

Becoming Colorado

THE CENTENNIAL STATE
IN 100 OBJECTS

W I L L I A M W E I

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Introduction

The first person I knew who was without a doubt a Coloradan was my daughter, Leslie A. Wei. She was born in Boulder Community Hospital in 1982 and like many Coloradans grew up riding horses, skiing down mountain slopes, and climbing up mountainsides. Except for her, everyone else I had met up until then seemed to be from somewhere else. That includes me and my wife, Susan C. Wei, a former professor. Both of us are migrants from other states who came to Colorado to work and remained because we fell in love with the place.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of meeting Coloradans who were born and raised here. Some of them, like Chin Lin Sou's descendants, have been here for more than five generations. Descendants of early arrivals like the Chins are proud of their family history. They can sometimes be recognized on the road by their special "Pioneer" license plates with the ox-drawn prairie schooner emblem. They cannot imagine living anywhere else or wanting to. They worry about what is happening to their state and sometimes wonder out loud about the large number of newcomers moving to Colorado.

Whether conceived or transplanted here, all are Coloradans. They are heirs to a rich heritage that can be traced back thousands of years to the Indigenous Peoples who first inhabited what became Colorado. The physical evidence of their lives can be found in History Colorado's grand collection of objects. As the steward of the state's past, History Colorado has assembled a treasure trove of over 15 million artifacts, photographs, documents, and audiovisual materials. Each item potentially represents a human story waiting to be told.

When I first proposed having an exhibit on the Centennial State in 100 objects at the History Colorado Center, the idea was to tell some of those stories. The sheer diversity of the stories that could be told shows that the Colorado of today is not a simple place with a simple history. Nor is today's Colorado a permanent, standstill affair. The state keeps evolving. Things were once different

here, and like the state's notoriously changeable weather, things will keep on changing in the future. 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.

For those of us who had the privilege of participating in the design of the History Colorado exhibit that became *Zoom In: The Centennial State in 100 Objects*, the challenge was deciding which stories to tell. To our advantage, we were using historical artifacts that people could experience directly for themselves, making it easier for people to connect to those in the past who experienced the same objects. 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.

Under the leadership of Jason Hanson—History Colorado's chief creative officer and the director of research and interpretation—a group of local historians, History Colorado staff members, tribal consultants, and outside specialists assembled to sort through the possibilities. Lively discussions ensued about Colorado and how best to convey its history and culture through the ordinary as well as unusual things people here have made or used.

Early on, it was decided to organize the objects more or less chronologically rather than in thematic groupings, though certain themes thread their way through the exhibit. These themes include the state's extraordinary environment and rich resources; the entrepreneurial character of its people, who have taken advantage of the opportunities offered by the environment; and the heterogeneity of the state's inhabitants, who represent different races, ethnicities, genders, religions, nationalities, and socioeconomic groups.

Winnowing down the list of items to the desired 100 was a lengthy process. In the course of selecting them, many intriguing choices were considered that never made it into the exhibit. A sod house? A Tenth Mountain

Division armored personnel carrier? There was not enough space to display them. Baby Doe's wedding dress? It was set aside because of curatorial concerns about its fragility. However, a few artifacts achieved near-unanimous acceptance, such as a Fifty-Niners whiskey bottle manufactured for the horde of thirsty prospectors who hoped to strike it rich in the Colorado Gold Rush. Perhaps this was a vote of empathy for those who needed a drink or two during their arduous journey across the desolate Great Plains to reach the goldfields.

Since we were limited to a small number of artifacts to be exhibited in a small space, this meant that every item selected would have to represent more than just itself. Each would have to serve one of three purposes: it would have to highlight a significant moment in Colorado's history when people made choices that have helped define who we are today, illuminate an important aspect of Colorado's evolving culture, or bring a recurrent pattern in Coloradan life into sharp focus. The selection process was difficult, to say the least.

At the end of our own journey through Colorado's rich material history, the group did arrive at a final set of 100 objects while recognizing that this was just one set among many alternatives that might have been chosen. Since History Colorado has invited viewers of *Zoom In: The Centennial State in 100 Objects* to select an additional, 101st object, we are happy to say that the list is not closed. We expect that the list will continue to evolve in the coming years, much like the state.

This book is intended to meet the needs of visitors who are interested in a closer look at the rare artifacts on display and the human stories behind them. The work contains 100 short essays, one for each object. The essays expand on the information presented in the museum labels about them. In addition to giving additional details, the essays seek to connect these self-standing objects to the people who used them and, to the extent possible, tell their stories as they understood them, showing how each individual is embedded in the interconnected web of human history. I hope readers will be rewarded with a deeper understanding of the artifacts' historical importance by gaining insight into relevant local, regional, national, and international contexts that illuminate their meaning.

The essays can be read in any order—straight through, in chronological order, or by skipping around. I anticipate that many readers may wish to read selectively to explore the historical artifacts that interest them most. For that reason, certain major events and important people reappear in different essays, where they are crucial to understand the significance of the relic and its role in shaping Colorado's past. Ideally, after poring over one essay, the reader will be inspired to read another, then another, and then all the rest.

The book is also intended to be a popular history rather than a scholarly monograph. It is written for a broad audience of readers who wish to learn about Colorado's history through its material culture. The work begins with an overview of Colorado history, highlighting key periods and presenting a cross-section of individuals and events. The essays that follow can be read in order like chapters in a standard historical text, if desired. They include tragic episodes in the state's history that will undoubtedly make some readers uncomfortable but are necessary to have a fuller understanding of Colorado's past. While generally following the chronology of the artifacts, the essays implicitly show how Colorado has changed over time, enabling readers to draw connections among periods, places, and peoples. Such interconnections constitute the warp and woof of the Centennial State's history.

As a whole, the book seeks to tell an inclusive story, giving voice to communities that have often been overlooked or obscured. It tells stories about how Coloradans, both well-known and unknown, have contributed to the state's development and how they dealt with the many political and socioeconomic challenges encountered in the course of the state's evolution. They shed light on who Coloradans have been and who they are now to provide an inkling as to who they can become in the future. Indeed, I hope the stories may serve to broaden horizons and make readers aware of possibilities not yet considered.

In summary, the 100 objects and essays serve as pathways to the state's history. They provide readers with a way to consider Colorado's past in light of what Coloradans value in the present day. Together, they speak to the larger narrative of Colorado, which has often been amazing, sometimes sad, but always colorful.

Colorful Colorado

A Historical Overview

Among the recurring themes in Colorado history, arguably the most prominent has been the importance of the land and its resources. American Indians who have lived and thrived in Colorado for thousands of years have always been keenly aware of the vital role the land played in their lives. As Regina Lopez Whiteskunk of the Ute Mountain Ute tribe has said, the history of her people was “written on the land.”¹ Other Coloradans have come to share this sentiment.

For that reason, a good place to begin an overview of Colorado is with its land, starting with the role geography and climate have played in shaping it. Geography and climate have presented both challenges and chances for people living here. The way Coloradans have responded to these realities constitutes an essential part in narratives about the state’s history and culture. Among them have been innovators, strivers, and entrepreneurs, whose responses to the difficulties and opportunities bestowed by Mother Nature have run the gamut from creative adaptation to ruthless exploitation for personal gain and public benefit.

The main features of Colorado’s geography are high elevation and variety. Its topography has been summed up as a series of prairies, plateaus, and peaks. The key to its climate is changeability. A local legend has it that forecasters have left the state in disgust because of their inability to predict the weather with any precision. Colorado’s geography and climate are related to each other, as the climate is influenced by the land’s elevation. More than anything else, the mountains have determined the climate, giving rise to low humidity and a lack of precipitation.

The shortage of rain (annually, only about an average of 17 inches statewide) has resulted in a water scarcity and prompted innovative ways to draw water from rivers and underground aquifers. In the early twentieth century, the need to bring water to the sugar beet fields on the eastern plains led to pivotal irrigation projects, while the need to

supply water to Western Slope fruit farms spurred a series of crucial reclamation projects. In areas without access to water for irrigation, farmers have engaged in dry-farming, sometimes with disastrous results.

Water deficiency is a perennial problem, making life particularly precarious for the state’s farmers and ranchers, who have become mainstays of Colorado’s economy. Water rights, the “new gold” of Colorado, have become a prerequisite for a community’s prosperity. The search for more water to sustain growth has led to tensions between rural and urban areas over water diversion projects through the Continental Divide. It has also led to such ingenious ideas as pumping groundwater from beneath defunct mines.

I now turn to the geographic feature most associated with Colorado—its mountains. The state’s mountains are part of the great line of North American mountain ranges that start north in Alaska and extend south to Mexico, with an average elevation of 6,800 feet. Colorado’s mountains include fifty-three Fourteeners, that is, peaks with an elevation of at least 14,000 feet, earning Colorado the nickname the “Highest State.”

The most famous Fourteener is Pikes Peak, near Colorado Springs. In 1893, after hiking to its top, Katharine Lee Bates was inspired by the breathtaking view to write the lyrics to “America the Beautiful.”² When people intone “purple mountain majesties,” they are singing about Colorado’s Rocky Mountains. Many people think “America the Beautiful” should replace or be placed alongside “The Star-Spangled Banner” as the national anthem. Proponents believe “America the Beautiful” better reflects the country as well as being easier to sing.

Colorado’s natural beauty has attracted an assortment of peoples. Its diverse population constitutes another major theme in its history, one that is increasingly important today. According to census data, in 2015, of the more than 5 million people living and working in Colorado, almost 43 percent were born in the state,

while the remaining 57 percent were from another state or nation. In addition to Colorado's Indigenous Peoples, Latinos, Europeans, Asians, Africans, Middle Easterners, and a host of others have come from different parts of the world. Historically, these migrants have been the labor force that has developed the state's economy. The continuous influx of people from elsewhere has created a vibrant multiethnic and multicultural society.

Contrary to the widely held conceit that Colorado (and the American West in general) was a vast empty wilderness before whites arrived, the region was populated by many Indigenous Peoples. Humans were in the area as early as 13,000 years ago, making a life for themselves as hunters, gatherers, and farmers. The Ancestral Puebloan people, who cultivated the valleys and mesas of the Colorado Plateau, were among the first to arrive. The Ute Indians have the distinction of being deemed the state's original residents, having lived in the Rocky Mountains since at least 1300 CE. All other American Indians migrated to Colorado later, usually because they were pushed out of their ancestral lands in the East by more powerful groups, along with invading whites. At least forty-eight different American Indian groups have lived in Colorado at one time or another; they are usually identified by their distinct languages such as Athabascan, Algonquin, and Numic. Their cultural legacies are omnipresent, most visibly in place names such as Kiowa and Ouray Counties, two of the state's sixty-four counties. Kiowa refers to a Plains Indian group and Ouray to a well-known Ute leader. While these place names situate American Indians in the past, it is important to note that they have *not* disappeared. On the contrary, American Indians are still very much in the present.

According to an oft-told tale, white intrusion began in 1492 when, under the flag of Spain, the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus sailed west in search of a water route to China, only to find the Americas instead. Compounding his error, Columbus called the people living in the Americas "Indians" because he believed he had arrived in the East Indies. His arrival started the so-called Columbian Exchange that changed the world forever, especially for the misidentified Indigenous Peoples of America. These Indigenous Peoples began experiencing the anxiety of alien contact and the nightmare of white

colonization. They suffered from "disease and war [that] wiped out 90 percent of [them], or about 55 million people,"³ according to traditional narratives of their plight. A recent interpretation argues that it was mass enslavement more than epidemics that decimated the American Indians.⁴ There is no gainsaying, however, that they have endured 500 years of settler colonialism that sought to displace them and assert state sovereignty over their homelands. It was a tragedy legitimized by the Doctrine of Discovery. European monarchies promulgated this principle to justify their confiscation of Aboriginal Peoples' land under the pretext of discovery. Thomas Jefferson later declared that the doctrine was equally valid for the newly founded United States of America and guided the federal government's policy toward the Indigenous Peoples on the North American continent.

Following Columbus's "discovery" of America came the Spanish *conquistadores* (conquerors) who, by employing advanced military weaponry and forging strategic alliances with local Indigenous Peoples, succeeded in conquering Mexico and the regions south of it to establish the Viceroyalty of New Spain. Any interest the Spanish had in fully colonizing the Mexican borderlands to the north diminished after expeditions into the region during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries failed to find any precious minerals and encountered fierce American Indian opposition.

Part of Colorado came under the Spanish flag in 1706, when Juan de Ulibarri (1670–1716) led one such expedition into the El Cuartelejo ("the far quarter") area on the Great Plains of eastern Colorado and western Kansas, claiming it for New Spain. He crossed into Colorado as far as the Arkansas Valley in present-day Kiowa County. Spanish and, later, Mexicans made a life for themselves in southern Colorado. Like the American Indians, their cultural legacy can be seen in the many places bearing Spanish names such as Mesa Verde (lit. green table), which has been designated a World Heritage Site. The most notable place name, of course, is "Colorado" itself, which means "colored red" in Spanish, referring to the Colorado River's red-brown silt.

The Spanish authorities considered Colorado and the southwestern borderlands a wasteland but were content to use them as a trading district with American Indians

and as a buffer zone against French Canadians coming south from Canada and European Americans coming east from the United States—both of whom had designs on the region. The American Indians were caught between these advancing peoples while under Spanish Colonial domination. The ill-fated Pueblo War of Independence (1680) against the Spanish authorities was an early attempt by Indigenous Peoples to free themselves from European domination. It would not be their last.

As a result of the Louisiana Purchase (1803), the United States expanded westward right to the edge of the Rocky Mountains. Mountain men and hunters came to the area to participate in the fur trade, trapping beavers and skinning buffalo for a living. From 1832 to 1856, white traders founded outposts along the Arkansas and South Platte Rivers, where they dealt mainly with American Indians, exchanging manufactured goods for beaver pelts and buffalo hides that were later shipped back East. The fur trade collapsed around the mid-nineteenth century when the demand for furs declined with changing fashions in the world market.

Some of the erstwhile trappers and hunters later served as guides for Euro-American explorers such as Zebulon M. Pike (after whom Pikes Peak is named) and Stephen H. Long (after whom Longs Peak is named), who came to survey the newly acquired territory. They provided the information necessary for the colonization of the western frontier by whites. They also paved the way for the later coming of the transcontinental railroads, which created a network that linked the territory to a national market and integrated it with the national culture.

Stephen Long was not favorably impressed with the land he traversed, dismissing the dry, treeless eastern plains as “the Great American Desert.” Colorado became known as a place to bypass rather than to settle during the early years of the country’s westward movement. Ever since, local boosters have worked assiduously to dispel this misconception of Colorado as a marginal place of little consequence.

Predictably, as whites moved westward, they encroached upon lands held by others, such as Indigenous Peoples’ lands and the remnants of European colonial empires on the North American continent. For the future Centennial State, the most important of these was

Mexico. Outstanding territorial claims between the United States and Mexico were settled with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War (1846–1848). The treaty ceded more than a third of Mexico’s land (called the Mexican Cession) to the United States, including what became a significant part of Colorado Territory. Soon, small settlements were founded in the territory. The first permanent settlement was the town of San Luis de Culebra, founded by Mexican American colonists in 1851. An earlier effort by Juan Bautista de Anza to establish the town of San Carlos near present-day Pueblo in 1787 had failed to take root.

The Mexican Cession ignited a national debate over the spread of slavery to the new territories, resulting in sectional strife and culminating in war. As is well-known, Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party ran on a political platform centered on preservation of the Union and the exclusion of slavery from the ceded territories. To gain the support of Western farmers and Northern industrialists, Lincoln and his party also supported a homestead act, that is, the distribution of free land and the building of the country’s infrastructure. Lincoln’s election led to the secession of the Southern states and the outbreak of the Civil War (1861–1865). The American West became embroiled in the war as Union and Confederate forces fought for control of the region and its resources.

As Ned Blackhawk has noted, one of the war’s consequences was “the militarization of Indian policy as many western territories fell under the command of army commanders.”⁵ While the Civil War ended slavery, it also generated genocidal campaigns against the Plains Indians, leading to the wholesale dispossession of their lands and the devastation of their cultures. Contrary to white expectations, their erstwhile enemies managed to survive the onslaught and to recover from it; since the mid-twentieth century they have experienced a cultural and economic revival. In the process, the Plains Indians and other Indigenous Peoples have made significant contributions to the development of the United States, though they have usually been overlooked.

The discovery of gold deposits at the confluence of the South Platte River and Cherry Creek in present-day Denver in 1858 precipitated the Colorado Gold Rush

(1858–1859). Once gold was discovered, the territory experienced a dramatic influx of whites who began to set up towns, mainly mining communities, to the detriment of American Indians already living there. The discovery of gold was a watershed event, changing the lives of Colorado’s American Indians forever. Within a few years, the territory went from a minor region to a major destination for whites from the eastern United States and immigrants from around the world. Stricken with gold fever, an estimated 100,000 would-be prospectors set out for Colorado to strike it rich, though very few did. There was money to be made in Colorado, but it was made by the merchants who equipped and supplied the gold seekers, the townsmen who met their need for basic amenities, and the farmers and ranchers who provided them with food.

The gold rush was only the first discovery of the rich resources to be found in Colorado. Many more discoveries followed, including the silver strikes in Leadville in 1878 and the discovery of the goldfields of Cripple Creek in 1890. Each of these finds was accompanied by a boom-and-bust cycle that has characterized Colorado’s extractive industries ever since, contributing to an alternating cycle of affluence and privation. With economic prosperity came urbanization and the growth of cities such as Denver, the state capital. With economic depression came a search for scapegoats, leading to xenophobic incidents such as Denver’s anti-Chinese riot on October 31, 1880. These boom-and-bust cycles were tied to forces beyond the state’s control, namely, the fluctuating prices for its mineral and energy resources in the global economy and the impact of federal government policies on the demand for these resources.

As the United States entered the post–Civil War period, Colorado contributed significantly to the country’s transformation into the largest and most advanced economy in the world. Colorado had its share of visionaries, boosters, and dreamers who wanted to make something more of the rough-and-tumble Colorado Territory. They wanted to integrate the territory into the national polity and its people into the broader American society. More important, they wanted to create a civil society, a fraught quest that constitutes another theme woven into the warp and woof of the state’s history.

Among them were colorful Gilded Age (1870s–1900) characters like Horace Tabor from Vermont, who became the Silver King of Leadville and lived a life of excess. Another was William Jackson Palmer from Delaware, a Civil War Medal of Honor recipient and head of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. His railroad, together with other railway lines that connected the state to the rest of the nation, was essential in exporting raw materials from and importing manufactured goods into Colorado. Men like Tabor and Palmer helped integrate Colorado into the nation, beginning with the establishment of the Territory of Colorado in 1861 and the State of Colorado in 1876.

Violence was an intrinsic part of Colorado’s development. During the second half of the nineteenth century, growth occurred at the expense of American Indians, as prospectors and farmers invaded their lands. American Indians fought the invaders and negotiated with them to preserve their ancestral lands and way of life as circumstances allowed. They became embroiled in the Colorado Indian Wars (1864–1869), which began with the Sand Creek Massacre on November 29, 1864, and ended with the Battle of Summit Springs on July 11, 1869.

Although they won some battles and even closed the Santa Fé Trail temporarily, the Plains Indians were ultimately unable to stop whites from moving into Colorado. Between the diseases that decimated their groups and the conscious policy of the US military to allow their principal food source—the buffalo—to be destroyed, the Plains Indians were ultimately defeated. They were forced to accept treaties that compelled them to relinquish their territory and live on reservations. Two federally recognized American Indian tribes remain in Colorado to the present day: the Ute Mountain Utes and the Southern Utes.

What happened in Colorado was hardly unique. It was part of a recurring pattern of Indigenous nations–US government relations. Between 1778 and 1871, the US government signed and ratified 370 treaties with American Indian nations, acknowledging American Indian sovereignty and dominion over their homelands. In these treaties, the US government affirmed American Indians’ rights regarding land use and agreed to protect the land and its resources. In return for the cession of

indigenous lands, the US government agreed to provide support and services. The US government regularly reneged on its commitments, invalidating the treaties it had made and inviting violence as a consequence. Broken treaties and other actions led to a cycle of violence in which American Indians renewed their attacks on whites, prompting US Army retaliation. Predictably, after their defeat, American Indians were dispossessed of even more of their ancestral lands.

With the removal of most of the American Indians, farmers, ranchers, and the cowboys who managed their herds took over the Indians' lands. Encouraged by the Homestead Act (1862), a tidal wave of white settlers descended upon vacated American Indian lands, which were eventually organized into American territories. The farmers and ranchers produced the food necessary to feed a growing urban population in an increasingly industrialized economy.

Along with the rest of the nation, problems caused by industrialization and urbanization during the Progressive Era (1890–1920s) afflicted Colorado. As the state's economy shifted away from boom-and-bust-prone gold and silver mining toward manufacturing and its small towns grew into big cities, Coloradans sought to ameliorate the difficulties caused by these changes through reform campaigns. Ever since, reformers have been at the forefront of social change to improve the quality of life in the Centennial State.

Among the most active were those in the labor movement, which sought to address the abuse of immigrants and racial minorities who worked in the coalfields and smokestack industries. Resistance to injustice led to intermittent labor disputes between workers and owners over wages and working conditions. An equally significant issue was company control over the lives of the workers and the right of workers to unionize. Some of the most violent confrontations were between hard rock miners and mine operators, leading to the Colorado Labor Wars of 1903–1904 and the Colorado Coalfield War of 1913–1914.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Colorado reformers were in the vanguard of what became successful national movements for social change. They were activists in the temperance movement, enacting local Prohibition by referendum in 1914 (effective

in 1916), several years before the passage of the 18th Amendment (1919) and the beginning of national Prohibition (1920). They were trailblazers in the women's suffrage movement, giving women the right to vote in 1893, almost a generation before the passage of the 19th Amendment (1920) that gave men and women throughout the country equal voting rights.

At the same time, fueled by popular fear of the rapid social changes sweeping the country, others took advantage of the era's call for change to advance a racial and nativist agenda, most notably the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The Klan established a Klavern in Colorado in 1922, which soon became the most influential KKK organization west of the Mississippi River. In its heyday, it is estimated that 5 percent to 10 percent of the state's population were either KKK members or sympathizers. Denver had an estimated 17,000 Klan members, who focused their hatred on vulnerable Blacks, Jews, and Catholics, harassing them and boycotting their businesses. The KKK achieved this by broadening its strategy, clothing its white supremacist agenda in patriotic garb and terrorizing people. The Klavern later collapsed when KKK-affiliated office holders were repudiated and the national organization was weakened by factionalism.

During the 1930s, Colorado survived the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl that devastated farms along the eastern plains. It was able to contribute to the defeat of the nation's enemies during World War II, as it had in the earlier Great War, sending its young people to fight overseas and producing food on the home front to feed the military. During the Cold War period (1947–1991), Colorado made a transformative transition from extractive industries to agriculture, industry, and recreation, as well as government-related programs that were deemed necessary to win the struggle against the country's communist enemies. Of the government programs, nothing was more controversial than the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons facility. It opened in 1952, with the mission of producing plutonium "triggers" to detonate thermonuclear bombs. Fears that the plant's radioactive materials would contaminate the water and pollute the air led to years of public protest.

By the early twenty-first century, Colorado's economy had moved to high-tech and service industries,

including gambling in the former mining towns of Black Hawk, Central City, and Cripple Creek. The gaming proceeds are heavily taxed to support historical preservation in all of the state's sixty-four counties. The state's newest growth industry has been the production and sale of recreational marijuana (starting in 2014). Tax revenues on marijuana have enriched state coffers. An additional source of revenue has come from so-called pot tourists, the latest group to visit the state regularly. Tourists and locals alike have benefited from Colorado's approval of both medical and recreational marijuana.

In recent decades, Colorado's economy has increasingly relied on visitors who appreciate the state's spectacular scenery and sunny climate. The state's tourism industry attracts people from around the world, who come to enjoy its picture-perfect landscape and to participate in outdoor recreational activities. Skiers and snowboarders can choose from a range of world-class ski resorts that were developed after World War II.

At the same time, Coloradans have become acutely aware of the natural world's fragility and the need to be responsible stewards of the land, with much of it set aside as national parks, monuments, and forests. Competing concerns about the environment and how best to utilize it have sparked challenges to federal land policies, conflicts between environmentalists and ranchers, and concerns over the pollution caused by extractive industries.

With regard to the latter, ongoing controversy continues over the exploitation of Colorado's oil and natural gas resources. The energy industry has had a long history in Colorado, dating back to 1860 when oil was first discovered in Florence, after which the Florence Oil Field was named. Although the industry plays a crucial role in Colorado's economy, recently, concerns have been raised about the hydraulic fracking process, during which fluids are injected into subterranean rock formations at high pressure to extract oil and natural

gas. Colorado currently has more than 5,000 active wells. Local communities have opposed fracking because of fears about very real health dangers and environmental damage. They are also concerned about the noise pollution and lethal accidents resulting from fracking. To deal with these threats, residents and municipal governments have engaged in public protests and litigation in the courts.

It is evident that Coloradans, beginning with American Indians, have been devoted to the land, but for contradictory reasons. On the one hand, there have been those who came to exploit the land for its resources for short-term gain; on the other hand, there have been those who have sought to preserve the land for posterity. In the early twenty-first century, the state government has been able to bring the oil and natural gas interests and the environmentalist together to produce an energy policy that limits future emissions. This was possible because of contemporary Coloradans' willingness to compromise rather than adhere to an inflexible ideological position.

As this brief overview of the Centennial State's peoples, places, and phenomena shows, the tapestry of Colorado's past is a rich one. The hoary American belief in Manifest Destiny notwithstanding, Colorado's history was never preordained. More than anything else, it was contingent upon the choices Coloradans made. Those choices, good and bad, have determined the destiny of the state. Recent ones such as the above-mentioned legalization of recreational marijuana and the 2018 election of Jared Polis, the nation's first openly gay governor, indicate that the arc of state history is bending toward a progressive liberal future, at least for now. The fact that the state's demography is becoming increasingly young, urban, and even more diverse undergirds this trend. But no matter what direction Coloradans take, they will need to understand their state's past in order to make informed decisions about their future.