

Olathe is in the heart of the Uncompahgre Valley on the western slope of Colorado along U.S. Highway 50 halfway between Montrose and Delta, Colorado. Olathe follows the typical western Colorado settlement pattern of river-railroad-highway. Sitting at 5,346 feet above sea level, Olathe is surrounded by fertile mesa lands such as the Ash, High and East Mesas. Primarily the Town provides goods, services, and housing for its agricultural community. The high mountain barriers surrounding Olathe afford the valley uniform weather and lower wind velocity. Mild winters with little snow and summers with cool nights are major assets. Average annual snowfall is 10.4 inches with an average temperature of 29.1 degrees Fahrenheit in January. The average highest temperature in July is 93 degrees. There are approximately 250 days of sunshine in the area. The average annual rainfall is 8.8 inches. Olathe has a comfort index of 76 which represents a measure of comfort or discomfort humidity and temperature ranges in Colorado. The ultraviolet or UV index in Olathe is rated 6 which indicates a medium risk of exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays at altitude on sunny days.

Surrounding this quiet community is the Gunnison River which flows northeast of Olathe. The Grand Mesa is to the north, the San Juan Mountain Range to the south, and the Uncompahgre Plateau to the west of Olathe. The sheltered valley, moderate climate, rich soil, and good irrigation systems supply Olathe with thousands of acres of irrigated cropland, fruit orchards, vineyards, and ranch land. Farming and livestock are a major source of revenue for the area. Olathe has always been a town rich in colorful history and charming character. The title "The Hub of the Uncompahgre" is claimed by Olathe because it is the business center and shipping point for a large area in the center of the Uncompahgre Valley. Crops include vegetables, wheat, oats, onions, barley, pinto beans, potatoes, hay, apples, cherries, and peaches. Grade "A" bulk milk is transported to larger metropolitan areas from dairies in Olathe. From this bustling town radiates roads like spokes of a wheel to tap into the produce of the region. Beyond the mesas lies a scenic wonderland abundant with some of Colorado's best hunting, fishing, camping, skiing, and snowmobiling which are all easily accessible.

## **History of Olathe**

Although "Olathe" is the Shawnee name for "beautiful", the Uncompahgre Valley Territory of Western Colorado was inhabited by the Ute tribe for hundreds of years. The present-day site of Olathe was at one time a Ute village, with plenty of hunting and fishing to sustain the village. In the late 1870's, the gold and silver boom encouraged western expansion, and settlers began to homestead in the area. By 1882 the Ute village had been pushed out of the area and the town was established.

In 1882-1883, the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad built their narrow-gauge line through Western Colorado and raised a section house halfway between Montrose and Delta. The section house was called Colorow, after a Native American who was thought to be a Ute Chief. Later it was discovered that Colorow was a renegade member of the Comanche tribe and a horse thief.

The first Post Office, located in the section house was known as Brown's Post Office, after the postmaster. In 1883 a cabin was built by L.L. Mears to house the Post Office. Mears' wife served as the Post Mistress.

In 1896, the D. & R. G. W. Railroad sent Al Burkitt from Olathe, Kansas to be Colorow's first railroad agent. There was quite a bit of confusion due to the depot and the post office having different names. The town's people had discovered, by this time, that Colorow was a renegade horse thief, rather than a Ute Chief. Upon this discovery, a name change was in order. During a town meeting Al Burkitt suggested changing the name to Olathe; after the beautiful and prosperous town in Kansas from where he had come. A vote was taken, and the name Olathe was chosen.

Olathe has changed little over the years since its incorporation in 1907. Population figures were relatively constant until the 1980's when the population increased significantly, due to newcomers working in Delta and Montrose, taking advantage of lower housing costs in Olathe.

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