

JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 4

FALL 1993

MESA STATE
COLLEGE

Moving Day in the Uncompahgre



JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE is published quarterly by two student organizations at Mesa State College: the Mesa State 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 and orders for back issues to:

Mesa State College
Journal of the Western Slope
P.O. Box 2647
Grand Junction, CO 81502

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THE COVER: The cartoon appeared in the September 24, 1909 issue of the
Rocky Mountain News.

**SHOO AWAY THE SNAKES, PRAIRIE DOGS, AND
RABBITS;
LET'S MAKE THE DESERT BLOOM:
THE UNCOMPAGRE PROJECT 1890-1909**

**By
Tess Carmichael**

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

Thanks to Marilyn Cox, curator of the Montrose Historical Society Museum, for the reprints of the museum's pictures and her help in locating items in the museum; Monte Sanburg, past president of the Montrose Historical Society, for letting me use the hardbound copies of the *Montrose Enterprise* and the *Montrose Daily Press* at the museum; and Paul "Tom" Thompson, the present assistant manager of the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association, for his update on the Gunnison Tunnel Project and its current affairs.

Thanks to Don MacKendrick for his eagle-eyes editing; Perry H. Carmichael, Paul Reddin, and Diana Jones for reviewing the manuscript; and to Gladys E. Tessman (deceased) for her initial prodding to do research on the tunnel project from a reporter's point of view.

The cartoons from *The Denver Post* and the *Rocky Mountain News* are public domain, according to the Colorado Historical Museum because they are older than 50 years.



Lynn Monroe
Editor Montrose Enterprise



Charles E. Adams
Editor Montrose Daily Press



West Portal - Gunnison Tunnel during construction

**Shoo Away the Snakes, Prairie Dogs, and Rabbits;
Let's Make the Desert Bloom:
The Uncompahgre Project 1890-1909**

By Tess Carmichael

During the hot dry summer of 1890, French gold miner and sometimes dirt farmer F.C. Lauzon sat smoking his pipe on the porch of his home on the Uncompahgre River near the Western Colorado town of Montrose.¹ Lauzon's gaze fixed on the Vernal Mesa ridge separating the Uncompahgre Valley from the Gunnison River flowing through the Black Canyon Gorge some fifteen miles to the east. As he smoked, he dreamed of bringing water from that granite prison to his parched fields. Lauzon knew that after the Fourth of July there was seldom enough water to irrigate the existing farms in the Montrose-Olathe-Delta area.

Later the same year, Lauzon walked into the office of Lynn Monroe's semi-weekly, *The Montrose Enterprise* (with the self-styled slogan: "The Official Paper of the City of Montrose") and outlined his meditations. Monroe was interested in Lauzon's dream because, without water, the valley's economy could not grow. The fertile land needed water for the orchards, gardens, hay, and fields of waving grain. Lauzon and Monroe agreed to begin a campaign to raise money for a survey for either an overland route or a tunnel through the wall of the Gunnison Gorge.

Lauzon worked the street corners, school rooms, and meetings of the social and political organizations in the three communities to argue for the

proposal while the *Enterprise* devoted its editorial column to the same cause.

Historically, the Uncompahgre Utes had occupied the valley. Outsiders began arriving in 1765 when Captain Juan Maria de Rivera led a Spanish silver-seeking expedition into the area.² In 1776, the commission of Francisco Antancio Dominguez and Silvestre Veléz de Escalante, seeking a safer route from Santa Fe to the Catholic missions on the West Coast, also passed through the valley.³ In 1809 two trappers, Samuel Spender and John Workman, entered the Gunnison River basin from the east and have been credited with "discovering" the Black Canyon of the Gunnison.⁴ By the 1830s, Antoine Robidoux had established his trading post, Fort Uncompahgre, at the mouth of Roubideaux Creek near Delta. Marcus Whitman, travelling from Oregon to New Mexico, visited the post in 1842.⁵ It was destroyed some time later, because it was in ruins when Captain John Gunnison passed through in 1853.⁶

When Ferdinand V. Hayden, who surveyed and mapped Western Colorado between 1873 and 1876, looked into the Black Canyon, he declared it "inaccessible."⁷ In 1875, a Ute agency was established nine miles south of the present town of Montrose at Fort Crawford — a mile west of the Uncompahgre River.⁸ An irrigation ditch supplied the fort with water from the river and may have been the first canal taking water out of the river. After the Meeker Massacre in 1879 by the White River Utes and the death of Uncompahgre Chief Ouray on August 24, 1880, the tribe was forced from its Colorado lands onto an Eastern Utah reservation⁹ and the valley was opened for settlement.¹⁰

Montrose was located and platted as a township on February 24, 1882,¹¹ by F. C. Loutzenhizer and Joseph Selig, merchants and gold miners eager to encourage settlers who would grow grain, hay, fruit, and vegetables for the miners in the southern San Juan Mountains.¹² They secured the second canal from the Uncompahgre River, christened it the Loutzenhizer Canal, and furnished water to the new town.

The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad arrived in Montrose August 13, 1882, by a narrow gauge track from Gunnison, following the Gunnison River through the eastern part of the Black Canyon (Sapinero to Cimarron). It left the canyon and crawled over Cerro Summit to Montrose.¹³ Later that year, the rails met the Rio Grande Southern at Ridgway, and a spur was extended up the Uncompahgre River to Ouray. These developments connected Montrose with the San Juan mining country. By 1883, the D & RG had built through the Uncompahgre and Gunnison River valleys to Grand Junction, connecting with the Denver and Rio Grande Western tracks to Salt Lake City.

Byron H. Bryant, who led the construction for the Uncompahgre Extension of the Denver and Rio Grande, surveyed the Black Canyon beyond Cim-

arron in late 1882 and early 1883. He aspired to continue the canyon rail route through the Gunnison River Gorge. The project took sixty-eight days as his crew struggled up and down steep walls, ice-blocked waterways, and the frozen river. Leaving the river near present Austin, Bryant determined it would not be feasible to continue the railway down the canyon. If this was not a possibility for a railroad, the canyon might be a place to divert water over or under the Vernal Ridge to the Uncompahgre Valley.¹⁴

With good railroad transportation in place, all the Uncompahgre Valley needed for rapid development of its agricultural resources was a better water supply. Despite some interest from farmers in the valley, preliminary investigations of the irrigation proposals advanced by Lauzon and Monroe proved too expensive for local resources.¹⁵

Nevertheless in 1894, Ouray, Montrose, and Delta counties financed an overland diversion survey by Richard Winnerah (Whinerah) and Walter H. Fleming (the present tunnel followed this survey). The two concluded that a ditch could bring water across the mesa from the Gunnison River using dikes, dams, and syphons.¹⁶ Later in 1895 Lauzon and Monroe, still promoting water, secured an election to fund a tunnel from the Gunnison River along the survey route, but the water-using farmers voted against the proposition.¹⁷ During this same period, fruitless attempts were made to interest the Colorado Legislature in supporting a diversion project.

Surveys were vague about the cost of such a project. One estimate for eleven miles of tunnel and a 100-foot dam across the Gunnison River was about \$75,000 – a figure which proved to be ridiculously low.¹⁸

While these events were taking place on the Western Slope, legislators in Denver considered the possibility of water diversion. Early in 1899, an appeal to fund a diversion project was made to the Twelfth Session of the Colorado General Assembly. On January 20, 1899, Senator W. S. Buckley from Telluride introduced Senate Bill No. 310 “to construct, maintain, and operate a state tunnel in Montrose (County, Colorado) and for the use of unemployed convicts in constructing the same and making appropriations therefore.”¹⁹ The bill went to the Labor Committee which tabled it in March because “there are no funds available for such purposes...the project is deemed to be impractical.”²⁰

In June of 1900, John Master, an Idaho capitalist, arrived in Montrose to investigate the possibility of damming the Gunnison River at Red Rock Canyon east of Olathe and building a power plant there to supply electricity for the Ouray mines forty-five miles away. However, he told local officials that his company must have at least a quarter of a million-dollar investment in prospect

East Portal entrance of the Gunnison Tunnel during construction.

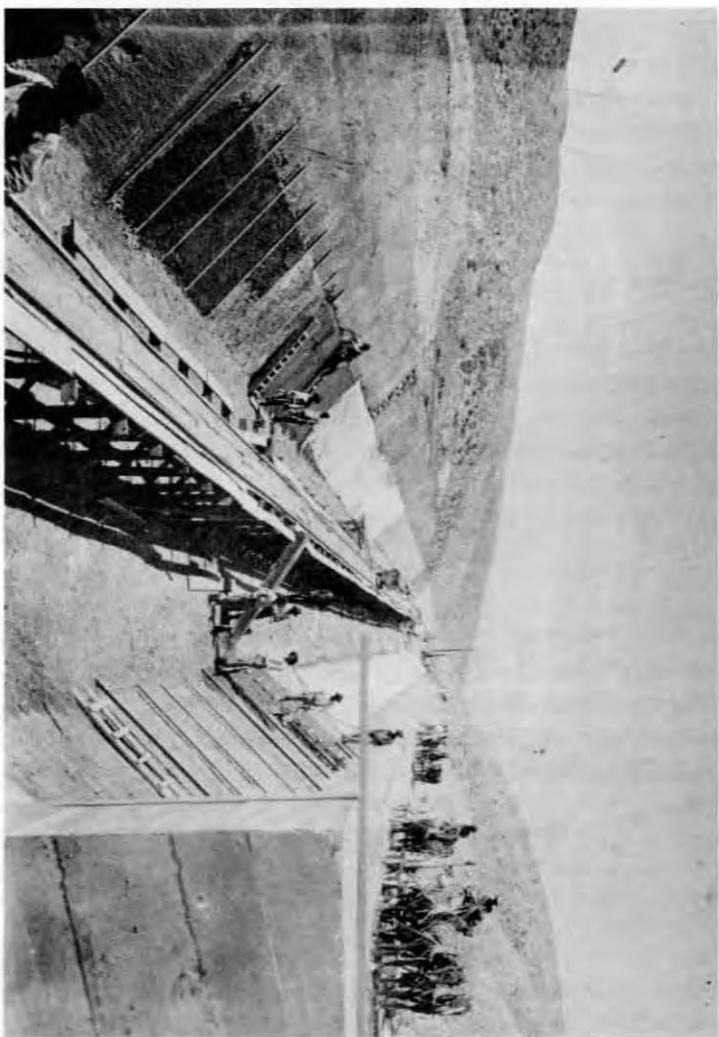


to take hold of it in earnest.²¹

In August of the same year, two men made special examinations that proved valuable. John A. Curtis, a surveyor for Delta County, and Fleming, now the elected Montrose County surveyor, took a crew up to Red Rock Canyon which overlooked the Black Canyon Gorge and the Gunnison River to "ascertain just what the condition which exists with regard to getting water from the Gunnison into this valley."²² Sponsors of the water diversion had only been momentarily set back by the Legislature's refusal for money, and the *Enterprise* urged each citizen to "put in a good word where he can."²³

Meanwhile, western Congressmen promoted the irrigation and diversion project in Washington, D. C. Especially busy were Western Colorado Representative John C. Bell and Representative John F. Shafroth of Denver. Senator E. H. Newlands of Nevada also advocated irrigation projects.²⁴ Bell introduced a national bill with a new twist: have the government build the project and allow the citizens to repay the costs over time out of profits. Unfortunately, the bill was tabled for the session, but this concept would later be included in the Newlands Act that authorized the U. S. Government to get into the reclamation business. The idea of a Gunnison tunnel had not died. Later that summer, five volunteers planned a survey of the Black Canyon to explore the feasibility of water diversion. The volunteers were William W. Torrence, superintendent of the Montrose Electric Light and Power Company; John E. Pelton, a Montrose farmer and local lake resort proprietor; J. A. Curtis, a Delta County surveyor and civil engineer; M. F. Hovey, a Montrose farmer and one-time miner; and E. B. Anderson, a Delta rancher. By September they had supplies and were ready to attack the river. Taking the railroad to the mouth of Cimmaron Creek at Cimmaron, they held a prayer meeting, then struck out for Red Rock Canyon thirty miles downstream. They hoped to arrive there in five days. Their equipment included two boats, the "City of Montrose" and the "John C. Bell," a month's supply of food, cameras, surveying instruments, notebooks, and barometers all protected in waterproof tins. By this survey, they believed that they could establish a route for a ditch downstream in the canyon to Red Rock Canyon and a tunnel upstream to the Uncompahgre Valley.²⁵

The first day, the surveyors made only three-quarters of a mile and had to carry their boats and provisions on their shoulders past the bad stretches of the river because of low water. On the second day, the "Bell" struck a rock and sank with most of their provisions and equipment. About eleven miles farther down the canyon, they went ashore to dry out from the rain and river water. During this respite, Pelton climbed out of the canyon and journeyed to Denver



Construction of South Canal to deliver water 15 miles to the Uncompahgre River nine miles south of Montrose.

where he encouraged Senator E. O. Wolcott of Denver to introduce a bill into the U. S. Senate for appropriation money to construct the proposed diversion tunnel and delivery ditch.²⁶

The remainder of the group abandoned the survey after about four weeks because the task became impossible after negotiating only five additional miles -- the last three without provisions. The canyon had narrowed to about thirty feet with walls rising two thousand feet overhead and the river cascading over huge rock falls. Anderson and Hovey attempted to continue downstream but their boat was swamped and they narrowly missed being propelled over a rock fall; undoubtedly, to proceed invited certain death. Disheartened, Torrence wrote in his notebook: "With our present equipment, we can go no farther. The Black Cañon is not impenetrable. If I get out of this scrape alive, I shall come back."²⁷

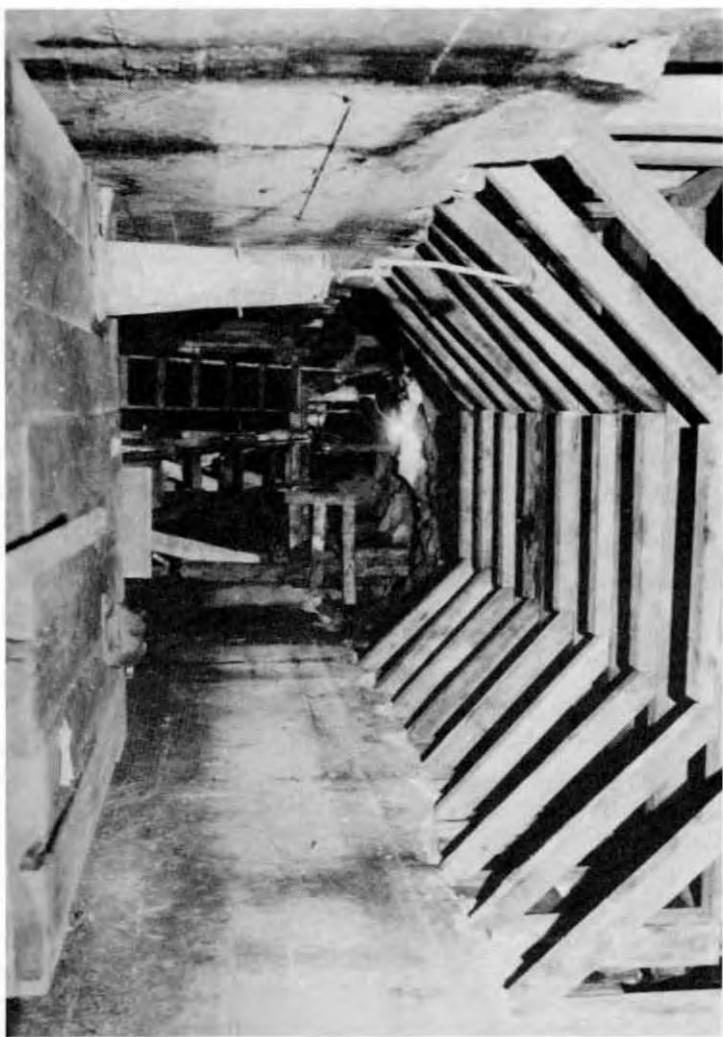
Leaving the river the next day at the Falls of Sorrow, upstream from the Narrows (now known as Torrence Falls), they roped themselves together and used the pike-shot transit tripod legs as alpenstocks to crawl up the wall. They hiked about fifteen miles through wild, brushy country before coming to a ranch, where they ate well, then hitched a ride to Montrose on October 1.²⁸

This partial exploration by river bolstered interest in irrigation. In 1901, Meade (Mead) Hammond, the newly elected State Representative from Paonia, introduced a new Gunnison Tunnel bill, House Bill No. 195, into the Thirteenth Session of the Colorado General Assembly. It proposed "to construct, maintain, and operate a State Canal No. 3 in Montrose and Delta counties; the creation of a board of control; the use of convict labor in construction; the issuance of certificates of indebtedness provided for the sale of water; and an appropriation for construction."²⁹ The bill requested \$50,000, but on April 11, it was approved with an appropriation of only \$25,000.³⁰

Hammond pushed hard, but Telluride's Senator W. S. Buckley added drama to the vote. Suffering from the last throes of tuberculosis at Denver's St. Joseph's Hospital, Buckley was carried into the chamber on a stretcher to cast his vote favoring the bill.³¹ Because of this legislative action and hardy local interest stoked up by Lauzon and the *Enterprise*, the U. S. Geological Survey authorized \$4,000 for a preliminary examination of the canyon and to check the geological structure of the proposed tunnel area. According to popular accounts, the chief engineer of the new Reclamation Service in Washington sent a wire to the Denver office: "Can Gunnison River be connected with the Uncompahgre by tunnel?"³²

The wire, relayed to A. Lincoln Fellows, an irrigation engineer and resident hydrographer for the USGS Survey in Montrose, replied: "Immediate preparations will be made for the exploration of the Gunnison Canyon at the

Interior of the Gunnison Tunnel during construction.



earliest possible date."³³ By the summer of 1901, Fellows commenced another survey of the contours of the land dividing the Gunnison and Uncompahgre Valleys to determine the shortest and most suitable route for a tunnel.

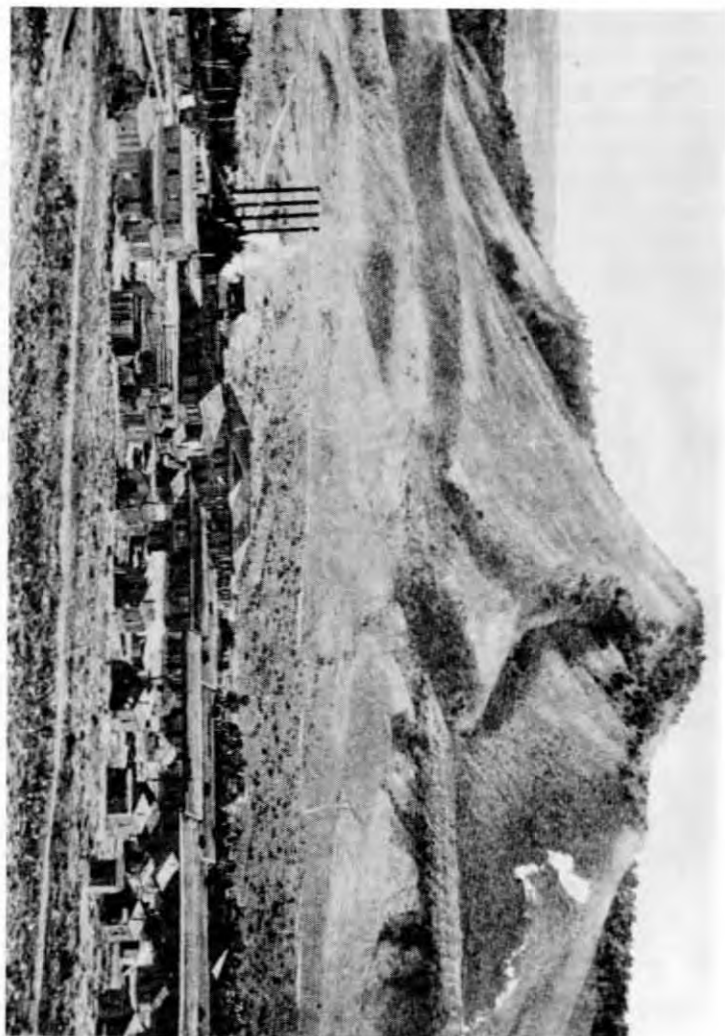
Vernal Mesa, the skyline ridge east of Montrose, was surveyed again and a topographical map showed a possible route for a road over the ridge and down to the river's edge. Fellows made the decision to run the river again to make a firsthand examination of the canyon from its floor.³⁴ He asked for a volunteer who was young, healthy, temperate, able to swim, familiar with the country, and unmarried. The volunteer who came forward was William Torrence.

Instead of wooden boats, the two packed a rubber mattress divided into several airtight compartments to hold notebooks, Kodaks, blankets, and provisions. On August 2, 1901, they took the train to Cimarron, the jumping-off place for the previous expeditions. They lost their provisions on the second day, but a friend hiked down a gulch bringing food and shoes for Torrence, who had already worn his out.³⁵ In five days they reached the Falls of Sorrow where Torrence and the first group had given up the year before. Both Fellows and Torrence jumped into the swirling water where huge rock walls blocked their way, shouted "Good-bye!" to each other, and disappeared over the falls. Both collapsed on a projecting rock in the calm waters below. Torrence described the experience to the editor of the *Enterprise*:

At the Narrows, the fun began. The cañon is full of great boulders which form bridges across the stream. Over these we must scramble, one getting on top and pulling the other up. These rocks were like grease and hard to climb. We spent the day going a quarter of a mile. The walls are almost perpendicular in many places and some 2,000 feet or more to the top.³⁶

It is not difficult today to visualize the immensity of the problems and hazards these surveyors encountered in the canyon. At times from the top, the Gunnison River looks like a thin, silvery ribbon, often disappearing from sight under the fallen boulders. Standing on the rim, one can imagine portages over slippery rocks and bumping over the rough rapids. Even today, the Black Canyon remains a dangerous adversary for rafters and fishermen. No visitor can escape a feeling of awe for the power of nature and a sense of solitude.

By the fall of 1901, it appeared that a diversion tunnel was feasible and surveyors proposed a general location near Serpent Point, five miles downstream from the site of the eventually completed tunnel. Getting the project going now fell to the Board of Control set up by the Colorado State Canal No.



Lujane, headquarters for the Gunnison Tunnel - Uncompahgre Project.

3 Bill (House Bill 135) which passed the previous April. The board included George E. Dodge from Delta, Senator C. M. (Mead) Hammond from Paonia, and John J. Tobin of Montrose, each for two-year terms.³⁷ This board appointed John A. Curtis, deputy state engineer, to make the final decision on the location of the main tunnel. Now the design extended on a northeast diagonal through the Mancos shale badlands (The Adobes) four miles northeast of Table Mountain (Flattop) to the Black Canyon near Serpent Point. A spur tunnel would extend upstream to the Narrows where a dam could be built. The water could be picked up there and delivered into and through a main tunnel by gravity flow to the valley.

Fellows, still busy on the river, inspected the proposed tunnel site to find a ravine suitable for building a wagon road to deliver supplies, equipment, and manpower into the canyon. The initial excavation began on the Uncompahgre Valley side in late 1901. As work progressed through the Mancos shale, it became necessary to timber the tunnel to prevent cave-ins. By one estimate, lining the tunnel with concrete or brick could run about \$29 per foot with a total cost of \$800,000 for the completed bore. There would be additional expenditures of \$200,000 for the dam, engineering, and other contingencies. This would bring the total cost, including the distribution system of canals, to about \$1,500,000.³⁸

The projected tunnel would be about three miles long, pouring water into a fifteen-mile canal that would carry the water westward to the mouth of the existing Montrose and Delta (M and D) Canal. More than 100,000 acres could be reclaimed -- enough for 1,200 families -- increasing land value by \$5,000,000.³⁹

During the first part of November 1901, work commenced on the road from Montrose to the Gunnison River portal of the tunnel. By December a frame dining room, a bunkhouse, and a blacksmith shop appeared at the western site. The gray face of the shale hill had been shaved off and the first dirt taken out of the proposed tunnel.⁴⁰ By the end of the year, ten men were working; convicts were not available because of a legal technicality. Timbering had been completed for a 12 by 12 foot framework and an arched roof. The tunnel was driven 835 feet from the west; 350 of that were timbered. Two air shafts were dug and five miles of road were constructed.⁴¹ At this point, funds ran out. The state appropriation of \$25,000 proved far too slim to complete the project.⁴² Meanwhile, Fellows' new survey indicated a better location for the tunnel five miles upstream at a site where a smaller dam could span the Gunnison River, making a spur canal unnecessary at this site.

Just when it appeared there would be no Gunnison tunnel, the Federal



Lujane, headquarters and western work camp for the Gunnison Tunnel - Uncompahgre Project.

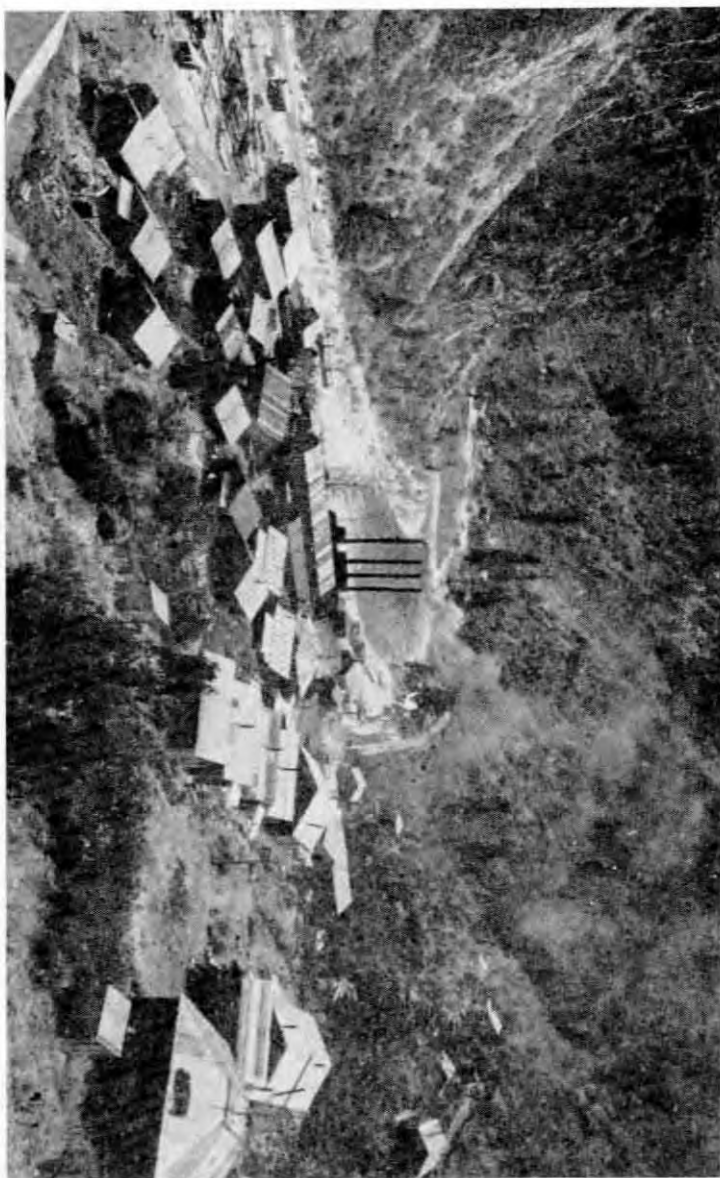
Government came to the rescue. On March 4, 1902, the Department of the Interior approved a tunnel project and set aside \$2.4 million from the new reclamation fund. In June, the National Irrigation Act passed and Colorado legislators authorized the transfer of "all property and rights acquired for State Canal No. 3 to the United States."⁴³

Led by Lauzon and local support, the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association was incorporated.⁴⁴ The existing ditches in the valley were pledged to help carry the proposed diversion water. Hammond appealed for help from other state legislators and hurried to get the new project going.

By February 1904, the boat landing site that Winnerah studied in 1894 in which he surveyed lines across the Vernal Mesa between the Gunnison River and the Uncompahgre Valley was being examined again. Fleming also advocated this site because it avoided the construction of a big dam and costly flumes. A work camp could be supported there and a nearby draw could be accessed by a wagon road to supply the work camp on the river. It presented simpler engineering problems, would allow an increase in irrigable land, and relief from building more miles of costly canals. This site determined that the proposed tunnel would be about 30,000 feet in length and 10.5 by 11.5 feet in cross section. It would fall two feet in a thousand and carry 1,300 second feet of water. Cement lining to re-inforce the tunnel walls would be necessary between the East (River) Portal entrance on the Gunnison River and the West Portal, seven miles east of Montrose and three miles west of Cedar Creek. A fifteen-mile canal would carry the water from the mouth of the tunnel at the West Portal to the Uncompahgre River south of Montrose, winding through the shale hills, dropping the water level from the 6,000-foot elevation at the mouth to the 5,624-foot elevation of the Uncompahgre River.⁴⁵

Bids were opened October 3, 1904 in Montrose with Ira W. McConnel, the chief government engineer in charge. The low bidder was the Taylor-Moore Company from Hillsboro, Texas. The contract called for excavation and lining for a 30,582-foot tunnel, and a cut of 40 feet to meet the proposed South Canal which would carry the water to the Uncompahgre. Bids were also let for construction of the North, East, and West Canals for \$1,250,000 to F. H. Newhouse. Completion was set for April 15, 1908.⁴⁶

"Hurrah, Hurrah. When Shall We Have the Jollification Meeting?" ran a headline in the *Enterprise*.⁴⁷ The road over Vernal Mesa to East Portal and the telephone line were quickly finished. Hauling over the road, sometimes built on a 32 percent grade, required large teams of horses and block and tackle to hold the loads going downhill. Freight costs ran about \$4.50 per ton.



East (River) Portal work town on the Gunnison River.

By May 1905, only 4.5 percent of the work had been accomplished and the contractors were encountering costly difficulties with the bore. The moist adobe and gravel deposits at the west end required heavy timbering to prevent cave-ins. The Taylor-Moore Company contract was suspended May 27 and the Reclamation Service assumed the job of completing the project when no satisfactory bids came from private concerns.

Eventually the work progressed on four headings: west from East Portal on the river, east from West Portal, and east and west from a shaft driven into Vernal Mesa – a mile from the East Portal. Drilling from the east was easier and safer because it was through the more stable granite. However, the tunneling from the west was hampered by difficult geological characteristics:

2,000 feet of heavy water-bearing clay, gravel, and sand;
1,200 feet of hard shale and gravel with much seepage;
10,000 feet of black shale with fossil deposits and combustible gas; 2,000 feet through a badly shattered fault zone which held high temperatures, hot and cold water, coal, marble, hard and soft sandstone, limestone, and concentrations of carbonic gas; and 1,455 feet of metamorphosed granite with water-bearing seams.⁴⁸

Originally the work camp at West Portal was a collection of tents with a poor water supply. Later, it was moved about a mile east to McConnel's rail siding. Dining halls, bunk houses, telegraph office, power house, machine shops, stable, post office, blacksmith shop, two churches, school house, and family cottages dotted the dry flats. The *Denver Republican* called it "Tar Paper City."⁴⁹ It rose on land leased from Zellah McCollum, a Denver school teacher who had filed on the land in 1903 when interest in the new project was beginning to stir in the newspapers.⁵⁰ Named Lujane (La Wannah) by McConnel, the school was conducted in a building supplied by the Montrose Public School District because there were too many children for the small Cedar Creek School three miles east. The *Enterprise* hired its own correspondent to write the society news briefs and vital statistics about its 800 residents.

At the East Portal, a similar town with many of the same facilities, was built on the rock debris taken from the tunnel excavation. Rena Olds, the first teacher, held year-around school because there was so little for the children to do.

Pay on the tunnel project averaged about \$2.36 per day with free lodging and hot showers. Each worker paid about 75 cents a day for meals. A man with a team and wagon could earn \$4 a day while the average wage for a concrete worker was \$2.36 for an eight-hour shift.⁵¹



Work crew at the East (River) Portal of the Gunnison Tunnel.



Meanwhile the *Enterprise* and its editor, Monroe, stayed with the semi-weekly stories about the progress of the tunnel and features about people and families involved with it. The paper also carried the names of newcomers to the valley. While Monroe promoted the project, Lauzon was off mining gold in Mexico.

Work was not easy. In 1906, a massive underground stream was struck, jetting 40 feet of water into the tunnel, knocking out equipment and drilling machines, and forcing 25,000,000 gallons of water into the tunnel every 24 hours. With the water came a heavy flow of carbon dioxide (choke damp) that halted work for about six months until a 680-foot ventilation shaft could be sunk from the west end and the water pumped out.⁵² Later that year, a cave-in killed six men. The Montrose County coroner's jury exonerated all persons from blame and attributed the accident to "unforeseen and unavoidable conditions."⁵³

Equipment and men were carried along the tunnel on trams powered by electricity made from burning coal excavated from the walls. At East Portal, it was costing about \$4.50 per ton for freight because of the hazardous road with its frequent washouts and steep grade. Soon after the construction began, it was evident that the timbering would not hold up under the presence of heat and moisture; it became necessary to line the tunnel sections with concrete.

By late June 1909, the two groups drilling toward each other began to hear each others' drills. Within a week, on the afternoon of July 6, the two crews met at a point 10,112 feet from East Portal through the rough bore of one of the longest tunnels in the United States. Supervising engineer McConnell, who had been on the job since 1903, shook hands with the east crew through the small bore.⁵⁴ When the engineers realized that historic first handshake meant the tunnel project could be finished to a point, the Montrose citizens' group, the Gunnison Tunnel Opening Committee, raised more than \$3,000 for a grandiose celebration. The committee contacted Colorado's Republican Senator, Simon Guggenheim, to ask someone important to dedicate the tunnel. He first suggested former President Theodore Roosevelt, who was very active in getting the Reclamation Service started; however, Roosevelt was hunting in Africa.⁵⁵

He then asked President William Howard Taft to do the honors. The President accepted and made arrangements to include Colorado and the Western Slope in a planned thirteen-hundred-mile summer tour. He left August 13, 1909, from the Boston Summer White House on his little five-car train for a two-month tour that would allow him "fifty one-night stands."⁵⁶ Not only were Western Slope newspapers in a flutter, but eastern journalists were riding the

train with Taft, as well as several members of his cabinet.⁵⁷

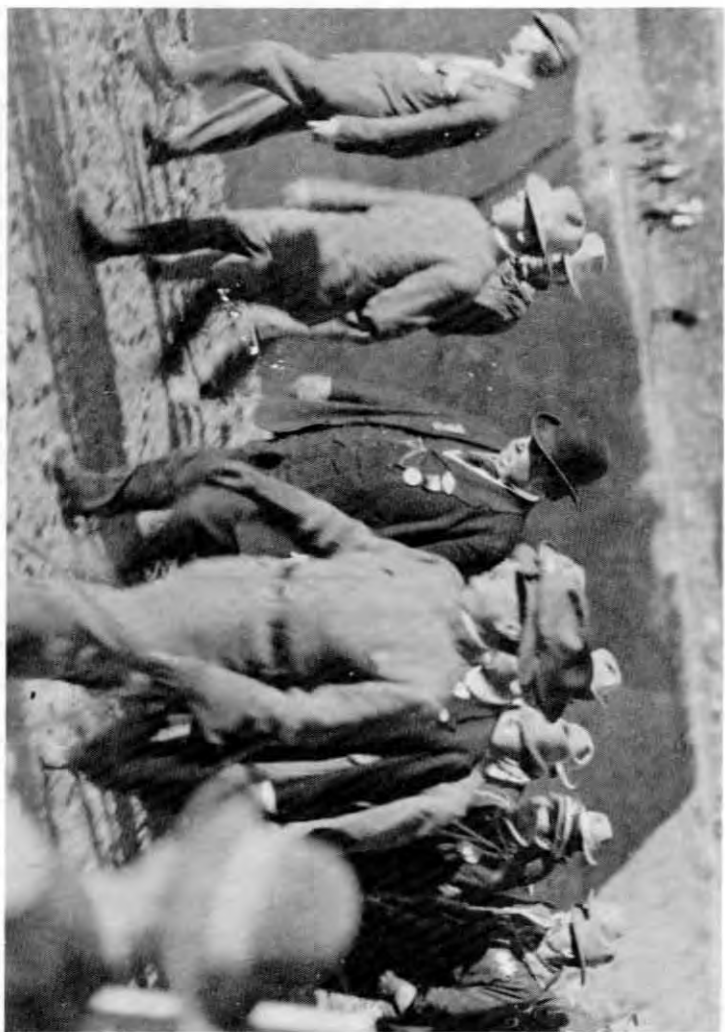
Grand Junction also became a whistle stop on the tour, with the President stopping off to participate in the 1909 Peach Festival.⁵⁸ He toured orchards, greeted the Peach Queen, and spoke at the Fairgrounds on the corner of North Avenue and Twelfth Street (now Lincoln Park). He paid homage to Chipeta, widow of chief Ouray, who came especially to meet the president.⁵⁹ After only an hour in Grand Junction, Taft boarded his train for Montrose.

Thursday, September 23, 1909, was warm in the "Valley of a Thousand Fountains" with an early frosting of snow on the San Juan Mountains to the south. Montrose, population 2,308, was the center of excitement for the thirty-three-year-old Centennial State. Anyone with a house found it crowded from attic to cellar with out-of-town guests. Some citizens realized they knew more people than they remembered. Churches and schools opened their doors providing food and lodging for visitors. Special trains from Gunnison, Lake City, Grand Junction, and Denver brought spectators to the small town. Even the Colorado newspaper editors held their convention in Montrose to coincide with the celebration, and greeted the President with a Main Street banner declaring, "Put 'er there, Mr. Taft. We're so glad to welcome you to this city."⁶⁰

Earlier in the week, Charles E. Adams, editor of the *Montrose Daily Press*, arranged to take the newspapermen on a damp, dark trip through the tunnel. They were so impressed that they proposed the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad give a free tunnel trip coupon to anyone who bought a ride to Lujane for the dedication, a proposal that was quickly squelched by Reclamation engineer McConnel,⁶¹ who knew it was too dangerous. He did not relish the prospect of trying to manage so many people and still finish the tunnel work and canals. Moreover, the tunnel was not yet cleared of debris. By 2:30 p.m., ten thousand men, women, and children gathered along Montrose's Main Street hoping to get a glimpse of

the Big Man with the smile that never came off. Every man, woman, and child, and even the pet kyoodles have been practicing the famous Taft expression and smile before the mirror in the seclusion of their den and boudoir. Women love and adore the big man for his manliness, his stature of great dimension, and his smile.⁶²

When the 350-pound chief executive stepped onto the D & RG railroad station depot platform, his six-foot height allowed him to be visible above the flying wedge of the Colorado Sheriff Guard, four members of the Secret Service, and an honor guard of the Grand Army of the Republic. He was driven east on Main Street in an open touring car under a fifty-foot welcome arch



President William Howard Taft and his honor guard at the West Portal of the Gunnison Tunnel, September 23, 1909.

stretched across Main Street at Cascade Avenue. The cheering lasted five minutes.⁶³ Another car procession took the smiling man to the fairgrounds where he visited Exhibition Hall and created more excitement when he asked to see the cowgirl riding event of the Fall Fair and Wild West Rodeo.

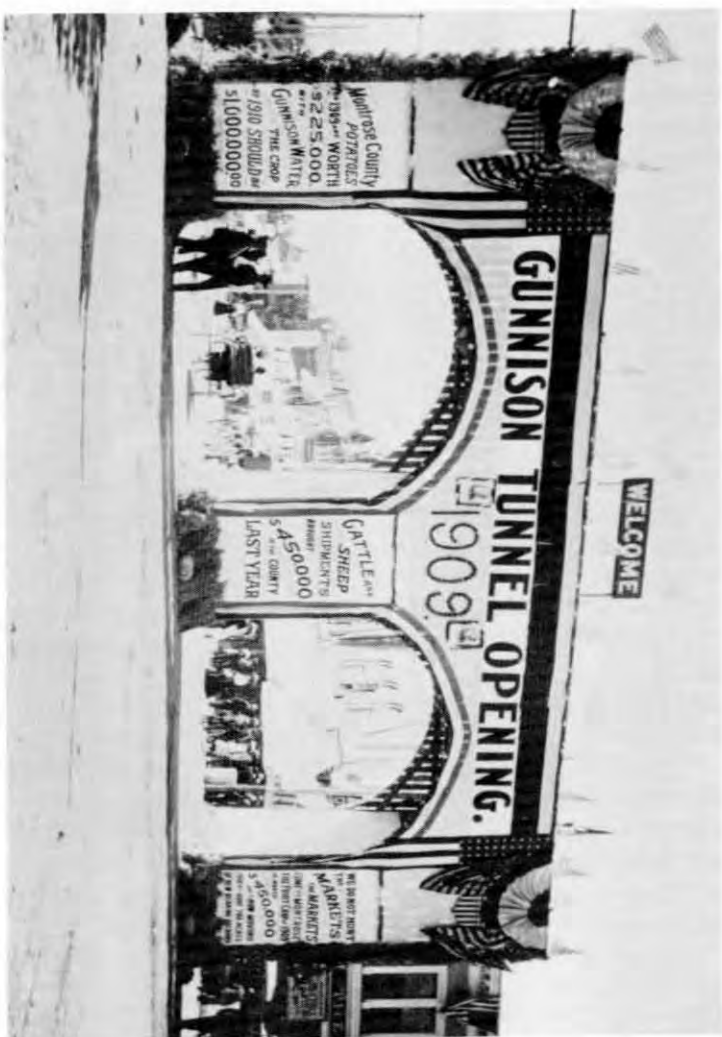
The four contestants had to race a lap, change horses, run another lap, switch mounts again, and race to the finish line. After the race, Taft asked to shake hands with the riders. Bertha Hull, the winner, was introduced first. As he shook her hand, he replied: "You are a fine horsewoman; this will be one of the very, very interesting pleasures of my whole trip," then turned to Helen and Alice Vader and commented: "I don't see how you women could stand this riding so rapidly." He was concerned that Mrs. Gord Galloway had placed second because she got tangled up in her riding skirts changing horses on the second round and seemed "bothered by too much skirt."⁶⁴ Bertha Hull had raced to the finish in bloomers.

The President also visited with Mrs. Alice Hammond, the mother of the late Paonia legislator who had kept the idea of the diversion tunnel before the State Legislature and who was often called "The father of the Gunnison Tunnel." Hammond died in 1905 just as work began on the project. He also greeted Mrs. W. C. Buckley, widow of the late Senator from Telluride who had campaigned for the project bill from a stretcher carried into the Senate chamber. Austen Gunnison, a cousin of Captain John Gunnison who made the first survey of the Western Slope in 1853, occupied the front seat in the Presidential car. He was an old friend of Taft's.

It was a banner day, too, for the editor of the *Montrose Enterprise* and a short French miner-farmer, who had pioneered the effort to bring water from the east to the Uncompahgre Valley. Lauzon returned to the mile-high town from gold-mining in Mexico to greet the President.

Now, the important thing was to dedicate the Gunnison Tunnel. Taft returned to the depot and boarded a special narrow-gauge train for the seven-mile ride to a specially constructed siding about a half-mile west of Lujane. He was escorted to a banner-bedecked box overlooking the west portal of the tunnel. More than 2,000 passengers paid 50 cents to ride the train with him. He was greeted by a dynamite-charged salute.

The formal ceremonies were inaugurated by Chairman J. S. Catlin, followed by the Reverend J. J. Singler invoking the word of Almighty God.⁶⁵ John F. Greenwalt, publicity agent for the Colorado Telephone Company, presented Taft with a bell connected to an electrical device that would raise the tunnel headgate inside the opening. The bell, made of 18-karat Colorado gold, was purchased from the Denver mint.⁶⁶ Green emphasized that the tunnel would



Welcome Arch at Main Street and Cascade Avenue facing east.

be irrigating land now producing only unwelcome sagebrush and affording habitation for skulking coyotes, prairie dogs, and rabbits. Water would bring more settlers.

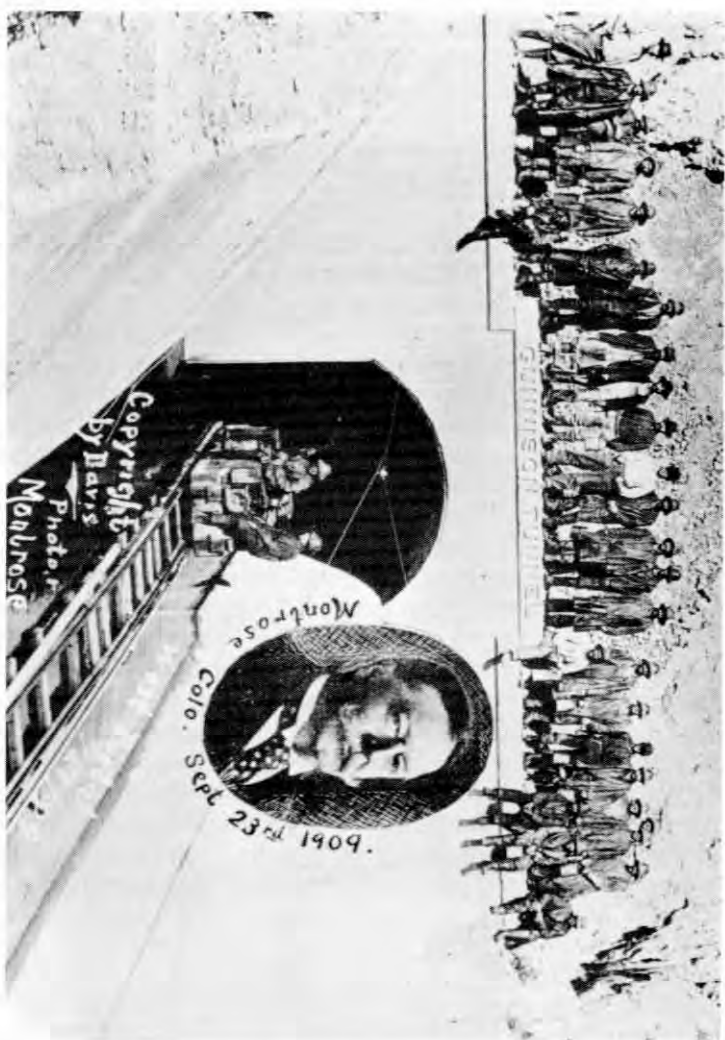
As Taft was not invited to make a long speech, he pushed the gold bell signalling to the world that water could flow through the Gunnison Tunnel through a six-mile hole in the wall. The crowd waited; a roar went up as four feet of Gunnison River water gushed from the mouth of the Reclamation Service project. Because it would not be finished for another year, the engineers had built a dam inside the mouth to hold a symbolic amount of water to be released when Taft pushed the bell.

A moment of humor was enjoyed when Senator Horace T. DeLong of Grand Junction commented: "Once we had a president who came to Colorado for the avowed purpose of killing all the bears in the mountains, but this time, we have a president who has come to encourage irrigation projects."⁶⁷ There were at least two tense moments during the ceremonies. At one point, the Secret Service and the sheriffs guarding the President became upset when an engineer attempted to move around the distinguished visitor to talk with his supervisor. The incident nearly developed into fisticuffs; the engineer apologized and admitted the officers were only doing their duty. Later, an unidentified man was pushed around by the National Guard.

Taft steamed back to Montrose for a rest and later dined at the Catlin home. He took time to address a crowd at Elks' Park where he praised the years of work by the surveying and construction crews; the Reclamation Service; and his friend and former President Teddy Roosevelt. He also left his regards with the small city and hoped it would never have any more trouble with water, and that wealth would be a permanent feature. By ten in the evening, Taft was on his way to Utah on his little private train.

Despite the 1909 dedication, only a small amount of irrigation water was available by 1910. The diversion dam on the Gunnison River at River Portal was not completed until 1912. The system came together with the completion of the Taylor Park Dam in 1937 during a period of severe drought. Constructed northeast of Gunnison on the Taylor River, a tributary of the Gunnison, the dam held back 106,200 acre-feet of water. The completed system guaranteed irrigation for 146,000 acres of land in Delta and Montrose Counties with 170 miles of canals, 400 miles of lateral ditches, and 205 miles of drainage ditches. By 1938 the cost of the entire project totalled \$8,976,484.⁶⁸ In the beginning, it was estimated that settlers benefiting from it would pay about \$35 per acre for water rights. That cost dropped to about \$13 in 1979, where it remains today.

Since the construction in 1965 of the Blue Mesa Dam on the Gunnison River near Sapinero at the entrance to the Black Canyon, its storage reservoir



Reproduction of commemorative postcard for the opening of the Gunnison Tunnel.

has been coordinated with Taylor Park Reservoir to optimize fishing, wildlife, and recreation benefits. Curicanti Dam at Cimarron and Crystal Dam above the intake of the Gunnison Tunnel both store some water for the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association, as well as for other projects including the Central Project in Arizona and California. The Ridgway Reservoir, constructed in the 1980s, also stores some water for the Association. The Association contracted to pay off the costs of the Uncompahgre project in 1930 in forty annual installments, but has since borrowed more for other work.⁶⁹

Many times, the valley was stirred by talk about a magnificent electric tramway that would trundle the length of the valley on power from the Gunnison River Diversion Project. This dream has not been realized even though the potential to make electricity still exists and continues to be discussed. A recently-formed organization, Montrose Partners, is still working through an arrangement with the Army Corps of Engineers to make application for the AB Hydro Power Plant. It would be located on the Uncompahgre River north of Montrose where the AB Lateral Canal empties into the river after its journey through the east side of the irrigated land.

The Water Users are working on the SOJU Project to line the canals and irrigation ditches with concrete to cut down the salinity of water returning to the Uncompahgre River. The project is being engineered by the Bureau of Reclamation and will be completed within the next few years.

There are 2,600 stockholders in Montrose and Delta Counties; they hold stock subscriptions first issued in 1909 to pay for the project. They irrigate on the original Class 1, 2, and 3 prime 80,000 acres guaranteed in 1909. They continue to pay for improvements to the system.⁷⁰

A note of interest corresponds to Charles Adams' newspapermen tour at the opening of the tunnel. The Water Users, until three years ago, did conduct tours through the tunnel for school children and other groups. It was discontinued because of liability should someone be injured,⁷¹ but it was a great attraction to be able to enter the dark tunnel heading east and look back to see the light getting smaller and smaller to a pinpoint almost six miles from the West Portal.

Today, a few foundations and some granite rubble at River Portal remain from the heyday of construction. A caretaker's house sits in the shadows of the high granite walls. Green hay fields cover the former site of Lujane, and a lone white house sits in a grove of trees about a half mile west of the mouth of the Gunnison Tunnel at West Portal.⁷² These serve as reminders that the dream of irrigation water came true for F. C. Lauzon, his neighbors, and the Fourth Estate, the press.

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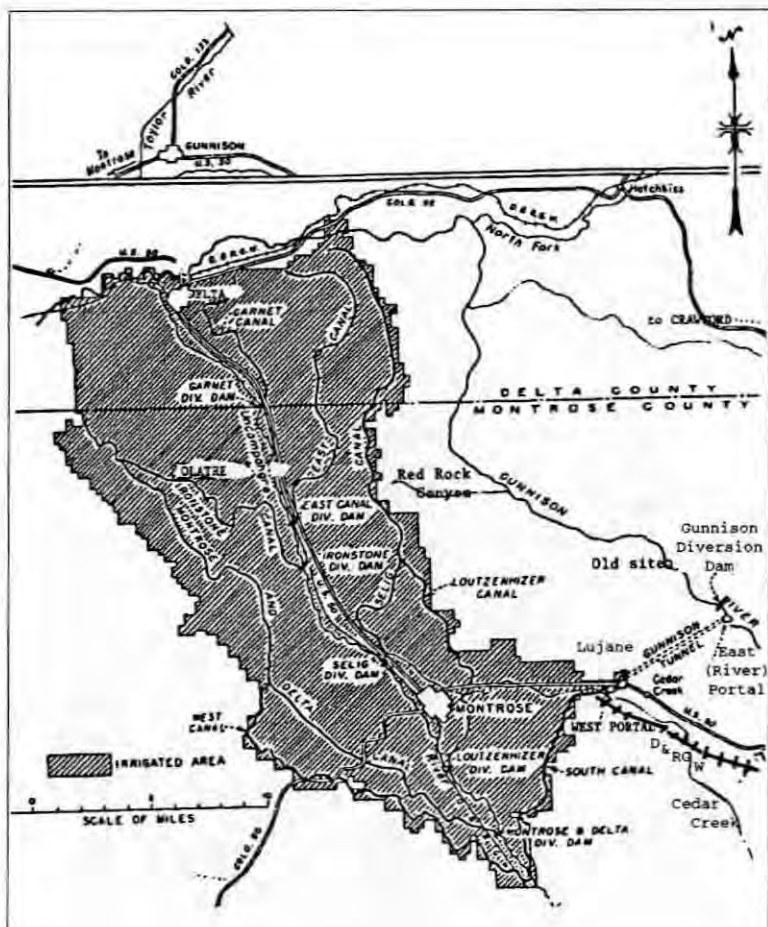


The Denver Post, September 19, 1909. Printed beneath the cartoon was the following message: "Half rates for round trip via Rio Grande to Montrose and all Uncompahgre valley points, also to Grand Junction. Tickets on sale September 20, 21 and 22. Return limit September 27. Get tickets and make sleeper reservations at City office, 1700 Stout street."

The Moses of the Twentieth Century



Rocky Mountain News, *September 23, 1909.*



*Uncompahgre project

* Map revised by T. Carmichael 1993

NOTES

¹Richard G. Beidleman, "The Gunnison River Diversion Project Part I," *Colorado Magazine*, 35 (July 1969), 187. (Hereinafter "The Gunnison River").

²Fray Angelino Chavez, *The Dominguez Escalante Journal*, (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1976). Chavez wrote the journal after his journey with Francisco Antansio Dominguez and Silvestre Veléz de Escalante in 1776. It was edited by Ted J. Warner and published on the 200th anniversary of the survey and the reenactment of the journey.

³Fray Angelino Chavez, 28.

⁴*Moab Times Independent*, July 5, 1947.

⁵Mark T. Warner, "Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument," *Colorado Magazine*, 11 (January 1963), 86. (Hereinafter "Black Canyon").

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Sidney Jocknick, *Early Days on the Western Slope*, (Denver: Carson-Harper Company, 1913), 96 (Hereinafter *Early Days*).

⁹Christian J. Buys, "Fort Crawford: A Symbol of Transition," *Journal of the Western Slope*, 8 (Spring 1993).

¹⁰Barton W. Marsh, "Earliest Occupation," *The Uncompahgre Valley and the Gunnison Tunnel: Special Tunnel Edition*, (Lincoln International Publishers Association, 1906.) Reissued with an addendum, 32.

¹¹Dona Freeman, *100 Years: Montrose, Colorado 1882-1982*, (Montrose, 1982). Hereinafter *100 Years*.

¹²Wilson Rockwell, "Montrose," *Uncompahgre Country*, (Denver: Sage Books, 1965), 32.

¹³Dona Freeman, *100 Years*, 4-5.

¹⁴Wilson Rockwell, "Montrose," 68.

¹⁵Richard G. Beidleman, "The Gunnison River," 190.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Senate Journal*, Colorado General Assembly, 12th Session, (Denver: 1899), 505-516.

²⁰*Montrose Enterprise*, July 7, 1890.

²¹*Montrose Enterprise*, August 4, 1900.

²²Richard G. Beidleman, "The Gunnison River," 190.

²³*Montrose Enterprise*, September 22, 1890.

²⁴Donald A. MacKendrick, "Before the Newlands Act: State Sponsored Reclamation Projects in Colorado 1888-1903," *Colorado Magazine*, 52 (Winter 1975).

²⁵A. W. Rolker and D. A. Willy, "Heroes of the Gunnison Tunnel," *Everybody's Magazine*, 21, No. 4 (1909).

²⁶When the *Montrose Enterprise* sent Pelton to Denver, he went with these figures: The valley has 30,000 acres under cultivation; an annual precipitation of 9.0 inches; the highest temperature 109 degrees; lowest temperature -36 degrees; mean temperature 51.4; 150 growing days; elevation 4,950 to 6,400 feet above sea level; and room for 300,000 more people. It also has a new high school, a manual training school, sidewalks, no slums, little crime, sanitation, woman's suffrage, and almost 80,000 acres for sale.

²⁷*Montrose Enterprise*, October 6, 1900.

²⁸There are many descriptions about the August 1900 preparations and descent into Black Canyon for the first tunnel survey. The *Montrose Enterprise* covered it in its August, September, and October weekly issues with a story, October 6, 1900, when the survey crew talked with reporters. Dona

Freeman in her book, *100 Years: Montrose, Colorado 1882-1982*, and Richard G. Beidleman in "Gunnison River Diversion Project Part I," put the date for the first expedition in 1900. However, Wilson Rockwell in *Uncompahgre Country* and Barton W. Marsh's souvenir book, *The Uncompahgre Valley and the Gunnison Tunnel*, give 1901 as the date of the first survey. When the author spent time in the bound copies of the *Montrose Enterprise* at the Montrose Historical Museum, she found that the article and interviews confirmed the 1900 date. It would appear that because the pictures of the second survey by Fellows and Torrence were so good, Marsh used them in his own book and gave credit for the survey in 1901.

²⁹Sidney Jocknick, *Early Days*, 282.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 283.

³¹Wilson Rockwell, "Montrose," 101. (From an interview with Rawalt in 1938): Shortly before Mead's (Meade Hammond) appropriation bill was voted on, C. Y. Rawalt, the State Representative from Gunnison County, called Mead aside. Rawalt had intended to revive the old Gunnison Normal School bill which requested an appropriation to build a college in Western Colorado at the town of Gunnison.

"Since both our appropriations are for the Western Slope...the bills kill each other. Therefore, if you think that my appropriation will endanger the passing of your Gunnison Tunnel bill, I won't present it at this session."

"Would you do this for me?" Hammond asked, since he knew how much the Gunnison Normal School meant to his colleague.

"Not exactly," Rawalt replied, "but I would do it for Western Colorado....your Gunnison Tunnel will do more for the Western Slope than my college."

Hammond laid a big hand on his friend's shoulder. "Don't let that stop you. We'll tie our bills together with barbed wire and they'll either win or go down together."

Both measures passed both houses and were signed by the governor.

³²C. W. Forbes-Lindsey, "Exploring the Gunnison Cañon," *World's Work*, 14 (1907), 9376.

³³*Montrose Enterprise*, August 3, 1901.

³⁴*Montrose Enterprise*, August 29, 1901.

³⁵Barton Marsh, "Earliest Occupation," 90.

³⁶*Montrose Enterprise*, September 15, 1901.

³⁷*Montrose Enterprise*, November 21, 1901.

³⁸*Montrose Enterprise*, December 12, 1901.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹When the author visited this site in 1979, a rutted road led to the Mancos shale hill and rusted iron rails, bolts, and tin cans marked the location of the work camp. When the author revisited it in the summer of 1993, the road was even more rutted and even fewer remains cluttered the ground. The Mancos shale had slid down and covered any sign of the original bore.

⁴²*Souvenir Booklet, Montrose County* (Montrose, Colorado: 1905), Montrose County Library, 15.

⁴³Arthur Chapman, "Watering the Uncompahgre Valley," *Review of Reviews*, (No. 2, 1909), 177.

⁴⁴On March 22, 1904, the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association was formed in Montrose. The officers from Delta, Olathe, and Montrose were J. H. Halley, president; John Tobin, vice president; Ira H. Monell, secretary; W. O. Stephens, treasurer; Directors: John Lamb, E. L. Ross, O. M. Kern, Frank Donlavy, W. E. Obert, W. R. Welch, and Frank Ross. Committee members were: Priorities: Rolla Butterfield, E. E. Young, and W. D. Stephens; Canals and Ditches: E. L. Osborn and W. R.

Welch; Subscriptions: I. H. Bigson, Frank Donlavey, and M. R. Welch; Final Organization and Completion Representatives: I. L. H. Monell, O. M. Kern, F. D. Catlin, and Arthur Stokes, superintendent of irrigation. Dona Freeman, *100 Years*, 42.

⁴⁵Files, Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association. (Hereinafter UVWA).

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷*Enterprise*, October 19, 1904.

⁴⁸Files, UVWA.

⁴⁹*The Denver Republican*, September 22, 1909.

⁵⁰McCullum was the author's family's neighbor at West Portal between 1937-1941. She was a retired teacher from Fairview School in Denver who came to West Portal in 1933 to farm the McCollum land. She bought land with her mother, brother, and a cousin in 1903. Each bought a section but were only allowed to irrigate 160 acres of each section from the Vernal Ditch Company. She farmed all the McCollum land until 1956 when she was no longer able to grow hay and grain because of blindness and age. The township of Lujane was leased from her; her brother Robert was postmaster at Lujane until the office closed in 1910.

⁵¹Files, UVWA.

⁵²A. W. Rolker and D. A. Willy, "Heroes of the Gunnison Tunnel."

⁵³The six miners killed in a cave-in during 1906 construction were James J. Cassidy, Charles Hornhundert, H. Okerman, Ed Shuler, H. C. Steele, and Floyd Woodruff. Files, UVWA.

⁵⁴Beidleman, "The Gunnison River," 280.

⁵⁵Alfred Henry Lewis, writing for the Hearst papers, wrote, "Guggenheim is in Europe. Mr. Taft was debarred from any polite recognition of that publicist Democrat." Guggenheim, a Republican, was not invited by any of the Denver committee to participate in any of the presidential events, even though he had invited Taft to come to Colorado. *Montrose Daily Press*, September 14, 1909.

⁵⁶*Montrose Daily Press*, September 14, 1909.

⁵⁷Members of the press on the train included Robert T. Small, Associated Press; Robert H. Hazar, United Press; E. A. Fowler, *New York Sun*; William Hoster, Hearst News Service; Sherman P. Allen, *New York Herald*; Harry L. Dunlap, *New York World*; F. H. Briswald, *Chicago Tribune*; and a reporter for the *St. Louis Globe Democrat*. Members of the presidential party included Capt. Archibald W. Butt, aide to camp; Assistant Secretary Wendell W. Mischler; Charles C. Wagner; Dr. J. J. Richardson, messenger; Arthur Brooks; James Sloan, Jr.; Lucien C. Wheeler; Gerrit Ford, assistant to the vice president of the New York Central Lines; Richard A. Ballinger, Secretary of the Interior; Senator Charles Hughes, Jr.; Colorado Representative Edward Taylor (whose name will appear in 1938 for the Taylor Park Dam); and Governor John F. Shafroth, who legislated for the original State Canal No. 3; officials of the Reclamation Service; and the Colorado National Guard. *The Daily Sentinel*, September 23, 1909.

⁵⁸Barbara Bowman, "The Peach Festival 1887-1909, A Celebration of the Land," *Journal of the Western Slope*, 2, Fall 1987.

⁵⁹Chipeta, widow of Chief Ouray, then in her nineties, was invited to the tunnel ceremonies; however, the celebration committee balked at funding her request for funds for her party of twenty other Utes and the invitation was withdrawn. She met Taft at the Mesa County Fairgrounds with her party of six Utes from the Uintah Reservation in Dragon, Utah. She was accompanied by McCook, who was at the Meeker Massacre, and Archie, who had visited with President McKinley in Washington, D. C. *Montrose Daily Press*, September 22, 1909; *The Daily Sentinel*, September 24, 1909.

⁶⁰Charles E. Adams, "The Human Side of President Taft." *Montrose Daily Press*, September 24, 1909. (Hereinafter "The Human Side").

⁶¹Vera La Rue, "Who's Who," *Montrose Daily Press*, September 23, 1909.

⁶²Charles E. Adams, "The Human Side." Even Taft's handshaking was publicized: "That handshake is worth a study. He extends his hand with the thumb perpendicular to the fingers, then he grasps

the hand with a quick gentle jerk up, releasing his hand as it descends—not more than six inches—should be able to handle ninety-five a minute.”

⁶³Charles E. Adams, “The Human Side.”

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵*Montrose Daily Press Program*, Sept. 23, 1909.

⁶⁶Beidleman, “The Gunnison River,” wrote that the gold bell was taken back to Washington with Taft.

⁶⁷*Montrose Enterprise*, September 24, 1909.

⁶⁸Files, UVWA.

⁶⁹Other work has included money to allow livestock water to be turned into ditches during winter time, drain ditches, expensive relining of the tunnel walls, and desalinization.

⁷⁰There are still many acres of land in both Montrose and Delta Counties not under irrigation. Class five land is swampy and some acres are set aside for Wetlands; class six land may be rocky, have high salinity, and be prone to alkali; or the terrain is steep, rocky, or eroded. As time goes by and more water might be available from the Ridgway Project, there might be considerations for more irrigable land, but not in the near future. Paul “Tom” Thompson, assistant manager of the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association, (Montrose, November 30, 1993), telephone interview.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²The author lived in this house between 1937 and 1941 when her father, Herman Martin Tesson, was a ditch rider for the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association. The family often drove through the tunnel for inspection tours and to fish at East Portal.

Roger Henn, *In Journeyings Often: A Story of Ouray Told Through Its First Church*. Ouray, Colorado: First Presbyterian Church of Ouray. 1993. viii + 165 pp. Illustrations, footnotes, foreword by Fitz Neal.

When one thinks of a Colorado high-country mining town, one rarely gives thought to that town's churches. This extensively researched work by Roger Henn illustrates the often overlooked connection between the boom-and-bust cycle of the precarious ore mining industry and how that was intimately reflected by the churches of the San Juans -- especially the First Presbyterian Church of Ouray.

The ruggedness, charity, perseverance, and stubbornness of the early settlers of Ouray is personified in the mining town's first minister, Dr. George M. Darley. In 1877 Darley crossed the mountains and literally built by hand one of the first churches in the mining camp later to be known as Ouray. This "pioneer" perseverance was to continue throughout the history of the town and the church.

Henn introduces the many committees, volunteers, and individuals committed to the growth of the town and church, with special attention given to the indispensable contributions of the women of Ouray.

Using local church records, letters, diaries, newspaper articles, and personal accounts, Henn reconstructs the perils, joys, and isolation of a mining town and the relevance of its church.

Lydia Herron
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