

Colorado Hispano *Fleteros* (Freighters), 1880  
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Not much has been written about Hispano *fleteros* (freighters) in Colorado. Prior to Colorado becoming a territory in 1861, no organized mode of transportation was available to transport people or freight from Denver to Santa Fe. You either traveled on horseback or hired a hack or small-time independent carrier. If you needed to transport items, you made the trip by horse and wagon (and joined a caravan for safety in numbers), or you hired an independent freighter.

By 1863, stage coaches began transporting people and freight from Denver to Santa Fe by way of the indirect route to La Junta then to Trinidad. Freight packages were placed in the rear boot of the coach; additional packages were placed on the roof behind the driver or, if necessary, inside with the passengers. Although the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail brought freight from La Junta and Trinidad, freighters were needed to transport items (such as furniture, crates, or barrels of goods and supplies) to other locations in Colorado. *Fleteros*, drivers with teams and wagons for hire, hauled goods from wholesalers in Las Animas, Pueblo, and Trinidad to mercantile stores throughout Colorado. Heavy goods such as machinery and safes were hauled by oxen; lighter goods such as hardware, and dry goods were hauled by the sure-footed mules.

The freighter occupation does not appear in the 1870 census, however many Hispanos supplemented their farm income by taking on freighting jobs. They worked for merchants, hauling large goods purchased from “rural” customers. *Fleteros* hauled timber to lumber mills, milled lumber to building supply stores, ties to railroad grading areas, and props to coal, gold, and silver mines. By the mid 1870s, the southbound rails of the Denver and Rio Grande Railway reached Cañon City and La Veta. *Fleteros* were needed to transport goods received at these depots, which included such items as supplies, cooking utensils, tents, pick and hammer, provisions, blankets, flour, coffee, sugar across the Sangre de Cristo range into the San Juan Mountains. They transported potatoes, lettuce, peas, cauliflower, hay, and alfalfa from the San Luis Valley and hauled pelts, hides, wool, and buffalo skins.

On long trips *fleteros* stopped midday to rest, water, and feed the team. For overnight trips longer than ten miles, *fleteros* packed extra provisions and joined their teams for safety in numbers. They assisted each other in pulling heavy wagons up the mountains and controlling the horses and loads as they came down steep grades.

The following page lists known Hispano freighters in Colorado by county:

County	Town / Precinct	Freighter	Age	Other Information
Conejos	Cenicero	Ursulo Maes	25	Josefa (spouse)
		Juan M. Martin	35	Asencion (mother)
	Conejos	Antonio Jiron	25	Maria S. (spouse)
	Los Pinos	Jose B. Gallegos		Maria T. (spouse)
	Rio Blanco	Augustin Baca	26	
		Juan B. Silva	48	
	San Antonio	Antonio Martin	18	
		Elfego Vigil	18	
	San Rafael	Quitano(?) Bustos	43	Maria L. (spouse)
		Jose A. Lucero	33	Rosalia (spouse)
Fernando Valdez		45	Maria de la Luz (spouse)	
Huerfano	Badito / 1	Antonio Rival	48	Manuela (spouse)
	Cucharas / 8	Nestor Guerrero	25	Andrea Bustos (spouse) Carmel Duran (spouse)
	Walsenburg / 6	Tomas A. Rivera	30	son of Tomas E. Ribera
	Huerfano Creek / 2	Manuel Galvez	40	Clara (spouse)
	La Veta / 5	Cesario Cordova	26	Abelina Trujillo (spouse); Cesario died March 4, 1925 in La Veta, CO
Las Animas	/ 5	Eutemio Duran	20	
	Trinidad	Serefino Vigil	54	
		Crescencio Vigil	21	son of Serefino Vigil
		Manuel Vigil	26	Maria J. (spouse)
		Antonio Velarde	50	
		Lucas(?) Duarte	38	Josefa (spouse)
		Jose R. Aguilar	39	
Rio Grande	/ 3	Gregorio Sandoval	28	
		Roman Romero	16	hired man
		Francisco Valdez	26	Martina (spouse)
		Juan M. Montoya	23	

Freighting was hard and dangerous work. *Fleteros* were responsible for the care of their animals and the contents they transported. Animals needed to be rested, fed, and shod, and wagon hubs had to be greased when they ran hot. Overnight trips often required that *fleteros* sleep under their wagons or a make-shift tarp. Often *fleteros* traveled in a caravan; families or *compadres* traveled together to assist in climbing the steep mountainous terrain and managing the animals and load during difficult descents.