In his book, *By One Vote*, historian Michael Holt delves into the intricacies behind the narrow and highly contested Republican victory in the presidential election of 1876. He identifies Colorado as one of the deciding factors in gaining that Republican victory. Holt makes the point that if the Democrats had rallied together and denied Colorado statehood, they would have taken back the White House. This oversight left Holt dumbfounded: “How, I asked myself, could [the Democrats] have been so stupid as to allow Colorado’s admission in time to participate in the presidential election?”

My research project would, in essence, seek to answer this question. I believe that the reason Colorado was able to become a state was a combination of support from leading national Republican figures and the miscalculation of a few key Democrats.

Colorado’s role in the election of 1876 has been largely overlooked. The majority of resources available focus solely on the 1876 election from Colorado’s perspective, as the catalyst for statehood. The few sources that attempt to approach the question from a national perspective do so only briefly, generating more questions than answers.

To begin my research, I obtained multiple secondary sources from the University of Denver’s library system describing Colorado’s journey toward statehood. Two problems quickly became apparent. First was the general lack of information, which is surprising given that the election could not have been won without Colorado’s electoral votes. The second problem was that resources that do analyze the achievement of statehood focus on the election from Colorado’s perspective. Only Michael Holt’s book focused on the role of politicians from other states who advocated for Colorado in Congress.

Fortunately, the limited secondary sources do not reflect a shortage of primary resources. The benefit of pursuing a topic focused on Colorado history is that many sources are housed here in the metro area. I found several collections of papers that would be useful, including the papers of Thomas Patterson, a man whom I believe to have been one of the key figures in sway the Democratic Party toward statehood. These papers are housed at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Patterson was a Democrat who was serving as Colorado’s territorial delegate in Congress during the 1876 election. There is evidence suggesting that it was his influence that influenced several Democrats to support Colorado’s statehood bill, allowing Colorado to become a state.

Because I am interested in the perspective on Colorado statehood at a national level, though, I am also planning to visit archives outside the state. Several crucial collections are housed in the Library of Congress. These include papers from leading Republican figures at the time and their correspondences with men who were crucial in Colorado’s formation as a state. The Republican Party was entering a period of deep turmoil in the early 1870s. This internal reform and dissent involved the same figures that championed Colorado’s bid for statehood, such as Schuyler Colfax, James Blaine, and Horace Greeley. In addition, no study of the pursuit of statehood would be complete without an examination of Colorado’s territorial papers. Ironically, these are housed not here in the state, but in the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

I plan to visit these archives in a single trip during winter break. I believe that these resources will be essential if I am to understand what national sentiments were towards Colorado statehood.

Resources:

1. Documents of James Gillespie Blaine, leading Republican figure in the 1860s and 70s
Colorado Statehood

- Correspondences with figures that were crucial in Colorado’s pursuit of statehood: Schuyler Colfax, Phineas Hitchcock, Ulysses S. Grant, Horace Greeley, William Sherman

2. Colorado’s Territorial Papers
   - National Archives, Washington D.C.

3. Documents of Schuler Colfax
   - Housed in the Library of Congress
   - Correspondences with Horace Greeley, Phineas Hitchcock

4. Documents of Ulysses S. Grant
   - Library of Congress
   - President who passed Colorado’s statehood bill

5. Documents of Andrew Johnson
   - Library of Congress
   - President who vetoed Colorado’s statehood bill (twice)

If awarded the PINS grant, I will use the money to fly to Washington D.C. to study the aforementioned documents, housed in the Library of Congress and the National Archives. I believe that the conversations between these prominent men will reveal important information illustrating the link between popular sovereignty and Colorado and between Colorado and National politics. My trip would take place in the beginning of December, and I would stay approximately five days.

This project would be an excellent use of the PINS grant money because it is conducting research in a field where there has been a wealth of information, but a significant lack of interpretation. My advisor for this project is Susan Schulten, a history professor who has researched the Colorado territorial period and who would be able to advise me as I explore this topic. This research that this grant would enable would be of great benefit as I move on to do a senior honor thesis in the history department. I would have the opportunity to present my findings to the history department at the University of Denver, and possibly to present my research to members of congress through the program “Posters on the Hill” (recommended by my senior seminar professor, Carol Helstosky).

Tentative Budget:

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