

Jefferson County History

Green Russell Expedition

The history of Jefferson County is contemporaneous with that of Denver. The first notable fact of Colorado's history is the Green Russell expedition. In the spring of 1858 Russell and eight other Georgians, accompanied by thirty Cherokee Indians, set out to prospect the Rocky Mountains for gold. On the way they were joined by a party of Kansans who had heard rumors of finds in the South Platte River. In June the united company consisted of 104 persons. They passed up the Arkansas River almost to the forks; then they turned northward, prospecting Fountain Creek, Cherry Creek, and the Platte. Weeks passed, and no important "prospects" were located. From time to time members of the expedition got discouraged and started back home.

Prospecting for Gold

On June 24, 1858, the party camped on the site of Denver. Moving in a north-westerly direction, they entered what is now Jefferson County, and prospected Clear Creek, near where the present town of Arvada stands.

Colors Found

To the Cherokees belongs the credit of originating the expedition. To the white men of the party belongs the credit of finding gold. The Cherokees lost hope and abandoned the quest. Russell and a dozen comrades had the virtue of stick-to-it-iveness; they stayed longer to prospect the streams of the eastern slope, and their persistence was finally rewarded. No gold to speak of was found at Arvada, but later they uncovered deposits of the glittering dust in the Platte and Dry Creek, a little south of the Denver of to-day. That was the real beginning of Colorado. In the summer and fall of 1858 upward of a thousand men found their way to Cherry Creek and the Pike's Peak country. Some of them panned out the sands of Clear Creek, getting colors to the value of a dollar or so a day, which was not encouraging. They wandered through the foothills, looking for gold nuggets. They found "prospects," but no gold to amount to anything.

Golden Founded

At the time Denver was building near the confluence of the Platte and Cherry Creek, two little gold camps (or, rather, camps of gold-seekers) grew up on Clear Creek about 15 or 16 miles farther west. That was in the fall of 1858. The following year Golden City was founded, and at once it became a rival of Denver. It was nearer to the new mountain towns – Central City, Idaho Springs, Boulder, Georgetown, and Breckenridge; and its position as the natural gateway to the mining camps led to greater enterprise on the part of its citizens than was exhibited then by the Denverites.

Capital of Territory

"By the close of 1859," says Hall, "there were seven hundred residents in Golden. The influx during the next year or two was steady, though not large. . . . In 1861 the War of the Rebellion and the subsidence of the gold mining excitement caused the tide of immigration to recede back to its original source. In 1862 stagnation set in. . . . Golden did not greatly improve between 1863 and 1867. It was made the capital of the Territory in 1862, and held the well-nigh empty distinction five years, when it was moved to Denver. Governor Cummings was the only chief magistrate to make his headquarters there, and he only for a short time."

School of Mines

With the building of the railroad, in 1870, a new epoch of progress came, and the town made tremendous advances. Mills were built, a brewery, and various industries established, such as the making of fire-brick and pottery. In 1874 the School of Mines was founded here, and the State Industrial School for Boys was opened in 1881. Meanwhile other towns were started in the county, which has for a long time been accorded a place in the front rank of Colorado's counties.

Name of County

The county was named in honor of the statesman who penned the Declaration. In early days the Territory itself was called Jefferson. Then the name was changed to Colorado, after the great river of that name whose headwaters are in the Rocky Mountains. Colorado is a Spanish word meaning "colored" or "colored red." The cañon of the Colorado River has many richly tinted rocks and cliffs; hence the appropriateness of the name. Jefferson County is bounded on the north by Boulder County, on the east by Adams, Arapahoe, and Douglas Counties, and on the west by Park, Clear Creek, and Gilpin Counties. The Platte River forms its eastern boundary for a considerable distance. It is wedge shaped, 72 miles long, terminating at a point at the southern extremity. The northern border is 20 miles long.

Surface

The surface is exceedingly varied. The northeast corner consists of rolling plains, suited to agriculture. The hogback, or range of foothills, traverses the county from north to south. In the southern portion are peaks from 11,000 to

12,000 feet or more in height. Says Captain E. L. Berthoud: "Fully two-thirds is comprised in high mountains and foothills, the remaining third being undulating prairies over 5,000 feet above sea line, and which to-day are occupied for agricultural and pastoral purposes "

Area

The area is 840 square miles, of which 61,224 acres, or 11 per cent., were under cultivation in 1900. The cultivated area in 1909 was upward of 100,000 acres. The mean yearly precipitation is about 15 inches, and the average temperature 45° to 50°. In 1900 the county had 9,306 inhabitants; the population in 1910 was 14,231. The industries are varied. Mining, manufacturing, stock-raising, fruit-growing, farming, and gardening are successfully carried on.

Resources

The county is rich in natural resources, having coal and petroleum beds, fine clays, kaolin, mica, lime, copper, lead, gold, silver, mineral paint, building and monumental stone, basalt used for paving stone, and rhyolite tuff (an eruptive rock used in buildings).

Products

Jefferson might be called a self-sustaining commonwealth, for its products include nearly everything needed by a civilized people. The cattle on a thousand hills furnish beef. The ground brings forth cereals and vegetables in abundance. Apples, pears, and small fruits do well.

First Gardening

Among the '59ers was David K. Wall, of Indiana, who may be considered the father of agriculture in Colorado. In May, 1859, he arrived at the present site of Golden. He brought with him garden seed, a plow, and other farming implements. Wall had been to California, where he had seen irrigating done. In the bottom lands of Clear Creek he plowed and irrigated between two and three acres, where he raised "bonanza" crops of grain and vegetables. Now there are 80,000 acres tilled and artificially watered in Jefferson County. The pioneers found wild cherries and wild plums growing here in profusion and of most delicious flavor. The first fruit trees in the State were planted near Golden, in 1860. Now the county has thousands of acres devoted to orchards and vineyards.

County Seat

The county seat is Golden, 16 miles west of Denver on the Colorado and Southern Railway. Its altitude is 5,693 feet. In 1900 the town had 2,152 souls; the population in 1910 was 2,477. The pottery and brick manufactories of Golden are especially noted. They obtain in the vicinity superior brick-clay and clay fit for the finest china ware. Golden is a popular picnic ground for Denver excursionists. Chimney Gulch is a picturesque locality.

Leaves from Geological Records

The vicinity of Golden was once a volcanic country. Table Mountain is a portion of what must have been an immense lava bed. This small mesa of lava is 250 feet thick. North of Golden are other lava masses, mute witnesses to the terrible volcanic eruptions that devastated this section ages ago. To the west is the surpassing pageant of mountain scenery, and in other directions one may gaze upon a variety of landscape. In various places between Golden and Denver stumps of palms and palmettos have been found, also fossil leaves of tropical trees, ferns, and other forms of vegetation common in southern Texas and Old Mexico. This district once abounded with luxuriant forests, which later formed the coal beds that lie beneath the surface of Jefferson County, extending from its northern border to Wolhurst. The region about Golden is one of the most attractive places within easy reach of Denver. It is also historically interesting. Up Golden Gate Cañon surged the gold-seekers of early days on their way to the mountains.

Morrison

Morrison, 17 miles southwest of Denver, was founded in 1874. It is the terminus of a spur of the Colorado and Southern Railway. In 1910 the place had a population of 251. The State Industrial School for Girls was established here in 1887. Morrison has an altitude of 5,766 feet. The "Tent City" and other spots in the environs of Morrison are good places to take the rest cure and build up physically. The bright sunshine by day and the cool nights (even in midsummer) make living a joy. Nearby is excellent fishing.

Fossils

Many fossils have been found near Morrison. Here have been unearthed some of the richest treasures of paleontology of the West. Among other finds is that of the thigh bone of an atlantosaurus, the largest land animal known to the scientific world; the bone is 9 feet long and 28 inches in diameter. This saurian had ribs 10 feet long and 4 inches thick. It must have been 80 feet in length, and over 35 feet tall, when standing. In the strata of the rocks have been found bones belonging to extraordinary animals and reptiles, such as the extinct Triceratops, which had a skull from 6 to 8 feet long. Scientists have dug up fragments of skeletons of other enormous reptiles of a far-off time when dinosaurs swam the inland seas of this continent. In other localities of Jefferson County have been uncovered

the teeth of mastodons and bones of monsters that had their day and disappeared long ago. Morrison also boasts of soda lakes. The mineral salts were leached out of the surrounding formations.

Park of Red Rocks

In the neighborhood of Morrison are many picturesque and romantic features. At a little distance southwest of the town stands Mount Falcon, and winding up its wooded slopes and defiles to its top is a scenic roadway for autos and carriages. It is known as the Mount Falcon High Line Drive. The Indian Burying Ground is an attraction in the fascinating region between Morrison and Golden. Some 3 miles or so to the south, in Turkey Creek Cañon, is a tall rock, where, tradition says, an Indian maiden, crossed in love, leaped to her death, followed by her copper-skinned lover, hence it is called Lovers' Leap. Overlooking the town on the west is the famed Park of Red Rocks, a wonderful aggregation of moss-grown cliffs and massive sandstone formations, with caves and cool grottoes. A mile ride up the Incline Railway to the summit of Mount Morrison (7,900 feet) is a thrilling experience. On this rugged eminence one is favored with enchanting views of the surrounding country. Other towns in the county are Arvada, Edgewater, Evergreen, and Critchell. In the early '60's the noted scout, Jim Baker, lived a short distance east of Arvada, and kept a toll-bridge over Clear Creek. Troutdale, near Evergreen, has idyllic surroundings. Buffalo and Pine Grove, in the southern part of the county, are adjacent to localities where hunters and fishermen enjoy themselves. The climate of the foothill district has been much praised. "The moment we enter the foothills," says Berthoud, "the extremes of a continental climate have lost their severe forms, and we reach a delicious blending of continental and Alpine climates, without the rude, unpleasant extremes of either."

Eugene Parsons, *A Guide Book to Colorado* (Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1911) 166-173.