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# THE VALLEY OF OPPORTUNITY

STEVEN F. MEHLS



BUREAU OF  
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COLORADO



**CULTURAL  
RESOURCES  
SERIES**

NUMBER TWELVE

A HISTORY OF  
WEST-CENTRAL  
COLORADO

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**THE VALLEY OF OPPORTUNITY**  
A History of West-Central Colorado

~~U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY  
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By  
Steven F. Mehls

Bureau of Land Management  
Colorado State Office  
Denver, Colorado

1982



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**DESIGNED BY Leigh Wellborn**

FOREWORD

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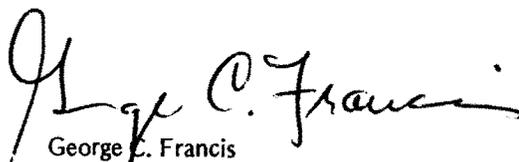
This document represents the latest Class I (History) to be written for the western slope of Colorado. Our three districts in this region of Colorado now have histories specifically for them. Such works provide a valuable and needed synthesis of history and literature for these areas and also gives our managers data that are used on a daily basis for land-use decisionmaking. Multiple land use is a Bureau mission that is being met. Oil and gas, coal, oil shale and other energy minerals, not to mention rights-of-ways, grazing programs, recreation projects and land-use planning, are all supported by histories such as this.

Resource Management Plans and subsequent Environmental Impact Statements that are produced for the Bureau's Area Offices are the foundations for long-term land-use management. The Glenwood Springs, Colorado, Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement is a Bureau pilot document and serves as a management tool for the Glenwood Springs Resource Area. This history, *Valley of Opportunity* supports the Resource Management Plan. In addition, a history provides background and support for the upcoming Grand Junction Resource Area Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement. The *Valley of Opportunity* has already been used for Oil Shale Environmental Statements and for the Federal Coal Leasing Program in the Grand Junction, Colorado, District. Truly, such histories are not only multiple-use in scope but are also management tools that provide basic understanding for land use decisions.

Additionally, this history represents an ongoing effort to provide the public reader with a work that is not only interesting but is also well researched. In this way, another sector is satisfied. These histories are used by schools, libraries, universities and, of course, the general public. Again, multiple-use is served.

Finally, as the *Valley of Opportunity* was being prepared, it happened that the City of Grand Junction's Centennial would occur in 1982. Coincidentally, the Glenwood Springs Resource Management Plan will be published in November 1982. Since this history serves several purposes, it is appropriate that it also is the Bureau's contribution to Grand Junction's Centennial celebration.

With these thoughts in mind, it is my pleasure to present to both the general public and to interested readers this latest history of a BLM Colorado district.



George E. Francis

State Director

Bureau of Land Management, Colorado

June 1982

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The history of west-central Colorado is the story of man using and adapting to his environment. As work on this study progressed, it became obvious that natural resources and their location led to two distinct patterns of development in different sections of the region. Men constantly made decisions about use of these resources and in a sense *The Valley of Opportunity* is a chronicle of those choices and their ramifications.

An author accumulates many debts along the trail of history and I am no different. I want to express my gratitude because without these people this document would have been impossible to write. Many thanks to the staffs of the Denver Public Library's Western History Department, the Documentary Resources Division of the Colorado Historical Society, the Western History Collections of Norlin Library at the University of Colorado, Mesa County Public Library, the Museum of Western Colorado, Mesa College Library, Garfield County Public Library, Glenwood Springs Public Library, Eagle County Public Library and Pitkin County Public Library. Special thanks go to the staffs at Colorado State Office and Grand Junction District Office, BLM, and Colorado National Monument, NPS. To simply say thank you to John Crouch, BLM District Archaeologist, Grand Junction hardly covers the debt. But the biggest obligation, by far, is owed Dr. Frederic J. Athearn, BLM's Colorado State Historian. His professional guidance and editing did more than anything else to strengthen the document. A special thank you to Lorraine Davis, Debbie Allyn, Vickie Noreen, Mary Seifert, Cindy Gurule, and Terri Kingery who made it all possible by spending what must have seemed like endless hours at a typewriter. Finally, I must say thanks to my wife Carol, for her help, encouragement and occasional use of her "nimble fingers".

## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of my father, Thomas, a life-long civil servant and the person who got me interested in history.

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## INTRODUCTION

*The Valley of Opportunity* is a title that symbolizes development and settlement throughout west-central Colorado. From the days of native-American occupation, to the most modern period, mankind realized the value and importance of the Grand (Colorado) River valley and its tributaries like the Eagle.

Early man saw that in the valley were sources of water, lush vegetation, and wildlife. They therefore used these resources to sustain themselves and they saw the Grand Valley as a major trailway between the Continental Divide and Utah. The Spanish explorers, Dominguez and Escalante, in 1776, traversed the Grand River valley on a northerly course while seeking a trail to California. This journal provided the first recorded European description of the region.

During the early to mid-1800s, fur traders and trappers came into the area, some from the eastern plains, beyond the Continental Divide, and others from New Mexico, to the south. These men, some Spanish/ Mexican, others American, found little beaver along the Grand River and mainly used the valley as a passageway into Utah where the Green, White, and other streams provided great quantities of the furry animals. Antoine Robidoux built a trading fort at the mouth of the Gunnison and Uncompaghre Rivers near present day Delta and it represented the first American settlement anywhere near the Grand Valley.

The next entrance came with official government explorations. John C. Fremont arrived in the Eagle River valley while on his way to Oregon in 1845, and then he returned to Colorado in 1848 where his party nearly perished in the snowy San Juan Mountains of southern Colorado. Disaster ended Fremont's efforts. However, in 1853 John Williams Gunnison was commissioned to survey a transcontinental railroad route over the legendary Cochetopa Pass. In his effort, Gunnison surveyed a line to the mouth of the Gunnison and Grand Rivers, later to become the townsite of Grand Junction.

In 1860 a group of miners, led by Richard Sopris, explored the Aspen and Glenwood Springs regions in search of minerals. None were discovered, but a mountain near Carbondale was named in honor of Sopris. The final gasp of exploration came in the

1870s when numerous geologists, geographers, and botanists under the direction of Ferdinand V. Hayden surveyed the western slope of Colorado. These surveys provided a wealth of information and provided the final touches preparatory to settlement in west-central Colorado.

In 1879, Ute Indians, residing on the White River Reservation near Meeker, rose in rebellion. They killed Agent Nathan Meeker and others. The U.S. Army was called in to restore order. By 1881, after outcries from the Anglo citizens of Colorado, the Utes were removed to reservations in Utah and far southwestern Colorado. The west slope was, at last, open to settlement.

The rush for western Colorado was soon in coming. The San Juans had already been invaded by miners and now it was west-central Colorado's turn. In the mid-1870s the upper Eagle River valley was settled. Redcliffe, Holy Cross City, and other towns were founded. By 1879, the Aspen region was under development and precious metal mining was established in the high country. Coal mining also developed in the early 1880s to fuel the smelters and towns that arose from silver extraction efforts.

Possibly the most important event in the region was the advent of transportation systems, beginning with roads and trails and culminating with railroads. In 1882, the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad reached the junction of the Gunnison and Grand Rivers on its way to Utah. The city of Grand Junction had been founded a year earlier. Meanwhile, the Rio Grande and the Colorado Midland raced each other to reach Aspen. The Midland chose the Hagerman Pass route while the Rio Grande used Tennessee Pass, the Eagle Valley, and Glenwood Canyon. By 1887, the Rio Grande reached Aspen, tapping the mines. The Midland arrived the next year.

What is more important, is that a rail connection from Denver to Leadville to Aspen, via Glenwood Springs was formed. The town of Glenwood Springs, founded in 1881, grew thanks to the rails. In 1890, the Rio Grande and the Midland jointly built a line from Glenwood to Grand Junction, thus assuring the success of the Grand Valley.

Along with the rails came settlement. In order for the Grand Valley to survive, agriculture became a necessary industry. Massive amounts of water in the Grand River provided irrigation resources and by 1900 such projects covered the valley. Sugar beets,

fruit trees, and other crops became the main source of income for the Grand Junction to Rifle region. Wheat, cattle, and hay were raised in the drier areas from the valley floors. Homesteading occurred in the uplands while valley areas were generally sold on a commercial basis. Agriculture took up the slack when the silver industry collapsed during the Panic of 1893, and Aspen, Redcliffe, and other silver towns were wiped out overnight.

Coal mining continued to support the economy as did a fairly major tourist industry at Glenwood Springs, but agriculture was the keystone of west-central Colorado. This remained true until recently.

During the early 1900s an oil shale boom occurred along Parachute Creek. Retorts were built, stock sold, and claims staked. However, by 1920 it was over, when the great Texas oil fields were brought in and prices dropped. Other mineral activities in the area included uranium mining near Rifle, Grand Junction, and at Gateway. This went on from about 1900 to 1950. The real boom took place after World War II, but it died by 1955. Oil and gas exploration also happened in the 1920s and continues to the present.

West-central Colorado can be characterized as a region that developed along geographic lines, using its natural resources and pathways to provide settlement and a stable economy. Unlike other regions in Colorado, the Grand Valley was not settled in the traditional frontier sense. It had many of the amenities foreign to the frontier before, or at the same time, as settlement took place. This makes the *Valley of Opportunity* unique, for in the truest sense Colorado's history and development fail to fit into the typical Turnerian "mold" of frontier development. The people who settled this region were not "misfits," nor outcasts, nor dreamers of fortune. In the main, they were solid citizens, with some means, who came west for the express purpose of recreating their lifestyles. Witness Glenwood Springs named after Glenwood, Iowa. The Midwest influence was strong in the settlement of west-central Colorado and remains so to this day.

Mining, of course, was something of an aberration in this pattern. However, even Aspen was settled in an organized, business-like manner by Midwesterners. How unusual to see crude mining camps develop into cultured cities!

Steven F. Mehls has, for the first time, not only provided a consolidated history of west-central Colorado based on extensive research, but he has also pointed out, very clearly, how unique this area's history and development really is. Mr. Mehls, in this work, is showing the reader a phase of western American history that is little known but of vast importance to our understanding of what is known as "The West".

Frederic J. Athearn  
Denver, Colorado  
July, 1982

## CHAPTER I. THE NATURAL BACKDROP AND SPANISH EXPLORATION

“And all the lands contained therein were given to the Earth People, the offspring of First Man and First Woman.”

*—Southwestern Indian Creation Myth*

West-central Colorado is a majestic, often awe-inspiring, land of 14,000 foot peaks, fertile valleys, and desolate plateaus. The region extends from the Continental Divide, near Leadville, Colorado, westward to the Utah state line. The northernmost edge of the territory borders the Flattop Mountains, the Piceance Basin, the Book Cliffs and the Roan Plateau. The Maroon Bells, Grand Mesa and the Uncompahgre Plateau dominate the southern reaches of west-central Colorado. Within these confines flow many rivers and streams that form the broad productive valleys of the area.<sup>1</sup> These geographic features give the land a natural isolation and greatly influences its uses by humans.

The indigenous environment forms the stage on which the drama of history is performed. The topography, geology, and climate have encouraged certain social and economic developments and constrained others. The geographic features were the reason for the great variety of ways land was utilized and the distinctive character of different segments of the area. For example, farmers were attracted to the valleys while miners looked to the mountains for wealth.<sup>2</sup> Over time, people have emphasized different elements of these surroundings thereby changing their uses of the land.

Over the billions of years of the earth's existence, the area has had a long and eventful geologic history. The first epoch came four billion years ago. This was the Pre-Cambrian era of volcanic activity when the first formations were created. These granite masses were then transformed by heat and pressure into metamorphic layers and provided the basis of the Rocky Mountains.<sup>3</sup>

The Cretaceous period, sixty to one hundred and twenty-five million years ago, was the first era of mountain making when pressures within the earth forced huge sections of the crust upward. At this time Colorado was covered by dense forests of ferns and other plants. The decayed remains of this vegetation, compressed by layers of mud and sediment became the coal and fossil fuel deposits that underlie much of west-central Colorado. Also, many of the rugged sandstone formations of the area were created.<sup>4</sup> The

Cretaceous period gave way to the Cenozoic Era; that was marked by renewed volcanic activity and mountain making through folding and faulting. At this time Grand Mesa, the world's largest flat-topped mountain, and the coal-rich Grand Hogback, which bisects the region from northwest to southeast, were formed.<sup>5</sup>

During a new epoch, the Mesozoic Era, a great shallow sea covered much of what is today's Utah. The extreme eastern edges of this ocean touched west-central Colorado. Dinosaurs and other large creatures lived in the coastal marshes. As the earth cooled these behemoths became extinct and great sheets of ice crept across the land.<sup>6</sup> Glaciers gouged and shaped the terrain creating new features and then receded. In their wake a young river system developed.<sup>7</sup> The huge flow in these watercourses, along with winds, combined to perform the last major topographic modifications through erosion.<sup>8</sup>

The Gunnison and Grand (later Colorado) rivers were the primary agents of these changes.<sup>9</sup> The Colorado, which created the Grand Valley, largest in western Colorado, has its origins at Grand Lake. From the lake it flows across Middle Park, cuts through the rugged Gore Range and then creates a broad floodplain in the sandstones of the Middle Valley. Near the eastern mouth of Glenwood Canyon, the Eagle and Colorado rivers meet and the mighty Colorado cuts through the Flattop Mountains, creating the spectacular Glenwood Canyon from which it emerges into a wide valley that extends westward to DeBeque Canyon and then widens into a valley again that continues into Utah.

This, the Grand Valley, is a product of sandstone erosion and volcanic ash.<sup>10</sup> That process created rich medium to moderately coarse soils capable of producing crops under irrigation. Just west of Rifle, Colorado, the bluffs of the Piceance Basin rise several thousand feet above the valley floor and level off into a plateau that becomes the southern edge of the Green River formation. This is one of the world's largest sources of oil shale.<sup>11</sup> Farther west, the Colorado River winds its way through the narrow sandstone walls of DeBeque into the area where the Gunnison and Colorado rivers meet. The river (Colorado) then makes its way into Utah and eventually empties into the Gulf of California thereby forming the second largest river system in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

Numerous rivers and streams drain the Colorado River basin. To the east, the Eagle River emerges from the heart of the Rockies near Leadville, Colorado, and cuts a spectacular gorge near Redcliffe, Colorado, then flows through the Eagle Valley where a broad floodplain is created. At Dotsero, Colorado, the Eagle and Colorado rivers meet.

To the west, the Colorado is fed by the Roaring Fork River. Beginning near Aspen, Colorado, the Roaring Fork flows down a broad valley and emerges at Glenwood Springs. The entire area is sprinkled with over 100 hot springs. The Roaring Fork is in turn fed by the Crystal River to the west and the Frying Pan River to the East. Cutting through granites and sandstones these rivers created narrow valleys in which there is limited agriculture. Both the Frying Pan and Crystal intersect mineral belts; the Frying Pan originates in the Leadville mineral belt with rich deposits of gold and silver found along its banks,<sup>13</sup> while the Crystal provides passage into layers of coal and marble.

Farther west numerous creeks flow into the Colorado. Canyon Creek, Elk Creek, Rifle Creek, Garfield Creek, East and West Divide Creeks, Mamm Creek, Parachute Creek, Roan Creek, and Plateau Creek are the main drainages to the north and south of the upper Grand Valley. These intersecting passages cause the land to have broken, difficult terrain. The creeks are not perennial in all cases; they may cause flooding during periods of heavy runoff.

The Grand Junction area is drained by Big Salt Wash, East and West Salt Washes, East Creek, Kannah Creek, Whitewater Creek, and the Dolores River. The land here is broken mesas with limited access, most of which occurs along the river drainages.<sup>14</sup>

West-central Colorado is a land of contrasts. From the high elevations of the Continental Divide to the lower elevations of the valleys a variety of flora and fauna exist. Species of evergreens, such as Engleman Spruce and Lodgepole Pine, are found in the higher elevations while Pinyon Pine and Cottonwoods thrive at the lower elevations. Aspens are the predominant herbaceous trees of the higher reaches of the region. Much of the plateaus and valleys are covered with Oakbrush, Salt Bush, and Sagebrush.<sup>15</sup>

Generally, vegetation is dependent upon climate and irrigation. The dry areas tend to be covered with sage and grasses while the mountain regions have large stands of timber intermingled with lush grassy meadows.<sup>16</sup> These areas were long used for lumbering and grazing.

The climate of west-central Colorado can be characterized as extreme. From the high country just west of the main range of the Rockies temperatures range from 50 degrees F below zero in the winter to the mid-70s during summer. The narrow, deep mountain valleys are usually very cold in the winter. The wider, more shallow valleys,

such as the Grand Valley, tend to be warmer. Winter temperatures hover near 40 degrees while in the summer the mesas often see 110 degree F readings. The climate of the Grand Valley, moderated by the surrounding mountains, is warm enough to provide a long growing season. The mountain valleys such as the Eagle and the Roaring Fork experience greater temperature extremes and are unable to sustain lengthy growing periods.<sup>17</sup>

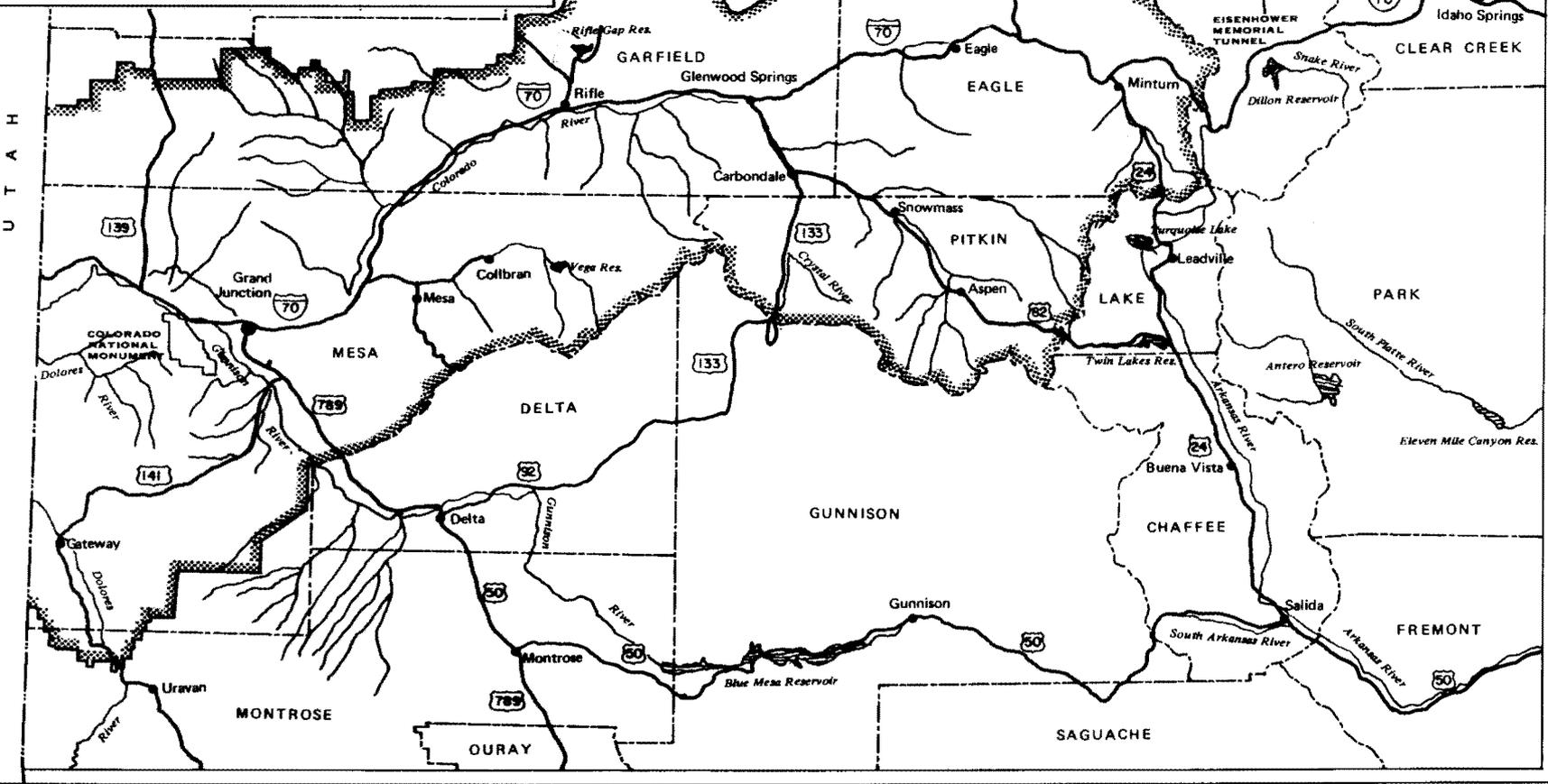
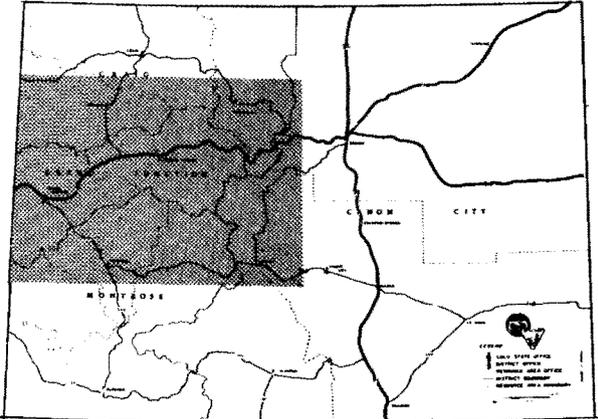
Moisture is limited in this region. Like the rest of Colorado, the climate is dry; snow and rain runoff is important. The availability of water for domestic, agricultural, and other uses has been one of the key factors shaping human occupation and use of the land.<sup>18</sup> The bulk of moisture falls in the form of snow on the high peaks during the winters. In the spring the melting snows provide the rivers with water that is diverted and used for agriculture and other purposes. Annual snowfall ranges from 10 or more feet in the high Rockies to a few inches on the mesas to the far west. The average rainfall is 6 to 11 inches a year, making this a semi-arid region.

All these topographic and climatic features influenced settlement of the region. In particular, the blockade formed by the mountains, while protecting the valleys, also acted to isolate the land from other areas and led to unique use and occupation patterns for the territory.<sup>19</sup>

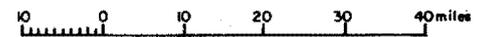
Prehistoric man dates from about 10,000 B.C. and evidence of this past is abundant. These earliest inhabitants were travellers migrating to new homelands further south. Not until about 4,000 B.C. did tribes make west-central Colorado their permanent home. The area offered them a reasonably steady food supply of mule deer, nuts and berries.<sup>20</sup> Growing none of their own food, these hunters and gatherers were members of the Desert Culture. This cultural group continued in the extreme western reaches of the area well into the years after the birth of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

Further to the south, in southwestern Colorado, a new culture was developing during the same period--the Anasazi. This people became sedentary after learning to plant crops from other groups. They experienced four distinct phases of development and held sway on their land from 1 A.D. until 1300 A.D., when they were forced to migrate south, probably because of droughts. The Anasazi were adept basketmakers and potters, but possibly are best known for their construction abilities as seen in the Mesa

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Verde cliff dwellings. At the height of Anasazi power, their lands stretched as far north as Glade Park and through trade networks, elements of their culture spread even further.<sup>22</sup>

The Fremonts were one tribe influenced by Anasazi cultural dissemination. These people occupied west-central Colorado generations before the Anasazi culture evolved, living as part of the Desert Culture. However, once trade was established, the Fremonts practiced selective adaptation. Fremonts started to grow corn, squash, and beans while maintaining their old skills as hunters and gatherers. They built pithouses and occasional surface dwellings such as the earliest Anasazi had, but never developed the larger surface structures such as Mesa Verde. However, in the hills around Grand Junction, the Fremonts did leave many petroglyphs as evidence of their existence.<sup>23</sup> The Fremonts may have been the predecessors of the Shoshonean tribes, one member of which became the primary occupants of the Colorado Rockies--the Ute.<sup>24</sup>

In approximately 1200 A.D., the Fremonts abandoned their fields and disappeared as a discernable cultural group. Many explanations for this shift, such as the abundance of food and therefore the lack of need to grow crops, have been put forward by archaeologists and anthropologists.<sup>25</sup> Whatever the reason, the Utes did emerge and remained the dominant tribe in western Colorado until the nineteenth century.

The Utes were hunters and gatherers of the Great Basin anthropological grouping and Shoshonean language family. There were seven major sub-groups of Ute: the Uintahs, Yampas, Parianucs, Uncompaghres, Weeminuches, Capotes, and Mouaches. The Parinucs and Uintahs were the primary inhabitants of west-central Colorado.<sup>26</sup> They were band and lineage organized and because of their dependence on natural food supplies, Utes seldom formed groups of more than 100. Armed with bows and arrows, these people were able hunters and feared warriors.<sup>27</sup> The Grand Valley was a favorite Ute spot because of the mild winters, abundant game on Grand Mesa and in the Piceance Basin, and the readily available pinon nut supply.<sup>28</sup> Glenwood Springs was highly prized by the Native Americans because of the medicinal and "magical" qualities of the hot springs. The area was elevated to sacred status by the Ute before 1800. The tribe also used the lands around McCoy as a burial ground for centuries before the Europeans arrived in Colorado.<sup>29</sup>

The Ute remained pedestrian and limited in their travels until after the first Europeans arrived in North America. However, Spanish intrusion into New Mexico led to a

socio-economic revolution for the Ute. The newcomers brought with them the horse and once seen, it became a highly prized possession by all Western Native Americans, Ute included. Introduced to Colorado by 1700, the horse allowed the Ute to increase their effectiveness as hunters. New sources of food such as the buffalo were hunted and Ute territory expanded. Also, with the greater ability to secure food, the size of their bands grew. At approximately the same time guns appeared on the Colorado scene. Native American possession of firearms did not lead to great power shifts but it did increase the chance for success in wars and hunts.<sup>30</sup>

Equestrian Utes expanded their trade and hunting territories and in so doing, came into contact and subsequent conflict with other tribes. The Kiowa, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe were traditional Ute enemies because those three tribes invaded Middle Park and other Ute mountain territories. The horse, in turn, allowed the Ute to assault the plains of their enemies on revenge raids and buffalo hunts.<sup>31</sup> The mobility of the horse permitted the Colorado natives to solidify their trade relations with the Pueblo tribes to the south and their new allies, the Comanche. This alliance lasted until about 1750, when the Utes broke relations with the Comanche and allied with the Jicarilla Apache and Spanish to war on their former confederates.<sup>32</sup> To their north and west the Ute maintained cordial, yet at times hostile relations, with other Shoshonean peoples of the area. Ute war with these tribes was primarily for territorial defense.<sup>33</sup>

The Ute reached the height of their power and influence by 1750. In 1800, reports indicated that these mountain people had a population of approximately 1,000.<sup>34</sup> This increased population and power coincided in time with the first direct Ute contacts with Europeans, in this case the Spanish from New Mexico. The natural isolation of west-central Colorado, the barrier that had protected the early inhabitants, was finally breached by New Mexicans during the second half of the eighteenth century.

The first known European visitors to Colorado were the Spanish who moved north from their bases in New Mexico. Three factors motivated these early explorers. Many searched for precious minerals hoping to repeat the Spanish experience in Aztec Mexico or Inca Peru. Others saw the natives in their "heathen" state and sought to convert them to Catholicism. Expansion of the Spanish empire was the third reason for Conquistadores to go forth into the wilds of the American Southwest.<sup>35</sup> This final factor became increasingly important after French and British trappers and explorers entered the Rockies in the middle eighteenth century.<sup>36</sup>

In 1540, the first Spaniard who traveled through Colorado was Don Francisco Vasquez de Coronado. He was in search of Cibola, the fabled seven cities of gold, but he found no riches.<sup>37</sup> Popular legend maintains that members of this expedition, probably priests, were the first Europeans to see and name the Mount of the Holy Cross, located near Pando, Colorado.<sup>38</sup> Records of Coronado's trip do not mention the event, however the rumor persists. The Conquistadore's failure to find riches and ensuing disappointment on the part of the Spanish government led to a 40 year suspension of exploration in the Southwest.<sup>39</sup>

Stories gleaned from natives captured in northern Mexico during 1579, led to a resumption of Spanish exploration in New Mexico the next year. The locals told of cities to the north where the inhabitants were well fed, lived in great stone houses and were dressed in fine cotton clothes. These descriptions of the Pueblos in New Mexico were enough to pique Spanish curiosity.<sup>40</sup> Fray Augustin Rodriguez led an expedition north along the Rio Grande in 1581 and 1582, to contact these peoples. The Padre succeeded and his reports led to further exploration and eventual settlement of New Mexico.<sup>41</sup>

From 1580 to 1680, Europeans moved into the new province and continued to explore the periphery of their domain. They established trade with the Ute and heard many tales of the land that would become Colorado.<sup>42</sup> The Spanish dream for a strong, prosperous New Mexico was interrupted temporarily in 1680, when Pueblo Indian uprisings rocked the province.

Unwilling to surrender its lands to the natives, the Spanish government sent Don Diego De Vargas to New Mexico to reconquer the territory. Successful at his assigned task, Vargas decided to do some exploring into the lands to the north and, in 1695, he visited the San Luis Valley. Colorado was of small interest to the Spanish for it showed little agricultural promise, and no precious minerals were found.<sup>43</sup>

The Ute were affected by the European presence in New Mexico in a variety of ways long before the Spanish actually entered Colorado. The first cultural contacts came in the form of trade after Europeans opened commerce with traditional Ute trading partners, particularly the Pueblos.<sup>44</sup> During the seventeenth century, a flourishing trade developed between Spaniards and Utes who captured Digger Indians in Utah and transported them to Taos and other New Mexico business centers. Part of this commerce, no doubt, was

routed via the Grand Valley and Gunnison River to reach Spanish settlements. The Utes exchanged slaves for horses, mules, and firearms. Also, they traded buckskins, hides, and dried meats for a variety of iron products and salt.<sup>45</sup>

This trade continued into the second decade of the eighteenth century when Ute raiders attacked Taos and relations between the two groups cooled for a time.<sup>46</sup> This was not the first such episode and often the Spanish replied by sending punitive expeditions into Ute lands. However, these incursions usually accomplished little and by 1750, the Native Americans and Europeans entered into a formal alliance. The treaty guaranteed Spaniards safe passage through Ute lands and led to a new series of expeditions into Colorado.<sup>47</sup>

The first formal post-treaty exploration (from 1761 to 1765) was led by Juan de Rivera, a veteran explorer and frontiersman. During those years he made three trips into southwestern Colorado, traveling as far north as the present site of Delta, Colorado, along the Gunnison River. Finding nothing of great value, he returned home and reported that the area was of little worth. However, in the years following Rivera's trips some of his men established a brisk trade with the natives along the Gunnison River in Colorado.<sup>48</sup> In 1775, Pedro Mora, Gregorio Sandoval, and Andres Muniz, three Gunnison River traders, followed that river north in search of new customers. They reached the junction of the Gunnison and Grand (Colorado) Rivers, the present site of Grand Junction, Colorado, before turning back to New Mexico.<sup>49</sup> They became the first known Europeans to see the Grand River.

During the next year Spanish officials launched their greatest effort to date to penetrate west-central Colorado. During 1776 the government in New Mexico decided that a new route to California was needed for imperial security. The Spanish, in particular the Catholic Church, were interested in a communication line to the Pacific coast. They looked for a northern route because the Hopi (Moqui) Indians blocked the most direct route across Arizona.<sup>50</sup> Two Franciscan explorers, Fray Silvestre Velez de Escalante and Fray Francisco Atensio Dominguez, led the effort. They decided to follow the traders' trail into Colorado as the first leg of their route to California. The Padres felt this could be done without a large party and at minimum cost.<sup>51</sup>

The proposal interested New Mexico's governor at Santa Fe and he volunteered to help arrange the trek. After providing material assistance, Governor Fermin de Medineta

saw the expedition off on July 29, 1776. The party of ten left Santa Fe and worked its way north into Colorado by August, 1776. They passed the future site of Dulce, New Mexico, and then moved to the San Juan River then on to the Dolores River.<sup>5 2</sup>

Upon reaching the Dolores, the expedition became lost. With help from friendly "Yuta" (Ute) Amerindians, the party was guided across Grand Mesa and down into the Grand Valley. Here they became the first recorded Europeans to have seen the Upper Grand Valley. In September the group crossed the Mesa into the Plateau Creek drainage. From here they moved downstream to Jerry Creek where they found water.<sup>5 3</sup> At this point they turned east and set up camp one-and-a-quarter miles downstream from the present Una bridge.<sup>5 4</sup> The expedition then moved westward along the Grand River to Roan Creek and from there they marched over Douglas Pass to Douglas Creek.<sup>5 5</sup> Along the way they saw the Canon Pintado (Painted Canyon) and what they felt to be veins of gold along the canyon walls. However, no attempts were made at mining. From the Douglas Canyon area the band headed west into Utah along the White River Valley. On September 14, 1776, they camped at the future site of Jensen, Utah. From there the expedition proceeded southwest across the state and into Arizona; they return to Santa Fe on January 2, 1777, without finding a route to California.<sup>5 6</sup>

The knowledge gained from the Dominguez-Escalante explorations was not widely distributed and many of the areas that had been explored for the first time remained "undiscovered". The expedition was of some value for later travellers for the map they produced and that the resources of the Great Basin area were explored.<sup>5 7</sup> However, outside of a few traders who widened their trading areas by 1800, the Spanish were not interested in taking advantage of these discoveries, and it was not for another 40 years that the Mexicans and Anglo-Americans would again venture into west-central Colorado.

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## CHAPTER II. THE FUR TRADE AND GOVERNMENT EXPLORATION

"When I first came to the mountains, I came a poor man. You, by your indefatigable exertions, toils and privations, have procured me an independent fortune."

*-William Ashley*

Fur trappers in search of beaver were the first Euro-Americans to visit west-central Colorado. These buckskin clad adventurers constituted the vanguard of American civilization as they spread out into the Rocky Mountains during the 30 years from 1810 to 1840. The mountain men, as hopeful capitalists, found and exploited the area's natural abundance for the first time. This use of resources differentiated these Anglo-Americans from previous travellers into the region who had gone to explore or trade with the natives. The fur business, based on the need for beaver pelts used in making hats, depended upon fashion trends to create a demand and stabilize prices. During the 1820s and 1830s, European male dress standards required beaver hats which caused a boom in trapping activities. These decades marked the high point of the mountain man and his fur trade. However, the first trappers were in Colorado well before 1820.<sup>1</sup>

The fur trade in central Colorado began in two places. The upper Arkansas River, near Leadville, Colorado, was visited in 1811, by the famous fur entrepreneur Manuel Lisa. Lisa, in that year sent a party, led by Jean B. Champlin and Ezekiel Williams, to trade with the Arapahoe. In the process of trapping they discovered and trapped the upper Arkansas River Valley, but due to the extreme height of the Rockies, they failed to pass into the Colorado River Basin. Natives wiped out this group and only Williams made it back to Santa Fe in 1813.<sup>2</sup>

The next recorded trapping party was the Joseph Philibert expedition of 1815. Organized by Auguste Chouteau and Julius DeMun of St. Louis, this party was typical of many of the early trapping efforts, being made up of men of French ancestry based in St. Louis, Missouri. That city became the center of the western fur trade during the early nineteenth century. They trapped along the upper Arkansas River to the head of the valley near Leadville, where they encountered Caleb Greenwood in charge of a Lisa outfit working the area. The Chouteau and DeMun group operated along the upper Arkansas for several years, but apparently failed to cross the Continental Divide into the Colorado

River Basin.<sup>3</sup> Trapping on the crest of the Rockies came to a sudden halt in 1817, when Spanish troops captured American traders along the Front Range. The American trappers were jailed and only after considerable difficulty were they released.<sup>4</sup>

Mountain men may have trapped the Eagle Valley as early as 1813. Local legend maintains that fur baron John Jacob Astor's men established a post at Astor City, near Minturn, Colorado, while returning from Astoria in the Oregon Country after Astor had sold his holdings to the British North West Company. This myth was given some credence because of casual references to Astor City in the Rockies in Longfellow's *Evangeline*. However, there are no other records of this post and in all probability, the Astorians never trapped the Eagle Valley at this early date.<sup>5</sup>

Fur trapping came to a halt along the Arkansas River corridor by 1817, because of Spanish intervention, and a few trappers began to operate from Santa Fe by way of the San Juan Mountains. The Mauricio Arze and Lagos Gracia expedition of 1813, had skirted this area on the way to Utah.

In 1821, the citizens of New Spain (Mexico) overthrew Spanish rule and declared themselves an independent nation. With the revolution, New Mexico became "open territory" for trappers and traders. Americans, who had been excluded, now were allowed into the area. Taos, New Mexico, became a major trade center and by 1824, the San Juan Mountains and Colorado River tributaries became preferred areas for trappers because the region's heavier snowfall led to a more constant stream flow that in turn tended to produce greater quantities of high quality furs. The area saw the likes of Ewing Young, William Wolfskill, and others and for the first time, the interior of Colorado was being trapped.<sup>6</sup>

From the opening of the center to the end of the fur trade, there was little activity directly along the Colorado River. However, trappers used some of the river's tributaries extensively, as well as using the river and the valleys as routes into other trapping grounds. The upper Arkansas Basin was in continual use, including the Hugh Glen-Jacob Fowler expedition of 1824. These men were responsible for the opening of the route from St. Louis to Santa Fe.<sup>7</sup> During the 1820s, many trappers and traders passed through west-central Colorado. In 1822, James Ohio Pattie travelled much of western Colorado, followed two years later by five trapping parties led by William Wolfskill, Etienne Provost, Antoine Robidoux, William Huddart, and William Becknell respectively. These parties

were headed for the Green River of Utah using the Dominguez-Escalante route from Santa Fe. During 1825, Thomas Long and "Peg-Leg" Smith, financed by Ceran St. Vrain trapped along the Grand (Colorado) River. James O. Pattie spent part of the 1826 trapping season on the Grand. The last fur expedition of the 1820s in west-central Colorado came in 1829, when George Yount, with an outfit of thirty men, trapped the Grand and Green Rivers.<sup>8</sup>

The fur trade in western Colorado boomed when William Ashley opened the Green River country in 1825, and began to exploit it. By the next year Ashley's group, which became the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, then owned by Bill Sublette, William Jackson, and Jedediah Smith employed the biggest names in the Colorado fur trade.<sup>9</sup>

The 1830s witnessed increased fur trapping and trading in western Colorado. During this decade mountain men worked the Crystal River, the Eagle River, the Gunnison River as well as the Grand.<sup>10</sup> The trappers included "Peg-Leg" Smith, Mark Head, and Jim Bridger.<sup>11</sup> The early years of the thirties were the era of the rendezvous, a system of central collection, employed by the fur companies. This meant that several times a year the trappers would gather at a pre-arranged place to exchange furs for goods and supplies, to drink and have a good time. These "fairs in the wilderness" generally turned into drunken brawls, but they did serve a purpose. Instead of having to go around and collect furs, the traders could simply meet with the trappers and barter. The rendezvous system came to an end in the mid-1830s with the advent of the trading post.<sup>12</sup>

Trading posts evolved in response to increasing threats from natives who objected to the incursions of the fur traders. The first forts in Colorado were established on the eastern plains to serve the buffalo trade. Bent's Fort, Henry Gantt's post, and others eliminated the need for the rendezvous. In the interior Fort Uintah, Utah, and Fort Davey Crockett, Colorado, served the northwestern part of Colorado. Central Colorado trade was concentrated at Fort Uncompahgre, also known as Fort Robidoux.

The post was built by veteran Taos trader Antoine Robidoux who, in 1837, left his carvings in the Book Cliffs near Fruita, Colorado. He also owned Fort Uintah. Fort Uncompahgre was built in 1828 near the junction of the Gunnison and Uncompahgre Rivers. This structure was a small wooden and mud fort built on a square. It afforded no real protection from hostile Utes.<sup>13</sup>

Fort Uncompahgre, the Western Slope's first general store, was a boon for trappers and traders in western Colorado. The fort's owner, Antoine Robidoux, a "bushwa" or trader, had long experience in the fur business, his father having started at St. Louis in 1790. Antoine was one of seven brothers, all of whom stayed in the fur enterprises. The post itself was licensed by the Mexican government and handled all matter of goods. It was the scene of many drunken brawls, inter-racial debaucheries, and the use of liquor to encourage the Utes to trade. As many as 20 trappers were based at Fort Uncompahgre, the most famous being Christopher "Kit" Carson, who, in 1840, trapped the Grand River. The post remained open until 1844, when the Utes burned it down, never to be rebuilt partly because of fashion changes that led to a depressed market after 1840.<sup>14</sup> Individual trappers, such as William Gant, on the Crystal River, or the Kimball brothers on Kimball Creek near Grand Valley, Colorado, continued to trap in western Colorado as late as 1882. The early 1840s marked the end of the fur trade as a big business all over the American West.<sup>15</sup>

The fur trade never impacted the Grand Valley because most travellers either avoided the region or simply passed through on their way to other, richer, fur lands. Perhaps it was the lack of access that prevented early development, or maybe the Rockies proved too stout a barrier. The only areas exploited were either north of the valley in the Flattop Mountains, the Eagle Valley and down the White River, or to the south in the Elk and San Juan Mountains.

The next major European thrust in Colorado was exploration in the 1840s. From 1800 to 1840, the Rocky Mountain West was the scene of competition between the British, Spanish, and Americans for control of the land. Spain originally claimed the entire area and maintained that control, despite threats of French incursion that ended with the Peace of Paris in 1763. The United States entered the contest with the purchase of Louisiana in 1803, that doubled the size of the country and made the crest of the Rocky Mountains the western boundary of the nation. The United States government recognized the need for exploration in the newly acquired territories west of the Mississippi River. When Louisiana was purchased no one knew what lay "out west". There was also a need to establish the boundaries of the region in that the Spanish claimed lands along the southern side of the territory while the British stated that the northern boundary was less than the United States thought.<sup>16</sup>

The first expedition to map these lands came in 1803, when Lewis and Clark made their way to the Pacific Ocean via the Missouri River Basin. Then, in 1804, Zebulon M.



The Grand River attracted fur trappers during the 1830s. This view of Ruby Canyon 1916, was little changed from the days of "Mountain Men".

*Photo by U. S. Geological Survey*



Men who sought beaver and other furs lived in log cabins when they meant to stay awhile. *Photo by U. S. Geological Survey*

Pike explored the front range of Colorado seeking the Red River which was considered the boundary between the United States and Spain. Pike reached no further inland than the San Luis Valley where he was captured by the Spanish. That put an end to exploration until 1819 when Stephen F. Long explored the northern front range of Colorado for the U.S. Army. This survey never penetrated into the center of the state because of the rugged Rockies.<sup>17</sup>

Western Colorado remained “unexplored” during the 1820s and 1830s, however, in 1830 and 1831, George Yount and other trappers laid out what was to become the Old Spanish Trail for future travellers and settlers. The North Branch of the trail followed the Gunnison River to its junction with the Colorado (Grand) and then west along the Colorado River into Utah. The Old Spanish Trail was never popular.<sup>18</sup> However, it did pique American interest in western Colorado.

The first time an expedition passed into west-central Colorado was in 1843, when John C. Fremont, the eminent Army explorer, crossed the area on his way to California. In that year, Fremont’s expedition wound its way from Independence, Missouri, over the plains of Kansas and Colorado, up the Arkansas River valley to near present day Leadville, Colorado. Then it crossed the Continental Divide and marched into North Park from which the Fremont party moved across northwestern Colorado into Utah. They finally reached California in 1844.<sup>19</sup> On the return trip Fremont sought, but failed to find, the source of the Grand River.<sup>20</sup> This expedition proved only that the Rockies were a major obstacle that could not easily be crossed.

Fremont again went out in 1845. This time he travelled from Independence, Missouri to Bent’s Old Fort where he hired Kit Carson as guide for the expedition. From the Fort the party passed along the Arkansas Valley, over the Continental Divide at Tennessee Pass, marched along the Eagle River to the Grand (Colorado) River, and then made their way north to the White River, north of the Flattop Mountains. Fremont followed the White River to the Green River and then west into Utah, and ended up in California via the Sierras once again.<sup>21</sup> Again, the benefits from the expedition were minimal; the Preuss map was the primary document produced and it was used by others for years. The expedition also proved that the Rockies were a brutal test of man’s endurance and could not be used for massive migrations from Missouri to California and Oregon.<sup>22</sup>

In 1846 the Mexican War began. This put a stop to exploration in the western United States. The U. S. and Mexico were at war over the very lands being explored. The Mexicans went to war with the United States over the question of the annexation of Texas, the threat of the loss of California and the general question of American imperial expansion in the West. Americans felt that it was their destiny to have a nation from Atlantic to Pacific. This concept, called "Manifest Destiny", was a reason for the war.<sup>23</sup>

By 1848, the Mexican War had ended and the United States gained the southwestern quarter of the nation. The entire Louisiana Purchase was now combined with the present states of Colorado, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Idaho, parts of Washington and Oregon, and, of course, California. The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo provided for the cession of these lands to the United States and the present border was established. In this way the United States completed the nation from the Atlantic to the Pacific and the West was ready to open.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most pressing issues in western politics was the development of a cheap, fast transportation system. To this end, Congress, mainly Senator Thomas Hart Benton, a Missouri promoter, began to press for a railroad. Once the nation had been consolidated, the reality of a rail line was possible.<sup>25</sup>

Naturally, when the matter of a transcontinental railroad came up, John C. Fremont was in the forefront. Having made a name for himself as an explorer in the early 1840s, and having the support of Benton, he was the prime candidate to lead transcontinental explorations. In 1848, Fremont led a party of explorers across the San Luis Valley and into the San Juan Mountains. In November the party became trapped in a snowstorm in the San Juan Mountains and several members of his expedition froze to death or died of starvation. Cannibalism occurred and when the party struggled into Taos, Fremont was disgraced for life as an explorer.<sup>26</sup>

Fremont's catastrophe in the San Juans put an end to exploration for a rail route in the central Rockies until 1853, when John Williams Gunnison of the U.S. Corps of Topographical Engineers was commissioned by Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis, to find a route across the Colorado mountains along the Thirty-eighth parallel. His was one of five parties sent to look for pathways across the West.<sup>27</sup> Gunnison departed from Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, on June 23, 1853, complete with survivors of the Fremont expedition as guides. Gunnison's party crossed the Kansas plains to the Arkansas River

which they followed over the Sangre De Cristo Mountains. From here the group passed into the San Luis Valley, went over Cochetopa Pass, and then down to the Gunnison River Valley.<sup>28</sup>

Gunnison surveyed along the Black Canyon of the yet-to-be-named Gunnison River, over Cerro Summit, and on to where Montrose, Colorado, would arise. From that point, the party followed the Uncompaghre River to its junction with the Gunnison River and north along the Gunnison until it met the Grand, at the future site of Grand Junction, Colorado. There Gunnison's party headed west along the Grand River into Utah via Ruby Canyon. In October, 1853, along the Sevier River, Paiute Indians attacked the surveyors. Gunnison and all but four of the party perished in the raid.<sup>29</sup> To say the least, the loss of Gunnison's expedition dampened enthusiasm for a central Rockies railroad route, and the Gunnison report, completed by Lt. E. F. Beckwith, indicated that such a route would be difficult to build. The central Rockies were written off and a Wyoming route was considered the best alternative.<sup>30</sup>

The Thirty-Eighth Parallel route, while dismissed by many, was favored by the merchants and promoters of St. Louis, Missouri, among them Senator Benton.<sup>31</sup> In 1853, with Missouri backing, John C. Fremont undertook yet another, and as it turned out his last, expedition to west-central Colorado in search of a rail route. He traced the path of Gunnison, but leaving late in the season, again was trapped by snow on Cochetopa Pass. The group struggled off the pass and successfully reached the Gunnison River. From there they proceeded north to the Grand River and westward into Utah.<sup>32</sup> Also, E. F. Beale undertook an exploration of the same route in 1853, at the behest of St. Louis merchants.<sup>33</sup> These reports were less negative about the area's potential use by railroads than the Gunnison document.

The Pacific Railroad route race came to an end over politics. In the late 1850s, the specter of Civil War loomed over the nation. The question of both Kansas and Nebraska being accepted for statehood became a national issue and the partisan politics that followed caused sectionalism to destroy the railway surveys concept. The South demanded the line be constructed along a southern corridor while the North wanted a transcontinental route along northern routes. The Civil War came along and stopped talk of a transcontinental railroad, and only by 1866 was the final decision made to build the transcontinental using the Wyoming route.<sup>34</sup> The central Rockies surveys were abandoned and west-central Colorado was forgotten.

The only lasting evidence of Gunnison's work was that the river he followed into the Uncompaghe Valley was named in his honor. When a railroad was built in the 1880s, it followed the Gunnison survey route exactly.<sup>35</sup>

During the 1850s other federal travellers passed through the Grand River area, often en route between assignments. The first of these was Captain Randolph B. Marcy, who during the Mormon War in 1857, was sent with relief parties to and from Fort Bridger, Wyoming to Fort Union, New Mexico. Along the way the Captain took notice of particular features of the area. He especially noted the difficulty in scaling the Roan Cliffs from the Grand River Valley.<sup>36</sup> The next exploration came two years later when Captain John Maccomb of the U.S. Army Corps of Topographical Engineers explored the Gateway-Unaweep region of western Colorado and assembled an accurate picture of the Grand River drainage system.<sup>37</sup> Two years earlier a project was undertaken by Lt. J. C. Ives to reach the headwaters of the Grand, but he failed after tracing the river only four hundred miles north from its mouth.<sup>38</sup> The approach of the Civil War led to a temporary cessation of federal exploration in Colorado.

Private explorers also visited western Colorado during the 1840s and 1850s. However, these people left few written records of their exploits. The famed Oregon pioneer, Dr. Marcus Whitman, followed the Grand River to the Gunnison and south along that river on his way to Washington, D.C. to inform President John Tyler on the value and potential of Oregon. He may have been accompanied on this trip by Francis Parkman, but evidence is scanty on that point.<sup>39</sup> Englishman Sir St. George Gore, for whom the Gore Range was named, travelled much of central Colorado's mountains on a hunting expedition during these years. His entourage included mountain men, artists and a variety of camp followers. The expedition left little for posterity except a tremendous record of game slaughtered in the name of sport.<sup>40</sup>

The next concerted effort at exploration occurred with the 1860 expedition of Richard Sopris, who led 14 adventurers across South Park, down the Blue River and into the Roaring Fork Valley. These men were looking for gold during the prospecting craze that took place in Colorado after the 1858 discoveries of gold along Cherry Creek, and the later Gregory Diggings near Central City, Colorado. The Sopris party found nothing of value in the Roaring Fork Valley and returned to the future site of Glenwood Springs. Then they made their way west to the White River, near the place where the town of

Meeker, Colorado later arose, before returning to Denver along the Gunnison route of 1853. The only contribution of the expedition was the naming of Mount Sopris, near Carbondale, Colorado, in honor of the group's leader.<sup>41</sup>

The Sopris expedition provided little insight as to the possible developmental value of the Grand Valley and the Roaring Fork region. However, other prospectors like William Gant were also in west-central Colorado observing the land's potential. The information they brought back, combined with the maps and notes that Sopris made, provided an incentive for new prospectors to cross the rugged mountains just east of the head of the Roaring Fork River and try their luck in the Aspen area.<sup>42</sup>

In 1870, Benjamin Graham and six companions crossed the Rockies and found themselves near Rock Creek in the Roaring Fork Valley. This party set up camp and proceeded to prospect for gold. By 1874, they had built a small camp and began to prospect for gold. They built a small fort-like cabin that the Utes burned in 1874. The little group was driven from the Roaring Fork Valley, not soon to return.<sup>43</sup>

Prospectors also worked the Piney (Eagle) Valley looking for gold placers during the 1860s and 1870s. A few promising strikes were made and the news carried back to Denver. For some reason, possibly lack of access, nothing became of these reports.<sup>44</sup> By the mid-1870s prospecting had ceased throughout the district.

The end of the Civil War led to a new and more intensive federal cataloging of west-central Colorado. These efforts were directed toward aiding settlement in the region as well as locating agricultural and mining lands. The reports also gave the prospective settler or investor a general economic picture of the area. The explorers were professional specialists sent out by the U.S. Army and the newly created United States Geologic and Geographic Survey (USGS). The Geologic Survey, part of the Department of the Interior, was especially interested in promoting settlement and other uses of the land, whereas the Army primarily hoped to find sites for posts and roads.<sup>45</sup>

The first of these surveys got underway in 1868 when Major John Wesley Powell started his great exploration of the Grand River and its tributaries. During that year Major Powell assembled his party in Middle Park, where he spent three months organizing the trip. The expedition spent the 1868 season (summer) working its way down the Grand River to its junction with the Green.<sup>46</sup> The Powell effort added significantly to

national understanding of the Grand River system and of environmental conditions in the Great Basin. During 1869 Captain Sam Adams claimed to have traced the Grand River from its mouth to source, but these claims were later disproven.<sup>47</sup>

Two other explorations touched the periphery of west-central Colorado a few years after Powell's conquest of the river. From 1867 to 1873, noted Californian naturalist Clarence King was commissioned to survey the Fortieth parallel. He spent 1871, 1872, and 1873 in Colorado, along the northern edge of the region. During the final year of King's effort, Army explorer J.B. Wheeler was in the Elk Mountains looking at possible routes for military roads.<sup>48</sup> These expeditions had very little impact on the development of west-central Colorado. However, another contemporary project did.

In 1873, the great Hayden surveys of Colorado began. Ferdinand Vandiveer Hayden, a professor of medicine from Yale University, was selected to lead surveys throughout western Colorado while mapping the balance of the state. Hayden had achieved his reputation in 1869 when he led the Yellowstone Park surveys. Originally, the U.S. Army Corps of Topographical Engineers was responsible for government surveys. However, in 1869, the U.S. Geological Survey was created and Hayden's Colorado expeditions were the "proving ground" for the infant Geological Survey.<sup>49</sup>

Hayden organized the surveys on a broad basis taking in all types of expertise and using specialists such as geologists, botanists, and topographers. With this group of experts, Hayden, from Denver, sent forth the expeditions on a yearly basis to record the features of western Colorado. In 1873, the Grand Valley was surveyed by J. T. Gardner, Henry Gannett, A. C. Peale, and others. From this survey came basic descriptions of the Grand Valley between Glenwood Springs and Grand Junction. Further, the Roaring Fork Valley, the Crystal River (Rock Creek) country, and the Elk Mountains between Gunnison and Aspen were mapped.<sup>50</sup> The Survey included not only the flora and fauna of the region, but also it drew conclusions as to the economic value of the Grand Valley. The Hayden party(s) found that the Grand River could support agriculture if irrigation was developed, while Battlement Mesa was volcanic ash that could be used for farming. The Hayden survey mentioned that oil shale was common along the Roan Cliffs, while there were natural salt deposits in the Sinbad Valley.<sup>51</sup>

The Hayden Survey made note of these discoveries and pointed out that but for transportation, coal mining could be a major industry in the area.<sup>52</sup>

Interestingly, no mention was made of precious mineral potential in the Grand Valley region. However, elsewhere in the area, investigators found evidences of silver and gold, especially near Aspen, Colorado, and in the Eagle Valley where they observed continuations of the Leadville carbonate belt.<sup>53</sup> Of primary importance, the Hayden surveys did map the Grand Valley by 1876, and for the first time, settlers on the east slope of Colorado realized that there were great possibilities for development in the west.

One of the innovative features of the Hayden project was the fact that they were among the first to use photography as a recording medium. William Henry Jackson, official photographer of the Hayden expeditions, recorded a number of major geographic and historic sites. Among them was the legendary Mount of the Holy Cross, photographed for the first time in August, 1873.<sup>54</sup>

The Hayden surveys were of considerable importance because they provided information that helped open the Grand Valley and its lateral valleys to settlement. These efforts not only provided detailed geographic information, along with careful survey work, but they also showed that western Colorado was ready for Anglo-American development.

From the end of Hayden's great reconnaissance until 1920, west-central Colorado was extensively explored by both private and public expeditions, most of which were interested in enlarging knowledge of the area. These adventurers encountered many of the same problems, especially the rugged, isolated nature of the land, that the earliest Spaniards and mountain men had met.

Cadastral survey of the land was a prerequisite for settlement. This process was contracted out by the General Land Office (GLO). Many of the surveyors covered only the easily accessible areas so that in later years the government had to re-survey the land to resolve numerous conflicts between landholders regarding property lines.<sup>55</sup>

Often following on the heels of the contractors came the first "tourists." These travellers were in search of minerals, science, or simply pleasure. Mining engineers such as B. Clark Wheeler, William Weston, or R. C. Hills were sent out by entrepreneurs to search for new sources of minerals such as coal or silver.<sup>56</sup> Scientific exploration took a step forward in 1900, when Elmer S. Riggs of the Chicago Field Museum of Natural History discovered fossilized remains of dinosaurs in the Morrison formation around Fruita,

Colorado. His excavations revealed that a large number of these creatures had once lived in the area. Riggs' finds were considered major discoveries at the time. As early as 1885, local residents took up fossil hunting and searching for old Indian relics so that by 1890 the majority of the known, easily accessible, sites already were plundered.<sup>57</sup> These weekend archaeologists were antedated by campers and other sportsmen who travelled to the mountains near the Continental Divide and recorded experiences for use by later generations. By 1900, much of the region had been examined by these amateur explorers.

At the turn of the century, the Federal government began a new program of geologic survey in western Colorado. This was carried out for three reasons. First, the government sought to establish patterns of geologic relations between formations. Secondly, to legally classify lands as coal or non-coal after reservation of the mineral estate started in 1906; and finally to estimate the potential market value of the various resources, especially coal and oil shale, within the area. At the same time, the U.S. Geologic Survey examined the Grand River for potential reservoir sites.<sup>59</sup> This work was all but finished by 1920.

West-central Colorado was thoroughly explored and mapped by Americans long before the first Euro-American settlers moved into the area. Thanks to the efforts of men like Hayden, farmers and miners on the eastern slope, or indeed any part of the nation, could consider the natural wonders and vast potential of the region. The explorers offered a blueprint for the use of the land and only the Utes barred the way of "civilization" on this frontier.

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### CHAPTER III. INTER-RACIAL CONTACT AND UTE REMOVAL

"This Ute reservation includes mines which will pay \$100 per day to the man, grasses which are luxuriant and inexhaustible and soil richer and more fruitful than any other in the territory."

*—Colorado Territorial Governor Edward McCook*

The Ute watched the progression of Anglo-Americans into west-central Colorado with little reaction. Trappers and traders did little to disturb the Indian way of life other than introducing new goods to the Native Americans. The explorers were less of an intrusion because they simply passed through the area. No doubt the major reason for lack of Ute hostilities to these Euro-Americans was based on the fact that such Americans did not come to settle or stay on the land. This situation remained relatively unchanged until the late sixties and the Cherry Creek gold rush. Once the yellow metal had been found and the prospectors spread out into the mountains, the Ute experienced increasing pressures on their lands.

During the period 1820 to 1860, Indian-European relations were friendly for the most part. In 1822, the Ute invited American trader Thomas James to come into central Colorado to trade furs and buckskins for the European's cloth and iron products.<sup>1</sup> This started a long and mutually beneficial commercial relationship that continued in west-central Colorado until 1844. Europeans liked to trade with the mountain tribe because they were friendly and receptive to the barter system.<sup>2</sup> The only recorded interruption of this trade took place in 1827, when the Ute forcibly closed the central Rockies to Anglo-Americans for a year.<sup>3</sup>

The construction of Fort Robidoux (Uncompahgre) led to increased commerce and inter-racial contacts. The post trade impacted the Ute more than any other early Anglo-American presence. At the fort the Native Americans traded beaver pelts, buffalo robes, and buckskins for iron tools, guns and ammunition, textiles, beads, and importantly, liquor. Alcohol debilitated the Ute. Trade also led to inter-racial relations and marriages. The second episode of Native American violence against Euro-American traders occurred in 1844, when the Ute burned the post, probably because of the whiskey trade.<sup>4</sup>

The Western Slope was in a state of flux by the late 1840s. John C. Fremont reported a buffalo shortage in the area in 1845.<sup>5</sup> The next year Brigham Young led his

Mormons from Nauvoo, Illinois, to their new home on the Great Salt Lake and as the settlements grew, the "Saints" looked to eastern Utah for land to colonize. When Mormon numbers in that region grew, the Ute were driven from the Great Basin back into western Colorado.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time Young was leading his followers to their Zion, the United States entered into a war with Mexico, the result of which was the acquisition of the Southwest for the nation. The Ute, thereby, came under Federal jurisdiction. While the exchange of land title did not have an immediate impact on the Native Americans, it did lay the foundation for eventual Ute removal from west-central Colorado.<sup>7</sup> In 1849, the year after the treaty ending the war with Mexico was signed, the United States government entered into an agreement with the Ute. James S. Calhoun, Indian Agent at Taos, New Mexico, negotiated the pact with Quiziachgate and 27 other Ute. The document, known as the Calhoun Treaty, called for continued friendship and peace, allowed Americans right of safe passage and permission to build military posts on Ute lands while it guaranteed to the Ute, control of their "customary territories."<sup>8</sup> To strengthen American claims, the U.S. Army built Fort Massachusetts near LaVeta Pass to safeguard all western Colorado and to control the Native Americans. The post proved to be a qualified success at best.<sup>9</sup>

The 1859 gold rush into Colorado marked the beginning of the second and final phase of American-Ute contact in west-central Colorado. With the arrival of Euro-Americans along the eastern slope the natives experienced new pressures from the front range to the east along with the continued presence of the Mormons in the west.<sup>10</sup> To establish a status quo, Territorial Governor John Evans, as Indian Agent for the newly created Territory of Colorado, proposed a new treaty to the Ute in 1863. This pact re-confirmed friendship between the races and established informal boundaries for the natives giving them land from the front range west or roughly the western one-third of the territory.<sup>11</sup> Details of the agreement were worked out between Lafayette Head, an Indian Agent, and Ouray, Chief of the Uncompahgre Utes.<sup>12</sup>

Ouray, translated "the Arrow," became the single most influential Ute in Colorado during the 1860s and 1870s. His father was an Uncompahgre Ute and his mother was a Jicarilla Apache.<sup>13</sup> Ouray was born in 1836 at Taos, New Mexico, where as a youth he worked as a sheep herder for Mexican ranchers.<sup>14</sup> The Arrow learned the language and ways of American citizens through contacts with traders both before and after the Mexican War. When the time came that the Ute needed a diplomat to deal with the Europeans in

the 1860s, he was a natural choice. Anglo-American negotiators found Ouray amiable and honest; as a result he was “duly elected” headman.<sup>15</sup> He proved to be an astute leader for his people. Ouray realized the futility of resistance and adopted a policy of guarded cooperation toward the Euro-Americans.<sup>16</sup>

Ouray’s second major act as chief of all the Ute was to enter into a new agreement with the American government in 1868. The treaty commission was made up of Nathaniel C. Taylor, then Commissioner of Indian Affairs; Alexander C. Hunt, Governor of Colorado Territory; and Christopher “Kit” Carson, famous scout, trapper, and guide.<sup>17</sup> The new treaty provided definite boundaries for the natives’ reservations, giving them the western one-third of the Territory.<sup>18</sup> Also, it established two agencies, one on the White River and the other along the Los Pinos River near Ouray’s home.<sup>19</sup>

This treaty lasted only five years because new gold and silver strikes were made, this time in the San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado. In 1870, reports filtered out of that area about the discoveries<sup>20</sup> and a rush started. Almost immediately Anglo-Coloradans started calling for Ute removal and in 1873, Felix Brunot was appointed to negotiate a cession of Ute land to the Federal government. Ouray again led the Ute treaty delegation. The Ute agreed to cede 6,000 square miles of the San Juan area to the Americans. This agreement allowed the chief to solidify his position within the tribe as well as earning a personal annuity of \$1,000 for life.<sup>21</sup>

During the 1870s, as Colorado prepared for statehood, the Ute remained as a barrier to settlement in the west-central part of the territory. This fact was not lost on Coloradans such as Territorial Governor Edward McCook and others. They constantly called for removal of the mountain tribe to Utah or elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> Alleged Ute transgressions such as burning forests or raiding ranches for cattle, frequently were cited by Anglo-Coloradans as evidence to support their removal demands. Colorow, a renegade chief, was especially offensive to the Anglo-Americans because of his stock stealing and begging.<sup>23</sup> government under President U. S. Grant, launched a new policy toward all western tribes. Its goal was the acculturation of the natives to European Agrarian life. Churches were given a large responsibility as far as recommending agents and the administration of reservation educational programs. These two policies, one of accommodation and one of removal, led to direct inter-racial conflict in western Colorado by the end of the 1870s.<sup>24</sup>

The White River Agency, in northwestern Colorado, had been the scene of minor troubles since it was created. In 1878, a new agent, Nathan C. Meeker, was appointed and

he proved to be the wrong man for the job.<sup>25</sup> Meeker was the first persident of the Union Colony at Greeley, Colorado, before taking over the Indian agency. Upon arrival in western Colorado, the new agent set about to plow fields and lay out irrigation ditches.<sup>26</sup> The Ute, led by Douglass Ouray's brother-in-law, Jack, and Johnson, opposed these changes. Those three also were involved in a power struggle for the position of chief of the White River Ute which made Meeker's job even more difficult. The natives had been threatened with the construction of an Army post nearby to stop raiding.<sup>27</sup> Also, Meeker's reforms, especially those aimed at the reduction of the horse herds proved to be too much for the Ute.

Throughout the summer of 1879, tensions between the agent and his charges grew. The Ute did not share Meeker's vision of a paradise of fields, farms, coal mines and a thriving city, all operated by the Ute along the White River. They simply wanted their life as horse raisers and hunters left intact.<sup>28</sup> During June and July of 1879, while Meeker's Anglo-American assistants futilely tried to plant crops,<sup>29</sup> some Ute led by Colorow raided ranches in North and Middle Parks, Colorado. Cultural conflict reached a flashpoint in September when Meeker plowed up the Ute's favorite racetrack and they retaliated by assaulting him.<sup>30</sup> On September 10, the Indian agent sent a harried telegram to the Bureau of Indian Affairs requesting military assistance to restore order.<sup>31</sup> The message was received and Major Thomas Tipton Thornburgh, and a contingent of the Fourth U.S. Infantry, was dispatched from Ft. Steele, Wyoming, to assist Meeker.<sup>32</sup> Unknown to the Major or Meeker was the fact that the Ute were well armed with Winchester rifles and Colt revolvers. Furthermore, gun sales around the agency were brisk throughout August into September.<sup>33</sup>

The Thornburgh command reach Milk Creeek, Colorado, near the end of September and the Major chose to camp here before proceeding on to the Agency, about two days march to the southwest. On September 29, after parlaying with the Ute the previous night, the column broke camp and headed toward the Agency. In a narrow canyon along the creek, the natives ambushed the troops. Thornburgh was killed in the first charge.<sup>34</sup> The Ute, under Colorow, then beseiged the surviving soldiers and their supply train. Messenger Joe Rankin was sent to Wyoming to get reinforcements, arriving in Rawlins, Wyoming, in 28 hours.<sup>35</sup>

During the afternoon of September 30, while some of the Ute kept up the seige of the troops, others returned to the Agency to attack Meeker. Jack was the leader of the band that killed and then mutilated all eleven Euro-American males there.<sup>36</sup> They took

Mrs. Meeker, her daughter Josephine, and three other women and children as hostages before firing the buildings. That evening Douglass, the captives, and a group of Ute refugees set out south toward the Grand Valley, knowing that more soldiers would come.<sup>37</sup>

News of the Thornburgh ambush reached the garrison at Ft. D. A. Russell, Wyoming, on October 1, 1879. The War Department ordered Colonel Wesley Merritt, with a force of cavalry and infantry, to march to the Milk River and relieve Captain Payne and the Fourth Infantry survivors. At the same time instructions were sent to Captain F. S. Dodge and his Ninth U.S. Cavalry, who were patrolling Middle Park, to move to the Milk River and give any aid he could. Dodge and his much feared Negro troops, "the buffalo soldiers", arrived at the scene on October 2, and joined the besieged force. Meanwhile, Merritt proceeded south and reached the area on October 5, only to have the Ute abandon the fight in the face of superior numbers.<sup>38</sup>

As the fighting on the Milk River continued during the first week of October, Douglass, his band and five captives, Mrs. Meeker, Josephine Meeker, Mrs. Shadrack Price and her two small children, continued their flight into the Grand Valley. Only after Merritt's force broke the siege and proceeded on to the Agency was the fate of Meeker and his associates ascertained. The captivity of the women was discovered and Colonel Merritt contacted the War Department and Bureau of Indian Affairs for direction. Charles Adams, retired Ute agent at Los Pinos and trusted friend of Ouray, was chosen to negotiate return of the hostages. Ouray, himself, sent out pleas for the fighting to stop and for the prisoners' safe release.<sup>39</sup>

Adams was successful in his mission. On October 21, 1879, he secured the captives' release near Douglass' camp on the plateau between the present sites of DeBeque and Palisade, Colorado. The good offices of Chief Ouray greatly aided Adams' work.<sup>40</sup> However, the negotiation period was not without incident. In late October, Paul Humme and William B. Weir, members of Merritt's force, were killed by Utes while hunting along the southern rim of the Roan Plateau. These deaths were seen by many Anglo-Americans as further examples of Ute treachery.<sup>41</sup>

The press did not receive their first dispatches describing the agency massacre until October 13, when reporters with Merritt sent back their stories. Newspaper headlines sensationally described the scenes of slaughter. This news gave people, such as Colorado Governor Frederick Pitkin, the excuse needed to demand Ute removal from the state to solve the problem once and for all.<sup>42</sup>

The citizenry of Colorado insisted that "the Utes must go," despite the fact that the Ute had been initially provoked. Their humane treatment of the captives and attempts at compromise by Ouray and Douglass were ignored. A commission was established to investigate the uprising, and see that those guilty were punished. The hearings were carried on at the Los Pinos Agency; the panel's conclusions were foregone. Douglass and some minor chiefs were eventually imprisoned at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, and that was the extent of punishment for the Ute who took part in the uprising.<sup>43</sup>

If the hearing results did not satisfy Coloradans, the terms of a new treaty in 1880 did. This treaty commission was led by Otto Mears, San Juan mining and transportation promoter. He sought Ute removal from the state.<sup>44</sup> However, the final agreement allowed the natives to select forty acre allotments along the Grand River near that river's junction with the Gunnison River. They also received \$60,000 in back annuities and \$50,000 in new payments.

Mears took a Ute delegation into the area along the Grand River in 1881, to look at tracts for their new homes. He envisioned the valley as a prosperous agricultural area for Anglo-Americans and encouraged the natives not to accept their allotments but rather ask to be moved into Utah. The Ute leaders took Mears' suggestions and chose to relocate on the Uintah Ute reservation in northwestern Utah.<sup>45</sup> On September 7, 1881, after considerable stalling, the last Ute crossed the state line into Utah.<sup>46</sup> Ouray did not live to see this exodus, having died on the Southern Ute Reservation the year before.<sup>47</sup>

The Ute's forced exodus into Utah did not mark the last contact they had with west-central Colorado. Every year from 1881 to 1890, small groups of Ute returned to Glenwood Springs to bathe and use the vapor caves. There were no incidents of violence and often friendly horse races occurred around town between Utes and American cowboys.<sup>48</sup> The natives were generally well accepted in most areas by Euro-Americans when they visited.<sup>49</sup> However, relations were not always calm between the races. The first settlers in Grand Junction lived in constant fear of the Ute returning to retake their old homelands.<sup>50</sup> On occasion these fears, combined with isolated cases of horse stealing, led to panics in west-central Colorado. The first such instance occurred in 1886, when Colorow and his band re-appeared in Garfield County.<sup>51</sup>

The next year Colorow again returned to Garfield County and precipitated a major fight. During August, some members of his band stole a number of horses from a ranch near Rifle, Colorado. Sheriff Kendall reacted by declaring a state of emergency and

In an affair rivaling the finest melodrama, or comic opera, 10,000 troops mobilized to defeat the Ute and teach them a lesson. Finally at Cedar Hill, north of Rifle, the two sides met and exchanged threats and gunfire before Colorow surrendered. He and his people were escorted back to the reservation. The Coloradans suffered two casualties; Lt. Frank Folsom, militia member from Aspen and Garfield County Under-sheriff Jack Ward of New Castle were killed.<sup>52</sup> While the Cedar Hill fight became the last incident of bloodshed, as late as 1897 a rumored Ute uprising could scare towns throughout western Colorado.<sup>53</sup>

Not all Europeans feared the Utes after 1881. In 1886, the Bureau of Indian Affairs sought to locate an Indian school on Colorado's Western Slope and the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce actively sought the facility. The town donated 160 acres of land and the school, known as the Teller Institute named in honor of Colorado U.S. Senator Henry M. Teller, was opened that year. By 1899, the school had 300 students enrolled in courses from home economics to manual arts, as well as the "3-Rs." In 1907, the Bureau of Indian Affairs suspended operations at the institute and turned the facility over to the state. The last students left in 1911, and the Teller Institute remained idle until 1920. It then became a state training home for the mentally handicapped.<sup>54</sup>

The Meeker Massacre and subsequent Ute removal were pivotal in the development of west-central Colorado. The causes of the tragedy were many and intricate, but the essential problem was a complete misunderstanding between two cultures. The Coloradans' land greed was the most reprehensible part of the episode. However, because of the events of 1879, west-central Colorado was thrown open to all.

Anticipation of Ute removal led to a flurry of activity around the periphery of the region as people prepared to rush onto the land as soon as the Ute were gone. The first manifestation of this was increased prospecting in the Eagle Valley and around Aspen, Colorado. When news of the White River uprising first reached these remote camps, the miners either fled to the eastern slope or those who chose to stay prepared to defend themselves. Fort Arnett was built at the junction of Turkey Creek and the Eagle River near Redcliff, Colorado, in 1879. At Ute City (Aspen) all but two of the prospectors moved to Leadville, Colorado, and those who remained constructed a fortified cabin. When the Ute threat did not materialize, the miners returned to their search for gold and silver.<sup>55</sup>

In 1880, as mining activity increased, new arrivals came to Aspen. Among these were Issac Cooper and B. Clark Wheeler. Once there they set about laying out new trails and towns while preparing for settlement. Their work covered the entire Roaring Fork

and towns while preparing for settlement. Their work covered the entire Roaring Fork Valley from Aspen to the hot springs at the junction of the Roaring Fork and Grand Rivers, well within the Ute reservation. By 1881, all was in readiness for the new settlers once they arrived.<sup>56</sup>

Along the Uncompahgre River Europeans impatiently awaited permission to rush to the Grand Valley during 1881. The U.S. Army stayed on the scene throughout the summer to separate the Ute from the Anglo-Americans and keep them off the reservation.<sup>57</sup> The prospective settlers studied Hayden's reports and Otto Mears' descriptions of the land and were anxious to stake their claims in this agrarian paradise. Governor George A. Crawford was a member of this group. He was a politician, gaining the title of Governor because he was once elected governor of Kansas but he never served. He moved to Colorado and took up town promoting as a livelihood, founding new towns such as Delta, Colorado.<sup>58</sup> During the summer of 1881, as "sooners" crossed the line and were thrown off the reservation by the Army, Crawford laid plans for his newest city--West Denver,<sup>59</sup> at the confluence of the Grand and Gunnison Rivers. Crawford hired Clayton Nichols and William McGinley to participate in the land rush on his behalf and to stake claims for the townsite.

At five o'clock in the morning on September 4, 1881, the Army bugler sounded permission to enter the reservation and the stampede was underway. By September 10, Nichols and McGinley reached the river junction and staked their plots. Twelve days later Governor Crawford arrived and officially founded West Denver. The name was soon changed to Grand Junction.<sup>60</sup>

While the land was opened by the Army in 1881, Congress had yet to declare the area free for homesteading. The new residents discovered this problem late that year. They formed the Grand Junction Settlers Protective Association to guard their claims from outside speculators until Washington could act. Senator N. P. Hill (Colorado) introduced the Ute Reservation Bill on January 5, 1882. This proposal provided for the land to become part of the public domain open for filing and to protect, through pre-emption, the claims already made. The bill passed Congress in July and on August 10, 1882, President Chester A. Arthur signed the proclamation declaring the former Ute reservation public land.<sup>61</sup> With this final barrier removed west-central Colorado entered a boom period that lasted 40 years with only minor interruptions.

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## CHAPTER IV. WEST CENTRAL COLORADO'S MINING FRONTIER

"Tell the miners for me I shall promote their interests to the best of my ability."

*—Abraham Lincoln*

Colorado's first permanent settlers were Mexican citizens who drifted into the state from New Mexico in order to make homes along the southern edges of Colorado. These farmers never came in numbers. In 1858, small gold deposits were found by Georgians along the South Platte River and these discoveries led to the permanent settlement of Colorado by Euro-Americans. Prospectors and miners were the first to people many parts of the state, west-central Colorado included.

The Gold Rush of 1859 occurred after William Greene Russell discovered small amounts of placer gold along the eastern slope of Colorado in 1858. Reports of these finds travelled "back East" to Kansas Territory and from there they were widely circulated. The "rush to Pike's Peak" caused great numbers of people, possibly as many as 100,000, to leave their homes and move west into the gold fields. The deposits were exhausted by 1860, and many prospectors were forced to search into the mountains for new "diggings," As these men spread out, new strikes were made in Gilpin County, South Park, and across the Continental Divide near Breckenridge. As previously mentioned, some of these gold seekers, such as Captain Richard Sopris, did penetrate west-central Colorado during the 1860's.

For the most part, they did not venture very far west of the Continental Divide. Their reports cited little of interest with respect to possible precious metals. Mineral fields and mining in the region remained almost non-existent in west-central Colorado for another fifteen years.<sup>1</sup>

The 1870's witnessed a new wave of mining excitement throughout much of Colorado's high country. Silver became the primary mineral produced during this decade. Starting at Caribou, Colorado, the silver boom spread along the Continental Divide's eastern edge, and then leap-frogged as far west as the San Juan Mountains in southwestern Colorado. The richest mineralizations discovered at the time were the lead-silver carbonates along the Upper Arkansas River in California Gulch near Oro City, Colorado. Once uncovered in 1876, these deposits proved to be incredibly rich and relatively easily

worked. Oro City changed its name to Leadville and a full scale boom swept the town by 1877. News of the Leadville strikes spread like wildfire and thousands rushed into the area.<sup>2</sup>

Many of these prospective silver barons arrived after the best claims had been filed. Rather than return to their former homes with empty pockets many stayed on and prospected elsewhere. Simultaneously, Hayden's reports and his geologic atlas of Colorado became available to the public. In search of guidance to new wealth these volumes were read avidly by the down and out miners of Leadville.<sup>3</sup>

In 1878, Leadvillite James Denning crossed Tennessee Pass into the Eagle Valley while hunting and fishing to supply fresh meat to the silver camp's population. During one of his trips, Denning noticed the similarity of Battle Mountain's rock formations to those around the "Cloud City." Upon returning to town, he related his observations to his employer, Robert L. Rohm. Rohm and his associates then grubstaked two prospectors, Mssrs. Kelly and Patton, to visit Battle Mountain and gather samples for assaying. The pair staked the Little Ollie claim on the mountain and returned to Leadville by Christmas, 1878. Ores brought back tested out rich in lead-silver carbonates.<sup>4</sup>

Kelly and Patton were not the first prospectors to visit the Eagle Valley. However, their discoveries did lead to permanent settlement of the area.<sup>5</sup> Legends date the first prospectors at about 1813, with the Astorians mentioned earlier.<sup>6</sup> In 1849, Buck Rogers and a party of Illinoians examined the valley on their way to California.<sup>7</sup> Seekers of riches combed the Eagle Valley during the 1860's, but being inexperienced, they found nothing.<sup>8</sup> By 1878, mining expertise in Colorado had developed to the point that Kelly and Patton's discoveries could be profitably exploited.

Throughout the winter of 1878-1879, many Leadvillites made plans to prospect the Eagle Valley when spring arrived and travel became possible. In April, Rohm and his group set out from the Upper Arkansas Valley to Battle Mountain. Making the trek of 24 miles on snow-shoes, and using hand sleds, they arrived safely at the Little Ollie claim. Rohm promptly laid out the town of Red Cliff, Colorado, in anticipation of a rush.<sup>9</sup> Throughout April and into May, a stream of prospectors made the journey from Leadville. They successfully sought minerals from Tennessee Pass down to Brush Creek. The number of miners and claims grew to the hundreds.<sup>10</sup> To establish control and organization of the various claims as well as prevent "claim jumping" miners founded

Red Cliff Mining District on May 19, 1879, at the confluence of Homestake Creek and the Eagle River.<sup>11</sup>

Red Cliff was the first of many towns formed wherever promising strikes were made.<sup>12</sup> In 1879, Eagle City, Astor City, Taylor City, Eagle River, and Horn Silver mining districts all were established in the Eagle Valley.<sup>13</sup> The next year Holy Cross Mining District, Pando, Gold Park, Mount Egley, Fulford, and Gilman came into existence. These camps enjoyed varied lifespans, many lasting only a few years as precious minerals played out and no other economic base could be found.<sup>14</sup>

Early Eagle Valley mining was a combination of placer gold digging and quartz or "hard rock" silver extraction. The gold supply ran out quickly and underground silver mining dominated the region during the 1880s.<sup>15</sup>

Following on the prospector's heels were the financiers and entrepreneurs. While these men were not the heroic loners with only a burro for company, they did play an important role in the development of Colorado's mineral frontier. News of the Eagle Valley finds' richness and quantity reached Leadville during 1879, and from there word spread around the state and nation. In the summer of that year, Henry A. Butters arrived at Red Cliff as an agent for Chicago investors interested in purchasing promising claims. He met with little success. The next year, Denver real estate promoters Walter S. Cheesman and George W. Clayton, along with Judge D. D. Belden, purchased the Cleveland Group, reported to be among the richest claims on Battle Mountain. These financiers helped construct stamp mills and a smelter to refine silver ore as well as fully develop the mines they owned.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, John W. Bailey organized the Gold Park Mining and Milling Company which controlled most of the mines in the Holy Cross area along with a stamp mill to crush ore. 1882 proved to be the company's most profitable year and by the next year it had started into a severe decline as the veins pinched out.<sup>17</sup>

The Eagle Valley mining region remained an economic suburb of Leadville during its early years. In the 1880s and the 1890s, ore reduction facilities remained limited in the area because Leadville smelters paid premiums for lead carbonates that were necessary for efficient functioning of refining.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, much of the Valley's trade went to Leadville, especially once the Denver and Rio Grande Railway reached Red Cliff, Colorado in 1882, thereby providing cheap, reliable transportation for bulk commodities such as silver ores and food stuffs. Leadville also offered a

greater variety of goods and services than available in the Eagle Valley.<sup>19</sup>

Before the Battle Mountain discoveries, San Juan miners visited far west-central Colorado, coming as early as 1876. They opened salt mines in the Sinbad Valley. Interest in the area continued after a wagon road was built from Ouray to the salt deposits. In 1880, unidentified miners filed placer claims in the Sinbad Valley and the La Sal Mountains. However, little else is known of these activities.<sup>20</sup>

In 1884, a small rush occurred along the Grand River west of Grand Junction. The diggings played out quickly but not the optimism. As late as 1920, John Godle still prospected in Glade Park.<sup>21</sup> Hope notwithstanding, the streams and mountains along the Continental Divide proved more profitable for miners during the later nineteenth century.

A short time after prospectors from Leadville entered the Eagle Valley during 1878, other men travelled from the "Cloud City" to the Frying Pan-Roaring Fork region. Among the first to report promising minerals along the Roaring Fork were the charcoal kiln workers at Sellars Meadow, near Basalt, Colorado.<sup>22</sup> Their information, reinforced by Hayden's books, led prospectors to inspect the area during 1879. The first group into the region contained Philip W. Pratt, Smith Steele, and William L. Hopkins. Two members of this party, Steele and Pratt, located the first claims near what soon became Aspen, Colorado.<sup>23</sup> Soon after these discoveries, a second expedition, the Bennett Party, arrived at the scene. Charles E. Bennett led a group composed of himself, S. E. Hopkins, A. C. Fellows, and Walter S. Clark. These men also staked claims.<sup>24</sup> A third, unidentified company crossed the Elk Mountains and examined the Roaring Fork Valley that summer and was successful.<sup>25</sup>

In the late summer of 1879, Ute City was founded at the base of Aspen Mountain. Reports of the discoveries filtered back to Leadville grubstakers who then set about planning ways to develop the finds. Henry P. Gillespie became interested in the region, and during the winter of 1879-1880, after the Ute scare passed, started buying up certain claims at the advice of geologists.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, B. Clark Wheeler, a moderately successful mining promoter, also became intrigued with the Roaring Fork's mineral possibilities. He, Isaac Cooper, and a small band of men pushed off for Ute City during the winter, successfully crossed Independence Pass, and made their way to Aspen Mountain. On March 6, 1880, the group organized the Aspen Town and Land Company.<sup>27</sup> Through Wheeler's persistence, Aspen became

the camp's accepted name, made officially so, when the U. S. Postal Service authorized the Aspen, Colorado Post Office.<sup>28</sup>

While Wheeler and his associates were founding Aspen, other men were scrutinizing the surrounding hills for silver veins. During late 1879, prospectors discovered rich ore at the head of Lincoln Gulch (Hunt's Camp), Independence (on the west side of the pass of the same name), Highland (later known as Ashcroft), and Schofield.<sup>29</sup> In 1880, Roaring Fork City, Frying Pan, Woody Canyon, Dry Pine, and Lincoln Mining Districts were formed.<sup>30</sup> Casey's Camp near Ashcroft was settled in 1882, only to be wiped out by an avalanche two years later.<sup>31</sup>



Independence, Colorado, preceded Aspen by a few years. Today little of that mining town is left. *Photo by F. J. Athearn*

For the most part, these mining areas developed slowly during the first half of the 1880s. Three essential problems confronted miners and mineral developers in the Roaring Fork-Frying Pan area. Mineral location was the first. Deposits were usually found at higher altitudes which meant long, severe winters and relatively short working seasons. Secondly, the long distances and rugged terrain between the mineheads and markets, usually Leadville, kept ore prices down. Finally, when ores were shipped before railroads arrived, only the highest grades could be hauled to the smelters profitably.<sup>32</sup>

Despite these problems each of the early camps proclaimed to the world that it was the next Leadville. From 1880 to 1884, Ashcroft, formerly known as Highland, led the area in silver production. The Tam O'Shanter and Montezuma mines proved to contain rich silver veins and the town prospered. By 1882, the community boasted daily stage service to Aspen, five saloons, two bawdy houses and two gambling halls.<sup>33</sup> Ashcroft's prosperity was short lived and by 1884, its position as leading producer of the Roaring Fork Valley was eclipsed by Aspen.<sup>34</sup>

That camp struggled for survival from 1879 until 1884, living on hope, determination and a small flow of silver from the mines. However, during the latter year, rich new veins were uncovered and Aspen entered a boom that continued until 1893.<sup>35</sup> Aspen's upturn began in November of 1884, when large, rich bodies of ore were found in the Aspen Mine. The operation was originally owned by H. P. Gillespie, but by that November, it belonged to David R. C. Brown and Elmer Butler.<sup>36</sup> The Aspen Mine's good fortune seemed to be contagious as other mines around the camp encountered new ore formations during late 1884 and into 1885.<sup>37</sup> The Emma, the Mollie Gibson, the Smuggler, the Durant, and other mines enjoyed part of this new prosperity. By mid-1885, the Aspen Mine was producing at a rate of \$10,000 a day and during the first five months of that year, the Emma's operators brought over \$375,000 worth of ore to the surface. The diggings yielded more raw silver than could be hauled out or processed.<sup>38</sup>

Leadville's smelters benefited from Aspen's new wealth. Pack mules transported the carbonates to the smelters, a distance of 40 miles. This process cost from \$50 to \$100 a ton. Snows closed the trail much of each year.<sup>39</sup> The North Texas Smelting Company opened a plant on the north side of Aspen in 1882, but finding little business, the owners sold out to Jerome B. Wheeler the next year. This new proprietor enlarged the plant and reopened it in 1884 as the Aspen Smelting Company.<sup>40</sup> Wheeler's mill's capacity was too small to handle the flood of business after 1884, and the Leadville refineries continued to profit from Aspen's fortune.<sup>41</sup> The trend became permanent after arrival of the Denver and Rio Grande Railway in Aspen during 1887, thereby assuring cheap, year-around transportation between Aspen and the Upper Arkansas smelters.<sup>42</sup>



Keeping the Rio Grande open during winter was a constant challenge as this Leadville winter scene demonstrated. *Photo by Colorado Division of State Archives*

Capitalists to invest, support and develop the mines were as necessary for Aspen's success as the area's rich ores. This was true of all western mining during the late nineteenth century. Aspen was fortunate to attract many of these entrepreneurs from its beginnings. Two men in particular built the camp into a major silver producer. B. Clark Wheeler and Jerome B. Wheeler, no relation to each other, both promoted the town throughout the period.<sup>43</sup>

B. Clark Wheeler arrived on the Roaring Fork late in 1879 and spent the winter prospecting the area. When springtime travel was possible, he returned to Leadville and undertook the selling of Aspen.<sup>44</sup> In addition to founding the town, he went on a lecture tour throughout eastern Colorado talking up the potential of "Aspen over the Range."<sup>45</sup> Journalists notwithstanding, Wheeler's sales pitch attracted others to Aspen.

Henry P. Cowenhoven and David R. C. Brown, Central City, Colorado merchants, were among those who heard the call to Aspen. They decided to relocate their store to the camp in 1880, and arrived late that summer with their goods in wagons.<sup>46</sup> After a tortuous trip over Independence Pass, they set up shop on the Roaring Fork. The pair, Brown primarily, became interested in mining.<sup>47</sup> Typically, they would either grubstake prospectors or buy promising claims after the locators exhausted their small capital reserves and became frustrated. This was the way Brown became a half-owner of the Aspen Mine and others before the 1884 bonanza. From these purchases, he eventually made well over a million dollars and guaranteed himself a place in Aspen's elite.<sup>48</sup>

Another early arrival in town, H. P. Gillespie, a Leadville mining promoter, became another successful mine owner. Originally he went to Aspen to investigate the Spar Mine and other claims for A. E. Breed, former owner of the Caribou Mine near Nederland, Colorado. Gillespie was impressed by what he saw, invested his own money and encouraged his employer to do likewise.<sup>49</sup> The success of his early purchases made Gillespie a wealthy man and, seeking to diversify his holdings, he purchased ranches and other property down the Roaring Fork Valley. His El Jebel Ranch became the modern town of the same name.<sup>50</sup>

When reviewing the accomplishments of Aspen's early entrepreneurs, the name Jerome B. Wheeler must be mentioned. Wheeler came to Colorado from New York City where he was an official in the world famous Macy's Department Store.<sup>51</sup> He

arrived in the camp during 1883, and immediately set out to buy up promising claims, such as the Smuggler that eventually yielded the world's largest silver nugget weighing over 1,800 pounds.<sup>52</sup> As mentioned, Wheeler also purchased and renovated the Aspen Smelting Company<sup>53</sup> and, throughout the 1880s and into the 1890s, was one of Aspen's leading mining magnates, building the Wheeler Opera House and other structures for the community.<sup>54</sup>

Aspen's business leadership, especially Brown, Wheeler, Wheeler, and Gillespie, could not finance the camp by themselves, and as a result, they sought outside investors during the 1880s. The men they attracted rarely chose to live in town, instead they stayed behind the scenes.<sup>55</sup> But their contributions to Aspen's success as a silver producer should not be slighted.

Jerome B. Wheeler hired Walter B. Devereux to manage his Aspen operations in 1883. Devereux was a trained mining engineer from Londonderry, Ireland, and was well connected in British financial circles. He proved to be an able manager as well as a financial asset to Wheeler's projects. Devereux's foreign associates invested heavily in many Roaring Fork projects at critical points during the decade.<sup>56</sup> In addition to Devereux, Wheeler helped convince Milwaukee ironmaker, and later Colorado Springs railroad builder, James John Hagerman to put money in various Aspen and Roaring Fork Valley mining ventures.<sup>57</sup>

As if not to be outdone by J. B. Wheeler, D. R. C. Brown, early on, entered the contest to attract outside capitalists to Aspen. He succeeded in interesting some of the biggest names in Colorado mining, at the time, in Roaring Fork companies. Among them were David H. Moffat Jr. and Eben Smith. Moffat was president of the First National Bank of Denver, and Smith was one of the best known mining engineers and managers in the state. These two men put money into many Aspen mines from 1882 until the nineties. Moffat and Smith began their investments with Leadville millionaire, Horace A. W. Tabor, in the Tam O'Shanter<sup>58</sup> and continued to back projects such as the Deep Mining and Drainage Company and the Franklin mine as partners of D. R. C. Brown and H. P. Cowenhoven.<sup>59</sup>

The money that men such as Moffat represented often proved to be the crucial factor determining the success of these ventures, however, they did find their way blocked occasionally. The problems they faced usually involved litigation of claims. Vague mining laws at the time provided many opportunities for the unscrupulous to

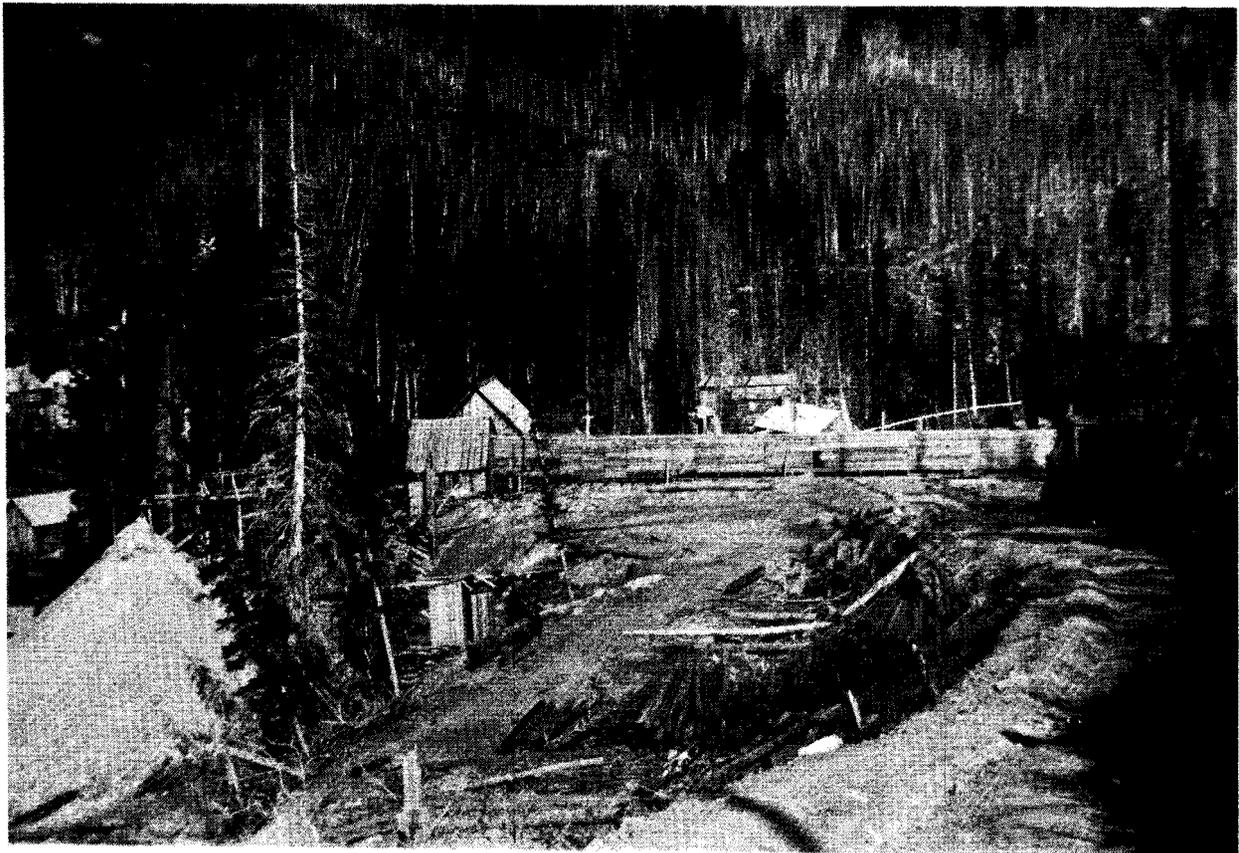
sue, especially in regard to the location of a lode's apex. Often, rather than having a case tied up in courtrooms for years, the entrepreneurs would simply buy out the adjacent property owners. This did not always work and in the case of two rich Aspen area mines, the Tam O'Shanter and the Durant, litigation lasted for years, nearly bankrupting both sides.<sup>60</sup> Apparently, lawyers were the only ones to profit from these mines.

The courts were not the only pitfall for the bonanza kings in west-central Colorado during the Victorian Era. The Roman adage, "buyer beware" applied to any and all mining ventures. Many times holders of relatively worthless claims would "enrich" the ore, get glowing assay reports and then look for investors to sucker.

One such hoax took on spectacular proportions in Garfield County during the early 1880's. At the same time, gold and silver were discovered along the Eagle River and in the Roaring Fork Valley, other Leadville prospectors ventured onto the Flattop Mountains. The exact names and dates vary as to the actual discovery, however, news of the find made its way back to Leadville and Denver by 1882. Along with the reports came ore samples that when assayed proved high in silver content. During the winter of 1882-1883 surveyors went out on snowshoes to lay out a town at the diggings site. With arrival of spring, a true rush got underway and the town of Carbonate was founded. The area was known as the Defiance Mining District, too. As many as 3,000 people lived there at one point, but it was soon discovered that the ore taken to Denver had been "enriched." The true wealth proved to be non-existent and Carbonate was soon abandoned. One thing did come of this fiasco. During 1883, as the population peaked, Colorado's state legislature determined that a new county was needed and created Garfield County with Carbonate as the county seat.<sup>61</sup>

These problems and false hopes aside, the second half of the 1880s was a profitable time for silver mining throughout western Colorado. This was due in part to the new discoveries and the beginning of rail service to many towns, but moreover, active federal involvement in the silver market made mining pay, especially after 1890. In that year, the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, that obligated the Treasury to buy up to \$4 million dollars of silver bullion each month, passed Congress. The metal's market value increased from less than \$1 an ounce to well over \$1.50 an ounce by 1893.<sup>62</sup>

The rising price of silver led to a new wave of prosperity in western Colorado. Roaring Fork and Eagle Valley mines enjoyed the boom, particularly Aspen which had become the center of silver extraction in west-central Colorado by 1890. The town's population grew from 35 in 1879 to more than 11,000 by 1893. Silver production averaged approximately \$6.5 million dollars a year from 1889 to 1893. In the Red Cliffe and Battle Mountain areas the same prosperous scene was repeated.<sup>63</sup>



While Aspen may have been the biggest mining town in the Roaring Fork area, little places like this produced silver too. This mine is typical of Colorado silver mining.  
*Photo by U. S. Geological Survey*

The good times did not last. In 1893, changes in international finances and a drain on United States gold reserves led President Grover Cleveland to call for repeal of the Sherman Silver Act. His request was granted by Congress. This led to a precipitous decline of silver prices. Many mines closed and Colorado silver mining camps sank into a depression. Aspen and Eagle were especially hard hit by the Panic of 1893 and never regained their stature as centers of precious metal extraction.<sup>64</sup>

Minor revivals took place in both regions by 1898, however, the new goals were the non-precious minerals, such as zinc or lead, that made up a large portion of raw ores. Lead mining continued in Aspen until World War I. At Gilman, on Battle Mountain, zinc became the primary product of the mines. The zinc workings were sold to Empire Zinc Company in 1917, and continued well into the twentieth century as one of America's largest sources of that metal.<sup>65</sup>

If the Panic of 1893 wiped out the fortunes of many entrepreneurs, it also severely effected the miners who toiled in the shafts and tunnels. Young, native-born Anglo-American males were the primary population component of the camps during the early years. As areas matured, more of the miners were married men, having entered wedlock either before or after arrival at the mines. Also, foreign-born people contributed more to the population as time progressed. The United Kingdom, particularly Cornwall, Wales, and Ireland, was the leading source of immigrants to west-central Colorado's mines. Italians also came in significant numbers to work underground.<sup>66</sup>

The working conditions they encountered were cramped, cold, wet, and generally unhealthy. Mining in the 1880s, was carried on with no legal protection so far as employer liability or responsibility. Wages averaged from \$3 to \$4 a day for a 10 or 12 hour shift. When the whistle blew to signal the start of each shift, the wives no doubt wondered whether their men would return home at the end of the day or if a cave-in or gas explosion would occur. Possibly he might just be mauled by the break of a worn cable or an out-of-control machine. There was always the possibility that all the powder charges placed by the shift before had not ignited and his pick would find it and ignite a misfire. If none of these disasters befell the miner, there was always the chance he could be fired or laid off. To further shorten the life expectancy of these people, respiratory diseases were a fact of life.<sup>67</sup>

To eliminate these problems miners tried many solutions. Their efforts at unionization met with little success. Mine owners broke up these groups and blacklisted the organizers. Eventually the miners' wrath vented itself in the form of anti-Chinese activities. Orientals were warned to stay out of Aspen<sup>68</sup> and when one appeared in Glenwood Springs, he and his employer both received threats on their lives if the "Chinaman" did not "vamoose".<sup>69</sup>



Aspen Colorado, looking from Hunter Creek in 1887. *Photo by Colorado Historical Society*

The experiences and hardships of the hard rock miners in Aspen or Eagle were equally repeated in west-central Colorado's coal mines of the late nineteenth century.

Coal mining originally evolved in the region as a support industry for precious metal extraction. The majority of lands within west-central Colorado are underlain with coal. Most notably the Grand Hogback and Grand Mesa contain rich deposits.<sup>70</sup> Hayden's reports again served as a guide to the fuel beds.<sup>71</sup> Changes in smelting technology, coupled with increased refining activity, created a demand for coal and encouraged prospective entrepreneurs to open mines along the Frying Pan River and in the Huntsmen Hills southeast of Glenwood Springs.

In 1881, commercial coal quantities were discovered in the Roaring Fork Valley. It was not utilized at that time because Leadville's smelter operators preferred charcoal, which was cheaper to import.<sup>72</sup> Two years later Walter Devereux examined the coal beds south of Glenwood Springs hoping to find an adequate supply for the Aspen Smelter. The seams he examined ranged from 6 to 14 feet thick and he promptly filed claims on the land.<sup>73</sup> However, only small mining operations worked the area for the next four years.

James J. Hagerman, builder of the Colorado Midland Railway, and Jerome B. Wheeler of Aspen, realized the potential market for coal and in 1887, opened large scale mining in the Huntsman Hills. The park in which the seams were located was named Jerome Park at this time. To fully exploit the resource, Hagerman and his Grand River Coal and Coke Company (organized in 1883) built coking ovens along the Colorado Midland Railway at Cardiff near Glenwood Springs.<sup>74</sup>

Jerome Park coal proved to be of good coking quality and soon the plant at Cardiff was expanded. The demand for coke remained strong through the 1890s and eventually the Grand River Company built 240 ovens at Cardiff and another 50 at Marion, in the park.<sup>75</sup> At the height of operations, the mines produced 1,000 tons of coal a day and the company employed over 1,000 miners and other laborers at its mines and plants in Garfield County.<sup>76</sup> Fuel from Cardiff was marketed in Leadville as well as at Pueblo and, after 1900, to the beet sugar factory at Grand Junction, Colorado.<sup>77</sup>

Development of the Jerome Park--Cardiff collieries was paralleled elsewhere in the Glenwood Springs region. In 1882, John C. Osgood came to Colorado at the request of the Chicago Burlington and Quincy (CB&Q) Railroad to develop mines and coal deposits to supply the company with fuel. Upon arrival, he founded the Colorado Fuel Company and began investing in Huerfano and Las Animas County mines as well as mineral lands in the Grand Valley. The Crystal River Valley appeared promising and Osgood began to buy up or claim lands along that watercourse as well as Thompson Creek near Carbondale, Colorado.<sup>78</sup>

Colorado Fuel Company undertook development of its properties in 1886. Osgood planned a series of roads and ancillary facilities throughout the region. However, it was another corporation, the Colorado Coal and Iron Company (CC&I), that took the first steps toward exploitation of the Carbondale area coals. In 1886, CC&I opened mines along Thompson Creek and the next year started construction of a rail line, the Aspen and Western (A&W), to connect Carbondale with the mines. The plans called for coke ovens to be built at Carbondale, but after two years the entire operation closed because the mines were not as productive as originally thought.<sup>79</sup>

This turn of events left Osgood free to develop the Crystal River Valley as he desired. By 1892, Osgood's wealth had increased to the point that when a merger of his Colorado Fuel Company and the older Colorado Coal and Iron was proposed, he accepted and became president of the newly formed Colorado Fuel and Iron Company (CF&I). The year before the merger, Osgood purchased the Grand River Coal and Coke Company from Hagerman, Wheeler, and their associates giving his company a near monopoly of Garfield County's coal mining.<sup>80</sup>

1892 marked the beginning of serious efforts at development of Crystal River Valley coal fields. Osgood purchased thousands of acres of land at Coal Basin to serve as a primary source of raw material. He planned to mine coal at Coal Basin and then transport it six miles to the Crystal River where a coking plant and town were to be built.<sup>81</sup> Osgood's efforts slowed due to lack of capital and throughout the 1890s, Placita, Colorado, remained the Valley's largest mine.

Prosperity returned to west-central Colorado by 1898, in the wake of the Panic of 1893, and Osgood launched his grandiose scheme for the Crystal River region. He hoped to make his operations a model industrial community. The name Crystal River

## NOTES

1. Robert G. Athearn, *The Coloradans*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976), see chapter 1.

2. Carl Ubbelohde, Maxine Benson and Duane A. Smith, *A Colorado History*, (Boulder: Pruett Press, 1976), pp. 160-162, hereafter cited: Ubbelohde, Benson and Smith, *Colorado History*.

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6. Robert L. Brown, *Holy Cross--The Mountain and the City*, (Caldwell, ID.: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1970), pp. 56-62., hereafter cited: Brown, *Holy Cross*.

7. Perry Eberhart, *Guide to the Ghost Towns and Mining Camps of Colorado*, (Denver: Sage Books, 1969), p. 169.

8. Knight and Hammock, *Early Eagle*, p. 4., and Charles W. Henderson, *Mining in Colorado, A History of Discovery, Development and Production*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926), p. 47., hereafter cited: Henderson, *Colorado Mining*.

9. Knight and Hammock, *Early Eagle*, p. 7.

10. Thomas F. Dawson, "The Old Prospector," *The Colorado Magazine*, 1 (March 1924): 104-105., and Brown, *Holy Cross*, p. 106., hereafter cited: Dawson, "Prospector."

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was applied to the stream known earlier as Rock Creek, but it was not until 1899 that the scope of Osgood's vision became apparent. He founded the town of Redstone, Colorado, along the river, eighteen miles south of Carbondale, to serve as headquarters and the coking site for the Coal Basin townsite and mines. Osgood started construction of his own palatial estate, Cleveholm, complete with a game ranch, about a mile south of Redstone. The Crystal River Railroad (CRRR) was built to connect the mines and coke ovens with the Denver and Rio Grande Railway at Carbondale.<sup>82</sup>

Redstone and Coal Basin commenced operation in 1900. The towns were typical company towns of the era complete with a company store (the Colorado Supply Company), clubhouses and recreational facilities, company doctors, a company sponsored brass band and several theaters. Newspapers were printed in both English and Italian. Homes were provided for both single and married workers. Many of the houses are still present in Redstone as is the Redstone Inn; former boarding house for single men. The washing plant, coke ovens and rail yard were on the opposite side of the river. By 1902, at its peak, Redstone had running water, sewers and electricity.<sup>83</sup> Osgood's dream was short lived. The market for coal and coke was over-supplied by 1900 and in 1903 operational cut-backs occurred. Within a few years, after Osgood lost control of Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, all mining activity at Redstone was abandoned.<sup>84</sup>

West of Glenwood Springs, along the Grand River, coal mines operated from 1882 until the end of the nineteenth century. During 1882 and 1883 William Devereux, William Farnum and George Mace located and claimed coal seams along the south side of the river in the Grand Hogback.<sup>85</sup> The Grand River Coal and Coke Company began development of its coal mines within a few years and the town of New Castle, Colorado, was built. Grand River Coal worked the mines until 1891 when Osgood bought the company and eventually merged it into Colorado Fuel and Iron Company.<sup>86</sup> At the same time he purchased more coal land and expanded his operations at New Castle.<sup>87</sup> Throughout the 1890s New Castle's mines continued in production, but by the end of that decade all but one had closed. Starting in 1895 a series of disasters hit the camp. The Vulcan Mine, in particular, was hard hit by fires and explosions. In 1895 a fire broke out but quickly was extinguished causing minimal

damage, just before noon on February 18, 1896 explosions rocked the Vulcan. The blast hurled timber and debris over a quarter of a mile into the Grand River. Fifty-three miners lost their lives. In 1897 fires and explosions resumed and only by diverting an irrigation ditch into the mine were the flames quenched. Sixteen years later yet another fire started and the Vulcan was closed permanently. This fire has never been extinguished.<sup>88</sup>

The first two decades of the twentieth century witnessed significant decline in coal mining activity throughout Garfield and Pitkin Counties. While disasters closed some operations, a general drop in demand had a more profound effect on the mines. Decreased silver refining, the primary consumer of the area's coal and coke, was a major factor in this demand decline. Redstone was the first to close, followed in 1910 by a suspension of operations at the Cardiff ovens. As the market remained depressed more and more mines ceased production. In 1916 Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, the region's largest corporation, dropped all operations in Garfield and Pitkin Counties and the next year all local CF&I mines were closed permanently.<sup>89</sup>

Mesa County coal mining during the late nineteenth century never achieved the scope of operation that other parts of west-central Colorado did. Production was for local consumption with little being exported.<sup>90</sup> Mining provided part-time work for many cowboys and farm hands.<sup>91</sup> The first mineral abstract in the Grand Junction region was filed in 1882 by J.A.K. Crawford, N. Pritchard and W.A. Lynch. Their plat covered a seam of coal located southeast of the townsite near the confluence of the Gunnison and Grand Rivers. The mine operated only a short time, supplying Denver and Rio Grande Railway locomotives with fuel. Grand Junction also benefitted.<sup>92</sup> Other would-be coal entrepreneurs were also finding and laying claims around the fledgling community. William Innis discovered the Hunter Seam and set out to develop it. George Smith worked his mine during the 1880s<sup>93</sup> as did the Grand River Coal Company.<sup>94</sup> However, the first massive coal mining was not attempted until the decade's close when William Carpenter opened the Little Book Cliffs mine about nine and one half miles northeast of Grand Junction. A camp grew up around the mine and Carpenter built the Little Book Cliff Railroad to connect his mines with the Denver and Rio Grande Railway at Grand Junction. His efforts never proved profitable as he was confined to supplying only local markets.<sup>95</sup> Over the years other mines opened and closed around Grand Junction but it was World War I that led to increased coal production, reaching its highest level in 1918. Because of their small size most of the Mesa County mines were not unionized and during 1918 and 1919 coal miner's strikes

in other Colorado fields coupled with heavy wartime demand caused increased output in the valley. This prosperity was short-lived. The War's end, along with the abandonment of the Colorado Midland Railroad in 1919, resulted in temporary curtailment of coal mining around Grand Junction.<sup>96</sup>

In addition to coal and precious metals, other minerals were extracted from west-central Colorado between 1880 and 1920, chief among them, marble. Near the Crystal River's headwaters, Sylvester Richardson discovered marble in 1873 and the next year George Yule "re-discovered" it.<sup>97</sup> Ten years passed before anything was done about the deposits. During 1885 G.D. Griffith, a Welsh marble worker, opened a quarry to supply stone for the Colorado State Capitol Building.<sup>98</sup> John C. Osgood took steps to develop the quarries in 1893 when he sent a large block of marble to Chicago's Columbian Exposition to publicize his Yule Creek White Marble Company.<sup>99</sup> During his early twentieth century financial troubles, Osgood lost control of the marble and in 1906 Colonel Channing F. Meek purchased the Yule quarries and plant at Marble, Colorado. As president of the Colorado-Yule Marble Company he set about to expand operations at both the quarry and the mill while extending the Crystal River railroad line, known then as the Crystal River and San Juan Railroad, south to Marble, from Placita. The cost amounted to \$3 million and by 1910 Colorado-Yule was doing a multi-million dollar a year business. Meek was killed in an accident on the marble tramway in 1912.<sup>100</sup> In 1913, J.F. Manning stepped into the presidency to fill Meek's position.<sup>101</sup> During the next year Colorado-Yule with help from Glenwood Springs Congressman Edward T. Taylor, received contracts to supply marble for the Lincoln Memorial.<sup>102</sup> This new business did not provide enough profit to keep the company solvent and in 1916 operations were suspended for six years.<sup>103</sup> The Vermont Marble Company bought the Colorado properties and reopened the quarry and mill in 1927. Three years later marble for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was fashioned from Marble Colorado stone. During the rest of the decade operations continued, however, in 1940 Vermont Marble management decided to close the mill and early the next year quarrying also ceased.<sup>104</sup>

While coal was America's source of energy during the late nineteenth century oil was growing in importance. As early as 1883 a farmer, C.P. Taylor, drilled for oil on his ranch near Fruita, but found little.<sup>105</sup> Possibilities of finding petroleum continued to intrigue people. Parachute, Colorado (Grand Valley) residents tapped a gusher in 1895 that caused great excitement, but the boom was short. By 1903 the wells were capped.<sup>106</sup> 1915 marked the last oil boom for west-central Colorado when Glenwoodites started looking for black gold. The Glenwood Oil Company sank wells near

town but found nothing.<sup>107</sup> The region's oil and natural gas resources were not developed by 1920 primarily because coal was abundant and cheap as was electricity. Many wells remained capped to await later use.<sup>108</sup>

Another hydro-carbon that affected west-central Colorado's development was Gilsonite. This was a raw material for asphalt manufacture and while not mined in the region, Mack and Grand Junction became centers for Gilsonite shipping and refining activity in the early twentieth century. Barber Asphalt Company, with mines near Dragon, Utah, founded Mack, to serve as a transshipping point for the mineral, as well as headquarters of the subsidiary Uintah Railway. Presence of Barber Asphalt stimulated Fruita business activity during the period.<sup>109</sup>

Two other minerals were extracted from the hills of west-central Colorado between 1880 and 1920, however, these did not have a great effect on the area's historic evolution. Copper was one. It was mined from 1899 to 1902 in the Unaweep area and from 1900 to 1915 at McCoy, Colorado, also the scene of a minor placer gold rush in 1880. The diggings were small and the boom soon petered out.<sup>110</sup> The second mineral was Vanadium. The Sinbad Valley witnessed, with little success, Vanadium prospecting during the 1890s.<sup>111</sup> In 1902 Vanadium was found near Grand Junction but little interest was shown in development.<sup>112</sup> Seven years later searchers discovered radioactive deposits north of Rifle, Colorado, that were commercially exploited. World War I Vanadium needs led three companies to build plants in western Colorado during the war, but once the war ended and demand dropped, operations ceased.<sup>113</sup>

Mining activity in west-central Colorado from 1880 to 1920 gave rise to another industry—lumbering. Tree cutting started in 1879 along the Frying Pan River to supply Leadville smelters with charcoal.<sup>114</sup> Lumbering spread throughout the Continental Divide area during the 1880s as mines needed timbers and housing had to be constructed in mining camps. Timbering continued during the 1890s and early 1900s. By the turn of the century many of the area's hills and mountains had been denuded by the woodsman's axe. Especially heavily used were the mountains near mining camps. However, passage of the General Revision Act in 1891 and creation of Timber Resources limited access to the trees.<sup>115</sup> Lumbering in Mesa County started in 1881 on Grand Mesa. Commercial operations remained small, providing mostly for local business and housing needs as well as meeting some of the area's fuel requirements.<sup>116</sup>

Mining attracted people to west central Colorado. It provided wealth for some, a livelihood for many and hardship for others. It helped cause the growth of lumbering but more importantly mining camp markets gave the impetus necessary for others to build transportation systems and farms in west central Colorado. While the mining industry was depressed by 1920 it was not dead. As demands for certain minerals such as Vanadium or oil increased, especially after World War II the west central part of the state witnessed another mining boom reminiscent of the 1880s.



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## CHAPTER V. THE TRANSPORTATION FRONTIER IN WEST-CENTRAL COLORADO

"Like Aladdin's magical carpet, the railroad crossed wide rivers, spanned barren deserts, climbed towering mountains, almost in a breath."

--*Unknown*

Adequate transportation, water, road, or rail, caused growth in nineteenth century America more than any other single factor. West-central Coloradans realized this, and over the years, worked hard to build and also encouraged the development of systems to move goods and people. Often construction capital came from outside the area, however by 1900, most roads in west-central Colorado led into Grand Junction. The river and stream valleys provided relatively easy paths and for that reason, builders prized those routes. The Continental Divide's rugged passes formed the greatest barrier for these transportation pioneers.

Road building dated to 1830-1831, in west-central Colorado when James Yount and his associates laid out what was called the Old Spanish Trail. One routing of the trail, known as the Northern Branch, followed the Gunnison River north to the Grand River and then west along that waterway into Utah. The trail was lightly used until the 1850s, during the Mormon Migration to Utah. The "Saints" sought new routes into Zion for future settlers and to connect their southwestern settlements with Salt Lake City. Mormons scouted the Grand River Valley and felt it could be used. Immigrants favored the Platte River-Wyoming route and the trail through western Colorado never saw heavy use.<sup>1</sup>

Large numbers of travellers did not use the Gunnison River trail until the 1880s, with the opening of the Ute Reservation for settlement. Many people followed the "Old Ute Trail" via Cochetopa Pass and the Gunnison River because that was the route used by Native Americans as a trade passageway to New Mexico.<sup>2</sup> Fremont and other explorers used that trail and popularized it; by 1880, it was well known, as were the dangers it presented.

Grand Junction's earliest settlers followed this pathway and successively overcame many inherent problems. Travelling in a Conestoga wagon with a team of two, four, or six oxen these families hauled all their worldly possessions hundreds of miles over roads full of tree stumps, rocks, steep grades and they used fords or ferry boats to cross rivers. Leaving their homes in late spring these future Coloradans traveled an entire summer to reach their new farms. Broken wheels, axles, and other problems plagued the travellers. Often family heirlooms, such as furniture, were discarded on the route to assure safe conquest of the

mountains. Potable water was in short supply.

Highwaymen posed a constant threat. So too did the death of a oxen. Wagon trains were not widely used in this type of migration, but often two or three families would meet on the trail and travel together. Despite all the hardships, intrepid souls did reach Grand Junction ready to build their fortunes in the valley of the Grand River.<sup>3</sup>

The Grand River itself was a favored route for transportation planners since the 1860s. In 1867 a group of Denver business leaders felt a wagon route between the "Queen City" and California could stimulate trade and help assure Denver a position as the commercial leader of Colorado. These Denverites hired surveyors, and that year they laid out the Colorado and California Wagon Road which crossed the Continental Divide near the head of Clear Creek and proceeded west until it bisected the Grand River, it then followed that watercourse west through the Grand Valley and DeBeque and Ruby Canyons into Utah. The backers ran into financial difficulties and the project never got beyond the planning stages.<sup>4</sup> However, it did help draw further attention to the Grand River as a practical route for east-west communications.

The 1870s witnessed the first actual road building in the region. After the Brunot Treaty of 1873, and with the establishment of Ute Agencies on the White and Los Pinos Rivers, federal authorities recognized a need for roads to connect these far flung outposts. One such line was built by the U. S. Army via Rifle Creek and it became known as the "Government Road." While never heavily used by troops, it did provide access into the area once other Anglo-Americans arrived and it encouraged settlement around Rifle. Local legend maintained that Rifle Creek got its name because one of the soldiers who surveyed the road left his gun along the stream and it was found by ranchers in the 1880s, thereby giving them something to call the creek.<sup>5</sup>

The silver discoveries at Red Cliff and Aspen during the late 1870s, led to frenzied road building activity. Aspen, in particular, felt the impact of highway construction. The original conveyance between Red Cliff and Leadville was the mule train.<sup>6</sup> These "Rocky Mountain Canaries" were used also between Aspen and Leadville (or Buena Vista) during the camp's earlier years.<sup>7</sup> A lack of adequate transportation led to high prices for supplies such as flour and liquor. In addition, it was financially profitable for only the best grades of ore to be shipped out for refining. The trip itself was costly and arduous especially in the spring or fall travel season.<sup>8</sup>

Such problems were partially solved by building toll roads over mountain passes. From the early days, Red Cliff and Aspen promoters called for highways to aid in economic growth. As early as 1866, Denver planners envisioned crossing the Continental Divide and using the Eagle Valley as a route west that would eventually reach into old Mexico.<sup>9</sup> However, it was not until the late 1870s and the silver discoveries, that roads penetrated the Valley. Kelly's Toll Road was opened in 1879, from Leadville via Tennessee Pass to Eagle City and Red Cliff. That year two companies, Wheaton and Wall & Whitter, started stage service from Leadville to Red Cliff. Henry Farnum then introduced daily stage service between those two points.<sup>10</sup>

Aspen's development as a transportation center followed Red Cliff's and was closely tied to development of the silver industry. The first route into town crossed Taylor Pass and connected Buena Vista on the Denver, South Park, and Pacific Railroad. H. P. Gillespie was the driving force behind this project which was finished in 1880.<sup>11</sup> Stevens and Company operated the original stage service along that road.<sup>12</sup> Taylor Pass was not the shortest way to Leadville and other Aspen promoters soon turned their attention to Independence Pass, a rough but shorter route.

B. Clark Wheeler, during 1880, started surveying Independence Pass as a possible wagon road and the next January he, along with H. P. Cowenhoven and Andrew MacFarlane, incorporated the Aspen, Hunter Creek, and Leadville Toll Road Company to build and operate a tollway.<sup>13</sup> The route was opened the next year and business boomed. The road aided Aspen's prosperity by shortening the haul and thereby decreasing freight rates.<sup>14</sup> However, descriptions by travellers between Aspen and Leadville were quick to point out hazards along the pathway and weather conditions, especially winter snows, made the road impassable much of the year.<sup>15</sup>

Further to the west, roadbuilding took place in 1881, when the first settlers arrived. During that year and into 1882, a toll road was constructed from Gunnison to Grand Junction. This first thoroughfare was described as an impediment to commerce and totally inadequate for local needs.<sup>16</sup> Early stage service was a buckboard wagon run by H. R. Hammond.<sup>17</sup> William Hunter operated a freight line between Montrose and the Grand River over this road at the same time.<sup>18</sup> Seeking other routes to Grand Junction, toll operators such as W. P. Poff undertook construction of pathways, such as the Unawep Road, from Ouray and Telluride or other San Juan locations.<sup>19</sup>

The largest single road building effort of the 1880s was the Roan Creek Toll Road that was to follow the Grand River from Grand Junction to Glenwood Springs, thereby

thereby giving Grand Junction traders a more direct and easy access to Aspen and Red Cliff. DeBeque Canyon blocked such a route and had to be breached. In the past, the canyon's old trails from Parachute (Grand Valley) to Grand Junction had taken two weeks and considerable extra distance to traverse.<sup>20</sup> In 1885, Edwin Price, H. R. Rhone, D. P. Kingsley, and W. A. E. Debeque formed the Grand River Toll Road Company, also known as the Roan Creek Toll Road.<sup>21</sup> The idea for this project began in 1884, when the Grand Junction Board of Trade called for an extensive program of road building, particularly along the Grand River.<sup>22</sup> This boosterism continued into the next year when Rhone and his associates made public their plans.<sup>23</sup>

The Roan Creek Road itself took about a year to build. Cost estimates varied from \$12,000 to \$18,000.<sup>24</sup> Wagons used the road for \$2.50, while the George Barton and Johnny Hynes' stage line offered passenger service on a two day schedule between the termini with an overnight stop at Parachute, Colorado.<sup>25</sup> The road remained in operation from 1885 to 1889, when the Denver and Rio Grande purchased it for roadbed for its proposed standard gauge railroad line to Grand Junction.<sup>26</sup> Success of the Roan Creek Toll Company encouraged others to build roads throughout west-central Colorado during late 1880s and 1890s.

The Roaring Fork Valley experienced the first road building craze in west-central Colorado during the early 1880s. However, the first major road, between Aspen and Glenwood Springs, was laid out by B. Clark Wheeler in 1882.<sup>27</sup> Charles H. Harris soon became the man responsible for the Roaring Fork's trails. He projected and built many tollways in the Valley during the decade.<sup>28</sup> Barlow and Sanderson offered stagecoach service to various points in the region, with competition between Aspen and Glenwood from the Kit Carson Stageline and the Western Stage and Express Company. That trip took twelve hours one way.<sup>29</sup> Many of these roads were crude at best and travel remained uncertain.<sup>30</sup> However, as time progressed the region's road system was improved and expanded. In 1883, Pitkin County built a trail from Aspen to Emma,<sup>31</sup> and two years later, Jerome B. Wheeler constructed a tollway from Carbondale to Aspen in order to haul coal.<sup>32</sup> The last major pathway to be opened in the Roaring Fork Valley was completed in 1891, along the Crystal River between Carbondale and Marble so as to serve as a feeder for the railroad at the former location.<sup>33</sup>

Equally important in allowing Aspen to maintain contact with the outside world was the telegraph. Much of western Colorado received telegraph service only in conjunction with the railroads but Aspenites were impatient for "talking wires" and in 1883, Gillespie

convinced Western Union to build a line from Granite to Aspen making it among the first west-central Colorado cities to have such communications.<sup>34</sup>

Red Cliff, the area's other mining district, was as anxious as Aspen to be the center of a road system. Arrival of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad in 1882 allowed Red Cliff to become the headquarters of large wagon freighting operations. Roads were built to Glenwood Springs and on to Rifle as well as to Gilman.<sup>35</sup> In 1880, plans were put forth to build across Vail Pass but such a route was not completed for 60 years.<sup>36</sup>

West of Glenwood Springs progress was somewhat slower because fewer settlers filled the area. Stage lines were built to connect various towns within and from outside the region such as from New Castle to Meeker or the Government Road from Rifle to Meeker. Not until 1887 did the citizens of Garfield County pressure the local government into building road. The county allowed its residents to pay their taxes by road crew work. Even so, much of the area's transportation was via trails well into the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup>

Stock trails offered pathways that travellers used in west-central Colorado. The first established was the JQS in 1885. This was the first of six stock trails that led from the Grand Valley to the top of the Cliffs by 1920. Stock trails offered pathways that travellers used in west-central Colorado. The JQS trail ran from near Rifle to the top of the Roan Cliffs. H. W. Hallett and William (Billy) Chadwick proposed and built the JQS in 1885.<sup>38</sup> This was the first of six stock trails that led from the Grand Valley to the top of the cliffs by 1920, however, there were no wagon roads.<sup>39</sup>

In the vicinity of Grand Junction, road building during this period directed itself to connecting outlying settlements with the Grand River and the Denver and Rio Grande Railway. In 1884, the Hogback Road was mapped and built from Grand Junction into the Plateau Valley.<sup>40</sup> At approximately the same time, Gordon's Toll Road from the Grand River to Glade Park opened for business,<sup>41</sup> as did a similar road to Little Park.<sup>42</sup> Other roads into the Glade Park area were little more than stock trails and often were used by stockmen to drive cattle from summer to winter range in the Grand Valley.<sup>43</sup> The first road to Grand Mesa was built in 1891 from DeBeque up the northwestern rim of the mountain.<sup>44</sup>

These and other roads throughout west-central Colorado saw continued use because many settlers preferred to use wagons, not railroads, to reach their new homes. This trend continued into the twentieth century.<sup>45</sup>

Further settlement provided state Senator Edward T. Taylor with the argument he needed to convince Colorado's legislature the next year. The law provided for an allocation of \$40,000.<sup>46</sup> The senator received support for this idea for two reasons. Promotion of settlement attracted many backers but moreover the idea of uniting the eastern and western slopes with a road especially appealed to merchants in Denver who saw possibilities for increased trade.<sup>47</sup>

Construction of the turnpike started in 1899, and was finished four years later. The roadway eventually became the basis of modern U.S. Highway 6. Over the years the road has been Colorado's main east-west trade and developmental axis.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time that Taylor's State Road was being built, the Good Roads Movement swept the nation. In many ways Taylor's highway was part of this phenomenon.<sup>45</sup> Much of the clamor to upgrade the nation's roads came as part of the automobile craze that touched west-central Colorado in the early years of the twentieth century.

The first motorcar visited Glenwood Springs in 1902, driven by Colorado Springs stockbroker W. W. Price. A year later Grand Junction had the same experience as "Old Pacific," a two cylinder Packard, passed through town on an overland trip from San Francisco to Denver.<sup>50</sup> The auto's popularity led to new pleas with Colorado's state legislature for money to build roads and from 1906 to 1920, towns throughout the region hotly competed for highways.<sup>51</sup>

By 1910, the Federal government also became interested in these projects by announcing plans for a transcontinental highway. The cities of west-central Colorado, especially Fruita, Grand Junction, and Glenwood Springs, campaigned for inclusion on the path. Drives were sponsored, endorsements gathered, and arguments marshalled as to why west-central Colorado had the best route available. Foremost, the Taylor State Road could be used thereby cutting construction expenses. The boosters prevailed and by 1916, when the first paved transcontinental highway was laid out, it bisected west-central Colorado.<sup>52</sup>

During these same years, the road system around Grand Junction grew, thanks mainly to the efforts of John Otto. In addition to being the father of Colorado National Monument, he built many roads in the area. Among these were the Land's End Road, on the side of Grand Mesa, well as trails on that Mesa and the Serpent's Tail from Fruita to Glade Park. These paths furnished easier access for two remote and inaccessible areas thereby encouraging grazing and recreation.<sup>53</sup>

Access was just one problem early transportation faced. Another possibly greater one was the Grand River. While it provided water for irrigation, it served as a barrier to through routes. People wishing to cross the river had to depend on finding shallow fords to wade or drive their wagons through or they used ferries. The second alternative was more practical, and towns along the waterway relied on those for many years.<sup>54</sup>

Occasionally, enterprising individuals built toll bridges, but most towns sought state aid to bridge the Grand River. In 1886, a state bridge was built at Grand Junction and from then until the early twentieth century, Colorado financed many such projects up and down the river. While spring floods constantly threatened these structures they proved much more satisfactory than the earlier ferries.<sup>55</sup>

Wolcott, Colorado, offered a good example of the economic impact of a river ford to bridge site as well as the interdependence of road travel and railroad transportation. When the Denver and Rio Grande Railway reached the area in the early 1880s and created Russell's Siding, a new route was opened north to Steamboat Springs because the Eagle River could be more safely forded. A small settlement grew up at the ford and became known as Wolcott. By 1890, a road between Wolcott and McCoy was built and state funds were secured to build a bridge over the Grand River at "State Bridge" near McCoy.



Roads were important as seen in this view of the Grand River Canyon where the Rio Grande railroad takes up one side and a wagon road from Glenwood Springs uses the other side. *Photo by Colorado Historical Society*



Surveyors were important to establish roads, boundaries, and to describe the "New West". *Photo by Colorado Division of State Archives*

Construction and opening of the bridge led to more intense use of the Wolcott-Steamboat Springs route. It became the gateway to northwestern Colorado until 1908, when the Denver, Northwestern and Pacific Railway reached Steamboat Springs. Wolcott served as a terminal point where teams changed, wagons loaded and unloaded, and passengers stayed over at the local hotel. The 85-mile trip took 12 hours by stage coach or 4 days by freight wagon. There was no stage station *per se* at Wolcott; rather a

livery stable and roominghouse served traveller's needs.<sup>56</sup> This type of multi-mode transportation system became prevalent throughout west-central Colorado in the late nineteenth century as railroads reached the region.

Iron horse fever touched the western reaches of the territory well before initial settlement occurred. In 1862, Congress passed the first in a series of Pacific Railroad Acts to subsidize construction of a line from Council Bluffs, Iowa, to California with the route to be determined later. This opening gave Colorado promoters, most notably Governor John Evans, the opportunity to try and attract the railroad to Colorado. Boosters hired surveyors to seek a route west from Denver. Reports indicated that the Grand Valley offered a possible solution, however, crossing of the Continental Divide presented an insurmountable problem. In 1866, the Union Pacific line was finalized through Wyoming, much to the disappointment of Evans and his associates.<sup>57</sup>

The railroad situation in west-central Colorado remained static for the next 15 years. Developments on the eastern slope took place that would impact transportation throughout the state and region. In 1870, William Jackson Palmer, a Union Civil War General, arrived in the territory as an engineer for the Kansas Pacific Railroad and immediately was taken by the wealth of railroading possibilities that Colorado offered. In that year he chartered the Denver and Rio Grande Railway with plans to run from Denver to Mexico City along the front range. To save money he decided to use a gauge of three feet rather than the standard four feet eight and one-half inches because the "narrow gauge" was cheaper to build and more adaptable to mountainous construction than was standard gauge.<sup>58</sup>

Competitive pressures and the Santa Fe Railroad's capture of Raton Pass blocked Palmer's way to the south but he was determined to build west, tap the mountain trade, and possibly build on to Salt Lake City. Throughout the seventies, Palmer fought to keep the road solvent while expanding his railroad. Toward the decade's end, many financial problems were settled and the Denver and Rio Grande was ready to set forth on a new, and more extensive program.<sup>59</sup>

Part of the plan called for construction of a line west from the Royal Gorge of the Arkansas River to Salida and then on westward via Marshall Pass to Gunnison, Colorado. From that town the road would follow the Gunnison River to the future site of Grand Junction and thence west along the Grand River into Utah.<sup>60</sup> While Palmer's crews were busy laying lines, other rail promoters also cast an envious eye on the Grand Valley. John Evans, denied the Union Pacific in Colorado set out during the late seventies to build his

own transcontinental line, the Denver, South Park and Pacific (DSP&P). DSP&P surveyors paralleled Denver and Rio Grande crews through the Grand Valley during 1880 and 1881, but financial problems kept the company from ever building such a railway.<sup>61</sup> Another company, the Greeley, Salt Lake and Pacific, a Union Pacific subsidiary, also surveyed routes along the Grand River at the same time. Again the reports came to naught,<sup>62</sup> and it was Palmer's Denver and Rio Grande that eventually penetrated the region with its twin ribbons of steel.

In 1881, the first link in Palmer's plan was completed, when the narrow gauge was built into Gunnison by way of Marshall Pass. Over the winter, supplies and men gathered at the end of track preparing for the 1882 season and the push to Grand Junction. The line, known as the Utah Extension, followed the 1853 Gunnison route almost exactly.<sup>63</sup> During the height of the 1882 season, more than 1,000 men worked on Denver and Rio Grande construction crews, facing all variety of dangers and hardships.<sup>64</sup> By September of that year, Kannah Creek was reached.<sup>65</sup> On November 21, 1882, the first train chugged proudly into Grand Junction amid wild cheers, great speeches, fireworks, and a generally riotous atmosphere.<sup>66</sup>

While construction progressed so did corporate events. On July 21, 1881, Denver and Rio Grande management incorporated the Denver and Rio Grande Western, commonly referred to as the Rio Grande Western or just the Western, under the laws of Utah territory. The new company was to build and operate a railroad from Salt Lake City to the Colorado state line west of Grand Junction and there connect with the Denver and Rio Grande. Before rails reached Grand Junction, the Denver and Rio Grande leased the Denver and Rio Grande Western so as to finish construction and commence operations.<sup>67</sup>

Wasting little time on celebrations, Denver and Rio Grande management turned its attention to Utah after arrival at the confluence of the Gunnison and Grand Rivers. On December 19, 1882, rails reached the state line,<sup>68</sup> while crews continued to build west. By the end of March 1883, tracklaying was completed and Grand Junction, a community in its infancy, enjoyed what many towns sought and never achieved: a transcontinental railroad.<sup>69</sup>

Grand Junction benefited from these rail connections, but the town also advanced because Denver and Rio Grande management chose it as the location for major shops and engine servicing facilities. The company built a roundhouse, repair shop, and other services at Grand Junction. In 1883, the western terminus of the Denver and Rio Grande was specified as Grand Junction as was the eastern terminus of the Rio Grande Western. While

the history of Grand Junction is much more than just the railroad, there can be no doubt that it contributed to the city's prosperity.<sup>70</sup> However, if the iron horse brought new wealth it also brought problems. When the railroad reached town the crews went wild drinking, celebrating, and carousing. Grand Junction experienced many of the same problems of lawless behavior normally associated with a Kansas cow town or the "Hell on Wheels" tent towns that followed Union Pacific construction crews across Nebraska and Wyoming. Grand Junction town fathers were upset but little could be done to stop the revelry.<sup>71</sup> Eventually the problem cured itself as the end of track moved westward into Utah.<sup>72</sup>

1880 and 1881 proved to be two big years for construction on the Denver and Rio Grande while towns nearby on the western side of the Continental Divide also received rail service in those years. The Rio Grande decided earlier to build north along the Upper Arkansas River from Salida to Leadville to capture the mine trade. The "Cloud City" market proved lucrative<sup>73</sup> and after the Eagle Valley discoveries, a narrow gauge line was built over Tennessee Pass and into the Valley. Rails reached Red Cliff in 1881, and then Eagle the next year.<sup>74</sup> There the railroad stopped for nearly five years.

The great amount of construction during the early 1880s sapped Palmer's railroad as well as his own wealth and he lost control of the Denver and Rio Grande, which went into receivership. The General did retain ownership of the Rio Grande Western. To survive, both companies needed each other's good will. However, both sides were hostile to each other. In 1884, relations deteriorated to the point of open warfare that centered itself in Grand Junction because of the termini. Neither company would interchange traffic with the other and the yards soon filled with freight cars. The town found itself cut off from the outside world for over two weeks during this "Summer War."<sup>75</sup> Peace was restored by late summer, but lost revenues could not be made up and D&RG receiver William S. Jackson found he could not afford any new projects until old debts were cleared.

If the Rio Grande was unable to undertake any improvements, another Colorado company nevertheless had started building toward west-central Colorado--the Colorado Midland Railway Company. Founded in 1883 by H. D. Fisher and other Colorado Springs businessmen, the corporation stalled until 1885 when James J. Hagerman, a Milwaukee ironmaster, joined the group as did Aspen's famed Jerome B. Wheeler.<sup>76</sup> The Midland was designed and built as a standard gauge line to more easily interchange with the major railroads of Colorado Springs and as such it was the first standard gauge line to penetrate Colorado's Rockies. The route entered the high country via Ute Pass west of Colorado Springs and proceeded on to Leadville via Trout Creek Pass.<sup>77</sup>

After serving notice on the D&RG that its mountain monopoly had ended, Midland management focused on Aspen and the mines of the Roaring Fork Valley. Hagerman and Wheeler no doubt supported this idea because of their extensive investments in the region. Original plans called for a line to be built south and west through the Saguache Range, approaching Aspen from the north. Workers bored a tunnel, the Hagerman Tunnel, through the Saguache Range beneath the pass of the same name.<sup>78</sup>

As the Midland's tracklayers moved toward Aspen in 1886, William S. Jackson sought and obtained permission from his stockholders and Receiver Moses Hallett for the Denver and Rio Grande to survey and begin construction on a line to Aspen. Work got underway immediately and an intense race for the silver traffic ensued.<sup>79</sup>

The narrow gauge company chose to follow the Eagle Valley to the Grand River, along that watercourse through Glenwood Canyon to Glenwood Springs and then up the Roaring Fork Valley into Aspen. Actual construction did not commence until January 1887, when Denver banker and mining magnate, David H. Moffat, Jr., took over as president of the D&RG. Over 600 tracklayers worked on the project. On October 4, 1887, section hands spiked down the last rails into Glenwood Springs and the next day a twenty car special arrived as the first train into town. Governor Alva Adams, Moffat, Walter Cheeseman, and other dignitaries were greeted by fireworks displays, electric lights, brass bands, shouting crowds, and Glenwood Springs Mayor P. Y. Thomas. At Hotel Glenwood, owner William Geilder, spread a banquet for the company. With dinner completed, a round of speech-making occurred, all in praise of Moffat, Jackson, the workers, the railroad, and whomever else could be congratulated. The festivities drew to a close in the small hours of the morning as the special returned to Denver.<sup>80</sup>

Not wasting time, D&RG crews started for Aspen soon after the Glenwood Springs festivities ended. Proceeding down the Roaring Fork Valley, tracklayers found their job easy compared to Glenwood Canyon. Buying parts of an old toll road near Carbondale to speed their efforts, Rio Grande management succeeded in reaching Aspen by the end of October, 1887. On November 1, the town held a celebration for the victors. Colorado Midland's effort stalled at Hagerman Tunnel, giving the race to the Denver and Rio Grande.<sup>81</sup> Aspen feelings about rail service were eloquently summarized at the celebration dinner in the following toast:

*Then here's to our Aspen, her youth and her age, We welcome the  
railroad, say farewell to the stage, And whatever her lot and wher-  
ever we be; Here's forever God bless the D&RG.*<sup>82</sup>

The railroad did not prove the blessing its Aspen supporters believed it would be. The company charged from \$50 to \$100 a ton for freight between Denver and Aspen.<sup>83</sup> After the Colorado Midland arrived in February 1888, competition forced rates down<sup>84</sup> and as CM tracklayers worked their way through Glenwood Springs and on to New Castle, a rate war ensued. The battle for passengers became so intense that one company offered free passage between Aspen and Glenwood Springs and to retaliate the other line not only offered a no-fare ticket but also paid one's admission to the hot springs pool at Glenwood Springs.<sup>85</sup>

Competitive pressures caused both railroads to look at the Grand Valley and again began a building race west toward Grand Junction. During 1889, a D&RG subsidiary, the Rio Grande and Pacific, extended narrow gauge trackage from Glenwood Springs west to Rifle, Colorado, so as to block the Colorado Midland from further westward construction.<sup>86</sup> Moffat, as president of the narrow gauge, purchased the Roan Creek Toll Road that same year for use as a right-of-way for a railway.<sup>87</sup>

The eighties construction race exhausted both companies' finances and in order to reach Grand Junction they entered into a joint agreement in December 1886, to build only one line. Colorado law would not allow competitors to rent trackage from one another so the Rio Grande Junction Railway was founded with the D&RG and CM as co-equal partners.<sup>88</sup> The Rifle-Grand Junction line was laid down as narrow gauge on standard gauge ties in preparation for conversion of the Denver and Rio Grande from three-foot gauge to standard gauge.<sup>89</sup>

During 1888, Moffat undertook to standard gauge the D&RG's mainline from Denver to Pueblo and then from Pueblo west via Leadville to Rifle. Many factors caused this. CM competition played a part as did the need to easily interchange traffic with railroads that ran east and south out of Denver.<sup>90</sup> Other improvements to the line included a tunnel below Tennessee Pass and the purchase of new equipment.<sup>91</sup> 1890 witnessed the extension of standard gauging west from Rifle to Grand Junction; arriving at the latter community on November 14.<sup>92</sup> Later that year, widening of the rails was completed to Utah and in a joint agreement with the Rio Grande Western the same process occurred to Salt Lake City.<sup>93</sup>

Moffat's tenure as president of the D&RG brought many changes for the railroad. His greatest vision went unfulfilled. During the late 1880s he had surveys made for a line to go directly west from Denver across the Continental Divide near Silver Plume, and then connect with the Grand River line thus shortening the Denver-Salt Lake City route by

150 miles. When Moffat laid his proposal before the Board of Directors in 1891, it was rejected as too expensive. The President then resigned and Edward T. Jeffrey replaced him as the D&RG's chief officer. Jeffrey believed in a policy of minimum expenditure.<sup>94</sup> The year before Hagerman had sold his control of the CM to the Santa Fe Railway because his funds were running dry during the great expansion race of the late 1880s.<sup>95</sup> Fortunately for west-central Colorado, the mainline railroads were finished before these changes in management occurred.

Throughout the 1880s, other companies examined the area looking for routes from Denver westward. Foremost among these was the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy (CB&Q) Railroad. In 1885, three years after reaching Denver, the Burlington announced plans to build a line from South Boulder Canyon into Middle park using a tunnel under James Peak and then go westward, possibly along the Grand River. The next year brought renewed talk of such a line with Burlington placing engineers in the Grand Valley looking at possible routes. However, little else came of this project.<sup>96</sup> Some evidence indicated that the company actually graded part of a route from Elk Creek to Glenwood Springs, but there are limited references to such an effort.<sup>97</sup>

Promoters of the Denver, Utah and Pacific also cast envious eyes on the Grand Valley during the eighties. Denver businessmen organized this road to build a system from Denver west via Rollins Pass to the Grand River or Yampa River and then west to Salt Lake City. Organizers included Horace Tabor and David H. Moffat, Jr. Some grading was done along the front range and near Rollins Pass but by 1887, the DU&P had passed into railroad history.<sup>98</sup>

The mines of the Roaring Fork attracted railroads like flies to sugar. In 1885, David Moffat organized the Denver, Aspen and Grand River Railroad Company to construct a line from the "Queen City" to the new silver camp and beyond to rich coal fields near Carbondale and the Huntsman Hills south of Glenwood Springs and then from there west along the Grand River to Grand Junction. Survey instructions included orders to locate the line near coal seams and mines; the promoters no doubt felt this was a good source of traffic. Surveys were conducted but no rail was ever laid.<sup>99</sup>

In 1899, another syndicate announced plans to build a railroad from Grand Junction west along the Grand River to its juncture with the Green River in Utah and then southwest down the Colorado River Valley to Southern California with a proposed terminus at San Diego. Plans called for a branch line to be built from Grand Junction to New Castle so that

Colorado coal could be marketed in Southern California. That summer survey crews pushed west from Grand Junction, planning a route for the Denver, Colorado Canon and Pacific as the company was named. Problems during the survey, as well as lack of enthusiasm, resulted in the suspension of all operations.<sup>100</sup>

While these grandiose schemes were being hatched, other individuals worked hard building short lines to act as feeders for the D&RG and CM. W. T. Carpenter, an early settler of Grand Junction, filed claims on coal lands north and east of town near the Book Cliffs. He built the Little Book Cliffs Railway in 1890, a line of some 11 miles, to haul coal from his mines to the D&RG at Grand Junction. Throughout the 1890s, Carpenter fought a running battle with the Denver railroad over rate discrimination and lack of cooperation in handling interchange traffic.<sup>101</sup>

The Grand Junction mine operator and railroader was not immune to visions of grandeur so in 1895, he organized the Colorado, Wyoming and Great Northern Railway to connect Grand Junction with the Union Pacific Railroad at Rawlins, Wyoming. Throughout that summer Carpenter tried to raise funds, with some success, but disagreements with investors dissolved the corporation in August 1895, after only small amounts of grading were finished.<sup>102</sup> Four years later, Carpenter sold the Little Book Cliffs Railroad to the Book Cliffs Railway Company that operated the line until 1920. After five years of standing idle, the tracks were torn up in 1925.<sup>103</sup>

Many other builders used the connection of mines with major railroads as the rationale for their dream. Aspen, in particular, enjoyed a multitude of such lines. During the closing years of the 1880s, years noted for the silver mining boom, the Aspen Mountain Railroad Company, the Aspen and Southern Railroad, the Aspen and Ashcroft Railroad, and the Aspen Public Tramway all were organized to run between various mines and either the D&RG or the CM. In 1893, the Aspen and Maroon Railway surveyed a course to Maroon Creek but, as with many of these projects, no track was ever laid.<sup>104</sup>

West of Aspen, in the Roaring Fork Valley, was the Crystal River Valley which offered entrepreneurs more opportunities in railroad building, as the valley formed a natural route south to McClure Pass and easy access to mineral deposits at Coal Basin and on Thompson Creek. The Aspen and Western was the first company to successfully build into the area. Incorporated in 1886, its charter called for a line between Carbondale and the head of Thompson Creek and from there to proceed in a generally western direction, possibly as far as Grand Junction or Utah.<sup>105</sup>

By 1888, tracklayers had placed 13 miles of narrow gauge railway up Thompson Creek to coal mines owned by Colorado Coal and Iron Company. The mines proved not to be great producers and the line closed after only a few years of operation. In 1892, it changed hands as part of John C. Osgood's purchase of Colorado Coal and Iron. Using the Aspen and Western as a base, Osgood founded the Crystal River Railway Company to extend a line south along the Crystal River Valley to Coal Basin as well as other lines to Glenwood Springs, New Castle, Harvey Gap, and Grand Junction.<sup>106</sup> As mentioned earlier, the Panic of 1893 and silver slump forced Osgood to postpone his plans for the Crystal River route.<sup>107</sup>

As the money supply returned toward the end of the nineties, Osgood revitalized his plans including a rail line. In 1898, the Crystal River Railroad Company, formed as a subsidiary of Colorado Fuel and Iron, announced plans to build from Carbondale to Placita by way of Redstone. At Redstone a branch line connected that town with Coal Basin. The route from Carbondale to Placita was standard gauge, however, narrow gauge was used between Redstone and Coal Basin, with dual gauge yards at Redstone. Rails were in place and the road was operational by 1900.<sup>108</sup>

After Osgood lost control of Colorado Fuel and Iron Company in 1903, the railroad changed hands and three years later was re-organized as the Crystal River and San Juan Railway. The new owners, primarily Colorado-Yule Marble Company, extended the line south to Marble. As an auxiliary to the railroad, Colorado-Yule Marble built an electric tramway from town to the quarry. These rail lines remained in more or less continuous operation until 1941.<sup>109</sup> The dawn of the twentieth century witnessed many new rail projects started throughout the district.

In a further effort to increase Aspen's rail service, the Taylor Park Railroad Company was founded in 1901 to connect Gunnison and Aspen. New silver discoveries during 1900 in Taylor Park led to a rush of miners and railroaders. The idea of a railroad into Taylor Park began in 1879, but no action occurred until the twentieth century. Tracklayers laid a few miles of line near Aspen but the deposits played out quickly and four years after organization the company was disbanded.<sup>110</sup>

During the same period, the electric railway's popularity grew throughout the nation. From 1906 to 1910, citizens of towns such as Fruita complained of needing an electrified train or interurban, as they were known. Such lines allowed for low cost operations and proved ideal for brief runs between neighboring towns. The first attempted interurban

in the valley began in 1905 when the Mesa County Traction Company proposed to build from Grand Junction to Colbran and then to the Utah state line. The project failed.<sup>111</sup> In 1908, the Grand Junction Electric Railway Company announced plans to build from Grand Junction northeast to Palisade and northwest to Fruita. The next year the company reorganized as the Grand Junction and Grand River Railway. By July 1910, cars were running over the lines to Fruita and Palisade.<sup>112</sup> At approximately the same time, other financiers set up the Grand River Valley Electric Railway, commonly referred to as the "Fruit Belt." In 1909, this company succeeded in building a line from Grand Junction to Fruita and operated until 1935.<sup>113</sup>

As the interurban craze swept the nation, coincidental to the Good Roads Movement, demand for road paving material increased sharply. To help satisfy a need, roads began to use asphalt, of which gilsonite constituted a basic ingredient. First discovered in 1884 in Utah by Samuel Gilson, commercial mines did not open until the late eighties.<sup>114</sup> Development of the mines depended on cheap and fast transportation because wagons were too slow and costly.<sup>115</sup>

The problem was solved when William N. Vaile and his associates, on behalf of the General Asphalt Company, earlier known as the Barber Asphalt Co., incorporated the Uintah Railway on November 4, 1903.<sup>116</sup> The road was planned to run from Mack, Colorado, on the Denver and Rio Grande north-northwest along West Salt and Evacuation Creeks to Utah and the Dragon Gilsonite fields. Built as a narrow gauge railroad, it had the distinction of being one of the last such railways built in the United States.<sup>117</sup> C. O. Baxter, for whom Baxter Pass was named, planned the route to haul gilsonite and it included some of the heaviest grades and sharpest curves of any rail line in North America.<sup>118</sup>

Construction took two years. During 1905 the line opened for business. Mack, Colorado, built solely for the railroad, became a shipping center where crews transferred gilsonite from narrow gauge to standard gauge cars. The Uintah Railway hotel and general headquarters were also located there. All this rail activity stimulated business activity in neighboring communities, especially Fruita. Eventually this town became the site of a large gilsonite refinery.<sup>119</sup>

From Mack to the crest of Baxter Pass the Uintah encountered all varieties of terrain, especially the difficulties in climbing atop the Roan Cliffs from the Grand Valley, some 3,900 feet below. Parts of the route between Atchee and Baxter Pass had almost 6



The Uintah Railway provided the only north-south connections from Grand Junction and served northeastern Utah until the late 1930s.  
*Photo by Museum of Western Colorado*

miles of 7.5 percent grade. In 1924, the Interstate Commerce Commission said the Uintah had some of the most difficult railroading in the United States.<sup>120</sup>

To alleviate operating expenses, Uintah planners decided to open their own coal mines as a supply of fuel. Seams were found along the route and mines started to operate at Carbonera, Colorado. The town, located 20 miles north of Mack, in Garfield County, remained small and was used only by the railroad.<sup>121</sup>

To keep their equipment running, the company established locomotive shops and a car repair facility at Atchee, Colorado, another town built by the Uintah. Located in Y-shaped canyon, Atchee, named after a Ute chief, also served as a locomotive changing point because the engines that brought trains to and from Mack could not negotiate the grades and curves west of Atchee. At its height, the town housed over 100 people, but being so closely tied with the railroad its fortunes matched those of the Uintah. When slurry pipelines replaced the railway in 1938, and it ceased to exist, so did the town.<sup>122</sup>

Uintah management, in 1911, determined to extend the line from Dragon, Utah, to Watson, Utah. Contemporary rumors in Grand Junction and Fruita contended that once the extension was completed, there was a serious plan by A. E. Carlton, Cripple Creek magnate, to connect the Midland with the Uintah by using his Grand River Valley Railway (an interurban) to form the final link. Citizens of Vernal, Utah also talked of the possibility of Uintah rails reaching their town. Most of this proved to be wishful thinking. The Gilsonite Road did build from Dragon to Watson (Rainbow mine) but that was as far west as it ever got.<sup>123</sup>

To provide points such as Vernal or Rangely, Colorado transportation, the rail company established the Uintah Toll Road Company as well as a freight wagon and stage service. This was cheaper than building more track and served the region's needs adequately by acting as a feeder to the rail line.<sup>124</sup>

The Uintah eloquently testified to the problems faced by rail companies throughout west-central Colorado. While the 7.5 percent grades of Baxter Pass were unusually heavy, the terrain presented problems for all railroads, especially trying to find useable passes. Often when a route could not be found one had to be created by blasting tunnels through the mountains. Both the Denver and Rio Grande and the Colorado Midland bored under the Continental Divide at great expense.<sup>125</sup> Because river valleys offered the course of least resistance, and haste was the builder's watchword, often the tracks were laid too near streams and washed out during heavy rains or in spring run-offs.<sup>126</sup>

As if natural problems were not enough, the carriers soon found themselves besieged by angry patrons. Every town and nearly every person wanted railroads but once service was established, the steam cars proved not to be the panacea envisioned. When the D&RG first arrived at Grand Junction the entire town, including a Chinese laundryman, felt that a new day had dawned and prosperity assured.<sup>127</sup> Within ten years, many of these same Grand Junctionites complained of unfair rates, discrimination among shippers, and generally viewed the railroads as the source of their economic woes. The carriers were guilty of some misdeeds such as charging the same to haul goods from Denver to Salt Lake City as Denver to Grand Junction. However, this was due in large part to the competitive nature of Salt Lake City's market in comparison to Grand Junction's. Nevertheless public outcry did reach the state legislature which soon investigated rate structures. This exposure forced the D&RG to lower its Grand Junction tariffs during the early twentieth century.<sup>128</sup>

The new century brought change to west-central Colorado's railroads. Old routes were modernized and operations were abandoned while one new mainline made its presence felt.

The Denver and Rio Grande came under the control of George Gould, rail entrepreneur and the son of Jay Gould. George Gould, in 1900, set out to create a coast-to-coast rail network. To do so he bought control of the Denver and Rio Grande Western in 1901. As part of Gould's improvements, the branchline from Montrose to Grand Junction was converted to standard gauge. The D&RG and RGW merged informally into the Denver and Rio Grande Western but due to financial distress the union was not completed. Gould's building of the Western Pacific Railroad from Salt Lake City to California drained his wealth and the Colorado companies went into receivership. A reorganization committee, without Gould, completed its work and in 1920, and the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railway Company emerged financially stronger than before.<sup>129</sup>

The area's other major railroad, the Midland, unable to profitably compete, went out of business by 1920. As mentioned, A. E. Carlton owned the Midland during the early twentieth century. He hoped to operate it efficiently, but even with the added business of World War I the company operated in the red. In 1918, the Interstate Commerce Commission held abandonment hearings and granted permission for cessation of business despite protest all over west-central Colorado. The next year, tracks were taken up and the roadbed converted for auto use, parts of which near Basalt are still used.<sup>130</sup>

In 1902, while the D&RG and Midland faced hard times, a new mainline road announced plans to build from Denver to Salt Lake City. David H. Moffat, Denver promoter since 1860, backed this new line, called the Denver, Northwestern and Pacific. Moffat had long sought a direct east-west transmontane railroad for Denver and, in frustration, finally determined to build such a line himself. DNW&P engineers laid out a route from Denver into South Boulder Canyon over Rollins Pass down to Middle Park and then north up the Yampa River to Steamboat Springs, west to Craig and then on to Salt Lake City. The road only slightly touched the northeast corner of west-central Colorado, and pushed the tracks over Rollins Pass and well into Gore Canyon. With help from other Denver financiers, the road reached Steamboat Springs in 1908, while new financial arrangements were made.

The Moffat Road, as the DNW&P was called, planned to tunnel under the Continental Divide at James Peak and open a new route to Salt Lake City that would by-pass Glenwood Springs and Grand Junction. This worried the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce because such a route would cost them trade and threaten their position as "capital" of the Western Slope. However, DNW&P passed within 35 miles of the D&RG mainline at Dotsero, making the possibility of a connection feasible. West-central Coloradans felt such a link would improve their rail service and protect their position *vis a vis* the rest of the state. David Moffat died in 1911, and two years later the road stalled at Craig. By 1920, the hopes and fears the line brought remained dead.<sup>131</sup>

West-central Colorado's transportation network rapidly expanded from 1880 to 1900. The region was well serviced by wagon roads and railways operating in a complementary manner. Mining attracted some of the commerceways, while others crossed the area in search of other riches. Nevertheless, the existence of these highways and railroads stimulated all types of economic activity in the region.

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## CHAPTER VI. THE STOCKMEN'S FRONTIER, 1880-1920

"The cow-puncher's play-ground in those first glorious days of his prosperity included battle and murder and sudden death as every-day matter."

*—Owen Wister*

Mining and transportation allowed west-central Colorado to be made available for general settlement. However, cattlemen and farmers peopled the land. The former two remained compact enclaves of Anglo-American culture and civilization while the latter two spread across accessible portions of the region hoping to build their fortunes from nature's bounty. The cowboy gave America its first unique folkhero with his peculiar garb and the romance of his free existence. The cattleman's frontier in the region contained the elements of hardship and adventure associated with the "Wild and Woolly West."

During the late nineteenth century the cattle industry was based on three factors. First, the vast amounts of federal land, the public domain, offered free natural pasturage for livestock. Furthermore, national land policy, particularly the Homestead Act of 1862 that provided for title after five years of settlement and payment of patent fees, allowed cattlemen to build home ranches from which to operate. Often stockmen located their homesteads around water holes or along creeks in an attempt to secure and monopolize adequate supplies.<sup>1</sup>

Water, or lack thereof, constituted the second controlling influence for cattle raising as for all western agriculture. Cattle needed water to survive, but, moreover, as haying became a prevalent source of winter feed, water was also necessary to grow it. If the land was not well watered naturally, as most of west-central Colorado was not, man had to artificially supply the fields through irrigation. Irrigation became prevalent through much of the region, especially in the major river valleys.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, western grasses proved nutritious for stock. The first Anglo-Americans to cross the Rocky Mountain west felt the natural grama grasses to be worthless because of their dry, brown appearance in comparison to the bright green turf of the East or Midwest. Discovery of the grama's true nutritional value came about by accident during the 1840s when settlers bound for Oregon freed some lame oxen on the plains. Assuming the animals would die the voyagers were surprised to find the stock healthy and fat the next spring having survived the winter on natural food supply.<sup>3</sup>

Hayden's 1876 survey reports recorded available pastures on the Roan Plateau and elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> but some cattlemen knew west-central Colorado's potential long before the reports were published. Ranchers such as Steamboat Springs founder, James H. Crawford, used Burn's Hole, near McCoy, as early as 1879, despite a Ute presence, because it offered safe winter range.<sup>5</sup> Further west, cattle grazed in the Sinbad Valley-La Sal Mountain-Gateway area. Occasionally violence broke out between the Utes and Anglo-American drovers probably because the Native-Americans still held title to the land. The herds came in from Utah while looking for new pastures.<sup>6</sup>

Patterns of range use established in these early years remained the same until well into the twentieth century. The necessity of maintaining separate summer and winter ranges, discovered when the first herds were taken into the high country, remained common throughout west-central Colorado. During the summer months, while alpine meadows were lush, cowboys drove the cows into these ranges. With the coming of fall, herds returned to the warmer, sheltered valleys to spend the winter. This practice not only protected the stock but also allowed the grasses to regain their vigor. Furthermore, the need for transfers from summer and winter range led to the construction of stock trails throughout the region and as discussed earlier a number of these paths served as basis for later roadbuilding.<sup>7</sup>

The second pattern of range utilization began in the 1870s. Ranchers used both Colorado and Utah lands as they sought the best pastures regardless of state boundaries. The Grand Valley, west of Grand Junction and the Unaweep Canyon area, in particular, experienced herd movements back and forth across the border. This fluidity not only made round-ups and the registration of brands difficult it occasionally offered jurisdictional protection for those who appropriated "unclaimed" cattle on either side of the line.<sup>8</sup>

Cattlemen, knowing the potential of the area, were among those impatiently awaiting opening of the Ute Reservation in 1881. The topography and climate, as explained by Hayden, was considered ideal. The Grand Valley, and other areas, provided natural winter range, protected from the harsh weather of the cold months as well as being adequately supplied with water and forage. The surrounding mountains and plateaus offered lush meadows for summer pasture despite some access difficulties.<sup>9</sup> It is small wonder that many of the first permanent settlers, especially in the Grand Valley, were stockmen.

The open range cattle industry in the United States boomed from the late 1860s through the the late eighties and coincided with the settlement of west-central Colorado. The “beef bonanza” success stories of the period portrayed cattle raising on the open range as an easy route to wealth.

The propagandists based their arguments on free use of the public domain to raise a Texas calf or cow costing \$4 and after two or three years of grazing the animal was worth \$40 to \$50 at market. As long as the demand for beef remained unsatisfied and grass was available there were no limits to the riches for cattlemen. This dream of wealth was already realized in Colorado’s eastern plains by such men as John Wesley Iliff, and it motivated many to head for the western slope.<sup>10</sup>

Free grass was the natural resource cattlemen used during the years of the “beef bonanza.” As stated, unclaimed federal lands were utilized by the cattlemen throughout west-central Colorado. In addition to the Homestead Act of 1862 and other laws such as the Ute Reservation Law of 1882, Congress during the 1870s, passed two other bills that aided cattlemen in their goals. The first, The Timber Culture Act of 1873 allowed a settler to claim an additional 160 acres if he planted and maintained forty acres of trees for 10 years. Later the requirements were relaxed by decreasing the number of acres of trees. The theory behind the act was that existence of timber upset the atmosphere and thereby increased rainfall.<sup>11</sup> While such theories proved not to be the case, the law did allow settlers to double the size of their holdings.

Four years later Congress, in a further attempt to encourage settlement in the arid west, passed the Desert Land Act. This law allowed a person to claim an additional 640 acres (1 section) by paying fees of 25 cents an acre. Claimholders then had three years to irrigate the land. If they did so and found a witness to testify to that fact, they could buy the property for an additional \$1.00 an acre.<sup>12</sup> These two laws had many loopholes and could easily be circumvented.

Cattlemen arrived in the region after the statutes were passed and soon were using and abusing the laws to their advantage. Early area stockgrowers, attracted by land and liberal federal land policies, set about immediately to cash in on the “beef bonanza,” and in so doing, did not worry about “bending” the law. After homesteading or pre-empting homesites, ranchers informally took up other areas. As usable lands filled and

competition for that which remained grew more intense, stockgrowers in the area started filing claims under the Timber Culture Act and Desert Land Act so as to obtain control of choice pastures or waterholes. In doing this, a cattleman could often control thousands of acres of surrounding public domain.<sup>13</sup> To “satisfy” requirements of these laws, area cattlemen used many ruses. A favorite was dumping a barrel of water on the land and calling it “irrigated” in order to satisfy Desert Land Act stipulations. Another trick was to “build” an irrigation ditch by dragging a pointed stick or plow behind a horse and rider.<sup>14</sup> The General Land Office (GLO) realized problems were created by the various laws and subsequently the stockgrowers’ use of the range.<sup>15</sup> However, changes were not



Cattle ranching was important to western Colorado and one of the annual events was cattle branding. *Photo by Museum of Western Colorado*

made until the 1890s.

In addition to these land frauds many cattlemen, determined to secure choice areas, simply fenced portions of the public domain. Barbed wire was first introduced in Colorado during 1878, by John W. Powers and its use spread with the herds into western Colorado.<sup>16</sup> From 1881 until 1884, herd size remained small, but by the later year large droves poured into the area and the demand for fencing increased.<sup>17</sup> These barricades often led to violence between rival cattlemen, with one cutting the other's fence. Congress, aware of these problems, started an investigation in 1884. The next year United States Interior Department officials became alarmed by the closing of public lands with barbed wire in Colorado and on August 7, 1885, President Grover Cleveland ordered all fences on public lands removed.<sup>18</sup> While the order was promulgated in 1885, as late as 1887 or 1888 and even into the 1890s, many federal lands remained fenced.<sup>19</sup>

During the 1890s, area ranchers contrived yet another method of using federal land without owning it. During the decade, cattlemen in the Gateway and Glade Park regions filed placer mining claims on many tracts to expand their grazing lands. At the same time, a few actually worked the claims in an attempt to augment their income during the Panic of 1893.<sup>20</sup> In 1901, the General Land Office introduced a system of grazing permits that removed many of these abuses.<sup>21</sup> The battle over control and management of the public domain will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

The stockmen of west-central Colorado during the late nineteenth century were typical of their counterparts throughout the west. Clad in boots with pointed toes, and high heels, chaps, a revolver slung on the hip, a bandana and wide brimmed hat, these intrepid young men came from many walks of life. Some were sons of midwestern farmers out to make it on their own, others were drifters needing a job and a few were men looking for a new start. Occasionally they were men who had problems with the law.<sup>23</sup> After construction of the Teller Institute in Grand Junction many ranchers in the vicinity hired Ute boys to tend the herds.<sup>24</sup>

The early herders drove cattle overland to reach summer and winter ranges and more importantly to and from the market place. While west-central Colorado never witnessed the long drives famous on the Great Plains, there were still occasional movements from Texas into the region, particularly when area ranching was in its infancy. Texas Longhorns served as the basis for many herds during the 1880s.<sup>25</sup> In 1883, Charles Sieber brought 8,000 head into Glade Park from Texas.<sup>26</sup> In addition to these

long drives, West Slope cattle went great distances overland to markets in Wyoming and the Dakotas before railroads arrived to transport them.<sup>27</sup> Cattle raised in eastern sections of the region, such as the Eagle Valley, or around Glenwood Springs, and then marketed at Leadville also moved by hoof until the advent of rail service and in some cases long afterward.<sup>28</sup> Mining camp markets offered considerable potential and miners disgruntled by a lack of success took up ranching as a livelihood.<sup>29</sup>

Rail service encouraged stock growers but did not eliminate the need for overland movements to the railheads. This facet of open range lasted well into the twentieth century. During the 1890s, Rifle became the largest volume livestock shipping point in Colorado. In 1904, over 22,000 head of cattle and 1,000 horses were put on rail cars at Rifle.<sup>30</sup> By 1899, Wolcott, another rail shipping location, loaded out an average of \$700,000 worth of cattle annually.<sup>31</sup>

Before stock could be marketed from open ranges it had to be gathered in one location. Traditionally rounds-up were held to accomplish this and throughout west-central Colorado, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such bi-annual operations were undertaken each spring and fall. Spring roundups were particularly important because they allowed cattlemen to identify and brand new born calves as well as account for winter kill before transferring the herds to summer pastures.<sup>32</sup> Occasionally the process of branding mavericks, unclaimed calves, and other cows led to disputes. In at least one case, the end result was the death of two Glade Park cattlemen.<sup>33</sup>

The early 1880s witnessed a boom in open range stock raising. However, this beef bonanza was short-lived. Severe winters and overgrazing depressed the beef markets during 1886 and 1887 and caused many stockmen to re-evaluate their methods.<sup>34</sup> A shift away from open range grazing started. As operations grew and market conditions demanded higher quality beef, ranchers began the process of herd up-grading by introducing blooded breeding animals.<sup>35</sup>

Ranchers took many steps to safeguard their new stock, as well as fencing the public domain and misusing land laws to increase their holdings.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, to protect Colorado cattle from deadly Texas Fever, the state legislature enacted strict quarantine laws.<sup>37</sup> Also cattlemen's associations were formed to enforce range divisions and the quarantine rules. Among the first on the Western Slope was the Grand River Cattleman's Association organized by Frank Squires for settlers in the Rifle-Glenwood

area.<sup>38</sup>

During the late 1880s, while these changes took place, ranching spread to new areas within west-central Colorado. The Gypsum Valley, Silt, Parachute Creek, Plateau Valley, and the Grand Valley (west of Fruita) all experienced settling by ranchers.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, large cattle companies entered the region. The Reefer and Nuckolls Cattle Company moved to Red Cliff with over 10,000 head of stock.<sup>40</sup> Further west at New Castle the Farnum Brothers, with financing from mining magnate Horace Tabor, set up and then expanded their operations.<sup>41</sup>

These large spreads required dependable sources of winter feed and haying became another use of the public domain. From the Roaring Fork and Eagle Vallies to Battlement Mesa mowing crews cut and stacked grass each summer. Competition for winter feed also occasionally led to gunplay and death.<sup>42</sup>

As a natural auxiliary to cattle ranching, many stockmen also started raising horses commercially. A few cattlemen gave up cattle entirely for horse rearing. In 1885, Tom Wallace set himself up as a horse rancher at Una, Colorado, simply to meet the cowboy's need for animals.<sup>43</sup> At about the same time, George Swigert started the same type of operation at Satank to raise draft animals.<sup>44</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, horse ranches dotted all west-central Colorado while many cattlemen raised horses to supply their needs as well as for sale because horse and cattle could share the same range.<sup>45</sup>

West-central Colorado horse raisers used traditional elements of the business. Foremost among these was taming of the horses that had spent a summer running loose on the range.<sup>46</sup> This use of the open range and incomplete round ups led to creation of the area's wild horse herds of today. This process, more commonly known as bronco busting or breaking, required men with particular talents, as many a bragging cowboy rudely found out when he landed unceremoniously on the ground after a short ride. The professional "bronco busters" travelled to ranches around the area like migrants.<sup>47</sup> If natural reproduction did not enlarge the herd to satisfactory levels, cowboys, especially in the extreme western areas, occasionally raided the Uintah Ute Reservation to increase their herd's numbers.<sup>48</sup>

The small cattlemen's apex passed quickly as a result of Federal land policy changes and a competition for land. The Panic of 1893 also put many out of business.<sup>49</sup>

Large operations remained viable and expanded at the end of the century, but many of the region's minor ranchers sold out or reduced the size of their herds and took up farming much the same way as others had taken up horse raising.<sup>50</sup> This process worked both ways, especially in dry farming areas such as Glade Park, and continued well into the twentieth century.<sup>51</sup>

At least one area stockman responded to the era's changes philosophically. Frank Benton, Burn's Hole rancher, began authoring a column "The Philosophical Cowman" for the *Denver Record-Stockman* around the turn of the century. Somewhat like a western "Poor Richard" he attempted to analyze problems of the day, such as federal forests.<sup>52</sup>

Other area cattlemen chose more direct approaches to protecting their lifestyle by opposing the entrance of sheep and "sod-busters" into the region.<sup>53</sup>

The hills and mesas around the area furnished good summer range for sheep as well as cattle and, because of this, many sheepmen cast envious eyes on those lands.<sup>54</sup> Woolies first crossed west-central Colorado in 1872, at about the same time as cattle entered the territory. The sheep were being driven overland from California and Oregon to New Mexico.<sup>55</sup> This was part of a mass exodus from the Pacific Coast due to droughts.<sup>56</sup> There is no record that any of these sheep stayed permanently in western Colorado.

The first sheep growers into the region came with the initial wave of agrarian settlement in 1881 and 1882. Many stockmen raised both cattle and sheep during the early 1880s, but as time passed they specialized in raising either one animal or the other.<sup>57</sup>

Sheepmen duplicated patterns of range usage established by cattlemen. In particular, the system of drifting between Utah and Colorado was repeated and the pattern became even more pronounced with sheepherders. This continued into the twentieth century.<sup>58</sup> Sheepmen also followed the summer range-winter range patterns, especially those who settled further east in the area.<sup>59</sup>

Sheep raising presented new problems. In addition to their market value as meat, the animals produced an annual crop of wool. However, securing labor to shear the lambs and tend the flocks was difficult. Anglo-American workers during the nineteenth century, at least in the West, felt sheepherding was demeaning, especially when compared to the highly romanticized life of a cowboy. Woolgrowers found the solution by hiring

Mexican-Americans or Mexican nationals to tend the flocks. By the 1890s these people had arrived at Fruita and soon their reputation as reliable shepherds spread throughout west-central Colorado.<sup>60</sup>

To augment the supply of Mexican workers, large sheep companies, particularly in eastern Utah, recruited Basques. These people, natives of Spain, had centuries of experience tending flocks in the harsh dry climates of their native land. By 1910, Basques were present in the western parts of Colorado shepherding their charges back and forth with the seasons from Utah.<sup>61</sup> These people became a key element in the success of woolgrowing in the area in the twentieth century and have continued to make contributions to many local communities.

While sheep were well adapted to the environment of west-central Colorado and a number of people took up sheep raising as a livelihood, they did not realize the early prosperity enjoyed by area cattlemen. Rather, they met stiff, often violent, resistance from beef producers because popular thinking at the time maintained that sheep ruined the range. Allegedly the woolies ate the grass down close to its roots, thereby killing it. Other legends claimed that sheep left odors that repelled cattle and that sheep fouled the water.<sup>62</sup> Credence was given to these findings when the Federal government refused to allow sheep grazing on federal Forest Reserves and Parks about 1900,<sup>63</sup> after impassioned arguments for such a ban.<sup>64</sup> Competition for the finite supply of grazable land probably played a greater role in the sheep-cattle hatred than any of the other allegations.<sup>65</sup>

These natural antagonisms flared into violence almost as soon as both sides arrived. In 1884, the Western Stockgrower's Association was formed by cattlemen around Grand Junction to stop the encroachment of sheep.<sup>66</sup> Two years later, on the road from Whitewater to Delta, a flock of sheep and their shepherd died at the hands of cowboys. Reports ranged as high as 300 woolies killed.<sup>67</sup> This started a period of sporadic open warfare between sheepmen and cattlemen that lasted well into the twentieth century.

In 1888, stockmen along the White River threatened death to any Utah sheepman who dared venture across the Green River into Colorado.<sup>68</sup> Two years later when Ed Horton, a woolgrower, tried to settle on part of Grand Mesa's cattle range, stockgrowers drove him out at gunpoint.<sup>69</sup>

The violence continued throughout the decade primarily in the form of the cattlemen's aggressions against sheep growers. In 1892, the greatest slaughter of woolies to

date took place when 800 sheep were killed by gunmen in the Plateau Valley. They also ran off the shepherds. Ranchers enjoyed status as local residents, familiar with the terrain and people, while the sheepmen usually were outsiders from Utah.<sup>70</sup> The events shook the region but proved only a minor event as the years passed.

On Peach Day of 1894, September 10, while most Parachute, Colorado, citizens were in Grand Junction celebrating, 50 hired gunslingers attacked sheep flocks pasturing in the Roan Cliffs above Parachute Creek. A Mr. Starkey, Charlie Brown, and Luther Hurlburt lost around 4,000 head of sheep. Masked riders rimrocked (drove over the cliffs) most of the woolies. Only one shepherd suffered injury and the perpetrators, who were paid \$100 each plus expenses, were never identified or brought to justice.<sup>71</sup> This episode convinced Hurlburt to sell his flock and take up farming.<sup>72</sup> The entire state was outraged by the events on Parachute Creek and demanded some kind of official action. The state legislature replied with passage of the Rees-Oldman Act, which divided the Roan Plateau ranges between cattle and sheep.<sup>73</sup>

Shock over the Peach Day Massacre led to a period of relative calm until the early twentieth century. In 1903, cattlemen renewed their attacks by driving 100 head of sheep over the edge of Pinon Mesa.<sup>74</sup> Two years passed before violence flared again near Fruita. About 300 sheep died near Dry Ridge at the hands of cowboys.<sup>75</sup> That same year other beef producers from Glade Park tried to raise \$1,500 as a bounty for the killing of a local sheepman. The plan failed when only \$1,000 was raised.<sup>76</sup> In 1907, four cattle-growers were convicted of the murder of Peter Swenson, a lamb raiser.<sup>77</sup>

From 1908 until 1915, the feud centered itself in Glade Park. Cattlemen continually harrassed the flocks and shepherds. The last major violence occurred in 1915, when Mrs. Nancy Irwing's herd of Angora goats was driven off the edge of No-Thoroughfare Canyon. A Mexican herder was killed and Mrs. Irwing's cabins were set afire.<sup>78</sup>

The people who possibly suffered most from the range wars were not the sheepmen but their Mexican and Basque herders who faced the cattlemen's guns and continued racial prejudice.<sup>79</sup> These feelings were reinforced in the 1930s when local Fruita folk-hero Charlie Glass, a black cowboy who had been in the region since 1917, was killed by Basques. This murder was in revenge for Glass's shooting of Basque sheep herder Felix Jesui in 1921.<sup>80</sup>

Illegal activities in the area were not limited to conflicts between cattlemen and sheepmen but also included stock rustling, bank and train robbery, murder, and all

varieties of lawlessness traditionally associated with the "Wild West." Livestock stealing, however, proved to be the greatest single problem throughout the region. Many years after the frontier's passing, these activities inspired a novel, entitled *Grand Mesa* about local rustling.<sup>81</sup>

Stock thieving started before settlers reached the Grand Valley. In 1879, George Howard and his gang took up rustling as a livelihood. They stole cattle from eastern Utah ranchers and used western Colorado, especially the Unaweep-Gateway area, as a hideout before moving the stock to the San Juans and elsewhere for sale. Their career only lasted two years. Gunnison, Colorado's Sheriff Bowman, and Marshall Allison tracked the outlaws to Monroe's Ranch outside of Grand Junction and in the shoot-out that followed, the highwaymen died.<sup>82</sup> Working as members of organized groups became the prevalent *modus operandi* for rustlers throughout west-central Colorado well into the twentieth century.<sup>83</sup>

Once the Ute Reservation was opened and settlers poured into the region, rustling became the greatest problem faced by lawmen. By 1882, bands of marauders infested much of the Grand Junction vicinity. In addition to stealing livestock, the bandits broke into stores and terrorized the citizenry. Lawmen worked hard to control the situation, attempting to break up the gangs by killing their leaders.<sup>84</sup>

The situation has not improved by the next year. The law and the citizens took matters into their own hands. George Lewis, described as an Afro-American desperado, threatened Marshall Crowley's life after an evening of drinking. The Marshall shot and killed the Negro and was acquitted on a plea of self defense.<sup>85</sup> Local citizens, while pleased with Marshall Crowley, felt he should be given a helping hand. They hired a night watchman, a Mr. Ham, to guard the herds, especially from three "Mexican" horse thieves known to be in the area.<sup>86</sup>

As more stockgrowers moved into west-central Colorado, so did more men to steal their cattle. The Brock Gang operated around Fruita<sup>87</sup> while the Johnson boys pilfered Roaring Fork ranches.<sup>88</sup> However, courts were established and now penalties were meted out by judge and jury, not Colt revolvers. But only if the desperados were arrested. As a mark of "civilization" a Grand Junction jury in 1885, sent two horse thieves to the state penitentiary for seven years rather than the old custom, the gallows.<sup>89</sup>

Occasionally residents, dissatisfied with the legal process, still took matters into their own hands. Thieves taking advantage of the Ute scare of 1886, attacked ranches along Rifle and Government Creeks and as far north as Meeker. In October 1887, local residents formed a Vigilance Committee and "took care" of the problem by hanging any rustler they caught.<sup>90</sup> The cattlemen's associations, formed to protect the range from sheep, also offered rewards and hired detectives to discourage rustling.<sup>91</sup>

These efforts did not stop the criminal activities but did slow the rate of loss. During the 1890s, rustlers continued to operate in areas near the Utah State line for easy escape. Horse-thief Valley, west of Fruita, became a collection point for stolen stock until enough was gathered to drive to Utah.<sup>92</sup> Areas such as Parachute Creek also were plagued by stock stealing and this remained the area's largest criminal activity as recently as 1970.<sup>93</sup> Glade Park ranchers, during the early years of this century, constantly found their herds pilfered by John Dalley who divided his time between rustling and train robbing.<sup>94</sup>

Many stock thieves came to west-central Colorado because of the advantages it offered. Being the most settled Western Slope region, the area offered good pickings. Also, nature gave the area many isolated locations perfect for hideouts. The Sinbad Valley, with only one entrance and walls 1,400 to 1,600 feet high, was one of these nearly perfect getaway places, except for the natural salt deposits which were used by animals and men.<sup>95</sup> The La Sal Mountains became another popular way station on the robber's route to Utah.<sup>96</sup>

The most famous group of outlaws to utilize these hideouts was the McCarty Gang. Led by two brothers Tom and Bill, the gang robbed banks throughout western Colorado during the 1880s and 1890s. The brothers, originally from Tennessee, headed west after Civil War and established a ranch in Eastern Utah on the south side of the La Sal Mountains.<sup>97</sup> They started their life of crime by trafficking in stolen horses.<sup>98</sup> The San Juan silver boom of the 1880s and the resultant bulging bank vaults of camps such as Silverton or Telluride, convinced them to take up bank robbing. On June 24, 1889, Tom McCarty, Matt Warner, and LeRoy Parker, better known as Butch Cassidy, held up a bank in Telluride and fled toward the Sinbad Valley with \$4,000 in loot. Because of pressures from local law enforcement officers Tom McCarty and Warner decided to head for the Pacific Northwest.<sup>99</sup> Tom and Bill McCarty, along with Bill's son, Fred, and Warner left for Washington state where they laid low until 1892. That year the band robbed a bank in Roslyn, Washington, taking \$30,000. Warner fell into the hands of the law and the three McCarty's returned to Utah.<sup>100</sup>

Once back in the area, their money ran low and the urge to pull yet another hold-up gripped the trio, especially Fred, the youngest of the gang. They considered a repeat performance at Telluride but telephones and telegraphs made bank robbing and subsequent escape a risky business, especially from Telluride. So through the summer of 1893, Tom and Bill examined other possibilities, such as some of the farming towns of southwestern Colorado. They chose the Farmers and Merchants Bank of Delta as a target. The two brothers felt they should wait but Fred, 25 years younger, chided them as old men and they agreed to go ahead with "the job."<sup>101</sup>

On September 7, 1893, the trio rode into Delta. Two entered the bank while the third held the horses and covered the street. With loot in hand, the three mounted their horses to make their getaway, but the alarm was sounded. As the highwaymen rode down the street, out of town, Ray Simpson an expert marksman fired at them, his Sharps rifle killed Fred and Bill. Tom made a successful getaway. He buried the loot along Tabogauche Creek before heading to Grand Junction and safety. A \$1,000 reward was offered for Tom dead or alive, but it was never collected.<sup>102</sup>

Stagecoaches and trains offered highwaymen many of the same attractions--namely money--that banks did and during the period from 1880 to 1920, west-central Colorado experienced a number of such robberies. The first occurred outside Aspen in 1882, when two masked men held up a stagecoach and made their escape. They were later arrested in Decatur, Texas, and returned to Colorado for trial.<sup>103</sup> Other stages were robbed but railroads proved more lucrative for bandits. The infamous Wild Bunch, notorious train robbers, tempted by gold shipments on the Denver and Rio Grande, stopped an express train about five miles southeast of Grand Junction on November 3, 1887. They found only 23 letters and no cash or bullion so the gang made their getaway.<sup>104</sup>

The most dramatic train robbery in the region did not occur until 1904. Three outlaws commandeered a Denver and Rio Grande express train at Parachute, Colorado, and had it taken about three miles west of town to Streit Flats. Once there, the crew returned to Parachute as the desperados made their escape across Holmes and Battlement Mesas to Divide Creek. At that point they encountered a posse from Grand Junction and one bandit, Harvey Logan, was killed. The remaining two fled on foot to Hole-in-the-Wall, Wyoming.<sup>105</sup>

John Dalley continued a life of crime, holding up trains, until World War I. He used Glade Park and other isolated parts of extreme western Colorado as his hideouts

between jobs.<sup>106</sup> However, Dalley's career marked the end of an era for the region.

Notably Garfield County did not experience the degree of lawlessness the rest of west-central Colorado did, especially in the Glenwood Springs vicinity. Possibly this was because of the resort quality of that town. In fact some of the Wild West's most notorious criminals passed through Glenwood Springs, but as tourists not on "business". Tom Horn, killer of over 20 men and who eventually died on a Wyoming gallows, liked to vacation at the Springs and take advantage of the healing waters. Doc Holliday, a dentist and companion of the Earp Brothers, came to the spa in an attempt to recover from tuberculosis. He died in Glenwood Springs and was buried above town.<sup>107</sup> Lawlessness in Garfield County during the period from 1880 to 1920, tended to lean more to riots than robberies.

Rifle, as a cattle shipping town, often experienced scenes normally associated with Dodge City or Abilene, Kansas, when the drovers hit the bars on Saturday night. Cowboys after weeks or months on the range or trail were ready for a good time when the drive was completed. Saloons did a booming business and as the liquor flowed, the celebrants became more boisterous. Occasionally shootings and brawling took place and men with exotic names such as the "Texas Kid" killed each other in these disturbances. Much of this type of behavior continued until 1920, when national prohibition closed down all public drinking establishments.<sup>108</sup>

The years from 1910 to 1920, witnessed many changes in west-central Colorado's stockgrowing industry. Meat demand during World War I led to greater production of both cattle and sheep. The violence of the frontier diminished. Reluctance to cooperate with Federal policies concerning grazing land had all but disappeared while the supply of available range land decreased.<sup>109</sup> Overgrazing, especially during the war, became a problem and, as a result, the trend toward individuals being both ranchers and farmers accelerated.<sup>110</sup> By 1920, the stockman's frontier had passed and it became just one more source of livelihood among many others, such as farming, in the region.

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## CHAPTER VII. WEST-CENTRAL COLORADO FARMING 1880-1920

"The year following our first planting on the mesa was fated to be one of the dryest on record. The canal stopped two miles above us and we died--slowly; keeping up the fight to the last."

*-Mary Hallock Foote*

In 1881, when the United States Army opened the Ute Reservation for settlement by Anglo-Americans, many of those who rushed in were searching for land to farm. The agrarians had read Professor Hayden's reports and heard about Meeker's experiments on the White River. They knew that with hard work, the valleys could bloom. Over the years these people struggled against drought, pestilence, and other hardships to carve out lives for themselves. These sodbusters, in many ways, were the real heroes in the settlement of west-central Colorado. They came as families to build permanent homes throughout the region's valleys. Their numbers were such that they peopled all arable land. Because many came as members of family units, they brought "civilizing" forces with them, demanding schools, churches, towns, and many other things not sought by cattlemen or prospectors.

Vast quantities of cheap land attracted farmers as it did cattlemen. Parts of the area fell under provisions of the Homestead Act, as explained earlier, while other tracts, particularly around Grand Junction, were covered by the Ute Reservation bill that allowed settlers to pre-empt up to 160 acres. Pre-emption gave each claimant the right to purchase his land from the government for \$1.25 an acre before the land was opened up to others. If farmers chose not to buy from the General Land Office (GLO) the land reverted to the public domain. It could then be filed on by anyone. Some west-central Coloradans also took advantage of the Timber Culture and Desert Land Acts to acquire farms, but not to the extent cattlemen did.<sup>1</sup>

People lured into the region by the availability of land came from all walks of American life. Many were Coloradans who moved to the new frontier from other parts of the state. A considerable number came from mining camps where they could not secure satisfactory jobs. Leadville, which attracted many people to Colorado, also acted as a gateway to the western regions of the state.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, early settlers and farmers who moved to Aspen, McCoy, Glenwood Springs, Rifle, and Parachute, as well as Grand Junction, often travelled via Leadville.<sup>3</sup> Grand Junction also received many settlers from the San Juan mining camps such as Telluride or Ouray.<sup>4</sup> After the Panic of 1893, and the closing of many Colorado silver mines, this trend became more pronounced. Mining towns within the region, such as Aspen, supplied settlers to farm in west-central Colorado.<sup>5</sup> Land

promoters around Grand Junction and Palisade recognized this phenomenon and actively recruited throughout the state, especially on the eastern slope. This type of boosterism lasted until 1910, and in some cases, later.<sup>6</sup> The promoters will be discussed in the next chapter.

The sellers of west-central Colorado spread their message throughout much of the United States and in so doing, convinced many Americans to relocate. While all parts of the Union contributed to the area's population, Midwestern husbandmen became the major source of the region's settlers. Rail connections helped, as did special fares offered immigrants by many rail companies.<sup>7</sup> Ohio, Kansas, Nebraska, Illinois, and Missouri all sent families to the Grand Valley. Some came before the Panic of 1893, however, that financial upheaval encouraged many to head west seeking a new start.<sup>8</sup> Iowa offered the largest and most consistent flow of Midwesterners to west-central Colorado.<sup>9</sup> Some of these people, such as Isaac Cooper, became town founders and promoters. Glenwood Springs was named after his hometown of Glenwood, Iowa.<sup>10</sup> Most from the Hawkeye State never became as well known as Cooper, but their presence brought qualities to area life that would have been missing otherwise. They took up homes all over the region, from Eagle to Grand Junction.<sup>11</sup> At times they came in large groups, such as a trainload of 50 who relocated to Palisade, Colorado, in 1905.<sup>12</sup> More often they arrived one or two families at a time.<sup>13</sup> No matter how they came, the Iowans were present in large enough numbers to hold their own Iowa Day celebrations at Grand Junction in the early twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> During the period 1881 to 1920, Midwesterners far and away led in numbers of emigrants to the area but other parts of the country also sent sons and daughters to the Grand Valley.

Another section of the United States from which large numbers migrated was New England. People from Maine settled Battlement Mesa in the late 1880s. They made up the majority of that locale's population until 1920.<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere in the region, such as at Grand Junction, other New Englanders built their homes at the same time. Few blacks settled in west-central Colorado, but those who did were well accepted.<sup>16</sup>

No matter where they moved from, native-born Americans made up the majority of west-central Colorado's population during the first forty years of Anglo occupation. In 1882, only a very small number of non-native born Europeans were present around Grand Junction.<sup>17</sup> This pattern remained fairly constant over the years and by 1930, only ten percent of the Grand Valley's population was foreign-born.<sup>18</sup>

Of that ten percent of non-native settlers, most came to west-central Colorado from English-speaking nations, primarily England and Canada.<sup>19</sup> W. A. E. DeBeque, for whom

DeBeque Canyon was named, relocated to the region from New Brunswick, Canada,<sup>20</sup> while Morrisania Mesa was first opened by Englishmen in an attempt to re-create the country gentry lifestyle of their homeland.<sup>21</sup>

People of German ancestry were also attracted to western Colorado. During the 1890s Germans, who first settled at Golden, Colorado, moved west to Conger Mesa near McCoy.<sup>22</sup> At approximately the same time, farmers from Mahrenburg, Germany, located on Battlement Mesa.<sup>23</sup> German-Russians, (Germans who had settled the Russian Steppe at the time of Catherine II) dissatisfied with Russian life, came to Colorado during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

These Volga Germans, well respected sugar beet growers on the eastern slope,<sup>24</sup> came to west-central Colorado early in the twentieth century as beet cultivation spread into the region.<sup>25</sup> In 1906 and 1907, German Russian representatives examined Mesa and Garfield Counties as well as Montrose and Delta Counties. This did not lead to a large migration until 1910-1913, when numerous Volga Germans crossed the Rockies in order to become independent farmers in the Grand Valley. They were disappointed by the hilly terrain and "poor" soil. By 1915, most had returned to eastern slope beet fields.<sup>26</sup> Not all immigrants were unhappy with west-central Colorado and stayed to build their lives much like their native born neighbors.

Other foreign-born families came from all over Europe. Frenchmen, Hungarians, Poles, Slavs, and others helped build the region from a barren wilderness into an area world famous for its bountiful crops.<sup>27</sup>

The river valleys such as the Eagle or the Grand were the areas farmers sought when they arrived during the 1880s or 1890s. The 1880s was a decade of rapid expansion for all Colorado farming. The number of farms increased 400 percent. The west-central area of the state led all Colorado regions in this increase.<sup>28</sup> The valleys had rich soils of decomposed lava and silt deposited by floods over thousands of years. The rivers also provided the water so necessary to successful crop cultivation.<sup>29</sup> In Colorado, land and water did not come together. A settler could buy or homestead land but then had to buy or claim water rights if he intended to irrigate his land.<sup>30</sup>

Irrigation in the United States dated to well before European settlement. The Pueblo Indians of New Mexico watered their fields for hundreds of years before Spaniards arrived in that territory. The Spanish had experience with artificial water supplies in the Old World

and when they found the Native American system, they simply adapted it to their uses. Out of this tradition, Mexican settlers in Colorado's San Luis Valley irrigated their crops, being the first Coloradans to do so. Next, Brigham Young's followers learned of irrigation first hand from these people when they settled Utah during the 1840s. The practice of artificially supplying water to the land was copied by Colorado's first Anglo farmers on the eastern slope during the 1860s and 1870s, such as the Union Colony settlers at Greeley, Colorado.<sup>31</sup> By the time Anglo-American farmers penetrated western Colorado, they were well informed as to reclamation methods and technical requirements.

Colorado's state constitution also helped spread irrigated farming. Framers of this document, realizing the special water problems faced by state residents, set out the doctrine of "prior appropriation" to govern all water usage. This called for superiority of rights if the water was put to "beneficial use," which was then defined as domestic needs, had top priority followed by agricultural use. This assured farmers protection for their rights once they had secured water through claim or purchase.<sup>32</sup>

The importance of irrigation to farmers in the Grand Valley was well recognized. During his promotional efforts of 1880 and 1881, before Grand Junction was founded, Governor Crawford recognized the need for reclamation. His ideas were probably based on the Hayden Tenth Annual Report in which the explorer proposed a canal system for the region.<sup>33</sup> Once the first farmers settled along the Grand River in the fall of 1881, they realized the accuracy of the Geological Survey's work.

The next spring construction on irrigation projects, using river water, got underway. Twenty-two ranchers built the Pioneer Ditch upriver from Grand Junction. Another group dug the Pacific Slope Ditch to carry water to town and this ditch opened on July 4, 1882.<sup>34</sup>

Further east in the region, other farmers also began irrigation systems during these first years of settlement. Near Rulison, Colorado, the Camp Bird, Harding and Sinnerl, and Holmes ditches, using water from Cache Creek, were all in operation by the end of 1884.<sup>35</sup> In the Roaring Fork Valley Glassier, Peterson, Robinson and Harris, and Reed ditches began moving water that same year.<sup>36</sup> Midwestern farmers learned quickly how to farm with artificially supplied water. Their economic and physical survival demanded such lessons. Throughout west-central Colorado the necessity of irrigation to successful farming was accepted. Until the early 1900s, almost all cultivation of crops was done by irrigation and the interdependence of the two must be kept in mind when discussing farming in the region's history during the years from 1881 to 1920.<sup>37</sup>

As mentioned, reclamation was started almost as soon as settlers arrived in the Grand Valley. These first attempts were limited in size to individual or small group ventures. Often these ditches were too poorly and hastily constructed to be long lasting. Spring high waters in the rivers often destroyed the headgates, inundating the entire system and damaging the fields. The lack of resources, both labor and financial, were to blame.<sup>38</sup>

Realizing this, many irrigators turned to cooperatives and corporations to solve their problems. In 1882, capitalist and water promoter, T. C. Henry, proposed the construction of an intricate set of canals to be known as the Grand Valley Canal from Palisade to the future location of Fruita. Local agriculturalists welcomed Henry's scheme as a panacea.<sup>39</sup> The canals were to be gravity activated.<sup>40</sup> The promoter secured financing for the effort and started construction. Part of his plan called for users to eventually buy out the company and operate it as a cooperative, allowing them to exchange money or labor for shares in the corporation. Parts of the ditch were completed by 1883, and the first fields were watered that year.<sup>41</sup>

Following Henry's example, companies and farmers all over the region built corporate canals during the 1880s and 1890s. Many of these companies were based outside the region and operated as both land and water brokers. Such ventures bought tracts from other landowners or the government while securing water rights at the same time. They offered settlers a package of both commodities. The corporations did much to promote the Grand Valley because to make a profit they had to attract pioneers.<sup>42</sup>

Another approach used by companies was to found agricultural colonies. Such operations were commercial farms wherein each worker had specialized duties. He rented or received housing and pay from the owners. The corporation retained title to the land and water rights. It also managed the farms by providing seed, tools, and other necessities. Often these large-scale commercial farms operated as raw material suppliers for food processing companies.

Garmesa Farms was foremost among such communal agri-businesses in west-central Colorado. This colony, located approximately 15 miles north-northwest of Fruita, on the border of Garfield and Mesa Counties, Colorado, covered 3,000 acres (probably 1,200). Quaker Oats owned the farms. The immediate area had been settled earlier but by 1911 these farmers had left. The colony was designed to be self-sufficient, growing or producing all the resident's needs on the farm.<sup>43</sup>

Plans called for all the facilities of an irrigated farm to be built at Garmesa. Cisterns, reservoirs, and irrigation ditches were constructed. Barns, sheds, houses, and various out buildings sprang up. Grain fields, stock pastures, and hay fields, as well as orchards, were planted. Cattle, sheep, pigs, and horses were tended and raised for work as well as food. Each family was assigned a garden plot in addition to the truck crops grown in the larger fields. Quaker management hired Robert Lazear to be general manager of Garmesa Farms. Quaker Oats did all this work as an experiment and an investment.<sup>44</sup>

When the project was announced in 1911, optimism ran high in Grand Junction. During the first years of production the farms lost money because of construction costs and the fact that self-sufficiency was not attained. During World War I, Garmesa enjoyed the general agricultural prosperity of the region, however, new problems began to appear late in the war years. Silt build-up in the reservoir and irrigation ditches required constant attention and a general drought made the situation worse. Silting removal became such a problem that by 1920, Quaker, on the advice of Lazear, decided to close Garmesa Farms. Lazear believed that the farms could have succeeded had a solution to the silting dilemma been found. But no practical alternative was found and on March 31, 1920, a liquidation sale took place.<sup>45</sup> This marked the end of the greatest experiment in corporate colonization in west-central Colorado.

The Garmesa experience typified many of the pitfalls faced by farmers in the region. First the practical problems of raising crops with irrigation had to be overcome. Silting was an ever-present obstacle and in many areas dredging canals became an annual event. Water seepage from the ditches and increased saline content also had to be overcome, either through drainage or concrete linings for feeder canals or both.<sup>46</sup> Spring floods endangered headgates and other parts of the systems and often caused severe damage.<sup>47</sup> These conditions limited the irrigator's choices as did other factors.

As corporations, rather than individuals, became the primary financiers of water diversions in west-central Colorado, the farmer's monetary woes grew. Homesteaders in any newly opened area needed capital and often used mortgages to raise funds. In irrigated regions the capital demand was greater, so water companies found a ready market for their services.<sup>48</sup> The agrarian's mortgage obligations and fixed costs were considerably higher in irrigated areas than elsewhere. Because of this they organized, and later lobbied for, state legislation to protect their rights from the water companies. They succeeded in getting an anti-royalty (surcharge) law for water companies placed in Colorado's statutes.<sup>49</sup>

During the 1890s irrigators also sought state financing for new reclamation projects. Grand Junction area agri-businessmen were particularly active in this drive. As early as 1891 Mesa County representatives secured state support for a "high line" canal from Palisade to Fruita, north of the Grand River. The state ditch plans lasted two years before the effort was halted by the General Assembly.<sup>50</sup> This defeat did not stop area farmers from arguing their case or hoping for renewed state interest.

Others, especially after defeat of the high line measure started talking of Federal aid to build irrigation systems. The Federal government, however, resisted all attempts to get directly involved in the business of supplying water during the 1890s. Rather Congress and the President hoped to encourage private or state involvement. Passage of the Desert Land Act in 1877, and its later application into west-central Colorado, served as an example of this *laissez-faire* philosophy of government that predominated the late nineteenth century American political climate. Many people, both in and out of Washington, felt that abuses of the public domain were not too high a price to pay to keep the Federal bureaucracy at a minimum.<sup>51</sup>

By the mid-1890s, when it became obvious that the Desert Land Act was not encouraging the development of private irrigation, Congress determined a new policy. Still believing in *laissez-faire*, the legislators examined the situation. After years of study it was decided that individual western states should have financial responsibility for reclamation projects. As a result, in 1894, the Carey Act passed through Congress and President Grover Cleveland signed it into law. This provided for grants of up to two million acres in each state if the individual states would capitalize and maintain irrigation projects. The law proved a failure and farmers, still seeking Federal aid, had to wait until the twentieth century for satisfaction.<sup>52</sup>

Demands for state or Federal assistance to reclamation was only one manifestation of the dilemma that faced most west-central Colorado irrigators. They had to have artificially supplied water to successfully grow most crops. But the cost per acre to produce that way ran as much as three or four times more than doing so with naturally available moisture. Cereal cultivation did not yield a high enough return to cover these increased expenses so west-central Colorado agrarians were forced to find cash crops.<sup>53</sup> Subsistence farming, as typically associated with frontier development, was not part of the area's experience. Instead of farming to survive, settlers in the region soon turned to commercial agriculture.

Upon arrival in 1881, the first settlers in the Grand Valley set out to establish farms and find markets for their produce. Many turned envious eyes farther east because they had easier access to the mining camps. These mineral towns offered trading centers. Furthermore, because of their isolation, often residents were willing to pay premium prices for foodstuffs. Grand Valley produce included wheat (flour), hay, oats, and vegetables.<sup>54</sup> In the Grand Junction vicinity, farmers, denied access to the east until construction of the Roan Creek Toll Road, turned their attention to the San Juans. Gunnison, Silverton, Ouray, and Durango all appealed to area farmers as potential markets. Otto Mears's system of toll roads made these camps accessible and since a number of Grand Junction's first settlers came from the San Juans, it was natural for them to be interested in those markets.<sup>55</sup>

The 1882 growing season, first for farming in much of the area, witnessed farmers busily at work on many problems. As earlier mentioned, they started construction of the first irrigation ditches that same year. Also, many searched for marketable crops. The mining camps needed all types of produce to feed the people and livestock. Early farmers attempted to meet all these demands by growing a wide variety of crops. Hay, oats, corn, wheat, rye, and vegetables occupied the newly plowed fields. This multiple-use practice was continued into the latter 1880s but was totally replaced by 1890 with single crop cultivation in the irrigated portions of the Grand Valley.<sup>56</sup>

The same year that the first crops were planted near Grand Junction, Elam Blaine, pioneer in that town, brought the first fruit trees into the Grand Valley. In so doing he introduced crops that were well suited to the environment, adaptable to irrigation, highly marketable and good cash crops. Blaine's peach and apple trees proved successful,<sup>57</sup> and soon orchards sprang up along the Grand River spreading from New Castle west to the Utah line.

News of Blaine's bountiful harvests spread. In 1883, D. S. Grimes of Denver was so impressed with the area's fruit potential that he purchased 2,000 acres and established a tree nursery.<sup>58</sup> All types of harder fruits were experimented with, however, pears, apples, cherries, and plums proved most popular with farmers. During the 1880s, peaches gained widespread acceptance, so that by 1890, these were the primary fruits of Grand Junction.<sup>59</sup>

At the same time that Grimes was setting out his nursery, William E. Pabor visited the area and envisioned orchards covering the valley. He originally came to Colorado as secretary of Horace Greeley's Union Colony at Greeley, Colorado, where he worked closely

with Nathan C. Meeker, later of the White River Ute Agency. Both men believed in the state's agricultural potential, especially through irrigation. In the fall of 1883, Pabor, as agent of Denver's Colorado Loan and Trust Company, visited the Grand Valley. Travelling west from Grand Junction, he located promising lands on which to found a town and set out orchards.<sup>60</sup>

Upon returning to Denver, Pabor undertook the promotion of an orchard settlement in the area he had visited. He penned pamphlets outlining the region's possibilities. The brochures spoke of a mild climate, vast lands open for filing, adequate water supplies and numerous markets. His analysis indicated there could be acres of peach and other fruit trees, the production of which could easily be sold to San Juan miners. These customers were named due to their proximity and easy transportation via the Denver and Rio Grande and/or wagons.<sup>61</sup>

All this promotional effort reached a climax the next year when Pabor returned to the Grand Valley and proceeded to found the Fruita Town and Land Company. This organization purchased 520 acres of land and enough water rights to irrigate the tract, thereby offering potential residents a package of both commodities. The first fruit trees were set out during the summer of 1884 and by 1886, they were bearing crops. By that latter year, a five acre plot, with orchard, sold for \$500. While costs were high, the promoters countered this by promising returns of \$600 to \$800 an acre.<sup>62</sup>

Publicizing the Grand Valley's fruit growing potential became a full-time livelihood for many individuals from the mid-1880s until 1910. Their basic arguments were based on the claims of wealth and prosperity available to anyone who would buy a few acres of orchard land (with water) and harvest the crops. By 1905, reports of income averaging \$3,200 from eight acres of peaches were common throughout the valley from Silt, Colorado, west to Loma or Fruita.<sup>63</sup> Land companies, such as the Antlers Orchard Development Company of Silt or the Reed Investment Company printed these claims as did numerous Chambers of Commerce or Boards of Information.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, many of the towns sponsored fairs such as Peach Days, Apple Days, Strawberry Days and so on to boost fruit cultivation.<sup>65</sup> At many of these celebrations local producers entered contests, won awards and had their products sent off by the promoters to serve as exhibits at national conventions and fairs. Often these same crops were photographed and the pictures were used in publicity brochures.<sup>66</sup> All these activities were aimed at increasing demand for Grand Valley fruit as well as attracting new farmers to the area.

The promoters' efforts succeeded and once relocated, the prospective orchardist faced many choices as to what he should raise. The early years witnessed the spread of peaches, apples, and pears but as the twentieth century approached other fruits were experimented with. Plums, cherries, various types of berries, melons and even almonds were cultivated in an attempt to find new cash crops. Certain areas specialized in specific kinds of produce.<sup>67</sup> During the 1880s and 1890s, orchard acreage steadily increased as more people came to west-central Colorado. The majority of fruit farms were small because of the large amounts of capital and labor required for fruit raising.<sup>68</sup>

As the industry grew and the Grand Valley's reputation for fine produce spread, farmers undertook to identify and open new markets. The mining camps continued to be important but during the 1890s, with established rail service and increased production, the Denver and east slope markets were also penetrated. As mining activity decreased after the Panic of 1893, the old steady customers no longer required as much produce.<sup>69</sup> After 1900, national fruit exchanges opened to Grand Valley producers and New Yorkers, Chicagoans, and others enjoyed Colorado peaches, apples, cherries, and various fruits.<sup>70</sup> The boom reached its height in 1906, as both acreages and prices peaked before entering into a period of decline. However, no one in the region recognized this trend at the time and optimism remained high.<sup>71</sup>

Throughout the boom, fruit producers not only searched for new markets but also for innovative methods of selling their crops. Starting in 1891, with the Grand Valley Fruit Growers Association, farmers voluntarily formed cooperative marketing organizations. It was felt that by joining together not only could better prices be achieved by controlling the supply, but also, favorable shipping and warehousing rates would be granted them.<sup>72</sup> Over the years many such cooperatives were organized and disbanded in an effort to secure better sales conditions either through marketing or by supporting the construction and operation of canneries.<sup>73</sup>

While marketing was the major emphasis of Grand Valley's fruit co-ops, they also served two additional functions. The Grand Valley Fruit Growers Association sponsored tests on different varieties of trees for weather resistance, bearing capacity, quality, and vitality. Furthermore, the members worked through the organization to control the quality of exported fruit. The group also served as a convenient way to organize pest eradication projects.<sup>74</sup>

After marketing, in the farmer's priorities, next came the control of pests and diseases. Codling moths and other insects did considerable damage to fruit buds as well as

to mature crops. Growers turned to spraying for controlling these infestations. The chemicals used were oil-based and generally proved effective. However, with passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906, regulations concerning the presence of substances on fresh fruit went into effect. The sprays used on Grand Valley orchards were banned thus forcing producers to find new control methods or thoroughly wash each piece of fruit before it was shipped. The costs involved proved great and some area growers decided to discontinue production or shift to other crops.<sup>75</sup>

Other problems also plagued west-central Colorado orchardmen during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One of these was the weather. While the surrounding mountains usually protected the trees from the most severe meteorological changes occasionally devastating snows or rains swooped into the valley and caused damage. These storms were rare occurrences compared to the instances of hard freezes during spring months. After a few bad experiences, farmers adopted smudging and orchard heaters as ways to protect the young fruit trees from cold weather. In the early 1900s heaters cost between 15 and 50 cents each and the oil costs for one night's operation on a typical fruit farm of eight acres was approximately \$2.50.<sup>76</sup> The buds and trees also were vulnerable to wildlife. Deer found them to be particularly good scratching posts in addition to providing a food they liked. Farmers were forced to shoot the animals or run them off.<sup>77</sup> If the trees were successfully protected through spring and summer, fall brought new problems for fruit growers.

Harvest time in August or September was in many ways the most critical for production. Most types of fruit grown in the Grand Valley had a very short prime harvest season. Peaches especially had to be picked quickly or they became unshippable, in some cases even falling off the trees. An entire crop could be lost within 24 hours. Apples were more durable and could be picked as much as two days after they were ready. This led to an uneven labor demand throughout the season with minimal numbers of workers utilized during spring and summer, but large crews needed at harvest time. Women, children, and anyone else available was pressed into service at harvest to get the crop out of the orchard and ready to ship. Migrant workers were occasionally hired but during the period from 1881 until 1920, large families supplied the majority of labor needed to harvest and pack the hundreds of rail cars of fruit shipped from Grand Valley farms each year.<sup>78</sup> The orchardman's last problem came in preparing the produce for transportation to distant markets. He had to pack it in such a way as to assure that it arrived in palatable condition. Again time was crucial, the "keeping time" of various fruits differed but none were

indefinite. Cooperative loading docks were constructed by many of the fruit growers associations to meet the deadlines.<sup>79</sup> Harvests tested not only the area's labor capacity but also that of the railroads. At such times as many as 100 cars were loaded each day. To meet this demand both the Denver, and Rio Grande and Colorado Midland leased extra locomotives from other lines and hoarded refrigerator cars.<sup>80</sup>



The annual fruit harvest in the Grand Valley provided a cash crop that was important for agricultural development. *Photo by Museum of Western Colorado*

All these problems, as well as the high costs of irrigation, meant that farmers had to get good prices for their crops in order to survive. As production expanded before 1906,

demand kept ahead of supply in most years, however, at approximately that point in time demand leveled off while the supply continued to increase. This drove prices down. Farmers failed to understand this marketplace change but rather blamed the associations for mishandling their trusteeship. This was logical because in years of good prices these same associations took credit for the high returns. Therefore it stood to reason that they were at fault for low price yields to producers.<sup>81</sup>

Some area residents understood the supply and demand relationship and started calling for local canning plants in an effort to avoid glutting the market by processing and withholding part of each year's crop. Such a solution also would be a way to profitably use over-ripe fruit.<sup>82</sup> In 1905, the valley's first cannery was built at Palisade by the local growers association. Soon others sprang up throughout the valley from Palisade to Fruita.<sup>83</sup>

These actions did not halt the downturn in prices and by 1908, local orchard land values were slipping at an alarming rate. This continued until 1915, and the outbreak of World War I. Again, as with the livestock industry, wartime demand came to the Grand Valley's rescue. The events in Europe temporarily halted the decline but by 1920, fruit growers entered a new cycle of depression.<sup>84</sup>

The Grand River floodplain from Silt to Loma was foremost among western Colorado fruit growing regions; the cultivation of these crops was also attempted elsewhere. During the 1890s Henry Butters, stockman and agriculturalist, tried to grow an orchard in the Roaring Fork Valley. His efforts met with little success.<sup>85</sup> There was no evidence of extensive attempts at orchards in the Eagle Valley.

While the fruit market was peaking in the early 1900s, some area farmers recognized the problem of over-supply and its relation to low prices. They started looking for new crops so as to diversify their operations. Alfalfa, vegetables, grain, and livestock were all looked to as solutions. Also, many thought that the same lands that grew fruit could be used simultaneously for another product by planting it between the tree rows.<sup>86</sup> Among these experiments, sugar beets became the crop to capture most farmers' attention in west-central Colorado.

Beet sugar cultivation dated to the time of Napoleon I of France and by the late nineteenth century it had spread across much of western Europe as well as the United States.<sup>87</sup> During the 1890s, Utah and Nebraska developed embryonic sugar industries. West-central Coloradans followed this progress with interest. Sugar beets were a staple cash

crop and as such appealed to area farmers. The cash generated would help cover irrigation costs involved in raising that crop. Also, once processed the beet tops and pulp were saleable as high quality livestock feed. Furthermore, many fruit growers experimented with raising beets between the tree rows, however, this eventually proved unworkable.<sup>88</sup> As early as 1887, Henry R. Rhone started beet culture on a test basis. His work produced crops high in sugar content. At approximately the same time other farmers tried growing sugar cane but with little success.<sup>89</sup>

Rhone's efforts gave Grand Valley beet proponents information to use in their arguments. Men such as George Crawford or Edwin Price, both Grand Junction boosters, set out on a propaganda campaign to encourage sugar beet production and possibly convince some company to build a refinery at that town.<sup>90</sup> By 1892, these boosters, joined by C.F. Mitchell, had sold the Oxnard Beet Sugar Company of Grand Island, Nebraska, on the idea of a plant at Grand Junction. Consummation of the deal depended upon valley farmers agreeing to raise a minimum of 5,000 acres of beets. With the fruit boom well underway local crop raisers were reluctant to support the project and Oxnard opted not to build the plant in Colorado.<sup>91</sup>

The plant proposal's failure did not dampen the spirit of area beet promoters. They continued to encourage farmers and made numerous visits to the Utah Beet Sugar Company facilities at Lehi, Utah. The Coloradans used the Utah operation as an example of what was possible for Grand Junction. All beets grown in western Colorado, at the time, were marketed to the Lehi factory. Production remained small, however.<sup>92</sup>

Charles E. Mitchell of Grand Junction became the premier booster of beet cultivation in the Grand Valley during the 1890s. He argued that the area was ideally suited for a plant because of the locally available coal, lime, and water. Also, adequate transportation was available via the Denver and Rio Grande or Colorado Midland.<sup>93</sup> High fruit prices and the uncertainties of national tariff policies on sugar imports defeated many of Mitchell's attempts until 1898.<sup>94</sup>

With the outbreak of the Spanish-American War and Cuban disruption in that year, the United States' sugar supply was interrupted. These events led to a re-evaluation of beet sugar as a source of sweeteners and aided Mitchell's work. In February, 1898, Mitchell and C. N. Cox, along with other Grand Junction business leaders, founded the Grand Valley Beet Sugar Company. This organization's purpose was to attract outside investors to build a factory in the valley. Their efforts focused on Denver and the eastern slope, as well as



The Grand Junction sugar beet factory was the first such plant in Colorado and stimulated the Grand Valley's leadership in beet sugar.  
*Photo by Museum of Western Colorado*



Grand Valley, Colorado, in 1916, appeared to be a prosperous town where agriculture was dominate. *Photo by U.S. Geological Survey.*

locally.<sup>95</sup> To further their cause, Mitchell and Cox prevailed upon Mesa County's commissioners to guarantee at least \$350,000 or 1 percent of cost of building a plant in that county.<sup>96</sup> Elsewhere, at Glenwood Springs and other towns throughout the region, merchants anxiously waited to see what success the Grand Junction forces would have.<sup>97</sup>

Cox and Mitchell's sales campaign paid off in Denver by late 1898. Charles Boettcher, founder of Ideal Basic Industries, John F. Campion, Leadville-Denver mining promoter, and others listened to the arguments and were convinced. On January 3, 1899, the Colorado Sugar Manufacturing Company filed incorporation papers with Colorado's Secretary of State. Organizers included Boettcher, Campion, as well as mining engineer Eben Smith, J. R. McKinney, and J. J. Brown, husband of the "Unsinkable Mollie" Brown. The corporation was to build a beet sugar factory at Grand Junction.<sup>98</sup>

At that time the beet sugar extraction process was fully automated. The Grand Junction plant design called for a daily capacity of 8,000 pounds of sugar needing only about 100 workers and staff to operate 24 hours a day. The facility was built by E. H. Dyer and Company of Cleveland, Ohio, who had previous experience with such jobs. They also built America's first successful factory at Alvarado, California. The Colorado plant was finished over the summer of 1899, and in November, the first beets were processed. Cox, long-time Grand Junction sugar promoter, was hired as manager.<sup>99</sup>

Grand Junctionites reacted to the plant with mixed feelings. The town council voted the company perpetual water rights for eight million gallons of water per day as well as donating 1,500 acres as a plant site. The Grand Junction Business Men's Beet Growers Association was founded to encourage farmers to raise that crop and to aid immigrants. All this to assure an adequate supply of raw material for the factory.<sup>100</sup> However, the intrusion of Denver capital into this Western Slope enterprise led to criticism of the "Queen City" and a general uneasiness amongst locals.<sup>101</sup>

When the Colorado Sugar Manufacturing Company factory opened in November 1899, it became the state's first beet plant.<sup>102</sup>

The corporation had hoped to sign contracts with farmers for 5,000 acres to be planted in beets, however, in 1899, only 260 agrarians entered into such agreements with total acreage of 3,500. Boettcher supplied the seed which was some of the finest in the world, having been imported from his native Germany. Optimism ran high through the summer of that year but by fall it became obvious that all was not well. Delays in plant

construction and problems with machinery set-ups led to a late opening. This, coupled with a smaller than expected harvest disappointed many, including the financiers.<sup>103</sup>

With the new year, hopes again soared on both sides of the Rockies. Farmers planted more beets and signed more contracts. Problems during the growing season, such as pests, led to another small harvest and losses to the company were greater than the preceding year. In November, one year after opening, the plant shut down and was put up for sale.<sup>104</sup>

An inadequate labor supply proved to be the single greatest limiting factor on the expansion of Grand Valley sugar raising. Cowboys and farm hands refused the backbreaking work of thinning and pulling beets so growers hired children 11 to 15 years old as field workers. When this labor pool dried up, Mormons, German-Russians, Chinese, and Native Americans all were tried. Eventually, in 1916, Mexicans were brought in from Mexico by the Holly Sugar Company as contract laborers. Some members of this last group decided to stay and become permanent residents of the Grand Valley.<sup>105</sup>

While solutions to the labor problem were being sought, the Grand Junction factory changed hands several times. Unable to find buyers, during 1901, Colorado Sugar Manufacturing Company backers closed the plant and the next January the courts appointed receivers.<sup>106</sup> In April the company was reorganized. From that point on, the corporation tried to cajole and then threaten farmers to produce beets but with little success. By November, 1902, the company again was in the hands of receivers.<sup>107</sup>

Wyoming financiers bought the plant the next year. They also secured title to 3,800 acres of land and founded the Western Sugar and Land Company. The Western Company's progress was slow but steady from 1903 until 1916, as more and more farmers took up beet raising to replace their orchards. That year Holly Sugar bought out the Grand Junction corporation and operated that factory and others on Colorado's Western Slope until 1929. Holly management decided, at that time, to close the Grand Junction facility because of its small capacity and consolidate its operations at Delta.<sup>108</sup>

Sugar beet activity centered itself in Grand Junction but farmers throughout west-central Colorado contributed to the post-1900 development of that agri-business. The first two decades of the twentieth century were a period of rapid expansion of sugar beet cultivation all over Colorado. Many promoters equated the state's agricultural future with the success of sugar beets and this feeling was shared by people along the Grand Valley,<sup>109</sup>

especially by area land and water companies. One of these, the Wilcox Canal Company, headquartered at Parachute, Colorado, had tried since 1893 to interest settlers in lands along the Grand River between that town and Rifle. The promoters met with little success and found themselves financially limited until 1910. At that point, with the beet boom underway, Wilcox backers attracted the attention of Arthur Havemeyer of the American Sugar Company. He and his family were the leaders of the United States sugar industry at the time and had vast sums of money at their disposal.<sup>110</sup>

Arthur Havemeyer visited the Rifle area and was impressed with what he found. He envisioned fields of beets stretching along much of the Grand River's northern bank from Rifle west to Parachute along with a sugar refinery at Parachute. The Havemeyer family invested heavily in the Wilcox Canal Company. They had plans designed for irrigating 8,000 acres around Sharrard Park, west of Rifle. This land was not yet farmed.<sup>111</sup>

To convert blueprints into reality, the Havemeyers hired William R. Lacy as their chief engineer. To reach Sharrard Park from the headgate near Rifle, miles of ditches had to be built and a tunnel bored through Webster Mesa. Raising water from river level to field elevation required large pumps that were constructed utilizing a unique water driven turbine mechanism. Lacy performed his job well, completing the entire project by May, 1912. The Havemeyer-Wilcox Canal included 27 miles of watercourses, the tunnel and a pumphouse, a forebay, syphons, headgates and protectors, as well as considerable concrete lining. The land was purchased and construction completed for slightly less than half a million dollars.<sup>112</sup>

On May 10, 1912, Colorado Governor John F. Shaforth dedicated the irrigation system in the midst of great fanfare. Banquets were held, speeches made, and promises of a great new day flowed almost as freely as the congratulations.<sup>113</sup>

Opening of the canal produced hopes for the area's residents, however, these were soon dashed. Heavy winter snows in the mountains and a warm spring led to severe floods along the Grand River during June. On the twelfth of the month, the flood crest reached Rifle and washed away the headgate, flooding the entire system and permanently damaging the pumps.<sup>114</sup> The Grand Valley Irrigation District purchased and attempted to reconstruct the facilities but failed. Because of this Sharrard Park was never reclaimed or settled.<sup>115</sup> The Havemeyer-Wilcox effort was among the largest of its type in Colorado and typified the fact that by 1910 most easily irrigatable land was previously claimed.



The Havermeyer-Willcox Canal was one of the boldest ventures in the state for providing water to beet fields. In 1980 all that remained was this pumphouse.  
*Historic American Engineering Record Photo by F. J. Athearn*



The Forebay structure of the Havermeyer-Willcox Canal is what remains today.  
*Historic American Engineering Record Photo by F. J. Athearn*

Settlers who could not obtain land near one of the region's many reclamation systems turned to the higher mesas and parks in an attempt to eke out an existence through dryland farming. Areas such as Orchard Mesa or Collbran felt the first plowshares of dry land farmers in west-central Colorado but eventually came to have artificially supplied water.<sup>116</sup> The dryland farmers needed large tracts of land to practice their expertise because as much as three-quarters of each farm lay fallow in any given year. Crops were rotated from field to field so groundwater could accumulate. These farmers lived each year on the brink of catastrophe should rains not come or if unusually hot summers or hail storms occurred. These people grew potatoes, corn, small grains, especially crested wheat, or anything else they could.<sup>117</sup> By 1910, Glade Park and Unaweep were centers of this type of agriculture. Many of these folks drifted back and forth between farming and ranching looking for economic survival.<sup>118</sup> They were the most vulnerable to any changes in market conditions.

All west-central Colorado agri-businessmen struggled to survive and succeed either through dry farming or irrigation. The search for a dependable cash crop, first fruit and later sugar beets was the key factor in regional agricultural development. Not until 1915, and the increased demands of World War I, did farmers enjoy true prosperity. During the war \$1 million a year was generated by Grand Valley fruit growers while sugar beets contributed \$1.3 million annually to the region's economy.<sup>119</sup> The war led to new lands being cultivated and more intensive use of older fields. But prosperity was short-lived and when the post-war depression arrived in 1920, farmers were especially hard hit.<sup>120</sup>

Farming was the economic backbone of the area's western reaches between 1881 and 1920, much as mining was the key further east in west-central Colorado. The sod-busters peopled the land more densely than their predecessors and because these farms were family operations they demanded things not seen as necessary by the miners or cattlemen. Also, due to the commercial nature of area agriculture, these people were consumers of goods and services not needed by subsistence farmers on other similar frontiers. The marketing techniques used by fruit growers such as cooperatives and canneries combined with the mercantile and other needs of these farmers encouraged town growth and development in parts of the region as much as mining or tourism did elsewhere.

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## CHAPTER VIII. THE URBAN FRONTIER

"This town is favorably located . . . The convergence of valleys and streams offers natural road beds."

*-unknown-*

Mining, stock raising, and, moreover, farming, brought people to west-central Colorado. Once there, they needed central locations for trading and social activities. Towns and cities developed to fulfill these demands. Many of the area's communities were built at the same time settlers arrived in the region, townbuilders arriving hand in hand with farmers, stockmen, or miners. Over the years, the area's towns served a number of functions, as well as being centers of political activity. Each community took on unique characteristics as it matured. Topography controlled urbanization just as it did agrarian settlement. The valleys that offered natural transportation routes also contained prospective townsites. During the nineteenth century, city builders paid careful attention to the actual or potential road and rail lines while planning. Boosters served as the driving force behind many of these projects as well as spokesmen for the Western Slope.

Promotion was a key factor in the rapid development of the Grand Valley. Each vicinity had its boosters. Governor George H. Crawford of Grand Junction, the Nogal family of Eagle, B. Clark Wheeler of Aspen, and others were typical of promoters. Each of their towns went through rough and tumble frontier days of saloon fights, drunkenness, and a generally riotous decorum, however, the boomers and early permanent residents discouraged such activity. They sought permanence as a stable, "conservative" community.<sup>1</sup> Each booster from every "city" felt his was the "Athens of the West" and finding suitable epigrams occupied much of their time. Aspen became touted as "The Capital City of the Rockies" or "the metropolis of the Pacific Slope,"<sup>2</sup> while Glenwood Springs claimed to be "the Spa of the Rockies" or the "Carlsbad of America."<sup>3</sup> Not to be left out, Grand Junctionites labeled their community as the "Little Empire of the Western Slope" and later the "All-American City." Platitudes were concocted to radiate a positive image of each city for prospective residents or investors.

Most of the towns, especially the ones that became heavily involved in booster activity, were those platted and sponsored by various companies. City building during the nineteenth century was as much a profession in the American West as medicine or law and western Colorado attracted its share of these men between 1880 and 1900. Foremost was governor

George H. Crawford, mentioned earlier, who left Gunnison in Fall 1881, to found a town at the junction of the Grand and Gunnison Rivers. He had previously promoted Fort Scott, Kansas, and now was boosting both Grand Junction and Delta at the same time. Crawford, joined by others, founded the Grand Junction Town Company on October 10, 1881, at Gunnison, before he had seen the land.<sup>5</sup> The town was laid out on a barren desert, but Crawford's boundless optimism, combined with financial backing from Philadelphia, soon changed that.<sup>6</sup>

Grand Junction boomers used many means to entice people to the area. The mild climate and long growing season, combined with reports of soil fertility, became standard lines for all of the Grand Valley's boosters and were publicized not only to encourage farm settlement but also to convince merchants of the wisdom of relocation in the area. The logic was simple; when the farmers came they needed many stores and shops so why shouldn't you, the aggressive businessman, get in on the ground floor and await the prosperity that was sure to follow. Furthermore, Crawford's pamphlets argued that the location, at the river junction, was sure to be a natural avenue of commerce and transportation. Railroad surveys were already completed. Additionally, other natural resources such as nearby coal deposits, received praise by the promoters.<sup>7</sup> Crawford and his associates painted a picture of infinite promise for those willing to seize the opportunities at Grand Junction. Other promoters, such as Fruita's William E. Pabor, used many of these same ideas to entice people elsewhere in the region.<sup>8</sup>



Grand Junction, like other towns in the Grand Valley, showed promise by the 1880s.  
*Photo by U.S. Geological Survey.*

Near the Continental Divide, other individuals were also at work building towns on unsettled lands such as in the Roaring Fork Valley. B. Clark Wheeler and Isaac Cooper went to the area in 1879 and 1880, and immediately set about building and boosting the town of Aspen. They used the mineral finds as a basis for these efforts, proclaiming Aspen as the most handsome and substantial mining camp in Colorado.<sup>9</sup> The local silver strikes helped to assure growth of that town, but not happy with one success, the duo, particularly Cooper, looked elsewhere along the Roaring Fork for townsites.

In 1881, Cooper travelled to Land's Ranch at the junction of the Roaring Fork and Grand Rivers where he saw possibilities for a future town. Cooper felt that the hot springs could be a resort for health seekers.<sup>10</sup> He interested a group of Denverites, including railroader D. C. Dodge, in the Defiance Town and Land Company that was soon renamed Glenwood Springs. These men published brochures and pamphlets portraying the natural beauty of Glenwood Canyon (then called the Grand Canyon of the Grand River) and the general area as well as touting the healing properties of the springs and vapor caves.<sup>11</sup>

Cooper's resort appealed to many Aspenites, such as B. Clark Wheeler and Jerome B. Wheeler, or the Devereaux brothers, but its development as a tourist spot was forced to await arrival of a railroad in 1887.



The Glenwood Springs area was a popular tourist spot as this photo of Teddy Roosevelt's hunting party in 1905 shows. *Photo by Garfield County Public Library.*

Cooper, Wheeler, Crawford, and Pabor all worked to build cities from the raw lands of the region and their efforts did not go unnoticed. Soon others joined the booster bandwagon. By the late 1880s and 1890s, as the towns grew, Chambers of Commerce were formed to encourage local business as well as to promote their town. Also newspapers came into existence and not only reported events but also provided a medium for selling their area. Activities of these later people were built on the foundations laid by original locators, in addition to adding new elements of their own.

Chambers of Commerce, businessmen's associations, or Boards of Trade and Information developed in nearly all towns of west-central Colorado. The exceptions were communities such as Redstone or New Castle that existed as company towns to house miners or the corporate farms at Garmesa. These groups published pamphlets and brochures, occasionally in conjunction with town or land companies and such publications made extravagant promises concerning an area's potential, carefully pointing out unusually good harvests, civic accomplishments, and unique events or scenery.<sup>12</sup> The propoganda campaign stretched far beyond the printed page in this region.

One way boosters attracted settlers was through the establishment of immigration services. Such organizations facilitated a settler's relocation to a new locale by first convincing him of the wisdom of such a move and then sending information on how to get wherever he was going, referring him to land agents and water brokers and helping him arrange for transportation. Once the newcomer arrived, the immigration panel helped locate temporary housing, put him in touch with bankers and other local suppliers, if needed, and generally smoothed his way.<sup>13</sup> Mesa County, in particular, created a Board of Immigration during the 1890s. It performed these services to encourage farmers to settle in the Grand Valley and cash in on the fruit bonanza.<sup>14</sup>

The fruit boom provided another way for boosters to attract settlers. Promoters sponsored fruit days and contests such as Peach Day or Strawberry Day. Not only did such festivals provide possible materials for pamphlets aimed at prospective newcomers, but also allowed the various towns to enhance their image and increase trade with people already in the vicinity. When visitors came to town, not only did they spend money by catching up on shopping that had been delayed or by eating a restaurant meal; new inter-personal relationships were also formed and old ones were reinforced. These contacts were as important to business success in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as advertising is today.<sup>16</sup>

The furthering of business became a primary focus of boosterism once settlers were attracted. To support this activity, various merchants banded together into the Western Slope Congress, a type of super Chamber of Commerce. The board functioned during the late 1880s and into the 1890s as spokesmen for the western part of Colorado. They based their operations at Grand Junction and Mesa County often got the lion's share of publicity. Congress documents emphasized the area's commercial and agricultural advantages, but it also included information about mining and tourism. The group held annual conventions where pertinent issues such as the monetary supply or railroad rates were discussed, in addition to issuing positive statements about the region.<sup>17</sup> Groups such as the Western Slope Congress were important in selling the area. Local newspaper editors were among the most vocal and constant spokesmen for west-central Colorado. Part of being a successful frontier editor during the late nineteenth century was to be an enthusiastic booster. From editorial pulpits, the papers constantly reminded citizens of the virtues of their residences as well as generally writing about the region. The publishers hoped these articles would be picked up by other papers "back east." Additionally, journalists used their position to stir up civic pride in an effort to better their towns. Topics ranged from the need to fix or pave streets to hopes for new commercial and/or industrial expansion. This writing style continued well into the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup>

Development of civic pride and community transformed the various clusters of people into genuine cities. The evolutionary process took many forms over the years from calls for law and order to demands for improved municipal services like fire protection. These efforts added to the pride and sense of identity held by residents.<sup>19</sup>

One of the first areas of concern was that of establishing local government. In towns founded by land companies, the corporations often became a basis for government. These administrative units were of various types including both the mayor-council and commission forms.

As towns grew, the residents demanded more and more from their municipalities. Basic needs for fire and police protection were recognized early. Many towns started by hiring night watchmen or town marshalls, who worked closely with county sheriffs. As communities grew, the necessity of a full time paid police department became more pressing. In larger towns such as Grand Junction constableries came into existence by the 1890s, however in other communities part-time or volunteer watchmen remained active until the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> Volunteerism was the basis of most fire protection, even in the larger cities, until the 1900s when some of these companies were replaced by paid professionals.<sup>22</sup>

After security from crime and conflagration was established, residents next wanted a reliable municipal water supply. Often this was accomplished by city government granting charters to individuals or corporations. The charters gave the grantee a monopoly of service and only with certain conditions such as quality and price.<sup>23</sup> Other towns such as Fruita, built municipally owned delivery systems, either because they could not attract investors or because the city feared monopolies. Either type of system replace early supply methods such as wells or drawing river water. Centralized operation allowed for certification and maintenance of water quality.<sup>24</sup>

Complementary to securing a water supply was the removal of sewage and waste water. When first laid out, most area towns had mud streets with ditches along side for waste removal that then flowed into the lowest part of the city and stood in pools or marshes. To remedy this towns, such as Rifle, passed ordinances and raised taxes to build sewer systems and provide for public sanitation facilities in the early 1900s.<sup>25</sup>

Water supplies or sewage plants were matters of necessity and civic pride, as were schools. Many townspeople sought education for their children from the beginning of their residence in an area. At Grand Junction, a subscription school, paid for by fees levied on parents, commenced classes in 1882.<sup>26</sup> Other regions, once settled, followed suit. This practice continued into the early 1900s in the more remote reaches of the region.<sup>27</sup> Once towns and counties were formed, demands for public education grew and so did public school systems.<sup>28</sup> Development of education typified the attitude of area people in that they wanted "the best" of everything and would pay for it either privately or through public funding.



Foremost among the many public services new towns were expected to provide were schools, like the New Castle, Colorado school.

*Photo by Garfield County Public Library.*

During the late nineteenth century, one thing exemplified modernity--electricity. Generation plant and transmission line construction was expensive and only the wealthy communities could afford this service, unless it came as an auxiliary of another company. Mining camps, such as Aspen, could afford it during the 1880s. In 1885, the Aspen Electric Company was founded, followed the next year by Consumers' Electric. Both organizations found backing from mine owners and business leaders.<sup>29</sup> Service began and Aspen became the first Colorado city to have electric street lights.<sup>30</sup> By 1886, W. B. Devereaux was promoting the Glenwood Light and Water Company as lines extended throughout the Roaring Fork Valley.<sup>31</sup> The next year Devereaux and D. R. C. Brown joined forces, chartering the Roaring Fork Electric Light and Power Company; they started to absorb smaller operations. In 1888, the new corporation built a hydro-electric plant at an uncertain location, probably on Castle Creek, and enlarged generation capabilities. This plant was one of the earliest of its type in the United States.<sup>32</sup>

Roaring Fork Valley residents were the first west-central Coloradans to receive electrical service while other area residents had to wait 20 or more years for the dawn of the electrical age. Service first came to Grand Junction with the opening of Grand Junction Electric and Gas Company facilities in 1903.<sup>33</sup> Other towns like Fruita and Palisade eagerly awaited the extension of power lines, by giving franchises as early as 1905.<sup>34</sup> They were not successful until 1910, when interurban trolleys reached the towns.<sup>35</sup> It was typical throughout the United States for trolley lines to sell electricity to towns along their routes. Furthermore, the street cars represented yet another municipal service, publically franchised and privately financed for local boosters to point at with pride.

By the time electric railways entered service, America was being swept up in a tide of reform. The period has been labeled the Progressive Era. One area of particular concern was the nation's cities. When examining urban areas, progressives found many problems, one of which was the abuse of franchise powers, practiced by many public utility companies such as water and power concerns. By 1900, such feeling reached Colorado, first focusing on Denver and later becoming wide-spread. The Denver home-rule charter battles of 1903, combined with the election of Mayor Robert Speer, served as a good example for the rest of Colorado as to the evils of corporate franchises.<sup>36</sup>

The people of western Colorado read of the Denver struggles with interest. No doubt they found many similarities to their own situation. Palisade voters cautiously approved a restrictive franchise for electric service in 1905.<sup>37</sup> The next year Glenwoodites took up the proposition of utility regulation by a different method. Because the power and water

companies already existed and had charters, the city tried instead to revoke their franchises. The courtroom battles lasted for four years and the city lost. This did not stop those determined to control utilities. After the judicial decisions, residents voted for construction of a municipally owned system. A public electric company was founded but by 1917, it failed.<sup>38</sup> By the 1920s, with the founding of Public Service Company of Colorado, most area utilities came to be owned by this larger company.

The franchise question was just one manifestation of urban progressivism witnessed in west-central Colorado. Another was the "City Beautiful" movement. The basic premise of this crusade was that man was basically good and problems in human life existed because of a slum environment. If the physical surroundings could be restored or "beautified," the the social evils attendant with urban living would be eradicated. This line of thinking attracted many followers nationally and in west-central Colorado.

Two items were of particular concern for the region's reformers. First was wide spread prostitution. Most towns, especially mining camps and railroad towns, such as Aspen and Grand Junction, had their red light districts. The "sporting ladies" arrived in Grand Junction with the Denver and Rio Grande Railway crews in 1882, and set up shop on Colorado (Hoodoo) Avenue.<sup>39</sup> At about the same time, the first ladies of the evening also arrived at Aspen and by 1900, they were present in both Aspen and Glenwood Springs.<sup>40</sup> At that point, Grand Junction's district had been nicknamed "The Barbary Coast" after San Francisco's red light neighborhood and was patronized primarily by area cowboys.<sup>41</sup> In those same years, the urban reform movement touched the region and various voices called for an end to vice. Glenwood Springs was noticeable for its efforts, spurred on by the Progressives, as well as a stinging rebuke, in its bid for the location of Western State College. The school was founded at Gunnison because the selection panel felt Glenwood Springs did not have the proper moral climate.<sup>42</sup>

Seen by reformers as a co-equal, if not greater, problem was drinking. Temperance and prohibition were ideas that had a long history in the United States. Given new impetus in the early 1900s by the general reform atmosphere, organizations such as the Womens Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) undertook far reaching campaigns to close all drinking halls. Saloons, as much as six shooters, were an American frontier tradition shared by west-central Colorado. Bars opened their doors as soon as towns were founded, from Aspen to Grand Junction. In 1882, Grand Junction had 22 saloons<sup>43</sup> while 5 years later, thirsts in Glenwood Springs supported 23.<sup>44</sup> One notable exception to this trend was Fruita, which was made dry by its founders in 1884, and kept that way until the 1930s.<sup>45</sup> By 1920,

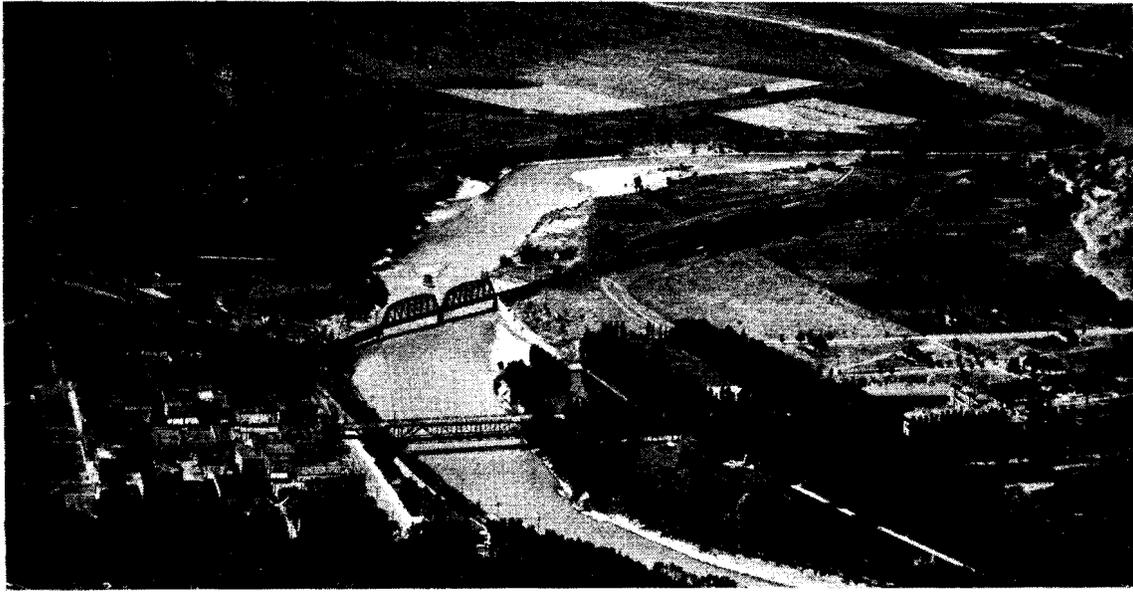
Fruita's example had been copied by many area towns, often under pressure from the WCTU. In 1909, Grand Junctionites voted liquor out of town.<sup>46</sup> The next year Rifle did the same, as part of a general civic "uplifting."<sup>47</sup> Glenwood Springs was somewhat slower to act but between 1912 and 1920, an anti-saloon atmosphere developed so that most residents supported enactment of state-wide (1916) and nationwide prohibition (Volstead Act) in 1920.<sup>48</sup> National prohibition, however, did not dry up all liquor supplies in the area. One Mr. Stubbs operated a ranch and still in Glade Park during the twenties and his product led to occasional shoot outs between drunken cowboys.<sup>49</sup> These cattle drovers were part of the region's color that did so much to attract tourists to Colorado.

The west-central part of the state attracted Americans from all parts of the United States who wanted to visit the "wild west" during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Glenwood Springs vicinity, particularly, came to depend on travellers for economic survival. That area became known as the "playground of the Republic,"<sup>50</sup> a name given by President Theodore Roosevelt. If Roosevelt's endorsement was not sufficient, both the Denver and Rio Grande and Colorado Midland railroads promoted the various scenic attractions to potential customers including the Mt. of the Holy Cross, Hell Gate, and Glenwood Canyon. The transportation companies began this promotion and soon trains were running those locales.<sup>51</sup> The D&RG even went so far as to run open-topped cars in Glenwood Canyon for sightseers.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to its scenery, the Roaring Fork Valley offered other incentives to visitors. That general area was dotted with hot mineral springs known for their therapeutic qualities. Penny Hot Springs in the Crystal River Valley, Conundrum Springs near Aspen, or the most famous Glenwood Springs represented these sites. Each tried to promote itself as a spa comparable to those of Europe, but only Glenwood Springs succeeded.<sup>53</sup>

Early residents of that town realized the spring's potential and began to exploit it. Colorado developed a reputation for her healthy climate by the 1870s<sup>54</sup> and people like Issac Cooper used this in their efforts to boost Glenwood Springs during the next decade. The Ute had used the waters for healing long before Anglo-Americans, yet by 1881, Johnas Lundigren was looking for commercial use of the baths.<sup>55</sup>

Throughout the decade, more and more people, especially from Aspen and other mining camps, started using Glenwood Springs as a weekend resort. After the railroads arrived a tourist boom ensued. The rail trip from New York City to the spa took less than two weeks and medical experts pronounced the pool to be of the same chemical content



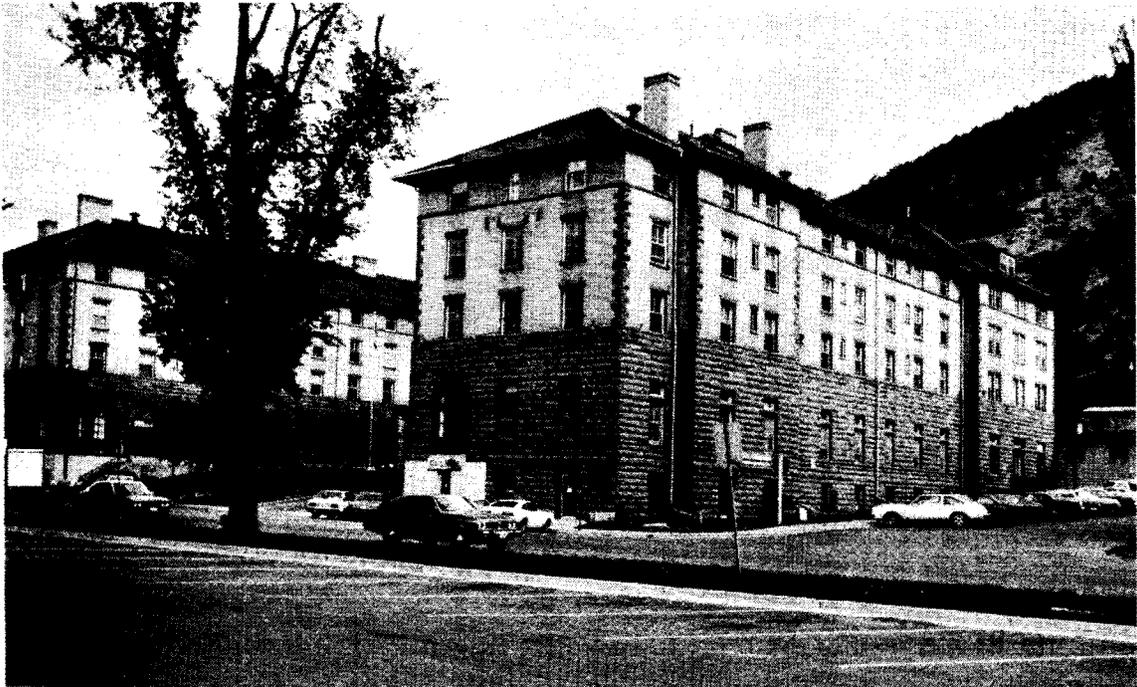
Glenwood Springs in the 1890s was a nice sized tourist town featuring the pool and Hotel Colorado. This 1895 view, shows the old railroad yards and several bridges that are gone. *Photo by Colorado Historical Society.*



By 1980, Glenwood Springs was a large town catering to tourists and the ski towns of Aspen and Snowmass. Note Interstate Highway 70 in this photograph. *Photo by F.J. Athearn.*

and quality of Aix-la-Chapelle, France, one of Europe's finest. The waters were supposed to be helpful for a variety of maladies, from syphilis to arthritis.<sup>56</sup>

To take advantage of the health seekers, ambitious businessmen built lodges to house them. Starting in 1883, with the St. James Hotel, to the present day, there has been a more or less steady trend of building more and more hostelryes.<sup>57</sup> In 1886, the hot springs pool and bathhouse were constructed in an effort to attract more visitors. The project cost \$400,000.<sup>58</sup> To further enhance the spa's cosmopolitan image, the Hotel Colorado, the most elegant in accomodations, was built between 1891 and 1892. Walter Devereaux, Aspen mining engineer, conceived and financed the project. He also bought ten acres of land south of town to build a polo field, as well as taking over ownership of the hot springs pool complex. Devereaux envisioned a resort which would appeal to the creme of American and European society. During the early 1890s, the English were among the most frequent foreign visitors to Glenwood Springs.<sup>59</sup>



The Hotel Colorado was one of the most elegant buildings west of the Mississippi when it was built. This structure is on the National Register of Historic Places.

*Photo by F.J. Athearn*

The spa attracted wealthy individuals during the early 1890s. It became known as the center of gracious living in Colorado. Silver kings were among Glenwood Springs' visitors. Because of its lifestyle, servants were needed and during the late nineteenth century these occupations were held by blacks. Anglo-Americans accepted members of that racial group because of their social position as much as anything.<sup>60</sup>

The posh life of Glenwood Springs proved short lived. The panic and depression of 1893, as well as the disastrous drop in silver prices, caused many of the town's former visitors to stop vacationing there. The local economy suffered, especially hotel owners and others involved in the tourist business.<sup>61</sup>

By the early years of the twentieth century, the spa was being revitalized. A major contributor to this resurgence was President Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt. He liked to hunt in the White River Forest Reserve and to stay at Glenwood's Hotel Colorado. Due to Roosevelt's liking of the area, and to boost the resort, Colorado U. S. Representative Edward T. Taylor of Glenwood Springs proposed to Congress in 1909, that a permanent summer "White House" be built at the springs. The Representative felt that once in Colorado, all future presidents would find it as attractive as Roosevelt did. The legislature turned down Taylor's proposal.<sup>62</sup> All the publicity did lead to Glenwood Springs becoming the state's best known resort by 1915.<sup>63</sup>

Taylor, in another attempt to attract tourists to Colorado, introduced a plan in 1913, to create summer homesteads. His bill called for the Federal government to give forty acres of land to anyone who would build summer homes on the tracts. This scheme also failed to win Congressional approval.<sup>64</sup>

Glenwood Springs was the prime tourist attraction in west-central Colorado, but the wooded mountains along the Grand River and its tributaries offered another lure to visitors. Game abounded in those forests and trout thrived in the streams. Outdoorsmen came into the Eagle and Roaring Fork Valleys during the 1870s, and as time passed and settlement spread, so did the hunters and fishermen.<sup>65</sup> By 1900, sportsmen from across the nation visited the area, especially the White River Forest Reserve. Again it was Teddy Roosevelt who helped the area's reputation. Legends contend that during the President's 1905 visit, that the ever popular children's toy, a "Teddy Bear" was invented. Whether this is true or not, and the exact connection remains clouded.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless the mountains of the area have remained a sportsman's paradise.

While Glenwood Springs was becoming a tourist mecca, events further west on the Grand River were taking place that would awaken Grand Junction as the leading city of the Western Slope. The early residents believed they had chosen correctly when they moved in and worked hard to make the dream of a commercial empire come true. The fact that Denver and Rio Grande Railroad management chose to locate a division point helped the town, as did the reality that after 1900, D&RG rates from Denver to Salt Lake City or to Grand Junction were equal.<sup>67</sup> During the late 1890s, Grand Junction merchants became aggressive in their search for customers and people as far away as Craig, Colorado, started trading with the town.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, Grand Junctionites also exerted every effort to encourage agricultural goods processors to locate in their town as witnessed by the beet sugar plant experience. Another entrepreneur, W. Currie, was sold on Grand Junction as the place to build a cannery, which he did during the 1890s. This was the first plant of its type in the Grand Valley<sup>69</sup> and led other towns to seek similar industries.

Fruita and Palisade both had canneries built in their towns during the first decade of the twentieth century in an attempt to compete with Grand Junction. These two communities felt dominated by Grand Junction and sponsored cooperatives to construct processing plants<sup>70</sup> and to take other steps to break Grand Junction's hold over them. Fruita residents went so far as to conduct a petition drive from 1909 until 1917, to force the state legislature to create a separate Pabor County from lands in western Mesa County.<sup>71</sup> This proposal was defeated for the last time in 1917. Palisade citizens did not go to those extremes; however, during 1905, in the midst of the fruit boom, Palisade farmers did form their own growers association in direct competition with the Palisade branch office of the Grand Junction Fruit Growers Association, feeling that the former organization favored Grand Junction to the detriment of Palisade.<sup>72</sup> Try as they might, these towns could not slow the business growth of Mesa County's seat.

The fruit boom and sugar factory aided Grand Junction's march toward commercial supremacy within the region. 1905 marked the take-off point for this growth and within twenty years the city dominated not only western Colorado but also eastern Utah. It became the largest city between Denver and Salt Lake City.<sup>73</sup> In addition to increased agricultural activity, the town also enlarged its number of commercial houses. The good roads movement, including a coast to coast highway and Taylor State Road, as well as other roads, made access to various parts of the state easier for businessmen. The merchants actively supported those highway projects and other road improvements. Furthermore, the introduction of parcel post and rural free mail delivery was immediately taken advantage of by Grand Junction traders. The city became a major distribution point and agricultural market by 1920, and by 1930, nearly \$10 million worth of business a year was carried on there.<sup>74</sup>

Other towns in west-central Colorado also enjoyed commercial prosperity but to a lesser extent than Grand Junction. Among these were Aspen, Rifle, Wolcott, and Eagle. Aspen became a trading center because of silver mining booms and as the bonanza passed, so did the town's position. Rifle, on the other hand, based its trade on livestock, being a primary rail loading point in Colorado. Wolcott was the contact point for much of northwestern Colorado from the early 1880s until 1908. It lost business when the Denver Northwestern and Pacific reached Steamboat Springs.<sup>75</sup> All these commercial centers grew because of location, availability of transportation, and financial support secured both from within and from outside west-central Colorado.

Capital was critical for business development of all types from railroads to mining, and food processing or other industries. Grand Valley's commercial history, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was that of attracting outside investors for regional projects. This money came from American and from European sources. Eastern financiers, like Jerome B. Wheeler, helped build Aspen. People from all over the northeastern U.S. loaned money for Colorado projects too. During the period for west-central Colorado, from 1880 until World War I, British financiers aided heavily in many western undertakings such as the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. Specifically, Englishmen backed improvements such as the Hotel Colorado and other Glenwood Springs undertakings, and also the Colorado Midland Railway.<sup>76</sup> Eastern and European capitalists made significant contributions to the region's growth but, more importantly, so did eastern Colorado investors. Men such as David H. Moffat and Walter Cheeseman pumped large amounts of capital into various types of companies throughout west-central Colorado. Additionally, many other individuals and syndicates put money into land, water, railroads, and other similar projects in an effort to settle the area.<sup>77</sup>

The influx of money from eastern slope sources made western slopers uneasy as well as thankful. They felt that Denverites controlled too much of the state government, capital investments, transportation, and other things. This feeling was justified because there was a definite Denver circle that dominated much of the state's business activity. The group had coalesced during Colorado's territorial period and remained strong throughout the late nineteenth century. Western slopers resented the power base and a feeling of being a "poor cousin" developed. Part of the problem was that Western Slope residents had no cohesive political leadership such as a "Grand Junction Circle" in the statehouse. Not until Edward T. Taylor rose to prominence during the 1910s, did the Western Slope find a spokesman.<sup>78</sup> However, west-central Colorado sought political cures for their problems before Taylor's time.

During the 1890s, a political movement swept the West. It was known as Populism because of its “grass-roots” nature and close association with the People’s Party. Many west-central Coloradans became involved in this party that started with the farmers and the Grange in the previous decade. In Colorado, by 1890, it became apparent to many voters that the major political parties were no longer responsive to them, but rather were pawns of Denver interests. Two socio-economic groups in particular felt left out of political life--miners and irrigators.<sup>79</sup> This feeling was based on many factors. For example, by the 1880s, state laws protected livestock’s health better than miners. Furthermore, irrigators were among the heaviest in debt of any of the state’s farmers and because of this, they actively sought implementation of an inflationary fiscal policy. Also irrigators wanted railroad rate controls and the regulation of water companies to protect the farmers’ economic position.<sup>80</sup>

These dissatisfied people, joined by residents of other western slope states, banded together in 1890 to form the Peoples Party locally. The Populists seized on serious economic issues and built a political platform. They sought government intervention in the economy to increase the money supply, which also appealed to farmers. The use of silver as a currency base, which was not the case at the time, became a primary issue by 1892. Additionally, banking controls, railroad regulation, and employers’ liability laws were demanded.<sup>81</sup>

By 1892, the Peoples Party was organized in Colorado and its followers braced for the upcoming elections. The party supported Iowan James B. Weaver for President nationally, but more importantly, they called for Aspen Editor Davis Hanson Waite to be Colorado’s Governor. Waite had moved to Aspen in 1881, as a newspaper editor and by the close of the decade, was heavily involved in labor reform activity as editor of *The Union Era*.<sup>82</sup> He had a reputation as a radical, but was socially accepted because of family ties to B. Clark Wheeler.<sup>83</sup> As an organizer of the Colorado Peoples Party, and permanent party chairman, he was a logical choice as Populist candidate for Governor. When the ballots were counted in November, Waite had won. Once in office, he was frustrated by the legislature in his attempts to implement Populist reforms and in 1894, he was not reelected. Part of his problem came from his unorthodox conduct in office, such as proposing to use Mexican silver pieces nicknamed “Fandango dollars” as a means of exchange and other “radical” actions.<sup>84</sup>

Despite Waite’s problems, the Populists remained a potent force in Colorado politics through the election of 1896 when the so called “Free Silverites” gained ascendancy. These

people were given that name because of their program to remove all restrictions on the use of silver for money. Free Silverites proposed the free and unlimited coinage of silver at a value ratio of 16 to 1 with gold. On the national level the party merged or "fused" with the Democrats who also supported "free silver." William Jennings Bryan ran as the candidate of the combined parties. He lost the election, but even before this, the Populists had lost their identity as a party because of the fusionists.<sup>85</sup>

While Populism was a dying force in much of Colorado, it remained strong in Mesa County. The party carried county elections in 1897, and area voters remained strong in their support of William Jennings Bryan well into the twentieth century.<sup>86</sup> Much support was based on the fact that irrigators had suffered from the Panic of 1893. Moreover the Federal government's new and active role in land and resource management, which began in the 1890s with the establishment of National Forest Reserves, was seen by west-central Coloradans as being adverse for their prosperity.

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## CHAPTER IX. THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN WEST-CENTRAL COLORADO

"I am chagrined that our great government, through Pinchot, has become so cheapened as to say to you and me that we are aliens in our own country."

*-Red Cliffe, Colorado Rancher*

The late 1800s was a period of change in west-central Colorado. Forces like Populism held sway in the region's thinking because of many residents inability to keep pace with rapidly evolving socio-economic conditions. Much of the region's prosperity was based on the unlimited exploitation of easily available natural wealth such as minerals, timber, land, water, and grass. But by the 1890s, the seemingly endless resources were being exhausted. Most Coloradans failed to realize this, yet other individuals did. Citizens on the eastern slope, and elsewhere in the United States, with their different, somewhat wider perspectives did foresee the finite nature of the resources. These same people began taking steps during the 1890s to protect and conserve those resources that remained.<sup>1</sup>

Such vision began a nationwide conservation movement in America during the 1880s and 1890s. Resource protectionists were particularly concerned with abuses to the public domain occurring under the Desert Land and Timber Culture Acts.<sup>2</sup> By 1890, these misuses were well documented, as a result pressure grew in Washington, D.C., for action. In February, Illinois U.S. Representative Lewis Payson proposed a General Revision Bill to repeal the Desert Land and Timber Culture Acts, as well as to allow the President to remove any tracts that he designated from future entry thus creating the Forest Reserves. Debate over Payson's bill lasted over a year.<sup>3</sup>

Opponents argued that such a law would remove from future generations opportunities that had long been enjoyed by their forefathers. No longer would the pioneer be able to go forth into the wilderness and carve out a life for himself. To take large pieces of public domain and hold them forever in Federal hands would mark the demise of the yeoman farmer who in 1890, was venerated by many as the backbone of American civilization.<sup>4</sup> However, other voices claimed this was not so.

Supporters felt that if something like Payson's bill was not passed soon there would be nothing left for future generations. This was quite the opposite of the anti-conserva-

tionists. Furthermore, as the scientific understanding of ecological systems developed, the important role of forests as watersheds became more apparent. If the use of irrigation was to continue growing, these woodlands had to be protected, especially in the arid West. Colorado conservationists agreed with such views and also advocated the managed use of lands and resources. They did not seek to close access to the natural bounty, but rather to instill order over it and thus began a campaign for conservation in 1876.<sup>5</sup>

Coloradans had first hand experience with unregulated resource exploitation. By 1890, private use of timber and grazing lands had left much of the state in a denuded condition. Over-grazing and fencing of the public domain had severely crippled much of the range's ability to produce adequate supplies of forage while denying many individuals access to the public domain. Worse yet were the depredation of Colorado's forests. The need for mine timbers and fuel (charcoal) led to the destruction of thousands of acres. Human carelessness that led to forest fires also wiped out timber resources. The lands around Aspen and the Mt. of the Holy Cross were two examples of this waste. As early as 1879, settlers caused forest fires in the Roaring Fork Valley. By 1905, mine timber and other needs for lumber led to many of the mountains from the Continental Divide to Battlement Mesa being barren except for tree stumps. Wildlife also suffered because of this uncontrolled use of the state's natural resources.<sup>6</sup>

The conservationist's arguments held sway and on March 4, 1891, the General Revision Act passed into law. Most Coloradans paid little attention to this event. But supporters of land management felt it would give them the power they had long sought to control resource exploitation.<sup>7</sup>

It was not long until west-central Colorado felt the impact of the new law. During March of 1891, special agents for the General Land Office (GLO) started working out of Glenwood Springs surveying timberlands along the Grand and White Rivers. They went about their work through the summer, little noticed by area residents. However, results of their efforts were awesome. On October 8, 1891, 1.2 million acres were withdrawn from private entry and eight days later President Benjamin Harrison declared the White River Timber Land Reserve. It was the second such tract in the nation set aside under the new law.<sup>8</sup>

From 1891 until 1905, each of the country's Chief Executives faced the violent conservation question of having to decide if more land should be held permanently by the General Land Office. On December 24, 1892, Harrison withdrew more of west-central Colorado from entry when he set aside Battlement Mesa Timber Land Reserve. This forest was consolidated with Grand Mesa National Forest in 1945, and was the scene of many early government sponsored forestry experiments.<sup>9</sup> From 1892 to 1905, public opposition to the creation of reserves spread and it was not until the latter year that new tracts were set aside in west-central Colorado.

President Theodore Roosevelt was a staunch supporter of conservation. During his tenure as President, Roosevelt created 37 national forests.<sup>10</sup> On June 14, 1905, the Uncompahgre Forest Reserve was established and two months later, in one of the last presidential proclamations of its type, Holy Cross Forest Reserve came into being.<sup>11</sup> Part of the Holy Cross lands became a National Monument, from 1929 until 1950, when this status was revoked. All of Holy Cross National Forest was consolidated into the White River reserve in 1945, making it the second largest forest in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

Early history of these lands was one of trial and error with regard to administration. From 1891 to 1898, the General Land Office controlled the land but had no procedures or personnel to administer the timber reserves. A formal Forest Reserve Service was established within the Interior Department in 1898. This agency got the power to administer Timber Reserves. To do so rangers were hired. In Colorado, Superintendent of Forests William T. May, a Denver attorney, hired William R. Kreutzer on August 8, 1898, as Forest Ranger for all Colorado.<sup>13</sup> While this was gross under-staffing, it was compatible with nineteenth century views of a ranger's duties. At that time, the position's duties were limited to horseback patrols of the reserves in an effort to discourage timber trespass (cutting) and the destruction of illegal stock enclosures.<sup>14</sup> Finally, rangers were also under orders to fight forest fires; nearly a revolutionary idea at the time. Generally accepted theories of "forestry" maintained that timber blazes should be allowed to burn themselves out.<sup>15</sup> During this period, the Forest Service grew slowly because the entire idea of Federal involvement in conservation became the center of political turmoil during the early years of the twentieth century as the rangers became less policemen and more foresters.<sup>16</sup>

Opposition to the reserves in west-central Colorado did not become vocal until after 1900 when rules were established concerning use of the land and rangers were sent out to

enforce them. After initial outcries in 1891 and 1892, many simply sat back and waited for the government's next move.<sup>17</sup> However, some residents in the area did make known their feelings about any attempt to limit access to Grand Mesa. The mesa was dotted with hundreds of small lakes which were populated with fish. In 1891, William Alexander and Richard Forrest started commercial fishing in some lakes they had homesteaded. From 1891 to 1896, they were reasonably successful in their business despite occasional poaching by other settlers.<sup>18</sup> During the latter year Forrest, having bought out Alexander a year earlier, sold his claims to an Englishman, named William Radcliff. The new owner decided to make a private guest ranch out of his Grand Mesa properties and in 1899, sought exclusive fishing rights. He secured a state license and notified all that poaching would not be tolerated. Armed guards were hired to keep trespassers out. Fishermen continued to use the lakes, feeling the fish belonged to whoever caught them. In 1901, one of Radliff's employees shot and killed a cowboy caught fishing in one of the private lakes. This touched off the long smoldering feud between the Englishman and other area citizens. His house was burned and he was driven from the mesa, returning to England the next year.<sup>19</sup> The Grand Mesa feud, as this episode was known, was not finally settled until the 1930s when the U.S. Forest Service bought up all private fishing rights in the area.<sup>20</sup> The conflict served as an example of west-central Coloradans' feelings concerning restrictions on the use of "nature's bounty."

By the late 1890s, Coloradans were economically hurt by the Panic of 1893 and the subsequent slow recovery. At the same time, the Forest Service issued regulations and sent out rangers to enforce them, particularly keeping lumbermen out of the reserves and controlling grazing. This was a serious attack on west-central Colorado's prosperity. Protest came especially from areas dependent upon mining, grazing, and lumbering for a livelihood.<sup>21</sup>

Another underlying factor that cannot be ignored examining the conservation conflicts that took place on the West Slope was that Forest Service policy makers, in particular Gifford Pinchot, were Easterners. Coloradans saw them as "carpetbaggers." According to area residents, government Foresters could not possibly understand the situation since they were not the ones who struggled to "civilize" the west-central Colorado frontier. To fight off these outsiders, the region's cattlemen and other residents undertook an almost evangelical campaign to stop the "U.S. Tree Agents."<sup>22</sup>

Foremost among Coloradans opposing the conservation movement was U.S. Senator Henry M. Teller. Teller had moved to the state in 1859 to make his fortune in Central City's gold mines. As statehood approached, in 1875 and 1876, Teller worked hard for it. Because of his long service to the Territory as a titular leader of one branch of the state Republican Party, Teller became one of Colorado's first United States Senators. He remained a politician for the rest of his life, serving numerous terms as Senator as well as Secretary of the Interior for three years. By the 1890s, Teller was the paternal voice of Colorado's Republican Party.

When the issue of Forest Reserves first became public, Teller led the state's forces in opposition until his death in 1908. He felt that such interference from Washington could permanently cripple Colorado's ability to grow. He also questioned whether the conservationists truly understood the Westerners' needs or if that region was being sacrificed to the whims of the politically dominated east. Teller continued to speak against federal conservation for the rest of his life. While Teller launched his first campaign, few other Coloradans joined.<sup>23</sup>

By 1898, as the Interior Department announced plans for a grazing system to control cattle on the reserves, Colorado opposition became stronger. Part of this resentment was due to President Grover Cleveland's "midnight reserves," a new set of forests withdrawn during the closing days of his administration in early 1897 in addition to the new rules. Governor Alva Adams helped lead much of the opposition. As a compromise solution, he suggested that the timber lands be turned over to the states because that would save the Federal government money, besides the states understood their own needs much better than Washington did.<sup>24</sup>

Adams' plan was debated widely through the early years of the twentieth century, especially by cattle and lumber interests. Ranchers with large operations in west-central Colorado generally favored both the proposed grazing permit system and the reserves. Others feared, however, that the permits would work to the detriment of small ranchers. C. H. Harris of Glenwood Springs and the Colorado Cattle Growers Association became one of the vocal opponents to permits.<sup>25</sup>

The next move made by area stockgrowers came on February 24, 1900, when a group from Garfield, Eagle, Delta, Mesa, Gunnison, Rio Blanco, and Routt Counties met at

Glenwood Springs to form the Western Range Stock Growers Association. The purpose of this organization was to serve as a focal point for attacking ideas of permits and reserves.<sup>26</sup> The Western Slope quickly became one of the most vocal centers of opposition to Federal land policy.

As anti-government feelings grew in Colorado, changes that would have an impact on the conservation movement were taking place in Washington, D.C. After the assassination of President William McKinley in 1901, newly sworn in President Theodore Roosevelt decided to move ahead with plans for the management of the National Timber Lands. Roosevelt himself was a friend of conservation and his views were reinforced by Gifford Pinchot, then a forester in the Department of Agriculture. Pinchot had long maintained the need for Federal planning of timber resources use. He was of the belief that if the government did not more closely control use of the public domain it would continue to fall prey to cattlemen and timber interests. Furthermore, from 1901 until 1905, Pinchot argued that the General Land Office (GLO) was not the agency to be in charge of these lands because that organization was not willing to police its own territories. He felt that timber reserves should be put under the control of a U.S. Forest Service within the Department of Agriculture.<sup>27</sup> The transfer was first proposed to Congress in 1902, and it was voted down. Yet by 1905, enough support was developed by Pinchot and Roosevelt for the bill. In that year administration of the timber lands changed hands,<sup>28</sup> and two years later the reserves were officially renamed National Forests.<sup>29</sup>

One reason President Roosevelt supported the interdepartmental transfer was that he was a Progressive and part of this philosophy was the belief in scientific management of all problems. Pinchot and other leading conservationists believed that applied science was basic to timber growth and use. In 1905, these same people also proposed to develop a comprehensive plan for range lands to maximize efficient use of that resource.<sup>30</sup> To accomplish this, and to pay for range administration and improvement, the Forest Service proposed in 1905, that a system of grazing fees charged to ranchers for pasture use be established.<sup>31</sup>

When the fee system of 25 cents a head annually was announced, reaction in west-central Colorado was immediate and loud. The charges were to begin on January 1, 1906, but before that the protests started. The leasing question galvanized opposition to the conservation movement in western Colorado.<sup>32</sup> Pinchot and Roosevelt felt that

through a fee system, sustained range yield could be accomplished,<sup>33</sup> but the cattlemen viewed it as another way to harass and tax them, alienating ranchers from the land they viewed as theirs by custom and right.<sup>34</sup>

Beginning in 1905, and continuing for seven years, west-central Colorado stockgrowers vehemently denounced "Czar Pinchot" and his eastern carpetbaggers. Glenwood Springs became the focal point of this movement.<sup>35</sup> On a hunting trip in 1905, President Roosevelt visited the area and took that opportunity to address crowds at Rifle on the need for conservation.<sup>36</sup> Unconvinced by the President's words, the protests and rallies continued to grow. The Eagle Valley and Roaring Fork Stockmen's Association, Rifle Stockgrowers, Grand and Eagle River Stockgrowers all joined the anti-federal movement between 1905 and 1907. Usually these groups voted to ignore the grazing fees as well as call for repeal of the General Revision Act. Their actions led to mass meetings usually held in Glenwood Springs.<sup>37</sup>

From 1905 until 1907, conventions were held in the resort town by cattlemen. In January 1906, they challenged Gifford Pinchot, the Chief Forester of the United States, to attend such a conclave and debate the issues. Pinchot accepted and calmly allowed the angry stockmen to argue their case and cross-examine him. Late in the meeting he rose and spoke. By the end of the afternoon Pinchot had defused even his most vitriolic opponents. In later assessments, anti-conservation journalists concluded that Pinchot was just too slippery for the honest, hard-working Coloradans to deal with.<sup>38</sup> The Federal forces won the first round but the war was far from over; as events proved.

The next year conservation opponents picked up new support from Colorado political leaders. Governors Ammons and Shaforth both came out against grazing fees as did Colorado politician John Bell. Ammons in 1907, during a series of debates, convinced many formerly neutral citizens to become anti-government. He was particularly effective on the Western Slope.<sup>39</sup> Ammons sponsored a national public domain convention in Denver that year and Pinchot was again invited to defend the government's policies. The meeting quickly moved from an anti-conservation to a pro-forest reserve assembly as Pinchot and his forces eloquently argued against the protestors on every point. From that time on, such conventions were pro-conservation,<sup>40</sup> but opponents did not give up.

Shaforth, with the help of newly elected Congressman Edward T. Taylor of Glenwood

Springs, continued the fight. Shaforth worked against the transfer of the reserves to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and once the relocation was completed he became more strident in his opposition to conservation. In 1909, as leader of the National Public Domain League, he set about to disseminate information damaging to Pinchot's plans. Shaforth pointed out that if the Chief Forester had his way, two thirds of Colorado's Western Slope would become National Forests or Parks thereby stopping future development. He argued that if the Federal agents were not stopped, the area's economy would stagnate. Representative Taylor was not as absolute in his evaluation of the situation. He felt the government needed directed multiple use of the public domain while not closing the land to genuine homesteaders.<sup>41</sup>

While Colorado politicians filled the air with rhetoric, area cattlemen took more direct steps toward stopping Pinchot's programs. By 1907, most stockgrowers decided to ignore the grazing leases and went ahead pasturing their cows on National Forests. They also questioned whether the whole reserve system was constitutional and one rancher decided to test the law in court. Fred Light of Snowmass, Colorado, near Aspen, was arrested for trespassing on the Holy Cross National Forest in 1907. He was found guilty and appealed the case through the Federal judicial system until it reached the United States Supreme Court. On May 1, 1911, the High Court rendered its verdict. They upheld Light's conviction and the constitutionality of the National Forest System, including regulated grazing and timbering.<sup>42</sup> After this decision, much of the furor surrounding the Federal timber reserves subsided in west-central Colorado.<sup>43</sup>

Outsiders observing Colorado's behavior during the entire conservation controversy were given the impression of statewide opposition toward Federal policies. However, this was not the case. The Colorado Conservation Association favored the Federal program as did many of Denver's civic and business leaders.<sup>44</sup> Even within the west-central portions of Colorado, hotbed of anti-forest reserve agitation, there were individuals who supported Pinchot's policies. Farmers in the triangle roughly formed by Grand Junction, Delta, and Montrose were among the staunchest proponents of the movement. Even some regional cattlemen, such as George Swigert of Carbondale, felt that Pinchot's programs would prove beneficial in the long run. In Glenwood Springs even the *Glenwood Post* backed President Roosevelt.<sup>45</sup> Swigert's views were correct because the Forest Service grazing permits did help stabilize local cattle businesses. Federal employment and spending became one of the main economic bases of Glenwood Springs, which served as the headquarters of White River National Forest as well as the site of a major branch of the General Land Office.<sup>46</sup>

One concern of the conservation movement that was less controversial, both nationally and in west-central Colorado, was the movement to create national parks. One project, in particular, was popular in the region. The creation of Colorado National Monument, west of Grand Junction, was considered important. This area of natural scenic beauty became a popular place for persons from the Grand Junction-Fruita vicinity to visit during the early twentieth century; long before it was made a national monument. Cattlemen used Monument Canyon for grazing and a few had settled there by 1900, however, because of the ruggedness, only the canyon was used. Ranchers also utilized other parts of the proposed monument as a route from summer to winter ranges between the Grand Valley and Glade Park.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, many people around the area visited the rocky cliffs and canyons to look for Indian relics. This was popularized by the successes of Rigg's Chicago Museum fossil expedition of the early 1900s. Rock hounding and pot hunting by amateurs in Monument Canyon destroyed many of the better archeological sites before they could be professionally examined. Such destruction led to passage of the Federal Antiquities Act of 1906. Despite the pot hunters, many petroglyphs remained and combined with the natural scenic beauty continued to attract visitors.<sup>48</sup>

One of these early twentieth century travellers was John Otto. He came to Colorado from California around 1900 to work on the Fruita Water pipeline. He fell in love with the canyon and its scenery and set out to find ways to share and protect it.<sup>49</sup> His habits were considered eccentric. He did not live in a house or cabin, although some sources indicate he did have a home in Fruita.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, he was a hard worker boosting his idea. In 1907, he started a petition drive to have the area designated as a National Monument.<sup>51</sup> After four years of debate, Otto's efforts were rewarded when Secretary of the Interior Richard Ballinger recommended to Congress the creation of a national monument. On May 24, 1911, President William H. Taft signed a proclamation setting aside 13,833 acres as a National Monument. The name was also a subject of debate, but in the official document the tract was listed as Colorado National Monument.<sup>52</sup>

The National Park Service made John Otto the first superintendent of the Monument because of his interest in promoting it and because he would work for \$1.00 a month. He took great interest in the Monument and raised funds any way he could, cajoling money from local Chambers of Commerce or selling cord wood he had personally cut.<sup>53</sup> Otto used this capital and his own muscles to build many of the early trails in the Monu-



The Grand Diversion Dam was one of the first reclamation projects on the Colorado River. Irrigation of the Grand Junction area from the Highline Canal began in 1915.  
*Photo by U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.*

ment and on Grand Mesa. Because of his unorthodox behavior and unwillingness to accept direction from Washington, D.C., Otto was fired in 1927. He returned to California where he died in 1952.<sup>54</sup> During his tenure as Superintendent, Otto wanted to share the Monument with visitors and as time passed and access became easier, the tourists did arrive. Construction of a transcontinental highway during the 1910s facilitated this, as did Otto's work on auto trails within the park. The 1920s and 1930s saw new transportation improvements. The Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce had paid \$45,000 for road improvements into the area by 1930. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built Rimrock Highway during the Great Depression as one of their many projects in west-central Colorado. Meanwhile, Fruita and Grand Junction boosters both fought to have a visitor's center located near their respective towns. Eventually the latter city won the contest.<sup>55</sup> The Monument continues to bring many tourists to the Grand Valley and is viewed by many local residents as a positive example of Federal involvement on the West Slope.

Another government-sponsored undertaking that had a major impact on the Grand Valley's economy was the Grand Valley Reclamation Project, also referred to as the "Government Canal" or Ditch. This was considered the answer to irrigators prayers when it was first planned. By 1902, the situation was such that a federal program was passed by Congress and implemented in the region.<sup>56</sup>

Federal interest in reclamation started during the 1870s with the explorations of Major John Wesley Powell. His principal goal was to map and then establish uses for the Colorado River System. In 1878, Powell published *Lands of the Arid Region* in which he outlined not only what water was available, but also how it could be best used for irrigation. The volumes also included his theories on farming and grazing on less well watered areas. The Powell treatise became standard for all those studying western lands and water policy.<sup>57</sup>

Powell and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) continued their work throughout the west. USGS crews looked at specific sites for reservoirs and diversion projects. The purpose was to tell the General Land Office (GLO) of prospective areas for development and have these lands withdrawn from private entry.<sup>58</sup> As the surveys continued, Congress worked on the irrigation problem. The debates continued until 1901, when followers of Powell, among them President Theodore Roosevelt, were able to convince

the legislature of the wisdom of Federal financial support for reclamation.<sup>59</sup>

In January 1901, U.S. Representative Francis G. Newlands of Nevada, introduced a bill calling for direct federal aid to western irrigation projects. The Newlands Bill sparked an eighteen month debate in Congress during which diverse opinions were expressed. Legislators from the east, midwest, and south all agreed that governmental aid to such undertakings constituted favoritism for one section over the others. To meet this objection, supporters proposed and incorporated into the Newlands Bill a system of self liquidating finances. Users of the water and those who would directly benefit from it were charged annual fees and part of that money was to return the project's debt. This income was then to be put into a revolving fund to finance still more systems. One fear expressed by many was that of monopoly. Such persons felt that the law needed some provision to limit the size of an individual's land holdings within the project. This matter was corrected by limiting each farmer to 160 acres of irrigated land. By doing this, arid lands would be improved by reclamation for homesteader settlement.<sup>60</sup>

The debates dragged on through 1901 and 1902, until President Roosevelt stepped in. He used his power as a supporter of the west to break the Congressional log jam during the Spring of 1902. On June 3, 1902, a final version of the Newlands Bill passed both Houses of Congress and two weeks later Roosevelt signed it into law.<sup>61</sup>

The Newlands Act led to the creation of the Federal Reclamation Service, later the Bureau of Reclamation and presently known as Water and Power Resources Service. Charles D. Walcott was appointed to organize and head the new agency. The staff immediately set about looking at the earlier USGS survey reports.<sup>62</sup>

One potential site that attracted the interest of Washington was the Grand Valley from DeBeque Canyon west to Fruita. On July 17, 1902, notice was given by the Reclamation Service of intent to build a diversion dam on the Grand River and lateral canals to carry water west.<sup>63</sup> The announcement was welcomed by farmers, promoters, and businessmen alike.<sup>64</sup> However, before Colorado's second federal water project could be started, it was stopped. Because part of the land was privately held, most by being left over from earlier reclamation projects, it took time and court battles for the Reclamation Service to secure clear titles. Also water rights had to be acquired. Furthermore, the legal status of irrigation districts as debtors had to be clarified in Colorado. Solving pro-

blems took ten years and it was not until 1912 that the first earth was moved for the government ditch.<sup>65</sup>

The Grand Valley Irrigation District had legal recognition by 1912, and it floated bonds to help finance the project. These obligations were the same as a first mortgage on the land. This created a unique debtor class dependent upon crop prices and the good will of the federal government in order to meet their financial obligations.<sup>66</sup> The project itself was an engineering oddity.

The diversion dam, built eight miles above Palisade, used a design common in Europe but not typical of most American sites. The roller crest dam, in which sections of the dam could be adjusted, was used to control the reservoir water level and also to protect the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad tracks from flooding. Because of its pattern and easy access, the Grand Valley dam attracted attention from the public as well as engineering professionals.<sup>67</sup>

Construction of the dam and canal system started in 1912, but it was not until the next year that major progress was made. There were 750 men employed in building the system, 300 on the dam and the remainder on canals. The diversion project was designed to irrigate 53,000 acres, using 60 miles of canals. As work proceeded west from Fruita, water began to flow into the fields along the way. By 1916, the government ditch reached Fruita and over the next two years it was extended westward. Total cost of the Grand Valley Reclamation Project was approximately \$4.5 million.<sup>68</sup>

Before the system was completed, problems appeared. By 1911, intensive farming in the area caused water seepage from irrigation ditches into the groundwater supply and with it came the appearance of high alkali levels. Over the next two years, studies of this problem were undertaken and in 1914, the Grand Valley Drainage Association was formed. This group, made up of area irrigators, sought to remove excess water from the fields and thereby protect the groundwater supply.<sup>69</sup>

The Federal Bureau of Reclamation aided this effort after 1919. From that date until 1921, the government helped finance and construct 400 miles of ditches that saved thousands of acres from alkali contamination. In 1921, the Bureau of Reclamation ceased aid to the Drainage Association when most of the necessary work was completed.

By 1930, water table recession helped offer what seemed to be a final solution, however, since then new salinity problems have arisen and projects by the Reclamation Service (Water and Power Resources Service) are underway to correct the situation.<sup>70</sup>

Water quality problems were not the only ones faced by farmers under the Government Ditch. They also had new and heavier debts to consider. Fate seemed to have cast her lot against these people because within a few years of canal completion, the bottom dropped out of the farm market. World War I led to increased demand and high prices for all agricultural produce, but once this artificial support was removed, economic disaster befell area farmers. While the reclamation project led to higher land values, it did not relieve debts.<sup>71</sup> One solution members of the Grand Valley Irrigation District tried as early as 1917, was to send out colonization agents to seek new settlers. Any new arrivals would be able to share the debt and lessen each individual's portion of it. This effort met with limited success.<sup>72</sup>

Failure to attract newcomers led farmers to try a new approach. Starting in 1922, as the recession deepened, they went to the Reclamation Bureau and Congress requesting an extension for their pay-back schedule. Edward T. Taylor, Congressman from Glenwood Springs, took up the cause and fought for three years for scaled down, longer term payments.<sup>73</sup> In 1925 he was successful; Reclamation administrators agreed to the plan. In 1927, a 40-year schedule was worked out with the Federal government, writing off nearly \$1 million of the debt. On January 1, 1932, the users were scheduled to take over operation of the system, exclusive of dams and tunnels. Irrigators petitioned the government to continue its control of the project until 1937, which was done.<sup>74</sup>

Congressman Taylor, always concerned with the welfare and promotion of his district, proposed another plan for use of the Grand Valley Reclamation Project. He felt that 160-acre tracts of the public domain within the reclaimed lands should be given to any World War I veteran interested in relocating to the Grand Valley. The Senate, however, defeated Taylor's idea.<sup>75</sup> More than a decade later, Taylor and others again sought to use the area as federally sponsored homes for those who would use them. This time it was suggested that unsettled areas be used by the Resettlement Administration for farmers who had been economically ruined by the Great Depression. This proposal was accepted.<sup>76</sup> The impact of this federal program will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter.



Edward T. Taylor's house still stands in Glenwood Springs, Colorado. Taylor was one of the most important politicians in western Colorado from the 1890s to the 1940s.  
*Photo by F.J. Athearn*

The Grand Valley Project was not the only such Reclamation Service undertaking in west-central Colorado. The second, less well known operation was located on Orchard Mesa near Grand Junction. In 1908, the Orchard Mesa Construction Company was organized to build an irrigation and power generating system at that locale. The plan called for an extensive system of canals, flumes, and a power plant. It was under construction for two years before the company went bankrupt. Farmers on the Mesa wanted the project completed, so in 1910, they organized the Orchard Mesa Irrigation District which bought out the previous owners for \$1 million. District efforts were not sufficient and in 1921, the members voted to request Reclamation Service assistance in upgrading and maintaining their system. Federal authorities agreed to the proposition. In 1930, 40-year financing from the Service was secured and 10,000 acres of land were thusly reclaimed.<sup>77</sup>

From 1930 until the 1950s the Bureau of Reclamation encouraged surveys and studies of proposed reservoirs. The U.S. Geological Survey carried on many examinations starting as early as 1910.<sup>78</sup> Representative Edward T. Taylor helped lead Congressional support for these projects until his death in 1941. During the 1920s he supported efforts by the Reclamation Service to put itself on a paying basis as had been the intent of the original Newlands Act in 1902. To further this goal, Taylor proposed, in 1920, that the Newlands Law be amended to allow sale of water from Federal projects for industries other than agriculture if farming did not suffer by such action.<sup>79</sup> In 1933, Taylor succeeded in getting Congressional approval for funds to build the Taylor Park Reservoir southeast of Aspen.<sup>80</sup> All his efforts were aimed at helping his district, as well as the entire west, by expansion of Reclamation Service activities.

The Colorado Congressmen made what may have been his greatest contribution to national water resource use planning in 1936, when he suggested a comprehensive development plan be built for the entire Colorado River Basin which included the Grand River. The Grand was renamed the Colorado in 1921, by joint consensus of various parties including the Federal government and the State of Colorado.<sup>81</sup> Taylor's proposal was in line with water use ideas at the time and the Reclamation Service and other government agencies adopted it.

World War II and defense preparations during the late 1930s and early 1940s distracted attention from the construction of any new projects, planning, however, did continue.

During the 1930s, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) came into existence as an agency for comprehensive planning and development of water resources. The success of TVA led to many similar plans being proposed across the nation during the late 1940s and early 1950s, including one for the upper Colorado River Basin. The blueprints called for unified state and federal actions in an effort to best determine and meet area water and power needs. Well over a dozen projects for the Grand Valley were included in the 1945 plan. From Collbran, east to Glenwood Springs, nearly every creek and water-course was determined a potential reservoir site.<sup>83</sup> However, it soon became obvious that there was not enough water in the Colorado River and its tributaries for all these projects. Therefore most were dropped and Colorado did not get its own "TVA."<sup>84</sup>

Part of this drive for comprehensive planning for Colorado River water was rooted in events of the 1920s. During that decade, water users from states all along the river from Colorado to California feared that the Reclamation Service, the Federal Power Commission, and other agencies were becoming too powerful and if the states did not stop this trend, they would lose control over water matters. Two Coloradans, Delph A. Carpenter of Denver and Congressman Edward Taylor, were among leaders of a movement to achieve interstate agreement on the allocation and use of Colorado River water. As early as 1920, Carpenter suggested such a compromise.<sup>85</sup>

For the next two years delegations from the various Colorado River Basin states met and debated issues, especially water allocation and the definition of beneficial use based on the state of Colorado's. In 1922, agreements were reached on all points and the Colorado River Compact was signed. Once the document was in many west-central Coloradans felt it would protect all water users including the irrigators of west-central Colorado.<sup>86</sup> However, this was not the case. Such a radical departure from typical political practice as a treaty between the states had to be approved by the federal government since the U.S. constitution made no provision for such action.

Edward Taylor, a long time supporter of the Compact, took it upon himself to defend the treaty before Congress. He worked throughout the 1920s for the agreement. Taylor especially sought to protect Colorado and Western Slope rights to water. In 1926, he spoke in opposition to Boulder Dam saying that until the seven state agreement was ratified such an undertaking might jeopardize other states water rights. In 1927, the treaty was approved by Congress at the urging of Taylor, the Chairman of the sub-

committee on the Colorado River, and despite threats from power companies.<sup>87</sup> From that point on he continued to defend Western Slope water both from interstate and intrastate forces. Taylor felt that since 1860, when the first water was diverted to the eastern slope at Hoosier Pass, that interests on the western side had been ignored. He saw it as a matter of sectional rights and that Western Slope needs should be considered not sacrificed. By the 1930s, Taylor was such a dominate force in Colorado politics that citizens along the front range seeking new or expanded water supplies, secured his blessing before proceeding with their plans. He was widely recognized as “the father of Western Slope water rights.”<sup>88</sup>

At the same time, the Glenwood Springs Congressman was also becoming a major force in the development of hydro-electric power. This came from the fact the located near his hometown was the first major hydro-electric plant along the Colorado River. In 1909, the same year Taylor left for Washington D.C., the Central Colorado Power Company completed construction of the Shoshone Dam and generating plant. The undertaking cost \$2.7 million and was estimated to supply all of the Colorado’s electrical needs as of 1905.<sup>89</sup> Electricity was transmitted to the eastern slope. In 1924, the original owners sold the facility to Public Service Company of Colorado.<sup>90</sup> The Shoshone plant remained the largest on the river until 1945, when larger plants were built.<sup>91</sup> Hydro-electric power did not attract much attention because of readily available coal for steam generation. This was despite many excellent hydro power sites throughout westcentral Colorado.<sup>92</sup> Taylor was well aware of this situation throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and by 1927, began to sponsor bills to maintain federal control over hydro-electric development, thereby preventing “power trusts” (electric companies) from denying Americans access to a cheap source of energy.<sup>93</sup>

Edward Taylor’s work on water problems was significant in the development of west-central Colorado, as was what he did concerning the use and administration of public domain within the area and the entire West. By 1920, after 11 years in Congress, he became recognized as an expert on public land issues.<sup>94</sup> As Representative from Colorado’s fourth congressional district which contained much public domain, Taylor had first hand experience with the Federal administration of land. His opinion was sought by others in and out of Washington on such matters. Congressional committee assignments placed Taylor on the Committee of Interior and Insular Affairs, which he eventually chaired, as well as the Appropriations Committee that originated all Federal spending

measures. By the 1930s, he was one of the senior Democrats in Congress and at his death in 1941, he was the ranking majority member.<sup>95</sup> In such a position Taylor was able to protect west-central Colorado's interests while furthering his own philosophy of proper use for public lands.

During the 1920s, the Glenwood Springs Congressman began to develop a clear program for use of the public domain. Bills such as the Taylor-Mondell Act represented his ideas. He felt that the land should be multiple-use, in this case, Federal coal lands were to be opened for farm settlement which would allow beneficial use of the surface while protecting the fuel reserves.<sup>96</sup> During the same decade, Taylor turned his attention to the plight of cattlemen throughout the West, including his district.

In 1928, Congress established the Mizpah-Pumpkin Creek Grazing District in Montana as an experiment in government management of public rangelands. The tests were followed with interest by many, including Taylor. Results were encouraging, especially increased productivity, thanks to federally sponsored improvements.<sup>97</sup>

The next decade witnessed an enlargement of the Montana system until it covered most of the western states including Colorado. Taylor was instrumental in this process. As early as 1930, he promoted the idea that all unhomesteaded, unreserved public land should be set aside for stockmen and others to use on a fee basis. In January 1934, Taylor's plan was formally introduced into Congress as a bill.<sup>98</sup>

The proposal called for lands to be withdrawn from private entry and administered by the Department of the Interior. Ranchers were to pay fees for use of the range and these rentals were to pay for conservation and improvements in addition to a portion of revenues to be returned to the states.<sup>99</sup> Opponents of the act felt that the individual states should be given the land to dispose of or use as they saw fit.<sup>100</sup> However, Taylor and Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, were successful in stopping the proposal and on June 28, 1934, Congress approved the Taylor Grazing Act which was signed into law the next month by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.<sup>101</sup>

West-central Coloradans generally reacted favorably to the new statute. Taylor had included in the package the idea of self-governing grazing districts where the users had input in the decisionmaking process. This helped head off potential opposition. During

the late summer of 1934, as organizational work for the Grazing Service was underway, President Roosevelt withdrew most remaining lands from entry by homesteaders. This included much of the balance of west-central Colorado, some of which was being "proved up."<sup>102</sup> Support for implementation of the new law spread. When Grand Junction area stockmen voted on the question of organizing a district, the tally was 414 yes, 58 no.<sup>103</sup> The large favorable vote could, in part have been due to overgrazing on the public range in areas like Glade Park.<sup>104</sup> Whatever their reasons, stockmen from Moffat, Mesa, Garfield, and Rio Blanco counties met on September 17, 1934, at Grand Junction and formed Grazing District Number One, also known as the "Taylor District." Edward T. Taylor attended the conclave and proudly announced that the Grazing Act was the greatest achievement of his political career.<sup>105</sup>

Despite the positive reaction to the new law, not all west-central Coloradans were happy with it. Some smaller ranchers objected to the Grazing Act for the same reasons they did the Forest Service grazing permit system. These stockmen felt that provisions of the act favored major cattle raisers over smaller ones. In at least one case, a Glade Park stockman felt the new law was responsible for the failure of his ranch.<sup>106</sup>

Ranchers were not alone in their complaints about the Federal government during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Changes in national mineral policies disturbed mining interests in west-central Colorado too. In 1906, the President was given powers to withdraw potential coal lands from use and this, combined with the forest reserve controversy, led area residents to conclude that Washington, D.C., was solidly opposed to development of the region's resources.<sup>107</sup> Fourteen years later the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 passed Congress. This law allowed certain types of minerals, such as coal and oil shale, to be leased for development from the government and removed these resources from entry under the 1872 Mining Act. This led to a short, but sharp, series of public outcries from mining promoters in the region and proved to be of long-term importance.<sup>108</sup>

Whether one views the new and expanded role of the Federal Government from 1890 to 1935 as a positive or negative force, no one can doubt that national policies did influence historical development of west-central Colorado during the early twentieth century. Congressman Edward T. Taylor caused millions of dollars to be spent in the region by various federal agencies.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, the national conservation movement

which included forestry, mineral development, and rangeland use, led to the passing of the "wide open" frontier. Prior to government intervention, resource use was haphazard, based on a first come, first serve philosophy. New policies such as reclamation imposed order to this process, something that was not achieved earlier. The dominance of federal control would become the key factor in regional development from 1920 on. The Great Depression of the 1930s and Franklin Roosevelt's response to it in his "New Deal" did much to further the trend of national control for regional events.

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## CHAPTER X. DEPRESSION DECADES

"It might be six months it might be a year. But when they got you down below what you could make a living off of, you was out of business."

*—Glade Park Rancher*

The end of the first World War, and the 1920s, was a watershed period in the history of west-central Colorado. Wartime demands led to increased production from all segments of the area's economy. During the 1910s, most residents predicted an era of prosperity for themselves. Adjustments were being successfully made to the Forest Reserve system and other manifestations of Federal power. Indeed, when the United States entered the "war to end all wars" in 1917, most, if not all, west-central Coloradans were optimistic about the future. However, these same people failed to realize that prosperity was based on artificial market conditions and that once the war ended and demand dropped, good times for the area would also end. By the 1930s, residents who previously had opposed Federal involvement now welcomed it.

The Armistice was signed during November 1919, and America's economy began a period of radical adjustment. Its various segments reacted at different rates but by late 1920, a full-scale depression swept the entire nation. The next year most of the country had recovered, but west-central Colorado did not. This was due, in large part, to the two largest sectors of the local economy--agriculture and mining--being caught up in a nationwide slump. This decline spread to all segments of the economy by 1923, and as the hard times continued, area citizens became more and more frustrated. They looked to many cure-alls to solve their woes, but it was not until the early 1930s, and the creation of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, that west-central Colorado's plight changed significantly.<sup>1</sup> Farming, the leading industry of west-central Colorado, acted as a barometer of regional business activity throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Fruit, the basis of the valley's agricultural fame, shared in the wartime prosperity and also in the postwar recession. Problems faced by fruit growers included not only low prices, but also insects and the first instances of migrant labor troubles along with tight credit.<sup>2</sup> These problems resulted in an increasingly widespread disillusionment with fruit growing. Evidence of this is that Grand Junction's Peach Day was discontinued in 1923.<sup>3</sup>

The first problem, that of low prices, was tackled in a way typical of west-central Colorado before the War, using cooperative marketing. In 1923, the United Fruit Growers Association was founded. This new organization was somewhat more successful than earlier attempts due to a revision in Colorado statutes dealing with cooperative marketing associations. State law then allowed co-ops like any other corporation and also permitted members to be legally bound to the group. The United Fruitgrowers and others in the Grand Valley began looking for new markets. It was felt that the northeastern United States and Canada offered potential customers, as did areas to be settled after Boulder (Hoover) Dam was completed on the Lower Colorado River.<sup>4</sup> Despite the optimistic talk, demand for Grand Valley fruit continued to decline and by 1929, over 50 carloads of produce were left on the trees by farmers because prices did not cover picking and shipping costs.<sup>5</sup>

The second area of concern for Grand Valley orchardists was pest control. By the 1920s, farmers turned to arsenate of lead to ward off insects, particularly the codling moth. The problem started when the Federal government, through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, started to inspect foods more closely in accordance with the Pure Food and Drug Act. Apple and pear growers around Fruita, particularly, were hard hit by these new regulations. They could not find an efficient, low cost method of removing the poisons without ruining the fruit. This situation and low market prices caused many orchardmen to pull up their trees in the late 1920s.<sup>6</sup> During that same decade, groups such as the United Fruit Growers Association helped finance studies searching for new, more practical pesticides. Farmers also requested Federal aid to find a solution. This assistance was forthcoming during the 1930s.<sup>7</sup>

As fruit production declined from 1920 to 1939, migrant workers used in orchard tending and harvesting became yet another problem for residents of the Grand Valley. Orchardmen came to depend heavily on these "fruit tramps," however, because of market uncertainties it was not known how many laborers would be required from season to season. In some years there were not enough hands available; in other years too many. Also, once in the area, they had to be housed which in turn drove costs up even further. Yet with all these dilemmas there was no record of violence or disturbance between growers and the migrants.<sup>8</sup>

The final obstacle many Grand Valley agriculturalists had to overcome was that of securing capital. As the agri-business recession deepened during the 1920s, many local banks and mortgage companies became reluctant to lend to farmers. Eventually

the money supply dried up and people found it impossible to seek loans, especially for new farms. By the 1930s, many good farmsites were for sale with no buyers because of mortgage problems.<sup>9</sup>

Farmers began to realize that their dependence on single cash crops made them vulnerable to any changes in market conditions. This led to diversification in the Grand Valley during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>10</sup> While some individuals began to cultivate crops other than fruit, such as sugar beets, it was the depression after World War I that led to a wholesale movement away from specialized production and toward general agri-business.<sup>11</sup> The era witnessed a steady decline in orchard acres from 1920 until 1940. By the middle years of the 1930s, almost all Fruita's orchards were pulled up and replaced by general crops of grains, livestock or vegetables.<sup>12</sup> Crops such as pinto beans and potatoes replaced fruit as cash generators for farmers.<sup>13</sup> What little money crop sales raised was immediately spent on mortgage payments and other absolute necessities of life. Farmers in west-central Colorado, as throughout much of the nation, had plenty to eat but no money.<sup>14</sup>

While irrigators carried on their struggle for economic survival with limited success, dryland farmers also attempted to do the same, generally with less success. Many areas were opened for farming only slightly before World War I. In 1916, Congress passed the Stock Raising Homestead Act to encourage settlement of these lands. This, combined with the wartime boom, led to only marginal dryland prosperity. When the depression struck, in the early twenties, many of those agriculturists were forced out of business. As late as 1923, newcomers were trying to make a start on non-irrigated tracts north of Fruita, not realizing the difficulties they faced.<sup>15</sup> Despite the hardships, some dryland farmers did manage to stay in business on a marginal basis until the 1930s. However, the financial catastrophe that hit the United States in 1929, soon made its presence felt in west-central Colorado. Many dryland farmers who had managed to continue in business through the 1920s failed during the next decade. The situation became so bad, according to one observer, that almost all Glade Park-Pinon Mesa farms were sold for taxes at least once by 1940.<sup>16</sup>

The cultivators of west-central Colorado were not alone in their suffering. Livestock growers were also affected by the depression, especially cattlemen. Many were forced to reduce or stabilize herd size because of poor market conditions. Cattlemen also became part time farmers raising both stock and crops, thereby continuing an earlier trend.<sup>17</sup> Sheep raisers also faced an economic downturn, yet,

flock size increased dramatically. Shepards trailed their charges unobstructed from Glenwood Springs to Grand Junction and other West Slope areas such as American Flats in southwestern Colorado. The "desert" west of Grand Junction became a popular range for "woolies." Basques became primary lamb tenders during the period and occasionally tensions flared between them and cattlemen, such as in the case of the death of Charlie Glass.<sup>18</sup> Statistics for all of west-central Colorado were not kept, however, in Mesa County alone the number of sheep doubled between 1920 and 1936, from 24,000 head to slightly over 48,000 by the latter year.<sup>19</sup> Other parts of the region, especially Wolcott, were also centers of sheepraising. Mutton production was one bright spot for farmers during the inter-war years.

Not only did low prices plague farmers, but periodic droughts and predators also inhibited prosperity. Coyotes and other animals attacked both cattle and sheep herds, causing losses for owners. Complaints and calls for assistance were sent out and Edward Taylor responded. In 1934, he succeeded in getting an appropriation to increase predator control for western Colorado.<sup>20</sup> Droughts were another matter. During the 1920s, dry years diminished returns from dryland farming and haying along the Grand Valley, from Parachute Creek west to Fruita.<sup>21</sup> The 1930s witnessed even more severe rainless periods throughout the West. The Great Plains entered a period referred to as the "Dust Bowl" and by 1934, west-central Coloradans feared it would spread to there. While dust bowl conditions did not occur, the summer of 1934 was unusually hot and dry, causing crop failures in addition to ruining a number of non-irrigated farms. The Federal government encouraged water conservation and started programs to reduce soil erosion but it was beyond the powers of Congress to make it rain.<sup>22</sup>

The government, after the election of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, took a more active role in agricultural stabilization and economic recovery. West-central Colorado benefitted from these programs due, in large part, to Edward Taylor and his constant urgings in Congress. He worked hard to assure his district an equal share of any program if it would genuinely help his constituents, such as the Taylor Grazing Act did. During the 1920s Taylor became associated with the "Farm Bloc." This group of Congressmen represented agricultural states and by 1925, had informally coalesced into a bi-partisan voting unit attempting to secure Federal aid for farmers. Taylor was particularly interested in relief for stockmen by using moratoriums on U.S. Forest Service grazing fees and extended payment plans for people who owed money to the Reclamation Service. He met with little success until 1932, when his

colleagues on Capitol Hill acceded to his pleas and authorized measures reducing grazing fees and declaring a suspension of charges for Federal reclamation projects.<sup>23</sup> The relief given area farmers in 1932, proved to be a small part of what became a widespread government program.

The first major legislation passed as part of Roosevelt's "New Deal" was the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA). The underlying premise of this statute was that produce prices were low, due to over-supply of basic commodities, so to cure this situation production must be controlled. Among the products included were sugar beets, cattle, sheep and goats. AAA administrators gave west-central Colorado producers quotas as to the quantities they could grow. In exchange for limiting output, farmers were paid directly by the government. This program satisfied most area farmers because prices were stabilized and they got relief checks to make up for any lost income. As part of the AAA's quantity control efforts occasionally livestock had to be killed. In west-central Colorado at least 4,000 goats were slaughtered to meet AAA quotas.<sup>24</sup>

Another Roosevelt farm relief project that affected the area was the Resettlement Administration. The goal of this organization was to help families put out of work by the Great Depression get a new start in farming. Resettlement Administration offices were located in Grand Junction and Fruita. At the suggestion of Congressman Taylor, tracts of public domain included in the Grand Valley Reclamation Project were made available for resettlement. In 1935, the first families were moved into the region and this process continued throughout the remainder of the decade. Eventually more than three dozen new farms were started in this manner.<sup>25</sup>

The last farm assistance program of the New Deal to touch west-central Colorado was the Federal Land Bank. This body's purpose was to encourage soil conservation by paying agrarians a small sum not to produce on parts of their farms. The regional office in Wichita, Kansas, came under fire from Taylor for allegedly slighting west-central Colorado.<sup>26</sup>

The Federal Land Bank and other relief programs stabilized the agri-business situation in western parts of the state. However, recovery was not achieved until World War II when increased demand and prices for all commodities occurred.

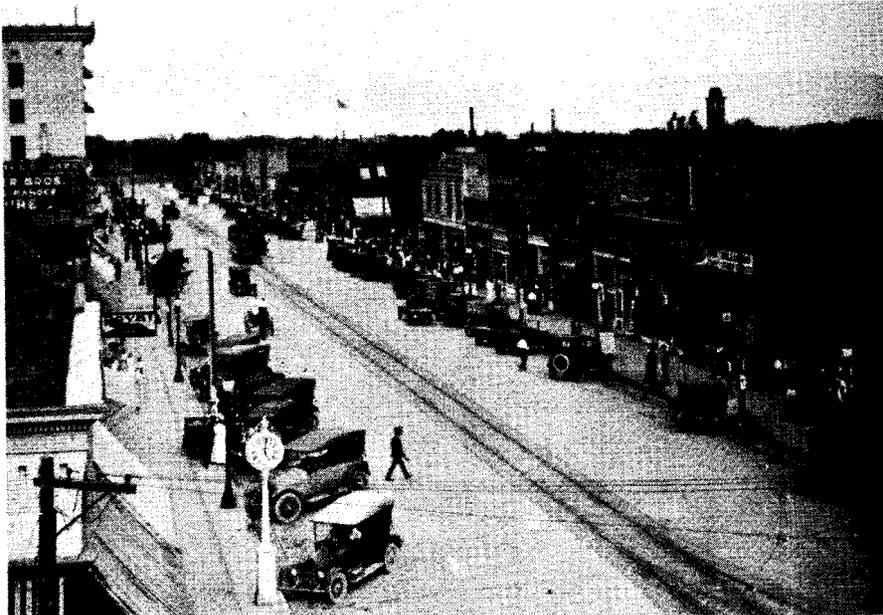
Since so many of the region's businesses depended upon farm trade, the agricultural depression had a widespread impact on many of the area's towns too. Grand Junction, as leading city of the Western Slope, continued its slow growth in both population and business from 1920 to 1940. In 1920, the Grand Valley Canning Company went into production and by 1930, two packing plants were still operating in Grand Junction. The year before Holly Sugar closed its beet sugar factory and consolidated its Western Slope operations at Delta, Colorado.<sup>27</sup> Despite the slow net growth, town boosters kept pushing Grand Junction. In 1925, they succeeded in convincing the state legislature to found Mesa College, as a state supported junior college in Grand Junction.<sup>28</sup> Four years later city fathers approved funding for construction of a municipal airport and the next year, 1930, Pike's Peak Air Commerce Company began regular flights between Denver and Grand Junction.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the 1930s, area promoters tried to establish an airmail route in Grand Junction, but the U.S. Post Office refused, saying the costs would be too great.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the city continued its commercial dominance of western Colorado and eastern Utah.<sup>31</sup>

Other area towns conceded that fact by the late 1930s. Fruita resigned itself to being a small farm town and admitted that Grand Junction was the area's trade and cultural center. Aspen, Eagle, Glenwood Springs, and other regional towns found themselves in much the same predicament; ranching and mining activity decreased after World War I, business slackened and these communities stagnated. Glenwood Springs did have one notable summer of activity during the 1920s when in 1926, cowboy star Tom Mix and a cast of 55 came to town to film a movie *The K&A Train Robbery*. However, this prosperity was shortlived and by the next year, the town was suffering from a recession.<sup>32</sup> The next decade brought more economic gloom for these communities as banks, like the Citizen's National of Glenwood Springs, failed and money became more scarce.<sup>33</sup> That same city became a center for many of the destitute during the Great Depression and a large hobo jungle developed.<sup>34</sup>

These obvious manifestations of the depression were not the only indicators of social tension brought on by the economic troubles in west-central Colorado. The use of alcohol and flagrant violations of national prohibition were examples of this stress. At least one moonshine still was camouflaged in a peach orchard west of Grand Junction and all information indicates it to have been a very prosperous operation. This was due in part, to lax local tax enforcement of the law and a reluctance of juries to convict those arrested.<sup>35</sup>



This general store at New Castle, Colorado stocked nearly every need as this 1923 photograph illustrates. *Photo by Garfield County Public Library.*



During the early 1920s Grand Junction was a growing, and as this view of downtown indicates, prosperous city. *Photo by Museum of Western Colorado.*

Another evidence of the underlying social tensions of the 1920s was the rapid spread of the Ku Klux Klan throughout Colorado during the first half of the twenties. The national rebirth of this organization came about in 1920. A 1915 film entitled *The Birth of a Nation* made by D. W. Giffith inspired men to remember the Klan and five years later Atlanta, Georgia, businessman William T. Simmons took action. Simmons, with the help of Edward Young and Elizabeth Tyler, two publicity agents, started advertising the new Secret Order of the Ku Klux Klan complete with secret codes, official "uniforms," and the trappings of a fraternity. Thousands of individuals joined and the organization soon reached outside the Deep South.<sup>36</sup>

Dr. John Galen Locke, a Denver dentist, saw the new Klan as a route to political power. The group's philosophy was based on white Anglo-Saxon supremacy and racial purity. Its propaganda played on the fears and insecurities of working class whites who saw their jobs threatened by minorities such as Blacks or, more significantly in Colorado, Mexican-Americans. This latter group also happened to be mainly Roman Catholic which violated a basic Klan premise, that of Protestant supremacy. The Colorado movement began in Denver, and grew powerful there but by 1925, it became a force in west-central Colorado.<sup>37</sup>

On the evening of July 24, 1924 the sky around Grand Junction glowed as Klansmen burned three crosses, one each on Mantey Heights, Orchard Mesa, and Mt. Lincoln. This signalled the arrival of the KKK in the Grand Valley. Throughout that summer its numbers grew and on August 17, Grand Dragon Locke and other Klan officials came to town to charter the Grand Valley's first chapter. The presentation took place after church services and a hooded torchlight parade down Main Street.<sup>38</sup>

Spurred on by white supremacy editorials in the Red Cliff newspaper, Anglo-American males throughout west-central Colorado joined the Klan.<sup>39</sup> By the spring of 1925, all indications were that the KKK was a permanent part of life in the region. However, the national organization and the state's were on the verge of a rapid decline. In the 1924 Colorado General Elections, movement sympathizers were elected to many key state and local offices, including the Governorship. Locke and his "Hooded Knights" controlled the Republican party as well.<sup>40</sup> But political opposition to the Klan-sponsored legislative program, led by Democrats in the State Senate and an Internal Revenue Service investigation of Dr. Locke's finances, soon ended KKK power on the state level.<sup>41</sup>

In Grand Junction the Klan continued to expand its influence during 1925. Both the city manager and police chief were sympathizers and recruited members to serve in city jobs. The police were used to raid and harrass anti-Klan groups and clubs. The Klan was opposed by the Editor of the *Daily Sentinel*, Walter Walker, and it was this opposition that eventually broke the KKK's hold over the city. The editor was attacked and when the police did not act swiftly, he started a new campaign that exposed local Klan corruption. While the organization's power dropped quickly, as late as 1927, membership still was used by politicians to attract voters.<sup>42</sup> The entire Ku Klux Klan experience, in many ways gave vent to frustrations felt by many local residents who had been disappointed by the economic failures after World War I.

Another hoped for item during the war was a post-war revitalization of tourism. This, too, failed to materialize in the twenties. Statewide efforts were made to attract visitors to Colorado. The Rocky Mountains' natural beauty was touted, as was the climate and sportsman's opportunities for successful hunting or fishing trips.<sup>43</sup> Organizations such as the West Slope Congress printed and distributed brochures proclaiming the wonders of a vacation in west-central Colorado.<sup>44</sup> All this boosterism accomplished little as only a few tourists came to the area between the World Wars.

However, two locales, in particular, did receive substantial numbers of travelers. The first of these was the Mount of the Holy Cross. By 1921, Red Cliff area promoters advertised "miraculous cures" taking place near the mountain. From 1928 until 1938, annual pilgrimages led by ministers were made to the shrine and reports circulated of miracles that occurred. The mountain's reputation spread and in 1929, President Herbert Hoover proclaimed it a National Monument.<sup>45</sup>

Another annual event was the Lands End Auto Race on Grand Mesa. While records from this event are sketchy its route can be followed. The race ran from Kannah Creek up the Lands End Road to the top of Grand Mesa. This event appears to have been discontinued during the 1930s.<sup>46</sup>

Glenwood Springs, west-central Colorado's premier resort by 1920, suffered during the "Roaring Twenties" as did the rest of the region. The town experienced a sharp business downturn after 1926. This trend began before then, but in the years that followed, tourism declined further. The spa was promoted as the finest in Colorado and statewide publicity was given it, but to no avail. About the only people with money attracted to Glenwood Springs during the 1920s were underworld figures

with the means to enjoy the "good life." "Diamond Jack" Alterie of Chicago made the Hotel Colorado his summer home.<sup>47</sup> His presence may have been colorful but it was not enough to bolster the spa's sagging economy. West-central Colorado continued to have considerable potential as a tourist mecca but it did not actually develop until after World War II.

One segment of area's development that did make progress during the 1920s and 1930s was transportation. While automobiles and airplanes became more popular as means of getting around, the railroad remained as the primary method of moving goods and people. After 1920, only two major rail companies remained to serve the region, the Denver and Rio Grande Western and the Denver and Salt Lake (formerly the Denver, Northwestern and Pacific.) The Colorado Midland had been abandoned at the end of World War I. The Rio Grande emerged from receivership in 1920, and continued to serve the area much as it had since the 1882.<sup>48</sup> However, the twenties and thirties were a period of dramatic developments on the Denver and Salt Lake.

Denver and Salt Lake management, plagued by continuing financial problems due to the 11,660 foot Rollins Pass, sought aid from the state to build a tunnel under the Continental Divide. Such a project would relieve the company of its Rollins Pass burden and improve service from Denver into northwestern Colorado. The idea of a bore under the Main Range dated to Moffat's original plans for the road in 1902.<sup>49</sup> Arguments supporting the tunnel included the commercial opening of northwestern Colorado, uniting the eastern and western Slopes and developing of area resources.<sup>50</sup> However, boosters of the project, such as Denverite William G. Evans, son of Governor John Evans, encountered opposition from many corners of the state.

Two cities in particular sought to stop state funding for the tunnel. Pueblo and Grand Junction both feared that with it the Denver & Salt Lake Railway (D&SL) might be able to find financial support and finish its mainline from Craig, Colorado to Salt Lake City. Such a route would be much shorter than that of the Denver and Rio Grande Western (D&RGW), thereby threatening each town's commercial position. During the 1910s, each time a proposal for tunnel aid came before the state General Assembly, representatives of these areas voted against the project.<sup>51</sup>

In June 1921, fate stepped in to help Evans and his associates when heavy rains in the Upper Arkansas Valley led to a flood which devastated Pueblo. Legislators from

southeastern Colorado called on Governor Oliver H. Shoup to hold a special session of the legislature. The purpose was to create a Pueblo Flood Conservancy District. The Chief Executive, sympathetic to tunnel plans, agreed to a special session and when the lawmakers arrived in Denver they found two items on the agenda, creation of a flood control system and a Moffat Tunnel district. He announced that he would only support Pueblo's demands if the legislators also agreed to the railroad bore bill. Using this leverage both proposals were passed and signed into law in 1922.<sup>52</sup>

A year passed as the constitutionality of the Moffat Tunnel District was tested in the courts. State and Federal courts decided favorably in 1923, and construction began. Four years later the pioneer bore was broken through and on February 26, 1928, the first train passed through the 6.2 mile long tunnel.<sup>53</sup>

The Denver and Salt Lake did not realize much profit from the tunnel and because of the Great Depression was unable to extend its line west from Craig. West-central Colorado businessmen, unaided by the tunnel, but fearful that someday the line would be finished to Salt Lake City, started a campaign to connect the D&RGW with the D&SL at some point west of the Continental Divide. This would enable them to share in any benefits to be gained from a shorter haul to Denver.<sup>54</sup> The idea of link was not new. As early as 1903, David Moffat, founder of the D&SL, had his engineers examine possible routes between his road and the Rio Grande. One line was particularly well suited to his plans. It ran along the Colorado River from Bond on the D&SL to Dotsero on the D&RGW.<sup>55</sup>

The advantages offered by the Moffat Tunnel were not lost on D&RGW management. After negotiations for lease of the route failed, Rio Grande officers decided to buy the other company and thereby gain access to the tunnel. In late 1929, they put their plans into action. Throughout 1930 and 1931, purchase efforts continued, after the Interstate Commerce Commission approved the plan. Eventually the D&RG purchased enough D&SL stock to achieve control of that corporation. Once this was accomplished, efforts to physically link the two lines got underway.

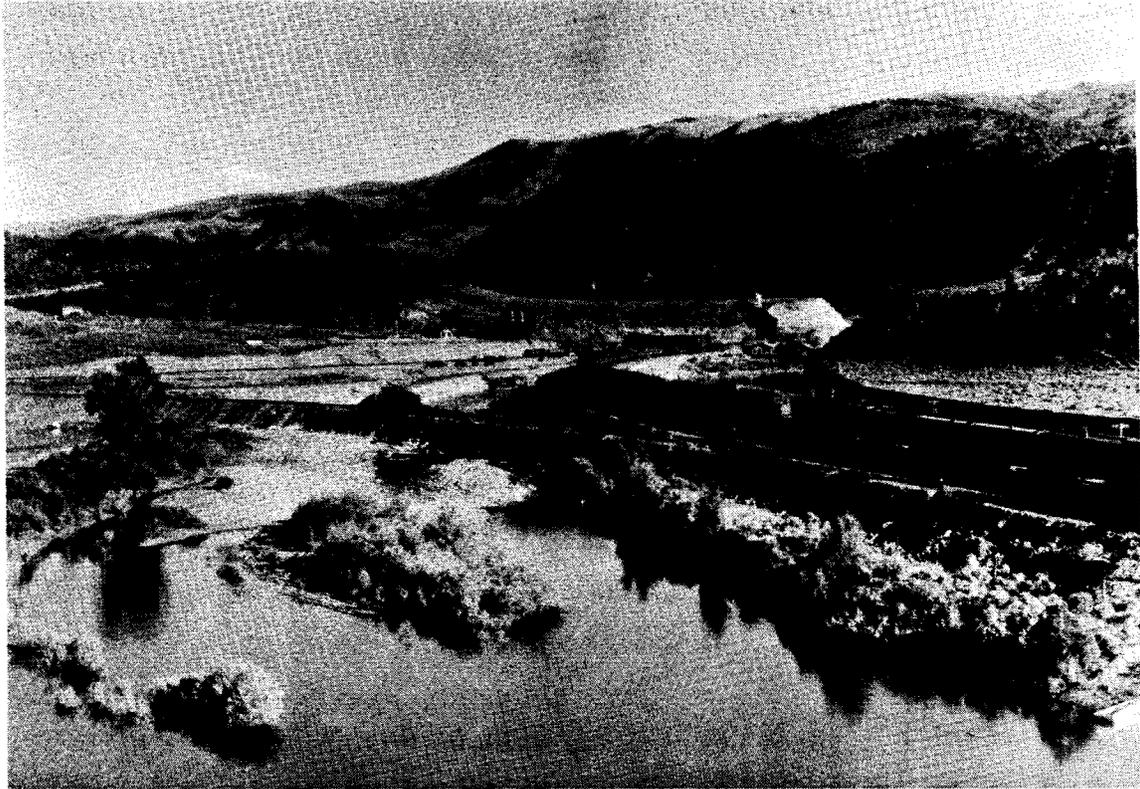
Support for the cut-off came from all over west-central Colorado. Businessmen, farmers and others, all saw advantages from such a route. The 173 mile shorter line to Denver not only would decrease rates, but it also would make eastern markets more accessible to the Western Slope. Proponents of the scheme also promised that direct rail service would increase outside interest in area industries, such as coal mining or

food processing.<sup>57</sup> With all this regional support, railroad management found it easy to convince Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) members of the plan's merits.

In 1924, with the tunnel under construction, D&SL leaders incorporated the Denver and Salt Lake Western to build a line from Bond to Dotsero. They did not formally apply to the ICC for approval until 1928. Debates on the application, complicated by the D&RGW's purchase of the D&SL, continued for four years. On September 12, 1932, the ICC recommended in favor of the plan. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) a Federal agency aimed at business revitalization from the Depression, lent nearly \$4 million to the D&RGW to complete the cut-off.<sup>58</sup> After two more years the Dotsero Cut-Off was finished and on June 16, 1934, formal opening ceremonies were held, reminding onlookers of 50 years earlier when railroads first reached the region. The new 34 mile long line gave west-central Colorado shorter, more dependable access to eastern slope markets, something area boosters had sought for 40 years. Moreover, it marked completion of the last transcontinental rail route to be built in the United States.<sup>59</sup>

While these developments occurred, other railroads in the region were experiencing hard times typical of the inter-war years. By the outbreak of World War II in 1939, all the area's minor roads had ceased operation except the Crystal River and San Juan which lasted until 1941.<sup>60</sup> The precipitous decline in west-central Colorado commercial activity was partially responsible for these abandonments.

The second factor was increased competition from automobiles and trucks. After World War I, "The Good Roads Movement" continued to gain strength throughout the state. Legislators, both state and federal, appropriated monies for highway construction. Many new thoroughfares were built, such as the route over Vail Pass. The new roads encouraged people to buy their own car, despite little problems like radiator boil-overs.<sup>61</sup> The use of trucks to carry freight also increased, cutting into railroad profits. Furthermore, motorbuses replaced branchline passenger service because decent roads were available.<sup>62</sup> Area businessmen supported this trend and lobbied for more roads. Grand Junction became the highway center of the Western Slope. A transportation revolution that would reach maturity after World War II was occurring in west-central Colorado. Roadbuilding became a popular way for government agencies to spend relief funds during the Great Depression.



The Dotsero Cutoff, connected west-central Colorado with the Moffat Tunnel, a route 180 miles closer to Denver. This view of the cutoff at Bond, Colorado was taken June 11, 1934. *Photo by Colorado Division of State Archives.*

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was another way that Federal funds were spent in west-central Colorado to aid recovery and improve the area. The CCC was part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Its goal was to provide jobs for teenage boys outdoors, away from the problems of the nation's large cities. The Corps efforts were directed by officers of the United States Army. In Colorado, the first local commandant was Colonel Sherwood A. Cheney who organized the state's effort in 1933. As many as 7,000 youths were given jobs in Colorado by the CCC. They were scattered about the state in groups averaging 200. Their efforts focused on the public lands, doing various jobs from fighting fires to building roads. Millions of dollars were spent throughout Colorado on these projects. All of the west-central region benefited from this New Deal Program.<sup>63</sup>

Starting in 1934, camps began to spring up throughout the region, from Eagle to Colorado National Monument. In that year, CCCers based at Glenwood Springs helped fight fires in the White River National Forest.<sup>64</sup> They also worked to reforest lands along the Frying Pan River.<sup>65</sup> For recreational use, the CCC built trails to Hanging Lake Park at Glenwood Springs, as well as Rifle's Mountain Park and the Red Mountain ski run.<sup>66</sup> The largest CCC project in eastern west-central Colorado was the construction of a trail and visitors center on Notch Mountain for tourist use viewing the Mount of the Holy Cross. This cost over \$120,000.<sup>67</sup> However, not all projects were recreational. CCC labor also was used to build Glenwood Springs municipal airport.<sup>68</sup>

Communities such as Glenwood Springs were pleased to have the Corps camps in their towns. Merchants of that city donated paint, flowers, grass seed, and books to the boys, all to make these strangers feel welcome.<sup>69</sup> At Grand Junction, businessmen, through the city council, supplied the CCC with warehouses and an auto repair facility when it was learned that the Western Slope district office was to be located there in August of 1935.<sup>70</sup>

With headquarters at Grand Junction, it was only natural that some projects were carried out in the vicinity. CCC workers concreted portions of the Grand Valley Reclamation Project canals in an effort to find a solution to seepage problems that damaged the fields.<sup>71</sup> At Glade park, and north of Fruita, these young men labored to improve public rangelands for use by the Grazing Service.<sup>72</sup> However, the most spectacular Corps project in west-central Colorado was the construction of Rimrock Drive in Colorado National Monument. This road made much of the park accessible to

motorized vehicles.<sup>73</sup> While the projects made positive contributions to the area, the workers were not always pleased with their lot. At Colorado National Monument, the boys caused nine commanders to be replaced because the youths staged strikes and leveled complaints at their bosses.<sup>74</sup> The CCC was just one of numerous New Deal programs that helped soften the Great Depression for the west-central part of the state.

Another was the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The WPA's efforts were directed at relieving unemployment by putting people to work on public projects. In Glenwood Springs, an auditorium, the county hospital, and a sewage plant were built using Federal funds.<sup>75</sup> The county fairgrounds at Rifle were rehabilitated in the same manner.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, WPA crews worked on various roads in the area.<sup>77</sup>

Elsewhere in west-central Colorado, WPA workers helped on other projects. Among them were the Pabor Library in Fruita and the Fruita district elementary and high schools.<sup>78</sup> These jobs helped keep men off the soup lines and were beneficial to area communities.<sup>79</sup>

The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) provided another source of aid for the region. Edward Taylor caused this agency to support construction and improvement of fifteen airports on the Western Slope including Grand Junction and Rifle.<sup>80</sup> The Rural Electrification Administration (REA), another New Deal bureau, began electrification projects to provide residents of farms in outlying areas the benefits of modern technology. It was through REA efforts that many Grand Valley farmers finally received power lines.<sup>81</sup> The final Federal effort at relief to affect the west-central region was the Civil Works Administration (CWA) which carried on many programs, among them the collection of interviews of long time area residents concerning memories of the past.<sup>82</sup> These documents have proved invaluable to historians trying to recreate the region's early beginnings.

The period from 1920 until 1940, witnessed significant changes in west-central Colorado. No longer was the area a booming, optimistic frontier with unlimited visions of future development. While the hopes died hard, they did pass by the 1930s and a rather grim picture of the years ahead developed. From the New Deal on, the Federal government was to play an ever increasing role in the region. This began with the conservation movement of the 1890s and the Great Depression assured that Federal involvement would be the case as the area's economy proved incapable of coping with the changing times. Such inability was due, in part, to the already weakened condition

of the region's economy before the crash of 1929, which only exacerbated an already bad situation. Depression extended to all sectors of west-central Colorado's industries, mining, previously a co-equal partner to prosperity, also proved a companion to misery.

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61. Bergner, “Fruita,” p. 76, and Moore Interview, CNM.
62. Brown, *Holy Cross*, pp. 95-99.
63. Taylor Scrapbook 17, NLWH., and L. A. Gleyre and C. N. Alleger, *History of the Civilian Conservation Corps in Colorado*, (Denver: Western Newspaper Union Press, 1936), p. 10., hereafter cited: Gleyre and Alleger, *CCC*.
64. Gleyre and Alleger, *CCC*, p. 145.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
66. *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146., and Urquhart, *Spa*, pp. 139-140.
67. Gleyre and Alleger, *CCC*, p. 125., and Brown, *Holy Cross*, p. 100.
68. Urquhart, *Spa*, p. 140.
69. Gleyre and Alleger, *CCC*, p. 146.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
71. *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 100-101.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 107., and Woods Interview, CNM.

73. Gleyre and Alleger, CCC, p. 135., and Taylor Scrapbook 13, NLWH., and Mike Douglas Interview, CNM.
74. Douglas Interview, CNM.
75. Urquhart, *Spa*, pp. 138-139.
76. Reading Club of Rifle, Colorado, comp., *Rifle Shots, The Story of Rifle, Colorado*, (Rifle, CO.: The Reading Club of Rifle, Colorado, 1973), p. 219.
77. Urquhart, *Spa*, pp. 138-139.
78. Bergner, "Fruita," pp. 105, 107 and 126.
79. Woods Interview, CNM.
80. Taylor Scrapbook 17, NLWH.
81. Bergner, "Fruita," pp. 93-94.
82. E. D. Stewart Interview, CWA, CSHS.

## CHAPTER XI. MINING SINCE 1920

“While it lasted the boom looked like the 1849 California Gold Rush. Then the government changed its rules and our paper millions evaporated over night.”

*–Uranium Prospector, 1958–*

Mining, with fortunes made and lost almost overnight, was once the glamour industry of west-central Colorado that had by 1920, lost much of its shine. The Panic of 1893 decimated the state’s silver industry, which never regained its status as the basis of Colorado’s wealth. Silver towns, like Aspen, languished as did coal mining camps that depended on the smelters for markets. Some precious metals camps, however, were not as terribly affected. The Gilman-Eagle area, for example, prospered from its mines because of the high lead and zinc content of local silver ores. Zinc mining continued into the mid-1970s. Other semi-precious minerals found in the area were also extracted. Vanadium and uranium mining experienced an up and down existence from 1920 into the 1970s. During the 1950s a Uranium boom, reminiscent of the gold and silver rushes of the nineteenth century, occurred. Furthermore, oil shale, a mineral previously undeveloped, became significant, both regionally and nationally during the early twentieth century.

Throughout the years from 1920, west-central Colorado’s mines have shared many experiences with other area industries. Foremost, the increasing presence of the Federal government has shaped regional mining activities. From the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 to the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) of the 1950s, national policy, made outside the region, directed and controlled mineral exploitation. Furthermore, economic troubles during the 1920s and 1930s affected mining in west-central Colorado, as did national recovery programs. World War II and post-war national priorities continued to fashion regional mineral extraction activities. Despite growing Federal involvement in area mining, much of the industry’s history remained the story of the individual or small group enterprises.

Single efforts started in the years immediately after World War I when miners attempted to revitalize the region’s sagging precious metal industry. A general feeling that great strikes were yet to be made, served to drive prospectors on.<sup>1</sup> In camps such as Aspen, a few individuals continued to work the mines after World War I, hoping to discover a new bonanza. These efforts continued in the Roaring Fork Valley throughout the 1920s and 1930s and into the 1940s with no success at all.<sup>2</sup> In 1927, Holy Cross City, the once famous camp near Tennessee Pass, experienced a last flurry of mining activity. This small boom went on only six

months and by the summer of 1928, the town was abandoned once again.<sup>3</sup>

The depression decade brought new efforts to revive precious metal mining in west-central Colorado. Along the Colorado River near Mack, Colorado, a few people tried their luck at placer mining, with limited results.<sup>4</sup> Other attempts at revitalization came from Congress. Edward Taylor of Glenwood Springs convinced the legislature to declare a moratorium on annual assessment work for claimholders. This allowed miners to maintain their claims without having to do at least \$100 worth of annual work to keep them valid.<sup>5</sup> Taylor, and the entire Colorado Congressional delegation, tried during 1934 and 1935, to persuade President Franklin Roosevelt to re-instate bi-metallism as the nation's monetary standard. This program, by making silver into legal tender for paper money at a fixed ratio value to gold, was the same type of cure sought by the Populists and "Free-Silverites" in the election of 1896. Taylor and others felt such a change would not only help the nation recover from the Great Depression but would also lead to reopening of silver mines in Aspen and elsewhere. Roosevelt did not feel that such a program would help the country and he refused to go along with Taylor and the Coloradans.<sup>6</sup> This was the last serious attempt to re-establish the silver industry in the west-central part of the state and because of its failure, regional precious metal extraction never again enjoyed the position it once had in the area's economy.

The only silver mines able to maintain profitable operations throughout the twentieth century were those that had ores high in base metal content, located in the Eagle Valley. From 1917 to the end of World War II, the Empire Zinc Company operated mines at Gilman. These mines became one of America's largest sources of zinc.<sup>7</sup> During the decade 1931 to 1941, the mines not only produced considerable quantities of that metal, but also some 65 percent of the state's silver and 85 percent of Colorado's copper ore.<sup>8</sup> In 1940, alone, Eagle County mineral extraction was valued at \$4,278,866.<sup>9</sup> Demand for zinc and copper during the second World War led to expansion of mining activities at Gilman. This increased work made that locale Colorado's number one zinc producer.<sup>10</sup> Mining continued into the 1960s and in 1966, the town of Gilman, which housed the company's miners, had a population of nearly 9,000.<sup>11</sup> However, during the 1970s, as the deposits became exhausted, the operations closed down.

Other minerals were commercially exploited in the years after 1920. Limestone quarries, primarily in Garfield County, were used to produce cement for local markets. The gypsum deposits along the Eagle River were not so fortunate. By 1949, these rocks remained unexploited, as did many of the clays in the area.<sup>12</sup> However, other minerals were commercially mined and/or refined in west-central Colorado.

One of these minerals was Gilsonite, found in Utah, but processed in Colorado. As the “good roads movement” gained momentum in the 1920s, demand for this paving material grew. Barber Asphalt continued to operate its mines near Dragon, and Watson, Utah. A refinery for the hydrocarbon was constructed near Fruita, Colorado. After the 1939 abandonment of the Uintah Railway, which had provided transportation, Gilsonite was hauled from the pits to the plant by truck or slurry pipeline. The processing plant remained in operation for many years after World War II and added to the locale’s economic base.<sup>13</sup> From 1920 on, other hydro-carbons also brought business into the region.

Coal was one attraction. Coal mining in much of west-central Colorado had ended during World War I when Colorado Fuel and Iron Company closed their operations in Pitkin and Garfield Counties due to lack of markets. This closure affected nearly all mines.<sup>14</sup> However, the smaller mines, many independently owned, continued to produce. During 1922 and 1923, labor strikes in the state’s major coal fields led to increased prices and generated work at these lesser collieries, especially those around Grand Junction. By the middle of 1923, the labor disputes were settled and eastern slope miners went back to work. Without the artificially created markets, west-central Colorado’s coal mines lost business and became part of a nationwide coal depression.<sup>15</sup> Other reasons for this downturn in activity included decreased industrial need for coal and an oversupply of the fuel in areas closer to the industrial centers of the East and Mid-west. This meant that any west-central Colorado coal mines that remained open did so to supply local markets. One such mine was the Hunter near Grand Junction. It was in production as late as 1934, at which point it became the Grand Valley’s oldest mine in continuous operation.<sup>16</sup>

After World War II, with a growing trend toward natural gas and oil to fuel America’s homes and factories, coal became even less popular. However, during the 1970s the Coal Basin Mine, originally opened by John C. Osgood in 1900, again was producing. This revival may be short lived due to environmental requirements for air quality which restrict users of coal and require expensive equipment to clean exhaust gasses.<sup>17</sup>

Another energy source, oil, caused great excitement in west-central Colorado during the 1920s. Throughout the region, speculators tried to convince investors in the future of oil drilling in that part of the state. The boomers’ promises were given some credence because of an oil boom occurring at Rangely, Colorado, during the same time. Also a general, nationwide excitement caused by new discoveries in Texas and Oklahoma, led many area residents to believe that black gold was available to anyone who would look for it.<sup>18</sup>

The boom started in 1921, when prospectors found signs of oil at Garmesa. Thirteen wells were drilled but most proved to be dry holes. The “boomlet” passed and Garmesa returned to its former role as agricultural and pastoral land.<sup>19</sup>

Four years after the Garmesa episode, a group of “Oklahoma” oilmen appeared at Rifle, Colorado, proposing to drill wells along Mamm Creek. The town was excited by the possibility of an oil bonanza and during the visitors’ stay, many townspeople envisioned themselves prospective millionaires from the black gold. However, one day the four oilmen disappeared. It turned out they were a gang of bank robbers “casing” Rifle’s financial institutions. This group, the Fleagle Gang, were later captured and brought to justice in Lamar, Colorado.<sup>20</sup> So ended oil excitement in west-central Colorado, but not energy development.

Natural gas proved a more reliable source of wealth for the region, especially in the years after World War II. The 1920s and 1930s witnessed limited development of the area’s natural gas supplies. The few wells that did exist were mostly capped because there was only a small market for the product. Furthermore, the few wells in operation were inefficient, with considerable waste at the pump head.<sup>21</sup> It was not until the 1950s, with increased home heating needs, that gas wells became valuable. The conversion of many factories from coal to natural gas provided another outlet for the fuel. Public Service Company of Colorado became one of the region’s leading producers of natural gas during the 1950s, pumping it out of the Book Cliffs.<sup>22</sup>

By the 1960s, national demand for the fuel continued to expand, and interest was paid to regional gas fields. Meanwhile, scientists were searching for new, peaceful uses for atomic power. The marriage of the atom and gas was referred to as Operation Plowshare and as part of Operation Plowshare the Rulison Project was conceived. The architects of this policy turned their attention to quantities of natural gas trapped in rock formations thousands of feet below the surface.<sup>23</sup> They reasoned that by placing a nuclear charge in those stones and detonating it, the trapped gas would be freed. As an experimental site the scientists chose a location on the mountainside above Morrisania Mesa, near Rulison, Colorado. After long preparations, a 40 kiloton bomb was exploded on September 10, 1969, some 8,431 feet below ground. The blast did free natural gas, however, it also radiated the gas making it unsafe for use. Because of this problem, the well was capped and now only a small building over the wellhead marks the spot.<sup>24</sup> Three years later plans were announced for another nuclear experiment north of Rifle, but it was dropped. Colorado voters became so opposed to such uses of nuclear energy that during the 1970s, an amendment was added to the state constitution prohibiting future blasts.<sup>25</sup>

Nuclear materials were also mined in west-central Colorado. Extraction of vanadium began in the area during the 1890s, in the Sinbad Valley and at Gateway. However, the deposits were of limited value compared to elsewhere in southwestern Colorado and little development work was done.<sup>26</sup> A few years later in 1909, vanadium was discovered north of Rifle, Colorado. Between that year and 1922, the find was publicized but nothing was done.<sup>27</sup> Part of this was due to a lack of local processing facilities. In 1903, radium plants had been established in Denver, but most of America's raw production was sent to Europe for refining.<sup>28</sup>

This situation changed in 1922, when H. K. Thurber organized the Vanadium Corporation of Colorado to operate the Rifle Mine and he built a processing plant at that town. Two years later A. H. Bunker founded the United States Vanadium Company and bought out Thurber's operation.<sup>29</sup> In 1926, with the mill in production, Union Carbide and Carbon Company purchased the Rifle facilities and operated U.S. Vanadium as a subsidiary corporation. This business continued until 1932, when the mine was shut down.<sup>30</sup> In 1929, the Garfield Mine, also near Rifle, was located by the Garfield Vanadium Corporation. That company built a small mill near the mine, but by the mid-1930s they, too, had ceased operations. U.S. Vanadium then leased the Garfield claims.<sup>31</sup>

The depression of the thirties was partially responsible for a decline in mining activity. Vanadium's primary use was as a strengthening alloy for steel, and as America's output dropped during the Great Depression, so did the market for vanadium. Another factor was new dependence on foreign supplies of that metal and radium. The Shinkolobwe Mine in the Belgian Congo became the world's largest source during the 1930s.<sup>32</sup> Again, Congressman Edward Taylor, in an effort to aid his district, campaigned in Washington to get Federal help for Colorado's radioactive mineral processors.<sup>33</sup>

His pleadings did little to influence national policy, yet relief for west-central Colorado's vanadium millers occurred anyway. The outbreak of World War II in 1939, led to American re-armament and subsequent weapons sales to the allies. Steel was a critical raw material in the process of gearing up for war. To toughen that metal, vanadium was needed. Starting in 1939, the Rifle Mine was re-opened after being idle for six years.<sup>34</sup> After the United States joined the war, in 1941, output at the mine and recently rebuilt mill increased. During the war, the Federal government built housing for workers on the north edge of Rifle and this community became known as "Vanville."<sup>35</sup> Operations at these facilities (mine and mill) continued until 1948, when production again was suspended.<sup>36</sup> By the late 1950s, demand for the metal made it profitable for Union Carbide to reopen the mines and build a new (the present) processing plant west of Rifle, Colorado. Construction started in 1958, and by 1960, the plant was turning

out refined vanadium and small amounts of yellow cake (uranium).<sup>37</sup>

That latter substance became a much sought after mineral in the post-World War II world. Wartime technological developments placed new emphasis on the potential of nuclear power. In August of 1939, Albert Einstein, world reknown physicist, warned President Franklin D. Roosevelt about the possibility that Germany might develop an atomic bomb. This led to frantic American efforts to do the same. These experiments were known as the Manhattan Project. In August, 1945, the awesome power of the atom was demonstrated when "A-bombs" destroyed two Japanese cities. From that point on, interest in uranium, the raw fuel for nuclear weapons, was assured.<sup>38</sup>

The United States jealously guarded its atomic secrets in the years immediately following the Second World War, especially from Communist countries such as Russia. At that same time, a non-military conflict between America and the Soviets began; it was called the Cold War. Neither side let the other have advantages and an arms race ensued. In 1949, Russia successfully exploded her first atomic bomb and the race grew more intense.<sup>39</sup> The contest to build nuclear weapons led directly to increased Uranium mining activity in west-central Colorado.

The area had witnessed two previous "U-bombs" but that of the 1950s was, by far, the largest. As mentioned, during the 1890s the Sinbad Valley had been the center of excitement over radioactive materials. Later, in 1913, Gateway experienced a similar phenomenon. Some claims made in that rush were worked on and off over the years, much the same as the vanadium operation at Rifle.<sup>40</sup>

In 1947, the recently formed Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) opened an office in Grand Junction to act as supervisory agent over nuclear material mining throughout the Colorado River Basin. For the next few years little happened. This was due in part to a Congressional investigation of the AEC, led by Senator Bourke B. Hickenlooper of Iowa. His panel found the agency to be mismanaged and suggested steps be taken to protect and encourage American Uranium development.<sup>41</sup>

Once this report was issued, while the Cold War intensified, AEC planners decided to take steps to foster domestic radio-active fuel production. In 1951, a program was started. It guaranteed prices for ore, gave bonuses to discoverers and offered development loans. All this was done because the Atomic Energy Commission was the sole legal customer of Uranium in 1950.<sup>42</sup> Because the AEC's Operations Office of the Division of Raw Materials, the formal name for the Grand Junction Compound, was near America's Uranium deposits, that city became the nerve center of a rush reminiscent of the gold rushes a century before.<sup>43</sup>

The lure of instant wealth attracted thousands of people to the Colorado Plateau in the early 1950s. Often they were normally sensible individuals who were caught up in Uranium fever.<sup>44</sup> The prospectors needed any help they could get from the AEC because of the high costs of exploration and mining. Otherwise, it would have been impossible for the “little guy” to have participated in the boom.<sup>45</sup> Another problem prospective “U-kings” faced was the physical characteristics of uranium ore. While it was detectable with a Geiger counter, its deposits were in small pockets or pods like placer gold. Discoveries might give first appearances of being valuable but after further exploration, prove to be too small to be mined profitably.<sup>46</sup> Also, like gold or silver strikes, uranium claims often were litigated between rival interests.<sup>47</sup> Most participants found disappointment and returned to their everyday lives.<sup>48</sup>

Despite these problems, the adventurous set out and a few struck it rich. Among them was Vernon Pick, a tenderfoot with a Geiger counter, who discovered paying deposits. His Delta Mine proved rich and its success piqued the public’s interest. He established offices and built a home at Grand Junction where he received many would-be “Uranium magnates” and gave advice. Pick’s word about various areas and prospects carried weight and he became recognized as a leader of the rush.<sup>49</sup>

Prospectors spread throughout western Colorado and Utah, as well as into New Mexico and Arizona. Their hunts touched many tracts of public domain. Caught up in a get rich quick psychology, and unconcerned with the environment, these uranium hunters left many scars on the land in the form of prospect holes and dump piles, very similar to goldseekers before them.<sup>50</sup> In some cases the lure of wealth became too much, even for AEC employees, who used confidential knowledge to stake private claims.<sup>51</sup> To further the boom, Warner Brothers produced a documentary film, entitled *Uranium Fever*, on the rush in 1954.<sup>52</sup>

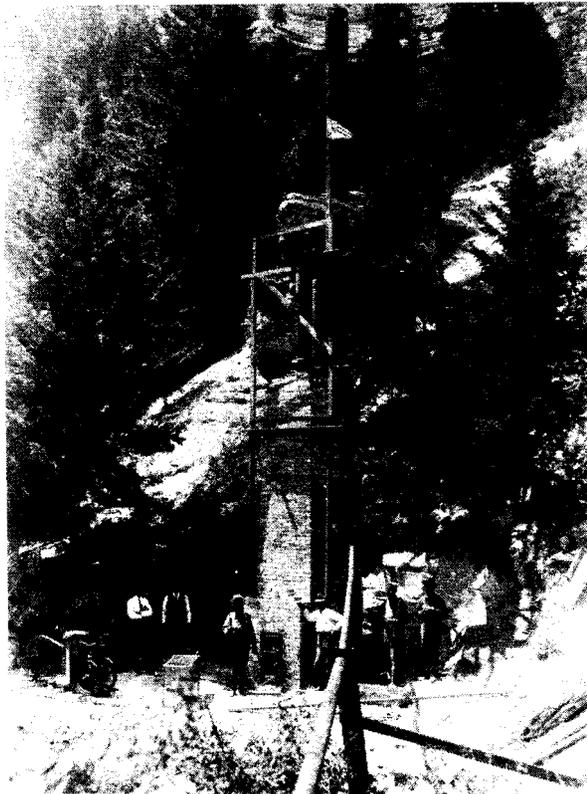
The rapid expansion of nuclear activity did effect west-central Colorado and especially Grand Junction. As headquarters of western Atomic Energy Commission operations, the town also experienced a boom. In 1950, there had been only 4 known Uranium ore bodies in the United States, but by 1954, there were 25 and some 1,000 producing mines. The output of these excavations all funneled through Grand Junction.<sup>53</sup> In 1950, the city’s mining related industries were almost non-existent except for the AEC, but 4 years later, city business directories listed 15 uranium companies, 40 mining companies, and 19 mine supply services.<sup>54</sup> Even the AEC compound grew dramatically. In 1947, 11 people worked there but by 1954, over 1,400 were in the agency’s employ. During 1955, total production topped 1,500,000 tons of ore.<sup>55</sup>

The boom continued unabated for two more years. In 1957, AEC officials decided that present production levels were adequate and ceased discovery subsidies. The next year, 1958, disaster befell the industry when on November 28th, the AEC announced that no more uranium oxide (ore) would be purchased from deposits not already developed. This stopped the rush dead in its tracks, much like the silver boom had in 1893. Paper millionaires were wiped out overnight. In the final analysis, only a few individuals had the success of Vernon Pick. Others returned to their old jobs, poorer but wiser for the experience.<sup>56</sup>

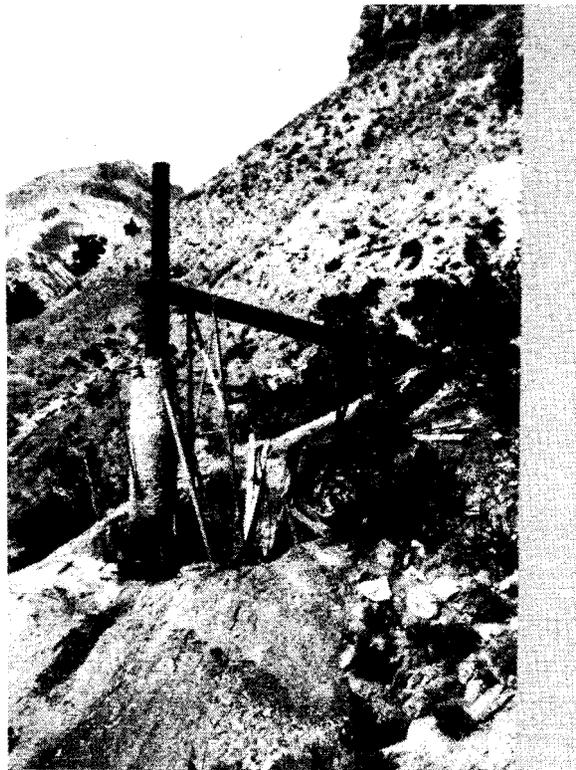
The Atomic Energy Commission was the only uranium market into the 1960s, and as such, controlled production. As late as 1960, processing of radioactive materials continued to be the largest mining activity in Grand Junction.<sup>57</sup> However, by 1965, the AEC's grip over the ore was relaxed and private buyers, mostly large energy (oil) companies, helped revitalize the industry. In 1967, the AEC reinstated its development incentives program and for the rest of the decade a new boom occurred. This time it was large corporations using teams of engineers and geologists that found uranium, not the lone prospector with his Geiger counter.<sup>58</sup> Not only did the U-boom of the 1950s boost west-central Colorado's economy, but it also left problems for the future, such as tailings dumps. Nevertheless, the Uranium rush did lead to new interest in other mining pursuits.<sup>59</sup>

One activity of this nature was oil shale extraction which had an up and down career ever since the late nineteenth century. Oil shale was an industry filled with problems and misconceptions over the years. First among these was that the rock contains oil. Actually, the stone holds partially bituminized matter that, under heat, will yield an oil-like substance, Kerogen. In other words, when shale oil is retorted (separated from the rock) man is finishing a job nature started--the formation of crude petroleum.<sup>60</sup> In Colorado, most shale, or organic marlstone, is of various shades of brown with a velvety luster.<sup>61</sup> It occurs in beds that range in size from a fraction of an inch to 80 feet thick.<sup>62</sup> The Mahogany Zone is foremost of west-central Colorado's shale deposits, and is estimated to contain 70 to 90 billion barrels of oil.<sup>63</sup> This outcropping is part of the Green River Formation which runs from the Roan Cliffs near Rifle, Colorado, north and west into Wyoming and Utah. Included is the Piceance Basin. Broken by the Colorado River, these deposits are also found on Battlement and Grand Mesas.<sup>64</sup>

To be profitable, efficient methods of retorting the shale had to be found. While the material was easy to mine, thousands of tons had to be processed each day to make shale oil competitive with oil from wells. The lack of an efficient method of refining has been the greatest single problem faced by west-central Colorado's shale oil operations.<sup>65</sup> Technology



The oil shale boom during the 1920s saw construction of retorts like this one belonging to the Oil Shale Mining Company on Dry Creek near DeBeque, Colorado. *Photo by U.S. Geological Survey.*



American Oil Shale Refining Company had its retort on Parachute Creek, north of Grand Valley, Colorado. *Photo by U.S. Geological Survey.*

developed in Britain during the nineteenth century was found lacking in Colorado, as early experiments proved.<sup>66</sup>

The United Kingdom first started development of a shale oil industry in the late seventeenth century. In 1694, three Englishmen distilled oil from rocks.<sup>67</sup> Their success went unnoticed for many years because oil was not in great demand at the time. Over the next 150 years, England experienced the Industrial Revolution and by 1850, this period of rapid technological change was completed. After new factories developed, the country's petroleum needs increased both for manufacturing and domestic uses, such as lighting. In 1850, James Young invented a process to retort oil from shales found deep underground in Scotland.<sup>68</sup> While expensive, Young's methods did supply a necessary product and other Europeans copied the Scottish system during that decade.<sup>69</sup>

U.S. citizens learned from Young's experiments and the 1850s witnessed the first American shale oil boom. Along the eastern seaboard, deposits were found and used to meet the nation's growing petroleum needs. In the West, early Mormon settlers distilled oil from rocks they found in eastern Utah.<sup>70</sup> In 1859, the shale boom ended when oil was discovered at Titusville, Pennsylvania. These fields more than met market demands at a lower cost than retorting shale, so the boom ended.<sup>71</sup> A pattern was starting to form in which interest in oil shale was directly linked to crude oil supplies. When natural oil deposits diminished, oil shale received attention, but when supplies were plentiful retorted oil (shale) was ignored.

Oil shale was well known in west-central Colorado when the first Euro-Americans arrived to settle during the 1880s. The Utes told these newcomers about the "rock that burns" found around Rifle and Parachute Creeks.<sup>72</sup> The Ute stories fascinated many of the newcomers who believed that they had found coal or some other combustible material. Mike Callahan, for whom Mount Callahan was named, settled along Parachute Creek in the early eighties and built himself a house. Intrigued by the attractive blue-gray rocks around his ranch, he decided to use them to build his fireplace. After Callahan's abode was completed, he invited his neighbors to a house-warming party. During the festivities a fire was built in the fireplace, and as the evening progressed, it began to smoke and then burn. Before the conflagration could be stopped, the entire building went up in flames. Mike Callahan had "discovered" oil shale.<sup>73</sup> His find went unnoticed or improperly identified. Other enterprising souls in the vicinity started to mine the "lignite coal" (oil shale) and sell it as fuel.<sup>74</sup>

By 1890, the rocks were correctly labeled by geologists and area residents began to wonder if some system to extract the oil could not be found. To encourage development they

founded the Parachute Mining District in 1890, under placer mining laws of the time. The Parachute District was the largest mining district ever established in Colorado, covering over 15 square miles. The organization maintained itself until 1935.<sup>75</sup> During the nineties, further work was done on shale oil development. T. E. Bailey built an experimental retort near the head of the West Fork of Parachute Creek. He used the Scottish retort process. Bailey's operations continued into the twentieth century.<sup>76</sup>

The 1910s witnessed increased oil shale activity in west-central Colorado. Beginning in 1913, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) started intensive work cataloging the quality and extent of the deposits and determining their economic potential.<sup>77</sup> The USGS's first reports were published in 1914 and 1915. These led to further work by the government. In the latter year, Dean E. Winchester, a professional geologist, was chosen to head the investigations.<sup>78</sup> The reports issued under Winchester's direction stimulated public interest in the resource and also led to creation of the Naval Oil Shale Reserve. This tract of 27,000 acres was set aside on December 16, 1916, by decree of President Woodrow Wilson. It was done because of a continuing fear that national defense would be in jeopardy if the Navy ever ran out of fuel oil.<sup>79</sup> The fact that World War I was raging in Europe and supply lines from the United States depended on ocean transportation, further convinced the government of the wisdom of shale oil development.

As early as 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt warned the nation of an impending oil shortage. As the Industrial Revolution in America was nearing a climax by 1900, and new demands for petroleum grew, it was generally feared that domestic crude oil supplies would soon be exhausted.<sup>80</sup> Because of these predictions, and the intense USGS surveys, many private individuals also became interested in shale oil during the 1910s.

In 1910, dozens of prospectors started to examine the Parachute Creek region in search of oil shale. The next year a claim was recorded with the Parachute Mining District's secretary and it appeared as if a "boom" was underway.<sup>81</sup> Government surveys intensified this interest and after 1915, a full-scale rush was in progress.<sup>82</sup> The events were well received by all Coloradans, who saw an opportunity to develop their state even further.

Colorado's Governor, Oliver H. Shoup, became a great supporter of shale oil. This official stance was echoed by State Geologist R. D. George who not only promoted the idea but also experimented with retorting processes. State sponsored distillation research was carried out at both the Colorado School of Mines in Golden and the University of Colorado at Boulder.<sup>83</sup> To help defray these costs, Federal monies were given to the state for those experiments.<sup>84</sup>

All the government publicity on oil shale, coupled with the retort experiments, gave credence to a belief in the future of the mineral. 1915 marked the take-off point for the shale oil boom in west-central Colorado. In the Parachute Mining District alone, almost 50,000 claims covering 12,000 acres were filed by 1928.<sup>85</sup> Towns such as DeBeque or Parachute were becoming household words as shale oil corporations were formed and began campaigns to attract investors. Between 1918 and 1923, over 100 such companies were founded.<sup>86</sup> The public was anxious to speculate and “oil” was a magic word in those days. The automobile was growing in popularity and it needed gasoline, as did other inventions. Promoters played on these factors as well as using typical tools of the trade by making outlandish promises of wealth, while capitalizing on people’s desires to get rich quickly. Oil shale also offered a degree of certainty not enjoyed by oil well drillers. There were no dry holes. Indeed, by 1920, the country went wild over oil in any form.<sup>87</sup>

By that year, even the major oil companies looked seriously at shale oil. Union Oil Company of California began, in the early 1920s, to buy shale lands for development. Eventually Union acquired over 18,000 acres of west-central Colorado. Standard Oil of New Jersey (now Exxon) also entered the rush and purchased 24,000 acres. In 1941, Standard sold its property for five dollars an acre or less. Union held on to its land but by the 1960s, they were not producing shale oil.<sup>88</sup> The lack of feasible and inexpensive retorting technology led to discouraging results.



Even during the oil shale boom, coal mining remained a major economic force in west-central Colorado. These miners, at the South Canyon Mine, Garfield County, Colorado, are glad to pose for the camera in 1916.

*Photo by Garfield County Public Library.*

Distillation of shales in west-central Colorado was based on Scottish retorting techniques. In 1917, the first commercial retort was installed by the Oil Shale Mining Company at the head of Dry Creek, 22 miles west of DeBeque. It was built using European designs but proved unworkable due to caking problems, where the shale stuck to the inside of the heating vessel, and limited capacity. While local shales were rich, running as high as 60 gallons of oil to the ton, compared to an acceptable 25 gallons, the early retorts were incapable of processing more than five or ten tons a day. To make operations profitable, 100 tons a day was considered optimum. Experiments continued into the 1920s,<sup>8,9</sup> however, other problems arose to plague the infant industry.

Foremost were the fraudulent claims promoters. Many of the stockjobbers sought to line their pockets at public expense. Often these companies did not have clear title to any shale land yet they accepted investor's money on the pretense of phoney land holdings or supposed future purchases. After passage of the Federal Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, the promoters assured the public that "special deals" had been worked out with the Department of the Interior to get shale tracts. By 1922 and 1923, investors became skeptical, especially after published warnings by the government concerning stock frauds and bogus titles. Enthusiasm for oil operations dropped further when the Teapot Dome scandal became public. This affair involved the unlawful use of Naval Oil Reserves in the Teapot Dome region of Wyoming. All these events had slowed shale oil development greatly by 1924.

Accidents at the mines also cooled interest in shale oil during the twenties. On July 31, 1921, the Schuyler-Doyle Mine tramway collapsed, killing seven and injuring three others. The operation closed down. Other area workers demanded safer working conditions.<sup>91</sup>

The final blow to the first oil shale boom came with discovery of new oil fields in Texas and California. The apparent shortage that stimulated activity in west-central Colorado evaporated in the face a market glut.<sup>92</sup>

Nevertheless, the government continued to be interested in oil shale as a future source of petroleum. It was felt that unless America developed its own oil, the nation would be left at the mercy of foreign producers.<sup>93</sup> In 1924, stern warnings issued by Interior Department officials, read; "The past history of the petroleum industry in this country reveals an astounding disregard for the conservation and efficient utilization of a valuable and irreplaceable resource."<sup>94</sup> Because of such attitudes, Washington continued to fund research in mining and distillation methods. From 1925 until 1928, the Bureau of Mines ran experimental retorts on the Naval Oil Shale Reserve.<sup>95</sup>

Private individuals also worked on shale oil problems during the twenties in an effort to make the industry commercially viable. Among those were Harry L. Brown, founder of the Index Shale Oil Company. He had started operations 14 miles north of DeBeque in 1918. A few years later, Brown discovered the medicinal value of his product and started to market patent medicines along the Western Slope through the offices of the C.D. Smith Drug Company of Grand Junction. Eventually Brown went out of business.<sup>96</sup> Others also found limited commercial uses for shale oil including road oil, sheep dip and soap.<sup>97</sup> These markets were not large enough to make oil shale profitable and by the end of the decade, most of the companies ceased operations.

The first boom did leave marks on west-central Colorado. Oil companies bought up many area ranches for the mineral rights.<sup>98</sup> In one rancher's view, it was the shale oil excitement and abuse of the range that crippled Parachute Creek's stock raising.<sup>99</sup> Despite this, the boom did cause many new roads to be built, which, because of the terrain would not have been built otherwise.<sup>100</sup>

The Federal government played an important role in encouraging the first oil shale boom and in the eyes of many, its involvement caused the end of the rush, due to the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920. This law allowed the Secretary of the Interior to lease designated tracts of Federal minerals, such as coal or oil shale, for development rather than having private individuals claim the land under the Mining Act of 1872, like gold claims were handled. Congress hoped to control and conserve oil shale much the same way Forest Reserves protected timber resources. However, confusion caused by the 1920 law led to many problems.<sup>101</sup> Passage of the act started court battles that continue to the present.

During the 1920s and 1930s, holders of claims staked under the 1872 act fought Interior's attempts to invalidate their filings. When they sought to gain patents to their land, officials of the Department found various reasons, such as lack of required assessment work, why title should not be granted. Problems about applicability of provisions of the 1872 law, written for hard rock mining, cropped up and as the conflict intensified, new actors joined the fray. Congressman Edward Taylor publically stated that the Mineral Leasing Act did not properly cover shale lands and the 1872 law should be valid. Because of these uncertainties over patents, west-central Colorado claimholders took their cases into the courts. In 1930, the United States Supreme Court upheld patentee rights under certain conditions and ordered the Interior Department to issue title.<sup>102</sup> While this was a victory for some, other legal battles over oil shale continued until June 1980, when the High Court again ruled in favor of the claimholders.<sup>103</sup>

The 1930s marked further declines in oil shale progress. The public was weary of the talk and lack of results by the time of the Great Depression.<sup>104</sup>

With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, and subsequent active American participation after Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Federal government, and others, took a new look at oil shale's potential. Fears of inadequate or interrupted supplies led to new experiments with the resource in west-central Colorado.<sup>105</sup> Starting in 1942, Union Oil Company reactivated their facilities and continued to look for efficient methods of reduction. Their plant remained in operation until 1958.<sup>106</sup> The Federal Bureau of Mines also built a new plant at Anvil Points, near Rifle, Colorado. The facility was part of a national program to develop synthetic fuels under the Synthetic Fuels Act of 1944. This operation worked on all phases of shale oil production, from mining to refining.<sup>107</sup> Anvil Points remained as a demonstrations plant into the 1970s.

Bureau of Mines officials hoped to attract private companies to cooperate in joint experiments at Anvil Points after World War II. However, America's major oil producers were hesitant to work with that Federal agency because of patent problems. Due to the fact that tax monies were used, any new inventions or processes, became part of the public domain and thus, could not be protected by patents. If no such security was assured, the opportunity for profit by sale of the technology was minimized. By 1954 and 1955, the major oil companies requested that Anvil Points be closed down.<sup>108</sup> In that latter year, Senator Estes Kefauver, famous for his investigations of organized crime, accused the petroleum industry of attempting to dictate Federal action.<sup>109</sup> Despite this, the Bureau of Mines closed the Rifle facility in 1956.<sup>110</sup>

In the early 1950s a new company joined the search for practical, profitable oil shale retorts. The Oil Shale Corporation, known as TOSCO, hoped to develop methods of distillation and then sell the technology to larger petroleum companies. TOSCO investigated shale oil factories in Europe, as well as what had been developed in the United States. Until 1960, it seemed as if the company's research was limited to the laboratory. However, some promising new ideas caught the attention of Standard Oil Company of Ohio (SOHIO) and in 1964, TOSCO and Standard Oil jointly formed Colony Development Corporation to carry out actual field experiments along Parachute Creek.<sup>111</sup>

During the 1950s, while TOSCO was at work on various retorting methods, nationwide attention was again focused on west-central Colorado's oil shale fields. *Readers' Digest* and other national publications ran articles about the region's shale resources.<sup>112</sup> At the same time, a comprehensive plan for the Grand Valley was prepared by graduate students of Cornell

a comprehensive plan for the Grand Valley was prepared by graduate students of Cornell University. It called for a city of nearly half a million people on Battlement Mesa and an extensive system of new highways to and from the mines and plants. Cornell's effort listed a lack of adequate water supplies to support the city and refineries as the primary problem facing future shale oil development.<sup>113</sup> This was just one of many plans put forward after World War II to utilize the billions, if not trillions, of barrels of fuel locked in the mountains.

The 1960s witnessed more efforts at finding workable distillation techniques and ways to fully develop the resource. From 1962 until 1964, the U.S. Bureau of Mines offered Anvil Points as a plant site to anyone who would take part in a joint experiment. In 1964, Mobil Oil accepted, and for two years Anvil Points was again active.<sup>114</sup> Colony Development, then owned by Atlantic-Richfield Oil (ARCO), Standard Oil of Ohio (SOHIO), TOSCO, and Cleveland Cliff Company, also continued its work into the late sixties. However, discoveries of petroleum of Alaska's North Slope dampened enthusiasm for Colorado shale oil.<sup>115</sup>

The next decade, with the ever increasing American dependence on foreign oil, led to still another flurry of activity in oil shale country. The Federal government was encouraging development by making the land easier to lease. In 1964, the Bureau of Land Management's Multiple Use Act was passed and in 1976, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) was signed into law. Both pieces of legislation attempted to make it easier for companies to plan for long range use of Federal lands.<sup>116</sup> Despite encouragements, such as leases being granted in 1974, in order to establish production of up to five million barrels of oil a day, there was, in 1980, no commercial shale oil marketed from west-central Colorado.

The seventies, and a new emphasis on domestic oil supplies, was also the decade when problems were encountered by prospective producers. The environmental protection movement, that gained momentum during the previous ten years, blossomed during the 1970s. New concerns for the environment led to tighter restrictions on all mining activity. Oil shale felt the power of those protecting the land, as the environmentalists fought in courts to prevent development of that energy supply in west-central Colorado.<sup>117</sup> Other problems still remain. The disposal of spent (processed) shale, as well as a lack of sufficient water, are questions yet to be resolved.<sup>118</sup>

Because of these dilemmas, area residents remained unconvinced that oil shale will be a primary business activity in west-central Colorado's future. Each spring they brace for the "annual oil shale boom."<sup>119</sup> As if to refute this skepticism, Exxon announced plans during the summer of 1980, for a 5 million barrel-a-day shale oil facility near Parachute, Colorado. In

May, 1982 Exxon announced that it was shelving all plans for the Colony Project and subsidiary operations like the proposed La Sal Pipeline to Casper, Wyoming. Citing cost estimates double those of 1980 and a glutted world oil market, Exxon concluded that commercial production of shale oils was not only too expensive, but not necessary at this time. The western slope was shocked by the cancellation of the five billion dollar proposal, and Parachute, which was a booming shale town, was suddenly left without means of support. Despite resident's cynicism, mining, and particularly energy development in the form of uranium or oil shale, has been an important contributor to the region's economy, especially in the years since the end of World War II. In 1960, mining was the second largest employer in Mesa County. Farming continued to lead the area's economy, but in the post-war years, tourism experienced new growth and revitalization so that by 1960, it ranked third.<sup>120</sup> The period since 1945 was a time of both continuation and change for west-central Colorado.



Exxon's Battlement Mesa development just south of Parachute represents the latest development in the oil shale industry of the Grand Valley. In May 1982, Exxon announced its pull-out of oil shale, creating unsettled futures for the occupants of these houses. *Photo by F.J. Athearn.*

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## CHAPTER XII. THE NEW PROSPERITY

"Things just ain't the same around here no more, all them super highways and tourists and all. Just not the same."

*-Old Timer-*

World War II ended the Great Depression for west-central Colorado's farmers and businessmen much the same as for regional mining interests. Increased wartime needs of food, transportation, and manpower virtually dried up unemployment in the area. The conflict also led to new Federal activities in the region, specifically Camp Hale and the Tenth Mountain Division. Army presence and the soldiers' experiences in Colorado led to a post-war revival of tourism and to development of a new visitor industry--skiing. National prosperity during the 1950s and 1960s furthered this trend. Two resorts, Aspen and Vail, became world-reknown winter sports centers. The post-war era was a period of rapid expansion and development for west-central Colorado's vacation spots. All of the region benefitted from increased tourist traffic. However, other area businesses experienced a continuation of patterns of growth established long before World War II. Grand Junction remained the economic and political center of the Western Slope. Agri-business prospered since 1940, but no startling new developments have occurred to change basic land use patterns.

Farming, since World War II, continued to dominate the economic life of west-central Colorado, especially Mesa County. Irrigation remained crucial to agriculture and was the prevailing method of production by 1960.<sup>1</sup> These lands produced 20 different crops while the adjacent dry land farms raised only wheat.<sup>2</sup> Grand Valley fruit continued to be important in irrigated agriculture.

By 1941, as area farmers increased output for war needs, a new cannery was opened at Palisade. This plant was larger than the older units, but those smaller operations continued. It purchased raw fruit by the ton, rather than by the bushel or pound.<sup>3</sup> By 1945, Mesa County led all Colorado counties in fruit production with nearly \$4 million worth of fruit grown that year.<sup>4</sup> By that time, Grand Valley fruit growers had accomplished a long-time ambition; to gain nationwide recognition and marketing for their produce. Since the war, fruit raising and processing has remained an major part of the local economy.<sup>5</sup>

Stock raising has been equally significant to west-central Colorado in the period after 1945. The use of Federal lands for grazing has continued as beneficial to ranchers because range

improvements carried out by agencies, particularly the Bureau of Land Management, increased forage production. During the 1920s and 1930s, the numbers of sheep increased and this continued into the 1960s. At that point, some woolgrowers started to decrease their flocks due to predator loss. Some sheepmen attributed this increase to less effective methods of control made necessary by stricter state and local regulations regarding the use of poisons and other devices.<sup>6</sup> No matter what the cause, there was a decline in sheep numbers over the period from 1960 to 1980.

Another factor that has contributed to the decline of west-central Colorado livestock production is the shrinking number of farms and ranches. As urban growth occurs, more and more farm land is taken out of production. Also, as oil shale development appeared imminent, many companies entered the region and bought up farms and ranches in the Grand Valley near Rifle and Grand Valley (Parachute). Most of the land remained in agricultural production but in the future, if oil shale becomes commercially viable, that change of ownership may lead to radical changes in Grand Valley farming.<sup>7</sup> As the Second World War and post-war policies affected regional farming, so, too, has it changed tourism in west-central Colorado.

In 1938, as the clouds of war darkened over Europe, the United States Army began planning for the future. As part of this process, it realized that any conflict in Europe would entail combat in mountainous regions such as Italy and to prepare American troops for that eventuality, it was determined to train soldiers in mountain warfare. The Army started buying or taking over National Forest and/or National Monument land near Pando, Colorado, just west of Tennessee Pass in that year for such an instruction facility.<sup>8</sup> In 1942, after the United States had entered the war, the Army constructed Camp Hale on these lands. Winter of that year saw the first troops in place and undergoing rigorous alpine training in all facets of soldiering, while also learning to ski and survive sub-zero cold. Camp Hale, named after Colorado's General Irving Hale, became the home of the Tenth U.S. Mountain Division. The base remained active from 1942 until 1957, when it was abandoned. Nine years later the Army declared it surplus and the land was turned over to White River National Forest.<sup>9</sup>

Troops at Camp Hale worked hard but, in their free time, they took advantage of the recreational benefits offered them in west-central Colorado. In addition to becoming avid skiers, soldiers also visited Glenwood Springs and spent relaxing hours in the hot baths. They also introduced a new sport to west-central Colorado, "jeeping" or off-road four-wheel driving. In 1943, as part of a campaign to sell war bonds, the Camp Halers offered free jeep rides to anyone who would invest in the war effort. Area residents enjoyed these vehicles and, after the war, bought them surplus just for recreation. At the same time, men who had originally come to

Colorado as members of the Tenth Mountain Division, returned after the war as tourists.<sup>10</sup>

The spa at Glenwood Springs attracted the attention of military doctors in 1943, and the United States Navy took over the Colorado Hotel and hot springs pool for therapeutic use. A similar plan was considered, but not acted upon, during World War I. Naval use of the facilities greatly helped the town. The hostelry was renovated and Glenwood Springs became a temporary home for many battlescarred sailors. Just as with the soldiers at Camp Hale, hundreds of sailors returned to the area as tourists after the war ended.<sup>11</sup>

The final way World War II touched the resort town came late in the conflict, after Nazi troops began surrendering to Allied forces by the thousands. The Glenwood Springs Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp was converted into a prisoner-of-war facility to house them.<sup>12</sup>

The experiences of GIs during World War II in west-central Colorado did more than any promotional campaign by regional boosters could. The soldiers' word-of-mouth advertising about the area's scenic and recreational attractions helped encourage and revitalize tourism after peace was achieved.

Despite short periods of economic adjustment in the late 1940s and 1950s, those years were of general prosperity and affluence for most Americans. This, coupled with a dramatic increase in the number of personal autos in use and the development of super-highways, created cheap mobility. These factors made the region more accessible to visitors. This trend continued into the 1960s and with it came increased numbers of vacationers to all parts of the state.<sup>13</sup>

Because of its accessibility, both by car and rail, the west-central part of Colorado became a paradise for many hoping to return to the "Wild West," to ski or to just enjoy the scenery and other natural bounties of the area. Scenic attractions, such as Glenwood Canyon or Colorado National Monument, lured many vacationers to west-central Colorado.<sup>14</sup> Hunters and fishermen also found much to enjoy in the area. Trout and other fish thrived in streams, while all varieties of game, from elk to rabbits, can be hunted in the mountains.<sup>15</sup> Rockhounds and archaeologists were never without things to do, especially in the Grand Valley, from Glenwood Springs to Grand Junction, described as a geologists' paradise.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the spa at Glenwood Springs continued to draw healthseekers from around the nation.<sup>17</sup> To capitalize on this, the owners of the Colorado Hotel completely renovated the structure between 1956 and 1961, spending over \$500,000.<sup>18</sup> Yet another stimulus to area tourism was the emphasis placed by various Federal agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service, on recreation use of government land.

Government land managers began, in 1948, a serious program to increase public enjoyment and benefit for all Federal lands, no longer limiting use to National Parks and Monuments. From 1948 until 1960, a nationwide visitor increase of 300 percent was experienced by the public domain.<sup>19</sup> Some agencies, like the Bureau of Land Management, that had previously not been involved in tourist use, started taking active parts in providing recreational facilities, such as wilderness areas and campgrounds. This use of public lands helped increase vacationer interest in west-central Colorado and, thereby, helped local businesses, thanks to increased numbers of visitors spending money locally.<sup>20</sup>

Specifically the Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and National Park Service (NPS) have stimulated tourism in west-central Colorado in various ways. The Forest Service and Colorado's Department of Wildlife (DOW) have undertaken programs to manage and foster hunting. Also, back roads and jeep trails of the region were heavily used due to these agencies.<sup>21</sup> The present JQS Trail, near Rifle, was originally built by BLM for stockmen but is also used by 4-wheelers for recreation.<sup>22</sup> Finally, Colorado National Monument, operated by NPS, continued to attract visitors over the years, partly because of its easy access from major highways through the region.

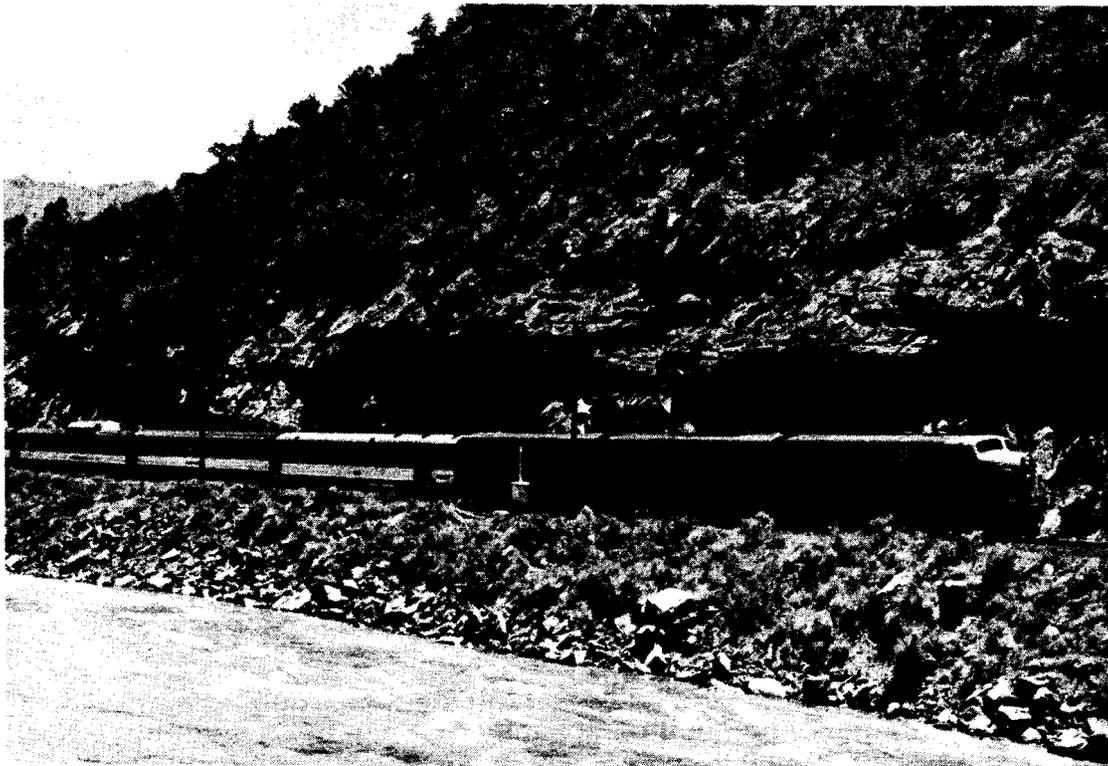
Transportation, always crucial to west-central Colorado development, played a large part in the socio-economic life of the region since World War II. The post-war era witnessed significant changes in basic transportation patterns. The trend away from use of railroads accelerated in 1945, as more and better highways were built.

Area railroading has changed little since World War II, the major difference being a rapid decrease in passenger service, despite efforts of the Denver and Rio Grande Western to stem the tide during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Also, the Denver and Salt Lake Railway ceased to exist after the war. On June 8, 1947, the Denver and Salt Lake was merged into the Denver and Rio Grande Western. The D&SL's Moffat Tunnel-Dotsero Cutoff route was maintained as the mainline of the D&RGW between Denver and Salt Lake City.<sup>23</sup> This left only one railroad, the D&RGW, serving west-central Colorado by 1950. This coincided with attempts by that company to renovate and upgrade its passenger service.

Rail travel, the most utilized transportation before the war, faced new competition

after 1945. The spread of good roads and increased auto ownership, helped tourism but hurt rail passenger business. Starting in 1948, Denver and Rio Grande Western officials began removing branchline passenger service into places such as Aspen.<sup>24</sup> Cutbacks continued until 1971, when only one passenger train served the region.

This train was a remnant of its former self. Known after 1971, as the *Rio Grande Zephyr*, the train represented what was left of one of America's finest post-war streamliners--the *California Zephyr*. This conveyance, a joint operation of the Burlington Route (CB&Q), Rio Grande (D&RGW), and the Western Pacific (WP), operated daily service between Chicago, Illinois, and San Francisco, California by way of Denver, Glenwood Springs, Grand Junction, and Salt Lake City. Designed to maximize the scenic wonders along its route, the *Zephyr* made extensive use of a new design passenger car known as the Vista-Dome. These cars had elevated observation platforms completely encased in glass, as to give riders the best possible view of the country.<sup>25</sup>



The Grand Valley was served by one of the most luxurious trains in the world, the *California Zephyr*. The Rio Grande Railroad still runs a shortened version called the *Rio Grande Zephyr*, seen here just west of Glenwood Springs, Colorado in 1980. Photo by F.J. Athearn.

The idea for this car was conceived in Glenwood Canyon. During a test run of new diesel locomotives in that canyon, an employee of the locomotive manufacturer, riding in the cab, felt that all passengers should enjoy the same view he had. To do this, it was necessary to elevate and glass enclose passenger coaches. The concept was well received and during the 1950s, almost every major passenger train in the nation had Vista-Dome cars as standard equipment. A monument to the idea still stands along U.S. Highway 40 in Glenwood Canyon.<sup>26</sup> Despite efforts such as this, rail passenger and freight service declined in west-central Colorado after 1950.

Highway projects such as Interstate 70 helped create this downturn. Shippers found it easier to load goods on a truck at a warehouse or plant and have these items transported directly to the recipient, rather than ship part way by rail, only to have the material unloaded from the train and then hauled by truck. Towns such as Rifle, once a large shipping point for cattle and other goods, no longer served in this capacity because shippers enjoyed the ease of truck.<sup>27</sup> Improved roadways not only made it easier for producers and consumers to handle goods but also made it easier for visitors to reach west-central Colorado. This factor led to tourism being the number one industry of the eastern section of the region by 1970.<sup>28</sup>

Another contributor to the rapid rise of vacation use in the region was the development of a ski industry. The use of skis or "Norwegian Snowshoes" first came to west-central Colorado in 1881, when travellers to and from Aspen found them necessary to get around in winter. At that point, skiing was not for sport but rather a form of transport.<sup>29</sup> Not until 1945 did the recreation value come to be appreciated.

In 1946, Friedl Pfeifer, Walter Paepcke, and Robert Hutchins "rediscovered" Aspen and saw that the town could become a center of winter sports. Pfeifer was an Army skier during the war and knew the area well. The next year, the first ski chair lift was built, and as the sport grew, so did the town's reputation as a resort. By 1960, the area's economic patterns of tourism and a winter playground were well established.<sup>30</sup>

Not all area residents were happy with that turn of events. During the 1960s and 1970s, some complained that Aspen was no longer a town, but rather a commodity to be bought and sold to the highest bidder.<sup>31</sup> These criticisms aside, there can be no doubt that the success of Aspen as a ski resort and center of "social awareness" saved the town and encouraged growth in the regional economy.



The rip-roaring mining town of Aspen is now a showcase of modernity as reflected in this downtown mall. *Photo by F.J. Athearn.*



But the past is not forgotten in Aspen, where old buildings are reused to serve modern-day tourists and jet-setters. *Photo by F.J. Athearn.*

Other parts of west-central Colorado soon imitated Aspen and promoted skiing. Vail, a part of west-central Colorado previously unnoticed, suddenly became a household word throughout the United States. The construction of ski slopes, visitor accommodations, and a massive promotional effort, changed Vail into another winter sports center for the nation. Other ski resorts spread throughout west-central Colorado, including Sunlight and Red Mountain near Glenwood Springs, as well as Powderhorn further west on the Grand Mesa.<sup>32</sup> The winter sports boom of recent decades, while helping regional tourist trade, has not been without cost and conflict.

One of the major bones of contention is the conflict between developers and environmentalists. From 1950 until 1970, individuals seeking to protect the region's natural beauty, made their presence increasingly felt. The use of mountains for ski runs, combined with the large incoming volume of auto traffic, led these people to question whether growth at any price was worth it. Out of this spirit, the wilderness movement arose. This was an effort to set aside and protect tracts of land from "destructive" human intrusions, such as roads or motor vehicles. Again, as in the earlier conservation crusade, the Federal government was caught in the middle attempting to satisfy both protectors and developers.<sup>33</sup> This conflict continues and its eventual outcome will have significant impacts on the future of west-central Colorado.

During the 1970s, the area's rise to national prominence continued. Attention was drawn to Rifle in 1971, and again in 1972, not because of oil shale, but rather due to an artist. Christo Javacheff, a New York City sculptor and impressionist, chose Rifle Gap as a site for one of his works. Using nature, Christo decided to stretch a giant orange curtain from one side of the valley to the other. In October 1971, he made a first attempt that failed. Undaunted, Christo returned next October to try again. This time he successfully placed the curtain, however, his creation lasted only 28 hours before winds through the Gap tore it to shreds.<sup>34</sup> Christo's curtain brought fleeting notoriety to west-central Colorado but other individuals brought more attention to the region.

West-central Colorado was fortunate to find another political spokesman after World War II. He was Wayne Aspinall. His career was much like Edward Taylor's; moving to Colorado from the Midwest early in life, serving in local offices, and the state legislature, before entering the House of Representatives in 1949, as the member from Colorado's Fourth District.<sup>35</sup>

Aspinall was interested in conservation and public lands and this concern was reflected in his career. It led him to the Chairmanship of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. From that position he was able to protect his district while promoting his

philosophy of developmental multiple use. Aspinall helped push the Alaska and Hawaii Statehood bills through Congress. However, his largest contribution, especially to conservation, was the Colorado River Storage Act, responsible for the creation of a number of new reservoirs along that waterway. Aspinall's other major piece of legislation was the Wilderness Preservation Act. This law provided the basic philosophy of development through multiple use which tempered all his efforts. In 1971 and 1972, he foresaw the energy crisis and began governmental studies on the problem and what America could do to develop its own fuel resources.

In the latter year, Colorado's Representative Districts were redrawn and this, combined with opposition from environmental groups, led to Aspinall's defeat at the polls. While out of public office, he continues in 1980, to be an important force on the Western Slope. His foresight helped the region deal with the problems of the 1970s.<sup>36</sup>

The probable development of regional oil shale resources, planned for many years past, appears to be on the verge of fruition, especially in light of later 1970s energy shortages. Area communities, such as Grand Junction, are bracing for the influx of people that oil shale will bring. This city, the largest between Denver and Salt Lake City in 1970, and still commercial leader of the Western Slope ten years later, is planning a mass transit system.<sup>37</sup> Even with such preparations, much of west-central Colorado still awaits extensive development by man.<sup>38</sup>

Over the past one hundred years of intense Euro-American use, the region experienced many changes. The natural setting helped determine what uses were made of the land. While Euro-Americans worked to alter the environment, through irrigation and other methods, failures like Garmesa Farms or the Havemeyer-Wilcox Canal stand as mute testimony to the powers of nature. The resources provided by the earth led to two distinct patterns of historic development in different sections of west-central Colorado. Indeed the American history of west-central Colorado is the story of man adapting to, and using, his environment to take advantage of the Valley of Opportunity.

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Steven F. Mehls was born in March, 1952 at Omaha, Nebraska. He received his Bachelor's degree from Drake University in Des Moines, Ia., in 1974. That summer, following the example of many of west-central Colorado's pioneers, the author moved West. The next year he received a Masters degree in American History from the University of Colorado and a Ph.D. in Western American History in 1982. The author has published in numerous professional journals and is a member of many professional societies.