The Present Counties of Colorado

The following list shows the dates of establishment of the present day 64 counties and the origin of the county names.

ADAMS COUNTY (1902)

Named in honor of Governor Alva Adams, who served two terms and sixty days as governor of the state. It was created from the north half of the previously existing Arapahoe County.

ALAMOSA COUNTY (1913)

Formed from the northern portions of Conejos and Costilla counties. Alamosa is a Spanish word meaning "cottonwood grove". Spanish pioneers gave the name to a creek within the existing county. The name was next given to the town and finally to the county.

ARAPAHOE COUNTY (1861)

Named for the Arapaho Indians who had inhabited eastern Colorado. Originally, the county extended all the way to the Kansas/Colorado border.

ARCHULETA COUNTY (1885)

Named in honor of Antonio D.Archuleta, who was the Senator from Conejos County when it was divided to form Archuleta county.

BACA COUNTY (1889)

Named, at the suggestion of Senator Barela, for the Baca family of Trinidad. A member of this family had been the first settler on Two Buttes Creek.

BENT COUNTY (1870)

Takes its name from Bent's Fort which was located on the north bank of the Arkansas River, near present day La Junta, and from the Bent brothers who founded the fort in 1828-1832.

BOULDER COUNTY (1861)

Named after Boulder City and Boulder Creek, which were given their names from the abundance of boulders in the area.

BROOMFIELD COUNTY (2001)

Broomcorn grown in the area originally inspired the name for the community called Broomfield. The city existed in 4 counties until it became the City and County of Broomfield.

CHAFFEE COUNTY (1879)

Named in honor of Senator Jerome B. Chaffee who retired from the United States Senate the year the county was formed.

CHEYENNE COUNTY (1889)

Named after the Cheyenne Indians who occupied much of eastern Colorado for many centuries.

CLEAR CREEK COUNTY (1861)

Gained its name from the stream that traverses the county. The creek was first called Vasquez Fork, and later changed to the present name.

CONEJOS COUNTY (1861)

Conejos is the Spanish work for "rabbit". The name was given to the river which flowed through the area by the early Spaniards of New Mexico long before non-Indian settlement of the region began. The name was then adopted by the town and then the county.

COSTILLA COUNTY (1861)

Costilla is the Spanish word for "rib" and for "furring timber". The Costilla River was named by the Spaniards prior to 1800. The town and then the county took the name.

CROWLEY COUNTY (1911)

Was one of the later counties created. It was named for John H. Crowley, who was the Senator from Otero County at the time that county was divided to form Crowley.

CUSTER COUNTY (1877)

Named after General George A. Custer, who, along with his men, died at the Battle of the Little Big Horn in Montana.

DELTA COUNTY (1883)

Took its name from the city of Delta, which was named for its location on the delta of the Uncompahgre River.

DENVER CITY AND COUNTY (1902)

Named after General James W. Denver, who was Governor of Kansas in 1858. When Denver was founded it was located in Kansas Territory. The City of Denver prior to 1902 was located in old Arapahoe County.

DOLORES COUNTY (1881)

Derived its name from the Dolores River. The full Spanish name, which was reported by Father Escalante in 1776, was Rio de Nuestro Senora de los Dolores (River of our Lady of Sorrows).

DOUGLAS COUNTY (1861)

Named in honor of Stephen A. Douglas, who died in the year of the creation of Colorado's first counties.

EAGLE COUNTY (1883)

Acquired its name from the Eagle River which flows through the county. This river had previously been called Piney River by General Fremont who explored the area in 1845.

ELBERT COUNTY (1874)

Named in recognition of Samuel H. Elbert, governor of Colorado when the county was formed.

EL PASO COUNTY (1861)

El Paso is the Spanish word for "the Pass". Ute pass, west of Colorado Springs, was the famous pass the name references.

FREMONT COUNTY (1861)

Named for General John C. Fremont, who explored the region before 1850.

GARFIELD COUNTY (1883)

Named in honor of President James A. Garfield.

GILPIN COUNTY (1861)

Named for Colonel William Gilpin, who was the first territorial governor of Colorado.

GRAND COUNTY (1874)

Named after Grand Lake and the Grand River which are located in the County. The Grand River name was later changed to the Colorado River.

GUNNISON COUNTY (1877)

Along with the town and river, this county was named after Captain John W. Gunnison, who explored the region in 1853 and was killed later that year in a battle with the Ute Indians in Utah.

HINSDALE COUNTY (1874)

Named in honor of George A. Hinsdale, a prominent pioneer and leader in southern Colorado, former Lt. Governor of Colorado, who died during the month preceding the creation of Hinsdale County.

HUERFANO COUNTY (1861)

Huerfano is the Spanish word for "orphan". The county was named after the Huerfano River which flows through the area. It was so named from Huerfano Butte which is an isolated, cone-shaped butte located in the river bottom area.

JACKSON COUNTY (1909)

This county is thought to have been named after President Andrew Jackson.

JEFFERSON COUNTY (1861)

Took its name from the unofficial Jefferson Territory, the extra-legal government that preceded the Colorado Territory. The name was adopted in honor of President Thomas Jefferson.

KIOWA COUNTY (1889)

Derived its name from the Kiowa Indians who hunted and lived in eastern Colorado before European's arrived.

KIT CARSON COUNTY (1889)

Named after the mountain man and Indian scout Kit Carson, who lived from 1809-1868.

LAKE COUNTY (1861)

Assumed its name from the Twin Lakes, a large geographic feature of the area.

LA PLATA COUNTY (1874)

La Plata is the Spanish word for "silver". Silver was discovered by the Spaniards in the region during the 18th century. The name La Plata was first given to the river and mountains. The name was subsequently adopted by the county.

LARIMER COUNTY (1861)

Named in honor of General William Larimer, who was one of the founders of Denver and prominent pioneer of Colorado.

LAS ANIMAS COUNTY (1866)

Took its name from the main river which flows through the area. The complete name of this river, discovered and christened by the early Spanish explorers, is El Rio de los Animas Perdidas en Purgatorio (River of the Souls Lost in Purgatory).

LINCOLN COUNTY (1889)

Named to honor President Abraham Lincoln.

LOGAN COUNTY (1887)

Named for General John A. Logan, who passed away shortly before the organization of the county.

MESA COUNTY (1883)

Mesa is the Spanish word for "table". The county was named because of the mesas, or tablelands, which were quite common in the county. However, some say the name originated from the geographic feature called "Grand Mesa", which is the largest flat top mountain in the world.

MINERAL COUNTY (1893)

Named for the many valuable minerals which were found in the mountains and streams of the county.

MOFFAT COUNTY (1911)

Was one of the last counties created. It was named for David H. Moffat, who was a Colorado pioneer and railroad builder.

MONTEZUMA COUNTY (1889)

Acquired its name from the famous chief of the Aztec Indians of Mexico. The prehistoric building ruins of Mesa Verde National Park, which are located in the county, were originally thought to have been built by the Aztecs.

MONTROSE COUNTY (1883)

Received its name from the City of Montrose which is surmised to have been named after Sir Walter Scott's The Legend of Montrose was published in 1819.

MORGAN COUNTY (1889)

Took its name from Fort Morgan. The original fort was in existence from 1865-1868. It was established as a protection post against the indians and was originally called "Junction" or "Camp Wardell". In 1866 the post became known as Fort Morgan in memory of Colonel Christopher A. Morgan, who died earlier that year.

OTERO COUNTY (1889)

Named after Miguel Otero, one of the founders of the town of La Junta. He was also a member of a prominent Spanish family of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico.

OURAY COUNTY (1877)

Named for Chief Ouray, who was a distinguish Ute Indian chief. Chief Ouray and his wife Chipeta were one of the several native American chieftain's who sought to live in peace with the non-Indian settlers and miners.

PARK COUNTY (1861)

Was one the seventeen territorial counties and acquired its name from the geographic region known as "South Park". This area was named by the early fur traders and trappers who first explored the region.

PHILLIPS COUNTY (1889)

Named for the secretary of the Lincoln Land Company, R.O. Phillips, who organized several towns in eastern Colorado.

PITKIN COUNTY (1881)

Named for the Colorado governor Frederick Pitkin, who was in office at the time the county was formed.

PROWERS COUNTY (1889)

Named after John W. Prowers, who was a leading pioneer in the lower Arkansas valley region.

PUEBLO COUNTY (1861)

Pueblo is the Spanish word for "town" or "village". The group of adobe houses built at the site of the present City of Pueblo in 1841-1842 came to be known as "the pueblo". The name was then adopted by the city and then suggested as the name for the county.

RIO BLANCO COUNTY (1889)

Rio Blanco is the Spanish name for White River. The county adopted the name Rio Blanco from the river which runs through the area. It is said that the Spanish explorer, Father Escalante, originally named the stream Rio San Clemente.

RIO GRANDE COUNTY (1874)

Was one of the counties created before Colorado became a state. The county derived its name from the river of the same name which flows through the county. The original name given to the river by the Spanish was Rio Grande del Norte (Great River of the North).

ROUTT COUNTY (1877)

Named in honor of Governor John L. Routt, the last territorial and first state governor of Colorado.

SAGUACHE COUNTY (1866)

Acquired its name from a Ute indian word meaning "blue earth" or "water at blue earth". The name was initially applied to a stream in the area, then the town and eventually to the county. The county sits at the upper end of the San Luis Valley.

SAN JUAN COUNTY (1876)

Was originally part of La Plata County. Its name is Spanish for Saint John. Early explorers to the region applied the name to the river and mountain ranges. Eventually, the name was given to the region and the county.

SAN MIGEL COUNTY (1883)

San Miguel is the Spanish word for Saint Michael. The name was used by the early Spanish explorers to reference the main river of the area. It was later chosen as the name for this county.

SEDGWICK COUNTY (1889)

Named for Fort Sedgwick, a military post along the Platte Trail, which existed from approximately 1864- 1871. This fort was located across the South Platte River, from the present day town of Ovid. The post was named in honor of General John Sedgwick who led Union military campaigns into the area.

SUMMIT COUNTY (1861)

Was one of the seventeen territorial counties. The county derived its' name from the many mountain summits located within the county.

TELLER COUNTY (1899)

Named to honor U.S. Senator Henry M. Teller, who served the state for a number of years.

WASHINGTON COUNTY (1889)

Named in honor of President George Washington.

WELD COUNTY (1861)

Named for Lewis Ledyard Weld, who was appointed by President Abraham Lincoln as the first Secretary of the Colorado Territory.

YUMA COUNTY (1889)

Was originally part of Washington County and named after the ancient Yuma Indians who inhabited the area.