



## History of Longmont, Colorado

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American Indians have traveled through the area where Longmont is today for thousands of years. Some of the earliest residents of North America, the Clovis people, lived in northern Colorado 14,000 years ago. A succession of other peoples moved through Colorado, including the Folsom people around 13,000 years ago, and the Plano people about 11,000 years ago. The dry climate, however, made continuous habitation difficult, and the northern plains were unoccupied for centuries.

The tribes that Europeans encountered in their explorations arrived in Colorado in the 1500s. The Cheyenne, Dakota, Arapaho, Kiowa and Comanche all traveled through Colorado, following huge buffalo herds across the American Plains.

The first Europeans to come into the northern Colorado area were explorers and adventurers. One of the first American explorers was Major Stephen H. Long, an Army officer. The most prominent mountain in northern Colorado, Longs Peak, was named for Major Long. Trappers, traders, and miners followed the explorers, setting up crude settlements such as Boulder, then called Boulder City.

Longmont began in an unusual way. In 1870, a group of prominent men in Chicago decided to start a new town in Colorado. They sold memberships in this new town,

called "The Chicago-Colorado Colony" and used the money to buy 60,000 acres of land for a townsite and nearby farms in a carefully chosen site in northern Colorado . They planned the town, and brought people, lumber, and building materials to the barren site, where they built a small town by the summer of 1871. They named the new town " Longmont " in honor of Longs Peak , clearly visible from the town.

While the climate of Longmont is dry, the soil is rich, and will produce excellent crops if water is brought to it. One of the great achievements of the Chicago-Colorado Colony was building large irrigation ditches to bring water from the rivers to the fields of wheat, fruit trees, and peas that farmers planted.

The Colony planners designed Longmont to look like many other towns in America . The original one-square-mile plan had stores along Main Street , homes arranged in a grid spreading out from Main Street , and industrial buildings located along the railroad and the St. Vrain river.

As the town grew, large-scale agricultural industries arrived, first flour mills in 1872, then the Empson vegetable cannery in 1887. Several leading citizens of Longmont worked together to build a beet sugar factory on the west edge of town, finally developing enough support in 1903 to build what soon became the Great Western Sugar Co. Sugar beets grow well in northeastern Colorado, because of the availability of irrigation water, and the richness of the soil.

The richness of Longmont 's soil attracted many people. People came from Sweden and settled northwest of Longmont . Germans came, by way of Russia , and farmed the sugar beet fields. People came from Mexico to work in the fields. People came from Japan , and set up vegetable farms. All these groups continue to be an important part of Longmont 's heritage, and their descendants still live in and around Longmont .

By 1910, the population of Longmont had doubled just about every ten years since its founding, and stood at 4,256 people. Growth slowed after this, with only 5,848 people recorded in the 1920 census. World War I took its toll on Longmont 's young men, and their names are recorded on a flagpole which stands today in Roosevelt Park . The worldwide influenza epidemic of 1918 killed many more people. Longmont 's City

Council ordered on October 11, 1918 that movie theaters, churches, schools, the public library, dances, and other public assemblies be closed to prevent the spread of influenza, but hundreds of people still sickened, and dozens died, before the epidemic slowed in November 1918.

In 1925, the Ku Klux Klan gained control of Longmont 's City Council in an election. They began construction of a large pork-barrel project, Chimney Rock Dam, above Lyons , and marched up and down Main Street in their costumes. In the 1927 election they were voted out of office, and their influence soon declined. Work on Chimney Rock Dam was abandoned as unfeasible, and its foundations are still visible in the St. Vrain river.

When the New York Stock Market crashed in 1929, the economy of the United States suffered terribly. The Great Depression which followed affected the whole world, including Longmont . Prolonged drought during the 1930s dried out the soil of the Great Plains . Windstorms picked up huge quantities of dust, and black dust clouds towered over Longmont . The drought eased by the late 1930s, and the economy improved. Only the United States ' entry into World War II in 1941 finally ended the Great Depression in this country.

When the United States entered World War II in 1941, Longmont joined the effort. Over 2,000 people from Longmont fought in World War II. Women worked in factories and offices in place of men who were overseas fighting. The sugar beet harvest was considered crucial to the war effort, and Japanese-Americans who had been imprisoned on the West Coast came to Colorado to work in the sugar beet fields. After the war ended, many stayed in Colorado .

In 1950, the population of Longmont was about 8,000, and the economy was based primarily on agriculture. During the 1950s, the economy of the Colorado Front Range began to shift to a more high technology orientation, and those changes would soon impact Longmont . Mayor Ralph Price, foreseeing a need for more water for a thirsty town, spearheaded the construction of Button Rock Dam, built seven miles upstream from Lyons on the North St. Vrain river. It paid for itself almost immediately, holding what could have been a disastrous flood in check, and filling the reservoir in a few days

rather than the years it was projected to take.

In 1962, the U.S. government built an air traffic control center in Longmont . Only three years later, IBM built a large facility seven miles from Longmont . Longmont , which had grown only slightly beyond its original square mile boundaries, grew explosively, doubling in size between 1960 and 1970, and again between 1970 and 1980.

Events in the 1970s and 1980s forced Longmont residents to re-examine their community. Two of Longmont 's long-time employers, the Kuner-Empson vegetable cannery and the Great Western Sugar factory, closed in the 1970s, leaving few links with Longmont 's agricultural heritage. On August 14, 1980, a Longmont police officer shot and killed two Hispanic residents, Juan Louis Garcia and Jeff Cordova, after a routine traffic stop. This tragedy forced the Hispanic and Anglo communities to work together to prevent further violence.

Recessions and cutbacks at IBM and StorageTech, a computer storage company founded by several ex-IBM employees, slowed growth during the 1980s. Rapid growth resumed in the 1990s. The 2000 Census measured Longmont 's population at 71,093, a jump of nearly 20,000 since 1990.

<http://www.ci.longmont.co.us/museum/research/history.htm>