

An Inventory of the Records of
Arapahoe County, Colorado

Collection Mss.00015

A Holding of the
Colorado Historical Society
Denver, Colorado 80203

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HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The first recorded exploration of the area that is now Arapahoe County was made by Louis Vasquez, a French-Canadian trapper and trader who, in 1832, built a trading post near the junction of the South Platte River and Cherry Creek on the outskirts of what is now North Denver. On July 22 1835, Colonel Dodge and several troops of the U.S. Dragoons came up the Platte and camped at the mouth of Cherry Creek.

In May 1854, as part of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Congress created the Territory of Kansas. Among the acts of the first legislative assembly of Kansas Territory was that of creating Arapahoe County, signed by acting Governor Dan Woodson on August 25 1855. The county, named for the Indian tribes that predominated in the plains area, embraced all of Kansas Territory west of the 103rd meridian (or about one-fourth of the area of present-day Colorado).

Although the act appointed several officers for the new county, none of them actually ventured to the area to serve their post. The first general election in Kansas Territory was held on October 6 1856. The same day, an election was held in Arapahoe County, making it the first such election in the Pike's Peak region. The county had so few residents, however, that this election had little effect. There is no other record of an election of any kind in Arapahoe County until November 8 1859.

The next contingent of county officers was appointed by Kansas governor James W. Denver before they departed Leavenworth to journey to the newly-discovered gold fields. They were H. P. A. Smith, probate judge; Hickory Rogers, chairman of the county

board of supervisors; and Edward Wynkoop, sheriff. These men came to Colorado with General William Larimer in late 1858 and helped form the Denver City Town Company. Since there were still few residents in the area, none of these appointed officials ever exerted any real authority.

The Pike's Peak gold rush then brought hordes of settlers into Arapahoe County in search of instant fortunes in 1859 and 1860. Several separate groups of settlers established communities on the confluence of the South Platte River and Cherry Creek. The first local election of county officers was held March 28 1859. When it became apparent that Auraria had out-voted Denver City, a movement began to consolidate the two settlements. Consequently, Denver formally annexed Auraria in April 1860.

Preliminary attempts by these early settlers to gain statehood for the area failed, but the constitution of the "Territory of Jefferson" was adopted by the local residents on October 10 1859. This territory had no federal authority, but it existed precariously for almost two years. The territorial, county and city laws were so intermingled and caused so much bewilderment that little attention was paid to any of the various governments.

In 1861, Congress passed a bill organizing the Territory of Colorado. Governor William Gilpin, appointed by President Lincoln, arrived in Denver on May 29 1861. The legislature met, and the state supreme court was organized in September 1861. The first territorial legislature granted a charter to the City of Denver on November 7 1861.

Arapahoe County retained its territorial boundaries until November 4 1902, when the Thirteenth General Assembly of the Territory of Colorado created Denver County as coterminous with the City of Denver, thus removing it from Arapahoe County. The General Assembly also decided that the remainder of what had been Arapahoe County

would be divided into Adams County and South Arapahoe County. On April 11 1903, “South” was dropped from the county’s name.

With the reorganization of Arapahoe County, the town of Littleton became the county seat. The town was named after Richard S. Little, who came to Colorado in 1860 to engage in farming and ditch building. The first meeting of the new board of county commissioners was held at the residence of Charles B. Patterson of Littleton on November 5 1902. On December 8 1902, the commissioners obtained the use of the town hall of Littleton as a courthouse. At a regular election of November 8 1904, Littleton was voted the permanent county seat of Arapahoe County.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1832 Louis Vasquez, a French-Canadian trapper and trader builds a trading post near the junction of the South Platte River and Cherry Creek on the outskirts of what is now North Denver.
- 1835 July 22: A Colonel Dodge and several troops of the U.S. Dragoons move up the Platte and camp at the mouth of what is now known as Cherry Creek.
- 1854 May: As part of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the U.S. Congress creates the Territory of Kansas, which includes parts of what is now Colorado.
- 1855 August 25: Arapahoe County is created in the new Kansas Territory by an act of Territorial Governor Dan Woodson.
- 1856 October 6: The first general election is held in Kansas Territory.
- 1858 William Green Russell discovers gold in Cherry Creek near the present site of Denver.
- September: William McGaa and John Simpson Smith establish St. Charles on the east bank of Cherry Creek.
- October 3: The Whitsitt party leaves Leavenworth, Kansas, heading for the Pike's Peak region.
- November: A group of settlers from Iowa travels up the Platte River and establishes the town of Auraria on the west bank of Cherry Creek.
- 1859 March 28: The first election of county officers is held.
- October 10: The constitution of the Territory of Jefferson is adopted.
- November 8: The second election is held in Arapahoe County.
- 1860 Richard S. Little moves to Colorado.
- 1861 November 7: The first territorial legislature grants a charter to the city of Denver.
- Congress passes a bill organizing the Territory of Colorado.
- 1902 November 4: The Thirteenth General Assembly of the Territory of Colorado divides Arapahoe County and creates Denver County, Adams County and South Arapahoe County.

- December 8: The Arapahoe County commissioners obtain the use of the town hall as a courthouse.
- 1903 April 3: The designation “South” is dropped from Arapahoe County.
- 1904 November 8: Littleton is voted the permanent county seat of Arapahoe County.
- 1907 July 2: The Arapahoe County commissioners contract with A. B. McDonald to construct the first county courthouse.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS

Arapahoe County is the oldest county in Colorado and it continues to serve a central function in the state.

The collection spans the years 1859 to 1904, and its series include **Historical Material (1904)**; **Financial Material (1959)**; and **Legal Material (1859-1897)**, which includes contracts, legal certificates and land claims; and **Miscellaneous Material (1880-1887)**, which includes three school registers.

The provenance of the collection is unknown. Other materials on Arapahoe County can be found in the Arapahoe County Courthouse and the Colorado State Archives.

SERIES DESCRIPTION

File Folders

Series

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Financial Material (1859).....	3
Legal Material (1859-1897).....	4-7
Miscellaneous Material (1880-1887).....	8-10

COLLECTION CONTENTS

FF	Description	Date
HISTORICAL MATERIAL (1904)		
1	“History of Arapahoe County” Historical Records Survey	undated
2	“Arapahoe County, Colorado and Littleton, Its County Seat,” by Henry Kraft	1904
Financial Materials (1859)		
3	County Warrant	Nov. 7 1859
Legal Material (1859-1897)		
4	Certificate of Appointment	Mar. 28 1859
	Certificate of Qualification	Apr. 13 1859
	Sales contract, typed copy	Aug. 29 1859
5	Letter from S. A. Miedary to C. R. Bissell, Justice of The Peace	Nov. 12 1859
	Certificate of Commission	Nov. 12 1859
	Certificate of Appointment and Commission	Dec. 2 1859
6	Certificate of Appointment and Commission	Dec. 10 1859
	Land Claim	Jan. 23 1860
	Land Claim	Jan. 24 1860
	“Justice Precincts and Road Districts in Arapahoe County”	Sept. 1888

7 Resolutions of the Citizen's League of Arapahoe County Jan. 4 1897

Miscellaneous Material (1880-1887)

8 Teacher's daily register Oct. 11 1880-

Dec. 24 1880

9 Teacher's daily register Sept. 18 1882

10 Teacher's daily register Sept. 6 1886-

May 20 1887