Welcome to “Proclaiming Colorado’s Black History”!

My name is Anna Belle Riley. In 1864, I became the earliest known child of African heritage born in the ancestral lands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Utes. At that time, this area was called the “Colorado Territory” by the United States government.

My father, Thomas J. Riley, traveled with his father, and a group of white men, from Georgia to Colorado in search of gold. He eventually settled in Denver, met and married my mother, Louisiana “Lucy” Riley. My mother was a biracial woman, so I’m biracial as well.

Like other migrants, my family established roots, built community, and created a place that we could call home. I too started my family by getting married and having a daughter.

It wasn’t always easy. African Americans faced numerous challenges because of racism, but we ultimately thrived and prospered.

Sadly, I experienced a number of illnesses and died in August 1907. Still, during my lifetime, I saw Colorado’s Black population grow and weave itself into the fabric of civic and cultural life by the time the territory was granted statehood in 1876, one hundred years after the Declaration of Independence. That’s why Colorado is nicknamed “The Centennial State.”

Step inside this exhibit and hear from Black Coloradans who have lived in this area for the past two centuries and learn about the contributions they have made to the Centennial State. I’m excited for you to experience my home state’s fascinating history through an African American perspective. I hope you enjoy this look at “Colorful Colorado!”