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JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE

CONTENTS

The Grand River Ditch 1
A Short History of Pioneering Irrigation in Colorado's Grand Valley
by Don Davidson

Recollections of Naturita 32
Taken from "Biography of Walter & Myrtle Cooper"
by Flora Locke

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THE COVER: The cover drawing is by Sara Mock, a 1968 Humanities graduate of Mesa College and former editor of the campus literary publication, The Review. She is presently attending graduate school in library science at Columbia University. The drawing was inspired by her grandfather, George Elbert Mock, who lived on the Redlands, Purdy Mesa, and Glade Park.

We have raised here fine vegetables,
celery, onion, and grain,
We can grow fine fruits,
And in it there's gain.
With markets unequalled
Anywhere in the land,
Prosperity must shine
On the banks of the Grand.[1]

THE GRAND RIVER DITCH

A Short History of Pioneering Irrigation in Colorado's Grand Valley

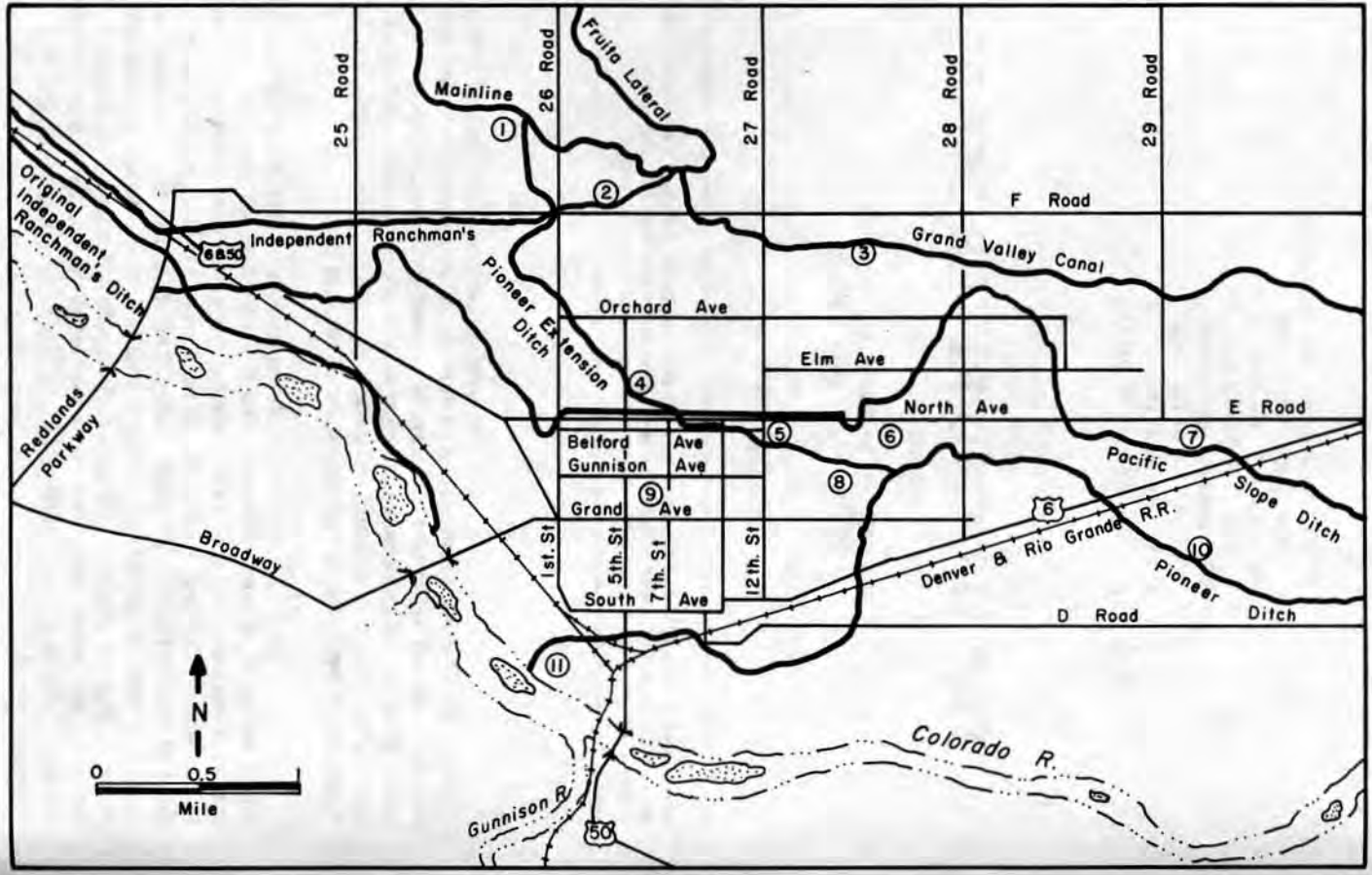
by

Don Davidson

Don Davidson is a native of Colorado and has lived in Grand Junction eleven years. He is currently a history major at Mesa College. Davidson is also the recipient of the Aspinall Award and plans to teach at the secondary level after graduation.

The poet spoke of a region nestled near a "Grand River," where crops second to none could be grown. The region was Colorado's Grand Valley and there was in appearance, name, and potential, a Grand River whose immense and surging volume suggested wonderful opportunities for those strong enough to settle a wild land. One of the greatest problems settlers faced was getting water to the arid land.

In the early days of September 1881, a bugler for the U. S. Army issued a series of shrill blasts signalling that the land that had once belonged to the Ute Indians was now open for settlement by the whites. The bugle had barely silenced when the stampede began: a flood of settlers entered the Grand Valley. This multitude soon demanded a supply of water to transform the barren land into towns, farms, ranches, and orchards. It was a story of men with little capital but lots of muscle and determination, undertaking the construction of the Grand River Ditch: a project many considered the "most ambitious and successful canal project in the entire world."[2]


25 Road
Mainline
26 Road
Fruita Lateral
27 Road
28 Road
29 Road
F Road
Original Independent Ranchman's Ditch
Independent Ranchman's Pioneer Extension Ditch
Grand Valley Canal
Orchard Ave
Elm Ave
North Ave
E Road
Redlands Parkway
Belford Ave
Gunnison Ave
Grand Ave
South Ave
1st St
5th St
7th St
12th St
Broadway
Pacific Slope Ditch
Denver & Rio Grande R.R.
Pioneer Ditch
D Road
N
0
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Mile
Colorado R.
Gunnison R.
50
1
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11

The Grand Valley Canal System: 1881-1986

These early irrigation canals were built to supply a growing town with water for a variety of purposes. This index is intended to provide the reader with points of reference from which a clearer picture of Grand Valley irrigation may be obtained.

1. In its original form, the Pioneer Extension Ditch fed its waste water into the mainline of the Grand Valley Canal. This was located below the "Great Drop" west of First Street (26 Road) on F½ Road.

2. The Independent Ranchman's Ditch in use today provides irrigation water to Fruita. It was originally intended to provide domestic water to a town called Fairview in 1884.

3. The mainline of the Grand Valley Canal divides at about Eighth and Patterson and becomes the Fruita Lateral, Mainline, and Independent Ranchman's ditches. The Fruita Lateral is sometimes referred to as the "highline" portion of the Grand Valley Canal. This is not to be confused with the governemment Highline Canal which came later. These ditches combined provide water to nearly 45,000 acres of land and are over 100 miles in length.

4. The Pioneer Extension Ditch was originally intended to be used as a power supply to turn large milling machines. This potential was never fully realized.

5. The Lincoln Park Auditorium, site of many "barn dances" and early community functions. The headgate of the Pioneer Extension Ditch began here.

6. The Veteran's Administration Hospital on North Avenue at 28 Road.

7. The Pacific Slope Ditch was Grand Junction's first source of domestic water. It originated near the present day Clifton water treatment p plant at 510 34 Road. Parts of this ditch are still in use on a small scale.

8. The Pioneer Ditch, intended for crop irrigation and livestock watering, fed its waste water into the Pioneer Extension Ditch.

9. One branch of the Pacific Slope Ditch ran south along Seventh Street. Lateral ditches, running east and west from this branch, supplied residents with drinking water.

10. The Pioneer Ditch originated on the river near 32 1/8 Road just south of D Road. This is east of Corn Lake.

11. The original Pioneer Ditch (prior to development of the Pioneer Extension) ended near Crawford Avenue in what is known as the Riverside area of Grand Junction.

The notion of supplying artificially channeled water in order to make the Grand Valley productive was not new. It had probably begun with Hayden's Tenth *Annual Report* which discussed the feasibility of a system of canals in the area.[3] This geological survey, combined with reports that the Grand Valley's climate had "natural advantages which equal or surpass the best European health resorts," led many settlers to believe the valley was indeed a place where one could live healthfully and earn a good living from farming, building, or mining.[4]

The hub of the Grand Valley was the city of Grand Junction, founded in 1882 on a 640 acre site by a former Kansas Governor named George Crawford. Grand Junction's population expanded quickly. In the three months between December 1, 1882 and March 1, 1883, the town's population grew from 524 to 1,006 people.[5] The early residents of the city met their need for water by filling barrels at the river and then hauling them by wagon to fill cisterns. Even the most casual observer could see that this laborious process would not meet Grand Junction's domestic and agricultural water needs. Clearly, the next and most crucial order of business was to devise a way to get large amounts of water to the people and to the thirsty land.

In response to the need for water, local men started three separate irrigation projects. The first was called the Grand Valley Ditch, conceived in late October 1881 by Palisade area ranchmen William Oldham, Elihu S. Oldham, William Cline, and John Biggles.[6] This group decided where they would locate a headgate on the Grand River and began digging a ditch with picks and shovels late in 1881. When the river froze, they suspended operation until warmer weather. Despite their work, they did not have legal rights to the land where they dug the ditch until 1882 when they filed a claim in the county seat at Gunnison. They originally planned to extend the ditch only up to the city of Grand Junction, a distance of about twelve miles.[7] It was to be a simple project to serve a simple purpose – getting water to their croplands as soon as possible. The major portion of this original Grand Valley Ditch was to be on a line north of its present location. The first survey was completed in the winter of 1882 and the plat recorded in Gunnison County on August 22, 1882.[8] This survey, by J. A. Blouvelt, was later found to have the ditch running uphill and was corrected by a new survey in January 1883.

Meanwhile, a second irrigation project known as the Pioneer Ditch began. Surveyed by J. P. Harlow and Patrick Fitzpatrick, it was officially incorporated and registered January 31, 1884, though actual work commenced as early as March 1, 1882.[9] Principal officers of the Pioneer Ditch Company were: George Crawford of the Grand Junction Town Company; Benjamin F. Jay, who later became a county commissioner; M. W. Whitehead; John Duckett; and Frank S. Whitson. Originally twenty-one shareholders formed the organization whose objective was "an irrigating ditch and the water therein to be used for that

purpose."[10] Water was drawn directly from the Grand River just east of 32¼ Road, South of D Road. It originally ran northwestward and then west around Twenty-fourth Street, terminating at the Grand River in today's "Riverside" area of Grand Junction.[11]

The Pioneer Ditch extended to a length of six and three-quarter miles and its original incorporated value of $50,000 was divided into 5,000 shares of $10 each.[12] Though the Pioneer Ditch Company did not incorporate until January 31, 1884, some people purchased memberships in the organization as early as March 24, 1882. For a one dollar membership fee and fifty cent monthly dues, payable the first of each month, memberships became the only method of receiving water from this project until the time of its incorporation.[13]

During the first meeting of the Pioneer Ditch Association held at the ranch of John Davis on March 24, 1882, Davis was elected chairman of the organization. With two other water projects underway in the area, the company moved to secure original rights to use the river water[14] by requiring each member to do improvement work by April 15, 1882, or "forfeit his interest in the ditch." Many original members apparently moved on to other endeavors or did not make required improvements since the only original members who remained on the official list after incorporation were Frank Whitson, John Duckett, and M. O. Whitehead.[15]

Improvement of the ditch proceeded; by April 1, 1882, the shareholders awarded Whitson a contract for construction of a headgate located on the Grand River for an estimated cost of $75. A six-man committee formed to ensure that ditch improvements were accomplished as planned: three people to watch over improvement work on the upper half of the ditch nearest the headgate, and three others to provide the same service on the lower portion.[16] The Pioneer Ditch was completed by April 20, 1882, less than two months after being started. It supplied water for land to the south of the ditch that same summer.[17]

Work on the third early canal project, the Pacific Slope Ditch, began March 20, 1882, and supplied water to the growing city of Grand Junction by July 1 of the same year.[18] The purposes of the project were "the construction and maintenance of a ditch for the supply of water for domestic purposes, the irrigation of lands and the use of towns and mills, and for the collection of water rents on the same . . . ."[19] George Crawford, its principal backer, and the other stockholders hoped for a mutual gain through speedy completion of the project. The headgate and point of origin of the Pacific Slope Ditch sat on the Grand River east of Oldham Bottoms above the present day Clifton water treatment plant at 510 34 Road.[20]

The Pacific Slope Ditch ran north of the Pioneer Ditch in a northwesterly direction and then along North Avenue,

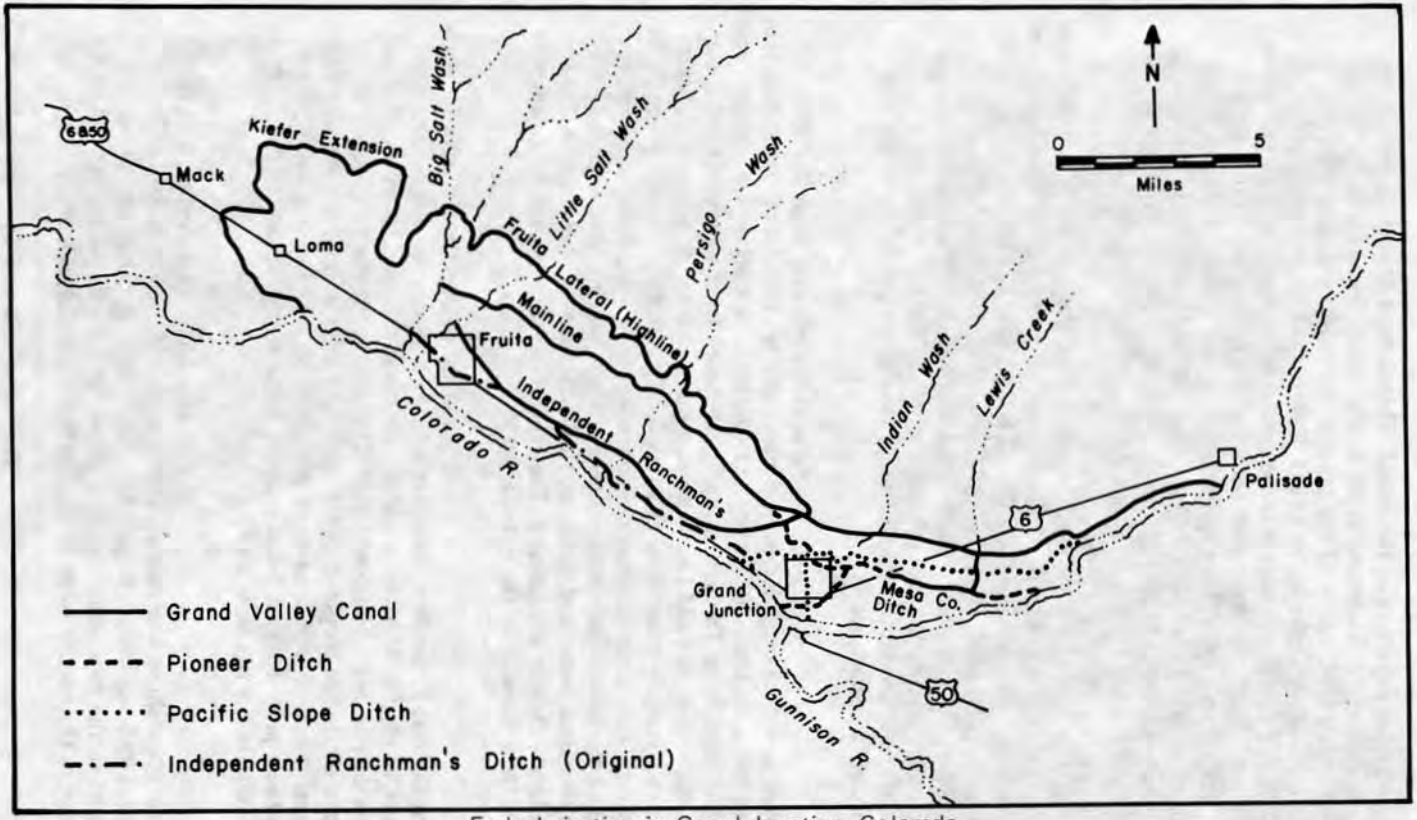
the northern boundary of Grand Junction in 1882. At Seventh Street the canal divided. One branch went south along Seventh Street draining into the Grand River, and the other continued westward, eventually emptying into the Grand River west of town. The ditch was about nine and one-half miles long and cost $15,000 to build.[21]

These early projects caused consternation among many citizens. The remarkable speed with which the early ditches were built proved to be a double-edged sword for the tiny community. Impatience to get water to the townsite had resulted in poorly constructed ditches with banks that sometimes collapsed, sending water throughout the town. When the Pioneer and Pacific Slope projects were about six months old, the *Grand Junction News* reported that ditches around town were in "shameful condition, the streets often becoming impassable by the overflow." Another issue of the newspaper proclaimed that the streets had become so bad that many people suggested half-seriously that they preferred crossing the canals to crossing the streets. Yet another article in the *News* stated that "city ditches reek from filth." Poor ditch management and slipshod upkeep raised questions about their overall contribution to Grand Junction's "health and decency."[22]

In addition to the myriad of problems associated with hasty construction, these early projects were too small to meet the needs of the settlers who continued arriving in the Grand Valley. By December 9, 1882, the quantity of water delivered by the Pacific Slope and Pioneer Ditch Projects combined proved insufficient to meet domestic and agricultural needs. The two ditches supplied water to about 7,000 acres, representing only one-fifteenth of the valley's agricultural potential. Some residents became skeptical of the Grand Valley's future. If sufficient water did not reach the dry land, crops could not grow and the local people would have to import agricultural goods from distant communities.[23] Clearly, larger irrigation projects needed to be completed.

While the Pioneer Ditch and the Pacific Slope Ditch Projects were quickly completed, work slowed on the earliest project, the Grand Valley Ditch. The Oldham brothers, Cline, and Biggles sold their interests in the project to Matt Arch, an ambitious entrepreneur from the Tomichi Creek ranching district near Gunnison. Arch bought the Grand Valley Ditch in January of 1883, and changed the name to the Grand River Ditch. Arch became president of the outfit and retained Oldhams, Cline, and Biggles as directors. The Company's capital stock was $200,000 divided into 20,000 shares of ten dollars each. A few days after acquiring the ditch, Arch hired three surveyors to resurvey the ditch line. During this second survey phase, the new men on the job discovered the earlier Blouvelt survey had the ditch line running uphill.[24]

Many people of the Grand Valley considered the Grand River Ditch an incredibly ambitious canal project, per-



Early Irrigation in Grand Junction, Colorado

haps unrivaled anywhere in the world. Therefore, it generated keen interest and controversy in the course of its development. Some thought the ultimate success or failure of the project would likewise determine the success or failure of the entire Grand Valley. Considerable controversy arose out of charges of poor management and slipshod construction in the earlier ditch projects, along with fears that the annual, and often notoriously ferocious, Grand River spring run-off could cause the ditch to overflow and to flood the entire valley. Some citizens were concerned with the sheer magnitude of the project, since the Grand River Ditch was to be significantly larger than any they had seen before.[25]

However, the *News* quickly acknowledged the "paramount importance of the success" of a canal constructed to proper standards. The *News* viewed the Grand River Ditch project as a thoroughly professional endeavor. On March 24, 1883, the *News* issued an appeal for the public to ignore poorly constructed and engineered ditches devised by those "desiring a large revenue" from a "cheap affair." Water was a necessity, and should be supplied only through proper construction and management techniques.[26]

Perhaps the warning from the *News* referred to a rival irrigation project underway to the west of Grand Junction. About the same time that survey and construction work had begun in earnest on the Grand River Ditch, a group of ranchmen from west of Grand Junction made plans to build their own separate irrigation project. This western land was generally recognized as having the greatest agricultural potential in the valley, and many of these ranchmen wanted an organization separate from all the other ditch concerns. No one wanted to admit, especially with such abundant water and sunshine, that local farmers could not feed the population already in residence. The ranchmen felt pressured to organize or risk a "bad showing to the outside world."[27]

The ranchmen organized the Ranchmen's Ditch Company, meeting December 13, 1882, to discuss specific project details, to elect J. E. Walls president, and to decide on December 27, 1882, as the date to begin construction.[28] The purpose of the project was to irrigate the fertile cropland to the north and west of the area served by the Pioneer Ditch, as well as to carry domestic water to Fairview, an eighty acre town project which failed and was replaced by William E. Pabor's town of Fruita in the fall of 1884.[29]

The Ranchmen's Ditch started at the Grand River about one mile downriver from the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad bridge. It proceeded northwest and then ran nearly parallel to the river about one and a half miles from the north river bank, ending at the natural waste known as the Big Salt Wash.[30]

The *News* criticized the "horny-handed"

Photo by Don Davidson

One of the canal's "great drops." This one is located on today's F ½ Road, just west of 1st Street (26 Road).

Photo courtesy Museum of Western Colorado: names from When the River was Grand, ed. by Richard Ott, (Palisade, Colorado: Gazette Press, 1976), p. 28.

The same drop as it appeared in the construction phase. No facility was built here to utilize the drop. People are, L to R: unknown, Joe Wolf, Estella Wolf, Mrs. Wolf, and Adelbert (Toothpick) Barnhouse.

ranchmen and the few "loudmouth gentlemen" who threatened to sink money into an independent canal of their own instead of mobilizing to finish Matt Arch's Grand River Ditch. The *News* suggested it would be better for the ranchmen to assist Arch in speedy completion of the big ditch, rather than insulting its feasibility or building a separate ditch. Further, the *News* implied that the ranchmen wanted to embarrass Arch in the hopes he would quit work so they could seize his location and build a "cheap affair." A separate project, according to the newspaper, would be at the expense of work already completed by Arch.[31]

The principal members comprising the Ranchmen's Ditch Company, M. B. and Douglas Ross, J. Downer, J. W. James, J. A. Thompson, J. E. Clause, and Frank Kiefer, did not budge even with such determined opposition. Six days after the scathing article against them, they voted to change their corporate name to the Independent Ranchmen's Ditch Association.[32] The ranchmen solved their immediate water problem by the summer of 1883, financing their concern with private capital in a fashion similar to the Pioneer and Pacific Slope projects.[33]

Meanwhile, Matt Arch continued to make big plans for his Grand River Ditch. He wanted it to be more than just a quick means to get water to a few acres of dry land. In addition to providing domestic and stock water for settlers and irrigation for 50,000 acres of fertile land, Arch planned several "great drops" for operating generating equipment, milling machines, and mechanical contrivances of varying descriptions. The velocity at which water plummeted down these great drops provided a means to harness power in an age without electricity by use of the water wheel. In particular, Arch planned to build a flour mill opearted by water power utilizing the canal's largest drop, today located on F½ Road west of First Street (26 Road).[34] Arch set the grade of the ditch low enough at the headgate in Palisade to ensure ample water for all these possibilities even during the worst summer drought. By doing so, he considered his trouble would be in "trying to keep the water out."[35] As it turned out, Arch never managed to fulfill his ambition of utilizing the full potential of the great drops.

Undoubtedly, unanimous and wholehearted support from the members of the community would have pleased Arch. But if competition from other ditch concerns or grumbling from local pessimists bothered him, he never allowed it to slacken the pace of work. By mid-January of 1883, the Grand River Ditch surveyors were spread out over the project with one directly ahead of the workmen, another at the ditch midpoint, and a third down valley near the canal's proposed end.[36]

Arch designed the Grand River Ditch to be thirty-five feet wide on the bottom, fifty feet on the top and carry

Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado

Early ditch excavation was accomplished largely through the efforts of huge and seemingly tireless draft horses. Many early teams such as these were able to complete an amazing half of a mile of ditch every day!

a depth of five feet. However, when construction began, workers cut it to a width of about thirty-eight feet on the bottom and to a depth of three feet, leaving two feet to be taken out later as the demand for water increased. The engineers maintained these dimensions up to the bluffs northeast of Grand Junction.[37]

Jobs were plentiful during the construction phase of the big ditch, but the work was back-breaking. Men with picks and shovels and teams of horses pulling fresnoes – large iron shovels hitched to the team with leather straps and guided by a man behind – did the excavation. Cuts through heavy shale required dynamite. In addition, carpenters built flumes and headgates and the framework for the drops from wood. Laborers and teams from the local area, as well as many from Utah, were working diligently by January 27, 1883.[38]

To solve a labor shortage, Arch hired the "Crandall grading outfit" from Springfield, Utah. Forty teams, wagons, scrapers, plows, hay, and grain arrived by train, filling eighteen railroad cars. This cost Arch $1,270 for the freight bill alone.[39]

Perhaps the various Matt Arch detractors in town were upset by the presence of his workmen rather than by the pro-

ject itself. Those who envisioned the development of a genteel city had to endure a throng of sweating, cursing, and rowdy men during the construction phase of the canal.

Undaunted, Arch poured his money and energy into the project. In February of 1883 there were 110 teams of horses and 150 workmen spread over twenty miles of ditch. Indeed, Addison J. McCune, chief surveyor and supervisor for the project, remembered having seventeen grading camps, as they were called, to look after at one time.[40] The cost of supporting such a crew of men and animals was tremendous. Though the teams pushed on ahead of schedule, the average daily cost of construction, including wages and horse feed, was $1,000 – quite a sum in those days.[41]

Early in the Grand River Ditch project, costs necessitated extra capital over the original stock sale of $200,000 in order to ensure success. Arch found himself in a difficult situation. He needed money to complete the project, and he could expect no payment from his customers until he actually delivered the water. Under pressure by those "independent ranchmen" to produce water, Arch sought the assistance of W. E. Pabor to help him acquire the funds necessary to complete the project. On February 24, 1883, the *News* reported that the pair attempted to entice a group of investors from Missouri to buy into the Grand River Ditch Company, giving them a tour of the headgate. The trip to the headgate that day was rough and progress was slow since the roads, "not having been touched by the magic wand of the county commissioners" were nearly impassable. According to the correspondent who rode along on the trip, Pabor "kept running up a fire of gigantic prophecies" which only slightly interested these entreprenuers. This attempt to build interest in the Grand River Ditch was critical since completing the project required outside funds. Without help, the whole Grand Valley economy might collapse. No one relished facing the bleak prospect of a hot summer without sufficient water from the Grand Ditch. One observer likened the situation to "a gas bag which the forces of circumstance would soon puncture."[42] Unfortunately for Arch and Pabor, the Missouri men chose not to invest in the Grand River Ditch.

While continuing to search for outside capital, Arch continued work on the ditch. By March 24, 1883, twenty-two miles of ditch stood nearly complete; however, some of the flumes necessary to carry water across low spots and portions of the frameworks for the drops needed to be finished. Consequently, water could not be delivered into its entire length. But ranchers who had pledged to buy water if delivery could be made by May began planting 5,000 acres of crops under the first few miles of the canal.[43] Arch began the timbering and rockwork at the head of the "Matt Arch" ditch while a "gang of men" worked feverishly to prepare the wooden headgate, the key to the valley's agricultural future. The deadline imposed by the upper valley ranchmen pushed the workmen to labor at a record pace.[44]

A large majority of the flumework in the Grand River Ditch project was accomplished through the efforts of local carpenters Charley Anderson (seated) and John Wester.

Photo courtesy of Lawrence O'Neil

On May 16, 1883, Matt Arch rose from his bed much earlier than usual, for it was the day his Grand River Ditch was to be opened. Arch and twenty-five of Grand Junction's leading citizens rose early in order to arrive at the main headgate by noon. Loaded down in four large wagons and inspired by large quantities of food and "spirits," the excitement mounted as the contingent began their journey."Owing to skillful driving," the party arrived at their destination with little loss "save some superfluous glass which had been dropped on the road." As soon as the group arrived, several men were put to work with scrapers and shovels removing a small dam which had been built to spare the headgate damage before its completion. Meanwhile, "Arch called all other hands away and spread a goodly feast which disappeared at a fearful pace." The feast complete, the party returned to the headgate in time to witness the scraper breaking through, sending a little stream over the protective dam. Water broke over the dam at 1:50 p.m., bringing with it hope that the promised prosperity would know no end. "A hearty cheer went up" as an "angry, roaring flood [began] sweeping away every barrier."[45]

Arch then stood atop the yet untested mass of wooden pilings which comprised the headgate while 100,000 tons of swollen Grand River water swirled under his feet. The "little ranchman from the Tomichi" opened the headgate and water surged into the first four miles of ditch.[46] Everything had gone according to the plan. The *News* considered the event reason enough for a valley-wide, one-day suspension of work and hailed Arch as a man deserving the "highest honor."[47] That summer, work on the Grand River Ditch proceeded, but due to a lack of funds, its completion was in doubt.

Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado

Shown here are the original wooden headgates of the Grand River Ditch, near Palisade, Colorado, prior to the flood of 1898 which destroyed them.

By August of 1883, Arch literally ran out of money to pay ditch laborers and they in turn could not feed their teams of horses. Arch was "cursed liberally" and was unable to deal with the immense financial and emotional pressures brought on him by the project's problems. Desperately in need of funds to complete their irrigation project, Pabor and Arch undertook a trip to Denver to visit the offices of Colorado Loan and Trust Company. By late August of 1883, they had interested company personnel in the project and convinced them that a substantial loan would be in the bank's financial interest. The Grand River Ditch Company acquired a loan of $75,000, enabling construction to continue.[48]

In addition to granting the loan, officers of the Colorado Loan and Trust, with Theodore C. Henry as president, offered to purchase Arch's interest in the project for the sum of $200,000, the original stock evaluation. Arch accepted the offer and left the venture at this point.[49] What portion of money he was able to keep after satisfying his creditors is not known. The departure of Matt Arch from the project marked a turning point in the history of the Grand River Ditch. Matt Arch was a man of concern, courage, and vision. His Grand River Ditch would supply water for a growing community. In addition, construction work on the ditch provided employment for hundreds of its citizens as laborers, surveyors, and engineers.

While Arch remained in control of the

Grand River Ditch project, he also owned and operated the Grand River Ditch Supply Store on what was known as Arch corner at Fourth and Main, downtown Grand Junction.[50] Matt Arch eventually returned to the Tomichi Creek near Gunnison. Still a man of vision, and as a result of his interest in mechanization, he was the first ranchman in Gunnison County to harvest wheat with the six-horse thresher.[51]

All the ditch concerns suffered financial woes, but the Grand River Ditch outgrew its budget on a proportionately larger scale. Arch realized outside capital would be needed to finish his big project. The ideal of local control was sacrificed as a necessary evil. For himself, Arch accomplished two objectives: he insured completion of his dream and he managed to let go of the project before being ruined financially.

With the acquisition of outside capital, an era of local control of Grand Valley ditch projects began to fade. The situation was typical of frontier areas needing extensive improvements. Local people were mostly small propertied individuals attracted by the prospect of owning land and bettering themselves on a farming frontier. Expensive large-scale irrigation projects like the Grand River Ditch required more money than local people could raise. The Grand Valley was fortunate to have attracted Matt Arch who provided the driving force to get such a large-scale irrigation project underway. But even Arch's money and determination proved insufficient. Outside capital was essential. This pattern of irrigation projects getting started and then requiring outside capital was typical of Colorado's irrigated valleys. In addition to the Grand Valley, the San Luis Valley and the Arkansas Valley needed help from the outside, and in these areas, too, T. C. Henry was involved as a financier.[52]

About the same time that the reins of the Grand River Ditch project were turned over to T. C. Henry, yet another group of ranchmen met to discuss a new project. On November 28, 1883, A. A. Miller, W. A. Rice, Patrick Sullivan, O. D. Russell, and William Connely met at the S. H. Stahl ranch to discuss a new proposal. This meeting resulted in the Pioneer Extension Ditch Company, officially incorporated on December 15, 1883, with stock set at $100,000 divided into 10,000 non-assessable shares at $10 each. The purpose of the Pioneer Extension Ditch was to "irrigate land along the line of said ditch and for milling and manufacturing purposes."[53] Since mill wheels required a wider ditch than the twenty-four foot Pioneer (Mesa County) Ditch, the Pioneer Extension was to be thirty feet wide.[54] Special permission for the construction was sought from, and granted by, the City of Grand Junction. The Pioneer Extension was completed by early spring of 1884.[55]

About the same time, the course of the main Pioneer Ditch was altered somewhat. It was changed to cross Indian Wash via a wooden flume at today's Twenty-eighth Street, just south of

Photo courtesy of the Grand Valley Irrigation Company

An early photograph looking west from the intersection of Twelfth and Teller at the headgate of the Pioneer Extension Ditch.

North Avenue.[56] From there it passed through what is today the Veteran's Hospital grounds and Lincoln Park (then an open field) and under two stone bridges, still in existence.[57] The Pioneer Extension Ditch then started at the Pioneer Ditch waste gate at Twelfth and Teller and ran for about three miles to the northwest, emptying into Grand River Ditch below the "great drop."[58] The plat of the extension was paid for by a cooperative arrangement with the Pioneer Ditch Company. The two companies were separate entities even though they shared the same point of origin on the Grand River.[59]

Although the Pioneer Ditch Association and Pioneer Extension Ditch Company were separate organizations, some board members feared possible legal ramifications from flood damage or a loss of water rights, since the similarity of names and co-use of the ditch might imply a partnership. To remedy this problem, on December 3, 1883, the Pioneer Ditch Association decided to draft bylaws for an entirely new corporation which would protect the board's water rights and establish a new identity for the Association.[60] The new entity was the Mesa County Ditch Company, incorporated by B. F. Jay, George Crawford, John B. Duckett, and John Davis on January 31, 1884.[61]

Soon after the completion of the Pioneer Extension, a flood demolished the common headgate of the Mesa County and Pioneer Extension, as well as that of the Pacific Slope. The Pacific Slope headgate washed out on May 31, 1884, and the Mesa County Ditch headgate went out in the first week of June. The flood water went crashing through

the little ditchbanks, spilling water into the city streets. The flood wreaked havoc on the Pioneer system, leaving both the city streets and many ranch properties in a "terrible state of disrepair."[62]

Since the Mesa County, Pioneer Extension, and Pacific Slope concerns were out of commission for the time being, the pressure was on for the successful completion of the Grand River Ditch. The new man in charge, T. C. Henry, was an able individual who brought much to the project. His experience with irrigation schemes and his financial abilities proved valuable. Also, he chose good men to oversee the completion of the Grand River Ditch. Henry delegated much of the responsibility to H. J. Aldrich, who in Henry's words possessed great "practical ability."[63] Henry hired Pabor as general manager. It was not the first time these two men had worked together on a financial venture. Earlier, Henry had been Pabor's backer for the Fruita Town Company.[64] Henry also employed Walter Graves as chief engineer and retained Addison McCune as assistant. Graves, a respected professional, had been John Wesley Powell's topographer for a United States geographical and geological survey party in 1872-1875 which passed through the Grand Valley.[65]

Capable people and solid financial backing enabled rapid progress to be made. Pabor bought 338,000 board feet of lumber from a local supplier, Innis, Hobbs, Bradish, and Rice Lumber Company, and imported 300 red cedar pilings from Sargeant, Colorado, for the completion of headgates, flumes, and canal diversions. After buying the lumber, the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad loaned Pabor a pile driver to drive supports for the flumes in the project.[66] The wooden structures lasted for a number of years, but eventually were replaced by concrete counterparts.

During the period of ownership by Colorado Loan and Trust, the Grand River Ditch reached final development. By the spring of 1884, the entire canal project was finished. This included both the main line and Fruita lateral or "high line" portion of the canal. The length of the main line from the headgate to the end at Big Salt Wash west of Fruita was twenty-four miles. The high line lateral began just north of today's Patterson (F) Road at Eighth Street and ran west for about twenty-five miles to its end in Big Salt Wash.[67]

As the Grand River Ditch system moved into full operation, unforseen problems began to develop. In the words of Addison McCune, "I have never heard of any canal having the trouble this one had in operation, in putting it in operation." There were many sections of ditch which had to be "puddled." This process involved soaking the ditch with water so that it would settle and hold water. The puddling cost more than had the original construction for those sections. In addition, every flume and culvert along the entire length had to be puddled. This, too, was expensive work. Where the ditch went through porous "blue shale," the

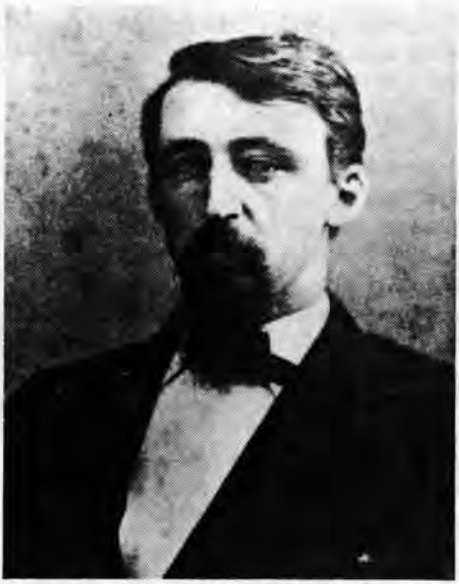


Photo courtesy of Frances M. McCullough of Monte Vista, Colorado

Once known as the "Wheat King of Kansas," T. C. Henry completed the Grand River Ditch to Fruita. He was also the founder of Monte Vista, Colorado.

original excavation had been very costly; but the difficulties did not end with construction. After water ran through these sections, it had to be reworked: more excavation was needed and silt was brought in from elsewhere to form a "veneer," or lining, to seal the ditch so it would hold water. For a distance of about six miles west of the "big drop" (F½ and 26 Roads), the canal banks settled from one to eight feet. This required many expensive man-hours to rebuild and rework the banks, enabling them to hold water. Also, there were too few well-defined natural waste ways to use for expending flood or excess water from the ditches when necessary. Cutting for these artifical waste ways to drain away excess water was expensive. All this additional work added to the already large sum spent on original construction,[68] making water from the Grand River Ditch expensive.

Henry was a businessman who wanted to make a profit in the Grand River Ditch undertaking. To cover the cost of construction and the necessary improvements on the ditch, Henry had to raise the price of water for those who used it. Naturally, the customers complained that the cost of water had become too high. Henry began to experience the frustrations that caused Matt Arch so much concern earlier. He had second thoughts about the venture, fearing the project would never make money.[69] Henry, like Matt Arch before him, sought buyers for the ditch who would purchase water rights, take up the unpaid bonds, and

Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado

Photo by Don Davidson

Upper photograph portrays the separation of the canal from the mainline to the Fruita Lateral. Lower photograph is the separation today. Water was pumped to higher ground using a large, wood-toothed water-driven pump. Arrow on top right shows the Fruita Lateral, and the arrow middle center depicts the approximate location of the water-driven pump.

Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado

A group of early residents pose for the camera during a skating session on the Grand River Ditch.

enable the farmers themselves to operate the concern. On November 1, 1884, Henry sold the Colorado Loan and Trust interest to Gustavus F. Davis of Hartford, Connecticut, representing the interest of Travelers Insurance Company, also of Hartford.[70] By May 16, 1885, Travelers became the major stockholder in the Company.[71] Interestingly, this company invested in other Colorado irrigation projects, including those in Colorado's San Luis Valley.[72]

Davis represented the legal interests of Travelers; and general manager Julius White assumed responsibility for appeasing the factions who thought Grand River Ditch water prices ($2 per acre of land per year) were too high.[73] By February 1, 1886, White joined forces with George Crawford in an attempt to consolidate all the Grand Valley ditch systems in order to maximize agricultural potential and to quiet those complaining of high-priced water. White's plan was to organize the Mesa County, the Pioneer Extension, and the Independent Ranchmen's Ditch Companies into one corporate entity with the Grand River Ditch and sell water rights to individual subscribers rather than charge a yearly rental fee.[74]

By the spring of 1886, the plan was approved and White began to sell perpetual water rights, subject to a small annual assessment for ditch upkeep, for $10 per acre of land (one share). He believed that purchase of water rights was a much better plan since yearly rental was "a constant drain on the purse of the irrigator." The cost could be spread over a five-year period to assist the irrigators in the transition.[75]

The consolidation worked, but financial problems still plagued the system. By July 21, 1888, the Grand River Ditch Company was delinquent on payment on the bonds taken earlier to help finance the construction. The company had become insolvent and the court appointed a receiver to liquidate the company at public auction. Frank C. Goudy was appointed to sell the company to the highest bidder. Goudy indicated the ditch had been operating at a loss for many years and the sale was necessary because the "ditch has never paid expenses." He contrasted ditch expenses of $10,000 per annum to its yearly income of $3,500.[76]

F. C. Goudy, acting as interim manager, tried making the Grand River Ditch into a paying proposition by widening and deepening it somewhat, making water available for an additional 15,000 acres of arable land.[77] A steam-powered floating dredge was ordered. George Gates, originally from Nova Scotia, Canada, operated the machine when it arrived.[78]

Costs continued to mount. The summer of 1888 proved to be unusually hot and dry and the Grand River dropped to an all-time low. The water from the river would not flow into the ditch in sufficient quantity. To remedy this, Goudy arranged to artificially elevate the water level at the headgate by building wooden cribbing at an angle in the river to divert additional water into the system.[79]

Goudy's attempt at improving the financial situation of the ditch failed. The auction proceeded as scheduled. The highest bidder at public auction in September 1888 was Travelers Insurance Company of Hartford, Connecticut. Although already the majority stockholder in the Grand River Ditch Company, the Travelers Company was supposedly not its legal owner and therefore could purchase the property outright.[80] After the sale, the Grand River Ditch Company's assets were conveyed to a new corporation which was called the Grand Valley Canal Company, a subsidiary of Travelers, incorporated October 8, 1888. The directors of the new company, James G. Patterson, Rodney Dennis, and Sylvester C. Denham, were all outsiders and legal residents of Hartford, Connecticut.[81]

After the public sale at which Travelers, in effect, purchased themselves and subsequently conveyed their rights to the Grand Valley Canal Company, even more of the Grand Valley's water rights were sold to Connecticut firms. On November 6, 1889, Travelers sold most of their remaining water rights in the Grand Valley Canal System to the Hartford Loan and Trust Company of Hartford, Connecticut.[82] These various sales caused much discontent among many irrigators and local businessmen. Many local water users were uncomfortable with so much of this valuable resource being owned by outsiders. They felt the Grand Valley's future could be unwisely manipulated. Potentially, this could have meant disaster for the local area.

Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado

Picture taken from Mantey Heights c. 1900. Note arrow pointing to house.

Photo by Don Davidson

Assessors Parcel Card No. 2945-121-10036; Photo by Don Davidson

This picture taken from roughly the same location as identified in upper photograph November 10, 1985. The same house still exists on the corner of 28th Street and Orchard Avenue.

The public sale in 1888 also caused a furor with former owner Colorado Loan and Trust. The Colorado firm filed suit questioning the legality of the sale and subsequent turnover of the Grand River Ditch and its water rights to the Grand Valley Canal Company. On July 25, 1892, a precedent-setting decree was handed down in Second District Judicial Court in Arapahoe County, Colorado. Plaintiffs in the case were T. C. Henry's Colorado Loan and Trust versus Travelers Insurance, Gustavus Davis, and the Grand Valley Canal Company. The Court ruled the sale completed by receiver F. C. Goudy to be "null and void" and in the end neither Travelers nor Colorado Loan and Trust won possession of the ditch. The property reverted to those individuals who had owned the water rights before Travelers. The Court ruled Gustavus Davis be removed as trustee because of his close ties to Travelers and appointed Frank W. Loveland public receiver. The Court also ordered that the Grand Valley Canal Company be resold. They eventually set February 5, 1894, at two o'clock in the afternoon as the sale date. The auction was held on the steps of the Mesa County Courthouse.[83]

The unincorporated water owners, most of them local farmers and businessmen, wanted to form an organization that could buy the interests of the former Grand River Ditch and Grand Valley Canal Companies. But they realized that they could not form a new company and "buy themselves" at the public auction; the precedent set in the Travelers case made such a course of action illegal.

On October 5, 1893, John P. Brockway made a proposal to the water owners that would solve their dilemma. He suggested they form the Grand Valley Irrigation Company. He individually would buy the property at public auction and then convey it, free of incumbrances, to their new organization for the sum of $40,000, plus 360 acres and two Grand Junction city lots.[84]

The water owners appointed a representative committee to study the matter. The committee recommended acceptance of the proposal and signed a contract with Brockway on January 4, 1894.[85]

The Grand Valley Irrigation Company, according to the terms of the contract, would pay Brockway the $40,000 by selling $70,000 in bonds, secured by the property. The excess $30,000 was to be used "for the purpose of raising money to be expended in making betterments and improvements of the property of the said Irrigation Company."[86]

The capital stock of the Irrigation Company would be divided among the various water owners. It would be distributed "pro-rata," i.e. on the basis of what their individual contracts and

deeds had been when under the consolidated system. The stock was "assessable;" each stockholder would be charged a yearly fee, based on his amount of stock, for maintenance, operation, enlargement, or improvement. The Company would therefore be non-profit, using assessments only to meet expenses.[87]

This complicated legal maneuvering provided a way for the Grand Valley to regain control of its destiny. On February 5, 1894, the Grand Valley Canal was sold at public auction to John P. Brockway for $10,000. The property was immediately transferred to the newly-formed Grand Valley Irrigation Company.[88] The recovery of the Grand Ditch by its users was considered a major victory. The Grand Valley Irrigation Company has managed and operated the concern since.[89]

After the purchase of the ditch, expansion of the system continued. In September of 1894, brothers Frank, Ben, and Joe Kiefer began a fourteen mile extension of the Grand Valley Irrigation Company. The Kiefer Extension grew out of the brothers' dissatisfaction with the prices for water from the Grand Valley Irrigation Company. The Keifers met with representatives of the Grand Valley Irrigation Company and reached an agreement to utilize the waste water from the Grand Valley Canal. This water made it possible to bring 10,000 acres of new land under irrigation in the Loma and Mack farming country.[90]

Many European immigrants had come to the Grand Valley to work as agricultural field laborers. These "Russian Dutch" people had successfully raised sugar beets in their homeland and the Kiefers quickly recognized the valley's potential for such a crop. Under the Kiefer Extension, the intrepid brothers began raising sugar beets on Crevasse Hill, 1,000 acres of prime land between Loma and Mack. Thus, a new industry was born in the lower valley. It would prosper for many years.[91]

Although Kiefer's water was owned by the Grand Valley Irrigation Company, the Kiefer Extension itself was a separate organization owned by the Fruita Canal and Land Company. It remained a separate entity until January 1, 1979 when the Kiefer Extension merged with the Grand Valley Irrigation Company as a move to use available water resources more efficiently.[92]

Another innovator in using water from the Grand Valley Canal was John A. Wellington. Wellington was deeded land by the United States receiver on January 30, 1894.[93] He purchased land irrigated under the line of the canal, as well as on an elevated rise above it, to the west of what is now known as Mantey Heights.[94] Wellington wanted to grow an orchard on 160 acres of the high ground, but he faced a problem in getting water from the canal which was a considerable distance below his property. His solution was to construct a huge water

Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado

John Wellington's Wheel and unidentified daredevils. The wheel was located where the north end of today's 17th Street meets the Grand Valley Canal.

Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado

The orchard of John Wellington. The "Wellington Wheel" is seen delivering water from the Grand River Ditch located fifty feet below the property.

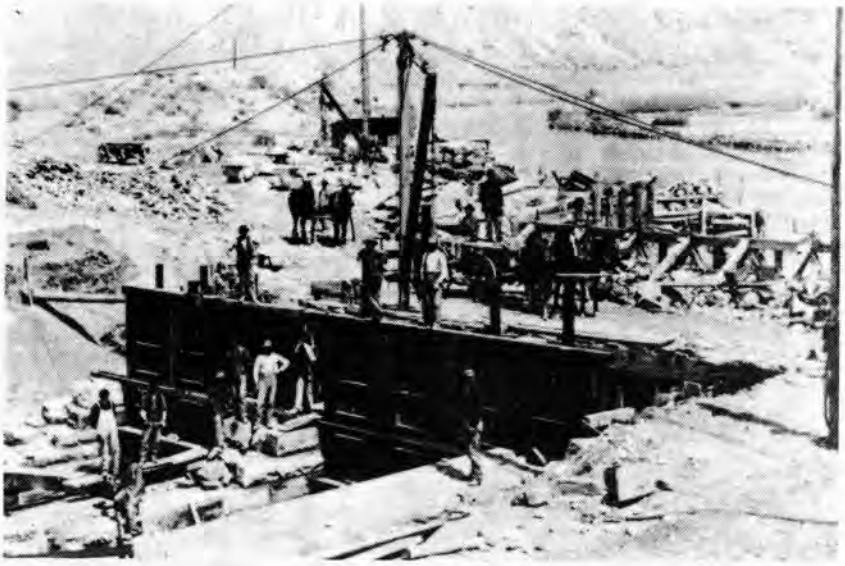


Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado

Photo courtesy of Grand Valley Irrigation Company

These pictures portray construction stages of the canal's steel headgate structure.

wheel, place it in the ditch, and forceably lift water, delivering it transversely to his orchard through a wooden flume. After first being turned down, he was granted permission to build the unlikely contraption on November 17, 1894. He later enlarged both the wheel and the canal width to supply a larger quantity of water to his orchard.[95]

By 1895, the Grand Valley Canal system at last seemed free of contention and was operating smoothly. Then on Memorial Day of 1898, an unusually fierce spring flood washed out the original wooden headgates of the Grand River Ditch.[96] Company directors agreed the best course of action was to build new headgates of steel, buttressed by stonework, to add weight and stability. Stockholders voted by a margin of more than two to one to support the project, and the work was completed by contractor J. J. Lumsden on May 6, 1901.[97] These steel headgates solved the problem of spring flooding and remain in use today.[98]

The Grand Valley Irrigation Company system is unique in the history of area irrigation since it was developed using private capital. Its story was one of men and ideas, of a vision of the future, of legal and financial struggles, and of the prominent role that water has played in the history of Colorado's Western Slope. In just nineteen years of operation, from 1882 to 1901, the Grand River Ditch evolved from untested vision to viable reality. As long as agriculture continues to play a leading role in the economy, the Grand Valley Canal system will be vital to the valley's continued growth and prosperity.

With the acquisition of the Kiefer Extension in 1979, today's Grand Valley Canal system encompasses 100 miles of ditch and provides water for nearly 45,000 acres of land. Its major use is still agricultural, though the emphasis has switched from growing food for human consumption to providing feed and pasture for stock animals. The Grand Valley Irrigation Company still provides a "winter run" to fill user stock ponds, but filling cisterns for domestic use is no longer a necessity. Today's maintenance workers, known as ditch riders, use pickup trucks rather than the horses their predecessors did. Though many things have changed in the last century, the role of the "Grand Ditch" remains the same: to provide the Grand Valley with life-giving water.[99]

The main control wheel and shaft house as it exists today.

Photo by Don Davidson

Photo by Don Davidson

The steel headgates as they are today. After an engineering inspection in 1962, the headgates were declared to be in excellent repair.

NOTES

[1]"Grand Valley Poet," excerpt from "The Banks of the Grand," published in the *Grand Junction News*, 21 April 1883.

[2]Richard E. Tope, *Objective History: Grand Junction, Colorado* (Grand Junction: Museum of Western Colorado, 1982), p. 6.

[3]Stephen F. Mehls, *The Valley of Opportunity, A History of West-Central Colorado* (Bureau of Land Management, Grand Junction, Colorado), p. 123.

[4]George N. Falconer, "All about Grand Junction and the Grand Valley of Colorado," (Grand Junction, Colorado: The Chamber of Commerce, 1904), p. 5.

[5]*Grand Junction News*, 10 March 1883.

[6]William Oldham testimony, "Claim of the Grand Valley Irrigation Company," Company archives, December 1908, p. 26.

[7]Ibid., p. 26.

[8]*Ditch Plats*, Book 1, Mesa County Clerk and Recorder, 22 August 1882, p. 1.

[9]Mesa County Democrat, *History and Business Directory of Mesa County* (Grand Junction: Mesa County Democrat, 1886), pp. 4-6.

[10]Records, Mesa County, Colorado Clerk and Recorder, *Corporations*, "Old Book," File no. 187, 31 January 1884, s.v. "Pioneer Ditch Association."

[11]*Ditch Plats*, Book 1, Mesa County Clerk and Recorder, 16 December 1882, p. 2.

[12]*Corporations*, File no. 187, 31 January 1884.

[13]Pioneer Ditch Association, Minutes, 24 March 1882.

[14]Under what has come to be known as the "doctrine of prior appropriation," a person seeking to claim a water right must make improvements on the property in question or forfeit said rights.

[15]Pioneer Ditch Association, Minutes, 24 March 1882.

[16]Ibid., 1 April 1882.

[17]*History and Business Directory of Mesa County*, pp. 4-6.

[18]Ibid., pp. 4-5.

[19]*Corporations*, File no. 184, 20 March 1882, s.v. "Pacific Slope Ditch Company."

[20]Interview with Shirley Gates Stocker, Homemaker, Grand Junction, Colorado, 28 December 1985. Shirley Gates grew up in a house at 3321 E¼ Road and remembered the abandoned Pacific Slope Ditch ran across her family's property.

[21]*Ditch Plats*, Book 1, Mesa County Clerk and Recorder, p. 7; *Grand Junction News*, 28 October 1882, 11 November 1882.

[22]*Grand Junction News*, 11 November 1882, 30 December 1882, 3 March 1883.

[23]Ibid., 9 December 1882.

[24]William Oldham testimony, "Claim of the Grand Valley Irrigation Company," Company archives, December 1908, p. 28.

[25]*Grand Junction News*, 24 March 1883.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., 9 December 1882.

[28]Ibid., 13 December 1882.

[29]*The Daily Sentinel*, 15 September 1957, "Jubilee Edition," p. 5.

[30]*Corporations*, Mesa County Clerk and Recorder, File no. 207, s. v. "Independent Ranchmen's Ditch Association."

[31]*Grand Junction News*, 24 March 1883.

[32]*Corporations*, Mesa County Clerk and Recorder, File no. 207, s.v. "Independent Ranchmen's Ditch Association."

[33]*History and Business Directory of Mesa County*, p. 12.

[34]*Grand Junction News*, 6 October 1883. An early postcard found in the archives of the Museum of Western Colorado describes the velocity as 65,000 lbs/sq. foot with 50,000 board feet of lumber used in its construction.

[35]Ibid., 24 March 1883.

[36]Ibid., 27 January 1883.

[37]Addison J. McCune, chief surveyor of Grand River Ditch, "Claim of the Grand Valley Irrigation Company," Company archives, 21 January 1909, p. 42. These bluffs northeast of Grand Junction are today known as Mantey Heights, located at 28½ Road just south of F Road (Patterson).

[38]*Grand Junction News*, 27 January 1883.

[39]Ibid., 5 May 1883.

[40]Addison J. McCune testimony, "Claim of the Grand Valley Irrigation Company," Company archives, 21 January 1909, p. 43.

[41]*Grand Junction News*, 24 March 1883.

[42]Ibid., 24 February 1883.

[43]Ibid., 24 March 1883.

[44]Ibid., 21 April 1883.

[45]Ibid., 19 May 1883.

[46]Addison J. McCune testimony, "Claim of the Grand Valley Irrigation Company," Company archives, 21 January 1909, p. 41.

[47]*Grand Junction News*, 19 May 1883.

[48]Ibid., 23 August 1884, 3 January 1885.

[49]Ibid., 3 January 1885.

[50]Ibid., 14 April 1883.

[51]Duane Vandenbusche, *The Gunnison Country* (Gunnison, Colorado: B & B Printers, 1980), p. 46.

[52]Virginia McConnell Simmons, *The San Luis Valley: Land of the Six-Armed Cross* (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 134-135. Henry, originally from New York state was a successful real estate investor. He started Colorado Loan and Trust in the early 1880s. He invested heavily in land and irrigation projects in Colorado, borrowing substantially from Travelers Insurance Company in Connecticut.

[53]*Corporations*, Mesa County Clerk and Recorder, File no. 186, 15 December 1883, s.v. "Pioneer Extension Ditch Company."

[54]Pioneer Extension Ditch Company, Minutes, 10 March 1883 - 28 November 1883.

[55]*Grand Junction News*, 12 July 1884.

[56]*Corporations*, Mesa County Clerk and Recorder, File no. 187, 31 January 1884, s.v. "Pioneer Ditch Company."

[57]First American Title Company, Map of Grand Junction and Vicinity, 1 August 1946. These stone bridges can be seen east of the old Lincoln Park Auditorium and east of the swimming pool complex.

[58]J. S. O'Neill, Superintendent of the Grand Valley Canal, "Claim of the Grand Valley Irrigation Company," Company archives, December 1908, p.5.

[59]Pioneer Extension Ditch Company, Minutes, 10 March 1883, 28 November 1883.

[60]Pioneer Ditch Association, Minutes, 3 December 1883.

[61]*Corporations*, Mesa County Clerk and Recorder, File no. 196, 31 January 1884, s.v. "Mesa County Ditch Company."

[62]*Grand Junction News*, 31 May 1884, 7 June 1884. The Pacific Slope Ditch may have been abandoned soon after this flood.

[63]*Grand Junction News*, 29 September 1883.

[64]Ibid., 10 January 1885.

[65]Ibid., 29 September 1883.

[66]Ibid.

[67]J. S. O'Neill testimony, "Claim of the Grand Valley Irrigation Company," Company archives, December 1908, pp. 2-4.

[68]Addison J. McCune testimony, "Claim of the Grand Valley Irrigation Company," Company archives, 21 January 1909, p. 44. A conservative estimate for the cost of rebuilding the Grand Valley Canal system from scratch today is $150-$200

million.

[69] *Grand Junction News*, 23 August 1884.

[70] Ibid., 27 January 1894.

[71] Ibid., 16 May 1885.

[72] Simmons, *The San Luis Valley: Land of the Six-Armed Cross*, p. 135.

[73] *History and Business Directory of Mesa County*, p. 72.

[74] *Grand Junction News*, 6 February 1886.

[75] *History and Business Directory of Mesa County*, p. 72. Today the Grand Valley Irrigation Company says it takes 1¼ shares of water to adequately irrigate an acre of land. "Delinquent" shares (those whose annual assessments have not been paid) are currently sold for about $200 each. Annual assessments are anywhere from $2.40 to $50 per share, depending on the type of stock owned. Shares of Grand Valley water are personal property. If land is sold, it is up to the buyer to determine if the selling price includes adequate water rights for the acreage involved.

[76] *Grand Junction News*, 21 July 1888.

[77] Ibid., 24 March 1888, 31 March 1888.

[78] Ibid., 21 July 1888; and Shirley Gates Stocker interview, 28 December 1985. After moving west from Nova Scotia in 1883, Gates was impressed with the Grand Valley. He returned to his native land, married Marianne "Minnie" Ferguson, and moved back to Grand Junction to take charge of Goudy's enlargement operation. After seeing Grand Junction for the first time, Minnie Gates reportedly said, "Where is the town?" A picture of the dredge used for ditch enlargement can be seen in the *Daily Sentinel*, Jubilee Edition, 15 September 1957. Minnie is shown on the floating dredge, holding baby son, Percy Gates, father of Shirley Gates Stocker.

[79] *Grand Junction News*, 21 July 1888.

[80] Ibid., 27 January 1894.

[81] *Corporations*, Mesa County Clerk and Recorder, File no. 224, 8 October 1888, s.v. "Grand Valley Canal Company."

[82] Mesa County Abstract Book, Abstract and Title Company of Mesa County, Inc., Grand Junction, Colorado, p. 29.

[83] *Grand Junction News*, 27 January 1894.

[84] Ibid., 6 January 1894.

[85] Ibid., 6 January 1894. Committee members were: Benton Cannon, J. W. Rose, Jeremiah Nolan, F. M. Slocomb, B. C. Oyler, B. F. Hughes, C. A. Brett, W. O. Cartmel, H. R. Rhone, M. L. Allison, A. J. McCune, A. D. Mahany, A. A. Miller, Joseph Deets, and H. A. Spencer.

[86] Ibid., 6 January 1894.

[87] Ibid. The consolidated system consisted of the Grand River Ditch Company, Grand Valley Canal Company, Mesa County Ditch Company, Pioneer Extension Ditch Company, and the Independent Ranchmen's Association. Any improvement or expansion requiring a special assessment would have to be approved by the stockholders.

[88] *The Daily Sentinel*, 5 February 1894.

[89] *Articles of Incorporation*, The Grand Valley Irrigation Company, 1 November 1979, p. 16.

[90] *The Fruita Times*, Centennial Edition, 3 October 1984.

[91] Ibid.

[92] *Articles of Incorporation*, The Grand Valley Irrigation Company, 1 November 1979, p. 17.

[93] United States Receiver to John A. Wellington, Title Abstract, Abstract and Title Company of Mesa County, Inc., "Old Book," 30 January 1894, p. 9.

[94] Interview with Louis "Art" Brodak, son of Mesa County Pioneer, Grand Junction, Colorado, 20 November 1985. Mantey Heights was named after Fred Mantey, an early Grand Valley saddle and bridle maker who lived on the rise.

[95] The Grand Valley Irrigation Company, Minutes, Volume 1, 17 November 1894. Minnie Gates, wife of the steam-powered floating dredge operator, related that a favorite pastime of many in the midst of a sweltering Grand Junction summer was riding Wellington's wheel in order to keep cool.

[96] *The Daily Sentinel*, Jubilee Edition, 15 September 1957.

[97] The Grand Valley Irrigation Company, Minutes, Record Book 2, p. 190.

[98] Interview with Bob Henderson, superintendent of the Grand Valley Irrigation Company, 23 October 1985. The Company considered automating the headgates in the early 1960s. But after an engineering inspection in 1962, the steel headgates were declared still in excellent repair and working order. The Company decided to leave well enough alone.

[99] Bob Henderson Interview, 14 April 1986.

Walter and Myrtle Cooper about 1940.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The following article provides insight to pioneer life on Colorado's Western Slope. It is valuable because it covers about half a century; presents a woman's reaction to pioneer life; records common people's efforts to make a living as economic conditions changed; and provides details and insights into the social history of Colorado's western plateaus. Such topics as keeping house, difficulties in travel, and the importance of water to the Western Slope are all themes in the article.

When Myrtle Iva Wressell decided to accept Walter Randall Cooper's proposal of marriage, she committed herself to pioneering on the plateaus of Colorado's Western Slope. Settlement had come late to this part of Colorado because it had been Ute territory and because the land was rugged and short on water. It required stubborn, adaptable, and resilient people to live there. The marriage ceremony was a simple affair, in keeping with the isolated nature of the area and foreshadowing the style of life required of pioneer women. The following narrative is extracted from Flora Locke's publication.

RECOLLECTIONS OF NATURITA

Taken from "Biography of Walter & Myrtle Cooper"
by Flora Locke

Flora Cooper Locke, the daughter of Myrtle and Walter Cooper about whom the article is written, recorded her mother's remembrances to form this narrative.

Myrtle Wressell's family came to Colorado from Ohio and Walter Cooper's family from Missouri. Both families settled in the small Western Slope town of Norwood, where the two met when Myrtle took a job doing domestic work for Walter's parents. They were married November 7, 1894, in Norwood, Colorado, by a Justice of the Peace in a simple ceremony in her mother's home. If they had wanted to be married by a minister it would not have been possible as there was none in the area then, nor for several years thereafter.

That day, after the ceremony, they traveled the 22 miles to a place called Naturita to begin their lives together. Their wedding journey was made in a big farm wagon, or so-called lumber wagon. Their first home was a log house with a dirt roof located close to the north bank of the San Miguel River. Their property contained 160 acres and lay on both sides of the river. Walter's brother Ed had preempted it, and they bought it from him. Their first son, Harry, was born in the log house with only a midwife to help, as was the custom in those days.

Since lumber was not easy to get, the early settlers often used dirt roofs. A dirt roof does not sound very practical, but with the dry conditions of the area, it served very well. There was

one time, however, when it rained for several days, and the dirt got wet through and water started dripping all through the house. Myrtle said there was one dry place on the bed where she put the baby, and she sat by the stove under an umbrella. Her husband was away at the time in the high mountains where he was pasturing some 120 head of horses, their only means of livlihood other than their garden.

Myrtle and Walter lived in their log house only about a year. They returned to Norwood for three years where their second son, Paul, was born in 1898.

Before leaving Naturita, they had sold their horses and bought cattle which they now pastured on the mountain called the Lone Cone. In those days the open range had very few restrictions, and people ran their livestock pretty much wherever they pleased.

In 1899, Myrtle and Walter moved back to Naturita where they had a house built on the south side of the canyon near the hillside and high above the river. They moved into it in 1900 where a daughter, Flora, was born in 1901 and a third son, Marion, was born in 1903.

Before Flora was born, Myrtle's mother and her mother's four other children, Fern, Moss, Forest, and Ella moved to Naturita from Norwood. Ella, the youngest, eventually moved to Grand Junction, but the others stayed in the area for the remainder of their lives.

The only means of travel in those days was on horseback or with team and wagon. Roads were poor and followed the lines of least resistance according to the contour of the earth. This often necessitated following stream beds and crossing over them here and there. Sometimes, after rains or in the spring when snow was melting and running off, the streams became too deep to cross and people would simply have to wait until the water level went down. Thick ice would form in the streams in the winter. When it began to warm up in the spring, the ice would thaw enough to break up into chunks, and as the chunks floated downstream, crossing became very hazardous. Sometimes the floating chunks would pile up in great heaps against other ice that had not yet broken loose. When this ice finally did break loose, it would go with a thunderous noise and force that would destroy bridges or anything that was built low enough to be in the way of the onslaught. Myrtle told of riding her horse across the river one time when there were chunks of ice floating in it. A few minutes later an ice jam, as it was called, took out a foot bridge she had just crossed.

In 1899, the Colorado Cooperative Company (C C Company) of Nucla had built a ditch from three miles up

the river to bring water onto land which they then farmed while building another ditch, the Nucla Cooperative ditch. (Editor's note[1]) The Coopers and other ranchers in Naturita took over and extended the first ditch and brought water onto their own land. Most of the land irrigated by the ditch was planted in alfalfa hay to feed the cows over the winter. Walter transferred his cattle during the summer to the Forty Seven Basin in the Uncompaghre range.

Walter and Myrtle Cooper found out before too many years that keeping only a small herd of cattle on the open range was not a very profitable business. They couldn't afford a man to look after the cattle while Walter tended his crops, and there were dishonest people who would steal the calves. Because of this, they sold all but a few milk cows which they could keep on their place and turned to other means of making a living.

Early in the 1900s, a very rich vein of copper was found in the La Sal Mountains on La Sal Creek, which runs into Paradox Valley. To get this ore to market, it was necessary to haul it with team and wagon to Placerville, a distance of about eighty miles. There it was put on freight cars on a narrow guage railroad which ran through Placerville and Telluride and on to Ophir Loop.[2] The train hauled the gold and silver ore out of that area, and of course, brought in supplies to those thriving mountain towns.

Since the cattle business had proved unprofitable, Walter and another man decided to try hauling ore. They each got four good horses and a large farm wagon and started out. The first leg of the trip was to Bedrock. The next day they went to the copper mine, loaded the ore, and returned to Bedrock. The following day they reached home again. With luck, they reached Norwood the next day and Placerville the day after. If nothing disastrous happened, they made the complete round trip in one week. Supper, bed and breakfast were usually obtained enroute for one dollar, so five nights away from home meant five dollars plus feed for the horses, and five dollars was a significant amount of money at that time.

As mentioned earlier, the roads in those days were hardly more than trails. Many people of the area complain about the Norwood hill being dangerous today; they should have seen it then. If one wished to explore, traces of the old road can still be seen, but you would hardly believe a burro could climb it without a pack, or that anyone could drive a four-horse team and wagon up and

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[1]For more information see Ellen Peterson, The Spell of the Tabaguache (Rimrocker Historical Society, 1957). The Colorado Cooperative Company was legally organized in 1893 by nine men and one woman to establish a cooperative settlement in Tabaguache Park, of which Nucla was a part, only five miles distance from Naturita.

[2]Otto Mears' Rio Grande Southern railroad.

Four-horse teams on the Norwood Hill.

down it. Roughlocks were used to hold the wagon from going too fast, as well as the regular brakes all wagons had. The roughlock was a chain, rope, or just something fastened on one wheel to keep it from turning, and the driver had to know which wheel to put it on, or it would throw the wagon off to one side. Since roads then were only wide enough for one vehicle, with turnouts here and there for passing, throwing the wagon to one side could likely mean throwing it over the hill.

When rain continued for any length of time, mud would get almost axle deep in some places, and it might take many days to go the distance ordinarily traveled in one day. There were usually places where one could stay overnight about every ten miles, but of course this was expensive.

While the men were hauling ore, the women necessarily tended the farms: irrigating, milking, feeding the livestock, and doing numerous other chores besides caring for the children. Myrtle was perfectly capable of doing all this work with the help of the children.

Walter didn't stay with ore hauling very long.

Myrtle was a real pioneer woman who never shrank from the hard work or privations she had to endure. In fact, she rather enjoyed meeting hardships face-to-face and conquering them. She was not afraid to stay alone night or day, and wild animals held no perils for her. She was an excellent shot with either a twenty-two or a shotgun, and she kept an eye out for coyotes, bobcats, foxes, hawks,

owls, and numerous other creatures that preyed on her chickens and turkeys.

Indians sometimes stopped by, but it never worried her. They were always friendly, and she said they seemed to be merely riding through the country, usually stopping only to ask directions.

Myrtle was at home either riding or driving horses. In those days, women rode their horses with sidesaddles. These saddles were made with a stirrup on one side only. The seat was quite flat, and there was a kind of curved saddle horn in front which the ladies hooked one leg over at the knee. People didn't talk about legs in those days; they were limbs. But the ladies, including Myrtle, were quite as adept at riding in this fashion as women are today with a common western saddle.

When the Coopers first moved to the valley, there were only two other houses. Gradually, other people followed and took up the vacant land, and built their ditches to bring water from the river to raise their crops. The Coopers and their neighbors had much in common and, in spite of hard work and long hours, did find time to be neighborly and help each other.

A one-room school house was built with lumber from the C C Company. This building was not only used for school, but for all social gatherings such as dances, box suppers, and potluck dinners. Music for the dances was furnished by anyone who could fiddle a violin accompanied by someone playing chords on an organ; Walter was one who often played the organ.

Water in southwestern Colorado was a problem for the early settlers in winter as well as in summer. Since water was shut out of the ditch during the winter, because flumes would freeze and burst, all water used in the home had to be hauled from the river in barrels. Walter usually had a farm wagon by the back porch with a couple of barrels in it and when they became empty, he hitched a team to the wagon and went down to the river and filled them up. In extreme cold weather a barrel would be kept inside the house, for if left outside it, too, would freeze solid.

In summer, if the ditch water was muddy when wash day came, Myrtle would take a few prickly pear cactus, burn the spines off, pound the cactus into a mass with a hammer, and then stir it into a barrel of water. In a few minutes, the juice of the cactus would absorb mud out of the water and settle to the bottom of the barrel, leaving the water clear.

Blocks of ice cut out of San Miguel River ready to store for the winter.

Keeping food in the summer time was difficult, and without a supply of ice would have been impossible. So a building was erected in which ice was stored in sawdust. This ice would last all summer if put up properly and at the right time. In those days, ice would freeze 18 inches thick on the San Miguel River, and the men would saw out big chunks, haul it with team and wagon, and store it in the sawdust. The ice had to be hard and clear, and this meant cutting it during the coldest weather before it started to melt. Putting up ice was a mean and hazardous job. It was cut out with an ice saw, pulled out with large tongs, and lifted into the wagons. More than one man had to be rescued from the ice cold river over the years.

The Naturita post office was the distribution point for several even smaller offices, some of which do not exist today. This meant that all of the first class mail for these small offices came in a locked sack, and then the Naturita office put the mail for each of these other offices in other sacks, and carriers would pick them up and take them to the other offices. The postmaster also put mail in sacks to be dropped at ranch mailboxes along the routes. For this extra work, they were paid a wage of a few dollars a month. Besides this income, they got fifty percent of the first hundred dollars worth of stamps they cancelled during the month; first class postage at that time was two cents on letters and one cent on postcards. They never cancelled anywhere near a hundred dollars worth of stamps a month, so their wages didn't amount to much. To compute the amount, they had to count and keep track of postage on letters, cards, parcels, etc.

The mail train leaves for Joe, Jr. — now Uravan, Colorado.

Myrtle and Walter kept the post office for four or five years and then turned it over to her sister, Moss, and the Coopers started boarding transients, which were mostly freighters and cowboys. When the Standard Chemical Company started operating mines and a mill, with offices a few miles from Naturita at a place called the Coke Ovens, a few white-collar workers stayed with the Coopers. Practically all who stopped at the Coopers, whether white collar worker, cowboy, or whoever, had healthy appetites, and this meant a lot of cooking. Since Myrtle was an excellent cook, and always served good meals, people liked to stop or stay with them. However, the profit didn't amount to very much.

She also tried to have clean beds, and this was not easy as most of those who stopped over never carried a suitcase or overnight bag containing such things as pajamas or clean clothes. They slept in their underwear (longhandles), and as they went from one hotel to another, they often picked up bedbugs and carried them along in their clothing, as well as the plain ordinary dirt they collected as they went along. Most of the travelers took a bath only when they got home. One of the chores when changing beds was to carry an oil can along and spray places in the mattresses or beds where vermin might hide. Myrtle had a fairly nice wooden bedstead with carving on it which got infested with bedbugs, and even after she quit keeping people, she never got rid of the bugs until she burned the bedstead.

About the time Myrtle and Walter first moved to Naturita, the hanging flume, was completed down river from what is now the nearby town of Uravan. An English company had spent great sums of money to have this ditch and flume built for the purpose of washing gold. This project was an unusual feat in engineering and accomplishment, and great portions of it can still be seen hanging in the

canyon walls. For miles along the face of towering cliffs, holes were drilled by hand (there was no other way then), and iron rods were inserted into the holes to support the wooden flume. The bed of the flume is about eight feet wide, and it was claimed, by men who lived in the area at the time, that donkeys were used to carry the lumber to the workmen as they pushed the building of the flume along in front of them. Sad to say, when the flume was finished, and the water was turned in, they found that the available gold was what was called flour gold, and was so fine they could not save it. The story is told that the man who engineered the building of the flume went back to England and shot himself. Through the years many stories have been built up around it. One was that the water wouldn't run through after the flume was built because it wasn't on grade, but Myrtle said she knew this was not true. She and Walter had seen the water running out the last end of it, and the caretaker had a trap fixed to catch the fish that came through the water.

The town of Nucla developed about five miles from Naturita, and eventually served many needs of the people of that west end of the county, although the Coopers, and many others, still needed to take their yearly trip to Montrose, the county seat, to lay in supplies of staples. This trip was made with a team of horses and a farm wagon over Highway 90, a distance of about 55 miles. It took four days to make the trip and do their trading. The first night they camped at Iron Springs on top of the Uncompaghre mountain. They went on to Montrose the next day and did part of their trading, finished up the following morning, and traveled back to Iron Springs for the overnight. The roads were hardly more than cow trails, and as they journeyed along over deep ruts, it was often difficult to stay in the seat. But for all that, it was a yearly adventure which afforded the participants a great deal of pleasure.

A postmaster was needed in the Naturita area, so Myrtle and Walter built a room on the front of their house, and the post office was established in it. At that time, there was no such requirement as a civil service examination for postmaster, especially for fourth class post offices; it usually went to whomever would take it. At one time, Naturita had a postmistress who limited the number of money orders she would write in one day, and if any more came for money orders that day, she would tell them she had written all she could in one day.

Walter built a good-sized barn with stalls for the freighter teams and a large hay loft above. Freighters and cowboys often slept in the loft on the hay when there was not room in the house.

The closest doctor lived about 75

Some of the first trucks that hauled mail from Naturita, Colorado.

miles away at Telluride and traveled only by horse and buggy, so usually home remedies were used. Eventually a doctor moved to Norwood, only 22 miles away, but this was a half day trip in good weather. Most babies were delivered only with the help of midwives.

When someone died, the neighbor men rallied around to dig the grave and build a coffin of plain pine boards. The neighbor women lined it with whatever cloth was available. There was no such thing as a mortician in the area, and bodies were not embalmed. Floral offerings were brought from the local gardens, but the sympathy from neighbors no doubt meant more than the floral offerings. Walter had an excellent bass voice and Myrtle a fair soprano, so they were often asked to sing at funerals. In fact, Walter once remarked that he had sung at every funeral in the valley.

Around 1910, Blake and Payson, who owned the ranch adjoining Myrtle and Walter's, laid out a town site on a small area of land about a half mile away from the Cooper's house. The post office was moved to this site, and other people had the job for a few years. Myrtle decided she would like to have it again when the postmaster's job became available.

By this time, a number of changes had taken place. It was necessary to take an examination for the job, so Myrtle took it and was awarded the position. Instead of the old wagons and teams, cars and trucks had come into use, but roads were still a big

problem. When the roads were dry, these vehicles went through easily; when the roads were muddy, their wheels became buried. With the help of chains and some pushing, they eventually went through. The mail stage (no longer a traditional stage coach) hauled quite a few passengers, as this was the only means many of them had for going to other towns. Men passengers were often asked to push. The Cooper's daughter Flora, when she became old enough, helped in the post office, but after graduating from high school in 1919, got married and soon left the area. Not too long afterward, Myrtle gave up the office, and they made their living mostly on the farm.

People on these small farms often tried ways of adding to their small income. One such venture of the Coopers was to raise turkeys for city markets. To do this, they kept over a few hens and toms in the fall to lay eggs and hatch young turkeys in the spring. Since the turkeys did not seem to do so well in confined conditions, they were given the run of the farm. They roosted in trees at night and hid their nests out in weeds or brush, so they were prey to many things. After the coyotes, bobcats, foxes, owls, skunks, and so forth got their quota, there were usually about 50 left in the fall for market. Preparing fowl for market was a far cry from what it is today. About the only things taken from them were their life and their feathers.

In order to kill them, a sharp instrument was run up through the mouth into the brain. This killed the bird, and as he died the feathers loosened somewhat for a few moments. The trick was to pull out as many feathers as possible while they were in this loosened condition, especially the large wing and tail feathers. They were picked dry, their head and feet left on, and their intestines left in. The fewer the feathers and blemishes on the skin, the better price was received when they were sent to market. The only thing water touched was the feet; they were scrubbed clean. No wonder people said a meat market fowl was not fit to eat.

A number of people in the area raised turkeys for market, so they formed a club and worked together to get truck loads ready to ship at the same time. In refrigerated trucks? Oh, no. They were killed for the Thanksgiving and Christmas markets, so they were boxed and shipped to Montrose in open trucks. The atmosphere was the refrigeration. People came in to meet with the club and give talks and answer questions about the best way to raise and market the fowls, and these occasions were used for social gatherings with pot luck dinners and so forth, and the old members of the turkey clubs have happy memories of these occasions.

Myrtle was always interested in schools, and served on the school board for thirty years. When electricity was brought into the area, Myrtle served on the R.E.A. board for a number of

years. Walter never seemed to care for this kind of activity, and kept busy on the farm.

She was also interested in politics, and served on election boards. In those days, counting the ballots didn't begin until the polls were closed at seven PM, and it was a long and tedious chore, usually lasting until midnight or later. After the ballots were all counted, one of them (usually this fell to Myrtle) called the Montrose Press to give them the results. Yes, by then they had telephones; over twenty on one line. The day after election, two people, one of each party, took the ballots to Montrose, the county seat. These people were paid mileage to do this, and Myrtle was often one of them. She could tell many tales about their arduous trips in wagons, Model T's, etc.

One by one their children married. Some continued to live near them for a time, but finally, all moved away; Harry and Paul to Oregon and Flora and Marion to southern California. But Myrtle and Walter continued to live on the farm, working long, hard hours to make their living. Paul had been the first one married, and some of his children were grown and married before he moved away; some stayed in the area, so Myrtle and Walter had the pleasure of having some of their grandchildren nearby, and others came back to visit about once a year.

Walter lost his health and died in May, 1948. After this, Myrtle and a younger sister Fern, who had never married, continued to live on the farm and run it. In 1953, Flora and her husband, Robert, who had just retired from an oil company, came to live on the farm and help run it. After some time, Fern left to live with another sister. Robert died in 1957, and Myrtle and Flora were left to carry on alone.

The town had grown and the land adjoining theirs was subdivided, but Myrtle refused many offers to sell the farm, and she continued to live in the house they had built in 1900. Flora's son, James, retired from the army in 1966, and he and his wife and their youngest son built a house adjoining the farm.

The former old, rough road had become a good highway, and trucks loaded with uranium and vanadium ore went by fairly often night and day. But Myrtle was content to stay on the old place to raise her flowers and garden, go to card parties and a social club called Park Club. In 1968, she voted for the 71st year, and she remarked that it was the first time she had voted on a machine. Yes, there had been many changes in her lifetime.

Myrtle's life ended peacefully, on the farm she had occupied for over 70 years, in December of 1970.

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