Journal of the Western Slope

Volume 2, No. 1 Winter 1987

Mesa college.

JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE

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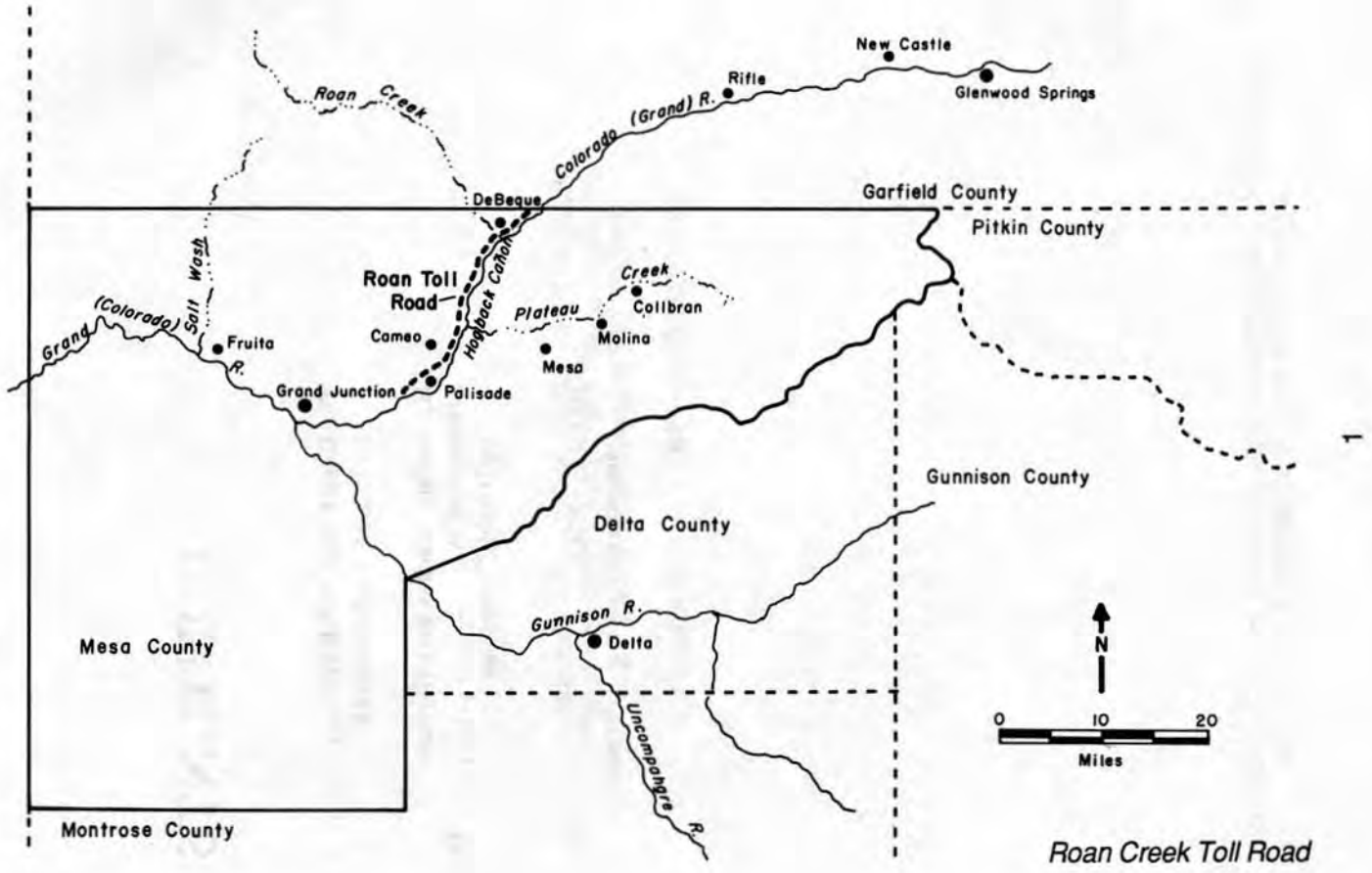
THE COVER: The cover drawing is by Jayne Valentine who came to Grand Junction from Wyoming. She attends Mesa College and is majoring in fine art.

CONTENTS



Roan Creek Toll Road

THE ROAN CREEK TOLL ROAD

by Donald A. MacKendrick

Donald A. MacKendrick is Professor of History and Dean, School of Social and Behavioral Science, at Mesa College.

To break transportation and communication barriers was always a prime item on the agendas of frontier communities. In part this desire for contact with the outside world sprang from a determination to avoid being socially and culturally isolated from the more developed sections of the nation. It sprang also from the intense interests of promoters, speculators, and settlers who wished to make money; to see the economies of their new communities burgeon and thrive. In this regard, the future of new communities depended on finding adequate solutions to the problems of moving goods to market and mill. In the nineteenth century, the best solution to the problem, of course, was a railroad for which every new town yearned and would willingly pay a premium to obtain. In the interim, however, a wagon road would have to suffice, and often did suffice.[1]

In the development of wagon roads many sections of the far West received significant aid from the federal government, especially from the United States Army and the Department of Interior's Pacific Wagon Road Office. Colorado largely was by-passed because of the ruggedness of the terrain and the availability of easier east-west routes both north and south of the state. Western Colorado suffered an even larger measure of neglect. The only federal activity in providing wagon roads through Colorado's westernmost regions resulted from Captain John W. Gunnison's expedition through the area in 1853 and subsequent improvements in his makeshift road by General Albert Sidney Johnston's force on its return trek from Utah's "Mormon War" in 1859. Nor were nineteenth century state and local governments of much help in providing overland arteries.[2]

Under such circumstances private enterprise saw opportunity in providing early wagon links. Privately financed, constructed, and operated toll roads thus became a major, though transitory, means of breaking transportation barriers in Western Colorado. The bulk of this activity occurred in the mining districts of Southwestern Colorado, especially in

Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado

A stagecoach on the Roan Toll Road.

the San Juan Mountains, where Otto Mears, Enos Hotchkiss, Sylvester Richardson, and others distinguished themselves in carving roads out of "high mountains, steep gorges, and river valleys – routes that even today, to experienced highway engineers, seem almost impossible of attainment."[3]

Not so well known or studied were toll roads built to serve communities outside the Western Colorado mining area. One such enterprise was a link between the towns of Grand Junction and De Beque via the canyon of the Colorado River (then Grand River) known as the Roan Creek Toll Road which served to unite the isolated eastern sections of Mesa County with its more settled western sections between 1885 and 1890.

The settlement of Mesa County began in the fall of 1881, the town of Grand Junction was platted in 1882, and Mesa County was carved out of a larger Gunnison county in 1883. Topography was largely ignored in establishing the Mesa County boundaries. Except for the county's southeastern boundary, which followed the divide between the drainage systems of the Colorado and North Fork of the Gunnison Rivers, the boundaries followed arbitrary lines without regard to natural barriers. One such barrier was the canyon of the Colorado River which obstructed access to the northeastern section of the county.[4]

This corner of the county, which included tiny settlements in Plateau Valley, in the Bluestone Valley, in Cactus Valley, and on Roan Creek, was clearly isolated, particularly from the principal town and county seat, Grand Junction. Wagon trails, as opposed to improved roads, served the area by indirect routes through difficult terrain. For instance, settlers in the Roan Creek area found travel down the Colorado River by wagon next to impossible. Most settlers chose alternate routes, either through the Plateau Valley country south of the river, or, more frequently, up Roan Creek, then along the backside of the Bookcliff Mountains to the head of Salt Wash near present-day Fruita, down Salt Wash to the Grand Valley, then east to Grand Junction; a trip of one hundred miles to a city only thirty-five miles down river from the Roan Creek settlements.[5]

Clearly the ideal solution to the problem faced by residents in the eastern part of the county was a railroad through Hogback Canyon (now called De Beque Canyon). Indeed there was much hope and a good deal of speculation that such a development might occur. The Denver and Rio Grande and the Colorado Midland were busy building toward Aspen and it seemed logical to Mesa County citizens that one or the other would extend its line down the Colorado River to Grand Junction to connect with the Denver and Rio Grande Western from Salt Lake City.[6]

Perhaps it was the likelihood of construction of a railroad through the canyon that stirred Henry Rhone, a recent arrival in the frontier town of Grand Junction, to action on the idea of building a toll road through Hogback Canyon. Such a road would be an interim solution to the problem of uniting the two parts of Mesa County; it would enlarge the market area of the Grand Junction community to include some of Garfield and Rio Blanco Counties; and it would put the builder in possession of the best right-of-way down the canyon should a railroad arrive at a later date.

Henry Rustler Rhone, the organizer and builder of the Roan Creek Toll Road, was born in Galesburg, Illinois, in 1858. After graduating from Union College of Law in Chicago he set out, in 1880, to seek his fortune in Colorado which was, at the time, in the midst of a great silver mining boom. He located first in the mining camp of Kokomo, near Leadville, but

Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado

Henry Rhone

when the government threw open the Ute Reservation, he decided to relocate in George Crawford and Company's new town of Grand Junction.[7]

Rhone arrived in Grand Junction in 1882, opened a law office, got a job as Grand Junction City Attorney, and began involving himself in civic affairs, serving, eventually, a term on the school board and a term as mayor. He became involved in real estate and mining speculation as well. A towering figure with a powerful, booming voice, he was, according to his godson, Armand De Beque, "quite a promoter." A contemporary characterized him as the best stump speaker in the Mesa County Republican Party.[8]

In 1883 Rhone tried out his toll road idea on a number of friends including Edwin Price, publisher of the *Grand Junction News;* D. P. Kingsley, associated with Price in the newspaper business and, later, president of the New York Life Insurance Company; and Dr. W. A. E. De Beque, a pioneer rancher in the Roan Creek country. For financial reasons, according to Rhone's widow, Ida, this first attempt to launch the road scheme failed.[9]

Undaunted, Rhone tried again in 1884. He resigned his position as City Attorney and closed his law practice to devote full time to promoting

and constructing the toll road. This time he drew two Grand Junction businessmen, Thomas B. Crawford and J. W. Boulden, into the enterprise and in August 1884, the threesome incorporated the Roan Creek Toll Road Company. The Articles of Incorporation projected the road to:

> commence at or near the headgate of the Grand River Ditch . . . and running thence by the most direct and feasible route to the mouth of Hogback Canyon, and thence up said canyon to the north side of the Grand River by the most feasible and direct route . . . and thence continuing up said Grand River on the same side by the most feasible and direct route to the County line between Mesa and Garfield Counties . . .

The length of the projected road was said to be about thirty miles.[10]

The company planned to sell 10,000 shares of stock at ten dollars par to raise capital to build the road, a large sum in that day and certainly more than was needed to construct the road.[11] It did not matter, however, for that amount of money simply could not be raised in the capital-poor Grand Valley in the 1880s. The stock did not sell well, and a series of financial schemes was launched to raise construction money. Rhone borrowed a small sum, about $500, from W. T. Carpenter, President of the Mesa County Bank and, later, builder of the Little Bookcliff Railroad. Also, Rhone launched a subscription drive among Grand Junction merchants, trading stock and scrip for cash and supplies. The scrip could be used later to pay tolls on the road to De Beque.[12]

The *Grand Junction News,* a vigorous booster, heartily endorsed these efforts, urging community support while chastising local businessmen for their lack of enthusiasm and foresight.[13] Repeatedly the *News* painted glowing pictures of all the business the road would generate with the east end of the county and beyond; Glenwood Springs, Aspen, and the White River country around Meeker.[14] An April, 1885, article in the *News* was typical of the paper's boosterism:

> If this road was now open Grand Junction would be the liveliest burg in Colorado. If this route was available, hundreds of freight teams would be laboring between this city and the north, and with that tide of traffic would go a hundred other industries. The question is how much longer will Grand Junction waste her opportunities? How long before her businessmen will see where their interests lie? Let the doubter spend $2 for a saddle horse some day and ride over the road. If he doesn't come back full of the vast importance of this project then he is as blind as a mule.[15]

The first attempt to raise money by subscription netted about $1,000 in cash and goods, not enough to push the project very far. Backers of the road accordingly turned to the County Commissioners for some public assistance. A petition signed by over 250 citizens was sent to the Commission pleading for funds. Whether the Commissioners were unimpressed with

Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado

A section of Henry Rhone's Dotsero Cutoff Road.

the plea, financially strapped, or uncertain of the legality of such aid is not clear. What is clear is that no public assistance for the project came from this source.[16]

Rhone proceeded with construction nevertheless, paying costs as they developed, and operating on a shoestring. With cash raised he bought equipment and dynamite. He paid workmen, some with their own teams of horses, in scrip rather than cash. Even hunters were hired for scrip to bring in venison to feed the work crew of up to two dozen men.[17]

Grading began at the Grand Junction end of the canyon and progressed slowly because of financial problems. Scrip brought workers to the job but did not keep them there. When Rhone got W. T. Carpenter to buy $3,000 worth of stock in the company, the construction workers demanded an end to scrip payment now that Rhone had cash in hand. When Rhone refused to pay in cash, many workers quit and subsequently sued in county court. They won, putting an end to the scrip system for paying labor costs and further exacerbating the job of financing construction.[18]

Rhone continued to use scrip, however, to obtain funds and supplies from Grand Junction merchants, trading one dollar in scrip for eighty cents in cash or goods. Judge R. D. Mobley, who had ruled against Rhone on the scrip issue, suggested that Grand Junction businessmen, in exchange for scrip from Rhone, pledge to pay the wages (about $1.50 per day) of a worker on the toll road for a month as a solution to the company's labor and cash flow problems. This proposal failed, also.[19]

Despite these problems, construction went forward. By April, 1885 the *News* reported that five miles of road had been completed but more complicated and expensive construction was still ahead. The editor reported optimistically: "any one who will look at what has been done will hardly doubt the ability of the company to build the road."[20] By August construction under the ledge of the so-called "high cliff," about twenty-five miles from Grand Junction, moved forward. Reported the *News:* "If no difficulty is experienced in collecting the money subscribed already, wagons will be driven to Glenwood and Aspen via this route in sixty days."[21]

In early December Rhone obtained another $2,000 from Denver financial interests to pay for the final phases of construction. The road became passable, though not finished, by December 5, 1885. Final touches on construction were completed in the spring of 1886.[22]

The reported cost of the total project was about $12,000. Two-thirds of this amount had been raised in cash, the remainder in scrip exchanges; a far cry from the $100,000 projected in the company's original stock issue.[23]

What kind of road had Mr. Rhone built? From inspection of some remaining segments of the road it would appear that the link was typical of toll roads built during the era. State law required such roads to be at least ten feet wide with vehicle passing turnouts, in sight of each other, every one-quarter mile. Such turnouts had to be sixteen feet wide and at least fifty feet long. The road grade could not exceed fifteen percent.[24] Rhone's road, which followed the north bank of the Colorado River, seems only to have met these bare minimums.

The road could not be opened until the County Surveyor certified to the County Commissioners that the law had been complied with. The Mesa County Surveyor appeared before the Commissioners on December 14, 1885 to deliver such a certification. The Commissioners accepted the certification, set the toll rates, and appointed R. N. De Beque, Dr. De Beque's brother, special constable on the road.[25]

The cost of using the road seems high but was typical of rates charged by other toll roads in Colorado: a single team and wagon or stagecoach, $3.00; each saddle animal, 75¢; loose cattle, horses, and mules, 22½¢ each; loose hogs and sheep, 75¢ each.[26] According to Julia Harris, a Mesa County pioneer whose parents traveled over the road, toll stations were located at each end of the canyon, one near the future town of De Beque and one in the vicinity of present-day Cameo.[27] Mile posts were erected along the road for convenient counting of distances.[28]

With the road open, stage lines began regular service between Grand Junction and Glenwood Springs. Though the toll road ended at the Mesa County line, it joined a public road maintained by Garfield County at its

Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado

Stagecoach outside the Brunswick Hotel, Grand Junction, ready for departure to New Castle over the Roan Toll Road.

De Beque terminus. Thus, the road continued on to Parachute, Rifle, New Castle, and Glenwood Springs. A firm named Hammond and Kennedy advertised regular weekly stage trips to Glenwood Springs leaving Grand Junction each Monday morning and departing from Glenwood Springs each Thursday morning.[29]

Hynes and Waller, operating out of Johnny Hynes' Livery Stable on Colorado Avenue in Grand Junction, advertised express service utilizing relays of horses. "This is the regular mail line," proclaimed Hynes' advertisement, "which enables us to defy competition. Express carried and guaranteed safe delivery," Neither company listed fares, time tables, or stops, though it appears that the Hynes Line stopped over at Parachute on a two day schedule to Glenwood Springs.[30]

By 1888 another stage line, Prairie's Stage, was operating along the route. Prairie's advertised a trip to New Castle in eighteen hours for a fare of eight dollars. Stages left Grand Junction three days a week on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 7 a.m. Three weekly runs suggest heavy passenger traffic over the road.[31]

In the summer of 1886, barely seven months after the opening of the road, rumors of a railroad down the Colorado River canyon began again. The Burlington was said to be interested in establishing a connection between Denver and Salt Lake City via Grand Junction. In addition, there was a report that the Union Pacific was planning to build from Rawlins, Wyoming to Meeker, Colorado approaching the Colorado River Canyon via Rifle Creek. Surveying was rumored to be underway south of Rawlins.[32]

By September, 1886 there were published reports that the Burlington, the Denver and Rio Grande, and the Colorado Midland all were surveying in the Colorado River Canyon below Glenwood Springs.[33] Obviously a railroad was coming. How soon it would arrive was still not clear, but few doubted that when it came the Roan Creek Toll Road right-of-way through the Hogback Canyon would be sought.

The railroad rumors subsided in 1887 only to revive in the summer of 1888 with published reports of a planned joint D & RG-Midland artery down the Colorado River to Grand Junction. This project came to fruition with the creation of the Rio Grande Junction Railroad Company whose trackage from New Castle to Grand Junction would be utilized by both the Denver & Rio Grande and the Midland.[34]

While the railroad barons negotiated and jockied, the toll road continued to operate as the only suitable link between Grand Junction and New Castle. The railroad had reached New Castle in 1889. Periodically Henry Rhone would take a trip over the road to inspect it and authorize repairs and improvements. In April, 1889 the *News* reported that Rhone had come down from Glenwood Springs where he had been engaged in some legal business and "is now with his usual vigor, overhauling the upper end of the toll road, putting in bridges and doing needed grading on the gulches near the Roan Creek hill."[35] In August of the same year, there was a report that Rhone was back traveling the road, "greeting numerous friends along the line. He came to inspect the condition of the road and to correct defects."[36] If the road's life was about to come to an end, Rhone's actions as late as August 1889 did not indicate it.

Late in 1889, however, the D & RG and Midland railroads struck their deal. It was at this time or shortly thereafter that Rhone sold his road to the Rio Grande Junction Railway. Grading below Rifle began in the spring of 1890 and by November the line was completed and standard gauge rolling stock came down the Colorado River following the old toll road bed through the Hogback Canyon and on to Grand Junction. The life of Mr. Rhone's remarkable frontier enterprise thus came to an end.[37]

Meanwhile, Henry Rhone had turned to other activities. He built a handsome home just outside the Grand Junction city limits (now on the southeast corner of the 12th Street and White Avenue intersection) and opened a real estate and law office on the 500 block of Main Street above Ackerman's Clothing Store. He acquired a thousand acres of land northwest of Grand Junction, subdivided it, and began planting apple orchards. He even laid out a townsite, but did not follow through with its development. The area is still referred to by Grand Valley natives as the Rhone District.[38]

Then, in 1911, Rhone turned once more to toll-road building. He acquired a right-of-way for such a road along the Colorado River from Dotsero between Glenwood Springs and Eagle to a point north (Orestod) where the river exits from Middle Park. Though he put considerable capital into the

Photo courtesy of Don MacKendrick

A remaining segment of the Roan Creek Toll Road.

Photo courtesy of Don MacKendrick

De Beque (Hogback) Canyon today.

Photo courtesy of Kent Main

Henry Rhone's house, located at Twelfth and White in Grand Junction, as it appears today.

project, it was never completed. Still, he retained the right-of-way and made periodic improvements on it.[39] Only four days before his sudden death from a heart attack in 1925 Rhone began negotiating with the Denver & Rio Grande for the sale of this so-called Dotsero Cutoff right-of-way. By that time the Denver & Rio Grande was struggling for its life and hoped to save itself financially by tapping the railroad traffic west of Denver. Such a connection would give Denver direct access to Salt Lake City and funnel traffic from the Denver and Salt Lake and other railroads to the Denver & Rio Grande line through the Colorado River Valley and Grand Junction. After many delays, the D & RG completed the cutoff in June 1934 utilizing Henry Rhone's projected toll road right-of-way.[40]

Today the De Beque Canyon between the towns of Palisade and De Beque, Colorado is pierced by two modern transportation systems. On the south side of the Colorado River runs a paved automobile highway. Along the river's north bank, where stagecoaches and lumbering horse-drawn wagons once rolled, diesel-powered freight and passenger trains now travel. However, the traveler with a watchful eye, while passing through the canyon, can still catch glimpses of surviving sections of Henry Rhone's old toll road; remnants of a remarkable era when frontier entrepreneurs with limited amounts of capital and a lot of determination, sweat, and intestinal fortitude struggled to open a virgin country.

Photo courtesy of Don MacKendrick

Remains of a bridge abutment on the old Roan Creek Toll Road.

Photo courtesy of Don MacKendrick

Scanning a remaining stretch of the Roan Creek Toll Road.

NOTES

[1]Oscar O. Winther, *The Transportation Frontier: Trans-Mississippi West, 1865-1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1964), pp. 10-13.

[2]William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and Scientist in the Winning of the West* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1966), pp. 286-288. Lois Borland, "Ho for the Reservation; Settlement of the Western Slope," *Colorado Magazine*, XXIX, 1952, pp. 58-75. See also, W. Turrentine Jackson, *Wagon Roads West, a Study of Federal Road Surveys and Construction in the Trans-Mississippi West, 1846-1869* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).

[3]D. H. Cummins, "Toll Roads in Southwestern Colorado," *Colorado Magazine*, XXIX, 1952, pp. 98-104. See also, Michael Kaplan, *Otto Mears, Paradoxical Pathfinder* (Silverton, CO: San Juan County Book Co., 1982). Arthur Ridgway, "The Mission of Colorado Toll Roads," *Colorado Magazine*, IX, 1932, pp. 161-169. Duane A. Smith, *Rocky Mountain Mining Camps, the Urban Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), pp. 53-55.

[4]Erl H. Ellis, *Colorado Mapology* (Frederick, CO: Jende-Hagan Book Co., 1983), pp. 215-216. *Session Laws*, General Assembly of Colorado, 1883, p. 133.

[5]*Grand Junction News*, 20 September 1890.

[6]Robert G. Athearn, *Rebel of the Rockies: A History of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), pp. 154-188.

[7]Charles W. Haskell, *History and Business Directory of Mesa County, Colorado* (Grand Junction, CO: the Mesa County Democrat, 1886), p. 56.

[8]Ibid. Interview, Armand De Beque, 18 July 1985.

[9]Interview, Ida Rhone, Pamphlet 364, Doc. 16, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, CO, n.d.k The "financial reasons" seem to have been an inability to raise the necessary funds and the speculative nature of such a project.

[10]Charters of Incorporation, Secretary of State of Colorado, Vol. 10, p. 90. Charles W. Haskell, *History*, p. 56.

[11]Charters of Incorporation, Vol. 10, p. 90.

[12]*Grand Junction News*, 23 January 1886. Charles W. Haskell, *History*, p. 56.

[13]*Grand Junction News*, 18 April 1885; 17 October 1885.

[14]Ibid., 21 February 1885; 20 June 1885; 5 September 1885.

[15]Ibid., 18 April 1885.

[16]*Proceedings*, Board of County Commissioners, Mesa County, CO, Book I, 22 April 1885; 29 April 1885; 25 May 1885.

[17]*Grand Junction News*, 22 August 1885; 23 January 1886.

[18]Ibid., 23 January 1886.

[19]Ibid., 6 June 1885.

[20]Ibid., 18 April 1885.

[21]Ibid., 22 August 1885.

[22]Ibid., 23 January 1886.

[23]Ibid.

[24]*General Statutes*, State of Colorado, CVII (Denver: Times Steam Printing and Publishing Co., 1883), pp. 946-48.

[25]Ibid. *Proceedings*, Board of County Commissioners, Book I, 3 August 1885; 14 December 1885.

[26]*Proceedings*, Board of County Commissioners, Book I, 14 December 1885.

[27]Interview, Julia Harris, 26 June 1985.

[28]*Proceedings*, Board of County Commissioners, Book I, 8 January 1886.

[29]*Grand Junction News*, 30 January 1886; 27 February 1886; 20 March 1886.

[30]Steven F. Mehls, *The Valley of Opportunity: A History of West-Central Colorado* (Denver: Bureau of Land Management, 1982), p. 78.

[31]*Grand Junction News*, 30 June 1888.

[32]Ibid., 10 July 1886.

[33]Ibid., 25 September 1886.

[34]Ibid., 21 July 1888. Morris Cafky, *Colorado Midland* (Denver: Rocky Mountain Railroad Club, 1986), pp. 47-49.

[35]*Grand Junction News*, 30 April 1889.

[36]Ibid., 6 August 1889.

[37]Ibid., 9 August 1890; 27 September 1890; 22 November 1890.

[38]Interview, Ida Rhone. *Daily Sentinel*, 20 March 1925.

[39]*Daily Sentinel*, 20 March 1925.

[40]Ibid. Robert G. Athearn, *Rebel of the Rockies*, pp. 274-299.

HISTORICAL NOTES

MUSEUM OF WESTERN COLORADO

In an effort to promote historical activities, the *JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE* will publish information about other non-profit organizations devoted to the study of Western Colorado. This service is free and will appear when space permits. Organizations wishing to submit material are asked to write letters of inquiry to the editors of this publication.

The following sketch features the Museum of Western Colorado. The editors wish to acknowledge the generous assistance of the Museum's staff to the authors and editors of the *JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE.*

The Museum of Western Colorado collects, preserves, interprets, and disseminates the social and natural history of Western Colorado. It offers seminars, classes, programs, educational tours to local, regional and national destinations, and special programming for educational institutions and organizations. Researchers are afforded access to special collections, including a historical archives and two research libraries. The Museum functions as a major regional tourist destination as well.

A department of Mesa County, the Museum is accredited by the American Association of Museums. It is operated by a professional staff assisted by associate curators, and more than 100 volunteers. The Museum's three major branches are the Museum, 4th and Ute; Dinosaur Valley, 4th and Main; and Cross Orchards Living History Farm at 3079 F Road in Grand Junction.

The Museum, located in the former Whitman School Building, was dedicated and opened to the public in 1965 as the Museum of Arts and Sciences. From 1968 to 1978 it operated as the Historical Museum and Institute of Western Colorado. Exhibits focus on the social and archaeological heritage of the region. The Museum's main offices, history division and archives are headquartered in the building.

Cross Orchards Living History Farm was acquired by the Museum in 1980, following an extensive community fund-raising effort. Its present 14.4 acres are the last vestige of the 243-acre Red Cross Land and Fruit Company which operated from 1909 to 1923, largely financed by Massachusetts capital. Extensive restoration efforts since acquisition have included interior and exterior renovation of the historic barn/packing shed and bunkhouse, and reconstruction of the summerhouse. Authentically costumed guides and bunkhouse cooks interpret the history of the site, Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., during the regular season, May to November. Scheduled events include Spring and Fall "Days on the Farm," the Julia Harris Lecture Series, and the Apple Jubilee. A gift shop, opened in 1986, specializes in items of country nostalgia.

Dinosaur Valley, opened in 1985, is a Museum exhibit focusing on dinosaur paleontology. Six half-size, animated creatures are surrounded by historic photomurals of early Chicago Field Museum expeditions to the area, fossils and casts of prehistoric creatures which roamed the region some 145 million years ago, and an active working laboratory, preparing fossils and demonstrating molding and casting techniques. The Museum offers ongoing educational courses and tours during the school year. A gift shop specializing in dinosaur-related merchandise provides an entertaining and educational experience.

The Museum and the Bureau of Land Management jointly administer the 280-acre Rabbit Valley Research Natural Area, located 30 miles west of Grand Junction. The 1.5 mile "Trail through Time" offers hikers an opportunity to study the local fossil record in situ and observe many other geological and natural features of the Rabbit Valley area. Ongoing excavations in the area continue to reveal an outstanding fossil record. In 1986 the Museum also acquired Dinosaur and Riggs Hills, sites of major finds made by the Chicago Field Museum in 1900 and 1901.

The Museum additionally co-sponsors the Mesa County Oral History Public Library. Locally, the Museum coordinates activities with organizations involved in its Heritage Council, and others who are concerned with the preservation of the region's social and natural history.

Direct inquiries about membership to 248 South 4th Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501.

EDITOR'S NOTE. During peach harvest in 1944, Harold Zimmerman worked with German prisoners of war. The following article provides the details of his experience.

German prisoners of war were a significant part of rural life in Colorado during World War II. The war created labor shortages, particularly in agricultural areas. After reading the articles of the Geneva Convention which governed the treatment of prisoners of war, American officials decided that such men could be used as laborers. The state had three major base camps, located in Colorado Springs, Greeley, and Trinidad. From these, prisoners went in groups of about 200 to 48 other camps in the state to provide help for Colorado's farmers.

The Western Slope had five prisoner-of-war camps: in Delta, Fruita, Grand Junction, Montrose, and Palisade. Old Civilian Conservation Corp camps housed the prisoners in all these places except Delta, where they lived at the Holly Sugar camp. Prisoners of war came to the Grand Valley for short periods of time to help with sugar beets and fruit harvest.

Those readers wanting more information on German prisoners of war in Colorado should consult: Allen W. Pashar, "The Enemy in Colorado: German Prisoners of War, 1943-1946" in the Summer/Fall 1979 issue of *The Colorado Magazine.* Most of the material in this Editor's Note is from that source.

HARVESTING PEACHES WITH GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR

by Harold Zimmerman

Harold Zimmerman came to the Grand Valley in 1907. As a youngster he lived in the Pomona and the Appleton areas, then Clifton, and finally Grand Junction. He attended the University of Colorado; returned to Grand Junction; married; and took a job as teller with the Grand Valley National Bank in 1927. After that he assisted W. S. Meek, the County Treasurer; moved to a job with Grand Junction City Manager J. P. Soderstrum; became the Mesa County Assessor; acted as secretary of the Board of Education for School District No. 1; and then served as Treasurer-Manager of the Mesa County Teachers' Federal Credit Union, a position he held until his retirement in 1968.

In the Grand Valley areas along the Colorado River from Fruita, Grand Junction, Clifton and Palisade, two crops have required extra help at harvest time.

The sugar beet industry needed labor for thinning in the spring, weeding during the summer, and pulling and topping in the fall. Most of the extra help for this came from Old Mexico during World War I. Many stayed after harvest and this marked the beginning of the Hispanic population in the Grand Valley.

The peach harvest was different, needing concentrated labor during late August and early September, usually over a ten to twelve day period. Youths and other persons living in the Valley used to plan to go to the Palisade area, camp out in the orchards, and help with this crop. During World War II, however, the young people were in the Army and the peach growers were desperate for help.

I had lived in the Valley most of my life, and in my teen years had always helped at harvest time, usually making boxes before harvest and working in the packing sheds or at the Fruit Growers' Association platforms during the harvest. This particular year I was married, living in Grand Junction. I decided to take my vacation during harvest time and went to

Photo courtesy of
Mr. & Mrs. Harold Zimmerman

Harold Zimmerman about the time he worked with the German prisoners of war.

the Peach Board of Control to see what work might be available. They told me that German prisoners of war would be arriving soon and then asked me to work there in the assignment of those men to particular growers and in keeping records on them.

I started my vacation on the day that the prisoners were to arrive. I do not remember the exact date, but it was late in August (1944, I believe) when the train rolled into Palisade. Quite a crowd of curiosity seekers had gathered. Among those in attendance were members of the Peach Board of Control and a few county and city officials. The Army officers got off the train first and met the officers of our delegation to get instructions. There was one captain, one second lieutenant, a master sergeant, and several other sergeants included among the eighty American soldiers. The Army guards then cleared spectators from an area near the train, and the German prisoners were unloaded and put into formation four abreast.

The procession then started from the train area to its destination with the Peach Board of Control with a few city officials leading in automobiles while the German prisoners marched. The Germans sang as they marched and gave us a sight that we had never seen before.

Our American soldiers and the German prisoners were housed in the old Civilian Conservation Corps camp along the Colorado River south of Palisade. When we arrived at the camp, we found that no preparations had been made and that the grounds were grown up with weeds as high as our heads and the buildings had not been cleaned. We made a rush to town for shovels, hoes, and other tools, and then the Germans began cleaning up. By evening there was not a weed left on the place and most buildings had been swamped out.

There were 250 German prisoners including their officers and we had an army captain, one second lieutenant and several sergeants plus a number of guards, all armed with rifles. The prisoners had been captured in Africa from Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's *Afrika Korps,* and shipped to Trinidad, Colorado. We had read in the papers about the atrocities and the ferociousness of the Germans and wondered before their arrival about our safety in working around them. The American officers and soldiers told us that this group was very reliable and peaceful and that we could expect no harm from them. Many of the prisoners left at Trinidad were hard core characters and would do anything to escape, but we had absolutely no trouble with any of our group. One even called our captain and told him that one of our guards leaning against a tree down on the shore of the river had gone to sleep. The German did not want anything to happen to cause them to be returned to Trinidad.

The prisoners were very happy to be with us and seemed to feel that this was a vacation. We enjoyed visiting and comparing our lives with theirs when we could find one who spoke English. One day when they were by an open hole with toads in it, one of our boys mentioned that in the South frog legs were a delicacy. This startled the German captain who had been in Russia, Turkey, and Greece and told us about the odd food they ate in those countries. Snails, horse liver, and snakes were eaten in some countries.

The morning work at camp began when about fifteen or twenty trucks came in to pick up their prisoners. The German officers had them all counted out in groups according to the number each grower wanted and they were loaded up and on their way. They seemed to enjoy the work and were merry. Several of them were not familiar with peaches and ate green ones and got sick. We soon corrected this and growers gave them some "overipes" to bring in to camp and we taught them to hold them a few days until they got ripe enough to eat.

The Germans soon learned how to tell when a peach was ripe enough to pick. In most cases, they did a good job. They would stop for a ten minute break each hour and without watches seemed to know when the hour had come. The growers who worked almost around the clock during harvest time resented this some, but put up with it. One grower on Orchard Mesa got several cases of beer and served them at one of their breaks each day, and they picked more peaches per man for him than for any other.

The American captain was a very sociable person and pleasant to deal with. There was one second lieutenant who was snobby, would not visit with us, hated the army, and on many mornings when I left home at five o'clock, he was out at the edge of town trying to hitch a ride to Palisade. I never saw him do any work all the time we were there. Several of the guards got permission to get leave in the evenings and went uptown and worked on the Association platforms loading cars with peaches. The first sergeant, Sgt. Slaven, was an old war veteran with thirty years of service who had been

promoted and then busted several times. The regular soldiers nearly worshipped him and treated him almost like a father. He was good at granting leaves and evening leaves and rotating them fairly.

At meal time the Germans would congregate on a small parade area, get into formation, and march while singing to the mess hall for meals. I was invited to join them at one meal and found that they had an excellent chef and fine meals. The day I was there they served small meat balls seasoned with something that made them delicious. When the meal was over, no one could leave their place until all silverware was collected and counted.

I kept very busy checking out the groups in the morning and then checking them back in in the evening. Then I had to get a report from each grower on the number of bushels picked by the prisoners to see that they were not loafing on the job or picking green fruit. I left home at five in the morning, and after getting reports and bills out for the growers every day, I usually did not leave work until one or two o'clock in the morning.

One grower, new to the peach business, called for help at 1:00 a.m. and a neighbor's truck came in to pick up his allotment of German workers. When we got to the orchard, we found that his packing shed had not been cleaned out, he had no ladders, picking sacks, or boxes. I expressed my opinion pretty frankly and made him mad, but I stayed with him and finally borrowed enough ladders, sacks, and boxes for him to begin his harvesting before quitting time that day. Things like this made the job difficult for me. After getting the crews out in the morning, I was on the run from orchard to orchard to see that all was going well. I was lucky to get two meals a day. After two weeks of this schedule, I was ready to sleep for a while.

When the harvest was over, the prisoners tried to find a way to stay in the area. They had learned that the peach season at Paonia followed the one at Palisade, and they begged to get permission to go up there for harvest. They did not want to go back to Trinidad, but the job was done and we had to send them back. A couple of hours after they left, two young soldiers' wives showed up and wanted to know how they could get back to Trinidad. A few wives had come in with the original group and found housing so their husbands could get leave and visit them. The two latecomers were turned over to welfare and I do not know how they got back to Trinidad.

Thus ended one of the most unusual vacations that a person could imagine. It was much different than my normal two weeks of vacation which I usually spent loafing and fishing on Grand Mesa. This particular year I had worked twelve days, about twenty-one hours each day, had always hurried, and met new problems. When my vacation ended, I swore that I would never again do such a thing. But after the tiredness had worn off, I remembered the unusualness of the work, and I might have been foolish enough to try it again.

JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE is published quarterly by two student organizations at Mesa College: the Mesa College Historical Society and the Alpha-Gamma-Epsilon Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta. Annual subscriptions are $10. (Single copies are available by contacting the editors of the Journal.) Retailers are encouraged to write for prices. Address subscriptions for back issues to:

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Grand Junction, CO 81502

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