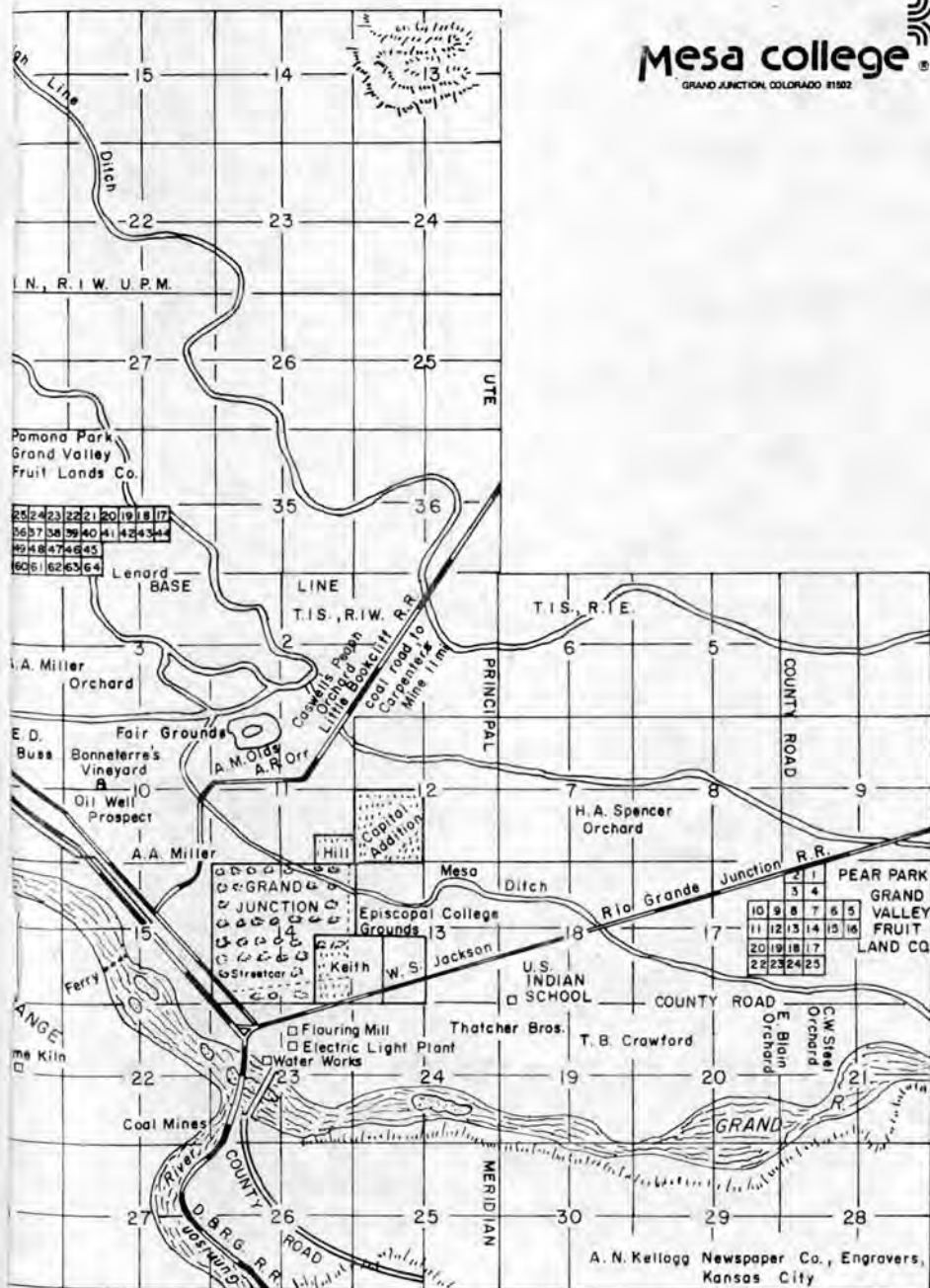


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THE COVER: Sectional map taken from the Grand Junction News, January 19, 1890.
Recreated by Michael Heinrich, Assistant Professor of Geography, Mesa College.

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THE
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GRAND JUNCTION
TOWN COMPANY.

THE GRAND JUNCTION TOWN COMPANY
AND
THE LAND DISPUTE WITH WILLIAM KEITH
by Janet Mease

Janet Mease is a graduate in history from Mesa College. She was granted an Editorial Internship from the University of Toledo Graduate School in Ohio.

Townbuilding on the frontier was a speculative venture that promised great wealth if a townsite prospered. But such ventures frequently involved confused and conflicting land claims, often leading to years of litigation before land titles could be cleared. Grand Junction was no different. When George Addison Crawford founded the townsite of Grand Junction at the junction of the Grand and Gunnison Rivers in 1881, it was not long before his claim was being challenged. Crawford's greatest challenge came from William Keith. Posterity would remember Crawford as the winner in this legal and personal dispute but Keith was clearly the victor.

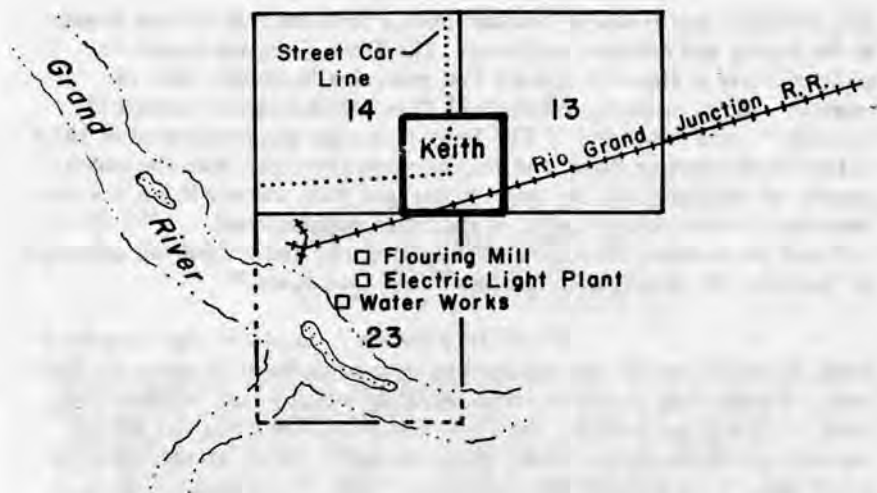
In the year 1879 the combined incidents of the Meeker Massacre and the Milk Creek Battle left the Utes with no way to deter the "Utes Must Go!" campaign of the white settlers of Colorado. By the terms of the Mear's Treaty¹ of 1880, the Uncompahgre and Northern Utes were forced to surrender all claims to the Western Slope and were removed to the Uintah reservation in Utah. Only a small portion of land in the extreme southwest corner of the state remained for use by the Southern Ute bands.² An Act of Congress on June 15, 1880, declared these lands "abandoned."³ These "abandoned" lands would not be open for legal settlement until an Act of Congress declared the lands "public lands." Such an act did not pass until July 28, 1882.⁴ However, this legal technicality did not deter white settlers eager to occupy the land or to reap the financial rewards of the newly opened territory. At 5:00 a.m. on September 4, 1881, the U. S. Army stepped aside and allowed whites to pour onto reservation lands.⁵



Photo courtesy of Dorey Collection, Museum of Western Colorado

George A. Crawford

Among those seeking fame and fortune on the Western Slope was Governor George A. Crawford, a master in the corporate venture of town building. Crawford was born in Pine Creek Township, Clinton County, Pennsylvania, on July 27, 1827. He received his higher education at Clinton Academy, Lock Haven Academy, and at Jefferson College where he became proficient in Latin and rhetoric. Crawford then went on to study law at the office of Messrs. Allison White and James W. Quigley in Pennsylvania. From there he moved to Kansas where he earned a reputation as an orator, a Democratic politician, and a townbuilder. In Kansas, Crawford acquired the title of Governor. Crawford founded the town of Fort Scott, Kansas, and as president of the Fort Scott Town Company, became involved in the same type of activities that he would pursue in Grand Junction, Colorado.⁶ While in Fort Scott, Crawford had a confrontation with the "Bloody Reds," a pro-slavery society. When they ordered him to leave Fort Scott for opposing their activities, Crawford replied: "I don't exchange messages with horse-thieves."⁷ Crawford later founded such



Map by Michael Heinrich

sites as Empire City and Osage Mission, also in Kansas.⁸ But his success in Kansas turned to financial loss and he journeyed to Colorado to obtain a fresh start and, hopefully, recoup his financial losses.⁹

Hiring William McGinley as their guide, Crawford and his associates – R. D. Mobley, M. Rush Warner, Col. J. E. Morris and S. A. Harper – set out to establish a townsite. They arrived at the Grand River on September 22, 1881,¹⁰ and on September 26 selected Section 14, Township 1 South, Range 1 West, Ute Meridian¹¹ at the junction of the Grand¹² and Gunnison Rivers. Crawford hired two men to build cabins to protect the claim and returned to Gunnison with his associates.¹³ On October 6 of the same year, William Keith staked a pre-emption claim that overlapped 80 acres of Crawford's claim.¹⁴ As required by the rules of pre-emption, Keith remained and built his cabin.¹⁵ The stage would be set for a legal dispute that would continue until 1890.

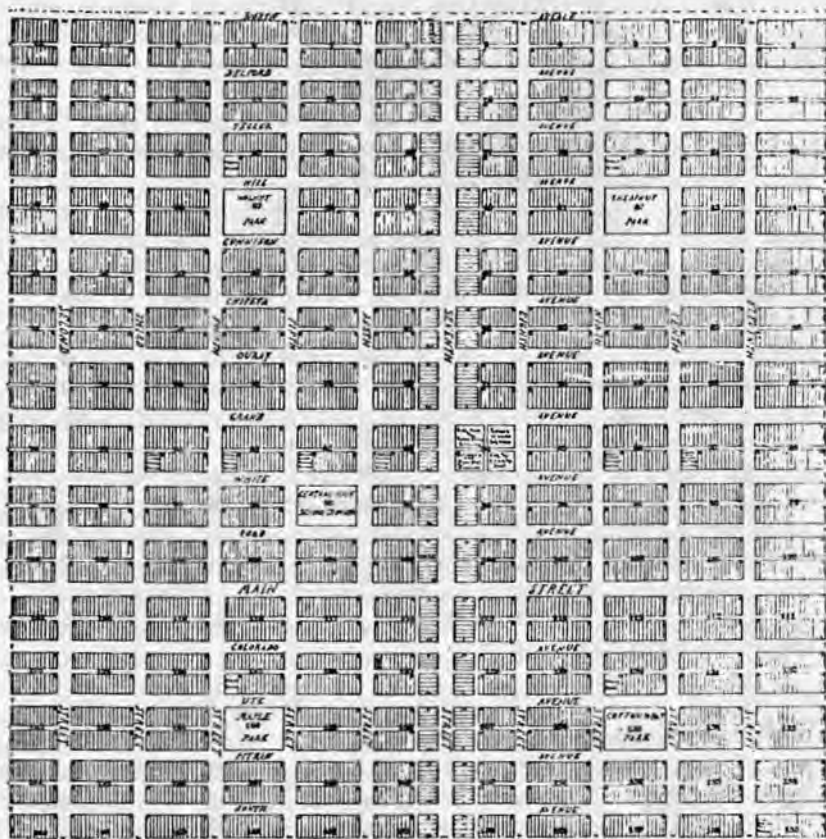
Crawford drew up the articles of incorporation for the Grand Junction Town Company on October 10 and filed them with the Secretary of State on November 19, 1881.¹⁶ The original members of the Town Company were George Crawford, M. Rush Warner, James W. Bucklin, Allison White, H. E. Rood, and Richard D. Mobley under the directorship of Crawford, Warner, and Mobley.¹⁷ White, Crawford's half-brother, and Rood, both from Philadelphia, would be honored for their financial participation by having Grand Junction streets named for them.¹⁸ The Town Company was to operate for a period of twenty years¹⁹ with the initial capital stock set at \$100,000.²⁰ Its purpose was to select, survey,

plat, purchase, and record a townsite; build a town on that site and engage in the buying and selling of real estate. The Town Company would, in addition, serve as Grand Junction's first governing institution with the assumed right to prosecute criminals.²¹ Crawford had already named the townsite "Grand Junction."²² The Town Company was reorganized in 1883 as the Grand Junction Town and Improvement Company, with the added purpose of supplying the city with "water, gas, heat, electric lights, the construction of street railways, ditches and other improvements. . . ."²³ Crawford and his associates then launched an exhaustive and widespread campaign to "promote the interests and prosperity" of their town.²⁴

With money in hand and high purpose in mind, Crawford and Mobley returned to their townsite on October 31, 1881, ready to begin their corporate endeavor. They took up residence in the log cabin McGinley had built for the Town Company. The cabin was located on what would shortly be called "Ute Avenue."²⁵ To his horror, Crawford found that "claim jumpers" had moved onto the site during his absence. John Allen and three others were living in a tent in the center of the townsite. They had dubbed their claim "West Denver."²⁶ Two days after his return, Crawford also found Keith's cabin and discovered the overlapping claim.²⁷ During the heated arguments that followed, Crawford let the "claim jumpers" know that they were trespassing and then proceeded with the business at hand. He could not spend his time arguing when he had towns to build. The Denver & Rio Grande narrow gauge line from Salida to Grand Junction was completed in November,²⁸ stimulating rapid growth in the new community. Crawford, who had left in December to locate the townsite of Delta on the Uncompahgre,²⁹ went to Gunnison to hire engineer Samuel Wade to survey and plat the townsite of Grand Junction.³⁰ Surveying began promptly on January 1, 1882. When Wade planted stakes on Keith's rival claim, Keith tore them out. The stakes were replanted only to be torn up again. Finally Crawford had newly arrived Judge J. P. Harlow issue a writ of arrest for Keith, John Allen, and one other claim jumper for pulling up stakes. On January 3, Keith was tried and found guilty³¹ by the "Settlers Protective Association" that functioned as the Town Company's judicial institution.³² He was fined one dollar plus thirty-three dollars for trial costs. The charges against the other claim jumpers were dropped. All the claim jumpers were subsequently ordered to vacate their claims. They refused.³³ On January 10, Allen and Keith were found guilty of forcible entry and trespass and a writ of restitution was granted in favor of Crawford and the Town Company.³⁴ Litigation continued until all rival claimants to the Town Company's claim, except for Keith, either left or gave up. Keith continued to fight for his contested eighty acres. The conflict, however, would remain in the background for some time. The people of Grand Junction believed that the courts would settle the dispute, forcing Keith to move on or concede the overlapping acreage. Meanwhile, everyone's attention centered on the development of Grand Junction.

Once the townsite was platted by Wade,

PLAT OF THE TOWN OF
WEST  EAST
GRAND JUNCTION
 Mesa County, Colorado



Grand and Gunnison Avenues and Main and Seventh Streets are 100 feet wide. All others are 80 feet except on the East, North and West which are half streets. All alleys are 20 feet wide and run East and West except those running North and South in the rear of Seventh street from Block 6 to 160 and Block 5 to 159, which are 15 feet wide.

citizens and the Town Company began building in earnest. Lots went up for sale and the Town Company offered free lots to those who could immediately build on their property.³⁵ The Town Company even gave a lot to the first couple to marry in the area – Thomas Koehm to Theresa Bonholzer.³⁶ On June 22, 1882, the settlers voted unanimously to incorporate the town. Unanimous, that is, in terms of those who voted. William Keith's name was noticeably missing from the list of voters.³⁷ At the time, no one, except Keith, resided on the disputed property.³⁸

In September, Crawford went to Denver and persuaded editor Edwin Price to start a newspaper in Grand Junction so the Town Company would have a mechanism to promote its interests as well as those of Grand Junction. The first issue of the weekly *Grand Junction News* appeared on October 27, 1882. That issue was sold at a public auction for \$35, the amount donated to the building of a public hall.³⁹

In the county election of 1883, Republicans and Democrats put aside their differences to help Governor Crawford, M. L. Allison, and special representative W. J. Jackson in their efforts to break away from Gunnison County. At that time the nearest seat of government was in Gunnison, making it most inconvenient for settlers in the Grand Valley to conduct any governmental or legislative business. They wanted to make Grand Junction the county seat for the new county of Mesa.⁴⁰ The bill creating Mesa County passed the Colorado Assembly on February 11, and Governor James B. Grant signed it three days later.⁴¹ Governor Grant came to Grand Junction for the subsequent celebration, during which time he appointed county officers to serve until regular elections could be held. Keith was appointed assessor for the county of Mesa until elections held in November removed him from that office. However, he continued to operate as an assessor elsewhere on the Western Slope and the Southwest United States.⁴² Not much else is known about this mysterious individual. Despite concerns voiced by the *Grand Junction News* that improvements were not being made fast enough,⁴³ Grand Junction underwent a boom in 1883 which most people attributed to the aggressive role of the Town Company.⁴⁴

To ensure that the D & RG railroad would run through Grand Junction and make Grand Junction its division point,⁴⁵ the Town Company sold the D & RG Railway Company a half interest in the Grand Junction Town Company.⁴⁶ Crawford would arrange with the D & RG for his townsites at Delta.⁴⁷ When the Town Company was reorganized in 1882, three D & RG executives were listed among the directors: David C. Dodge, William A. Bell, and R. F. Weitbreck.⁴⁸ Weitbreck would be replaced a year later by William Hastings.⁴⁹ Although the list of Town Company officials and stock holders varied through time, the *Grand Junction News* listed the following as stock holders in December 1883: A. McDonald and E. C. McDonald of New York; B. P. McDonald from Fort Scott, Kansas; and Thomas Crawford, William Nishwitz, Harvey C. Bucklin, George Thurson, and M. L.



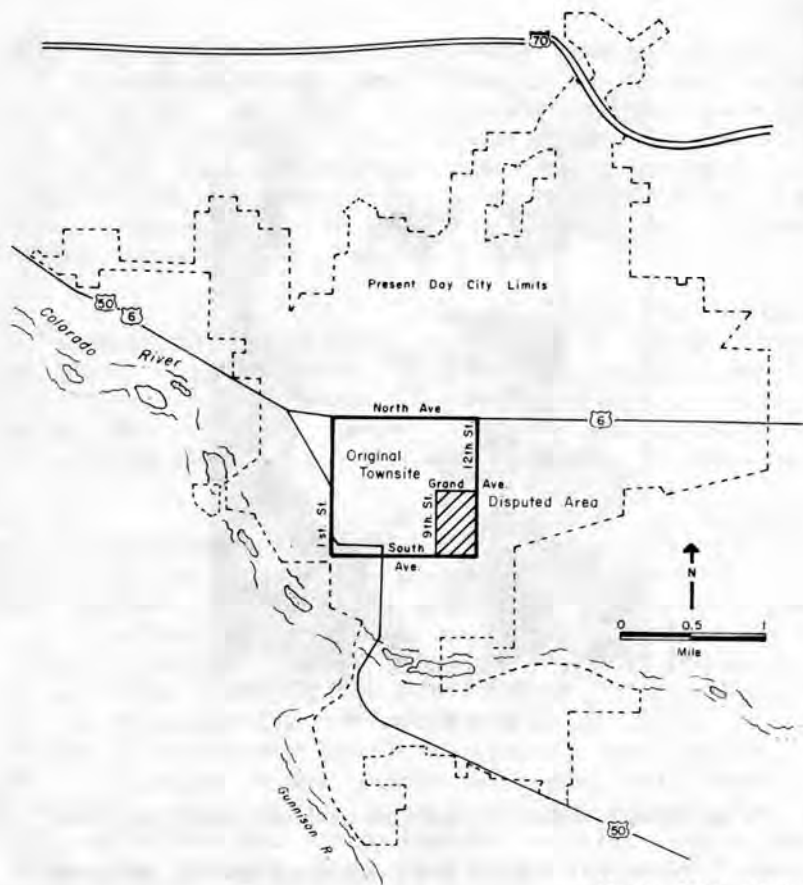
Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado

James W. Bucklin

Allison from Grand Junction,⁵⁰ in addition to those already mentioned.

In the years that followed, the Town Company attempted to establish and maintain a political monopoly and a business monopoly. Crawford wanted the Town Company to control everything. Accordingly, the Town Company became a major employer in Grand Junction, hiring people in many capacities.⁵¹ It owned Grand Junction's first hotel, the Brunswick.⁵² It also manufactured pressed bricks and, with the purchase of the competing brick press of Dunham and Shackelford,⁵³ had a virtual monopoly on bricks. These bricks were utilized for local construction, sold to the D & RG for its construction projects,⁵⁴ and sent to many locations throughout the Western Slope and Utah.⁵⁵ Business was so good the Town Company negotiated with the D & RG to have tracks laid to the brick yard.⁵⁶ The Town Company became involved in irrigation projects as well. As the owner of three-fourths of the Pacific Slope Ditch Company, the Town Company employed many workers in its construction.⁵⁷ This early ditch met the towns' initial water needs.⁵⁸

Other members of the Town Company contributed to Grand Junction's development in their own unique ways. James W. Bucklin, the Town Company's attorney,⁵⁰ was elected to the state legislature in 1884. He used his position as chairman of the finance com-



Map by Michael Heinrich

mittee and the ways and means committee to secure the building of a state bridge⁶⁰ and the Teller Institute, and Indian School, in Grand Junction.⁶¹

Other projects met local needs. The Town Company provided the city with a flouring mill⁶² and received the contract to provide cut stone for a new school building and the contract to paint the structure when completed.⁶³

To make the barren Grand Valley more attractive to prospective settlers and residents, Crawford launched a major tree-planting campaign. He planted trees in front of public buildings and on all the Town Company lots.⁶⁴ The Town Company was soon ordering trees by the carload⁶⁵ and citizens of Grand Junction became caught up in the arbor enthusiasm. The city administration even made tree planting mandatory for all lot owners.⁶⁶ With public sentiment so great, and with the growing importance of fruit in the Grand Valley, it was not long be-

fore newspapers were warning citizens to be wary of "bogus tree peddlers" who sold inferior tree stock at very inflated prices.⁶⁷

The widespread growth and enthusiasm that the Town Company sparked on the Western Slope encouraged a sizeable migration into Grand Junction. The town grew large enough to welcome a second newspaper, the *Mesa County Democrat*, edited by Charles W. Haskell.⁶⁸ The introduction of this newspaper resulted, in part, from the Town Company's need for a loyal medium through which to express its views. The dispute with Keith, combined with the fact that the *News* was a Republican paper while the Town Company was primarily a Democratic organization, meant that the *Grand Junction News* was becoming hostile to its cause.⁶⁹

Regardless of the growing dispute with the *News* and with Keith, the Town Company continued to expand. By 1885, it felt the need to enlarge and moved to its new office on Grand Avenue near Fifth Street.⁷⁰ This was its third location since 1881. In October, 1882, the Company had moved its office from the log house on Ute Avenue to a larger wood structure on the corner of Seventh and Main where the Cooper Theatre stands today. Until regular churches could be built, Grand Junction's first regular minister, the Reverend Isaac Whicher, held Sunday services there.⁷¹

In this flurry of activity the Keith dispute with the Town Company seemed forgotten, but it emerged again in the mid 1880s.⁷² For Keith, the conflict remained alive, and he warned prospective buyers to stay away from the lots on the disputed part of Section 14.⁷³ On July 29, 1882, after the Ute Reservation lands were formally released, the Town Company reasserted its claim to Section 14⁷⁴ and then deeded the section to the town of Grand Junction.⁷⁵ Keith refiled his pre-emption claim on September 26, 1882. By that time, the Town Company had built a house on each 40 acre square of Keith's claim. To prove up his claim, Keith appeared in the Leadville Land Office December 5. However, when the Town Company contested his claim, on the advice of his lawyer, Keith withdrew his proofs.⁷⁶ Crawford and the mayor of Grand Junction, Charles Shanks, evidently took Keith's action as a denial of any claim to the disputed property and on December 6, made a cash entry for 640 acres.⁷⁷ The town then deeded Section 14 back to the Town Company.⁷⁸ But for Keith the dispute had not ended. Hanging on with bulldog tenacity, Keith pressed his case further.

The Gunnison Land Office was divided over the dispute. Receiver Leonard upheld the townsite entry while Register Thomas had found for Keith.⁷⁹ As a result, the case proceeded to a higher level where Acting Commissioner Harrison ruled in favor of the townsite. Eventually, the case ended up in the Department of the Interior in Washington, D. C.,⁸⁰ and the U. S. Land Department sent Investigator C. W.

Sanborn to Grand Junction in May, 1884, to gather information for the case.⁸¹ Secretary of the Interior Henry Teller overturned the last decision in favor of William Keith and removed the town's entry on the contested portion.⁸² Teller's argument was that since both claimants had settled prematurely, neither claim was valid until the reservation lands had been made public. Teller decided against Crawford and for Keith for the following reasons: 1) the Town Company had not stayed to settle on the land, while Keith had remained; 2) Crawford had reserved too much land,⁸³ the standard townsite claim of the time being only 320 acres;⁸⁴ and Crawford had established his townsite on "abandoned" land, not "public" land, and therefore the townsite was not exempt from pre-emption claims. Keith was entitled to stake his pre-emption claim and should be allowed to complete his proofs. Teller ruled that there was no settlement in existence when Keith arrived, and therefore, as first to initiate a claim and the first to actually settle on that portion, he had the superior claim.⁸⁵

The Town Company had been counting on the townsite laws for protection. It had always assumed that "lands included within the limits of any incorporated town, or selected as the site of a city or town" were exempt from any pre-emption claim like Keith's.⁸⁶ The Company appealed the decision and asked Teller to reconsider the case. The Town Company's argument was: if both claimants had settled prematurely, and therefore had invalid claims, Teller could not rule that Keith's claim was superior.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Keith had "expressly abandoned this contest at the District Land Office at Leadville. . . ."⁸⁸ The Company reasoned that since the town of Grand Junction was incorporated prior to the release of the reservation lands, once those lands were declared "public" there existed an incorporated townsite exempt from pre-emption. The Town Company also argued that even though there was no one residing on the Keith addition at the time of the initial claim, that section would someday be a necessary and integral part of a growing town worthy of an entire 640 acre section.⁸⁹

The existence and incorporation of the town constitutes the municipal occupancy of its site. It is no more required to reside in the person of its occupants on all its sub-divisions than a pre-emptor is required to live in a house on each 40 of his 160 acres.⁹⁰

The Town Company added that some lots on the contested eighty acres had already been sold to third parties and failure to reconsider the decision would throw those property titles into contention.⁹¹

Teller's second decision, handed down in February, 1885, upheld his first decision: the law of pre-emption depends on "priority of settlement; that 'the patent upon a pre-emption settlement takes effect from the time of the settlement, and cuts off all intervening claimants' (91 U. S., 330)."⁹² Keith had settled first and established his claim before Grand Junction's incorporation, therefore Keith had the superior claim.⁹³ Furthermore, Keith had not abandoned his claim since it was "still



Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado, source unknown.
Main Street, Grand Junction, 1884.

in the custody of the law."⁹⁴ As to the charge that Keith had staked his claims purely for speculative gains, Teller stated that he had already considered that issue in his first decision and Keith had every right to any economic benefits that his property might provide.⁹⁵ It is interesting that the Town Company, deeply involved in speculation, wanted to deny that right to its competitors.

Furthermore, Teller had expressly stated that his decisions only went so far as to allow Keith to prove up his claim. If Keith had failed to comply with the law in any way, the townsite could assert its charges at that time.⁹⁶ However, this was not to be the case. The local officers ruled that Keith was in "compliance with the law, and recommended that his entry be allowed to stand."⁹⁷

The Town Company immediately appealed again. Its popularity at home was becoming seriously endangered because everyone's titles were now in question.⁹⁸ When Land Commissioner Sparks ordered the dispute be dropped, the law firm of Clayton and Sullivan filed a motion before the Gunnison Land Office to delay that action on behalf of the Town Company.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, Crawford did his best to allay the concerns of Grand Junction's citizens, but to no avail. Teller's second decision did much to discredit Crawford and his associates.

Disgruntled citizens began to oppose the Town Company's dominance over local affairs. Townspeople began to complain, especially on the issues of providing sufficient water, inadequate fire protection, and excessive rates.¹⁰⁰ As evidence of the upset, the people of Grand Junction overrode Crawford's objections and voted to grant a franchise to a private firm to provide the town's water.¹⁰¹ In an effort to regain as much local control as possible, Crawford bought back all the D & RG stock in the Grand Junction Town and Improvement Company and in the Delta Town Company.¹⁰²

Once again, the Town Company sought a review from the Secretary of the Interior. This time it ignored the legal niceties, and accused Keith of perjury, fraud, deliberate trespass, and general stupidity.¹⁰³ The change in tactics did not work, and in April, 1888, Secretary of Interior William F. Vilas ruled in Keith's favor for the third time.¹⁰⁴ One month later, during the Presidency of Grover Cleveland, Keith received a government patent for his entire 160 acres.¹⁰⁵ Undaunted, the Town Company pursued its case in District Court again that summer.¹⁰⁶

By the Spring of 1889, the townspeople and the *Grand Junction News* were openly hostile towards the Town Company and Governor Crawford. Articles in the *News* attacked the Town Company's "do-nothing policy" which stagnated the town's economic growth.¹⁰⁷ The *News* charged that Crawford opposed the inflow of outside investments for fear someone other than his cronies would profit from

the deal.¹⁰⁸ The *News* also concluded that the Town Company was trying to "drag an unwilling Grand Junction into the dispute" with Keith.¹⁰⁹

Apparently the *News* was not alone in this opinion. The town's Board of Trustees voted unanimously to drop the suit.¹¹⁰ Since the town of Grand Junction had no argument with Keith, many saw no reason why the town should pay the Town Company's court costs.¹¹¹ Stubbornly holding on to the belief that the land in question belonged to it, the Town Company continued to develop the Keith addition.¹¹² In retaliation for this intractable position, Keith contested the legality of the entire Grand Junction tract.¹¹³ He reasoned that since the original claim had included his property, the town's patent was invalid.¹¹⁴

When Crawford refused to revise his stand on the issue, the Board of Trustees, in the name of the town of Grand Junction, filed suit in June. Actually, there were two suits; one against the Town Company, accusing it of the fraudulent acquisition and transfer of deeds; and the second, against Crawford "for 160 acres north of town transferred as a part of the townsite to the defendant, Crawford." The Trustees alleged that Crawford, by acting both as an individual and in the name of a corporate entity, had managed to lay claim to a total of 1,280 acres. He thereby "proceeded to buy out or drive off the previous occupants."¹¹⁵

As the plaintiff, the Board of Trustees demanded the following: that the 160 acres be signed over to Grand Junction, to be held in trust by the corporate authorities in Grand Junction; that the profits from the transfer of this property be turned over; that the defendants be prevented from selling or disposing of the disputed property; and that the defendant assume the cost of the suit and be required to pay all costs and reimbursements "judged to be 'just and equitable.'" ¹¹⁶ Henry Rhone, the Mayor of Grand Junction and the town's attorney, became the leading prosecutor in the case.¹¹⁷ James W. Bucklin, on behalf of the Town Company and Thomas Crawford, petitioned the District Court to issue a mandamus declaring the office of Town Mayor vacant and ordering special elections be held since Rhone could not legally hold both offices at the same time.¹¹⁸ The mandamus was issued but thrown out on a legal technicality two months later.¹¹⁹ To cap off their defiant stance, Governor Crawford and the Town Company took the Keith dispute to the state's capital.¹²⁰

The town's leaders tried to get the U. S. Circuit Court to dismiss the Town Company's suit on the grounds that the suit had been brought in the name of the Mayor of Grand Junction, and Grand Junction strongly asserted that it had no dispute with Keith. The Town Company was the only party with an interest in the case. Judge Halleck, however, overruled the motion to dismiss. Technically,



Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado

Henry Rhone

the town was still liable for damages and court costs that would arise from continued litigation, but the town hereafter stated that it would not be held liable in any way for costs incurred by the Town Company.¹²¹ As far as the town of Grand Junction was concerned, the Town Company stood alone. Bucklin tried to have the suit against the Town Company removed, but Mayor Rhone had moved on and was already pushing the suit in the U. S. District Court.¹²² In the meantime, supporters of the Town Company discussed "necktie parties and gunplay" as a means of evicting the trespasser Keith.¹²³ Seeing the damage being done to the community, a citizen's committee moved to have the suit against the Town Company dropped.¹²⁴ The *News* accused the citizen's committee of "stooging" for Crawford,¹²⁵ arguing that the suit had to be settled one way or another if the land titles were ever to be cleared.¹²⁶ Regardless of this argument, the suit was dropped.¹²⁷

As it became increasingly clear that he was not going to win his case, and in the face of growing animosity at home, Crawford discontinued the pursuit of legal vindication. Nevertheless, he continued to act as if the contested acreage was indeed his. In October, 1889, Crawford granted the Rio Grande Junction Railway a right of way through the corner of the Keith addition.¹²⁸ Keith tired of the fight and sold his entire 160 acre tract to the Grand Junction Land and Improvement Company under the leadership of George Arthur Rice. Keith then

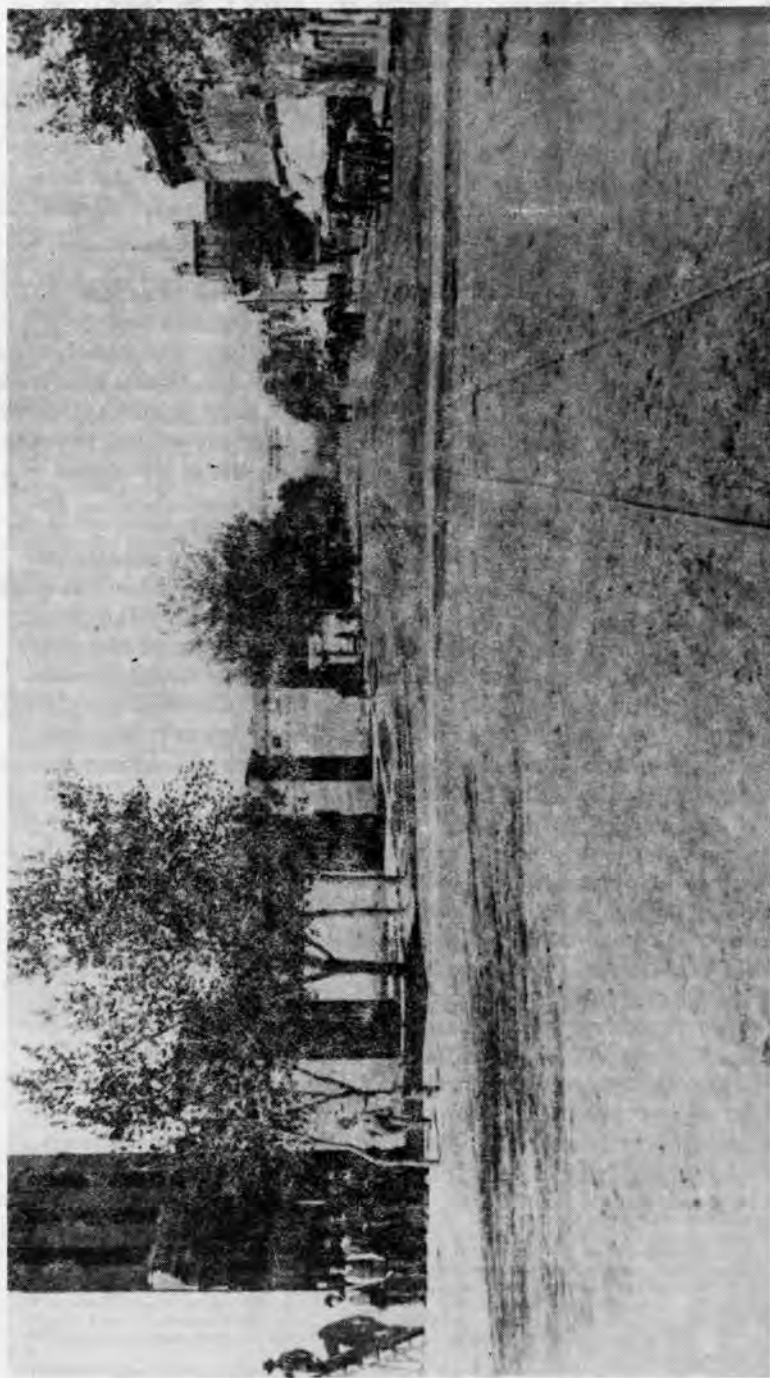


Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado, source unknown
Main Street, 1890.

left Grand Junction and moved to Denver.¹²⁹ Almost at the same time, Crawford sold his own personal tract as well as his share of lots in the Town Company to the same development company.¹³⁰ It was then left to Henry Rhone to clear the townsite's title. Going to Washington, Rhone petitioned the Commissioner of the General Land Office to issue Grand Junction a patent.¹³¹ Another agent from the Land Department, Christopher Blakeley, came to Grand Junction in January, 1890,¹³² and finished his investigation in February.¹³³ The town's titles were cleared and a special patent issued on February 19, 1890.¹³⁴

In Grand Junction, the news was heralded as a victory for the Town Company and a vindication of Crawford's activities. But in reality, this was not the case. The Blakely report made no mention of the dispute with Keith, nor was the dispute mentioned in the decision to grant the town's patent.¹³⁵ The Keith patent had already determined that Keith owned the disputed portion of the original townsite. The February patent gave Grand Junction what was left of its original claim, no more.¹³⁶ Legally, Keith had won.

Politically, the continued debacle of Crawford and his company in the Keith dispute forced the Town Company to abandon its role in politics, though many of its members would remain influential in public affairs.¹³⁷ The Town Company continued to operate in real estate and development under the auspices of the Grand Junction Town and Improvement Company, headed by one of Crawford's nephews, Charles B. Rice.¹³⁸ Another of Crawford's nephews, James P. McKinnie, incorporated the Grand Junction Town and Development Company in 1900 with its headquarters in Colorado Springs.¹³⁹

Crawford died of consumption at the Brunswick Hotel on January 28, 1891 at the age of 63.¹⁴⁰ Crawford will undoubtedly remain in the public mind as Grand Junction's most prominent citizen. His importance in Grand Junction's history cannot be disputed. Interestingly, posterity would remember Crawford as the winner in the Keith dispute. His surviving relatives and supporters did much to promote the mythology of the man and his "empire builder" status, as did later historians who accepted folklore as fact without supporting it with the appropriate research. However, it can no longer be accepted that Crawford was not without his faults, or that Keith was a notorious "claim jumper." His claim to the land was upheld in the highest courts. Crawford simply refused to accept it. The blame in this legal debacle lies with Crawford, not with Keith.

NOTES

- ¹Carl Ubbelohde, Maxine Benson, and Duane A. Smith, eds., *A Colorado History* (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1982), p. 191.
- ²*Ibid.*
- ³*Grand Junction News*, 2 December 1882, p. 2.
- ⁴*Ibid.*, 28 October 1882, p. 1.
- ⁵Frank Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, Vol. 4 (Chicago: The Blakely Printing Company, 1895), p. 210.
- ⁶"George A. Crawford" (Clipping marked "From a History of Kansas"), Crawford file, Museum of Western Colorado, Grand Junction, Colorado, pp. 237-247.
- ⁷*Ibid.*, p. 241.
- ⁸*Ibid.*, p. 245-246.
- ⁹"George Addison Crawford," *Ft. Scott, A Pictorial History*, p. 14, Crawford file, Museum of Western Colorado, Grand Junction, Colorado.
- ¹⁰*Ibid.*
- ¹¹Kathleen Hill Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier: Grand Junction, Colorado, 1880-1900" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1982), p. 161 (hereafter cited as Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier").
- ¹²The Grand River was eventually renamed the Colorado River because the state already had a Grand River — the Rio Grande.
- ¹³Wilbur Fisk Stone, ed., *History of Colorado*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: the S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1918), p. 129.
- ¹⁴The Keith claim included the "E. ½ of the S.E. ¼ of Township 14" as well as 80 acres in Township 13.
- ¹⁵Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier," p. 161.
- ¹⁶Charles W. Haskell, ed., *History of Mesa County Colorado* (Grand Junction: The Mesa County Democrat, 1886), p. 4.
- ¹⁷Grand Junction, Gunnison County, Colorado, *Articles of Incorporation of the Grand Junction Town Company* (1881), (Mesa County Court House, Grand Junction, Colorado, *Index to Grand Junction's Corporations*), preamble and art. 5 (hereafter cited as *Articles of Incorporation* (1881)).
- ¹⁸Underwood, "Town Building of the Frontier," p. 38.
- ¹⁹*Articles of Incorporation* (1881), art. 3.
- ²⁰*Ibid.*, art. 4.
- ²¹*Grand Junction News*, 29 December 1883, p. 2.
- ²²*Articles of Incorporation* (1881), art. 3.
- ²³Grand Junction, Mesa County, Colorado, *Amended Certificate of Incorporation of the Grand Junction Town Company of Grand Junction, Colorado* (1883), (Mesa County Court House, Grand Junction, Colorado, *Index to Grand Junction's Corporations*), art. 1 and art. 2 (hereafter cited as *Amended Certificate of Incorporation* (1883)).
- ²⁴Charles W. Haskell, *History of Mesa County* (Mesa County: The Daily Sentinel, 1915), p. 33.
- ²⁵Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, p. 210.
- ²⁶*Ibid.*
- ²⁷Crawford Diary, 2 November 1881, George A. Crawford Diaries, Museum of Western Colorado, Grand Junction, Colorado.
- ²⁸Richard E. Tope, *An Objective History of Grand Junction* (Grand Junction: Museum of Western Colorado, 1982), p. 4.
- ²⁹Crawford Diary, 20 December 1881.
- ³⁰Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, p. 211.
- ³¹Crawford Diary, 1-3 January 1882.
- ³²Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, p. 211.
- ³³Crawford Diary, 3 January 1882.
- ³⁴*Ibid.*, 4 and 10 January 1882.
- ³⁵Tope, *An Objective History of Grand Junction*, p. 4.
- ³⁶Haskell, *History of Mesa County Colorado*, p. 8.
- ³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 7 and 31.
- ³⁸Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier," p. 161.
- ³⁹Walker D. Wyman, "Grand Junction's First Year, 1882," *Colorado Magazine* 12 (1936): 135.
- ⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 130; and Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier," p. 57.
- ⁴¹Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, p. 214.
- ⁴²*Ibid.*
- ⁴³*Grand Junction News*, 18 November 1882, p. 2.
- ⁴⁴Wyman, "Grand Junction's First Year, 1882," p. 137.
- ⁴⁵Haskell, *History of Mesa County, Colorado*, p. 45.
- ⁴⁶Wyman, "Grand Junction's First Year, 1882," p. 131.
- ⁴⁷*Grand Junction News*, 28 October 1882, p. 4.
- ⁴⁸Grand Junction, Gunnison County, Colorado, *Certificate of Changes in the Articles of Incorporation of the Grand Junction Town Company* (1882), (Mesa County Court House, Grand Junction, Colorado, *Index to Grand Junction's Corporations*).
- ⁴⁹*Amended Certificate of Incorporation* (1883).
- ⁵⁰*Grand Junction News*, 29 December 1883, p. 2.
- ⁵¹Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier," p. 39.
- ⁵²Haskell, *History of Mesa County*, p. 26.
- ⁵³*Grand Junction News*, 23 December 1882, p. 2.
- ⁵⁴Haskell, *History of Mesa County*, p. 12.
- ⁵⁵*Grand Junction News*, 30 June 1883, p. 3.
- ⁵⁶May 1883, p. 2; and 21 April 1883, p. 3.
- ⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 28 April 1883, p. 3.
- ⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 29 December 1883, p. 2.
- ⁵⁹Haskell, *History of Mesa County Colorado*, p. 45.
- ⁶⁰*Grand Junction News*, 29 December 1883, p. 4.
- ⁶¹Haskell, *History of Mesa County Colorado*, p. 6.
- ⁶²James H. Rankin, "The Founding and Early Years of Grand Junction," *Colorado Magazine* 6 (1929): 52-53.
- ⁶³*Grand Junction News*, 10 March 1883, p. 3.
- ⁶⁴Haskell, *History of Mesa County Colorado*, p. 18.
- ⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 58.
- ⁶⁶*Grand Junction News*, 10 March 1883, p. 3.
- ⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 29 December 1883, p. 2.
- ⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 3 December 1887, p. 6.
- ⁶⁹Haskell, *History of Mesa County Colorado*, p. 12.
- ⁷⁰Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier," p. 20.
- ⁷¹*Grand Junction News*, 22 November 1884, p. 3.
- ⁷²*Ibid.*, 28 October 1882, p. 3.
- ⁷³Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier," p. 20.
- ⁷⁴Namely the E. ½ of the S. E. ¼ of Section 14 (*Grand Junction News*, 23 December 1882, p. 3).
- ⁷⁵U. S. Department of the Interior, "Wm Keith, Contestant, vs. the Town Site of Grand Junction, Contestee," *Brief and Argument for Contestee, On application for reconsideration and review of decision of Secretary of the Interior, 1884*, p. 1 (hereafter cited as U. S. Dept. of Interior, *Appal 1884*).
- ⁷⁶Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier," p. 162.
- ⁷⁷"Keith vs. Townsite of Grand Junction," *Decisions of the Department of Interior and General Land Office in Cases Relating to Public Lands*, vol. 3 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885), p. 357 (hereafter cited as *Teller Decision 1884*).
- ⁷⁸Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, p. 11; Cash entry was made on the N. W. ¼, S. W. ¼, S. E. ¼, the S. ½ of the N. E. ¼, Sec. 14 and N. ½, N. W. ¼, Sec. 23, Township 1 South, Range 1 West, Ute Meridian. For some reason, cash entry was not made at this time for all of Section 14. The Town Company simply acted as though the complete section was its possession (Haskell, *History of Mesa County Colorado*, p. 9).
- ⁷⁹Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier," p. 162.

- ⁷⁹U. S. Department of the Interior, "William Keith, vs. The Townsite of Grand Junction. And in Protest vs. The Pre-emption of Wm. Keith," *Brief and Argument, 1886*, p. 1 (hereafter cited as U. S., Dept. of Interior, *Appeal 1886*).
- ⁸⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.
- ⁸¹*Grand Junction News*, 11 May 1884, p. 2.
- ⁸²The E. ¼ of S. E. ¼ of Section 14 (U. S. Dept. of Interior, *Appeal 1886*, pp. 1-2).
- ⁸³*Teller Decision 1884*, p. 356.
- ⁸⁴U. S. Dept. of Interior, *Appeal 1884*, p. 5.
- ⁸⁵*Teller Decision 1884*, pp. 358-360.
- ⁸⁶*Grand Junction News*, 2 December 1882, p. 2.
- ⁸⁷U. S. Dept. of Interior, *Appeal 1884*, pp. 7-8.
- ⁸⁸*Ibid.*, preliminary page.
- ⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 2-8.
- ⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 25.
- ⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 27-28.
- ⁹²"Keith v. Townsite of Grand Junction. (On review. 3 L. D., 356)," *Decisions of the Department of Interior and General Land Office in Cases Relating to the Public Lands*, vol. 3 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885), p. 433.
- ⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 432.
- ⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 434.
- ⁹⁵*Ibid.*
- ⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 435.
- ⁹⁷"Keith v. Grand Junction," *Decisions of the Department of the Interior and General Land Office in Cases Relating to the Public Lands*, ed. S. V. Proudfoot, vol. 6 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1888), p. 635 (hereafter cited as *Vilas Decision 1888*).
- ⁹⁸Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier," p. 64.
- ⁹⁹*Grand Junction News*, 4 July 1885, p. 3.
- ¹⁰⁰Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier," p. 59.
- ¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, p. 63.
- ¹⁰²*Grand Junction News*, 12 November 1887, p. 3.
- ¹⁰³U. S. Dept. of Interior, *Appeal 1886*, pp. 2-39.
- ¹⁰⁴*Vilas Decision 1888*, p. 637.
- ¹⁰⁵U. S. Land Patent, Ute Series, Certificate No. 59, 16 May 1888 (Mesa County Court House, Grand Junction, *Patent Book*, No. 11, p. 7).
- ¹⁰⁶*Grand Junction News*, 23 June 1888, p. 3.
- ¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 24 March 1888, p. 2.
- ¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 20 April 1889, p. 2.
- ¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 11 May 1889, p. 2.
- ¹¹⁰*Ibid.*
- ¹¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 1.
- ¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ¹¹³*Ibid.*, 4 January 1890, p. 1.
- ¹¹⁴Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier," p. 163.
- ¹¹⁵*Grand Junction News*, 15 June 1889, p. 2.
- ¹¹⁶*Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁷*Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 22 June 1889, p. 1.
- ¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 22 June 1889, p. 3.
- ¹²⁰*Ibid.*
- ¹²¹*Ibid.*, 29 June 1889, p. 2.
- ¹²²*Ibid.*, 6 July 1889, p. 2.
- ¹²³Letter, John McKinney to Mame McKinney, 3 June 1943, as read by John Lindstrom on Oral History Tape, OH-162 (Mesa County Public Library, Grand Junction, Colorado).
- ¹²⁴*Grand Junction News*, 13 July 1889, p. 2.
- ¹²⁵Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier," p. 64.
- ¹²⁶*Grand Junction News*, 13 July 1889, p. 2.
- ¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 20 July 1889, p. 2.
- ¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 5 October 1889, p. 3.
- ¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 16 November 1889, p. 3.
- ¹³⁰*Ibid.*
- ¹³¹*Ibid.*, 11 January 1890, p. 1; and *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ¹³²*Ibid.*, 25 January 1890, p. 2.
- ¹³³*Ibid.*, 8 February 1890, p. 4.
- ¹³⁴*Ibid.*, 22 February 1890, p. 5.
- ¹³⁵Letter, National Archives, Washington, D. C., to Janet Messe, 17 March 1986.
- ¹³⁶U. S. Land Patent, Certificate No. 820 (Mesa County Court House, Grand Junction, Colorado, *Deed Book*, No. 7, p. 345).
- ¹³⁷Underwood, "Town Building on the Frontier," pp. 64-65.
- ¹³⁸*Grand Junction News*, 23 April 1892, p. 8.
- ¹³⁹Grand Junction, Mesa County, Colorado, *Articles of Incorporation of the Grand Junction Town and Development Company* (Mesa County Court House, Grand Junction, Index to Grand Junction's Corporations).
- ¹⁴⁰*Grand Junction News*, 31 January 1891, p. 4.

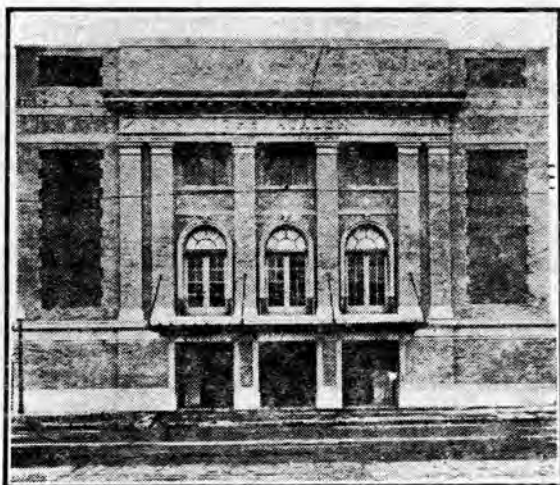
BOOK REVIEW . . .

Dave Fishell, The Grand Heritage: A Pictorial History of Grand Junction, Colorado. Norfolk/Virginia Beach: The Donning Company, 1985. Pp. 208.

Dave Fishell is a well-known western Colorado journalist and popular historian. His presentations of Colorado history find their way into all the media forms — television, radio, and newspaper. Mr. Fishell is also a popular lecturer and his Colorado history cassette series is used in numerous Colorado schools.

The Grand Heritage is a pictographic history of the Grand Valley commissioned in celebration of Grand Junction's centennial in 1982 and Mesa County's centennial in 1983. Following popular folklore and oral traditions, Mr. Fishell's informal style simultaneously informs and entertains. *The Grand Heritage* was not intended as a scholarly work. Rather its purpose was to celebrate 100 years of life in the Grand Valley of Colorado with all its trials and triumphs. A special strength of this book is Mr. Fishell's description of historic landmarks in relation to modern day reference points. By doing this, even the newest resident can know that the infamous "Barbary Coast" operated at the western ends of Pitkin and Ute Avenues in Grand Junction; and that the first structure built in Grand Junction, a "crude log-walled, dirt-roofed cabin," stood at the intersection of Second Street and Ute Avenue. By condensing an entire century into a visual display showing the evolution of the Grand Valley community from frontier hamlet to modern city, Mr. Fishell has made a valuable contribution to history.

THE NEW YEAR'S FIRST BIG GIFT TO GRAND JUNCTION



THE AVALON

Dedicated to the Amusement, the Pleasure and the Inspiration of the People of Western Colorado.

Opening Night, Friday, January Fifth,
Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-Three.

Taken from the opening night program "The New Year's First Big Gift to Grand Junction."

THE AVALON THEATER

Rebecca A. Patton

Ms. Patton received her Bachelor's degree in History from Mesa College in May, 1986. She is a ten-year resident of Eckert, Colorado, and the mother of two children. Ms. Patton will continue her studies at Northern Arizona University, working towards a doctorage in history and political science.

When it is springtime west of the Rockies, the air is heavy with that sweet apple blossom smell. The apple brings bounty to Western Colorado and is very much a part of the fabric of life and the livelihood of the people who live there. As it is today, so it was in 1922 when the *Daily Sentinel* chose "the Avalon," derived from the Welch for apple, as the name for the ultra-modern new theatre being built in Grand Junction.¹ Avalon thus symbolized Western Colorado's thriving fruit industry. In time it came to symbolize more: a rich cultural tradition that developed along Colorado's Western Slope.²

The Avalon Theatre was the dream and design of one of Grand Junction's greatest fathers, Walter Walker. Born in Marion, Kentucky, Walker began working for his father's newspaper while still a young lad. The Walker family was in farming and politics in Kentucky and in 1879 R. C. Walker, Walter Walker's father, began the *Crittenden Press*. In April, 1883, Walter was born and twenty years later R. C. decided to travel West (partially for healty reasons). R. C. rode by stagecoach to Colorado. He explored the front range, then crossed the mountains; his travels carried him to Grand Junction. He loved the Grand Valley and the little frontier town intrigued him. He returned to Marion and gathered his family together for the westward journey.³

When young Walker was about fourteen, his father, R. C., was elected to the Kentucky State Legislature. In his father's absences, Walker essentially ran the *Crittenden Press*.⁴ Within a few years he also began bringing touring lectures, lyceums, and traveling theatre companies to Marion. Walker and his friend, Henry Hayes, brought in some top-name attractions and arranged for them to be presented at the Old Marion Opera House.

How The Avalon Got Its Name

A prize was offered in a contest to be awarded to the person who suggested a name that was finally selected for the new Theatre. More than five hundred names were suggested. Out of this long list, the name, "The Avalon," suggested by Miss Kathryn J. Forrest, of this city, was chosen.

The word "Avalon" is from Celtic mythology and from Tennyson's "Idylls of the King," so that the new Theatre's name has received the associations that make it especially appropriate for this region of apple orchards.

Derived from the Welsh word for "apple," it has been used to designate the north-country idea of Elysium, since the apple was the fruit best known to those colder climates.

The New International Encyclopedia calls Avalon "the Land of the Blessed, an earthly paradise in the western seas."

The Encyclopedia Britannica says: "Of all the qualities of the Tir Tairngire, abundance of apples, the only fruit known to the northern nations, seems to have been the only one that carried the highest notion of enjoyment. Hence, the soul kingdom was called by the Welsh 'The Island of Apples'—Ynys yr Avallon."

The name thus symbolizes the fruit which is the basis of much of the prosperity of the Colorado valley, and which adds greatly also to its beauty and romance. "Pomona," the Latin name for apple, is another local name carrying this symbolism, but the new one is equally euphonious and appropriate.

The famous reference in "The Passing of Arthur," the last of the "Idylls of the King," is as follows:

" I go
To the island-valley of Avalon;
Where falls not hail, nor rain, nor any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer seas,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

Taken from the opening night program "The New Year's First Big Gift to Grand Junction."

By the 1860s, "opera houses" were being built in many progressive towns and villages in America. Villagers had little knowledge of opera, so the name "opera house" was a misnomer, but was generally chosen over the term "theatre", a term in bad repute at the time. The prejudices against "theatre" were fanned by professional actors who sometimes ignored local standards of behavior with drinking bouts and sinful, wayward displays of behavior. Another charge against "theatre" was that romantic performances too often exceeded acceptable limits.

Opera houses supported both home town talent and professional traveling companies. By the early 1900s, moving pictures shown on the Ediscope began to challenge opera house "live entertainment," and, in time, would cause the decline of the opera house as an institution.⁵ By the 1890s, Grand Junction had built the Park Opera House. Outside culture and refinement came to Grand Junction. The Park was a showplace, an old-style theatre with an orchestra section, parquet, and two balconies. Because Grand Junction was midway between Denver and Salt Lake City, this "big city" opera house attracted all the big name traveling shows. Screen shows eventually destroyed the traveling attractions, and the Park was closed. The Whitman School was later built on the site.⁶

What the Park Opera House was to Grand Junction, the Marion Opera House was to Walters' home town in Kentucky. Among some of the best known attractions brought to Marion were Tennessee Governor Bob Taylor, former Confederate General John B. Gordon, and the great labor leader Eugene V. Debs. Marion also hosted the first formal lecture engagement for William Jennings Bryan.⁷ When he was seventeen, Walker contracted and arranged for the famous newspaperman, Henry Waterson from Louisville, to come to Marion and lecture on newspapers. Walker was the only person to meet the train that day. Waterson stepped off the train, hailed the young lad, and asked if he knew where to find a Mr. Walker; he was utterly astounded when he found out the seventeen-year-old youth was the agent who so professionally had contracted his services.⁸ It was during this time in his life that Walter Walker developed his belief that there was a direct relationship between newspapers and stage and platform entertainment.⁹

While the elder Walker was preparing his family for the move to Colorado, Walter was making his own arrangements to marry his sweetheart, Kathy. After their wedding, the whole Walker family left by train. Walter and Kathy spent their honeymoon in an immigrant car bound for Colorado.¹⁰ The Walkers thus moved from the East with its high culture and sedate civilization to a little dusty frontier town with broken boards in the wooden sidewalks.¹¹

The Walkers arrived in Grand Junction in August, 1903. R. C. went into real estate. The *Daily Sentinel* was a Democratic newspaper, founded in 1893; Walker, a Democrat, wanted to

work for the *Daily Sentinel*. At first, however, he bought into another Democratic weekly, but it soon folded. Walker then went to work for the *Sentinel*, soon becoming its City Editor, though wages were so low he barely made a living. He felt he was stagnating, so about 1910 he bought a weekly paper in Ouray and he and Kathy moved again. Nearly a year and a half later, the owner and publisher of the *Daily Sentinel*, I. N. Bunting, died. Bunting's widow called Walker and asked him to return to the *Sentinel*; Walker agreed. By 1915 he was buying into the newspaper and by 1919 he formed the Sentinel Company. He always made sure dividends were paid first to Mrs. Bunting.¹²

After moving to Grand Junction, Walker continued his tradition of bringing in the finest road shows. Grand Junction was located between Denver and Salt Lake City on the travel route of the entertainment touring circuits, so it was relatively easy for Walker to obtain engagements with top-name entertainers from all over the country. Walker and his friend and Republican newspaper competitor, Karl A. Bickel, of the *Grand Junction Daily News*, began the tradition of bringing this entertainment to the Western Slope, presenting on August 12, 1912, the noted aviator Charles F. Walsh. Anxious crowds, waiting in intermittent rain showers at the Grand Junction Fair Grounds, witnessed Walsh's performance. Walsh was the first man ever to fly over Grand Junction. A special train from Montrose brought spectators and the Montrose band provided fanfare. Special interurban cars came from Fruita and reduced train rates on service from points east of Grand Junction were offered. The special "86-proof gasoline" needed for Walsh's airplane engine to attain its full 60-horse power was brought in from Dragon, Utah.¹³

This was the beginning of a long-lasting affair between Walter Walker and Grand Junction residents and the most illustrious and glittering stars, celebrities, and shows America had to offer. The daring airman Lincoln Beachey and the auto speed king Barney Oldfield later thrilled the audiences. The Chicago Sunday Jubilee Singers sang out at the old Grand Junction auditorium in 1915. The moving picture "Revelation of the Age" was viewed at the Lyceum Theatre. The songs, music, comedy, and one-act play of the Joseph Newman Company were enjoyed at the Methodist Church. The brilliant orator and Speaker of the House of Representatives, Champ Clark, spoke at the Tabernacle.¹⁴

In July, 1916, Walker presented the Redpath-Horner Chautauqua, the first seven-day Chautauqua to be presented in Grand Junction. It opened under a regulation Chautauqua tent which accommodated two thousand people, set up at Seventh Street and White Avenue at the site of the future Lowell School. The *Daily Sentinel* (and Walter Walker) assumed responsibility for the guarantee of payment which was necessary to bring the Chautauqua to town, a responsibility maintained as long as the Chautauqua came to Grand Junction.¹⁵



Photo courtesy of the Mesa College Library, Special Collections

Walter Walker

By the time the Chautauqua came to Grand Junction, it was already a national institution. Chautauqua programs emphasized traditional American values: religion, rugged individualism, and the ideal of the self-made man. From the turn of the century to the 1930s, summer Chautauquas drew the "better people" of small town and rural America to a week of lectures, music, readings, and Sunday School Teachers' Assemblies.¹⁶

In addition to summer Chautauquas, the *Sentinel* and *News* joined in sponsoring Lyceum courses in 1916 and 1917. Like the Chautauqua, the Lyceum was a favorite educational and cultural program in rural areas and in small towns until the era of the Great Depression. Focusing on educational subjects and upon cultural and moral uplift, Lyceum courses were offered once or twice a month.¹⁷ Among Lyceum programs brought to Grand Junction were: Dr. G. Whitefield Ray's illustrated lecture "Thru Five Republics on Horseback," magicians, reader-impersonators, the Royal Welsh quartet, a survivor of the *Lusitania*, dramatic sketch artists, the Oxford Company presenting Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta "The Mikado," lectures, authors, and humorists, and Thomas R. Marshall, Vice President of the United States during the Wilson administration.¹⁸

Through the years, often through Walter Walker's efforts, Grand Junction's list of visiting celebrities and attractions grew. There were foreign diplomats, lecturers, singers, dancers, scientists, world travelers, Shakespearean sketches, theatre plays, political leaders, writers, musicals, readings, newspaper correspondents, comedians, opera, ballet, moving pictures, and more — a long, impressive list. The events were held at various sites: the Congregational Church, the Baptist Church, the Majestic Theatre, and at the armory. By 1919, most events were being held at the armory, located at Second Street and Rood Avenue. Former President William Howard Taft spoke there on June 7, 1920 on "The League of Nations, the Reservations, and the Situation of the League Up-To-Date." Taft had visited Grand Junction once before while still President.¹⁹ Years later another President, Franklin D. Roosevelt came here while in office and Herbert Hoover, ex-President, spent two days here while on a fishing trip about 1937. In September, 1948, President Harry S. Truman on a campaign tour spoke from his train in this city, and again in 1952.²⁰

There was one great problem, however, in Grand Junction's cultural awakening. The city lacked adequate facilities to house and produce the attractions. Largely due to Walter Walker's efforts, overwhelming interest and patronage had developed over the years and forced hundreds of patrons to squeeze into places like the armory. Seating there was inadequate, sometimes cold, and always uncomfortable. Grand Junction needed an auditorium where people could comfortably patronize the arts and entertainment available to them.²¹

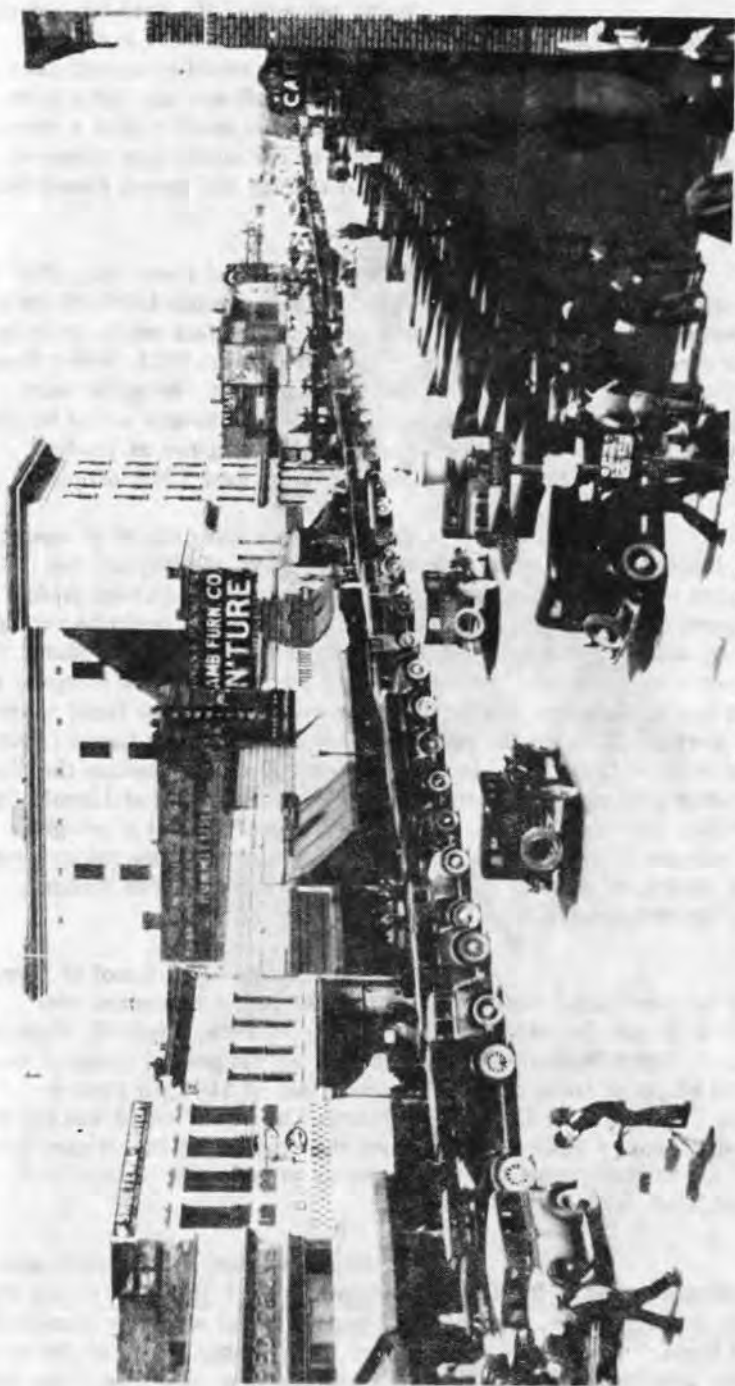


Photo courtesy of Molly Dean Stucker, Collector, Museum of Western Colorado

Main Street in Grand Junction, Colorado, during the 1930s.

Walter recognized the need for adequate facilities and by 1920 he was running editorials and articles in the *Daily Sentinel* calling for a safe, modern auditorium. It would be a great asset and good advertisement for Grand Junction as well as a profitable investment. Building an auditorium would not cause the same conflict a theatre would in the business district and it would be less costly than a theatre to build. Some of the best known stars of the day had passed Grand Junction by because of the inadequacies.²²

Pueblo already had a new, beautiful auditorium by 1921; Colorado Springs citizens had voted \$390,000 for a new auditorium. With a new auditorium, Grand Junction would no longer have to turn away the "Big Names."²³ By December, 1921, Walter Walker made the decision to build a new, modern auditorium during the next year. Locally financed and privately owned, the auditorium would be able to accommodate even the largest shows, with dressing rooms, modern accoustical and lighting design, and seating for at least 1,800 people.²⁴

Communities could finance an opera house, theatre, or auditorium in a number of ways. Wealthy citizens wishing to perpetuate their family names or acting through civic pride built some. City governments financed others. The most common way of financing such projects, however, was by citizen subscription of shares.²⁵ So, being a promoter and organizer, Walker organized a stock company to build a first-rate facility, comfortable year-round, fit for the finest shows in the world.²⁶ Through the years Walker saw many things Grand Junction needed in order to be a thriving, progressive community. Besides the Avalon, Walker promoted the Veterans' Hospital, the old pool at Lincoln Park, and Walker Field Airport. In addition, he was instrumental in bringing radio to town, in establishing Mesa College, and more. These projects were for the growth of the community, not for personal gain. For Walker, Grand Junction always came first.

The incorporators and Board of Directors of the new Grand Junction Theatre Company were businessmen William J. Moyer, James H. Rankin, Ollie E. Bannister, Clyde H. Biggs, and of course, Walter Walker who was to be the unpaid general manager. One hundred shares of stock certificates were issued at \$100 par value by Sterling B. Lacy of the Grand Valley Bank. The capital raised was for the amount needed to build and then cover the expenses of the theatre; it was important to Walker that there be no waste or graft. The theatre incorporated, then, with \$100,000 capital.²⁸

Letters of support and pleasure came in from Montrose and Delta. Grand Junction buzzed with talk of where the theatre would be built, what it would look like, and when the construction would begin.²⁹ Friend and business rival, H. T. Nolan, owner of the Majestic Theatre, sent Walker his congratulations on the new enterprise. Nolan felt



Photo courtesy of Mrs. Clyde Biggs, Grand Junction
Mr. Clyde Biggs

civil authorities and municipal bonds should have met the need, as was done in Denver, Pueblo, Colorado Springs, and Raton, New Mexico; nevertheless, he assured Walker he would help to secure attractions and he would further cooperate by limiting his own operations to motion picture programs.³⁰

With the business of incorporating finished, the Denver architectural firm of Mountjoy and Frewen was chosen to draw up the plans. The Avalon would be of the highest quality with an unobstructed view and the largest stage in the West, making it equal to any standard stage in New York. The stage would convert into a ballroom with a hardwood floor for dancing; it would have a kitchen and caterer's headquarters. The plans called for a collapsible floor to cover the permanent floor to accommodate athletic events or livestock shows. Special attention would be given to the heating and cooling system to assure patrons' comfort. There would also be a house orchestra to add to the programming.³¹

The site was chosen: the Avalon would be erected on the corner of Seventh Street and Main Street. An adobe building, Grand Junction's oldest structure and the original office of the old Town Company, built in 1882, and some other old buildings were torn down to make way for the new structure.³² The Daughters of the American Revolution placed a plaque in the lobby of the Avalon commemorating Grand Junction's oldest building:

On this site formerly stood the adobe building which was the original home of the Grand Junction Town Company. Through its organizer and president, George A. Crawford, this company filed on land left vacant by the removal of the Ute Indian Reservation to Utah, Sept. 1881, and thus founded the city of Grand Junction.³³

There were delays from the beginning, starting with the architects. Throughout 1922, however, Walker kept articles running on the front pages of his newspaper detailing the progress of the Avalon and inviting people to invest in the project. Grand Junction contractors, Winterburn and Lumsden, received the contract for the electric wiring.³⁴ The Avalon would be Grand Junction's tallest building, except for the Grand Valley National Bank, and it would be brilliantly illuminated – the most attractive theatre in the Rocky Mountains.³⁵

Initially the opening date had been set for October 30, 1922. In anticipation, Walker had scheduled attractions for November and December and the Avalon was slated to open with Mitzi, the primadonna comedienne, starring in "Lady Billy." But the theatre was not finished; delays forced the cancellation of the shows or the transfer of some to the armory.³⁶

The ushers were chosen from many applicants. All were well-known local boys: Leonard Wolfe, Paul Jones, Jr.,

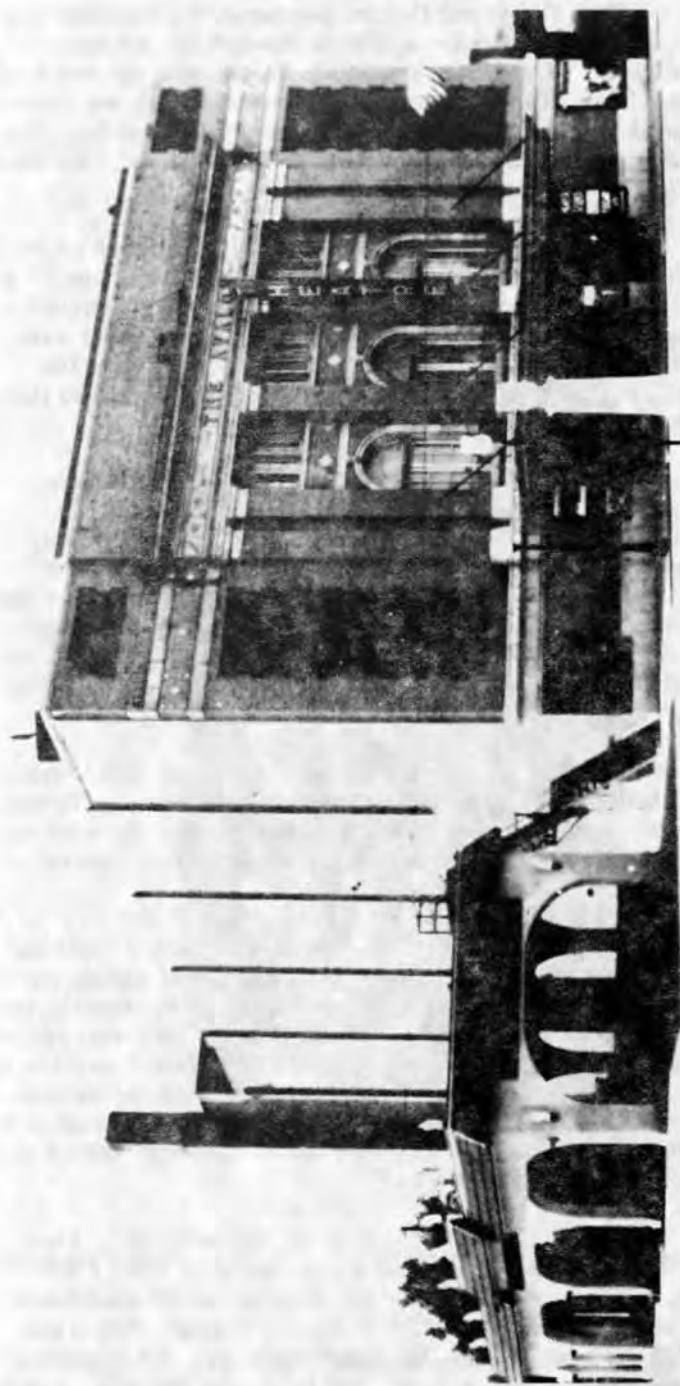


Photo courtesy of Molly Dean Stucker, Collector, Museum of Western Colorado
*The Avalon Theatre, corner of Seventh and Main Streets, Grand Junction, Colorado.
A service station sits to the East of the theatre.*

Ralph Peterson, Dean Forey, and Douglas Armstrong. The substitute and extra duty ushers were Arthur Drew, William Marshall, and Clifford George.³⁷ The Shrader-Blackstone Orchestra, consisting of local musicians, was hired. The drummer, Johnny Cameron, one of the best in the West, was anxious to return to Grand Junction to be close to his mother, who lived here. The pianist was Jain Shrader, Earl Blackstone was the cornetist, and Glen Shrader was the violinist. All were splendid musicians.³⁸

By December, 1922, the contractors were pushing to finish the playhouse, working extra men and extra hours.³⁹ The strength and deflection of the balcony were tested, proving the attention to safety during construction: 97,900 pounds of sacked gravel (more than twice the weight the balcony would ever carry) were loaded onto the balcony. As Grand Junction businessmen watched, they commented that it was certainly an unusual test.⁴⁰

Finally, the Avalon opened its doors despite the fact that some minor details remained to be finished. On January 5, 1923, the new blue velvet curtains parted and the brilliant, beautiful young soprano, Lucy Gates, opened the Avalon's first show. Neither the stage nor the auditorium was finished and workmen were busy even as the music began to play. After her opening number, Miss Gates interrupted her program to praise the acoustics of the new playhouse and she predicted that those artists who would follow her to the stage of the Avalon would agree.⁴¹

The dream was realized; Grand Junction could boast about its new playhouse. People from as far away as Telluride, Ouray, Montrose, and Delta traveled in car parties to spend the weekends in Grand Junction, filling the hotels, shopping, and enjoying the best entertainment in America.⁴²

In subsequent years Walker continued as the General Manager of the Avalon, conducting its business himself while continuing as editor and publisher of his newspaper. Yet he stayed in the background, giving credit to others. Apparently Walker was always first and foremost a newspaperman and his promotional activities were always something extra. Though there were five directors on the Board, the operation of the playhouse usually fell to Walker and Clyde Biggs, long-time friends and associates. In 1925, Walker and Biggs, both in full agreement, carried out a complete redecoration of the interior.⁴³

The theatre prospered, but by 1926, economic problems clouded the Avalon's bright horizons. One of Walker's fundamental business principles was to pay dividends to the stockholders while never seeking self-enrichment.⁴⁴ As General Manager, Walker had never received any compensation. His policy was to pay all legitimate and necessary operating expenses, overhead, and taxes, then distribute dividends.

HER CHARMING PERSONALITY AND HER MARVELOUS
VOICE WILL CAUSE THE OPENING OF THE AVALON
LONG TO BE REMEMBERED.



LUCY GATES.

Taken from the opening night program "The New Year's First Big Gift to Grand Junction."

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J. T. Allen, of Denver.

B

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James S. James.
W. H. Jones.
Harry B. Jones.

K

Herman W. Kluge.
William D. Kluge.

Taken from the opening night program "The New Year's First Big Gift to Grand Junction."

The Avalon Stockholders

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Mrs. Emma B. Lyons.
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O. D. Williams.

Taken from the opening night program "The New Year's First Big Gift to Grand Junction."

A Word as to the Policy

With the completion of The Avalon, Grand Junction has realized a long cherished hope and a need long felt throughout this section of Colorado has been filled. This city can now list among its assets a large, standard, modern theatre equal in size, appointments and equipment to any theatre to be found in any of the smaller cities of America. The Avalon seats 1,466 people and its stage can accommodate the largest attractions that tour the country, handling a performance with the same ease and completeness that a production can be handled in Denver's largest theatres.

A high standard will be maintained for the house at all times. It will be conducted with the idea of making it a credit to the company, to the management and to the community, and an institution of which all the people will be proud.

A faith in the future of Grand Junction and a belief that Grand Junction and western Colorado will give the deserved support to such a theatre have made possible the financing of this large project. It will be conducted in a business-like manner at all times, and the management will have a definite line of policy concerning every feature of the enterprise.

The Avalon will be open every afternoon and every evening during the week. Theatrical performances, musical artists, high-class vaudeville, famous lecturers, and moving pictures of the very highest type will be the leading offerings at the new playhouse.

Every honorable effort to make The Avalon one of the best known, one of the best conducted, one of the most popular and one of the most successful theatres and auditoriums in the west will be our ambition.

We will greatly appreciate your friendly co-operation.

WALTER WALKER,
Manager.

Taken from the opening night program "The New Year's First Big Gift to Grand Junction."

Program

MISS LUCY GATES, *Coloratura Soprano.*

MISS SYBELLA CLAYTON, *Accompanist.*

1. Aria—Una Voce Poca Fa (from the "Barbier of Saville")-----*Rossini*
2. AMERICAN SONGS.
 - (a) I Bring You Heartease-----*Gena Branscomb*
 - (b) In the Woods-----*Edward MacDowell*
 - (c) Fairy Pipers-----*Herbert Brewer*
 - (d) Where the West Begins-----*Frank La Forge*
3.
 - (a) Hungarian Dance-----*Edward MacDowell*
 - (b) Concert Etude-----*Edward MacDowell*Miss Sybella Clayton.
4. Aria—Bell Song (from the opera, "Lakme")-----*Leo Delibes*
5.
 - (a) Solveg's Song-----*Edward Grieg*
 - (b) When Love Is Kind (Old English)-----
 - (c) Vous Dansez Marguise (sung in French)-----*Gustave Lemaire*
 - (d) Se Saran Rose (sung in Italian)-----*L. Arditi*
6.
 - (a) Etude-----*Frederich Chopin*
 - (b) Prelude-----*Rachmaninow*Miss Sybella Clayton.
7. CHILDREN SONGS.
 - (a) There Are Fairies at the Bottom of Our Garden-----*Liza Lehman*
 - (b) If No One Ever Marries Me-----*Liza Lehman*
 - (c) A Little Bird-----*Bainbridge Crist*
 - (d) Little Orphant Annie-----*A. Needham*Miss Sybella Clayton at the Piano.

The Avalon Orchestra will render a program prior to the appearance of Miss Gates.
The Baldwin Grand Piano used by the Accompanist was provided by
the Song Music Company.

Taken from the opening night program "The New Year's First Big Gift to Grand Junction."

Heavy expenses had been incurred during the construction and efforts to pay dividends from the beginning severely strained the Avalon's budgets. Beyond rejecting a salary, Walker had contributed \$8,500 of his own funds to the company. During 1926, at least \$6,000 were paid out in dividends, while other needs were neglected. The two percent annual dividend rate had caused a constant drain on the business funds. In retrospect, Walker felt the Avalon ought to have waited at least five years to build up capital before dividends were declared.⁴⁵

An audit in August, 1927, finally convinced Walker that the Avalon must be sold. The theatre had come to demand more of Walker than he could give. At first the asking price was \$135,000, offered to the Publix Theatre Corporation but the timing was bad. Hard times, a preview of the Great Depression, had come to the Grand Valley. Walker wanted full return on the investment by stockholders, but eventually had to settle for much less and many years later.⁴⁶

Publix Corporation decided there was no incentive for it to buy the Avalon, it was cheaper to rent the theatre than it was to own it. Walker continued to look for a way out and by the end of 1928, the Grand Junction Theatre Company leased the Avalon to the Rex Amusement Company, a holding company for a motion picture syndicate and part of Publix Corporation. In an article in the *Daily Sentinel*, Walker assured the stockholders that their interests would be fully protected and annual dividends would be paid. Maintaining the public trust was always paramount with Walker.⁴⁷

The lease was only a temporary solution to the theatre's problems. Walker still had the responsibility of dealing with Avalon business and he continued to write letters and offer deals. Since the financial problems continued, Walker and Biggs considered getting loans to cover the dividends or juggling dividend payment dates to gain some time.⁴⁸ An audit by C. H. Fulton in January, 1930, recommended no more dividends be paid, but if the company decided to continue meeting its obligations, a loan would have to be secured to meet the payments due in 1930.⁴⁹

After the demise of the Rex Company and the Publix Theatre Corporation, which went into receivership in the early 1930s, the theatre was leased to C. H. Cooper Company in 1933. Walker then engaged Mr. Cooper in negotiations for the purchase of the Avalon. In a letter to Clyde Biggs in 1935, Walker confided he did not want to run after Cooper, but would rather Cooper be the aggressor.⁵⁰ By the end of the 1930s, however, Walker wanted to be rid of the theatre. Over the years, he offered the Avalon to Cooper for \$60,000, then \$50,000, then \$40,000, but there was no sale.⁵¹ Not until after Cooper's death in 1946 was the Avalon finally sold to the Cooper Foundation.⁵²

The Cooper Theatre has continued to bring motion pictures to Grand Junction since the early 1930s. The motion picture industry replaced the Lyceums, the Chautauquas, and the opera house shows of an earlier age. The stage shows and live entertainment were shifted to Mesa College where the Walter Walker Theatre, on the college campus, continues the tradition set by Mr. Walker, though one can still catch an occasional newspaper article on the old Avalon Theatre, or hear talk about turning it into a Performing Arts Center.⁵³

The magnificent Avalon Theatre brought the greatest celebrities in the world to the quiet, western town of Grand Junction. One of these visitors, English author, poet, and dramatic interpreter Frank Speaight, caught the spirit of the Avalon years in writing a little poem about Grand Junction:

A name too small for such a mighty bowl of awe-inspiring granduer:
A world of men should pour into this God-like Valley
Ringed around with snow-capped hills that touch the moon.
With God and Time and Space
I stood upon a jut of sandstone rock
And looked into that Nature's scoop of pulsing silences.
I felt alone with only God for my companion.
Oh man how small thou art compared with Ever-lasting time.
The Architect of this army of cathedrals all around me.
What pigmies seem the Dictators of this age
Who snarl and bite and quarrel over that which could be buried here —
Perhaps Grand Junction you are rightly called —
For here is Earth with God combined.⁵⁴

Some things seem to stay the same, but Walter Walker spent much of his life changing that little dusty town with broken wooden sidewalks into a beautiful city. The Avalon Theatre, a grand old building, stands in tribute to this man who gave so much to that endeavor.

NOTES

- ¹"The New Theatre to be Known as the Avalon," *Daily Sentinel*, 14 April 1922, p. 1.
- ²Marion Fletcher, "Book of Attractions Presented by Walter Walker," given to Mr. Walker by Miss Fletcher, 25 December 1943. The original book is located at the Museum of Western Colorado, 4th and Ute Avenues, Grand Junction, Colorado; a copy is located in the Archives Room of Heiny Library, Mesa College, Grand Junction, Colorado. No page numbers.
- ³Interview with Rev. Kenneth Baird, arranger and compiler of the Walter Walker Papers, Grand Junction, Colorado, 18 April 1986.
- ⁴*Ibid.*
- ⁵Lewis Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), p. 135.
- ⁶Richard E. Tope, "Objective History of Grand Junction, Colorado," Ph.D. dissertation, Mesa County Public Library, p. 54.
- ⁷Fletcher, Book of Attractions.
- ⁸Rev. Baird interview.
- ⁹Fletcher, Book of Attractions.
- ¹⁰Rev. Baird interview. An immigrant car was a train car divided so that luggage and freight could be put in one section and the family would have seats and bunks in the other section.
- ¹¹Rev. Baird interview.
- ¹²*Ibid.*
- ¹³Fletcher, Book of Attractions.
- ¹⁴*Ibid.*
- ¹⁵Fletcher, Book of Attractions.
- ¹⁶Atherton, *Main Street*, pp. 259, 269, 278, 322-323.
- ¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 127, 141, 312.
- ¹⁸Fletcher, Book of Attractions.
- ¹⁹*Ibid.*
- ²⁰*Ibid.*, written in pencil in Walker's handwriting and signed with his initials.
- ²¹"Armory Like An Ice House," *Daily Sentinel*, 12 February 1920, p. 1.
- ²²"One Thing Grand Junction Needs Badly," *Daily Sentinel*, 30 January 1920, p. 2.
- ²³"Grand Junction's Need for an Auditorium Great," *Daily Sentinel*, 22 November 1921, Sec. 2, p. 2.
- ²⁴"Grand Junction to Have New Modern Auditorium in 1922," *Daily Sentinel*, 24 December 1921, p. 2.
- ²⁵Atherton, *Main Street*, p. 137.
- ²⁶"Local Capital to Build a New Auditorium," *Daily Sentinel*, 23 January 1922, p. 1.
- ²⁷Rev. Baird interview.
- ²⁸"With \$100,000 Theatre Incorporates," *Daily Sentinel*, 1 February 1922, p. 1.
- ²⁹"General Satisfaction Over Plan of New House," *Daily Sentinel*, 26 January 1922, p. 1.
- ³⁰"From the Owner of the Majestic," *Daily Sentinel*, 18 March 1922, p. 2.
- ³¹"Statement From Directors," *Daily Sentinel*, 10 February 1922, p. 1.
- ³²*Grand Junction Daily News*, 29 December 1883, p. 1. The very first location of the Grand Junction Town Company office was on Ute Avenue. It was later moved to 7th and Main, the site of the Avalon.
- ³³"Some Local Ancient Landmark Going," *Daily Sentinel*, 18 March 1922, p. 2. Plaque was erected by the Mount Garfield Chapter of the DAR in 1924. (Tope, "History of Grand Junction," p. 101.)
- ³⁴"Theatre Site Nearly Ready," *Daily Sentinel*, 24 March 1922, p. 1.
- ³⁵"Proposed Avalon Theatre," *Daily Sentinel*, 17 February 1922, p. 1.
- ³⁶"Noted Star Was to Open House," *Daily Sentinel*, 23 October 1922, p. 2.
- ³⁷"Ushers Chosen for the Avalon," *Daily Sentinel*, 21 November 1922, p. 8.
- ³⁸"Avalon Music Will Be Fine," *Daily Sentinel*, 27 December 1922, p. 1.
- ³⁹"The Avalon To Be Ready," *Daily Sentinel*, 13 December 1922, p. 1.
- ⁴⁰"Avalon Theater Balcony Remained Firm Under Very Severe Test," *Daily Sentinel*, 21 December 1922, p. 1.
- ⁴¹"The Theatre Which Opens Its Doors," *Daily Sentinel*, 5 January 1923, p. 1.
- ⁴²"Red Pepper" review, *Daily Sentinel*, 12 April 1923, p. 1.
- ⁴³Letter, Walter Walker to Clyde Biggs, 27 May 1925, Walter Walker Papers, Mesa College.
- ⁴⁴Rev. Baird interview.
- ⁴⁵Letter, Walker to Biggs, Walter Walker Papers, 11 September 1926.
- ⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 5 August 1927.
- ⁴⁷"Avalon Theatre is Leased to Rex Amusement Company," *Daily Sentinel*, 7 December 1928, p. 1.
- ⁴⁸Letter, Walker to Biggs, Walter Walker Papers, 10 October 1929 and 9 November 1929.
- ⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 6 February 1930.
- ⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 14 March 1935.
- ⁵¹*Ibid.*, 14 October 1937 and 17 November 1939.
- ⁵²"Walter Walker Welcomes New Cooper Theatre," *Daily Sentinel*, 24 August 1947, p. 3.
- ⁵³*Ibid.*
- ⁵⁴Fletcher, Book of Attractions.

THE PATRON'S PAGE

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