

Colorado had no distinctive position on the maps, although the country had been explored as early as 1540 by Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, who was sent out by the Spanish Viceroy of Mexico to glean information respecting the northern possessions claimed by that sovereign. Tradition tells us that he went in search of the seven cities of Cibolla, that were supposed to be situated in a peaceful, luxurious valley enclosed by huge mountains of solid gold. History, however, gives no record of his having discovered the key to the suspected treasure vaults.

The name Colorado has been by some mistakenly supposed to be a corruption of Coronado; but, on the contrary, it is a common Spanish word, from the verb colorar, to color, usually to color red, and means colored red or ruddy. It is a name frequently applied to rivers, mountains and localities in Spanish America, where the prevalence of red rocks and soil constitutes a characteristic physical feature of many portions of the country.

This portion of our continent was a sealed book for nearly three centuries after Coronado; and was generally designated the Great American Desert. In 1803 the United States purchased from France the immense territory known as Louisiana, the price being fifteen millions of dollars.

In 1806, Captain Zebulon Pike was sent with a party of Government explorers to ascertain the resources of this new acquisition. They camped where Pueblo now stands. On the day of their arrival the Captain and a few of his company started out with the idea of scaling the Big Mountain, as they called it, and returning the same evening. When night closed around them they found themselves at the foot of Blue Mountain, south of Cheyenne Mountain, and the next day toiled to the top of it. On reaching the summit, the Big Mountain appeared to be as far away as when they first began. The enterprise ended in defeat. They returned to their camp almost famished, and with their feet frozen; thereby, possibly adding to the vernacular of the West the term "tenderfoot."

Captain Zebulon Pike did not take to himself the credit of being the first explorer of Western Louisiana, but accords the honor to James Pursley, of Bardstown, Kentucky. Pursley, with amazing generosity, credits it to Pike.

Pike subsequently indulged quite heavily in a kind of appropriation peculiar to the West, called "land-grabbing." He crossed the Sangre de Cristo Range into the San Luis Valley, and built a fort on the Rio Grande del Norte, claiming the land in the name of the United States, for which he was taken prisoner by the Spanish soldiers, but afterwards released.

The ebbing wave of time threw a mist over the country for fourteen years more. In 1820, Major S. Long was sent out to explore. He discovered Long's Peak, which was named for him.

The curtain went down, and was rung up again in 1843, when General John C. Fremont passed through on his way to the Pacific. Soon after, the great migration to California commenced, and Colorado became the gateway to the land of gold, her own treasure still sleeping.

In 1858, gold was discovered near the present site of Denver, and with the discovery began the first chapter in the history of Colorado.