

The Constitutional Convention of 1875

The year was 1876. Thirty-nine members of the constitutional convention convened on December 20th. The total population of Colorado Territory was approximately 100,000 and a major railroad connected the territory. Knowing the time was now right for statehood, many dedicated delegates traveled almost 1000 miles over mountains and through heavy snowstorms to attend the convention at the Odd Fellow Hall in Denver. They spent 87 days preparing the constitution, taking months longer than the two earlier attempts. Committees carefully examined such topics as the control of corporate bodies, the disposition of public waters and lands, the forming and maintaining of a public school system, taxation of property, non-residents against debts, and the right to suffrage.

The constitution, completed on March 14, 1876, was modeled after the Nation's constitution. Beginning with the Bill of Rights which guaranteed all national and civil rights, it set the terms and duties of government officials and the ways in which a law could be introduced and passed. It established the State Supreme Court, district courts and county courts. It provided for the supervision and maintenance of public schools. The constitution also determined that a state census be taken in 1885 and every ten years afterward. It designated the elimination of dormant corporations. It regulated railroad lines and set up a system for state tax. Finally, it allowed for future amendments of the constitution. When submitted to the citizens for vote, 15,443 favored the constitution from a total of 19,505 votes.

Colorado's original constitution was handwritten by Fred J. Stanton, the engrossing and enrolling clerk for the constitutional convention. A copy was then penned from the original by the assistant engrossing and enrolling clerk, W.A. Salisbury. On July 25, 1876, Governor Routt dispatched his secretary, John N. Reigart, to Washington, D.C. with the copy of the constitution along with certified ordinances, votes and proclamations. President Grant declared Colorado a state on August 1, 1876 and it became known as the "Centennial State." Since then, the constitution has been the foundation of the State's government and the citizen's freedom. Colorado's constitution today remains very similar to the original constitution conceived for statehood in 1876. The original is preserved in the Colorado State Archives.