

Patty Limerick is the Faculty Director and Chair of the Board of the Center of the American West at the University of Colorado, where she is also a Professor of History. Limerick has dedicated her career to bridging the gap between academics and the general public and to demonstrating the benefits of applying historical perspective to contemporary dilemmas and conflicts. Limerick is also known as an energetic, funny, and engaging public speaker, sought after by a wide range of Western constituencies that include private industry groups, state and federal agencies, and grassroots organizations.

On August 1, 2020 Governor [Jared Polis](#) appointed Patty to the [Colorado State Geographic Naming Advisory Board](#). This board, together with the [United States Board on Geographic Names](#) (USBGN) will play an important role in Colorado's historic effort to rethink some of the current names of state landmarks. In January 2016 she was appointed the Colorado State Historian and served until August 2018. Also in January 2016, she was appointed to the [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) advisory board, the National Council on the Humanities. Patty was nominated by President Obama in Spring 2015, was confirmed by the United States Senate in November 2015, and served until October 2019.

Limerick was born and raised in Banning, California, and graduated from the University of California at Santa Cruz in 1972. She received her Ph.D. in American Studies from Yale University in 1980, and from 1980 to 1984 she was an Assistant Professor of History at Harvard. In 1984, Limerick moved to Boulder to join the [History Department of the University of Colorado](#), where she was promoted to tenured Associate Professor in 1987 and to Full Professor in 1991. In 1985 she published *Desert Passages*, followed in 1987 by her best-known work, *The Legacy of Conquest*, an overview and reinterpretation of Western American history that has stirred up a great deal of both academic and public debate. In 2012 she published [A Ditch in Time: The City, the West, and Water](#), a history of water in Denver. Limerick is also a prolific essayist, and many of her most notable articles, including "Dancing with Professors: The Trouble with Academic Prose," were collected in 2000 under the title *Something in the Soil*. Limerick has received a number of awards and honors recognizing the impact of her scholarship and her commitment to teaching, including the [MacArthur Fellowship](#) (1995 to 2000) and the [Hazel Barnes Prize](#), the University of Colorado's highest award for teaching and research (2001). She has served as president of several professional organizations, advised documentary and film projects, and done two tours as a Pulitzer Nonfiction jurist, as well as chairing the 2011 Pulitzer jury in History. She regularly engages the public on the op-ed pages of local and national newspapers, including serving as a guest columnist for *The New York Times* in the summer of 2005. She currently writes a monthly column for *The Denver Post*.

Limerick has served as President of the [Organization of American Historians](#), [American Studies Association](#), the [Western History Association](#), and the [Society of American Historians](#), and as the Vice President of the Teaching Division of the [American Historical Association](#), where she co-wrote a successful proposal to the Lumina Foundation, on "tuning" (as in tuning up an orchestra) the historical profession's teaching efforts.

In 1986, Limerick and CU Law Professor [Charles Wilkinson](#) founded the Center of the American West, and since 1995 it has been her primary point of affiliation. During her tenure, the Center has published a number of books, including the influential [Atlas of the New West](#) (1997), and a series of lively, balanced, and to-the-point reports on compelling Western issues,

including [*What Every Westerner Should Know About Energy*](#) (2003), [*Cleaning Up Abandoned Hardrock Mines in the West*](#) (2006), and [*What Every Westerner Should Know About Energy Efficiency and Conservation*](#) (2007). The Center's film, *The Lover's Guide to the West*, offering counseling to the American public on its "troubled relationship with fossil fuels," debuted on Rocky Mountain PBS in April 2010. Limerick and Center staff are currently working on several projects, including a book about the role of the Department of Interior in the West, based on the "Inside Interior" series of interviews hosted by the Center between 2004 and 2006. Under her leadership, the Center of the American West serves as a forum committed to the civil, respectful, problem-solving exploration of important, often contentious, public issues. In an era of political polarization and contention, the Center strives to bring out "the better angels of our nature" by appealing to our common loyalties and hopes as Westerners.