



Columnists

[View from the Center](#) [Bear Smart](#) [The Travel Troubleshooter](#) [Dear Abby](#) [Student Aide](#)

[Life in the Legislature](#) [Of Sound Mind](#) [Others Say](#) [Powerful solutions](#) [You are What You Eat](#) [Out Standing in the Fields](#)

[From the State Senate](#) [What’s up in Durango Skies](#) [Watch Yore Topknot](#) [Local First](#)

Becoming Colorado: 100 objects that illuminate the state’s vivid history and people



By Andrew Gulliford Fort Lewis College
Saturday, Jul 9, 2022 5:00 **Updated Tuesday, Jul. 12, 2022 6:29**



Bicycle-crazed Durangoans should know that in the late 19th century bicycling was considered inappropriate for young women, yet they wanted to ride. This unique bike, The Mauro Special built in Denver between 1893 and 1898, symbolized feminine freedom. Suffragist Susan B. Anthony argued that bicycling, and the requisite change in women’s fashion from skirts and dresses to bloomers and pants, had “done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world.” (Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)

RECENT LOCAL NEWS



(Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)



Imagine trying to define our state’s diverse history and culture by carefully choosing 100 objects selected from History Colorado’s 15 million documents, photographs and artifacts.

Then, once those objects have been chosen with attention to statewide distribution, ethnic groups, historic people and events, and chronological sequence – write essays. The end product is a marvelous, highly readable book.

Congratulations to former Colorado State Historian William Wei for this fact-filled compendium that belongs on the shelves of every Coloradan who longs to learn about spear points, fire helmets, bicycles, Geiger counters, photographs, ball caps and an astronaut’s in-flight suit. Reading this book, I gained knowledge about Colorado Native American tribes as well as Mexican-Americans, German-Russians, Crypto-Jews, and Black buffalo soldiers. “Becoming Colorado: The Centennial State in 100 Objects” contains color images of a steer horn leather chair, a coal miner’s pick, a gold railroad pass for Otto Mears’ railroads and an original Aspen Mountain single-seat chairlift.



When she was 13 in 1892, Otto Mears gave his daughter this gold filigree pass, No. 336, for her to travel on his Rio Grande Southern Railroad. He gave passes to friends, family and politicians, but few passes were crafted from gold. Some were made of buckskin. Known as “the Pathfinder,” Mears built what is now the Million Dollar Highway connecting Durango, Silverton and Ouray. (Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)

(Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)

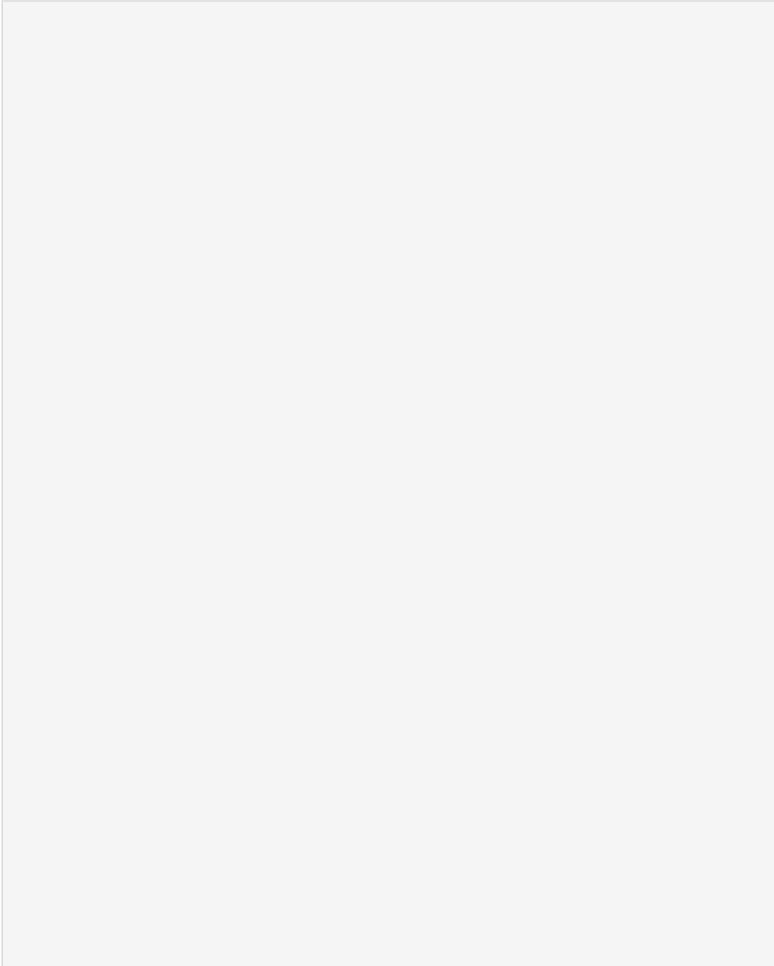


Professor of history at the University of Colorado-Boulder William Wei worked

with the design team at History Colorado on the exhibit “Zoom In: The Centennial State in 100 Objects.” “Becoming Colorado” is a book based on that exhibit on display in Denver, but it is much more. Thanks to Wei’s masterful knowledge of our state and the unique objects selected, this exhibit catalog offers snapshots of Colorado history published by History Colorado and the University Press of Colorado.

■ ■ ■

Each of the 100 objects comes with a succinct essay about the artifact and its cultural and historic meaning. The essays, like the objects, vary widely and endnotes accompany each of the 100 short chapters. “Becoming Colorado” represents current Colorado historiographic interpretations, including new perspectives about the reputations of John M. Chivington and Gov. John Evans and the role both men played in the Sand Creek Massacre. Plains Indian wars are described as they relate to Colorado history, and the Colorado Indian Wars are also defined. A hallmark of the book is excellent cross-indexing with references to other chapters and similar themes.





Our Lady of Guadalupe, Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe, is portrayed in this traditional Hispano devotional painting or retablo created between 1850-1880. This Catholic religious folk art was created by local santeros or “saint makers” who traveled throughout Colorado’s Hispano villages making devotional art. (Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)

(Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)



I enjoyed seeing carefully curated wedding dresses, baptismal gowns, crazy quilts, Art Nouveau Van Briggie pottery, guns, swords, ox yokes, caps and beaver hats.

“The goal of the exhibit was to explain how we ended up in the present circumstances –how Colorado became the place it is and how Coloradans became the people they are today,” Wei says in the introduction. “Even though objects themselves are mute, they can still give voice to the voiceless. They can speak for

ordinary people and communities whose stories we otherwise would never hear.”

“Becoming Colorado” is a true delight. The essays are well researched and written. Wei weaves threads of social, economic, cultural and political history into one text. His historical overview notes that “Colorado had its share of visionaries, boosters, and dreamers who wanted to make something more of the rough-and-tumble Colorado territory.”

He writes in detail of the dispossession of Native Americans from their lands and is particularly sensitive to the waves of immigrants who came to Colorado. He mentions mining, agriculture, gaming, tourism, oil and gas exploration, outdoor recreation, marijuana and, of course, beer.

Chapters are arranged chronologically beginning with a 12,000-year-old Folsom spear point. “The book seeks to tell an inclusive story,” Wei says. “It tells stories about how Coloradans, both known and unknown, have contributed to the state’s development.” Readers will enjoy scanning the pages, looking at artifacts, and then reading about the objects’ cultural contexts.

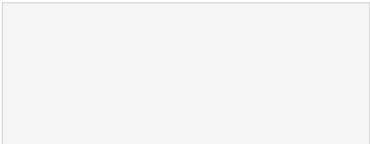
■ ■ ■

A Spanish sword blade from Solingen, Germany, engraved with the words “NO ME SAQUES SIN RAZON; NO ME ENBAINES SIN HONOR” (“Draw me not without reason; sheath me not without honor”) testifies to international trade across the Great Plains in the early 1830s. A shag beaver felt top hat “worn widely by gentlemen other than those belonging to the upper class” must have stories of its own.

There’s a U.S. Army calvary buffalo fur overcoat, an Hispano retablo or painting on wood of Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe, a whiskey flask, a gold ingot and a deadly looking double-barreled 10-gauge Belgian shotgun carried by an express rider protecting a stagecoach strongbox.

A copy of the Colorado state Constitution guarantees an individual’s right to “speak, write or publish whatever he will on any subject.” I also like the Coors Malted Milk can, Molly Brown’s opera cloak, various medals and awards, and distinctive Rockmount Ranch Western shirts from downtown Denver. Who knew that those attractive cowboy shirts with their diamond-shaped snap fasteners and special pockets have been worn by Bob Dylan, Elvis Presley, Bruce Springsteen, Ronald Reagan and Robert Redford? I’m diving into my clothes closet right now to toss out my Hawaiian shirts to make room for Colorado Rockmounts, if only I can find deals on such vintage attire.

Other examples of Colorado clothing include a 2006 Arapahoe High School letter jacket, which represents the work of Northern Arapaho tribal member Wilbur Antelope. His version of an “Arapahoe warrior” is the new school logo.



“To show respect for American Indians, the Arapaho Warrior image is not used on football uniforms, since the image would be rubbed into the dirt in the



A state law now requires Colorado high schools to rid themselves of derogatory emblems and symbols offensive to Native Americans. Arapahoe High School decided to have Wilbur Antelope, a Northern Arapahoe artist, create a new school logo in 2006 which appears on this letter jacket. In addition to the logo, in a special ceremony the Arapahoe High School gymnasium was renamed Sitting Eagle Gymnasium to honor Arapahoe elder Anthony Sitting Eagle. (Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)

(Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)

course of a game,” Wei says. “The image is also not used on the gym floor, since students would deface it while walking on it.”

“Becoming Colorado” is a book rich in clothing with a ball cap from Sakata Family Farms, a 10th Mountain Division all white military uniform, a U.S. Air Force Academy cadet hat, a vintage Orange Crush sweater (1977), and former Denver Mayor Wellington Webb’s sneakers. Webb, Denver’s first Black mayor, walked 200 miles across the city’s diverse neighborhoods during his mayoral campaign. As an example of Wei’s comprehensive writing, the historian begins a chapter essay by describing Webb’s “sneaker campaign” for mayor in 1994. Wei contrasts Webb’s success with the 1920s dominance of the Ku Klux Klan in Colorado politics when a Colorado Supreme Court judge, city council members, the governor, the Denver mayor and a U.S. senator were all Klansmen.

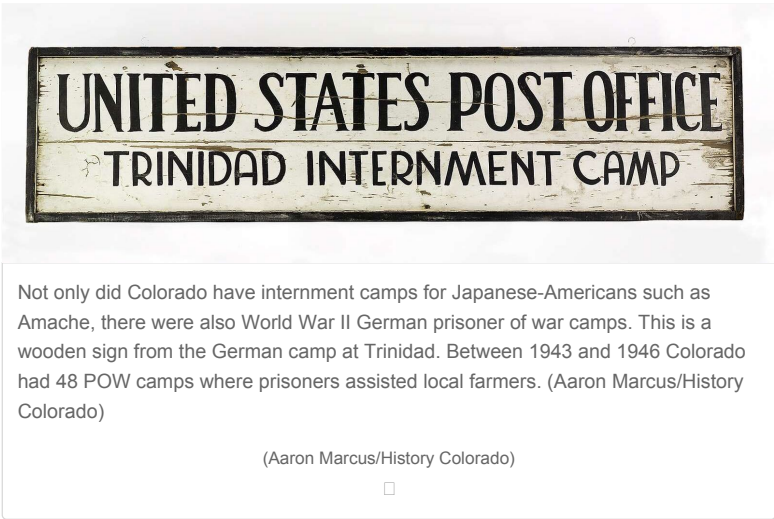
Similarly, a ball cap from Sakata Family Farms, now 3,200 acres of vegetables, pinto beans, sweet corn and onions, is used to tell the story not only of the

Sakata family but of other Japanese Americans imprisoned at Camp Amache during World War II. Wei describes the camp and also Gov. Ralph L. Carr, the only Western governor to welcome internees from the West Coast. His tolerant attitude cost him his political career. He was never elected to public office in our state again. So, it is fitting that the Colorado Judicial Center bears his name.

■ ■ ■

There are artifacts and objects from the Front Range to the Western Slope, from the Eastern Plains to the San Luis Valley. There’s a Moffat Tunnel drill bit, a thick, black, gooey sample of the first oil retorted from oil shale, and a Ute child’s toy cradleboard. I like the story of the Georgetown miners who created an engraved silver spike to commemorate the joining of the Denver Pacific Railway to the Union Pacific in June 1870. Headed downslope for the ceremony, the miners got thirsty

and pawned their gift, which was later recovered. I’m also in awe of seeing an admission badge to the 2008 Democratic National Convention that allowed the wearer to hear candidate Barack Obama speak about “Change We Can Believe In” before 84,000 people.



Not only did Colorado have internment camps for Japanese-Americans such as Amache, there were also World War II German prisoner of war camps. This is a wooden sign from the German camp at Trinidad. Between 1943 and 1946 Colorado had 48 POW camps where prisoners assisted local farmers. (Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)

(Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)

“Becoming Colorado” belongs in every Colorado library and in Colorado history classes. The heartfelt dedication is “For the people of Colorado – Past, Present, and Future.” Dazzle your friends and neighbors. Have a dinner party with all local foods and beer, then show off this book. I guarantee it’ll be well-thumbed by the end of the night.

Andrew Gulliford, an award-winning author and editor, is professor of history at Fort Lewis College. Reach him at andy@agulliford.com.



A Southern Cheyenne shield cover circa 1850 represents Native American warrior societies and the “golden age” of the Plains Indians across Colorado. Belonging to Lame Bull, it is decorated with sacred images from a personal vision, which included a horned turtle flanked by two horned butterflies. (Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)

(Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)





Estimates are that between the end of the Civil War and 1895, one fourth of all cowboys were African-American. One such cowboy was Charles Walden Rothwell and this is his hammer circa 1913-1930. He lived in Dearfield, which was a Black agricultural community on Colorado’s high plains. (Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)

(Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)



A shag beaver felt top hat from 1856 to1867 was headgear “worn widely by gentlemen other than those belonging to the upper class” notes the book “Becoming Colorado.” It took up to five beaver pelts to make these hats, which were wildly

popular in Europe in the 16th through the 19th centuries. (Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)

(Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)



Kit Carson, legendary scout and messenger for the U.S. Army, only stood 5 feet 2 inches and weighed no more than 140 pounds. This is his buckskin coat. He became a Western hero in his own lifetime and developed a sympathy for Native Americans over his own peers. Carson was Indian agent to Taos Pueblos, Muache Utes and Jicarilla Apaches. (Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)

(Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)





Jack Swigert graduated from the University of Colorado and was on the Apollo 13 space expedition where he famously said, “Houston, we have a problem here.” When the spacecraft was 250,000 miles from Earth the oxygen tank ruptured. This is his in-flight cover garment from 1969. Swigert received the Presidential Medal of Freedom because he “demonstrated a courage and heroism that defines the human spirit.” (Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)

(Aaron Marcus/History Colorado)



You might also like

