



Arvada

The Gold Rush

The story of our community begins with the discovery of gold on June 22, 1850. A wagon train of prospectors, bound for California, crossed the Platte River just north of the confluence with Clear Creek, and followed Clear Creek west for six miles. The members of the wagon train rested for a day, and Lewis Ralston dipped his gold pan in an unnamed mountain stream. He found almost \$5 worth of gold in his first pan. The stream was later named Ralston Creek in his honor. This was the first gold discovery in Colorado, and one of the most significant events in Colorado history. At the time the find was not considered significant and the party continued on to the California gold fields.

In 1858, Ralston accompanied another group of prospectors back to the site of his 1850 discovery. Again, gold was panned from the stream in small amounts. Ralston became discouraged and soon quit the area, but the rest of the group continued prospecting and discovered richer diggings upstream along the South Platte. Early in 1859 rich strikes were discovered in the mountains along the upper reaches of Clear Creek and the Colorado gold rush began.

Celery is King

Not all the prospectors found paying claims. Some soon realized that growing crops and selling them to the miners could make them a good living. The area near Ralston's original gold strike had fertile soil and could be easily irrigated. A small farming community sprang up on a ridge between Ralston and Clear Creeks and became known as Ralston Point. The first settlers to the area claimed the bottomland adjacent to streams. Latecomers claimed land farther from the water source, but irrigation ditches made it possible to farm these lands too. Crops that thrived were wheat, corn, oats, plums, celery, cherries, berries, melons, strawberries, and vegetables. At one time, Arvada was known as the celery capitol of the world.

Birth of a Town

On December 1, 1870, soon after the construction of a railroad near the settlement, and six years before Colorado would achieve statehood, legal notice was posted for the new Town of Arvada. Benjamin F. Wadsworth and Louis A. Reno filed a town plat, and Wadsworth's wife, Mary, named the new town in honor of her brother-in-law, Hiram Arvada Haskin.

Trains of the Colorado Central Railroad passed through the Arvada village twice a day. At first they only slowed so the mail sack could be tossed to Wadsworth, the postmaster. By 1872, passengers could board the train on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to travel east to Denver or west into the mountains as far as Black Hawk.

On August 24, 1904 the Town of Arvada was officially incorporated. Grandview Avenue (known then as Railroad Street) became a thriving business area. There was a livery stable, a feed store, a blacksmith, a threshing operation, a tannery, a shoemaker, a dry goods store, a cigar store, a grocery store, and a lumberyard. Arvada's economy surged with the 1906 opening of a brickyard, employing more than 40 men, on Carr Hill just north of the railroad tracks. The Arvada Enterprise newspaper published its first edition on July 3, 1908.