

COLORADO Day by Day

WRITTEN BY COLORADO HISTORIAN *Derek R. Everett* and copublished by the University Press of Colorado and *History Colorado*, “Colorado Day by Day” takes an unusual “day by day” approach to compiling essential Colorado history; from pre-statehood to modern times.

The book begins on January 1, 2014 with the state’s legalization of marijuana and ends on December 31, 1943 with musician John Denver’s birthday.

We have chosen several excerpts pertaining to the Central Colorado region and begin with the story of the Colorado Central Railroad, this publication’s namesake.

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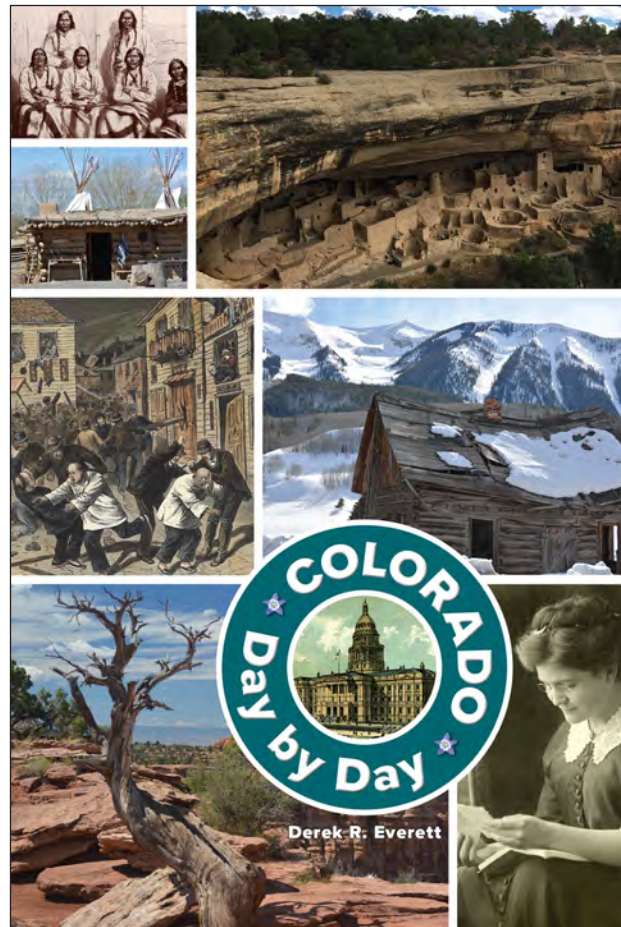
January 14, 1868

Naming the Colorado Central

Colorado’s first railroad received its third name in as many years on January 14, 1868, one it kept for the next two decades: the Colorado Central Railroad. Chartered by the territorial legislature in 1865 to connect the competing capitals of Golden and Denver with the gold mining districts up Clear Creek, the Colorado Central proved essential to the region’s growth.

Golden booster William A.H. Loveland hoped to breach the Continental Divide by rail and hired Edward L. Berthoud to survey a route, although Berthoud Pass proved unsuitable for a railroad. In the meantime, mining districts hoped that a railroad connection would boost flagging production and investment. Construction on the standard gauge line between Denver and Golden concluded on September 26, 1870, making it the third railroad with a Denver terminus that year. From Golden, the Colorado Central proceeded via narrow gauge up Clear Creek to Black Hawk, which it reached by December 1872. Extending a mile farther to Central City took nearly six years because of the Panic of 1873. By the time of that national economic collapse, another branch of the Colorado Central stretched north from the Denver-Golden line to Boulder and Longmont.

Once investors returned, the Colorado Central pushed beyond Longmont to Fort Collins, building



a town named for Loveland along the way. It linked with the Union Pacific Railroad in Wyoming on November 7, 1877. Three months earlier, a branch of the narrow gauge route had reached Georgetown. An early 1880s effort to cross the Continental Divide at Loveland Pass—also named for the founder—failed, but it left Coloradans with an engineering marvel known as the Georgetown Loop. The Union Pacific bought and merged the Colorado Central, the Denver, South Park & Pacific, and several other lines in 1889.

Ten years later, they reorganized as the Colorado & Southern Railway, which operated independently until a buyout from the Burlington Route in 1908. Regardless of its myriad names, the Colorado Central encouraged mining and agricultural expansion in the late nineteenth century and created and served many communities.

May 12, 1882

A Jewish Revolt in Fremont County

Residents of a nascent Jewish colony along the upper Arkansas River threatened to kill those responsible for settling them there on May 12, 1882. Far from the paradise

described by boosters, the soil at Cotopaxi in Fremont County seemed suited for growing rocks and little else.

Russia commenced state-sponsored persecution against Jews in the early 1880s, and evacuees—bearing little more than the clothes on their backs—crossed the Atlantic Ocean in search of a safe haven. Many Americans affirmed the sentiment of this Leadville newspaper in 1882: “The probability is that an enormous immigration of Russian Jews will take place this year. They are welcome. No class of people have done more to build up and enrich this country.” Emmanuel H. Saltiel, after his capture, founded Cotopaxi as a mining center. He saw an opportunity to help fellow Jews fleeing eastern Europe and worked with immigrant groups in New York City to organize a colony at his town. The sixty-three settlers who arrived in early May 1882 ranged from farmers to craftspeople, but they all doubted the region’s ability to support them. When they turned on an immigration company agent on May 12, an armed Saltiel faced them down.

The Jewish settlers at Cotopaxi scratched out an existence in the summer of 1882. They dug a 3-mile-long canal through rock to water their fields, but meandering livestock ate the crops and proved a danger to the nearby Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. All the while, the colonists retained their faith, using a small cabin in the town as a cozy synagogue. But the limits of the land proved their downfall. When a party of Jews from Denver investigated Cotopaxi, they found the settlers hungry, freezing, and desperate; some scavenged for coal that fell from passing trains. Most colonists moved elsewhere in Colorado or across the West after the first winter, and the entire Jewish colony was abandoned by 1884. The discredited Saltiel disappeared from the historical scene shortly thereafter, mirroring his ill-fated idea.

September 6, 1920

The Manassa Mauler Defends His Title

In a small town in Michigan on September 6, 1920, fourteen months after claiming the title of world heavyweight champion, William H. “Jack” Dempsey defeated Billy Miske in the first boxing match broadcast by radio, proving that he deserved his hard-earned notoriety.

Dempsey hailed from Manassa, a Mormon farming colony in Conejos County, although he and his family strayed from the faith. Born in 1895, Dempsey lived a migratory childhood, as the large family meandered through various Colorado towns trying to make ends meet. They found their greatest success in Montrose, where mother Celia took the reins from



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Jack Dempsey, the "Manassa Mauler," photographed in 1919 shortly after he claimed the title of the world's heavyweight boxing champion. Courtesy History Colorado, Stephen H. Hart Research Center, object I.D. 89.451.5784.

her unreliable husband, Hyrum. She opened a boarding house catering to builders of the Gunnison Tunnel water diversion project, and the Dempseys prospered until the work was finished and crews moved elsewhere. The family relocated to Utah, but Dempsey returned to Montrose in 1911 to start a pugilistic career in a town he liked.

Boxing under the name "Kid Blackie," Dempsey alternated between small local bouts and work in the mines. He sparred in Aspen, Durango, Gunnison, Leadville, Rico, Salida, Telluride, and Victor. In 1913, when Dempsey stood in for his brother Bernie in a fight in Cripple Creek, he inherited his older sibling's nickname "Jack."

Dempsey's fame grew in the late 1910s as he boxed to raise money during World War I. On Independence Day in 1919, Dempsey defeated Jess Willard in Ohio to capture the world heavyweight boxing championship and won international renown. In the 1920s, between defending his status in the ring, Dempsey pursued an acting career, appearing several times with Denver native Douglas Fairbanks. Even the loss of his boxing title in 1926 to Gene Tunney failed to tarnish Dempsey's appeal. He retained close ties to his native state; Dempsey often relaxed quietly in a motel on Denver's Colfax Avenue owned by sports enthusiast Eddie Bohn.

The "Manassa Mauler," nicknamed for his hometown, returned to the San Luis Valley in 1966 to dedicate his birthplace as a museum. Dempsey died in New York City in 1983.

March 30, 1923

Western State on the Western Slope

The Colorado State Normal School at Gunnison, established on the east side of town in 1901, trained

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teachers for the western slope. On March 30, 1923, Governor William E. Sweet signed a bill renaming the school Western State College to reflect its broadening curriculum.

As early as 1885, Gunnison sought to host the state teacher's college and benefit from the appropriations and notoriety such a school would inspire. Greeley captured the honor in 1889, but a dozen years later the General Assembly authorized a branch in Gunnison to serve western Colorado. The school did not open until 1911, with free tuition for Colorado residents and out-of-state students paying five dollars per year. It closed during the influenza epidemic in 1919 and boasted a new president, Samuel Quigley, when it reopened. Quigley oversaw the transition to Western State College in March 1923, and five weeks later the school marked the change in grand style. On May 2, all 135 faculty and students helped mark a giant "W" on Tenderfoot Mountain south of campus, with freshmen carrying 100-pound sacks of lime to the construction site. Whitewash splashed over rocks shaped the "W," with legs 16 feet wide stretching 420 feet from side to side and 320 feet top to bottom. It remains the world's largest collegiate emblem.

February 19, 2015

Preserving a Whitewater Playground

White-knuckle adventures in Colorado often include whitewater rafting, shooting the rapids while admiring spectacular scenery. The Arkansas River in Chaffee County, especially between Buena Vista and Salida, boasts some of the best rafting territory in the state, and the companies that offer trips along it take as much pride in the vistas as they do in their services.

Starting in the 1970s, advocates of the industry sought to preserve the area through which the Arkansas River flowed to prevent over-development. A group of concerned citizens and businesses organized the Friends of Browns Canyon in 2003 to lobby for federal protection. With bipartisan support from

Colorado's congressional delegation, Representative Joel Hefley—a Colorado Springs Republican whose district included Chaffee County—introduced a bill to designate Browns Canyon as a wilderness area in 2005. Although Congress failed to act on the legislation, support for the idea built steadily. In 2014, Democratic senator Mark Udall sponsored a bill to set aside 21,000 acres as a national monument and wilderness area, but the legislation met with similar congressional lethargy. The idea remained popular nonetheless.

The Friends of Browns Canyon identified themselves as "a group of passionate outdoors recreationists, hikers, equestrians, whitewater enthusiasts and guides, anglers, mountain bikers, rock climbers, hunters, photographers, and more." Politicians and private citizens alike touted the natural beauty and biodiversity of the upper Arkansas River valley, as well as the economic benefits and agricultural protections federal designation would provide. To that end, on February 19, 2015, President Barack Obama used his authority under the Antiquities Act to authorize Browns Canyon National Monument. As a result, generations of screaming, laughing visitors who ride the rapids will enjoy a landscape that meets the needs of local residents while preserving the beauty of an adrenaline-fueled journey through Browns Canyon. ■

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