

A Brief History of Pueblo and Immediate Surroundings

Courtesy of the Pueblo Economic Development Corporation (PEDCO)

History

This region, surrounding the spot where the Fountain Creek flows into the Arkansas River, has been a natural crossroads for travelers and traders since early times. Natives and visitors alike regarded it as a very special place. It continues to be a very special place - a sanctuary for people seeking work, relaxation and the good life.

Pueblo can trace its reputation as the climate capital of Colorado to ancient legends that claim the Aztecs built a sun temple near the Huajatolla Peaks south of Pueblo. They apparently regarded those mountains as the northern boundary of their empire.

Early Inhabitants

From about 1600 on, Spaniards frequented the area but failed to establish any permanent settlement. Many came in search of the legendary -Seven Cities of Gold,- but found only a few bands of Indians scattered about. French trappers followed the Arkansas through the area during the late 1600's.

Mountain and plains Indians were Pueblo's first tourists. They considered the area to be a neutral zone between the lands claimed by the various tribes and also as a special meeting place with abundant game and water. In 1779, the region was the site of the Comanches' first defeat at the hands of the Spanish. A young war chief, Cuerno Verde, died during the battle and in his honor, the mountain range and valley where he last fought bears his name - Greenhorn.

Lieutenant Zebulon Pike first raised the American flag over Colorado soil when he camped at the site of present-day Pueblo in 1806. It was from this campsite that he made his unsuccessful assault on nearby Pike's Peak.

From an Early Fort

The first permanent settlement began to develop in 1842 when James P. Beckwourth, George Simpson, Joseph Doyle and other trappers and traders built an adobe fort - El Pueblo. The location was ideal for them - close to the mountains for the trappers, with rich grasslands for grazing and agriculture and in an Indian neutral zone for the traders. Pueblo's raw materials, water and readily-available space - the same features we sell today - were abundant.

Near the end of the 1840's, at the conclusion of the Mexican-American War, the land south of the Arkansas became U.S. territory. The area prepared for more settlers. But, on Christmas Day, 1854, a band of Ute Indians massacred the residents of Fort Pueblo and

the site was abandoned. With the coming of the gold rush four years later, the settlers returned. Fountain City was established on the north bank of the Arkansas to be followed by Pueblo in 1859.

In 1872, the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad reached Pueblo. It was part of General William Palmer's dream of building a national rail system. While he was opening the West, he helped shape Pueblo's hometown attitude. Palmer founded the town of South Pueblo and brought in thousands of people to man his mines and operate his steel works. It was a rich ethnic mix.

[The Going Got Tough](#)

In 1888, Western Union and four major railroads had reached Pueblo. It had become the smelting capital of the world, refining gold, zinc, lead and silver. The town grew rapidly around the turn of the century and life was good. The turning point came with the great flood of 1921, followed by the depression years.

It was a tough time, but a strong sense of family prevailed. With neighbor helping neighbor and a "never-say-die" attitude, Pueblo survived... and grew strong and committed. Tough times came again when the U.S. steel industry collapsed, taking thousands of Pueblo jobs with it. The citizens, two-thirds of whom owned their own homes, were not ready to move.