

The social legacy. The social legacy of mining is equally important to contemporary Lafayette. The mines required far more labor than was available locally and quickly attracted experienced miners and laborers from Europe and other parts of the U.S. The result was a community comprised of many ethnic groups, including Welsh, English, Scottish, Irish, central European, Hispanic, Italian, and Swedish workers and their families. Local farmers and ranchers also shared in the coal boom and worked as miners in the winter when coal production was high and agricultural work slow. A sense of this ethnic diversity can be gained by walking through the Lafayette cemetery at Baseline and 11th Street. The variety of family names gives a sense of the many nationalities that have contributed to Lafayette's history. Although the mining life was hard, families were fun-loving and many social activities centered around schools and churches. This legacy continues today as Lafayette remains one of the most diverse and interesting communities along the Front Range.

Further Reading

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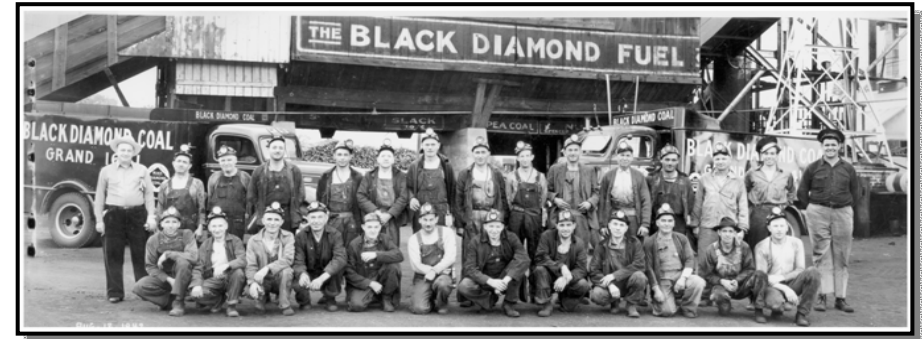
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Credits and sources. This map was compiled from digital sources by Kenneth E. Foote and Anna Milan of the Department of Geography at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Text is by Kenneth E. Foote and Vicki Trumbo. The mine locations are available from the Colorado Geological Survey (Carroll and Bauer 2002). The locations of mine extents and faults are available from the United States Geological Survey (Roberts, Hynes, and Woodward 2001) and the digital files are online at <http://energy.cr.usgs.gov/other/frmp/index.htm>. Digital maps of rivers, water bodies, railroads and major roads were downloaded from Boulder County Geographic Information Services at www.co.boulder.co.us/gis/. Local roads are from the 2002 update of the 2000 TIGER maps produced by the United States Bureau of Census at www.census.gov. The quality and completeness of each of these sources varies, so the position of features on this final map should be read as approximate rather than absolute.

Photographs of Black Diamond Fuel crew; the Simpson Mine; East Cleveland Street from the Simpson mine; and Simpson camp courtesy of the Lafayette Miner's Museum. Photographs of the Waneka Lake power plant courtesy of Dean and Norma Ross. All other photographs by Kenneth E. Foote. Photographs used with permission; all rights reserved. Thanks to Glenda and Phil Chermak, Stephanie Schmidt, Andy Patten, Dean and Norma Ross, Cathleen Norman, and Stephen Roberts for providing help with this project.

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The Coal Mining Heritage of Lafayette

From the late 1880s until the 1930s, Lafayette was a major coal town. Mines in and around Lafayette, Louisville, Erie, Superior and Marshall were suppliers of fuel for heating and power along the Front Range. Some mines in this Boulder-Weld county coal field continued production for several more decades, but the industry passed its peak before the Second World War as natural gas for heating became widely used and as better grades of coal from more distant mines became economically competitive.



Much of the evidence of coal mining has since disappeared from the landscape. The shafts were filled and the heavy equipment and buildings were sold, moved, or scrapped. New development has covered other traces, as at the Black Diamond mine on the northwest corner of Baseline and U.S. Highway 287. A sign, pictured to the left, at the new Black Diamond Center and shaped like the winding gear tower over a mineshaft, provides a faint reminder of the mine. Other evidence still remains of Lafayette's mining heritage in the town's architecture and place names. You can explore these features using this map and guide.

Coal in Boulder and Weld Counties

Coal is one of Colorado's greatest resources with beds underlying approximately 28 percent of the state's land area. An inventory by the Colorado Geological Survey for the years 1864 to 2002 lists 1,736 mines in the state of which about 163 were in Boulder and Weld counties. The Denver coal basin of which the Boulder-Weld fields are part has the distinction of being one of the first deposits to be mined. Beginning in the 1860s and 1870s, settlers mined coal for local consumption by digging horizontal openings called adits into coal seams that were close to the surface. With increased demand and better rail transportation in the 1880s and 1890s, companies dug shafts downward into the coal deposits and mined underground.

The coal in the Boulder-Weld fields is mostly bedded in seven seams, although the number of seams varies somewhat from place to place. The coal seams are interlayered with sandstones, shales, and clays of the Laramie Formation, all being sedimentary deposits dating back about 80 million years. The seams vary in thickness and quality. Some are as thin as a foot and were never economical to mine; others are as thick as 14 feet and were the layers the miners targeted. The coal varied from sub-bituminous B to sub-bituminous C, meaning its heating capacity was greater than wood and low-grade lignite coal, but far less than the heating capacity of bituminous and anthracite coals. The best seams in Boulder and