

Colorado Municipalities

Vol. 102, No. 2, April 2026



America 250
Colorado 150







Hey Colorado — unlock the value in your people

We believe organizations thrive when people thrive. And we’ve spent the past two decades partnering with Colorado municipalities and other public sector organizations to make that possibility a reality through:

Compensation Studies and Structures

Design compensation structures that drive performance, retain talent, and keep you competitive

Pay Equity Analysis

Built under Colorado’s Equal Pay for Equal Work Act, our proven formula keeps you compliant and provides safe harbor protections

Compression Analysis

Compile your performance and experience data to keep all your employees progressing at the right rate

Performance Management

Enhance professional development and create the pathways to grow your employees — and retain them

Leadership Evaluation, Coaching, and Development

Empower high-performing teams through impactful feedback, skill development, and coaching

Culture Assessment, Design, and Transformation

Create a culture and employee experience you and your stakeholders can be proud of



Partner with Graves

Visit graveshrconsulting.com

Executive Board

PRESIDENT

Seth Hoffman, Lone Tree city manager

VICE PRESIDENT

Laura Weinberg, Golden mayor

SECRETARY/TREASURER

Carol Saade, Breckenridge council member

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

Wynetta Massey, Colorado Springs Independent Ethics Commission alternate member

Kim Boyd, Kiowa town administrator

Sharon Davis, Arvada councilmember

Dave Frank, Montrose mayor

Jason Gray, Castle Rock mayor

Duane Gurulé, Rocky Ford mayor

Dale Hall, Greeley mayor

Liz Hensley, Alamosa mayor pro tem

Sarah Johnson, Colorado Springs city clerk

Dan Kramer, Estes Park town attorney

Angela Lawson, Aurora council member

Rachel Medina, Cortez mayor

Candy Meehan, Norwood mayor

Joshua Rivero, Parker mayor

Hollie Rogin, Lyons mayor

Anna Stout, Grand Junction council member

Amy Tharp, Centennial mayor pro tem

Scott Trainor, Fountain city manager

CML STAFF

Kevin Bommer, executive director

Rachel Bender, senior associate counsel

Owen Brigner, legislative & policy advocate

Emma Donahue, legislative & policy advocate

Haley Doyne, receptionist & administrative assistant

Elizabeth Haskell, legislative & policy advocate

Kharyl Jackson, marketing & communications specialist

Lara Larkin, executive assistant

Molly McClure, law clerk

Maeve McHugh, municipal research analyst

Alex Miller, publication & design specialist

Karen Rosen, meetings & events planner

Robert Sheesley, general counsel

Beverly Stables, legislative advocacy manager

Mark Vanderbrook, database specialist

Denise White, engagement & communications manager

Allison Wright, finance & administration manager

CML SECTION CHAIRS

ATTORNEYS

Chris Price, Widner Juran LLP, attorney/partner

COURT ADMINISTRATORS

Lisa Coughlin, Pueblo court administrator

FINANCE DIRECTORS

Bryan Archer, Arvada director of finance

FIRE CHIEFS

Alec W. Oughton, Aurora fire chief

HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTORS

Terri Wilcox, Montrose human resources director

LIBRARIANS

Amy Phillips, Loveland library director

MANAGERS

Jennifer Hoffman, Broomfield city & county manager

MAYORS & COUNCIL MEMBERS

Colleen G. Whitlow, Mead mayor

MUNICIPAL CLERKS

Jolene Nelson, Delta city clerk

MUNICIPAL ENERGY UTILITIES

Nicole Means, Colorado Association of Municipal Utilities executive director

MUNICIPAL JUDGES

Jason Lantagne, Westminster presiding municipal court judge

PLANNING OFFICIALS

Shelia Booth, Colorado Springs comprehensive planning and special projects manager

POLICE CHIEFS

Brice Current, Durango chief of police

PURCHASING

Pam Roeding, Longmont procurement specialist

COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT

Todd Barnes, Thornton communications director

PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTORS

John Burke, Westminster city engineer

DISTRICT CHAIRS

DISTRICT 1

Dana Sherman, Brush mayor

DISTRICT 2

Andrew Moore, Erie mayor

DISTRICT 3

Lauren Simpson, Arvada mayor, and **Sharon Davis**, Arvada councilmember

DISTRICT 4

Mitchell LaKind, Monument mayor

DISTRICT 5

Matt Brachtenbach, Stratton mayor

DISTRICT 6

Joseph Ayala, La Junta mayor

DISTRICTS 7/14

Heather Graham, Pueblo mayor

DISTRICT 8

Paula Medina, La Jara mayor

DISTRICT 9

Shari Pierce, Pagosa Springs mayor

DISTRICT 10

TBA

DISTRICT 11

Art Riddile, New Castle mayor

DISTRICT 12

Chris Nichols, Craig mayor

DISTRICT 13

Paul Wenke, Westcliffe mayor, and **Buck Wenzel**, Silver Cliff mayor

DISTRICT 15

Carolyn Skowrya, Dillon mayor



About CML

The Colorado Municipal League is a nonprofit association organized and operated by Colorado municipalities to provide support services to member cities and towns. The League has two main objectives: 1) to represent cities and towns collectively in matters before the state and federal government and 2) to provide a wide range of information services to help municipal officials manage their governments.

MISSION

Colorado Municipalities is published to inform, educate, and advise appointed and elected municipal officials about new programs, services, trends, and information to help them perform their jobs and better serve their citizens and communities.

Letters to the editor

Have thoughts about an article that you read in *Colorado Municipalities*?

Want to share those thoughts with your colleagues across the state?

CML welcomes thought-provoking letters to the editor! Send comments to CML Engagement & Communications Manager Denise White at dwhite@cml.org.

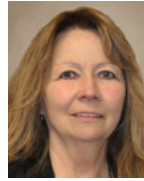
Advertise

Each issue of *Colorado Municipalities* reaches 4,000 municipal officials and decision makers. To reach those who lead Colorado cities and towns, contact CML Engagement & Communications Manager Denise White, dwhite@cml.org.

ABOUT SOME OF OUR CONTRIBUTORS



CHELSEA PENNINGTON HAHN HAS BEEN THE DIRECTOR OF THE LAFAYETTE HISTORY MUSEUM SINCE 2022 AND HAS NEARLY A DECADE OF EXPERIENCE WORKING IN MUSEUMS, MOST OF WHICH WERE LOCAL HISTORY MUSEUMS. HER WORK IS INFORMED BY HER MASTER'S IN MUSEUM STUDIES. SHE HAS HELPED THE LAFAYETTE HISTORY MUSEUM GROW THROUGH RECEIVING FEDERAL GRANTS AND IMPROVING COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING AND EXHIBITS. PREVIOUSLY SHE WORKED AT THE MUSEUM OF BOULDER, WHERE SHE OVERSAW THE FORMATION OF THE BOULDER STRONG MEMORIAL COLLECTION THAT PRESERVED ITEMS LEFT IN HONOR OF VICTIMS OF THE 2021 KING SOOPERS SHOOTING. ORIGINALLY FROM TEXAS, CHELSEA NOW LIVES IN BOULDER COUNTY WITH HER HUSBAND AND THEIR RESCUE DOG, PIPPIN.



PATTI LOWELL IS THE CITY CLERK AND DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES FOR THE CITY OF FEDERAL HEIGHTS. SHE IS A CERTIFIED MUNICIPAL CLERK, WITH 26 YEARS OF MUNICIPAL EXPERIENCE, INCLUDING THE PAST 14 YEARS SERVING FEDERAL HEIGHTS. AS THE CITY'S RECORDS CUSTODIAN, PATTI HAS EXTENSIVE EXPERTISE IN RECORDS MANAGEMENT, PUBLIC TRANSPARENCY, AND PRESERVING OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS. IN ADDITION TO HER PROFESSIONAL ROLE, PATTI IS AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE CITY'S HISTORICAL COMMITTEE, WHERE SHE CONTRIBUTES TO DOCUMENTING AND SHARING THE COMMUNITY'S RICH HISTORY. A GENEALOGIST AT HEART, SHE HAS A DEEP APPRECIATION FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND THE STORIES THAT SHAPE LOCAL IDENTITY.



SETH HOFFMAN IS PRESIDENT OF THE COLORADO MUNICIPAL LEAGUE EXECUTIVE BOARD. SETH IS CITY MANAGER OF THE CITY OF LONE TREE AND HAS SERVED IN VARIOUS ROLES AT THE CITY SINCE 2005, INCLUDING DEPUTY CITY MANAGER AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR. DURING THIS TIME, HE CONDUCTED SUCCESSFUL EXPANSION, RETENTION, AND RELOCATION NEGOTIATIONS ON A LARGE NUMBER OF HIGH-PROFILE PROJECTS, AND HE FACILITATES THE WORK OF THE CITY COUNCIL BY IMPLEMENTING ALL ELEMENTS OF ITS GOALS AND POLICIES. PRIOR TO JOINING LONE TREE, HOFFMAN WORKED AT THE CITY OF GRAND JUNCTION.



MAEVE MCHUGH IS CML'S MUNICIPAL RESEARCH ANALYST. SHE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR RESEARCHING AND CONDUCTING SURVEYS AND LEVERAGING THAT DATA TO SUPPORT COLORADO'S MUNICIPALITIES, HELPING TO SHAPE POLICIES THAT DRIVE SUSTAINABLE GROWTH. SHE HAS WORKED WITH THE CITY OF AUSTIN'S SMART MOBILITY OFFICE AND SERVED AS THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATE WITH THE COLORADO CHILDREN'S CAMPAIGN. SHE JOINED THE LEAGUE IN 2025.



STEPHANIE HORVATH IS THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MANAGER FOR THE TOWN OF BERTHOUD. STEPHANIE'S BACKGROUND IN ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS HELPS HER COMMUNICATE CLEARLY WITH RESIDENTS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND STAKEHOLDERS. SHE MANAGES OUTREACH, SHARES INFORMATION, AND ENJOYS SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON LOCAL PROGRAMS, NON-PROFITS, AND EVENTS. STEPHANIE FOCUSES ON PRACTICAL WAYS TO INVOLVE PEOPLE IN THEIR COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT LOCAL PROJECTS, WITH THE HOPE OF CREATING A MORE CONNECTED COMMUNITY. HER WORK AIMS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION, CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS, AND STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS AMONG RESIDENTS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND THE TOWN.



ABOUT SOME OF OUR CONTRIBUTORS



KATHERINE MERCIER IS AN EXHIBITION DEVELOPER AND HISTORIAN WITH HISTORY COLORADO. SHE RESEARCHES AND CREATES EXHIBITIONS AT THE HISTORY COLORADO CENTER IN DENVER. HER EXHIBITIONS INCLUDE 38TH STAR: COLORADO BECOMES THE

CENTENNIAL STATE, ON VIEW THROUGH MARCH 2027. ORIGINALLY FROM BAILEY, COLORADO, SHE HOLDS A BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN ANTHROPOLOGY FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF DENVER AND A MASTER'S DEGREE IN MUSEUM STUDIES FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER. A CERTIFIED INTERPRETIVE GUIDE AND TRAINER THROUGH THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR INTERPRETATION, KATHERINE SPECIALIZES IN COMMUNICATING COMPLICATED STORIES TO THE PUBLIC. SHE WORKED AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF TOYS AND MINIATURES IN KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, AND THE TOWN OF WINDSOR MUSEUMS IN WINDSOR, COLORADO, BEFORE JOINING HISTORY COLORADO IN 2024.



KAY BRIGHAM RICH IS THE CURATOR OF THE OVERLAND TRAIL MUSEUM IN STERLING, COLORADO. A FOURTH-GENERATION COLORADO NATIVE, KAY WAS BORN IN DENVER AND SPENT MUCH OF HER CHILDHOOD IN FORT COLLINS BEFORE RETURNING TO DENVER TO RAISE HER

THREE CHILDREN WITH HER HUSBAND, GARY. IN 2005, KAY BEGAN A NEW CHAPTER WHEN SHE MOVED TO STERLING. SHE JOINED THE CITY OF STERLING/OVERLAND TRAIL MUSEUM IN 2006 AND QUICKLY SET TO WORK TRANSFORMING THE MUSEUM INTO A MORE FAMILY-FRIENDLY, HANDS-ON HISTORY EXPERIENCE. OVER HER 20 YEARS OF SERVICE, SHE HAS HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF WATCHING THE MUSEUM GROW AND EVOLVE AND IS PROUD TO HAVE BEEN A PART OF ITS SUCCESS. KAY AND GARY ARE THE PROUD PARENTS OF THREE ADULT CHILDREN AND GRANDPARENTS TO EIGHT GRANDCHILDREN, ALL OF WHOM CALL COLORADO HOME.



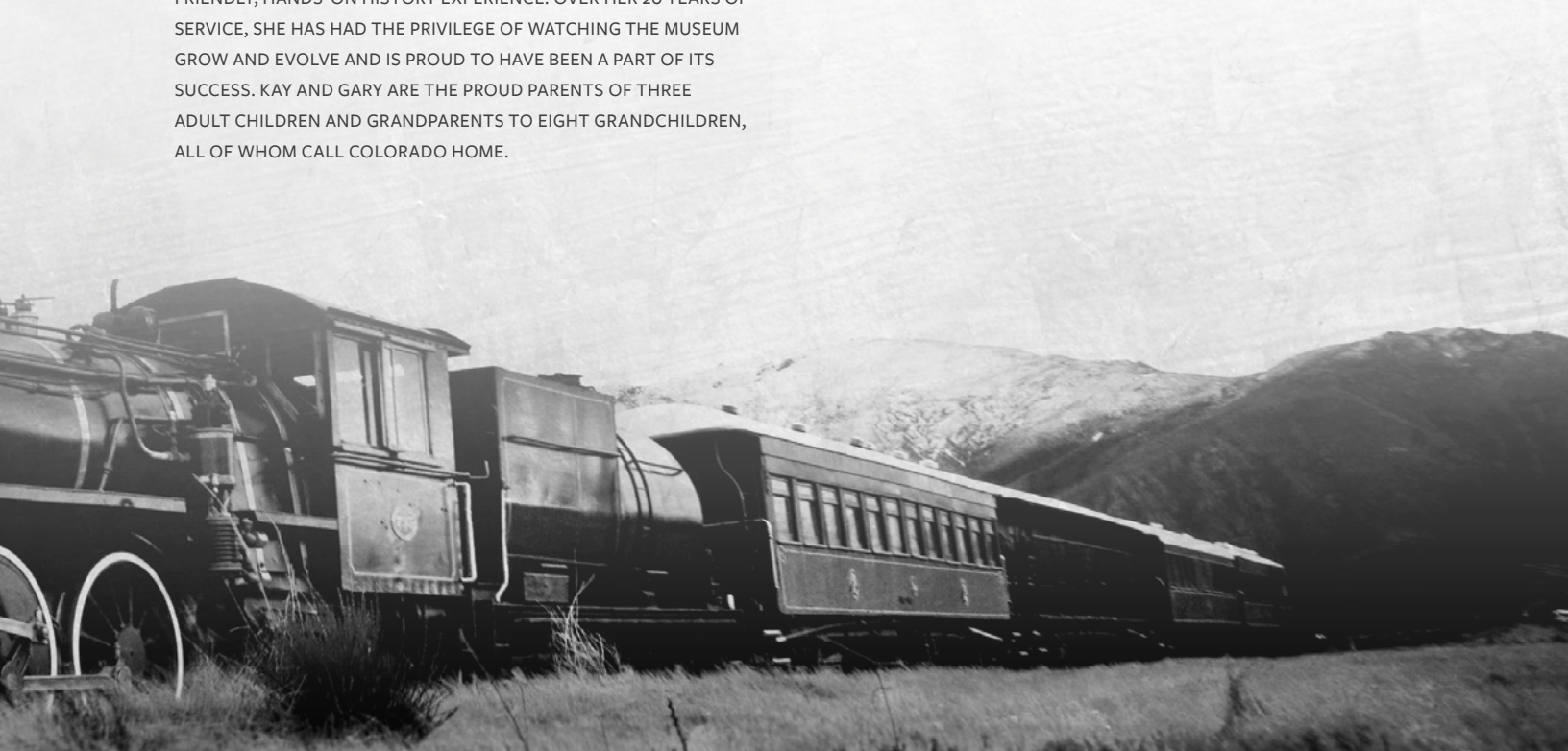
ROBERT SHEESLEY IS CML GENERAL COUNSEL. HE MANAGES LEGAL SERVICES FOR CML, RANGING FROM EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT FOR MUNICIPAL ATTORNEYS THROUGHOUT THE STATE TO ADVOCACY FOR MUNICIPAL INTERESTS IN THE COURTS. HE ASSISTS THE LEGISLATIVE

ADVOCACY TEAM, FIELDS INQUIRIES FROM COLORADO MUNICIPAL ATTORNEYS, STAFFS THE CML AMICUS COMMITTEE, AND FILES FRIEND OF THE COURT BRIEFS IN SUPPORT OF MUNICIPAL INTERESTS. SHEESLEY IS THE FORMER CITY ATTORNEY OF COMMERCE CITY. ROBERT JOINED THE LEAGUE IN 2021.



ANDREW WAYLAND, M.A., IS AN EXPERIENCED MUSEUM PROFESSIONAL WITH A FOCUS ON COLLECTIONS CARE, EXHIBITION PLANNING, AND COMMUNITY-CENTERED PROGRAMMING IN BERTHOUD, COLORADO. HE HAS WORKED FOR THE BERTHOUD HISTORICAL SOCIETY SINCE

2023. ANDREW IS WORKING TO BUILD THE BERTHOUD HISTORICAL SOCIETY INTO A COLLABORATIVE ORGANIZATION TO ENHANCE ACCESS TO HISTORY AND CULTURAL RESOURCES IN TOWN. ANDREW EARNED HIS BACHELOR OF ARTS IN AMERICAN HISTORY FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO AND HIS MASTER OF ARTS IN PUBLIC HISTORY FROM SOUTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE UNIVERSITY. WHEN HE IS NOT WORKING AT THE MUSEUM, YOU CAN FIND ANDREW ENJOYING LIFE IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS AND EXPLORING ALL THE GREAT THINGS COLORADO HAS TO OFFER.



Contents



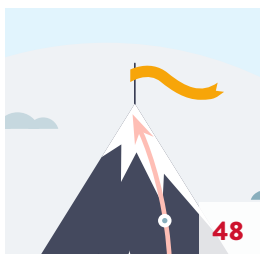
10



42



16



48



22



35

Column

9
President's Corner: 250 years of local leaders, local decisions

Features

- 10
Colorado municipalities shape the Centennial State
- 16
Home rule history: *Denver v. State*
- 22
History up close: Lafayette History Museum
- 26
The fight for Colorado's home rule amendment
- 37
Happy municipal birthday!

38
History in focus

42
From the CML Archives: Colorado's urban frontier

48
What's in a name?

Spotlight

- 25
Federal Heights
- 32
Berthoud
- 34
Sterling
- 35
Keystone

Go digital



An e-version of *Colorado Municipalities* is available on cml.org once the issue is published. Between editions, keep up with CML via Facebook, X, or LinkedIn.

Join CML

For associate membership information, contact CML Marketing & Communications Specialist Kharyl Jackson at kjackson@cml.org.

President's Corner

250 years of local leaders, local decisions

BY SETH HOFFMAN, CML EXECUTIVE BOARD PRESIDENT

As this issue looks back at America 250 and Colorado 150, one point comes through clearly: cities and towns did not just appear on a map after the country was founded or after Colorado became a state. They were built because leaders like you came together locally to solve practical problems, organize services, and make decisions close to home.

These anniversaries are worth recognizing. They also highlight something people not reading this magazine overlook: most of what people experience as “government” in Colorado has always happened at the local level, through the work you do in cities and towns.

You can see that throughout Colorado's history. Before home rule was written into the constitution, communities were already acting on the basic idea behind it. They were creating order, providing water, building roads, supporting commerce, and figuring out how to govern themselves in ways that matched local conditions. Statehood mattered, but the people who led our communities were not passive players in that story — they made Colorado what it is today.

With that in mind, I want to share what the CML Executive Board and staff have focused on recently. We worked to strengthen CML's role and clarify priorities around advocacy, engagement, and leadership. We had serious discussions about dues structure and long-term financial sustainability. The Policy Committee continued the detailed legislative and policy work that helps guide the League's positions. We took a more proactive approach to housing, including standing up a housing

committee, because if that problem is going to get solved, it's going to be solved locally.

We stayed engaged with the governor's office and with legislators throughout the year. Gov. Jared Polis and Speaker Julie McCluskie both joined us at CML Executive Board meetings. That did not mean agreement on every issue. It meant maintaining working relationships and making sure the municipal perspective was heard clearly and directly.

The Board also made a point of getting out all across Colorado this year. We attended district meetings in communities across the state — not to present, but to listen. What we heard in Pueblo wasn't what we heard in Sterling or Grand Junction. That's the point. The only way to understand what 270 member communities actually need is to go ask them. Nothing the Board did this year mattered more than that.



This will be my final President's Corner, as I wrap up my term this June at the CML Annual Conference in Westminster. It has been a privilege to serve alongside the Board, CML staff, and the municipal leaders across Colorado who make this organization what it is. Stay engaged — in training offerings, in district meetings, and in CML's legislative work. The organization is only as strong as its members make it.

One final thought. The signers of the Declaration of Independence are America's most famous advocates for local control. So if you're carrying on that tradition, you're in good company.

I hope to see you all in Westminster.



Laramie

Cheyenne

Fort Collins

Longs Peak
14265

Sterling

Greeley

Boulder

Denver

Pikes Peak
14110

Colorado Springs

Grand Junction
Mt. Elbert
14431

Montrose

San Uncompahgre Peak
14314

Canon City

Pueblo

Juan

Alamosa

La Junta

Lamar

t.s.

Wheeler Peak
13151

Trinidad

Baton

Grande

Colorado municipalities shape the Centennial State

By **KATHERINE MERCIER**,

History Colorado exhibition developer & historian

On the bright, cold morning of Dec. 20, 1875, thirty-nine delegates convened for the first time on the third floor of the First National Bank on 15th Street in Denver. Their task? Writing a constitution for the proposed new state of Colorado.

Delegates had traveled from cities and towns including Fort Collins, Golden, Black Hawk, Longmont, Central City, Georgetown, Walsenburg, Pueblo, Montezuma, and Lake City. The men elected J.C. Wilson of El Paso County as the convention's president. In his acceptance speech, Wilson acknowledged the importance of the different places working together: "No act of mine shall be tainted with the slightest semblance of partisanship or sectional spirit. Here I know no party but the entire people; no section but the whole Territory."

Wilson's speech hinted at challenges facing this Constitutional Convention. This wasn't Colorado's first statehood attempt. Since 1859, groups in Colorado had tried for statehood four times and failed. During each attempt, individuals, communities, municipalities, and even the federal government had stopped statehood for reasons of politics, money, representation, and power. This fifth time, the delegates may have felt the pressure of those failures. Municipalities were vital to Colorado's statehood process. If delegates could not write a state constitution that voters across Colorado municipalities could agree on, Colorado could not become a state in 1876.

The roots of this Constitutional Convention began in June 1858 when prospectors discovered gold in the South Platte River near Cherry Creek. By mid-1859, over 100,000 hopeful miners traveled to what was then part of Kansas Territory. Treaties with Native Nations including the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Ute Tribes had not

opened up Kansas Territory to Euro-American settlement, but the U.S. government did nothing to enforce the treaties. Land speculator William Larimer founded Denver in November 1858. Months later, in April 1859, powerful men in Denver attempted to create the new state of Jefferson, named after Thomas Jefferson. The men reasoned that Kansas Territory was too far away to provide a government.

The roots of this Constitutional Convention began in June 1858 when prospectors discovered gold in the South Platte River near Cherry Creek.

But many of the miners in towns like Boulder and Golden, both established by summer 1859, rejected statehood. Early gold strikes had quickly played out, and miners were struggling. A state would bring laws and services, but it would also bring taxes. In September 1859, miners voted against statehood in favor of becoming a territory, which had fewer taxes. The Denver men formed Jefferson Territory, but the U.S. government refused to recognize it for political reasons. When Jefferson's

self-proclaimed government tried to institute taxes, most miners refused to pay them. Miners developed their own districts with laws and courts. Early miners' districts included Gregory Diggings, near modern-day Black Hawk, and Gold Hill, near Boulder.

Then, on Feb. 18, 1861, Congress created Colorado Territory. After southern states began seceding from the Union in December 1860, the United States needed land and gold. Creating a new territory provided both. Congress rejected the name Jefferson for the new territory, following their unofficial rule to never name a territory or state after any person other than George Washington. They selected the name "Colorado" because the Colorado River's headwaters started in the new territory. Colorado Territory was born.

The second attempt at statehood followed in 1864. During this attempt, people in different municipalities influenced Colorado's statehood chance, splitting into factions based on occupation, identity, and geographic region. The "Denver Ring" consisted of powerful Denver businessmen and politicians like John Evans, Jerome Chaffee, and Samuel Elbert. They sought to consolidate power in Denver. The "Mountain Crowd," made up of businessmen and miners in Golden and mountain towns like Black Hawk, opposed this.

In southern Colorado, thousands of Hispano people, who trace their heritage and roots to early Spanish colonists, did not support statehood. Their land, originally part of Mexico, was



History Colorado

Mining in Gregory Gulch, 1859.

added to the United States in 1848 after the Mexican-American War. Hispano residents founded San Luis, the first town in what would become Colorado, in 1851, and established deep cultural ties to the land. When Congress created Colorado Territory in 1861, it removed a small notch from New Mexico, including towns like Trinidad and San Luis, and placed it into the newly formed Colorado. The Spanish-speaking Hispano residents there were suddenly subject to a

government up north in Denver that did not speak Spanish. Colorado's territorial legislature promised to translate laws into Spanish, but they rarely followed through. Many Hispano people in southern Colorado felt underrepresented and rejected statehood.

The Denver Ring convinced Congress that Colorado was ready for statehood in 1864 and drafted a state constitution. As before, many Hispano people and miners in other municipalities spoke out against statehood. The

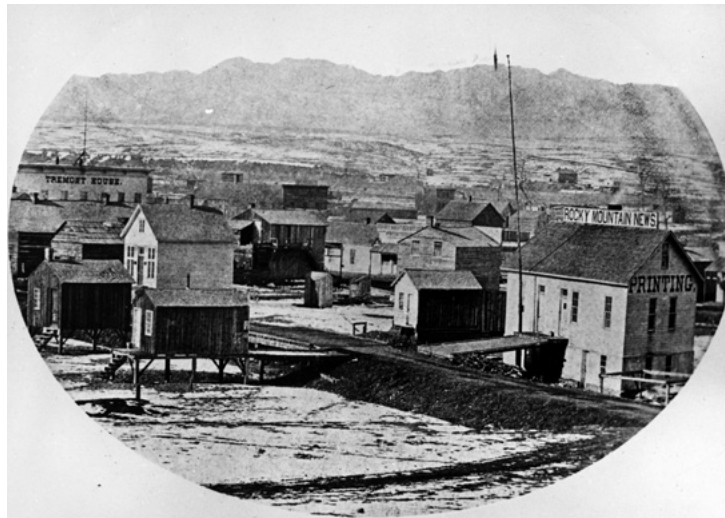
Daily Mining Journal in Black Hawk reported on July 26, 1864, "Gov. Evans and his more ardent supporters are daily becoming more unpopular. The miners of this region, and we have here the balance of power, are sick of the attempt to force upon them ... a State government." The second statehood attempt failed.

In 1865, the Denver Ring tried again. Voters passed statehood by a slim margin, and it finally seemed within reach. But not all Denverites

supported statehood. The 1865 Constitutional Convention wrote into the proposed constitution that only white men could vote in the new state. Denver's Black community leaders, who technically had the right to vote under territorial laws, organized and sent a petition to Congress stopping statehood. Congress debated the issue and delayed statehood until ultimately passing it to President Andrew Johnson in 1866. Johnson vetoed this attempt at statehood and another in 1867 due to disagreements between political parties.

Between 1868 and 1875, Colorado Territory grew. The railroad arrived in 1870, bringing goods and settlers. More land was freed for Euro-American settlement as the U.S. government removed Indigenous People from their homelands, promising goods and safety to Native Nations who signed treaties. Silver discoveries in the San Juan Mountains boosted the economy. By 1875, Colorado Territory had nine incorporated municipalities: Denver, Georgetown, Golden, Boulder, Cañon City, Fairplay, Walsenburg, Alma, and Erie. Dozens of other towns and cities provided a stable economic base. In March 1875, Congress issued an Enabling Act stating that Colorado Territory could become a state if it could write a constitution and approve it by popular vote. This vote had to be held by July 1876.

This time, the Constitutional Convention's delegates knew they needed to build consensus and agreement across Colorado Territory. Casimiro Barela, a Hispano delegate from Trinidad, told the convention that southern Colorado's Hispano residents would not vote for statehood unless laws were translated into Spanish. The convention needed the Hispano votes. They also acknowledged Colorado's many German-speaking immigrants. They wrote into Colorado's constitution that laws would be translated into Spanish and German until 1900.



Women across Colorado Territory saw the Constitutional Convention as a way to gain voting rights. Women from Denver, Longmont, Cañon City, Greeley, Littleton, Colorado Springs, Boulder, and Pueblo formed the Colorado Woman Suffrage Association. They elected Alida Avery, the first woman licensed to practice medicine in Colorado Territory, as its president, and petitioned the Constitutional Convention for the right to vote. The convention listened to the women but ultimately did not include women's suffrage over concern that men would not vote for the constitution. Because of the women's efforts, delegates did include a provision for a future vote to be held on the issue. In 1893, Colo-

rado became the first state to grant women the right to vote through a popular referendum.

The convention finished the constitution in March 1876. On July 1, 1876, the vote for the constitution was held. On July 4, exactly 100 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, newspapers announced the results: voters had approved the Colorado Constitu-

tion. On Aug. 1, 1876, President Ulysses S. Grant signed the proclamation making Colorado the nation's 38th state. Colorado had become the Centennial State.

People in communities, cities, and towns across Colorado, from Pueblo to Fort Collins to Gunnison to Walsenburg, created the state. If residents of mining towns like Boulder and Golden had not organized against the Denver Ring, Colorado may have become a state in 1864 instead of 1876. The majority of southern Colorado's Hispano residents voted against statehood in every attempt before 1876, ensuring that Colorado would not become a state until the government finally agreed to translate laws into Spanish. Colorado is the Centennial State today because of these efforts. Today, just as in every statehood attempt between 1859 and 1876, our municipalities continue to shape our Centennial State.



History Colorado

Above: Casimiro Barela, ca. 1910. Opposite page: Denver, ca. 1864.

Home rule history

By **ROBERT SHEESLEY**, CML general counsel



Denver v. State

The story behind a seminal home rule decision

Rather than being a political ideology or policy issue, home rule in Colorado is a constitutional governance structure that reserves legislative control of local policy matters to local bodies. Like the powers of initiative and referendum, home rule is a critical piece of our system of government that expresses distrust of overreach by the General Assembly and a desire for self-determination.

Home rule in Colorado was adopted in 1902 after repeated state interference in the control of the City and County of Denver that nearly came to armed conflict. The 1990 decision, *City and County of Denver v. State*, has similar (if less potentially violent) roots that seem to reappear any time the General Assembly chooses to interfere directly in a local policy matter specifically addressed in a home rule city's charter or ordinances.

Legally, *Denver v. State* is most notable for clearly formulating the test for evaluating whether a subject of regulation is of “local and municipal concern,” where the General Assembly has no authority to regulate, or a matter of statewide or mixed state and local concern, where local laws must yield to state law.

Beyond just framing home rule cases for the past 36 years, *Denver v. State* offers historical lessons on the constitutional balance for local officials and state lawmakers.

LOCAL DEBATES ON RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS

The constitutional question of *Denver v. State* emerged from the mid-twentieth century migration of populations from cities to suburbs (commonly referred to as “white flight”). To counter the effects of the population loss, Denver leaders responded with policies like an occupation tax and a residency requirement for city employees. State legislators, in turn, reacted with their legislative and constitutional efforts to limit Denver's decisions.

Denver's idea for a residency requirement may have originated as a fire department rule that sought to keep employees close for emergency. Never popular with public safety employees, the rule was suspended in 1966 when the city attorney identified a conflict with Denver's charter. Robust public debate continued locally for several years, as befits a contentious issue confronting a local government.

A charter review commission declined to refer a question to voters in 1974, the same year that voters statewide approved a constitutional amendment that limited Denver's ability to annex new territory (the Poundstone Amendment). In 1976, voters rejected a proposed residency restriction after the city council overrode a mayoral veto to get the question on the ballot. Voters finally approved a toned-down version in 1978 by a two to one ratio. Denver immediately faced legal challenges and encountered interpretive problems, but the policy was ultimately cemented as the law. Curiously, the city's auditor openly ignored the requirement.

Residency requirements were not uncommon in municipalities. The City of Durango adopted a similar policy in 1980. By the time *Denver v. State* made it to the Supreme Court, 21 home rule municipalities had adopted residency requirements or hiring preferences for residents.

A LONG FIGHT FOR A NEW PREEMPTION

Led by legislators from nearby communities, the General Assembly swiftly waded into the policy debate to reject the local decision-making regarding residency requirements. Bills directly countering the local policy failed at least four times before they found success. Gov. Dick Lamm vetoed a measure in 1984 in objection to the interference with home rule authority. The Colorado Senate killed versions in 1985 and 1986. Gov. Roy Romer vetoed a 1987 effort to preempt local residency requirements, saying in a veto message “that this issue is one that should be addressed at a local level.”

In 1988, Gov. Romer changed his mind and signed HB1152 to expressly preempt employee residency requirements imposed by any local government. The law declared that residency requirements harmed the health, welfare, and morale of the public and harmed the state’s economic well-being. The law further declared that “the right of the individual to work in or for any local government is a matter of statewide concern.”

What spurred the General Assembly to enact HB1152 and for Gov. Romer to change his mind? Ongoing labor influences and continuing suburban objections to Denver’s law were primary drivers of the fight. Concern for “metropolitan cooperation” — perhaps a gentler description of years of severe intergovernmental animosity — also affected the passage.

The key issue for the governor, though, was voter approval of the new Denver International Airport and Denver’s related annexation of territory in Adams County. The governor cited as a “major threat” the risk that the residency requirement would limit Adams County residents from being hired (although only about 2% of jobs at the existing airport were city positions). In 1988, the same year that the law was enacted, Adams County voters approved Denver’s annexation of territory for the airport.

LOWER COURT PROCEEDINGS

With the support of their elected officials to defend their voters’ choices, Denver and Durango immediately challenged the new statute in the Denver District Court and obtained a preliminary injunction after an evidentiary hearing. The court ultimately permanently enjoined the law as applied to Denver and Durango.

According to contemporary reporting in the *Rocky Mountain News* (June 30, 1988), Chief District Judge Clifton A. Flowers stated in an oral ruling that there was no statewide interest because the Denver and Durango rules did not affect all state residents, only those that wanted to work for those cities. A written order noted that the law was “a commendable effort purportedly in the public interest” but that it was “nonetheless an unconstitutional interference in the rights of the (cities) to legislate, regulate, conduct and control the terms of employment within their municipalities.”

THE SUPREME COURT

The Colorado Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the case at Otero Junior College in La Junta on Oct. 30, 1989, nearly a year after the favorable airport election. Five months later, a unanimous Supreme Court upheld the district court’s ruling and invalidated the state law. Oddly, the decision makes no reference to the airport or to the metropolitan cooperation that Gov. Romer cited to justify signing the law.

The written opinion by Justice Mary Mullarkey is remarkable for several reasons. First, the opinion established the framework for analyzing home rule cases on a case-by-case basis. This framework could consider many relevant factors, but five general factors tend to be most relevant: (1) the need for statewide uniformity of regulation of the issue (which alone is “no virtue”); (2) the impact of municipal regulation of the issue on persons outside of the municipality (i.e. extraterritorial impact); (3) historical considerations, such as which level of government traditionally regulated the issue; (4) the need for intergovernmental coordination in a city to ensure protection outside of a city; and (5) constitutional commitment of the issue to a particular authority.

The Court determined that these and other relevant considerations favored the cities. The lack of uniformity alone could not justify state interference without a “discernible pervading state interest.” The state presented no evidence of a significant economic effect on the rest of the state from the cities’ regulations. Interjurisdictional competition for tax revenue was reasonable. Although not dispositive, the Court found it significant

Denver v. State reminded Colorado that the General Assembly cannot simply declare a topic to be a matter of state concern.

that Article XX, Section 6 provided direct textual support for the cities' regulation by enumerating the power to determine the terms of municipal employment. The cities' interests were also supported by important, legitimate reasons.

Second, the Court rejected broadly defined state interests by focusing on a narrow view of the subject of regulation. The residency restrictions did not present a question of the burden on a person's right to reside where they wish; the question was whether a person had a right to reside where they wished and insist on government employment.

Finally, the decision reminded the state that the General Assembly cannot simply declare a topic to be a matter of state concern, mirroring an argument made in the amicus brief filed by CML in support of the cities (authored by the estimable Jerry Dahl). The decision confirmed that legislative declarations, while relevant, are not binding. As the ultimate arbiter of whether an issue is a matter of state, local, or mixed concern, courts should evaluate the plausibility of the state's interest against the weight of the local interest. Even plausible interests may not suffice to qualify an issue as a matter of mixed concern.

Justice Mullarkey wrote, "If the constitutional provisions establishing the right of home rule municipalities to legislate as to their local affairs are to have any meaning, we must look beyond the mere declaration of a state interest and determine whether in fact the interest is present."

BUT WHOSE POLICY WAS RIGHT?

Both sides of the debate over residency requirements had valid arguments, as with any reasonable policy disagreement. Opponents appealed to concepts of justice and were concerned about the availability of labor, freedom of movement, and cooperation with neighboring jurisdictions, as well as state funding of Denver projects

that wouldn't employ all Coloradans. Conversely, at a time when city residents were moving to suburbs, supporters believed that city funds should be spent to employ residents when it was estimated that 30-40% of employees lived outside the city (and spent their tax dollars elsewhere), that the rule would increase minority hiring, and that employees should live in the city for purposes of responsiveness and motivation.

But for home rule questions, which policy choice is "better" is irrelevant. Neither the governor nor the General Assembly is authorized to preempt the local policy on a local matter simply because they disagree with it or because they perceive of a better choice. As the *Rocky Mountain News* editors described it in an editorial entitled "A Right to Be Wrong" (Feb. 16, 1987), "In principle, we're with [the opponents of residency requirements].***But Denver deserves freedom to mind its own business. Colorado's constitution allows home-rule cities to write their own employment regulations.***Repeal makes the most sense — but arm-twisting ill becomes the legislature."

WHAT TO LEARN FROM DENVER V. STATE?

The Colorado Constitution and the governance structure it establishes determine what body has the power to control the outcome of a legislative decision. *Denver v. State* shows that this constitutional question is not so fickle as to depend on how important the state may think its policy preference is.

Defenders of home rule believe that the "better" outcome on a matter that hits close to home is the one reached by the local governing body or by the voters of the municipality directly. The decision is better because it reflects — or at least more closely approximates — the needs and desires of the community and best accounts for the

Good faith interests and laudable goals don't substantiate a state interest or turn a local concern into a matter of statewide or mixed state and local concern.

impacts on the community, without the interference of partisan politics or the undue influence of special interests. In fact, Denver voters approved an initiated change to the residency requirement in 1998 that allowed employees to reside anywhere in the six-county metro area. In 2001, voters narrowly approved a council-referred charter amendment to repeal the requirement entirely.

The 1988 legislation invalidated in *Denver v. State* undoubtedly was passed by lawmakers seeking to obtain a certain policy outcome that they believed would be in the state's best interest. But good faith interests and laudable goals don't substantiate a state interest or turn a local concern into a matter of statewide or mixed state and local concern. Gov. Romer's comments in 1988 illustrate how easy it is to confuse these concepts. According to an article in the *Rocky Mountain News* (Feb. 16, 1988), Gov. Romer said, "I understand the argument that cities ought to be allowed to make their own rules ... But let me just say it doesn't make a lot of sense to annex land from Adams County and then say workers from Adams County can't work on that land."

Courts must respect a fine line, then, in determining whether the state's interest is not only plausible but a legitimate intrusion on a local matter, as opposed to merely a policy dispute. The Colorado Supreme Court rightly rejected the concerns that the state could preempt residency requirements because of perceived unfairness and negative impacts on suburban residents. In its proper role as arbiter of matters of state, local, or mixed concern, the Court discerned that these were policy disputes that were irrelevant to questions of constitutional authority to make the policy choice.

Decisions since *Denver v. State* sometimes characterize the subject matter of regulations at a high-level (e.g., "economic regulation") instead of the specific matter at issue. This suggests an unfortunate tendency to confuse policy questions (and preferences of the General Assembly) with the proper constitutional analysis. High-level and amorphous concepts cannot reasonably be measured as subjects of regulation. More often, now, we see elaborate policy arguments masquerading as legislative declarations of state interest to conceal the true character of legislation as a fundamental disagreement with local policies. Giving undue weight to such legislative declarations or policy appeals disguised as a "state interest" undermines the constitutional allocation of power between the people and their state government.

Denver v. State continues to shape court decisions and legislative battles in Colorado. The most enduring legacy of the case, however, may be the reminder for municipalities and the officials to use and defend home rule as the power to make decisions directly when they are important to the people of their communities, whatever the policy issue. If that power is sacrificed in the name of any given policy, the damage doesn't extend to that policy but reaches to future decisions where the state may choose to interfere. And for state legislators, *Denver v. State* should stand as a reminder that General Assembly doesn't have a magic wand to override local decisions.



LEGAL CORNER

The CML Legal Corner takes a deep dive into legal issues that affect cities and towns in Colorado. The column is written by members of the CML legal team and appears every two weeks in the CML Newsletter. Stay up to date on the latest developments in municipal Law! Read the CML Newsletter and Legal Corner column online: tinyurl.com/CML-newsletter





Photos by Lafayette History Museum

Conservation work is performed on historic clothing at the Lafayette History Museum.

History up close

Lafayette History Museum keeps local stories alive

By **CHELSEA PENNINGTON HAHN**, director of the Lafayette History Museum

In a recent conversation with my mother, I mentioned that she should see if her local history museum was doing anything special for the America 250th anniversary. She paused, and then said, “You know, I guess we do have a local museum. I’ve never really thought about visiting it.” This from a woman whose own daughter

has spent a career working in local history museums! Unfortunately, she’s not alone in forgetting about local history museums or thinking that they’re not relevant. But local history museums have unique advantages because of their focus on place-based history and the flexibility that comes from their smaller size.

Preserving a city’s unique story is invaluable for many reasons, and often, the local museum is the only physical repository for the area’s history. Large, statewide museums such as History Colorado only have so much space and resources available; local museums are the organizations focused on preserving the stories to

their municipality. This means gathering, cataloging, photographing, and storing physical artifacts such as tools, clothing, and household goods, archival documents like newspapers, records, scrapbooks and ledgers, and photographs.

These collections are not simply saving objects for the sake of saving them; artifacts are used to support research, develop exhibits, and enhance programming. These all work together to create pride in a community among people who live there, and also showcase the city to tourists in the area. At the Lafayette History Museum, we regularly have visitors who are in town for a short time, so they decided to stop by the museum; by the end of their tour, they are amazed at all the history of the area and have a full list of other businesses and local landmarks to visit based on our recommendations and discussion. Through knowledgeable tour guides, sponsored events, and partnerships with businesses, local history museums can be an economic engine for both tourist and local activity.

With a commitment to authentic history, museums are also responsible for supporting cities as they reckon with the darker parts of their past, through acknowledgment in exhibits, tours, and even public signage. History can teach us both how to avoid mistakes from our past and how to find hope and guidance from previous triumphs, but often national or global history can seem abstract to us here today. Local history museums show how the city was a microcosm of large historical moments, making history more relevant through local connections. We recently did this at the museum through an article about the fight over Amendment 2, an initiative in the 1990s to amend Colorado's state constitution to prohibit municipalities from implementing protections for the LGBTQ+ community. The statewide history of the movement is already a microcosm of the country's wrestling with discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community, and our article highlighted responses in the local newspaper and the fact that ultimately Lafayette voted against the ban.





Visitors attend a program at the Lafayette History Museum.

Most local history museums are quite small — the Lafayette History Museum has two-part time staff including myself. Many are entirely run by volunteers. While a small team certainly presents challenges, it also has unique opportunities. Local museums are more accessible in a variety of ways; Denver, of course, boasts many impressive large museums, but many people in the state face barriers, either because they live farther away or can't afford the entrance fee. Local museums, on the other hand, are by nature nearby, and many are free or low cost to visit.

We also have a finger on the pulse of a community and can therefore be more responsive to what people are

concerned about, addressing it through exhibits, programming, or even articles and social media posts. One of our most well-attended events occurred when we hosted programming focused on the fate of the historical Nine Mile Pillars, which had been a topic of heated discussion among locals.

It is important for museums of all sizes to share stories of people from historically excluded communities who overcame barriers to achieve success. Children and other visitors don't just see someone who looks like them; they learn about someone who came from their same neighborhood or attended their school and now has become a role model.

As we celebrate the twin anniversaries of America 250/Colorado 150, appreciation for history is stronger than ever. The bicentennial in 1976 saw a flourishing of local museums — the Lafayette History Museum was in fact founded that year, making this year our 50th anniversary. We are celebrating this with new permanent exhibits opening this summer; a fundraising campaign to preserve our historic building, and new programming such as our History Happy Hour series. We hope that this year's celebration will be another chance to invest in local history and recognize the importance of local history museums.

SPOTLIGHT

From bison to Water World

A brief history of Federal Heights

By **PATTI LOWELL**, Federal Heights city clerk

The City of Federal Heights stands on land once traversed by vast herds of bison and inhabited by Native American tribes — the Cheyenne and Arapaho. Passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 opened western lands to settlers, allowing individuals to claim up to 160 acres. Within the present-day boundaries of Federal Heights, five homestead claims were filed beginning in 1873.

In 1925, Albert E. Johnson platted a quarter-section known as original North Federal Heights — named for its location along Federal Boulevard, then a two-lane dirt road — into 55 tracts. He later transferred 28 of those tracts to his wife, Florence, “in consideration of the sum of One Dollar, Love and Affection.”

During the 1930s, residents grew dissatisfied with the quality of their water supply and sought legal status to issue bonds for water development. In 1940, the vote was 32-2 in favor of incorporation. Federal Heights officially became a town in June 1940. Following the first bond issue, a new well was drilled to a depth of 1,750 feet, securing a reliable water source.



This historic photo shows a farm owned by the Camenisch family, the area where Water World is now located. The silo shown in the image was later converted into the lighthouse feature at Water World and still stands today.

On August 6, 1956, Federal Heights became a member of the Colorado Municipal League. By 1957, the town’s population had grown to 512 residents. Community fundraisers — including spaghetti dinners, raffles, talent shows, and carnivals — served as important social and civic events. Over the years, Federal Heights was home to taverns, restaurants, grocery stores, a sawmill, and Ruston Airport, notable as the first privately owned airport in Colorado

and the highest-elevation airport in the Denver metropolitan area.

The city’s first annexation occurred in 1957, followed by eight more over the next 14 years. In 1977, when the population exceeded 2,000, Federal Heights became a statutory city. In 2002, residents adopted a home rule charter by a vote of 889 to 245. Today, the city encompasses approximately 1.78 square miles and is home to Water World, one of the largest water parks in the country.

The fight for Colorado's home rule amendment

By **ROBERT SHEESLEY**, CML general counsel

[A]rticle 20 as written, is a part of the Constitution of the state, the same as any other of its provisions, and is as much in force as any part of the original Constitution itself. It is not only a part of the Constitution, but it is there to stay, until the authority which voted it in shall vote it out.¹

These words from an early judicial rejection of limitations on Colorado's constitutional home rule amendment resonate today as the concept of local self-governance struggles to maintain the respect of state authorities.

Home rule in Colorado is as much an expression of the people's desire to control their own destinies as it is a rejection of centralized power and a statement of distrust of the General Assembly. Naturally, home rule in Colorado has never been without resistance from state lawmakers and the

interests that often influence them. As court decisions, statutes, and executive actions increasingly frustrate local self-governance as envisioned by the voters, a path forward may lie in recalling the motives that led to the home rule amendment and to voters' reactions to early legislation and judicial decisions related to home rule.

'DISREPUTABLE SQUABBLE' INFLUENCES VOTERS' CHOICE OF HOME RULE

Home rule was born in social and political contexts that removed people

from political decision-making in their communities, including political machines, corrupt influences, and heavily partisan politics. In Colorado, as CML's former Executive Director Ken Bueche wrote in CML's Home Rule Handbook, the push for constitutionalized local control stemmed, at least in part, from Denver's government being a "political football" of whichever party controlled the statehouse.

From statehood, Denver operated under a territorial charter that the state could easily manipulate with special legislation. Early Colorado legislatures "made sure of the spoils of office" by regularly adjusting Denver's charter to ensure total party control and a patronage system that allowed state-appointed boards to control Denver's government.² This sanctioned system was only applicable to those few municipalities that



Denver Public Library Western History Department

Crowds outside Denver City Hall at 14th and Larimer during the City Hall War.

remained under territorial charters, whereas other municipalities governed by general statutes were protected from known “evils of special legislation” generated “to satisfy the caprice or selfish interests of individuals” and passed by legislators not personally affected by the law.³

From 1893 until 1902, the home rule movement grew within an upended political landscape in the new state. It was a period of “industrial stagnation and depression through-

out all of Colorado, and especially in Denver,”⁴ marked by the crash of the silver market, the resulting financial panic, and labor strikes in mining communities. Political power in the once solidly Republican Colorado split among coalitions of various groups, including traditional parties, “free silver” advocates, populists, socialists, and more, while Denver was often excluded.⁵

The most dramatic consequence of this system was the so-called “Denver

City Hall War” of 1894. Laws passed in 1891 and 1893 gave the governor authority to appoint commissioners for Denver’s powerful Police and Fire Commission. The commission fully controlled the appointment, removal, discipline, and compensation of fire and police employees. Under the pretext of preventing local corruption, the laws “only transferred their corrupt use from city to state.”⁶

Believing that his recent appointees were not enforcing gambling

laws adequately, Populist Gov. Davis Waite (“an honest and irate believer in the suppression of all gambling and vice”)⁷ ordered them removed and appointed new commissioners. The incumbents refused to leave their offices and challenged their removal as politically motivated. That may have been Gov. Waite’s intent, as he wanted to change a system understood to be coordinated with — or at least tolerant of — criminal elements.

In what the *Colorado Transcript* (April 4, 1894) described as a “disreputable squabble,” district court judges issued conflicting injunctions. The *Grand Valley Star-Times* (Mar. 17, 1894), called it the governor’s “grand coup d’etat” and said, “it is thought blood will flow.”

On Thursday, March 15, 1894, about two hundred state militia men armed with two Gatling guns and two twelve-pound cannons arrived at city hall, then at 14th Avenue and Larimer Street, while armed city police, fire, and sheriff’s deputies in the same number occupied the building with Orr and Martin.⁸ Armed men associated with criminal groups arrived to support the city officials. Three hundred U.S. Army troops from Ft. Logan arrived “to assist in maintaining order in the city.”

For days, a stalemate ensued as Gov. Waite submitted the matter again to the Colorado Supreme Court (then only three justices). By Saturday night, the Court rejected the governor’s resort to force to implement his appointments. Only the courts could resolve the issue:

*We are clearly of the opinion that the governor is greatly in error in assuming that it devolves upon him to enforce his order of removal. His constitutional oath to “take care that the laws be faithfully executed” imposes no such obligation upon him. His duty and responsibility cease upon the making of the order of appointment, and any attempt on his part to personally enforce such order or install his appointees is beyond any express or implied duty or power imposed or conferred upon him by constitution or statute.*⁹

Ultimately, though, the armed parties withdrew, and the governor’s authority to remove the commissioners was affirmed.¹⁰

The home rule amendment may not be directly traceable to the events of 1894, but the City Hall War likely convinced many that the situation could not continue. Efforts to draft a new legislative charter had started a year earlier.¹¹ An organization called “The Municipal League of Denver” formed in May 1894 to study “the correct principles of self-government” and “to obtain the best city government for the wisest expenditure of money.”¹² In 1898, the city council endorsed a short-lived “charter convention” that included John Rush, who later pushed home rule discussions in the General Assembly as a state senator and sponsored the 1901 bill that would lead to voters enacting Article XX in 1902.

UNEASY EARLY YEARS

The first decade of home rule tested the state’s ability to accept the concept of local self-governance, the im-

pact of which may have been underestimated.¹³ Political machines and public utility corporations helped defeat Denver’s first charter proposal in 1903, but voters approved a charter in 1904.¹⁴ Colorado Springs, Delta, Durango, Grand Junction, and Pueblo also adopted home rule charters during this period.

The courts quickly waded into developing an understanding of Article XX as part of Colorado’s fundamental law. Before Denver even adopted a charter, the Colorado Supreme Court overruled procedural and substantive challenges to the constitutional amendment in *Elder v. Sours*. This decision confirmed that the amendment allowed self-government in local matters but did not exempt the municipality from all laws.¹⁵ Justice Robert W. Steele (district attorney during the City Hall War), articulated that, while Denver was not fully free of state constitutional limits or state laws on state matters, Article XX provided “absolute freedom from legislative interference in matters of local concern.”

The Court went on to give effect to the constitutional amendment. One case acknowledged that the amendment terminated the governor’s right to appoint and remove members to the city’s commissions, recognizing that “the purpose was to give to the people of the new corporation as large a measure of home rule in municipal affairs as could be granted under a republican form of government”¹⁶ In another case, the Court confirmed that Denver’s authority was not limited to the powers specifically enumerated in the constitution.¹⁷



The Rocky Mountain News, Vol. 46, No. 176, p. 1, June 25, 1905

“The Great Judicial Slaughter House and Mausoleum” editorial cartoon responds to the Colorado Supreme Court’s ouster of officials elected under Denver’s first charter.

In 1905, judicial skepticism of the independence of municipal organization and elections under Article XX began. This skepticism coincided with the expansion of the Supreme Court from three to seven justices. Voices like those of Justice Steele were relegated to dissents in a series of decisions regarded as politically motivated.¹⁸ The Court held that Denver could not create additional county offices (such as a second judge), con-

solidate city and county offices, or fix different times for electing officers because matters relating to county offices needed to be general and uniform under the constitution.¹⁹ The Court (with Justice Steele dissenting) even sanctioned newspapers with contempt for various publications criticizing their decisions.²⁰

Clyde Lyndon King, the contemporary political scientist cited throughout this article, characterized early

judicial views of Article XX as “this lamentable doctrine of limitation.”²¹ In 1911, after turnover of several justices, the Court reined in this aggressively restrictive view of Denver’s authority. The Court, resurrecting the *Sours* decision, reminded itself that Article XX was, in fact, a part of the constitution and that the will of the people could not be “abrogated and thrust aside as if mythical and unreal.”²²

1912 COURSE CORRECTION

Despite this progress, the Court returned to its narrow view when it held, in 1912, that Denver remained subject to state election laws when electing municipal officers. The Court saw home rule control of elections as “a result so absurd and utterly impossible” and thought the state’s interest in the purity of even local elections was plain.²³

Voters had had enough. In 1912, using the new power of initiative, Colorado voters amended Article XX to broadly endorse home authority by specifically listing several powers reserved to home rule municipalities by the people as local and municipal matters.²⁴ The amendment also confirmed the “full right of self-govern-

ment in local and municipal matters” and all powers essential to exercise that right. Notably, the passage of the home rule amendment was encouraged by opponents of the temperance movement, who also defeated a prohibition amendment.

ECHOES OF HOME RULE’S FIRST DECADE

The 1912 constitutional amendment confirmed that certain subjects were “fixed by legislative declaration of the people as local and municipal matters.”²⁵ Still, the struggle in the first decade of home rule to find the boundaries between matters subject to state regulation and those that are local and municipal has continued to ebb and flow. Even into this century, local authority regarding matters

specifically enumerated in Article XX, supposedly fixed as local and municipal matters by the people, has been usurped by state laws and preempted by judicial rulings with expansive views of state power.²⁶

Would Mr. King and Justice Steele lament the current trend in the General Assembly and courts that interpret municipal authority strictly while viewing in the broadest and most deferential terms the power of the state to interfere with local affairs? Justice Steele’s opinion in the *Sours* case involved “important principles inseparably linked with the right of the people to govern themselves through the will of the majority.”²⁷ As King said, “Home rule implies that the electorate are the rulers, not the ruled.”²⁸

ENDNOTES

- People ex rel. Atty. Gen. v. Curtice*, 50 Colo. 503, 506-07 (1911).
- Clyde Lyndon King, *The History of the Government of Denver* 106 (1911); Marjorie Hornbein, *Denver’s Struggle for Home Rule*, *The Colorado Magazine* XLVIII/4 1971, at 338.
- Coulter v. Routt Cnty. Comm’rs*, 11 P. 199, 264 (Colo. 1886).
- Clyde Lyndon King, *The History of the Government of Denver* 160 (1911).
- Id.* at 166.
- Id.* at 128.
- Id.* at 211.
- War’s Horrid Front, *Colorado Transcript*, Mar. 21, 1894, at 2.
- In re Fire, Police & Excise Comm’rs of City of Denver*, 36 P. 234, 241 (Colo. 1894).
- People ex rel Engley v. Martin*, 36 P. 543 (Colo. 1894).
- Marjorie Hornbein, *Denver’s Struggle for Home Rule*, *The Colorado Magazine* XLVIII/4 1971, at 338 (citing Cinch for a Mayor, *Rocky Mountain News*, Jan. 21, 1893, at 8).
- Municipal League, *Rocky Mountain News*, Dec. 11, 1894, at 4.
- Walter Lawson Wilder, *Robert Wilbur Steele: Defender of Liberty* 228 (1913).
- Clyde Lyndon King, *The History of the Government of Denver* 234 (1911).
- People ex rel. Elder v. Sours*, 31 Colo. 369 (1903).
- People ex rel. Parish v. Adams*, 31 Colo. 476 (1903).
- City and Cnty. of Denver v. Hallett*, 34 Colo. 393 (1905).
- Clyde Lyndon King, *The History of the Government of Denver* 248 (1911).
- People ex rel. Miller v. Johnson*, 34 Colo. 143 (1905); *People ex rel. Stidger v. Alexander*, 34 Colo. 193 (1905); *People ex rel. Lawson v. Stoddard*, 34 Colo. 200 (1905); *People ex rel. Stidger v. Horan*, 34 Colo. 304 (1905).
- People ex rel. Atty. Gen. v. News-Times Pub’g Co.*, 35 Colo. 253 (1906).
- Clyde Lyndon King, *The History of the Government of Denver* 243 (1911).
- See *People ex rel. Atty. Gen. v. Curtice (Cassiday)*, 50 Colo. 503, 522, 533 (1911).
- Mauff v. People ex rel. Clay*, 52 Colo. 562, 564-65 (Colo. 1912).
- People ex rel. Tate v. Prevost*, 55 Colo. 199, 214-15 (1913).
- Id.*
- See Senate Bill 25-001; *In re People v. Camp*, 581 P.3d 763 (2025).
- Walter Lawson Wilder, *Robert Wilbur Steele: Defender of Liberty* 227 (1913).
- Clyde Lyndon King, *The History of the Government of Denver* 290 (1911).

*You are
invited
to the*

COLORADO MUNICIPAL LEAGUE 104th

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

WESTMINSTER • JUNE 22-25 • 2026

Join CML for an incredible week of learning, networking, and fun
with Colorado's most talented municipal officials



COLORADO
MUNICIPAL
LEAGUE

WWW.CML.ORG

SPOTLIGHT

Berthoud: The little town that did

Because the little engine couldn't

By **ANDREW WAYLAND**, Berthoud Historical Society museums director, and **STEPHANIE HORVATH**, Berthoud community engagement manager

Berthoud's history was shaped by a remarkable decision, one that quite literally moved the town. While its early beginnings followed a familiar Colorado story of homesteaders, agriculture, and the lure of the gold rush, it was the railroad's limitations that ultimately reshaped Berthoud's future.

During the 1860s and 1870s, settlers established a small agricultural community along the Little Thompson River. Known then as the Little Thompson settlement, the area drew people by the promise of land under the Homestead Act and opportunities tied to the Gold Rush. Early residents such as William Blore, Cary Culver, and John Mahoney built their lives raising cattle and sheep. By 1872, the Little Thompson settlement had begun to take shape, complete with a post office, school, and a growing population.

Change accelerated with the arrival of the Colorado Central Railroad in 1877. The rail line connected the community to larger markets, allowing farmers to ship hay, grain, and livestock beyond the valley. In 1878, the

settlement was renamed Berthoud in honor of Captain Edward L. Berthoud, the railroad's chief civil engineer. Like many towns of the era, Berthoud quickly became tied to the railroad's success.

The town's original location along the river, however, soon proved problematic. Steam locomotives struggled with the steep grade needed to climb out of the river bottom after stopping in Berthoud. What once seemed like a natural place to settle became a logistical challenge for the railroad that sustained the town's economy.

Rather than risk being bypassed, Berthoud made a bold and unusual choice: it moved.

In November 1883, Peter Turner filed for a new town site on higher ground, about a mile north of the original settlement. Over the following months, buildings were physically relocated up the bluff to align with a new section of track better suited to the railroad's needs.

By early 1884, a new Berthoud was emerging and now sat strategically beside the rail line, ensuring its continued

growth. This relocation proved to be a turning point. By 1888, Berthoud held its first elections, and the following year brought a surge of development. Businesses flourished, brick buildings rose along the streets, and the town began to resemble its current layout. With the grade no longer an issue, the railroad became the lifeblood of the community, bringing in goods, people, and equipment while carrying agricultural products to markets across the region.

As Berthoud entered the early 1900s, industries such as sugar beet farming brought prosperity and stability. The decision to relocate, driven by the practical limits of steam locomotives, secured Berthoud's future as a thriving agricultural and commercial hub.

Today, Berthoud's story stands as a testament to adaptability and determination. Few towns can say they picked up and moved for the sake of progress, but Berthoud did just that. In reshaping itself to meet the demands of a changing world, the town created a legacy of resilience that continues to define the community today.



Photos courtesy of Berthoud Historical Society

A passenger train from the Burlington Zephyr fleet stops at the Berthoud Rail Station, ca. 1940s.



Berthoud's original main street, 3rd Street held the business district and Berthoud's train depot. Photo taken in 1891.

SPOTLIGHT

The early history of Sterling

By **KAY RICH**, Overland Trail Museum curator

What is known today as “Old Sterling” was originally located about three to four miles northeast of present-day Sterling. Settlement in the area began in the early 1870s, largely influenced by the passage of the Homestead Act of 1862, which encouraged westward expansion.

By 1874, enough settlers had arrived to establish a post office named “Sterling,” with Frank Soper appointed as the first postmaster. The small but growing community was connected to regional travel routes, with stage lines running between Denver, Julesburg, and Cheyenne, bringing mail, supplies, and new residents.

The settlement was named by David Leavitt, a member of a railroad survey crew for the Colorado Central Railroad, after his hometown of Sterling, Illinois. At that time, the population was estimated between 25 and 30 people.

In 1875, Sterling was designated a “fence district,” enclosing approximately 1,000 acres with smooth wire fencing to protect crops from roaming buffalo and cattle. Newspaper accounts from that year describe about a dozen homes, each situated on 160-acre claims.



Overland Trail Museum

Sterling's Main Street in 1888.

Education began early in the settlement's history. The first school, established in 1875, was a modest 14-by-16-foot adobe structure located on R.G. Smith's homestead. The building also served as a Sunday school. With a dirt floor, shingled roof, and iron stove at its center, it reflected the frontier conditions of the time. Students brought their own chairs, and the first teacher, Miss Carrie Ayres — just 15 years old — taught about 20 students ranging in age from 4 to 20.

A major turning point came in 1880, when news arrived that the Union Pacific Railroad would extend a line through the area from Julesburg to LaSalle. Early settler and businessman Minos King played a crucial role by offering to donate 80 acres of land along the right-of-way — land he had

purchased for \$400 — in hopes of attracting railroad shops.

In 1881, King formally platted the new townsite, laying out 19 blocks. Many residents relocated from Old Sterling to the new site, and King, along with R.E. King, established a lumber yard and general store. He also donated land for a church, school, public buildings, and a cemetery.

With the railroad secured, a depot and section house were constructed, and the town began to grow rapidly. On October 7, 1884, a petition was filed to incorporate the new town of Sterling.

Just a few years later, in 1887, Logan County was created from part of Weld County, and Sterling was designated as the county seat — cementing its role as the region's central community.

SPOTLIGHT

Keystone: Colorado's newest town

By **KEN RILEY**, Keystone mayor

Keystone is a community with deep Colorado roots. What began as a collection of homesteads and mines became a logging and rail hub in the 1800s. By the 1930s, it had faded into a ghost town — only to be reborn in 1970 as a ski resort. In 2024, Keystone completed its transformation by becoming Colorado's newest municipality.

In the mid-1990s, the resort had expanded to three mountains, two mountain bases, a lakeside village, two golf courses, and trail access to the National Forest — a year-round resort and community. About 700 full-time residents called Keystone home. Early concerns about resort-built infrastructure and long-term support prompted initial discussions about incorporation. However, the resort was being sold to Vail Resorts. In the words of one of the ski resort's founders, Bill Bergman, the timing wasn't right.

By 2020, Keystone had grown into a major day skier and destination resort with more than 3,500 residences, 2,000 short term rentals, 1,200 full time residents, and 4,000 part time residents. Winter peak weekends brought in 25,000 visitors. Traffic and pedestrian safety concerns along U.S. 6 grew, and aging resort-built



Adobe Stock

An aerial view of Keystone, Colorado.

infrastructure was deteriorating with no clear maintenance responsibility. Summit County, while effective as a regional government, was not structured to support the unique demands of the community.

Incorporation was revisited by a core of residents who consulted with Summit County, Northwest Colorado Council of Governments, and Colorado Department of Local Affairs as they explored the question: could Keystone make it as a new town without

raising taxes? The study said *yes*. Due to the county's tax structure, incorporation would redirect more than \$7.5 million annually from Summit County to the town, providing the resources needed to deliver the current level of local services.

Residents formed an incorporation committee and launched a grass roots campaign. Unlike most other paths to incorporation, they decided to bypass becoming a statutory town and go straight to home rule, resulting in



Adobe Stock

A hiker stands on a precipice with the ski runs of Keystone in the background..

combining the state's incorporation and home rule processes. This decision would increase the incorporation timeline by six months but give the new town more autonomy and flexibility. More than 50 volunteers conducted an incorporation petition drive, formed a charter commission, drafted the town charter, and formed an election commission. Three elections were needed to approve incorporation and elect a charter commission, approve the town charter, and elect the town council. With valuable advice from the Colorado Municipal League and an experienced attorney, it took two years from committee formation to home-rule town incorporation.

Three months before the town council was elected, residents formed

a transition committee — made up of all council candidates — supported by an ex-county/town manager, legal advisor, and community volunteers. This early coordination proved critical. As a result, the town hired an interim manager, clerk, and community development director on day one, secured interim financing, and began building the administrative and regulatory framework needed to function.

After only two years, the town is fully operational and staffed. Necessary ordinances, resolutions, and intergovernmental agreements are in place. A comprehensive plan is complete. Preincorporation concerns are being met with the first U.S. 6 safety infrastructure project completed with more underway. Roads and trails

maintenance projects are ongoing, a new joint police department has been formed with the neighboring Town of Dillon, and community committees are working on the town's future. Recognizing their shared future, the town is building a collaborative relationship with Keystone Resort.

Looking ahead, Keystone is entering its next phase. With extensive public engagement, this year Keystone will develop its first strategic plan and trails and open space master plan to shape the town's next 10-20 years. The future is bright. The community, its residents, part-time residents, second homeowners, workforce, and businesses will determine the future character of their town and the services they receive for generations to come.

AMERICA 250

COLORADO 150

HAPPY

Municipal

BIRTHDAY!

CENTENNIAL

25 years · founded 2001

BETHUNE

100 years · founded 1926

WALSH

100 years · founded 1926

LA VETA

150 years · founded 1876

OURAY

150 years · founded 1876

PLATTEVILLE

150 years · founded 1876

TRINIDAD

150 years · founded 1876



History in f cus

*Images of Colorado cities & towns through the years,
from the History Colorado collection*



Colorado State Capitol in Denver, ca. 1890-1910.



The Civilian War *Boulder News-Herald* Force hold newspapers announcing the end of World War I. Photo taken Jan. 11, 1919.



People, horses, and a wagon on the main street of Telluride, 1908.



Members of the Grand Junction Cornet Band hold brass instruments and drums while posing in a row on Main Street in Grand Junction, ca. 1884-1889.



Trolley cars on 15th Street at the intersection of Lawrence Street in downtown Denver, 1887.

We, the people of Colorado, with profound reverence for the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, in order to form a more independent and perfect government; establish justice; insure tranquility; provide for the common defense; promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this constitution for the “State of Colorado”.

— *Preamble to the Constitution of the State of Colorado, 1876*



Pike's Peak Avenue in Colorado Springs, ca. 1860-1890.

AMERICA **250**

COLORADO **150**

FROM THE CML ARCHIVES: 1976

Editor's note: The following article was originally published in the November/December 1976 issue of Colorado Municipalities, in recognition of the Colorado centennial and U.S. bicentennial. The article chronicles the growth of cities and towns during the first 100 years of Colorado statehood. It is reprinted here in its entirety.

Colorado's urban frontier

Published in commemoration of the
100th birthday of Colorado's statehood

By **JANET HELT**,
CML editorial assistant in 1976



Across the state in almost every corner of every community, Coloradans this year commemorated the creation of a new nation and a new state. As many, no doubt, have discovered, the origin of communities in Colorado was unique. Here, the creation of a town was sudden, explosive and dramatic. Communities sprang up overnight and experienced beanstalk growth.

In the humid east, farms were established first, and with the gradual need for trading and manufacturing centers, cities and towns emerged and grew at a sedate and orderly pace. Coastal cities, born as ports of commerce, usually did not change their direction of growth.

GROWTH IS RAPID

In the volatile, dynamic West, however, each discovery of gold or other unexploited resource brought hundreds of fortune seekers converging on a single spot, in rapid succession. The Pikes Peak gold rush of '59 was one of the great mass migrations of American history, numbering around 100,000 immigrants.

The need for laws and services was immediate and the challenge to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the Colorado pioneers, unprecedented. Every strike spawned new settlements, each more remote from civilization than the last. Settlements appeared from nowhere and immediately claimed status as "cities." Because of the temporary nature of the mineral frontier, many of the fledgling villages died an early death. The survivors, those that ultimately became important cities, usually developed as supply points rather than mining camps.

DEVELOPS IN A DAY

The famous city of Leadville came nearer to being "built in a day" than any other city of the world. In 1859 and the four succeeding years, the valley boasted a population exceeding 10,000. The growth of Leadville in its "second generation" mining bonanza was unprecedented. In January 1878 the camp consisted of 20 to 25 log cabins. Four months later, the number of buildings had

increased to 400. As growth continued, a water works, police department, fire department, and gas works were established, all within a period of 18 months. Helen Hunt wrote of the phenomenal growth in the May 1879 issue of *Atlantic*, "It was a Monaco gambling room emptied into a Colorado spruce clearing." By 1880, Leadville was reported as the second largest city in the state with a population of about 15,000.

GROWTH IS WIDESPREAD

Except for the first gold rushes, Colorado's period of most rapid growth was in the decade ending in 1880. In 1870 the territory had a population of about 40,000; in 1880, the state, then four years old boasted nearly 200,000 inhabitants. Nearly all parts of the state had shared in the increase.

Urban development gained steam in 1858 with the arrival of a few ambitious speculators. Unable to find gold, they decided to capitalize on the situation, and spent their first winter in Colorado sitting around a campfire "manufacturing" cities. Each envisioned the town he would stake out as the metropolis of the mountains.

One group of promoters organized the town of St. Charles on the east bank of Cherry Creek, then hurried back to

the Kansas Territory to obtain a charter for their town. The St. Charles Town Company was a business venture, requiring settlers to purchase cabin sites. Although land was available, free for the taking, the advantages of organization for the protection of property and person could not be completely ignored. As the numbers on Cherry Creek increased, a public meeting was called and The Auraria Town Company was established to rival the St. Charles venture, which was later renamed Denver City. Cherry Creek provided a natural boundary between the rival communities.

Denver City and Auraria flourished in 1859. Through their streets passed most of the men bound for the mines, and to them came the returning miners to spend their gold dust. Out of their spending came roads civic development, churches and schools. Those who were serious about



the new land settled down to extract their own kind of gold — grain or cattle.

In 1860 Denver City and Auraria merged their interests and buried their antagonisms. Competition was a luxury these men could no longer afford. Up the canyon of Clear Creek the newly established community of Golden City was proving a dangerous rival, and to the north and south other competitors threatened.

CITIES ARE PROJECTED

Other new “cities” were projected by idle and ambitious men. One group of squatters called their hamlet “Fountain City,” but it disappeared when the town of Pueblo emerged in 1860. El Paso City, built in 1859, was superseded by Colorado City (Colorado Springs), and in 1859, Boulder City was laid out on a generous scale by a group of town promoters. Essential to the growth and progress of an early settlement was its newspaper, proclaiming to the world the advantages of America’s newest, most promising town.

Central City was an example of a mining camp which blossomed into a mining town. Houses were built on the mountainside with little regard for order. Streets were narrow, and persons on the sidewalk risked being spattered with mud. There were no gardens and no shade trees, for the early settlers, in short-sighted fashion, had cut down the trees which rimmed the town. As in other western villages, the town saloon played a conspicuous part in main-street activity. Although it spoils the picture of the frontier as a place that was always wild, always rough, and always wide open, restrictions to regulate saloons appeared almost as soon as the saloons themselves. Other typical features of town life were the music halls and theaters where traveling companies of players brought culture to the miners in the form of dramatic productions.

TOURIST INDUSTRY BEGINS

Although many social groups were organized, much of the recreation was casual, for nature had created trout streams, wild animals, and scenic wonders everywhere. This sportsmen’s paradise was advertised as the finest on the continent. The mountains also provided hot springs which were converted into sites for health seekers. Thus began the Colorado tourist industry.

A new wave of miners arrived in the spring of 1860. When the travel season reached its height, more than 5,000 newcomers arrived each week, most of them stopping at Denver before entering the mountains.

Providing goods, supplies, and services for the men in the diggings gave many a chance to make a living from the miners’ trade, but also presented difficulties of impressive dimensions. The Rocky Mountains deflected the main overland routes to the north and south, and the mining districts were some 600 miles from the sources of supply on the Missouri River. Most freighters used teams of oxen to pull the heavy merchandise wagons over the prairies. Travel was slow, water and feed scarce, and attacks by Indians, robberies by renegades, and bad weather added to the hazards of commerce.

In addition to the other more dramatic hardships endured by the early settlers, many fought and lost the battle of inadequate sanitation systems, crowded conditions, and isolation from the amenities of civilization. At one point so many died that burials were conducted at night in unmarked graves.

TOWN IS FOCAL POINT

The town was often the focus of ambitions and problem solving for the area it served. It was the scene of constant mass meetings for civic improvements; the assembly point for shaping the growth and development of the urban frontier. It was the city fathers, representing local merchants and nearby farmers, who drew attention to the West’s continuing progress and the need for political recognition.

Miners in the gulches and hills followed the example of town promoters and created governmental agencies called “mining districts. Their function was to see the claim system worked properly, although actually all claims were of doubtful legality since the Indians held title to much of the land. Codes were written to protect the miners’ property and to provide a method for settling disputes. Several hundred mining districts were organized with no authority other than the “sovereignty” of the individual miners who agreed to place themselves under the districts’ control.

Another form of government, called a “claim club,” was created by the agricultural settlers to secure for squatters



Adobe Stock

their particular tracts of land against both latecomers and speculators. Persons accused of wrongdoing were tried before assembled citizens, with those pronounced “guilty” punished immediately, for there was neither time nor money to maintain prison facilities. A thief was more certain of punishment than was a murderer in some places, for public opinion often regarded shootings as justifiable, but never thievery. However in Denver, after many complaints of pistol shots breaking the stillness of the night, the frontier substitute for the modern noise control ordinance was created. A 150-man vigilante “committee” soon ushered the more blatant offenders out of town.

STRIVE FOR ORDER

No matter how effectively the people’s courts administered “justice,” there was a yearning and striving for legitimate, recognized government in the region. Amidst the

turmoil and excitement of the first gold rush in 1859, and without the slightest prospect for success, a constitutional convention was called for creation of the State of Jefferson. Leavenworth & Pike’s Peak Express office, at the corner of Larimer and 14th streets in Denver, was the scene of the first “Jefferson legislature” which industriously turned out laws at a rapid rate. At the time no great mine had been opened, or even discovered, and not an acre of land had been planted. Several early attempts to attain territorial status failed, but on Feb. 28, 1861, the Territory of Colorado finally became a reality. Colorado City was designated as the permanent capital of Colorado Territory.

In 1862, however, the capital was established at Golden City, where wood, lights, and hall were offered free of charge. Although Golden remained the designated capital until 1867, officials insisted on transacting their business in the larger and more convenient Denver.

Late in 1859 the first school was established by “Professor” O.J. Goldrick, who came thundering down Cherry Creek atop an ox cart podium. The following year Goldrick organized the first library association, with one book on its shelves. Two years after the “Professor” opened Colorado’s first school, the legislature reserved sections 16 and 36 in each township for school purposes.

PROVE OWNERSHIP

A frontier public school system was difficult to achieve, for school bonds were hard to sell. Property could not be taxed until final proof of ownership was made and a patent issued on a homestead. In most cases five years elapsed before title was gained. In many communities, schools were built by donated labor.

The next item on the frontier agenda was the development of adequate transportation systems. There were no roads worthy of the name from the valley towns up the grades to the diggings, and moving supplies was difficult. Toll companies began to construct roads after 1860, and at the Gold Lake mining camp, miners established a tax of \$1 for each claim, to be used for road making. In many mountain towns travel in winter was on runners. Even the hook-and-ladder vehicle for fire protection of the town was placed on a bobsled.

When, like the wagon trails before them, the two major railroad arterials linking the east and west coasts bypassed the rugged Colorado terrain, a citizens’ meeting was organized. Bonds were issued, and the town of Denver, with a population of less than 5,000, built four of its first five railroads. All the territory was interested, and in 1870 the Denver and Rio Grande Railway, as the winner of a railroad war of magnificent proportions, claimed the

right to serve the mining communities that sprang forth almost daily. Building the railway through the Colorado mountains was one of the engineering miracles of the age.

Early settlers who shaped the urban frontier soon became aware of another obstacle to be overcome in taming the mountainous state. Although more rivers of importance have their source in Colorado than in any other state, the supply of water never seemed to be in the right place at the right time. “Mass production” mining methods required a constant supply of water, and some of the ditches dug by the miners carried water 10 or 12 miles through rugged mountain terrain.

RELY ON IRRIGATION

On the east slope, irrigation commenced as soon as the ’59ers arrived. By 1866 ditches were serving over 100,000 acres. Organizations interested in securing agricultural settlers for Colorado emphasized the superiority of irrigation over reliance on “Providence” for rain. Nevertheless, dryland farmers of the eastern plains fought a continuing and sometimes disheartening battle for survival in a semi-arid land, termed by many as the “Great American Desert.” Bright prospects in the late 80s were followed by drought and depression in the early 90s. Farms were abandoned, and many towns, such as Akron, Burlington, Holyoke, Haxtun, and Wray, dwindled in size. As a result, the federal government as well as states of the semi-arid West developed drought-resistant crops, special tools, and special methods of cultivation. Abandoned farms once again were occupied, dead towns brought to life, and new towns founded.

More difficult than the construction of ditches and dams was the invention of institutions for social control.



Pioneer irrigators were antagonistic to laws and institutions which would control their lives and property. Yet, irrigation required some subordination of the individual to group control. The resulting conflict led to the formation of a system of public control of water which has served as a pattern for the public control and administration of water in most of the western states.

Agricultural colonies became the distinctive mode of settlement in the early part of the 70s. The Union Colony, established at Greeley, was well known for its thrifty, industrious, and temperate people. Two similar colonies, Longmont and Evans, followed, and in 1872, Fort Collins was built on an abandoned military reservation on the Cache la Poudre River.

TREATY CLEARS THE WAY

In the late 1870s a new Indian treaty cleared the way for the settlement of the valleys of the Gunnison, Grand, and White rivers. Farmers and promoters were on hand awaiting the opportunity to pick the best lands and the most likely town sites. Grand Junction, Delta, Montrose, and Meeker were quickly settled.

Rivaling the town-boomers of the agricultural frontier were the range-right promoters. By the summer of 1882, the cattle business boom was at its height. Men swarmed in from all parts of the country to buy ranches and herds of cattle. By 1885 the range was overstocked, and few of the vast herds survived the harsh winter. Many cattlemen sold out and left the country. Those who remained, as well as newcomers, confined their efforts to raising small herds; sheepmen began to graze their flocks on the vast grasslands of the eastern plains.

In the late 70s rich silver ores were discovered at Leadville, and prospecting was conducted on a tremendous scale. One day in the spring of 1880, a correspondent reported 250 teams bound for the Gunnison area. Out of the rush to the San Juan region grew such towns as Lake City, Silverton, and Ouray. For a time the town of Silver Cliff ranked next to Denver and Leadville in population.

The romance and excitement of the silver mining camps ended suddenly when the federal government repealed its silver coinage legislation. As the depression of 1893 swept over the nation, Colorado witnessed the complete collapse of her economy. By the end of the year more than 20,000 Coloradans had left the state.

THE FRONTIER MATURES

Fortunately, it was at this time gold was discovered near Cripple Creek and, with the upturn of the national economy, Colorado was on the road to recovery. At the turn of the century, one of the last of America's urban frontiers had attained maturity. The days of quick money were over. As the westward rush lost its momentum and the initial excitement wore off, settlers prepared to live like other American farmers and city dwellers. Although many young and struggling communities attempted to pattern themselves after an eastern heritage, nevertheless, western culture emerged. It developed within the confines and constraints of an arid area, exploited by many who desired only to "make their pile" and go home. Many came, few stayed.

Today, those who choose to live in an area of natural beauty, and of natural and scientific resources, are challenged to protect the fragile environment, encourage controlled growth, and forge a viable future for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Building the railway through the Colorado mountains was one of the engineering miracles of the age.

What's in a name?

The colorful history of Colorado cities & towns

By **MAEVE MCHUGH**, CML municipal research specialist

Have you ever wondered how Colorado's places earned their names? Some of Colorado's municipalities or landmarks are tributes to Native American tribes and figures, while others preserve the original names used by indigenous peoples. Colorado's Spanish colonial past is likewise evident in a number of its municipality names, even if contemporary pronunciations have diverged (Salida, Limon, Del Norte, and Buena Vista to name a few).

As expected, many places are named after people, primarily explorers, military leaders, pioneers and settlers, politicians, promoters, railroad entrepreneurs, or prospectors who struck gold (or silver, lead, uranium, etc.). Not only are Colorado's towns named for the people who settled there, but the geological and geographical features they encountered (Golden, Boulder, Red Cliff, Dinosaur, you get it).

Other place-namers were inspired by other locales (or not inspired at all,

in the case of No Name), giving us Englewood (New Jersey and Illinois), Holyoke (Massachusetts), Hoosier (Indiana), Kenosha (Wisconsin), Rangeley (Maine), Springfield (Missouri), Sterling (Illinois), and Superior (Wisconsin), among others.

Here are some more place names and the stories behind them:

- **Almont** (Gunnison County) — named after a Kentucky racehorse
- **Cotopaxi** (Fremont County) — named after Mount Cotopaxi in Ecuador (the world's tallest active volcano at more than 19,000 feet). Named by Emanuel Saltie, the owner of a nearby silver mine, who established a Jewish agricultural colony here in 1882.
- **Dacono** (Weld County) — Named by a nearby mine owner, combining the first two letters of his wife's name (Daisy), and two of her friends, Cora and Nona.
- **Durango** (La Plata County) — Durango was the result of a feud

between nearby Animas City and the Denver and Rio Grande Railway. Animas City would not grant concessions to the railway as they planned a depot in the town. Instead, in 1880, the company planted roots in Durango two miles south of Animas City.

- **Egnar** (San Miguel County) — simply, “range” backward.
- **Fairplay** (Park County) — Founded by miners from nearby Tarryall (nicknamed “Grab All” by locals), who were disappointed by the greed they witnessed by prospectors and other settlers. As a result, they moved and established Fair Play (now Fairplay). The Fair Play ethos proved popular — during the Civil War period, the town was home to eleven post offices. The community was renamed South Park City in 1869, before reverting to Fairplay five years later.
- **Greeley** (Weld County) — Named for the editor of the *New York*

Tribune, Horace Greeley. Greeley visited the area where the South Platte met the plains of Colorado in 1859 and decided that the area had agricultural potential. Not long afterward, Nathan C. Meeker — the agricultural editor of the *New York Tribune* and the namesake of Meeker, Colorado — secured Horace Greeley’s support and funding to establish a utopian communal settlement known as Union Colony. Although the experiment was short lived, the community eventually evolved into the city of Greeley.

- **Nucla** (Montrose County) — Established in 1894 as a utopian socialist colony. The name references the nucleus of an atom, and the colony’s aspiration that they would be the nucleus for such movements nationwide. This, of course, didn’t come to fruition, but the name may have been prophetic, as the area later became a hub for uranium mining.
- **Ordway** (Crowley County) — named for Denver Businessman George

N. Ordway, who bought the land and led the townsite development. One story goes, his name, along with two other promoters were put in a hat, and his was selected in the draw.

- **Pikes Peak** (El Paso) — Named for Zebulon Pike Jr. (would Mt. Zebulon be a better name?). However, despite “America’s mountain” carrying his name, he never actually reached its summit. In November of 1806, Pike and his men attempted the summit but turned back before they could make it. Pike was killed in 1813 in Canada during the War of 1812, before he had a chance to finish what he started in 1806.
- **Telluride** (San Miguel County) — This area was home to three cities: San Miguel City, Newport, and Columbia. Newport became Pandora, while Columbia became Telluride. Telluride is named for the element, tellurium, however, the district of

Telluride does not contain this mineral. In light of this, some have said that the name is derived from prospective Telluride visitors being warned “to hell you ride!”

- **Vail** — Named after Vail pass, which in turn was named after the state highway engineer, Charles D. Vail. From 1930 until his death in 1945, Vail was instrumental in increasing the area of paved state roads tenfold from around 5,000 miles of road to 50,000. One can only imagine how this highway engineer would react to the world-spanning conglomeration now bearing his name.

SOURCES

1001 Colorado Place Names, Benson, Maxine. University Press of Kansas, 1994.

Colorado Place Names, Bright, William. Johnson Books, 2004.

A Compendium of Curious Colorado Place Names, Flynn, Jim. History Press, 2016.



Spring

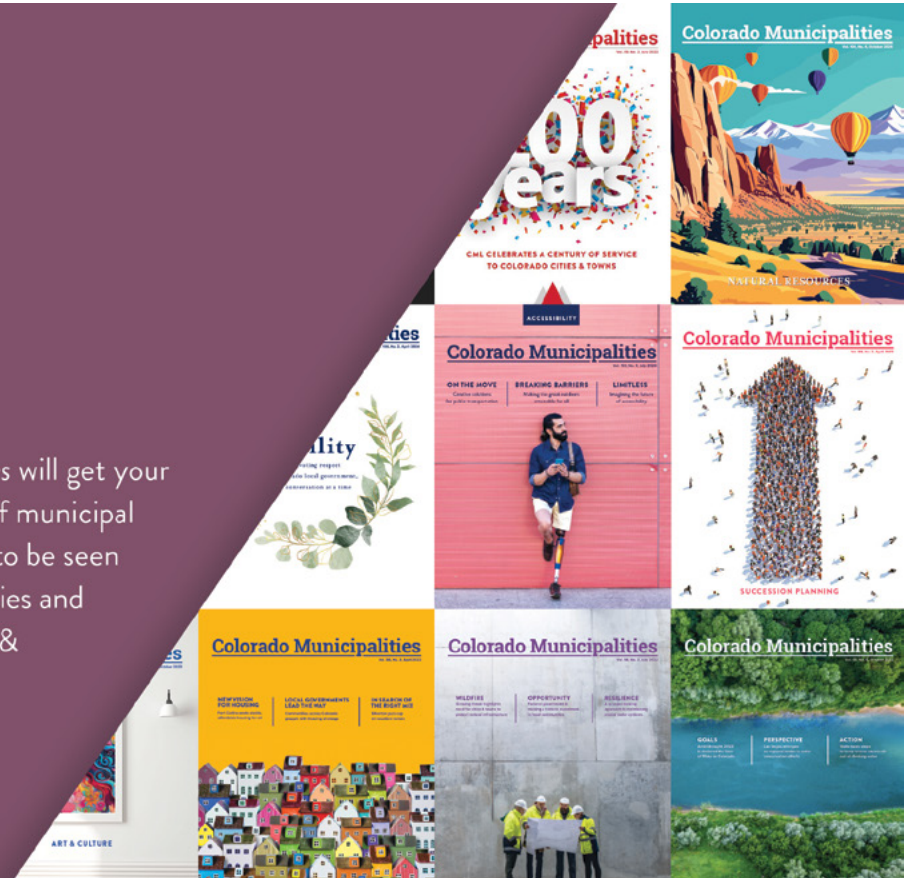
DISTRICT MEETINGS

Starting in May, CML is coming to a city or town near you. Learn more and register at CML.org



WE SEE YOU

Advertising in *Colorado Municipalities* will get your organization noticed by thousands of municipal officials and decision makers. Want to be seen by the people who lead Colorado cities and towns? Contact CML Engagement & Communications Manager Denise White at 303-831-6411 or dwhite@cml.org



1144 Sherman St.
Denver, CO 80203-2207
(p) 303-831-6411 / 866-578-0936
(f) 303-860-8175

www.cml.org
cml@cml.org
Copyright©2026

COLORADO MUNICIPALITIES

Denise White, editor
Alex Miller, assistant editor & graphic design
Mark Vanderbrook, circulation

Articles in *Colorado Municipalities* (ISSN 0010-1664) may not be reproduced unless permission is received from the editor and the reprinted article includes credit to the author, *Colorado Municipalities*, and the Colorado Municipal League. Viewpoints and opinions expressed by authors in any guest article are not necessarily those of the CML Executive Board, members, or staff of CML and do not represent official positions of the Colorado Municipal League.

Advertisements contained in the magazine do not reflect League endorsement of any product or service. Advertising rates provided on request.

Manuscripts: Original articles on subjects of interest to Colorado municipal officials accepted. Contact the editor for guidelines. Subscription rate: \$25 an issue, \$100 a year. (Colorado residents, add sales tax: in Denver, 7.72%; all others in Regional Transportation District, 4.1%; all others in Colorado, 2.9%.)

Periodical postage paid at Denver, Colorado. Postal Information: *Colorado Municipalities* (USPS 123-140) is published January, April, July, and October by the Colorado Municipal League, 1144 Sherman St., Denver, CO 80203-2207, 303-831-6411 / 866-578-0936.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Mark Vanderbrook, Colorado Municipal League, 1144 Sherman St., Denver, CO 80203-2207; email: cml@cml.org.

Colorado Municipalities Online

A DIGITAL VERSION OF
COLORADO MUNICIPALITIES
IS AVAILABLE ON **CML.ORG**.

BETWEEN EDITIONS, KEEP UP
WITH CML ON SOCIAL MEDIA
VIA FACEBOOK, X, OR LINKEDIN.

Join CML

FOR ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP
INFORMATION, CONTACT CML
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS
SPECIALIST KHARYL JACKSON AT
KJACKSON@CML.ORG.



COLORADO
MUNICIPAL
LEAGUE

Elevate your leadership skills with CML

Election Webinar: Debrief & Tales to Tell Online May 14

A wide-ranging conversation will engage attendees in an election debrief, provide insights, and share stories covering what worked, what did not, and what attendees wished they had known ahead of the elections. This webinar is designed with the needs of municipal clerks in mind.

Legislative Wrap-up Webinar Online May 19

Learn more about the new laws you need to know following the 2026 Colorado General Assembly. Join the CML advocacy team at this wrap up webinar to find out what comes next and ask questions about new laws or ongoing issues that affect your city or town.

Register now at cml.org!





COLORADO
MUNICIPAL
LEAGUE

USPS 123-140

Periodical postage
PAID
at Denver, Colorado

1144 Sherman St., Denver, CO 80203

