

# CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix

**Introduction** 3

**January** 5

**February** 37

**March** 67

**April** 99

**May** 129

**June** 161

**July** 193

**August** 225

**September** 257

**October** 287

**November** 319

**December** 351

IMAGE CREDITS 383

SOURCES 387

INDEX 417

## INTRODUCTION

Here, where the great backbone of the Continent rears and rests itself; here, where nature sets the patterns of plain and mountain, of valley and hill, for all America; here, where spring the waters that wash two-thirds [of] the western Continent and feed both its oceans; here, where mountains are fat with gold and silver, and prairies glory in the glad certainty of future harvests of corn and wheat—here, indeed, is the center and the central life of America,—fountain of its wealth and health and beauty.

Samuel Bowles, a Massachusetts newspaperman, wrote these words after spending a summer holiday in Colorado Territory—which he called “the Switzerland of America”—in 1868. The opportunities he saw in the prairies, peaks, and plateaus of Colorado have inspired countless people over the centuries. Colorado offers fascinations, challenges, rewards, frustrations, catastrophes, and glories. This book explores many of Colorado’s facets through distilled tales of the people, places, events, and trends that have shaped and continue to shape the region.

All too often, history can feel like little more than “one damn thing after another,” a dismissive mind-set this book seeks to challenge in both blatant and subtle ways. Offered in a day-in-history format with a cross-referenced index and sources, *Colorado Day by Day* allows the reader to explore and comprehend the state’s heritage as individual threads or as part of the greater tapestry. It was researched and written with academic rigor but intended to appeal to readers of diverse backgrounds, ranging from those whose ancestors have resided here for many generations to those who arrived yesterday. Sources at the end provide avenues to pursue more detailed information to supplement these daily entries. This book also hopes to combat other stereotypes about history generally and Colorado’s past in particular. Far too often the state is viewed as the Rocky Mountains alone, with the Great Plains and western plateaus included as afterthoughts, or Denver and Colorado are considered synonymous, with places outside the metropolitan area overlooked or dismissed. In *Colorado Day by Day*, however, entries incorporate tales from each of the state’s sixty-four counties, ensuring that all regions receive credit for contributing to the community’s broader story. It is difficult to deny Denver’s often overwhelming influence; nonetheless, the pages that follow seek to demonstrate how the Centennial State’s past has unfolded from places



*Detail of a mural in the US Department of the Interior headquarters in Washington, DC, depicting the diverse uses of public lands in Colorado*

cosmopolitan and humble alike. Throughout, stories of infamy and sorrow are interspersed with ones of innovation and triumph, reflecting the spectrum of experiences in Colorado. The reader can expect to smile and laugh at times, to seethe and weep at others. But that's life, after all, and history is life.

*Colorado Day by Day* began as an intriguing half-idea that morphed into an obsessive quest, as my wife can attest. How many times did I tell Heather that I would only be a minute while I looked up something, and minutes turned into hours? From the late seventeenth century through the early twenty-first, this book traces Colorado's story through tales from every county in the state. When I started this project, I wondered if I might struggle to track down enough issues, events, and people to cover 366 days (counting Leap Day, of course). As the work progressed, however, the challenge evolved into paring down the myriad facets of Colorado history, casting aside far too many worthy stories to accommodate what I discovered were surprisingly limited options. There is in my possession a list of guilt and frustration, hidden safely from the light of day, including all the worthwhile tales that for one reason or another didn't make the cut. If this project hadn't nearly driven me mad more than a few times, I might have added a year or two to cover even more worthy adventures.

And now, it's time to begin another exciting year in the Centennial State.

## **Introduction**



**January**

January 1, 2014

## Legalizing a “Rocky Mountain High”

Colorado started the year on a “high” note on January 1, 2014, when it became the first US state to legalize the growth, sale, and consumption of recreational marijuana.

Cannabis came to Colorado during the boom times of the 1880s, along with other popular drugs of the era including opium, cocaine, and alcohol. It flourished in the early twentieth century, thanks to Latino immigrants recruited for beet sugar work who brought it with them for medicinal and recreational reasons. After the General Assembly outlawed marijuana in 1917, its illicit use emerged as both a legal issue and a source of ethnic tension. By the 1930s, law enforcement launched an anti-cannabis crusade, prompting a Denver-based federal judge to declare: “I consider marijuana the worst of all narcotics. Marijuana destroys life itself.”

Attitudes shifted by mid-century, reflected in John Denver’s 1972 song “Rocky Mountain High” and its thinly veiled references to marijuana. Yet attempts to permit the drug’s use for medicinal purposes, authorized in a bill signed by Governor Richard Lamm in 1979, encountered federal resistance. Nonetheless, cannabis cultivation and use thrived even as authorities cracked down; estimates in 1986 identified it as Colorado’s second most valuable crop, behind wheat.

In 2000, an initiative approved by voters permitted medicinal marijuana provided by regulated dispensaries. A dozen years later, nearly 55 percent of Coloradans joined residents of Washington state in permitting marijuana sales to anyone twenty-one years of age and older. Stores run by “ganjapreneurs” opened on New Year’s Day in 2014, months before Washington’s debuted. State officials struggled to manage a substance that remained banned by federal law, and cities and counties chose whether to permit marijuana shops in their communities. Legalized marijuana has been credited with a “green rush” of newcomers to the state, like the mining rushes of the late nineteenth century. It also led to lawsuits from neighboring states trying to halt the drug’s influx. For many people in the early twenty-first century, cannabis and Colorado are synonymous.

January 2, 1895

## The Legislature Comes to the Capitol

Colorado’s capitol ranks as the most important symbolic place in the state. This significance comes not just from the structure’s design or history but mostly because it houses the General Assembly. The boundaries of Colorado embrace

diverse cultures and environments, and the democratically elected legislature brings these disparate groups together to debate their common needs, goals, and desires. When the General Assembly first convened at the statehouse on January 2, 1895, architectural form and political function blended together for the first time.

The building in which legislators met remained a work in progress—it had been under construction for nearly nine years, and six more would pass before it was considered finished. Officials including the governor, supreme court justices, treasurer, and auditor occupied their quarters in late 1894, but the Tenth General Assembly's arrival transformed the capitol into the symbolic center of the state. Its members in 1895 included James H. Brown, whose father, Henry, had donated the land on which the capitol stood (and built the Brown Palace Hotel), and the state's first African American legislator, Joseph H. Stuart. "Perpetual senator" Casimiro Barela—then halfway through his four decades of service—and three representatives from Conejos, Costilla, and Huerfano Counties lobbied on behalf of Latino issues in the building's marbled halls.

Three members of the Tenth General Assembly, elected in 1894 during Colorado's first campaign with equal suffrage regardless of sex, earned national attention. The first women elected to a legislative body in American history—Clara Cressingham, Carrie Holly, and Frances Klock—served in the House of Representatives. Their distinguished and effective service set a precedent for women serving in elected government in Colorado and across the country. In many ways, the 1895 General Assembly established the capitol's symbolic potential and created a lasting legacy. As a reporter commented in 1950: "You look at this fine old building and you think of all the tremendous work and pride that went into it. It is the heart of Colorado."

**January 3, 1899**

## **Colorado's Sweetest Industry**

With the collapse of silver mining in the 1890s, Coloradans searched for an economic lifeline. Residents found hope in the form of a homely yet versatile root vegetable, the sugar beet. During the nineteenth century, European factories distilled beets into sugar, and Americans adopted the industry with factories in California, Nebraska, and Utah. Desperate for a new source of income, Colorado entrepreneurs gave the sweet beets a try. On January 3, 1899, investors including John F. Campion, Charles Boettcher, and James J. Brown (husband of the unsinkable Margaret) filed to incorporate the Colorado Sugar Manufacturing Company (CSMC).

After considering several agricultural regions, the CSMC chose Grand Junction as the site of Colorado's first beet sugar factory. Boettcher imported more than 37 tons of beet seed from his native Germany, where the industry had originated a century earlier. Grand Valley farmers planted the beets among their fruit orchards in the summer of 1899, while a brick and steel factory arose in Grand Junction—one that could produce as much as 45 tons of granulated sugar a week during the “campaign,” the post-harvest sugar processing season.

Many challenges undermined Colorado's first attempt at beet sugar, including late spring downpours, summer droughts, and an insect infestation. Early frosts forced a premature harvest, and the beets rotted in piles outside the factory before it was ready to operate. As a Denver newspaper opined, “The rose-colored hopes that were as bright in the springtime as the sunset flush that rests on the Book Cliff range in summer, faded to an ashen gray when the harvest moon shed its silvery rays down the valley.” Disappointing totals from the campaign inspired the CSMC to sell the factory to Grand Junction businessmen and invest elsewhere, although the refinery operated for local farmers until 1931. In 1950, the Cold War offered the facility a new purpose—processing western Colorado uranium for nuclear weapons. In the meantime, beet sugar shifted to more lucrative territory in the Arkansas and South Platte River valleys.



*A Longmont-area farmer poses with his load of sugar beets bound for a Great Western Sugar Company factory in the early twentieth century.*



**January 4, 1941**

## **Putting the Bang into World War II**

A contract signed in Washington, DC, on January 4, 1941, authorized construction of one of the nation's largest armament factories, the Denver Ordnance Plant, on a cattle ranch in Jefferson County. The works contributed to Colorado's dramatic growth during World War II, as civilians and military personnel alike flocked to the Centennial State to assist the United States in building up its defenses against the international threats of fascism and totalitarianism.

Most Americans preferred to stay out of the conflict raging in Asia and Europe in the early 1940s. Nonetheless, President Franklin D. Roosevelt called for preparedness in case the United States got drawn into the fight. To that end, the US Department of War contracted with the Remington Arms Company to manufacture small arms and ammunition. The January 1941 contract, announced by US senator Edwin C. Johnson, authorized \$122 million to purchase a site, erect a factory, and commence production. Surveyors selected the 2,100-acre Hayden Ranch southwest of Denver, and the first phase stood complete by October. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor two months later, the Denver Ordnance Plant had already produced 14 million rounds. By 1943, it employed nearly 20,000 people and operated around the clock, producing millions of rounds a day. In addition, thousands more Coloradans and newcomers alike worked at Denver's Rocky Mountain Arsenal producing chemical weapons, at Pueblo's steel mill and munitions depot, and at many other facilities. Colorado's economy flourished as companies and the federal government erected facilities far from the reach of wartime enemies.

The Denver Ordnance Plant closed in 1944, but private manufacturers operated at the site until World War II ended. The government retained most of the property and during the Cold War turned it into the Denver Federal Center, the largest assemblage of national government offices outside of Washington, DC. Now surrounded by Lakewood, the federal center remains a major source of employment and reflects Colorado's long dependence on national largesse.

**January 5, 1859**

## **Finding Gold at Idaho Springs**

George A. Jackson, looking for gold in present-day Clear Creek County, had a difficult start to 1859. On January 4 he wrote in his journal: "Mountain lion stole all my meat today in camp; no supper tonight; D—n him." But things looked bet-



ter the next morning: “Up before day. Killed a fat sheep and wounded a Mt. lion before sunrise. Eat ribs for breakfast; drank last of my coffee.” Once he finished his gustatory report, Jackson recorded even better news: “After breakfast moved up half mile to next creek on south side; made new camp under big fir tree. Good gravel here, looks like it carries gold.” His entry on January 5 offered the first recorded evidence of gold on the upper reaches of Clear Creek, at what is now the town of Idaho Springs.

The placer flakes scooped out of streams by prospectors came from veins, or lodes, of gold upstream, worn away gradually by the erosion of wind and water. Placer deposits found along the eastern slope since the summer of 1858 hinted at substantial gold sources in the Rocky Mountains. Jackson joined Tom Golden—who founded the town named for him in Jefferson County—in searching up Clear Creek for color by the year’s end. Two days after his find on January 5, Jackson sifted many flakes and a small nugget of gold, suggesting a vein nearby. Winter weather forced him out of the mountains by the month’s end, but he returned that spring. Other miners joined him and laid out a camp named Idaho Springs near a source of thermal waters. Jackson prospected near present-day Leadville until early 1861, when he returned to his native Missouri to serve as a Confederate soldier. Following the Civil War, Jackson came back to Colorado, settled near Ouray, and promoted mining there until his death in 1897.

Idaho Springs remained a vibrant lode gold mining community for decades, although it lost the seat of Clear Creek County to Georgetown, a larger community upstream, in 1867. Commercial mining in the area dwindled long ago, but tourists still prospect for some color of their own at the Argo Gold Mine and Mill, hoping to emulate the luck of Jackson.

**January 6, 1942**

## **Founding Fort Carson**

Starting in the late nineteenth century, Colorado Springs had enjoyed an international reputation as a vacation destination for the rich and powerful. But a new industry debuted in El Paso County on January 6, 1942, when the US Army announced plans for a training facility on donated land south of the city. The local newspaper described the news as “a belated Christmas present, twice welcome . . . that affords this region, primarily a resort, a place in the war economy and we think it affords the army a location not excelled anywhere for the training of men.”

The army appropriated \$25 million for the project and erected a headquarters building before the end of the month. It took the name Camp Carson in honor of

renowned scout and officer Christopher “Kit” Carson. A crew of more than 11,000 workers erected barracks and other facilities within a matter of months, enough to serve more than 37,000 soldiers, officers, and nurses at a time—roughly the equivalent of the population of neighboring Colorado Springs. More than 100,000 service personnel passed through Camp Carson during World War II. It supported satellite posts including the mountain facility at Camp Hale on Tennessee Pass and housed 9,000 German and Italian prisoners of war who performed manual labor across the state.

Camp Carson faced decommissioning after World War II, but the Korean War offered the post a new purpose. It earned a promotion to fort status in 1954 and flourished as an armored combat facility, expanding to more than 200 square miles in El Paso, Fremont, and Pueblo Counties. In 1983 the army added the Piñon Canyon Maneuver Site, roughly 370 square miles in Las Animas County northeast of Trinidad, to provide more land for vehicular training. Fort Carson prepared soldiers for combat in Iraq and Afghanistan and remains an integral part of the national defense. It also heralded the military-dominated economy of El Paso County, which includes Peterson (1942) and Schriever (1983) US Air Force bases and the Cheyenne Mountain Complex. The legacy of World War II in Colorado resonates loudly in Colorado Springs.

**January 7, 1865**

## **Julesburg Suffers for Sand Creek**

Six weeks after the murder and butchery of Cheyennes and Arapahos in the Sand Creek Massacre, enraged American Indians on the Great Plains struck back. Their target, the vital crossroads of Julesburg in Colorado Territory’s northeastern corner, felt the wrath of native cultures eager to give Americans a taste of their own medicine on January 7, 1865.

Once the shock of Sand Creek wore off, American Indians went on the offensive. A band of seven Cheyenne led by Big Crow struck the first blow by firing on a stagecoach just east of Julesburg in the wee hours of January 7. Several hours later they killed a teamster driving supply wagons nearby. Then they taunted soldiers at Camp Rankin, a post west of Julesburg renamed Fort Sedgwick later that year. Falling for the ruse, Captain Nicholas O’Brien led thirty-seven soldiers in pursuit toward the sand hills beyond the South Platte River. Suddenly, more than sixty native warriors crested the hills and set upon the troops, killing fourteen. The rest retreated to their camp, evacuating the residents of Julesburg at the same time. A sympathetic officer later reflected on O’Brien’s actions: “Whether or not this bat-

tle should have been fought is a question that may arise in the reader's mind; but, Captain O'Brien was full of fight and was devoted to duty, and the fight had to be." Considering the odds the troops faced, the battle near Julesburg could have gone far worse for the US Army. Cheyennes looted the unprotected town and destroyed telegraph poles to disrupt communications but did not destroy Julesburg. Reason dictated that if they left the town standing, it would be reoccupied and make a convenient target again.

Raids on nearby ranches continued throughout the month, as northeastern Colorado became a war zone. American Indians returned on February 2 to pillage Julesburg again, but this time they burned the town to the ground. By the end of 1865 a new Julesburg would rise from the ashes, and the nearby military post expanded as well. Yet the message was clear—Colorado would reap the high plains whirlwind it had sown with the Sand Creek Massacre.

**January 8, 1976**

## **Elvis versus the Fords in Vail**

The King ran afoul of the first family in the winter mecca of Vail on January 8, 1976, when Elvis Presley spent his forty-first birthday celebrating with friends in Eagle County.

Presley sought a quiet, press-free vacation and rarely left the home where he and his entourage stayed. When he did, he wore a full winter face mask to conceal his identity while the King of rock 'n roll indulged in his favorite winter pastime: snowmobiling. He dashed through the forest far from the busy ski runs and particularly enjoyed riding the vehicle at night. When he did so on January 8, he raised the hackles of a nearby resident who complained to Vail authorities about the obnoxious noise made by someone violating the municipal code. The disgruntled caller happened to be Susan Ford, daughter of the president of the United States.

Although he was one of the most athletic presidents, comedians branded Gerald Ford a klutz for stumbling down the stairs of Air Force One. Ford had enjoyed skiing since his college days and kept up the pastime during his political career. During the winter of 1974–75, a few months after Richard Nixon's resignation and his ascension to the presidency, Ford spent enough time resting and recreating in Vail that a local newspaper declared its community the "Winter White House." Gerald and Betty Ford rang in 1976 in Vail, and during his visit the president gave replicas of Theodore Roosevelt's skis to a local museum, honoring both TR's Colorado connections and his status as the first president known to ski. A week later, after the first couple returned to Washington, DC, their college-age

daughter, Susan, vacationed in Vail with friends. Her complaints about the noisy rocker drew the attention of the *National Enquirer* tabloid, which a month later published photographs ostensibly showing Presley snowmobiling by moonlight.

After his presidency, Gerald and Betty Ford returned to Vail each year to dedicate the town Christmas tree, and they kept a vacation home in nearby Beaver Creek. Tourists relax during the summer months in the Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, located in Gerald R. Ford Park.

**January 9, 1974**

## **From the Moon to the Mile High City**

Governor John Vanderhoof accepted an out-of-this-world gift on behalf of the state on January 9, 1974. Astronaut Jack Lousma presented him with a plaque containing a Colorado flag that had traveled on the Apollo XVII mission in December 1972—the last manned visit to the moon—and a few small pieces of the lunar surface collected during the trip. Every state and most countries received a similar gift, but tracking their fate in later years proved quite a space case.

Born in Rocky Ford, Vanderhoof served as a pilot in World War II's Pacific theater and earned numerous commendations for bravery and injuries. He worked his way up through the state government, including well-regarded service in the General Assembly. In 1973, when "Johnny Van" held the post of lieutenant governor, Governor John Love announced his resignation after a decade in that position to take a federal job. Vanderhoof took over the executive branch but failed to win his own term in 1974. That year, Richard Lamm captured the governor's office for the Democrats for the first time in a dozen years, and Vanderhoof retired to the western slope. Among his souvenirs from many years of public service was the Apollo XVII plaque.

In 2010, a college student tried to track down the wayward moon rocks. Searches at History Colorado, the state archives, several science museums, and the state capitol ended in disappointment, but inquiries to Vanderhoof resolved the puzzle—the plaque hung on his home office wall in Grand Junction. The former chief executive had tried to donate it to a museum over the years, but none expressed interest. He chuckled to report that the rocks, valued at \$5 million, had once served as his grandson's show-and-tell at school. Vanderhoof donated the plaque to a geology museum at the Colorado School of Mines. Governor Bill Ritter dedicated a new exhibit including the moon rocks in 2010, an appropriate tribute to Colorado's aeronautics and aerospace industries at the state's most scientifically oriented university.

## Bidding Farewell to “Buffalo Bill”

A world-famous showman who presented a caricatured vision of the American West to global audiences died at his sister's house in Denver on January 10, 1917. William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody's life reflected the saying that the truth should never interfere with a good story.

Born in Iowa in 1846, Cody first came to Colorado Territory in 1861 as a teamster on the road to Denver. His life led him across the West, although often not in such dramatic fashion as contemporary sources suggest. Cody made an early career—and earned the nickname “Buffalo Bill”—in the late 1860s when he hunted bison in western Kansas. In 1868, he signed on as a civilian scout with the US Army to track American Indians. Cody often patrolled from Fort Lyon on the Arkansas River and joined Pawnee allies of the federal government to pursue Cheyenne Dog Soldiers in the summer of 1869. A battle at Summit Springs in northeastern Colorado that July proved to be the last major conflict between soldiers and native cultures in eastern Colorado. Cody later reenacted a fanciful version of the fight in his Wild West extravaganza.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West debuted in 1883. Four years later, a Fort Collins newspaper illustrated nineteenth-century rivalries between Colorado towns when it editorialized a letter from a local man touring with the show: “New York was bad enough, but London is as bad as Greeley; London must be bad.” Cody's show performed in Colorado numerous times, but by the 1910s he faced declining interest and ticket sales. A circus owned by the *Denver Post* bought the Wild West, and Cody's career ended in subservience. Nonetheless, his death in 1917 led to a frenzy of mourning. Cody's body lay in state at the capitol, and 18,000 people walked by the open coffin before his burial on Lookout Mountain in Jefferson County. To ensure that jealous interests in Wyoming and Nebraska could not disinter his remains, they lie under several feet of concrete and a massive stone marker in a park operated by the City and County of Denver. The grave and a nearby museum represent Cody's final stage, upon which he takes his eternal bow.