

Brief History of the County

In 1851, the Territory of New Mexico was organized with New Mexico, Arizona and part of Colorado, including the San Luis Valley. The Territory of Colorado was created in 1861, with the boundaries almost identical to the state of Colorado today. All of the San Luis Valley was considered as Conejos County. In 1866, Saguache County was carved from Conejos County, which lay north of the Sangre de Cristo Grant. In 1867, the County of Saguache was established with Saguache as the County seat.

John Lawrence is credited with the legislative act to create Saguache County. He was the first state representative for the County while Otto Mears was the first County Treasurer.

The Homestead Act was passed in 1862 and the Indian Treaty in 1863. Many of the people who claimed land under the Homestead Act were veterans of the Military. Captain Charles Kerber homesteaded in the Bonanza area, and Nathan Russell homesteaded south of Saguache.

The first crop planted in this area was wheat, as there was a demand for flour by the miners who settled in Crestone and Bonanza. The early settlers raised cattle and sheep and grew hay. Some vegetables were raised but they were limited by the short growing season at this high elevation. Today the area around Center is well known for its potatoes. Villa Grove was well known for the Hall Turquoise Mine. Timber cutting was popular in the La Garita area.

Saguache County normally receives 8 to 16 inches of precipitation per year. Winters are quite mild today compared to the late 1800's and early 1900's. There is always a period in late January and February when the warm winds arrive in Saguache County. The ranchers begin their calving season at this time.

The towns of Saguache County today are Bonanza, Center, Crestone, Hooper, La Garita, Moffat Saguache, Sargents and Villa Grove (unincorporated).
by Ken Poirier

Additional Sources of Information

Books

The San Luis Valley: Land of the Six-Armed Cross, Virginia McConnell Simmons, Second Edition, 1999, University Press of Colorado. ISBN0-87081-530-X

This sparkling new edition lays before the reader the stories and voices of this multicultural land. Ranging from prehistoric peoples and historic Indians to early Spanish settlers, trappers, American explorers, railroads, and Euro-American pioneers, this book is a comprehensive volume covering the geography and social history of Colorado's San Luis Valley.

The Last Ranch: A Colorado Community & the Coming Desert, Sam Bingham, 1997, Harvest Book.

Colorado's San Luis Valley is a ... place where a small enclave of ranchers struggle to make a living, fighting not only the elements but a host of forces--politics, the pressures of modern culture and technology, the marketplace--that conspire to put an end to their generations-old community. For a year ... naturalist and magazine writer Sam Bingham lived in the valley. In *The Last Ranch* he brings to life both the people of the valley and a flock of international characters who have targeted the San Luis Valley for exploitation.

Additional Sources of Information, Continued -

Museums

Hazard House Museum Tower, 807 Pitkin Avenue, Saguache.....719 655-2488
Saguache County Museum, 405 8th Street, Saguache719 655-2557

Web

The Saguache Chamber of Commerce
719 655-2805 - <http://www.saguache.org>
Includes photos, and stories by Cecil Hall on
history of Saguache.

Other Web sites

<http://www.crestone.org>
<http://www.manitou.org>
<http://www.slv.org>
<http://www.evalle.com>



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