

Crowley County, Colorado

Crowley County (population 5,500) is located in the high plains of southeastern Colorado. Before 1876, the prairie that is now Crowley County was used for winter encampments by Cheyenne tribes. When the state of Colorado was accepted into the Union in 1876, the entire area was known as Bent County. The western section later became Otero County, and Crowley County was formed in 1911 from the northern part of Otero County, when local residents grew tired of the two-day commute to its county seat, La Junta. Ordway now serves as the Crowley County seat.

Crowley's residents are employed as ranchers, farmers, in government, education, and the correctional industry. A prominent local resource is the 1918 Crowley County High School, the second oldest school building in the state still in use. The 1914 Crowley grade school, the only county building listed on both the national and state historic registers, has been restored with the help of state grants and the Crowley County Heritage Society. It is now the home of the Crowley Heritage Center and Museum. The building also serves as the town hall, municipal court, and as a community center.

The annual "History in our County" program focuses on themes such as towns within the county, farming, ranching, county schools, and ethnicity. Each year this program includes a temporary exhibit that remains open to the public throughout the summer season.

The county is also exploring the heritage tourism potential of a 1953 Imperial Pullman railroad sleeper car. Located on a side rail for many years, it was acquired by the county in 2006 through a partnership with V&S Railway, Inc. The county commissioners and chamber of commerce are studying the feasibility and costs of restoration, interpretation, and possible use as a bed and breakfast.