festival...the nation's centennial and the birthday of the Centennial State."

And across that thirty-eighth state, thirty-nine men watched the festivities with relief. They spent eighty-six days, from December 20, 1875, to March 14, 1876, drafting Colorado's Constitution. They weighed public petitions and debated potential laws for this new state of Colorado. The constant reminder of past failures loomed over every minute of the proceedings. Colorado had already tried four times between 1859 and 1876 to become a state, and each attempt had failed. Now, voters had to approve a constitution by July 1876.

The statehood those soon-to-be Coloradans celebrated was only possible due to a convergence of interests coming together at a pivotal moment in the history of the American West. Against the backdrop of the Civil War and Reconstruction, complicated federal politics played a role in statebuilding. But Colorado also needed its people to support statehood. From the Front Range and the Eastern Plains to the San Luis Valley and the Western Slope, diverse voices spoke for or against each attempt at statehood, raising questions of representation, voting, taxation, and power. Thirty-nine men wrote our Constitution, but the true authors of our statehood story were the people living in Colorado who fought at every step along the way to be heard and represented.



Denver, about 1864. History Colorado, 10027124



Map showing the boundaries of Jefferson Territory and Colorado Territory, 1920. History Colorado, G4310 1859-1876.S2

FORMING A GOVERNMENT

Anslem Barker, the 1876 Convention's security officer, remembered the first time statehood failed. He was there. Born in Ohio in 1822, Barker moved to Nebraska in 1857 and opened a dry goods store. The Panic of 1857 (a financial crisis caused by failing banks and railroad speculation) was sweeping across the United States. Thousands lost farms, jobs, and homes. Then, one day in 1858, Barker read a newspaper announcing William Green Russell and

his party discovered gold in what was then called the Pike's Peak Country.

Barker and over 100,000 hopeful prospectors flooded what became Colorado's Front Range between summer 1858 and late 1859. After arriving on October 24, 1858, Barker began mining and helped establish the town of Auraria. But the newspapers exaggerated the reports of gold. Thousands of goldseekers returned east with empty pockets.

Those, like Barker, who stayed faced

scarcity and ridiculously expensive prices for basic goods. But one even bigger problem quickly emerged: No one knew who was in charge.

When gold was discovered in 1858, most of the Front Range was part of far-western Kansas Territory. Technically, Kansas's territorial government governed the region. But the northern part was in Nebraska Territory, the Western Slope was part of Utah Territory, and southern areas were in New Mexico Territory. Even if Kansas Territory was in charge,



On September 28, 1864, a delegation of Cheyenne and Arapaho leaders met Colorado Territory officials at Camp Weld near Denver to negotiate for peace. This photograph shows the participants of the Camp Weld meeting. Identities are believed to be, from left, kneeling in front: Major Edward W. Wynkoop and Captain Silas Soule. Seated, first row, from left: Chief Neva (Arapaho), Chief Bull Bear (Cheyenne), Chief Black Kettle (Cheyenne), Chief White Antelope (Cheyenne), and Chief Na-ta-nee (Arapaho). Back row: unidentified; unidentified but possibly Dexter Colley, son of Indian agent Samuel Colley; US interpreter John Smith; Chief Heap of Buffalo (Cheyenne); Chief Bosse (Arapaho); unidentified but possibly Samuel Elbert, secretary of Colorado Territory; unidentified. History Colorado, 10025492

communication with Kansas-based officials took weeks.

So in an attempt to fill the power vacuum, miners soon established their own laws and courts, causing mass legal chaos: Something that was illegal in one mining town might be legal in another, or a sentence for a crime might be more severe in one district than in another.

Seeking a central government, civic infrastructure, and a standardized system of law, some men began to take action. William Byers, founder of *The Rocky Mountain News*, used his first newspaper to advocate for statehood on April 23, 1859. "A new State will be organized west of Kansas and Nebraska ere this year is closed, with a hundred thousand inhabitants," declared Byers. It was a grandiose vision for what was then just a loose collection of men whose ability to make a living was as yet a matter of prophecy. Nevertheless, a Constitutional Convention, consisting mostly of Denver residents, formed in summer 1859.

But how would they achieve statehood? And why become a state instead of a territory?

There are few rules guiding the admission of states to the Union. Article IV, Section III of the US Constitution states only, "no new State shall be formed or erected within the Jurisdiction of any other State; nor any State be formed by the Junction of two or more States, or Parts of States, without the Consent of the Legislatures of the States concerned as well as of the Congress." The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 specified that a territory should have 60,000 free adult men before it could become a state, but Congress sometimes waived this requirement for political reasons.

Generally, a place became a territory before becoming a state. One exception was California, which experienced such a huge population explosion after the 1849 Gold Rush that it became a state in 1850, bypassing territorial status.

With California in mind, the 1859

Denver convention believed direct statehood was feasible. The men named their new state "Jefferson" because Thomas Jefferson had brought about the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, of which the Pike's Peak Country was part. They established boundaries for Jefferson and drafted a constitution.

Now, the vote for statehood was in the hands of miners like Anselm Barker. But mining was hard, and the golden dreams of many prospectors had not panned out. Miners, struggling to survive, resisted the idea of higher taxes for a state government.

Worried, the convention placed two options on the ballot: becoming a state, or becoming a territory. On September 5, 1859, voters overwhelmingly rejected statehood in favor of becoming a territory. The first attempt at statehood had failed, and the men in power quickly organized Jefferson Territory instead.

Jefferson Territory enacted civil and criminal laws, created ditches and

roads, and regulated wills. But Jefferson's leaders also took action on another issue: They knew they were living on the land without any legal right to be there.

THE HOMELANDS OF NATIVE NATIONS

Over fifty-one Native Nations, including the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Ute Tribes, call the land that is now Colorado home. For generations, Indigenous peoples survived and thrived across this land. The 1848 discovery of gold in California changed everything.

In 1848, the US government began to negotiate with Tribes for travel rights across what would become Colorado. Faced with encroaching settlement, some Ute leaders signed the 1849 Treaty of Abiquiú, which promised Ute people reparations if they allowed US forts, trails, and peaceful travel on their land. However, the US government did not keep the promises contained in the treaties.

Then in 1851, the US government authorized a treaty council to negotiate with Native Nations who lived across the West. Over 10,000 Indigenous people, including members of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Crow, Assiniboin, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Oglala and Brule Lakota Tribes, gathered near Fort Laramie in Wyoming to negotiate with the US government.

The Treaty of Fort Laramie guaranteed legal title to specific lands for each Tribe, but did not restrict movement, preserving the Tribes' rights to freely travel, hunt, and fish across their homelands. The treaty declared that much of modern-day eastern Colorado was Cheyenne and Arapaho land. In return, like the Treaty of Abiquiú, the Tribes would allow construction of US forts and roads and give settlers safe passage.

The Fort Laramie Treaty gave the Cheyenne and Arapaho legal title to much of the land that would become Colorado. Early miners and settlers knew this. One of Jefferson Territory's first actions was to issue a petition to Congress to unilaterally remove Native

title to the land without Tribal consent or agreement. "We would further call your attention to the importance of extinguishing the Indian title to the lands in the vicinity of the gold mines," the Territorial representatives wrote in a petition to Congress in 1859, "as you are well aware that in cases of this kind emigration can only be regulated, not checked."

To the residents of Jefferson, the extinguishment of Native title seemed inevitable. In other states and territories, the US government had negotiated treaties with Tribes that freed land for settlement. Congress soon began appropriating funds to hold treaty negotiations in this new region. "The future of Jefferson Territory—soon to be a sovereign State—is glorious with promise," wrote *The Rocky Mountain News* on November 10, 1859. But the newspaper was wrong.

Congress, embroiled in national political debates, never recognized

Jefferson Territory. As Jefferson's hopeful leaders cobbled together a government, Congress was divided over whether slavery should be allowed in western territories. Northern states led by Republicans wanted to stop the spread of slavery, while southern states led by Democrats wanted to expand it. The 1820 Missouri Compromise had outlawed slavery in northern territories, including most of the proposed Jefferson Territory. This was repealed by the 1854 Kansas Nebraska Act, and the 1857 Dred Scott decision held that slavery could not be prohibited in western territories. Admitting Jefferson as an official territory would add to the debate, so Congress never recognized it.

Unauthorized, Jefferson Territory was left without authority or funding. Its struggling legislature charged a poll tax of one dollar. Hundreds of miners signed a petition rejecting the tax and voted against becoming counties of Jefferson Territory. Some miners insisted



San Luis, 1899. History Colorado, 10025406

they would answer only to the Kansas Territorial government. Others argued they were still in “Indian Territory” and refused to follow any laws. Legal chaos ensued once more. Becoming a state had failed, but pushing for a territory seemed to have had little tangible impact.

REORGANIZING FOR RECOGNITION

After its failure to become either a state or a federally recognized territory, Jefferson struggled along until 1861. Then, South Carolina seceded from the Union on December 20 of that year. Congress suddenly found itself faced with financing a war and became concerned about controlling the western goldfields. Federal political and military control would be imperative if the US was going to hold the gold, so it created the Colorado Territory out of portions of Kansas, Nebraska, Utah, and New Mexico on February 28, 1861.

Congress wanted the new territory’s boundaries to be straight. At the time, the northeastern edge of New Mexico Territory included a notch that raised into the new territory. Congress wanted to cut off this notch and place it into Colorado to follow the thirty-seventh parallel and create a smooth southern boundary.

New Mexico’s territorial representative to Congress, Miguel Otero, protested. Many residents of the notch were in Spanish-speaking communities of Hispano people, who traced their heritage and roots to early Spanish colonists. Originally part of Mexico, the land had become part of the United States with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo at the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848. Under that treaty, Mexican citizens became US citizens overnight and were placed into New Mexico Territory. They were accustomed to New Mexico’s laws, measurements, and systems of trade. Cutting them out of New Mexico would be removing them from a familiar system and language and placing them under the jurisdiction of the Denver government far to the north. “I cannot sit here quietly and see the people of that Territory, who, as I have said, are a homogenous people, cut in pieces, and a portion of them transferred to another jurisdiction, when I know it is against their wishes,” argued Otero.

But Congress ultimately decided to cut off the notch. “Geography requires it shall be done,” insisted Galusha Grow, speaker of the House of Representatives. Today, Colorado’s boundaries give it the appearance of a rectangle on a map, although early surveying errors mean the

state actually has 697 sides. The decision to place the notch in the new territory would affect its statehood chances for years to come.

When naming the new territory, Congress rejected the name Jefferson, following its unofficial rule against naming states or territories after individuals except for George Washington. Congress nearly named the new territory Idaho, but on February 4, 1861, a representative argued that it should be named Colorado because “the Colorado river arose in the Territory, and there was a sort of fitness in it.” With that, Colorado Territory was born.

But powerful Denver men were not content with the territory. They knew that statehood would further their business interests, and this seemed like the time to pursue it. The early 1860s had seen the passage of federal acts and treaties that opened Colorado land for Euro-American settlement and industry. The 1861 Treaty of Fort Wise reduced Cheyenne and Arapaho lands from most of the eastern third of the Territory to a much smaller portion, while the 1863 Conejos Treaty restricted Ute people from much of the Rocky Mountains. For each treaty, only a few Native leaders, facing the constant threat of US military hostility, signed. Still, the United States applied it to all members of those Tribes, who suddenly found their movements restricted. The Pacific Railway Act of 1862 allowed railroad construction across Native land, while the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 enabled the government to seize and sell Native homelands to create land-grant universities. And the 1862 Homestead Act granted 160 acres to US citizens who could live on the land for five years.

For Native Nations, the acts meant removal from their homelands and a struggle for survival as the federal government broke treaty promises of goods and protection. For the powerful Euro-American men in Denver, these acts presented endless economic opportunities. Now, the railroad



Mining in Gregory Gulch near Black Hawk and Central City, 1859. History Colorado, 10024607

seemed to have a clear path to Denver—if Colorado could become a state.

RINGS OF POWER

Denver men lobbied Congress for statehood again in 1864. These men, including Territorial Governor John Evans, Colonel John M. Chivington, Jerome Chaffee, and Samuel Elbert, became known as the Denver Ring. Congress actually agreed that Colorado should become a state and issued an act enabling statehood. The fall 1864 presidential election loomed, and Congressional Republicans wanted to ensure that President Lincoln was reelected. Since Colorado was a Republican territory, its statehood would provide more Republican votes.

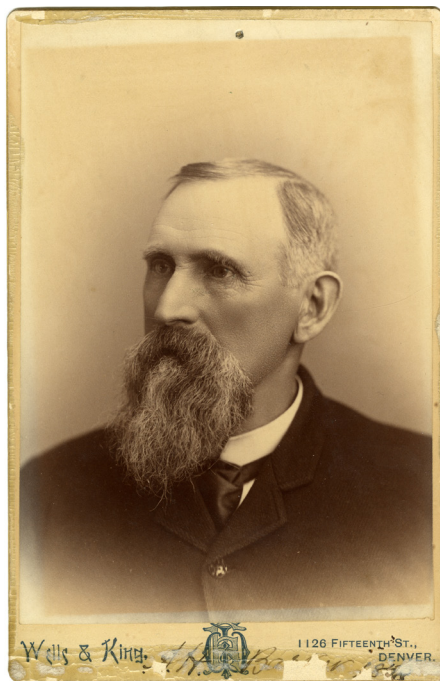
A state Constitutional Convention convened on July 4, 1864. The Denver Ring had almost complete control of the proceedings, writing and approving a constitution by July 11. “There was a constant disposition upon the part of all to hasten and perfect their work,” observed *The Rocky Mountain News*. “Probably no State Constitution was ever before framed in so short a time, and we are vain enough to believe that none possesses a better one.”

But men in Golden and other mountain mining towns were concerned that the Denver Ring would enact laws and raise taxes that came at the expense of Colorado’s miners. A “Mountain Crowd” of mining leaders and businessmen sprang up in opposition. Ovando Hollister, the editor of the *The Daily Mining Journal* in Black Hawk, published scathing rebuttals against statehood and the Denver Ring. In June 1864, *The Daily Mining Journal* stated that statehood supporters were “doing their best to secure the ruin of the Territory for the temporary advancement of their private interests...everybody knows that the whole movement originated with Gov. Evans.”

Many miners also believed state taxes would be too high. Life was tough and expensive in Colorado Territory in the 1860s. Residents complained that eggs

cost two dollars per dozen, equivalent to fifty dollars in purchasing power today. Gold discoveries declined starting in 1862. Eastern speculators invested in mines that often did not produce any gold, making it impossible for miners to attract financial backing. Anselm Barker left the goldfields and began farming near Clear Creek. This did not seem like the right time for higher taxes, and becoming a state in the middle of the Civil War meant miners would be subject to the draft, which was highly unpopular.

To make matters worse, members of the Denver Ring placed themselves on the ballot for state government. Confident statehood would pass, the



Anselm Barker, 1858. History Colorado, 10046140

Denver Ring scheduled the election for state government on the same day as the statehood vote. Both actions confirmed the Mountain Crowd’s fears about the Denver Ring’s ambitions.

In southern Colorado, many Hispano residents also opposed statehood. Residents of the former New Mexico notch dealt constantly with unfamiliar taxes, laws, and language. The Colorado Territorial Legislature had claimed it would translate laws and proceedings into Spanish, but it often did not approve the funding to do so. Land

speculators, including Colorado’s first territorial governor William Gilpin, purchased and divided land near San Luis, ignoring traditional land rights maintained by descendants of the people who had settled there in the 1840s. The Denver Ring wanted to consolidate power in Denver, and they weren’t overly concerned with the rights of people in southern Colorado.

Feeling underrepresented, some Hispano residents launched an 1862 petition for the notch to be placed back into New Mexico. The petition was debated in Congress but delayed by the Civil War, so as late as 1864, some Hispano residents believed it was still possible for them to be placed back into New Mexico.

Coloradans went to the polls to vote on the second statehood proposal on September 13, 1864. Immediately, the numbers showed that statehood was failing. The *News* refused to admit defeat or publish full election results until early November. “In the southern portion of the Territory the most of the majorities are against the Constitution,” bemoaned *The Rocky Mountain News* on September 20, 1864. The final vote was firmly against statehood, 4,672 to 1,520.

The powerful Denver men, including Territorial Governor John Evans and the influential Colonel John M. Chivington, had lost their chance at federal power, and they viewed Native Nations as a continued obstacle to their personal ambitions. Evans and Chivington went on to perpetrate the deadliest day in Colorado history: the Sand Creek Massacre. In November 1864, Cheyenne people and Arapaho people camped on reservation land along Big Sandy Creek in southeastern Colorado, trusting the treaties and Evans’s and Chivington’s promises they would be safe there. Cheyenne Chief Black Kettle flew a thirty-three-star US flag above his lodge, which the US government had given him in 1860 as a peace symbol. At sunrise on November 29, 1864, the US Army led by Colonel Chivington attacked the Tribal

chiefs' camp of mostly women, children, and elders. The soldiers murdered more than 230 peaceful Cheyenne people and Arapaho people. The Sand Creek Massacre broke any remaining trust in the US government and changed the Cheyenne people and Arapaho people forever.

The Cheyenne and Arapaho people at Sand Creek were promised rations and safety, but instead they were betrayed and slaughtered. The massacre disrupted their political systems and family structures. But Evans and Chivington thought their actions were heroic and glorious, and newspapers claimed the massacre was justified. The US Army relentlessly pursued Cheyenne people and Arapaho people, chasing them from their homelands, ultimately leading to their removal from Colorado. Even today, there is no reservation for Cheyenne people or Arapaho people inside Colorado's boundaries—a direct and enduring result of Colorado's push for statehood and private ambitions for political influence.

SUPPORT FOR STATEHOOD

Anselm Barker and others involved with the 1876 Constitutional Convention did not invite any Native Nations to attend. Native people were not considered legal citizens of the United States then, and they could not vote in any of Colorado's statehood attempts. Prior to 1876, statehood attempts ignored the pleas of Hispano voters of southern Colorado, whose opposition was one of the main reasons statehood was defeated in 1864. Convention delegates in 1876 were concerned this might happen again. They knew they would need at least some Hispano votes for the constitution to pass.

Delegate Casimiro Barela, a Hispano justice of the peace from Trinidad, advocated for the translation of laws into Spanish. "We must ask that the laws be published in Spanish for a period of twenty-five years, and, in return, the people of southern Colorado will

lend their support so that the Territory might be made a state," he argued.

The delegates agreed. Delegate Frederick Ebert, a German-born surveyor from Denver, advocated that the constitution should also be translated into German. The delegates decided to translate the constitution and state laws into Spanish and German "for the benefit of the portion of our citizens who speak that language." After seventeen years, there was finally a concession to acknowledge the needs of the Hispano citizens of Colorado.

But this wasn't the end of issues of representation in the 1876 Constitutional Convention. Women had been arguing for suffrage in Colorado since its earliest



Barney Ford. History Colorado, 2022.57.2099

territorial days, and the convention presented an opportunity for them to gain the right to vote.

A group of women from across Colorado formed the Colorado Woman Suffrage Association in December 1875. They elected Alida Avery as president, the first woman licensed to practice medicine in Colorado. In their constitution, they declared that "women ought to enjoy the same legal rights and privileges as men" and that "so long as women are denied the elective franchise, they suffer

a great wrong, and society a deep and incalculable injury."

The women argued before the convention for the right to vote. They presented a petition with 1,000 signatures supporting their cause. Statehood would fail, they insisted, if the constitution did not include women's suffrage.

This was not the first time voting rights had the potential to derail statehood. Local newspapers remarked on Colorado's third attempt at statehood in 1865—and how voting rights had contributed to its failure.

THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM?

The end of the Civil War—and the end of the draft—in April 1865 began to persuade some residents that statehood might benefit them. Anselm Barker was now running a ranch and farm near Clear Creek, but it was difficult to make a profit when goods had to be shipped over rough, slow wagon roads. Having representation in Congress would mean more chances to bring the desperately needed railroad to Colorado. Statehood supporters in Denver sensed an opportunity and launched a third attempt. This time, the Denver Ring wisely left themselves off the state official ballot and included the Mountain Crowd. A new Constitutional Convention began on August 8, 1865, in Denver, with Ovando Hollister, the formerly anti-statehood newspaper editor, serving as the convention's secretary. The convention reused the constitution from the year before and completed it in five days.

With the draft ended, the Mountain Crowd included, and the pressure for a railroad looming, some miners decided to vote for statehood. But many Hispano voters were still against it, continuing to feel underrepresented and ignored by the government in Denver. Voters from Conejos and Costilla Counties refused to vote on the statehood question altogether. "This will give a large majority for the State, as the people of those counties were generally opposed to a State organization, and all voted against that

measure last year,” concluded *The Rocky Mountain News*.

The vote was held September 5, 1865. It became quickly apparent that the large majority predicted by the newspaper had not come to fruition. Statehood ended up passing by fewer than two hundred votes.

For the first time, voters in Colorado had narrowly decided that Colorado should be a state. Now, Congress and the President had to make it official. Most Coloradans assumed that statehood would easily pass Congress. But Colorado’s new constitution had excluded Black men from voting in the new state.

Black businessmen and community leaders including William J. Hardin, Barney Ford, Henry O. Wagoner, and Edward J. Sanderlin immediately began to organize against statehood. They circulated a petition among Black residents of Colorado. One hundred and thirty-seven Black men signed the petition, which rejected statehood. The petitioners argued, “We are taxed by men who made the Constitution, and are allowed no representation.... We ask for nothing but even handed justice.” The Black community leaders sent the petition to Territorial Governor Alexander Cummings, who supported Black suffrage. He forwarded the petition to Congress in December, 1865.

When news of the petition arrived in Colorado, statehood supporters were outraged. “This action on their part of petitioning Congress...is an act of treachery and ingratitude rarely exceeded,” *The Rocky Mountain News* declared. The paper called Territorial Governor Cummings “a piece of double concentrated scum.” But it was too late. Because of the petition, Congress debated and delayed statehood. Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner proposed an amendment stating that statehood should not move forward.

But federal politics stepped in once more. Republicans in Congress were trying to advance civil rights initiatives and impeach President Johnson. They

needed Republican votes, and the staunchly Republican Colorado would provide two more. Sumner removed his amendment. By early May 1866, both the Senate and the House approved Colorado statehood, and the bill was sent to President Andrew Johnson.

Johnson promptly vetoed it, claiming that Colorado’s population was too small. The third attempt at statehood had failed, a combination of local voting rights and federal politics stopping it in its tracks.

Congress passed another statehood bill in 1867, still looking to add Colorado’s Republican votes. But Johnson vetoed it again, arguing that Colorado’s population remained too small. An 1868 attempt at statehood at the federal level died before it even started. It would be seven years until statehood seemed within reach once more.

FINDING A MIDDLE GROUND

For Anselm Barker and other residents of Colorado Territory, change came swiftly with the arrival of the first train in Denver on June 24, 1870. The cost of transportation and goods immediately dropped. A bag of flour that cost twenty-five dollars in 1865 sold for two dollars and fifty cents in 1875. Then, the discovery of silver in the San Juan

Mountains in 1871 launched a new mineral rush. New technologies, like Colorado’s first smelter built in 1868, enabled gold and silver processing in the territory. So much wealth was coming out of the ground that, when President Ulysses S. Grant visited Colorado in 1873, Central City residents constructed a silver brick sidewalk worth twenty-thousand dollars for the president to walk on.

With so much growth and investment, statehood sentiment was on the rise once more by the mid-1870s. Unlike the 1859 statehood attempt that had mostly featured Denver men, the 1876 delegates were elected from across Colorado. Three were Spanish-speaking Hispano delegates from southern Colorado. Over one-third of the delegates were lawyers, but others were bankers, judges, farmers, stock raisers, and miners. Their task was difficult: Congress had given them a deadline of July 1876, just in time for Colorado’s Republican votes to be added to the 1876 presidential election. The majority of voters, from the heads of corporations to residents in small towns, had to support the constitution the delegates were writing, or else Colorado would never become the Centennial State.



Governor Oliver Shoup signs Colorado's ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution surrounded by women's suffrage leaders, some from the 1893 campaign. From left to right: Frances B. Wayne, Joseph E. Moorhead, Laura Holtschneider, James R. Noland, Senator Perry Dunlap, Dr. Margaret Long, Senator Agnes A. Riddle, Representative Mabel Ruth Baker, Representative Mary G. Bigelow, Mrs. James Crosby and Mrs. Harriet G.R. Wright. Seated at right is Mary C.C. Bradford, state superintendent of public instruction. December 16, 1919. History Colorado, 86.296.3617

Voting rights for women quickly arose as an issue that could derail statehood like Black suffrage in 1865. The Colorado Woman Suffrage Association presented arguments and petitions to the 1876 Convention for the right to vote. The delegates listened to the women's arguments, but they were concerned about the reaction of male voters. "A constitution granting suffrage to women would probably be defeated," the *Rocky Mountain News* warned on January 12. Ultimately, the majority of delegates voted against putting women's suffrage in the constitution. Still, two members, H.P.H. Bromwell and Agapito Vigil, a Hispano delegate from southern Colorado, argued in favor of women's suffrage: "It is false that Woman is inferior to Man...each is part and parcel of the same humanity." They proposed that women should at least be given the right to vote in school elections, which the convention granted.

And the delegates included a provision that paved the way for women's suffrage in Colorado: the state could hold a popular vote on women's suffrage in the future. Due to this provision, in 1893, Colorado became the first state to grant women the right to vote via a popular referendum of men. The 1876 efforts of the Colorado Woman Suffrage Association had not been in vain.

And the convention also considered what values should underpin the new state. Delegates enshrined the concept of schools open to all, writing, "nor shall any distinction or classification of pupils be made on account of race or color." This provision would help lead to future school desegregation efforts in Colorado. In the 1914 *Maestas vs. Shone* litigation, Hispano people in southern Colorado used this Constitutional provision to successfully establish their children's right to attend the nearest public school.

The convention also realized the importance of Colorado's natural resources. Mining and agriculture had stripped forests across Colorado. "If we do not protect our forests against devastation," one delegate argued, Coloradans would lose "the beneficial influences of our forests upon climate and

vegetation." The Colorado Constitution became the first in the US to provide for the protection of forests.

After eighty-six days of deliberation and writing, the delegates approved the constitution on March 14, 1876, with some signing the morning of the 15th. The delegates, recognizing the need to listen to people across the territory, had written one of the longest state constitutions ever produced.

On July 1, 1876, voters went to the polls. Results immediately showed statehood had passed. "TRIUMPH!" shouted *The Rocky Mountain News* on July 2. "COLORADO THE CENTENNIAL STATE!" A total of 15,443 votes had been cast for statehood, with 4,039 against. Huerfano, El Paso, Las Animas, and Pueblo Counties had voted against statehood, but all other counties voted for it. Coloradans

In the echoes of these past voices, we can recognize the state we live in today.

celebrated the impending creation of the nation's only Centennial State, and President Grant declared Colorado the thirty-eighth state on August 1, 1876.

Colorado's statehood had immediate ramifications beyond its boundaries. Adding a new state changed the balance of electoral power and influenced the result of the 1876 presidential race. Colorado's three electoral votes went to Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes, and when the votes were tallied, the nation learned Hayes won by one single electoral vote. In exchange for Democratic recognition of his victory, Hayes agreed to end Reconstruction policies protecting the rights of formerly enslaved people, ushering in an era of segregation and legal discrimination.

And Colorado's statehood forever affected the Native Nations who call this place their home. Though many Native people still live in Colorado, only the

Southern Ute Indian Reservation and Ute Mountain Ute Indian Reservation are located within the state's boundaries. The Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray have a reservation in northeastern Utah. The Northern Cheyenne Tribe is headquartered in southeastern Montana. Many Northern Arapaho Tribal members live on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. Members of the Southern Cheyenne Tribe and Southern Arapaho Tribe, today the Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes, are headquartered in central Oklahoma.

OUR CENTENNIAL STATEHOOD

Becoming a state was not easy. The people and communities who were not included in the four failed statehood attempts became as consequential as those who were.

In the echoes of these past voices, we can recognize the state we live in today. Our statehood story didn't just shape our boundaries or our nickname. It shaped our Colorado State Constitution, and through that document—which has been amended 176 times since 1876—the statehood process has shaped our state ever since.

And that brings us back to the parade winding through Denver on July 4, 1876. After seventeen years of trying, the moment of statehood was at hand. Colorado's future lay ahead. When the parade ended, thousands of Coloradans flocked to Denver Park to watch fireworks. Anselm Barker may have been among them, as he lived in Denver until his death in 1895. And just like those spectators in 1876, this anniversary offers a shared moment to reflect on the people and forces that created our Centennial State, and to consider the impact we will have on our next 150 years. 

Katherine Mercier is an exhibition developer and historian with History Colorado. Katherine grew up in Bailey, Colorado. She graduated from the University of Denver with a BA in Anthropology and the University of Leicester, UK, with an MA in Museum Studies.



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How Did Colorado Become a Territory? The Story in Maps

Maps reveal changing perceptions about the American West.

BY SUSAN SCHULTEN

I moved to Colorado thirty years ago to teach at the University of Denver. When I set about learning the history of my new home, I was surprised to discover that the Colorado Territory was created in February 1861. How on Earth, I wondered, was Congress able to organize the territories of Colorado, Dakota, and Nevada in a moment of supreme national upheaval, in the midst of a secession crisis over slavery that exploded a few months later into the Civil War?

As I eventually learned, the territory that became Colorado came into the United States largely in two stages: the eastern half was carved from the western edge of the Louisiana Purchase, while the western half was acquired through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Histories of Colorado often begin with the Pikes Peak Gold Rush, when tens of thousands of young men traveled across the plains in the spring of 1859 to seek their fortune along the banks of the Cherry Creek and the Platte River. At the time, those mining camps were located at the western edge of Kansas and Nebraska Territories, which had been organized in 1854 but drew little attention or white settlement prior to the rumors of gold that spread a few years later. With so many migrants sweeping across the plains, some kind of governing structure was needed. And the Territory was born.

This story is fine as far as it goes. But while the gold rush mattered, so too did the larger environmental and political context. From the 1820s through to the Civil War, American understandings of the land that became Colorado shifted dramatically, and those shifts are richly documented through contemporary

maps. What was initially considered the “Great American Desert” began to be reconceptualized as a fertile prairie, eventually christened as the Great Plains. This was nothing less than a reorientation of mental geography, with profound consequences. What had been seen as irredeemable land fit only for “Indian Country,” eventually became land ripe for cultivation, and by extension Indigenous dispossession.

**Stephen Long's
description of a
“Great American
Desert” across
the middle of the
continent generated
an impression that
lasted for decades.**

This reconsideration of American geography in the 1840s and 1850s fueled the heightened battles over slavery. Or, put differently, as Americans began to see the plains as a place of agricultural potential, that region became a site of contention over slave labor. Thus, the creation of new territories in the 1850s became battles over slavery. Ultimately, this presented a tremendous irony, for the conflict between free and slave states in the east first prevented, and then facilitated, the admission of new western territories. In fact, it was only with the secession of seven southern states after the election of Abraham

Lincoln that Congress was able to admit Kansas as a state and then organize the Colorado Territory.

From a region that was written off as the “Great American Desert” to a more neutral “prairie” and ultimately a place of abundant riches, we can trace these shifting perceptions of the land through the maps of that era. Maps are generally made and preserved by those in power, so they necessarily privilege those same perspectives. But even with that in mind, they give us a unique glimpse of the shifting perceptions of the region we now know as Colorado.

THE GREAT AMERICAN DESERT

No part of Colorado had been mapped with any degree of detail until 1811, when Alexander von Humboldt—though having never visited the Rocky Mountain region—published a map of “New Spain” that extended northward to the thirty-eighth parallel. More consequential were the expeditions of Major Stephen Long, which resulted in his influential map of *Country Drained by the Mississippi* in 1823. Edwin James, who accompanied Long on the expedition of 1819, recorded his perceptions of the land between the Missouri River and the newly named “Rocky” Mountains. He described the land that would become the eastern half of Colorado as “almost wholly unfit for cultivation, and of course uninhabitable by a people depending upon agriculture.” Though there were traces of “fertile land” here and there, the absence of wood and water created “an insuperable obstacle” to settlement and was best fit as a “range for buffaloes, wild goats, and other wild game.” Yet James saw tremendous strategic value in this

arid land: above all it formed a natural “frontier” for the United States that would “prevent too great an extension of our population westward” as well as a “barrier” against the “incursions of an enemy” from the west. Long himself was blunt: on his map the words “Great American Desert” dominate the region that became the southern plains. Within a year, school texts, atlases, and maps reproduced the language, generating a lasting impression for Americans.

Repeated over decades, the language on Long’s map entrenched an assumption that was difficult to dislodge. But equally powerful was the growing sentiment in the late 1830s that Americans were ordained to expand their reach across the continent. In 1839, the newspaper editor John O’Sullivan described the United States as the “great nation of futurity,” and a few years later coined the phrase “Manifest Destiny” to describe this vision. Even earlier, a then-unknown Philadelphian, William Gilpin (for whom Colorado’s Gilpin county is named), traveled to Missouri, and was captivated by the economic potential further west. In 1836, he predicted that the nation’s future lay in continental expansion, which would place St. Louis at the heart of the country.

Writing to his sister that same year, he urged her to get out Samuel Augustus Mitchell’s *Map of North America*. He described the magnificent lands west of Missouri as a “Grand Prairie,” using a term that the French had introduced in the eighteenth century to describe the unique grasslands of North America. As he wrote, traveling west along the rivers that flowed into the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, “you may journey a thousand miles on a dead level—its beauty cannot be excelled, free from timber or shrubs of any sort, and covered with the most luxuriant grass, it is so gently rolling as to be effectually drained yet not break its perfect smoothness.”

This “prairie” extended across the interior to the Rocky Mountains. He conceded that some of these areas were only “a sandy waste,” yet others

were “fertile and covered with herds of buffalo.” Gilpin was determined to see it for himself: Once his military service was through, he would travel to Fort Leavenworth, and then further west. Yet unlike other champions of Manifest Destiny, it was not the far western lands that interested Gilpin, but rather the interior. As he wrote, “I often think... that the part of the Valley which lies on the Mississippi and West of it must one day surpass aught now existing or which has existed in all that constitutes natural resources—hence my strong desire to see and learn all I can—indeed one who has not seen the Valley of the Mi’ppi can hardly be said to have been in America—he knows not what a **heart** and **sinews** she has.”

In 1836, he predicted that the nation’s future lay in continental expansion

Gilpin spent the next decade exploring the West as a member of several expeditions led by John Fremont, whose accounts, alongside the maps produced by the able Charles Preuss, drew public attention to the Far West. But while most Americans who followed these expeditions still considered the interior a desolate, unforgiving landscape, Gilpin saw a well-drained landscape with terrific potential. And while others saw the Rocky Mountains as an obstacle to overcome, he believed they held riches that were just waiting to be discovered.

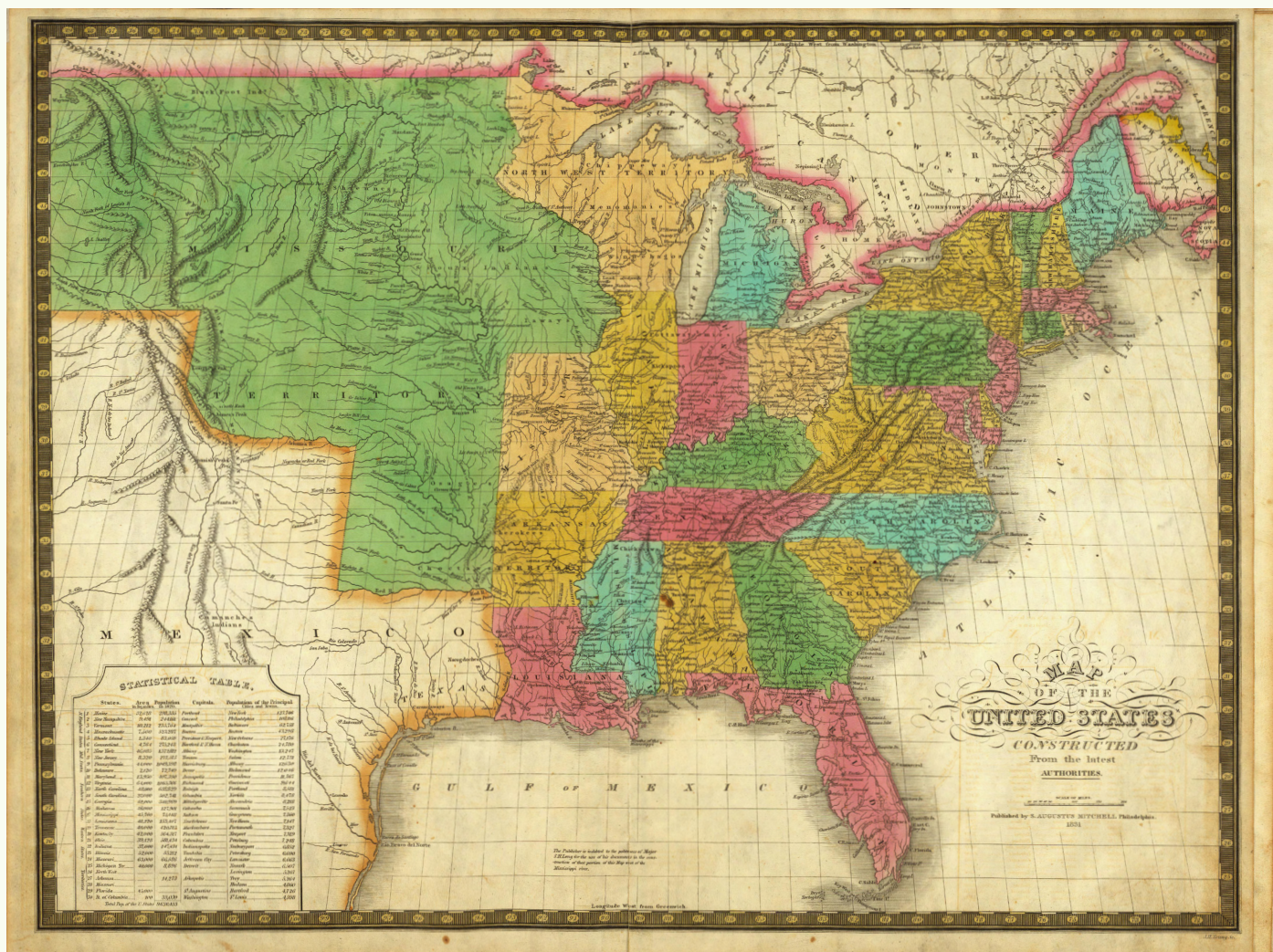
In January 1846, Missouri Senator David Atchison asked Gilpin for information on a western mail route, which prompted the latter to write a forceful and lengthy case for westward expansion as a means to opening trade with China across the Pacific. The maps from Fremont’s expeditions, together

with Gilpin’s letter, reflect the Senate’s growing interest in the Far West, and were published at the very moment that the nation was heading toward a conflict with Mexico in the spring of 1846.

Many Americans tend to think about the US-Mexico War in terms of the Far West, for the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo transferred enormous lands to the United States and gave the nation its continental outline. But that frenzy of expansion also influenced American perceptions of the interior. Just after the end of the war, Gilpin published his *Hydrographic Map of North America*, an idiosyncratic but effective attempt to focus the nation’s attention on the interior by outlining the Mississippi drainage basin. Gilpin had become a booster for the West, making outsized claims about the interior’s economic potential in the midst of national expansion. But growing scientific knowledge of climate, and the mineral discoveries along the Front Range in 1859, seemed to confirm his predictions.

Part of the reason Gilpin was able to make such audacious claims about the North American interior was the growth of knowledge about the environment itself. The Army Surgeon General’s Office began collecting information on climate to understand the outbreak of disease at its remote military outposts throughout the West in the 1810s. By the early 1850s, the Army—with help from the newly founded Smithsonian Institution—had gathered mountains of data on temperature and rainfall. But this mass of observations could only be useful to the extent that it could be understood. This is why the ability to map rainfall and temperature was such a breakthrough in the mid-1850s. For the first time, Americans could see the data in the aggregate, and to witness patterns across space. The map of rainfall is among the earliest of these, a cartographic breakthrough that began to break down the idea of a “Great American Desert.”

Moreover, though there was nothing official to dispel the myth of the Great Desert, emigrants passing the plains



Samuel Augustus Mitchell, *Map of the United States*, 1831.

Though the “Great American Desert” language could be found on maps into the 1830s and 1840s, a rising expansionist sentiment in America began to challenge this assumption. In 1836, William Gilpin was sent to St. Louis to recruit men to fight in the Seminole War. While there, he became captivated by the lands lying west of Missouri and saw not an irredeemable desert but something with great, unexploited potential. He wrote home to his sister in Philadelphia, and described for her the tremendous potential of the lands west of Missouri. Using one of Samuel Augustus Mitchell’s widely available maps at that time, he drew her attention to the wide treeless plains that formed the heart of the continent. Where others saw a desolate desert, he saw a region unto itself, with luxuriant grasses covering a rolling and well drained timberless landscape, a “Grand Prairie.” That term had been introduced by French explorers in the eighteenth century to describe the grasslands of North America, and over the next few decades, Gilpin would use it with increased frequency to dislodge the “Great Desert” from American vernacular. Map courtesy of David Rumsey Map Collection

to the Far West, and farmers creeping toward the one-hundredth meridian, introduced a feeling of cautious optimism about the American interior. Such optimism grew immensely as white Americans began to scrutinize the potential of the interior. Gradually, the Eastern Plains were dubbed the “prairie,” a term connoting a region fit for grazing, though not intense cultivation. By the end of the 1850s, extreme views of the barren interior had been replaced by more nuanced and moderate evaluations, and maps shaped these new perceptions.

FROM DESERT TO PRAIRIE

The eroding framework of the Great American Desert paralleled the erosion of “Indian Territory” in the interior. The number of westward migrants along the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails—both of which are marked on Gilpin’s 1848 *Hydrographic Map*—had grown rapidly in the 1840s, particularly after the discoveries of gold in California in 1849. This stream of migrants passing through the plains was unsustainable, not just for the violation of Indigenous sovereignty but for the depletion of scarce resources, both of which led to conflicts between the two groups. All of this prompted Congress to authorize a meeting with the Tribes of the plains to negotiate peaceful passage of migrants along the trails and compensation for the costs incurred in the process.

This meeting was originally to be held at Fort Laramie, but the enormous number of Indigenous attendees—estimated between 10,000 and 15,000—pushed the location thirty miles to the east, near the Nebraska border. In preparation for the meeting, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs asked the Jesuit priest Pierre-Jean De Smet to map Indigenous sovereignty. De Smet had emigrated to the United States in 1821, first settling in Missouri to work with Native populations alongside his fellow Jesuits. For the next three decades, he traveled extensively through the high plains and the Pacific Northwest, drawing dozens of maps of that region

based on his extensive interactions with Indigenous Nations.

Though DeSmet’s maps were used for purposes of conquest, they remain important statements of Indigenous claims to sovereignty. Nowhere is that clearer than in the map De Smet produced for the 1851 council meeting between the US government and the Tribes of the plains. Here, De Smet shows us the massive expanse of the Great Plains and the West as they were understood by the Native inhabitants.

The map was used at the Treaty of Fort Laramie, and government officials agreed to respect Tribal sovereignty in exchange for the construction of key forts that would help to protect migrants along the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails. This treaty recognized the legitimacy of Indigenous land claims, undermining Gilpin’s vision of the Great Plains as

Yet only two years after the Treaty of Fort Laramie was signed, its promises began to evaporate.

the future of American settlement. Yet only two years after the Treaty of Fort Laramie was signed, its promises began to evaporate.

In 1853, the senior senator from Illinois, Democrat Stephen Douglas, announced that “the Indian barrier must be removed.” Douglas was particularly keen to develop a transcontinental railroad route through Chicago, benefitting his home state of Illinois. To do this, however, required organizing the lands of the plains into territories for white settlement, a goal entirely at odds with the Treaty of Fort Laramie. Writing to a convention of voters who shared his outlook, Douglas wrote that “[t]he tide of emigration and civilization must be permitted to roll onward until it rushes through the passes of the mountains,

and spreads over the plains, and mingles with the waters of the Pacific.”

Just weeks after the writing of this letter, Democrats in Congress introduced a bill to organize the enormous remaining lands of the Louisiana Purchase into two new territories, named Kansas and Nebraska. At the last minute, Douglas added a small amendment that would enable the settlers of these new territories to determine the future of slavery. Such legislation was shocking, for it overturned the Missouri Compromise.

In 1820, slavery had been banned in all remaining lands of the Louisiana Purchase north of the “36 30 line” save Missouri. For the next thirty-four years, there had been no question that these lands—generally regarded as Permanent Indian Territory—would be closed to slavery. Now, because Douglas was courting favor with southern Democrats to advance his political ambitions and his plans for a transcontinental route through Chicago, he made it possible for slavery to expand far past its established limits. He reversed established law that contained slavery, unleashing tremendous anger across the northern states.

The result was a political firestorm that transformed the two-party system. Once Congress passed the bill in May 1854, disaffected Whigs and Democrats alike gathered to form a new “Republican Party,” dedicated to the belief that Congress had not only the right but the obligation to ban slavery from the territories. And because many had been exposed to new ideas about the interior West—that this “prairie” was a place of economic potential and white settlement rather than a barren “desert”—the threat of slavery moving north onto the plains became very real indeed. One leading anti-slavery newspaper in New York railed against Douglas’s legislation by painting the plains as “the Central Kingdom” of the nation. As the editors wrote, “if the reports of those who have explored it be true, it only needs the hand of civilization to make it also the Flowery Land.” Lincoln himself similarly worried about the potential of slavery



William Gilpin, *Gilpin's Hydrographic Map of North America*, about 1848.

From 1843 to 1849, Gilpin made good on his promise to explore the West by joining several of John Fremont's expeditions. That experience gave Gilpin firsthand experience to write forcefully in favor of western development. Most Americans in this era were riveted on the Far West, from the Oregon Country down through the new gold discoveries in California. But for Gilpin, there were riches to be had from the interior, whether extracted from the wealth of the Rocky Mountains or the prairie of the plains. As the United States concluded the war against Mexico in 1848, Gilpin published this "hydrographic" map to make his case. Here he divides North America into drainage regions, showing that the largest of these is the Mississippi Valley. With the nation now extending to the Pacific Coast, Gilpin argued, the interior was both the geographic and economic heart of the country. An outermost circle unites Boston, San Francisco, and Mexico City, while an inner ring highlights the natural drainage basin that unites the massive land mass at the geographic center of the United States. The army institutionalized this geographic "center" with the 1852 founding of Fort Riley at the confluence of the Smoky Hill and Republican Rivers. Gilpin noted the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails, and forcefully argued for the development of these routes to stitch the nation together. His claim was clear: The center of the continent was not just its largest hydrographic region, but a place of immense economic potential that would also integrate the far reaches of East and West. Map courtesy of the Newberry Library

to spread northward onto the plains, for a mere “glance at the map” showed that climate was no barrier to slavery. As another Republican wrote, once Kansas was lost to slavery, the free states would also “lose not only the Indian Territory lying to the south of it, but those vast territories stretching to the westward.”

The crisis in Kansas drove the Republicans’ first political campaign in 1856, in which they nominated John Fremont to demand a West free of slavery. Though they lost the election, in the process they moved anti-slavery sentiment from the abolitionist margins to the center of American politics. The Republicans opposed the spread of slavery in the West, and this message resonated among northerners who might not otherwise have concerned themselves with the issue of slavery. In other words, the Kansas-Nebraska Act substantially broadened the anti-slavery coalition, and placed the interior at the center of political conversations about the nation’s future. Little wonder, then, that the Republican Party used maps extensively in its 1856 presidential campaign.

This political crisis is relevant in two ways. First, the subsequent opening of Kansas for settlement in 1855 immediately became mired in violence over slavery, which effectively deterred Congress from organizing any new territories. Second, it was in this moment of extreme sectional polarization that credible rumors of gold began to emerge from the far western edge of the Kansas Territory. In the spring of 1859, tens of thousands of men—driven by dreams of easy gain amidst an economic crisis in the late 1850s—streamed across the plains to seek their fortune along the Cherry Creek and the Platte River.

Prior to these mineral discoveries, Americans had paid little attention to the area that would become Denver, for it provided no easy path through the Rocky Mountains. Moreover, it was home to Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians, and had been formalized as such by the Treaty of Fort Laramie less than a decade earlier. These factors generated significant

confusion about the actual geography of the gold fields, readily apparent on contemporary maps.

Consider the name given to the event itself: the “Pikes Peak” gold fields invokes a mountain that is nowhere near the initial discoveries of gold. This confusion extended to the larger geography as well, for few Americans had traveled along any routes to the area that would become Denver. The result was a cottage industry of guidebooks published to aid the migrants, each claiming to represent the points of departure and routes across the plains. These guides included maps that were a mix of naivete, aspiration, information, and misinformation, designed to promote competing points of departure such as St. Louis, Omaha, or Kansas City. Most were hurriedly

Prior to these mineral discoveries, Americans had paid little attention to the area that would become Denver, for it provided no easy path through the Rocky Mountains.

printed in 1859 to feed the enormous demand that spring.

The Gold Rush birthed the town of Denver, and soon after miners were streaming into the high country. Mining settlements seemed to spring up everywhere. But the relationship of these instant settlements to the Kansas Territory was fragile at best, for hundreds of miles separated the mines from the settlements in eastern Kansas. By early 1860, many began to fear that these unstable new settlements at the western edge of the territory might become the center of power.

In February 1860 the Kansas Legislature responded by proposing

a state constitution that detached the mining regions and the city of Denver. Kansas would not be admitted to the Union for another year—yet another casualty of the ongoing crisis over slavery—but this proposed constitution established its boundaries and effectively orphaned the gold fields. The discoveries of gold had fulfilled William Gilpin’s longstanding predictions that the interior West would become the center of a new “empire of mountain and plain.” As new mines opened throughout the Rockies, the demand for governance only increased, yet any plan for a new territory remained constrained by the sectional crisis and competing demands of the settlers themselves.

THE CREATION OF SLAVERY

Amid these deadlocks, in November 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected the nation’s first Republican President, without electoral support from a single slave state. South Carolina rejected the outcome of the election and seceded from the Union just before Christmas. As the states of the Deep South followed in January, their representatives in Congress also left Washington, DC. As a result, the Republicans now enjoyed a majority in the House, and an effective majority in a diminished Senate. The Senate swiftly approved the Kansas constitution, admitting it as a free state by the end of that month. A few days later, Republican Senator Ben Wade revived the effort to organize the Colorado Territory (initially named “Idaho”), which passed with little debate; bills to organize two additional territories in Nevada and Dakota soon followed.

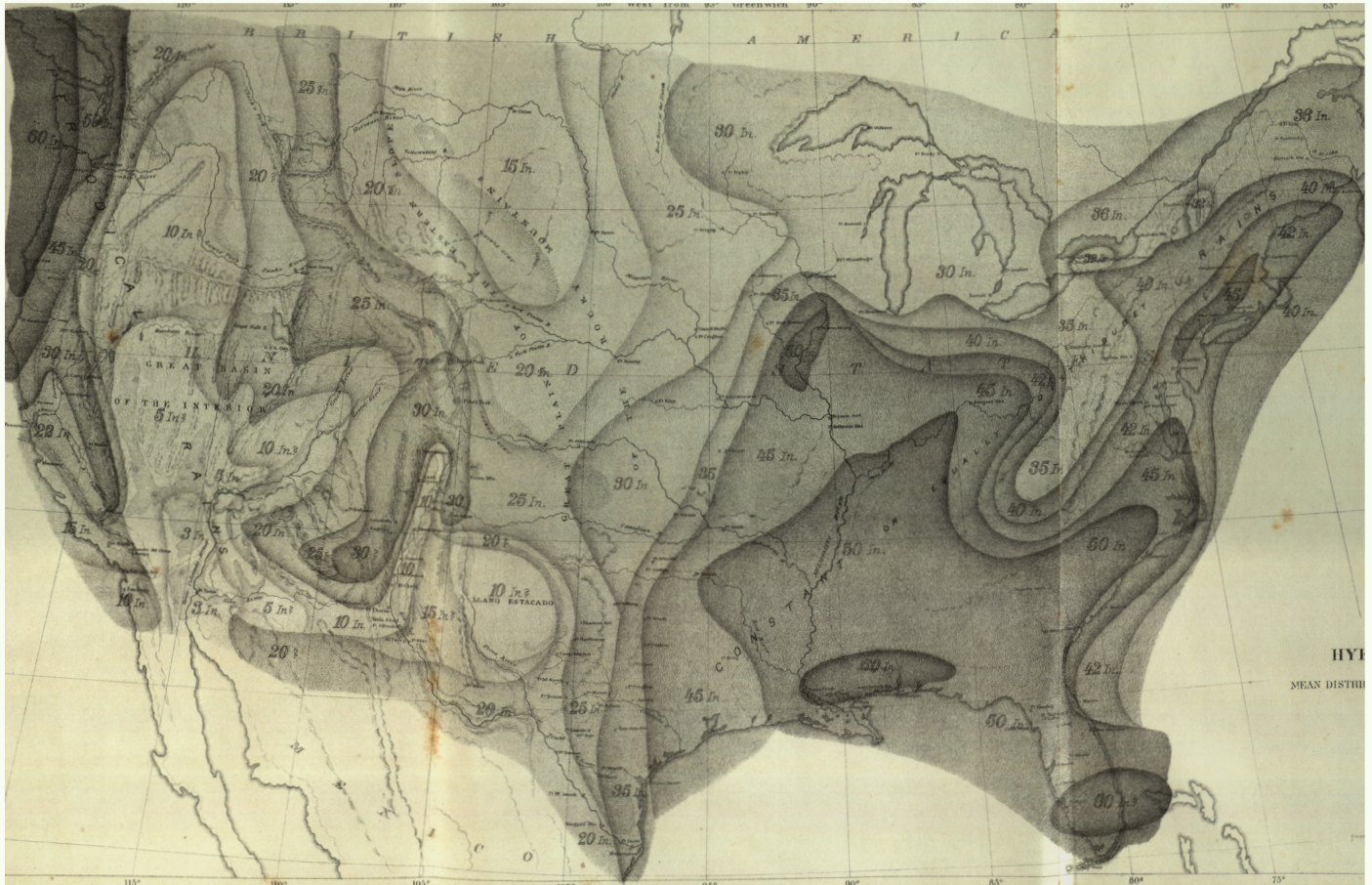
The boundaries and laws of this new Colorado Territory were deeply contested in ways that reflect the crisis engulfing the nation. The territory was carved out of eastern Utah, northern New Mexico, western Kansas, and western Nebraska. The southern border was the most contested, for it appropriated a population with deep ties to New Mexico, and more recently to the Democratic Party.

The status of slavery in the territory was similarly charged, for while Republicans sought to ban slavery in the territory, they also downplayed the issue in the hopes of slowing the momentum of secession. Both of these issues were far overshadowed by the catastrophic implosion of the Union. President Buchanan signed the bill organizing Colorado Territory on February 28, just days before Lincoln was inaugurated.

From 1861 to 1865, the Lincoln

Administration appointed secretaries, judges, Indian agents, marshals, surveyors, and of course governors to these western territories. Among these was William Gilpin, who earned his appointment as Colorado's first territorial governor through his longstanding promotion of the interior West as well as his support for the Republican Party in Missouri. President Lincoln gave little thought to the appointment in April, for he was

consumed by the worsening situation at Fort Sumter and the looming prospect of civil war. But by appointing Gilpin, Lincoln implicitly endorsed the former's vision for western development which was reinforced by Republican measures during the war. In June 1862, Congress abolished slavery in the territories, and soon thereafter passed landmark legislation shaping the vision of the West in the Homestead Act and the Pacific Railway Act.



Lorin Blodget, *Hyetal or Rain Chart...for the year, 1855.*

Gilpin's increasingly ambitious claims about the economic potential of the plains and the Rocky Mountains were somewhat reinforced by the growth of environmental knowledge about the interior. In 1855, the Army Surgeon General's Office published a series of groundbreaking maps of temperature and rainfall that began to open up discussions of the West. These maps were among the first to show patterns of seasonal rainfall and temperature, based on decades of collected data. While many of the rainfall maps confirmed the assumptions about aridity throughout the region, they also introduced a degree of nuance. And it is here we find the first use of the phrase "Great Plains."

Notice also the use of shading to indicate varied levels of rainfall. In this respect, the maps of rainfall and climate introduced at the same time gave Americans a sense of what was often absent from maps: the unseen environment. A map as complex as this showed that geographically proximate areas might have distinct climates, while distant regions might share important environmental dynamics. In turn, maps such as this disrupted the blanket characterization of a "Great Desert," and gave fuel to boosters such as Gilpin. But notice also that this map evades much of human geography. Topography and river systems are clearly marked, but state boundaries and Indigenous peoples are not. Map courtesy of Penrose Library, University of Denver

MAPS REVEAL MORE THAN GEOGRAPHY

No single factor explains the creation of the Colorado Territory. Though the gold rush remains the most consequential, it cannot be understood apart from the larger context. Without the optimistic reassessments of the plains and Rockies prompted by Gilpin and others in the 1840s, the end of the gold rush might have left little trace of settlement in this semi-arid region. And without the secession crisis that followed Lincoln's election, Republicans would neither have been able to admit

Kansas as a free state or organize the territories of Colorado, Dakota, and Nevada. Ironically, the breakdown of the Union made the creation of these territories possible, showing a nation that was simultaneously shrinking in the South and growing in the West. The Colorado Territory emerged from a political crisis, the discovery of mineral wealth, and the rise of a more optimistic view of the region's economic potential.

And as these maps document, what passes for geographical knowledge is always a complicated mix of fact and fiction. By recording hopes as well as fears, firsthand experience as well as rumor and

aspiration, these maps remain rich sources for understanding our shared history. They capture moments in time, and remind us of how dramatically American perceptions of the interior shifted as the nation expanded westward. 

Dr. Susan Schulten serves as Colorado's State Historian in its 150th year. A nationally recognized scholar of the American Civil War, the presidency, and the historical intersection of history and cartography, she is Distinguished University Professor of History at the University of Denver, where she has taught since 1996.



Map... Showing Pike's Peak and the Newly Discovered Gold Fields, about 1859.

In the fall of 1858, the nation remained polarized over slavery. As Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas debated the future of slavery in the territories, rumors of gold on the far edge of the Kansas Territory began to circulate. The following spring, as many as one hundred thousand men migrated across the plains to seek their fortune at the confluence of the Cherry Creek and the Platte River. The gold rush created enormous demand for maps and gave surplus copies of the Republican campaign broadside a second life. The political marginalia were removed, and then the map was inked with the competing routes to the gold fields along the Republican and Arkansas Rivers.

Notice that these mimicked Fremont's 1854 expedition routes, which the Republican Party had used in its 1856 campaign to claim the west as a place free of slavery. The map was then folded into a compact size for ease of carrying across the plains and packaged with a cover that advertised it as showing the correct routes and necessary gear for the journey. It survives in a fragile state, reminding us that the Colorado Territory emerged from the discovery of gold and silver against the backdrop of a political crisis. Map courtesy of Barry Lawrence Ruderman and Antique Maps



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Straight Lines, Broken Histories: Reconsidering Colorado's Starting Point

How does our sense of the state today change when we embrace a deeper history?

BY NICK SAENZ

Colorado before it got that name was a place of possibility—one in which many horizons beckoned. Diverse empires, homelands, and nation-states envisioned different trajectories for the place now considered Colorado, and had been doing so for centuries before it became a state in 1876. In fact, it was only very late in this statehood process that Colorado emerged as a unitary idea, defining both a place and a community with a shared identity and government.

It took many years for that idea to gain traction. Indeed, several abortive attempts at territorial formation preceded the creation of the Colorado Territory in 1861 (see Katherine Mercier's article in this issue for more). Place names like Colona, Idaho, Jefferson, and Osage predated statehood in 1876. By contrast, New Mexico appeared on maps and existed as a social construct for more than 300 years prior to its own statehood in 1912—sixty-four of those years as a US

Territory. The comparative suddenness of the fifteen-year process of Colorado's statehood served as an abrupt endnote to a long history of cultural, social, and regional transformation.

But what happens to our perception of this place when we move its starting point backwards in time? Colorado is, after all, a place with many origin stories, where tumultuous historical events have meant that some of its oldest inhabitants have struggled to find a place for themselves.

IT DIDN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY

Many years after Colorado statehood, geologist John Wesley Powell, then director of the US Geological Survey, ignored the borders of the new state altogether in a well-known map published within a 1891 agency report. For a number of years, Powell had challenged US settlement strategy then actively underway in the American West. In Powell's estimation, the region west of the 100th Meridian was simply too dry to support large population centers. He rather boldly offered instead a vision for the western United States built on small scale communities living within their means and an organizational framework for political boundaries centered on watersheds. In his reasoning, a limited water supply in the West called for a sustainable pattern of settlement that could support the long-term development of the region. In support of his argument, Powell produced a technicolor representation that ran counter to what became hardened contours of territorial and state boundaries.



A waterfall among the canyonlands of the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness in western Colorado. While the expedition never actually traveled through the wilderness area now named after Fr. Domínguez, this kind of varied and colorful terrain is what the Spanish encountered and mapped during their 1776 expedition. Photo by John Fielder, 1991. John Fielder's Colorado Collection. History Colorado, 2023.1.515

Powell's thinking was rooted in something more than mere fanciful imagination. As historian Derek Everett has suggested, "Westerners with their perennial concerns about water rights could see the appeal of a political community organized around a drainage area." Powell's vision, nevertheless, ignored a political geography already in place and in any event was poorly suited to the West's development as it unfolded in his time. It lacked any hope of reshaping policy and would have no effect on the shape of Colorado. Changing the boundaries of the state would have disrupted firmly entrenched power structures and the maturation of business enterprises already underway.

Powell's exercise in seeking to align human settlement patterns with the rather austere geology and climate of western North America serves as a point of departure for thinking about the idea of Colorado as a geographic entity. There was nothing natural in the designation of the state's political boundaries, "straight-line conveniences" according to geographer William Wyckoff. They were, at their core, products of the political context of the US Civil War and a necessity to bring monied interests and the persons working the gold fields into the fold of the Union cause. Like the straightness of Roman roads in antiquity, the US Congress's forceful scratching of broad ink strokes across the western landscape was a kind of imperial gesture, an act meant to convey control more so than the reasoned application of astute political administration and the exercise of justice.

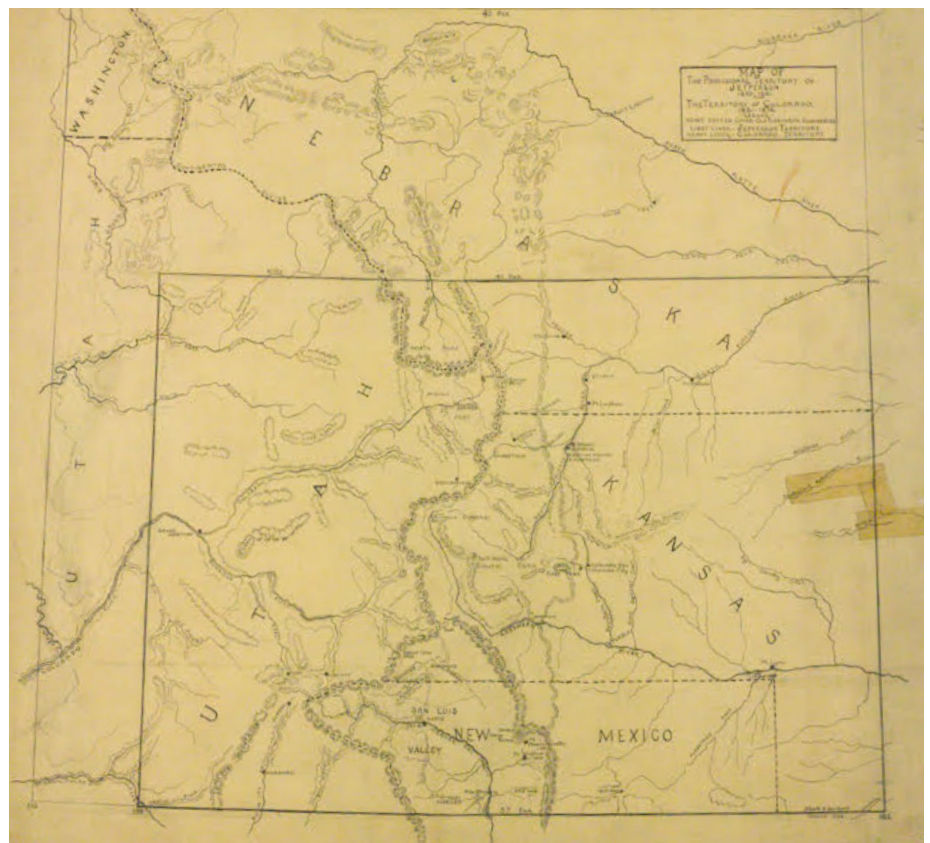
Surveyors struggled to demarcate the lines established by Congress on the land itself, limited by the technology of their day and the curvature of the earth. For this reason, Colorado is not a perfect rectangle but rather a hexahectaenneacontakaiheptagon, or 697-sided polygon. At a bird's-eye view, the borders of the state take the form of a jagged slash; a cartographer's hand reduces the disorder encountered by surveyors into well-ordered and neat

lines enclosing a tidy quadrilateral. The simplicity of this shape obscures the geological considerations foremost in Powell's mind and the history of the peoples who resided there and the environmental considerations that ordered their settlement, movement, and survival. The imposition of these borders disrupted legacies and lifeways and split entire communities. In this respect, the very idea of early Colorado was extremely disruptive.

HOMELANDS AND EMPIRES

Before the era of America's westward expansion, a host of Native and non-Native peoples envisioned Colorados of their own. Although the Ute were the dominant group occupying the mountains in what would become Colorado, other Indigenous communities also called the region home. At the start of the eighteenth century, sedentary communities of the Jicarilla Apache farmed along the banks of the Arkansas River and its tributaries. Clusters of

thirty or forty Apaches farmed streams separated by anywhere from four to ten miles. Puebloan and Diné (Navajo) people continued to visit the headwaters of the San Juan River and Río Grande to access essential resources and conduct sacred rites. For Pueblo communities, their ties to the land were spiritual and ancestral, linked to stories of creation and migration from the lands that today figure as part of southwestern Colorado. In the case of the Diné people, the sacred summits of Blanca Peak and Hesperus Mountain served to orient an environmental connection that was spiritual as well as practical—the region provided access to good pastureland for sheep. Further to the east and north, the Pawnees, Kiowas, and other Plains peoples inhabited open grasslands. Colorado in this period was a plural space composed of intersecting Indigenous communities whose connection to the land was tied to its ability to offer sustenance, protection, and deep spiritual meaning.



Map of the Provisional Territory of Jefferson. This proposed territory was never recognized by Congress, and was supplanted in 1861 by the establishment of the Colorado Territory. History Colorado, G4310 1859-1876 .S2



A map titled *Plano Geografico de la tierra descubierta* (*Geographic Map of the Discovered Land*) by Bernardo de Miera y Pacheco, detailing the cartographer's proposal for Spanish settlement of the western slope of the Rocky Mountains. Courtesy of Army Central Geographic Map Library, National Geographic Institute of Spain, Ar.J.T.2-C.1a-93

The preponderance of Ute bands between the southern (thirty-seventh parallel) and northern (forty-first parallel) latitudes of present-day Colorado offer a compelling case for considering them as the progenitors of the eventual state. Their spatial connection to this early range of Colorado was linked to the natural environment and seasonal cycles of movement built from the resources found at differing terrain within the Rocky Mountains. Their homelands embodied a territorial consciousness that other empires recognized. In 1694, New Mexico's governor, Diego de Vargas, was briefly forced across the present Colorado-New Mexico border, as he put it, "toward the land of the Utes." The emergence of a trade in Native captives made the Ute a powerful force in the region and compelled fear in some quarters, particularly among the Paiute and Shoshone who bore the brunt of

Ute raiding in this regard. Although the Ute bands did not control the region absolutely, their engagements with neighboring tribes conveyed a sense of territorial possession.

Once ransomed in Spanish New Mexico, these captives were typically baptized and indentured to prominent families. The descendants of this trade in human beings became a separate caste known as the *genízaros*. They were ineligible to live among the *pueblos* and often scorned by persons of Hispanic ancestry. In time, they settled the remote outposts of the kingdom of New Mexico, including towns like Santo Tomás de Abiquiú and Rancho de Taos. Later generations of *genízaros* would find themselves in the vanguard of settlement in the future Colorado.

From the south, the Spanish increasingly looked to the land north of New Mexico for its potential to

yield new opportunities for resource extraction and the conversion of souls. From the east, the expansion of the French trading complex between the Great Lakes to New Orleans turned its horizons westward. The Pueblo Revolt of 1680 briefly ousted the Spanish from the Río Grande, but divided loyalties and increasing raiding by nomadic groups stymied the emergence of a new stable political order. By the mid-1690s, the Spanish had reasserted their political influence over the fractious *pueblos* of New Mexico. Much of Colorado would remain out of reach for the Spanish. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the Spanish were cautious of disrupting a tacit peace with the Ute. Successive campaigns were launched into the Great Plains to compel the return of Puebloans who fled New Mexico during the turbulence of the previous decades. In 1706, Juan de Ulibarri led one such

campaign along the Arkansas River to an Apachean settlement known as El Cuartelejo located in present-day Kansas. Over the next several years, the Spanish visited the region regularly.

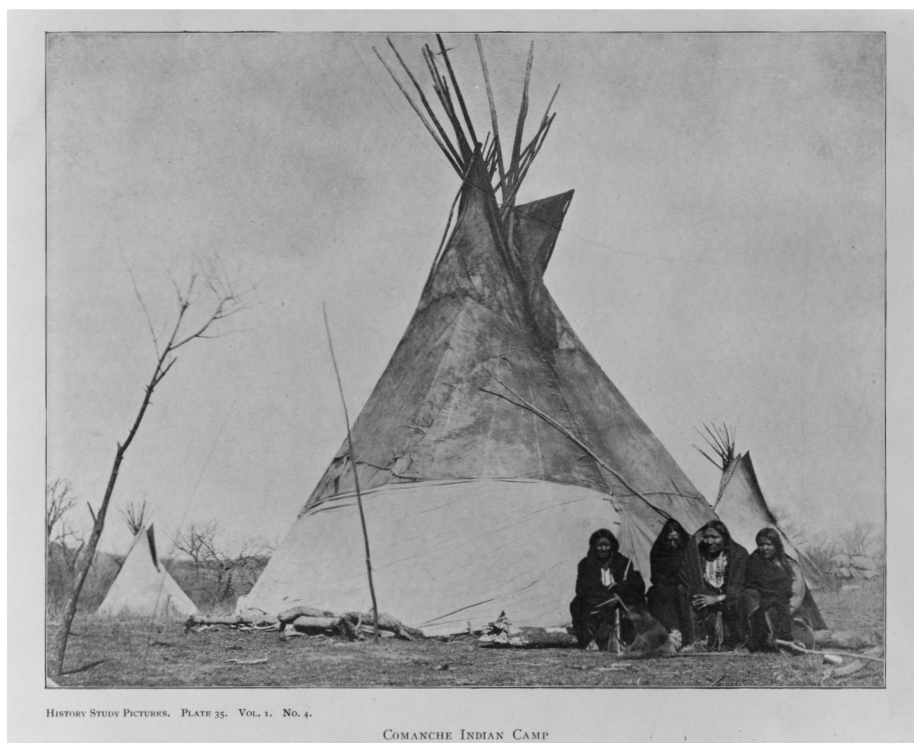
Reports of French activity emerged in 1719. One year later, the campaign of Pedro de Villasur suffered an attack from Pawnees supplied with French arms. The defeat triggered paranoia of French expansion into the region aided by Indigenous allies. The concern was short lived, for the French favored a Colorado that was integrated into a mercantile empire in place of a military one. The arrival of the expedition led by brothers Pierre and Paul Mallett at Santa Fe in 1739 caused a great stir. The men made use of the Arkansas River and Native guides to reach Spanish New Mexico. Although Spanish authorities were not open to trade, the French governor of Louisiana, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, considered their feat “a very important factor for the colony.”

The Comanche later became the dominant force in trade across the

Great Plains. The rapid expansion of the Comanche also altered the situation of the Ute during the middle part of the eighteenth century. The precise origins of the Comanche are hard to date, but likely date to the end of the seventeenth century. A hasty Spanish retreat from New Mexico in 1680 led to a mass trade in horses. Those Shoshone who adapted to the equestrian lifestyle moved into the Great Plains, becoming a distinct Tribe. Driven by a need to acquire horses to fuel their growing equestrian empire, the Comanche moved rapidly southward aided by their linguistic cousins, the Ute, who likely introduced them to Taos, then a major center of trade and a source of horses. Their arrival displaced neighboring Indigenous communities, some of whom were incorporated directly into the emerging fold of a diverse Comanche society that grew in consequence of absorption as much as conquest. The taking of captives was central to the sizable growth of Comanche numbers, and created a society that was, in effect, assimilationist at its core.

The expanding borders of the Comanche Empire—to borrow a phrasing made popular by Finnish scholar Pekka Hämäläinen—were perhaps most disruptive to the Apache. Spanish accounts reference the arrival of Apache refugees streaming into New Mexico in 1717. Traveling through present-day Colorado in 1719, the Spanish governor of New Mexico, Antonio Valverde y Cosío, heard a series of tragic accounts offered by the Carlana Apache who complained that “their enemies, the Comanches, were persecuting and killing their kinsmen.” The matter was all but settled in 1724 following a long battle at an indefinite location referenced as the Gran Sierra del Fierro (Great Mountain of Iron). The Apache loss there marked the early end of one idea of Colorado, as the Tribe fled south and westward over the Sangre de Cristo Range. There they came to forge an alliance with the Ute, former allies of the Comanche, some of whom similarly were forced out of their ancestral homeland. In their meetings with Ute leaders in 1776, the Franciscan friars Francisco Atanasio Domínguez and Silvestre Vélez de Escalante were repeatedly warned of the threat posed by the Comanche who were then bearing down on the region north of the Colorado River.

The Comanche Empire posed an impediment to the expansion of the Spanish Empire in North America. The effect was a case of reverse colonialism in which Europeans were forced into retreat. The Comanche relegated Spanish New Mexico into a virtual satellite as a source of horses to fuel its commercial ambitions. It likewise presented a challenge to the westward penetration of French and Spanish traders operating out of Louisiana and Texas. The emergence of Comanchería, as the lands controlled by the several Comanche bands became known, was not the only instance of Indigenous power exercised against Europeans in the Americas. For Colorado’s purposes, it was the most influential.



A Comanche lodge in an unknown location, around the 1890s. The Indigenous peoples of the Plains have a very different concept of territory, borders, and land use than Euro-Americans, which has informed relationships between the Tribes and non-Native governments since contact. Photo by William S. Soule, around the 1890s. Courtesy of Library of Congress, 00650194

Not a state in a Western sense with power bounded unitarily in a sovereign authority, the Comanche system of power was decentralized into a series of bands that, operating together, fostered the development of an impressive trade system reaching from the prairies of Colorado across the Great Plains to the forested lands abutting the Mississippi River. There is some suggestion that the Comanche leader Cuerno Verde (Greenhorn) pushed Comanchería toward rule by a single political authority during the 1770s, when a sudden decline in rainfall triggered a loss of grass that in turn led to dwindling bison herds. He succumbed to defeat near the future site of Colorado City at the hands of a combined Spanish and Pueblo campaign aided by the Ute and Jicarilla Apache in 1779. In 1786, the Spanish and Ute entered into a prolonged period of peace with the Comanche who were brought to the negotiating table by a calamitous drought and a virulent smallpox epidemic that cut their numbers substantially. Those agreements stabilized the borders of Comanchería, stalling further expansion into Spanish New Mexico and the historic domain of the Ute. The draw of hunting and raiding grounds in the south coupled with the arrival of the Cheyenne and Arapaho in the north pressed the boundaries of Comanchería deeper into Texas and eventually Mexico. By the middle years of the nineteenth century, a new Indigenous imperial power emerged in the north with the consolidation of Lakota supremacy over the northern Great Plains.

In the late years of the eighteenth century, the Spanish flirted with expansion into the intermountainous West more intentionally than the Great Plains. At the end of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), Louisiana was transferred to Spanish control thereby placing all of the future state of Colorado under Spanish rule—at least in European eyes. The 1765 appearance of silver at a Taos trade fair initiated a sudden flurry of interest in the land north of the San Juan

River. Expeditions led by Juan María Antonio de Rivera into the Western Slope later in the year sought to locate a Ute man named Cuero de Lobo, or Wolf Skin, reputed to know the location of a silver deposit. Although the Rivera expeditions failed to find silver, they opened Spanish eyes to the potential for greater trade with the Ute and other drivers of expansion. Some of the men who accompanied Rivera also took part in the expeditions led by the Franciscans in 1776 and Spanish Governor Juan Bautista de Anza in 1779.



The statues on the southern pedestal of *This Is the Place*, a monument in Salt Lake City commemorating the early exploration and eventual settlement of what is now Utah by Euro-Americans, depict the Dominguez and Escalante expedition. Fred M. Mazulla Collection. History Colorado, 2022.57.1907

Among the members of the Domínguez-Escalante Expedition, only Bernardo de Miera y Pacheco's vision of Spanish expansion into the Colorado Plateau has survived in any detail. A cartographer, he produced maps of present-day Colorado with Indigenous homelands clearly inscribed in place of a vast wash of Spanish territory. The sexagenarian articulated an elaborate settlement plan in a letter he wrote to King Carlos III in 1777. Historians have speculated why the aging cartographer

wrote the monarch directly. Omitting the friars, he may have been the only literate member of the ten-man expedition. He wrote the letter as an individual, however, and perhaps sought to advance his own prospects to take a role in the opportunities presented by a forthcoming settlement scheme. He appealed for the establishment of three presidios, or military outposts; one in the Four Corners region, near present-day Durango was intended to control the lands along the San Juan River extending into the nearby La Plata and San Juan Ranges. Miera y Pacheco's imaginary settlement never took shape—another would-be idea of Colorado. Had it materialized, Spain's presence on the Western Slope could have been a good deal greater than it ultimately was. Despite many Spanish place names in Colorado, no land grants were established by the Spanish in what would become Colorado. No towns can claim direct descent from Spanish-era settlement. Spain's aid to the Thirteen Colonies and declaration of war on Great Britain in 1779 reoriented priorities toward the Caribbean Sea and the Mississippi River. The fortunes of this war would place the region on a very different trajectory.

GREATER NEW MEXICO AND THE PROLIFERATION OF NEW BORDERS

The end of the Comanche expansion with the peace of 1786 brought stability to Indigenous and New Mexican communities. On the basis of the peace, trade prospered and communities grew closer together. Much of modern Colorado remained part of the Ute homelands despite the disruptions of the middle years of the eighteenth century. Following the independence of Mexico in 1821, the region underwent a series of transformative changes that ended with the forceful arrival of the US Army in 1846. In these years entrepreneurial fur trappers, like the Frenchmen Antoine Leroux and Simon Carat and Maryland-born Jacob Fowler, and traders such as the American brothers Charles and

William Bent and the French-born Ceran St. Vrain began to visit the future state regularly, slowly pulling the Ute homelands into the orbit of an emerging commercial market dominated by Euro-American and Mexican profiteers. Their quiet invasion constituted the fulfillment of earlier French and Spanish visions of Colorado as a space for commerce and extractive opportunity. Whereas the Spanish had historically limited direct trade with the Ute, the virtual absence of restrictions by Mexican authorities and opportune marriages proved encouraging of trappers and traders operating in the region. Their presence furthered new intercultural relations and introduced new economic power dynamics.

Maps of the region produced in these years by American and Mexican mapmakers suggest the absence of Native communities altogether and an idea of the region as theirs for the taking. Unlike the maps produced by Meira y Pacheco in the late 1770s, they present overtly false projections of unrealized ambitions. The borders of Mexico extended north of Colorado's present-day border to the 42nd parallel—a border established between Spain and the United States in the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819—despite the fact that few Mexicans traveled north of Taos. The Ute continued to enjoy virtual autonomy north of the Gunnison River. Mexico inherited much of western North America as previously claimed by the Spanish Empire at the time of its independence, but did not move to settle the land north of the present Colorado-New Mexico border for at least a decade. An 1833 attempt to settle a Mexican land grant west of the Río Grande was forced off the land by Indigenous resistance. Another concerted effort to attempt settlement in San Luis Valley would not follow until the late 1840s. The resources of the Mexican Republic were certainly meager. Local ranchers were still eager to find new pasture land for sheep and began summering in the San Luis Valley. Accounts describe sheep herds numbering in tens of thousands. Deeper and, in the



A group of tourists visiting the Four Corners Monument in 2008. The borders of four states—Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado—meet here in a single place. The isolation of the monument shows clearly how the borders of these states follow no natural boundaries or cultural groups, instead cutting in straight lines through the terrain. Photo by J. Doll. *Four Corners in All Its Glory*, 2008. Wikimedia Commons

end, more consequential inroads into the Ute homelands followed from the establishment of Fort Uncompahgre in 1828 and maturation of the Old Spanish Trail network in the 1830s.

The Santa Fe Trail running between Missouri and New Mexico proved most disruptive. The establishment of Bent's Fort in 1833 and El Pueblo in 1842—both at Mexico's border with the United States on the Arkansas River—contributed to the long-term residence of non-Native traders on the Great Plains and a steady flow of people, goods, and capital into the region. These new arrivals meanwhile stimulated the local economy of New Mexico while presenting something of an uncertainty. The power structures and social makeup of New Mexico was changing, incrementally diminishing the influence of cultural connections to Mexico City and stressing the bonds of nationhood that kept New Mexico tethered to Mexico. The 1837 Chimayó Revolt put New Mexicans at odds with the centralizing tendencies of the regime headed by Mexican President Antonio López de Santa Anna. The defiance of New Mexico cast the future Colorado not as a future Mexican state, but rather

as a hinterland of greater New Mexico.

The Republic of Texas claimed a vast swath of the west beyond the borders of the US state, part of it contained within the modern borders of Colorado. The Republic envisioned a border stretching westward to the Río Grande, inclusive of the then Mexican state capital at Santa Fe. North of Santa Fe, a narrow band of land carried north between the Río Grande and Arkansas River, abruptly cutting northwards from the headwaters of both rivers through the most mountainous portions of the future state. Texas's claim on Colorado remained just that. An invasionary expedition launched in 1841 was forced to surrender many miles short of Santa Fe. Having failed to provision themselves adequately, the Texans were forced into a hasty surrender.

ENTER THE UNITED STATES

The signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848 did not immediately sever the connection of New Mexico to the future Colorado. The 1840s marked a flow of settlers into the San Luis Valley, which remained a part of the New Mexico Territory until 1861. Much has been made of the Hispano identity of the early



A group of Apache men posing with weapons, photographed in 1873. The Apache were one of many peoples who inhabited the land known as Colorado long before Euro-Americans began drawing borders across it. Photo by Lt. George M. Wheeler. History Colorado, 84.192.1591



A group of surveyors posing with their equipment in 1878. Borders were often drawn up by politicians who had little access to information about the land they were dividing up, and only surveyed later by geologists and cartographers who charted details that inhabitants of the region already knew and shaped their lives around. History Colorado, 84.192.688

settlers, stressing in some cases their links to Spanish identity. Twenty-five years of rule by Mexico did not fundamentally alter the identity of New Mexicans in every sense, but association with Spain alone overlooks the Indigenous roots of many of the early settlers, many of whom were drawn from communities like Abiquiú and Ranchos de Taos settled years earlier by *genízaros*. These were people with one foot in the cultural inheritance of Spain and another in the Indigenous world. As they moved northward, the degree of intersection and overlap between northern New Mexico and the Ute homelands necessarily intensified. One early settler in the San Luis Valley, Atanasio Trujillo, pointed to good relations with the Ute, with whom he conversed in their language, as a core feature in the success of settlement in the San Luis Valley. Historian Thomas G. Andrews suggested the Ute may have

agreed to such a concession owing to their interest to build a coalition with New Mexicans, with whom they maintained closer cultural affinities, in the face of increasing competition with Americans. If so, the Ute pivoted to an outlook that sought to preserve the integrity of their ancestral homelands through partnership with a community that was increasingly viewed in similar terms. In effect, the partnership amounted to a vision for the region as a bulwark to American expansionism.

The vision was short-lived, and the Ute-Hispano coalition proved a poor match for the United States. During the 1850s, the US Army actively campaigned against the Ute and Jicarilla Apache in the San Luis Valley. These conflicts took shape as the walls of Fort Massachusetts (1853) went up. By the time of the construction of Fort Garland (1858), the conflict had been resolved to the favor

of the United States. Separate treaties in 1863 and 1868 forced Chief Ouray's Tabeguache band and fellow Ute bands west of the Continental Divide. In the course of these events, some Ute denied their status as Native Americans with the apparent complicity of their Hispano brethren and chose to stay in the valley. They adapted quickly to the imposition of new borders by redefining themselves not as Coloradans but as New Mexicans in ethnic terms.

At the same time, land that had been New Mexico was transferred into the fold of Colorado. For fifteen years after the arrival of US troops in Santa Fe, much of the San Luis Valley and Purgatoire Valley remained politically and culturally part of New Mexico. The settlement of what would become Colorado's oldest communities remained linked to the northward expansion of New Mexico. The Hispano homeland



The Duran family outside their homestead in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in southern Colorado. Many Hispano communities had generations of ties to settlements to the south, such as Santa Fe, Taos, and Albuquerque, but following the creation of the Colorado Territory in 1861 these families suddenly found themselves overseen by an English-speaking government seated in Denver. History Colorado, 2025.128.2

ballooned northward to include lands formerly part of the Ute homelands. The formation of the Colorado Territory disrupted this development, as a piece of land known as the New Mexico “Notch”—extending eastward from the Continental Divide between the 37th and 38th parallels—was transferred from New Mexico Territory to its new northern neighbor.

This sleight of hand served to grant the territory the necessary population that would place it on track to statehood. During the Congressional debate, US Representative Thomas S. Bockock (Virginia) cautioned against the inclusion of the New Mexico Notch within the Colorado Territory, preferring “to sacrifice beauty and grace to right and justice.” Galusha Aaron Grow, the US Representative from Pennsylvania, succeeded in stifling the objections of the New Mexico territorial delegate, Miguel Antonio Otero, and the formation of the Colorado Territory advanced alongside the formation of new territorial boundaries for Dakota and Nevada. Overnight, a generation born as subjects of the Spanish Crown and raised as Mexican citizens experienced another transition from status as New Mexicans to Coloradans. In the San Luis Valley, an invisible line at once severed Taos County in half, separating Colorado’s earliest settlers from their historical and cultural roots to the south. The

resulting reorientation of power to the north meant that these same individuals would lose access to the protections offered by their kin who remained in positions of power at Santa Fe.

In the former Notch, there remained much resistance to the idea of Colorado. Military reports from Fort Garland in the years after the formation of the Colorado Territory suggest antagonism strong enough to warrant a full-blown insurrection as petitioners unsuccessfully lobbied for their return to the New Mexico Territory. Historical observers should likewise read the outbreak of violence tied to the Espinosa brothers in 1863 as an expression of popular

discontent with the presence of the US military installation at Fort Garland. The affair erupted in the context of a wartime effort to inventory resources for requisition. Whereas Anglo contemporaries viewed the men as singling out whites for murder in racial terms, a more complete treatment has hinted at a sort of anticolonial sentiment. Hispanos repeatedly voted against statehood in the 1860s.

For their part, Easterners found the region distant and strange. Journeying to Fort Garland from Denver took several days until the arrival of the railroad in the years that immediately followed statehood. The timelessness and apparent



A Native man riding past the ruins of an adobe church near Taos Pueblo, around 1930. History Colorado, 2022.57.34300

foreignness of the region was not lost on Nathaniel P. Hill who, traveling with former Colorado Territorial Governor William Gilpin—an early speculator in the region—at Culebra (San Luis) in the summer of 1864, claimed to have met a man 101 years old, born in the very home he was then living. “The population is entirely Mexican,” he explained “and the place possesses all the characteristics of the Mexican towns.” Colorado was not to be found in such a space.

On Christmas Day 1867, a brawl in the streets of Trinidad erupted in a major conflict between Hispanos and white newcomers. As one daily issue of the *Rocky Mountain News* reported, “The affair of Christmas seems to have grown into a war of races, in which the Mexicans are opposed to the Anglo Saxon. The strife is bloody enough already, but of its termination no one can predict. We think it is about time the United States officers interfered.” Colorado, it seemed, would have to be imposed from above.

Such a top-down process fit the experience of Native communities. From the vantage of US settlers, Tribal communities posed an obstacle to settlement and the extraction of mineral resources. The massacre of Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples at Sand Creek in 1864 signaled their exclusion from Colorado. Those Tribes were forced to relinquish their reservation in Colorado one year later. Ute lands west of the Continental Divide would be further partitioned and cut down to present size. Major steps in this process followed from the discovery of mineral deposits and public suggestion that the continued existence of Native Americans posed a risk to the safety of white settlers. Following the discovery of gold and silver in the San Juan Range, the Ute were forced to concede the Brunot Agreement in 1873. Following the outbreak of violence linked to the Meeker Incident in 1879, another agreement in the years after statehood led to the relocation of “Northern Utes” across the border with the Utah Territory. The Ute homelands—so long the region’s foremost territorial expression—was

diminished only after statehood. The process of making Colorado necessarily required disrupting an earlier Ute vision of Colorado.

In an ironic twist, the very miners who benefitted from the displacement of the Ute raised the banner of secession in 1877. Such a move was a bold statement in the years after the US Civil War. Not only was such a contradiction lost on the organizers, but the same men also sought to rally a handful of New Mexican counties to their cause. The proponents of statehood for “San Juan” were mostly whites who resented the centralization of decision making across the mountains in Denver. In the course of the ensuing debate, the editors of Pueblo’s *Colorado Chieftain* quipped “There perhaps [are] no two parts of any state in the Union so unnaturally linked together as the country north and south of the divide” marked by the South Platte and Arkansas Basins. Thus, the idea of Colorado remained an unsettled question even after 1876.

TO THE PRESENT

Statehood brought a sense of greater coalescence to the idea of Colorado advanced by Anglo settlers and the United States. Fragmented subregions pulled closer together with each passing year. For generations, the north-south line of intersection between the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains had served as a boundary for successive groups of peoples. Indigenous communities kept to homelands on either side of the Front Range with the San Luis Valley serving as a zone of intense intermixing during the warmer months and virtual abandonment during colder ones. European empires looked to the east and west of this divide; French traders ventured only so far as the sea of grass would carry them and Miera y Pacheco’s hopes were firmly situated in the intermountain West. The settlement of New Mexicans in what would become Colorado and the later penetration of Easterners reversed the pattern of separation between these distinct zones of inhabitation. Farmers in the San Luis

Valley proved vital in supplementing miners with critical foodstuffs, functioning as an emergent breadbasket for the future state. Denver, Golden, and other towns along the Platte River were instrumental to the rise of mining communities and served as staging areas for the distribution of supplies and later sites for smelting operations. The fusion of mountains and plains through railroads and commerce was essential to the emergence of Colorado as it is known today. Connections across the geographic boundaries of the present state were nothing new, but they deepened in the years after 1861 and were plainly visible at the time of statehood. These forces and others since (including roads, communication, and energy infrastructure) have tightened this bond, but have not stymied every centrifugal force.

As the events of 1862 and 1877 suggest, the integrity of the state as a geographic entity has faced challenges since the beginning. The state weathered another movement that tugged at its borders more recently. In 2013, eleven northeastern counties attempted to form a new state of “North Colorado.” The dispute highlighted the intensification of an increasingly partisan rural-urban divide. The idea of Colorado carried through this challenge despite voter support for the measure in Cheyenne, Kit Carson, Phillips, Washington, and Yuma counties. The brushup demonstrates that Colorado is hardly monolithic.

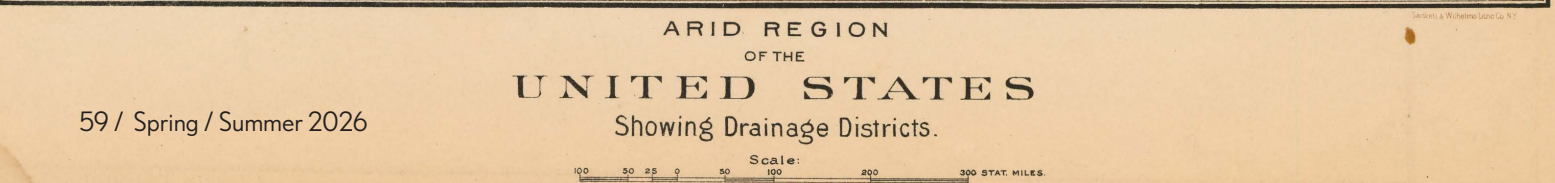
Other regional and cultural identities present themselves across the state. In the San Luis Valley, differing irrigation practices derived from mountain runoff channeled by way of acequias dug by the earliest Hispano settlers coexists with the industrial practice of well-fed sprinklers. On the Western Slope, conservationists spar with private land adherents over the fate of natural resources. In the plains of Eastern Colorado, legacies of struggle and resilience unite the tragedies of Sand Creek, Amache, and the Dustbowl. Front Range towns support a variety of Catholic parishes



Arapaho spiritual leader Little Raven (seated on the far left) and his family posing for a photograph with early Colorado trader William Bent (second from the left), in 1869 at Fort Dodge, Kansas. The men seated on the roof of the adobe building behind them are United States soldiers. Photo by William S. Soule. History Colorado, 89.451.3767



A group of Ute men posing outside of a photography studio in Colorado Springs, wearing a mixture of traditional Ute and Euro-American clothes. This photo was taken in 1875, a year before Colorado gained statehood, just a few years before the Ute Tribes were forcibly removed from Colorado. Photo by B.H. Gurnsey. History Colorado, 84.192.323





A New Map of Texas, Oregon and California, showing the American West before Colorado was carved out from various other territories.
History Colorado, H.976

alongside evangelical megachurches, the stakes of Latter Day Saints, and smaller communities of worship. In Denver, a vibrant immigrant community drawn from every continent offers linguistic diversity to rival other large cities. Within such spaces, individuals and entire communities wrestle with the continuing complexities of a human geography with roots in many instances reaching back to the period before statehood.

Colorado—the legal entity—undeniably turns 150 this year. And yet, given how much farther back in time its peoples' history stretches, that number hardly seems like an adequate starting

point. Examining all of the various plans its people have had for this place rightly asks us to question when that would have been.

Competing visions for the integration of the region into empires, homelands, and nation-states were present from the eighteenth century onwards. These visions pulled the region in different directions. But today, what was so contested at the outset is growing increasingly accepted. Processes of integration and desegregation have created a broader, more inclusive idea of Colorado that can accommodate an earlier starting point. Coloradans

of many backgrounds still confront the contradictions of their geographic inheritance while embracing a richly diverse community of identities. And in this way, they are making this place, known for the last 150 years as Colorado, into an idea much greater than themselves. 🇨🇺

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➤The Many Loves of Katharine Lee Bates:◀

A Story of Nature, Sexuality, and Patriotism in Industrial America

Katharine Lee Bates's deep loves—for nature, for her colleague Katharine Coman, and for her rapidly changing nation—converged in Colorado to create “America the Beautiful,” one of the nation's most enduring patriotic songs.

BY JARED ORSI

THE VIEW FROM PIKES PEAK

In June 1893, Wellesley English professor Katharine Lee Bates headed to Colorado from Massachusetts by train. After stopping briefly to meet her life partner Katharine Coman and take in the World's Fair in Chicago, they continued to Colorado Springs, where they spent what Bates called “an enchanted summer.” One day, they hired a wagon to carry them with some friends to the top of Pikes Peak. With “one ecstatic gaze,” Bates took in “the most glorious scenery I ever beheld.” The view stirred her to write the poem that soon provided the lyrics to “America the Beautiful.”

From atop Pikes Peak, she saw fruited plains—the agricultural hinterlands feeding America's burgeoning cities. She saw spacious skies, unpolluted by factory smoke, and purple mountains comparatively unscarred by logging and mining. These, along with the intrepid pilgrims of stanza two, the martyred soldiers of stanza three, and the alabaster cities of stanza four, were America's treasures. And yet, knowing all this was endangered by industrialization, she prayed for national purification, “may God they gold refine.” In the Centennial State, Bates found a metaphor for the contradictions of industrial America.

When Colorado became a state in 1876, America was on the cusp of industrial take-off. The Centennial State had welcomed three transcontinental railroads, which connected its mines, coal fields, timber reserves, clear healthy air, and ever-popular vacation sites to the rest of the industrializing

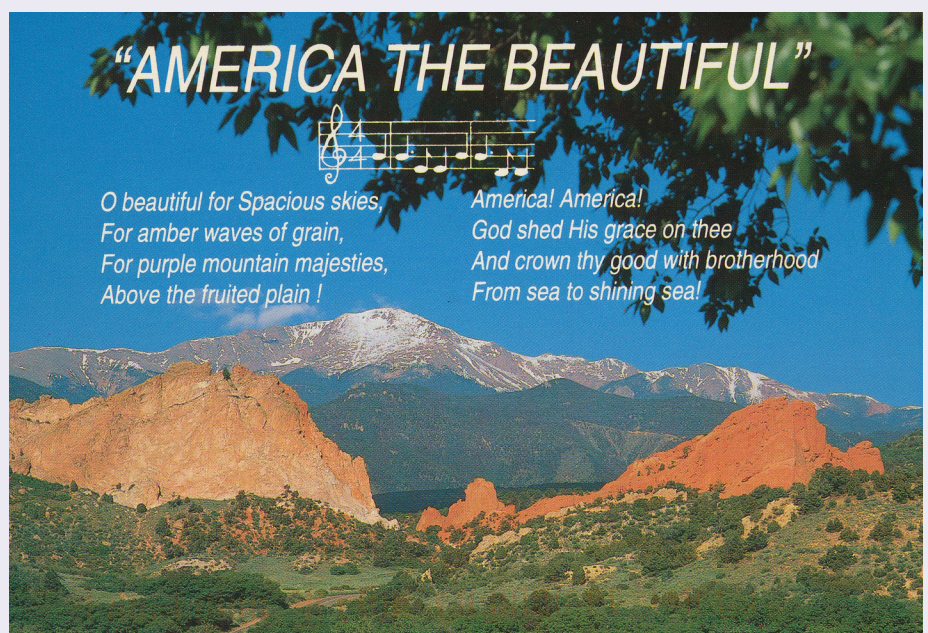
nation. By 1893, Pueblo had earned the moniker “Pittsburgh of the West.” Colorado Springs had become one of the nation's premier tourist destinations. Immigrants flocked from all over the world to dig coal, lay ties, pick crops, and work as domestic servants in the cities. Industrialization also unsettled things. Bates arrived amid the worst economic depression the nation had ever experienced. A few days after ascending Pikes Peak, she visited Cripple Creek, the gold mining town on the mountain's southwestern flanks, soon to erupt in labor violence.

But industrialization encompassed more than union strikes, miles of track, and tons of steel. It was also a social revolution. It changed how Americans lived, worked, and played, their hopes for

their country, even their most intimate relationships. Katharine Lee Bates had many loves: words, nature, and beauty. She loved America—deeply. Most of all, she loved Katharine Coman, her colleague and lifelong companion. Bates's personal story and the nation's larger industrialization met on a mountaintop in Colorado. Bates's experiences with her partner in Colorado in 1893 inspired an anthem that resonated with Americans in the midst of industrial and social transformation.

A LITTLE RED DIARY

In the summer of 1859, gold fever swept the nation. Argonauts painted “Pikes Peak or Bust” on their wagons and crossed the Great Plains to Colorado. Meanwhile, in Falmouth, Massachusetts,



A picture postcard of Pikes Peak featuring the title and opening lines of Bates's “America the Beautiful.”
History Colorado, 2006.90.46



A view of Pikes Peak from Colorado Springs, photographed by William Henry Jackson in the 1880s. History Colorado, 86.200.2003



Pikes Peak Cog Engine No. 4 pushing a passenger car up a hill overlooking Shady Springs, on the way to the Pikes Peak summit. History Colorado, 2022.57.12921

Cornelia Bates gave birth to her fourth and final child. Her husband, William Bates, was the pastor of the town's Congregationalist church—a community that during the Civil War would raise more than a thousand dollars, plus six barrels of clothing and other supplies for Union soldiers and formerly enslaved people. Katharine Lee, or Katie, as the family called the child, grew up in the sleepy Cape Cod agricultural and fishing village of 2,000 people. It was twenty miles (a full day's journey) to the nearest railroad. But Katie's life would trace the

contours of the industrialization that transformed America.

More than eighty percent of Americans lived in rural areas when Katie was born. Until the late nineteenth century, most Americans encountered nature through the hard, physical work of agricultural labor. They cleared forests, ploughed land, planted, weeded, and harvested, slopped pigs, boiled fat, shoveled manure, and plucked chickens. Families like the Bateses were primarily economic units formed to meet members' material needs.

Everyone in the pre-industrial family worked—and not usually for wages. Men worked in the fields and tended livestock. Women engaged in domestic production, processing food, sewing clothing, and making soap, candles, and other goods for sale. Children, who provided extra hands to help with all these tasks, were essential economic assets. The basic purpose of this family unit was to support a household and to reproduce workers who would help the family work the land, and who in turn, would grow up to reproduce more laborers of their own. In rural areas, it was very difficult to make a living outside of this family structure. All members of the family unit worked; otherwise, they didn't eat.

Disaster struck the Bates family a month after Katie was born. William Bates died of cancer, leaving Cornelia with, as Katharine described in her autobiography, "the slightest material resources and with four young children." To make ends meet, Cornelia gardened, raised chickens, and sold the eggs and produce. She took in sewing, and her sons Sam and Arthur picked berries, drove cattle, fished, and hunted in the woods. The village "practiced a neighborly socialism without ever having heard of it." As Katharine later recalled, these kindnesses helped sustain the family for a while. But without two adult laborers in the family, it was never enough. Cornelia's sister was ill and needed care, but she did have some space for the family. So Cornelia did what countless unmarried rural women before her had done. She moved in with relatives.

The industrial revolution was well underway in New England, however, changing the way people made their living and thus their family structures and relationships with the land. New kinds of jobs were available—manufacturing, retail, service, management, and finance. These jobs paid wages—money on which single people could not only support themselves but often send home a little extra to help out parents and younger siblings. Katie's oldest brother, Arthur,

clerked for an insurance company in Boston. Sam found work in an organ factory. Sister Jeannie taught school. Together they earned enough to keep Katie in school through senior high and pay for her tuition to start Wellesley College in 1876. By the 1870s, for the first time in American history, large numbers of single people could support themselves outside of heterosexual family units. Katie would be among the first beneficiaries.

Young Katie's writing gives us some insight into her early loves. Katie was a precocious child, a lover of words and writing, constantly filling the pages of her little red diary with astute observations about the world. She only lived in Falmouth until the age of twelve, but she was a romantic observer of its landscape, noticing and writing about the seasons, woods, marshes, fields, and sea. One story she wrote featured a character who pondered "the beautiful colors around you, dear setting sun," and who wanted to know "how the earth came to be and all about the stars." Already, she was exhibiting the eye for beauty that she would demonstrate throughout her life.

In the same childhood story, she announced her passion for intellectual pursuits: "I would study and study," she wrote, "I would learn all about the nations on the other side of the globe... and I would read the thoughts men wrote hundreds of years ago in strange letters and queer-sounding languages.... I would find out... where the Garden of Eden was, and how my head thinks. I would study and study and study and know and know and know."

Even at nine years old, she perceptively observed gender inequality. Women are "impatient under the restraint men put upon them," she wrote, "so the question of womens [*sic*] rights has arisen. I like women better than men. I like fat women better than lean ones... Girls are a very necessary portion of creation. They are full as necessary as boys." A budding feminist she was, and possibly someone who would grow up to challenge the sexual conventions of the agrarian heterosexual family unit.

WELLESLEY

The 1890s were the fulcrum of Bates's life. She graduated from Wellesley, an all-women's college, in 1880 and spent several years teaching high school. In 1888, her alma mater hired her to be an instructor in the English Department. In this milieu as a beginning faculty member, she began to distinguish herself professionally, met her lifelong partner, and wrote a poem that would make her famous.

At Wellesley, Bates immersed herself in a world of academic achievement and camaraderie with other women. In the



A photo portrait of Katharine Lee Bates, taken in 1886. Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives Image Gallery, wca_2016_10_26_006

decades around the turn of the century, Wellesley counted noted botanists, historians, economists, literary critics, physicists, and philosophers among its faculty, even a future Nobel Peace Prize winner in economist Emily Greene Balch. Women's colleges provided unparalleled intellectual freedom, and Bates found a place where she could "study and study and study and know and know and know" with other curious, ambitious women. Sometime in the late 1880s, Bates met her future romantic partner Katharine Coman, a faculty colleague and a woman destined to be an eminent historian and economist.

Their paths crossed at a historical moment that afforded new opportunities for women to explore their affections for one another. In the pre-industrial agricultural world, single adult men and women had rarely lived alone. Instead, as Cornelia eventually did, they lived with siblings, parents, or other kin. So rare were single people who lived alone that they were often reviled as recluses, old maids, outcasts, or even witches or sorcerers. This also meant that the agrarian family structure was thoroughly heterosexual. To be sure, plenty of people experienced same-sex attractions and pursued them when opportunity availed. But because it was so hard to make a living outside of the heterosexual economic family unit, few managed to build a way of life around such attractions. Although romantic friendships often emerged among women in the early nineteenth century, they were rarely socially or economically viable outside of heterosexual marriage.

By the late nineteenth century, however, the industrial urban areas that provided jobs to Arthur, Sam, and Jeannie, also created possibilities for single women such as the two Katharines. With the rise in professional careers and wage work, women could increasingly support themselves without the income of a husband. Victorian beliefs about women's innate passionlessness and purity allowed women to couple in so-called "Boston Marriages" without raising much public objection. Sometimes, they even won approval. Although records are scant, evidence suggests some of these relationships were romantic.

Even as her relationship with Coman blossomed, Bates also began to make a name for herself. In 1889, she won a prestigious prize for her novel *Rose and Thorn*. Wellesley matched the money, which gave Bates the wherewithal to cross the Atlantic to Oxford University for a year of study. She was excited, though she found the prospect of parting from Coman "heartachy," having "just found the long-desired way to your dearest heart." The sabbatical proved socially and

intellectually engrossing, but landscape and love both tugged at her.

Comparing the English countryside to America's, she later wrote that "the scenery that is most beautiful to me is the scenery to which my eyes are most wonted." New England had a "shyer, more elusive beauty," she concluded. "At Wellesley the woods and waters become revelation. A divinity shines through them." She missed Coman even more. Bates wondered in one letter whether the "English spring can be as beautiful" as a sunset stroll she had taken one evening with Coman when "there were two hands in one pocket." In another letter she promised, "I am coming back to you, my Dearest... You are always in my heart and in my longings. I've been so homesick for you on this side of the ocean... Sweetheart, I always love you, more dearly than you know."

Letters and writings like this seem to leave little room for doubt about the nature of their relationship. And indeed, some segments of LGBTQ communities in the twenty-first century have claimed Bates and Coman as examples of gay contributors to history. Scholar Judith Schwarz made a strong case for that conclusion, citing the language of Bates's letters and poetry and tracing the intertwined threads of the two women's lives.

On the other hand, Melinda M. Ponder, Bates's most recent and most thorough biographer, suggested that Bates welcomed courting from at least two men, whom she ultimately declined to wed partly out of concern that marriage might jeopardize her faculty position at Wellesley. There is also a tantalizing line in Bates's otherwise laconic and unsentimental autobiography written late in her life, in which she observes that one of her early writings, *The Wedding Day*, "did not prove prophetic." Might this brief line be a glimpse into an elder Bates's lament at not having ever married? Perhaps it indicates heterosexuality or flexibility in the objects of her desires. We cannot know.

In addition to the archival ambiguities, there is also the trouble of even defining sex historically. In the face of the inconclusiveness of sources like Bates's autobiography, historian of sexuality Leila J. Rupp has argued that "the problem for historians is that... ways of viewing the sexual world are not universal across time and space." Not all cultures identify the same "categories for types of sexuality... nor do they all even define the same acts as sexual." Thus, relationships that appear sexual to twenty-first-century eyes may not have been considered so in the nineteenth



A photo portrait of Katharine Coman, taken around the 1880s. Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives Image Gallery, wca_2016_10_28_002

century. To apply categories from one time to another is anachronistic. Despite such limitations on what we can know, Rupp cautioned against assuming that all people in the past were heterosexual until definitively proven otherwise. Instead, she suggested that, like today, our predecessors defined and engaged in a variety of sexual activities, while disagreeing on the meaning and social acceptability of those acts.

Even with the difficulty today in pinning down how Bates and Coman understood their relationship, this much is clear. The two women enjoyed a long and loving bond of twenty-five years,

which Bates described as the "friendship which remains my joy and blessing." For both women, the relationship was the main object of their energies and emotional attachments. Whether or not their relationship included sexual intimacy, the historical record is clear that they lived together, worked together, played together, traveled together, tenderly nursed each other in illness, and reveled in each other's health. And they did so for a quarter of a century, until parted by death. All the while, they enjoyed a tender and romantic relationship. After their year apart during Bates's time at Oxford, the next time Bates sojourned from Boston, Coman would accompany her.

ACROSS THE CONTINENT

In 1893, they went off to see America. Bates and Coman were invited as lecturers for the summer at Colorado College in the resort community of Colorado Springs. After visiting Niagara Falls, Bates connected with Coman, who was vacationing in Chicago, and together they attended the World's Columbian Exposition, the so-called "White City" because of the color of its neo-classical buildings. If America had been a debutant, the Chicago World's Fair was her coming-out party. The marvels on display attested that the United States was ready to take its place among the modern nations of the world. Visitors gaped at the industrial contraptions—dynamoes, electric lights, moving pictures, long-distance telephone calls, and the world's first Ferris wheel. One visitor, historian Frederick Jackson Turner, gave an influential academic paper celebrating white settlers' repeated conquest of the "free land" on the frontier as the defining experience in making Americans rugged and democratic. Bates did not attend Turner's academic talk, but she did take in Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West extravaganza, which played daily across the street from the fairgrounds and told a similar story. Through staged battle reenactments in which white and Indigenous historical figures

played themselves, the show inverted Natives into aggressors and settlers into stout defenders. Collectively, the fair's components told a self-congratulatory story of a humble nation's ascent to modernity.

Bates left drunk on America's bright prospects. Reboarding a train, she spent Independence Day speeding across the wheat fields of Kansas, a much quicker, safer, and more comfortable journey than that of the footsore goldseekers who struggled over the Great Plains to Colorado in the year of her birth. The trip stirred in her a "quickened and deepened sense of America." She called Kansas "a thing of beauty," and called herself "a better American for such a Fourth." As she chugged into Colorado Springs, the words almost seemed to be forming in her head, "amber waves" and "fruited plains."

For nearly a month, she and Coman each gave and attended lectures, but they played as well. On July 23, when they packed their picnic baskets and hired the wagon to cart them up to Pikes Peak, they exemplified Americans' growing affinity for outdoor recreation. In 1865, noted landscape architect and a future designer of Chicago's White City, Frederick Law Olmstead, wrote a report on Yosemite Valley in which he declared outdoor recreation to be a fundamental human right. "The contemplation of natural scenes of an impressive character" he wrote, and other activities that promoted people's "health and vigor" were part of the "pursuit of happiness," which the Declaration of Independence numbered among the inalienable rights government was duty-bound to protect. In agreement, Americans went camping—and hiking, hunting, fishing, and mountain climbing—for sport. Cornelia Bates's boys, who trawled the ponds and woods for the family's meals, would not likely have considered such things to be leisure in the 1860s. By century's end, however, a growing number of Americans sought outdoor recreation that mimicked the labor their pre-industrial forebears had done but

that the beneficiaries of industrialization no longer had to undertake to survive.

Colorado Springs responded to this mania for outdoor recreation. In 1891, Zalmon Simmons opened the city's premier tourist attraction, a steam-powered cog railway running nine miles to the summit of Pikes Peak. The contraption being closed on the day of their outing, however, Bates and her friends took the wagon instead, with the arduous last leg by horseback. Nevertheless, both road and railway had made the mountain's seemingly unscalable heights accessible to the easterners wearing top hats, corsets, and petticoats. "When I saw the view," Bates later recalled, "I felt great joy. All the wonder of America seemed displayed there." Inspired by Colorado's scenery, the next day she jotted a few lines in her notebook, lines that became the basis for "America the Beautiful." Her ode to beauty expressed a love of nature that late-nineteenth-century Americans could now more easily hold because of the material security afforded by industrial comforts.

PATRIOT DREAMS

"America the Beautiful" speaks of a mighty nation made great by its stunning beauty, divine blessing, intrepid pilgrims, alabaster cities, and eternal brotherhood. By the 1890s, an industrial nation spanned from sea to shining sea. The rails that Coman and Bates rode connected Wellesley to Pikes Peak and points between and beyond. Telegraph wires crisscrossed state lines. Factories churned out mass-produced goods for far-flung distribution. Nationally circulating print media brought mass culture to every corner of the country.

Among the stories told at the World's Columbian Exposition was that of industry's march across the continent. As the historian Frederick Jackson Turner observed, the frontier was no longer remote. Bates's "pilgrims" of stanza two, who beat "a thoroughfare of freedom... across the wilderness" sounded a lot like Turner's white settlers who carried civilization West. Like Turner's, her narrative obscured that pre-contact America was not empty free land but rather home to Indigenous peoples who



Katharine Lee Bates, photographed wearing a ceremonial scholarly robe in her office, later in life. Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives Image Gallery, wca_2016_10_26_009



This vinyl record in the Library of Congress is a recording of a big band playing “America the Beautiful” in December 1925, and was published by Columbia Records to accompany live singing. Courtesy of Library of Congress, A3111

had lived at least freely as the fairgoers and visitors to Pikes Peak. In succinct, evocative language, Bates added another chapter to this fable. “A and B,” as Bates called the poem, enjoyed considerable success because it resonated so well with industrial-era patriotic values.

After descending from the mountaintop, Bates let the poem percolate for two years, perhaps not fully realizing what she had conjured. She first published the poem under the title “America” on the Fourth of July, 1895 in *The Congregationalist*, earning five dollars—the only money she ever made from the much-sung anthem. The editors believed it had “a true patriotic ring, pertinent” to the date of the issue’s publication. Bates continued tinkering with the wording over the years and republished it in various venues, including her 1911 collection *America the Beautiful and Other Poems*. Set in 1910 to Samuel Ward’s melody, “Materna,” the poem gained the final form Americans joyfully sing today. It was sung by church congregations, schoolchildren, choirs, soldiers and sailors, and Red Cross workers. Bates regularly handed out permissions for free use of the popular poem.

Its fame grew as patriotic fervor seized the United States during the First World War. “Wanted—a national hymn,” wrote one contributor to the *Boston Herald*

in 1918. Wartime America was setting “the loftiest standards” for nations, he reasoned, and it “needed an anthem worthily expressing what she is, what she stands for and what she, as a nation, strives to be.” “Bates’s poem,” he argued, “has gained immense popularity” since the nation’s “entrance into the war.” It was “patriotic in the true and highest sense,” and it “appeals to the best side of our people.” Indeed wet, hungry, muddy American soldiers at Verdun, France, sang it moments after the armistice ending World War I took effect. They believed it expressed what they had fought for.

Her defining contribution was to inject beauty into American patriotism. Although appreciation of the nation’s scenery stretches back to the 1820s in

A mighty nation made great by its stunning beauty, divine blessing, intrepid pilgrims, alabaster cities, and eternal brotherhood.

Hudson River School paintings and the literature of Romanticism, Bates’s generation imbued it with greater urgency. Construction of the steel rails and wooden ties over which the two Katharines comfortably rode to Colorado defiled coal-rich mountainsides and stately forests somewhere. Late-nineteenth-century Americans beheld tired, worn-out landscapes, chewed up by industrialization’s voracious appetites for natural resources. Now that many of them were materially comfortable themselves, they began preserving bits and pieces of the untamed land Turner said they had lost.

Less than two years before Bates put pen to paper in Colorado Springs,

President Benjamin Harrison designated the Pikes Peak Timberland Reserve, the nation’s second national forest, to ensure future replacement growth. The federal government established Yosemite, Yellowstone, and other national parks to preserve extraordinary scenery for visitor enjoyment. In addition to pilgrims’ conquests, sublime nature, too, confirmed America’s greatness. When the naturalist John Muir condemned plans to dam Yosemite National Park’s Hetch Hetchy Valley, he compared it to Europe’s cathedrals. Scenery, Americans increasingly believed, put the nation culturally on par with the Old World. A nationwide advertising campaign urged tourists to “See America First,” a slogan that might have lured Bates west after her year at Oxford. Amid the era’s zeal for stewarding resources, saving scenic places, and enjoying outdoor recreation, Bates writing about “spacious skies” and “mountain majesties” was just as much an industrial act as hacking ties or smelting iron.

The industrial era also opened vigorous debate about who counted as an American. American Industrialization could not have happened without the immigrants who sweated in the nation’s factories, yet some Americans doubted their new neighbors’ and coworkers’ loyalty and Americanness. The era’s sometimes violent labor conflicts, as workers struck for better pay and safer workplaces, also led some folks to suggest that the tactics, ideologies, and laborers themselves were un-American. “America the Beautiful” however, seemed to hover above the Gilded Age messiness of lynchings, tenements, and strikes, offering beauty, brotherhood, and other universally agreed-upon attributes of the nation to conjure a generic, unobjectionable, unifying patriotism. The third stanza, for example, lauds “heroes” who “more than self their country loved.” The lines have sometimes been interpreted as praise of “liberating” Union soldiers who died freeing enslaved people and loving “mercy more than life.” But Bates did not actually say on which

side the martyrs in her poem fought, making the words equally palatable to former confederates, who in the 1890s were busy erecting monuments to their own fallen champions. The genius of American patriotism has been its capacity to accommodate the nation's many voices at once, something "America the Beautiful" accomplished well.

Bates also pushed back, however. By the 1880s, dog-eat-dog industrial capitalism had unleashed an atomizing individualism that threatened to eclipse patriotic republican virtue and sacrifice for community. Social Darwinist William

Graham Sumner unapologetically pronounced that the only kind of liberty was the individual's right to compete without interference. He opposed helping those left behind, something he said ensured "survival of the unfittest." Bates's abolitionist childhood congregation and her own family's poverty, however, had taught her the human cost of inequality and the value of a helping hand. During her stop at the Chicago World's Fair, Coman took her to visit Jane Addams at Hull House, the famous settlement community that ministered to immigrants and other impoverished

Chicagoans. Along with Coman and other Wellesley colleagues, Bates had already helped establish Boston's first settlement community, Denison House, modeled on Addams's work. With word and deed, she resisted industrialism's rampant individualism. Instead, she insisted on holding onto the republican ideals of virtuous citizenship. Stanza two urged America to "confirm thy soul in self-control," while stanza three held that "all success" was "nobleness." And twice in the poem, she praised the nation for its "brotherhood." Clearly, she understood the nation's darknesses, not just its beauty.

All of which raises the question: How could a correspondent of Jane Addams and a founder and benefactor of a Boston settlement house write of industrial America's gleaming "alabaster cities... undimmed by human tears?" Inspired by the White City, the phrase came in the final, forward-looking stanza. In contrast to the first three stanzas that reflect on America's inheritance—scenic beauty and the patrimony left by pilgrims and martyrs—this fourth stanza looks forward. Opening with a "patriot dream that sees beyond the years," the concluding lines express an aspirational glimpse of what America might look like when the nation is one day fully purified. And Bates indeed believed it would be. She offered America hope in unsettled industrial times.

MANY LOVES

After the Pikes Peak summer, the two Katharines settled into life together as scholars and companions. They rented a house in Wellesley in 1894, embarking on more than twenty years of sharing a domicile. Coman joined Bates in Spain during Bates's 1898 sabbatical. Together they raised their beloved collie Sigurd. Bates spent several months in 1906 and 1907 touring Egypt, and when she returned, she and Coman moved into their own custom-built home. They called the three-story, brown-shingled house the Scarab, after the Egyptian dung beetle. In ancient hieroglyphics, Scarabs represented creation or



A picture postcard from about 1925-1945, showing the view from Windy Point along the tracks of the Pikes Peak Cog Railway, with Lake Moraine visible below. History Colorado, 2019.13.7371



A color postcard titled "Above the Clouds," showing the view from the snowclad summit of Pikes Peak, with the railroad visible. History Colorado, 2019.13.7367



View from the summit marker at the top of Pikes Peak, photographed in the 1920s–1940s.
History Colorado, 2019.13.8128

transformation, and Bates brought an amulet of one home from her journey and placed it on the mantle. The top floor became Coman's retreat, which the two women named "Bohemia." By pooling their wages, they hired a series of immigrant cooks and housekeepers to free them from the drudgery of women's domestic labor.

The house was always full of people. Bates's mother and sister lived with them for a time. Students and colleagues congregated there for conversation, and the two Katharines entertained a steady stream of houseguests. Eva Phillips Boyd, a former student, remembered the weekly Elizabethan literature seminar Bates hosted. Officially, the class was three hours, but the pupils usually stayed for four, often five, so enamored were they of the warm, intellectual delight they found at the Scarab. "Miss Bates was larger than books and bookishness," Boyd recalled. The classes "abound[ed] in...rollicking fun" and Bates's "merry whimsicality." Sitting in "comfortable chairs" next to "well-filled bookshelves" and a "gently whispering flame on the hearth," the students partook of "a gracious feast" of cakes and coffee, all served, of course, on "cups and plates...from Oxford." Bates "gave beauty every day of her life," Boyd said, "and her reward was love."

Katharine Coman died a painful,

drawn-out death from cancer in 1915, and Bates sat by her bedside for much of it. She even had holes cut from all the floors of the Scarab and set up a makeshift elevator through which Coman could be lowered to join household meals. One Saturday, the pair advanced from page 196 to 287 of the novel Bates was reading aloud, but that was the last they would read together. Coman's breathing stopped the next morning, "so gradually, so quietly," Bates recalled, "that we could not tell the instant." Bates never moved the bookmark or finished the story.

In 1922, she published a collection of poems about Coman, *Yellow Clover: A Book of Remembrances*. Literary scholar Ellen Leopold characterized the poems as having an "intensity that distinguishes them from most of [Bates's] other work." Bates dedicated the book "To Katharine Coman. *Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus. Tam cari capitis.*" The Latin comes from the poet Horace, who mourned a lost intimate in a verse that both Katharines surely knew well. The poem "Yellow Clover" itself is a lament of lost love: "All...sunshine vanished when you died." Coman left most of her modest estate to Bates.

Katharine Lee Bates knew sorrow in her life, from her impoverished, fatherless upbringing, to the bouts

of depression she periodically suffered, to the devastating loss of her beloved companion. But Bates also knew delight and evoked it in others. She saw beauty, wrote lyrically, inspired her students, loved her country, and knew deep human affection through the companionship of Katharine Coman. As the United States marks its semiquincentennial, reflecting on both its better angels and its hollow darkneses, we could find worse models of America at its best than Katharine Lee Bates, inescapably a creature of a grim historical moment and yet also someone who called patriots to act bravely to bring about a future "undimmed by human tears." 🍷

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FirstBank Helped Build Colorado For Sixty Years.

Here's What's Next.

FirstBank has been woven into Colorado's history and growth, from financing transformative developments to investing in communities across the state. That made Colorado's largest locally owned bank a natural partner for our *Moments That Made US* exhibition. We spoke with FirstBank CEO Kevin Classen about FirstBank's legacy, its impact on Colorado, and what its merger with PNC means for residents, businesses, and communities across the state.

WHAT IS FIRSTBANK'S HISTORY IN COLORADO?

We were founded in Lakewood in 1963. Our first location was a twelve-foot by fifty-foot trailer that they called the "Check Wagon." It was almost like a mobile home—you could haul it in,



Kevin Classen, President and CEO of FirstBank Holding Company, soon to be PNC's regional president.
Photo courtesy of FirstBank

set it up, and people could come in to do their business. That's how it started, and we've been a part of the fabric of Colorado for more than sixty years now. We've certainly grown with Colorado over all those decades. Our philosophy has been very straightforward: We've tried to do what's right, and to show up for our communities in meaningful and lasting ways. We helped launch Colorado Gives Day back in 2010, and since then we've raised over 580 million dollars for thousands of nonprofits. That's a great reflection of what we believe in—bringing people together to support something that's bigger than ourselves.

How has FirstBank changed alongside Colorado?

We went from one branch in 1963 to about a hundred locations across Colorado. In that same time, countless people relocated here from all over the country. We put branches on the corner so we could provide access and services to new and existing residents. We've also evolved in the banking industry over that historical period. When we first opened, it was about check writing,

then it was about debit cards, and now you have digital and mobile banking. More than that, we were part of Colorado's growth. Over the years, we have contributed billions of dollars in loans towards housing, businesses, and major developments that have powered our economy. We've helped bring to life marquee landmarks like Union Station and Larimer Square, while also investing heavily in the communities we serve. Since 2000, we've contributed well over 100 million dollars to local nonprofits. Growing anything relies on credit, whether you're expanding a company or buying a home. We were there to provide that to Coloradans, and we're very proud of the impact.

FirstBank is merging with PNC. What does that mean for FirstBank, and for Coloradans?

We wanted to be sure we found a partner that shares our values, whose philosophy aligns with ours, and we found that in PNC. They align with our values, and they do it at scale. PNC is a 160-year-old company that's taking its expansion into Colorado incredibly

seriously. This will be one of their largest markets, and what comes with that is a lot of resources, capital, and services. They've been a wonderful partner, and we will remain committed to Colorado and its communities, now just backed by expanded resources.

You'll see that in tangible ways, too. Colorado Gives Day will continue under PNC's sponsorship, our nonprofit partnerships will remain strong, and community support will advance

through PNC Grow Up Great®, a 500-million-dollar bilingual philanthropic initiative focused on early childhood education.

What do you expect for Colorado and FirstBank in the future? What do you hope Coloradans can take away from this moment?

We're very proud of our history. Now, more than ever, we're both committed

and equipped to show up for the people, businesses, and communities that make Colorado a great place. I can't predict the future, but we want to be a long-term partner in Colorado's success story. We plan to bring the resources to make it happen.

I think if, in twenty years you look back, we'll have helped strengthen the state. We won't have just participated in that growth, we'll have helped drive it forward.



The first branch of First Westland National Bank (now FirstBank) opened in the 1960s. Photo courtesy of FirstBank



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