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Denver: An Introduction

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Denver — An Introduction

There is a widespread assumption, undoubtedly fueled by football telecasts during early season snowstorms, that Denver is both in the mountains and snowbound for an unremitting six months. Denver is a mile high, but sits on a high plain against the spectacular backdrop of the Rockies' front range. Most of the snow falls in the mountains, maintaining Colorado's unsurpassed reputation for winter sports.

In stark contrast with the geologic eons of mountain-building, Denver itself is only 130 years old. Settled after the discovery of placer gold in 1858, Denver was soon eclipsed by the boom towns growing up in the mountains where the real riches lay. In 1870, however, a hard-won transcontinental rail link shaped the city not as a mining town, but as a center of finance, culture and distribution for the mountains and the plains. Denver's ascendance during the boom years of the 1870's and 1880's is evidenced several blocks from the Conference hotels at Larimer Square, a restored and revitalized late-Victorian commercial block. Gone were the false-fronted frame livery stables, saloons and general stores of the Old West. Instead, the street was soon lined with two and three story brick buildings with cast iron facades, elaborate cornices and large display windows, all brought in by the railroad. Denver had electricity in the 1880's, but the legislators moving into the new capitol in 1894 insisted on gas lighting "just in case."

At the same time, the city was expanding to the southeast where mining, ranching, real estate and banking wealth built homes earning Denver the title "City of Mansions." That boom, fueled by the riches of the mountains and plains, preceded a bust which from 1893 to the turn of the century brought the economy to a standstill. Denver's recovery was based in a more diversified economy.

Denver today may surprise you if you were last here for the Conference a decade ago. An energy industry boom spurred the transformation of a downtown already bulldozed by urban renewal. Practically overnight, we awoke to a skyline of cranes atop thirty and forty story

glass and steel towers. Sixteenth Street was redesigned as a mile-long pedestrian mall with free shuttle buses departing every few minutes. The Tabor Center brought the idea of a festival marketplace to the mall, and the picturesque Tivoli Brewery opened with shops, restaurants and cinemas. The recent energy slump has resulted in a high office vacancy rate, yet it has also brought time for preservationists and planners to look toward downtown Denver's future. The revitalization of lower downtown's blocks of fine, late-Victorian commercial buildings and the incorporation of Cherry Creek as a scenic amenity are getting underway. A new convention center is on the drawing boards.

After a fifteen minute, nine dollar cab ride from Stapleton Airport east of downtown, you will find downtown Denver to be pedestrian-friendly. The Conference hotels are only a few blocks from the exhibit areas at Currihan Hall. Denver's humidity is negligible; the sunshine abundant; and the evenings comfortable with a sweater or light jacket. At this time, the Rocky Mountain Chapter is putting its restaurant recommendations to the test. Come to Denver early and stay on to see Colorado. The high country is glorious in June and best of all, you can have a complete change of scenery just minutes west of Denver. Consider half-day trips to Central City or Georgetown, restored Victorian mining towns, or a day trip through Rocky Mountain National Park along Trail Ridge Road. If you have more time, set out for Aspen, explore Anasazi ruins at Mesa Verde or ride the Durango to Silverton narrow gauge railway. There's history, scenery and invigorating opportunity awaiting you in Denver and in Colorado.

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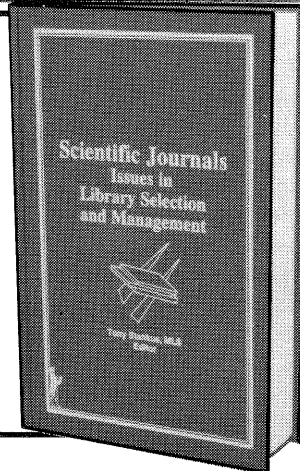
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