CITIES OF COLORADO

Overview:

From the beginning, settlement in Colorado was urban as well as rural. Towns and cities played an essential role in the development of the territory and state. The miners in the Rocky Mountains could not have survived without nearby supply towns and wholesale/distribution centers down on the plains. Early farmers and ranchers also depended towns, whose merchants, blacksmiths, and lumber dealers followed them into each rural area. Small towns, in turn, depended on larger towns and cities. A string of cities emerged along the Front Range from Fort Collins to Pueblo that gave this region a decidedly urban character. Growing urban populations provided farmers and cattlemen with near-by markets for vegetables, meat, and other products. The wholesale merchants and shippers of Longmont, Grand Junction, Denver, and other cities sent Colorado farm produce on to more distant markets. Some towns, such as Denver, Pueblo, and Leadville, also became industrial centers. By 1900, Colorado itself had a distinctively urban character, as a majority of its citizens lived in towns and cities.

Food, Clothing, and Shelter:

The people who settled in towns and cities grew very little of their own food. Most bought what they needed from general stores, meat markets, and vegetable or fruit peddlers. They also patronized drug store lunch counters, as well as local restaurants. City people had a enormous variety of foodstuff available to them. In addition to locally produced meat, vegetables, and fruit, they could buy canned goods shipped in from all parts of the United States.

The clothing that urban dwellers wore varied according to occupation and social class. Working men and women wore much the same kind of clothes as miners, farmers, and ranchers. Men wore dark works shirts and pants; women dressed in cotton print dresses or skirts and blouses. Business class men and their families dressed more formally. Men wore 3-piece suits to work. In public, their wives wore skirts with tailored blouses and coats. Nearly all men wore hats, especially on public occasions, but often at work. Boys and girls' clothing were junior versions of what their parents wore.

The settlers who laid out new town sites typically began by building lean-tos, tents and log cabins for shelter. Such structures usually served as the first business establishments, as well. As the towns grew, tents and cabins were replaced by frame buildings made from boards sawn at a local sawmill. When local timber supplies were exhausted, lumber was shipped in by railroad. However, frame buildings were fire hazards, as many townspeople discovered to their dismay. By the 1880s, the surest sign of a prosperous town in Colorado was the appearance of brick and stone buildings in the business district. Brick also became a popular home-building material in middle-class and upper-class neighborhoods. The disparity of wealth in Colorado's larger cities produced a wide range of housing styles and building materials. Depending on the neighborhood, houses ranged from shacks to small frame houses brick and stone mansions. By the turn of the 20th century, builders in Denver and other large cities also were constructing apartment buildings.

Families, Children, and Schools:

Family, wedding, and other photographs from 19th century Colorado reflect the great diversity of urban society. Cities were mosaics of different occupations, social classes, and ethnic groups. The clothing and toys of the children in these photographs reflected the social status of their families.

In the first years of settlement, children were the focus of a town's community life. The first public building often was the schoolhouse, typically a one-room log or frame structure. These were replaced by brick and stone buildings as towns grew into cities. By the turn of the 20th century, school buildings in Denver and other cities were large three-story brick structures. Larger towns and cities also could afford the luxury of high schools. Few rural children attended high school prior to the 20th century. Those who did either had families who moved to town or who sent their teen-age children to board in a city when they reached high school age. Aspiring cities also competed with one another to become sites of colleges and universities.

Work Places:

The great many ways in which city people made a living was another distinguishing characteristic of urban life. Towns began primarily as commercial centers where bankers, merchants, buyers, shippers, and craftsmen provided goods and services. The variety of such occupations proliferated as towns grew into cities. Larger centers like Denver, Leadville, and Pueblo became centers of transportation, wholesaling, and manufacturing. That latter included factories that manufactured mining machinery and equipment. By 1890, Colorado's iron and steel and smelting industries were thriving. Cities also were banking centers where buyers, merchants, and builders obtained commercial loans. By the end of the century, large towns and cities also offered a variety of service occupations. Urban dwellers also worked as public service employees, including policemen, firemen, sanitation and healthcare workers. Cities along the Front Range of Colorado became centers for treating tuberculoses and other respiratory diseases.

Large Cities:

By the 1890s, Colorado had several major cities. The largest were Denver, Pueblo, Leadville, Colorado Springs, and Grand Junction. These cities had much in common. Each included retail, wholesale, manufacturing, and service establishments. Each also was the commercial center of a hinterland that included smaller towns and villages. These cities also had individual characteristics that reflected its particular role in Colorado's urban development.

Denver was the first town to be founded in Colorado and would remain its largest city. It began as a supply town for miners. It quickly became a wholesale distribution center, shipping mining equipment, hardware, canned goods, clothing and other merchandize to merchants in mining and farm marketing towns throughout Colorado. As the state's economy developed, Denver became a shipping point for Colorado livestock growers, a manufacturing and smelting center, and an investment banking and financial center. As the state capital, Denver also was the political center of Colorado.

Pueblo began in 1842 as a trading fort on the Arkansas River. Abandoned after a band of Utes massacred its inhabitants in 1854, the settlement was re-established in 1859-1860 as a market and supply town for the farmers and cattlemen of the upper Arkansas valley. By the 1890s, Pueblo also had become an important industrial center. Nearby deposits of iron ore and coking coal made it a logical place to establish an iron works. The mining of silver, zinc, and other minerals in the mountains west of Pueblo also helped make the city it an important smelting center.

Leadville owned its existence to the discovery of rich silver deposits in Lake County. The town, founded in 1877, grew rapidly as silver mines were developed. By 1880, Leadville had become the second largest city in Colorado with a population of 24,000. The city served as a commercial hub for the nearby mining camps and as a smelting center. (Silver ore had to be reduced by smelting before it could be profitably shipped to refineries beyond Colorado.) Leadville experienced boom times during the 1880s, although its prosperity was short lived. It came upon hard times in the 1890s, when the price of silver sharply declined.

Colorado Springs was founded by William Jackson Palmer in 1871 as a resort community. Palmer capitalized on the scenic beauty and natural wonders the Pike's Peak area, which also included the Garden of the Gods and the mineral springs at nearby Manitou. The city became a resort destination for wealthy Europeans as well as Americans as well as a magnet for Colorado tourists. The building of a cog railway up Pike's Peak in 1890 added to the city's tourist appeal. Palmer's city absorbed the nearby town of Colorado City to become the Pike's Peak region's major market and supply center. The city's prospectors and bankers also played a major role in the opening of the Cripple Creek mining district, which was Colorado's last major gold strike.

Of Colorado's major cities, **Grand Junction** was the most recently founded. The original town site was platted in September 1881, only a few days after the Ute inhabitants of that area left for a reservation in Utah. The removal of the Utes set off a land rush by white settlers. Among the first to arrive was George W. Crawford, who claimed the Grand Junction town site. He named the town for its location at the junction of the Grand and Gunnison rivers. Grand Junction's hotels, cafes, and post office served the settlers who moved into the region. As those settlers transformed the Grand Valley into a showcase of irrigated farms and fruit orchards, the city's bankers, merchants, flour millers, and sugar refiners prospered. Grand Junction became the regional financial, marketing, and supply center for the Western Slope.

Community Life:

The people who settled in Colorado's towns and cities brought a variety of community institutions with them. As early as 1860, Methodists, Episcopalians, and Catholics either had established missions or had built churches in Denver. By the mid-1880s, those denominations as well as Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists had built imposing, stone-faced church buildings in Denver and other cities. As in rural areas and in Colorado's mining towns, religious services, national holidays, local elections, and public meetings provided occasions for people to come together. The Fourth of July was a major event in every city, typically celebrated with a parade and picnic. By the end of the century, Labor Day also had become a major holiday in Colorado's cities. Skilled

craftsmen, clerks, and laborers lined up to march in Labor Day parades. Sporting and other recreational events also brought people together.

Transportation:

Horse-drawn vehicles were the primary mode of urban transportation throughout the 19th century. Horses pulled delivery wagons, omnibuses, and hacks for hire, as well as private carriages. By the 1890s, electric streetcars had replaced horse cars or omnibuses on the streets of Denver, Pueblo, Grand Junction and other cities. Automobiles also made their appearance during that decade, although they remained a novelty. For inter-urban and long-distance transportation, city people depended on railroads. The main railroad station, usually a Union Station shared by several railroads, was central urban gathering place as well as (usually) a focus of civic pride. As the architectural monuments of their time, the railroad stations rivaled the city hall and the churches of major denominations.