

Clear Creek County History

The first important discovery of placer gold in the Rocky Mountains was made in Clear Creek County by George A. Jackson. He was a Missourian who had been to California and knew something about mining. In January, 1859, he was prospecting at the mouth of Chicago Creek, a right-hand branch of Clear Creek. He had been out on the trip about two weeks, and supplies of provisions had run low, except the meat he got by hunting. It was cold weather, but the man was used to roughing it.

Discovery of Gold

"Good gravel here," Jackson cheerily writes in his diary (January 5, 1859); "looks like it would carry gold. Wind has blown snow off the rim, but gravel is hard frozen. Panned out two cups; nothing but fine colors." The next day he built a big fire on the rim of the rock to thaw out the gravel. On January 7 he says: "Removed fire embers and dug into rim on bed rock. Panned out eight treaty cups; found nothing but fine gold; ninth cup got one nugget of coarse gold. Feel good to-night."

Jackson Bar

This find, near the present site of Idaho Springs, was an event of vast moment in the history of the West. When winter was over, Jackson returned to the spot at the head of a party of 22 men. On May 7 the Chicago Mining Company, headed by Jackson, began placer mining on Jackson bar, the first large deposit of gold ever uncovered in the Rocky Mountains. In one week they washed out nineteen hundred dollars' worth of the shining dust.

Gregory Diggings

At the same time John H. Gregory, of Georgia, was prospecting a few miles away and discovered free gold in the gulch that bears his name. The Jackson Diggings and the Gregory Diggings were located some 35 miles west of Denver.

Rush of '59

As soon as the news spread, a restless tide of "Pilgrims" surged up the winding banks of Clear Creek, in search of "the golden fleece." In the summer of '59 the gulches and cañons of Front Range were alive with miners and prospectors. These were the beginnings of the mineral industry of Colorado, which now leads all the States of the Union (except) California in the production of the yellow metal.

Clear Creek

Clear Creek County was organized soon after Colorado was admitted as a Territory, in 1861. It got its name from the brawling stream that winds eastward through the cañon of the same name and empties into the South Platte River. It is said that the waters of Clear Creek were then almost transparent and that every pebble in its depth could be seen; now it is anything but clear.

Area of County

Clear Creek County is bounded on the east by Jefferson County, on the south by Park County, on the west by Summit County, and on the north by Grand and Gilpin Counties. It is one of the smallest counties in the State, its area being 425 square miles. The surface consists of mountains, spurs, and narrow valleys. The Front Range forms the western boundary. But little land is cultivated, and mining interferes with grazing to such an extent that not much live stock is kept here. The mean annual rainfall is 15 inches, and the average temperature from 40° to 45°. In 1900 the county had 7,082 inhabitants; the population in 1910 was 5,001.

Mines

In its mines Clear Creek County, finds the chief source of wealth. The first discovery of Colorado silver made by American prospectors was near Georgetown, in 1860. The Georgetown district is a section of an extensive mineral belt that stretches from Boulder southwest to a point beyond Leadville. Around Georgetown silver-lead-zinc ores predominate. Around Idaho Springs gold is a leading feature in the ore bodies. Clear Creek's output of the precious metals during the past half-century (1859-1909) exceeds \$90,000,000. Of late years its annual production of metallic treasure has varied between \$900,000 and \$2,000,000. In 1909 its yield of gold was \$484,000, and that of silver \$235,000. The mineral deposits of this county are far from being exhausted.

Georgetown

The county seat is Georgetown, which nestles among the mountains of the Front Range. In the early '60's it was a mighty gold camp. Then placer and gulch mining for free gold played out, and a period of stagnation followed. With the building of smelters the era of lode mining began. The white metal now could be profitably handled. In the '70's

Georgetown became the center of a great silver-producing district and was dubbed the "Silver Queen of the Rockies." Today the town is surrounded by mines that have a world-wide reputation.

Environs

In 1900 Georgetown had 1,418 inhabitants; the population in 1910 was 950. It is situated on the Colorado and Southern Railway, 52 miles west of Denver. Its altitude is 8,507 feet. At no great distance are the towering peaks – James, Gray's, Torrey's, McClellan, Evans, Rosalie and other massive heights. The pedestrian or rider can choose one of several trails and steep burro paths leading to romantic spots in the neighborhood. A nine-mile drive over the highest wagon road in the world takes one to Argentine Pass, which affords a superb panorama of rugged mountains and emerald valleys. The sportsman may go by stage (over Berthoud Pass) to Middle Park, a hunter's paradise.

Idaho Springs

Idaho Springs, 38 miles west of Denver on the Colorado and Southern, is the largest town in the county and a popular resort, on account of its mineral fountains. The waters are mild solutions of carbonate and sulphate of soda, having a temperature of 75° to 120°. They rival the renowned Carlsbad waters of Bohemia. The place is a veritable mountain Elysium. Its altitude is 7,556 feet. In 1900 the "Saratoga of the West" had 2,502 inhabitants; the population in 1910 was 2,154. There are several mills that handle ores from mines nearby.

Silver Plume

Silver Plume is a well-known mining town, having an altitude of 9,189 feet. The far-famed "Loop," between Georgetown and Silver Plume, is a wonderful piece of railroad engineering. The scenery in the vicinity is of the wildest description. The mines of this district produce high-grade ores. The markers that follow the so-called Santa Fe trail in this State, from Holly to Trinidad, were made of Silver Plume granite.

Newhouse Tunnel

The Newhouse Tunnel was driven more than 20,000 feet northward from Idaho Springs into Gilpin County, intersecting some of the richest veins of this section – the Gem, Saratoga, Old Town, Sun and Moon, etc. The completion of this engineering work, in 1910, means the reclamation of many deserted mines. It was named for Samuel Newhouse, a millionaire mine-owner. The tunnel is 21,968 feet in length from the portal at Idaho Springs to the opening at Central City in Gilpin County. It cuts veins of rich ore from 1,500 to 1,800 feet in depth.

Eugene Parsons, *A Guide Book to Colorado* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1911) 34-38