

HISTORY COLORADO | SUMMER / FALL 2024

# THE COLORADO

MAGAZINE

## The Bone Wars

Border Map Mixup / Period Piece / A Stolen Train



History Colorado

# DE LA TIERRA

REFLECTIONS OF PLACE IN THE UPPER RÍO GRANDE



VISITA  
EL  
MUSEO  
HOY

VISIT  
MUSEUM  
TODAY

# BELIEVING IN OUR COMMUNITIES

**Y**ou may call it my optimistic imagination or my naivete, but I continue to be shocked when I hear suggestions across the political spectrum that our nation should abandon democracy. Tech billionaire Peter Thiel has written, for example, that “I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible.” And elitist pundits have decried community engagement in local level decision making. I reject these ideas because I learned long ago that when things are tough you need to lean into the community—to make decisions, to create hope, to build a fuller understanding of history through lived experience, and to foster our collective strength, together.



I've long been witness to the merits of community and its wisdom. The magical women and men of my childhood quietly and quickly created the safety nets for families in need. It's this community care that also translates into civic action. I have been a very active member of the League of Women Voters, registered an impossible-to-count number of voters over the years, taught teenagers how to participate in elections, and served as an election judge.

A belief in democracy is a belief in the larger community and the wisdom that it holds. I have certainly been disappointed in elections when my hopes don't align with the broader community but am ultimately grateful for the ideal of a world where we have a collective say in our destiny.

This commitment to community is what sets History Colorado apart. You can find our community-defined ethos in our award-winning Sand Creek Massacre exhibit, our internationally recognized Museum of Memory program, our hyper-local curriculum development, our preservation programs, and Colorado Heritage for All initiative—just to name a few. Listening and learning sessions and Tribal consultation are foundational to our ongoing boarding school research. And, we just launched a statewide community engagement tour to hear directly from Colorado's diverse Latino communities around the Governor's idea of a state-run Latino Heritage Museum.

At History Colorado, we often say that “When you have the power to write your own history, you have the power to write your destiny, too.” We witness every day the transformational power of history and community. As we gallop through the next few fast months to a historic election and gear up for the 250th anniversary of the founding of these United States and Colorado's 150th birthday, we must resist the urge for cynicism and isolation and instead embrace our larger national community as we would our neighbors, to continue to write our shared destinies and realize our shared ideals.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dawn DiPrince".

President/CEO & State Historic Preservation Officer

We acknowledge that the land currently known as Colorado has been the traditional homelands of Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. We are grateful to work in partnership with the fifty-one sovereign nations who continue to call this land home. Together, we plan exhibits; collect, preserve, and interpret artifacts; do archaeological work; and create educational programs to share the history of Colorado.

## HISTORY COLORADO

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND LEADERSHIP

Penfield W. Tate III  
*Chair, Board of Directors*

Nancy Chisolm *Vice Chair,*  
*Board of Directors*

Aaron A. Abeyta

Richard B. Benenson

Brad Clark

Kelly Brough

Kayla Garcia

Kim MacDonnell

Zebulon Miracle

Claudia Moran

Kate Siegel Shimko

Paul Weissmann

Dawn DiPrince, *President/CEO*  
*and State Historic Preservation Officer*

### State Historian's Council

Dr. William Wei, *State Historian*  
University of Colorado

Dr. Nicki Gonzales, Regis University

Dr. Claire Oberon Garcia,  
Colorado College

Dr. Jared Orsi, Colorado State University

Dr. Susan Schulten, University of Denver

Dr. Tom Noel, *Emeritus,*  
University of Colorado Denver

### PUBLISHED SINCE 1923

This publication was supported in part  
by the Josephine H. Miles Trust.

*The Colorado Magazine* (ISSN 2765-8856)  
contains articles of broad general and educational  
interest that link the present to the past, and is distributed  
quarterly to History Colorado members, to libraries, and  
to institutions of higher learning. Manuscripts must be  
documented when submitted, and originals are retained  
in the Publications office (publications@state.co.us).  
An Author's Guide is available at HistoryColorado.org.  
History Colorado disclaims responsibility for statements  
of fact or of opinion made by contributors.

Postage paid at Denver, Colorado.

© 2024 History Colorado

# SEE YOU ON 2ND SATURDAY

Join us every 2nd Saturday for family-friendly fun! Watch veterinarians at work, explore virtual reality, dig into our rooftop greenhouses, play in our Kid's Mock Vet Clinic and Kid's Kitchen, take a cooking class, or listen to the scientific sounds of the South Platte River.

**It's free. Come visit.**

CSU Spur is free and open to the public from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday and from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the 2nd Saturday of each month.



CSUSPUR.ORG



# THE COLORADO MAGAZINE

5 **The Forum** / 7 **A Mistaken Map** by Shaun Boyd / 9 **Period Piece** by Anna L. Weissman  
19 **By Rail and River** by Jim England and Sam Bock / 31 **Fire in the Boneyard** by Devin Flores  
45 **A Wellspring of Culture in the San Luis Valley**



ABOVE A watercolor by Arthur Lakes, titled *Digging Out Bones at Morrison*. Lakes produced many watercolors during his life, including several of his paleontological digs and expeditions across North America. Courtesy of the Yale Peabody Museum, YPM.002773

COVER Artwork by Thomas Lusk

**HISTORY COLORADO MEMBERS RECEIVE *THE COLORADO MAGAZINE* AS A BENEFIT OF MEMBERSHIP.**

Individual subscriptions are also available, \$45 per year (four issues). Join or subscribe: [h-co.org/join](http://h-co.org/join)

# THE FORUM

## We love hearing from you.

Drop us a line at [publications@state.co.us](mailto:publications@state.co.us)

### This Was a Great Magazine!

*Readers have been letting us know how much they enjoyed the last issue of The Colorado Magazine!*

The founder of the Black Cowboy Museum used to speak to my classes when I was in elementary school, so I really enjoyed the article on black cowboys. I used to walk along the High Line Canal as a child so that article once again brought back great memories. I once thought I would be a linguist so your article on Aurelio M. Espinosa was so great. I love watching how languages change or move through countries. This was such a great article that I didn't want it to end. Keep up the good work!

—Jill Krug, via email

### Copies of *Hilos Culturales: Cultural Threads of the San Luis Valley* Now Available

*Subscribers to the magazine will have seen an excerpt from History Colorado's most recent book in the last issue.*

I thoroughly enjoyed the article on Aurelio Espinosa by Enrique Lamadrid. At the end of the article there is a note that this is an excerpt from an introduction to the book *Hilos Culturales: Cultural Threads of the San Luis Valley*. How can I obtain a copy of that?

—Tim Bachicha

*History Colorado replies: Thanks for asking, Tim! The book is available in our online shop at [historycoloradoshop.org](http://historycoloradoshop.org)*

### On the Final Episode of *Lost Highways*

I am very upset to hear that the *Lost Highways* podcast has ended. Why did this happen? Was it privately funded?

Maybe by including local voices and inviting teachers to talk on the podcast about different subjects, you can find other funding!

—Zara Bailey, via email

*History Colorado replies: Thanks, we were upset too. The podcast was funded through a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, who declined after an unheard-of-run of four consecutive years, to renew their grant. Please stay tuned for more podcasts and videos coming from History Colorado!*

### On Visiting the History Colorado Center

I haven't really spent much time inside since its opening quite some years ago, and was amazed with the depth and breadth of the information presented and the interactive format here. Not only history buffs would certainly enjoy their time here, the unassuming visitors would also find this place entertaining while learning a whole bunch about Colorado. Great destination for the whole family. Highly recommended.

—Adam You, via Google

### On Visiting El Pueblo History Museum

Small museum about the history of El Pueblo. Nice to visit, we walked through it under 1 hour and read almost everything. Some nice things for kids to do, but could be more interactive. It was a bit boring for my school kid, 10. Staff was very sweet. There is also a little museum shop with some regional craft works and a small art gallery. We liked the time.

—Sari, via Google

### On Visiting Trinidad History Museum

Wonderfully preserved site...Museums aren't really my thing. I think just due to information overload at them. However, this was a great site to learn about the fort, the Utes and Buffalo Soldiers! I especially appreciated that it didn't gloss over some of the unsavory aspects of history.

—Radi Johnson, via Google

### De la Tierra Exhibition Now on View

*We've been getting all kinds of feedback on our newest exhibition at the History Colorado Center.*

The art of *De La Tierra* was great, but the presentation left a lot to be desired. The Morada of San Francisco (the oldest Morada in Colorado) that HC restored and registered as a historic site should have been highlighted rather than the church of San Acacio, which is not registered. There are more than a dozen Santero/as from Colorado, some with ties to the Valley. It is my understanding that names were given, but HC staff declined this offer.

—Carlos Santistevan Sr. via Facebook

*History Colorado replies: We are so grateful for all of our community partners, and regret that there wasn't enough space to tell every story. Thank you for this valuable feedback, and we're glad you enjoyed the exhibition.*

## THE COLORADO MAGAZINE

Sam Bock, Managing Editor  
Lori Bailey, Associate Editor  
Devin Flores, Assistant Editor

Jori Johnson, Ann Sneesby-Koch,  
Aaron Marcus, Photo Services

Mary Junda, Designer

Jason L. Hanson, Chief Creative Officer

### EDITORIAL TEAM

Shanea Ewing, María Islas-López,  
Aaron Marcus, Keith Valdez, Bethany Williams

### VOLUNTEERS

Jim England



**History Colorado**

# WINTER WARRIORS

## THE 10TH MOUNTAIN DIVISION IN WORLD WAR II



**History  
Colorado**

**VISIT EXHIBITION TODAY  
HISTORY COLORADO CENTER**



# A MISTAKEN MAP

## Did putting El Paso in the wrong spot cost the United States ten million dollars?

BY SHAUN BOYD

**M**aps hold a special place in my heart. Luckily, I'm one of the curators entrusted with History Colorado's map collection, and one of my favorites came to the museum sometime between 1915 and 1930. Donated by James F. Willard, a University of Colorado history professor, the map tells the story of negotiations over the border between the United States and Mexico following the Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the conflict.

A mistake on this and previous versions of the map misinformed US officials during negotiations with Mexico over the ten million dollar Gadsden Purchase less than a decade later. It's a story of human error, and a lesson about the trouble with mapping vast and inaccessible swaths of inhospitable landscape. It's a moment that reveals the twists and turns of history along a contentious and somewhat arbitrary boundary, and fortunately for map lovers like me, it's all right there for everyone to see.

With the ponderous and curious title, *Mapa de los Estados Unidos Mejicanos Arreglado a la Distribución que en Diversos Decretos ha Hecho del Territorio El Congreso General Mejicano*, or *Map of the United States of Mexico Adjusted to the Distribution That the Mexican General Congress Has Made of the Territory in Various Decrees*, the map was printed in Paris in 1851. It was the second edition of a map first published by Jean Frederic Rosa in 1837 right after the Republic of Texas was established. The Rosa family

were creating them for the Mexican government and other Latin American interests, and bringing the maps to the European market. Rosa's map was one of three used to locate El Paso (labeled Paso on map, facing page), and define the US-Mexico border. It's considered exceptionally rare in map expert circles.

Rosa's 1837 version copied an earlier 1826 map by Henry Tanner that was based on the work of several explorers including Zebulon Pike. In the 1826 map and later editions, Tanner erroneously moved the location of El Paso further north on the map (it had been correct in the first edition), which doesn't seem like a big deal, but it would prove to be quite problematic for the United States.

The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican-American War, and the agreement forced Mexico to cede 55 percent of Mexico's territory, adding millions of acres of land to the United States, including parts of what became Colorado, Utah, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Wyoming. The treaty also set the conditions under which the US-Mexico border was taking its shape. Negotiations between US and Mexican officials over the border's location used yet another version published by John Disturnell in 1847 (the second map in the series). That map also had the location of El Paso wrong, and since the border was based on a line west of El Paso, that meant that the border itself was in the wrong spot.

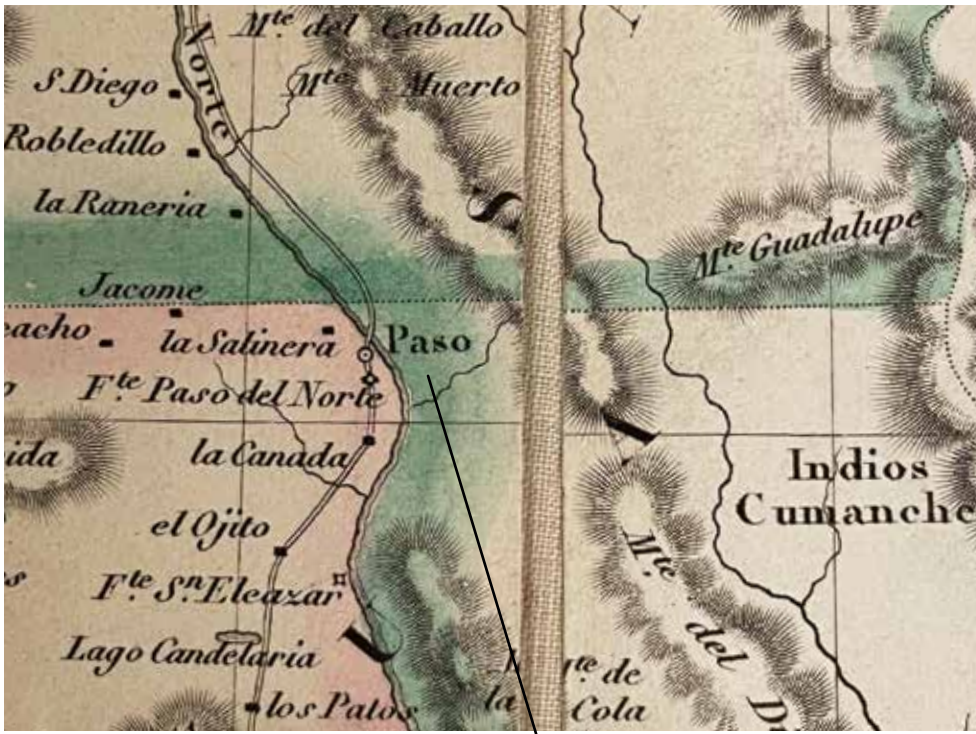
So all three maps (Tanner, Disturnell, and Rosa) had El Paso too far north.

The California Gold Rush in 1849 brought thousands of settlers into this territory just a year later. This land was already the home of Indigenous peoples and former residents of Mexico, who suddenly found themselves residents of the United States when the border crossed them.

By 1851, as US investors started looking to build a railroad to connect California via a southern route and link the newly bi-coastal nation, they realized that the best place to put train tracks was, according to their maps, in Mexico. But the mistaken placement of El Paso meant that the US would have to renegotiate and ultimately purchase land from Mexico to make the route possible. The Gadsden Purchase of 1853 created the border that's so fraught with controversy today. It's one of the most guarded and politically contested parts of the country, and as it turns out, it might not have needed to be part of the US at all. 🇺🇸

**Shaun Boyd** is History Colorado's Curator of Archives, Politics, Government. She has worked in Colorado libraries and museums since 1995. Her primary interests are Women's History, Early Colorado History, and the Progressive Era, as well as maps, ghost stories, and cemeteries.





Mapa de los Estados Unidos Mejicanos Arreglado a la Distribución que en Diversos Decretos ha Hecho del Territorio El Congreso General Mejicano or Map of the United States of Mexico Adjusted to the Distribution That the Mexican General Congress Has Made of the Territory in Various Decrees. A mistake on this and previous versions of the map misled US officials during negotiations with Mexico over the ten-million-dollar Gadsden Purchase. History Colorado, R.109.2006.60



# PERIOD PIECE: MENSTRUATION'S HIDDEN HISTORY

Menstruation is one of the most fundamental human stories. It's time to tell it more openly.

BY ANNA L. WEISSMAN

**M**enstruators have been using all manner of materials to stem the tide—plant fibers, buffalo skin, sea sponges, wool, lint, paper, even bog moss—since time immemorial. But the first American commercial period products launched in the mid-1800s, with the first patent for a menstrual belt awarded in 1854. As these products gained popularity through the 1920s, the commercial period industry was born.

But pads and tampons are more than just consumer products—they are items imbued with meaning, with social expectations and attitudes towards women, of taboo, impurity, and weakness. These attitudes are reflected in menstruation's material culture—not just the products, but the stories told about them, especially visible through marketing and advertising. Advertisements over the last hundred years utilize many, often contradictory, narratives—fear and freedom, modernity and shame—that have endured to the modern day.

Colorado has made its own mark on menstrual history, from the invention of the commercial tampon and the

development of the Tampax brand, to medical intervention into the safety of these products. Our state has also been on the forefront of pursuing more equitable access for people who menstruate—removing luxury and sales taxes on period products and making them available to students and those in prisons and homeless shelters.

Understanding menstrual history is crucial—it sheds light on the social, cultural, and medical challenges faced by individuals throughout time, helping address issues of access, stigma, and health disparities. Menstruation is a vital part of the human condition, and it's time to bring it out into the open.

## FROM HIPPOCRATES AND THE BEES TO EBONY

Women have had it pretty rough when it comes to social attitudes towards menstruation. Menstruation has historically been viewed as a symbol of inferiority, disability, impurity, weakness, and rooted in medical myth and cultural taboo.

Hippocrates, the fifth-century physician and “Father of Modern Medicine” believed that menstruating

women could sink ships, spoil cheese, tarnish silver, and kill livestock. In the year 77 CE, the Roman natural philosopher Pliny the Elder wrote a thirty-seven-volume encyclopedia which included theories on menstruation. According to him, menstrual blood could make seeds infertile, kill insects, flowers, and grass, and drive dogs mad. Just a glance from a menstruating woman could kill bees.

But it wasn't just men in ancient times who displayed such fears. A menstruation information booklet from 1943 produced by Kotex listed the “common superstitions of the day” in a section called “When Grandma Was a Girl,” which warned:

**If she drank milk, the cows were doomed.**

**If she entered a wine cellar, wine went sour.**

**Flowers would wither at her touch....**

**Meat would spoil if she dared salt it.**

**A look from her eyes would kill a swarm of bees.**

Bees seem to have been in constant danger from menstruating women.



◀ One of the earliest Tampax boxes, when they were still made in Denver. Courtesy of the Museum of Menstruation and Women's Health

▶ This 1923 Kotex ad vows to complete one's “toilette” with their sanitary pad. *Ladies Home Journal*

# KOTEX



(Reprinted by request)

## Kotex completes Milady's toilette, insuring perfect poise

**K**OTEX, the new sanitary pad, has caught women's favor like a "best seller". More absorbent, and therefore safer in any emergency, Kotex is also cheap enough to throw away and easy to dispose of instantly and conveniently by following simple directions found in each box.

Kotex saves inconvenience in several ways: It is easy to buy without counter conversation by asking not for "sanitary pads" but for "Kotex". It is sold in drygoods, drug and department stores everywhere in the United States and in many cities

in Canada. It comes in a blue box which has no printing except the name Kotex. A supply can be easily carried in a lady's handbag.

Kotex comes in Regular or Hospital size (additional thickness), and in vending machines which supply one large Kotex with two safety pins, in plain white envelope.

The first box usually—the second box always—results in the discovery of a new comfort, a new convenience, a new economy, a new habit.

Ask by name for Kotex.

Cellucotton Products Co., 166 W. Jackson Boul., Chicago  
New York Office: 51 Chambers St. Factories: Neenah, Wis.



*Kotex cabinets are now being distributed in women's rest-rooms everywhere — hotels, office buildings, restaurants, theatres, and other places — from which may be obtained one Kotex with two safety pins, in plain wrapper, for 10 cents.*

*Regular Size, 12 for 65c  
Hospital Size, 6 for 45c*

© 1923, C. P. C.

**INEXPENSIVE, COMFORTABLE, HYGIENIC and SAFE — KOTEX**



Attitudes towards menstruation arguably haven't changed much since Hippocrates. We can see this continuity clearly in marketing for commercial menstruation technologies. What are they really selling? Seemingly, products that save women from the shame of their periods. For example, a Kotex ad from 1924 contended that women spend "one-sixth of [their] time in fear of embarrassment"—but never fear!—"Kotex brings peace of mind, poise, and exquisiteness at a time when most women lose it." Another contemporary Kotex ad assured "concealment," their product virtually "non-detectable, even under your lightest, filmiest clothes." Another promises "telltale revealing outlines gone" with their new "Phantom Kotex."

Isn't this ancient history though? A relic from the past? Unfortunately not. In the mid-2000s, the compact section of the tampon market grew four times faster than tampons overall, according to a brand manager for Kotex. We still see tampons touted for their compact sizes (a recent ad from U by Kotex described theirs as "comfortably compact") and for their "discrete" disposal (like the contemporary Tampax Radiant tampon ads), lest anyone find out a menstruator is on their period. Karen Houppert, author of *The Curse: Confronting the Last Unmentionable Taboo, Menstruation*, writes about this "culture of concealment" surrounding menstruation.

This fear and secrecy used to sell women products relies on erroneous information and can even be promoting potentially dangerous products. For example, menstrual blood does not actually have an odor until it comes into contact with air. But that did not stop the commercial inclusion of fragrance chemicals in tampons complete with ads promoting unnecessary additives.

In an early example, a Playtex tampon ad from 1973 featured a wide-eyed woman seated amongst a large group, with a question splashed across the top of the page: "Are you sure your tampon keeps you odor-free?" Fifty years later, a Playtex Sport tampon box from 2023 features the words "odor shield" in bright, capital, neon green lettering, promising "up to two times more odor protection." But this is not a harmless marketing ploy. Vaginal tissue is highly sensitive; these

This artifact from the History Colorado Collection is thought to be a menstrual "apron" from the Ancient Puebloan people, dated to 500-700 CE

## All of the glamorous Modess models were white, upper-class women.

chemicals can upset the pH balance which leads to infections, irritation, or an allergic reaction. Reports have even identified certain ingredients in these fragrances as hormone disruptors. All for a phantom problem created from whole cloth to sell more stuff.

You've probably seen one of those tampon commercials with overexcited women frolicking in white bathing suits, horseback riding, giggling with glee. This messaging is also not new. Ads from the 1920s also showcased active, radiant women—playing sports, traveling, stepping into cars expressing “how marvelous...the freedom with this new sanitary protection.” Another vintage ad exclaimed that “Tampax makes life worth living!” complete with a beaming woman holding a golf club. Three women jubilantly jump in unison for a basketball in another spread, with the exclamation “Where are the bloomers of yesterday?” Dressed in her tropical-print bathing suit, a woman beams in an ad with the heading “Vacation Discovery! Glorious freedom now with Tampax!” Undoubtedly, better sanitary products made life a lot easier for women. Navigating travel, sports, education, and the workplace is certainly a lot easier with disposable products you can pick up at the store rather than a DIY solution with limited materials.

And yet, even these messages were coded. Women were granted freedom, as long as they menstruated in private, maintaining effortless non-menstruation in public. The key is still hiding your period within the culture of concealment. For example, Kotex ads from the 1920s and 1930s habitually featured glamorous women in silky dresses, with promises that “your poise and charm are safe.” Even the ads featuring women playing sports still promised “no telling lines” (Heaven forbid your doubles partner knew you were on your period). The Modess company had an entire advertising campaign from 1948 to the 1970s which never even featured their period products, no description or what it was for—just

impeccably dressed women wearing ball gowns in beautiful locales and the text “Modess...because.”

Historian Tess Frydman describes this coded social narrative as a conflicting cultural expectation of “menstrual regularity and menstrual invisibility.” Women are expected to skillfully manage their period in private so that they could appropriately perform “womanhood” in the public sphere. This “womanhood” refers to what feminist theory scholars describe as “normative femininity”—not who women are, but who they should be as deemed by society—slim, elegant, feminine...and bloodless. Women who don't openly menstruate (but somehow are still fertile).

Normative femininity also has classist and racial undertones. All of the glamorous Modess models were white, upper-class women. This was not unintentional; much of the marketing represented and was aimed at an aspiring (white) middle-class audience, as historian Jaime Schultz explains. For instance, Schultz describes how ads in the late-1930s through the 1950s depicted elite women playing golf, tennis, and swimming: these were class-based, racially-segregated, and gender-appropriate as seen by their elitism, movement aesthetics, and by the style of clothing they wore. It wasn't until 1962 that Kimberly-Clark published ads with Black women to pitch Kotex to Black readers. This was in *Ebony* magazine: there were no Black Kotex models in mainstream magazines targeted at white audiences.

### MENSTRUAL HISTORY IS COLORADO HISTORY

A menstrual device, now part of the History Colorado Collection, was found (presumably) where its owner left it in southwest Colorado over 1500 years ago. Made of yucca fibers and twine, the device would be worn like absorbent thong underwear. Interestingly, this “T-bandage” or belt would remain the predominant design choice

for menstrual wear for a long time. As patent drawings and more modern examples attest: women from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would recognize this device immediately.

Some 300 miles north of where this ancient menstrual object was found and over a millennia after its creation in the 1930s, Colorado physician Dr. Earl Haas patented the first tampon with an integrated cardboard applicator, inspired to improve the internal sponges that his wife used. Thus the modern tampon was born. Of course, menstruators have been using tampons for thousands of years—one of the first documented appearances was in ancient Egypt and was made using papyrus plant fibers, but this was the first time an applicator was integrated, commercialized, and marketed for use.

Dr. Haas's patent was awarded during the Great Depression. Given the economic climate, he had a difficult time marketing his product. After two years, he decided to sell the patent and his trademark—Tampax—to Denver entrepreneur and German immigrant Gertrude Tenderich. Tenderich put her purchase to use immediately, hand-sewing tampons before eventually scaling to using machinery. Her prescient investment would eventually develop into the Tampax we know today—an international, multi-billion dollar company.

During the 1970s, Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) emerged as a significant health concern, and initially the medical community struggled to understand the cause of the sudden surge in cases.

This changed when Dr. James Todd, working at Children's Hospital of Denver, made a pivotal discovery

**Beltx**<sup>®</sup>

*Personal Belt*

**25¢**

**No. 219  
Adjustable  
All Sizes**



*stainproof cushion tabs*

Before the inclusion of adhesives, menstrual belts held pads in place like this Beltx example from the 1960s. History Colorado

**Beltx**<sup>®</sup>

## Personal Belt

- ❁ Dainty, light and comfortable . . . designed to stay smoothly in place.
- ❁ Launder in warm water with mild soap. Do not iron. (Buy two . . . one to wear, one to wash.)



When pinning, bend cushion tab back, pin napkin end thru tape only . . . Do not pin thru cushion tab.

Get your copy of the Beltx booklet, "Just Between Us", on the menstrual cycle . . . plus a clever dial calendar to help you keep track of your periods . . . send 10¢ in coin or stamps to:

*Betty Kay*

c/o BELTX CORP. • BOX 807 • ST. LOUIS 88, MO.

Made in U.S.A.

U.S. PAT. NO. 3,030,752  
CANADIAN PAT. NO. 658087



about TSS, ultimately saving thousands of lives. His expertise in infectious disease allowed him to better understand that septic shock can come from a strain of staphylococcus or streptococcus bacteria. For the women suffering from TSS, the deadly bacteria was introduced into their system via highly absorbent tampons (left in for far too long) and afflicted thousands. At the time, TSS was a mystery disease that stoked fear throughout the country, not unlike Covid-19 of recent years. But Dr. Todd's discovery provided an answer and intervention into these potentially fatal situations.

The commercial tampon with integrated applicator came on the market in 1936, but it took until the 1950s for the medical community and the general population to fully accept it. Religious leaders initially denounced them, saying that they would "aid in contraception, sexual pleasure, or both." Doctors echoed this position, declaring that tampons would be "easily lost in the body and sabotaged virginity," another example of a lacking understanding of female reproductive anatomy, even within the medical profession. Women couldn't possibly "invade the vagina" during menstruation.

Advertising campaigns played a large role in reaching the skeptical—particularly with the myth that "unmarried women" (i.e. women presumed to be virgins) couldn't use tampons, lest their hymenal membrane be broken (the hymen is culturally associated with virginity but that idea is a social construction not based in biology). Ads in the 1940s and 1950s came out addressing this question directly, stating: "of course unmarried girls can use Pursettes!" Many focused on the use of the applicator, so women wouldn't have to do any "undue



▲ These tampons, made from wool by the H.K. Mulford Company around 1880-1900, were intended for use as medicated suppositories rather than for menstruation. History Colorado

◀ In 1969, Stayfree introduced the first adhesive pad, which rendered menstrual belts obsolete by the 1970s. History Colorado



handling.” One Meds brand advertisement from 1944 touted their tampons’ “applicators for daintiness!”

Other campaigns emphasized the idea of modernity and relied on the “modern woman” to sell these new products. One such modern woman in a 1929 Kotex ad exclaimed “If only I could tell this to every business girl!” A Tampax ad in 1938 touted that “college girls lead the way.” A Wix tampon ad from the same year extolled readers to “Be modern!” and another from 1945 that Tampax tampons were “the modern way to think about ‘those days.’”

“War workers” were “strong for Tampax,” too, as a 1944 Tampax-sponsored article had declared. During times of national crisis, traditional gender restrictions tend to ease. This was the case during World War II as the nation came to encourage and rely on women’s formal labor in traditionally male industries. Tampax took advantage and promoted tampons as a “productive wartime technology,” claiming that tampons would help women take less sick days during their periods, maintain the efficiency of work, and of course, bolster patriotism, as historian Sharra Vostral explains in her book *Under Wraps: A History of Menstrual Hygiene Technology*. One Tampax ad from 1942 showcased a long line of women on an assembly line with the promise blazed across the top: “Objective: Reduction of Female Absenteeism.” Another from Kotex claimed that “You’re the fun in his furlough!” but that “you don’t need a furlough, keep going in comfort with Kotex!”

By 1941, Tampax tampons appeared in fifty-one magazines with a total circulation of nearly fifty million, as historian Jaime Schultz reports. Sales soared for the tampon industry as a result of these marketing campaigns

and due to women’s larger presence in formal work and need for these products. It ultimately took two decades from the commercial introduction for the public to finally accept tampons.

## LYSOL AND TOXIC SHOCK SYNDROME

Do we just chalk these ads up to ridiculous, outdated marketing ploys? Or are there serious implications of the culture of concealment? Looking through the different marketing campaigns over the last hundred years, themes of shame and fear are remarkably consistent. Even the oft-used term “feminine hygiene” implies menstruation as fundamentally dirty—as unhygienic. Period companies’ marketing continues to refer to menstruation in consistently negative terms, and this reinforces the same message, over and over: that our menstruating bodies are a problem that needs to be fixed (and conveniently, that these companies are the only ones who can help).

Over the years, women internalized this message, which has led to bodily harm. For example, the Lysol disinfectant douche became a top-selling “feminine hygiene” product from the 1930s through the 1960s. It was also touted as a contraceptive device, despite being wholly ineffective and dangerous for this use. An ad from 1934 warns the reader, “Don’t take chances with marriage hygiene my dear, Lysol is safe.”

At the time, Lysol contained cresol, which caused burning, blistering, inflammation, and hundreds of deaths.

It wasn’t just Lysol. Non-organic materials were common in early tampons, most notably including rayon, which created a perfect storm of serious health problems. Rayon is more absorbent than cotton, but a byproduct of rayon is dioxin—which is a known carcinogen that can damage the immune system and decrease fertility. And yet, companies were producing tampons with rayon until the 1990s.

Synthetic materials in tampons (with their high absorbability) allowed women to wear them for much longer, but also created an ideal environment for bacteria. For a period in the 1970s and 1980s, women who used these synthetic tampons were struck with life-threatening infections, high fevers, dangerously low blood pressure, vomiting, diarrhea, organ failure, and even death. The connection between high-absorbency tampons and these deadly infections was a mystery until a doctor in Denver isolated the issue. It wasn’t until 1975 that Dr. James Todd at the Children’s Hospital of Denver identified “Toxic Shock Syndrome” (TSS) as the cause of so many infections. Between 1970 and 1980, there were 941 confirmed cases of TSS, in which seventy-three women died. Hundreds more were sickened.



Rely tampons were connected to the surge of Toxic Shock Syndrome cases in the 1970s and 1980s, causing widespread fear and illness across the nation. History Colorado

By 1980, the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention implicated Procter & Gamble's Rely brand of tampons as the single tampon "most contributing" to the onset of TSS, as historian Sharra Vostral writes. Shockingly, even after the report came out, Procter & Gamble continued to send out millions of samples of these high-absorbency tampons. It wasn't until 1990, after two decades had passed since its onset and TSS affected an estimated 60,000 people, that the FDA took action and required industry-standard ranges of absorbency and labeling on packages. Even today, there are no federal regula-

tions that require menstrual companies to disclose what is in their products, leaving their products a potentially dangerous black box to consumers.

### PERIOD CULTURE TODAY

The culture of concealment that still infuses menstrual marketing entrenches myths, stigmas, and stereotypes. According to Planned Parenthood and the Guttmacher Institute, twenty-two states mandate schools teach about reproductive health, and just thirteen require teachers to share only medically accurate information. When reproductive health is taught

in schools, classes are often gender-segregated—so boys aren't learning about the biology that shapes the lives of half of the population. However, it has been shown that education decreases stigma, stereotyping, and misinformation. Numerous studies, including a 2016 study supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and a 2020 study in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* based on three decades of research, demonstrated that lack of sexual and reproductive education leads to more sexually-transmitted infections, more unintended pregnancies, and continued ignorance about common illnesses. For example, serious conditions like endometriosis (a common condition that causes severe pain, infertility, and heavy bleeding) are underreported and under- or untreated, and ignorance about common medical issues can lead to delayed diagnosis and treatment, worsening health outcomes. Lack of knowledge perpetuates stigma and misinformation, preventing individuals from seeking proper care and making informed decisions about their health.

Vintage Tampax boxes from 1960, 1980, and 1990 showcase the brand's early designs and the evolution of one of the first commercially successful tampon brands. History Colorado



The real curse is the idea that the very biological machinery responsible for perpetuating the species is somehow dirty or toxic, as obstetrician/gynecologist and TED Talk speaker Jen Gunter explained in a 2022 presentation. Women suffer when shame and secrecy are the norm, creating and encouraging an environment without adequate oversight leading to serious physical and emotional harm.

One of the issues stemming from this environment of secrecy is known as period poverty—being unable to afford necessary products, or not being in a position to procure them. However, recent changes reflect a growing recognition of menstrual equality as a vital component of public health. For example, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, twelve states and the District of Columbia provide menstrual products in schools, twenty-four states (including Colorado) provide products in correctional facilities, and at least three states provide them in homeless shelters. Several Colorado colleges and universities already provide free menstrual products to students and faculty. Governor Jared Polis just signed a bill into law in June of this year requiring Colorado middle and high schools to provide free menstrual products to students by 2028.

Greater access to menstrual products is important because, as a study in 2021 showed, the lack of access has jumped 5 percent, to nearly one quarter of those surveyed. Lower income and students of color have been particularly affected. The study found that almost a quarter of Latino students had to choose between buying clothing and food, and almost half of Black and Latino students reported in a 2021 study that they felt unable to do their best school work because of lack of access to period products. In a 2024 study, the Denver nonprofit Justice Necessary found that 80 percent of female teens in Colorado have missed class due to lack of menstrual products and 90 percent have unexpectedly started their periods in

public without proper menstrual products on hand. Teens often lack access to funds to buy products because they typically do not have steady sources of income or depend on parental support. Additionally, financial constraints within families can mean prioritizing other essential household expenses over purchasing period products, leaving teens without the resources they need.

Some states have removed the luxury tax on period products and some do not charge sales tax at all—slightly improving the accessibility of these already costly items. This is the case in Colorado: sales of period products have been exempt from sales and use taxes since January 1, 2023. These policies are small improvements for access (we wouldn't necessarily champion toilet paper being more available), but these changes are increasing availability of necessary products, allowing for more equal participation in school and sports, and hopefully moving towards greater acceptance of menstruation as a fact of life for many people.


New, women-led companies have come to the market which aim to destigmatize sexual and reproductive health, and more organizations and individuals than ever before are vocal about period poverty, body literacy and positivity, and period stigma. There are gender-neutral companies as well, with slogans like “for everyone who menstruates”—working to combat the invisibility of the multitude of people who menstruate who may also be non-binary, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, or transgender. Their products are wider-ranging, including for example absorbent underwear which look like boy-shorts or boxers.

Are social attitudes to menstruation changing? In many ways, yes. Manufacturers have had to listen to the public's demand for better options (like all-cotton products), advertisements have become more open (with actual products featured, no more blue liquid!), and new, period-positive companies have flourished. And

yet, the tampon box is still opaque: companies resisting disclosure of their materials has led to public harm—from early rayon use in Rely tampons in the 1970s, to toxic materials found in tampons even today. A 2024 study by the University of California, Berkeley, detected toxic metals such as lead and arsenic in more than a dozen brands of tampons sold in the US, the European Union, and the United Kingdom.

I continue to ask myself—how much has changed from the early days of the period industry over a hundred years ago, when the products and the advertisements and the messaging came from people who don't menstruate, created for people who do? Menstruation is more than just a biological function; it is a narrative interwoven with cultural, social, and economic threads. The evolution of menstrual products—from ancient devices to modern tampons—mirrors broader shifts in societal attitudes and medical knowledge. Despite some advancements, menstruation remains enveloped in a culture of concealment and stigma.

Contemporary efforts to destigmatize menstrual health and address period poverty are crucial steps forward for public health. By fostering open dialogue and increasing access to menstrual products, we can move towards a future where menstruation is recognized as an aspect of human experience. Menstruation is a human story, one that requires biological, economic, social, and historical lenses to fully comprehend.

In short, the bees are safe. 

**Dr. Anna L. Weissman** is the Associate Curator of Domestic Life at History Colorado and holds a doctorate from the University of Florida. She is a social historian of gender and sexuality, reproductive rights, and the politics of menstruation. Anna co-edited *Troubling Motherhood: Maternity in Global Politics*, published by Oxford University Press in 2020.

# By Rail and River

---

Amidst one of the worst economic downturns in Colorado history, two ill-fated contingents of “Coxeyites” tried unconventional means of joining a nation-wide protest movement.

BY JIM ENGLAND and SAM BOCK

**A** train robbery was in the headlines of southern Colorado newspapers in the spring of 1894. Not the Hollywood version of a stickup on rails. This was the theft of an entire train.

The several hundred labor protesters who liberated the train from a Pueblo rail yard managed to take it more than two hundred miles, even rebuilding

tracks by hand as they went to avoid capture. Though stopped just across the Kansas border, the protestors brought widespread attention to their cause and most avoided any consequences for their heist. At the same time, in Denver, another group constructed homemade rafts and attempted to navigate the Platte River. The rafters were less successful than their rail-bound brethren:

Attempting to navigate the river at flood stage, their homemade rafts sank after just a few miles.

The train thieves and rafters were Coxeyites, and they were just two contingents of a nationwide movement calling itself Coxey’s Army. Taking the name of Jacob S. Coxey, an Ohio man who encouraged protestors from all over the country to converge on the nation’s



Sander’s Colorado contingent were not the only Coxeyites to steal a train. A group from Idaho made it all the way to Green River, Wyoming, with their stolen engine. This photo shows them being escorted onto a train back to Idaho by federal troops. Courtesy of the Sweetwater County Historical Museum



Coxey's Navy in Denver, posing along the banks of the South Platte River with their flat-bottom boats. The boats have been painted with political slogans, such as "Down with Plutocracy" and "Crime." Denver Public Library, X-21554

capital, the so-called army's cause was to draw attention to hard economic times and high unemployment that came with the economic crash of 1893. The hijackers had begun as a group of unemployed miners in Cripple Creek who decided that stealing a train was their only way of reaching Washington, DC and joining their fellow protestors. The Denver river-rafters similarly were made up of unemployed men that local authorities forced to go elsewhere—literally anywhere else as long as they were out of Denver—in search of economic redress.

While the protest movement was successful in drawing attention to the cause, labor tensions persisted long after the heist was over, leading to some of the most violent and shocking moments in Colorado history including the Ludlow Massacre. In many ways, the Coxey movement was a ground-up expression of discontent, and a precursor to various twentieth- and twenty-first-century protests of the unemployed and powerless, including the Occupy Wall Street movement of the early 2000s. Though the motivation may be familiar, their means were unusual, and were perhaps one of the most unique protest methods the state has ever seen.

## COXEY'S ARMY

Colorado was facing particularly hard economic times following the Panic of 1893, a nationwide economic depression that was among the worst in US history. The silver market collapsed that year as a result of a national decision to demonetize silver and return to a currency based on gold, sending the state's economy and its large silver mining industry into a nosedive.

One result was the rise of a state-wide pro-labor, Populist movement. As distinguished from later political ideologies loosely dubbed as "populist," the Populists of the late nineteenth century were a more-defined third political party movement. Its core constituency consisted of farmers, miners, and other laborers, who shared a distrust of corporations, banks, and the existing political structure. This Populist movement sought elective office by means of parties with a shifting set of names, but it was the People's Party that enjoyed the most success in Colorado, culminating in the election of the state's avowedly Populist eighth governor, Davis Waite, in 1893.

Growing tensions between miners and mine owners over poor working conditions were reaching a boiling

point in many parts of the state, finally spilling over in Cripple Creek in February of 1894. Many unemployed silver miners had come seeking work in its gold mines. Although the local prevailing wage for miners had long been three dollars a day, the length of that work day varied from mine to mine, from eight hours to as many as ten. In early 1894, taking advantage of the confluence of an expanded labor pool and depressed economy, many of the mine owners collectively decided to establish a work day of a uniform nine hours, for no additional wage. Hundreds of miners promptly went on strike.

At around this same time, the continuing national economic depression and persisting high unemployment rate (probably well over 10 percent) had sparked a different kind of response. On Easter morning in March of 1894, Ohio Populist Jacob Coxey set out with about 100 unemployed workers on a march to Washington, DC. The plan was to present Congress with Coxey's plan to create a federally-funded roads project to put the unemployed to work building and improving infrastructure around the country. Because the marchers were organized along military lines, they were popularly referred to as

Coxey's Army, led by "General" Coxey. The official name of the movement, however, was the Commonwealth of Christ.

Coxey's march was extensively publicized and inspired a number of similar marching armies from all across the nation, particularly in the West, where organized labor and Populist followers provided ready recruits. In Cripple Creek, notices were posted around town stating: "All idle men are requested to meet at the flagpole, Sunday, April 23, 1894...for the purpose of forming a contingent for the Coxey industrial army."

Three days later at the first meeting, "a recent arrival from the Pacific slope" addressed the crowd. This was John Sherman Sanders, a native of the Missouri Ozarks but more recently from either San Francisco or Spokane, where he was variously reported to have been either a miner, an engineer, or some type of electrician. At this first meeting, he was elected a "brigadier general" and would thereafter be identified with the honorific of General.

General Sanders quickly began drilling his volunteer recruits, and army-like rules were adopted, which included prohibitions of firearms, profane language, intoxicating liquors, fighting, quarreling, begging, and foraging. Although not reported locally at the time, some 500 Cripple Creek supporters joined in adopting Articles of Agreement, setting forth their "object and purpose" of a march to Washington, DC, to present demands for legislation aimed at addressing their dire economic straits. In addition to the familiar Populist demand for the return of federal support for silver coinage, this group proposed a bill for "irrigating millions of acres of desert land" in Colorado and other western states, "thus giving employment to thousands of now unemployed men and homes for thousands of families."

On May 3, a brigade of 159 men left Cripple Creek for Washington, first marching seven miles to Victor, where they were joined by anywhere from fifty to 150 additional recruits.

## **General Sanders quickly began drilling his volunteer recruits, and army-like rules were adopted, which included prohibitions of firearms, profane language, intoxicating liquors, fighting, quarreling, begging, and foraging.**

A short march to the mining town of Wilbur then brought the men to a brand new station of the Florence and Cripple Creek Railroad. In fact when they arrived, workers had just finished driving the last spike in the rail line. Railroad president William E. Johnson generously offered the free use of six rail cars to haul the men and their four wagons of baggage to Florence, east of Cañon City, making them the first passengers (of a sort) from that station.

### **STEALING A TRAIN**

At Florence, General Sanders formed five companies: three of Cripple Creek miners, one of Victor men, and one of Coal Creek miners from Florence. The Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad agreed to furnish ten empty box cars to transport the 354 men to Pueblo. They were met there by Pueblo Mayor L.B. Strait, who arranged for that town to feed three meals to all of Sanders's men and to provide a Main Street parade, and attempted to negotiate free rail transportation further east. Missouri Pacific Railway officials, however, were adamant that transportation would be provided only at full fare. Sanders, extremely unwisely in hindsight, told the Rio Grande's superintendent that his army was going to Washington "if they had to steal a train from

every road on the way." Thus alerted, the Missouri Pacific officials therefore ordered all of their locomotives be sent east of Pueblo to prevent their capture by Sanders.

On May 8, after Mayor Strait told General Sanders that the city would no longer feed his men, the contingent's officers met privately. Confirming the railroad's suspicions, one of the companies then commandeered six Missouri Pacific coal cars in the Pueblo train yards and loaded them up with the camp's equipment. Engineer P.G. Buerger was forcibly removed from idling Rio Grande switch engine No. 817, and was replaced by Morgan Cosgrove, a Coxeyite said to be a former Rio Grande engineer. With Sanders's men controlling all of the rail yard's switches, the fifty-ton engine was hooked up to the coal cars, the army's men climbed on, and the train headed east out of town on the Missouri Pacific's tracks.

Missouri Pacific officials, particularly Pueblo's District Superintendent O.A. Derby, reacted by devising two plans. First, they ordered that another engine and some cars be "ditched" (or overturned) to block the track some fifty miles east of Pueblo, near Olney Springs. Second, they ordered that all water be removed from the tanks along the line east of Pueblo so that Sanders's steam engine could not be replenished. And they obtained a warrant for the arrest of Sanders, his officers, and Engineer Cosgrove for the theft of a Rio Grande engine valued at eight thousand dollars, and requested an injunction restraining the movement of the "wild train." It was noted that serving these court papers to the men in that train might prove a challenge.

Although initially reported as hurtling down the tracks at fifty miles per hour, the hijacked switch engine, ordinarily limited for use just within the train yards for switching cars from one track to another, was probably only capable of about twenty to twenty-five miles per hour at most. This is consistent with the fact that it took the Cripple Creek army

two hours just to travel the thirty or so miles east from Pueblo to the town of Boone.

Shortly before midnight on the 8th, the army reached the “ditched” train, but the men, who had been erroneously warned that they were being trailed by a posse from Pueblo—(neither the railroad nor the Pueblo County Commissioners were willing to pay the expense) simply began building around it. They ripped up the tracks behind them, and re-laid them around the ditched train, all by hand, so as to bypass the obstruction. After just a few hours, they were back on their way eastward, but made only about ten miles before having to stop at Ordway to take on water for the engine’s steam boiler. The Mis-

souri Pacific water tank there had been drained, but the water had puddled on the ground. One report had the discouraged Coxeyites using this puddle to fill up coffee pots and buckets to add to the boiler. A second, similar stop was made after another forty miles or so near Arlington, but the water in Adobe Creek there was so alkaline as to endanger the train’s boiler.

Another twenty miles or so brought them near Haswell, only to encounter a second engine and car ditched at the order of Superintendent Derby, requiring yet another impromptu re-laying of bypass tracks. Derby’s zealotry in this regard might have been partially due to antipathy toward the strik-

ing miners based on his own recent acquisition of an ownership interest in a local mine. With water again running low and impeding speed, it then took almost an hour to travel about fifteen miles and reach Eads. There, “a large number of men were set to work carrying [1,600 gallons of] water from a farmer’s well, a full quarter of a mile away.”

With the engine’s water replenished, by the afternoon of May 9 General Sanders’s Cripple Creek “legionaries” had made it almost to the tiny town of Chivington (named after the infamous commander of the massacre at nearby Sand Creek), only to find yet a third deliberately-wrecked train, this one the most extensive yet. By now



Members of Coxey’s army at the camp outside Denver, 1894.  
History Colorado, 90.156.126

8PH

“wet with rain, worn out with exposure and hard work, with practically no food on hand,” the men called a temporary halt, and walked three or four miles into town “to get what victuals they could.” This only amounted to about “two potatoes, a small piece of meat...and a little coffee for each man.” And then it really started to rain on the camped-out men.

From here, accounts diverge. In one, Sanders somehow motivated the discouraged men and they returned to the ditch site and resumed efforts to once again bypass the obstruction. In the other account, a Missouri Pacific work crew arrived to clear the tracks for the mail trains, and were surprised when Sanders offered his men’s assistance.

This account is somewhat bolstered by ongoing judicial efforts. The railroad’s first attempt to obtain an injunction against the “wild train” crew had been filed in Colorado’s federal court in Denver. Federal Judge Moses Hallett, awakened at one o’clock in the morning to hear the request, denied it. The railroad had based its request on the stolen train’s supposed interference with trains delivering US mail, but Judge Hallett found that any interference was instead due to the railroad’s efforts to block its own tracks. The railroads then sought a judicial bypass, joining forces with the US Attorney in Kansas to seek judicial intervention in that state. Receiving some kind of assurance that the Kansas

courts would be more helpful, Superintendent Derby ordered that one more ditched train in eastern Colorado be removed in order to clear the tracks into western Kansas, “where the little game will be stopped.” Sending a work crew to Chivington could well have been part of the plan to make sure the train was able to cross over into Kansas.

## LOSING STEAM

Work on the tracks near Chivington was performed all through the night in a “driving rain,” and the tracks were cleared by 8 P.M. Water for the boiler was secured either from a nearby pond or by transporting barrels of water from Chivington in hand cars, and the train set out eastward at 9:00. General Sanders’s army next stopped at Sheridan Lake, where they expected supplies but received only a sack of flour and one loaf of bread. Their train then crossed the Colorado border and pulled into Horace, Kansas, where “the people from all the country around were there to greet the Industrials and gave them a rousing cheer.” The cheer was offset by the discovery that the “464 breakfasts which [Sanders’s army] had telegraphed for the night before at twelve cents each had been disposed of.” A Horace deputy sheriff arrested his own underaged brother, who had joined the army at Chivington.

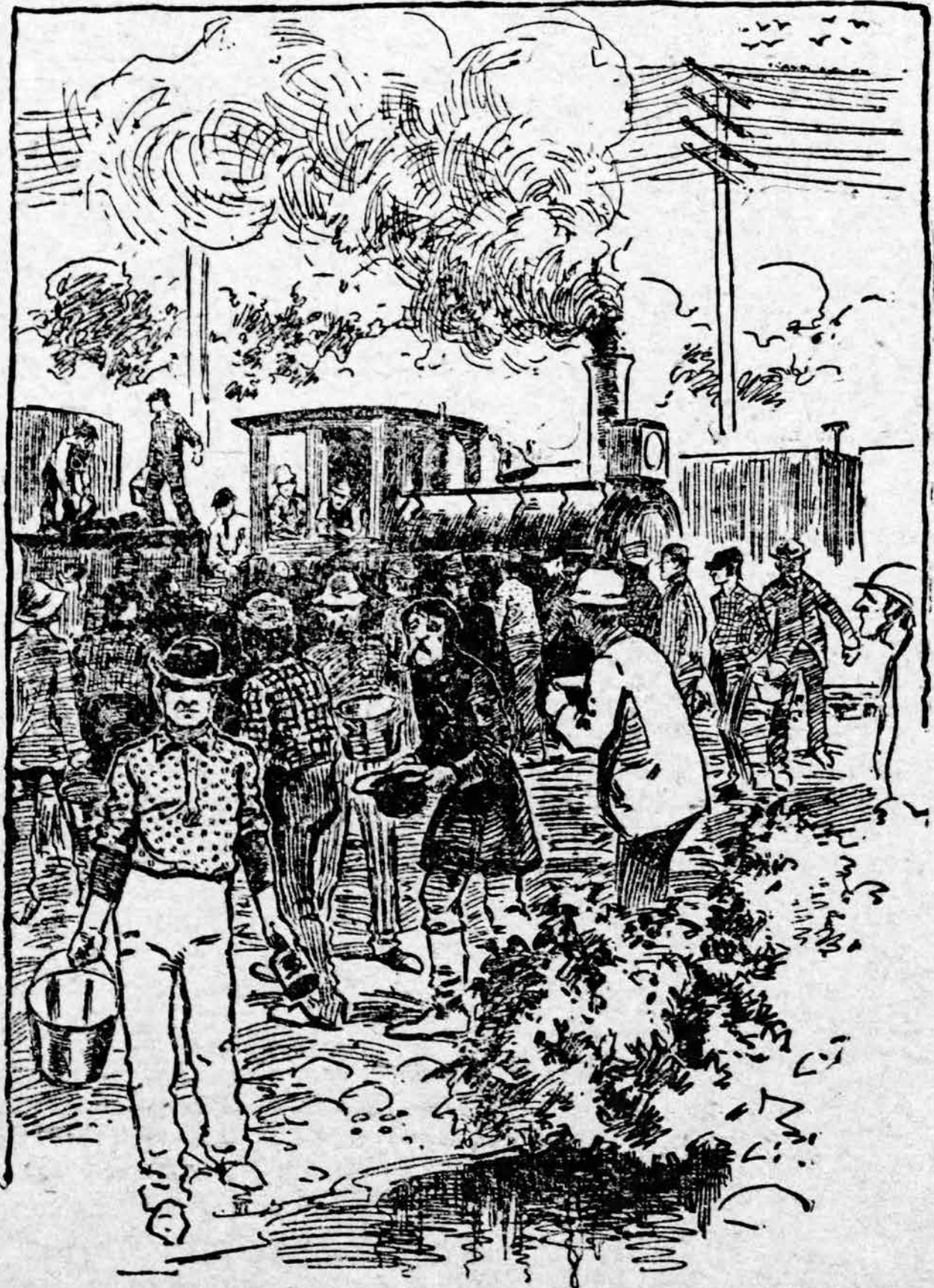
The trip of 167 miles from Pueblo to Horace, overcoming the numerous railroad obstacles, was said to be “regarded by railroad men as little short of remarkable, for an engine of the [Rio Grande switch engine’s] class.”

◀ An illustration of “General” Sanders, made from a photograph taken of him while in Kansas. The theft of the train made headlines not just in Colorado and Kansas, but across the country. *Times* (Kansas City), May 12, 1894

▶ An illustration of Sander’s Coxeyites carrying water via bucket-chain to refill their stolen engine’s boiler. While not widely remembered today, Sander’s “wild train” left quite an impact on the people of the time. This illustration was published three years after the Coxey marches, in a Memphis newspaper—one of many across the country to run a syndicated article about it that year. *Commercial Appeal* (Memphis), June 13, 1897







**AS MANY AS COULD FIND BUCKETS BEGAN CARRYING WATER.**



Many in Colorado were left unemployed by the 1893 crash. Many of those joined Coxeyite movements, such as these men photographed in Denver in 1894. Denver Public Library, X-21557

Perhaps for this reason, the men pulled off a remarkable switch themselves at Horace, and appropriated yet another engine, Missouri Pacific Passenger Engine 989 (“the best passenger train they could find”), to continue on east, Engineer Cosgrove again at the throttle.

Although Sanders and his men were said to have been confident of favorable treatment by Kansas’s own Populist governor, in fact their train was heading into a trap. Missouri Pacific officials were said to have obtained as many as 500 federal-court warrants for the arrest of Sanders’s army, and those officials had traveled in special rail cars to Scott City, Kansas, with a US Marshal and as many as 300 armed deputies on board.

Traveling some fifty miles from Horace, Sanders’s second stolen engine reached the Scott City trap on the afternoon of May 10. After some negotiations, food for his men, and dinner for Sanders in the railroad superintendent’s private car, Sanders announced an “unconditional surrender.” He was reported as saying to his 450 men: “Now, remember, boys, you are all under arrest as well as I,” with his men then yelling, “We will stay with you, general.”

Arrangements were made to return Sanders’s stolen Rio Grande switch

engine to Pueblo, after determining that it had not sustained any damage. Found inside the cab when it reached Pueblo was a note from Cosgrove to Rio Grande engineer Buerger saying: “This is a good engine. Take good care of her. I may need her again.”

Considerably more damage had resulted from the railroad’s own efforts to obstruct the stolen train. Although not the most objective evaluator, General Sanders placed that damage at “fully \$5,000.” He pointed out to a Missouri Pacific attorney that the railroad would have saved considerable money if it had only agreed to transport his men without charge as originally requested. An unidentified lawyer also claimed that the railroad had by then already incurred another eighteen thousand dollars in fees in responding to the “wild train.”

Sanders’s army of 450 men, now riding in passenger cars, were fed lunch (biscuits, boiled eggs, and coffee) in Hoisington, Kansas the next day, before being unloaded at Topeka, which proved only a temporary stop before they were transported to the army facilities at Fort Leavenworth. During this period, a story was sparsely circulated that among the recruits who had joined Sanders in Pueblo were two young women who

had dressed in men’s clothing and were discovered only once at Leavenworth. The women were reported to be sisters, named Emeline and Leonore Gordon. Virtually all of the details in this account have defied verification. With the possible exception of two women, the demographic makeup of the army was said to include “a few Swedes, some Irish, possibly a dozen Scandinavians, two American-born Mexicans and two mulattoes.”

## TRIALS AND SMALL FINES

Detention at Fort Leavenworth continued for more than a month, until some sort of mass jury trial could be convened. On June 18, a federal jury delivered a verdict, somehow against a collection of 290 of Sanders’s men, finding them collectively guilty of obstructing US mail. This verdict did not apply to Sanders, who had been released on bond and was being charged in a separate case. Nor did it apply to his engineer, similarly released on bond. At the time of this mass trial, however, this engineer was being referred to as “William Lewelling,” even though all of the prior Colorado accounts had instead referred to Cosgrove. In any event, “Lewelling” did not make his required

appearance on the day of that trial and was apparently never heard of again.

The following day, 121 of those convicted were sentenced en masse, each fined from between twenty-five and fifty dollars, and committed to jail for inability to pay those fines. They were distributed among five Kansas jails, ultimately “to be released in small numbers so as to effectually break up and disband the army.”

Sanders himself remained free, even marrying a woman in Leavenworth, but in mid-September ended up in the federal court in Wichita, where he pled guilty, possibly to mail obstruction as well, and was fined fifty dollars. A short stint in jail there ended when his “populist friends” paid his fine. Before the end of the month, he had returned to Colorado, saying he would campaign around the state for the Populist cause before that fall’s election. He said he had been traveling around the country “addressing audiences...as far East as Ohio,” but apparently had never made it to Washington, DC.

Any notion that his legal worries were behind him were ended just days after that fall election, when he was arrested in Pueblo on the warrant that had been issued way back when the train was first hijacked. Sanders’s plea that he had already been punished in Kansas for the transaction was unsuccessful, because this arrest was for seizure of Rio Grande property, not for mail obstruction. Sanders was released on bond, and returned in two weeks for the scheduled trial, only to learn that Rio Grande officials were not willing to see the prosecution proceed.

Although newspapers throughout the country had provided extensive coverage to the Pueblo train theft and its aftermath, the dismissal of charges represented the end of any significant publicity for Sanders, and little record of his later life remains. He did make it to Washington—but it was Washington state, where he lived before moving to California, dying at age sixty-nine or seventy in San Francisco on January 16,

## As 1893’s depression progressed, Denver saw an influx of unemployed and homeless men.

1936. Nothing at all can be discovered of the fate of Cosgrove (or the mysterious Lewelling). The rest of Sanders’s army apparently scattered, with some of them no doubt returning to Cripple Creek. Upon returning, they would have discovered that they had missed out on the dramatic escalation of the miners’ strike they had left, culminating in late May with blown-up mines, and fatal encounters between strikers and more than a thousand “private deputies” hired by the mine owners.

Engine 817’s Engineer Buerger received one later newspaper mention, albeit posthumously. In 1900 he slipped underneath his own locomotive (Engine No. 621 this time) and was “ground to pieces.”

While the dramatic course of Sanders’s wild train ride was noteworthy because of how much distance was reached, it was not the only instance of Coxe’s followers “stealing” a train. In early 1894, trains were commandeered in Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Montana, and Wyoming, though generally no great distances were achieved.

## COXEY’S NAVY ON THE PLATTE

The origins of Denver’s contingent of Coxeyites are somewhat different. As 1893’s depression progressed, Denver saw an influx of unemployed and homeless men. In the summer of 1893, they were gathered by the hundreds, housed in tents and fed in “Camp Relief” in the River Front Park west of downtown Denver along the Platte River. City officials ended the housing and food after several weeks, and instead offered free one-way rail tickets out of town.

In the spring of 1894, many homeless men returned to River Front Park, where they were joined by Coxeyites, many from California. “Before long, River Front Park had 1,500–1,800 residents, the largest encampment of Coxeyites in the country.” But the railroads were now not interested in providing free fare out of town. The Coxeyites’ elected leader, “General” William Grayson, publicly announced an effort to capture an empty freight train. After one such attempt was thwarted, Grayson ended up marching about one hundred of his men to Nebraska.

No doubt inspired by an account of another Coxe group in Montana trying to reach the East by boat down the Missouri River, someone in late May proposed having the Denver contingent head east down the Platte. That idea had actually been floated six weeks earlier, when an unnamed sailor from Scotland proposed travel to Missouri by raft, saying, “We will make the jags give us grub and grog and I will pilot yees safely over the blooming sand bars.” That proposal might have been somewhat sensible back in mid-April, when sand bars were still visible in the lazy Platte, but by early June conditions had changed dramatically. Colorado was deluged with heavy rainfall, resulting in significant flooding in Boulder and Pueblo. The Platte itself became an “alarming rampage” between Denver and Brighton, with a flow unmatched during the prior sixteen years.

Denverites had become anxious about the hundreds of hungry Coxeyites remaining in their midst. So, in spite of the raging floodwaters, the Denver Chamber of Commerce encouraged the homeless Coxeyites’ nautical departure by agreeing to provide lumber for constructing boats. On June 2, 22,600 board feet of lumber was delivered and hundreds of men began constructing 100 four-by-sixteen-foot flat-bottomed boats.





A group of the Denver contingent of Coxey's Army assembles amid their newly-constructed rafts near the Platte River in the first week of June, 1894. History Colorado



Unemployed workers under the banner of Coxeys Army demonstrate in downtown Denver in 1894 in the wake of the silver crash and the waning days of the Gilded Age, demanding jobs. Denver Public Library Western History and Genealogy Collection. X-21550

Although a trial run on June 6 resulted in two boats capsizing almost immediately, plans for the next day's full-scale river excursion were not modified. On June 7, the entire Coxeys Navy left Denver, planning to make Brighton the first stop on the way to Kansas City. Many of the first-time sailors didn't make it that far.

Five boats never even made it farther than the equivalent of about ten city blocks, striking piers or capsizing even before reaching the bridge at 31st Street. For the remainder of the initial leg of the voyage, the next day's *Rocky Mountain News* headlines tell the story:

"Only God will ever know how many of the Coxeites were drowned in the Platte last night," said [Coxey Navy] Commander Twombly yesterday." Only six bodies were ever recovered, with dozens more missing and suspected to have also drowned.

Accounts are somewhat confused about what happened to the survivors. Many apparently managed to travel, perhaps on foot, to LaSalle, south of Greeley. There are reports that they somehow managed to take a hijacked train from there to Julesburg, before unsuccessfully attempting to hijack yet another train there. About eighty men were arrested,


returned to Denver and tried, with only five convicted and sentenced to short jail terms. And as a result, River Front Park was sealed off for good.

## A FORGOTTEN FIGHT

Summarizing the Coxeys movement and its moment in American history, labor historian Carlos Schwantes provided an overall appraisal: "In common with the Populist revolt, Coxeysism was a democratic movement that called into question the underlying values of the new industrial society.... The story of the Coxeys movement is ultimately a case study of how ordinary citizens influence—or fail to influence—political and economic issues in modern America."

In hindsight, the Coxeys movement bore no direct fruits, either nationally or locally. The petitioned-for legislative reforms were not realized, although some would argue they were ahead of their time and were later more successful. Labor historians and progressives can also find parallels between 1894 and the present-day in their respective responses to the unemployed and unhoused. Lessons, too, can be learned from how a frequently unsympathetic local press responded to the Coxeys protesters.

In Colorado, 1894 saw the peak influence of the local Populist movement. Both its incumbent Governor and Congressman lost their re-election bids that fall, and the People's Party never again achieved statewide elective office. Still, Coxeys Army proved somewhat of a model for later protest and petition movements, particularly the "Bonus Army" march on Washington for veterans' benefits in 1932, and the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011. But the overwhelmingly non-violent Coxeites (Jacob Coxeys own single conviction was for walking on the grass outside the US Capitol) should not be seen as the role models for the January 6 insurrectionists of 2021.

Though deadly serious for the unfortunate rafters from Denver who decided to navigate the Platte, the rest of Colorado's Coxeys contingent might seem like an amusing footnote in history. But to the diehard members of the movements, this was not just serious, it was a fight for their lives and livelihoods. To them, success meant the difference between a liveable wage and destitution. The circumstances driving them to these grand, dramatic efforts—a desperate economic downturn and the collapse of much of Colorado's mining industry—show them to be one of the earliest expressions of the era's growing labor movements that presaged much of the unrest and violence erupting in Colorado during the early decades of the next century. 

**Jim England** is a retired trial lawyer who has lived in Colorado since 1979. Most of that time has been in Boulder County, where he was Board Chair of the Museum of Boulder. Since 2022, he has volunteered with History Colorado's Publications department.

**Sam Bock** is History Colorado's Director of Interpretation and Publications, and the Managing Editor of *The Colorado Magazine*. He hails from Boulder, where he conducted his graduate studies in history at the University of Colorado.

# Help Us Preserve a More Complete History

Recommend  
a Place Today



History Colorado is working to add 150 places on the Colorado State Register of Historic Properties that tell the state's diverse stories. Learn more!

[h-co.org/heritage-for-all](https://h-co.org/heritage-for-all)



**History Colorado**

**COLORADO HERITAGE FOR ALL**



# FIRE IN THE BONEYARD

Over a century ago, a vicious academic feud in the Colorado foothills lit a spark—a dinosaur mania that never quite died out.

BY DEVIN FLORES





**A**rthur Lakes set out from Golden, Colorado on a trek into the rugged foothills around Mount Falcon in the late spring of 1877. It was not a long journey—a few hours of hiking, there and back. Lakes, a clergyman and professor of geology, had set out to measure the depth (and therefore the age) of certain rock formations in the area around Morrison. But what he found there, purely by happenstance, would change the trajectory of his life, and leave a cultural impact so strong and deep that we still feel it.

He found dinosaur bones.

Today dinosaurs are everywhere. They're in hundreds, maybe thousands, of children's books. They're on cereal boxes, sports team logos, comic book covers, and billboards. They stalk the toy aisle of practically every store that has one, often outnumbering the more mundane animals. Every few years they stomp across the silver screen to chase after action stars, to the cheers and screams of millions of moviegoers.

The average American probably sees depictions of dinosaurs almost as often as they see those of still-living animals like lions, tigers, and elephants. And probably, for most people, it barely even registers. Dinosaurs have become so universal and pervasive that we don't even notice.

And this makes it absolutely staggering to remember that these animals—so iconic that children can rattle off their names and confidently tell you which ones were carnivores—have been extinct for sixty-five million years. It's astonishing that we know these creatures even existed, much less feel their presence so constantly.

But when Arthur Lakes stumbled upon those fossils almost one hundred and fifty years ago, dinosaurs were a rare and unfamiliar thing, even for an

academic like him. He was about to set in motion a series of sometimes preposterous events that made dinosaurs the iconic and familiar sight they are today. And it all started in the foothills of Colorado.

Arthur Lakes came to Colorado from England as a missionary and pastor, but his true calling was studying and teaching geology.

This wasn't terribly uncommon at the time. Academia was a less-regulated world. There were no formal training programs for most fields, and the gentleman scholar—essentially a self-trained scientist—could gain prominence and secure positions by virtue of either merit or nepotism. Luckily, Lakes had secured his professorship at the Colorado University Schools (now the Colorado School of Mines) by merit. He was studious, well read, and knowledgeable, and also well-liked.

**It's astonishing that we know these creatures even existed, much less feel their presence so constantly.**

His colleagues knew him to be affable and expeditious, and students appreciated his friendly demeanor and adventurous spirit. He was young, too, closer in age to his students than the typical professor today—he was only twenty-six when he came to the university in 1870.

Seven years later in 1877, he was well-established at the university. He'd taken to teaching with enthusiasm and a hands-on approach. In the years since he arrived in Colorado, he'd sprouted a pushbroom mustache and taken on a near-permanent suntan thanks to his frequent hikes and expeditions into the Rocky Mountains. It was on one of these scholastic jaunts that Lakes made a chance discovery that changed the trajectory of his career.

Few could have made the discovery. “[The fossils] at Dinosaur Ridge don't stick out very much,” explained Dr. Beth Simmons, a retired paleontologist and former secretary of the Friends of Dinosaur Ridge. “If it hadn't been for Lakes, maybe those bones never would have been found.”

But Lakes was a skilled geologist, and as his later career would show, he had an undeniable knack for “bone hunting”—that is, finding and identifying fossils.

The fossils Arthur Lakes found that day in 1877 rose out of the nondescript gravel and stone of a hogback ridge like a whale surfacing from the mysterious waters of the open sea. They looked back up at him from the depth of over a hundred million years, hinting at an exciting revelation of new scientific discovery, just out of reach. So he set to work.

He knew something of extracting delicate samples from stone, and began work with students and colleagues to uncover more of the find. The fossils, rust-red against the paler colors of the surrounding stone, surfaced slowly. As they did, the enormity of his chance discovery came into focus.

For one thing, they were literally enormous. Most fossils, including the majority of those found at what we now call Dinosaur Ridge, are relatively small and fragmentary. But one of the samples Lakes revealed in 1877 was an enormous vertebra, and it was almost as tall as Lakes.

From our perspective, looking back at the past from a world saturated with dinosaurs, it's hard to imagine how this would have felt. Even geologists and students of geology at that time had rarely encountered dinosaur remains in their lives. This was a world before cinema, before pop science magazines or sci-fi novels, before even fossils on display in museums. To stumble across a fossil is one thing, but to be confronted with the bone of something so large that its spine was as thick around as you are tall is something else entirely.

FACING A portrait of Edward Drinker Cope (left) aged about 50. Courtesy of the Yale Peabody Museum, YPM VPAR.002544. A portrait of Othniel Charles Marsh (right), aged about 40, during his professorship at Yale. Library of Congress, LC-BH832-175. Art by Thomas Lusk

Lakes knew plenty about identifying fossils as fossils, and had enough knowledge of biology and anatomy to identify which bones he was looking at. But at the time, that was about as far as his understanding of paleontology extended.

In the nineteenth century, much of academia dismissed the young field of paleontology as an idle curiosity. Most geologists were far more interested in practical applications of their knowledge. This is why there was such a burgeoning group of geologists in Colorado in the first place: they were being trained to enter the mining industry.

“Paleontology was considered secondary,” explained Dr. Simmons. “The gold rush paid for schools and universities, that’s what paid for all the museums. Lake’s job was to teach geology so we could find more gold.”

The Dakota Hogback above Morrison, photographed in 1926. The edge of the town is visible on the bottom left. Courtesy of the US Geological Survey, CMR01759

The field of biology was a little more refined than paleontology. Darwin’s theory of evolution was a hot new topic on the academic scene, and was still being hotly contested. For that passionate cohort of young biologists embracing evolution, the theory gave them an obvious explanation for what happened to all extinct animals: they were failures. If they had gone extinct, it was because they were not fit for survival. To many nineteenth-century biologists, extinct vertebrates represented dead ends, failed experiments along the march of progress that inevitably led to the evolution of humans. As such, what could be learned from fossils of big, clumsy “thunder lizards” was limited, and certainly much less exciting than discovering new living, breathing species of mammals.

“Back then, paleontology was more a gentleman naturalist’s hobby,” explained Dan Brinkman of the Yale Peabody Museum. “But after the 1859 publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, and after 1868, the public became

interested in fossil discoveries, and what they could tell us about the evolution of life. They wanted to know whether or not you could address these things in terms of Darwin’s evolution by natural selection.”

Arthur Lakes simply didn’t have the background or know-how to properly examine his find, and he also wasn’t too proud to admit that. So, while his students continued to poke up and down the hogback ridge looking for signs of more fossils, Lakes wrote Othniel Charles Marsh, a professor of paleontology at Yale University.

Marsh was already a star, one of the most prominent names in American paleontology. He was a Yale graduate, had studied in Germany—then home to the premier schools of paleontology in the world—and had already financed several successful digs at his own expense. He was a pioneer in his field in the United States, and his work appeared often in both biological and geological journals, which Lakes would have been very familiar with.



Marsh was ambitious, driven, and also very busy—too busy to respond promptly to a letter from a provincial amateur like Lakes.

The days ticked by, becoming weeks, and the enigmatic fossils gathered dust in Arthur Lake's office. But he knew the enormity (both metaphorical and literal) of this find. Likely figuring that Marsh was simply preoccupied with other matters, Lakes reached out to his second choice: prominent (and self-taught) paleontologist Edward Drinker Cope.

Lakes had no idea that with a simple, politely inquisitive message, he had unwittingly fired the first shot in an arcane new type of academic war.

Marsh and Cope hated each other. This is not an overstatement, and would, over the course of two decades of ruthless academic espionage and outright sabotage, become an understatement.

Marsh and Cope first met in Germany in the 1860s, and it would have been apparent to anyone who saw them even at a glance that they were very different people.

Othniel Charles Marsh was studying in Berlin, an ambitious Ivy League graduate whose schooling was funded by his millionaire uncle. He was a broad, even burly man, with a round face and a bushy beard, and large eyes that accentuated his penetrating, calculating gaze. He was an inveterate social climber who, while never described as particularly friendly, was shrewd and strategically diplomatic. He knew how to cultivate connections wherever he went, whether in academia, politics, or business. He was perpetually conscious of his reputation, and approached science like a ruthless businessman for whom respect and renown were the most valuable currencies.

Notably, he didn't enter paleontology out of any great passion. His fiercest ambition was to hold a respected professorship at Yale University, his alma mater, but he had been told that the only such position likely to be available to him was in the new and relatively under-staffed department of



A view of the foothills around Morrison, from the side of Dinosaur Ridge, July 2024. Courtesy of Devin Flores

paleontology. So he threw himself into the field, his rapid rise fueled largely by determined ambition.

“They both had big egos, don't get me wrong,” said Dan Brinkman of the Yale Peabody Museum, “but Marsh... his thinking was more self-serving. He was described as being kind of stand-offish, suspicious, and not forthcoming even with people who considered him a friend.”

In contrast to Marsh, Edward Drinker Cope was the child of a comfortably upper-middle-class family. As a boy he attended expensive private schools, but never showed much aptitude for topics that didn't interest him (and, famously, had terrible handwriting). However, he had a bright and inquisitive mind, and from his teens he began to teach himself anatomy and biology out of books. Once he began attending the University of Pennsylvania, Joseph Leidy—another naturalist and self-taught paleontologist—took him under his wing, and Cope became something of a rising star. By his mid-twenties, he had already published more than three dozen papers.

Cope was open and outgoing, and made acquaintances easily. He was a tall man and well groomed, with a friendly face and approachable demeanor. This served him well during his time in Europe, where he

met and befriended some of the most renowned scientists of the day. He had gone overseas to avoid the Civil War draft, as he was a pacifist. However, that does not mean he was peaceful. Where Marsh was methodical, Cope was bold; where Marsh was brooding, Cope was brash; and where Marsh was political and cunning, Cope was blunt, abrasive, and known for his towering temper.

“He made friends easier than Marsh,” said Dan Brinkman. “He was more outgoing, but he had a fiery temperament. Wherever he went, he butted heads with his bosses.”

Despite their many differences, the two had a relationship perhaps best described as ambivalent at first, perhaps even friendly. They toured museums together and wrote to one another frequently after Cope returned to the United States. However, once Marsh finished his studies and came back to assume his professorship at Yale, things soured.

Over the years, the differences in their personalities grated against each other, exacerbated by their ambitious and prideful natures. But as the premier American paleontologists of their generation, it was inevitable that they would interact with each other, over and over and over again.



The remains of Marsh's "bone quarry" in Garden Park, north of Cañon City. Photographed around 1906, well after the "Bone Wars" had ended. Courtesy of the US Geological Survey, STW00257

The tension between them began rising early on in 1868, the year Marsh returned to the United States. Cope introduced Marsh to the owner of a quarry which frequently produced fossils. Marsh promptly went behind Cope's back and paid the quarrymen to send their finds exclusively to Marsh, and no one else—including Cope.

"Unlike Cope, who still viewed [academics] as a gentleman's pursuit, from the very beginning Marsh viewed it as a business," explained Dan Brinkman. "And a cutthroat business at that. He was like a robber baron."

Marsh's act of espionage undoubtedly irritated Cope, and it was only the beginning. Over the next several years, the two would regularly butt heads, each incident escalating further. They corrected each other's papers, a normal part of the scientific process, but it must have been like nails on the chalkboard of the soul for men with egos as large as theirs. In 1871, Cope went on a dig to Kansas, which raised Marsh's hackles. Marsh was horrendously possessive and territorial. While he never hesitated to snatch valuable resources from under others' noses, he guarded jealously everything he could lay even the vaguest of claims over, and that apparently included entire regions of

the country. To Marsh's mind, because he had done a dig in Kansas first, the whole state was his "territory," and any other paleontologist doing work there was not only a betrayal, it was a threat to his ambitions.

This attitude brought things to a fiery head in 1872, when paleocene mammal fossils were uncovered in Wyoming. Both Cope and Marsh headed out west on expedition.

That long, hot summer in southern Wyoming destroyed all pretense of cordiality between the men. By the time Arthur Lakes contacted them five years later in 1877, even the paper-thin facade of academic politeness had burned away, leaving only a deep, deep hatred.

They were both actively publishing papers on finds in the American West. Cope was especially active, identifying or describing fossils found by miners in Utah, Montana, and New Mexico. However, neither was particularly invested in financing official digs. They were content, for a time, with receiving specimens from afar and frostily ignoring one another's accomplishments.

Things changed when Arthur Lake's message brought them both to Colorado in the early summer of 1877.

Each realized the other was interested in this new site in Morrison. The competitive fires were stoked.

Both men rushed to Colorado to see what Lakes had found, and to examine the geological formations around what is now the Denver suburbs. But while Cope was putting on the airs of a gentleman scholar, Marsh cut right to the chase. He quickly laid claim to the bones in the best way he knew: with money. He immediately began making overtures to Lakes, the humble Colorado geologist, offering hearty payments and well-financed digs if he continued to seek out fossils for Marsh alone. Lakes agreed to the proposition, as yet unaware of the whirlwind he had just signed on to reap. The Bone Wars had come to Colorado.

You can still see evidence of the excavations Lakes carried out. If you travel to Dinosaur Ridge, as it's now known, just east of what became the famous Red Rocks Park an Amphitheater and head to the western side of the ridge, you can find a great slice taken out of the hill showing where, a century and a half ago, Lakes and his students carefully carved out and carted away tons of rock. The obscuring sediment and upper strata have been peeled away, revealing ancient bands of stone beneath: layers dating back over 100 million years to the Late Jurassic. A few dozen rusty-red fossils are still very visible in the hard stone, left in situ because of the tremendous difficulty of removing them. It can be an overwhelming thing to realize you're gazing at the remains of animals so long dead that it's a gift we even know they existed.

"This was once a seashore," said Alyce Olson, lead tour guide at Dinosaur Ridge, as she pointed out the layers of stone that make up the western, Jurassic-aged side of the ridge. "All of this land used to be flat. All these layers of rock were sand and sediment at the edge of a sea."

The soft sediment of that ancient shoreline, and the rivers that flowed across into the sea, were perfect for preserving traces of ancient life. And by pure chance those conditions endured for millions and millions of years, capturing hundreds of specimens from dozens of species, across fifty million years from the Mid-Jurassic into the Early Cretaceous. But even more fortunate are the conditions that brought those remains near enough to the surface that a local pastor-turned-geologist could stumble across them on a hike.

“[The ridge] is a hogback, a hill that was uplifted when the Rocky Mountains were formed,” explained Olson. “That’s special. That’s what allows us to see dinosaur fossils.”

The number of specimens Lakes uncovered as he worked that summer was astonishing. It seemed like everywhere he went, he struck fossils. Now

that he was looking for them, they were turning up everywhere. The red sandstone ridges and steep foothills of Golden and Morrison were a fertile field of dinosaur bones. By October, Lake’s had accumulated several more crates of finds, which he shipped off to Yale to the eager care of Othniel Charles Marsh.

From Lake’s finds, Marsh was able to describe three new species of Dinosaur that summer and fall. The first two were the vertebrae of sauropods, those enormous long-necked titans which dwarf every other land animal that has walked the Earth, before or since. Marsh called them *Titanosaurus montanus*, the Titan Lizard of the Mountains (now renamed *Atlantosaurus*), and the much more enduring *Apatosaurus*. The third find was something different, something special, and so utterly strange that at first Marsh suspected it was some kind of enormous sea turtle.

It was a set of jumbled bony plates in strange pentagonal shapes. At the time nobody had seen anything like it before, but nowadays its name is a staple on the tongue of millions of children, and its bizarre form is quickly recognizable: Colorado’s very own state fossil, *Stegosaurus*.

Marsh was apparently feeling quite triumphant. He published several papers in academic journals, and even gave self-congratulating lectures on these new species at the National Academy of Science. It was quite the feather in his cap.

*Leaping Laelaps*, a painting by Charles Knight and an early example of paleoart, the artistic rendering of prehistoric animals in an attempt to display how they would have appeared in life. This image was directly inspired by the *Laelaps/Dryptosaurus* debate between Marsh and Cope, and there are rumors that the fighting dinosaurs depicted are meant to represent the two paleontologists. It was a pop-culture staple for many generations, and still appears in many media. Wikimedia Commons





Paleoartist Charles Knight creating a clay model of *Stegosaurus* in 1899. In 1982, in response to a public campaign led by elementary school students, the *Stegosaurus* was designated Colorado's state fossil. Wikimedia Commons

But while Marsh was paying off Lakes and doing an impromptu victory lap in the halls of academia, Cope was anything but idle. Seeing (and no doubt seething) that he was unlikely to be able to compete with Marsh's claim to the Morrison area, he turned his attention elsewhere. He made contact with prospectors to the south, following vague newspaper reports of "unusual bones" being found near Cañon City not long before Lakes had sent his letters.

Cañon City is more remote than Morrison, and was even more so in the late 1800s, but it's no less picturesque. Nestled high in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo range, the landscape is high, dry, and windswept. The whole area is dominated by high ridges that wind across the landscape like primordial serpents, their steep and jagged pinnacles rising out of the Earth like the vertebrae of a great spinal column. They're of the same age as Morrison's, and they, too, are a treasure trove of fossils. Digs continue sporadically in the region to this day, exhuming fantastical bones from the earthy slopes and canyon walls.

Once Cope realized what fertile soil he had found, he moved quickly, and began seeking out locals to be his agents.

Marsh heard about Cope's work around Cañon City and was apparently

outraged by yet another example of Cope infringing on what he considered his territory—in this case, the entire state of Colorado. He sent a snappish telegram to one of his agents in Denver, claiming that Cope had "already violated all agreements" and ordering the man to travel south to Fremont County and immediately purchase some fossils on display at a local "museum" (really an auctioneer's office). Marsh's agent did so, but to his consternation, the fossils turned out not to be a new discovery. They were from a now-obscure carnivorous theropod previously described by Cope in 1866 as *Laelaps*.

The presence of Marsh's agent did nothing to deter Cope, who quickly set about making contacts around Cañon City. He made agents of two locals, a schoolteacher named O.W. Lucas, who had discovered the theropod bones now in Marsh's possession, and a homesteader named Marshall Felch. With the help of these two locals, Cope was able to stake claims in the ridges and foothills around Cañon City and begin digging his own quarries.

Marsh was not pleased by this, and quickly claimed a very petty kind of revenge. Using the theropod bones acquired by his agent, he published a paper tearing apart Cope's initial

description of *Laelaps* and renaming the species *Dryptosaurus*. This caused ripples among the scientific community and infuriated Cope. Until the day he died, Cope continued to use the name *Laelaps*, even long after the majority of the paleontological community had adopted Marsh's new name.

As Marsh and Cope were building themselves up into a furor and preparing for the next round of their decade-long competition, something was changing out in the world beyond the ivory tower of academia. Both men had been describing prehistoric animal species for years at this point, including several varieties of dinosaur, and they weren't alone. But something was different this time.

Marsh's impromptu publicity tour wasn't staying confined to the halls of academia—it was beginning to reach the public's attention.

"Before then, dinosaurs didn't have that place of primacy in scientific literature, and certainly not in the wider culture," said Steve Belletini, the writer and host for the online science communication series *Your Dinosaurs Are Wrong*. "Pterosaurs and marine reptiles, like plesiosaurs, would get decent billing. But dinosaurs were kind of just a weird side note."

That really started to change following the discoveries in Colorado. Something about *Apatosaurus* and *Stegosaurus* caught the public's imagination. Reports about the discoveries, and Marsh's descriptions, began appearing in newspapers. It started slow, but it was definitely noticeable compared to the scant publicity paleontology had received even a few years earlier.

"I suspect it's a combination of the timing, and the novelty," said Belletini. After all, nobody had seen anything approaching the size of *Apatosaurus* before, or anything like the strange body plan and extreme ornamentation of *Stegosaurus*. "They set the standard for what a dinosaur is."

As the two rivals began ramping up their digging in the Rocky Mountains, Marsh took notice of this new attention his discoveries were getting. While Cope still had a very ivory tower academic mindset, Marsh was ever the businessman and had a keen instinct for public relations. He knew that the more interested in his work the public became, the more funding for his digs he would receive, and the higher his star could rise. So as the months ticked by and 1877 progressed into 1878, he began to share romanticized and colorful descriptions of these new dinosaurs, really talking up their size, exotic anatomy, and overall monstrousness. The newspapers picked up on these stories, and soon would fill empty space with columns about “Extinct Monsters!” which the *Aspen Daily Times* exclaimed would have “Made Elephants Look Like Guinea Pigs.”

Arthur Lakes also proved to be a natural spokesman for the dinosaurs. His work in Morrison and association with Marsh made him rather well-known locally, and he soon began giving lectures for the public about

his findings. They proved to be so popular and engaging that newspapers would print excerpts. His poetic words brought dinosaurs to life in the minds of a widespread and eager audience, and with them populated the mountains and plains of Colorado:

“Thrilling stories and catastrophes, filling with wonder the student, or observer, of the earth’s structure, are told by every foot of the ground we tread. You have but to look around you for the satisfaction of your taste for the wonderful. As evidence of this fact, I am going to speak to you of dragons; and reptiles, and weird beings now extinct, which once roamed over these plains and are now found beneath its surface...”

This is how two of the first American dinosaurs to enter public consciousness roared onto newspaper columns like movie monsters making their debut. *Apatosaurus* and *Stegosaurus* had captured the public’s attention, and were

quickly immortalized as some of the quintessential dinosaurs—a position they still enjoy over a century and a half later.

Over the next few years, Cope and Marsh’s bitter feud burst out of the realm of academia and onto the quarries of the American West. It became their very own, bizarre range war as the simmering hatred that had been churning just beneath the surface finally erupted. To both men, it was not enough that they succeeded. The other must fail.

Each man had his claims staked, and rushed to dig quarries, extract specimens, and publish descriptions of new species. They hired larger and larger teams, and sent thousands of telegrams and dozens of train shipments from Colorado to the East Coast.

In this 1934 photograph, exposed sauropod dinosaur fossils are visible in a Morrison Formation quarry in southern Wyoming. Paleontologists throughout the 20th century built upon the foundation laid by Marsh and Cope, and continued work both in the same quarries and in nearby regions of the same geological formations. Courtesy of the US Geological Survey, LGE00198



Things continued to escalate in academic publications as well. The years of chilly silence on each others' work was brought to an abrupt end by Marsh's attack against *Dryptosaurus*, and the two began to fire wild academic shots at one another. They corrected each other's work, accused one another of plagiarism, and often their allegedly academic responses devolved into a public forum for their furious arguments. It reached the point that at least one publication refused to publish work from either man any further. In response, Cope dug into his inheritance and outright purchased a prestigious academic journal to assume full editorial control, while Marsh simply began bribing other publications to print his papers and not his rival's.

One of the still-visible quarries at Dinosaur Ridge. This one is part of the ridge's famous dinosaur footprint tracks. The bulges visible in the stone are molds of a sauropod's footprints, left in river mud over 100 million years ago. July 2024. Courtesy of Devin Flores

As their feud raged, Marsh and Cope both sent more extreme instructions to their agents in the West. The two dredged up many of the old tactics they had used in their earlier conflicts in Wyoming, and invented new ones. They began hiring men to spy on one another's agents. Marsh's men would learn that Cope's bone hunters were sniffing around in the South Park and Middle Park, and he would order them to purchase claims before Cope had the chance. Cope's men would figure out which specimen Marsh was most interested in, so they could tell the hasty Cope which finds to rush to publication before the more deliberating Marsh could write up a description.

The two also began expanding their purview beyond the established quarries near Morrison and Cañon City. They threw more and more money at any prospective find. Word quickly spread among prospectors on both sides of the Rockies that Marsh and Cope would pay top dollar for fossils, and that it was easy to get the

two into a bidding war. They raced to stake claims in neighboring states, and some of the most furious competition arose not in Colorado but in southern Wyoming, where the Como Bluff dig site would prove to be the most profitable for both.

At the same time landowners and cattle barons were fighting bloody battles over the range of the high plains, prospectors feuded over claims and stakes in the foothills. Violent land wars were fought over very tangible, practical resources—grazing and water rights, gold and silver. Marsh and Cope took many of the attitudes and tactics animating the range wars into the world of academia, where nobody would have expected them.

In their haste to accumulate as many specimens as possible, Marsh and Cope ordered their diggers to adopt more and more reckless behavior. Soon enough, the patient methods of carefully extracting fossils Arthur Lakes used to such great success in Morrison





were tossed out the window in favor of dynamite blasts. Untold numbers of “less valuable” fossils were heedlessly destroyed to get at the more exciting finds underneath. At one point, Cope’s agents began following on the heels of Marsh’s, taking over in quarries that Marsh had moved on from. They managed to find overlooked fossils, which Cope rushed to publication. Hearing about Cope’s “poaching,” Marsh issued a new order, his most drastic yet: destroy the quarries with dynamite once his teams were done with them. In his mind, it was better the fossils be irreparably destroyed, than fall into Cope’s hands.

Despite their madcap rush and criminally sloppy methods, they succeeded over, and over, and over. As their outfits dug desperately for more and more fossils, the rich Colorado soil was only too happy to provide.

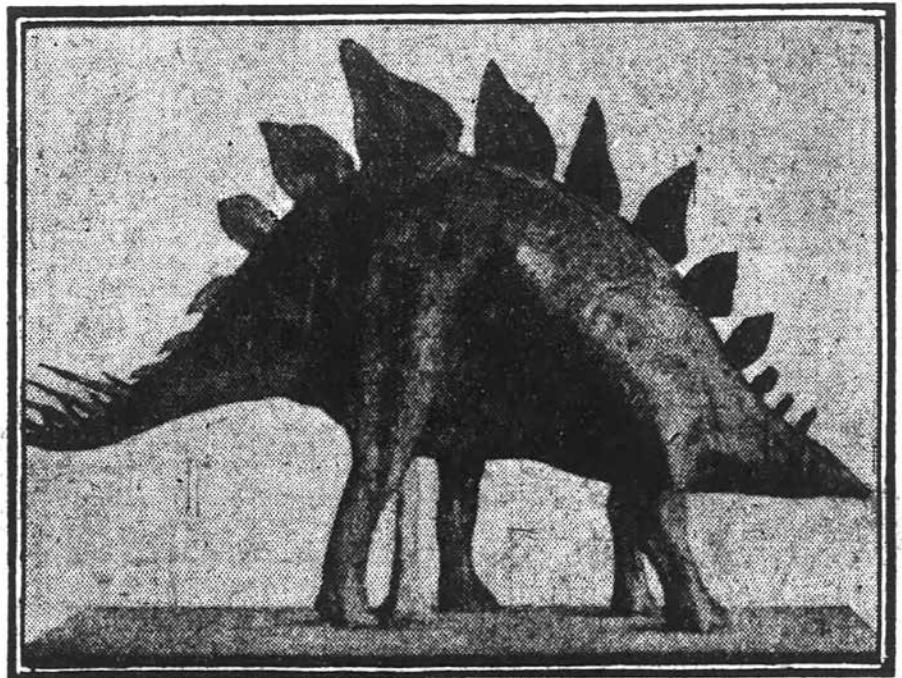
For over sixty million years, the Rocky Mountains had preserved their stores of dinosaur-era fossils. And now that vault had been cracked, these pioneering paleontologists found it didn’t contain the pittance they’d grown used to back east. It had been hiding a treasure trove.

“I have worked at fossil sites across North America, and none of them have the sheer concentration of fossils you have here,” said Amy Atwater, the Director of Paleontology at Dinosaur Ridge. “It makes sense that when early paleontologists were really realizing the potential of North America, they came to Colorado.”

Fossils flowed out of the Rockies like a flood from a burst dam. There were more samples—from scattered teeth to full, articulated skeletons—than Marsh and Cope could ever hope to handle. But their ambitions could not be satisfied. They ordered their teams to dig deeper, and more greedily, until thousands of samples were flowing east.

Most of these would never even catch the attention of either man. The goal wasn’t to amass the largest

## Was Most Grotesque Animal



**STEGOSAUR, WHO LIVED IN UTAH AGES AGO, IS A FREAK OF NATURE.**

Header of a 1912 *Washington Post* article reporting on ongoing paleontological digs in Utah, where several brontosaurus and stegosaurus (the “most grotesque animal that ever existed”, according to the author) were found. *The Washington Post*

collection, it was to describe the most new species and publish the most noteworthy papers. Almost everything that wasn’t an immediate and obvious asset to this goal was ignored—relegated to the hands of half-trained assistants, who assigned them basic labels and shunted them into storage. The collections at Yale, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Smithsonian are still glutted by thousands of under-examined fossil samples extracted from the Rocky Mountains in a few short years by the madcap digs of Marsh and Cope. New discoveries are made almost every year just by the dedicated researchers poring over the samples that the Bone Wars barons deemed beneath their attention.

But while Cope’s quarries were just as fruitful as his rival’s, Marsh as ever proved the more able publicist. He shamelessly exaggerated his findings to

the newspapers. With each new “titanic” or “monstrous” discovery of a “prehistoric beast” or “antediluvian monster,” the public’s interest in dinosaurs rose.

This was likely a strategic move. He had the soul of a capitalist, not a naturalist, and he knew how to draw in investors. The more attention his finds garnered, the more likely he was to attract wealthy patrons. The more wealthy patrons he had bankrolling his department, the more digs he could finance. And the more digging he did, the more his career would advance, and the further he would outpace Cope.

Most of the “big name” dinosaurs were introduced to the public by Marsh’s publicity hounding. The newspapers crowed about his finds to any who would listen, boasting of the animal’s size and ferocity, and forever burning their names into the American public’s consciousness. The

romantic vision of a prehistoric Earth was quickly becoming populated by fearsome hunters like *Allosaurus*, massive herbivores like *Apatosaurus* and *Diplodocus*, and bizarre monstrosities like *Stegosaurus* and *Triceratops*.

All of these species, whose names still bounce off the tongues of excited children and whose caricatures still stomp across television screens, came from Colorado quarries and were described by Othniel Charles Marsh.

In the 1880s, Marsh's scheming paid off in a big way, while Cope began to flounder. Marsh had risen to higher

and higher positions throughout his career, and was even able to use his economic connections and political clout to push for the creation of the US Geological Survey (USGS)—with himself as its first (and only) chief paleontologist, of course. Cope, meanwhile, had managed to alienate most of his superiors and financiers with his bluster and temper, leaving him to finance his digs himself. He sold his family's land and spent the entirety of his inheritance to fund more digs in Colorado, while Marsh financed his digs with government funding and built himself a lavish mansion in New Haven, Connecticut. Cope gambled the remainder of his fortune on an investment in the silver mining industry in Colorado, but he proved to be a much

poorer businessman than an academic. He was left bankrupt by the toppling price of silver in the late 1880s, and Marsh successfully cut him out of the federal geological surveys entirely.

Marsh, it seemed, had won. But Cope refused to take this lying down.

The bitter rivalry between the two had already entered public consciousness by this point, but only fellow academics then knew the true extent of their vicious hatred for each other—and nobody at all knew the depths to which they had been willing to sink. That changed in 1891, when Cope went public with his accusations.

Marsh's new government job with the USGS gave him a lot of power, but it also made him vulnerable to public scrutiny. Cope took advantage by

This *Stegosaurus* statue welcomes travelers to the Dinosaur Ridge Visitor Center, and commemorates the discovery there of the type specimen of what is now Colorado's state dinosaur by Arthur Lakes in 1877. July 2024. Courtesy of Devin Flores





publishing scathing accusations about his rival in tabloid newspapers, accusing him of bribery, plagiarism, and political cronyism. Marsh was quick to fire back, and the Bone Wars erupted back into the newspapers—not as fantastical reports of prehistoric creatures, but as full exposés of the childish and self-destructive bickering of two of the top names in American academia.

It was a low-brow drama, and quickly everyone knew it—including Congress.

Marsh and his supervisor at the USGS both lost their jobs, and in fact Marsh's position of chief paleontologist was dissolved entirely. Without his cushy government position, and embarrassed in front of all his prior patrons, Marsh found himself suddenly unable to support his lavish lifestyle. He mortgaged his opulent house and was soon left nearly as destitute as Cope.

And that is how the careers of two American pioneers of science ended. Not with comfortable retirements or heaps of accolades, but with two demolished reputations and more debt than you can shake a stick at.

When Marsh and Cope entered the American paleontological scene, it was a largely barren one. All of the noteworthy discoveries were happening continents away, in Europe and India. But after all the dust had settled and their careers had been irreparably demolished, they had populated prehistoric America with dozens of new and enticing dinosaurs.

“In the United States, prior to the Bone Wars, we had like nine dinosaur species described,” said Colton Snyder, Colorado's State Paleontologist. “They weren't well-known or popular. But following the Bone Wars, we had over 130.”

This life-size statue of an *Allosaurus* looms over passersby just outside the Cañon City Regional Museum. O.C. Marsh named the species from a specimen found in one of the quarries he financed in Garden Park, a region not far from Cañon City which was one of the sites the feuding paleontologists fought over ferociously. Courtesy of Devin Flores

Over the next several decades, dinosaurs became a staple of popular culture. As museums began amassing more and more fossils, they hit upon an innovation that, in hindsight, seems obvious but at the time was a genius business strategy that brought in hundreds of visitors: they mounted the bones.

Mounted dinosaur skeletons showing the shape and scale of the animals as they were in life were not new—a mounted *Hadrosaurus* had been touring the United States for about thirty years at this point—but they were exceptionally rare. But now, armed with thousands and thousands of samples

collected from Colorado and Wyoming, museums not only had the ability to put together entire skeletons, they had the popular interest as an incentive. Tellingly, when the first permanent mounted dinosaur skeletons went up, it was Marsh's now quite-famous *Apatosaurus*, on view for all to see at the National Museum of Natural History.

Both of the rivals died not long into this new era of publicity for their science, Cope in 1897 and Marsh in 1899. They left behind a mixed legacy, having both elevated American paleontology to previously unimagined heights, and simultaneously tarnishing it forever.

"At the time, vertebrate paleontology was going through growing pains," explained Dan Brinkman. "The personality issues didn't help matters any."

Paleontology was a young field when Marsh and Cope burst onto the stage, and they each did an incredible amount to advance it. However, they also embarrassed themselves in front of the

entire scientific community. They were seen as lunatic mavericks who consorted with cowboys, prospectors, and hired thugs. And worse was the low-brow publicity the Bone Wars had generated.

Dinosaurs were no longer the subjects of academic discourse. They had burst out of the proverbial electric fences and were now stomping around the public's imagination. They were a novelty, a growing feature of fantasy and science fiction, and so the field that studied them—paleontology—became viewed as crowd-pleasing and unserious compared to the other sciences. This was a reputation that followed the field for decades.

"We would never talk about dinosaurs. It was considered kid's stuff," said Dr. Simmons, recalling her own education. "In my generation, [paleontologists] would end up in the oil industry. Dinosaurs were child's play. It was fantasy land."

But it was a fantasy land that the public was more than eager to visit.

People adored the first big dinosaur exhibits going up in science and natural history museums in the 1890s. They were huge draws that quickly became mainstays of museums across the country. Before long, museums were acting almost as competitively and possessively as Marsh and Cope. Dinosaurs quickly became staples of fiction and appeared in countless novels. They were even among the first stars of film. *Gertie the Dinosaur* was the second-ever animated movie, which featured the eponymous Gertie performing tricks. Notably, Gertie—who would become an icon for American understanding of dinosaurs—was a *Diplodocus*, one of the species Marsh had described from his days digging in Colorado.

A view from Skyline Trail, a historic route that winds across the top of one of the fossil-rich ridges outside of Cañon City. This ridge was the site of one of the Bone Wars quarries, and Ankylosaur footprints are visible in the rocks along the side of the trail. Courtesy of Devin Flores



Then came *King Kong* in 1933, and it brought on a complete paradigm shift. Its popularity changed the landscape of cinema. And it's telling that the three dinosaurs who rampage onto the screen as bellowing beasts, only to be fought off at great peril by the intrepid protagonists or defeated in primordial combat by Kong himself, are primarily, once again, representatives of Marsh's finds in Colorado. First comes a *Stegosaurus*, then a *Brontosaurus*, and then finally the iconic *Tyrannosaurus rex*—which, while ultimately named from a fossil found in Montana decades later by one of Cope's students, first turned up in Marsh's Morrison 1870s dig as a mysterious (and disregarded) tooth.

The movie-monster dinosaurs in the film awed movie-goers, and firmly cemented prehistoric animals' place in pop culture. Dinosaur mania was no passing fad. It was a new, eternal feature of the public imagination.

Dinosaurs have left a larger footprint in Colorado than most places in the United States. You can see that clearly in some of our state's most notable tourist destinations, from the famous Dinosaur Ridge and Dinosaur National Monument to the relatively new Royal Gorge Dinosaur Experience in Cañon City.

"If you're in Colorado, you're incredibly fortunate to be surrounded by dinosaurs," said Amy Atwater, Director of Paleontology at Dinosaur Ridge. "These are places people seek out for recreation, for community, for tourism, for scientific research, for all sorts of reasons."

And these sites bring in hundreds of thousands of visitors a year, each one a living testament to the popularity of dinosaurs in our modern culture, and of the enduring fame of Colorado's fossils.

"I think everybody has a general interest in dinosaurs," said Zach Reynolds, President of the Royal Gorge Dinosaur Experience. "It's very rare, if ever, that I talk to someone who just doesn't care about them at all."

Dinosaur exhibitions remain one of the biggest draws at science museums across the country. They have incredibly broad appeal, and they seem to speak to something nearly universal, some curiosity and fascination that's present in most of us.

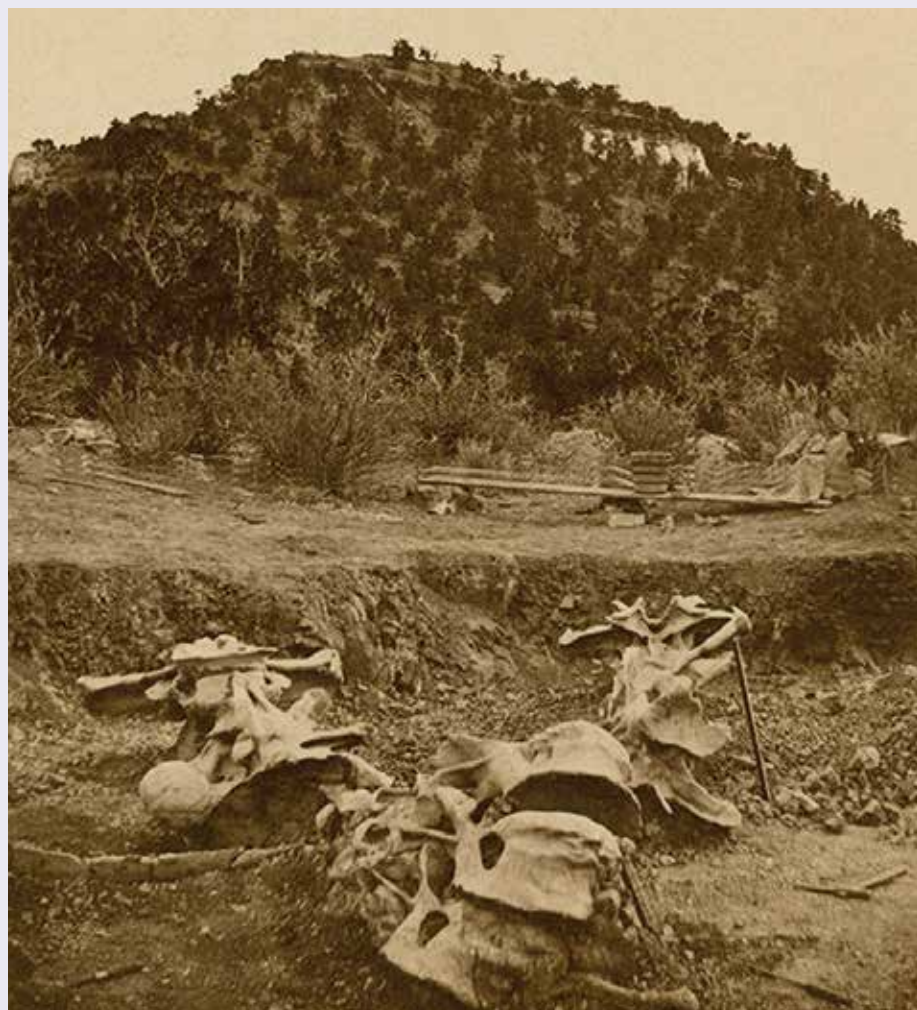
"It appeals to everyone, of every age," said Amy Atwater. "With paleontology, you have to be able to get your imagination going, get curious, and hold onto your childlike wonder. That's one of the reasons why it's a popular science."

"Certainly kids are dinosaurs' biggest fans, in general," said Zach Reynolds. "But people might come in

with their kids, expecting the kids to just be entertained, but a lot of times what ends up happening is that the kids run off to play outside and the parents want to stick around and learn more about dinosaurs!"

And if you ever doubt the incredible impact that a few chance finds in the foothills of Colorado had on modern American culture, just wander down to your local dollar store or the nearest supermarket, and pick through a shelf of plastic toy animals. Odds are good you'll find at least one Colorado dinosaur. 🇨🇴

**Devin Flores** is the Assistant Editor for *The Colorado Magazine* and the managing editor for the *Colorado Encyclopedia*. He lives and works in Pueblo, Colorado, where he has been the lead developer for several exhibits at El Pueblo History Museum.



This photo, titled *The Old Graveyard* by the photographer, shows exposed fossilized dinosaur bones at one of Cope's dinosaur quarries when excavation was ongoing in Garden Park, not far from Cañon City. Photo by C.W. Talbot around 1880. Courtesy of the Yale Peabody Museum, YPM VPAR.000178

# A WELLSPRING OF CULTURE IN THE UPPER RÍO GRANDE

We caught up with Brandon Maldonado, one of the artists featured in the new History Colorado Center exhibition *De la Tierra*. It's a showcase of the ways land and water have influenced Latino artistic traditions going back generations in the upper Río Grande region.

## **Q** Tell us how you became an artist.

My earliest memories are of sitting with a stack of paper and drawing. They'd tell me I had such concentration, that it was funny to see a child working like that for hours. Later, I was exposed to graffiti through my friend's older brother. It went hand in hand with the skateboarding we were into at the time. The boldness and stylization of the forms made a lasting impact on me. Even after I stepped away from that scene in college, it still informed the aesthetic of my work to a significant degree. So, that's the result of being a primarily self-taught artist, or should I say "street-taught" artist. Someone recently said my style is "vicious." I thought that was an interesting way of describing it.

## **Q** Vicious is an interesting way to describe your art, what do you mean by that?

I think what they meant is that I distort anatomy, bigger heads, bigger hands, and a lot of impossible anatomical poses. It's part of the visual language of graffiti to make things extremely distorted and stylized. It's what we would call bringing "flavor." Later, while studying artists from the Upper Río Grande from 150 to 200 years ago, I saw they had their own way of bringing the flavor. Today, I would describe it with terms like abstraction and deconstructing the forms. They worked quickly and stylized their subject matter at every opportunity, which reminded

me of the graffiti artist's approach. And this is work being made 100 years before Picasso would be famous for abstraction and deconstructing images.

## **Q** Can you elaborate on what you've learned while studying the history of Upper Río Grande art and santeros?

"Santero" is a term created by Americans in the early 1900s to describe the makers of saint imagery found in the Upper Río Grande. This art form had almost vanished by the late 1800s when Archbishop Lamy became Archbishop of Santa Fe. He didn't really like the local style and wanted everything to look more European. Although this art form basically died, there was a revival in the early 1900s with an emphasis on understanding the techniques of these santeros, which has led to the creation of the Traditional Spanish Market held in Santa Fe each year, where you can see the legacy of these artists carried on by contemporary makers.

## **Q** We're hoping to tell some of that history through your paintings in *De la Tierra*, can you describe your inspiration for the paintings in the exhibition?

The piece featured here, entitled *Penance*, draws inspiration from Chimayó, a significant pilgrimage site in New Mexico.

The background echoes the work of Molleno, who painted the central altar there. Throughout the painting I incorporated traditional motifs found in the work of the old santeros. Some might think the imagery is disturbing, but the bloodiness isn't exaggerated from what you find in the classic imagery of santeros like Jose Rafael Aragon, even the blue-gray flesh of Christ is a citation from his work.

## **Q** We're honored to have you as part of *De la Tierra*. To finish, can you tell us why exhibitions like this one are important?

Exhibitions like this help create an awareness of the rich and unique visual language of the santeros. Unfortunately, these works are often hidden in museum vaults. I think when people see this type of work it can be an inspiring experience leading them to seek out more of it, and reconnect to their cultural roots. It's also hugely important in giving the community a sense of pride that their heritage is being celebrated in a major institution such as the History Colorado Center.

*Penance* by Brandon Maldonado focuses on the Hermanos Penitentes. Maldonado's great-grandfather was active in the group around Walsenburg, Colorado. According to Maldonado, the blue colored flesh is an image that turns up in the works of Santero José Rafael Aragon (1792-1863), and the design pattern in the background was derived from the main altar at the Santuario de Chimayó in Northern New Mexico, which is a popular pilgrimage site for the community. History Colorado, IL.2024.21.3



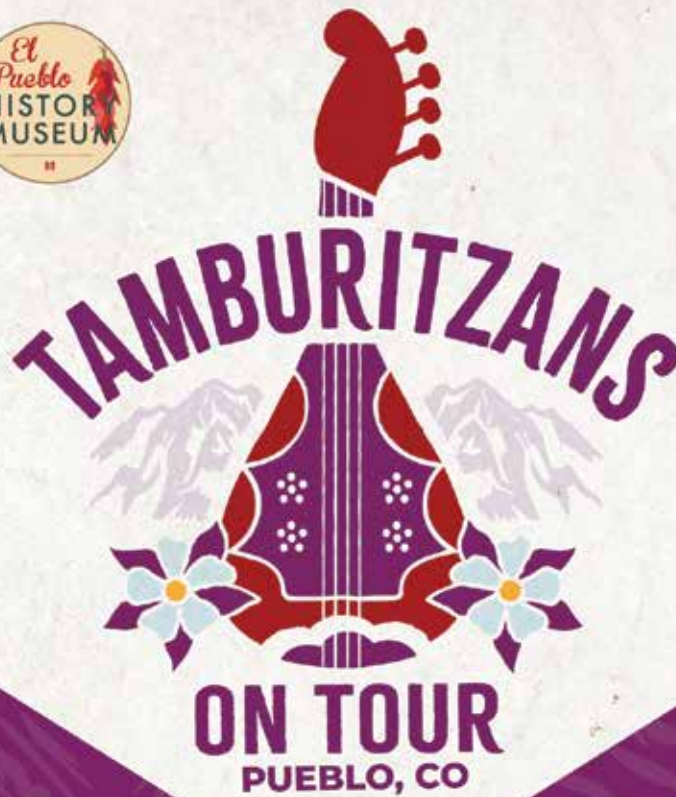


**History Colorado**

HISTORY COLORADO CENTER  
1200 BROADWAY  
DENVER, COLORADO 80203



Nonprofit Org  
US Postage  
PAID  
Denver, Colorado  
Permit No. 1080



**Visit Museum Today**

Get tickets:  
[ElPuebloHistoryMuseum.org](http://ElPuebloHistoryMuseum.org)