

What's in a name? Curious town titles explained

BY KATHY JORDAN

Traveling through Western Colorado, I have often pondered how or why a town or area got its name.

Following are a few names and explanations that I found in the booklet, "Place Names in Colorado," written by Frank Dawson in 1954.

BOWIE – First known as Wauneta, then Reading, after Reading, Pa. It was finally named Bowie for Alexander Bowie, who operated a coalmine in that area and was the first postmaster.

CEDAREEDGE – For the cedar trees in the area.

CLIFTON– For the steep cliffs of the Bookcliffs.

COLLBRAN – First called Hawxkhurst in honor of Hawxkhurst the first settler in the community. In 1894 Dr. Wallace A. De Beque got it changed to Collbran after a railroad man living in the area.

COLONA – First called Hotchkiss for Enos Hotchkiss, later changed to Colona, Spanish for "colonist".

CREEDE – For Nicholas Creede, an early-day miner. Creede committed suicide in Los Angeles when his wife, from whom he was separated, informed him she wanted to reunite with him.

CRESTED BUTTE– Because of its resemblance to a cock's comb.

De BEQUE--For Dr. Wallace A. De Beque.

ECKERT – The maiden name of Mrs. Adelbert Slates, whose husband established the first store and post office there in 1891.

FRYING PAN RIVER– Ute Indians attacked and killed all but two of a group of trappers. One trapper went for help, leaving the seriously injured one in a cave, which he marked by leaving a frying pan in the fork of a tree. When the trapper and soldiers returned they were able to locate the man because of the frying pan. However he had died before they returned.

FRUITA – Spanish for "fruit".

GATEWAY– One version is that it is named for the nearby Gateway Canyon which has a pillar formation of rock at its entrance. Another version is that it is a natural gateway entranceway to the country to the north, south and west.

LEADVILLE – The town had a variety of names before H.A. W. Tabor officially named it Leadville on Jan. 14, 1878, because of the lead ore in the area. It was originally called California Gulch, then Boughton, because of temporary shelters made of tree boughs, then Cloud City, because the town was often nestled in clouds. Next came Harrison, after the owner of the first smelter, and Slabtown, because several temporary homes were built on slabs. On Jan. 14,

LOMA--Spanish word for “small hills”.

MACK – Named for John W. Mack, president of an asphalt company.

MARBLE -- Because of the marble quarries in the area. The marble from these quarries was used in the Lincoln Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, D.C.

MAYBELL -- The first post office for the area was at Bell and Banks’ Ranch and was named for Bell’s wife, May.

MESA COUNTY– Spanish for “table”.

MONTROSE – First called Ouray Junction, it was re-named by Joe Selig after Montrose, Scotland, from Sir Walter Scotts’ “The Legend of Montrose”.

NEW CASTLE – In 1866 it was known as Grand Butte but in 1867, changed to Chapman. In 1888 the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company named it Newcastle after a town in England.

NUCLA – The town was organized in 1904 by the Colorado Co-Operative Company as a socialistic farm colony. The name was suggested by C.E. Williams, as he believed the movement would spread, and their town would be the center, or nucleus, of the movement.

OLATHE– Shawnee Indian word meaning “beautiful”. First known as Brow, then Colorow after the Ute Indian Chief who was active in the area with Chief Court.

OURAY – After Ute Indian Chief Ouray. The county was first called Uncompahgre. Three days later it was changed to Ouray and was the first county created under the statehood of Colorado.

PALISADE – Named because of the high perpendicular cliffs in the area.

PAONIA – When first founded in 1881 it was named Peaonia, but the postal authorities changed it to Paonia. This could be because it is said that Sam Wade named the town after the “Peonie” flower. However, his “e’s” reportedly read as “a’s”.

PARADOX– The Delores River cuts through the cliff walls at right angles, an unusual phenomenon.

RANGELY– Named for Rangely, Mass., the hometown of D.B. Case, a trading post operator.

RICO – Spanish for “rich”. Other names were suggested, such as Carbon City, Carbonateville, Lead City and Dolores City, but Rico was the choice and the former county seat.

RIDGWAY – Named for R.M. Ridgway, superintendent of the Mountain Division of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad in 1891. It was first called Dallas.

RIFLE – After Rifle Creek, which received its name from a group of soldiers who, while surveying, left a rifle that was later recovered on the bank of the creek.

RIO BLANCO – Spanish for “white river”.

SHOSHONE– For the Shoshone Indians.

SILT – Named by the Rio Grande Railroad because of the nature of the soil.

SINBAD– After the Arabian Nights story of “Sinbad the Sailor” because of its inaccessibility.

TELLURIDE – For the ore tellurium. It was first called Columbia.

UNCOMPAHGRE – Ute Indian word for “hot water spring”.

URAVAN – Word combination of uranium and vanadium.

Kathy Jordan

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Thanks and pass it along!

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Rio Blanco County – Spanish for “white river”.

Shoshone – for the Shoshone Indians.

Silt – named by the Rio Grande Railroad because of the nature of the soil.

Sinbad – after the Arabian Nights story of “Sinbad the Sailor” because of its inaccessibility.

Telluride – For the ore tellurium. It was first called Columbia.

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