Jefferson County:

1598: Spanish expedition of Juan de Zaldivar, sent by Governor Juan de Oñate from Santa Fe, reaches the present day South Platte River at Jefferson County. They name it the Rio Chato.

1682: France claims future Jefferson County area as part of the new Louisiana district of New France.

1739: Mallet brothers rename future southern Jeffco boundary the Riviere la Plat, in future years anglicized to Platte. Its Spanish, French and English names all refer to the same thing, its being a wide, flat river.

1750: Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes arrive in future Jefferson County.

1800:

November 13, 1762: Future Jefferson County area transferred from France to Spain with Louisiana by the Treaty of Fontainebleau.

April 30, 1803: Future Jefferson County becomes United States territory when the U.S. purchases Louisiana from France under President Thomas Jefferson, after whom county one day will be named.

1815:

September 1799: French trading party led by Jean de la Maisonmune and Pienelope possibly reach future Golden valley.

1832:

Trader Louis Vasquez builds fort at mouth of present day Clear Creek, which is renamed Vasquez Fork or Vasquez River. He traps for furs along the river in ensuing years.

1833:

Estes party finds and mines gold at Clear Creek sandbar southwest of present day West 44th and Michtyre.

1834:

Circa 1839: Major conflict between Ute, Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes results in future Golden valley becoming de facto no man’s land.

1843-1844:

Adventurer Rufus B. Sage camps in future Golden valley and writes of his experiences.

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1843:

Estes party finds and mines gold at Clear Creek sandbar southwest of present day West 44th and Michtyre.

1855:

Lucian Ralston, future prominent county citizen, first travels through area as Army scout.

1855:

William Green Russell party follows up on Ralston gold discovery and finds limited results. Searching further, discovers major gold near the confluence of Cherry Creek and the South Platte River, touching off the Colorado “Pikes Peak” gold rush.

1857:

August 25, 1855: Kansas Territory establishes Arapahoe County to include area of eastern Colorado to the Continental Divide.

1858:

November 29, 1858: The Arapahoe City Town Company organized by miners who found Clear Creek sandbar and laid claims alongside leftover Estes markers. Although Arapahoe City existed for only a few years, it was the town in what later became Jefferson County.

1860:

Early 1850s: Peter Rosen and wife, forced to stop traveling due to her health, reputedly establish ranch atop Crow Hill at present day Gehlmann Park, becoming first permanent Jeffco settlers. Surveyors in 1866s don’t change any stakes Rosen laid out with rudimentary instruments.

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Lucian Ralston, future prominent county citizen, first travels through area as Army scout.

1867:

August 25, 1855: Kansas Territory establishes Arapahoe County to include area of eastern Colorado to the Continental Divide.

1870:

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Early 1900s: Peter Rosen and wife, forced to stop traveling due to her health, reputedly establish ranch atop Crow Hill at present day Gehlmann Park, becoming first permanent Jeffco settlers. Surveyors in 1866s don’t change any stakes Rosen laid out with rudimentary instruments.
A Chronology of Events

May 6, 1859: Arapahoe City miner John H. Gregory discovers gold at present area of Black Hawk/Central City, giving sustaining credibility to gold rush.

January 7, 1859: Arapahoe City miner George A. Jackson discovers gold at present site of Idaho Springs, giving sustaining credibility to the gold rush.

1859: Gold rushers rename rivers Clear Creek and Montana Creek. Montana Creek, named after Colorado’s first gold rush city at its mouth, soon renamed Bear Creek.

1859: The first irrigation ditch in the current Jefferson County is dug by David K. Wall, the “father of irrigated farming in Colorado.” The ditch extended from Tucker Gulch near Clear Creek and was used to irrigate Wall’s vegetable farm. By the end of 1859 two other irrigation ditches had been dug in Jefferson County, the Wanamaker ditch off of Clear Creek, 14 miles north of Golden.

June 16, 1859: Golden City established. “City” was dropped from the town’s title Jan. 22, 1872.

July 17, 1859: Golden City Methodist Episcopal Church, now First United Methodist Church, becomes first religious congregation established in Jefferson County.

November 28, 1859: Provisional Jefferson territorial legislature meets and organizes twelve counties, including Jefferson County.

December 1859: First newspaper, the Western Mountaineer, published in Jefferson County by the Boston Company, George West editor.

1861: Three mining districts formed and operated in central Jefferson County to administer extra legal law. Bergen District (Bergen Park), Junction District (Conifer), and Mt. Vernon District (Mt. Vernon Canyon) then combined under the leadership of Thomas Bergen to secede from Jefferson County form short-lived Ni-Wot County. Loyalists secede from Ni-Wot County to turn nearby Baden paper townsite into reality, competing with Mt. Vernon.

February 28, 1861: President James Buchanan signs bill creating the Territory of Colorado.

November 16, 1861: Original Jefferson County Commissioners, John M. Ferrell, Spafford C. Field and George H. Richardson, appointed by Gov. William Gilpin and meet to organize upcoming county election. Original 5 districts of Jefferson County created.

November 19, 1861: Great windstorm destroys 25 buildings in Golden City.

December 7, 1861: Election of county officers, including the first elected Board of County Commissioners.

January 6, 1862: Newly elected County officials assume office.

March 28, 1862: Lt. James A. Dawson of Golden City helps lead critical attack that turns Battle of Glorieta Pass in New Mexico in favor of the Union, turning back Confederate invasion targeting Colorado and other western territory.

November 1861: Jefferson County reorganized to become one of the original 17 counties created by Colorado Territorial Legislature. New Jeffco borders leave out Henderson, Marshall coal banks and areas east of present day Sheridan Boulevard and bring in areas of future Pine Grove and Buffalo Creek and areas to the south and west.

Historically Jeffco 2011
January 1, 1868: Golden City celebrates the ground breaking for the first railroad construction in Jefferson County, by the Colorado Central Railroad Company.

1867: Last documented encampment of Arapaho tribe, led by Chief Friday, in Jefferson County.

1869: Jarvis Hall, first college in Jefferson County, established.

February 10, 1870: Colorado School of Mines established at Golden.

September 12, 1870: Martin Leyden, and fellow miners Patrick Stanton and Patrick Kelly die when Leyden Creek Coal Mine fills with deadly fire damp gas.

September 24, 1870: The Colorado Central Railroad line completed. First train arrives in Jefferson County, at Golden City, from Denver.

December 1, 1870: The first town plat of Arvada filed. Originally, the settlement was known as Ralston Point.

1873: Colorado School of Mines Geology Museum established as Jarvis Hall Museum by Arthur Lakes.

September 12, 1873: First Swedish church in Colorado, the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church, established at Golden by Swedish immigrants.

August 1, 1876: Colorado becomes a state.

1877: First county courthouse completed in Golden at 1500 Washington Avenue between present-day 15th and 16th streets.

November 7, 1877: Dinosaur fossils discovered under auspices of Arthur Lakes in Morrison Formation along the Dakota Hogback near the town of Morrison in Jefferson County; this was the first major, and one of the most important, dinosaur discoveries in North America.

November 15, 1887: 1st electricity in Jefferson County as Golden Illuminating Company’s power plant goes online.

November 19, 1866: Colorado Transcript, now the Golden Transcript, now Colorado’s second oldest newspaper, founded by George West in Golden City.

1866: Colorado’s first railway company, the Colorado Central Railroad Company, incorporated by William A. H. Loveland in Golden.

June 1864: Flood wipes out all bridges on Clear Creek, compelling citizens to use ferries.

October 23, 1864: Jefferson County citizens including George West and George Jackson face each other in combat in the Civil War battle of Westport, in Missouri.

December 1, 1870: The first town plat of Arvada filed. Originally, the settlement was known as Ralston Point.

January 3, 1871: Town of Golden City incorporated.

September 19, 1872: Matthews Hall divinity school opens.

October 24, 1879: Golden Opera House, Jefferson County’s first theatrical venue, opens.

December 27, 1879: The Hayward murderers, captured after interstate manhunt, illegally hanged at Golden.

November 24, 1873: Coors Brewing Company founded in Golden by Adolph Coors Sr. and Jacob Schueler. Coors bought out his partner on May 4, 1880.

September 1, 1879: 1st Jefferson County telephone service started by Golden Telephone & Dispatch Company.

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November 7, 1882: Election Day earthquake of magnitude 6.2, the largest recorded in Jefferson County, shakes Golden, with effect particularly felt at Jefferson County Courthouse.

September 15, 1883: Sacred Heart College, now Regis University, moves to and opens in Morrison.

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1903: Coal mining company town of Leyden established. copyright Kathryn Ordway

1906: Crown Hill Cemetery established. Tower of Memories built in 1926-1948. copyright Kathryn Ordway

1909: Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini purchases Lookout Mountain property above Jackson Gulch on which she built a summer home for Denver orphans. The stone house was completed in 1914. copyright Kathryn Ordway

1911: Leyden Coal Mine fire disaster, ten miners killed, several injured. One injured miner dies several years later. Leyden Shaft #2 destroyed, but mine is able to rebuild.

May 10, 1911: Concert by renowned opera singer Mary Garden puts Red Rocks Amphitheatre on the world musical map.

1912: Lookout Mountain Scenic Railroad from Golden completed.

August 2, 1912: Two shot and South Platte Hotel destroyed when gunman arsonist terrorizes South Platte. Hotel is later rebuilt.

1913: Colorado Legislature passes an act authorizing the city of Denver to establish the Denver Mountain Parks in the mountain areas of Jefferson, Clear Creek, and Grand counties.

December 4-5, 1913: Blizzard of 1913 dumps 4-5 feet of snow in Golden, Arvada, Morrison, and Evergreen, the largest 24-hour and overall storm amounts on record for Jefferson County. The death of pioneer resident John Bergen in Evergreen and the probable death of Golden dairymen John Klaasens are attributed to the storm.

April 15, 1913:

May 31, 1908: Lakeside Amusement Park opens. Image from September 1, 1908 Denver Republican.

July 30, 1908: First automobile ascent of Castle Rock on South Table Mountain near Golden made by George Hering of Denver in his new 20-horsepower Stanley Steamer.

1908: “M” emblem for the Colorado School of Mines placed on Mount Zion by students and faculty, designed by Joseph F. O’Byrne.

September 7, 1911: Standley Lake formally dedicated by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson.

Historically Jeffco 2011 33
1914: The Lariat Trail, also known as the Lariat Loop Road, to Lookout Mountain Park at the top of Lookout Mountain completed by William "Cement Bill" Williams.

1915-1920: Tiny Town, a miniature town for children, built by George E. Turner on Turkey Creek.

June 3, 1917: Buffalo Bill buried on top of Lookout Mountain near the current site of the Pahaska Tepee, built in 1921 as his museum.

1917: Charles Boettcher’s summer home on Lookout Mountain completed. The home was given to Jefferson County by Boettcher’s granddaughter, Charline Breeden, in 1972; it is now open to the public for tours and special events.

1918-1919: Spanish influenza epidemic hits Jefferson County, hospitalizing hundreds and claiming lives including Golden City Councilor Oscan Nolin and pharmacist Henry Foss.

December 13, 1921: Satanic Coal Mine Disaster near Morrison claims lives of 6 men and injures 1 as mine fills with deadly fire damp gas.

April 14, 1922: The first public gathering of the Ku Klux Klan in Jefferson County on the present site of Heritage Square, complete with blazing torches.

September 27, 1923: Ku Klux Klan burns crosses on top of South Table Mountain on Castle Rock above Golden. It becomes major regional meeting place of the Klan.

August 7, 1927: Dance hall on top of Golden’s Castle Rock burns down, believed caused by arsonists.

March 27, 1937: Denver Fire Clay Mine north of Golden caves in, trapping 3 miners while 1 escapes. After 18 hours all miners are rescued uninjured.

August 15, 1938: Jefferson County Pioneer Museum established by Jefferson County Commissioners with aid of Works Progress Administration. It continues to operate as Golden History Center today.

September 2, 1938: Bear Creek flood kills 6 people in Bear Creek Canyon between Morrison and Kittredge, with $450,000 in damage through Morrison.

1935-1939: Ralston Dam built as Depression era federal works project.

October 17, 1940: Jefferson County Under Sheriff Clarence Bunch Fogate dies in line of duty when shot by bartender wanted for earlier shooting in Arvada.

1941: Remington Arms Company ammunition factory established in Lakewood, now the site of the Denver Federal Center; the largest contract awarded by the federal government in Colorado up to that time.

1945: Ruth W. Quinn of Edgewater becomes the first woman to serve on a Jefferson County jury.


March 18, 1948: Denver annexes Inspiration Point out of Jefferson County.

1949: Jolly Rancher candy invented by Harmens at shop in downtown Golden.


1950: All 39 existing Jefferson County school districts consolidated into the state’s largest school district, Jefferson County R-1.

1952: Jefferson County Public Library established by the Board of County Commissioners.

1955: Martin-Marietta Company (originally the Glen L. Martin Company), now Lockheed-Martin Company established in South Jefferson County near Waterton.

August 24, 1946: Flood from rainstorm near Idle-dale floods Bear Creek, killing woman at Morrison.

1947-1950: All 39 existing Jefferson County school districts consolidated into the state’s largest school district, Jefferson County R-1.

March 18, 1948: Denver annexes Inspiration Point out of Jefferson County.

1958: Town of Bow Mar established and incorporated, located in both Jefferson and Arapahoe Counties.

1957: County jail and Sheriff’s residence built next to the 1953 courthouse at 16th and Arapahoe. It was later used as the Assessor/Treasurer building.


November 15, 1952: The first televised Colorado football game, Colorado School of Mines versus Colorado College, played at the School of Mines’ Brooks Field and shown on KFEL-TV Channel 2.

1953: New county courthouse completed in Golden at 17th and Arapahoe.

1953: Jefferson Symphony Orchestra begins performing.
February 9, 1960: Adolph Coors, III murdered.

October 16, 1960: Rocky Mountain Metropolitan Airport dedicated as Jefferson County Airport.


1967: Rockmont College, now Colorado Christian University, moves to Lakewood.


January 11, 1963: All time coldest temperature in Jefferson County of -56 degrees recorded in Buffalo Creek.

July 1963: First county courthouse on Washington Avenue demolished.

1964: Mt. Linda Cross, created by Francis Van Derbur, first lit during Holy Week.

1965: Floods hit Clear Creek, Tucker Gulch and South Platte, causing major metro area damage.

1966: Hall of Justice at 18th and Arapahoe in Golden completed.


1990: C-470 highway completed through Jefferson County.

1993: Administration and Courts facility completed in Jefferson County Government Center at 100 Jefferson County Parkway.

April 28, 1995: Jefferson County Sergeant Timothy Mossbrucker dies in line of duty when shot by gunman at grocery in southeast Jefferson County.

May 18, 1996: Buffalo Creek wildfire begins, destroying 12 structures and burning 12,000 acres.

April 20, 1999: Columbine High School massacre takes place when two students open fire in Columbine High School, killing 13 and injuring 24.

November 24-26, 1999: Old 1953 Courthouse demolished by Colorado School of Mines.

November 15, 2001: The city of four counties (Boulder, Adams, Weld, and Jefferson) officially becomes the City and County of Broomfield, withdrawing from Jefferson County.

June 8, 2002-July 18, 2002: Hayman Fire, one of the largest wildfires in Colorado history, burns southern Jefferson County and Douglas, Park and Teller counties, destroying 138,114 acres and 133 homes.

March 18-19, 2003: 2nd largest snowstorm on record in Jefferson County dumps 50.5 inches of snow on Golden and other Jeffco places.

May 15, 2004: Girder falls from C-470 bridge over I-70, killing the Post family.


May 18, 1996: Buffalo Creek wildfire begins, destroying 12 structures and burning 12,000 acres.

May 1, 2010: Basket handled 6th Avenue Bridge moved into place in Lakewood, is largest object ever moved within Jefferson County. Carving 17-span Indiana Bridge completed the same year at Golden, both part of West Corridor light rail project.

2011: St. Anthony West Hospital, Jefferson County's first major hospital built from scratch in a century, completed in Lakewood.

1958: Bandimere Speedway opens. Copyright Kathryn Ordway

1973: Interstate-70 through Jefferson County completed. Picture Frame Bridge at Genesee exit (completed 1970), designed by Frank Lundberg, receives national award from American Institution of Steel Construction.


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1967: Rockmont College, now Colorado Christian University, moves to Lakewood.


1972: Jefferson County voters approve a one-half percent sales tax for Open Space, inaugurating the county’s award winning Open Space Program. Copyright Jefferson County Historical Society

1974: First woman, Joanne K. Patterson, elected as a county commissioner. She served 1975-1979.


1974: National Earthquake Information Center moved to Golden.


August 1, 1976: Lakewood Heritage Center opens as Belmar Museum.


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