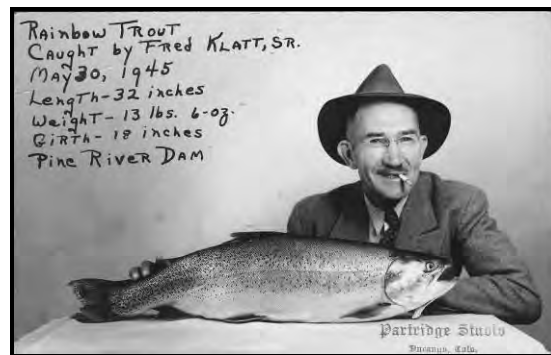
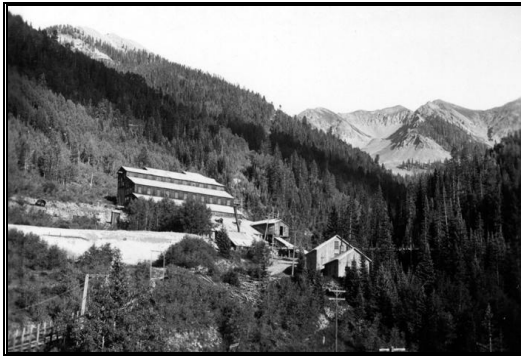


Pioneers, Prospectors and Trout



A Historic Context For La Plata County, Colorado

By
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And
Ruth Lambert, Ph.D.

January, 2010

**Pioneers, Prospectors and Trout
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La Plata County, Colorado**

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Cover photographs: Top-Pine River Stage Station. Photo Source: La Plata County Historical Society-Animas Museum Photo Archives.

Left side-Gold King Mill in La Plata Canyon taken in about 1936. Photo Source Plate 21, in U.S. Geological Survey Professional paper 219. 1949

Right side-Local Fred Klatt's big catch. Photo Source La Plata County Historical Society-Animas Museum Photo Archives.

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Introduction

This historic context was written as part of a survey of the historic resources of La Plata County. The survey is documented in a separate report entitled *A Historic Resource Survey of 100 Sites in La Plata County, Colorado* and is available at the La Plata County Planning Department, the Colorado Historical Society in Denver and the Animas Museum (operated by the La Plata County Historical Society) in Durango, Colorado.

A historic context provides a summary and overall perspective of the known history of a defined region, which in this case is La Plata County. A context does not usually incorporate original research but instead relays a composite of previous work. As a result, some areas of La Plata County's history, such as the Denver Rio Grande Railroad or the creation of Durango, have rich and detailed information. Other topics have not been studied and offer intriguing opportunities for research. A listing of references and interviews is included at the end of the context and provides many sources on local history.

La Plata County is located in southwestern Colorado. The county's terrain soars with the rugged San Juan Mountains on the north and east, and descends toward the south to mesas and river drainages. Awe-inspiring peaks include four mountains (Mt. Sunlight, Mt. Windom, North Eolus, and Mt. Eolus) that exceed 14,000 feet. Among the mountains are small lakes and valleys that eventually give way to broader valleys in the lower elevations to the south. The southernmost area of the County is an open plateau region that descends to the lower elevations of northern New Mexico. The diversity of landscape, vegetation, and natural resources offer endless challenges and opportunities.

A combination of volcanic activity and uplifts formed the San Juan Mountains. One of the most broken and challenging landscapes in the state, the mountains contain mineral veins that drew miners and adventurers. The generally southward tilted landforms and the progression in latitude from north to south create a range of plant communities. The high elevation spruce fir forests give way to mixed conifer forests at lower elevations. At even lower elevations, the vegetation changes to ponderosa and oak woodlands, interspersed with the mountain shrub community. Numerous diverse woody plants such as Gambel Oak, Mountain Mahogany, Snowberry, Serviceberry, roses, and yuccas provide a transitional zone to the dry semi-arid grasslands with sagebrush and deep well-drained soils.

Rivers and canyons slice through these landscapes and environmental communities, feeding four major drainages. The drainages run roughly north-south. The major rivers are the Pine, the Florida, the La Plata and the Animas. The headwaters of the Animas River are in San Juan County near Animas Forks, above Silverton at an elevation of 11,200 feet. The river flows through the length of the County and empties into the San Juan River, a tributary of the Colorado River. The Animas River canyon is deeply incised a few miles below Silverton and in the upper Animas Valley. Farther south, the river's gradient gradually declines to a meandering stream with several oxbow lakes. The

Animas runs through the City of Durango and then flows more directly south toward New Mexico and the San Juan River. Until 2009 the Animas had no flow regulation. The pumps from the recently completed Animas-La Plata project will begin to deliver water from the river to Lake Nighthorse Reservoir in 2009.

West of the Animas River, the La Plata River flows from the La Plata Mountains. The La Plata travels through the pine and fir forests down through the mountain shrub and grasslands communities to New Mexico on its way to the San Juan River. The Florida and Pine Rivers are east of and eventually join the Animas River. The Florida River forms the eastern boundary of Florida Mesa and provides irrigation water for the mesa. It is controlled by Lemon Dam. The Pine River originates in the Weminuche Wilderness area, flows into Vallecito Reservoir and provides irrigation water to the valleys below the reservoir.

In general terms, land ownership in the county runs in three broad horizontal bands. The northern band is primarily public land, designated a forest reserve in 1905 and managed by the United States Forest Service (San Juan National Forest), with water projects (Electra, Lemon, and Vallecito Lakes) under the federal jurisdiction of the Bureau of Reclamation. Some private parcels that are primarily located along the river valleys are scattered within the public ownership band. The central band contains lands in private ownership. These lands were mostly historically acquired through homesteading. The southern band of the county contains a mix of non-Ute, Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute land. The Ute lands include individual Ute allotments, Southern Ute or Ute Mountain Tribal Trust Land, and Tribally owned land in fee.

La Plata County's political, geographical and environmental diversity influenced settlement. The access to land in rugged terrain, the availability of land for settlement, the opportunities of the natural resources and the critical availability of water have all shaped where, how and when the County has developed and make this place like no other.

New Frontiers



Top: La Plata City was the major mining town in the La Plata Mining District. Photo from the Denver Public Library Western History Collection.

Bottom: Soldiers at Fort Lewis soon after its construction in 1880. Photo Source: Fort Lewis College Center of Southwest Studies Fort Lewis Collection

Initial Exploration

This document focuses on La Plata County's history, beginning in the 1860s when European Americans began to establish a permanent presence in the area. People occupied the area well before this time in a prehistoric period that ends roughly in 1300A.D, with the departure of the Ancestral Puebloans. Some anthropologists believe the Numic-language speaking people who we now call the Utes probably arrived here at about the same time as the departure of the Ancestral Puebloans. Others support the theory that the Utes arrived in the early 1500s. In 1598 the Utes were among the tribes trading with the Spanish in present day New Mexico under the rule of Juan De Onate. Navajos also lived in the area, but had concentrated more to the south and the west by the 1860s.

Spain pushed northward from Mexico and in 1598 colonized a large area of what would one day become part of the southwestern United States. After almost 223 years of Spanish rule, Mexico assumed control when it gained independence from Spain in 1821. A spoil of war, the property again changed hands in Mexico's loss to the United States in the Mexican War. The land transferred to the United States via the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Four years later, the U.S. Government established Fort Massachusetts in the San Luis Valley to protect settlers from Indian attacks.

Each government authorized expeditions into the unknown territory under their control. Spain sought the fabled mineral wealth of the region and sent numerous parties in search of riches. In addition to the formal journeys there were other, more furtive, prospecting expeditions not openly reported by explorers who were trying to avoid the Spanish taxes.

Juan Maria Antonio de Rivera was appointed by Governor Tomas Velez Cachupin to explore the northern territory in 1765. His group journeyed along the west side of the San Juan Mountains and turned east toward present day Delta, Colorado by following the route of the Gunnison River. In October, the party returned to the Dolores River area. On both journeys, Rivera encountered Ute and Navajo settlements. The party was even led by Utes to an area in the La Plata Mountains, where the rumored silver deposits appear to have been lead.¹

Thirty year old Fray Francisco Atanasio Dominguez, the recently arrived superior of the Franciscan missions in New Mexico and Fray Silvestre Velez de Escalante, a 26 year old missionary who had been stationed at Zuni, searched for a route between Santa Fe, New Mexico, and the missions of California (Monterey area). They left Santa Fe in late July 1776, and traveled northward into La Plata County before following the Dolores River and eventually heading into present day Utah and Arizona. They never reached California, but returned to Santa Fe on January 2, 1777. The Expedition's route through La Plata County crossed parts of Ridges Basin and Thompson Park.

¹Gilpin, Dennis. *Animas La Plata Project Volume V*. Phoenix, Arizona: University of Arizona Press. 2007. Page 50.

The Mexican period saw a host of budding entrepreneurs who came to Santa Fe in the early 1820s. Fur trappers based their operations in Taos and Santa Fe where the Santa Fe Trail provided a convenient link to the domestic and international markets for beaver pelts. In the late 1820s and 1830s, trappers such as Antoine Robideaux, William Wolfskill and the multi-faceted Kit Carson traveled north from New Mexico through Southwestern Colorado, sometimes using the Spanish Trail and sometimes seeking other routes. With decreasing demand for pelts in the 1840s and increasing tensions between the United States and Mexico, the fur trade slowed to a trickle.

In the mid-1800s, the United States government commissioned a number of surveys to be conducted by the Army Corps. These were the first scientific studies organized to record detailed geographical, geological, and paleontological data. Captain John N. Macomb (1811-1889), one of the original members of the Army Corps of Topographical Engineers, explored parts of the San Juan drainage and the Colorado River to determine a route for a wagon road between New Mexico and Utah. His route passed through present day Pagosa Springs and by Chimney Rock. Macomb found the terrain so difficult that he recommended against new construction.

After the Civil War, the United States mounted a number of investigative campaigns. In 1867 Congress commissioned three major surveys of the western territories: a geological survey of the 40th parallel, led by Clarence King; a geological and geographical survey of the western territories, led by Ferdinand V. Hayden (Hayden's survey traveled through southwest Colorado in 1874); and a geological and geographical survey of the Rocky Mountain region, led by John Wesley Powell. These surveys would form the basis for the United States Geological Survey (established in 1879). Another geographical and geological survey west of the 100th meridian was led by Lt. George M. Wheeler in 1871.

Native Americans and early explorers left a legacy of historic trails and routes. The most prominent arose partly from the Dominguez-Escalante route and became the Old Spanish Trail, a major travel route between Santa Fe, New Mexico and California, primarily between 1829 and 1848. Dennis Gilpin provides a summary of the relationship between the two routes in *The Animas-La Plata Project Volume 5* ²

Another less formal route, the Old Ute Trail, was identified and recorded as site 5LP4213 as part of the Animas La Plata archaeological research project. The trail is actually a network of trails connecting to locations beyond La Plata County. Dennis Gilpin provides the following description of the trail in *Animas La Plata Project Volume V*. —The Old Ute Trail was one of the main routes in a network of trails that was probably established in antiquity and was used over the centuries by successive groups.” ³

The main trail as described by Gilpin connected the area of present day Ignacio and present day Towaoc. From the Ignacio area, the trail ran through Ridges Basin, and then forked. The northern branch ran northwest through the present town of Hesperus, then to Thompson Park, Cherry Creek and along the north and west sides of Mesa Verde. The

²Ibid Page 161.

³Ibid. Page 23.

southern branch ran southwest generally toward the present-day location of Redmesa, then headed west down the south side of Johnson Canyon to the Mancos River, and proceeded north to Navajo Springs with a later connection to the area now known as Towaoc. Gilpin notes that parts of the trail were incorporated later into the Old Spanish Trail and that the modern name of “Old Ute Trail” appeared on maps in about 1900.

Native American—European Contact

Early relations between the Utes and the Spanish have been characterized as generally peaceful with an emphasis on trading. Much of the activity was centered in Taos and Santa Fe. The Ute acquired horses from the Spanish, providing easier mobility and more efficient hunting. These changes to Ute society are thought to have encouraged the congregation of scattered Utes into bands.⁴

In the 1700s about 700 people of the Weminuche Band of Utes lived in an area between Tierra Amarilla, the San Juan Mountains and the Colorado River in eastern Utah. The Mouache Band lived in the San Luis Valley and numbered about 480, while the Capote Band consisted of about 500 people living between Abiquiu and the Navajo River. The Tabeguache or Uncompaghe Utes numbered about 3,000 and populated the Tomichi and Gunnison Country. Three additional bands made up the Northern Utes.⁵

The Utes were a loosely affiliated federation of seven nomadic bands by the time of the United States assumed control of the region in 1848. The Utes and the U. S. entered into their first treaty in 1849, establishing an agency at Taos (opened in 1850). While this first treaty sought to create a peaceful agreement between the two entities, relations would soon change with the discovery of gold and the Americans' dawning realization that the Utes stood in the way of the potential path to riches. A new treaty in 1868 required the seven bands to consolidate into one entity and forced the Utes to relinquish their lands in the San Luis Valley and in South, Middle and North Parks. The new reservation boundaries moved the eastern edge close to the 107th meridian, west of an imaginary line between Steamboat Springs and Pagosa Springs. Two Indian agencies, the White River (located near present-day Meeker) and the "Los Pinos", were to be established on the reservation. The Los Pinos Agency ultimately ended up outside of the boundaries of the newly established reservation, about 75 miles south of present day Gunnison, along a tributary of Cochetopa Creek that was named Los Pinos Creek to meet the language of the treaty.⁶

Undeterred by the boundaries set by the treaty, miners and would-be settlers poured onto Ute lands. Under increasing pressure from the United States, the Utes entered into the Brunot Agreement on September 13, 1873, in which they were to receive annual payments of \$25,000 in exchange for 3.5 million acres. Congress ratified the Agreement on April 29, 1874, and began a lengthy process to remove the Utes from their San Juan homeland.

The Federal Government went about its usual course to establish an organized presence in the area through Indian agencies, military protection and eventually Indian schools.

⁴ O'Rourke, Paul M. *Frontiers in Transition: A History of Southwestern Colorado*. Denver, Colorado: Bureau of Land Management, 1982. Page 46.

⁵ Nossaman, Allen. *Many More Mountains Volume I*. Denver, Colorado: Sundance Publishing. Page 13.

⁶ A more detailed explanation of the role of the Tabeguache Band in the location of the Los Pinos Agency is provided in *Frontiers in Transition*, by Paul O'Rourke, Pages 49-50.

The Southern Ute bands were hardly impacted by the agencies established by the 1868 treaty. They rarely visited the remote Los Pinos Agency, which was located southeast of Gunnison and far from their homeland. Although the Indian agents were attempting to turn the Utes into agriculturalists, the agency was located above 7,000 feet and crop production was not feasible. Over time it became clear that the Southern Utes could not be persuaded to relocate from southern Colorado.⁷

The Brunot Agreement stipulated that the Los Pinos Agency be moved to the southern portion of the Ute reservation.⁸ In 1875, the agency moved to Colona, about 12 miles south of present day Montrose, and was renamed the Uncompahgre Agency. Unphased, the Southern Utes continued to travel to the more conveniently located Indian agencies that they had traditionally frequented in New Mexico at Abiquiu and Cimarron. Concerned northern New Mexico residents applied pressure on the government to confine the Utes to their Colorado reservation and to construct the promised Los Pinos Agency.⁹ In 1877, the Los Pinos Indian Agency was established along the Pine River near present day Ignacio. Francis A. Weaver was appointed Indian Agent and construction began while efforts continued in Washington D. C. to remove Utes from the area. By February of 1878 only two buildings had been constructed; a storehouse and a three-room dwelling. Weaver had followed orders to suspend any new construction and other improvements pending decisions on Ute relocation.¹⁰

For seventeen more years the Federal and State governments continued in their efforts to relocate the Southern Utes. In February 1895, a ‘solution’ was found with the enactment of the Hunter Bill, which was derived from the 1887 Dawes Severalty Act. The Dawes Act advocated for individually owned Indian allotments separate from tribal lands. The act intended to ‘civilize’ Native Americans by promoting agricultural practices. The Hunter Bill specifically applied these principles to the Ute bands in Southern Colorado. This bill allowed Southern Utes to choose land that they would individually own, and also allowed for the western-most tribal lands to be held in common.¹¹ The Mouache and the Capote Ute Bands (now the Southern Ute Tribe) accepted these terms and members applied for allotments. The Weeminuche Band (now the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe), located in the southwest corner of the state, opted to continue to retain their lands in common and they did not participate in allotment process.

⁷ Thompson, Gregory Coyne. *Southern Ute Lands, 1848-1899; The Creation of A Reservation*, Occasional Papers of the Center of Southwest Studies No. 1, Fort Lewis College, Durango, Colorado, March 1972. Page 7.

⁸ The Brunot Agreement is often mistakenly referred to as a ‘treaty’. After 1871 the Federal Government no longer made ‘treaties’ with Indians as they were not considered foreign or sovereign powers, but dependents of the U.S. Government. As a result, after that date, documents between the Government and Indian tribes became agreements that continued to require the approval of Congress and the signature of the President. Decker, Peter R. *The Utes Must Go!* Page 208, fn 32. Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado. 2004.

⁹ Thompson, Gregory Coyne. *Southern Ute Lands, 1848-1899; The Creation of A Reservation*, Occasional Papers of the Center of Southwest Studies No. 1, Fort Lewis College, Durango, Colorado, March 1972. Page 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Page 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Page 50-51.

Tribal members selected allotment lands in 1896 and the remaining unallotted lands were opened for non-Indian purchase and settlement in May 1899. The available lands, located in a 15-mile wide band that extended east west across the county, became known as the 'Ute Strip'.

The land allotments of 1898 resulted in new sub-agencies at Navajo Springs near present day Towaoc and at a location on the Piedra River that is now under the waters of Navajo Reservoir. These agencies were under the direction of the Los Pinos Agency.¹² The Los Pinos Indian Agency continued as a location for government oversight and provisions.

Over time, the Los Pinos Agency added new buildings and a post office opened on January 31, 1882. The Agency established a store/trading post, the government Indian boarding school, other agency buildings and homes for agency staff by 1907.¹³ The town of Ignacio was platted in 1909 and incorporated in 1913. The presence of the Agency was, according to many, the stimulus for the later development of the town.¹⁴

In 1934, Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act (also known as the Wheeler-Howard Bill). This act attempted to reverse the past U.S. government policies to assimilate Native Americans through the allotment system, erode tribal sovereignty, and damage native cultures. It called for the creation of tribal governments and constitutions. The Act also ended tribal allotments established under the Dawes Severalty and Hunter Acts.¹⁵ As a result of the Indian Reorganization Act, 200,000 acres of unsettled Ute Strip land returned to Southern Ute Indian Tribe ownership in 1938.¹⁶ These policies and land practices created the checkerboard nature of the Southern Ute Indian Reservation.

The uncertain fledgling relationships between Utes and new settlers brought the military to the area. Camp Lewis garrisoned in Pagosa Springs in 1878 to safeguard the terms of the Brunot Agreement. The camp was named for Lt. Colonel William H. Lewis, who had been killed in a battle against the Cheyenne in Kansas in September of 1878. Between October 1879 and January 1880, personnel from the Post camped on either side of the Animas River in the new town of Animas City to assuage nervous settlers in the wake of the Meeker Massacre, a bloody confrontation that had occurred in north-central Colorado.

¹² *Ibid* Page 55; Wattson, D.H., Consolidated Ute Agency in Colorado, in *The Ute Indians of Southwestern Colorado*, Helen Sloan Daniels, eds., Jan and David Smith. Western Reflections Publishing Company, Lake City, CO. 1936, reprinted 2008. Page 72.

¹³ Marker, Nell. Ignacio The Town That Was Named For A Ute Chief, in *Pioneers of San Juan Country* by Sarah Platt Decker Chapter, D.A.R., Durango, CO. Colorado Springs, CO, Out West Printing and Stationery Company. 1961. Volume IV, Pages 213-214.

¹⁴ *Ibid*. Page 215.

¹⁵ Young, Richard K. *The Ute Indians of Colorado in the Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma Press. 1997. Pgs 107-112.

¹⁶ Congressional Order 9-14-1938. Denver National Archives & Records Administration: Rocky Mountain Region. Annual Project Histories: Pine River Project, 1943.

Anticipating the arrival of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad and the resulting rush of new settlers to the brand new town of Durango, the Army upgraded Camp Lewis to a post in 1880 and moved the operation from Pagosa Springs to a site south of present day Hesperus, Colorado, on the La Plata River. The newly relocated post was soon promoted to a fort. At its peak, Fort Lewis had a population of about 500 people. Soldiers quelled an occasional disagreement between settlers, kept the peace between Utes and Navajos and provided a very good market for local retailers.

Various units served the fort for short assignments. In 1882, the 9th Cavalry, consisting of two companies of African American soldiers stayed at Fort Lewis for a few months. By 1890, the numbers of conflicts had slowed to a trickle and Fort Lewis, like many similar posts, could assert few reasons to continue to operate. On May 28, 1891, the Secretary of War approved an Army recommendation to abandon the Fort with a final departure date of September 18, the last time La Plata County would see a permanently established military facility. The old Fort Lewis was converted into an Indian school by renovating the former army buildings and adding a few new buildings.

In the late 1880s the Federal Government developed policies to assimilate younger Indians into mainstream America by removing the children from their native culture and teaching them life skills related to white society. By 1897 there were 23 government-established Indian schools in the United States.

When the Fort Lewis Indian School opened in 1892, the first 51 enrollees included Mescalero Apache, Ute and Navajo children. The Indian School peaked at 345 enrolled students in 1900-01 with 200 acres in cultivation. History leaves us a mixed impression of a well run school in terms of curriculum, but also a school with many resentful students and parents. When an epidemic closed the school in 1894, the buildings were looted and some were burned. Indian students and their parents were blamed for the devastation, although the historical record is not totally clear about this.¹⁷ The school reopened in 1895 with only a few buildings.

The school superintendents included William Peterson who began in 1903. Superintendent Peterson also briefly served concurrently as the Ute agent, a position that took much of his time as he negotiated with the Ute Mountain Utes (Weeminuche Band) over the creation of Mesa Verde National Park. Peterson left in 1906.

Federal policy changed in the first decade of the 1900s to encourage construction of schools closer to home in the local Indian communities. When the Federal Government built new facilities on reservations, attendance at remote Indian schools plummeted. A new school, located in nearby Ignacio, drew on the Fort Lewis student population, reducing the numbers of students to 127 in 1903. Enrollment dropped to 40 in 1908. The property changed from Federal to State ownership and the school converted to a public high school. The legacy of the Indian School years lives on at the modern Fort Lewis

¹⁷ Mary Ayres, in her "History of Fort Lewis Colorado", in the Colorado History Magazine (Volume VIII, No. 3, May 1931) claims that some of the family members of Indian students burned some of the buildings on the campus out of anger about the school. Other accounts specific to this incident could not be located.

College, which grew from the old Hesperus campus to the current four year college located in Durango, where no tuition is charged to Native Americans.

The Ignacio Indian School opened as a day school in 1886 as part of the federal obligations of Los Pinos Indian Agency. It soon converted to a boarding school.¹⁸ With low attendance and deteriorated conditions, the school closed in 1890. It opened again in 1902, as the Southern Ute Boarding School. Students transferred from the Fort Lewis Indian School to Ignacio. Enrollments increased, but in 1920 the Ute students transferred to local public schools and the boarding school closed. In 1924, the boarding school reopened on agency grounds primarily to serve Navajo students. Some Ute children were transported to the boarding school.¹⁹ By 1935, the school attendance was limited to 200 children, of which 90% were reported to be Navajos.²⁰ With the establishment of public schools in Ignacio, Tiffany, and Bayfield, approximately 60 Southern Ute children were enrolled throughout the area at schools that were closer to home. In later years, the boarding school was renamed the Southern Ute Vocational School and the dormitory was used for Ute children from other areas while they attended the Ignacio schools.²¹ In 1955, negotiations between the Ute Tribe and the Ignacio Public School District consolidated the Southern Ute Vocational School into the public school system.²²

The early federal institutions that attempted to control Native American activities influenced early La Plata County history in the forms of Indian agencies, the military and Indian schools. Federal policies defined what land would be open to settlement and where the Utes could live. As more and more newcomers arrived, the federal roles receded but their legacy remained. The Utes persevered, revising their governmental system, acquiring land and investing with great success.

¹⁸ Young, Richard K. *The Ute Indians of Colorado in the Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. Page 129.

¹⁹ Marker, *Op.cit.* Page 215.

²⁰ Wattson, *Op. cit.* Page 73.

²¹ Marker, *Op.cit.* Page 215.

²² Young, Richard K. *The Ute Indians of Colorado in the Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. Page 160.

First Miners and Settlers

Gold, or at least the possibility of gold, lured the first potential settlers to the San Juan Mountains. Funded by Denver backers Stephen B. Kellogg and F.R. Rice, prospector Charles Baker led 21 men from the gold workings along the Arkansas River to the west over Cochetopa Pass and down the Gunnison River to the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River. The party split up after panning for gold at the Lake Fork. Baker and six others continued over present day Cinnamon Pass and down to the headwaters of the Animas River. They entered the broad plain that later became known as Baker's Park and the future site of Silverton. The party was probably panning for gold on the Animas River by July of 1860.²³

The Baker group remained in the high country into September. Baker traveled south at least twice to Abiquiu in October and November and filed a lengthy letter to the editor of the *Santa Fe Gazette* extolling the potential wealth of the high San Juans, and blithely ignoring the fact that the prospectors were trespassing on land under Ute domain. Baker's letter, which was reprinted in Denver's *Rocky Mountain News* on January 23, 1861, proclaimed —. They are extensive gulches and bar diggings, and I believe them to be richer than any mines discovered to the northeast of them....”

The letter, along with other reports from small groups of prospectors, managed to raise some interest and excitement. Small parties from Denver and points south began the arduous journey to the potential gold field. Their goal was the new town of Animas City that Baker referred to in his letter as —ontaining a population of three to five hundred men.” This Animas City was located near the present day Baker's Bridge on La Plata County Road 250, about 16 miles north of the latter day community of the same name. It is more likely that only a few hundred prospectors had settled in Animas City at this point, but new arrivals were fast approaching. Denver backers Kellogg and Rice, and their families, joined some 200 others in a group known as the Baker Party, even though Baker was not among them. The entourage left Denver in December of 1860, joined by Thomas Pollock's party. Slowed by the extreme winter snows, the parties arrived in Animas City in late March, 1861. Other parties straggled in and remained in Animas City, awaiting the winter snowmelt in the higher country. The spring and early summer saw the peak population of up to a thousand people.

The new residents probably paid little heed to the news that the Colorado Territory was created on February 28 of 1861. As soon as the snowmelt receded, the settlers built a temporary camp between Animas City and the upper reaches of the Animas River drainage. Known as Camp Pleasant, the exact location is lost to time, but it was likely to have been at the base of the east face of Castle Rock. Enthusiastic would-be prospectors advanced northward as the weather turned warmer, but their gold-seeking days were very short lived.

²³Nossaman, Allen. *Many More Mountains Volume I*. Denver, Colorado: Sundance Publishing. 1989. Page 37.

For the prospectors, panning was not really “panning” out. The yields were very small, the snow still blanketed much of the high country in late June and word had reached the camp of the beginning of the Civil War. As Allen Nossaman explains, “...the realization that there would be no bonanza, coupled with the confirmation that the Civil War was well under way, produced an exodus from the Animas River drainage that was total in its scope, uncharacteristic of most other mining regions in the state.”²⁴ Animas City was deserted by the end of July. The prospectors left behind a small community of log cabins and a log bridge. Lt. Col. E. H. Bergmann came upon the ruins of the town in 1867 while investigating potential sites for a fort. He reported seeing about 50 cabins in the old town. James Harvey Pinkerton, whose family homesteaded in 1875 on land including Animas City, observed that the old cabins were well built of hewn logs and must have had tarp roofs. Pinkerton noted shakes had been cut and placed in piles in anticipation of installing more permanent roofs.²⁵

While efforts were made in 1873 to resurrect the town under the name of Elbert, the project never came to fruition. Many of the earliest Animas City pioneers went on to notable achievements in their lives. Mary Melissa Nye Hall stayed in Colorado and founded the Christian Science movement in Colorado. Her husband, Charles Hall, was a successful businessman and member of the Colorado legislature. Benjamin Harrison Eaton became the fourth governor of Colorado. Richard Sopris moved to Denver, where he became that city’s mayor and a founding vice president of the Colorado Historical Society. John C. Turner returned some 15 years after leaving Animas City to farm in the Animas Valley. His descendents still live in La Plata County.

As for Charles Baker, the story is intriguingly vague. He dropped out of the historical record during the Civil War, but later resurfaced in the Animas Valley. He was killed near the Colorado River while on an exploration in 1867.

Some of the early prospectors returned after the Civil War; a few brought more knowledgeable partners and others were on their own. Among them were three prospectors, Adnah French, Dempsey Reese, and Miles T. Johnson, who returned to Baker’s Park in April 1870. They followed a productive course of the gravels until they reached the gulch wall and the likely end of a gold vein. They had already staked three silver claims by then, but this discovery was their most important. They named the claim The Little Giant.

After fierce winter weather drove the prospectors out, they returned to their gold claim in 1871. Word had begun to spread and other hopeful explorers soon followed. By mid summer, 40 to 50 prospectors were working the area. The miners formed the Las Animas Mining District and Miles T. Johnson was appointed the recorder for the District. That first year of production yielded \$3,000 to \$4,000 dollars of precious metal, which

²⁴Ibid. Page 65.

²⁵ Seth Sackett is credited with having built the first Baker’s Bridge, which was rebuilt in the 1880s by Joseph Freed (road overseer for La Plata County) and replaced after the 1911 flood swept it away.

historical archaeologist Eric Twitty converted to a present day value of \$45,000 to \$60,000.²⁶

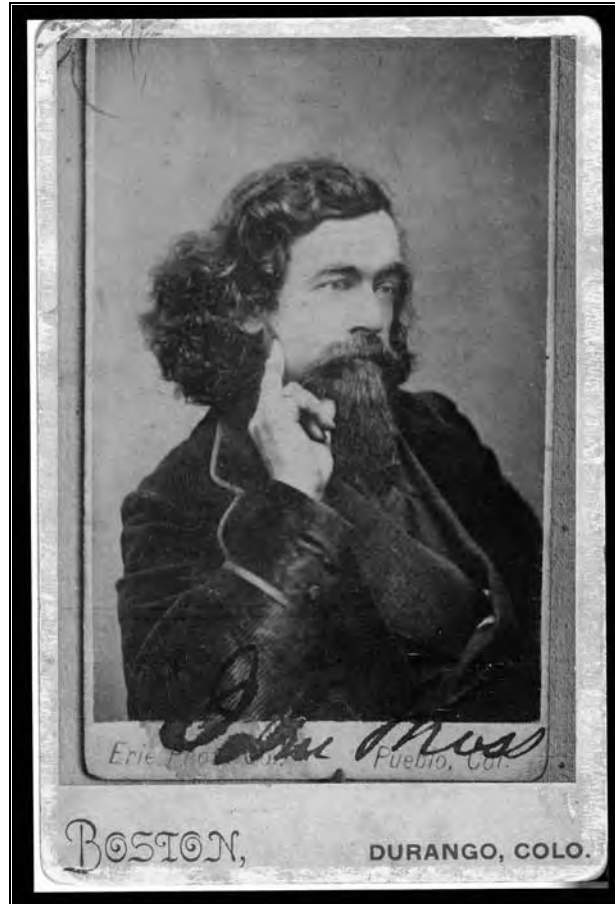
As more of the would-be millionaires arrived and built their cabins, the rudimentary requirements for a long term settlement began to take shape. That all of these participants were trespassing on Ute land seemed far from any miner's mind.

Over in the southwestern parts of the county, John Moss led a group of about ten prospectors from California via Arizona and Utah to the La Plata drainage in 1873. Frank Hall lists the party members in his 1895 *History of Colorado, Volume 4*. They were Richard Giles (or Gyles), John Merritt, Thomas McElmel, John McIntire, John Thompson, John Madden, Henry Lee and John Robinson. Their search for gold found some encouragement from a gravel bar located near the mouth of La Plata Canyon. With dwindling food supplies, the party decided to head south to restock. The men had not traveled far when Richard Giles accidentally shot himself in the neck. Part of the group continued south, and Giles remained with a few men to attend to his recovery. By the time the group reunited, the men had decided to establish a camp by the Mancos River, which eventually became Giles' Ranch.

While Giles recovered, John Moss approached Ute Chief Ignacio and negotiated an agreement that allowed the miners to use a 36 square mile area in exchange for numerous blankets, livestock and gifts. The miners named their works the California Bar and christened the potential mining area the California District. In late 1873 a second group of prospectors arrived from Arizona and panned the Bar until winter weather forced them to seek out warmer climates.

In 1874 Moss obtained backing from a San Francisco banker named Tiburcio Parrott and led a return party that included Almerian Root, James Ratcliff, Henry Lee, and John McIntire back to the La Plata Mountains. They settled in a fledgling community near the California Bar. Moss officially named their settlement Parrott City and, with E.H.Cooper, platted it as a townsite. The California Mining District was officially formed in 1874, with Richard Giles as President, Alexander Fleming as Secretary and John Moss, Recorder.

26 Nossaman, Allen. *Many More Mountains. Volume 1*. Denver, Colorado: Sundance Publishing. 1989. Page 104 and Twitty, Eric. *Basins of Silver*, Lake City, Colorado: Western Reflections Publishing, 2008. Page 38.



La Plata County Historical Society, Animas Museum Photo Archives

Photograph 1. John Moss. The son of a preacher with a talent for languages, John Thomas Moss was born in Utica, New York on March 4, 1839. Moss left his family at the age of 18 and struck out for California. A handsome and somewhat enigmatic man, Moss is the subject of some possibly true but more likely apocryphal tales. Robert Brown noted while writing a history of the early mining in the region that the Moss stories were among the more difficult to separate the facts from the folklore.²⁷

Recognizing the increasing demands from the settlement and mining on lands opened by the Brunot Agreement, the Colorado territorial government passed legislation to create three new counties-- La Plata, Hinsdale and Rio Grande-- out of massive Conejos County on February 10, 1874. La Plata County covered a vast area including present day San Juan, Montezuma, Dolores and San Miguel Counties.

Territorial Governor Samuel Elbert appointed La Plata County officials to provisional positions until an election could be held, but conflicts arose before the very first County Commissioner meeting. President Ulysses Grant had appointed a new Colorado Territorial Governor, Edward McCook, to replace Elbert. The congressional process

²⁷ Brown, Robert. *An Empire of Silver*, Denver, Colorado: Sundance Publications, Ltd., 1984. Page 9.

dragged on, leaving McCook's secretary, John Jenkins, to act on his behalf; a move that was rigorously contested by the deposed Governor Elbert. Jenkins, none-the-less, changed one of the country commissioner appointments and selected a different county clerk.

Jenkins did not meddle with the originally designated county seat of Howardsville, which was an unorganized cluster of a few buildings located high in the burgeoning San Juan Mountains mining territory. The temporary county commissioners held their first meeting there on June 12, 1874. Commissioner Dempsey Reese who had been appointed by Elbert, and Jenkins appointment, Gus Begole, met with the Elbert appointee county clerk William Morgan, who had not yet received the mailed notice that he was no longer the county clerk. (A third commissioner, James Osborne, never appeared.) The temporary team went straight to work to find a suitable building to rent as a courthouse and to build a jail, both in Howardsville. Liquor licenses were set at \$300 per year, and the county was divided into three voting districts. In the Fall of 1874 the first county election established the county's elected officials and determined that the county seat should be located in Silverton.

Table 1. Elected County Officials in 1874

Title	Name	Town
Commissioners		
	R.J. Carley	Eureka
	T.M. Trippe (Chair)	Hermosa
	Alex K. Fleming	Parrott City
Probate Judge	S.E. Jones	Silverton
Clerk and Recorder	John L. Ufford	Silverton
Treasurer	Benj. F. Lovett	Silverton
Sheriff	John Grennell	Silverton
Assessor	Peter Robertson	Silverton
Surveyor	Wm. Monroe	Silverton

While La Plata County worked to organize, the Colorado Territory became a state. President Grant approved a bill for Colorado Statehood and replaced Territorial Governor McCook with John Routt. In 1876, while Colorado developed a state constitution, movement was afoot in the southwest portion of the state to change the county structures. The remote county seat in Silverton was having difficulty addressing the needs of the growing populations in the lower river valleys. John Moss and his followers in Parrott City wanted more prominence for their community, possibly by designating the town a county seat. La Plata County's representatives introduced a bill in the first session of the 1876 Colorado Legislature to create a new San Juan County that would include the entire northern half of the original La Plata County. After heated debate, legislation passed on January 31, 1876 (to become effective May 1, 1876) to create San Juan County. The newly downsized La Plata County now encompassed the equivalent of modern day La Plata and Montezuma Counties. With no more legal ties to the Silverton area, La Plata

County's new county seat became Parrott City, a town that would hold this lofty status for four short years before the booming town of Durango lured the people and money of the region. Durango was selected as the county seat in an election in 1881.

The newly reorganized La Plata County once again worked with temporary gubernatorial-appointed officials, including E.H. Cooper as Clerk, Richard Giles as Sheriff, Charles Bennett as Treasurer and Henry Lee as Assessor. The appointed County Commissioners were John Moss, John Merritt and J.H. Pinkerton. The new Commissioners conducted their first business meeting on July 2, 1876 in Cooper's one room log house, which was presumably in Parrott City.²⁸

An election held in July authorized the county to bond for \$25,000 over a twenty year period. Licenses were required at \$75 per quarter for saloons and \$50 per quarter for peddlers.

The next election was held on October 3, 1876. Richard Giles was elected Sheriff. Giles died in office and was replaced by Robert Dwyer. A.R. Lewis was elected County Clerk. Lewis did not last very long in office either and was replaced by A. B. Roberts. Carl Stebbins was elected County Judge and John Moss was selected as the state representative for the county. The first three elected county commissioners were J.C. Turner, W. Findley, and H.M. Smith.

Precincts for road work and for voting were created for the new county. Precinct 1 covered all areas west of the divide between Cherry Creek and the Mancos River; Precinct 2 included all land west of the ridge between the La Plata and Animas Rivers over to Precinct 1. Moving east, Precinct 3 covered the area from the edge of Precinct 2 to the divide between the Animas and Florida Rivers, and Precinct 4 covered the remaining land to the east.

The election held in La Plata County in 1876 went for the Democratic candidate for governor over the successful Republican, John Routt, in a 108 to 50 vote. The second time around, in 1878, the county was almost split with 977 Republican ballots for the eventual winner Frederick W. Pitkin over 953 for Democrat William A.H. Loveland. The Democrats held sway in 1879 when only two of the county officials listed in the Colorado State Business Directory affiliated with the Republicans, against eight Democrats and one Independent located in far flung Mancos.

Table 2. County Officials in 1879 as noted in the 1879 Colorado State Business Directory.²⁹

Position	Name	Town	Affiliation
County Judge	J.H. Pinkerton	Rockwood	Republican

²⁸Hall, Frank . *History of Colorado Volume 4*, 1895. Chicago: Blakely Printing Company, 1895. Page 174.

²⁹ J.A. Blake editor, *Gazetteer* Publishing Company, Denver 1879.

Table 2. cont.

Clerk and Recorder	John Reid	Parrott City	Democrat
Treasurer	A.R. Lewis	Parrott City	Democrat
Sheriff	Robert Dwyer	Animas City	Democrat
Assessor	H.W. Lee	Parrott City	Democrat
Coroner	E.R. Cooper	Animas City	Democrat
School Supt.	J.P. Wallace	Animas City	Republican
Surveyor	Wm. M. May	Dolores	Democrat
Commissioners	D.L. Murray	Florida	Democrat
	J.C. Turner	Animas City	Democrat
	H.M. Smith	Mancos	Independent

The revised La Plata County boundaries remained unchanged until Montezuma County split from La Plata County in 1889. The *Durango Herald* was opposed to the change, citing concern in an editorial in its March 22, 1889 edition. Based on the assessed valuations of the County, it is clear that Montezuma's removal did not have the dire effect feared by the *Herald*. Of course, the largest influence on the surge in assessed valuation resulted from the arrival of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad and the related phenomenal growth and development.

Table 3. Early Assessed Values for La Plata County as Noted in the Colorado State Business Directories for 1879-1880.

Year	Amount
1874	\$31,159
1879	\$254,447
1880	\$303,075
1890	\$2,008,717*
*The 1890 figure was taken from Frank Hall's <i>History of Colorado Volume 4</i> , which was published in 1895.	

Parrott City was a bustling center of activity for the miners bound for the La Plata Mountains. The Colorado State Business Directories assigned a steady population of 100 to the town for every year from 1876 to 1880. This may not be a true accounting of the town's size, as the Parrott City businesses listed in the directories during that time illustrate a small town with lots of new construction.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY.	
Officers.	Hoots and Shoes.
POSTMASTER — A. H. Kallen- berg.	Cooper & Co., E. R. Sheek, S. A.
JUSTICE OF THE PEACE—S. A. Sheek.	Brick Maker.
Abstracts.	Wallace, T. R.
Cooper, E. H. Hagan, F. A.	Carpenters and Builders.
Assayers.	Findley, W. Hatfield, S. A. Holmes, Peter. McQuarry, A. M. Smith, H. M. Valliant, Win.
Attorneys.	Cigars and Tobacco.
Hagan, F. A. Hechtman, H. J. Hechtman, J. F. Shannon, Mark.	Cooper & Co., E. R. Sheek, S. A. Sheek, J.
Bakery.	Clothing.
Faigle, Mrs.	Cooper & Co., E. R. Sheek, S. A.
Barber.	General Merchandise.
Grantfells, Wm.	Cooper & Co., E. R. Sheek, S. A.
Beer Garden.	Meat Market.
Harbler, P.	Reld, John.
Blacksmiths.	Notary.
Joy, C. B. Naegelin, J. F.	Cooper, E. H.
Boarding Houses.	Palatar.
Harbler, Mrs. McGeoch, Mrs.	Dunlap, F. B.

Figure 1. Parrott City Business listings in an 1877 Colorado State Business Directory

Parrott City served as the first La Plata County seat until Durango wrested that distinction away in 1881. Without a railroad, the little mining settlement never had a chance against the Denver and Rio Grande's development scheme for Durango. Parrott City waned. The town site was abandoned and only a few stone remnants remain today.

While the miners can claim the distinction of the first settlement in what would soon become La Plata County, the farmers and ranchers were right on their heels. Calmer pioneers, perhaps less intoxicated by the chance to strike it rich in the mines, made their way to the river valleys. Their future lay in producing the food and supplies for the miners and the other settlers who would certainly come to the area. They were drawn to the lower, warmer and more fertile terrain in La Plata County, particularly along the river drainages, where water was accessible and plentiful.

Potential homesteaders in the Animas Valley were impatient for the Brunot Agreement with the Utes that would open desirable Ute land to white pioneers. Many settlers had staked a preliminary claim. Frank Hall wrote in his history of Colorado that —...within 30

days after the ratification....of September 3, 1873 (agreement)...every acre of available land in the (Animas) valley had been located and staked off in ranch claims.”³⁰

The earliest Animas Valley settlers were the Lamberts at Waterfall Ranch, Robert Dwyer who owned land from Junction Creek to the north, Frank Williams, Seth Sackett, Frank Trimble, A. Johnson, David Miller, T.M. Trippe and his brother Charles Trippe, A.M. Fuller, and Thomas Gaines. Robert Dwyer, who may have the distinction of being the first settler (albeit illegal), built his cabin and wintered over in 1873-1874.

Renowned photographer William Henry Jackson traveled through the Animas Valley in 1874. On September 4, 1874, he encountered parties of men camped out at the former (and now abandoned) Animas City and Castle Rock camps. These men, Jackson reported, had abandoned ripening crops in the fields in the Animas Valley to hide from threatening Indians. Three men had remained in the valley and offered produce to Jackson’s party. On his return on September 16, another family with two men and boys also offered food. Allen Nossaman believes two of these men were Robert Dwyer and Charles Trippe and that the family was the Hugh Lambert family. Dwyer probably built his cabin in the lower Animas Valley, near the confluence of Junction Creek and the Animas River.

Some of these early settlers laid out a town called Hermosa. Allen Nossaman, in his research of the early history of the settlement of Silverton, came across sporadic references to the creation of a town in 1873 to be called Hermosa. Nossaman found a few references to ownership interests in a Hermosa townsite in the remnants of the old Conejos County (the county from which La Plata County was carved) records. He identified John Dunn, Andy Richardson and Billy Quinn as possible early property owners in this new town.³¹ There is no known surviving plat of Hermosa, but the settlement had a post office (established July 27, 1876) located in a store. Andrew A. Fuller was the first postmaster. In 1877 C.E. Dudley planted fruit trees and built a flour mill at his Hermosa ranch. A cemetery, located to the east of “town”, remains from those early days. The valley’s early settlers were a mix of second or third generation Americans and recent immigrants from Europe. The warmer climate quickly drew disillusioned miners from Silverton who held some of the early homestead patents.

Not far behind Hermosa, a new Animas City was platted on 640 acres, including John Fowler’s homestead. Animas City was La Plata County’s first successful commercial real estate venture. Developers J.D. Ankeny, Canfield Marsh, Ruel L. Nute, Hemel Schwenk, Ira Smith and W.E. Earl established their new town on the Animas River about 12 miles downriver from the original Animas City. The town plat was filed on September 6, 1876. Thirty-two shares of stock in the corporation were offered at \$100 per share. After two years, the company announced it was debt-free and the town voted to incorporate itself. By August of 1877, Animas City had 45 houses, 150 people, four stores and a post office. The 1879 Colorado State Business Directory lists the town’s population at 250. The

³⁰ Hall, Frank. *History of Colorado Volume 4*. Chicago: Blakely Printing Company, 1895. Page 169.

³¹ Nossaman, Allen. *Many More Mountains Volume 1*, Denver, Colorado: Sundance Publishing. 1989. Page 151.

town's population peaked at 286 residents before the railroad, and Durango, arrived in 1881.

Animas City was the home of La Plata County's first school district (Animas Number 1). The district's first school was a log cabin constructed on the east side of present day Main Avenue, and north of 32nd Street. A grand stone schoolhouse built in 1905 at the corner of 31st Street and West Second Avenue remains today. A newspaper, *The Southwest*, was established in 1879. Animas City also had a cemetery. The cemetery, located on a hillside below Fort Lewis College, is home to the graves of some of the earliest pioneers in the county.

Animas City's commercial district was centered on the present day intersection of 32nd Street and Main Avenue in Durango. The 32nd Street bridge location was a pivotal crossing point for travelers arriving by wagon road from Tierra Amarilla, as no railroad existed yet. The primary access roads into the mines of the San Juan Mountains and to the west to the La Plata Mountains went through Animas City, whose residents enjoyed a very brief period of prosperity before the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad (D &RG) came to the Animas Valley.

Animas City lost out to the D&RG's darling Durango, another successful real estate venture launched by the railroad. Without a depot and without the commercial power of the railroad, Animas City languished, eventually annexing into the City of Durango in 1948.

To the east of the Animas Valley, homesteads were filed in the 1870s in the Pine and Florida River valleys. The first known non-Indian settler in the valley was John Taylor, a former slave who served in the Union Army.³² Taylor is reported to have first settled in the Valley in 1871-1873, before the Brunot Agreement of 1873. Following Taylor's arrival, the next known homesteaders arrived in 1877, including the Pargin, Wommer, Bates, and Patton families.³³ By 1877 a small settlement, known as Pine River, was established on the east bank of the Pine River where the toll road between Pagosa Springs and Animas City crossed the river, about four miles north of present day Bayfield. This road provided a route for wagon freight and passengers prior to the establishment of the railroad.

In its first year Pine River boasted a post office (established 1878), a store, hotel, stage station, a flour mill, and about 100 residents.³⁴ According to early resident Emerald Patrick, the stage route passed south of the store and crossed the river at the Middle Bridge where the Bellflower Ranch was located and proceeded west through Wallace Gulch, Benn Spring, Horse Gulch and then on to Animas City, approximately 20 miles

³² Warlick, Dottie. *Vallecito County*. Western Reflections Publishing Company, Montrose, CO. 2003, Page 32.

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ John, Laddie E. *Bayfield and the Pine River Valley 1880-1960*. Arcadia Publishing, San Francisco, CA. pg. 41.; Warlick, Dottie. *Op. cit.* Page 32.

away.³⁵ An 1885 travel publication, praises the hotel at Pine River by saying —. here we found the best accommodations for travelers in the whole San Juan Country. It is the first and only place where we were reminded of the chicken, and that it laid eggs and found the meals well cooked...³⁶ An early oral history suggests that the proprietress of lodgings may have been Mrs. Serelda Pargin who had been widowed with five children a few years earlier.³⁷

It has been reported that the settlement had a fire in later years and was relocated to the west side of the river, but an 1886 map shows the settlement in its original location.³⁸ The post office closed and moved in 1898 to Bayfield when the town was platted. The remaining structure associated with the Pine River settlement is the stage stop, located west of the river on private property.

In summary, the signing of the Brunot Agreement in 1874 saw a flurry of settlement activity in La Plata County. Although white settlers had been in the area, the Agreement was the official authorization to take up residence. As a result, several early towns sprang up and their lands were designated and/or platted. These included Parrott City (1876), Hermosa (1876), Animas City (1876), Los Pinos Indian Agency (1877) and Pine River (1877/1878). Some of these took hold and grew, others faded and are gone. However, all represent the energy, optimism, and pioneering spirit that continue in the County.

³⁵ Warlick, Dottie. *Op.cit.* Page 51.

³⁶ *Ibid.* Page 32.

³⁷ Pargin, Leon D. Pargins of the Piedra in *Pioneers of San Juan Country by Sarah Platt Decker Chapter, D.A.R., Durango, CO.* Colorado Springs, CO, Out West Printing and Stationery Company. 1961. Volume III, Pages. 152-155.

³⁸ Laddie, John E. *Bayfield and the Pine River Valley 1880-1960.* Arcadia Publishing, San Francisco, CA. pg.41 but see map page 4.

Frontiers In Natural Resources



The Sanchez No.1 Well, located in Long Hollow in about 1932

Photo Source: La Plata County Historical Society, Animas Museum Photo Archives



Look closely to see the two placer miners amongst the rubble near Borens Creek in La Plata Canyon. William Henry Jackson took this photo, probably in September of 1874. (USGS photo collection)

Precious Metal Mining

In general terms, mining in Southwestern Colorado developed in a typical pattern, starting in the 1870s and 1880s with individual discoveries, small scale operations and miners/owners working the claims. By the 1890s, as the scale of the successful mines expanded and the output became more prolific, individual prospectors gave way to corporate structures, often characterized by out of state investors and absentee owners. Investors made development decisions and provided capital for mechanical improvements. Trained engineers and geologists, hired by the new corporations, began to appear on the scene. The role of the miner changed from an involved owner to a laborer for a larger company.

As the miner's role evolved into a laborer, unions began to take hold. The predominant union in Colorado was the Western Federation of Miners, which had a presence in Southwestern Colorado. Telluride and Silverton had strong union membership and miners in the region sympathized with union activities that included some conflict with management over working hours, wages and working conditions. Strikes and conflicts in the Telluride area between 1903 and 1904 divided the community into pro and anti union camps. Union supporters lost in most of the conflicts.

Mining progressed amidst fluctuating prices and demands for precious metals. Southwest Colorado mines produced mostly silver in the early years. The drop in silver prices in the 1890s, the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act in 1893 and a severe recession that began in 1893 all contributed to a drop in production and a shift in emphasis from silver to gold. New ore reduction processes and the establishment of railroads to efficiently ship the ore contributed to the rise of gold production from about 1895 into the twentieth century.

Gold mining flourished up until World War I. The end of the war brought a brief demand for both silver and industrial metals as Europe rebuilt, but as normalcy returned to the United States and Europe, the demand for and value of industrial metals declined. All mining in Colorado saw decreasing returns in light of a reduced national and international demand. The value of all minerals mined in Colorado decreased by two thirds between 1920 and 1932.³⁹ Entry into World War II increased the demand for copper, lead and zinc, but prohibited gold mining per a 1942 federal act as part of the effort to concentrate American efforts on recovering the industrial resources needed for the war effort.

A brief surge in prices after World War II led to a short boom in mining in Southwest Colorado. The boom was quickly replaced by new interest in radioactive minerals and the development of the federal Atomic Energy Commission's uranium exploration program. While precious metal mining continued in the area, production dropped to very low levels, not yet to return to the heyday of the beginnings of the twentieth century.

³⁹ O'Rourke, Paul M. *Frontiers in Transition: A History of Southwestern Colorado*. Denver, Colorado: Bureau of Land Management, 1982. Page 157.

Mining brought many technological and scientific advances. The most notable advance in Southwest Colorado, and in much of the country, involved electricity. In 1891, the Ames Hydropower plant was the first to apply alternating current (AC) power to milling operations at the Gold King Mill. The adaptation of AC power immediately dropped the price of ore processing and spread throughout the mines and the communities of the southwest corner of the state. Durango's plant operators supplemented DC power with AC power in 1892 and transferred its AC power equipment to a new power plant in 1893.

The earliest La Plata County prospectors had no idea that their impacts would be so great. Prospectors had sporadically explored Southwest Colorado for many years, but their legitimate efforts began in 1874 after the Brunot Agreement. Three areas drew the would-be millionaires. The upper Animas River drainage, high in the San Juan Mountains, garnered most of the attention. At the same time, the gravels of the La Plata River lured placer miners to the mouth of La Plata Canyon, and a few years later the first mineral claims were filed in 1879 in the Pine River Drainage.

Other historic mining districts in La Plata County never amounted to much more than a hopeful claim, followed by little to no yields. They included the Needle Mountain District, the Florida District and the Cascade District. The 1883 Report of the Director of the Mint regarding the production of precious minerals noted no shipments of consequence from these districts. By 1926, the U.S. Geological Survey had written off the Pine River area and the Needle, Florida and Cascade Districts, noting that these areas had not produced much ore.⁴⁰

Table 4. La Plata and San Juan Counties Production vs. Southwest Colorado 1860-1914⁴¹

County	Gold	Silver	Lead	Zinc	Copper
La Plata	\$ 3,337,912	\$1,004,408	\$ 9,747	\$ 0	\$ 32,527
San Juan	20,438,444	17,208,265	10,489,022	861,967	5,872,759
San Miguel	43,804,891	21,579,554	5,149,255	738,558	1,242,659
Ouray	32,167,763	26,051,774	6,052,912	30,650	2,897,804
Mineral	2,612,113	26,906,736	8,178,556	1,456,410	32,121
Dolores	1,938,377	8,808,386	1,342,872	432,617	509,010
Hinsdale	1,422,615	4,411,112	3,884,250	55,823	384,097
Rio Grande	2,348,085	169,914	1,827	0	19,826

The San Juans produced a variety of minerals, sustaining the mining district through fluctuating demands and prices. Gold, silver, lead, copper and zinc were the most common. Baker's Park, where Silverton would be established, quickly became the hub of mining activities. Historian Paul O'Rourke notes that — the Baker's Park region...

⁴⁰ Henderson, Charles W. "Mining In Colorado." Professional Paper 138 of the U.S. Geological Survey of the Department of the Interior. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926. Page 52.

⁴¹ Data taken from Smith, Duane A. *Song the Hammer and the Drill*. Golden, Colorado: Colorado School of Mines Press, 1982. Page 166.

received some two thousand prospectors in 1874, and it was estimated that one thousand lode mining claims were staked during that single year...⁴²

La Plata County can only briefly lay claim to Silverton and the mines of the San Juan Mountains. The first two years that La Plata County existed, it contained the lucrative mining area. In 1876, the State Legislature split San Juan and La Plata County apart. Although no longer a part of La Plata County, the mining industry in the San Juan Mountains had a major impact on its southern neighbors, luring a railroad through the Animas Valley, providing a market for farmers and smelters and inspiring new technologies such as electricity and the telephone.

While rich in agricultural products, the Pine River area never produced much mineral wealth. The area yielded some low grade lead-copper ores with low gold and silver values. No significant —~~st~~rikes” occurred until 1913 when gold was found in the Cave Basin area on the Dowell property. The nearby Acord and Tom Boy claims also yielded some gold. The May Murphy Mine claim in 1914 added to the local gold fever and a small town, Tuckerville, developed to serve the miners in the remote Cave Basin. Access to the mines was limited to rough roads and mule trains. By 1929, gold mining had waned to almost no activity.

The 1876 version of La Plata County established the county seat at Parrott City, the mining settlement that had grown with the first placer miners who panned the La Plata River. The first placer miners were working the La Plata River gravels before the Brunot Agreement took effect, but their leader, John Moss had negotiated a short term agreement with the Utes that had allowed his crew to work the gravel bars and start a small settlement. The first noteworthy strike came at the Comstock mine in 1878. Other early finds were at the La Plata, the Lady Eleanor, the Cumberland, the Snowstorm and the Bay City mines.

The La Plata mining district encompassed the east and west slopes of the La Plata Mountains including the watersheds of the La Plata and the Mancos Rivers, and of Bear, Lightner and Junction Creeks. The eastern Junction Creek drainage was also referred to as the Oro Fino District. The La Platas produced gold, silver, lead and copper. An article in a United States Geological Survey report published in 1899 said —By the end of the year 1881 many locations had been made, and the nature of the richest ores, tellurides of gold and silver, was well known. Among the mines first developed... were.....the Tippecanoe, the Bell Hamilton and the Ashland.”⁴³ Both gold and silver production were unimpressive until 1894 when production increased so much that government geologist Charles W. Henderson questioned the accuracy of the figures for that year for silver. Miners had quickly graduated from panning for gold to hard rock mining for silver, but hydraulic mining was still underway on the Mancos side in 1896, to the benefit of the Rio Grande Southern Railroad that hauled the hydraulic pipe and related equipment.

⁴² O'Rourke, Paul M. *Frontiers in Transition: A History of Southwestern Colorado*. Denver, Colorado: Bureau of Land Management, 1982. Page 64.

⁴³ Cross, Whitman. *U.S. Geological Survey Geological Atlas, La Plata Folio (No.60)*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1899. Page 12.

The early 1900s and the 1930s saw the greatest production in the district as output switched from silver to gold. In 1902, the Neglected Mine (located near the head of Junction Creek) produced \$117,041 in gold along with \$1,682 worth of silver. The May Day (on the La Plata drainage) and the Valley View Mines also opened that year. In 1907, their combined production topped \$500,000. The May Day's prosperity in 1905 prompted the Rio Grande Southern Railroad to agree to serve a spur to the May Day. The new capital allowed the mining companies to expand their operations, installing generators, mills and trams. In 1905 the *Durango Democrat* newspaper reported on Page 1 of its March 25 edition that the May Day mine was close to completing a new office, ore house and tramway. The *Democrat* noted the mine employed 80 men, that 25 new hires were anticipated and that telephone service was to be installed that month.

Given the isolated and relatively inaccessible location of the mining district, it was essential to build mills and concentrators near the mines to reduce the amount of ore that was packed in and out on the dirt trails and road that accessed the La Platas. Many of the larger mines had their own mills. The most visible mill to modern day residents of La Plata County was the Gold King Mill, which was located on the east side of Forest Service Road 12, about four miles above May Day. The mill was supplied by a tram from the mine. Originally known as the Baker Mill, the operation ended some time near the beginning of World War II, but stood as an icon of the mining industry until it burned down in the early 2000s.

The mines enjoyed a respectable output up until 1912 and then began a slow decline. In his 1926 report on mining in Colorado, Charles W. Henderson noted that the district was “practically the sole producing district in La Plata County”.⁴⁴ Gold strikes at the May Day, the Idaho and the Red Arrow led to spectacular production in the 1930s, prompting the Durango booster organization “The Durango Exchange” to publish promotional material about the wealth of the La Platas, to lure new investors into the area. Sadly for La Plata County coffers, the Red Arrow was located on the west slope of the La Plata Mountains in Montezuma County. Other La Plata County mines, including the re-opened Bay City mine and the Lucky Moon (later to be renamed the Lucky Discovery), added to the total. Between 1900 and 1937, over six million dollars worth of ore came from the La Plata mines, and more than half of that amount came from the May Day and Idaho mines.⁴⁵ While mostly gold, the ores also contained silver, lead and copper.

⁴⁴ Henderson, Charles W. “Mining In Colorado.” Professional Paper 138 of the U.S. Geological Survey of the Department of the Interior. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926. Page 52.

⁴⁵ Eckel, Edwin B. *Geology and Ore Deposits of the La Plata District, Colorado*. Professional Paper 219 of the U.S. Geological Survey of the Department of the Interior. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1949. Page 1.

Table 5. Mineral Production in the La Plata District from 1878-1923 in \$⁴⁶

Year	Gold	Silver	Copper	Lead		Total
1878	1,000	2,224				\$3,224
1879	2,500	4,331				\$6,831
1880	5,000	8,894				\$13,894
1881	5,000	8,739				\$13,739
1882	10,000	26,451				\$36,451
1883	13,000	4,292				\$17,292
1884	500	5,152				\$5,652
1885	5,000	5,350				\$10,350
1886	10,225	4,625		4,600		\$19,450
1887	12,473	6,983		1,899		\$21,355
1888	3,574	2,156				\$5,730
1889	4,465	1,051				\$5,516
1890	3,729	2,112				\$5,841
1891	23,054	3,175				\$26,229
1892	34,881	2,901				\$37,782
1893	37,872	3,844				\$41,716
1894	114,264	263,003				\$377,267
1895	3,682	64				\$3,746
1896	10,741	28				\$10,769
1897	36,944	908	50	31		\$37,933
1898	38,653	3,079	318	319		\$42,369
1899	41,092	2,033	36	143		\$43,304
1900	24,927	4,456	58	638		\$30,079
1901	30,819	3,353	22	266		\$34,460
1902	127,182	3,930	383	88		\$131,583
1903	145,331	4,167	111	127		\$149,736
1904	130,200	18,030	189	94		\$148,513
1905	254,007	56,887	456	29		\$311,379
1906	304,633	82,770	86	127		\$387,616
1907	413,034	143,602	142	18		\$556,796
1908	101,584	37,944	60	31		\$139,619
1909	127,205	38,563	63	128		\$165,959
1910	399,608	76,546	46	12		\$476,212
1911	286,953	36,805	9,239	68		\$333,065
1912	135,391	29,488	151	304		\$165,334
1913	312,891	73,158	17,654	196		\$403,899
1914	126,498	33,315	3,463	445		\$163,721
1915	72,024	23,561	720	1,106		\$97,411

⁴⁶ Data taken from Henderson, Charles W. "Mining In Colorado." Professional Paper 138 of the U.S. Geological Survey of the Department of the Interior. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926. Page 178.

Year	Gold	Silver	Copper	Lead		Total
1916	33,055	19,332	3,725	460		\$56,572
1917	27,952	12,782	7,735	322		\$48,791
1918	7,378	6,415	165	213		\$14,171
1919	5,966	6,804	31	121		\$12,922
1920	11,020	11,530		75		\$22,625
1921	45,181	20,327		168		\$65,676
1922	32,261	10,656				\$42,917
1923	15,905	14,053	120	126		\$30,204
Totals	\$3,588,654	\$1,129,869	\$45,023	\$12,154		\$4,775,700

As historian Duane A. Smith has argued, a successful mining area needs profitable minerals, adequate capital and economical and reliable transportation.⁴⁷ Although the golden hope of many a local booster, the La Plata District inspired countless prospectors and enterprises, but only briefly met the mark in any of these basic requirements. The closest smelter had closed in 1930 and escalating transportation and production costs further discouraged mining. When the Federal Government suspended gold mining in 1942 and called for mining only the minerals needed by the war effort, the La Plata production came to an end.

The mines drew entrepreneurs bent on making their fortunes by supplying the miners. Mining camps, in most cases hardly big enough to be called towns, soon followed the miners. Many a settlement started and fizzled along with the fortunes in the mines. In the Pine River drainage, Tuckerville, a gathering of seven log buildings served the miners in the little boom of the late 1910s. It was abandoned in 1928. No standing buildings remain. In Crystal Basin near the head of the Florida River was Hewit, with four or five log cabins established around 1882-1885. The abandoned remains prompted a new name, “Logtown”, which is still used today even though the tiny community never used that name while people lived there.

The only La Plata County mining towns with any staying power were Parrott City, La Plata and May Day, and even these towns had short lives. Parrott City apparently thrived on the money flowing in from San Francisco investor Tiburcio Parrott. The town’s chief booster, John Moss, was Parrott’s principal conduit for financing the town and the mines around it. Moss had encouraged the development from mining camp on the California Bar to settlement. Along with E. H. Cooper, he platted the townsite and when San Juan County split from La Plata County, Moss convinced the county electorate to establish Parrott City as the County seat in 1876. Moss even went so far as to marry the first postmistress in town. The town had a courthouse, a jail, a two-story hotel, a few stores and a number of homes. But Moss’s efforts could not withstand the isolation and the relatively small output of mineral wealth in the La Plata district. Historian Allen

⁴⁷ Smith, Duane A. *Song the Hammer and the Drill*. Golden, Colorado: Colorado School of Mines Press, 1982. Page 18.

Nossaman notes that when Tiburcio Parrott sold his interests in Parrott City and in his mining investments to a New York firm in March of 1877, no new merchants came to town, the number of businesses was down to a handful and by the end of August, 1877, the town's traffic was all outbound.⁴⁸ Moss had joined the exodus, never to return. He died in San Francisco in 1880 at the age of 41. Parrott City held on as the county seat until 1881, when the new railroad town of Durango handily won an election for county seat. Parrott City had a reportable population until 1898; at its peak about 50 buildings graced the community. No buildings remain standing at the site of the former county seat.

As the miners worked their way up the drainages in search of the sources of the gold in the gravels, they settled in an area near the confluence of Boren Creek and the La Plata River. The camp known as La Plata had a recognized population by 1882 and a post office in 1894. The January 5, 1899 edition of the *Durango Wage Earner* newspaper (page 3) provided a glowing report on the potential for wealth in the La Platas and described the "little mining camp town" as having from 150 to 300 people and a "steady and profitable trade". Called a "growing mining town" in the 1910 Colorado State Business Directory, La Plata had a population of 150 that year. A 1911 directory for La Plata listed mostly miners and mining company officers, a shoemaker, a livery, the postmaster, a photographer, a saloon and a justice of the peace. A school was built to the south and the town prospered when mining was productive. Isolated in the high country and subject to long hard winters, La Plata was accessed only by a dirt road. The school only operated in warmer months. (Children attended the May Day school in the winter.) The community never grew beyond settlement status and dwindled to a handful of residences after the great gold discoveries of the 1930s. The 1930 population was 33, and the post office closed in 1934. The school burned down in the 1980s. Most of the remaining buildings are located north of the core of the town and are summer residences.

May Day fared a bit better than La Plata. Located farther south and at a lower elevation than La Plata, May Day's climate and accessibility were a little bit better for a mining community. The camp also had the only railroad access in the La Plata District, a 1.92 mile long spur (financed by the May Day Mining Company) from the Rio Grande Southern Railroad main line to the mine. The resulting connection led to predictions of a new town at the terminus. Miners set up tents in camps between La Plata and May Day and a school was built, but the community never was big enough to even warrant a listing in the business directories for the county. Mine production ranged from sparse to spectacular. At the end of 1917 an application was made to the Interstate Commerce Commission to abandon the spur, but the line continued in operation until 1929, reflecting the irregular annual production. May Day did not prosper beyond the peak mining years, and is now a concentration of homes.

The people who lived in the mining towns were a mix of young and old, native born Americans and immigrants, men and women. The challenges drew adventurous members of both sexes. Although most miners were men, the January 5, 1899 edition of the

⁴⁸ Nossaman, Allen. *Many More Mountains*. Volume 2. Denver, Colorado: Sundance Publishing. 1991. Page 92.

Durango Wage Earner reported on the progress of Mrs. Sarah Styles, who was working the Sarah S Mine —with pleasing results”. Women worked as shop keepers, hoteliers, prostitutes and school teachers. Many of the post masters were women as well. Men worked as blacksmiths, butchers and livery masters. Married couples often partnered in hotels, saloons and shops. Administrative professionals, such as bankers and lawyers were few and far between in these frontier-like towns that had not progressed to a level that required these services. A 1921 post office listing for La Plata listed 19 single men and 11 couples. The couples were outnumbered by the 12 mining companies included in the listings. The 1900 Census and directory information suggest that the majority of the miners were American born, but also included Swedes, Bavarians, Germans, Irish and English. In his description of the demographics of the Silverton mining districts, Duane Smith notes, —They came from all over the world and the United States.” in what must have been an interesting international gathering.⁴⁹

While it was never strictly a —mining” town, Durango owes its existence to the mines in the San Juan Mountains. The town’s creator, the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad (D&RG), entered the Animas Valley in 1881 to access the riches from the mines. Along the way, the D&RG established the town, invested huge amounts of capital into the region’s economy and industry, and spurred additional development in a previously isolated area traversed by rough roads and trails. The D&RG’s railroad, formally titled the San Juan Extension, changed the arduous journey up the Animas Valley to a quick and relatively cost effective jaunt. Freight rates to transport the San Juan ores and concentrates to the smelters at Durango dropped from \$60 to \$12 a ton.⁵⁰

Miners in the La Platas were not so fortunate. Far from the route of the D&RG, they struggled over rough mountainous terrain with pack animals. They only partially benefited from a connection to the Rio Grande Southern Railroad (RGS). Completed in 1891, the RGS connected the mines and communities of the western San Juan Mountains, including Rico, Ophir, Telluride and Ridgeway. Although entrepreneur John Porter boosted the RGS payload via the coal from his mines located west of Durango and along the railroad line, most of the mines were far from the route. The RGS passed about two miles south of the mouth of La Plata Canyon, requiring a long journey from the mountainous mines to the rail road. The connection was shortened somewhat when the May Day Mine built a spur from the railroad to its mine in 1905, but other mines had no direct connection to the railroad. Mines located on the east and west sides of the La Plata drainage had no access to the rails. Non-miners traveling to —the diggings” relied on a daily stage that traveled between Hesperus and La Plata.

The packing industry thrived on the lack of railroads. Using strings of horses, mules or burros the packers provided vital supplies and hauled out the ores. In the 1920s, trucks began to replace the animals. Two well known and long lived packing companies were

⁴⁹Smith, Duane A. *Song of the Hammer and the Drill*. Golden, Colorado: Colorado School of Mines Press, 1982. Page 78.

⁵⁰ O’Rourke, Paul M. *Frontiers in Transition: A History of Southwestern Colorado*. Denver, Colorado: Bureau of Land Management, 1982. Page 94.

located near the mouth of La Plata Canyon. One was run by Olga Schaaf Little, who was a respected expert packer. Olga Schaaf came to the United States with her family from Germany in 1885 when she was two years old. After spending time in Nebraska, Holyoke, Colorado and Chama, New Mexico, the Schaafs moved to Animas City (north of Durango) in about 1897. Olga, whose primary schooling had been in Spanish in Chama, started to make a living by breaking horses for \$5 a week. She also guided hunting and sight seeing parties in the mountains. Her reputation grew and she was offered a job as a packer to take supplies to the Neglected Mine in the La Plata Mountains. In her first few years as a packer, the 5' 4" Olga used horses, but she soon discovered that the smaller burros were easier for her to pack and much more sure-footed on the trail. Among her steady clients were the Neglected and Durango Girl Mines. She worked as a packer until her saddle horse fell on her and broke her leg, probably in 1912. During her recovery, she met Bill Little a miner at the Neglected. William C. Little was born in 1887 in Glasgow, Scotland. He began working there as a coal miner at the age of 11. He ended up in Durango at about the age of 19 with 50 cents to his name and went to work at the Smelter Coal Mine just outside Durango. He and Olga married in 1913 and worked together as packers. Packing rates at the time were \$20 a ton. Bill eventually became the mine foreman for the Kybab and Monarch Mines in La Plata Canyon, but Olga continued to pack, managing a string of 20 to 40 burros in the rugged La Plata Mountains until the 1930s. Bill retired in the 1940s and became a rock collector. He opened his Rock Shop to the delight of tourists seeking the old gold mines in La Plata Canyon. Olga was recognized in many ways for her long career as a packer. In 1958 she was the subject of an episode of the "This is Your Life" television program held at the Denver Coliseum in celebration of the state's 100th anniversary of the discovery of gold in Colorado. She was also listed in —Who's Who of Colorado Women". Bill Little died in 1969 and Olga died in September 1970.



Photograph 2. Olga Little stands on the back of the truck in La Plata Canyon to transfer ore sacks from her burros in 1934. Photo Source: La Plata County Historical Society Animas Museum Photo Archives

A second well-known supply company was run by the Curtet Family out of their mercantile in Hesperus. Joseph and Christina Borgia Curtet moved their family to the Mancos area from Silver Cliff, Colorado in the 1890s. George Curtet freighted for the Bauer Mercantile Company in Mancos. He bought the old Hag Coppinger Saloon in Hesperus and changed it into a general store. The miners up La Plata Canyon were among the store's customers. The business had an extensive delivery service up La Plata Canyon as far as the Gold King Mill. The Curtets used a mule team and a wagon in the summer and a sleigh or sleds in the winter. They purchased a truck for deliveries when the roads were passable, but ended the freighting business after World War I. Christina died in the early 1900s and Joseph passed away in 1928. The Curtet children ran the store and continued the delivery business. There were four brothers, Phil, Charlie, George and Gabe, and one sister, Mary, who died in 1939. As the brothers grew older, they reduced their commercial operation and began collecting antiques and working their 17 mining claims in the La Plata area. They closed the store in 1953.

Table 6. Packers/Freighters known to have operated in or near the La Platas

- Dick Martin operated out of May Day and later raised and raced horses.
- S.B. Henry was the proprietor of the Hesperus and La Plata Stage Line.
- George Washington Spencer freighted by ox team from Bluff, Utah.
- Milt and Charles Verden freighted by ox team from Santa Fe, New Mexico.
- Perly Wason had stage lines and mail contracts in Southwest Colorado.
- Olga and Bill Little operated out of May Day
- The Curtets operated out of Hesperus

In the 1870s, the high country mines had tried with little success to economically smelt their ores. The president of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, William Palmer, and William Bell saw an opportunity to establish a profitable smelter in Durango, at one end of their new Silverton railroad line. Durango possessed many advantages for smelting, including readily available coal to turn into coke for fuel, proximity to the railroad for easy transport, and a lower elevation allowing for downhill transport of the ores and a year round operation. Palmer and Bell incorporated the San Juan and New York Smelting Company (also known as the New York and San Juan Smelting Company) in the summer of 1880 and acquired the former Greene Smelter in Silverton. They hired the Greene's former manager, 31-year-old John Porter, who oversaw the move and installation of the smelter in Durango, which was operating by August of 1882. Under Porter's capable management, the operation prospered and established Durango as a regional smelting center. The San Juan and New York employed between 40 and 50 people in 1887. It smelted over a million dollars worth of ore that year and stood 9th in production in Colorado. The booster publications from the early 1900s proudly proclaimed Durango as "The Smelter City". The San Juan and New York outlasted its major regional rivals. The Rico Reduction and Mining Company closed in 1883, the Lake City (Crooke Brothers) smelter sold out in 1886, and the Grandview Smelter in Rico closed in 1888.

Animas City had a short lived copper smelter, The Lafayette Copper Reduction Plant. It operated some time between 1882 and 1885 and processed the gold ores from the Red Mountain area mines. Porter upgraded his smelter to process the gold ores as well, but in 1892 the Standard Smelter, specializing in copper ores, opened about a half mile to the south of the San Juan Smelter. By then, Porter's smelter employed 300 people and had a monthly payroll exceeding \$30,000.⁵¹

In the early 1900s, changes in the ore reduction process, the switch to primarily gold instead of silver ores and the growth of mining into a large scale corporate activity severely reduced the smelter trade. The mines switched to on-site reduction techniques, which substantially reduced the need for a separate smelter process. The Standard Smelter closed. The San Juan had been reorganized, leased to the Omaha and Grant Smelting and Refining Company and then, in 1899, merged into the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO). The smelter limped along at low production numbers in the 1920s and closed in 1930.

The smelter revived as a processing site for vanadium and uranium ores during World War II and the cold war years, but smelting never returned.

⁵¹ Smith, Duane A. *Rocky Mountain Boomtown, A History of Durango, Colorado*. Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company. 1983. Page 28.

Coal Mining

In the late 1800s and early 1900s Americans burned coal for more than 90% of their energy needs. Colorado production at that time was in the top ten of the country's coal producing states and territories. In 1885, 53 operating mines produced 1.4 million tons from ten Colorado counties. The state's production grew steadily, peaking at 12.1 million tons in 1910, followed by a slight decline and then a surge to 12.7 million tons in 1918 in response to the demands of World War I. Colorado's 12.5 million ton output in 1920 was the last year of plentiful production.⁵²

The nation's need for coal dropped precipitously after World War I. By 1920, coal was reduced to 73% of the nation's form of energy consumption, and further reduced to 58% in 1929, as alternative fuel sources (oil and gas) became more available. A recession in 1920-1921 and coal overproduction in 1920 also contributed significantly to the downfall of the industry. Colorado had a similar decline. The state's increased availability and use of natural gas and electricity seriously reduced the demand for coal. Natural gas wells in nearby New Mexico and subsequent wells in La Plata County provided gas as early as 1929-1930.

While La Plata County's coal market experienced similar tendencies to the national trends, the county's regional market for coke prolonged the local demand for coal until 1930. In La Plata County, the domestic market for coal provided a steady demand, supplemented by the industrial needs of the smelters and the railroads. Small mines providing coal for domestic use operated in the Hay Gulch and Hesperus areas up into the 1970s. One large scale coal mine, the King Coal Mine, still operates in Hay Gulch. The King Coal mine now primarily supplies cement companies, but maintains a link to the past as the supplier for the Durango and Silverton and the Cumbres and Toltec railroads. A list of all of the documented coal mines in La Plata County is located in the Appendix.

La Plata County's first coal mines were small independent operations. Coal seams exposed on the hillsides provided relatively easy access at first, allowing for drift mines at exposed beds and eventually developing into underground shafts.

Early mining operations and the associated permitting processes were pretty straightforward. Federal legislation was almost non-existent until 1873, when Congress passed the Coal Lands Law, which clarified earlier mining legislation and allowed for the sale of public lands for coal in 160 to 640 acre parcels. Theodore Roosevelt's administration, concerned by the fraud and abuse of coal mining on public lands, withdrew all federally designated coal lands from use and in 1906 directed the United States Geological Survey to assess the value of the lands. In 1909 Roosevelt signed legislation that opened previously designated "coal lands" to homesteading. Federal leasing of mineral rights and the development of royalty payments occurred in 1920 with the Federal Leasing Law.

⁵² All figures provided in these first two paragraphs are from Scamehorn, Lee. *High Altitude Energy*. Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2002, pages 1-16.

La Plata County's early coal mines were located around Durango, and expanded to Wildcat Canyon, Hesperus, Hay Gulch and Bayfield in later years. Many of the mines were small producers.⁵³ In 1883 La Plata County produced 12,000 short tons.⁵⁴ Production gradually increased. In 1886, 600 men were employed in coal mining. By 1890 the county produced 33,045 tons of coal and there were seven active mines in the immediate Durango area.⁵⁵ Small mines, often family owned and run, were typical of La Plata County coal mines.

Durango area mines tapped the extensive coal bed known as the Fox Hill Horizon. In the first few years of the 1880s, after the arrival of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad (D&RG), the small local mines supplied a fourth of the coal used by the D&RG.⁵⁶ The railroad, through its subsidiary, the Durango Land and Coal Company, developed its own mine in 1884. Known as The Carbonera, or Carboneria, the mine was located 2 ½ miles downstream from Durango. The beds at Carbonera had a 35 degree dip, badly broken seams that rarely exceeded seven feet, and large quantities of explosive gas, so the mine was never very fully developed. The D&RG continued its practice of shipping in some of the coal they needed. Locals also bought some of the D&RG Coal for domestic use, but after 1884 Durango citizens got coal from a number of small mines including the Adams Coal Mining Company, the Champion and the Black Hawk.⁵⁷ The Gates Mine in Ridges Basin provided coal a little later, between 1910 and 1930.⁵⁸ These small operations employed two or three miners apiece and delivered roughly 1,000 tons of coal in a year.

Bayfield's coal mines were also small ventures that were developed and operated in the 1910s and 1920s to supply the new town of Bayfield. The Wildcat Canyon, Hesperus/Hay Gulch and Perins area coal mines boomed from the easier transport provided by the Rio Grande Southern Railroad, beginning in 1890.

The following table lists the ten largest producing coal mines in the county. The King Coal Mine has the largest cumulative coal production in the county and is still operating.

⁵³ Scamehorn, Lee. *High Altitude Energy*. Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2002, page 31.

⁵⁴ Smith, Duane A. *Rocky Mountain Boomtown, A History of Durango, Colorado*. Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company. 1983, page 23.

⁵⁵ Hall, Frank. *History of Colorado Volumes 1-4*. Chicago: Blakely Printing Company, 1895. and Smith, Duane A. *Rocky Mountain Boomtown, A History of Durango, Colorado*. Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company. 1983, page 23.

⁵⁶ Cook, George, Dell McCoy and Russ Collman. *The RGS Story Volume 9*. Denver, Colorado: Sundance Books, 2001. Page 376.

⁵⁷ Ibid Page 376.

⁵⁸ Gilpin, Dennis. *Animas La Plata Project Volume V*. Phoenix, Arizona: SWCA, 2007. Page 273.

Table 7. Eleven Largest Producing Coal Mines in La Plata County From 1881-2000⁵⁹

Name of Mine	Dates of Operation	Total Short Tons
King Coal Mine	1936- present	4,175,993
Peacock-Porter Mine	No dates available	3,052,800
Calumet Perin #1	1901-1926	1,192,105
Porter Coal Co.	1886-1908	911,064
Hesperus Coal Mine	1892-1922	845,666
Asarco-San Juan Mine	No dates available	739,310
City Mine #1	1887-1893	338,952
Victory #1	1943-1958	233,391
Knapp	1885-date unavailable	186,825
OK #1	1913-1947	170,461
Morning Star	1916-1970	153,958
Sunshine Coal	1893-1949	152,182

By 1891, the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad and the Rio Grande Southern were both operating. They formed an axis for north-south and east-west transport through La Plata County, with Durango at the intersection. The RGS hauled the bulk of the coal payload, but one enterprising mine tapped the D&RG. Along the D&RG, in 1891, the La Plata Coal and Iron Company built a branch extending 3.75 miles north from milepost 443.66 to reach the La Plata Coal Mine north of Bocea, in the area now known as Grandview. The La Plata Mine's main customer was the Durango smelter. In 1893, the Porter mine opened, severely reducing the demand for coal from the La Plata Mine. The La Plata Mine operated at least until 1903 and possibly until 1906, when the branch track was removed.



Photograph 3. A cabinet card from Durango photographer E.A. Wilder shows miners at the La Plata Mine in about 1892. This photograph was found on an E-bay listing and was sold before the authors could track the owner and source.

⁵⁹ Figures taken from Carroll, Christopher J. and Bauer, Mark A. *Historic Coal Mines of Colorado. Colorado Geographical Survey Information Series 64.* Denver, Colorado: Colorado Department of Natural Resources, 2002. This publication is a database presented on a CD.

The Porter Mine thrived on the symbiotic relationship between the railroad and coal mine. John Porter, a major investor in the San Juan and New York Mining and Smelting Company in Durango, established the Porter Coal Company in 1890 (renamed Porter Fuel Co in 1894) and began developing an old mine in Wildcat Canyon. His Porter Mine was the largest coal producer in the county until it closed in 1908. The Rio Grande Southern Railroad (with support from Porter) reached the mine on December 1, 1890, providing cheap freighting for Porter and an important revenue source for the RGS.⁶⁰ Four hundred tons of coal and coke were moved daily during the winter of 1890-1891 from Porter's mine to his smelter. Porter eventually sold the company to the Union Pacific Coal Company (a subsidiary of the Union Pacific Railroad) in 1906. The Porter mine suffered a major fire in 1908 and closed.

John Porter had also acquired major holdings in the Hesperus area and was prepared for the arrival of the RGS in that town. His Hesperus Mine (opened in 1892) was his second largest producer. The Hesperus and Porter Mines produced half of the coal mined in La Plata County in 1894. A spur from the Rio Grande Southern Railroad track reached the coal yard on October 14 of that year. The Union Pacific Coal Company (UPCC) purchased the mine as part of the Porter Fuel Company in 1906 and operated the mine until 1917, when the former supervisor for the UPCC, W.I. Gifford, took over the mine on lease from the UPCC and renamed it the Hesperus Fuel Company. The spur to the mine was officially active until 1924, suggesting the company's demise in the 1920s.⁶¹

The RGS accessed previously inaccessible coal mining country. In 1892, the Ute Coal and Coke Company contracted with the railroad to construct a 1.87 mile branch line to their mine from milepost 146.8. A coaling facility was constructed near the branch at Ute Junction. The Ute Mine had a shady history. Apparently the principals of the company never bothered to obtain any rights to their mine and had been mining on federal land free of charge.⁶² Although the first legal charges against Ute Coal may have been filed as early as 1898, RGS records indicate that they provided service sporadically to the mine until about 1908. The railroad continued to use the coaling facility at Ute Junction.

George C. Franklin organized and promoted the Boston Coal and Fuel Company and began mining coal at Perins in 1901. The company was bought by the Calumet Fuel Co in 1906 and became the largest coal producer in the county after the Porter mine closed down. The Perins Mine was accessed by a 4.7 mile long spur from the Rio Grande Southern Railroad at Franklin Junction, which was located near the intersection of Lightner Creek and Wildcat Canyon. The train made up to three trips a day to the coal mine, carrying as many as 17 full cars of coal down to Durango. The mine operated until 1926, the last large scale coal mine in the Durango area. The mine's railroad closed down at the same time.

⁶⁰ Cook, George, Dell McCoy and Russ Collman. *The RGS Story Volume Nine*. Denver, Colorado: Sundance Books, 2001. Page 393.

⁶¹ Ibid. Page 376.

⁶² Ibid Page. 376.

Two other large producers, the San Juan and the King Coal, prospered without the benefits of direct access to the railroad. John Porter's San Juan Mine was located on the site of his San Juan and New York Mining and Smelting Company. The mine provided on-site fuel via a tram. The King Coal Mine opened in Hay Gulch in 1936 and trucked their coal.

Only a few of the coal mines in La Plata County were large enough to generate a town. The town of Porter, which grew up around the Porter Mine, reached a peak population of 437 in 1900 and extended about 2/3 of a mile along Wildcat Canyon. The town had mining facilities, a post office, a tippie, coke ovens, two saloons, a boarding house a school and houses, along with the RGS section house, a power plant and a water tank⁶³. Coal resources declined soon after 1900. A fire destroyed the coal chute and tippie and much of the mine facility in 1908, and the mine closed.

The town soon followed the fate of the mine. Porter had 155 residents in 1910. By 1920 the town no longer existed. Estimates based on census data indicate in 1900 there were 55 miners of whom 27 were married and living with their wives, 25 were single, and three were widowed or divorced. Thirteen of the miners owned homes. Fifteen of the miners were U.S. born and 39 were immigrants, with a break down by country of origin as follows: British Isles—20, Italy 13, Sweden 3, Germany 1, Austria 1 and Spain 1.⁶⁴

By 1910 only eight men were miners. Fourteen railroad survey crew members lived in the boarding house and most of the other residents lived in homes. One hundred and twelve were U.S. born.

The core of the no-longer extant townsite was recorded by SWCA Environmental Consultants as sites 5LP517 and 5LP518.

The Town of Hesperus had already been established before the Hesperus Coal Mine opened, but John Porter, in partnership with Alexander C. Hunt, platted additional lots around the existing small settlement in 1894 in hopes of selling real estate. Hesperus served as a supply point for the gold and silver mines in La Plata Canyon, and had a depot on the Rio Grande Southern Railroad. In 1892, about 50 families lived in Hesperus. The 1900 census listed about 200 residents. While the Hesperus Coal Mine was the major source of revenue for the community, other smaller coal mines were also in the area. The town suffered when the coal mines declined. A final blow came with the closure of the Rio Grande Southern Railroad in 1953. Hesperus remains today in a much smaller form. A glance through the town directory of 1911 and the family histories of the area, suggest the town was quite a cosmopolitan place during the coal mining heyday.⁶⁵ Immigrants from Lithuania, Italy, Wales, Ireland, Austria and Mexico were all working at the Hesperus area mines. Scottie Henry, who grew up in Hesperus remembered a large number of the coal miners were Welsh or Italian.

⁶³ Gilpin, Dennis. *Animas La Plata Project Volume V*. Phoenix, Arizona: SWCA, 2007. Pages 60 and 274.

⁶⁴ Ibid. Page 278.

⁶⁵ Fort Lewis Mesa Reunion History Committee. *Pioneers of Southwest La Plata County, Colorado*. Bountiful, Utah: Family History Publishers, 1994.

The small town of Perins, located near the mine of the same name, had all of the local needs, including a school. Former resident, Lillian McCormick, remembered there were many nationalities working in the mines including the Scotch, Irish, Welsh, Austrian, English, Greek, Italian, Polish and Russian. The Welsh were particularly honored because many of them had mining experience from their home country.⁶⁶ Calumet operated until 1926, the last large scale coal mine in the Durango area. The railroad closed down at the same time. Perins was quickly abandoned after the mine closed. The old town is no longer standing.

The employment provided by coal mining provided income for newcomers and for homesteaders struggling to clear and settle their as yet unproductive land. Many of the early mines were small operations with only a few employees, but as the mine operations grew, the companies that managed the mines took on more corporate personalities. Perhaps because of the isolation of La Plata County from the larger coal mining operations in other parts of Colorado, management-worker relations in the coal mines of La Plata County saw little remarkable activity. In September of 1913, some of the La Plata miners joined miners throughout the state to strike in support of the labor demands of the United Mine Workers of America, although the demands were coming from the camps of Southeast Colorado, far removed from the La Plata mines. While there were mild skirmishes at the Perins Mine, a former Perins resident remembered there were no strikes at that time.⁶⁷

The coal in La Plata County is primarily bituminous coal, which is the most desirable for coking. Coke was used as a fuel in smelting ores. It is created by roasting coal to remove gases and moisture. The resulting material has a dense structure that produces even heat.

La Plata County, the Trinidad area and the Carbondale-Crested Butte area were Colorado's three main coal sources for coke. Trinidad and Carbondale area coal mines were mostly operated by and suppliers for the large smelting operations in Leadville, Denver and Pueblo, along with the steel works in Pueblo. Durango's smelters were the primary consumers of the local coke market.

Coke was so integral to the smelting process that many smelters, including Durango's San Juan and New York Mining and Smelting Company, constructed their own coking ovens near the smelter. The SJ&NY also owned the San Juan Coal Mine, which was located on the slope above the smelter and accessed via an aerial tram. The San Juan Coal Mining Company yielded 26,000 tons in 1888 and had 20 employees. By 1892, the SJ&NY had 28 beehive coke ovens that produced 11,000 tons of coke per year.⁶⁸

The coke-intensive ore smelting process was replaced by a milling and chemical leaching process in about 1910. Most ore processing companies ceased smelting in favor of using

⁶⁶ McCormick, Lillian A. *Perins Peak, the Mining Camp That Was*. Durango, Colorado: self-published, 1984. Page 10.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Page 10.

⁶⁸ Scamehorn, Lee. *High Altitude Energy*. Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2002, page 31.

cyanide, chloride or bromide to leach the desired minerals from the ore. While this technological change drastically affected the coke producers in the other parts of Colorado, the impact in La Plata was less immediate. The SJ&NY Smelter had changed hands and had become part of the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) in 1899. ASARCO continued to produce coke on-site and to smelt ores in much smaller quantities. The ovens operated until November 1930. Coke ovens maintain a legacy in Durango, however, as the stones used in the disassembled ovens were reused as the building material for Sacred Heart Church, which is located on Third Street in Durango.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Cook, George, Dell McCoy and Russ Collman. *The RGS Story Volume Nine*. Denver, Colorado:Sundance Books, 2001. Page 393.

Mining for the Nuclear Age

While the precious metal smelters in Durango fell silent by 1930, the old San Juan Smelter rose again in America's war efforts during World War II. In the early part of the twentieth century miners discovered carnotite, an ore containing uranium and vanadium, in western Colorado. Carnotite was initially valued primarily for its radium content. In those days, uranium had few known applications and vanadium, used as a strengthening agent in steel, had very little demand. The market for vanadium changed beginning with the onset of World War II in Europe in 1939 as Britain and France, followed by the United States, rebuilt their war machines. Concerned that the demand from overseas would outstrip the domestic supply of vanadium needed for the war effort, the United States government limited exports in 1940 and placed the mineral under an allocation system in 1941. The west slope of Colorado was the country's primary source of vanadium for the war effort. The newly created federal Defense Plant Corporation, a subsidiary of the federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) funded construction of five vanadium processing mills in the Four Corners states. The most active were the Durango, Colorado and the Monticello, Utah plants. Durango's plant was the revamped old San Juan Smelter. It's wartime operations employed about 50 people.

As mining historians Jay Fell and Eric Twitty describe it:

It was a heady day for the vanadium industry. New enterprises entered the market, many new mines opened, and production even surged beyond war-spawned demand. The U.S. Bureau of Mines conducted an extensive drilling program on the lands of some producers. The Public Roads Administration built roads.....By war's end in 1945, the Uravan Mineral Belt had produced some 650,000 tons of carnotite ore from which the processing plants extracted some 24 million pounds of what was called —adcake,” the concentrate bearing vanadium.⁷⁰

Uranium, also found in the carnotite ore, had been dumped in the waste piles of the vanadium plants and carnotite mines. As scientists began to uncover the potential power of splitting uranium atoms via fission, the realization came that the uranium in the waste piles was valuable. President Franklin D. Roosevelt formed the Advisory Committee on Uranium in 1941, soon followed by a uranium development program. The program assigned the Army Corps of Engineers to develop the atom bomb under the code name Manhattan Project.

The Metal Reserves Corporation, another federal subsidiary of the RFC partnered with the Vanadium Corporation of America (VCA), a private mining company, to act as the buying agent to obtain stockpiles of uranium. The VCA operated the plants that reworked discarded carnotite ore tailings to extract uranium that was then sent to the labs at Los Alamos for bomb manufacture. In Durango a second plant built under an army contract opened in 1943, near the San Juan Smelter. The old San Juan Smelter processed

⁷⁰ Fell, Jay and Eric Twitty. —The Mining Industry in Colorado; National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Submission”. Washington, D.C.; Department of the Interior, 2006. Section E Page 72.

vanadium and the new plant extracted uranium. Bill Moore ran the vanadium operation while Art Wyatt was hired to start up and run the new uranium plant. Activities at the uranium plant were top secret, but since both mines provided the major employment for the remaining men in La Plata County who were too old to fight in World War II, there was some tacit understanding throughout the region that the work was for the war effort. Wyatt remembered that most people in Durango assumed the main purpose of the plants was to extract vanadium.⁷¹

After the war, Wyatt was ordered to dismantle the uranium plant. The structures were torn down to the foundations by November of 1945, but the old vanadium plant remained.

The Federal Government continued to control all mining and processing of uranium after World War II through the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). The Commission, which was established in 1946, set a relatively low price for low grade uranium but offered a higher price and a cash bonus for significant finds. Prices sharply increased in 1950 partly in response to the onset of the Korean War. The “uranium rush” to the west slope of Colorado and the Four Corners in the 1950s brought an estimated 10,000 prospectors by 1951.⁷² Durango newspapers published uranium guides for would be prospectors and the local boosters promoted this new industry. Repeating the pattern of precious metal mining from fifty years before, the productive mines were not located in La Plata County, but the ore was shipped to the processing plants in Durango.

The mill, which had closed in 1945 at the end of the war, was reopened by the VCA, with financial support from the AEC on March 20, 1949. It employed over 200 workers. (A *Durango Herald* booster publication said the mill employed more than 500 workers.) The largest processor in the United States, the Durango mill produced 7,851,425 pounds of uranium concentrate between 1950 and 1963.⁷³ Durango historian Duane Smith noted “The amount of money pumped into the local economy proved substantial and was one of the major factors in bringing about the postwar boom.”⁷⁴

Funding from the AEC also brought about improved roads between the VCA’s mines and mills in Durango, Naturita (and Uravan), and Monticello, Utah. Considered part of the effort to promote uranium development, the AEC embarked on a road building campaign, using a \$10 million allocation from the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1950. Between 1951 and 1955 the Department of Defense built over 800 miles of roads in the Four Corners states to provide better access to uranium resources. Colorado’s share was 223 miles of roads. VCA’s president, Dennis Viles, lobbied heavily for road development to connect Durango with the uranium mines on the Navajo Reservation. The largest response to his

⁷¹ Seyfarth, Jill. The Secret of Smelter Mountain, in “Historic Durango, 1997”. Durango, Colorado: La Plata County Historical Society, 1997. Page 10.

⁷² Gomez, Arthur R. *Quest For the Golden Circle, The Four Corners and the Metropolitan West*. Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1991. Page 25.

⁷³ Ibid. Page 51.

⁷⁴ Smith, Duane A. *Rocky Mountain Boomtown, A History of Durango, Colorado*. Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company. 1983. Page 161.

pleas was the upgrading of a hodgepodge of roads into the present day U.S. Highway 160 between southeast Arizona and Durango.

Uranium mining was a steady source of income in the remote towns and mines of the Four Corners states. When the Eisenhower administration shifted federal policy away from war time uses for uranium, the demand was replaced by the potential development of nuclear power plants. The uranium boom continued into the 1970s but the uranium party ended in La Plata County in 1962 when VCA's federal contract expired. VCA closed the Durango plant in 1963 and shifted its milling operations to Shiprock, New Mexico.

Just as had happened when the smelters closed in 1930, the 1963 closures left a void in the Durango economy. This modern mining bust was not as much of a blow because of the development of the oil and gas economy that had taken off in the 1950s.

Open Rangers and Ranchers

While the prospectors searched for gold and silver in the 1870s, the cattle industry came to seek its fortune. Early cattle grazers took advantage of the federal government's generous open range policy. Large herds of cattle roamed large acreages of otherwise unclaimed government land. Although longhorns were driven in from Texas, Colorado's climate was more favorable to Shorthorns and Herefords.

Trinidad cattleman, George W. Thompson brought about 5,000 head of cattle to the open range near the Mancos River at the western edge of the area that would be named for him---Thompson Park. Thompson's entry date into the area is unknown, but the Hayden Survey of 1874 shows Thompson Park on its maps.

Originally from Kentucky, Thompson married into the wealthy Bent family and acquired interest in their 4,097,000 acre St. Vrain and Vholland Land Grant in southeastern Colorado. By 1880, Thompson's Two Cross Ranch stretched from the La Plata Mountains to the San Juan River in northwestern New Mexico. The Two Cross had its main summer range headquarters in the area now known as Ridges Basin, which is south and west of downtown Durango.⁷⁵ The Two Cross was managed by Thompson's nephew, George II. He had up to 12,000 head in 1884, including purebred Shorthorns and Herefords.⁷⁶

Not much is known about other cattle barons in the area, mostly because they were mobile. The Carlyles who were "...an English outfit", the Coxes and the LK-Company were large cattle companies reportedly in the Florida River region.⁷⁷ The Colorado State Business Directory from 1879 lists McCarthy and Cahill (address: "La Plata" with no state indicated) and C. B. Tison of Animas City as the only registered cattle growers.⁷⁸ Many had moved on before the onslaught of homesteaders. George Thompson left La Plata County in about 1884, as homesteading and fencing cut into his range.

The first cattlemen in the Pine River drainage were the Grimes Brothers who brought in a thousand head of cattle from Texas in 1875. Other early cattlemen were Charley Johnson (1,500 cattle and 400 horses) and Dyke and Freeman who had 1,000 head on the nearby Piedra drainage. Jim and John O'Neal and George Morrison were also in the area.

Herman Shroeder wrote in 1929 that he remembered that "Old man Cox and Sons on the lower Animas perhaps ran the biggest outfit of all, with over 2,500 head. (Jose) Perry and (Pit) West came later with about 1,200 head... The greater portion of these cattle was

⁷⁵ Gilpin, Dennis. *Animas La Plata Project Volume V*. Phoenix, Arizona: SWCA, 2007. Page 274.

⁷⁶ O'Rourke, Paul M. *Frontiers in Transition: A History of Southwestern Colorado*. Denver, Colorado: Bureau of Land Management, 1982. Page 122.

⁷⁷ Daughters of the American Revolution, Sarah Platt Decker Chapter. *Pioneers of the San Juan Country*. Reprint of Volumes I-IV in One Edition. Bountiful, Utah: Family History Publishers, 1998. Volume 2, Page 144.

⁷⁸ *Colorado State Business Directory*. Denver, Colorado: Gazetteer Publishing Company, 1879. Page 243.

driven in from eastern and northern Colorado, also from New Mexico and Texas.”⁷⁹ Shroeder also named other early Pine River cattlemen, including Y.E. Salabar, Walter Burtenrook, Bart Sease, Andy Jackson, Sam Logan and Tex Lions. The partnership of Hatcher and Dyke created the H.D. Ranch, which employed 40 cowboys in the 1880s. Their name defined an area grazed by their cattle called the H.D. Mountains.⁸⁰

Over to the west of the Pine River, the earliest cattle people to settle in La Plata County came in April of 1874. Tim and Mellie Gallegos McCluer, and Tim’s half brother David Murray, came from the Pueblo area in a wagon with the McClure’s two children and a third child expected soon. They had about 800 head of cattle, according to one report.⁸¹ They settled along the Florida River, north of present day US Highway 160, and filed on a 160 acre homestead. They were joined in October of 1874 by Columbus Evans (C.E.) Hampton, who had ventured west from Georgia to La Veta, Colorado and had been inspired by the newly available land. C.E.’s family soon followed. The Hamptons and McCluers remained on the Florida drainage for the rest of their lives.

Frank Hall’s early history of Colorado reports that other early cattle men in the Florida drainage or on the Florida Mesa were Theodore Slack, Tom Johnson and a Mr. Batholomew.⁸²

Another major cattle outfit located west of the McCluers and the Hamptons, in Wilson Gulch. The Pearson Brothers established a large (800 + acre) ranch they named Bocea. Their spread included a Denver and Rio Grande Railroad cattle loading station with the same name as their ranch—Bocea. Charles (born 1844) and John (born 1853) Pearson came from England to Denver in 1873. They worked in the Del Norte area and arrived in Silverton in 1874-1875. By 1875 the brothers were in the butchering business and by 1877 they had five meat markets in the mining towns in and around Silverton. Charles married Caroline (Carrie) Mallett on May 12, 1877 in Silverton. John married Ellen Biedler on February 26, 1879 in Silverton. John and Charles homesteaded the ranch in 1882 and built a large ranch house.

The Animas Valley can lay claim to the earliest settlers in the county, but most of those early homesteaders were farmers who raised livestock as a secondary activity. The earliest recognized specialists in raising cattle in the valley were Bally Scott, Harry Sefton, John Reid and a “Mr. Weed”.⁸³

The west side of the county saw the previously mentioned George Thompson and McCarthy and Cahill. The partnership may have been located in either La Plata, New Mexico or La Plata, Colorado. Many ranchers in New Mexico drove their stock north to

⁷⁹ Bayfield Public Library “*Bayfield Views Through Time*”. Bayfield, Colorado: Bayfield Public Library, 2000. Pages 1-6.

⁸⁰ John, Laddie. *A Brief History of Bayfield and the Pine River Valley 1877-2007*. Bayfield, Colorado: Self-Published, 2007. Page 2.

⁸¹ Hall, Frank. *History of Colorado Volumes 1-4*. Chicago: Blakely Printing Company, 1895. Volume 4, Page 173.

⁸² Ibid. Volume 4, Page 174.

⁸³ Ibid. Volume 4 Page 174.

take advantage of mountain pastures in Colorado. By 1880, when Fort Lewis had been constructed as a military fort, the beef for the soldiers was delivered from New Mexico and from ranchers in the Hay Gulch area.

In 1878, La Plata County had 4,633 cattle at a valuation of \$58,112 and 11,850 sheep worth \$11,925.⁸⁴ Livestock growers served a local market, but that market was limited. Transport was limited to sheep and cattle drives until 1881, when the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad came to Durango, providing a cheaper means of freight to a more distant market. The arrival of the railroad expanded the livestock market. Most stock was shipped to Denver and Kansas City.

Many of the open range cattlemen left to avoid the problems created by changes to the open lands. Homesteaders began settling in 1874 as soon as the land was officially open to non-Indian settlement. A newly patented barb wire fence machine made fencing material more easily available to homesteaders who were filling in the former open range. Sheep, which had been grazed for centuries in nearby New Mexico, were brought into the county. Tensions increased between the cow and sheep people, sometimes erupting in conflict over who had rights to grazing on the public lands. Unusually severe winters in 1884-1887 decimated many herds.

In 1891 the Federal Government passed the Forest Reserves Act to protect the natural resources on certain public lands from further damage. The Act empowered the President to create forest reserves in part to control grazing and, in effect, to put an end to the era of open range grazing. In 1905, federal livestock management policies came home to La Plata County when President Theodore Roosevelt signed legislation to create the San Juan Forest Reserve and four other reserves. The legislation placed more than 3.7 million acres in Southwest Colorado under Federal conservation programs.

In 1906 a grazing tax went into effect requiring 25 to 35 cents per head of cattle and five to eight cents per sheep to graze on the public reserves. The tax was not well received. Herds moved to unregulated open land, where overgrazing quickly deteriorated the once bountiful range. Another blow came with a national downward trend in meat consumption between 1908 and 1914.⁸⁵

The livestock industry changed from “ranging” to ranching in the early 1900s as the open range was severely reduced, and ranchers turned to raising feed for their stock. Short summers and severe winters in the higher elevations of La Plata County shaped typical ranching activities. Most ranchers had access to summer range in the high county and winter range at warmer, lower elevations. Livestock was moved along established stock drives. Hay and alfalfa were grown for winter feeding.

⁸⁴ *Colorado State Business Directory*. Denver, Colorado: Gazetteer Publishing Company, 1878. Page 213.

⁸⁵ O'Rourke, Paul M. *Frontiers in Transition: A History of Southwestern Colorado*. Denver, Colorado: Bureau of Land Management, 1982. Page 145.

La Plata County was apparently in need of support businesses for the livestock industry. An 1892 booster publication bemoaned the fact that over 600,000 pounds of “dirty” wool was shipped out because no company had set up a wool processing plant in the region. Another publication in 1893 announced 400,000 pounds of hides had been shipped out untreated because of the lack of tanneries in the region.

The county also had some specialty agriculture. Turkeys raised in the Allison area were freighted to other markets on the railroad between 1915 and 1950. L.E. Jenkins had a silver fox farm near Bayfield in the 1920 and 1930s. Fish Hatcheries were also developed near the mountain streams. Wash Patrick is credited with the first fish hatchery (dated approximately to 1880) located near Wits End at present day Vallecito Lake. Patrick’s fish were sold to local restaurants and also stocked the lakes and streams. Either Charles Graham or Johnny Kirkpatrick built a fish hatchery at Emerald Lake in 1894 located up-valley from the Teelawuket Ranch. Graham went on to build another hatchery in the Animas Valley.

A hatchery operated near the present day Electra Lake before the lake was created in the early 1900s. Both Graham and Patrick have been credited with working at this hatchery, which may have been the same as the one started in this general area by Thomas and Alice Hamor in 1899. Wash Patrick and his brother, Levi, constructed and operated the Colorado State Fish Hatchery located in Durango in 1902. Wash was later transferred to Denver to be the State Superintendent of Hatcheries. Another small hatchery was operated on the Hotter Ranch in the north Animas Valley in the 1920s.

Livestock values fluctuated in the first 40 years of the 1900s, reflecting the impacts of national issues such as the increased demands leading up to World War I and the Depression of the 1930s. In 1918 there were 18,421 head of range cattle and 1,801 milk cows in La Plata County versus 1,361,000 cattle within the entire state of Colorado. Sheep totaled 42,462 in the County and 2,303,000 in the state.

Table 8. Livestock Average Values In Dollars Per Head in La Plata County⁸⁶

	1914	1919	1930	1933	1935
Cattle	30.26	40.40	33.32	12.29	14.21
Sheep	2.55	11.60	5.50	2.00	3.07

During the Depression both the physical and financial condition of the livestock industry was in bad shape. The Federal Government’s response was the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934. Under the Act, the Secretary of the Interior was authorized to define grazing districts and issue permits. The public grazing lands had so deteriorated by then that

⁸⁶ Figures taken from Colorado State Board of Immigration. *Year Book of the State of Colorado 1919-1940*. Denver, Colorado: The Bradford Robinson Printing Company. 1919-1940.

many Colorado stock growers supported the act which many saw as —.their last chance against being forced out of business.”⁸⁷ Ranchers struggled through the Depression.

Across the county many agricultural cooperative associations formed during the Depression. The USDA listed 12,000 farmer cooperatives with over 3.1 million members in 1929-1930. The Colorado New Mexico Wool Growers Association was active in La Plata County with 261 memberships in 1934, and a cooperative of turkey growers developed in Allison.

Ranchers switched to trucks to transport much of their stock, beginning in the 1930s. Freight on the railroad and stock drives decreased as auto traffic increased. Livestock values increased steadily in the 1940s and early 1950s, providing a good wage for ranchers in La Plata County. Ranching continues to have a significant presence in the county. A recent assessment of agriculture in La Plata County suggests the trend after World War II has been toward producing forage crops for the local livestock industry, noting that fewer farms in the county produce food crops in 2002 than in 1945, and the number of farms with dairy cows dropped from 730 in 1945 to 55 in 2002.⁸⁸

⁸⁷O'Rourke, Paul M. *Frontiers in Transition: A History of Southwestern Colorado*. Denver, Colorado: Bureau of Land Management, 1982. Page 146.

⁸⁸ Growing Partners of Southwest Colorado. *Community Food Assessment*. Durango, Colorado: Self Published 2006. Page 3.9.

Homesteading and Water

Settlers with visions of living off the land were drawn by the opportunities presented in the Homestead and Desert Lands Acts. Enacted in 1862, the Homestead Act authorized the claims of up to 160 acres of land by any head of a family over twenty-one years of age. The homesteader paid a small registration fee and lived on the tract for five years to qualify for title to the land. A speedier process provided title to the homesteader who paid a minimum of \$1.25 per acre and resided on the land for six months.⁸⁹ While 160 acres may have been sufficient in the Midwest, the drier climate and the soils in the West demanded larger acreages for reasonably productive yields. Congress amended the act to allow for larger parcels under the 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act, and again in 1916 to allow for a full 640 acre section under the Stockraising Homestead Act.⁹⁰

The Desert Land Act of 1877 provided another mechanism to obtain western land. The act allowed a homesteader to claim 640 acres of land if the land was put under irrigation within three years. This act intended to reclaim desert lands and to provide homesteaders with family farms and ranches. Wells, or much more commonly, irrigation ditches brought water to the claims.

The act was not effectively used in La Plata County until a portion of previously Ute-owned land, nicknamed the Ute Strip, was opened for non-Indian settlement in 1899. After the opening of the 15 by 73 mile strip along the southern portions of La Plata, Archuleta, and Montezuma Counties, new settlers claimed the lands and worked to expand the ditch network.

Running for the Land: The Opening of the Ute Strip

The Ute Strip was the result of an allotment process that was established by the federal government to offer 160 acres to each head of a Ute family. They could select their land from within the reservation boundaries of 1879. If they didn't opt for an allotment by 1898, the land was put in the pool to be available on May 4, 1899.

At noon, on May 4, 1899, unallotted Ute Strip lands were opened for homesteading. Early reports indicate that there was a 'land rush' although not of the magnitude of the land rush under the Homestead Act in 1862. Settlers could either 'run' for the land, or (more sedately) file on a parcel in Durango.⁹¹ According to an early account, the 'run' for the land was staged on Main Street in Durango at 10 am. Individuals rode out of town, found their parcels, and at noon put in stakes to identify the pieces. On their return to Durango, they would file on the parcel.⁹² One future Bondad resident, 'ran' from the

⁸⁹ Ubbelohde, Carl, Maxine Benson, and Duane A. Smith. *A Colorado History*. Pruett Publishing. Eighth Ed. 2001. Page 186.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* Pages 251-252.

⁹¹ Frazier, Stella W. Early Days on the Five-Mile Mesa in *Pioneers of San Juan Country by Sarah Platt Decker Chapter, D.A.R., Durango, CO*. Colorado Springs, CO, Out West Printing and Stationery Company. 1961. Volume IV, Pages 189-192.

⁹² Mason, Lloyd B. These Changing Times in *Pioneers of San Juan Country by Sarah Platt Decker Chapter, D.A.R., Durango, CO*. Colorado Springs, CO, Out West Printing and Stationery Company. 1961. Volume IV, Pages 205-208.

New Mexico state line to claim his land just north of the state line.⁹³ As a result of the general chaos, there are reported accounts of duplicate claims where one person filed in Durango and another *Ignacio* for the land. In the Bonadad/Elco area one dispute resulted in the shooting of one of the claimants. The young daughter recounts her fear in seeing her father shot by another potential settler. This case eventually went to court and became the first claim settled by court in the county.⁹⁴

Following the initial settlement, land parcels were actively advertised and marketed.⁹⁵ In the Ignacio area, prospective settlers or speculators were encouraged to contact the Los Pinos Indian Agency Superintendent for descriptive information and brochures on available properties.⁹⁶ Land within the Ute Strip was actively bought and sold through the purchase of unclaimed land and the sale of allotments. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 ended the homestead period on the Ute Strip, by returning any land that had not been settled to the Southern Ute Indian Tribe. Previously, agricultural areas in the County had been primarily in the Pine, Florida, and Animas River valleys. With the opening of the Ute Strip, new settlement at lower elevations provided for a greater diversity of agricultural crops and new opportunities for hopeful settlers.

Figure 2, a map of Ute holdings, and illustrating the Ute Strip, is attached to the end of this document.

Water was the biggest challenge for any settler in La Plata County. Colorado's water laws were established in the state's first constitution in 1876. Unlike much of the United States where water rights were allocated to land owners bordering a river or lake, this new arid state followed a concept from California, permitting users to divert water regardless of who owned the adjacent banks. The first person to divert and use the water for a legitimate purpose received the first priority on the water. This Doctrine of Prior Appropriation remains a cornerstone of Colorado water law and was adopted in Utah, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Arizona and New Mexico.

First ditches in La Plata County are reported to have been constructed in 1877 in the Animas Valley (Hermosa area) and along the Pine River to serve small farms and the Ute Indian Agency at present day Ignacio.⁹⁷ Ditches were cooperatively maintained and were sometimes the object of conflict. Reports of disputes, injuries, and lethal violence came with water development.⁹⁸

Although water systems were developed with homesteading, there was no guarantee of consistent water delivery in predictable quantities. In 1911 a severe flood throughout

⁹³ Frazier, Stella W. *Op.Cit.* Page 189.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Durango Daily Democrat*, August 1911.

⁹⁶ *Weekly Ignacio Chieftain*, August 5, 1921.

⁹⁷ Simonds, William Joe. "The Pine River Project." Bureau of Reclamation History Program, Denver. 1994.

⁹⁸ One documented dispute is the famous Lambert-Lamb argument and subsequent murder in the Animas Valley over water diversion at Waterfall Ranch. In the Pine River area, the Wommer murder over the Wommer Ditch was reported in detail in local papers.

southwest Colorado washed out bridges, roads and ditches while in other drought years, water was insufficient.

White settlers who came to the Pine River Valley struggled with the availability and control of the river flow. The river's high spring runoffs would often give way to late summer drought. In the 1920s, the 40 to 50 ditches that diverted water directly from the Pine River and its tributaries ran dry. While the properties with the oldest water rights remained productive, several thousand acres went dry. Periodic flooding also brought disaster.

Frustrated locals turned to the federal government for help to establish dams for controlled agricultural water releases. These efforts were heightened in 1930 by a Federal Court ruling that supported Ute water claims filed in 1895. The Utes claimed senior water rights dating to the formation of the Indian reservation in 1868 under the Hunt Treaty. The court ruling prompted Congress to authorize the Pine River Project under the Appropriation Act of 1937.⁹⁹ The project's primary objective was to provide water for the 375 allotments totaling 72,970 acres along the Pine River that were owned in 1898 by the Moache and Capote Utes, but it also helped resolve irrigation issues and became a popular recreation venue.¹⁰⁰

The project was assigned to the Bureau of Reclamation. A new name –"Vallecito"– was used to avoid confusion with similarly named projects located in other states. Ironically, some of the earliest homesteaders, including the Sullivans, Deckers and Dunsworths soon realized that parts of their homesteads would end up at the bottom of the new lake that was supposed to help them with their water problems. In 1937, construction began on the dam and related facilities by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

This giant construction project offered good jobs during a time of massive unemployment in the Great Depression. People came from all around the region to work there. The Bureau of Reclamation set up a CCC camp just south of the dam site. At Vallecito, CCC Camp #BR 81, was established in May of 1939 and operated into November of 1941.¹⁰¹ The remains of the CCC camp are still evident at the Vallecito Resort, located at 13030 County Road 501.

A –"Government Camp"– was located upslope from the CCC camp where the project's Senior Construction Engineer, C.A. Burns, lived with the other administrators and engineers. The houses from the old Government Camp and the Pine River Irrigation District Office, which occupies one of the old headquarters buildings, are located across County Road 501 from the former CCC camp.

⁹⁹ Simonds, William Joe. –"The Pine River Project."– Bureau of Reclamation History Program, Denver. 1994. Page 9.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Pfaff, Christine. –"The Bureau of Reclamation and the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942."– Denver, Colorado: Department of the Interior and Bureau of Reclamation, 2000.

In 1940, the Pine River Irrigation District was formed and entered into an agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation to regulate water distribution to water users. The reservoir was filled in 1941 and Vallecito Dam was dedicated on September 14, 1941. Dottie Warlick writes in her book *Vallecito Country* that —.seven thousand people came to the dedication ceremony. The road leading to Vallecito was a big cloud of dust all day long.”¹⁰²

A parallel water management effort was initiated in the 1930s for the Florida River. This project would encounter numerous political and other problems delaying the project until the 1960s. The construction of Lemon Dam was begun in 1961 and completed in 1964.¹⁰³ Water from Lemon Dam provides water to Florida Mesa and is managed by the Florida Water Conservancy District.

Meanwhile on the west side of the county, residents had used water from the La Plata River since first settlement. In the 1880s and 1890s a few ditches were constructed, mainly in the Hesperus and Hay Gulch areas. Early settlers attempted to improve their situation with the establishment of ditches to direct water to fields. Two larger ditches in the area are the H.H. Ditch, which filed for water rights in March 1900. A second ditch, the Big Stick Ditch was filed in 1907. The colorful name was derived from Teddy Roosevelt’s motto to —Walk Softly and Carry a Big Stick”.¹⁰⁴

New farmers on the Ute Strip and the droughts from 1900 to 1904 intensified the water claims on the La Plata River. Water users located downstream of Colorado in the New Mexico Territory demanded that Colorado leave more water in the river. After years of negotiations (and the achievement of statehood for New Mexico) the La Plata River Compact was signed in 1922.¹⁰⁵ The Compact required water users in Colorado to provide stipulated water flows into New Mexico throughout the year. The already over-appropriated river can not always meet the required flows, resulting in marginal water availability on the west side of the county. Water management programs have provided a little relief to the water demand. Mormon Reservoir was constructed in 1910 to provide water storage for late season irrigation. It stores approximately 1100 acre feet of water and is a stockholder-owned project.

The most recent water management project is the Animas La Plata Project that is almost complete. The project’s pumps will fill Lake Nighthorse, south of Durango in Ridges Basin in 2009-2010. This project will provide water to Indian tribes, municipal and domestic users. Revisions to the Animas-La Plata Project removed the provisions initially included for the needed irrigation water in this area.

¹⁰² Warlick, Dottie. *Vallecito Country*. Montrose, Colorado: Western Reflections Publishing Company, 2003. Page 174.

¹⁰³ Autobee, Robert. —The Florida Project.” Bureau of Reclamation History Program, Denver. 1995.

¹⁰⁴ Paulek, Alice. The Big Stick Ditch in *The History of Southeastern La Plata County, Colorado*. Fort Lewis Mesa Reunion History Committee. 1991. Pg.L-1.

¹⁰⁵ Lile, Daries, C. Brief History of the La Plata River Compact, in *The History of Southeastern La Plata County, Colorado*. Fort Lewis Mesa Reunion History Committee. 1991. Page I-1.

The history of water and water management has always been a high priority in the arid southwest. La Plata County ranchers and farmers were historically able to rely on snowmelt and rain at the higher elevations in the county to help meet water needs. The availability of water has been one of the major factors in the development of farming and ranching.

Farming

The first farmers began planting in La Plata County in 1873, even before they could legally file in the land in 1874. Forward thinking farmers saw their future in providing food for themselves and others. Miners and the soldiers at Fort Lewis paid well for produce, providing an immediate local market.

The first farmers were a mix of second and third generation Americans and immigrants from Europe and Mexico. Hispanic settlers had been displaced by the loss of traditional land grant lands and moved north to the southern most portions of La Plata County along the west side of the Animas River.¹⁰⁶ Farmers on the county's west side attracted the Italian, Welsh and Russian coal miners who had worked the nearby coal mines as well.¹⁰⁷

An early staple crop, wheat, was introduced by Mexican settlers in the Cortez area in the early 1880s.¹⁰⁸ Ranchers needed alfalfa, so it was also one of the earliest crops grown in the county. Alfalfa improved soil nutrients and farmers soon learned to alternate alfalfa and potato crops to increase the potato yield. Oats were also produced prolifically. Other crops included hay, barley, corn, garden vegetables and fruits. The Animas Valley farmers planted apple, cherry, plum, pear, peach and apricot trees with good success. Apple trees were by far the most common. Beekeeping, in proximity to clover or alfalfa fields, was productive throughout the county.

Farmers enjoyed the same benefits of the railroad as the ranchers. The arrival of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad in 1881, and later of the Rio Grande Southern in 1890, simplified the transport of produce and provided a larger market.

Threshing machines made their debut when Herman G. Schroeder brought the first thresher to the county in November of 1877. He had one job at the old English place on the Pine River, owned at that time by Russell Bean. —These ranchers had not as yet raised enough grain in most cases to make a threshing...” Schroeder wrote in 1929. The entire Animas Valley produced barely 5,000 bushels. —B Lamb and Pete Archdeacon of the Home Ranch had the big job of 1,700 bushels. The price of grain that season went from \$3 to \$5 per hundred....”¹⁰⁹

In the early 1900s the few farmers who had horse-powered machines would provide their services to nearby farms. As farming equipment became more mechanized, farmers began to purchase their own equipment. The first Caterpillar on the Florida Mesa was owned by F.D. Pastorius. The tractor gave immediate relief to the monotonous, back

¹⁰⁶ Wilson, Chris and David Kammer. *La Tierra Amarilla: Its History, Architecture, and Cultural Landscape*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1989. Pgs. 12-14.

¹⁰⁷ Excerpts of various family histories in: Fort Lewis Mesa Reunion History Committee. *Pioneers of Southwest La Plata County, Colorado*. Bountiful, Utah: Family History Publishers, 1994.

¹⁰⁸ O'Rourke, Paul M. *Frontiers in Transition: A History of Southwestern Colorado*. Denver, Colorado: Bureau of Land Management, 1982. Page 131.

¹⁰⁹ Bayfield Public Library. —Bayfield Views Through Time”. Bayfield, Colorado: Bayfield Public Library, 2000. Page 2.

breaking manual clearing of the land. It was used —.to pull up sagebrush and pull cedar and pinon trees scattered over the mesa.”, remembered an old time Florida Mesa settler.¹¹⁰ Gasoline powered tractors began to appear around 1915. La Plata County had five farm tractors in 1919, a number that grew steadily to 27 tractors in 1921 and then dropped back to 10 in 1922. By 1930 the tractor population was up to 30. Automation and post World War II prosperity boosted the number to 957 tractors by 1954.¹¹¹

By 1900 there were 297 farms encompassing a little over 60,000 acres in the county. Most of the early farms reflected the 160 acre allotment of the Homestead Act, with numbers and sizes of farms growing over time as more property was acquired.

Table 9. Farms and Farm Sizes in La Plata County 1920 to 1959¹¹²

Year	Number of Farms	Average Farm Acreage
1920	649	204
1930	1,161	309
1940	1,042	356
1950	902	1,034*
1959	677	992

* This number is questionable. The 1945 average acreage was 640. The 1954 average acreage was 650.

Colorado ranchers and farmers saw their produce prices bloom in the years leading up to World War I encouraging them to expand their holdings. Prices plummeted after the war, but slowly were recovering until the stock market crashed in 1929. The financial decline had only a small effect in 1930, but by 1932, statewide farm income was down to \$82 million from \$213 million in 1929. The farmers who could afford to expanded their holdings and produced more crops during the Depression in an attempt to mitigate the much lower prices their crops brought.

Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal initiatives provided some relief. A Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp, located near Kline, helped with soil conservation, erosion control measures, fence building and stock corral building projects. The CCC program aimed to employ as many young men as possible in community betterment projects that also provided the enrollees a sense of accomplishment in such desperate times. It was wildly successful. Over 250,000 young men were put to work across the country in the first three months and the program lasted up until World War II. Enrollees lived in camps where they received room, board and some education as well as vocational training. Each

¹¹⁰ Daughters of the American Revolution, Sarah Platt Decker Chapter. *Pioneers of the San Juan Country*. Reprint of Volumes I-IV in One Edition. Bountiful, Utah: Family History Publishers, 1998. Volume 4, Page 203.

¹¹¹ Figures are taken from the agriculture charts in Colorado State Board of Immigration. *Year Book of the State of Colorado 1919-1940* and Colorado State Planning Commission. *Year Book of the State of Colorado 1941-1956*. Denver, Colorado: The Bradford Robinson Printing Company. 1919-1956.

¹¹² Ibid.

man made \$30 a month, of which \$25 was sent to their families. The CCC boys also provided extra partners for the local girls at dances at the Breen Hall!

The Rural Electrification Administration (REA) was another New Deal program that eventually brought electricity to rural La Plata County. Created in 1935, the REA's goals were twofold: first, to create jobs for installing electrical lines and facilities and second, to improve the quality of farm life. The REA reorganized under the Department of Agriculture in 1939 where it provided loans to non-profit cooperatives to extend electric service.

In 1935, one out of every nine farm homes in Colorado had electricity. By 1940, the number was up to one of every four. In 1939 the La Plata Electric Association (LPEA) was formed. The association obtained REA loans and constructed 188 miles of line to serve 350 people. By 1947, LPEA had received \$786,000 in loans from the REA, constructed 282 miles of line and served 1,035 customers.

World War II affected local growers in many ways. Pine River Valley ranchers Roberta and Bob Barr decided to sell their herd because they expected Bob to be drafted into the army and Roberta could not handle the full ranching responsibility herself. They could not afford to buy their herd back and ended up working in the beekeeping business for the rest of Bob's career. Their major client was Sue Bee Honey, who would send in a truck to pick up the honey.

The rise in commodity prices after World War II brought a boom to the farmers who had been producing on a larger scale during the Depression. The post World War II years clearly saw extensive expansion in farming, but severe drought in La Plata County in the 1950s affected the livestock and the agriculture industry. The average annual precipitation in the county from 1892 to 1956 was 18.98 inches. In 1956, the area received only 10.19 inches of precipitation. The previously mentioned La Plata River Compact of 1922 and the resulting loss of late season irrigation also caused farmers on the west side to gradually grow less wheat and more dry land crops such as beans. Demand for beef and produce remained high after the war and, after the drought of the mid 1950s most farmers and ranchers enjoyed prosperity into the 1960s.

Table 10. Irrigated Acreages in La Plata County 1889-1939¹¹³

Year	Acreage
1889	11,785
1899	10,771
1909	40,840
1919	63,755
1929	94,532
1939	75,218

¹¹³ O'Rourke, Paul M. *Frontiers in Transition: A History of Southwestern Colorado*. Denver, Colorado: Bureau of Land Management, 1982. Page 136.

According to a La Plata County Planning Department report on agriculture from 2008, the County has produced over 17 million bushels of wheat since 1929. That wheat provides a great market for flour mills. The first mill was constructed by William Chubbock and Company. Other mills quickly followed. C.E. Dudley had a mill on his property near Hermosa by 1877. Thomas Kerr also had a mill in the Hermosa area. Thomas Graden had a large flour mill located on the site of the present Doubletree Hotel at the intersection of US Highways 160 and 550 in Durango. A flour mill was also located in Allison. Bob Taylor built the Long Hollow Flour Mill in 1924 on a site located south of Marvel—a town named for the Marvel Midget Flour Mill that once operated in the town. Taylor's Long Hollow Mill is still owned and operated by the Taylor family under the name Blue Horizons Mill. Most flour was ground from local wheat and provided to the local market. The Long Hollow Mill provided white flour as far away as the trading posts on the Navajo Reservation.

The mill was a social hub of the farmers coming and going with their wheat. Other rural organizations also had that sense of community. Pioneer Allison citizen, Georgeanna _Georgie_ Etheridge, described her home town as a place —.where people still believe in helping others when help is needed.”¹¹⁴ That was the spirit of rural community organizations like the grange.

The grange is America's oldest national agricultural organization.¹¹⁵ It formed in 1867 in Washington D.C. to provide economic assistance to Midwestern and eastern farmers, who were struggling after the Civil War with agricultural production, high shipping prices and general survival on their farms. The grange provided a voice for farmers and helped them to negotiate bank loans, insurance, and reduced shipping costs.

The grange organization began in Colorado in 1873, three years prior to statehood.¹¹⁶ With assistance from grange organizers from Nebraska, 22 granges were chartered in 1873. The first state grange was Ceres Grange No. 1 (in the Denver area), formed on February 8, 1873. Others were formed in Greeley, Arvada, Boulder, Pella (Hygiene), and Fort Lupton.¹¹⁷ On January 28, 1874 in Denver, the State Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry was formed and Colorado became the 23rd state to establish the state-wide grange. All individual granges adopted charters and were known as Subordinate Granges. Granges were assigned sequential numbers as they were formed. At the end of 1873 there were 783 members and by the start of 1875, there were 1,625 members.¹¹⁸ A total of 492 Subordinate Granges were established in Colorado.

¹¹⁴Etheridge, Georgeanna. Allison: The Neighborly Town, in *Pioneers of San Juan Country* by Sarah Platt Decker Chapter, D.A.R., Durango, CO. Colorado Springs, CO, Out West Printing and Stationery Company. 1961. Volume IV, Page 212.

¹¹⁵ National Grange website, accessed May 12, 2009.

¹¹⁶ Colorado State Grange, *Colorado State Grange History: 1874 to 1975*. North Suburban Printing, Westminster, CO. 1975. Page 7.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* Page 11

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* Page 13.

The individual granges were built around local rural communities, often meeting in rural schools, churches, or other community buildings until they were able to construct a hall. Meetings were for members, but many community-wide events were also held. The grange elected local officers and was set up on a fraternal basis to provide mutual benefits to the members. Membership included men, women and youth over 14. In the 1930s, the State Grange established Juvenile Granges (now called Junior Granges) for those between 5 and 14 years. At that time, a Women's Work Committee was established to promote women's activities. The 1940s were the decade of greatest growth and prosperity of the granges as members were involved in assisting the war effort with food production for the military troops.¹¹⁹ During the 1950s and 1960s, state memberships declined, but membership remained remarkably high considering the number of farms declined by 7,000 over the previous 50 years, and 800,000 agricultural acres were converted to recreation, urban and highway usage during the period.¹²⁰

Sixteen granges were established in La Plata County. The first grange in the county was Animas Valley Grange No. 194, established in Hermosa on April 1, 1911. The Grange is still active today. Active granges in the County are listed in Table 11.



Photograph 4. The Animas Valley Grange was created in 1911 and still operates in this grange hall on County Road 203.

The La Plata Pomona Grange No. 10 was established on June 22, 1929. This grange included the Animas Valley, Pine River, Florida Mesa, Eureka, Mt. Allison, Breen, Marvel, and Oxford Granges, and the Piedra Grange in Archuleta County. The Pomona Grange dealt with many familiar issues such as road maintenance, mosquito control, shipping costs, certification of produce such as potatoes and turkeys, and charitable aid for the needy. The La Plata Pomona Grange was active in the 1976 Centennial

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* Page 24.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* Page 27.

celebrations. Grange members continue to exemplify the neighborliness that was so necessary to early life in La Plata County.

Table 11. Granges in La Plata County

Grange Name	Grange Number	Date Established	Comments
Animas Valley	194	4/1/1911	70 members; Hall completed in 1917
Oxford *	196	4/28/1911	
Pine River	197	4/29/1911	24 members; Bought Woodmen of the World Hall in Bayfield
Ignacio *	198	5/6/1911	
Florida Mesa	306	11/22/1916	66 members; First hall purchased in 1917 from Perino family
Pine Cone Valley *	307	11/24/1916	Ignacio area
Mt. Allison	308	12/8/1916	36 members; Hall completed 1920
KilKare *	309	12/9/1916	Oxford area
Kline *	310	12/14/1916	
Eureka *	311	12/4/1916	62 members; Originally located at Sunnyside School
Morrison *	312	12/16/1916	Ignacio area
Redmesa *	313	12/18/1916	
Breen	318	1/14/1917	Marvel Grange prior to 1940
Big Stick *	319	1/20/1917	Breen area
Marvel	479	4/1/1957	Met in old Kline School
Oxford	482	12/30/1957	18 members; New Grange Hall/fire station in 2005

* Dormant

Comments from: Colorado State Grange, *Colorado State grange History: 1874 to 1975*. North Suburban Printing, Westminster, CO. 1975.

The earliest farming towns, Hermosa and Animas City were established by 1878 and catered to local needs. These two towns are discussed in detail in the First Miners and Settlers Section of this document. Other farming supply towns took advantage of proximity to the railroad and were developed next to railroad sidings. These towns include Allison, Tiffany, Oxford and Falfa, which are discussed in detail in the Railroad Section of the document. The following discussion describes agriculturally oriented towns that were far from the railroad, such as Breen, Kline, Marvel, Redmesa and Bayfield. Other small farming communities located near a rail route that were established before the railroad's coming are also described, including Elco/Bondad, Sunnyside and La Posta.

Breen was never a formally platted town. In fact, it appears to have been located in more than two locations. Dr. Thomas H. Breen was a medical doctor who served as the Superintendent of the Fort Lewis Indian School from 1894 to 1903. Thomas's wife, Bessie W. Breen, was appointed the postmistress from 1901 to 1903 at a new post office named Breen, located just south of the school buildings. The post office moved two miles south to the Aspaas farm in about 1907. Mrs. Aspaas became the postmistress in 1907 and passed the duty on to her nephew Knute Johnson, in 1921. A regional 1911 business directory notes Postmistress Aspaas and lists about 100 people living within the Breen post office area. In the early 1930s the Breen Mercantile opened for business a few miles south of the Aspaas place, near the intersection of State Highway 141 and County Road 140. A grange and dance hall soon followed. Knute moved the post office to this —~~new~~ Breen, where it operated until November 30, 1954. The little settlement was a center for dances and social activities. A community building remains at Breen, but the post office and store closed.

Kline and Redmesa had strong Mormon roots in their settlements. Kline's settlement is attributed to Mormon pioneers who came mostly from Arizona. The name of Kline is thought to have been one of the early settlers. John Eaton divided a 160 acre parcel into the townsite and recorded the plat on July 8, 1908. Many of the future townspeople had already arrived. The post office had been established in 1904. In the same year a log Mormon Church had been constructed. (It was replaced by a frame building and then by a red brick church in the 1920s.) Hanford Miller opened a store in Kline in 1906. By 1911 about sixty people were living in or near the town. The town never grew much beyond that size. When the Kline Ward of the Mormon Church was merged with the Redmesa Ward in 1955 the old church property was sold to Durango School District 9R for a new elementary school, which is now a central building in the community. The old church building was bought by another denomination.

Miller's Kline Store was successful, so he decided to move south to build a newer and bigger store with a new post office location. The new —~~Kline~~ post office was now closer to another fledgling community to be called Marvel. Platted by Hanford's brother, Ray Miller, on April 28, 1916 the new town was named for the Marvel Midget, a flour mill in operation on the site that is now occupied by the Marvel Grange. The Millers donated land for the cemetery and the school. School was held in the Methodist Church in Church Hollow until the new school was built in 1916. The Methodist Church moved into town in 1919.

Marvel was prosperous with three stores, the Marvel State Bank, a shoe repair shop, an auto garage, a blacksmith shop, a photographer's studio and a doctor's office. The community doctor was C.D. Smith who moved to Marvel in 1922 and practiced until his death in 1936. For fun there was a dance hall, a pool hall and an ice cream store. The phone system, a community project, had a single wire line attached to fences and posts. No switchboard was needed for the single line, but later a switch board was operated in the former bank building. The line was upgraded when electrical power came to Marvel in 1940. The Marvel State Bank was opened by Michael Lester in approximately 1919.

Lester was, conveniently, also the town's undertaker. It is not clear exactly when the Bank closed, but it appears the Lesters moved to Durango in the 1930s and the bank probably closed during the Depression.

Marvel suffered from the Depression and from the lack of irrigation water for the local farmers. Farming production dropped. The location of State Highway 140 to the west of the townsite was the final blow for the town that is now a small residential community.

Redmesa was established in 1907 by Mormon settlers, many of whom were from nearby Mancos. Hyrum Taylor built the original Mesa Mercantile. The store had gas pumps, the post office, a cream station, an ice house, a wool storage room, a safe for Indian pawn and a grain room. Navajos often camped by the store, which burned in 1931. The Mormon Church organized a ward in 1908. In 1924 the Long Hollow Mill was built south of Redmesa providing jobs and a hub of activity for the region. The Mormon Church burned down in 1951 and was replaced by the current structure in 1958. Plagued with the same difficulties as Marvel, Redmesa never grew beyond its peak in the late 1920s. The lack of water and the switch to dryland crops, such as pinto beans, reduced the flour production at the mill. Redmesa's post office closed in 1955.

On the Pine River, the land that would later become Bayfield was originally homesteaded by George Morrison who ranched and ran cattle on the land. The land was sold to the Bay family in 1894. In 1898, the Bays donated 80 acres of the land to create the town. The Schiller family also donated land for the town (land that was first homesteaded by Walsh Keith in 1879). By the flip of a coin, the town was named Bayfield.

The new town was a small ranching community serving local farmers and ranches. The Calvary Presbyterian Church was one of the first community structures and was dedicated in June 1900. The post office, originally established four miles north at Pine River, was relocated to Bayfield in 1899. Other community buildings and services included a flour mill, a school, general store, the Pine River Cemetery, a creamery, a hotel, drugstore, livery barn, Free Methodist and Union Churches, a newspaper, the *Bayfield Blade*, and later The Pearl Theater. Bayfield was incorporated in 1906 and provided community services to rural residents in the Pine River Valley, both north to the future Vallecito area and south to Ignacio.¹²¹

Elco was an isolated area located about 24 miles south of present day Durango, on the west bank of the Animas River. A few ranches served as unofficial stops along the stage route between Durango and the Aztec Farmington area. The first non-native settlement began with the opening of the Ute lands in 1899. Sadly, in 1901, the first young child had been buried in what would become the Elco Cemetery. The Elco School opened in 1903. John Frazier, the son of Civil War veteran and homesteader James Frazier, was the first teacher. A post office was operating by 1905, when the rail line between Farmington and Durango was constructed on the east side of the Animas River. The rail

¹²¹ Additional information for Bayfield are 1) Early Residents of Pine River Valley, Anna Lois Tubbs Wilmer, ed., Pine River Public Library, 1999; and 2) Laddie E. John, *Bayfield and The Pine River Valley: 1880-1960*. Arcadia Publishing, Chicago. 2002.

stop on the east side of the river hastened the development of a bridge at Twin Crossing (a double ford of the Animas River) and the establishment of a new station called Bondad on the east side of the river.

Although the origin of the name Bondad is somewhat uncertain, the Bonds family members were influential early residents in the area and the name may be associated with that family. The descendants of the first family of Bonds homesteaders still live in the area. In the 1930s, a rural store was established at Bondad along the highway. The remains of the little settlement of Elco are approximately a half mile to the west.

Early homesteading families to the Elco/Bondad area included the Fraziers, Oscar Gibson, Andersons, Wyatts, Bonds, McCulloch and Rhodes. One early account describes the cattle drives through the area to the upper areas of the Animas Valley by two ‘little cowgirls’. These young ladies were Annie and Mayme Williams who lived on the Boyce Ranch with their grandmother Mrs. Mary Boyce and their Uncle Bill May. The group would drive their cattle up to the Rockwood area for summer pasture with the girls wrangling cows and Mrs. Boyce driving the camp wagon. On one trip, the horses spooked and ran away with Mrs. Boyce and the wagon. Annie Williams took off and jumped on the runaway horses saving her Grandmother from certain injury by careening off a cliff! Annie went on to marry Tony Lechner, of the Rockwood area, and wrangle cows for many years.¹²²

The Sunnyside area was settled with the opening of the Ute Strip. Prior to the railroad, early pioneering families had settled the western edge of Florida Mesa and the area off the mesa down along the river. The farmers met in the school house for functions and established a Eureka Grange No. 311 in December 1916. The farm families traded produce and services and traveled to Durango as needed.

Pioneer Alva Short was instrumental in starting a school district. Early school teacher, Lavenia McCoy, describes Sunnyside School as two rooms with students that attended all eight grades and the first two years of high school. She remembers that students were good readers and she had to continually request more books from the superintendent.¹²³ Merl Short remembers attending high school in Durango and traveling on the Cannonball Stage to go to school. His mother paid 10 cents for travel each way.¹²⁴

The settlement of La Posta began in the late 1890s as a result of the land allotments made to Ute tribal members. Ute allotments were filed in 1897 and 1898 in the La Posta area along the west side of the Animas River and near the stage route connecting Durango to Aztec, New Mexico. The concentration of Ute allotments along this river route attracted

¹²² Rhodes, Edith, “Bondad” in *Pioneers of San Juan Country* by Sarah Platt Decker Chapter, D.A.R., Durango, CO. Colorado Springs, CO, Out West Printing and Stationery Company. 1961. Volume IV, Pages 180-185.

¹²³ Lavenia McCoy, Sunnyside Mesa Memories panel, April 22, 2009.

¹²⁴ Myrl Short, *Ibid.*

wage farm labor from Hispanos who were moving north into the southern portions of La Plata County seeking work.¹²⁵

The settlement quickly became the major stage stop along the southern route to Aztec. Hispanos farmed the allotments and raised goats. By 1900, four Hispanic families had settled in the area including the Rendon, Pallan, Vigil and Sanchez families. Travel and commerce moved through La Posta and the community was growing. In 1900, Maria Antonia Head Tucson Vasquez (a woman descended from Ute Tribal leaders who had married into a Hispanic family), provided her allotment land for a school. The school was constructed of upright cedar posts packed and covered with adobe and served about 30 children. In 1901 Mrs. Effie Bryce, a bilingual widow with three small children, became the first school teacher at La Posta. The family lived in the teacherage that was attached to the back of the adobe school. Mrs. Bryce earned the mighty sum of \$40 per month and, her daughter Mary reports, they loved living at La Posta.

In 1901, there were about 175 people living in the settlement and St Joseph's Catholic Church was constructed as a mission church from St. Columba Church in Durango. A small cemetery located next to the church is still in use. In 1905, a post office was established at La Posta and named Castelar. The first postmaster was Oscar Gibson, an 1899 homesteader who lived next door to the post office. Interestingly, mail was delivered to Sunnyside farms on the east side of the river via a pulley and can system when the river was too high to ford.

The new Durango to Farmington rail line bypassed La Posta. Without bridges across the river, activity slowed. The post office moved across the river to the Sunnyside area, but continued to bear the same name until it closed in 1912 and mail service was consolidated at the nearest stations at Falfa, Oxford, and Durango. A flood destroyed the school. A new adobe school was constructed on Vasquez land further away from the river, was replaced in 1935 by a brick school that is now a residence. In the 1920s, La Posta had a store to service the community and the few travelers that passed along the west bank route. The Catholic Church provided services until it collapsed in the 1960s.

¹²⁵Wilson, Chris and David Kammer. *La Tierra Amarilla: Its History, Architecture, and Cultural Landscape*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1989. Pgs. 12-14.

Timber

The early settlers all needed lumber. Mining shaft timbers, building lumber, railroad ties, water tanks and bridges all created a hearty demand for milled wood. The first sawmill, brought in by the firm of Scott, Earl and Cooper in 1876, served the first mining activities in La Plata Canyon. The enterprising threesome reportedly brought the equipment from Pueblo via Farmington using an ox team.¹²⁶ In a curiously parallel story, old timer Andy Chitwood remembered that a sawmill had been set up in Animas City by “Scott, Ely and Cooper” in the late 1870s.¹²⁷ William Chubbuch and Company brought in a second mill. Soldiers at Fort Lewis installed a sawmill soon after their arrival at the planned fort site south of Hesperus in 1880.

Throughout the West, new settlers and developers took ample advantage of the stands of timber on public land. The resulting growing desecration of the forests inspired Congress to pass the Forest Reserves Act in 1891. The act empowered the President to withdraw designated lands from the public domain. The withdrawn lands, called reserves, could then be managed to protect their natural resources, including timber and grasses. In 1905 President Theodore Roosevelt signed legislation to create the San Juan Forest Reserve and four other reserves. The legislation placed more than 3.7 million acres in Southwest Colorado under Federal conservation programs.

Even with new regulations, plentiful available timber attracted outside interests, bent on creating a lumber industry to serve markets beyond southwestern Colorado. Most of the larger scale timber harvesting occurred to the east and west of La Plata County. The forests along the New Mexico-Colorado border, near Pagosa Springs, drew entrepreneurs such as Edgar Biggs and A. T. Sullenberger in the mid 1890s. Following the route of the Rio Grande Southern Railroad, Biggs moved west to the Dolores area in the early 1900s, where his partners, C.D. McPhee and J.J. McGinnity eventually built a large logging operation. The McPhee operation was the largest producer in Colorado for a short time in the 1920s.

Small scale sawmills serving local markets characterized most La Plata County operations. These businesses had few reporting requirements so it is difficult to determine the size and scope of the timber industry from historical records. In its January 3, 1901 summary of businesses in La Plata County in the previous year, the *Durango Herald* reported that the timber industry employed 50 men with an aggregate payroll of \$86,000, placing the industry fourth in prominence behind the smelter, coal mining and the railroads.

La Plata County’s actual reported production was among the lowest in the state. In the 1920s, the National Forest Service provided an annual summary of lumber production from the National Forests of Colorado in the annually published Colorado Year Book

¹²⁶ Hall, Frank. *History of Colorado Volumes 1-4*. Chicago: Blakely Printing Company, 1895. Page 174 of Volume 4.

¹²⁷ Daughters of the American Revolution, Sarah Platt Decker Chapter. *Pioneers of the San Juan Country*. Reprint of Volumes I-IV. Bountiful, Utah: Family History Publishers, 1998. Page 102 of Volume 2.

(State of Colorado, publisher). In the years 1922-1924, when specific figures were provided in the Year Books, The San Juan National Forest had four operating sawmills employing 40 people.

One of the county's prominent early businessmen, Thomas C. Graden, constructed a sawmill near Rockwood in 1881 to sell timber to the new Denver and Rio Grande Railroad.¹²⁸ Graden followed this venture with other mills including the Falls Creek Mill, the Deep Creek Mill in the Lightner Creek drainage, and one in the Pine River drainage. Other sawmills served the local market and were located throughout the county. Many of the small scale lumber mills would locate near a stand of timber and then move to a new location when the immediate supply was exhausted. Some timber was shipped out on the railroad, but not as much as was used locally.

The industry grew in the 1940's via the development of the Weidman Sawmill located just south of the city on the road now known as Sawmill Road. John Weidman came from Michigan, where he had learned the lumber business. The Weidman Sawmill was the principal processor of harvested timber in the 1950s. In 1959 the United States Forest Service reported that the San Juan National Forest produced 54.5 million board feet of commercial timber, primarily spruce and mostly cut at Weidman's.

When the Denver and Rio Grande Western abandoned service from Durango to Chama, New Mexico in 1967, Weidman lost his most economical form of transporting the lumber. He sold his mill in 1969. The mill operated into the 1970s.

¹²⁸ Daughters of the American Revolution, Sarah Platt Decker Chapter. *Pioneers of the San Juan Country*. Reprint of Volumes I-IV. Bountiful, Utah: Family History Publishers, 1998. Page 79 of Volume 2.

Oil and Gas

Petroleum products and natural gas were mostly curiosities to the early La Plata County settlers. A gas manufactured from heated coal provided the first practical uses for lighting and cooking, but the high cost of production and distribution limited its use to wealthy urban areas. The first Colorado gasworks was established in Denver in 1869. Four other Colorado communities had gasworks by 1881. Durango's first street lights and some of the homes on East Third Avenue are known to have had gas lighting, but they were quickly replaced by electricity when the county's first electric plant opened in Durango in 1887. The exact location of the gas works in Durango is unknown, but it is possible that the gas was manufactured as part of the coking operations at the San Juan Smelter.

Drilling for either gas or oil required knowledge, machinery and money. Many early drilling prospects hit their target, but were unable to develop the find. In the 1890s a group of local businessmen and geologist Arthur Lake drilled and discovered an oil and gas deposit, establishing the first such find in La Plata County. Their efforts did not spur a rush, and very little sporadic drilling occurred in the county in the following 30 years. In 1910 a gas well on the B.W. Ritter Ranch near Bayfield provided gas and water for the Ranch. Efforts in Long Hollow produced oil in the mid 1920s and 1930s, but the wells were never developed. Natural gas was definitely available. Old timers describe gas seeps north of Bayfield. One location north of Highway 160 near Bayfield was said to have fueled warming fires for ice skaters years ago.

La Plata County has large natural gas reserves, which had little value in those early days. Gas was usually burned off if encountered while drilling for petroleum. The demand changed in the 1920s when the modern seamless steel pipe was developed. The strength of this new pipe, which could be welded into long sections, allowed gas to be carried under higher pressures and in greater quantities. For the first time, natural gas transportation was profitable.

In 1921, the Hope Engineering Company through its subsidiary, the Mesa Grande Gas Company, discovered a huge natural gas source at the Ute Dome in northern New Mexico. Hope Engineering built a pipeline from Ute Dome to Durango in 1928 and in 1929 created a second subsidiary, the Durango Natural Gas Company, to manage the line and the gas distribution. The west side of La Plata County received natural gas in 1930 through a line to Fort Lewis, which was located south of Hesperus.

Natural gas development occurred as the coal mining industry was suffering the beginnings of a long decline. As natural gas cut into the coal market and the economic setbacks of the Depression hit the consumer, the local coal and gas suppliers engaged in a very public battle in La Plata County. Coal miners formed the San Juan Coal Producers Association to promote their fuel. Both the Coal Producers and the Durango Natural Gas Company placed regular ads in the local papers extolling the virtues of their products. Bit by bit, the coal companies lost to the gas supplier as large entities such as the Durango Public Schools converted to gas, followed by the Western Colorado Power Company Power Plant.

The Southern Union Gas Company made a second significant find in 1945 at the Barker Dome in northern New Mexico and southern La Plata County. The Stanolind Oil and Gas Company (Standard Oil of Indiana) soon followed with a major find on Southern Ute Lands with their ~~Ute~~ Indian No. 1" well that had potential to produce 15 million cubic feet of gas per day.¹²⁹ The Ignacio-Blanco fields became the largest producers in Colorado. The gas rush of the 1950s employed conventional gas wells, extracting gas and oil from sandstone formations such as the Mesa Verde and Dakota between 3,500 and 10,000 feet below the ground.

Pipeline construction firms and companies seeking the next big strike poured into the region. In 1953, the Pacific Northwest Pipeline Corporation (ironically located in Houston) announced plans to build a pipeline to California and to develop a large corporate headquarters in Durango. A 1956 *Durango Herald News* feature on the oil and gas industry named 16 nationally known oil production firms with offices in Durango. That same year the Federal Power Commission approved a natural gas transmission line proposed to connect the San Juan Basin to the Pacific Northwest. Geologists, engineers, drilling experts and professional administrators moved to La Plata County. Over 800 new homes were built between 1955 and 1960, mostly in Durango.

The sudden influx of well-paid college educated outsiders brought changes and challenges to the county. Duane Smith provides an interesting description of the ~~“culture~~ “culture clash” between the new people and the old timers. ~~“They~~ “They created an immediate impact, sending ripples throughout the community. ...Unlike the smelter, which employed mostly locals at prevailing wages, the oil companies hired at wages paid elsewhere and brought in large staffs.”¹³⁰ Some believe the newcomers with a higher income level instigated the trend to high real estate prices in much of La Plata County.

Progressive oil people on Durango's City Council raised the ire of some but also helped bring about paved streets, an improved golf course, a city recreation director and a mosquito control district. The oil people were almost exclusively white men. The Petrol Club, an organization of oilmen's wives supported social and cultural causes including creation of the Mercy Hospital Auxiliary in 1959.

The boom was short lived. After five years of investigation and speculation and no new strikes, the oil companies sent their professionals to promising fields in Wyoming and Nebraska. Gulf Oil Company started the trend in 1956 when they cut their La Plata County based exploration forces in half. In addition, the Northwest Pipeline Corporation plans to move a headquarters to Durango never came to fruition. In 1961 Shell moved their offices from Durango to Farmington, New Mexico. While field operations continued, the influx of well paid professionals was over by the mid 1960s.

¹²⁹ Scaemhorn, Lee. *High Altitude Energy*. Boulder, Colorado:University Press of Colorado, 2002. Page 133.

¹³⁰ Smith, Duane A. *Rocky Mountain Boomtown, A History of Durango, Colorado*. Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company. 1983. Page 171.

Another series of gas wells was initiated in the 1970s. These coalbed gas wells generally range from 1,000 to 4,000 feet deep and extract gas from coal-bearing formations, primarily the Fruitland formation. While the gas wells of the 1950s produced mostly ~~dry~~ "dry" gas that contained little to no liquid petroleum and required minimal processing, gas from the coalbed wells is processed to remove liquids. Consequently an additional natural gas-related industry of processing plants was established in La Plata County.

Transportation



In the early 1950s, travelers on U.S. Highway 160 West passed under this Rio Grande Southern trestle near Lightner Creek.



The same view today. Historic photograph from the La Plata County Historical Society Animas Museum Photo Archives

Railroads

Frank Hall wrote in his 1895 *History of Colorado* —. All railroads and highways of every sort from the mines..... lead downhill to Durango.”¹³¹ By the end of the 1800s, La Plata County was a railroad hub, with as many as three major routes coming into Durango amidst the constant rumors of new lines.

It started with the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad (D&RG). Founded in 1870 by General William Jackson Palmer, the company’s ultimate destination was Mexico. Palmer chose to use the three foot wide narrow gauge as opposed to standard gauge, which is defined by the four foot eight and a half inch separation used on the Transcontinental Railroad. Palmer’s narrow gauge was the first such width in Colorado. It was cheaper to build and well suited to rough terrain. Narrow gauge rails weighed considerably less than standard gauge, and the locomotives and rolling stock were also lighter and smaller.

Construction from Denver started out pretty smoothly until the railroad reached Pueblo. South of Pueblo, the D &RG and the Santa Fe Railroads launched into a nasty battle over rights of ways and routes. As a result of the wranglings, the D&RG reached Antonito (near the New Mexico state line) in 1880 with court imposed limitations on where and when the railroad could go. In the mean time, the promising strikes of silver in the San Juan Mountains suggested a potentially profitable western detour. The D&RG headed west, constructing the San Juan Extension with the final objective of reaching Silverton.

The route passed through Chama, New Mexico and headed west toward the Animas River, which would provide a difficult but navigable route north to Silverton. Typical of its previous operations, the railroad company eschewed developing its facilities in the existing community of Animas City and aimed for their own property on the banks of the Animas River, to be developed into the townsite of Durango.

The railroad arrived at the new town of Durango in August of 1881. It pushed on to Silverton reaching the town in July of 1882. The last 45 miles of rail between Durango and Silverton came from the Colorado Coal and Iron Company, another of General Palmer’s commercial ventures. They were the first rails laid in Colorado to have been manufactured in the state. Construction of the arduous last segment came at great cost-up to \$1,000 a foot- in the area near Rockwood.

The San Juan Extension ended in Silverton, leaving others to build the small railroads to reach the mining camps. Former toll road operator and entrepreneur, Otto Mears, took advantage of the situation and built a number of the mining railroads.

Mears had a knack for identifying missing links. In 1889, he created the Rio Grande Southern Railroad (RGS) to provide a connection between Ridgeway and Durango via

¹³¹ Hall, Frank. *History of Colorado Volumes 1-4*. Chicago: Blakely Printing Company, 1895. Volume 3, Page 177.

Telluride, Rico and Dolores. With work underway in April of 1890 at each end of the line, Mears completed the line by 1891, and the first through train traveled the tracks on January 2, 1892. The January 28, 1892 edition of the *Pagosa Springs Sun* reported that "The passenger rate on the Rio Grande Southern is ten cents per mile on the whole length of the road. Otto Mears says he will extend the line to Cortez next year." A segment from Durango to the Porter Coal Mine began operating December 1, 1890, providing an immediate revenue stream from hauling coal. For a short time, the RGS boomed. As many as 20 freight trains a day ran on parts of the line. But Mears could not have had worse timing. The devastating economic depression of 1893 pushed the company into bankruptcy. It was purchased by the D&RG and operated as a subsidiary of that company.

The RGS continued under the D&RG, providing needed freight and passenger service through the rugged mountains. Hard times often inspire innovation and such was the case with the RGS. When the economic depression of the 1930s reduced the line's regular revenues, management rescheduled their federal postal contract (the most lucrative and consistent work at the time) and devised a new small vehicle to carry both mail and the dwindling numbers of passengers who could afford a ticket. The new vehicle, known as the Galloping Goose, was a gas powered rail bus that rattled down the tracks from 1931 until the railroad closed down in 1951. Seven of the contraptions ran on the rails and the RGS built an eighth for the San Cristobal Railroad.¹³²

In 1905, the D&RG built the Farmington Branch between Durango and Farmington. The branch was the result of an ongoing battle to access the coal deposits around Durango and Hesperus. Three competing interests were strategizing on a railroad to transport La Plata County coal to points south.¹³³ The interested parties included the Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, the Southern Pacific Railroad, and the newly incorporated Colorado & Gulf Railway, a Durango community development effort lead by Charles McConnell. Each group wanted to develop a railroad to access the southern areas for transport and supplies. Initial surveys in 1901 explored various routes, including the La Plata River drainage, the Animas River drainage, and east/west connections through Lightner Creek and Wildcat Canyons. The Arizona & Colorado Railroad also began rail construction from Cochise, Arizona toward Durango in 1902.

The flurry of activity galvanized the D&RG to initiate its own field efforts in February 1905, beginning with grading a locale about 2 miles south of Durango at Carbon Junction. Standard gauge track was laid in spring and summer of 1905, and the first regular train service began in September 1905. The branch became locally known as the "Red Apple Line" due to the main produce hauled, although the primary intent of the line was to haul coal. A three rail system between Carbon Junction and Durango allowed standard gauge trains to continue into town.

¹³² The author had an opportunity to ride a restored Goose in 2000 and can attest that the ride is indeed "rattly".

¹³³ Cook, W. George. "The Battle for the Coal Fields: Three Rail Days" in *The R.G.S. Story: Volume XI Durango and The Perins Peak Branch*. Dell A. McCoy, Russ Collman and Robert W. McLeod eds. Sundance Publications Ltd., Denver. 2005. Pages. 139-168.

Tired of transferring and switching rails and cars, the D&RG converted the standard gauge to narrow gauge on Labor Day weekend in 1923. A crew of 300 men working throughout the weekend removed the outer rail along the length of the line. On Monday morning, the first narrow gauge train ran between Durango and Farmington. When coal production decreased, the railroad began to haul oil from New Mexico in the 1920s as the economic profits shifted from coal to oil. The last train to Farmington ran on August 31, 1968 and the D & RG dismantled the trackage in 1970.

Very few connections from the main route of the D&RG San Juan Extension were located in La Plata County. In 1891, the La Plata Coal and Iron Company built a branch extending 3.75 miles north from milepost 443.66 to reach the La Plata Coal Mine north of the Bocea siding, in the area now known as Grandview. The La Plata Mine's main customer was the Durango smelter. In 1893, the Porter mine opened, severely reducing the demand for coal from the La Plata Mine. The La Plata Mine operated at least until 1903 and possibly until 1906, when the branch track was removed.

The RGS had a few additional branches in La Plata County to accommodate the mines. Railroad freighting significantly reduced the cost of mining and was one reason the marginally profitable mines in La Plata Canyon were productive.

The Mayday Branch left the Rio Grande Southern line at milepost 141.93, near Cima, and headed north 1.87 miles to the ore loading site of the May Day mine in La Plata Canyon. Construction began on the Mayday branch in late 1905 and immediately shut down under a heavy snowstorm. Undaunted contractors resumed work in 1906, completing the work in August. The line functioned for 23 years, ending service in late 1929.

In 1892, the Ute Coal and Coke Company contracted with the RGS to construct a 1.87 mile branch line to its mine from milepost 146.8. A coaling facility was constructed near the branch at Ute Junction. Railroad service to the mine was discontinued in 1898. The RGS continued to use the coaling facility at Ute Junction at least into the 1920s.

The Boston Coal and Fuel Company built a 4.7 mile long railroad to connect its Perins Coal Mine to the RGS line at Franklin Junction, a point close to the confluence of Wildcat Canyon and Lightner Creek. The first train ran on November 25, 1901. Trains made up to three trips a day to the coal mine, carrying as many as 17 full cars of coal down to Durango. The Calumet Fuel Company purchased the mine and the rail line in 1906 and operated until 1926.

The D&RG and the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad reorganized in the 1920s and were known after that time as the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad (D&RGW).

The onslaught of truck and automobile traffic, particularly after World War II, ate into the profits of all trains in the United States. By 1951, passenger traffic on the San Juan

extension was down to a trickle and the D&RGW shifted from trains to its trucking business, the Rio Grande Motorway. The D&RGW terminated passenger service from Alamosa to Durango on February 1, 1951. The RGS terminated service in 1951 and in the next two years the RGS was scrapped.

The regular train between Durango and Silverton survived because of a prevailing American sentimentality about the old west. Through a general rise in tourism after World War II (made possible in part by the very highways killing the narrow gauge), tourist ridership numbers on the Silverton train began to rebound, in stark contrast to the rest of the narrow gauge system. Although the county lost its sole remaining rail freighter, it realized a gold mine in the form of tourists coming to ride the train. By 1970 the only two passenger trains run by the D&RGW were the Durango-Silverton and the Colorado Zephyr.

The impact of the railroad in La Plata County cannot be overstated. The arrival of relatively cheap transportation and the financial backing of the railroad companies affected every aspect of the county's development. The miners of the region eagerly anticipated the arrivals of the trains. Ores that might have been too costly to bother with suddenly became economical because of the railroad's relatively cheap transportation. A single ton of ore required 10 burros or seven mules. A wagon might handle up to four tons. A short 10-car train could handle 100 tons. With the arrival of the railroad, cost per ton from the San Juans to the Pueblo smelters dropped from \$60 to under \$10.¹³⁴

Other freighters also benefited. The farmers providing food, the furniture salesman, the mail carriers, and even the sheep men and women used the railroad to transport their goods. Commerce gathered at the railroad and communities thrived with the railroad's success.

Durango, of course, is the most obvious example of the railroad's influence on the communities of La Plata County. Even though Animas City was already established, the town leaders watched in dismay as their merchants, newspaper and bank abandoned Animas City to settle in the community that would have the railroad depot and the D&RG's financial support.

The Durango Trust was the official town company that created Durango, but the Trust was basically made up of investors in the D &RG. William A. Bell, arranged for several individuals to file homestead claims and then to sell the ~~homesteads~~ to the Trust. Surveyor Charles M. Perin platted the new townsite. Lots were offered for \$50 to \$100 dollars. It was a wildly successful venture. In the first two days buyers snapped up over \$15,000 in parcels. By the end of 1880, about 2,000 people were already in town. The 1885 Colorado Census reported Durango had 2,254 residents while Animas City had

¹³⁴ Ferrell, Mallory H. *Silver San Jun: The Rio Grande Southern Railroad*. Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1973. page 85 and O'Rourke, Paul M. *Frontiers in Transition: A History of Southwestern Colorado*. Denver, Colorado: Bureau of Land Management, 1982. Page 94.

shrunk to 83. In 1881, Durango—the city with the railroad and the rosy future---wrested the county seat away from Parrott City, a mining settlement located near the mouth of La Plata Canyon with no railroad and no chance of seeing one any time soon.

The D&RG did its part to promote this golden opportunity. Railroad President Palmer joined other capitalists to create a smelter company and to use the train to move a smelter from Silverton to the new town, providing an 1880s version of “smokestack chasing” to bring industry to Durango. The Durango Trust donated strategic blocks for use as city parks and school sites and even offered a free lot to the first church that was ready to build.

No other La Plata County community received the special treatment of the D&RG’s own Durango, and it showed. Rockwood, a small community strategically located at the juncture of the Durango-Silverton-Rico roads held great possibilities. The settlement received a post office designation in 1878. In 1881, the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad built the Silverton branch with a wye at Rockwood. A 20 by 60 foot combined passenger and freight depot was completed by December 1881. The first revenue train arrived in January of 1882, and a telegraph office was operating in the Rockwood Depot by the same month. Without additional capital from the D&RG, it never grew larger. When the RGS arrived in Durango, providing a railroad route to Rico, Rockwood’s fate as a small rural outpost was sealed.

Hermosa, another possible rival to Durango, had a small depot and was primarily used as the loading station for the farmers and ranchers of the Animas Valley. Roberta Barr grew up in Hermosa in the 1920s and remembers seeing one loaded freight train every morning and one passenger train in the afternoon. She remembers seeing sheep loaded on the train but not any other forms of livestock.¹³⁵ Hermosa had a store and post office but no commercial area.

Railroad sidings served various loading and rolling stock needs and provided support facilities such as water tanks. The tanks were spaced every 10-15 miles to provide water for the engine’s boilers. For more difficult sections, tanks were spaced as closely as five miles apart. Elevated wooden cylinders secured by iron hoops, tanks fed water into the locomotives by gravity pipes. In La Plata County, water tanks were located at La Boca, Ignacio, Florida, and Durango. On the Silverton route, tanks were located at Hermosa, Tank Creek, Needleton, and Deer Creek, two miles south of Silverton. On the Farmington branch, a water tank was located two miles north of the state line.

Some of the more entrepreneurial landowners wisely sold right of way for the railroad across their property and received in return a siding. The Home Ranch and the Trimble Ranch were two such properties with sidings located between Hermosa and Durango. The Home Ranch siding was a convenient loading station for the Ranch’s produce and was also used by other farmers and ranchers. Trimble’s siding allowed a stop off and boarding point for guests at the hot springs. Another siding, Bocea, was located on the massive ranching spread owned by the Pearson Brothers near present day Grandview.

¹³⁵ Interview with Roberta Barr by Jill Seyfarth at Roberta’s Hermosa home on May 5, 2009.

Bocea had large corrals and stock pens used by many of the county's ranchers. Historical references to the site do not suggest any other development occurred there.

Meanwhile, failing Animas City was relegated to a freight depot and ended up in lengthy battles with the D&RG over franchise fees for the railroad route through the city.

East of Durango, the D&RG pushed into La Plata County from a working railroad terminus located at the old settlement of Arboles (now flooded by Navajo Lake). As the line moved west toward Durango, railroad sidings and section houses were established. Although the railroad had initially given Hispanic names to the stations, some of them were renamed when settlement developed around the locations. An early train schedule published about a year after operations began, lists the following stations and stops for service.

Figure 3. Time Table No. 19 for July 23, 1882¹³⁶

Station Name	Miles From Durango	Miles Between Stations
Arboles	47.9	0
Siding No. 22	44.8	3.1
Vallejo [Allison]	40.7	4.1
Solidad (sic) [Tiffany]	38.0	2.7
Serape	34.7	3.3
La Boca	32.6	2.1
Ignacio	25.8	6.8
Silla [Oxford]	19.9	5.9
Colina	16.7	3.2
Florida	14.3	2.4
Bocea	5.7	8.6
Carboneria [Carbon Jct]	2.5	3.2
Durango	0	2.5

The first station established in the county was Vallejo or Allison. Initially the station consisted of a section house and warehouse to help maintain railroad operations. Over two miles to the west, Solidad, later known as Tiffany, was established with the same railroad facilities. Both of these locations remained small railroad sidings until the opening of lands (the Ute Strip) to non-Indian settlement in 1899. After that time, settlements developed and flourished with the added boost of the railroad activity.

Allison's development was limited by the lack of water, which had to be hauled about five miles from the Piedra River or transported by railroad.¹³⁷ After the Ute Strip opened to settlement, families began to move into the area. In 1906 the Pine River Canal was

¹³⁶ Partial transcription of Time Table cited in Allen Nossaman's *Many More Mountains, Volume 3*. Denver, Colorado: Sundance Publishing, 1998. Page 349.

¹³⁷ Etheridge, Georgeanna. Allison: The Neighborly Town, in *Pioneers of San Juan Country* by Sarah Platt Decker Chapter, D.A.R., Durango, CO. Colorado Springs, CO, Out West Printing and Stationery Company. 1961. Volume IV, Pages 210-212.

constructed to bring water into the area, easing the water situation. The supply was not fully adequate until the completion of the Vallecito Reservoir in the early 1940s.¹³⁸

The origin of the name, Allison has more than one story. One account says the town was named after the Allison outlaw gang, while another stated it was named after an early canal surveyor named Allison.¹³⁹

Regardless of the name origin, Allison's new businesses, churches, and school established shortly after 1900. All of the earliest structures clustered along the railroad line and included a mercantile store run by the Briggs family, a pool hall, blacksmith, and a school. The railroad facilities included a warehouse, a bunk house, and the section house.¹⁴⁰ A post office was established in 1904 and located in the mercantile.¹⁴¹ The Allison school was constructed in 1906 and consisted of three rooms. The school had so many pupils that the railroad's bunkhouse was used for some classes and school lunches were provided at the pool hall.¹⁴² Early church services were held in the railroad section house.¹⁴³ By 1908, the Community Church was housed in a small wooden building located near the railroad.¹⁴⁴

The *Durango Herald* included glowing reports on the progress at Allison, with comments on new construction, 'good fruit-growing possibilities' and progress of irrigation projects.¹⁴⁵ By 1910, it was reported that 2,500 acres were under cultivation, 10,000 acres were irrigated, and 90 acres were planted as orchards. In Allison, school attendance was 50 to 55 students.¹⁴⁶ Two more mercantile stores and a grange (Mount Allison Grange # 308 established December 1916) added to the town.¹⁴⁷ In the 1920s and 1930s, the Turkey Cooperative Association operated out of the former railroad warehouse, a Seed Growers Association was established, and dances were held at the Grange. The Tanner Flour Mill produced "White Rose Flour – It Blooms in Your Oven" and a corner gas station dispensed gas to the few vehicles that traveled the graveled roads.¹⁴⁸ A boys'

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* Page 210.

¹³⁹ Interview with early residents, February 8, 1991. In, *The History of Colorado Towns Allison, Tiffany, Arboles* by Anna Lois Tubbs Wilmer. Self published Bayfield, CO. Pages 3-25.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Page 18.

¹⁴¹ Bauer, William H., James L. Ozment, and John H. Willard. *Colorado Post Offices 1859-1989: A Comprehensive Listing of Post Offices, Stations & Branches*. Colorado Railroad Historical Foundation, Golden. 1990. Page. 11.

¹⁴² Interview with early residents, February 8, 1991. In, *The History of Colorado Towns Allison, Tiffany, Arboles* by Anna Lois Tubbs Wilmer. Self published Bayfield, CO. Pages 3-25.

¹⁴³ Etheridge, Georgeanna. Allison: The Neighborly Town, in *Pioneers of San Juan Country* by Sarah Platt Decker Chapter, D.A.R., *Durango, CO*. Colorado Springs, CO, Out West Printing and Stationery Company. 1961. Volume IV, Page 212.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Page 211.

¹⁴⁵ *Durango Herald*, February 15, 1909. and February 21, 1909.

¹⁴⁶ *Durango Daily Democrat*, August 1911.

¹⁴⁷ Colorado State Grange. *Colorado State Grange History: 1874 – 1975*. North Suburban Printing & Publishing Inc. Westminster, CO. 1975. Page 111.

¹⁴⁸ *The History of Colorado Towns Allison, Tiffany, Arboles* by Anna Lois Tubbs Wilmer. Self published Bayfield, CO.

ranch, Rancho Mesa Verde, operated southwest of Allison.¹⁴⁹ In 1925, the local community members built St Patrick's Catholic Church constructed of adobe bricks. The first wedding was held in January 1926 to marry local residents, John Degani and Mary Procarione.

After World War II, Allison suffered from closures and consolidations. Railroad passenger service ended in 1951. The post office closed in November 1954. Rural schools were consolidated and students were bussed to Ignacio. The development of Navajo Lake about eight miles east of Allison in 1962 provided some visibility to the community, but the abandonment of the railroad route (for freight only by this time) in 1968 delivered a final blow to a struggling town, which now has a few businesses and the Community Church.

Tiffany, located approximately three miles west of Allison was established as a stop along the Denver Rio Grande Railroad. An 1882 railroad schedule notes a daily train with an approximate 10 minute stop to take on passengers and freight.¹⁵⁰ Known by the D&RG as Solidad (an Americanized version of the Spanish word, Soledad), the only structure in the area appears to have been the section house established to maintain the rails through the area.

In 1900, B.W. Solomon a 'dealer in dry goods, groceries, hardware, country produce, and hay and grain' established a mercantile at the stop and a small one room school was built.¹⁵¹ The extension of the Spring Creek Ditch by 1901 provided water to the area and encouraged settlement in the area.¹⁵² The Tiffany post office was established in Solomon's mercantile store on December 3, 1907.¹⁵³ John Tiffany surveyed a townsite in 1909 and filed a town plat with the County in August 1909. The plat formally renamed Solidad as Tiffany.¹⁵⁴ Most of the street names were fruit names, perhaps a reflection of local hopes that the area would become a fruit growing area. By 1911, Tiffany proclaimed itself a permanent settlement with a good store, a school and attractive dwellings.¹⁵⁵ A new two room school was constructed northeast of the Catholic Church in 1911 to house grades 1-10.¹⁵⁶ The school served as a social center for the town with Protestant church services held in the building by the circuit pastor from Durango.¹⁵⁷ Speculation and promotion continued with the intention of creating a large town.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with early residents, February 8, 1991. In, *The History of Colorado Towns Allison, Tiffany, Arboles* by Anna Lois Tubbs Wilmer. Self published Bayfield, CO. Page 9.

¹⁵⁰ Nossaman, Allen. *Many More Mountains Volume 3*. Denver, Colorado: Sundance Publishing 1993. Page 349.

¹⁵¹ Hott, Zelta. "Tracks Through Tiffany". Paper submitted to Duane Smith, Fort Lewis College. 1973. Pages 1-7.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* Page 2.

¹⁵³ Bauer, Willam H., James L. Ozment, and John H. Willard. *Colorado Post Offices 1859-1989: A Comprehensive Listing of Post Offices, Stations & Branches*. Colorado Railroad Historical Foundation, Golden. 1990. Page 141.

¹⁵⁴ La Plata County Records. Plat Book 2 – Tiffany Town Plat.

¹⁵⁵ *Durango Daily Democrat*, August 1911.

¹⁵⁶ Shock, Emma. Interview, August 27, 2008, Ignacio.

¹⁵⁷ Shock, Emma. Interview, August 27, 2008, Ignacio.

Irrigation water was available and a lake was constructed south of the town site to provide water.¹⁵⁸

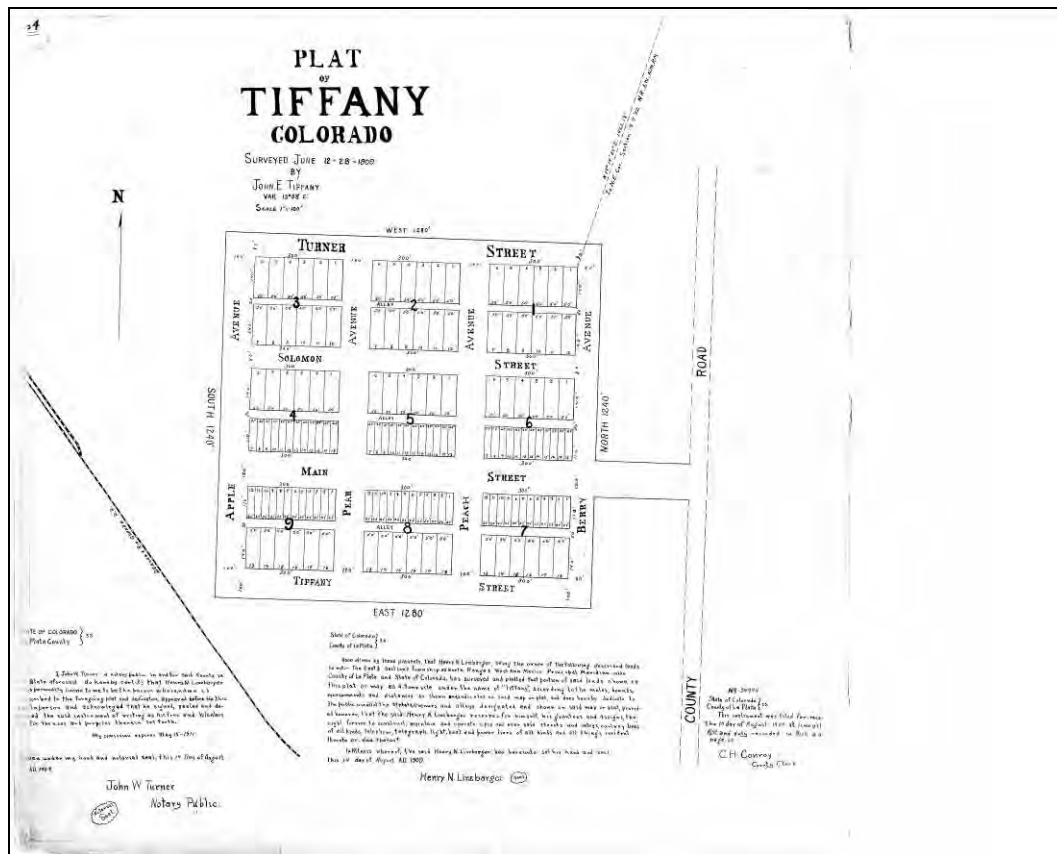


Figure 4. Plat of Tiffany, filed at La Plata County.

In 1909, local resident H.N. Linebarger built a stone bank at the east end of Tiffany. The rock was hauled from Devil's Creek Canyon by wagon and a vault was brought from Pueblo on the railroad. The bank never opened and remained empty until it was torn down in 1972.¹⁵⁹

Protestant church services were held in the school house. Catholic services were held in the Abeyta Dance Hall located on the main street until the San Antonio Catholic Church was constructed in 1928.¹⁶⁰

Operations increased at the railroad stop and stockyards. Scales were installed near the station house in about 1914 and Tiffany became a stock loading area for eastern shipments by rail. Local resident Maurice Levy was the station agent and he later

¹⁵⁸ Interview with early residents, February 8, 1991. In, *The History of Colorado Towns Allison, Tiffany, Arboles* by Anna Lois Tubbs Wilmer. Self published Bayfield, CO. Page 8.

¹⁵⁹ Hott, Zelta. "Fracks Through Tiffany". Paper submitted to Duane Smith, Fort Lewis College. 1973. Pages 1-7.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

purchased the mercantile and operated the post office.¹⁶¹ Telephone service arrived in 1916, via the Rosa-Ignacio Telephone Company. H.C. Linebarger and R.P. Hott of Tiffany and A.H. Long of Rosa started the company by extending a line from Ignacio to Tiffany to Arboles. Telephones were connected to the line as residents' incomes permitted.

Tiffany appeared to be a developing town with increasing population, community services and railroad commerce. School records from 1939 indicate that the Tiffany school district (Tiffany school and four nearby rural one-room schools) had 240 enrolled students.¹⁶² Interestingly, this number is only exceeded by student counts from Durango, Bayfield and Ignacio. These numbers suggest that the efforts to promote were succeeding.

Tiffany's decline appears to have begun when the schools consolidated and the new highway bypassed town. The post office closed in 1954, and railroad passenger service ended in 1951. Freight service was discontinued in 1969, and the tracks were removed.

Further west along the rail line, La Boca station was established to take on water, passengers and freight at a point where the railroad crosses the Pine River (Los Pinos River) and makes a gentle turn to head north toward Ignacio. The rail line passed over the river on a steel Pratt through truss bridge. The bridge is still in use today as a road; it is one of only two known steel bridges in the county along the D &RG main line.

The La Boca Station had a section house, storage facilities and a water tank with a windmill.¹⁶³ The 1882 Time Table indicates that the east bound stop at La Boca was brief. In the 1880s, the station had an adobe store and one-room school. A post office opened in 1895. Residents added more buildings and planted orchards in the early 1900s, and a cemetery with the first burial dating to 1918 is nearby. La Boca's population has always been predominately Hispano. The earliest settlers were migrants from Tierra Amarilla in the 1870s. A few years later, Hispanos moved north to work on the railroad and permanently settle in area. An 1880 census indicates that 11 Hispano families had settled in the La Boca area, most from Tierra Amarilla.¹⁶⁴ In later years, the residents of the La Boca area continued to be a mix of Hispano, Ute, and a few Anglo settlers consistent with population demographics across the southern portions of the county and of Colorado.

About seven miles north of La Boca, the town of Ignacio and the Ute Indian Agency shared a railroad stop. The railway station was located south of Ignacio and included a depot, section house, water tank and storage and maintenance facilities. This rail station

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² County School Census. Cited in Bruce Spining. *Clapboards, School Boards and Blackboards: A History of the Florida Area Rural Country Schools 1875-1959*. Florida Schools Association. Self published. Durango, Colorado 1993. Page 21.

¹⁶³ The description of La Boca is abstracted from historical information provided by the La Boca Ranch Trust Trustees for the La Plata County Register of Historic Places nomination, 2006.

¹⁶⁴ Quintana, Frances Leon. *Pobladores: Hispanic Americans of the Ute Frontier*. Privately published, Aztec, N.M. 1991. Page 105.

was a larger stop along the D&RG line, in part because the Ute Indian Agency had been established prior to the arrival of the railroad. The area included a concentration of farms and associated community services. Unlike other settlements and towns along the railroad line, Ignacio had a more diverse economic base. The railroad enhanced but did not overwhelm the town.

The town of Ignacio grew up adjacent to the Ute Indian Agency, which was first established in 1877. The D & RG established a depot and station facilities in 1881. The Ignacio post office opened in 1882.¹⁶⁵ Early businesses included a trading post run by H.L. Hall in 1896. Hall was a relative of T.D. Burns, an Anglo trader from Tierra Amarilla who also owned Trimble Hot Springs and started the Burns Bank in Durango. With the opening of the Ute lands for settlement in 1899, enterprising businessmen saw the future of a town near an Indian agency that also had a railroad. The son of Norwegian pioneer Hans Aspaas (Hans Aspaas Jr.) moved to the site of the future Ignacio in 1897 and by 1907 had purchased Hall's trading post.

In 1908, Hall and Aspaas purchased relinquished allotments. Hall bought the 160 acre allotment of a Ute relative of John Taylor's. Aspaas purchased the adjoining allotment of the Shoshone family. Hall and Aspaas planned to merge the tracts and file for a plat for the townsite of Ignacio. They would then sell lots and create the new town. Apparently, there were problems. Hall filed a plat for his land around where he had established a store in what is now the north end of Ignacio in June of 1909. Just two weeks later the Ignacio Townsite and Development Company filed a separate plat in the central area of today's Ignacio.¹⁶⁶ Later in 1910, both men filed for additions to the townsite, Hall 1st Addition, and Aspaas 1st Addition.

Nell Bradshaw Marker, daughter of pioneer T.J. Bradshaw, describes early Ignacio. She notes that there was nothing between the railroad depot south of town and the Indian Agency except the Catholic Church. She also notes that there were arguments between Hall and Aspaas over the platting and development of Ignacio.¹⁶⁷ As a result of the dual filings the town developed to the north in the vicinity of the present St Ignatius church and further south near the intersection of Highway 172 and 151.

Jean McClanahan, a young girl in Ignacio in the 1930s provides information on the range of businesses that were located in the town including stores, the Lindsay Hotel, a school, a blacksmith, the Burns Hall (a community hall) and the Bee Shanty that sold honey.¹⁶⁸ The town had water wells and hand pumps on several corners where residents got their water. There was some running water from a reservoir on the hill on the west side of

¹⁶⁵ Bauer, Willam H., James L. Ozment, and John H. Willard. *Colorado Post Offices 1859-1989: A Comprehensive Listing of Post Offices, Stations & Branches*. Colorado Railroad Historical Foundation, Golden. 1990. Page 77.

¹⁶⁶ La Plata County Records, Plat Book 2, Pages 61 and 62.

¹⁶⁷ Ignacio, The town that was named for a Ute Chief. In *Daughters of the American Revolution*, Sarah Platt Decker Chapter. *Pioneers of the San Juan Country*. Reprint of Volumes I-IV in One Edition. Bountiful, Utah: Family History Publishers, 1998. Volume 4, Pages 213-215.

¹⁶⁸ McClanahan, Jean P. "Recollections" in *Early Residents of Pine River Valley*. Edited by Anna Lois Tubbs Wilmer. Privately published, 1999. Pages 26-27.

town. The town had electricity by 1937. Numerous cement block buildings are present due to a cement block business in town that was run by Edgar Richard Copeland who ~~made~~ made almost all of the buildings in Ignacio”.¹⁶⁹

In contrast to the development of the northern portions of Ignacio, Hispanic residents tended to locate in the southern areas closer to the railroad depot. Businesses at the south end of town included Billiard Pool Hall, bakery, café, stores, the Garcia Store, a barbershop, and the Commercial Hotel.¹⁷⁰ Helen Mullen Dunn, an early resident of the town, describes many of the Hispanic homes as constructed of adobe. One building, the hall for La Sociedad Proteccion Mutua De Trabajadores Unidos, or S.P.M.D.T.U., was constructed of adobe by local men for dances and celebrations.

Silla, a railroad station located about 6 miles north of Ignacio, appears to have been at the same place as present day Oxford. In October of 1909, J.M. Denning of Iowa filed a plat for the Town of Oxford creating about 100 small parcels with the railroad route bisecting the town.¹⁷¹ A post office named Grommet and operated there from March, 1904 to January, 1908 when the name was changed to Oxford.¹⁷² Oxford had a stone schoolhouse and Grange No. 196, which was established in April 1911.¹⁷³ Nothing remains of the railroad facilities at Oxford.

About five and a half miles north of Oxford, the railway crossed the Florida River at what was called the Florida Station. The station included a section house, maintenance facilities, windmill, and a water tank. The Florida School was located at the station on the east side of the river, but most of the children lived on the west side of the river. The children had to cross the river by walking over the railroad bridge. The one-room school house opened in 1903 and closed in 1944 with the county-wide reorganization of schools.¹⁷⁴ The rail line crossed the river on a steel Pratt through truss bridge. The bridge is still in use as a one lane road and is listed as site 5LP3864 on the State Register of Historic Places.

The Falfa railroad stop was midway between the Florida Station and Bocea Siding. It was originally named Griffith in honor of a prominent landowner in the vicinity. Several families lived in the area including James and Hattie Laughren (pronounced ~~Loren~~) who owned large parcels that they had acquired in 1899 with the opening of the Ute lands. The Laughrens owned the general store and ran the Griffith post office, which was

¹⁶⁹ Copeland, Dick, ~~My~~ Memories of the BIA Years 1925 to 1945. In *Early Residents of Pine River Valley*. Edited by Anna Lois Tubbs Wilmer. Privately published, 1999. Pages 16-23.

¹⁷⁰ Dunn, Helen Mullen, ~~The South Part of Ignacio~~, in . In *Early Residents of Pine River Valley*. Edited by Anna Lois Tubbs Wilmer. Privately published, 1999. Pages 28-32.

¹⁷¹ La Plata County Records, Plat Book 2, page 66, October 24, 1909.

¹⁷² Bauer, Willam H., James L. Ozment, and John H. Willard. *Colorado Post Offices 1859-1989: A Comprehensive Listing of Post Offices, Stations & Branches*. Colorado Railroad Historical Foundation, Golden. 1990. Pages 67, 109.

¹⁷³ Colorado State Grange, *Colorado State grange History: 1874 to 1975*. North Suburban Printing, Westminster, CO. 1975. Page 108.

¹⁷⁴ Spining, Bruce. *Clapboards, School Boards and Blackboards: A History of the Florida Area Rural Country Schools 1875-1959*. Florida Schools Association. Self published. Durango, CO 1993. Pages 100-101.

established in 1909.¹⁷⁵ Hattie Laughren was the first postmistress, continuing until her death in 1934.¹⁷⁶ In 1914, Hattie filed a plat with the county to create the town of Laughren.¹⁷⁷ Even though the plat map stipulated that Griffith was now officially Laughren, the town's name was changed to Falga in 1924. The name of Laughren was never used for the town due to disagreements among residents.¹⁷⁸ Apparently, the post office determined that another Griffith existed in Colorado and the post office name was changed to Falga in November 1924.¹⁷⁹ The post office remained in operation until November 1954.

The original Falga store and post office burned prior to 1930 and were rebuilt, only to burn again in the 1940s. Traces of the railroad grade remain.

Although these towns and settlements were purposely developed along the D&RG route, they paid dearly when the railroad closed down. Unlike the D&RG, the RGS had a slightly different relationship with La Plata County's towns. A relative latecomer in 1890, the railroad could pinpoint some of the existing mines and established towns with potential for lucrative freighting contracts and passenger traffic. The route out of Durango bee lined for John Porter's coal mine and town, turned south toward Fort Lewis, which was transitioning from a military fort to an Indian School and then headed north toward the small community of Hesperus, which was the center of another group of John Porter's coal holdings. In Hesperus, the RGS built a two story depot and a section house. Former Hesperus resident Scottie Henry remembered that in the 1920s "The railroad was the only means of getting livestock to the markets. A large number of sheep and cattle were shipped out each year."¹⁸⁰ Railroad workers, coal miners and ranchers kept Hesperus busy. Locals probably foresaw the demise of the RGS in May of 1940 when the elegant depot burned down and was replaced by an old coach car, parked on the spur to the closed coal mine. Although US Highway 160 was rerouted just north of the original town and helped keep the town alive, Hesperus experienced serious setbacks when the coal mines closed in the 1920s and the railroad shut down in 1951.

The companies that built or paid for extensions to their mines, such as the May Day and the Perin mines prospered from the easier transport, but the mining communities, such as Parrott City and La Plata City were too far away to benefit much. They remain in bits and pieces, never able to attract commerce or money beyond the investors in the mines.

¹⁷⁵ Bauer, Willam H., James L. Ozment, and John H. Willard. *Colorado Post Offices 1859-1989: A Comprehensive Listing of Post Offices, Stations & Branches*. Colorado Railroad Historical Foundation, Golden. 1990. Page 67.

¹⁷⁶ Bryce, Mrs. John. "The Mail Must Go Through" in *Pioneers of San Juan Country* by Sarah Platt Decker Chapter, D.A.R., Durango, CO. Colorado Springs, CO, Out West Printing and Stationery Company. 1961. Volume IV, Pages 78 -80.

¹⁷⁷ La Plata County Recorder, Book 2 Plats, Page 83, November 17, 1914.

¹⁷⁸ Bruce Spining, personal communication. May 13, 2009.

¹⁷⁹ Bauer, Ozment, and Willard. *Op.Cit.* Page 53.

¹⁸⁰ Fort Lewis Mesa Reunion Committee for 1991. *History of Southwestern La Plata County, Colorado*. Hesperus, Colorado: Self-published, 1991. Page F-2.

Roads and Routes

Early trails in and through La Plata County are discussed in the Initial Exploration Section of this document. By the time the county officially organized in 1874, and Colorado gained statehood in 1876, a number of toll roads and wagon roads were already in use, bringing people and supplies to Southwest Colorado.

Travelers arrived from the north and east via a route through Del Norte, Stony Pass, Silverton and down the Animas Canyon. By the early 1870s, a southern toll road originating in Abiquiu, N.M. was in use to transport mining supplies to the San Juan Mountains. The toll road left Abiquiu and crossed the Tierra Amarilla Land Grant to Pagosa Springs. From Pagosa Springs, the route turned west and crossed the Piedra and Pine Rivers to the Animas River then north to Animas City.¹⁸¹ By 1876, a heavily used wagon road extended from Abiquiu west to Canon Largo to the San Juan River then north up the Pine River. It appears that traffic stepped up on these routes with the signing of the Brunot Agreement in 1874 and the establishment of the Ute Indian Agency in Ignacio in 1877.¹⁸²

Within the county, several toll roads were proposed to profit from the mining activities of the San Juan Mountains. In December 1873, the Las Animas Toll and Wagon Road and Land Company incorporated to construct a toll road from _the Ute border to the Silverton area'.¹⁸³ Later, in January 1875, the La Animas Valley and San Juan Mining and Turnpike Company incorporated to construct a toll road connecting Silverton with Tierra Amarilla via the Animas Valley and Pagosa Springs.¹⁸⁴ Neither road ever came to be.

The first successful effort to construct a toll road from Silverton to the Animas Valley began in July 1876 with the incorporation of the Animas Canyon Toll Road. The company began construction work in October 1876 and completed the toll road in 1877 with full use in summer of 1878.¹⁸⁵ The route followed the Animas River Canyon for about 18 miles then climbed out of the canyon to travel through Rockwood and down the Animas Valley to Animas City. There were two toll stations at the ends of the road. One was located south of Silverton and the other was at Baker's Bridge, north of (old) Animas City. Several stops were located along the road for the convenience of travelers. These included Ten Mile House, Needle Creek, the Bowen Ranch (two miles north of Cascade Creek) and the bottom and top of Cascade Hill, a major ascent on the road. At these stops, travelers could rest and or change horses, eat, and if necessary stay overnight. The station at the top of Cascade Hill (now the north end of Electra Lake) was run by Sam Smith on his homesteaded land from 1877 to 1880. In 1882 it was leased by

¹⁸¹ Quintana, Frances Leon. *Pobladores: Hispanic Americans of the Ute Frontier*. Privately published, Aztec, N.M. 1991. Page 89.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* Page 90.

¹⁸³ Nossaman, Allen. *Many More Mountains, Volume 3*. Denver, Colorado: Sundance Publishing, 1998. Page 176.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* Page 234.

¹⁸⁵ Nossaman, Allen. *Many More Mountains, Volume 2*. Denver, Colorado: Sundance Publishing, 1993. Pages 85-90.

Theodore Schoch and named Cascade House. With the construction of Electra Lake in 1906, the cabin was dismantled and moved to the south near the Lake. It is currently a summer residence and the only known remaining building associated with the toll road.

The Rico-Rockwood Road was the major route from the Animas drainage to the remote mining town of Rico. Travellers and freighters used the road in the 1870s and 1880s, until the Rio Grande Southern reached Rico in 1891.¹⁸⁶ The route headed northwest from Rockwood to Scotch Creek and then north along the Dolores River to Rico. On the way were various road houses and stops. The Meserole post office and livery was located on the west side of the current day Hotter Pond near the junction of two major forks of the Hermosa Creek.¹⁸⁷ A field assessment of parts of the road identified at least one additional station along the route.¹⁸⁸

In 1879, John Shaw established the Animas City, Florida, Los Pinos, and Pagosa Springs Toll Road Company. The Road went from Parrott City to Animas City, then up Horse Gulch to the Florida River to Mr. Shaw's toll gate. From the Florida River the road headed east through Wallace Gulch to the Pine River, crossing the Pine at the Middle Bridge. The road continued east through the Beaver, Hayden and Skunk Creek drainages to the Piedra River and east to Pagosa Springs. The stage station was located where the road crossed the Pine River and consisted of a large frame hotel, and a general store and post office. In 1881, Charley Johnson constructed a log house on the east side of river where he ran a store, trading post and the post office. The route remained a toll road for a few years and in 1880 became a regular stage route from Durango to Pagosa Springs.¹⁸⁹



*Photograph 5. The Pine River Stage Stop on the toll road.
Photo Source: La Plata County Historical Society Animas Museum Photo Archives*

¹⁸⁶ McCoy, Dell A. , Russ Collman, William A. Graves, *The R.G.S. Story: Rico and the Mines, Volume 5*. Sundance Publishing, Denver. 1996. Page 82-83.

¹⁸⁷ Nossaman, Allen. *Many More Mountains, Volume 3*. Denver, Colorado: Sundance Publishing, 1998. Page 173.

¹⁸⁸ Newell, Louis. *A Field Assessment of the Rico-Rockwood Wagon Road, La Plata, San Juan & Dolores Counties, Colorado*. San Juan National Forest, Colorado, Cultural Resources Report, Animas & Dolores Districts. 1986.

¹⁸⁹ John, Laddie. *A Brief History of Bayfield and the Pine River Valley, 1877 – 2007: A Reference Book with 19th and 20th Century Names, Dates, and Places*. Self published, Durango, CO. 2007. Pages 20-26.

In 1880, Otto Mears purchased the Parrott City to Animas City portion of the toll road from Shaw for \$3,000.¹⁹⁰

Tolls could be a lucrative business. The 1879 La Plata County Commissioners approved the following schedule for the Pine River toll road:

- 25 cents for a vehicle drawn by animals
- 10 cents per each additional pair of animals
- 1/3 cent per head of loose cattle

Travel from Animas City to Parrott City was more expensive. The 1876 toll rate was 75 cents for a vehicle drawn by animals, twenty-five cents for each additional pair of animals and the same 1/3 of a penny per head of loose cattle.

Road Companies incorporated in 1880 and listed in the Colorado State Business Directory for 1880 include:

- Animas City, Florida, Los Pinos and Pagosa Springs Toll Road
- Dolores Valley Toll Road from La Plata and Parrott City
- Lost Canon and Dolores Toll Road from La Plata and Parrott City
- Mancos and Dolores Toll Road from La Plata and Parrott City
- Rockwood and Dolores Wagon Road from La Plata and Rockwood

Toll roads declined as tax supported roads were developed and after the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad arrived in 1881.

Contacts with New Mexico strengthened through the years. The Canon Largo and Tierra Amarilla roads continued to supply new residents to La Plata County. A stage route ran along the west side of the Animas River from Durango to Aztec. The stages operated daily between about 1890 and 1905.

Other routes criss-crossed the county. The remnants of the Old Spanish Trail provided an east-west route. The Bull Whacker Road went through Ridges Basin west from Centennial Center (where Office Depot is currently located) to the La Plata Electric Substation located near modern day County Road 211. The route connected the Animas Valley with Fort Lewis, and linked with the Togay Trail from Fort Lewis to Fort Wingate, New Mexico.¹⁹¹

Once it was legally established, La Plata County had four road districts that also defined the voting precincts. As more people arrived and the demand for roads rose, the road business got more complicated. The number of road districts surged to as many as 16 in the 1880s. The county played a major role in road development. Citizens requesting a

¹⁹⁰ Nossaman, Allen. *Many More Mountains, Volume 3*. Denver, Colorado: Sundance Publishing, 1998. Page 26.

¹⁹¹ Fort Lewis Mesa Reunion History Committee. *Pioneers of Southwest La Plata County, Colorado*. Bountiful, Utah: Family History Publishers, 1994. Page 414.

road would file a petition with an agreement to dedicate right of way over their land. The county surveyor or road engineer would survey the route, usually suggested by the petitions and would make a recommendation to the Commissioners. If the road was approved, the county would build it. There was no master plan for roads, but the routes were defined by the needs of the population.

The early roads were designed for wagons. The introduction of automobiles changed the face of travel in the county and throughout the United States. The first cars were noteworthy oddities, but soon became more common. Durango merchant Harry Jackson got La Plata's first known car, a Winton, in 1903. Soon thereafter, the State of Colorado established a Highway Commission in 1909.

In 1918 the Colorado Year Book (published annually by the State of Colorado) reported that 667 vehicle licenses were issued in La Plata County and 87,116 licenses were issued in the entire state. In 1919, Colorado created a 1 cent a gallon tax on gasoline that grew to four cents a gallon by the end of the 1920s. The Federal Government had passed the Federal Highway Act of 1916 to provide matching funds for state highway construction projects.



Photograph 6. A wagon struggles through the ubiquitous mud made worse by the rains and severe flooding in 1911. This picture was taken looking west toward the bridge over the Animas River. Source: La Plata County Historical Society Animas Museum Photo Archives.

The combination of federal money and gasoline tax revenues fueled a building program for state roads. One of the earliest highway efforts, the treacherous Wolf Creek Pass, officially opened on August 21, 1916. The steep one lane gravel road with turnouts for passing vehicles had been completed for about \$100,000. It was only drivable with good weather and brave drivers. The steep grade wreaked havoc on cars with gravity flow gas tanks. Cars sometimes would drive backwards up the hills if their gas tanks were low.



Photograph 7. Harry Jackson with one of his Winton cars on a road in the area once called Bocea and now known as Grandview. Photo Source: La Plata County Historical Society Animas Museum Photo Archives.

La Plata County residents watched gleefully in 1921 as the State completed the “Million Dollar” portion of what would become US Highway 550, between Ouray and Red Mountain; they were delighted when the road reached Durango in 1924. Local leaders with foresight understood the potential boost to the area that would come from easier access created by Highways 160 and 550. They also looked to the south. The 1919 Annual Report for the Durango Board of Trade listed the continued construction of the road to connect Albuquerque to the San Juan Basin as a major accomplishment.¹⁹² By 1935, the entire Colorado section had been completed as part of US Highway 550.

The road builders led the wave of automobiles poised to run over the nation. The number of cars in Colorado rose from less than 90,000 in 1918 to over 300,000 by the end of the 1920s. In 1922 the Colorado Year Book reported La Plata County had 105 miles of state roads and 1,495 miles of county or local roads. None of these routes was paved.

Some time after 1920, the county reduced the number of road districts to five. The sparse road network around Tiffany and Allison that comprised District 4 was incorporated into District 3, resulting in four districts with the modern day county road series of 100s, 200s, 300s and 500s.

¹⁹² The Annual Report, dated January 19, 1920, is located in the Southwest Collections of the Durango Public Library.

Unlike most construction activities during the Depression, road building flourished in Colorado. The New Deal federal work programs of the 1930s poured money into the nation's roads. In Colorado, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) built and improved 10,825 miles of highway and farm-to-market roads. They also constructed or repaved 4,251 bridges.¹⁹³ Wolf Creek Pass was improved to year round status and more of Highway 160 was constructed.

At the beginning of the 1940s, the construction of Vallecito Dam resulted in a realignment and upgrade of the road connecting the job site to Highway 160 at Bayfield. Residents of the northern Pine River Valley benefited from the improved access on what is now County Road 501.

Other local roads within the county saw some enhancement as some of the roads were oiled and graded during the 1930s. State Highway 141 between Hesperus and Fort Lewis was first graded and oiled in 1936. The 1940 tally of roads in the Colorado Year Book reported 171.2 state road miles and 694 miles of county roads. Of this total only 2.8 miles were paved, presumably the portion of the state highway passing through downtown Durango. At the same time, the count of vehicle licenses was up to 3,913 in La Plata County.

Rural county residents remember the deep mud and ruts in the roads, saying the best way to use the roads in the winter and spring was to travel early in the morning while things were still frozen. Some roads were so rough that they earned a descriptive name like The Washboard Road, which connected Marvel area residents with Durango. Emma Horvath recalls Lester Holgate and Cleburn Campbell were two road supervisors during the 1920s-1940s who graded the roads on the west side of the county, using caterpillars with blades. State Highway 140 was graveled south of Breen in 1942, but the entire highway was not oiled until the early 1960s.

The earliest asphalt roads had a mix of materials that were blended on the job site and applied to the road. The first hot mix asphalt plant in La Plata County opened in about 1950, providing the first opportunities for modern asphalt road surface that we know today.

During World War II and the Cold War Era, Durango's uranium ore processing plants played an important role and provided an indirect benefit to the roads in the county. The State of Colorado dedicated a fleet of 60 trucks to keep Highway 550 open year round and enabled the transport of the essential ores and supplies from the mines to the smelters and out to the users. Highway 160 was upgraded as well.

The 1950s and 1960s saw paving upgrades to many sections of the State and US Highways. Colorado State Highway 151 was improved as part of the construction of

¹⁹³ All WPA figures in this paragraph are from Associated Cultural Resource Experts. *Highways to the Sky: A Context and History of Colorado's Highways System*. Denver, Colorado: Colorado Department of Transportation, 2002. Page 6-3.

Navajo Dam. US Highway 550 ran along the route of the present day County Road 203 until it was realigned to its current location and paved in 1960. A major realignment also occurred south of downtown Durango in 1978-1979, bypassing the downtown and creating the current junction with Highway 160. The old route was renamed State Highway 3, and is known within the Durango city limits as Sawmill Road. By 1979, Wildcat Canyon Road (CR 140), the Buck Highway (CR 501) and the East Animas Road (CR 250) had also been paved.

La Plata County's website indicates that as of 2005 the County had 490 miles of gravel roads, and 196 miles of paved roads. The County has returned to its original number of four road districts but their work has shifted from building new roads for settlers to maintaining good road conditions for residents.

Airport

Air travel has progressed from novelty to luxury travel to the current drudgery. The first plane to fly in La Plata County arrived in pieces in 1913 on the train. Ralph McMillen flew the curiosity for an enthusiastic crowd at the County Fairgrounds. After more Americans experienced airplanes during World War I, Durangoans lobbied their City Council for an airport. The council, after study and discussion, purchased land on Reservoir Hill (near the present site of Fort Lewis College) and opened the Durango Municipal Airport on October 12, 1929 with an airshow.¹⁹⁴ Durango proudly joined 26 other public airports in Colorado in 1930. Daily air service, however, did not come until after World War II. The airport was moved south of town and re-characterized as the regional Durango-La Plata County Airport. The current airport was constructed in 1988 and is close to the former 1950s era airport site. Regular air service began after World War II and was provided by Monarch Air Lines, a precursor to Frontier Air Lines.

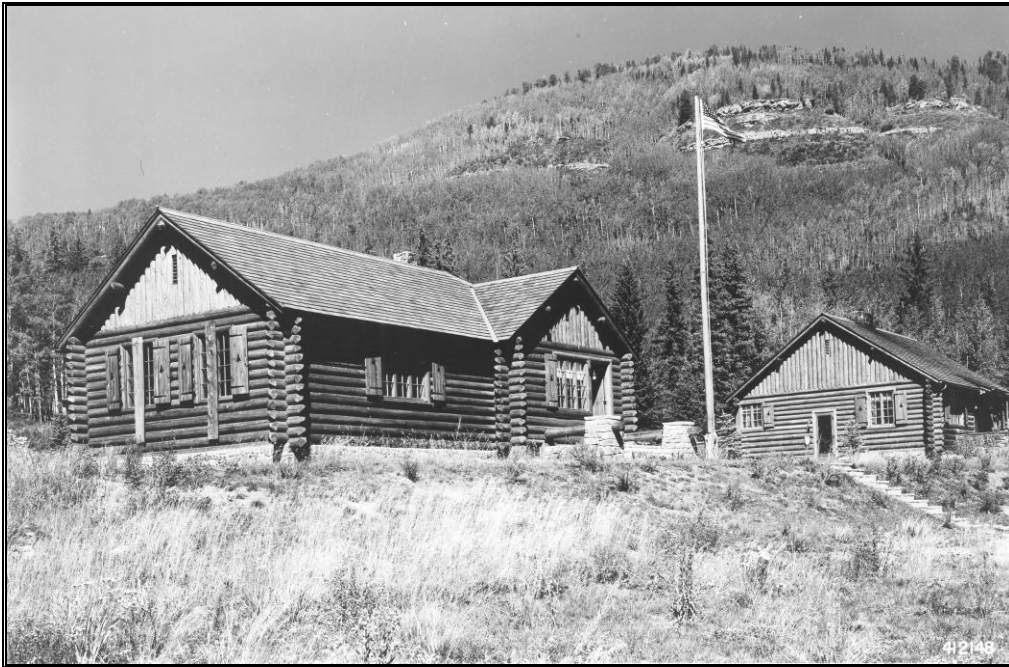
The airport opened the region to more travelers and in later years allowed commuters to live in their southwest Colorado paradise, but travel to work.



Photograph 8. Monarch Airlines plane landing at the Durango-La Plata Regional Airport about 1950. Photo Source: La Plata County Historical Society Animas Museum Photo Archives.

¹⁹⁴Smith, Duane A. *Rocky Mountain Boomtown, A History of Durango, Colorado*. Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company. 1983. Page 109.

The Federal Government



Columbine Ranger Station just after completion in 1941



The station as it looks today. Historic photo from the La Plata County Historical Society Animas Museum Photo Archives.

Agencies

With a little more than 40% of its area in public land, the history of La Plata County is intertwined with the policies and management of several federal agencies. Many federal agencies were organized to assess, manage and develop resources in the western United States. La Plata County contained many of these resources and has long been the home to federal government offices and field headquarters. A brief description of some of these agencies and a description of the prolific efforts of the New Deal Depression era programs in La Plata County follows. Examples of the agency projects are found in various thematic sections of this report.

Forest Service

The United States Forest Service (USFS) had its beginnings with the Forest Reserve Act of 1891 that allowed the establishment of forest reserves of timber that would remain in the public domain. Unlike most other land managing agencies, the forest service was placed under the Department of Agriculture, reflecting the focus of agricultural production for public benefit. There were six forest reserves in Colorado when the forest service was formalized as the U.S. Forest Service and charged with management of forest reserves in 1905. Two years later the reserves became forests and numbered 16 in Colorado.

The San Juan and Montezuma Forest Reserves were created in 1905 with the intent to conserve water, timber and grazing lands. In 1911 the Durango National Forest was created. In 1920, the Durango and San Juan National Forests were combined and consolidated into the San Juan National Forest (SJNF) with headquarters in Durango. Part of the former Montezuma National Forest was added to the San Juan National Forest in 1947. Forest districts were created within the SJNF between 1920 and 1960. The present configuration of three districts (Dolores, Columbine and Pagosa) was finalized by 1967. The forest lands in La Plata County are all within the Columbine District and include over 403,000 acres.

Several ranger cabins, guard stations and service buildings were constructed in the Columbine District for forest management. Recreation management is a recent duty initiated in the district. The majority of the forest lands lie in the central and northern portions of the county and settlement has been interspersed in and around the edges of the forest.

Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) had its origins in the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934. This act provided methods to control the effects of grazing on increasingly drought-ridden land through the issuance of permits and establishment of grazing districts. The Taylor Grazing Act also established the U.S. Grazing Service to manage and implement the permit program. In 1946, the Grazing Service merged with the General Land Office to form the Bureau of Land Management within the Department of the Interior. The BLM dealt with a myriad of laws until 1976 when the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) provided guidance for land management.

In contrast to the Forest Service, the BLM manages several types of landscapes from grass lands, forested areas, and mining locales. The FLPMA stipulates that BLM lands are ~~multiple use~~ and that they are managed for numerous resources including recreation, cultural values, oil and gas, and mineral extraction.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is an agency that was formed during the depression in 1933 as the Soil Erosion Service, the predecessor to the Soil Conservation Service. The Service initially worked with farmers to help stem the effects of soil erosion due to prolonged drought during the depression. The Service sponsored numerous erosion control efforts that were implemented by Civilian Conservation Corps groups. In 1935, the Soil Conservation Act was passed to establish conservation districts and to provide scientific assistance to land owners. The NRCS has evolved out of the SCS and continues to provide advice to conservation districts and to individual farmers and ranchers.

Bureau of Reclamation

President Theodore Roosevelt established the U.S. Reclamation Service under the Reclamation Act of 1902. The Reclamation Service was lodged within the Division of Hydrography in the United States Geological Survey. In the jargon of the day, irrigation projects were known as reclamation projects with the purpose to reclaim arid land for human use.

The Reclamation Service became a separate agency named the Bureau of Reclamation in 1923. The Bureau's projects are primarily located in 17 western ~~arid~~ states that could most benefit from irrigation projects related to the 1902 definition of reclamation. A major influential factor in the Bureau's activities is the Colorado River Compact, which determined the allocation of water from the Colorado River to Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming. The Compact was highly controversial and not approved by all states until 1928, with numerous associated lawsuits. The Compact overestimated the water flows from the river. In 1944 an amendment to the Compact required the delivery of 1.5 million acre feet to Mexico. The Compact resulted in the construction of dams along the Colorado River, regulations on equalization of water flows between dams, and continued wrangling between Compact states.

An earlier Supreme Court decision, *Winters v. United States*, had lasting effects on the Bureau of Reclamation activities in Colorado and La Plata County. The 1908 decision, known as the ~~Winters Doctrine~~, found that Native American water rights were established at the time of the designation of their reservations and that these rights could be reserved and did not have to be exercised to remain in effect. Therefore, Indian tribes' water rights can be specified at some time in the future, and they have priority over other water rights that were established later in time. This doctrine applied to Ute water claims in both the Vallecito and the Animas La Plata projects in La Plata County.

The Bureau of Reclamation constructed Lemon Reservoir for agricultural purposes, and constructed the Vallecito Animas La Plata projects to store and manage water and to meet water claims from Native Americans and other water users. At Electra Lake, the Bureau of Reclamation developed and continues to oversee water releases for hydroelectric generation at Tacoma power plant in the Animas River Canyon.

National Park Service

Although the National Park Service did not have parks or monuments located in La Plata County, nearby parks such as Mesa Verde and Canyonlands have had considerable influence on the county's tourism and recreation sectors.

The concept of national parks was an outcome of the American fascination with the West. Expeditions into the west by Ferdinand Hayden, George Wheeler, John Wesley Powell and others had provided information to easterners that would stimulate interest in western resource for purposes other than settlement and exploitation. An 1871 expedition to the Yellowstone area, inspired the passage of the National Park Act in 1872 and the creation of the first national park, Yellowstone National Park. In the 1890s, additional national parks were added to the growing system, including Yosemite, General Grant, Sequoia, and Mount Rainier National Parks.

The observations reported during the early geographical and geological surveys of the West included information about 'ruined civilizations' and living native peoples. These reports stimulated additional expeditions to explore ruins in the southwest. In 1906, Mesa Verde National Park was established, the first national park to recognize cultural resources. In August 1916, the national parks were consolidated under the direction of the new National Park Service within the Department of the Interior. The administration and organization of the Service helped to increase interest and tourism in Mesa Verde. The tourism that developed and its affects on La Plata County are described in the Tourism Section of this report.

Other governmental entities that have influenced the history of the county include the Atomic Energy Commission , which is addressed in the Mining for the Nuclear Age Section of this document.

The New Deal in La Plata County

President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs implemented during the depression left indelible impacts on the county, including the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Works Progress Administration, the Public Works Administration, and the Rural Electrification Administration.

The CCC program employed young men at meaningful work for \$30 a month. \$25 was sent home to their families. The boys lived in camps in a quasi-military setting. Over three million young men participated in over 4,000 camps in all 48 states between 1933 and 1942. Colorado had more than 40 camps employing 57,000 men.¹⁹⁵ In a less honorable aspect of the program, separate camps were set up for Native American workers. These camps have very little historical documentation.

Three regular camps were established in La Plata County. One was in Durango on Reservoir Hill (the present location of Fort Lewis College), where workers built park facilities. A second camp near Kline operated under the Department of Grazing (now the Bureau of Land Management) to build erosion control features to improve water management. A third camp was established at Vallecito to help the Bureau of Reclamation build the Vallecito Dam.¹⁹⁶ Other temporary work camps and an Indian camp located near Ignacio also operated in the CCC program.

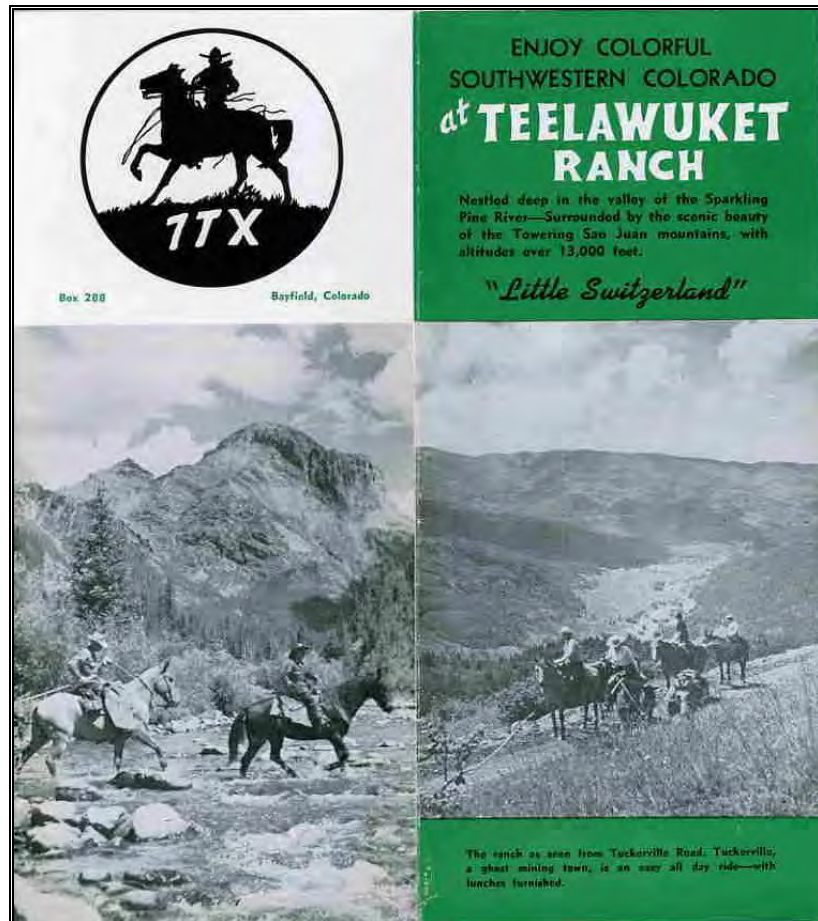
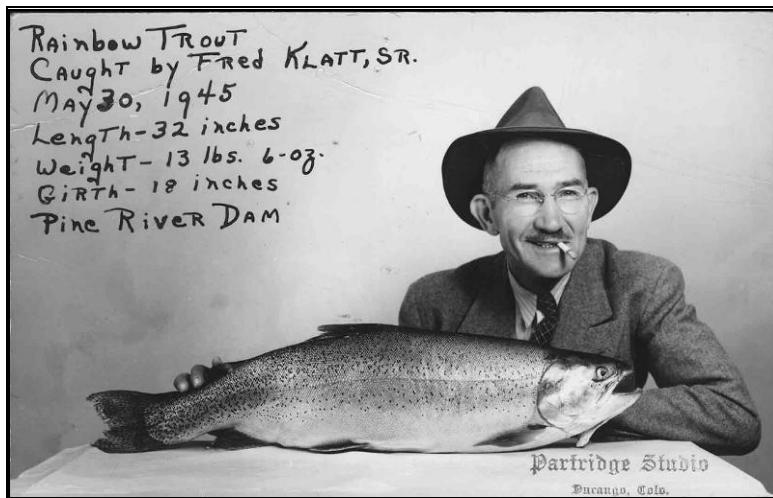
In addition to the CCC, other New Deal programs were conducted in the county. The La Plata County Fairgrounds were built under the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The National Youth Administration (NYA), another program under the WPA, was oriented toward programs and projects for local youth. Avocational archaeologist and writer, Helen Sloan Daniels, used these funds to develop a library display project for youth and to organize and implement archaeological excavations for youth under local direction. Other New Deal projects in the county included Durango's Emory E. Smiley Junior High School, and the library and faculty housing at the old Fort Lewis College Campus faculty. Another program, the Rural Electrification Administration helped bring electricity to rural residents, and is discussed in greater detail in the farming section of this context.

Although the 1930s and 1940s were difficult times, evidence of New Deal programs is throughout the county. The legacy of these programs is fine stone work on bridges and culverts, solid construction and carpentry on buildings, and important historic records and photographs.

¹⁹⁵ Hinton, Wayne K. and Elizabeth A. Green. *With Picks, Shovels & Hope: The CCC and Its Legacy on the Colorado Plateau*. Mountain Press Publishing, Missoula. 2008.

¹⁹⁶ Articles on several New Deal programs can be found in *Historic Durango Volume XV*, 2009, published by the La Plata County Historical Society.

Tourism



Trout photo from the La Plata County Historical Society Animas Museum Photograph Archives..

Beautiful scenery, fascinating history, natural wonders and the romantic remnants of a disappearing old west: La Plata County had everything to offer the tourists who arrived in the 1880s on the heels of the first settlers. Little did they know of the vital role that tourism would play in the county's economy after the heady years of mining and energy development.

The last rail had barely been laid in Silverton in 1882, when promoters began inviting tourists to enjoy the scenery and culture of the region. George Crofutt, the author of an early travelers guide to Colorado wrote glowingly of Durango, of the nearby archaeological ruins and of the railroad route in his 1881 and 1885 editions of *Crofutt's Grip-Sack Guide of Colorado*.¹⁹⁷ The railroads also promoted the area. Combined with the Rio Grande Southern Railroad, the Denver and Rio Grande (D&RG) promoted the "Around the Circle Tour", targeted at the middle class and the curious school teacher. In the 1890s the D &RG spent \$60,000 a year advertising its \$28 ticket for a four day 1,000-mile loop through scenic southwestern Colorado.¹⁹⁸

The Durango Board of Trade, a local booster organization, published a promotional brochure in 1892 touting all that Durango had to offer, including tourist itineraries. The brochure suggested visitors could tour the smelter and coal mines, see the Indians both in Durango and out on their reservation, ride the Rio Grande Southern to a point close to the "Manco's Cliff Dwellings", join the locals in a favorite activity of camping, hunting and fishing, or view the spectacular Animas Canyon above Rockwood.

The natural bounty of the area brought hunters and fishermen. In 1891-1892, the Board of Trade publication noted that 118 bears and 23 mountain lions had been taken in addition to trout, deer, antelope, elk, and Rocky Mountain sheep. Fish hatcheries were developed to supply local streams, ponds and restaurants.

Another highly touted attraction was the nearby Trimble Hot Springs. Popular with locals and tourists, Trimble Hot Springs offered recreation, music and perceived health benefits from taking the waters. William Frank Trimble and his wife Rufina homesteaded the property in 1874 and, wisely, later sold a right of way to the D&RG for \$445. Although the Trimbles opened the healing waters of their spring to the public, it was not until Thomas D. Burns bought and developed the springs that a major attraction was born. A prominent business man based in Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico, with his wife, Josefa Gallegos Burns, Thomas bought the springs in late 1882 and immediately constructed a handsome two story hotel. This building burned in 1892 and was replaced by the even grander brick three story Hermosa House. With an elegant dining room, electrical lighting and steam heat in all forty guest rooms, the Hermosa House was the scene of many grand parties and social events. Additional guest cottages, a bath house and a

¹⁹⁷ Crofutt, George. *Crofutt's Grip-Sack Guide of Colorado*. Reprint, Golden, Colorado: Cubar Associates, 1966. Pages 89, 164,62.

¹⁹⁸ O'Rourke, Paul M. *Frontiers in Transition: A History of Southwestern Colorado*. Denver, Colorado: Bureau of Land Management, 1982. Page 160.

separate building with a saloon, bowling alley and gymnasium were next to the grand hotel. Indoor baths and a large outdoor pool made good use of the natural springs.

Most of the visitors arrived by train at the new Trimble siding, but locals also arranged outings to Trimble where they would ride their bicycles or come out by wagon. Trimble maintained a livery and provided a cab service. Although not as large or prominent as some of the other Colorado spas, Trimble was a prosperous operation.

A new attraction in the 1880s and 1890s drew curious visitors to the archaeological remains of the Ancestral Puebloans near Mancos. The world became aware of these more romantically called “ruins of the ancients” through William Henry Jackson’s 1874 photographs of sites in the Mancos and McElmo Canyon. The photographs were published in newspapers and used as part of an exhibit on the region in the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Twelve years later, in 1888, members of the Mancos area Wetherill family came upon ancient cliff dwellings, and soon collected an assortment of artifacts, which they displayed in Durango, —. where they realized, much to their amazement, that people would pay to see what they had found.”¹⁹⁹

The Wetherills cleverly presented their collections at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Word spread quickly, drawing visitors to Mancos to engage a guide to the ruins. While the sites were not located in La Plata County, Durango profited as the transportation hub for the region. Prior to 1890, visitors would arrive in Durango on the train and endure a wagon trip to Mancos. When the Rio Grande Southern was completed in 1890, the train connection between Durango and Mancos reduced the travel time. Victorian sensibility created a new position for the growing guide business in Mancos as high school girls were hired to accompany groups with only one woman.

Along with the increased awareness came an alarming volume of exported cultural materials. In 1893 explorer Gustaf Nordienskind arrived at the ruins and departed with a large collection to the growing consternation of the local population. Led by Colorado Springs activist Virginia Donaghe McClurg and Lucy Peabody, the Colorado Cliff Dwellings Association partnered with women’s clubs in four states and lobbied nationally to protect the ruins. After many failed attempts, their efforts coincided with President Theodore Roosevelt’s conservation-minded administration. In June of 1906, Congress passed the Antiquities Act, which defined protective measures for cultural resources located on federal lands. Three weeks later, on June 29, President Roosevelt signed the Mesa Verde Park bill specifically ensuring protection for many of the prehistoric remains. (Cliff Palace was not included in the original bill and was added in 1913.) Durango now was a gateway to a national attraction.

The nature of tourism changed throughout Colorado and the rest of the country with the introduction of the automobile. By 1925, there were 1,689 licensed cars in La Plata County and 269,854 in the State. New roads, built for automobiles opened up new

¹⁹⁹ Smith, Duane A. and Winkler, Willima C. *Travels and Travails, Tourism at Mesa Verde*. Durango, Colorado: Durango Herald Small Press, 2005. Page 7.

territory for tourists. Colorado's State Highway Commission and State Highway Department constructed roads that eased the tourist's access to Colorado's many attractions and would eventually traverse the State. The infamous route over Wolf Creek Pass was constructed and graveled in 1916.

A major north-south route through La Plata County, to become known as US Highway 550, was built in the 1920s and 1930s. The east-west route (to become US Highway 160) was also completed in that time, connecting the east slope of the state with the west.

Local businesses adjusted to the new automobile. A small number of auto courts and motels popped up in La Plata County, mostly in Durango. In 1923, Trimble Hot Springs offered a bus from Durango that made five trips a day. Tourists could now drive to Mesa Verde, if their cars had made it all that way to Colorado. The *Durango Semi Weekly Herald* ran a long article in its September 10, 1917 edition chronicling the adventures of an Oldsmobile owners automobile club that left Denver on September 1, bound for Mesa Verde via the new Wolf Creek Pass. They left Denver on a Saturday and arrived in Durango on Monday afternoon at about 3pm, where they received an enthusiastic welcome from the local booster organization, The Durango Exchange. After a public display of the cars on the main street of Durango, the group was off to Mesa Verde. Their return route included a stop at Trimble Hot Springs and travel home through Silverton and Ouray.

The first automobile tourists came to La Plata County for the outdoor experiences and to see ancient ruins. Thanks to the federal government, the concessionaires of the Four Corners states were primed for these new travelers. Nine national parks or monuments were recognized and created by the Federal Government between 1906 and 1929. The San Juan National Forest was created in 1905 and expanded in 1920 by the addition of the Durango National Forest that had been established in 1911. A "See America First" campaign was endorsed in 1917 by powerful western politicians and included a promotional partnership with the Atcheson Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad to encourage tourists westward.

Table 12. Federally Recognized Parks and Monuments in the Four Corners States Before 1930

Site	Year
Mesa Verde National Park	1906
Chaco Canyon National Monument	1907
Grand Canyon National Monument	1908
Hovenweep National Monument	1919
Yucca House National Monument	1923
Zion National Park	1923
Aztec National Monument	1924
Bryce National Park	1924
Arches National Park	1929 (originally established as a Monument)

The Trimble Hot Springs pursued other health-minded ~~medical~~ tourists. In 1919 the Springs launched, with help from the Durango Board of Trade, an application to the federal government to be designated a Government Recuperation Camp. Presumably this facility would have been for the returning veterans of World War I. The outcome of this attempt is lost to history, but apparently was not successful.

Motorists often carried their own supplies and camping equipment and were inclined to ~~roughing it~~. Some historians have noted that the automobile democratized tourism, opening an era of travel to the middle class where previously the wealthy had been the primary clientele. The preference for ~~curative waters~~ at the hot springs was quickly going out of style and tourist business at Trimble Hot Springs suffered. In 1937 Dorothy Piccoli bought the Trimble Hot Springs and turned it into a local night club. Trimble continued to be a local favorite, but it no longer held much interest for tourists.

Cheap camping excursions certainly allowed automobile tourism to continue into the economically depressed 1930s, although in smaller numbers. The San Juan National Forest offered acres of beautiful country for the outdoors lovers. Mesa Verde provides a reliable indicator of the continued popularity in automobile touring in the 1930s. In 1921, the Park reported 3,003 visitors and 651 visiting automobiles. The numbers climbed steadily through the 1930s and were up to 36,443 visitors and 10,459 automobiles in 1940.

The 1930s also saw the expansion of air travel. In 1930 there were 27 public airports in Colorado and the Durango Municipal Airport was one of them. Durango's airport opened on October 12, 1929 on Reservoir Hill, near the present site of Fort Lewis College. Daily air service, however, did not come until after World War II.

The upper Pine River Valley, and much of La Plata County, received a tourism boom from the development of the Pine River Project. Conceived as an irrigation reservoir with a minor recreation component, Vallecito Dam and Reservoir were completed and filled by the Bureau of Reclamation in the days leading up to World War II. People who worked on the project and were charmed by the area stayed. The influx of new development was slowed by the war, but the new road to the reservoir allowed much easier access to the ranches that had dominated the valley.

World War II brought gasoline rationing. The trains were reserved for federal transport. Tourism slumped, but was rapidly revived after the war by a mobile, more affluent society that enjoyed more leisure time than before. A new nostalgia for the old west attracted hundreds to Colorado and La Plata County. In the words of historian Duane A. Smith, ~~Drango~~ attempted to live off a legend, a legend that never actually existed.”²⁰⁰ All things western appealed to the traveling public and to the communities trying to attract their dollars.

²⁰⁰ Smith, Duane A. *Rocky Mountain Boomtown, A History of Durango, Colorado*. Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company. 1983. Page 176.

Mancos outfitter, Ansel Hall had anticipated the surge. During the war years he purchased the old Gold King Mine and Mill in the La Plata Mountains and set it up as a base camp for his Explorers Camps for Boys. Ansel was no single minded outfitter. The first chief naturalist and the first chief forester for the National Park Service, Ansel left the Service and became the first concessionaire at Mesa Verde National Park. The Explorers Camps were a side business that guided participants under the skilled leadership of Kenneth Ross, the former Chief of Interpretation at Mesa Verde.

Other summer camps arrived or operated after the war. In 1949, Bill Groves and his father, Forrest, founded Camp Silver Spruce for boys and girls along the Florida River. The Groves family operated the camp until 1969 when the business was sold to the Colvig family and the original campground was subdivided into residential lots. The Teelawuket Boys camp and the Rancho Mesa Verde Camp (located near Allison) continued operations from the 1920s up into the 1950s.

Dude ranches, the quintessential sentimental attempt to experience the West, sprang up throughout La Plata County. Operations ranged from extensively developed guest ranches to simple provisions of guide services or horses.²⁰¹ Milton Lechner, who grew up on a ranch near Rockwood, remembered they would get \$5 a day for a horse for the dudes. Jewell Ludwig LePlatt, whose family had the Jewell-Carroll Guest Ranch (named for Jewell and her cousin) remembers picking up the dudes at the train station in Ignacio and driving them up to the family's summer range that also doubled as the base for outfitting the visitors for hunting and camping trips.

A summer recreation guide published in May 1953 by the Durango *Herald News* proclaimed that guest ranches in the San Juan Basin drew 5,000 guests and half a million dollars in revenue. The guide featured stories about three La Plata County dude ranches and listed some of the outfits in La Plata County and the San Juan Basin. Ben and Kay Franklin, who came from Ohio in 1948 to build the Cherry Creek Lodge Guest Ranch on County Road 105 were featured. Their facilities included a recently completed 10 acre lake for fishing. In 1953, Bob and Thelma Venuti were operating El Rancho Encantado, which was located at the old Pinkerton Springs. The Venuti's place later became the Golden Horseshoe (bar and supper club) before it was converted into its current function as a private school called Colorado Timberline Academy. The Venutis had built and developed the Wilderness Trails Guest Ranch, which was operated by their son, Bob Jr. and his wife, Mary at the time of the 1953 article. Further up the Animas River from El Rancho Encantado was the Ah Wilderness Guest Ranch, which was only accessible by the train and was run by Ross and Ethel McCausland. These are just a few of a burgeoning industry that catered to the city people who could now get to the remote ranches of the West via train, plane or automobile.

²⁰¹ Dude Ranches were very popular in the 1920s in other parts of the country, particularly in Arizona and the Rocky Mountain States. While a few dude ranches operated in the 1920s in La Plata County, the trend was apparently more popular in the 1950s.

Table 13. Known Dude Ranches Operating in La Plata County in the 1950s

-
- Cherry Creek Lodge Guest Ranch located at west edge of the county
 - Teelawuket located near Vallecito Lake
 - Wilderness Trails Guest Ranch located near Vallecito Lake
 - Wits End Guest Ranch located near Vallecito Lake
 - Meadow Lark Inn (outfitting) located near Vallecito Lake
 - El Rancho Encantado Guest Ranch located in the Animas Valley
 - Ah Wilderness Guest Ranch located in Animas Canyon
 - Columbine Guest Ranch located near present day Durango Mountain Ski Resort
 - Hermosa Cliffs Guest Ranch located near present day Durango Mountain Ski Resort
 - Hotter Brothers (outfitting) located near present day Durango Mountain Ski Resort
 - Jewell Carroll Ranch located in the Piedra drainage
-



La Plata County Historical Society Animas Museum Photo Archives

Photograph 9. Teelawuket was homesteaded in 1886 by brothers Charles C. and Joseph H. Graham. The ranch sold in 1894 to “Coal Oil” Johnny Kirkpatrick who had made a fortune in the oil business, loved to entertain and ran in powerful circles. He imported Swedish builders to construct the grand main house in 1895. Kirkpatrick sold the property to Pete Scott, a sheep man from Aztec, New Mexico, who raised sheep and cattle and hosted paying guests. The place was run as a boys camp from 1921 until 1953 and then converted to a guest ranch.

No longer working ranches, most of the dude ranches were operated for the guests, requiring their owners to seek out alternative income in the winter. Ross McCausland

taught industrial education in the Durango public schools in his “off” season from Ah Wilderness. The Franklins operated a bookstore in Durango to carry them through the lean times.

The dude ranches helped promote of La Plata County’s western image. Bob Venuti Sr. is credited with influencing many of the movie companies to film their westerns in La Plata County, including the well-known *Ticket to Tomahawk* (1948) and *Across the Wide Missouri* (1950). The nationally released films furthered the western image and the appeal of a dude ranch. Even the local airline carrier, Frontier Airlines, portrayed itself as the Dude Ranch Airline.

The Vallecito area also boomed after the war. Lakeside resorts and cabins and marinas were developed in the late 1940s and 1950s. Some of these properties were developed by old ranchers who had once used the land to graze livestock before they ended up with a lake in their midst. The Bureau of Reclamation constructed Lemon Reservoir in 1963 to store and manage Florida River water. Although primarily built to provide irrigation, the lake proved popular for fishing and boating.

Along with their rural counterparts, the urban “boosters” in Durango were also hard at work to develop more tourism after World War II. A big post-war predicament was the future of the train. Once a dominant force in La Plata County, the Denver & Rio Grande Western (D&RGW) was teetering towards closure. Railroad officials wanted to discontinue the entire route west from Alamosa, but protesting locals were able to salvage the Durango to Silverton Route and convince the D&RGW to promote the train as a tourist attraction. In 1950, the railroad transported 4,500 camera clad visitors. By 1953, three trains ran during the summer weeks with each carrying 200-300 people who paid \$5 each. A train also ran in the winter, but only on Wednesdays and passengers rode in the caboose. A second summer train was added in 1963 serving about 600 passengers a week.

Local tourist attractions were sprouting up along highways as well. To the east of Durango was Gem Village, a unique theme town in the county.²⁰² In 1941, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Norse platted a parcel of land to establish a colony for gem crafters and artisans. Interest in rocks and minerals was spreading and the Norse believed that a small community could further the public’s interest in rocks and minerals. In the 1950s there were small shops that displayed specimens and gem crafts and handmade jewelry. Interest continued to grow and in 1954, 16 people met at “Treasure House” the home of Mrs. Jo Copeland to discuss the formation of the Navajo Trails Gem and Mineral Club. The purpose of the Club was to 1) study earth sciences; 2) encourage the collecting of rocks and minerals; 3) promote artistry in lapidary; and 4) encourage the exchange of knowledge. Later in 1954, membership had outgrown meetings in homes. Mrs. Copeland donated land for a clubhouse and Mr. and Mrs. Jones donated logs from their property along the Piedra River. The members constructed a large log cabin, now known

²⁰² The following information is 1) abstracted from “The Story of the Navajo Trails Gem and Mineral Club” by Ruby Schuler in *Bayfield: Views through Time*. A collection of articles at the Pine River Public Library, January 2000; and 2) telephone interview with Mary Alice Copeland, December 9, 2008.

as the Rock Club. The structure has at least two interesting features, an exterior chimney built of numerous colorful rock specimens, and on the east side, a series of stalls for artists to conduct rock and mineral demonstrations and sell their crafts. The club held annual Rock Shows and was incorporated in November 1954. It became affiliated with the Rocky Mountain Federation of Mineralogical Societies.

The village provided community services such as a store and restaurant/ bar. Other commercial operations catered to tourists with trading post goods and souvenirs. Most of the homes in the community belonged to club members.

In 1988, there were 10 active members with 3 charter members ranging in age from 73 to 102 years and the club decided to disband. Today, the village is a mix of small commercial stores that travelers whiz past. The closed Rock Club with its interesting rock chimney stands along the highway as the reminder of a community created around rocks and minerals.

Beginning in 1949, La Plata County boosters joined a "Navajo Trail Committee" to develop a paved road across the Navajo Reservation. The process dragged through numerous governmental agencies, including the Atomic Energy Commission, which wanted to improve transportation between uranium sources and mills, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Navajo Nation and all four state governments from the Four Corners states who were wrangling over the actual route of the road. In about 1957, the Durango and Cortez Chambers of Commerce petitioned to realign the proposed road into Colorado, a request that infuriated the City of Farmington, whose citizens noted that the Navajos were, after all, located in New Mexico, NOT in Colorado.

It took the election of a sympathetic John F. Kennedy as president and his appointment of Arizona Senator Stewart Udall to head the Department of the Interior to finally fund and complete the route across the Navajo Reservation. Perhaps as a compromise, the road passed close to the intersection of the four warring states. The road was completed in 1962 and Durango celebrated with its first Navajo Trail Fiesta, featuring a parade with an all-Navajo marching band and the local Durango American Legion Goldenaires. Historian Art Gomez noted "Shortly after its completion, the Navajo Highway became nationally recognized as the shortest and most scenic all-weather route between Los Angeles and Kansas City...The Navajo Trail linked the Southwest to mainstream America and in the process improved interstate communication throughout the Four Corners..."²⁰³

In the midst of the road wars, La Plata County realized a stabilizing influence in its summer oriented tourist season. In 1965, Ray Duncan made a public presentation on his plans to develop the Purgatory Ski Area, north of Durango. Local businesses and individuals raised to \$90,000 fund a development corporation, which Duncan matched with \$350,000 in loans from the Small Business Administration. Skiing had a long history in the county, but not as a commercial activity. The early miners and mail

²⁰³ Gomez, Arthur R. *Quest For the Golden Circle, The Four Corners and the Metropolitan West*. Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1991. Page 118.

carriers, and even an early itinerant priest, used skis to travel the snowy mountains. One would think they occasionally had a little fun too. Locals enjoyed a few small ski hills such as the hill at Hesperus and Chapman Hill, but Duncan was the first to propose such a large scale operation.

A new winter attraction boosted the growing tourism and recreation economy in La Plata County. Summer visitors in ever expanding numbers supported many businesses that had suffered with the waning oil and gas boom in the 1960s and the closure of the uranium processing mill in 1963. Business owners hoped that Purgatory would bring in much needed winter traffic.

Tourism, with its fans and detractors, continues to be a prominent contributor to the local economy and to the economies of other communities in the Four Corners states. Historian Art Gomez observed that tourism has replaced energy resource development as the region's leading industry. Gomez also argues that as a locally sustainable and controlled sector, tourism differs from the historical tradition of the energy and mining industries in the Four Corners that relied on capitol and decision-making from absentee and distant owners. Gomez believes that tourism is one of the ongoing economic factors in determining how La Plata County and the other rural regions of the Four Corners states will develop.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Gomez, Arthur R. *Quest For the Golden Circle, The Four Corners and the Metropolitan West*. Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1991. Page 121.

Community Development



Teacher Phyllis Jones took this photo of her Students at the Red Creek School in the 1940s. Photo from the La Plata County Historical Society Animas Museum Archive.



Tiffany Catholic Church

Settlement and Population

La Plata County's development follows the path of opportunity. The first legal prospectors and settlers came in late 1873 and 1874, while the ink was still wet on the Brunot Agreement with the Utes. A fresh wave of optimists came in 1899 in search of the chances offered by the newly opened Ute Strip.

The period between 1874 and 1881 were the county's frontier years. Travel was difficult, slow and expensive. Services were small scale. Many camps and communities were focused on a single economic activity such as mining or farming. The arrival of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad (D&RG) in 1881 and the later completion of the Rio Grande Southern (RGS) in 1890 connected the county to the outside world, accelerating the establishment of social and commercial entities and radically and permanently changing the county.

The railroads provided capital, business expertise and transportation. The D&RG platted and developed the town of Durango and boosted local commerce in the 1880s through direct and indirect investments in major industries such as coal mining, smelting and electricity.

Railroad freight also provided goods that could not be produced locally and encouraged ever more new settlers in the towns and the country side. Communication was much faster as the mail could come on the train, and the telegraph lines could follow the routes of the railroads. The railroad exponentially increased the rate of growth and brought religious, education and other cultural institutions to what had been a remote frontier.

A new wave of homesteaders arrived in 1899, when the federal government opened previously unallotted Ute land to non-Ute settlement. The west end of the Strip motivated Mormon settlement and provided land owning opportunities to the miners working the nearby coal mines in Hesperus and Porter. The east end of the Strip inspired farmers and land speculators who created new towns along the railroad.

The railroads continued to shape the future of La Plata County's communities. The county's older camps and settlements that were not located along a railroad route suffered and either withered or completely disappeared. Towns developed next to the railroad faltered when the railroad discontinued passenger services in the 1950s. Other communities that had established after 1890 and were far from existing railroads did not suffer as directly from the closing of the railroads, but struggled with access via rough roads and contended with the economic challenges of their remote locations.

By 1920, the initial flurry of homesteading or setting up businesses had defined the character and location of the major urban and rural communities in La Plata. The county enjoyed continuous growth. The population figures in Table 14 show the five fold increase between 1880 and 1890 when the railroads arrived. A more modest but still remarkable 27% increase occurred from 1890 to 1900 and growth continued at a very healthy rate after the opening of the Ute Strip into the 1910s. The table also shows the

distribution of people in La Plata County. In the 1890 census about half of the County's population lived in Durango, but a majority of the county population was rural until some time in the 1950s.

Table 14. Population of La Plata County From 1880 to 1960 Per U.S. Census Data

Year	County	Durango	Bayfield	Ignacio	Colorado
1880	1,110				194,327
1890	5,509	2,726			412,198
1900	7,016	3,317			541,483
1910	10,812	4,686	227		799,044
1920	11,218	4,116	267	290	939,191
1930	12,975	5,400	277	464	1,035,791
1940	15,494	5,887	372	555	1,123,296
1950	14,880	7,489	335	526	1,325,089
1960	19,225	10,530	322	609	1,753,947

Curiously the county grew during the economically depressed 1930s and experienced its only population decrease after World War II. The 1950s saw an onslaught of energy companies and their employees come to the county. In 1956, sixteen major oil production firms had offices in La Plata County, and over 800 new homes were built between 1955 and 1960.

The influx of newcomers in the 1950s, bringing new ideas and further reducing the county's isolation had a familiar pattern of exponential growth in social and cultural activities and services, harkening back to the heady first years of the coming of the railroad.

The petroleum boom was one of the many economic and social changes to shake the county after World War II. Fort Lewis College moved to Durango in 1956, expanding its offerings and attracting a new generation of educators. A new community hospital district was formed, providing an alternative to Mercy Hospital, which also expanded and remodeled in the 1950s. After a very lengthy process, the state-mandated public schools consolidation was completed and all rural one room school houses were closed in favor of larger regional elementary schools. Junior high and high schools were located in Ignacio, Bayfield and Durango. Government agencies employed a growing number of specialists.

Americans enjoyed new prosperity and with it came more leisure time with an emphasis on outdoor recreation. No longer attracted by the opportunities to live off the land, new post-war pioneers came to mine La Plata County's recreational and scenic opportunities. Tourism brought scattered vacation and second homes, mirroring a nationwide trend. These homes introduced more exotic buildings into the county. They were either nouveau rustic woodsy cottages or the ultra modern A-frame. The nationwide surge from the cities to the suburbs took on its own character in La Plata County, where people with no

interest in farming or ranching sought acreage in the country. Ranchers and farmers found themselves with a new opportunity to sell off parts of their land to these new settlers, and long held land ownership patterns began to change.



Photograph 10. One of the multitudes of cottages constructed in La Plata County in the 1960s and 1970s, the A-frame was a wildly popular design across the country because it was cheap and easy to build. Many A-frames were sold as kits.

The Purgatory Ski Area and the Tamarron Resort, established in 1965 and 1974, respectively, were evidence of the change in the population. La Plata County's new frontiers shifted to reflect changing American society.

Ranging from mining camps to aspiring state capitals, the towns in La Plata County are diverse and unique. The following summary of towns is supplemented by discussion in other sections of this document.

Mining Camps 1874-1930

The first gatherings of prospectors in La Plata County are discussed in the First Miners and Settlers, and the Precious Metal Mining Sections. They include:

Animas City #1-- established in 1860 near Bakers Bridge

Parrott City-- named for a San Francisco financier and developed by miners near the California Bar diggings at the mouth of La Plata Canyon. Briefly served as the La Plata County seat but soon faded into oblivion

La Plata—a mining camp located higher up La Plata Canyon and active into the 1930s.

May Day--- site of the May Day mine and terminus of a spur from the Rio Grande Southern Railroad, the settlement was the drop off point for miners packing ore down from the mines located higher up La Plata Canyon.

Tuckerville—the only mining town located above the Pine River Drainage

Hewit, later known as Logtown—located in the never-productive Needles Mining District.

Coal Mining Towns 1890-1920s

Essentially company towns, these communities boomed during coal mining and, except for Hesperus, disappeared when the mines closed. They are discussed in the Coal Mining Section.

Perins—Named for the Perins Mine

Porter--- Named for the Porter Mine

Hesperus--- Gave its name to the nearby Hesperus Coal Mine

Pre-Railroad Settlements 1873-1881

These earliest settlements served the farmers and ranchers of La Plata County in the frontier period before the railroad arrived. Hermosa and Animas City are discussed in the First Miners and Settlers Section. Rockwood was vitalized by the railroads and is discussed in the Railroads Section.

Hermosa-A settlement with one or two stores and a post office

Animas City-A platted real estate development venture that enjoyed modest success as a supply point until it was throttled by the Denver and Rio Grande's new town of Durango.

Rockwood-initially a settlement located near the termini of the Silverton and Rico roads, Rockwood became a freight stop for the railroad.

Farming/Ranching Towns 1874-1905

These settlements started out as rural community centers. Some grew to town status.

Elco/ Bondad-Started out as Elco

La Posta- Also known as Castelar

Sunnyside-An informal settlement

Later Farming Towns 1899-1906

These towns developed to serve farming communities and were independent of and far removed from the railroads. They are discussed in the Farming Section.

Marvel, Kline and Redmesa-settled on the west side of the county after the Ute Strip was opened **Breen**-a post office named for the wife of the former Superintendent at the Fort Lewis Indian School.

Bayfield-a successful town that still serves the Pine River Valley

Settlements along the Railroad 1881-1924

Developed from sidings or service communities for the railroad, these towns are discussed in the Railroads Section. Durango is also discussed later in this Community Development Section

Durango-the spectacularly successful real estate development project of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad

La Boca-a siding that eventually had a school, store and post office

Silla-later called Grommet and then Oxford

Griffith-named for a prominent local landowner and eventually renamed Falfa

Tiffany-formerly the Solidar Siding for the Railroad

Allison-formerly the Vallejo Siding for the Railroad*Indian Agency Towns*

Ignacio is a townsite platted next to an Indian Agency and near the D&RG depot. It is discussed in the description of Indian Agencies in the New Frontiers Section, in the Railroads Section, and later in this Community Development Section.

Tourist and Recreation Communities

Vallecito and **Gem Village** have origins related to leisure time pursuits and are discussed in the Tourism Section and later in the discussion of leisure in this section.

The post office often served as the community center. Post offices were a sure sign of the early pioneers' intent to permanently settle their lands. Early applications to establish post offices abounded. In La Plata County's brief earliest configuration (which included present-day San Juan County) the post office was located in Howardsville. In 1876, San Juan County was split from La Plata and the first post office in the newly reconfigured county was established at the new county seat, Parrott City, on May 5, 1876.²⁰⁵ The second post office in the county opened in Hermosa in July of 1876, followed by Animas City in March 1877. Other early settlements in the county, such as Florida, Niccora, Pine River, and Rockwood soon followed.

Many post offices were short lived or mobile. November 30, 1954 was an auspicious day for closures when the U.S. postal service closed offices at Allison, Breen, Falfa, Oxford, Redmesa, Tacoma, and Tiffany in a move most likely related to the loss of D &RG passenger service in 1951 and the general shift away from railroad service in rural areas.

In a few cases, some offices closed for brief periods during the winter months. Niccora has the distinction as the shortest operating post office in the county. Niccora was located along the Animas River north of the confluence of Cascade Creek and the River. The post office served the Animas Canyon Toll Road that ran between Animas City and Silverton. The post office operated for a total of four months and then was closed.

Forty-eight post offices were authorized in the county. Of these, only two did not open for operation. The office at Wall had the designation rescinded, and the office at McQuiety was authorized but never operated.²⁰⁶ A review of the names of the post offices and their locations provides an interesting glimpse of the aspirations of early settlers and their hopes for the continued development of their new settlements. A list of all post offices in the county and their dates of operation are included in the Appendix.

Just as post offices often provided the commercial center of a rural area, schools provided the social and educational home. Granges sometimes also served that purpose. Granges started in La Plata County in 1911 and are discussed in the Farming Section.

²⁰⁵ Bauer, William H., James L. Ozment, and John H. Willard. *Colorado Post Offices 1859-1989: A Comprehensive Listing of Post Offices, Stations & Branches*. Colorado Railroad Historical Foundation, Golden. 1990. Page 111.

²⁰⁶ Bauer, Ozment, and Willard. *Op.Cit.* Pages 97, 148.

The beginnings of rural education in La Plata County were the result of early nation-wide efforts for public education. Following the Northwest Land Ordinance of 1785, newly created territories were required to set aside Section 16 in each township for a public school. In 1848 Congress required that Section 36 also be set aside for school purposes.²⁰⁷ Across the nation, many states began to implement legislation that stipulated a free public education for children.

The Colorado Territorial Assembly passed laws in 1861 that provided for the administrative framework for public schools. The Colorado Compulsory Education Law, passed in 1889, stipulated that children aged eight through 14 were required to attend school for at least 12 weeks each year. The law exempted children living more than two miles from a school.²⁰⁸

The parents of as few as 10 students could petition the county school superintendent for a school. Schools were often constructed by local families and were located close enough to the home to allow children to attend school and still help out on the family farm or ranch. Funding came from levies assessed by the school district until 1936, when voters approved a state tax to fund schools. In La Plata County, school districts that included the railroad right-of-way received monies from levies placed on the railroad based on the amount of linear feet within the district. The efforts to capture railroad taxes resulted in creative district boundaries, particularly in the Oxford area.²⁰⁹

Although efforts across the state to consolidate many of the rural schools began in the early 1900s, the School District Reorganization Act was not passed until 1949. This act stipulated that county committees would develop a reorganization, or consolidation, plan for the schools and that voters must approve the plan. The act led to the eventual closing of rural schools.

In La Plata County, the first schools opened in Parrott City, Animas City, Pine River, and Hermosa. The earliest schools established at farms and ranches to accommodate rural children were located in the Pine River Valley and on Florida Mesa.²¹⁰ In spite of the mandated use of Sections 16 and 36 for schoolhouses, schools in La Plata County were erected where land was available (usually by family donation) or where it was geographically most feasible. The school districts were sequentially numbered when established. Animas City had the first school in the Animas Valley, a log cabin structure erected in 1876 and the first building in Animas City School District #1. The Lightner Creek, Rockwood and Pine River Valley districts followed. The Durango School District

²⁰⁷ Doggett, Suzanne and Holly Wilson. Rural School Buildings in Colorado; National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form. Colorado Historical Society. 1999. Page E-7.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* Page E-20.

²⁰⁹ Spining, Bruce. *Clapboards, School Boards and Blackboards: A History of the Florida Area Rural Country Schools 1875-1959*. Florida Schools Association. Self published. Durango, CO 1993. Page 53.

²¹⁰ John, Laddie. *A Brief History of Bayfield and the Pine River Valley, 1877-2007: A Reference Book with 19th and 20th Century Names, Dates, and Places*. Self published, Durango, CO. 2007. Page 3-1 to 3-29.

was # 9 and formed in 1881.²¹¹ One district could have one or several schools. The Sortais School District (#14) included the Sortais Main School, the Lissner School, and the Red Creek School or Sortais Middle School.²¹² The districts adjusted to changing student populations and finances. The county had 38 school districts encompassing over 70 schools by 1938. A list of historic schools and their known dates of operation is included in the Appendix.

County rural schools tended to share many characteristics. They were usually relatively small, wood frame buildings with a central entrance into one room. Some entrances had covered porches and some had vestibules that served as cloak rooms. A separate cloak and/or book room occurred occasionally. A few schools had more than one room, reflecting either a larger population or a greater age range of students. Some of the larger schools were replacements of the smaller first schools. Examples of multi-room rural schools included the Orr School (second and third structures), Allison school and Tiffany school.

The interiors of the rooms usually included tables and/or desks, blackboards, a teacher's desk, and a wood or coal stove. A good example is the Lower Spring Creek School that has a small book room with shelves and bead board walls.

The schools were often built by neighbors with locally obtained and donated materials. A 1932 photograph of the Lissner School shows neighbors re-roofing the school.²¹³ A few early schools were built of other materials. Examples of early log schools are at Animas City and Los Pinos. Adobe schools were constructed at La Posta (first and second schools). Brick or stone schools were built at Oxford, La Posta (third school), and Elco/Bondad.

Structures associated with rural schools included playgrounds and some equipment such as teeter totters, slides, and swings; sheds and barns to house pupils' horses and mules; flagpoles; water pumps; and boys and girls outhouses. At some remote schools, teacherages were provided, either as separate cabins or attached to schools. At the Picnic Flat and Rockwood schools wood cabins were provided for the teacher. At the first La Posta School, the teacher's quarters were attached to the school building. Where teacherages were not available, the teacher often boarded with a local family.

Efforts began to consolidate the rural schools after the School Reorganization Act passed in 1949. After much discussion and a final vote in 1959, La Plata County schools consolidated into three districts: Durango School District 9-R, Bayfield 10 JT-R and

²¹¹ Seyfarth, Jill. Durango School District 9R: The First 120 Years. Cultural Resource Planning. Durango, Colorado 2001. Page 1.

²¹² Spining, Bruce. *Clapboards, School Boards and Blackboards: A History of the Florida Area Rural Country Schools 1875-1959*. Florida Schools Association. Self published. Durango, Colorado 1993. Page 28.

²¹³ Spining, Bruce. *Clapboards, School Boards and Blackboards: A History of the Florida Area Rural Country Schools 1875-1959*. Florida Schools Association. Self published. Durango, Colorado 1993. Page 83.

Ignacio 11.²¹⁴ The Durango School District sold a number of the schoolhouses at public auction to supplement funding, including the Cascade, Rockwood, Elco, Cherry Creek, Pleasant View and Lightner Creek schools.²¹⁵ Many schools were purchased and remodeled or relocated. In the Bayfield district, the early Pargin School was moved into Bayfield and reused as a school district facility building.



Photograph 11. The Rockwood School was purchased at an auction. The new owner wanted to buy the property to get its playground equipment for the St. Columba School in Durango.

Ignacio had a combination of public schools and schools associated with the Indian agency. In the early years, the agency school system remained distinct from the Ignacio public schools. The Los Pinos Indian Agency established a day school, which was converted to a boarding school for Indian students. By 1909, the Allen Day School was established as one of the first public schools in Ignacio. Indian students began to attend public schools in Ignacio, Bayfield, and other small rural communities in the 1930s. In the 1950s, efforts were made to consolidate the Southern Ute Vocational School into the Ignacio public school district, resulting in one school system.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ John, Laddie. *A Brief History of Bayfield and the Pine River Valley, 1877-2007: A Reference Book with 19th and 20th Century Names, Dates, and Places*. Self published, Durango, CO. 2007. Pages 3-1 to 3-29.

²¹⁵ Durango 9R School Board Minutes, April 1960.

²¹⁶ Young, Richard K. *The Ute Indians of Colorado in the Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma, Norman. Page 160.

Commercial Development

Most La Plata County settlements served the nearby local population and rarely progressed beyond a local store, often in combination with a post office. Bayfield, Durango, Marvel and Ignacio grew beyond the local market and influenced the region around them. Durango's development was the easiest to predict. With strong backing from the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, the town had available capital and a population optimistic enough to risk its savings and future in this brand new community. Even the established businesses in nearby Animas City packed up and left for Durango, including *The Southwest* newspaper and the bank. Railroad officials had been instrumental in locating a smelter and developing the downtown. The city's first substantial hotel, The Strater, opened in 1888. In 1892, local booster Richard McCloud extolled the town's and the region's prosperity. Three banks, the First National, the Colorado State and the Smelter National reported healthy capitalizations with total combined deposits of over \$674,000 and a fourth bank, the Durango Savings Bank had just opened.

By 1892 local specialty producers included two flour mills and the Durango Iron Works, which advertised iron column storefronts of a quality to match any brought in on the train. The Durango area had two brick companies that employed clay from Lightner Creek. The Bell Pressed Brick Company had a "Lion" brick press that produced 60,000 bricks in 24 hours and the Durango Pressed Brick Company employed a "Boyd" brick press at the maximum rate of 20,000 bricks in ten hours.

Lime mined near Rockwood and at other unspecified points in the Animas Valley was roasted in lime kilns for fluxing at the smelters and for mortar. The pace of construction in Durango kept the nearby sawmills busy. In 1892, Durango had three listed architects—Miss Maud Holly, Paul Geier and Silas W. Smith. Another local source of pride was the Smelter City Brewery. The local brewer since 1886, Smelter City produced 20,000 barrels of the amber nectar in 1893. With such a diversified and healthy economy, Durango never faltered in establishing itself as a regional center for the Four Corners states.

The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad had a vested interest in Durango's development that it did not have in Ignacio. As the home of an Indian agency, Ignacio was an established trade center that further benefited when the Ute Strip opened to new homesteaders. Starting with the agency and the St. Ignatius Catholic Church, the town had a bank in 1911, a blacksmith shop, a mercantile, a hotel and a thriving supply and construction economy for the region. An ornamental concrete block company set up shop in Ignacio in the early 1910s and built many of the distinctive block buildings in and around the community. As one long time resident said in 1961, "The country around here was being homesteaded and cultivated and farmers needed a place to trade eggs and produce for groceries. However, I think it was the Indians with their school and agency,

which caused us to outgrow our neighboring small towns, and now, with oil at our door, we may yet be a city.”²¹⁷

Bayfield, located far from the railroad, was a regional supplier for the Pine River Valley. The town was self sustaining with its own water powered flour mill giving its name to Mill Street, the town’s main thoroughfare, and a telephone company in 1904. Hardware companies were in business soon after 1900, including Lewis Hardware, which is still operating today. Bayfield struggled to have enough capital to fund a bank. The Farmers and Merchants Bank opened in 1910 and closed in the 1930s, a victim of the Depression. No new bank opened in the town until the 1970s. Belle Lacy, Bayfield’s first dentist (1912-1920) also brought entertainment to the town. She and her husband Edward opened the first theater, the Pearl Theater, in Bayfield. Without a railroad to depend upon, Bayfield did not suffer much when passenger service ended in 1951. It continued to be a regional supply and service center.

Marvel was another regional supply center without reliance on the railroad. The town was named after the “Marvel Midget” flour mill, a self-contained roller mill that was produced by the Anglo-American Mill Company in Owensboro, Kentucky and installed at the north end of town. It began in 1915 and quickly had three mercantiles, a garage, school, shoe repair shop, blacksmith shop, the Marvel State Bank, pool hall, ice cream store, and more. Marvel prospered in the 1920s with many businesses but hit hard times when water shortages severely curtailed farm production.

Modern communication came quickly to La Plata County, but electricity was a different story. The Fort Lewis Military post inspired an early telegraph connection in 1881. The Fort also communicated via the heliograph, a large reflective disk that sent reflections up to 40 miles. Soldiers used Morse code to send about 10 words a minute to other outposts. Telephone lines soon followed. Durango had a telephone system supporting 66 phones by 1894.²¹⁸ Bayfield’s phone company was operating by 1904. Outside of Bayfield, the farmers and ranchers would connect to each others lines to create a phone network. The Rosa-Ignacio Telephone Company served the far east side of the county beginning about 1916.

On the west side of the county, Marvel and Kline operated a community-owned telephone line soon after Marvel was platted in 1916. In the 1950s, a new line connected Fort Lewis College and Durango and the Marvel-Kline system was upgraded to an 8-party line that served the Breen area. A caller on the west side paid a long distance charge to call Bayfield and Ignacio until 1990. Emma Horvath remembered that in the 1950s people would go to the Breen Mercantile to use either the Durango phone or the Marvel exchange to avoid long distance toll charges.²¹⁹ It appears that the Florida Mesa

²¹⁷ Daughters of the American Revolution, Sarah Platt Decker Chapter. *Pioneers of the San Juan Country*. Reprint of Volumes I-IV in One Edition. Bountiful, Utah: Family History Publishers, 1998. Volume 4, Page 215.

²¹⁸ Smith, Duane A. *Rocky Mountain Boomtown, A History of Durango, Colorado*. Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company. 1983. Page 71.

²¹⁹ Fort Lewis Mesa Reunion Committee for 1991. *History of Southwestern La Plata County, Colorado*. Hesperus, Colorado: Self-published, 1991. Page J-3.

area may have been among the last to get telephone service. As long time resident Alva Short remembered, “Schools, county roads and bridges came about 1908....rural delivery of the mail and telephone service came much later.”²²⁰

Durango had the earliest electricity in the county. The first plant was constructed in 1887, offered direct current (DC) power and served local businesses and homes. The electric company added some AC equipment in 1892 and in 1893 moved into a new, expanded plant that still stands today along the Animas River at Camino Del Rio and 14th Street. Both facilities were coal powered steam plants, but the 1893 plant eventually switched to natural gas power.²²¹ The power plant served the City of Durango and some of the coal mines and smelters at the edges of town. The plant was connected with the Tacoma Power Plant in 1909 to expand electricity to more of the remote mines in the mountains and to bring more power from Tacoma down the valley. The Tacoma Plant, a hydroelectric plant, was built by the electric company serving the Silverton area (the Animas Power and Water Company). The Durango and Silverton plants eventually became part of the Durango based San Juan Water and Power Company.

On the west side, electricity came first to the Fort Lewis campus in 1914 when the school built its own electrical plant, incorporating a sawmill engine and two sawmill boilers, generating 440 volts. A central heating plant was installed in 1919. The on-site electrical plant was replaced by a connection to the Western Colorado Power Company lines in 1927. In 1940, through the efforts of the La Plata Electric Association (LPEA) and the Rural Electrification Administration (REA), electricity was delivered to the farms and ranches around Breen. The REA was a New Deal program created in 1935 that authorized the creation of cooperatives and provided a loan program to sponsor the delivery of electricity to rural areas. The LPEA formed in 1935. In 1939 the Association had obtained REA loans and constructed 188 miles of line to serve 350 people.

The LPEA also delivered electricity to the Florida Mesa in the early 1940s. The Durango power plant supplied LPEA’s power lines to the west side of the county and to the Florida Mesa area. Bayfield was a bit of a latecomer to the electricity age. Their first power plant, the Soens Hydroelectric Plant came on line in 1939.

²²⁰ Daughters of the American Revolution, Sarah Platt Decker Chapter. *Pioneers of the San Juan Country*. Reprint of Volumes I-IV in One Edition. Bountiful, Utah: Family History Publishers, 1998. Volume 4 Page 204.

²²¹ The 1893 Durango Power Plant is the oldest surviving AC powered steam plant in the nation. It was the first commercial building to be built in the Mission Style outside of California. The plant functioned in various capacities until the 1970s.

Religious, Cultural and Social Institutions

Settlers and the almost constant influx of newcomers rapidly introduced the religious, cultural and social aspects of society to La Plata County in the early years of settlement. The first religious services were purportedly held by itinerant minister George Darley in a bar in Animas City in 1877, followed quickly by the construction of a Presbyterian Church. The Episcopalian Church responded first to an offer of free land from the Durango Trust to the first church to build in town. It opened in 1881 and was quickly followed by the Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist and Catholic churches. The Mormon Church established a strong presence in the western part of the County in Kline. The Methodist Church also developed early on the west side, after the opening of the Ute Strip. Ignacio's early days saw the previously mentioned Catholic Church, and the Presbyterian Church provided early spiritual guidance in Bayfield in 1899. Rural churches provided spiritual and social support. The Florida Presbyterian and the Florida Baptist Church were two such institutions constructed in the late 1800s and early 1900s to serve the Florida rural community.

Cultural activities might have had a start at the bandstand in Animas City's park. Durango's churches offered some of the first cultural activities before 1885, such as musical performances on the two church organs in town. The Fort Lewis Military band traveled from its post to perform in the new town. The respectable people at the same time tried to discourage the burgeoning saloon and dance hall traffic in town. Two opera houses in 1894 -1895 offered appropriate alternative entertainment.

Social organizations formed early on. Some, such as the Durango Archaeological and Historical Society of 1893, had cultural orientations while others were more for social activities. A long list of organizations published in a Durango booster piece in 1893 included the social Durango Club, various labor organizations, a gun club a baseball club, two Chatauqua Clubs, a Shakespeare Circle and various reading clubs. The granges, rural school houses and dance halls provided social gathering places in the rural areas.

Ethnic social organizations, such as the Christoforo Columbo Lodge and the Slovenian Lodge offered social and financial support to new immigrants and Woodmen of the World provided insurance to members. A fraternal society that existed primarily in rural areas, La Sociedad Proteccion Mutua De Trabajadores Unidos (S.P.M.D.T.U.) had halls in Ignacio and Durango. Organized in Antonito, Colorado in November 1900 to provide social aid, insurance, and burial assistance to its members, the organization was primarily concentrated in the San Luis Valley. In 1902 the first lodge outside the San Luis Valley was established in Ignacio.²²² The organization continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s when prejudice against Hispanos was pronounced. The organization is still in operation with the *Concilio Superior* in Antonito undergoing renovations. The hall established in Ignacio is now used by the school district.

²²² Valdez, Maria, "La Sociedad Proteccion Mutua De Trabajadores Unidos. *The San Luis Valley Historian*. Volume 33, No. 2, 2001. Pages 5-25.

National organizations such as the Masons and the Order of the Eastern Star had chapters in Durango, Bayfield and Ignacio. On a less desirable note, the Klu Klux Klan had its influence in La Plata County, primarily targeting Catholics and immigrants. The Klan was active in the 1920s. Klan paraphernalia were recently discovered in a building in Bayfield, but the Klan's activities were not limited to that town. Klan Chapter #69 was active in Bayfield until 1928 or 1929.

Five newspapers reported on local activities in Durango's first year. Ignacio and Bayfield residents had the *Ignacio Chieftan* and the *Bayfield Blade* to keep them current.

The county's community and social institutions reflected a rapidly growing region. Libraries were established in Durango (1907) and Bayfield (1934). Fort Lewis, which had become a school and then a junior college, constructed a library in 1938. Some public schools also had libraries.

Medical facilities included Mercy Hospital, a frame building with eight beds established by the Sisters of Mercy under the direction of Reverend Mother Mary Baptiste Meyers in Durango in 1882. A more substantial stone building replaced the first one in 1884. Mercy was the only general hospital in southwestern Colorado. A private hospital, the Robbins Hospital, was constructed just south of Bayfield by a Dr. A.W. Robbins in 1911. The doctor never used his new facility because he moved to Durango shortly after its completion. It appears likely that the hospital was used as part of the private medical practice of Dr. Downing who had purchased Robbins's Bayfield practice. The more rural patients relied on the skills of the local country doctors, such as Dr. Portales in Hesperus and Dr. Smith in the Marvel area.

Melvin Butler, who spent part of his youth in the Marvel area wrote the following recollection of Dr. Smith and medical care in an on-line blog (accessed March 19, 2009, at <http://arts.onbloglist.com/lbutler/>)

—Dr. Smith was the only doctor in a fifteen or twenty mile radius. He and his wife lived at Marvel, which was six miles from us. He lived a very rugged life but was a very kind and dedicated man. In winter he made house calls for miles with a horse and buggy, in the summer he used a Model- T Ford. His charge was \$1 per mile one-way that many times he didn't get. During that time the medicine chest contained very few items. Kerosene and sugar for cough syrup, turpentine, mustard plaster, and mentholatum for rubbing chests, black draught and calomel were standbys for liver and bile attacks as well as fever. Good old Castor oil and Epsom salts for laxatives. Aspirin wasn't here yet. Iodine, creosote and peroxide were used for cuts and infections. Paregoric was used for colic and also given as a painkiller”

As early settlers took up residence in La Plata County, many spent the remainder of their lives here. Life was fragile and burial census information indicates many young children

in the cemeteries. About 25% of the burials at the Animas City cemetery were for children 10 years of age and younger.²²³

The earliest known cemeteries in La Plata County dated from about 1877 to 1880 and they were located at old Fort Lewis, the Animas City Cemetery, and at Parrott City and Rockwood. Early military records from Fort Lewis state that military burials were disinterred and reburied at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas with the decommissioning of the Fort.²²⁴ The Animas City Cemetery's earliest monumented burial is 1878 for young Orvil Lavender.²²⁵ Research continues at the cemetery by the La Plata County Historical Society. The locations of the Parrott City and Rockwood Cemeteries are unmarked and uncertain.

Twenty one cemeteries have been recorded and/or researched in the County. Four of the cemeteries, Animas City, Hay Gulch, Hesperus, and Thompson Park are inactive. A chart in the Appendix lists the cemeteries in the county.

²²³ Animas City Cemetery Assessment Report, Animas Museum, 2008.

²²⁴ Mona Charles, personal communication, 2007.

²²⁵ Animas City Cemetery Assessment Report, Animas Museum, 2008

Leisure

There was also some leisure time and the opportunity for recreation. Camping was popular, as were outings to the Trimble Hot Springs. Picnics and dances, often held at the local schoolhouse were favored past times. Outdoor activities include skiing at local hills and bicycle riding.



Photograph 12. A pleasant ride to Bakers Bridge in 1895. Photo Source: La Plata County Historical Society Animas Museum Archive..

Fairs were very popular. The La Plata County Fair Association held an annual agricultural fair and exhibition at the Trimble Hot Springs. A separate County Fair, also held at Trimble ended when a fire in 1892 burned down the major buildings at the Springs. (The Trimble Springs Hotel was rebuilt and is discussed in the Tourism Section). The County Fairgrounds were developed at their current location after 1892. La Plata County assumed management of the fairgrounds in the 1910s. Bayfield constructed a fairgrounds and held horse races and parades on the fairgrounds track. A 1922 photograph of the track shows a covered grandstand and an announcer's or judge's platform. The Bayfield fairgrounds also served as a campground for farmers overnight camping after a long trip into town. A Colorado-New Mexico Fair was also held to promote the region and the commodities of the two states. Bayfield has a long standing

tradition of Fourth of July parades, dating back to the early 1900s. Durango also celebrated with parades, featuring local bands and floats. Baseball was a popular organized sport. Rivalries between towns and some of the mines in the San Juans fueled tournaments and much coverage in the local newspapers.

New wealth and leisure time found an appealing outlet at Electra Lake. In 1902 a portion of the Elbert Creek valley was dammed to create a water reservoir that would feed a power plant. The water flowed from the lake downhill through pipes to power the new hydropower plant, named Tacoma and located on the west bank of the Animas River. The Electra Lake project began in 1904/1905 with the construction of a wooden flume to divert water from Cascade Creek into the new reservoir.

Electra Lake presented new recreational opportunities. In 1910, the Electra Lake Sporting Club was officially born. The club was, and still is, a membership-based organization. Begun by William N. Searcy, Rowe N. Pingrey, Ben Russell, and Rex Mollette the club provided recreation and cabin sites and around the lake. Membership was limited to 100 and included the more affluent and influential locals.

Since no road had yet been constructed, access to the lake was via the train stop at Tacoma Power Plant then a cable bucket system to the top of the canyon. This ride was followed by a hike along the flume route to the lake. Alternatively, a member could take a stagecoach that followed the route of the old Toll Road.



Photograph 13. Electra Lake Sporting Club Clubhouse

In 1929, the present clubhouse was constructed. The structure was designed by architect Eugene Groves and features a distinctive concrete ceiling that resembles an overturned boat. The clubhouse functions as a restaurant for members and the public that overlooks the lake.

Other man made lakes provided additional opportunities for recreation while addressing irrigation and water rights issues on the Pine and Florida River drainages. Vallecito Reservoir was constructed by the Bureau of Reclamation in the late 1930s and filled in 1941.²²⁶

Locals from the Four Corners states quickly purchased lots to build their lakefront vacation homes. Some of the ranchers saw the opportunity to develop resorts or guest ranch facilities on their new lakefront property. The new road from Bayfield, constructed as part of the project to improved access to the dam, provided easy access to the new lake. The community of Vallecito, which developed to provide amenities to the recreationalists, developed soon after the lake was filled, but really took off after World War II.

A second lake, Lemon Reservoir was constructed by the Bureau of Reclamation in 1963 to capture and control Florida River water. Although primarily built to provide irrigation, the lake proved popular for fishing and boating.

A new dimension in skiing was introduced in 1966, when the Purgatory Ski Area opened. The new ski area contributed to developing the Durango Ski Club and the Fort Lewis College Ski Team as skiing powerhouses in the 1960s.

²²⁶ Warlick, Dottie. *Vallecito Country*. Montrose, Colorado: Western Reflections Publishing Company, 2003. Page 174.

Afterword

Our triumphs and failures mark the land, define our communities and strengthen us as people. Our collective experiences give us wisdom, but only if we know and understand these experiences that formed our past. This historic context only skims the surface of the county's incredibly rich history, but it provides a broad perspective when making important decisions about what we value about our heritage and how we should protect or preserve it.

La Plata County recognizes the importance of history and historic preservation in its strategic plan, *The La Plata County Compass*. The county's Planning and Community Development Department is in the process of updating its comprehensive plan and will, hopefully, also address history as a core value that bonds and strengthens all residents of the county.

Preserving important historic resources gives us a greater understanding, respect and appreciation of the people in our community. What a privilege it has been as part of this project to meet and interview some of our "living legacies"---the people whose families have been in the county since the 1880s and who, through their descendants, have helped form the La Plata County we know today. Equally important are the "newcomers"- be they one year or one generation in the county – who have preserved important historic landmarks and were willing to share their treasures with us. Our history unites us.

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Mona Charles, personal Communication with Ruth Lambert at Durango, May 2007.

Sam Creacy, interview with Jill Seyfarth and Ruth Lambert in Durango, February, 2009

Robert Hott, interview with Ruth Lambert at Tiffany, April 2009.

Lavenia McCoy, Sunnyside Mesa Memories Panel, April 2009.

Emma Shock, interviewed by Jill Seyfarth and Ruth Lambert in Ignacio, August 2008.

Myrl Short, Sunnyside Mesa Memories Panel, April 2009

Bruce Spining, personal communication with Ruth Lambert in Bayfield, May 2009.

Appendix

- Appendix 1 Coal Mines
- Appendix 2 Post Offices
- Appendix 3 Cemeteries
- Appendix 4 Schools

Appendix 1- Coal Mines

The data for this chart of all known coal mines in La Plata County was provided in *Historic Coal Mines of Colorado. Colorado Geographical Survey Information Series 64.* by Christopher J. Carroll and Mark A Bauer. This document is available on CD and was published by the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Denver, Colorado, in 2002.

Name	Primary Operator	Dates of Operation
Knapp	K and TC Company	1885
Driscoll	D and HC Company	1885
Shore	Andrew Shore Coal Company	1893
Duggan	James Duggan and Company	1893
Wheeler	Schrader	1906
Basin Ridge	Gates Coal Company	1921
Wrights	Hawkes Garage	1923
Horse Gulch	Horse Gulch Coal Company	1927
Rainbow	Allison Edwards	1927
Gingrich	Albert Gingrich	1928
Manning	O.V. Mannnig	1928
Bob Cat	W.O. Cowan	1928
Florida	Louis Bodo	1935
Fort Lewis	Xavier Dufer	1881-1941
Carbonaria or Carbonero	J.G. Jackson	1885-1886
Black Diamond	Black Diamond Coal Company	1885-1889
Porter	Porter Coal Company	1886-1908
City Mine #1	HJ Rasmussen	1887-1893
Champion	Champion Coal Company	1888-1926
La Plata	No operator given aka Fairmont/La Plata Coal and Iron	1890-1891
Ute	Ute Fuel Company	1892-1906
Hesperus #1	Hesperus Coal Company	1892-1922
La Plata	Lester Hightchew	1893-1902
Sunshine	Sunshine Coal Company	1893-1949
Black Hawk	F. Grabowski	1894-1896 and 1918-1919
Perins Peak	Calumet Fuel Company	1901-1926
OK #1	Unknown	1913-1947
Peerless	Peerless Coal Company	1913-1961
Carbon	Carbon Coal Company	1914-1944
Peacock	Mancos Fuel Company	1914-unknown
Morning Star	Morning Star Coal Company	1916-1970
Graves Triangle	Triangle Coal Company	1920-1937
Minnie	Minnie Coal Company	1921-1925

	Appendix 1- Coal Mines Continued	
Florida Grange	Florida Grange #306	1922-1926
Peacock	Peacock Coal Company	1922-1977
Tipotsch	Peacock Coal Company	1923-1953
Durango	Durango Coal Company	1924-1943
Valley View	Valley View Coal Company	1924-1951
Gadberry	RV Gadberry	1925-1930
Pine River	Pine River Coal Company	1925-1935
Jackine	Jackine Coal Company	1927-1928
Wilden #1	Wilden Coal Company	1927-1938
Excelsior	Excelsior Coal Company	1927-1938
Shamrock #1	James A. Bierce	1928-1936
Soda Springs	Xavier Dufer	1928-1947
Fitzgerald	Harrington Coal Company	1930-1931
Hammond	M.F. Leonard	1930-1934
Morning Glory	Charles Yingling	1930-1936
Superior #1	Superior Coal Company	1931-1934
Sunnyside	George A. Greenwood	1931-1935
Elledge	Dill and Boglino	1932-1937
Fire Glow	Bert Coon	1933-1941
Hay Gulch #1	Hay Gulch Coal Company	1933-1964
Blue Jay	J. Russell Purcell	1935-1944
Wilden #2	Charles Fitzgerald	1935-1948
Durkin	James T. Durkan	1935-1951
Fire Chief	Pioneer Fuel Company	1936-1938
King Coal Company	King Coal Company	1936-present
Klondyke	Klondyke Coal Company	1937-1938
Supreme	Otto Serroni	1937-1947
Coal King #1	Oren A Pilcher	1938-1965
Shamrock #2	James A. Bierce	1939-1942
Dufer	Minoletti Brothers	1941-1944
Dunn	LF Dunn Jr	1941-1947
Triple S	Otis H. Snooks	1941-1951
Wright #2	Wright Fuel Company	1941-1955
Fort Lewis (new)	Xavier Dufer	1943-1949
Victory #1	Victory Coal Company	1943-1958
Monarch	La Plata River Corporation	1944-1958
Cherry Creek	A. Gardenas and G. Prado	1945-1955
Blue Flame	Fidel Lobato	1948-1970
Burnwell #2	La Plata River Corporation	1949-1967
La Plata (new)	No operator given	1950-1954
Wright #1	Wright Fuel Company	1955-1961
Victory #3	Sundance Coal Company	1956-1969
Burnwell #1	La Plata River Corporation	1958-1970

	Appendix 1- Coal Mines Continued	
Hesperus #4	Hesperus Coal Company	1960-1971
Hesperus #5	Hesperus Coal Company	1971-1972
C and F	C and F Coal Company	1975-1976
Coal Gulch	Peerless Resources	1977-1986
Carbon Junction	Pueblo Coal Company	1984-1985
Peacock Porter	Porter Fuel Company	no dates given
Beaver Creek	Joseph Montague	no dates given
Sunnyside	David Smallwood	no dates given
Carletons	No operator given	no dates given
Boston	No operator given	no dates given
Florit	Red Glow Blacksmith C and C Company	no dates given
Black	No operator given	no dates given
Dunlap	No operator given	no dates given
San Juan	American Smelting and Refining Company	up until 1930
Jewett Palmer's Mine	Jewett Palmer	1910s and 1920s
Mrs. E.M. Tendick mine	Tendick	no dates given
Bayfield Coal	No operator given	no dates given
Tom Petty	No operator given	no dates given
Adams	No operator given	no dates given

Appendix 2 Post Offices

Information on La Plata County Post Offices is abstracted from 1) Bauer, Willam H., James L. Ozment, and John H. Willard. *Colorado Post Offices 1859-1989: A Comprehensive Listing of Post Offices, Stations & Branches*. Colorado Railroad Historical Foundation, Golden. 1990. and 2) Nossaman, Allen. *Many More Mountains*. Volume 1. Denver, Colorado: Sundance Publishing 1989. Page 229.

Name	Dates of Operation	Comments/Notes
Allison	3/1904 to 11/1954	Known earlier as Vallejos
Animas	7/1886 to 9/1900	Formerly named Animas City
Animas City	3/1877 to 8/1885	Named changed to Animas
Bayfield	2/1899 to present	Formerly named Los Pinos
Breen	7/1901 to 11/1954	At Fort Lewis Indian School
Cascade	6/1880 to 7/1882	
Castelar	5/9/1905 to 6/30/1912	Present day La Posta
Columbus	5/15/1894 to 4/30/1903	
Content	9/21/1901 to 10/15/1913	
Dix	4/8/1890 to 9/29/1900; 1907	
Durango	11/19/1880 to present	
Elco	7/28/1905 to 5/31/1914	
Emery	2/5/1892 to 11/11/1897	[Neglected Mine?]
Falfa	11/19/1914 to 11/30/1954	Formerly Griffith
Florida	8/8/1877 to 3/31/1881	
Fort Lewis	10/5/1880 to 10/10/1881	Moved to Hesperus
Griffith	12/2/1909 to 11/19/1924	Renamed Falfa in 1914
Grommet	3/3/1904 to 1/13/1908	Renamed Oxford
Hermosa	7/27/1876 to 9/29/1900	Brief periods of winter closure
Hesperus	10/10/1891 to present	Moved from Fort Lewis
Hewit	7/14/1882 to 7/9/1885	Brief winter closure in 1883
Ignacio	1/31/1882 to present	
Kline	4/22/1904 to 3/31/1953	Moved to Marvel
La Boca	1895 to 1896; 2/1909 to 9/1937	
La Plata (City)	1882 to 1885; 4/1894 to 7/1934	
Los Pinos	1/18/1889 to 2/25/1899	Name changed to Bayfield
Marvel	4/1/1953 to present	Moved from Kline
Mayday	9/4/1913 to 12/13/1914	
McQuiety	3/1894 to 8/1895	Authorized but never operated
Meserole	9/12/1882 to 7/28/1884	Along Rico/Rockwood road
Murnane	11/10/1882 to 7/8/1886	
Needleton	5/26/1882 to 1/31/1910	Prior to 1885 part of SJ County
Niccora	7/16/1877 to 11/26/1877	
Oxford	1/13/1908 to 11/30/1954	Previously Grommet
Pargin	7/24/1901 to 1/15/1903	
Parrott (City)	5/5/1876 to 11/12/1893	First County seat of LP County

	La Plata County Post Offices Continued	
Perin	4/4/1902 to 8/14/1926	Brief winter closures
Pine River	7/15/1878 to 9/12/1895	
Porter	10/7/1891 to 9/15/1908	
Redmesa	4/24/1907 to 11/30/1954	
Rockwood	7/1878 to 4/1917;4/1923 to 2/1940	
Tacoma	9/25/1906 to 11/30/1954	
Tiffany	12/3/1907 to 11/30/1954	
Trimble	1/29/1883 to 9/15/1900	Brief winter closures
Vallecito	11/15/1901 to 6/12/1917	Ceased; no postmaster
Viceto	5/1890 to 10/1891	Same location as Vallecito
Walls	4/1896 to 8/1896	Establishment rescinded
Young	11/1882 to 3/1883	

Appendix 3

La Plata County Historic Cemeteries

Name	Location	Dates of Use	Status	References
Allison	CR 329	1908 -	Active	1,2,3,4
Animas City	Durango	1878-1965	Inactive	1,2, 4
Bayfield	CR 501	1885-	Active	1,2,3
Crestview	CR 172	1925 -	Active	1,2,3
Elco	CR 213	1901-	Active	1,2,4
Florida/Hood	CR 225	1880-	Active	1,2,3,4
Greenmount	Durango	1888-	Active	1,2
Hay Gulch	CR 120	1889-1926	Inactive	1,2,4
Hermosa	Hwy 550	1889 -	Active	1,2,3,4
Hesperus	Hwy 140	1881-1965	Inactive	1,2,4
Ignacio/Catholic	Ignacio	1911-	Active	1,2
Ignacio/Protest.	Ignacio		Active	1,2
Kline	CR 119	1904-	Active	1,2,3,4
La Boca	Hwy 172	1899 -	Active	1,2,3,4
La Posta	CR 213	1902-	Active	1,2,4
Marvel	CR 131	1907-	Active	1,2,3
Oxford	CR 311	1925-1978	Active	1,2,3,4
Redmesa	Hwy 140	1909 -	Active	1,2,3
Thompson Park	CR 105	1896-1976	Inactive	1,2,3,4
Tiffany	CR 326	1914 -	Active	1,2,4
Ute/Ouray Mem	Ignacio	1916-	Active	1,2

Notes: Unmarked/unknown cemeteries include Fort Lewis, Gold King, Parrott City and Rockwood Cemeteries.

This listing of cemeteries includes only community cemeteries and not private family burial locations.

1=Colorado Council of Genealogical Societies, –Colorado Cemetery Directory”, 1985

2= Genealogical Research Society of the Four Corners, –La Plata County Cemetery Index” 1997

3=Tombstone Project, Colorado, U.S. Genealogical Web site

4=La Plata County Historical Society

Appendix 4
Schools

School Name/ Historic District	Location	Dates of Operation If Known	Comments/ References*
Waterfall	CR 203		
Perins #2	Perin townsite	1901-1926	
Lightner Creek #2	CR 207/208		
Spencer	Wilson Gulch		Merged with 1st Orr School; 1,
Sortais # 14	CR 240/234	1896-1955	Sortais Main School; 1
Red Creek #14	CR 240/ north of 246		a.k.a. 'Red School or Sortais Middle School
Lissner #14	CR 243	1910 - 1955	a.k.a. Upper Sortais School; 1
PinonGrove/Hood #5	CR225/228	1875-1955	Burned, oldest school on Florida Mesa; 1
Florida #22	CR 225/513	1903-1944	Merged with Orr School, a.k.a.Tyner School,demolished; 1
Griffith	Hwy 160	1903-1906	Merged with 1st Orr School; 1,
Cottonwood #26	Hwy 172/CR 302	1905-1925-1939-1959	3 schools, Conducted first year high school classes; 1
Thompson #26	CR 302/306	1914-1950s	
Long Lane #33	Hwy 550/CR 302	1908-1929; 1930-1959	Burned in 1929, rebuilt, now private home; 1
La Posta #16	CR 213	1901- 1950	3 schools; 1st adobe school with teacherage, 3rd school 1930;1
Elco #29	CR 213	1904-1959	sandstone building; now private home; 1
Sunnyside #30	CR 216/215	1908-1922; 1922- 1950s	Offered high school classes through 11 grade;1
Columbus #8	CR 501/245	-1948	Included teacherage, now private residence; 1, 5
Benn Spring #37	CR502/228	1925- 1946	Log school, later rebuilt and now a private home; 2
Lowell #10	CR502	1882-1923; 1923- 1940s	School house moved to Bayfield; 2
Moss #27	CR 505	1885-1905; 1908-1954	School burned 1954; 2
Orr #17	Hwy160/CR229	1906-1923; 1923- 1950s	Rebuilt as Florida Mesa Elementary in 1960s; 1

School Name/ Historic District	Location	Dates of Operation If Known	Comments/ References*
Bayfield #4	Hwy 160	1886- present	Series of schools in town from 1886; 2
Los Pinos #4	CR 501	1878-1886	Log school, closed 1886 and moved to Bayfield; 2
Missouri Center #37	CR 520/509	? - 1923	Merged with Bayfield in 1923; 1930s building sold; 2
Morrison #21	CR 316/317		
Pargin #15	Hwy 160	1893-1946	School moved into Bayfield; 2
Church Hollow #24	CR 100/101	1912-1919	School held at Methodist Church, moved to Marvel school; 6;7
Picnic Flats #34	CR 138	1916-1947	School moved to Aztec, NM;, teacherage extant; 3;8;9
Picket Corral	CR 138	Approx. 1922-1931	9
Regnier #24	Hwy 140/CR 136		Burned down by a student; 3
Red Mesa #18	Hwy 140	?-1961?	1-3rd grds in 1 room; 4-10th 2 room brick school; 7
Marvel #34	Hwy 140	1917-1953	First school burned; Second school built 1933-1961; residence;9
Mountain View	CR100/111	1917-1953	1st sch moved;2nd sch 1945-1959;teacherage demo. 2007; 3;7;9
Kline #36	CR122		2rooms; up to 10th grd; demolished; 7;9
Independent #38	CR 126/128	1917-1950	Students sent to Kline school; 4
Pleasant View #32	CR 120		
Cherry Vale #35	CR 105	unknown-1945	Restored, private residence;3
Cherry Creek # 35	CR 105		Private residence;3
Squeeky Squawk			
Rockvale # 6	CR 120	1905-1948	Restored as private residence; 3
Hay Gulch #6	CR 120	to 1905	Log building, replaced by Rockvale School in 1905
Thompson Park #7	CR 105	to 1979	Burned, suspected arson; 4
Hesperus #20	Hwy 140	Approx. 1898-1947	Restored as private residence;
Mayday # 19	CR 124		Private residence
La Plata City # 19	CR 124		Burned in 1980s
Pine Ridge #31	CR 141		Classes held in 1937-1938; 10

School Name/ Historic District	Location	Dates of Operation If Known	Comments/ References*
Porter #31	CR 141		
Cascade # 13	Hwy 550		At Needles, now café.
Rockwood # 3	CR 200	1905-1949	Restored with teacherage, private residence.
Pinkerton			
Hermosa #12	CR 203	187? - 1950s	Demolished after consolidation.
Trimble #11	CR 250		Altered, private residence.
Ignacio #21	Hwy 172		
Allen Day # 21	Hwy 172	1909-1927	
Harvey #23	CR 319		
Holder #28	Hwy 151/ CR336		
Mason # 28	Hwy 151/CR333	1904 - 1950s	Private residence;
Ute Creek #37	CR 523/525		Near Missouri Center # 37; merged with Bayfield;2
Cedar Grove #23	CR 311/310		Funded by Oxford and Elco districts; 1.
Oxford #23	Hwy 172		Stone school, demolished 2006
Pink #28	CR 334/523		a.k.a. Upper Spring Creek
Tiffany # 28	CR 321	1900 - 1948	Two room school constructed 1911.
Allison #25	CR 329	1906-1948	Three room school
Fairview			
Lower Spring Crk#28	So of CR 321		Restored school house, private ownership
La Boca #21	Hwy 172	1880s-1948	Adobe school
Center #31	CR 141/126	1930- 1961	Restored as residence; 3
Old Center School		to 1929	Replaced by Center School; private residence;3
Old Fort Lewis	Hwy 140	1891-1956	Ind.School 1891-1910; High Sch. 1911-1933; Jr. Coll.1933-1956
Bruner	CR 131		Also called 'Schneider'

School Name/ Historic District	Location	Dates of Operation If Known	Comments/ References*
Upper Dry Side	CR 114/115		3
School House Hill	CR 103		3
Mayflower	CR 314		
Lower Cherry Creek	CR105		Moved to CR113; 7
Ridges Basin	CR211		Area now Lake Nighthorse
Unknown Locations:			
Pumpkin Center			
Valley View			
Parrott City			near CR124, location uncertain
References Include:			
1) Spinning, Bruce. Clapboards, School Boards, and Blackboards: A History of the Florida Area Rural Country Schools 1875-1959.			
Privately Printed, Durango, 1993			
2) Johns, Laddie. 2007/2008: A Brief History of Bayfield and the Pine River Valley, 1877-2009: A Reference Books with 19th and 20th Century Names, Dates and Places. Privately Printed, Durango, CO. 2007.			
3) Jean Campion communication, 2008.			
4) Fort Lewis Mesa Reunion History Committee, A History of Southwestern La Plata County in Colorado. 1991.			
5) Warlick, Dottie. Vallecito Country. 2003			
6)Marvel Methodist Church: Frist Century of Prayer and Praise;			
7) Pat Greer communication			
8) Louella Eldridge Noyes communication			
9) Lila Eldridge Greer communication			
10) Pioneers of Southwest La Plata County, Colorado. Fort Lewis Mesa Reunion History Committee. 1994			
11) Nellie Oldfield Horvath			

