

STATE GUIDE

COLORADO

by DANA MCCULLOUGH

"PIKE'S PEAK OR bust!" If your ancestors were among the thousands who trekked to the Centennial State looking for gold in the 1800s, they may have cried this popular slogan. Between Green Russell's 1858 discovery of a gold deposit at the South Platte River and Cherry Creek, and the last major strike at Cripple Creek in the early 1890s, Colorado's population grew drastically—from around 25,000 to more than 400,000. Many of the new settlers came from the Northeast and Midwest, particularly New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Missouri and Ohio. Others were immigrants from Europe, Canada, China and other parts of the world.

Tracing those settlers—and other Coloradans—won't be a tough uphill climb, thanks to the state's mountainous genealogical resources. Start your trek with these tips.

STATE HISTORY

Gold seekers weren't nearly the first to explore Colorado's eastern plains and Rocky Mountains. Ute Indians resided in the area around the time Spanish explorers came through in 1541. More than a century later, a French explorer appropriated land east of the Rockies. More adventurers followed, including Zebulon Pike three years after the United States acquired part of what's now Colorado in the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. The mountain peak he discovered now bears his name. After the Mexican-American War ended in 1848, US winnings included the rest of present-day Colorado.

By 1820, after being forced from their land in other states, the Arapahoe, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, Pawnee and Sioux Indians had joined the Utes in Colorado. Numerous forts and trading posts sprang up, and the first permanent non-Indian settlement was founded in 1851. Tensions grew between settlers and Indian tribes, culminating in Indian attacks on settlers and the 1864 massacre of Cheyenne and Arapahoe at Sand Creek. The US Army built Camp Collins (now Fort Collins) and Fort Morgan to protect travelers. By the late 1800s, most Colorado tribes had been beaten back onto reservations.

The gold rush era drew to a close by the turn of the 20th century, but mining still remained a prominent industry along with ranching, and later, oil.

FAST FACTS

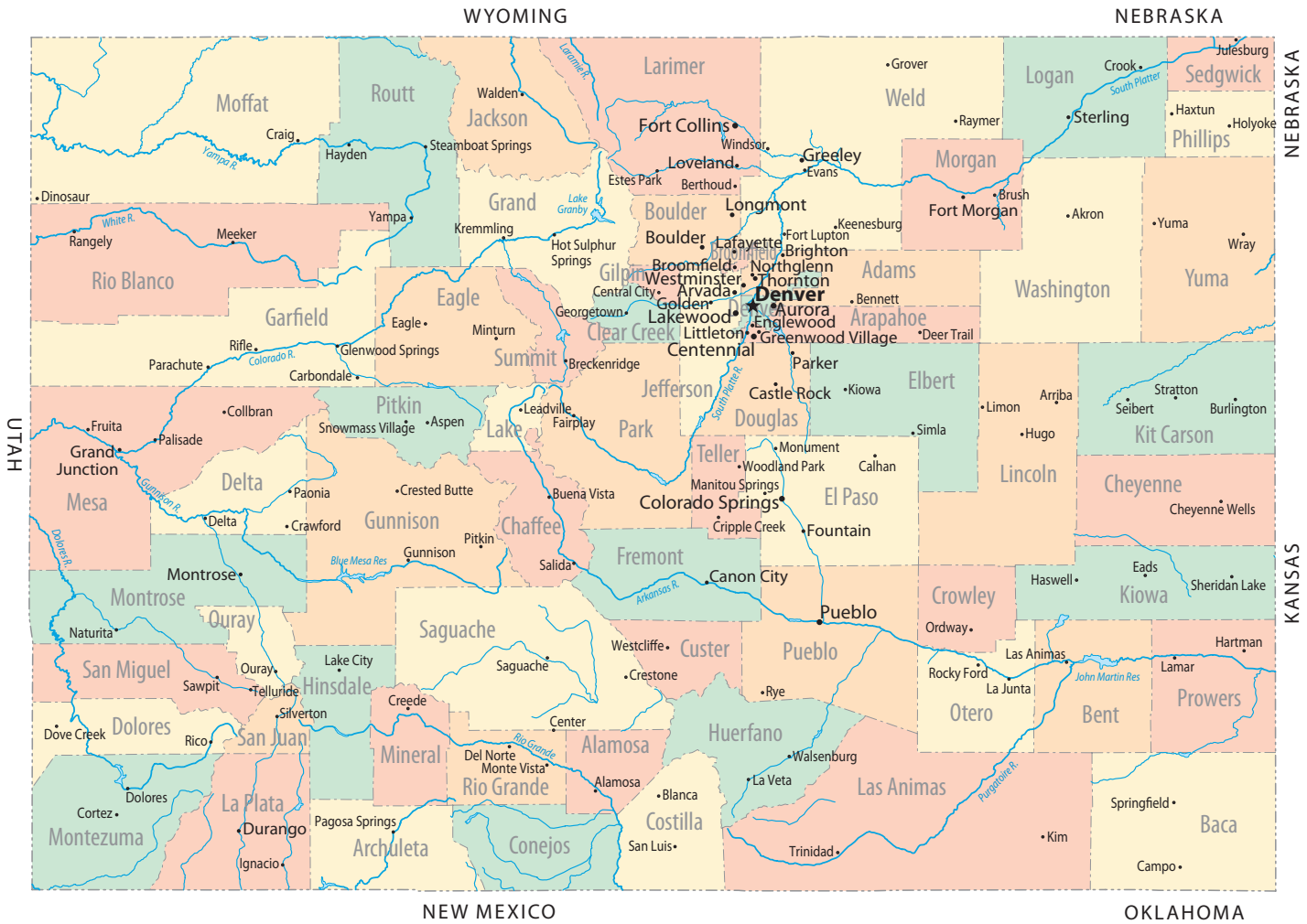
- ★ **Statehood:** 1876
- ★ **First federal census:** 1870
- ★ **Statewide birth and death records begin:** 1907
- ★ **Statewide marriage records begin:** 1907
- ★ **Public-land state**
- ★ **Counties:** 64
- ★ **Contact for vital records:**
Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Vital Records Section,
4300 Cherry Creek Drive S.,
Denver, CO 80246,
(303) 692-2200,
<colorado.gov/cdphe>

CENSUS, MILITARY AND VITAL RECORDS

US censuses first counted Coloradans in 1860, when residents were split among four territories: Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico and Utah. Federal enumerations of Colorado Territory, established in 1861, exist beginning in 1870. A special count of Colorado was taken by the federal government in 1885, which you can browse on FamilySearch.org <familysearch.org>; searchable images are on subscription site Ancestry.com <ancestry.com>.

If your ancestors were members of a Colorado Indian tribe, you can use the Colorado State Archives' microfilm

COLORADO



timeline

1806

Zebulon Pike sets out to explore the West

1833

A trading post is founded at Bent's Fort

1858

Green Russell discovers gold deposits, setting off the gold rush

1859

Colorado's first newspaper, the *Rocky Mountain News*, is published

1863

Telegraph links Denver to eastern United States

1870

First trains from Cheyenne, Wyo., arrive on the Denver Pacific Railway

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copies of the annual American Indian censuses the federal government took from 1885 to 1944. Enumerated tribes are listed at colorado.gov/pacific/archives/census-records-0. Before 1930, records provide the person's name and basic information; after 1930, they give additional details including the degree of Indian blood. Access these record indexes and images on Ancestry.

Colorado's statewide registration for birth, marriage and death officially began in 1907, but some counties started recording vital data as early as 1876. Contact the courthouse in the county where your ancestor lived for pre-1907 birth/death records and marriages pre-1900 and 1940-1974. Colorado's vital records office colorado.gov/cdphe has other birth/death (starting in 1907) and marriage records (1900-1939 and 1975-present). You must prove your relationship to the person in the record and provide identification when making a request.

For help locating vital and other early records, search the state archives' online Historical Records Index colorado.gov/pacific/archives/archives-search by name, county, time period or record type. It indexes births before 1907, statewide divorces (1890-1939), and vital records from several counties and cities back to the 1860s. Search also indexes to court cases, wills and probates, military records and more. You'll also find an index to land patents granted by the state (not the feds). Matches show a name, date, record type, and case or record number so you can find the original.

Colorado was home to a lot of soldiers. Look for service details of frontier assignments in Registers of Enlistments in the United States Army, 1798-1914; both NARA and the FHL have copies. Coloradans fought in the Civil War (for the Union) and several Indian Wars from the early 1800s to early 1900s. Original service and pension records are

at NARA in Washington, DC. The FHL has microfilm indexes for volunteer Union soldiers and pension records.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Colorado researchers can strike gold in several great internet resources, including:

★ The Western States Marriage Records Index abish.byui.edu/specialcollections/westernstates/search.cfm contains nearly 6,000 entries from the Centennial State.



BWELLEN/PIXABAY

1906

Denver's US Mint issues its first coins

1914

Southern Colorado Coal Strike escalates into Ludlow Massacre

1917

Buffalo Bill Cody is buried on Lookout Mountain

1958

US Air Force Academy opens in Colorado Springs

1980

Coal mining production peaks on the state's Western Slopes

1993

Colorado Rockies become the first major league baseball team in the region

TOOLKIT

Websites

Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library Finding Aids <history.denverlibrary.org/research?qt-guides=4#qt-guides>

Colorado GenWeb Project <cogenweb.com>

Colorado Historic Newspaper Collection <coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>

Colorado State Archives: Digital Records <colorado.gov/archives>

Cyndi's List: Colorado <cyndislist.com/us/co>

Rocky Mountain Online Archive <rmoa.unm.edu>

Publications

Colorado and Its People, Vol 4: Personal and Family History by Le Roy Reuben Hafen (Literary Licensing)

A Colorado History by Carl Ubbelohde, Maxine Benson and Duane A. Smith (Pruett Publishing Co.)

Colorado: A History of the Centennial State by Carl Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel (University of Colorado Press)

From the Grave: A Roadside Guide to Colorado's Pioneer Cemeteries by Linda Wommack (Caxton Press)

Historical Atlas of Colorado by Thomas J. Noel, Paul F. Mahoney and Richard E. Stevens (University of Oklahoma Press)

Archives & Organizations

Colorado Council of Genealogical Societies Box 40270, Denver, CO 80204, <cocouncil.org>

Colorado Genealogical Society Box 9218, Denver, CO 80209, <www.cogensoc.us>

Colorado Historical Society 1200 Broadway, Denver, CO 80203, (303) 447-8679, <historycolorado.org>

Colorado Society of Hispanic Genealogy 2300 S. Patton Court, Denver, CO 80219, <hispanicgen.org>

Colorado State Archives 1313 Sherman St., Room 120, Denver, CO 80203, (303) 866-2358, <colorado.gov/archives>

Denver Public Library Western History and Genealogy Department, Central Library 10 W. 14th Ave. Parkway, Denver, CO 80204, (720) 865-1821, <denverlibrary.org>

National Archives at Denver 17101 Huron Street, Broomfield, CO 80223, (303) 604-4740, <archives.gov/denver>

Norlin Library Western Historical Collection Archives 184 UCB, 1720 Pleasant St., University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309, (303) 492-7242, <colorado.edu/libraries/libraries/norlin-library>

★ The Colorado Historic Newspaper Collection <coloradohistoricnewspapers.org> offers more than a half-million digitized pages from 163 newspapers.

Ancestry has Colorado city directories, a list of WWI soldiers, and more. There's also an index to 40 years of Denver Land Office Records, with the landowner's name and the location of his plot. (A few land records prior to the opening of Colorado's Denver Land Office are with New Mexico records.)

★ The Bureau of Land Management's General Land Office site at <glrecords.blm.gov> has land patents for Colorado and New Mexico. NARA's regional facility in Denver lets you order copies online <archives.gov/research/order> of tract books and land entry case files (including those for relinquished and incomplete claims). The FHL has only a few miscellaneous land titles and private land claims from the 1800s and earlier.

ONSITE RESEARCH

At the DPL—one of the country's top genealogical research repositories—Colorado visitors can begin scaling the peaks and valleys of their family's records. The Western History and Genealogy collection <history.denverlibrary.org/genealogy> offers online indexes and transcriptions for pre-1963 Colorado mining fatalities, state reformatory prisoner records, *Colorado Statesman* newspaper obituaries, Denver obituaries, mortuary records, Denver Old Ladies Home records, WWI casualty and draft registration indexes, pioneers indexes, voter lists and more.

Researchers making an in-person visit to the library can access historical documents including newspapers, ephemera, maps and books, plus another helpful finding aid: a general index card file to help you locate your ancestors in newspapers, local histories, biographical works, newsletters and journals.

About a stone's throw away, the Colorado State Archives has a mountain of other records, including those related to military service, schools, railroads, penitentiaries, the Civilian Conservation Corps, the state children's home and mines. You'll find indexes and holdings information for most of these records at <colorado.gov/pacific/archives/genealogy>.

The Colorado Historical Society <historycolorado.org>, also located in Denver, boasts the state's largest collection of newspapers, dating as far back as 1859. You'll find lots of books, manuscripts, maps, photographs and city directories there, too. A bit further down the road in Boulder, use the extensive map holdings in the University of Colorado's Norlin Library <colorado.edu/libraries/norlin>. With all these resources at hand, your new slogan might be "Genealogy or bust!" ●