BEST BOOKS ON COLORADO
By Tom Noel

Compiled for the Auraria Library’s Center for Colorado & the West.
We welcome your feedback at tom.noel@ucdenver.edu

Abbott, Carl, Stephen J. Leonard, and David McComb
Colorado: A History of the Centennial State

This well-written survey offers stimulating interpretations and emphases on the state’s twentieth-century urbanization, multiculturalism, and boosterism.

Afton, Jean, David Fridtjof Halaas, and Andrew E. Masich, with Richard N. Ellis Cheyenne Dog Soldiers: A Ledgerbook History of Coups and Combat

Cheyenne warriors painted their military exploits in this captured ledgerbook, providing a rare and compelling look at Colorado history from the Indian perspective.

Andrews, Thomas G.
Killing for Coal: America’s Deadliest Labor War

Andrews, a history professor at the University of Colorado at Denver, describes the environmental history of a Colorado tragedy.

Arps, Louisa Ward
Denver in Slices

Delicious slices of Denver’s past including the Mint, drinking water, City Ditch, Cherry Creek, the South Platte, Tabor ghosts, the Windsor Hotel, the Baron of Montclair, Overland Park, Buffalo Bill, Elitch Gardens, and Eugene Field. A delightfully written and diligently researched appetizer.

Babb, Sanora
An Owl on Every Post: A Personal Recollection of Life on the Plains
A lively account of the author's girlhood in early 1900s in a sod house, homesteading the “grey desert” of eastern Colorado.

Baca, Vincent Z. C. de, ed.  
*La Gente: Hispano History and Life in Colorado*  

*Thirteen authors chronicle Hispanic women, art, labor, rug-making, militants, cultural landscapes, and other topics.*

Backus, Harriet Fish  
*Tomboy Bride*  

*The wife of a mining engineer chronicles their cold, lonely, isolated life with warm memories and rich descriptions of Colorado’s Silvery San Juans.*

*History of Colorado*  

*Topically arranged, this magnum opus features fine overview essays on major topics by leading authorities. Hafen, the first and most productive official state historian, complains about the dictatorial and dying Baker in Hafen & Hafen, The Joyous Journey, which was not so joyous at this point.*

Bauer, William H., James L. Ozment, and John H. Willard  
*Colorado Post Offices, 1859–1989: A Comprehensive Listing of Post Offices, Stations, and Branches*  

*Valuable reference guide listing each post office (and its name changes) with its county, dates of establishment and abandonment, and very brief remarks. Not a history but a useful place-name aid and indication of a town’s birth and death dates.*

Beebe, Lucius Morris and Charles Clegg  
*Narrow Gauge in the Rockies*  

*This duo steamed around the country tracking down railroadiana and writing colorful rail history.*

Benson, Maxine  
*Martha Maxwell: Rocky Mountain Naturalist*

Benson, Maxine
1001 Colorado Place Names

Colorado’s former state historian has compiled the state’s best place-name guide.

Bird, Isabella Lucy
A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains

This tiny, eccentric English world traveler left a memorable picture of Colorado in 1873 but not a flattering one. “The great braggart city spread out brown and treeless upon a brown and treeless plain,” she describes Denver, and the South Platte she found “shriveled into a narrow stream with a shingly bed six times too large for it, and fringed by shriveled cottonwoods.

Bolton, Herbert E.
Pageant in the Wilderness: The Story of the Escalante Expedition to the Interior Basin, 1776, including the Diary and Itinerary of Father Escalante Translated and Annotated
Salt Lake City: Utah Historical Society, 1951. 265 pages. Index, bibliography, footnotes, photos, maps. 8-1/2 x 6 inches. Paperback.

Padre Escalante, a Franciscan missionary, produced this first written report on Colorado.

Borland, Harold Glen (“Hal”)
Country Editor's Boy
The Seventh Winter
High, Wide and Lonesome

In this trilogy, a distinguished and prolific writer recalls his boyhood on the plains of Colorado during the early 1900s.

Brettell, Richard B.
Historic Denver: The Architects and the Architecture, 1858–1893

A gorgeously illustrated, smartly written tribute to the brick and brownstone city now bowing to glass, steel, concrete, and asphalt. The fine, brief overview of nineteenth-century
Denver is followed by a critical look at its leading architects, Frank E. Edbrooke, William Lang, and Robert S. Roeschlaub.

Cassells, E. Steve
*The Archaeology of Colorado*

*The best overview and introduction to prehistoric Indians.*

Caughey, Bruce, and Dean Winstanley
*The Colorado Guide*

*The best guide to Colorado since the one published by the WPA in the 1930s, this book provides eating, drinking, sleeping, and playing tips, as well as historical and stylistic perspectives.*

Coel, Margaret Speas
*Goin’ Railroading: A Century on the Colorado High Iron, as told by Sam Speas to Margaret Coel*

*Superb railroadiana based on interviews with her father by one of Colorado’s rising literary lights.*

Coel, Margaret Speas
*Chief Left Hand: Southern Arapaho*

*A fascinating, sad look at the Arapaho chief who welcomed palefaces and paid the price at Sand Creek.*

Coleman, Annie Gilbert
*Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies*

*By immersing herself in the language and history of Breckenridge during its dredge boat mining bonanza years, Dallas provides a fine history in a highly readable fictionalized format.*
Dallas, Sandra
*The Diary of Mattie Spenser*

*This novel from one of Colorado's literary lights focuses on the issues faced by frontier women, including domestic violence, adultery, and other topics that historians usually avoid.*

Dallas, Sandra
*No More Than Five in a Bed: Colorado Hotels in the Old Days*

*Well-illustrated descriptions of thirty-seven early Colorado hotels, resorts, spas, and watering spots, many of which are still around.*

Danilov, Victor J.
*Colorado Museums and Historic Sites: A Colorado Guide Book*

DeLorme Mapping Company, ed.
*Colorado Atlas and Gazetteer*

Dodds, Joanne West
*They All Came to Pueblo: A Social History*

Dunning, John
*Denver*

*A lusty historical novel that vividly portrays Denver journalism, politics, and the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s.*

Dyer, John Lewis

*Autobiography of the last and best known of the circuit riders of the Methodist Episcopal Church.*
Ellis, Anne
*The Life of an Ordinary Woman*

*A lively, candid account of everyday lower-class life in mining towns by an extraordinary woman.*

Faulkner, Debra Benson
*Touching Tomorrow: The Emily Griffith Story*

*The inspirational story of Colorado’s great teacher.*

Fay, Abbott
*A History of Skiing in Colorado*

*An important, readable book on the neglected, unromantic, but crucial subject of ore processing, which made paydirt pay off.*

Fell, James E., Jr.
*Ores to Metals: The Rocky Mountain Smelting Industry*

*Colorado’s greatest poet, in nationally acclaimed work, often focused on change in Denver and Colorado. This anthology pulls together his best poetry and prose with commentary from admirers.*

Ferril, Thomas Hornsby
*Thomas Hornsby Ferril and the American West*

*Colorado’s greatest poet, in nationally acclaimed work, often focused on change in Denver and Colorado. This anthology pulls together his best poetry and prose with commentary from admirers.*

Fielder, John, William Henry Jackson and Ed Marston
*Colorado, 1870-2000*

Fowler, Gene
*Timber Line: A Story of Bonfils and Tammen*
New York: Covici, Friede, 1933 (many reprints). 480 pages. 6 x 9 inches. Hardcover.

A gossipy, not always true, account of the adolescence of The Denver Post, written with as much zest and a shade more accuracy than the former con-man Bonfils and former bartender Tammen ever mustered for their outrageously sensational (and profitable) newspaper. One of the funniest and best-selling books ever written about Denver.

French, Emily
*Emily: The Diary of a Hard-Worked Woman*

A painfully detailed and insightful look at a year in the life of a washerwoman who bore the stigma of a divorce.

Gehres, Eleanor Mount; Sandra Dallas; Maxine Benson; and Stanley Cuba
*The Colorado Book*

The best anthology of the best that has been written about Colorado, with brief excerpts from the writings of some 150 explorers, historians, journalists, novelists, poets, and scientists.

Goldberg, Robert Alan
*Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado*

The best study of the 1920s KKK nightmare comes to some surprising conclusions.

Gould, Richard
*The Life and Times of Richard Castro: Bridging a Cultural Divide*

This is a well-written overview of the statewide emergence of the Hispanic rights movement during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s.

Grinstead, Steve and Ben Fogelberg, eds.
*Western Voices: 125 Years of Colorado Writing*

Griswold, Don L., and Jean Harvey Griswold
*History of Leadville and Lake County, Colorado*

Gulliford, Andrew  
*Boomtown Blues: Colorado Oil Shale, 1885–1985*  

Hafen, LeRoy R.  
*Colorado and Its People: A Narrative and Topical History of the Centennial State*  
New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1948. 2 volumes. Index, footnotes, b&w photos, tables, appendix. xvi + 644 (vol. 1); iv + 784 (vol. 2). 7-1/2 x 10-1/2. Hardcover.

> With topical essays by noted authorities, this is still the most detailed and documented state history.

Halaas, David Fridtjof  
*Fairmount and Historic Colorado*  

> Halaas, the Colorado Historical Society’s former chief historian, has made this potentially morbid tale an engrossing history not only of Fairmount but of other early Denver boneyards.

Hall, Frank  
*History of the State of Colorado...from 1858 to 1890*  

> Near-definitive early history by Judge Hall, an active participant.

Haruf, Kent  
*Plainsong*  

> Perhaps the best-selling and best novel of life on the Colorado high plains.

Haywood, William Dudley  
*Bill Haywood's Book: The Autobiography of William D. Haywood*  

> Uproarious autobiography of the one-eyed, heavy-drinking socialist union organizer who used to terrorize the Oxford Hotel bar and the Mining Exchange Building before he was
deported to the Soviet Union in 1919. Big Bill was the star promoter of the Western Federation of Miners and the Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW or Wobblies).

Hoig, Stan
_The Sand Creek Massacre_

_The best book so far of two dozen works on this controversial tragedy._

Hosokawa, William
_Thunder in the Rockies: The Incredible Denver Post_

_A candid, insider's story of the paper that has done so much to shape twentieth-century Denver. A sequel and reliable antidote to Gene Fowler's Timber Line._

Hughes, Johnson Donald
_American Indians in Colorado_

_The best Colorado survey on Indians._

Hyde, George E.
_Life of George Bent: Written from His letters_

_Indian history by the son of William Bent and Owl Woman, who chose to live—and fight—with his mother’s folk, the Southern Cheyenne._

Iversen, Kristen
_Molly Brown: Unraveling the Myth_

Jameson, Elizabeth
_All that Glitters: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek_

_A good example of the new western history written from the bottom up._

Kelsey, Henry, Jr.
_Frontier Capitalist: The Life of John Evans_
The definitive portrait of a key man in nineteenth-century Colorado.

Lamm, Richard D. & Duane A. Smith.
*Pioneers & Politicians: Colorado’s Governor’s in Profile*

A revised, updated version of the authors’ 1984 work.

Langdon, Emma Florence
*The Cripple Creek Strike: A History of Industrial Wars in Colorado, 1903–4–5: Being a Complete and Concise History of the Efforts of Organized Capital to Crush Unionism*

Firsthand account from the daring young journalist who dared defy the state militia and stick up for striking miners.

Lavender, David Sievert
*Bent’s Fort*

Lecompte, Janet
*Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn: The Upper Arkansas, 1832–1856*

Leonard, Stephen J., and Thomas J. Noel
*Denver: From Mining Camp to Metropolis*

The most comprehensive Denver history with separate chapters on the suburban counties, automobilization, and aviation. Over two thirds of the book is devoted to the twentieth-century metropolis.

Leonard, Stephen John
*Trials and Triumphs: A Colorado Portrait of the Great Depression, with FSA Photographs*

With telling anecdotes and fine wit, Leonard recaptures the defining decade in twentieth-century Colorado.
Lindsey, Benjamin Barr, and Harvey J. O'Higgins

*The Beast*


Chilling exposé by the celebrated juvenile court judge and muckraking reformer who blackens Denver’s power elite—Evans, Moffat, Hughes, Cheesman, and (sparing not even the clergy) Buchtel. The trail of the Beast in Denver led, according to the Judge, “step by step, from the dives to the police board, from the police board to the lower courts, from the courts to the political leaders to the corporation magnates who ruled all. The trail leads from the offices of the corporations to the doors of the Capitol, it ascends the steps of the State House; it enters the sacred precinct of the Supreme Court itself.” A fast cure for any nostalgic soul hungry for the good old days when politicians were supposedly honest and democracy supposedly pure.

Mangan, Terry William

*Colorado on Glass: Colorado's First Half Century as Seen by the Camera*


A crackerjack collection of photographs with biographical sketches of the men and women who took them.

McGovern, George S., and Leonard F. Guttridge

*The Great Coalfield War*


The 1914 Ludlow Massacre in southern Colorado was the deadliest confrontation in the history of the American labor movement. Based on Senator McGovern’s Ph.D. dissertation at Northwestern University, this is the best overview of a still-controversial, much-written-about conflict.

McManus, Carol Crawford

*Ida: Her Labor of Love*


One of the best accounts from a pioneer woman of early-day life on the western slope. Ida spent her life consoling the sick, tending the poor, comforting the dying, and trying to get her rambunctious husband to settle down.

Michener, James A.

*Centennial*


This historical novel provides a fine overview of Colorado prehistory and history. A broad survey of Colorado from prehistoric times to 1976, it is the all-time best-selling book on Colorado—a fairly comprehensive, well-researched history of the South Platte Valley of
northeastern Colorado in the guise of a novel. Michener includes chapters on the prehistoric period, Indians, trappers, miners, cowboys, hunters, sheepmen, sugarbeets, and Hispanos.

Mills, Enos Abijah
_The Rocky Mountain Wonderland_

This is a sampling of the two dozen books by Enos Mills (1870-1922), Colorado’s pioneer conservationist who settled near Long’s Peak as a boy. He rode avalanches, fathered Rocky Mountain National Park, and led the crusade to preserve the Colorado wilderness. For an objective biography of this difficult and controversial hero, see Alexander Drummond, _Enos Mills: Citizen of Nature_ (Niwot: Univ. Press of Colorado, 1995, reprinted 2002) 431 pages. Index, endnotes, illustrations.

Moody, Ralph
_Little Britches: Father and I Were Ranchers_

A classic account of growing up on a Colorado ranch.

Noel, Thomas J.
_Guide to Colorado Historic Places: Sites Supported by the Colorado Historical Society’s State Historical Fund_

Noel, Thomas J.
_Riding High: Colorado Ranchers & The First 100 Years of the National Western Stock Show_

Noel, Thomas J.
_Colorado: A Liquid History & Tavern Guide to the Highest State_

Noel, Thomas Jacob
_Buildings of Colorado_

The first detailed survey of the notable prehistoric, historic, and contemporary structures in each of Colorado’s sixty-three counties.

Noel, Thomas J., Paul F. Mahoney, and Richard E. Stevens
**Historical Atlas of Colorado**

> Surveys in maps and one-page chapters show major developments in Colorado, from Indian battlegrounds to historic hospitable landmarks, from transportation systems to literary landmarks.

Norgren, Barbara S., and Thomas J. Noel
**Denver: The City Beautiful and Its Architects,**

> Includes discussion of styles common in Colorado, building types, and biographical sketches of leading Colorado architects.

Nossaman, Allen
**Many More Mountains: An Illustrated History of the Earliest Exploration in the High San Juans of Southwestern Colorado and the Settlement and Founding of Silverton, Colorado**

> This is an exhaustive history of Silverton and San Juan County.

Osterwald, Doris B.
**Cinders and Smoke: A Mile by Mile Guide for the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Trip**

> This bestseller is a model guide, complete with history, archaeology, geology, and botany as well as railroadiana galore.

Papanikolas, Zeese
**Buried Unsung: Louis Tikas and the Ludlow Massacre**

> A beautifully written attempt to reconstruct the life of the Greek labor organizer murdered by Colorado authorities at Ludlow.

Perkin, Robert L.
**The First Hundred Years: An Informal History of Denver and the Rocky Mountain News, 1859–1959**
*This witty, highly readable account of the Rocky Mountain News and Denver is a splendid complement to the less reliable Timber Line by Gene Fowler, who wrote the introduction for this treasure chest of knowledge and trivia.*

**Propst, Nell Brown**  
*Those Strenuous Dames of the Colorado Prairie*  

*A gifted and energetic rancher-farmer herself, Nell covers ground she knows and tells well.*

**Pyle, Robert Michael**  
*The Thunder Tree: Lessons from an Urban Wildland*  

*Eloquent reminiscences of an ecologist who found the High Line Canal a great escape from the proliferating suburbs of Aurora, Colorado’s largest city in terms of square miles and third largest in terms of population.*

**Robertson, Janet**  
*The Magnificent Mountain Women: Adventures in the Colorado Rockies*  

**Rockwell, Wilson**  
*The Utes: A Forgotten People*  

*Rockwell, a Western Slope rancher and legislator, writes about a land and a tribe he knows well.*

**Secrest, Clark**  
*Hell’s Belles: Prostitution, Vice, and Crime in Early Denver: With a Biography of Sam Howe, Frontier Lawman*  

*Secrest, a former Denver Post columnist and editor of the Colorado Historical Society’s magazine Colorado Heritage, offers a tenacious and titillating examination of the sisters of perpetual indulgence.*

**Simmons, Virginia McConnell**  
*The San Luis Valley: Land of the Six-Armed Cross*  
Best account of the south-central Colorado valley where Spanish-surnamed people first settled along the Rio Grande.

Simonin, Louis L.  
*The Rocky Mountain West in 1867*  

*A look at early Colorado through the letters of a young, witty French mining engineer who was as fascinated by pioneer society as he was by the minerals.*

Smiley, Jerome Constant  
*History of Denver: With Outlines of the Earlier History of the Rocky Mountain Country*  

*Centuries from now Smiley will probably still be the definitive and the longest-winded biographer of nineteenth-century Denver. A booster history written with amazing grace, wit, and insight.*

Smith, Duane Allan  
*Horace Tabor: His Life and the Legend*  

*The best biography makes a heroic effort to unravel the mythical silver tycoon.*

Smith, Duane Allan  
*The Trail of Gold and Silver: Mining In Colorado, 1859-2009*  

Sprague, Marshall  
*Money Mountain: The Story of Cripple Creek Gold*  

*Liveliest account so far of “the World’s Greatest Gold Camp.”*

Sprague, Marshall  
*Newport in the Rockies: The Life and Good Times of Colorado Springs*  

*An insider’s witty, well-written account of the personalities and institutions that shaped Colorado’s second largest city.*
Stegner, Wallace
*Angle of Repose*

This 1971 Pulitzer Prize–winning novel explores America’s mining frontiers from one family’s perspective, setting one man’s obsession with mining against his wife’s yearnings for the cultural opportunities she left in the East.

Steinel, Alvin Theodore
*History of Agriculture in Colorado: A Chronological Record of Progress in the Development of General Farming, Livestock Production, and Agricultural Education and Investigation...1858 to 1926*

This plodding but definitive work awaits an update.

Sternberg, Barbara Edwards with Jennifer Boone and Evelyn Waldron
*Anne Evans—A Pioneer in Colorado’s Cultural History: The Things That Last When Gold Is Gone*

The best account of the bitter statewide 1904 strike that led to widespread bashing of unionists.

Townshend, Richard Baxter, 186-1923
*A Tenderfoot in Colorado*

Varnell, Jeanne
*Women of Consequence: The Colorado Women’s Hall of Fame*

Velez de Escalante, Silvestre
*The Dominguez-Escalante Journal: Their Expedition Through Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico in 1776*

West, Elliott

A major reinterpretation, eloquently written by one of the best and brightest Colorado historians.

Whiteside, James
Colorado: A Sports History

The best overview from a legendary CU-Denver history prof.

Wilkins, Tivis E.
Colorado Railroads: Chronological Development

A most useful reference guide to the building and abandonment of some 100 Colorado railroads arranged by year. Lists the miles of track involved, and offers brief, basic information.

Wolle, Muriel Sibell

The first—and still the best—of Colorado mining ghost-town guides is enriched by the author’s paintings of ramshackle ruins. A professor of art at the University of Colorado, Wolle began painting and writing up ghost towns in the 1920s when many of them were still lively.

Works Progress Administration Workers.
Colorado: A Guide to the Highest State

Wyckoff, William

Wynar, Bohdan S.
Colorado Bibliography
This comprehensive bibliography of Colorado has chapters on history, Indians, geography, natural resources, flora and fauna, economic conditions, mining, agriculture, transportation, communication, social environment, politics, government, education, literature, the arts, health, medicine, recreation, sports, and religion—listing 9,182 books and booklets “of permanent and scholarly value.”