

## All Hail the Denver Pacific: Denver's First Railroad

BY THOMAS J. NOEL

*But hark! down this once lone valley,  
You can hear the thundering tread,  
Of the iron horse advancing,  
And rushing with firey breath —*

*To gain this goal of welcome;  
This gem of our mountain land;  
Bringing the wealth of the nations,  
And laying them in our hands.*

*Then hail, all hail to its coming,  
Let the welkin loudlo ring  
With three times three for the D.P.R.,  
And our Denver "Railroad Kings."\**

When gold was discovered in Colorado in the 1850s, a town of canvas and wood sprang up among the cottonwood trees where Cherry Creek flows into the South Platte River. Infant Denver City attracted hopeful emigrants from throughout the United States. For a troubled country slowly recovering from the depression of 1857 and heading for a civil war, news of the Colorado '59ers recalled golden days of the California '49ers. One gold seeker, Libeus Barney, wrote home to the *Bennington* (Vermont) *Banner* on July 12, 1859, that "in Denver City they behold in the future another San Francisco, and along the val-

\*The poem is from the *Denver Colorado Tribune*, June 22, 1870.

ley of Clear Creek they seem to witness the uprising of a second Sacramento."<sup>1</sup>

Robert W. Steele, governor of the extralegal Jefferson Territory, too was optimistic. Speaking before the freshly elected provisional legislature in Denver in 1859, Steele predicted that by spring the "population will probably be swelled to 100,000, all eager to push their fortunes in any avocation that promises the greatest remuneration."<sup>2</sup> In the following spring of 1860, however, the census taker found only 4,749 Denverites.<sup>3</sup> Ten years later, the 1870 census showed that Denver's population growth for the decade amounted to only ten residents.<sup>4</sup> Evidently fortune seekers found greater remuneration elsewhere.

Some Denverites, such as the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* editor William N. Byers, professed relief at being rid of the "go-backers," who "because they cannot shovel out nuggets like they have been accustomed to dig potatoes, they raise the cry that it is all a humbug, that there is no gold in the country, and take the back track for home where it is to be hoped they will ever after remain."<sup>5</sup> Many of the people who came to Denver

did not return to the East but sought out the mining towns west of the Queen City. Some of these Argonauts settled in Golden, the capital of Colorado Territory from 1863 until 1867 and a rival to Denver for the mountain mining town trade.

The Queen City was stagnating. Denverites began to seek a steel lifeline to span the eight hundred miles of the "Great American Desert" that separated them from the States. A railroad lifeline would also confirm Denver's position as the regional metropolis, the supply depot and market for the Rocky Mountain region. Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune* and astute observer of the West, traveled through Denver and concluded that

those who prospect or mine there must live—a point to which eating is rather essential in that keen mountain air. Everything that can be eaten or drunk is selling in the Kansas mines at far more than California prices. A railroad from the Missouri to the heads of the Platte or Arkansas would reduce, in those mines, the average cost of food at least half, and would thereby diminish sensibly the cost, and increase the profit of digging gold. If one hundred thousand persons can manage to live in the Rocky Mountain gold region as it stands, three hundred thousand could do better there with a railroad up from the Missouri.<sup>6</sup>

If Denver was eager to have a railroad, many railroads were eager to get to Denver where they could profitably exchange supplies for gold ore. Numerous railroads had "reached Denver," but only on paper. As early as 1860 Saint Joseph, Missouri, had launched the Missouri River and Pike's Peak railroad. Denver's hopes were also brightened by the projected Saint Joseph and Denver City railroad; the Atchison and Pike's Peak; the Leavenworth, Fort Riley, and Western; the Saint Louis, Lawrence, and Denver; the Pacific railroad of Missouri; and the Cedar Rapids and Missouri railroads.<sup>7</sup> But hopes dimmed when these roads never graduated from speculator's maps.

<sup>1</sup> Libeus Barney, *Letters of the Pike's Peak Gold Rush: (or Early Day Letters from Auraria)* Early Day Letters by Libeus Barney, Reprinted from the *Bennington Banner, Vermont, 1859-1860* (San Jose, Calif.: Talisman Press, 1959), p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53. For a discussion of the various governmental activities of the state of Colorado see J. L. Frazier, "Prologue to Colorado Territory," *The Colorado Magazine* 38 (July 1961):161-73.

<sup>3</sup> U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Population of the United States in 1860* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), p. 548.

<sup>4</sup> U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *The Statistics of the Population of the United States, Ninth Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 1:95.

<sup>5</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News* (weekly), April 23, 1859.

<sup>6</sup> Horace Greeley, *An Overland Journey from New York to San Francisco in the Summer of 1859* (New York: C. M. Saxton, Barker, & Co., 1860), p. 373.

<sup>7</sup> LeRoy R. Hafen, ed., *Colorado and Its People: A Narrative and Topical History of the Centennial State*, 4 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1948), 2:637.



William Newton Byers,  
editor of the Denver  
Rocky Mountain News.

Despite this rash of disappointments, Denver was still banking on the projected transcontinental railroad. President Abraham Lincoln's new appointee as governor of Colorado Territory, John Evans, assured the people on his first night in Denver (May 16, 1862) that the Pacific railroad would become the town's "great commercial auxiliary."<sup>8</sup> Denverites noted hopefully that Evans was one of the commissioners appointed by Congress to organize the Pacific railroad.

Concerning this projected transcontinental line, Byers editorialized in the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* as early as 1859 arguing that "the road must pass through the South Platte gold fields, and this, our consolidated city at the eastern foot of the Rocky Mountains, will be a point which cannot be dodged."<sup>9</sup> Editor Byers went on to suggest that the railroad follow the South Platte to Denver and then up Platte Canyon into the Rockies. Minimizing the mountain barrier west of Denver, he claimed that

for hundreds of miles through the mountain region on the route indicated, the profile of the country is fully described when we say *hilly*; but few elevations attaining the prominence of mountains, the valleys and slopes are rich in grasses, prolific in fruits, and abounding [sic] with inexhaustible forests [sic] of pine, fir, and cedar timber, presenting a most vivid contrast to the barren and desert plains, that surround and stretch away from the South Pass, which, whilst we admit their practicability as a railroad route, present but few pleasing features and no advantages as the home of man.<sup>10</sup>

The directors of the Union Pacific Railway were more intimidated by the "hilly" land west of Denver. As late as 1866 Union Pacific President John A. Dix wrote to John Evans mentioning the difficulties of constructing a line over Berthoud Pass, where he felt a tunnel would be required. However, the UP was definitely interested in Colorado Dix wrote, "but after two years examination by our Engineers, candor compels me to express the belief, that a railroad connecting Denver and the Salt Lake Basin, must commence the ascent of the mountain, at least as far north as the point where the Cache la Poudre leaves the mountain and meets the level plain in the vicinity [sic] of Laporte."<sup>11</sup>

The Union Pacific line was to go through Cheyenne, a hundred miles north of Denver. The transcontinental route com-

pletely skirted Colorado, except for a dip into the extreme northeast corner of the state at Julesburg. For the cash-conscious directors of the Union Pacific, serving existing population centers or even catering to long range money making projects, like Colorado mining, were subordinated to pushing westward as fast as possible in order to grab government land grants and to collect bonuses for every mile of track laid.<sup>12</sup>

Denver, with a sagging economy and hopes crushed once again, had one other place to turn. The Pacific Railway Act of 1862 provided for a secondary, more southern branch line as well as the primary transcontinental line. This second line, the Union Pacific Eastern Division, was authorized to run westward along the Kansas River to Fort Riley, then cut northward along the Republican River to join the main UP line near Fort Kearney in Nebraska Territory. This abrupt right turn several hundred miles east of Denver meant that the Queen City would once again be bypassed by the iron highway. This second road was a congressional concession to the Saint Louis railroad interests, bitter about the main transcontinental line that was to begin at Omaha, the choice of Chicago interests. Although the Union Pacific and the Union Pacific Eastern Division (UPED) shared the same name and legislative origins, they were separate, rival companies. Despite the limitations of the 1862 act, the UPED dreamed of becoming a second transcontinental road.

UPED aspirations climbed after President Andrew Johnson signed into law the Extension Act of July 3, 1866, which permitted the line to push on to Denver before joining the main UP line. Denver, disappointed by the UP, now anticipated the arrival of the UPED. In the excitement it was perhaps forgotten that a budget conscious Congress had refused to grant the UPED any additional bonds along with its new route. For the UPED, chronically short of capital, this was a crippling restriction.<sup>13</sup>

Colonel James Archer of the UPED appeared in the Queen City later that year to tell local businessmen that his company could not complete the road to Denver unless the town contributed \$2,000,000. For Denverites this impossible-sounding sum seemed like outrageous blackmail. Editor Byers ranted in the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* that "it is not the design of the Eastern Division Company, to come to Denver with their

<sup>8</sup> Harry E. Kelsey, Jr., *Frontier Capitalist: The Life of John Evans* (Denver, Colo.: State Historical Society; Pruett Publishing Co., 1969), p. 169.

<sup>9</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News* (weekly), November 24, 1859.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> John A. Dix to John Evans, February 12, 1866, John Evans Papers, Documentary Resources Department, State Historical Society of Colorado, Denver.

<sup>12</sup> Robert G. Athearn, *Union Pacific Country* (Chicago, Ill.: Rand McNally & Co., 1971), p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> This highly condensed account of the UPED (the Kansas Pacific after 1869) is drawn from William R. Petrowski, "The Kansas Pacific: A Study in Railroad Promotion" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1966).

road via the Smoky Hill Route, as they had promised, and . . . all the influence given them in aid of the change of charter, by the last Congress, is a sell, practiced upon us." Byers urged Denver businessmen to seek out a rail connection with the UP at Cheyenne, concluding that "our time of triumph will surely come, and the day is not distant when the old foggy capitalists of the east will see with shame and remorse how much they have lost by ignoring the resources of this rich though now struggling territory."<sup>14</sup>

Denver's fears of being bypassed in the country's great push to the Pacific were further exacerbated by the news that General William J. Palmer of the UPED was surveying possible routes to California, all of which bypassed Denver to the south.<sup>15</sup> Although short on capital, the UPED was long on dreams.

Soon after the UPED had thus antagonized the Denverites, the star promoter of the Union Pacific, George Francis Train, addressed the townspeople. The speech Train gave the night of November 14, 1867, was to be acclaimed by his audience as the inspiration for a "home town" railroad—the Denver Pacific.<sup>16</sup>

The UP promoter, also known as "Express Train," suggested that Denver build her own road, connecting the Queen City with the Union Pacific transcontinental at Cheyenne.<sup>17</sup> Paraphrasing "Express Train," editor Byers caught his evangelical flavor in the *Denver Rocky Mountain News*.

The road he said could be built for \$20,000 per mile, or a total of \$2,000,000. He believed it might be done for \$14,000 a mile. This road must be built or the town was gone up. Everybody would move away. We could not afford to pay our enormous freights—\$1,000,000 on 12,000,000 pounds of freight would soon destroy any town. When asked how to proceed he replied we must force the eastern division to give up those lands. We must organize at once. All in favor of it would say

<sup>14</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News* (weekly), September 19, 1866.

<sup>15</sup> William J. Palmer, *Report of Surveys across the Continent in 1867-'68 on the Thirty-fifth and Thirty-second Parallels, for a Route extending the Kansas Pacific Railway to the Pacific Ocean at San Francisco and San Diego* (Philadelphia, Pa.: W. B. Selheimer, 1869).

<sup>16</sup> Jerome C. Smiley, *History of Denver* (1901; reprint ed., Evansville, Ind.: Unigraphic, 1971), pp. 586-87.

<sup>17</sup> A little-known phenomenon of the Gilded Age, Train was an eccentric world traveler and adventurer (his eighty-day trip around the world in 1870 made him the prototype of Jules Verne's Phineas Fogg), author of over twenty books on politics and travel, and a wildcat presidential candidate in 1864 and 1872 on a dictatorship platform. See Thornton Willis, *The Nine Lives of Citizen Train* (New York: Greenberg, 1948). The motivation of Train (who gave the Credit Mobilier its name) in suggesting the Denver Pacific has not been explored by historians. The subsequent long struggle and eventual success of the Union Pacific in taking over the Denver road suggests that Train and the financially embarrassed Union Pacific were exploiting local capital, figuring that the DP would eventually have to come to terms with the UP. Of course, the UP was also eager to keep the rival KP from constructing the Denver to Cheyenne road.

yes. (Loud responses of yes.) The thing was accomplished. We should break ground to-morrow, and build a mile of it. All in favor of it would say yes. (Responses of yes.) The work was commenced.<sup>18</sup>

Train's oratory was not the only inducement for Denver to act. Competition, not only from newly platted Cheyenne but also from closer to home, threatened Denver. In neighboring Golden W. A. H. Loveland had incorporated the Colorado Central railroad in 1865 and had contracted with the Union Pacific to construct a line from Cheyenne to Golden. The Colorado Central was to provide the roadbed, ties, and bridges and then the Union Pacific would iron the road.<sup>19</sup>

In order to raise the necessary capital the Colorado Central promoted county bond elections in Jefferson, Arapahoe, Boulder, Gilpin, Weld, and Larimer counties. Only the citizens of Jefferson County fully supported the CC, voting \$100,000 for the Golden road.<sup>20</sup> Not until January 1, 1868, did the Colorado Central construct "a little stretch of roadbed about 200 feet long in an easy place" amid much celebration.<sup>21</sup> This outburst temporarily exhausted the Colorado Central's efforts.

Meanwhile, the Denver Board of Trade spearheaded the creation of the Denver Pacific Railway and Telegraph Company, which was incorporated according to the laws of Colorado on November 19, 1867. As originally suggested by Train, the road was capitalized at \$2,000,000 (the same sum that the UPED had asked as only a contribution).<sup>22</sup> Within three days the Denver Pacific had sold subscriptions for \$300,000. Denverites were allowed to purchase shares with the promise of working on the roadbed or supplying railroad ties.<sup>23</sup> This fit of boosterism extended to January 20, 1868, when residents voted 1,210 for and only 15 against an Arapahoe County railroad bond. As with the earlier bond vote on the Colorado Central, the procedure was then to exchange the county bonds for railroad stock, on the assumption that it would be easier for the railroad to sell county bonds than its own stock. This Arapahoe County bond added \$500,000 to the growing Denver Pacific treasury.<sup>24</sup>

With \$800,000 in the treasury, local capital fairly well exhausted, and \$1,200,000 yet to be raised, the Denver Pacific fund

<sup>18</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News* (weekly), November 20, 1867.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel D. Mock, "The Financing of Early Colorado Railroads," *The Colorado Magazine* 18 (November 1941):205.

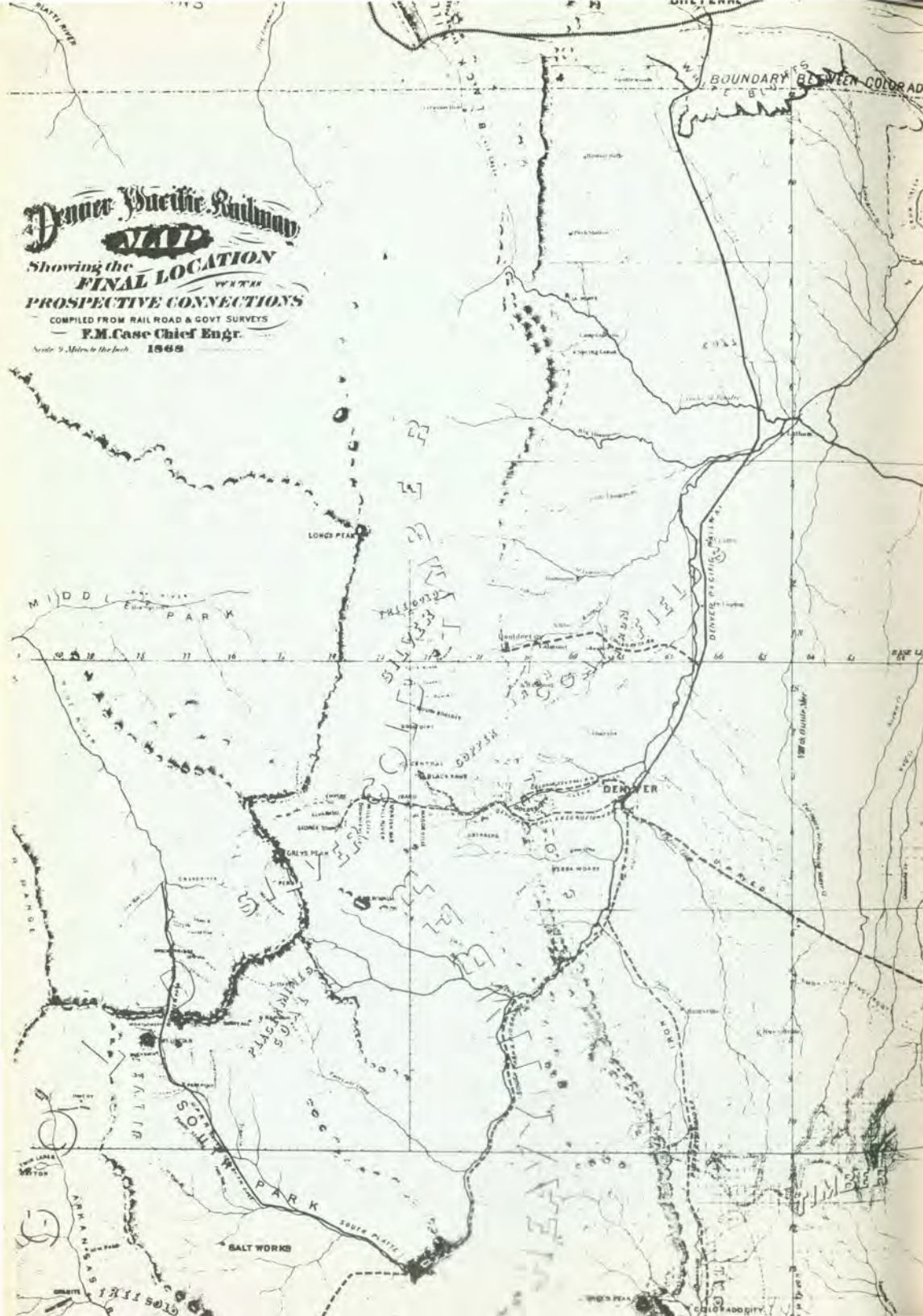
<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>21</sup> Smiley, *History of Denver*, p. 591.

<sup>22</sup> Denver Pacific Stock Subscription Ledgers of David H. Moffat, Jr., Denver Pacific Railway and Telegraph Co., Manuscript Collection, Documentary Resources Department, State Historical Society of Colorado, Denver.

<sup>23</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News* (weekly), November 27, 1867.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, January 22, 1868.



raising campaign ran out of steam. Additional county bonds, a standard tool of railroad finance, seemed an unlikely approach after the Colorado Central's abortive campaign two years earlier. Also, Denver could be none too sure of sympathy from the surrounding counties. Golden, her railroad rival, had captured the loyalties of many of the mountain mining districts. These mountain settlements were closer to Golden than to Denver in both a geographical and cultural sense and had come to share Golden's mistrust for "the Queen City of the Plains." The *Central City Colorado Times* (daily), for example, showed no sympathy for the Denver road.

This [the Colorado Central] is good news for mining districts, for there is but little of the Denver egotism about the Golden City folks. We can hope for advantages from Golden City that Denver in her exclusiveness would never grant. Denver is like the adder, which, perishing from the cold, was taken by the countryman out of pity into his bosom, but which on being revived by his warmth, as a return for his kindness, bit him. So Denver in her selfishness would have the mines of Colorado—the very bowels of her existence—shift for themselves. . . .

Far better would it be for Denver to build a railroad to Golden City to connect with the Colorado Central, than to run a starving line for their own private monopoly.<sup>25</sup>

In the spring of 1869 Denver turned from the "bowels of her existence" to look for aid in the "financial bosoms" of the East. John Evans, a member of the Board of Directors of the Denver Pacific and the road's prime mover, traveled to Chicago, New York, and Boston in search of capital. Eastern financiers, suffering from the depression of 1866-67 and surfeited with the stock of the Union Pacific and other railroads, expressed little interest in the Denver Pacific. Failing to find many buyers, even for the Arapahoe County bonds, Evans turned to the Union Pacific.<sup>26</sup> The big road was eager to tap the Colorado mines with a feeder line but had grown disillusioned after the Colorado Central, its first Colorado partner, had failed to raise sufficient funds. Evans wrestled an informal agreement from the Union Pacific to iron the road once the Denver Pacific had built the roadbed and had laid the ties and bridges. In exchange for this aid the Union Pacific asked for the right to lease the Denver Pacific after its completion on terms that would guarantee eight percent interest to DP stockholders.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, December 4, 1867, quoting the *Central City Colorado Times*.

<sup>26</sup> Address by Governor Evans to the Denver Board of Trade, *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, November 9, 1869.

<sup>27</sup> Mock, "The Financing of Early Colorado Railroads," p. 205.

Evans also conferred with the owners of the Union Pacific Eastern Division, for in December 1868 he reported to the Denver Pacific stockholders that "an agreement was made with all the principal men of the Union Pacific Railway Company to aid in the completion of the road, and an agreement has been made and signed with the President of the Union Pacific Railway Company, Eastern Division, for the transfer of their right of way and grant of lands for their road north and westerly of Denver City, to your Company, and its ratification by act of Congress is hoped for at an early day."<sup>28</sup> With uncanny financial wizardry Evans had brought the two competing Pacific roads to the aid of the Denver Pacific. The price he paid was the eventual loss of local control.



John Evans,  
one of Denver's  
"Railroad Kings."

All of Evans' plans and the fate of the Denver Pacific, however, continued to hinge on the legislation before Congress to transfer the Union Pacific Eastern Division land grant and right of way between Denver and Cheyenne to the Denver road. The lands had been given to the UPED by the 1866 Extension Act as an inducement to have the UPED tie up with the UP in Wyoming after getting to Denver. In exchange for its concurrence in this transferral the UPED was hoping to gain additional government appropriations for their road to Denver and also the use of the DP line. After extensive lobbying by the UPED and Evans, an act to transfer the lands was signed into law on March 3, 1869, by President Johnson on his last day in office.

With the passage of this act the Denver Pacific was assured of the land grants and the rights to a government insured first mortgage of their road for an amount not more than thirty-two thousand dollars per mile. In somewhat ambiguous terminology the act authorized the UPED to contract with the DP "for the construction, operation and maintenance" of the DP line but forbade "the said eastern division company to operate or fix the rates of tariff for the Denver Pacific Railway & Telegraph Company."<sup>29</sup>

Now carrying the approval and the financial support of the federal government in his pocket, Evans sought out UP President Oliver Ames to confirm their agreement of the previous year by which the UP was to iron the DP road. The financially harassed UP president proved hard to locate. Eventually Evans found him at Quaking Asp, Utah Territory, where he was besieged by unpaid Union Pacific tie cutters. "After nearly a month's waiting," as Evans said later, "I finally was told by them that they were not in a financial position to aid me."<sup>30</sup>

Bewildered by this news, the Board of Directors of the Denver Pacific assigned Evans the "honor" of finishing the road

<sup>28</sup> "First Annual Report of the Officers of the Denver Pacific Railway & Telegraph Co. to the Stockholders, December 14, 1868," p. 8, Western History Collections, Norlin Library, University of Colorado, Boulder, hereafter cited as "First Annual Report of the Denver Pacific Railway."

<sup>29</sup> "An Act to Authorize the Transfer of Lands Granted to the Union Pacific Railway Company, Eastern Division, between Denver and the Point of its Connection with the Union Pacific Railroad to the Denver Pacific Railway and Telegraph Company, and to Expedite the Completion of Railroads to Denver, in the Territory of Colorado," U.S., *Statutes at Large*, 1867-1869, 15:324.

<sup>30</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, November 9, 1869. Why Evans continued to seek out the nebulously promised aid of the UP remains unclear. The dizzy world of railroad finance, in which the leading figures sometimes preferred to leave their transactions obscure for contemporary courts as well as for future historians, has probably led more than one researcher to conclusions similar to that of George L. Anderson that "the arrangement between the Kansas Pacific and Denver Pacific companies, whereby the former constructed and obtained control of the latter, is one of those railroad transactions which has remained more or less mysterious" (George L. Anderson, *Kansas West* [San Marino, Calif.: Golden West Books, 1963], p. 81).

and assuming its debts. The Denver Pacific was at the time \$181,579 in debt with another \$100,000 worth of work to be done before rails could be laid. On June 24, 1868, the board of directors had increased the company's stock from \$2,000,000 to \$4,000,000 in order to meet the growing debts and expenses.<sup>31</sup> Other assets included the land grant, \$500,000 in Arapahoe County bonds, \$6,500 in cash, and \$2,500,000 in mortgage bonds to be issued under the provisions of the 1869 act. (As might be surmised from this statement of accounts, the stocks and bonds of the Denver Pacific were not worth anything like their face value.) After some thought, Evans agreed to take upon his shoulders the heavy obligations that the Union Pacific had come to refuse. His contract with the DP required that the principal offices and the machine shops remain in Denver and that management control remain in the hands of the property holders and residents of Arapahoe County for at least five years.<sup>32</sup>

Evans quickly found associates willing to share in his enterprise. The Kansas Pacific, as the UPED was called after 1869, became increasingly interested in the fate of the Denver Pacific as its own tracks neared Denver. After three weeks of meetings in Chicago, Columbus, and Philadelphia, Evans came to an agreement in July with the Kansas Pacific President Robert E. Carr.<sup>33</sup> Carr and his KP associates were given a one-half interest in the Denver Pacific, while Arapahoe County, Evans, and two Denver associates, David H. Moffat, Jr. and Walter S. Cheesman, held the other half. Evans was to maintain control of the road for the next five years (as his contract with the DP required) and then surrender control to the KP. A joint construction company presided over by Evans and William J. Palmer of the KP was created. The contract also specified that

the parties further agree that they will upon the completion of their roads to the city of Denver equally divide between them monthly the gross receipts from the traffic and business of any and all portions of 212 miles of their said roads—that is to say—of the receipts from traffic or business done on 106 miles of their respective roads nearest to the City of Denver, and for the purpose of ascertaining the said gross receipt any proper official of either company shall have the right to examine the books and papers of the other which may be necessary to determine the amount of said receipts.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Smiley, *History of Denver*, p. 592.

<sup>32</sup> This information is drawn from a copy of the contract between Evans and the Denver Pacific, which is Exhibit A in *Carlos S. Greeley v. the Denver Pacific Railway and Telegraph Company et al.*, Docket 156, U.S. Circuit Court for Colorado, Container 5176, Record Group 21, Federal Records Center, Denver, hereafter cited as *Greeley v. Denver Pacific Railway*, Federal Records Center, Denver.

<sup>33</sup> Petrowski, "The Kansas Pacific," p. 198.

<sup>34</sup> Exhibit D (a copy of the contract between Evans and Carr), *Greeley v. Denver Pacific Railway*, Federal Records Center, Denver.

With this agreement the two roads, somewhat suspiciously, joined their fortunes. The larger Kansas road with its superior financial connections in the East and in Europe proved useful in disposing the Denver Pacific stock and bonds. Denver was assured in the contract of being headquarters for the DP offices and shops and also for the western division of the KP. The contract also called for mutual cooperation in the further development of Colorado railroads, including the Denver, Central, and Georgetown; the Denver, South Park, and Rio Grande; the Denver and Santa Fe; and the construction of the Boulder branch of the Denver Pacific Railway.<sup>35</sup> Thus, John Evans, in three weeks of hard bargaining, had managed to maintain marginal control of the Denver Pacific—at least until 1874. Denver's pioneer capitalist had clung to the all-important management control for which railroad tycoons risked fortunes and jail sentences.<sup>36</sup>

Addressing the Denver Board of Trade, Evans pointed out the advantages of the merger. Expressing hearty approval, the board of trade agreed that "by this arrangement the city of Denver is secured all that she can reasonably ask. The dangers of competing roads making new centers of business in their rivalry is thus obviated, and the co-operation of the most powerful railroad influences is secured for the extension of other railroads to almost every important part of our territory."<sup>37</sup> With the financial reinforcement of the KP alliance and the 1869 land grant, Evans proceeded to issue \$2,500,000 in bonds, as the 1869 act had authorized. These bonds paid semiannually seven percent a year with the principal payable in 1899, and they were marketed in New York City, London, and Frankfurt.<sup>38</sup>

The following year an elegant, promotional booklet, printed on Fleet Street in London, appeared in European financial circles proclaiming that the 900,000 acre DP land grant was a plum situated along the scenic front range of the Rockies, whose snows assured a year around water supply for farming. "Without taking into consideration the unusually rapid increase in the value of lands in proximity to railways in America," the

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of the importance of management control in American railroading, see Thomas C. Cochran, "North American Railroads: Land Grants and Railroad Entrepreneurship," *Journal of Economic History* 10 (1950):53-67.

<sup>37</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, November 9, 1869.

<sup>38</sup> Exhibit B, the Deed of Trust for the "First Mortgage of the Railroad & Land Grant of Denver Pacific Railway and Telegraph Company to John Edgar Thompson, Adolphus Meier, John Evans" in *Joseph J. Slocum v. the Denver Pacific Ry. & T. Co.*, John Evans, Carlos S. Greeley, and Adolphus Meier, Docket 278, U.S. Circuit Court for Colorado, Container 5183, Federal Records Center, Denver.

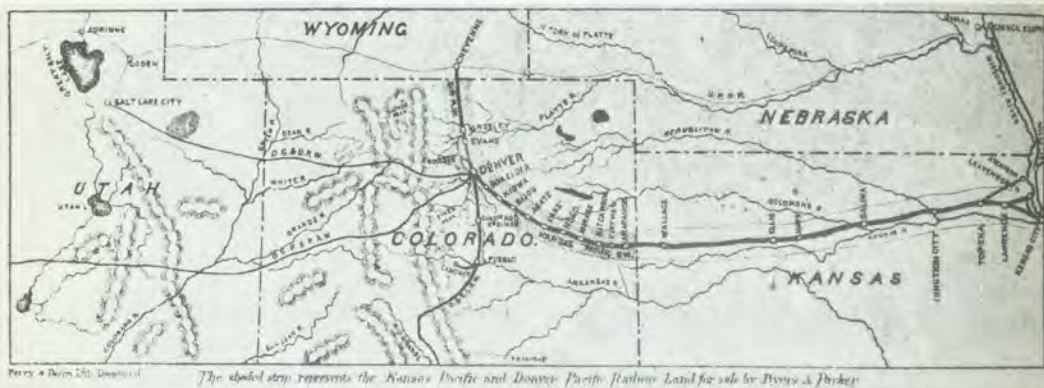
booklet pointed out, "the land mortgaged . . . will realize a total of \$3,200,000—much more than sufficient to pay off the whole of the mortgage debt."<sup>39</sup> Actually the total land grant came to 977,994 and 96/100ths acres, although various considerations kept parts of this land out of the hands of the Denver Pacific.<sup>40</sup> The prior rights of homesteaders were protected by the federal government as were the UP claims to the twenty miles of land directly south of its Cheyenne line, which coincided with the DP line. Another 100,000 acres had to be set aside for the construction of the road itself.

Ultimately the DP land grant came to 821,822 and 57/100ths unencumbered acres in "ten (10) sections per mile on each side of said railroad on the line thereof within the limits of

\$6.50. With nonirrigable lands, "worth not more than twenty-five cents per acre," the DP was happy to comply with federal regulations requiring a \$2.50 per acre minimum selling price to protect the market for adjacent, alternate sections of government land.<sup>42</sup>

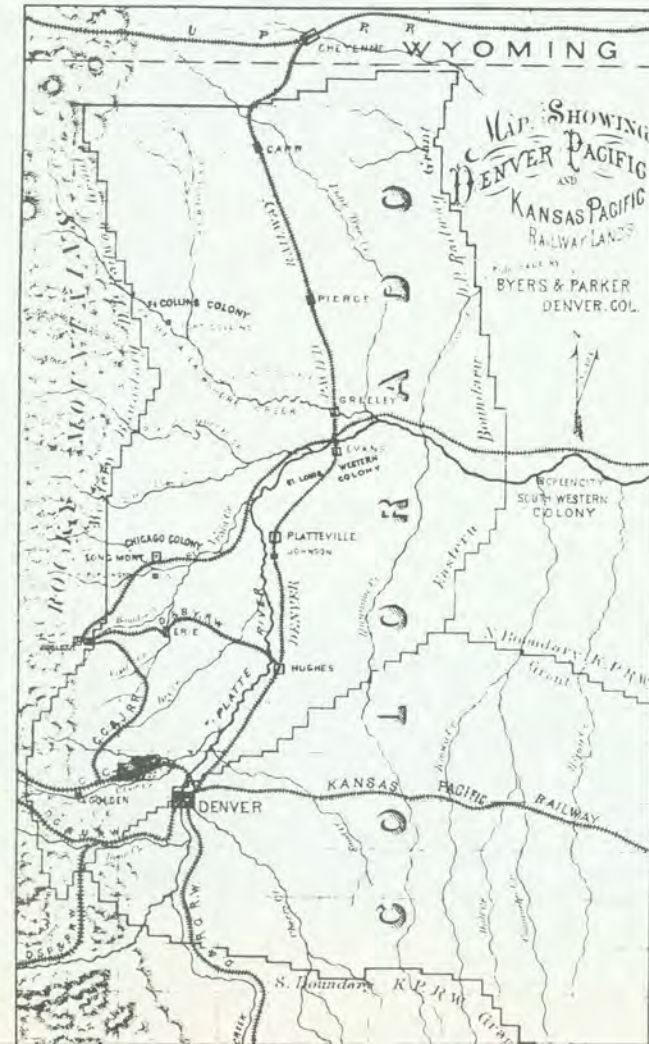
The National Land Company of Topeka, Kansas, the agent for KP land sales, was commissioned to manage the DP land sales as well. This firm hired William N. Byers of the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* to handle their Denver office. Through this office and his newspaper, Byers pushed land sales vigorously.<sup>43</sup>

Some of Byers' biggest sales were to agricultural colonies whose members were fleeing the large cities of the East. The



twenty (20) miles on each side of railroad not sold, reserved or otherwise disposed of by the United States and to which pre-emption or homestead claims had not attached, at the time of the definite location of said road, excepting mineral lands other than coal and iron lands."<sup>41</sup>

The Denver Pacific divided its acreage into three categories before putting it on the market. Approximately forty thousand acres of coal lands concentrated in the Boulder area were valued at approximately \$20.00 per acre and irrigable lands at



A map of Denver Pacific and Kansas Pacific railroad lands, for sale by Byers and Parker in Denver, showing the location of the agricultural colonies.

<sup>39</sup> John Collinson and W. A. Bell, *The Denver Pacific Railway: Its Present Position and Future Prospects* (London: W. J. Johnson, 1870), p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> *Third Annual Report of the Officers of the Denver Pacific Railway and Telegraph Company Made at the Stockholder's Meeting, Held May 8th, 1871* (Denver, Colo.: Woodbury & Walker, 1871), p. 15, John Evans Papers, Documentary Resources Department, State Historical Society of Colorado, Denver, hereafter cited as *Third Annual Report of the Denver Pacific Railway*.

<sup>41</sup> Robert E. Carr et al. v. the Union Pacific Railroad Co., et al., Docket 3651, U.S. Circuit Court for Colorado, Container 5351, Federal Records Center, Denver.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, Testimony of William N. Byers, p. 5.



Union Colony, pet project of Horace Greeley, purchased thousands of acres for their settlement at Greeley. Back in New York, editor Greeley recruited New Yorkers of good character and of the temperance persuasion who were able to pay the \$155 membership fee. The Denver Pacific provided free transportation for the colonists to their Colorado utopia. A large frame lodging house was railroaded from Cheyenne to Greeley and dubbed the Hotel de Comfort. Most of Greeley's "saints" were comfortable in their agricultural paradise, emancipated from alcohol and other big city vices, although one quitter warned the world that "if you can't possibly stay where you are, *dont go to GREELEY, Colorado Territory!* That is the last place on the face of this terrestrial ball that any human being should contemplate a removal to! Greeley, Colorado T., is a delusion, a snare—it is a fraud, a cheat, a swindle."<sup>44</sup> Editor Byers, well accustomed to such "go-backers" after a decade of promoting Colorado, continued to lure settlers to the Colorado paradise strung out along the DP tracks. The Chicago-Colorado Colony founded Longmont in 1871; the Saint Louis-Western Company settled near the town of Evans that same year. Thus, by 1871 the Denver Pacific had sold almost sixty thousand acres at an average price of \$4.18 per acre.<sup>45</sup>

The actual construction work on the 106 mile Denver Pacific line followed the fluctuating patterns of the road's financial fortunes. Although the roadbed was surveyed in 1868, construction was held up to wait the approval and the confirmation of assistance from the UP. Work began in earnest after the KP replaced the UP as an underwriter. Colonel Leonard Eicholtz, a veteran of western railroad construction, was made chief engineer of the DP.

Roadwork began at the Denver end of the line in May 1868. A general holiday was declared and about one thousand Denverites joined the celebration. A band struck up "The Railroad Gallop," and a keg of beer was tapped. General John Pierce of the DP spoke on behalf of the women of Denver, two of whom guided the plow that first broke into the virgin prairie soil to mold the roadbed. However two men, as Denver historian Jerome C. Smiley noted, "drove the mule teams that really did about all the actual work performed that day; though John W. Smith [president of the Board of Trade] shifted a few



*Breaking ground on the Denver Pacific, May 18, 1868, near what was the junction of the Denver Pacific and the Kansas Pacific railroads.*

shovelfuls of earth."<sup>46</sup> At the northern end of the line in Cheyenne construction did not begin until September in a town that was not particularly eager to introduce Denver to its new railroad prosperity.

By 1870 the Denver Pacific was definitely off speculators' maps and well on its way to completion. Railroad ties were felled in the Ponderosa foothills and floated down the Cache la Poudre River to the treeless plain. A feeder line of the road was being constructed to the coal beds near Boulder. In these fields the Denver Pacific had a fortune according to United States geologist T. V. Hayden, for "when the Union Pacific railroad and the Pacific railroad, eastern division, with their numerous branches, are completed, millions of tons of this beautiful fuel will be distributed over this vast area which is now almost or entirely destitute of both wood and coal."<sup>47</sup> Boulder county commissioners approved \$100,000 in bonds to support the DP feeder line, the Denver and Boulder Valley railroad, which reached the Erie coal beds by 1871.<sup>48</sup>



<sup>44</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, June 27, 1870.

<sup>45</sup> *Third Annual Report of the Denver Pacific Railway*, p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> Smiley, *History of Denver*, p. 592.

<sup>47</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News* (weekly), December 4, 1867.

<sup>48</sup> Jean M. Greiner, "The Golden, Boulder and Caribou," *The Colorado Magazine* 44 (Fall 1967):309.

As the road neared completion, the hopes of the DP management swelled like a balloon. In their first report to stockholders the Denver Pacific directors enumerated the myriad benefits of the road. The Denver Pacific would "make the forests of Colorado a source of constantly increasing revenue," would soon be "transporting 50,376,585 pounds of produce" to market for Colorado farmers, and would develop the cattle business that "is to be the great source of wealth in Colorado." Greatly reduced transportation costs, the directors added, would increase the state's mining income to "magnificent proportions."<sup>49</sup>

As the day of June 22, 1870, approached, the Denver road bought rolling stock from the UP, including Engine No. 29, which was rechristened the "General D. H. Moffat, Jr." On that day Chief Engineer Eicholtz jotted down in his diary that the "General" "reached the upper end of Denver Yard at noon today and at 4 P.M. completed [laying] main track—at 7:15 P.M. first regular passenger train arrived."<sup>50</sup> Formal festivities took place June 24, when the train steamed into town bearing one-day-old Omaha newspapers, two-day-old Chicago papers,<sup>51</sup> and 200 whooping Masons.<sup>52</sup> A crowd of Indians, fur trappers, miners, and others gathered to witness the last of Denver's pioneering days. Many of the Indians and some of the whites in the crowd had never seen the "iron horse" before. Describing this scene a decade later, William B. Vickers wrote that "old timers, who had toiled across the Plains in ox teams or on foot, in the early days, dodging Indians in season and out of season, and enduring discomforts which tried their souls and bodies too, clasped hands in congratulations that the old 'overland' days were done, and Denver was nearer New York to-day than she was to many of her mining camps in the mountains, which were reached slowly and painfully, by stages or freight trains."<sup>53</sup>

Two days later John Evans, DP president, presided over the official welcoming ceremonies. A silver spike, symbolic of newly arrived prosperity, also became symbolic of the improvisations that had brought the road to Denver when it had

<sup>49</sup> "First Annual Report of the Denver Pacific Railway," pp. 26-29.

<sup>50</sup> Diary of Leonard Eicholtz, June 22, 1870, Acc. No. 238, Box 1, Diary #17, Leonard Eicholtz Collection, Western History Research Center, Main Library, University of Wyoming, Laramie.

<sup>51</sup> *Denver Colorado Tribune* (weekly), June 29, 1870.

<sup>52</sup> Elmer O. Davis, *The First Five Years of the Railroad Era in Colorado, June 19, 1867, to June 19, 1872, Julesburg to Pueblo in Five Years* (Golden, Colo.: Sage Books, 1948), p. 90.

<sup>53</sup> William B. Vickers, *History of the City of Denver, Arapahoe County, and Colorado* (Chicago, Ill.: O. L. Baskin & Co., 1880), p. 221-22.

to be replaced by a conventional spike wrapped in white note paper. Evans held the spike in such a manner that the white note paper passed for silver. The miners bringing the spike from Georgetown had pawned it, gotten drunk on the proceeds, and slept through the ceremony. Evans later recovered the silver spike from a pawn shop.<sup>54</sup>

Although President Evans had redeemed the silver spike, the Denver Pacific proved more difficult to keep out of hock. The chronic financial problems of the Denver Pacific were revealed seven years later in an 1877 letter from DP President D. M. Edgerton to two of the road's trustees.

Since the date of the opening of the road from Cheyenne to Denver the earnings from its business have been barely sufficient to pay its operating expenses and meet the semi-annual interest upon its bonds . . . .

That the earnings of the road would have been largely in excess of what they have shown, had the Union Pacific Company accorded to this Company its rights in compliance with the requirements of the Government charters creating the Union Pacific Railroad and branches, cannot be doubted, but that Company has thus far ignored the law and continues to utterly refuse to this branch of the Pacific system of railroads its rightful demands under the law, and by prohibitory rate of charges bars us from even our natural share of the trans-continental traffic.<sup>55</sup>

By merging with the Kansas Pacific the Denver Pacific had managed to complete its road, and by numerous loans from that company it had managed to stay alive in the 1870s. But their merger had also secured for the DP the rivalry of the octopus, the Union Pacific. This rivalry proved to be fatal among this notably unapacific system of railroads. At a meeting in Boston on January 14, 1880, the independent careers of both the Denver Pacific and her sister road, the Kansas Pacific, were terminated. Wall Street financier Jay Gould forced the Union Pacific directors to comply in his scheme for buying out the two smaller roads.<sup>56</sup>

In 1877 Golden, Denver's persistent rival, finally completed its Colorado Central line to Cheyenne under the auspices of the Union Pacific. Although the new road further damaged the financially unstable DP by its competition, Golden could never again hope to replace Denver, well established after a seven

<sup>54</sup> This account of the often and variously told silver spike episode is based on Helen S. Digerness' "Jesse Summers Randall and Pioneer Georgetown," *The Colorado Magazine* 22 (November 1945):263.

<sup>55</sup> Exhibit 9, D. M. Edgerton to trustees Meier and Dulman, August 10, 1877, Robert E. Carr et al. v. the Union Pacific Railroad Co. et al., Federal Records Center, Denver.

<sup>56</sup> Athearn, *Union Pacific Country*, p. 227.

year lead as the railroad center and the dominant metropolis of the state.

Perhaps the best autopsy for the Denver Pacific was a bitter attack upon the unregulated railroad system of the age by a lawyer representing the Dutch stockholders who were absorbing the losses of the DP. Testifying before Congress, Samuel Parrish condemned both the illegal methods used by the railroads and the failure of the federal government to enforce the law against corporations of its own creation.

It was the money of the bondholders (over two million dollars in cash, obtained from Holland about the year 1870), that built this road. The stock never had any value, nor was it ever supposed to have any, except as a means of controlling the policy of the road, and enabling it, in company with the other roads of the Pacific system, to successfully defy the law; in this case, for the benefit of the Kansas Pacific Company, at the expense of the Denver Pacific bondholders, the public and the government.<sup>57</sup>

The KP had used its management control over the DP to keep the UP out of Colorado by charging prohibitive rates on DP shipping. Although the aggrieved Dutchmen owned DP bonds, only stockholders could determine company policy. And KP stockholders claimed they were only retaliating against the prohibitive rates charged by the UP on its road between Cheyenne and points west. Thus the Denver Pacific, authorized by Congress as a connection between the UP and KP, became instead a barrier between them.

Attorney Parrish went on to say that by means of the Denver Pacific, provided it was operated by an independent management, solicitous only for the interest of its stockholders and bondholders, the Union Pacific became a competitor with the Kansas Pacific for the business of Colorado. Could the Kansas Pacific only control the management of the Denver Pacific, such exorbitant rates could be made from Cheyenne to Denver, as to shut out the Union Pacific from all competition for Colorado business.

Parrish argued that in February of 1872 certain Colorado stockholders of the Denver Pacific, having more regard for their own pockets than the interest of the community in which they lived, sold out their stock at a high figure to the Kansas Pacific, and thus the much coveted privilege of defying the law at the expense of the Denver Pacific Company, who otherwise might have made fair rates with the

Union Pacific for business seeking Colorado over the Union Pacific and Denver Pacific roads. All this was done, I contend, in direct defiance of the Acts of 1862 and 1864, but also in defiance of the Act of March 3, 1864, which expressly enacts, Section 2, that "nothing herein shall authorize the said Eastern Division Company (Kansas Pacific) to operate the road, or fix the rates of tariff for the Denver Pacific Railway and Telegraph Company."<sup>58</sup>

The "certain Colorado stockholders of the Denver Pacific Company" who emerged as the villains, according to Parrish, may have pocketed more money than simply their stock sales to the Kansas Pacific. Samuel D. Mock in his study of early Colorado railroads concluded that "certainly it is not unreasonable to assume that the road [the DP] was built for approximately one-third of the claimed cost."<sup>59</sup> The books of the Denver Pacific placed the final cost of the road at \$6,500,000, although evidence uncovered by Mock suggests that the actual construction cost was much closer to the \$2,000,000 figure originally suggested by George Francis Train. How much money disappeared and exactly where it disappeared will most likely never be known. If the profiteering was largely a project of the DP construction company, as it was with the Union Pacific construction crew—the Credit Mobilier—the DP construction company of Governor Evans and General Palmer may have siphoned off the difference. The Union Pacific Railway Commission, which investigated the Denver Pacific, could prove nothing because the "necessary books appear to be missing or to have been unintelligibly kept."<sup>60</sup> Denver's pioneer "Railroad Kings" seem secure in their probably irretrievable fame.

Regardless of the fate of the Denver Pacific, of the fortunes of its stockholders, or of the fame of its builders, Denver's expansion after the arrival of the railroads cannot be questioned. Many of the golden promises of the 1860s were realized. The isolated prairie town, which stagnated between 1860 and 1870, septupled its population in the next decade from 4,759 to 35,629 residents.<sup>61</sup> And completing the Denver Pacific was only the beginning, according to editor Byers.

We are now in a condition to press forward the mountain road, to be followed by a system of roads which shall bring all parts of the territory into connection with Denver, and so with the great continental roads through Kansas and Ne-

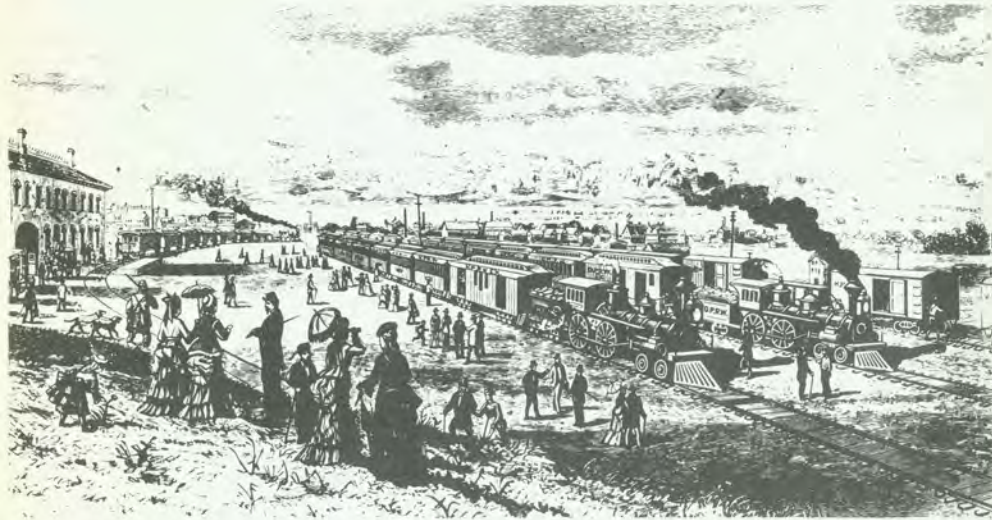
<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Mock, "The Financing of Early Colorado Railroads," p. 208.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistics of the Population of the United States in the Tenth Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 1:113.

<sup>57</sup> Samuel L. Parrish, "Statement of the Relations of the Denver Pacific Railway and Telegraph Company to the Union Pacific System, Submitted on Behalf of the Bondholders to the Judiciary Committee of the Senate, Feb. 12, 1878," *Western History Collections*, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.



The Kansas Pacific, Colorado Central, and Denver Pacific railroads at Denver's first depot, which was located at the end of Twenty-second Street.

braska. As immediate results we look for a more rapid and profitable development of our mining interests, the cultivation of our agricultural lands, the steady growth of an industrious and enterprising population, and so the realization of the faith and hope of our people, to which they have courageously clung in the darkest hours. Knowing what great gifts nature has lavished upon us, we look with the utmost confidence to a brilliant future.<sup>62</sup>

Denver emerged as the banking and commercial center for the region after the DP arrived. The Colorado National Bank reported a third quarter 1870 increase in assets of \$73,974.42 and the First National Bank a still greater jump from total assets of \$457,536.00 to \$1,538,606.52. The *Denver Colorado Tribune* crowed that "this magnificent increase of deposits denotes that our business men are doing well—in fact, as well as those of any section of the United States. Our railroad communications, that we have worked for so long and patiently, now give us lower freight rates than any other city within a radius of five hundred miles can boast of."<sup>63</sup>

Mining production climbed dramatically after the arrival of the railroads. Colorado gold production climbed from \$3,015,000

<sup>62</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, June 22, 1870.

<sup>63</sup> *Denver Colorado Tribune* (weekly), October 19, 1870.

<sup>64</sup> Hafen, ed., *Colorado and Its People*, 2:691-93.

<sup>65</sup> See the market reports in the *Denver Colorado Tribune* (weekly) during this period.

<sup>66</sup> Davis, *The First Five Years*, p. 92.

in 1870 to \$3,633,951 in 1871. Silver production soared from \$660,000 in 1870 to \$1,029,059 in 1871 and to over \$2,000,000 in 1872. Copper production income doubled between 1870 and 1872, from \$44,140 to \$106,258. Most obviously stimulated by the railroads was coal production, which increased over four hundred percent between 1871 (\$31,720) and 1872 (\$137,080). Lead production income climbed from \$15,000 in 1869 to \$73,600 in 1871.<sup>64</sup> Although railroads were not the only factor involved in the mineral production boom, they greatly facilitated the growth by the shipping in of heavier, more sophisticated mining machinery and the shipping out of ores. Railroads hauled in the stamp mills and the other heavy equipment that enabled miners to switch from placer mining to lode mining.

Agricultural produce, livestock, and timber, being less unique to Colorado than her mineral wealth, did not fulfill the highest hopes of Colorado exporters due to the high railroad rates. Another advantage the railroad did not bring was significantly lower prices. Between June and December of 1870, for example, there was no change in the price of horseshoes, domestic bourbon, imported gin, hay, vinegar, corn meal, and sheep, although the price of coffee and glass went down slightly.<sup>65</sup> Seven days after the arrival of the DP a committee of merchants complained of exorbitant railroad freight rates.<sup>66</sup>

*The Denver Pacific bringing in machinery and carrying out minerals.*



If Colorado's exports were perhaps disappointing, one vital import—people—began to enrich the state enormously. The railroad tourist, in a wide-eyed quest of Indians and buffaloes, gold nuggets and towering peaks, venison and rainbow trout, began to swarm into Colorado. The Denver Pacific passenger cars promised tourists comfort unthinkable in the stagecoach days, as an advertisement in the *Denver Colorado Tribune* proclaimed.

The new cars are the most beautiful and elegant we have seen. The ladies' coaches are finished inside with Hungarian ash and black walnut, set in elegant panels, showing the natural grain of these beautiful woods. The doors are finished with rosewood. Between each window is a small oval mirror surmounted with elaborate carved designs. The seats are lined with fine silk plush; the fronts of a beautiful Solferino color, and the backs a rich green. The cushions are of the most approved material, and are fixed upon delicate springs, which altogether makes the most luxurious seat we ever occupied. Equal to a stuffed Elizabeth chair. The entire interior is of unsurpassed beauty and magnificence.<sup>67</sup>

To accommodate the railroad tourists, hotels, restaurants, and saloons were opened. Travelers might dine at Charpiot's elegant new restaurant, which was heralded by large letters across the front facade as the "Delmonico of the West." They might stay at the Sargent House, built for \$20,000, and soak themselves in Turkish, Russian, electric, medicated, and other baths.<sup>68</sup> The Denver City dining rooms offered meals at all times, including, in season, fresh oysters, fresh fruit, and game.<sup>69</sup> After dinner entertainment for the new crowds of pleasure seekers included the Denver Theatre, closed for lack of business in the 1860s but reopened with the arrival of the DP.

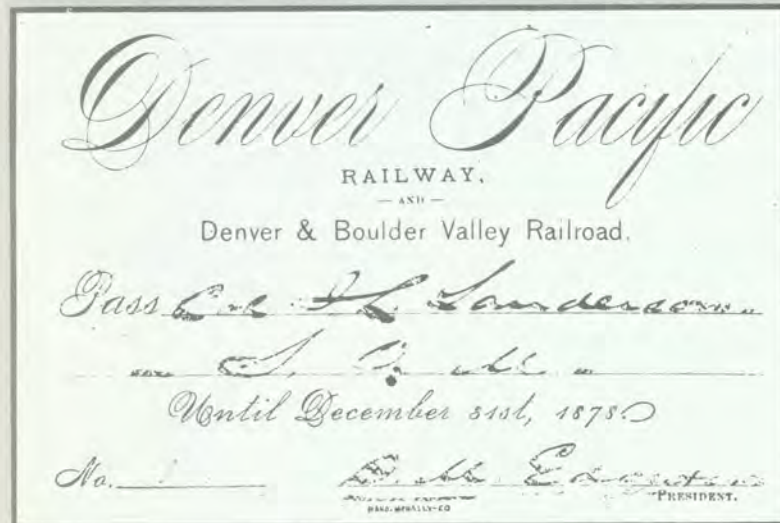
One species of the railroad tourist tended to stay in the salubrious, dry air of Colorado. The invalid, the consumptive, and the aged frequently decided upon Colorado as a permanent home. These health seekers generally were of the independently wealthy, better educated, and more refined classes and contributed much to the economic and cultural health of the state. The growing numbers of the "one-lung army" attracted comment by the end of the decade from the *Inter-Ocean*.

With the opening of the spring of 1871, the consumptive stricken and threatened of the east, captivated by the promise of health in the pure air of the mountains, encouraged by the

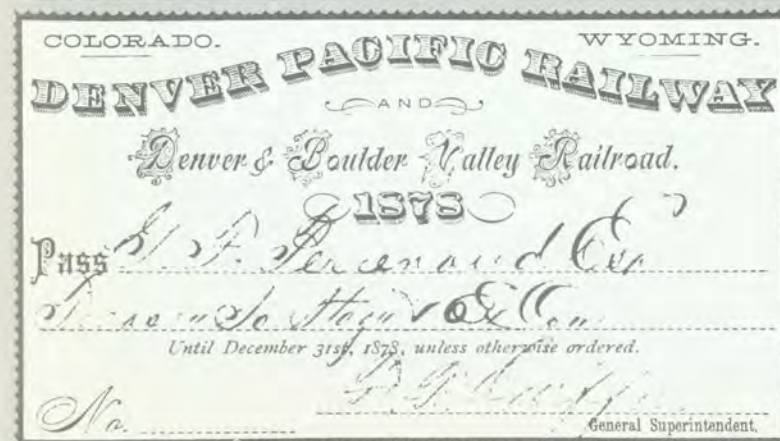
<sup>67</sup> *Denver Colorado Tribune*, May 18, 1870.

<sup>68</sup> *Colorado Business Directory* (Denver, Colo.: J. A. Blake, 1875), pp. 40, 113; *Denver Business Directory* (Denver, Colo.: Corbett & Hoyle, 1875), p. 25.

<sup>69</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, January 10, 1871.



Denver Pacific passes. One was issued to Colonel Jared L. Sanderson, one of the owners of Barlow and Sanderson's Southern Overland Mail and Express Company.

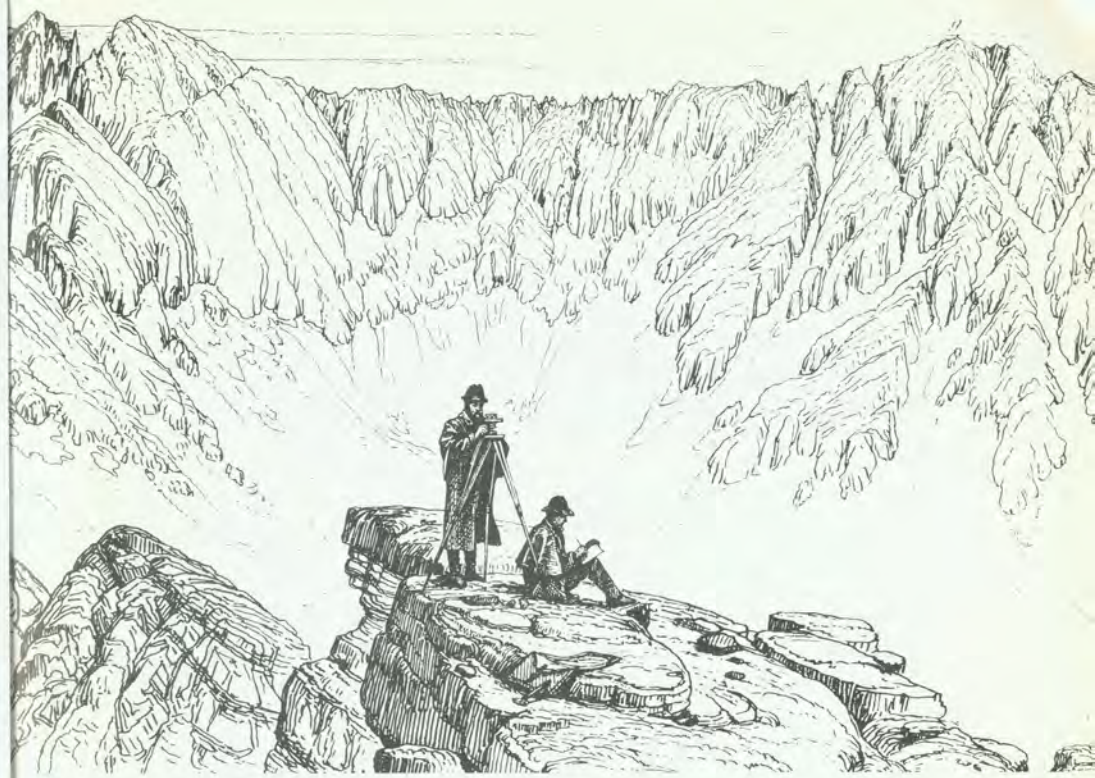


assurance of easy and luxurious modes of travel and charmed by the picture of railroad trains running through herds of buffalo, were drawn in great numbers to Colorado. They came alike from bleak New England, from the breezy Northwest, and from the sultry South. They filled the hotels, crowded the boarding houses, and thickly invaded the private residences. In the cool mornings and evenings they moved in thronging, encumbering crowds through the streets, and in the heated mid-day, they blocked with their chairs, the shaded portions of the sidewalks.<sup>70</sup>

There is little reason for the historian to disagree with most of the proud claims of the people of Denver in 1870. Denver's emergence as the regional metropolis of the Rocky Mountain area cannot solely be explained by geographical location or by chance. Rather, it was the result of the conscious, capable, courageous, if chicanery, efforts of the "Railroad Kings" who brought the Denver Pacific to the city one hundred years ago.

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<sup>70</sup> *Inter-Ocean: A Journal of Colorado Politics, Society, and Mining* (Denver, Colo.), June 6, 1880, p. 271, Western History Collections, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.



## Man against the Black Canyon

BY DUANE VANDENBUSCHE

The Black Canyon of the Gunnison River is an awesome gorge that has acted as a barrier to surveying parties, railroad builders, and irrigation projects. It lies in the rugged Gunnison country on the Western Slope of Colorado, beginning at the Blue Mesa Dam, twenty-six miles west of Gunnison, and ending near Lazaar, where the North Fork of the Gunnison meets the main river. The canyon is called Black because of the dark gray color of its walls and the lack of sunlight in its gloomy depths. The depth of the chasm, the dark and vertical walls that flank the river, and the moving shadows that pervade the bottom, make the name Black appropriate. Some canyons of the West are longer, some are deeper, and some are steeper than the Black Canyon; however, no other canyon in North America combines the depth, sheerness, narrowness, and somberness of the Black Canyon.



A product of erosion, the canyon ranges from about five hundred to twenty-seven hundred feet deep. Winding west by northwest, the turbulent and swift Gunnison River began carving the deep gorge, which is about fifty miles long, two million years ago, averaging approximately one-foot per one-thousand years. From the head to the mouth of the canyon, the Gunnison River falls approximately twenty-two hundred feet, an unbelievable drop of forty-three feet per mile. By comparison the massive Colorado River falls only seven and one-half feet per mile. Only the Yellowstone River, which drops an average of fifty-six feet per mile through its canyon, falls more than the Gunnison River in the United States. In one hair-raising half-mile the Gunnison falls an incredible 180 feet.<sup>1</sup>

Dark colored gneiss and schist, intruded by pink granite bodies, make up the major portion of the Black Canyon and constitute much of the beauty of the chasm. Men have often waxed poetic about the wonders of the deep gorge. Eugene Parsons, who viewed the canyon at the turn of the century, was overcome by what he had seen. Parsons spoke in awe of "the gorge . . . which sometimes narrows down to the width of the river, and is all gloom and grandeur, and again broadens out into a park, with waterfalls dashing down its enclosed walls, needles of highly-colored sandstone pointing skyward, trees growing out of the clefts in the palisades, huge rocks grouped fantastically about, curious plants sheltering in their shadows, and the brilliant, strong river darting down in swift green chutes between the spume-flecked boulders, dancing in creamy eddies, struggling to tumble down some sparkling cataract, making the prismatic air resound with the soft tinkle as of merry laughter."<sup>2</sup>

In September 1853 army Captain John Gunnison, in charge of surveying a transcontinental railroad route along the thirty-eighth or thirty-ninth parallel to the Pacific Coast, crossed Cochetopa Pass into the Gunnison country and gazed for the first time into the deep and foreboding Black Canyon. Lieutenant E. G. Beckwith, Gunnison's second in command who took over after the captain and seven of his men were massacred in Utah the following month, was shocked at the immensity of the canyon. Beckwith referred to the chasm as the "cañon which we have been so many days passing around." An abbreviated look at the canyon convinced him that "a railroad, although possible, can only be constructed in the vicinity of this section of Grand [Gunnison] river, at an enormous expense."<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Albert C. Peale, geologist of the middle division of the Hayden Survey mapping Colorado in 1874, formed some definite views on the Black Canyon during that fall. Peale referred to the gorge as the "Grand" canyon, approximately fifty miles long and fifteen hundred to two thousand feet deep. One look was all Peale needed. With finality he declared that "it is inaccessible in most places, and I am therefore obliged to pass by it with merely this reference."<sup>4</sup>



<sup>1</sup> For a geological study of the Black Canyon see Wallace R. Hansen, "The Black Canyon of the Gunnison Today and Yesterday," *Geological Survey Bulletin 1191* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965).  
<sup>2</sup> Eugene Parsons, *A Guidebook to Colorado* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, and Co., 1911), p. 142.  
<sup>3</sup> U.S., Congress, House, *Reports of Explorations and Surveys, to Ascertain the Most Practicable and Economical Route for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean Made under the Direction of the Secretary of War, in 1853-4*, H. Ex. Doc. No. 91, 33rd Cong., 2d sess., 1855, 2:56.  
<sup>4</sup> F. V. Hayden, *Annual Report of the United States Geological and Geo-*





*William Jackson Palmer, planner and organizer of the narrow gauge Denver and Rio Grande, had been a director of the Kansas Pacific and had supervised the construction of the Denver Pacific.*

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century the Black Canyon loomed as a major obstacle to easy travel and rapid progress in the Gunnison country. William Jackson Palmer, with his sights set on Salt Lake City, wondered if his narrow gauge Rio Grande could run through the canyon. Settlers in the Uncompahgre Valley, desperate for water, yearned to divert the rampaging waters of the Gunnison River to irrigate their arid lands. Yet, the Black Canyon had resisted all attempts to map and survey its rugged terrain. What was down there?

Starting in 1880 and ending in 1909, the Black Canyon was surveyed and mapped. The men who descended to the depths of that gorge during that time embarked upon a great adventure, and braving vertical canyon walls, rampaging waters, and isolation, they solved the mysteries of the Black Canyon.

Despite the views of Beckwith and Peale, in 1881 General William Palmer elected to run his Denver and Rio Grande Railway through at least the eastern sector of the Black Canyon. The Rio Grande originated in Denver and entered the Gunnison country from the east, passing through Colorado Springs and the meandering Arkansas River Canyon before crossing the Continental Divide over the 10,856 foot Marshall Pass. After arriving in Gunnison in August of 1881, Palmer's men relent-

*graphical Survey of the Territories Embracing Colorado and Parts of Adjacent Territories being a Report of Progress of the Exploration for the Year 1874 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 109.*

lessly laid track west, coming closer and closer to a direct confrontation with the canyon.

Nearly a year before, during the late fall of 1880, Rio Grande engineers had investigated the eastern section of the canyon and had declared it impassable. The engineers failed, however, to reckon with the determination of Palmer, who believed nothing to be impassable. Because he believed the Black Canyon offered the least difficult and the shortest route for the Rio Grande, Palmer ordered his men to begin surveying in January of 1881. The surveying was extremely dangerous and was done partially through the use of ropes and scaling ladders, particularly when the walls of the canyon narrowed to such a degree as to prohibit passage below. Men, horses, and wagons were lowered down the steep walls by ropes. In the bottom of the ominous and silent gorge surveyors picked their way





through on the ice of the Gunnison River and conducted their tests. The work was not without cost. Below the head of the canyon, sheer walls forced surveyors to use scaling ropes to get to the bottom. "A long rope was fixed to a cedar, and a man started down. The rope parted ten feet from the top of the wall, and the daring engineer was dashed to death at the bottom of the cañon. Another rope was brought, another man went over, another, and another, and after burying their comrade in a quiet place they pushed on and planted a flag on the point of Currecanti [sic] Needle."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cy Warman, *The Story of the Railroad* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1898), p. 173.

Finally, by the early summer of 1881, Palmer's relentless pathfinders finished sounding the depths of the Black Canyon to Cimarron. Construction in the canyon started during the summer of 1881. For a year over one thousand men blasted and cut a road bed fifteen miles through the gorge. The work demanded only the most rugged men. "During the winter days the rays of the sun never reached the depths where the men toiled; the cold was intense; one day in January the thermometer did not rise above thirty-three degrees below zero."<sup>6</sup> Ripley Hitchcock, a New York writer covering the building of the railroad, recalled the special dangers of the work, aside from the ordinary accidents and exposures. "A little time before, two men were swept away by the rapid current of the river, others had been killed by the overhanging rocks."<sup>7</sup>

As work continued in the canyon, the Rio Grande railhead reached Soap Creek at the entrance to the gorge on July 5, 1882. A *Gunnison Daily News-Democrat* correspondent, identified only as "Jones," was at the end-of-track point and was hardly impressed with the surroundings. The shocked correspondent reported that he had "found out a fact which would go far to upset the theories of the prohibitionists — that the people of Soap Creek live on whiskey. There is no other visible means of living, as among eight or nine saloons, only one combines the business of a restaurant."<sup>8</sup>

Ripley Hitchcock rode into the Black Canyon among ties on a flat car in the summer of 1882 while track was being laid. One day he stopped at the boarding or "hotel" train on the siding opposite the famed Curecanti Needle, a conical and isolated rock that towers several hundred feet into the air five miles down river in the canyon. Later, the New York writer nostalgically recalled the scene of the "hotel" and of the brave and rugged men who worked in the shadows of the canyon.

Here was the temporary home of four hundred men. A little beyond was the working train at the very end of the rails. All along the dump or road-bed, gangs of men were busily unloading and placing ties and rails, or leveling the surface with exactness. Presently a whistle blew. Six o'clock had come, and the men leaving their tasks scrambled aboard the flat cars and the train rumbled back to the "hotel on wheels." Long before the cars stopped, the men were hustling each other like a flock of stampeded sheep in a wild race for supper. The seats were limited in number, the laborers many, and none had any idea of waiting for "second table." A toilette

<sup>6</sup> Class of 1916, *Historical Sketches of Early Gunnison* (Gunnison: Colorado State Normal School, 1916), p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> Ripley Hitchcock, "At the Head of the Rails," *Chautauquan* 9 (1889):541.

<sup>8</sup> *Gunnison Daily News-Democrat*, July 16, 1882.

was a trifling matter. The next morning would be time enough for soap and water. There were swarthy Italians, Irishmen with carrot locks, men of a score of nationalities, begrimed, tattered, gnawed at by the appetite given by labor in the bracing Colorado air, all brethren in a purely animal instinct, a ravenous desire of satisfying hunger. They swarmed into the old freight cars which had been fitted up with long planks for benches and tables. On the latter were tin pannikins, iron knives and forks, and pewter spoons. Mounds of coarse bread, pans of some strange stew, and pots of rank black tea appeared and disappeared before these lusty trenchermen. Words were not wasted. Every act had a bearing upon the business of satisfying hunger. A railroad navvy hungry and tired has "no time for nonsense." One by one they rose from the table. There was nothing to be said. They had been fed and for the time they were content. But presently the social instinct reasserted itself. They lighted black pipes and drew together. Some rudely mended their garments, in company, and others produced dirty cards, or gathered to talk. A few clambered into the narrow board bunks in the cars and drew their blankets up over aching limbs.

It was a glimpse of a hard cheerless life that I had had, but as I turned to go back to the construction train some one struck up a rollicking Irish song and others joined until the cañon walls gave back the chorus.<sup>9</sup>

In the succeeding weeks Palmer's persistent tracklayers laid their tracks past Curecanti Station and to the new end-of-track at Cimarron, where the railroad left the Black Canyon. Even William Palmer realized that the canyon might be impregnable past that point. The first Rio Grande train, an excursion carrying 121 passengers from Gunnison, passed through the eastern fifteen miles of the Black Canyon on August 13, 1882. The passengers gazed in wonder as the narrow gauge wound along the Gunnison River, passing Chipeta Falls and the cylinder-shaped Curecanti Needle en route to Cimarron. The cost of building the fifteen mile road from Soap Creek to Cimarron was prodigious—\$165,000 a mile, but the road was now open to the Uncompahgre Valley.

Despite his breaching part of the rugged Black Canyon, William Palmer's success was incomplete, for he desired to follow the Gunnison River through the canyon from Cimarron to its union with the North Fork. During the early summer of 1882 "a party was sent out by the railroad company to make an examination of the canon to determine whether a road could be built through it to Delta. On the first day out the single boat that the party had was swamped, their provisions were lost and the explorers returned that evening."<sup>10</sup> What especially angered Palmer was that, despite the abortive expedi-

tion, no one really knew if the Black Canyon could be breached between Cimarron and the North Fork juncture. A few men had peered in from both sides, but no one had ever surveyed or passed through the entire canyon.

Perhaps hoping for a short cut on the Rio Grande line, Palmer in December of 1882 asked Byron Bryant, who had been in charge of the Uncompahgre extension of the Rio Grande, to "undertake to explore the Grand Canyon of the Gunnison from the mouth of the Cimarron River to Delta Station, at the point where the Uncompahgre [*sic*] River empties into the Gunnison River."<sup>11</sup> When Bryant accepted the job, he had no idea of the incredible and dangerous task that lay before him.

Bryant organized a party of men, which included C. E. Telvirer as head of surveying, N. C. Wright as transit man, James Robinson as levelman, a Gunder as topographer, Charles Hall as head of the supply train, and several other men as laborers. Shortly before Christmas Day in 1882 Bryant joined his party at Cimarron and spent the night at the home of Captain W. M. Cline, an old frontiersman and friend of the legendary westerners Kit Carson and Jim Bridger. During the course of the evening, spent in front of a crackling fire, Cline spun yarn after yarn to the fascinated men. The most intriguing story told by Cline concerned a trip he had taken through the Black Canyon years before in a canoe. Later, after having surveyed the canyon, Bryant recalled that "while listening to the Captain's story I did not doubt its truth, but after I had seen the canyon I did doubt it. . . . At the same time, it is possible a man of such iron nerve as many of the hardy men of the class to which he belonged possessed, . . . may have made the trip and lived to tell of it. Such a trip would have to be made at a time of extreme high water. Even under such conditions escape from death would be almost a miracle."<sup>12</sup>

The Bryant party entered the Black Canyon shortly before Christmas of 1882, expecting to complete the entire journey in twenty days. Instead, about sixty-eight days elapsed before the five men who remained reached the mouth of the great canyon.

<sup>11</sup> Byron Bryant to Dr. Emory A. Bryant, 1909, typescript copy of the letter in "Exploration of the Black Canyon," *Trail* 12, no. 3 (August 1919):2. Only thirty-five years old, Bryant, nevertheless, was one of Palmer's top engineers. He held the position of locating and resident engineer on the Denver and Rio Grande from October 1879 to March 1884. By 1879 the young man had already served as chief engineer on several Midwestern railroads. After leaving the Rio Grande in 1884, Bryant served as construction engineer on the Canadian Pacific Railroad. In 1887 he joined the Colorado Midland Railroad and eventually rose to the general superintendent's position. While with the Midland between 1887 and 1904, he was instrumental in building the famed Busk Tunnel. Before his death in 1922, Bryant helped construct railroads in Brazil, Mexico, Guatemala, Salvador, and Honduras.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> Hitchcock, "At the Head of the Rails," p. 541.

<sup>10</sup> *Denver Republican*, December 9, 1900.

Amazingly, there was still another, more harrowing sector of the Black Canyon. Bryant recalled the place.

There is another point in the canyon where it narrows to a width of forty-four feet at the surface of the water with walls nearly perpendicular to a height of about one thousand feet . . . and from that height the walls continue to rise two thousand feet more, making the total height of the walls approximately three thousand feet.

The distance through this narrow gorge was eight hundred and twenty feet and we triangulated the distance through it and also passed the levels through, but did not pass through ourselves, as the gorge was filled from wall to wall with a torrent of water flowing at the rate of 15 or twenty miles per hour.<sup>14</sup>

The extreme danger and hard work in the Black Canyon soon took its toll. After twenty days of frightening, back-breaking work, every member of the party except Hall, Gunder, Robinson, Wright, and Bryant quit. Bryant declared that "four men including myself ran the transit, the level, both ends of the chain and carried the leveling rod and took the topography during about forty days of the time we were occupied on this exploration."<sup>15</sup>

Theirs was no easy task. Every morning all except Hall, who took care of the camp and pack animals, climbed down perpendicular walls two to three thousand feet to conduct the canyon survey. At approximately one o'clock every afternoon, the four men packed their instruments and began the long and tricky climb back to the top of the canyon walls. The descent to the bottom of the canyon averaged two and one-half hours and the ascent required nearly three and one-half hours. Using up six hours of the short, mid-winter days going to and from the Gunnison River, the four men were only able to work three hours a day in the bottom of the canyon. Constantly near disaster, Bryant remembered that "we were rarely in a position where serious accident was not possible." The men were forced to cross channels of rushing, tumbling water by jumping from the narrow fringe of ice around one boulder to a similar fringe of ice surrounding another boulder or to cross frail ice bridges spanning the spaces between the huge rocks.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, in late February of 1883, the Black Canyon survey was completed. Bryant and his rugged band had surveyed from Cimarron to the mouth of the canyon at the Gunnison River-North Fork juncture, thirty-eight miles away. Bryant's report



*A bird's-eye view of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison.*

What the men saw was spectacular. Wild, rampaging white water, sheer black canyon walls, and a feeling of claustrophobia sorely tested their nerve. In one sector the canyon was filled to a depth of three or four hundred feet with fragments of rock that had fallen from the vertical walls, and the Gunnison River roared along its violent way through the rocks a hundred or more feet below, while the river bed was perfectly dry.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-7.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-7.

to William Palmer indicated only too clearly the impossible task of building anything further in the treacherous depths of the Black Canyon.

The fifteen mile Denver and Rio Grande Railway line between Soap Creek (Sapinero) and Cimarron through the Black Canyon was laden with danger. At Sapinero an engineer's muscles tightened, he grew tense, and all small talk ended. In the flickering canyon shadows Chipeta Falls and the towering Curecanti Needle were spectacular, and by night the canyon presented an eerie, ghostly face. On stormy nights all prayed that no avalanche would come rumbling down from above, for spring and winter were most feared by the railroaders who ran trains through the Black Canyon. During these two seasons, high water, ice, heavy snow, and rock, mud, and snow slides were most likely to threaten trains.

*The Curecanti Needle in the Black Canyon.*



*A Denver and Rio Grande section house in the Black Canyon in 1886, not far from the Curecanti Needle.*

Typical of the danger prevalent in the Black Canyon were the events of mid-April 1886. Just past Curecanti Station, six miles into the canyon, massive snow slides had buried the track. Sixty men worked two days and nights clearing the debris, enabling fifty-three passenger coaches and two hundred freight cars to get through to Montrose. No sooner had the trains passed than a major rock slide came down at exactly the same site just vacated by the Rio Grande cars. The rampaging slide covered about one hundred feet of track to a depth of five feet. Again, crews were called out—this time spending fifteen hours clearing the track. Because of this danger, the Rio Grande normally sent out pilot engines to clear the track ahead of passenger trains.

In 1883 Lewis Lathrop, whose experiences as a Denver and Rio Grande engineer were dramatically recalled in *Little Engines and Big Men*, and his partner George Porter were transferred from Chama, New Mexico, to Gunnison. Lathrop, then a fireman, and Porter, his engineer, were immediately given the most dangerous run on the entire Rio Grande line—the “suicide special” through the Black Canyon to Grand Junction. A

January thaw had increased the danger of slides in the canyon a thousand fold. A stunned Lathrop recalled that "the Black Canyon of the Gunnison became a railroaders' hell. The almost perpendicular mountains, particularly the north slopes, began avalanching great snow slides down over the track and into the river along the stretches where the railroad followed the north wall."<sup>17</sup>

One year later in April of 1884 Lathrop cheated death in the Black Canyon. On the morning of April 17 Porter and Lathrop were ordered to take a work train through the canyon ahead of the west-bound passenger train because of the serious avalanche danger. Three miles into the gorge they spotted a long and deep slide that covered the tracks. The work train was halted to allow section men to shovel out the slide. Engineer Charley Bratt halted his passenger engine behind the work train and sent for Lathrop to visit him. While both men reminisced in Bratt's cab about their days in Chama, a thundering avalanche tore down the canyon and swept the engine from the track, crushing Bratt under tons of snow and seriously injuring Lathrop. The *Gunnison Review Press* lamented that "the fatality of engineers in the Black Canon during the past year has been enormous. It would seem that the faithful engineer upon whom so many lives depend and who is compelled to constantly risk his own life to save others, sooner or later meets with a violent death. Every few months the undertakers of Gunnison are called upon to lay out one of these boys and send his remains to sorrowing friends elsewhere."<sup>18</sup>

Famed English author Rudyard Kipling, returning to England from India via the United States, rode the Rio Grande narrow gauge through the Black Canyon in 1889. He later reminisced about his ride.

We entered a gorge, remote from the sun, where the rocks were two thousand feet sheer, and where a rock-splintered river roared and howled ten feet below a track which seemed to have been built on the simple principle of dropping miscellaneous dirt into the river and pinning a few rails a-top. There was a glory and a wonder and a mystery about the mad ride which I felt keenly . . . , until I had to offer prayers for the safety of the train. There was no hope of seeing the track two hundred yards ahead. We seemed to be running into the bowels of the earth at the invitation of an irresponsible stream. Then the solid rock would open and disclose a curve of awful twist-

<sup>17</sup> Gilbert A. Lathrop, *Little Engines and Big Men* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1954), p. 87.

<sup>18</sup> *Gunnison Review Press*, April 19, 1884.

<sup>19</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *American Notes* (New York: Manhattan Press, n.d.), pp. 204-5.

<sup>20</sup> *Gunnison News*, September 17, 1898.

fulness. Then the driver put on all steam, and we would go round that curve on one wheel chiefly, the Gunnison River gnashing its teeth below. The cars overhung the edge of the water, and if a single one of the rails had chosen to spread, nothing in the wide world could have saved us from drowning.<sup>19</sup>

As the years passed the Black Canyon continued to claim more victims. In September of 1898 a Rio Grande engine, pulling seven empty passenger cars and running late into Grand Junction, recklessly tried to pick up time in the canyon. Three miles below Curecanti Needle, on a sharp curve, the train left the rails at high speed. The engineer, fireman, conductor, and brakeman were all killed.<sup>20</sup> During the fading days of winter in 1916, a major storm hit Gunnison and was still in progress as Engine 315 pulled out of town at eleven in the morning on March 1. Eight inches of snow had fallen and a driving wind was piling up overhanging drifts in the Black Canyon. As the passenger train neared Chipeta Falls, it was hit by a massive snow slide, which sent baggage and mail cars crashing into the freezing Gunnison River. Word of the slide was immediately wired to the Rio Grande Third Division headquarters in Gunnison. In the meantime crashing avalanches came down behind and in front of the train, blocking off any escape. With the passenger train in an extremely perilous position, Rio Grande officials threw caution to the wind and ordered a rotary plow into the canyon. The plow had never before been west of Gunnison because the bridges were too flimsy to support the weight of the



heavy machine. Engineer Lewis Lathrop tenderly coaxed the rotary two miles west of Sapinero where, just short of reaching the stranded passenger train, it caved in a bridge.

When the rotary plow failed to get through, a wedge plow crew was ordered to smash its way through to the marooned train in the canyon. Accompanying the wedge plow was a wrecker and a company doctor. Twenty-four hours after the first slide hit, the wedge plow finally broke through to the passenger train, but not before another slide had swept the wrecker into the river. The crew discovered that the express messenger and the captain of the Pueblo Centennial High School basketball team were missing (both were later found dead) and that forty-seven passengers were badly shaken by their ordeal. Lathrop later recalled the horror of the marooned passengers. "Anybody who ventured into the Black Canyon that year will never forget the experience . . . For the next seventy-two hours they [the passengers and the wedge plow crew] were stalled there, listening to the constant thunder of running slides, not knowing when one would smash into their outfit." Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the slides stopped and the passengers were released from their prison.<sup>21</sup>

Trains run no more through the Black Canyon; trucks and automotive transportation have taken care of passenger and freight traffic since 1949. But for those who rode the little narrow gauge trains through the narrow and perilous canyon, the wild river, dark vertical walls, and omnipresent danger will never be forgotten.

Although the Bryant party had surveyed the Black Canyon during the winter of 1882-83, they had done it by descending into the chasm daily. No known man or party had ever successfully penetrated the canyon by boat or on foot. After the Bryant Survey, there was no reason for any immediate future exploration of the canyon. Yet, events, which would involve the Black Canyon, had already been set in motion. With the removal of the Ute Indians from Colorado's Western Slope to Utah in 1881, there was a great rush for land in the Uncompahgre Valley. It was soon evident that with irrigation crops were possible in the valley. When the valley was first settled, it was felt that the Uncompahgre River and its tributaries would carry enough water for the irrigation of all of the tillable 175,000 acres. Alas, the farmers found that sufficient water was available for only 30,000 of the acres. In the succeeding years depression came to

<sup>21</sup> Lathrop, *Little Engines and Big Men*, pp. 305-6; *Gunnison News-Champion*, March 3, 1916.

the Uncompahgre Valley with large tracts of land, valueless without water, deserted. Temptingly, only twenty miles away, the Gunnison River pounded its way through the awesome Black Canyon. However, diverting the water out of the two thousand foot deep chasm seemed impossible.

The first man who dreamed of doing the impossible was F. C. Lauzon, a Frenchman who was among the earliest settlers in the valley. Lauzon dared to think that a tunnel might be built through the ridge separating the Uncompahgre Valley and the Gunnison River, thus bringing life-giving water to the arid region. Interested in the wild scheme to divert the Gunnison River water, the Colorado legislature appropriated \$25,000 in 1901 to explore and possibly to start the tunnel. The small amount of money was quickly exhausted and the project appeared to be dead. Then a new federal agency, the United States Reclamation Service, became interested in the project. But before risking millions of dollars, it wanted a thorough exploration made of the Black Canyon, for several questions had to be answered before any tunnel could seriously be considered. The major question was whether or not the Gunnison River was enough higher than the Uncompahgre Valley to allow water to flow across if a tunnel was built. Other questions involved the terrain in the bottom of the canyon and the place where a tunnel might be started. Thus, the Black Canyon again commanded man's attention.<sup>22</sup>

Abraham Lincoln Fellows came to Colorado in 1887 as a hydrographer for the United States Geological Survey. Fourteen years later in the summer of 1901 he was instructed to traverse the dangerous Black Canyon to determine the feasibility of a tunnel. At the time that Fellows received his instructions, it was considered suicide to attempt a trip through the entire canyon. Oblivious to the danger, the engineer advertised in the *Montrose Enterprise* for an assistant—a strong swimmer, unmarried, temperate, and obedient. He soon had his man—young and athletic William Torrence of Montrose.

During the fall of 1900 Torrence and four other Uncompahgre Valley residents, led by John Pelton, had fought their way fourteen miles down the Black Canyon from the confluence of the Cimarron and Gunnison rivers. The rugged trip had taken twenty-one days and had ended in disaster at the Falls of Sorrow, a very fast falling section of rapids seemingly impossible to pass. Torrence gained valuable experience from his perilous

<sup>22</sup> Richard G. Beidleman, "The Gunnison River Diversion Project," *The Colorado Magazine* 36 (July 1959):187-92.

voyage through the canyon. One lesson learned was that heavy boats laden with provisions were impractical. At several places in the canyon the river ran below huge boulders that had fallen from the sides of the canyon walls. Portaging the boats over the rocks had been a Herculean task, sapping the strength of the men. A second lesson learned was that only men in superb condition could make the trip. The rock-climbing, swimming, and extremely difficult hiking demanded a well-conditioned athlete.

On August 12, 1901, Fellows and Torrence undertook to accomplish what the first expedition had failed to do—conquer the Black Canyon. August was chosen because the water would be warmer than at any other time of the year, and also because it would be low. Embarking on a truly great and dangerous adventure, they knew little of what lay before them. Only tales, legends, and scattered pieces of reliable information guided

*William Torrence (left) and Abraham Lincoln Fellows.*



them, for “whether the river on its course broke into cataracts that would smash boats like egg shells, whether it would lead over falls down which a boat would shoot to destruction, or whether it would suddenly dip underground, sucking men into the earth like so many flies down a sink hole, none could foretell.”<sup>23</sup> They realized that once they started their trip, however, there could be no turning back. It would be almost impossible for them to fight their way back against the raging current of the Gunnison River; it would be equally difficult to climb the perpendicular one-half mile high walls, which led to daylight above.

Like Torrence, Fellows was also well acquainted with the Black Canyon, although in a different way. Since June he and C. A. Fitch had systematically surveyed Vernal Mesa, separating the Gunnison River from the Uncompahgre Valley. Fellows later recalled that in “the two months of surveying, I had never lost an opportunity to study the canon from the top and of finding ways of getting down into it.”<sup>24</sup> With this knowledge Fellows selected three places in the canyon where his assistant A. W. Dillon could bring supplies, “waiting at each one in turn until we should have arrived, or until there was no longer hope that we would ever arrive.”<sup>25</sup>

With the knowledge that boats were impractical, the two men carried their equipment on their backs, trusting to Dillon to supply them with the major portion of their food from above. They began their canyon voyage on the morning of August 12 from the mouth of the Cimarron River. They carried a small rubber raft, two silk life-lines, each 600 feet long, rubber bags for food, and hunting knives.

The first part of the trip—the fourteen miles to the Falls of Sorrow—was tough, but varied little from the Pelton Expedition Torrence had taken part in the year before. By the third day the water had grown white and vicious and the canyon walls had become vertical. Swimming when crowded into the water by sheer walls and walking on narrow ledges above the water when they could, they soon reached Trail Gulch, the first of the three outfitting points. There they were met by Dillon who carried their film and notes out to civilization. The exhausted explorers spent two nights and a day recuperating at Trail Gulch and then moved out again on their relentless march

<sup>23</sup> A. W. Rolker and D. A. Willey, “The Heroes of the Gunnison Tunnel,” *Everybody's Magazine* 21, n. 4 (October 1909):509.

<sup>24</sup> Report of A. L. Fellows, 1901, as quoted in Alvin T. Steinel, *History of Agriculture in Colorado* (Fort Collins, Colo.: State Agricultural College, 1926), p. 531.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 532.





*A view of the Black Canyon from the air, looking west to east.*

through the canyon. An awed Fellows observed that "the canon . . . now became more and more rugged. . . . The canon walls appeared more and more to be hemming us in from the outer world. One remarkable point which we passed . . . , I called the Giant Stairway. The walls looked almost as if cut into enormous steps by some Titan of old, while statues, turrets and pinnacles adorned the rugged precipices on either side."<sup>26</sup>

Progress came slower as Fellows and Torrence pushed deeper into the canyon. The two men built great bonfires out of driftwood lining the stream to let Dillon know that they were not dead—only delayed. At eleven o'clock on the morning of the seventeenth, Fellows and Torrence "reached what had hitherto

been the Ultima Thule of other explorers. Legends existed of a party which many years before had attempted to pass through the jaws of the canon."<sup>27</sup> The legend told of the party, unable to retrace its steps, scaling the sides of the canyon with great difficulty. Fellows, stunned by the sight before him, recalled that when they saw "the mighty jaws, past which there was to be no escape, I believe I might be pardoned for the feeling of nervousness and dread which came over me for the first time."<sup>28</sup>

Fellows and Torrence had now reached the feared "Narrows" and Falls of Sorrow, which had turned back the Pelton Expedition. Here the Gunnison River plunged through a narrow gorge and descended with a thundering, deafening roar, how far down the two explorers knew not. In the vale of mist that rose from the falling waters about them, the two men could make out the tops of trees below on both sides of the gorge. Fellows remembered that "we beheld as a beacon of hope through the narrow opening, where the water was of unknown depth and velocity, and below which it was believed there were high falls, a bonfire kindled by Dillon on a huge rock below the jaws of the canon."<sup>29</sup> The aide had risked his life coming down a vertical canyon wall to bring supplies to the hungry explorers. The men could not gauge the fall of the river at this point and had to trust to luck to reach Dillon far below. Torrence was the first to test the violent and fast-falling rapids with Fellows close behind. Fellows exclaimed that "we plunged into the foaming water and in a few minutes we had passed through the jaws of the gorge and were safe among the enormous boulders below."<sup>30</sup> Here the famished men hungrily ate the food brought to them by Dillon and once more were on their way.

Fellows and Torrence were now absolutely committed to go on. They had passed the only known avenue of escape and could not go back against the raging river. After passing the Falls of Sorrow the two explorers ran into another, and more serious problem. Boulders, larger than good-sized houses, forced them to climb higher and higher above the swift-flowing river. Fellows declared that "we made camp under a huge shelving rock against which the roaring of the river reverberated and echoed like demons howling over their prey. We were so far above the water that it took an hour to make a trip down for a coffee pot full."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 533.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 534.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

As the boulders grew bigger, the water swifter, and walls higher, the two explorers entered the most dangerous section of the Black Canyon. Fellows recalled the tremendous boulders and the nearly vertical walls, one-third mile straight up.

At the very start we came to a gorge where gigantic boulders had fallen in from the cliffs, the water flowing 100 feet or more beneath these boulders. They were packed closely enough, however, so that they formed a dam in high water. The boulders were smooth and polished to such an extent that it was only with the greatest difficulty they could be surmounted. It took us six hours to traverse less than a quarter of a mile. At times it would be necessary for one of us to climb upon the shoulders of the other, clamber to the top of some huge rock and draw our supplies and the other man up by means of the rope which we carried with us. Again on the other side there might be a deep pool where we were obliged to swim, into which the water boiled from the caves above and was sucked out again through the crevices between the boulders below.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the extreme danger that surrounded them, Fellows and Torrence were in a section of indescribable beauty. Because the huge boulders buried the channel, the river was forced to gurgle blackly underneath, hunting whatever avenues it could find. The little sunlight that entered the canyon cast eerie shadows inside the great gorge. In the occasional pools they came to, the two explorers were often startled by the splat of a leaping three or four pound trout.

They had, however, very little time to admire scenery. They were fighting for their lives. At one point in the boulder field Fellows was caught in a whirlpool and almost dragged into the underground river, "but by dint of the hardest kind of swimming, succeeded in getting into still water. At this time, Torrence felt that he would never see me again."<sup>33</sup>

Shortly after this incident the explorers experienced another crisis. The canyon was blocked by a great deposit of huge boulders, under which the water ran. The action of the rushing water had worn the boulders smooth, making it impossible for Fellows and Torrence to climb them. It was also impossible to climb up the sheer walls at this point, and it was equally impossible to go back through the rushing torrent behind them. There was only one way out, and that was through the hidden archway with its foaming waters. The men did not know the extent of the cave-in or how narrow the openings were. They could see nothing but darkness; they could hear nothing but the constant pounding of the river. After deliberating they "decided

to attempt to go with the boiling waters into the unknown depths of the foam-flecked cavern. . . . Fellows slid off the rock on which they were sitting, into the whirlpool of water beneath. Torrence saw him turned over as soon as he struck the water, and as he shot under the archway all that could be seen of him was one of his feet whirling around in the mad torrent. . . . Again Torrence did not expect to ever meet him alive, and for a long time sat there before he could decide to court what seemed to be the certain fate of his companion. At last, it being the only alternative that presented a single hope for life, he, too, plunged in."<sup>34</sup> Both men were carried with great velocity for twenty-five feet through the nearly underground cavern and were slammed against the rocks as they struggled in the water. Miraculously, both survived their ordeal, picking up only cuts and bruises.

By August 18 Fellows and Torrence were reeling from the blows of the Black Canyon. The constant pounding from the river, boulders, and ledges had taken its toll. The two men were out of provisions, having lost or spoiled those Dillon had given them at the previous rendezvous. Fellows exclaimed that "we were hungry, sick and exhausted and were losing flesh, . . . at the rate of about two pounds a day." Salvation came in the form of two mountain sheep. Startled when the two men appeared out of nowhere, one jumped off a cliff, breaking its shoulders on the rocks below. A hind quarter was quickly devoured by the half-starved explorers.<sup>35</sup>

No one can ever properly gauge the hardship and danger that Fellows and Torrence overcame in the Black Canyon. The two men were forced to swim seventy-six times in the icy waters of the Gunnison. "The swimming was naturally fraught with great danger, it being necessary for us often to land on sharp points of rocks where the water was flowing swiftly. We were bruised from head to foot."<sup>36</sup> For ten days they climbed and waded and swam, fighting exhaustion, fatigue, a roaring river, and the psychological problems that come with complete isolation. For days they did not have a dry piece of clothing on and worked with cracked lips and nearly frozen hands. For hours they were immersed, now swimming, now wading, in waist-deep, icy water.

After eating their first good meal in several days, Fellows and Torrence continued down river, passing a succession of falls,

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Barton W. Marsh, *The Uncompahgre Valley and the Gunnison Tunnel: A Description of Scenery, Natural Resources, Products, Industries, Exploration, Adventure, Etc.* (Montrose, Colo.: Marsh and Torrence, 1905), pp. 105-7.  
<sup>35</sup> Report of A. L. Fellows, 1901, p. 534.  
<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 535.

which were promptly named for Torrence. A day later the tired men, fourteen miles from the Narrows, finally reached Red Rock Canyon, the last rendezvous, where they once more found the reliable Dillon waiting for them with a most welcome meal. One more stretch and the thirty mile journey would be over. Although the men considered leaving the gorge at Red Rock Canyon, "the fever was upon us and we thought it would be a great pity when we were so fully equipped not to go entirely through the canon."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, Fellows and Torrence doggedly went on, hoping to reach a ranch house supposedly eight miles distant. The distance proved to be much greater than that and the two men put in the hardest day's trip of the entire voyage. At night they camped without bedding or food in the chill of the canyon. Ill from overexertion, loss of sleep, and having lost fifteen pounds each, they came to the end of the line. The next morning, "having passed through all of the canon that was of any interest to us and having reached a horse trail," they decided that "we had gone far enough and directed our course toward Delta."<sup>38</sup>

The job was done. Twelve miles from the mouth of the Cimarron River they found an acceptable location for a diversion tunnel. On the basis of the Fellows-Torrence Report the United States Reclamation Service started work on the Gunnison River Diversion Project. On September 23, 1909, President William Howard Taft presided at the opening of the Gunnison Tunnel. The tunnel, approximately 30,583 feet long, was part of the project that was to eventually cost nearly nine million dollars. But it was worth it, for the tunnel helped save the

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. On August 19, 1972, Dave Nix, a graduate student at Oklahoma State University, John Hrovat, a Burlington, Colorado, high school teacher, and I attempted to duplicate most of the Fellows-Torrence mission. I had already run the fast-moving twelve mile stretch of Gunnison River rapids from Cimarron, where Torrence and Fellows began their voyage, to the east portal of the Gunnison Tunnel. However, this was the "easy" portion of the two explorers' trip. The wildest part of the canyon lay below, down river. Hence, the 1972 trip began at the east portal and ended at the junction of the Gunnison River and the North Fork of the Gunnison near Lazear.

The trip took four days and covered approximately twenty-eight miles. When my two companions and I passed through the canyon, 300 second feet of water was flowing through the gorge—the rest was diverted through the Gunnison Tunnel to irrigate the Uncompahgre Valley. When Torrence and Fellows made their trip, an unbelievable 3,000 second feet of water was roaring through the canyon. In my opinion it was nothing short of a miracle that Torrence and Fellows survived with that amount of water flowing through the canyon. The roaring rapids, the huge and smooth boulders, the waterfalls, and the extreme fatigue and tension—all could have killed them.

My party used a sturdy five man rubber boat weighing thirty-three pounds, 100 feet of silk mountain climbing rope, life preservers, ponchos to sleep in, and small cans of soup and meat for sustenance. It was found that the need to travel light was of critical importance. The worst problems encountered were the carrying of the boat over huge and slippery rocks, the lack of fresh water, and the constant tension.

<sup>39</sup> Beidleman, "Gunnison River Diversion Project," pp. 280-85; Steinel, *History of Agriculture in Colorado*, pp. 336-39.



Uncompahgre Valley and helped open the Western Slope to settlement.<sup>39</sup>

Today, the Black Canyon is inundated from the Blue Mesa Dam near old Sapinero to the Morrow Point Dam near Cimarron. Another dam, the Crystal, is being built twelve miles west of Morrow Point, just short of the east portal of the Gunnison Tunnel. The dams are all part of the Curecanti Project to store water for ultimate use in the lower basin states of Nevada, California, and Arizona. When the Crystal Dam is completed in the mid-1970s, nearly one-half of Black Canyon will be a lake.

The great days of the Black Canyon are gone forever, a victim of what some people call progress, but the misty memories still remain in the hearts of all who knew and grew to love one of nature's true wonders. Through the mists of time the shock on the faces of John Gunnison and A. C. Peale as they viewed the canyon can be imagined; the noise of the Rio Grande workmen as they carved out a railroad route between two vertical walls can be heard; and the journey of Fellows and Torrence, always on the edge of the knife, conquering the canyon for the first time can be enjoyed.

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## The Barlow and Sanderson Stage Lines in Colorado, 1872-1884

BY MORRIS F. TAYLOR

The trans-Mississippi projection of railroads to the Pacific Coast forced the contraction and ultimate extinction of stagecoach lines that had served the vast and diverse distances across the American West. The process was persistent, though uneven, in the 1860s and 1870s, its significance first becoming apparent with the linkage of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads in Utah in 1869. The second important thrust came the next year with the completion to Denver of the Kansas Pacific railroad, formerly the Union Pacific Eastern Division, which had actually begun construction from Kansas City

<sup>1</sup> Robert Edgar Riegel, *The Story of the Western Railroads from 1852 through the Reign of the Giants* (1926; reprint ed., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), pp. 112-13.

<sup>2</sup> Morris F. Taylor, *First Mail West: Stage Lines on the Santa Fe Trail* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), pp. 173, 178.

a short time before the Union Pacific rails started westward from Omaha.<sup>1</sup> By the mid-1870s construction of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad was effecting a similar roll-back on the edge of the Southwest. Replacement was pretty well completed by the end of the nineteenth century, although there were vestigial remains of stage lines still operating in the early twentieth century.

The last one of the so-called transcontinental stage lines was Barlow and Sanderson's Southern Overland Mail and Express Company. When it became the final stagecoach carrier of the overland mail to California—successor to Butterfield's Overland Mail Line, Holladay's Overland Mail and Express Company, and Wells Fargo's Great Overland Mail Route—the Southern Overland Mail's eastern terminus was the Kansas Pacific railroad town of Kit Carson on the plains of eastern Colorado. That railroad had pushed the stage line out of Kansas, so that by 1870 most of the Southern Overland Mail route lay south and west of Santa Fe through Tucson to California. For a while the Colorado town of Trinidad was the stage line terminus because the narrow gauge Denver and Rio Grande Railway reached a nearby point on the Purgatoire River in 1876 and the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe tracks came into the town in 1878.<sup>2</sup>

BARLOW & SANDERSON'S SOUTHERN OVERLAND MAIL & EXPRESS LINE 1872

— STAGE LINE  
 - - - - - RAILROAD



Bradley Barlow and Jared L. Sanderson, proprietors, had long been aware that their main line along the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail would be overcome by railroad iron. As early as 1874 they were planning their Southern Overland Mail service west from Canon City, up the Arkansas River, and across the San Luis Valley to Del Norte.<sup>3</sup> The actual railhead of the Denver and Rio Grande was a few miles short of Canon City at the time.<sup>4</sup> In getting ready for the new operation thirty-eight head of "fine American horses" were shipped by rail to West Las Animas, railhead of the Kansas Pacific branch from Kit Carson.<sup>5</sup>

The feasibility of the proposed stage line rested on two points. The little town of Del Norte (established in 1872) on the western side of the San Luis Valley was a supply base for miners and freighters flocking into the San Juan Mountains following the Brunot Treaty with the Ute Indians in 1873.<sup>6</sup> And decisions by officials of the Denver and Rio Grande on building south to Trinidad and New Mexico made it likely that locomotive whistles would not be heard west of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains for some time, while the railroad south from Pueblo would further curtail the stage line east of the mountains.<sup>7</sup>

It appears that Barlow and Sanderson's Canon City-Del Norte venture was successful. Early in the spring of 1875 they received six new four-horse Concord coaches for the line, and in April fifty-two head of horses arrived from Saint Louis. Ten sorrels were for the old Santa Fe line, and forty-two iron-greys were sent to the Canon City-Del Norte route. In May Lewis

*This stage station was used by Barlow and Sanderson's Southern Overland Stage and Express Company while it operated in Del Norte. Hand-hewn of red spruce logs, it is being restored by the San Luis Valley Historical Society.*



Barnum, a division superintendent, returned from Saint Louis with another shipment of horses for the Del Norte route.<sup>8</sup>

When the nation pulled out of the depression that had hit in 1873, the various railroad constructions were resumed. Track-laying for the Denver and Rio Grande to Trinidad commenced in January 1876, and on February 22 the iron reached the new townsite of Cucharas, near important coal deposits a few miles east and slightly north of Walsenburg.<sup>9</sup> Cucharas was slated to become a railroad junction as well, because Denver and Rio Grande officials, changing their minds, decided to build westward also to tap the trade of the San Luis Valley and become the first railroad to reach the rich gold and silver mines of the San Juan Mountains.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the Santa Fe railroad had built into Pueblo a few days after the Denver and Rio Grande reached Cucharas was a stimulant also, it being understood that surveyors for the Santa Fe were looking westward.<sup>11</sup>

These developments, of course, had an important bearing on the Southern Overland Mail and Express Company. Extension of the Santa Fe railroad along the Arkansas to Pueblo had ended another segment of the stage line, and the revised Denver and Rio Grande plans brought an almost conditioned response from Barlow and Sanderson. They decided to run a line of coaches from Cucharas westward along the Huerfano River via the old county seat of Badito, over the Sangre de Cristo Pass, and across the San Luis Valley to the San Juan country. While working out preliminary plans, Lewis Barnum died suddenly in January from pneumonia at the Summit House atop the Sangre de Cristo Pass.<sup>12</sup>

The loss of Barnum put a great burden on Superintendent Harley Sanderson, Jared's brother. The two Sandersons, together with employee Malcomb G. (Mac) Frost, were in West Las Animas in late March to accept a shipment of thirty horses

<sup>3</sup> *Las Animas, Col., Leader*, June 5, 1874. At the same time eight new coaches were received from the Coan and Ten Broeke Company of Chicago, but they were for the old route through Trinidad to Santa Fe.

<sup>4</sup> The tracks reached Canon City on July 1, 1875. B. F. Rockafellow, "History of Fremont County," *History of the Arkansas Valley, Colorado* (Chicago, Ill.: O. L. Baskin & Co., 1881), p. 603.

<sup>5</sup> *Las Animas, Col., Leader*, June 5, 1874.

<sup>6</sup> LeRoy R. Hafey, ed., *Colorado and Its People: A Narrative and Topical History of the Centennial State*, 4 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1948), 1:337.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert O. Brayer, *William Blackmore: Early Financing of the Denver & Rio Grande Railway and Ancillary Land Companies, 1871-1878* (Denver, Colo.: Bradford-Robinson, 1949), pp. 110-11.

<sup>8</sup> *Las Animas, Col., Leader*, March 26, 1875; April 9, 1875; May 14, 1875.

<sup>9</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, February 24, 1876; Brayer, *William Blackmore*, p. 188.

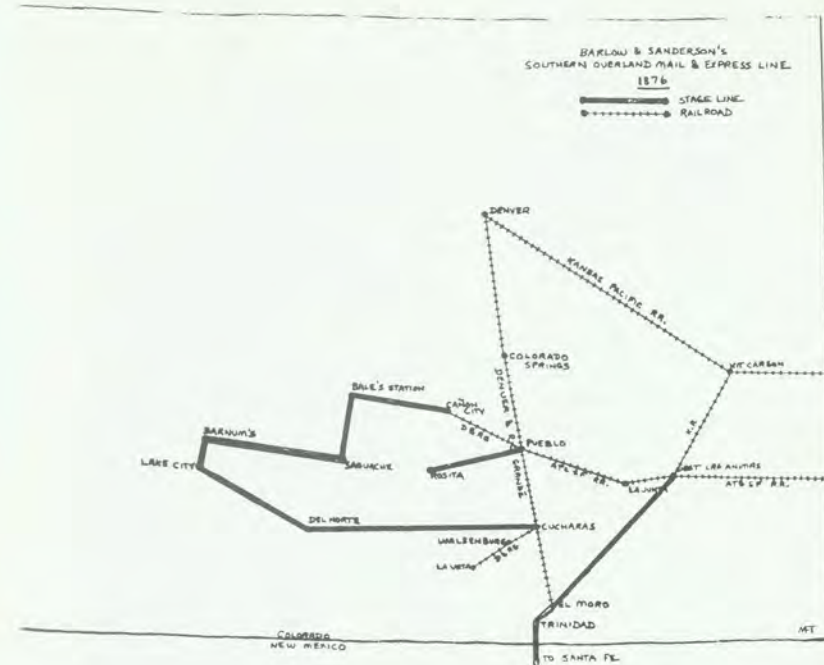
<sup>10</sup> Dutch capitalists who owned the Sangre de Cristo Grant and stock in the railroad wanted the connection also. Brayer, *William Blackmore*, pp. 196-98.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 190, 197; *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, February 27, 1876.

<sup>12</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, May 11, 1876; January 15, 1876; March 19, 1876; January 16, 1876.

and ten coaches for their line from Cucharas now projected to Lake City in the San Juans, which was scheduled for a May 1 opening.<sup>13</sup> Undoubtedly, the plans for abandoning the West Las Animas-Trinidad division were discussed, in view of the probable construction of the Kansas Pacific from the new railroad town of La Junta on the Arkansas River southwestward to Trinidad. And abandonment of the Pueblo-Trinidad division was imminent as the Denver and Rio Grande was built south from Cucharas. In mid-April it was learned that livestock for the new line would be taken from both of these parts of the system.<sup>14</sup> The alertness and energy of the Barlow and Sanderson partnership was further shown when, in April, they established a daily stage service between Canon City and Rosita, a prosperous mining town in the Wet Mountain Valley, but they relinquished that route to others within a short time.<sup>15</sup> The Colorado Stage and Express Company, incorporated in 1878 and based in Canon City, took over, and as late as 1881 Rosita, Silver Cliff, and other points were on the route of the Pueblo, Rosita, and Silver Cliff Daily Stage Line.<sup>16</sup>

The Barlow and Sanderson stage on its way to Silver Cliff and Canon City in 1878.



On May 3, 1876, the Southern Overland Mail and Express Company ran its last coach out of Pueblo because the Denver and Rio Grande had completed its line to the new town of El Moro on the Purgatoire River, several miles downstream from Trinidad. Now Barlow and Sanderson's red coaches operated tri-weekly from Canon City to Saguache and the San Juan country, tri-weekly from Cucharas to Del Norte and the San Juans, daily from Canon City to Rosita, and daily from West Las Animas to Santa Fe.<sup>17</sup>

Very soon after reaching Cucharas, the Denver and Rio Grande began its branch towards the San Juans. By June 4

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., April 12, 1876; *Las Animas, Col., Leader*, March 24, 1876.

<sup>14</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, December 18, 1875; April 12, 1876; May 2, 1876; *Las Animas, Col., Leader*, May 19, 1876.

<sup>15</sup> *Las Animas, Col., Leader*, April 28, 1876.

<sup>16</sup> Fremont County Deed Record, Book 14, pp. 108-9, County Clerk Records Office, Fremont County Court House, Canon City; *Southern Colorado: Historical and Descriptive of Fremont and Custer Counties with Their Principal Towns, Canon City and Other Towns, Fremont County, Etc.* (Canon City, Colo.: Binckley and Hartwell, 1879), p. 128; *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, February 17, 1881; June 22, 1881.

<sup>17</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, May 11, 1876; *Las Animas, Col., Leader*, April 28, 1876. Between Del Norte and Lake City the Del Norte and Antelope Park and the Antelope Park and Lake City roads were used (D. H. Cummins, "Toll Roads in Southwestern Colorado," *The Colorado Magazine* 29 [April 1952]:101).

tracks were two miles west of Walsenburg, and by the last week of June the railroad was at the new town of La Veta at the foot of the mountains twenty-two miles west of Cucharas.<sup>18</sup> Apparently the stage line westward via Badito and the Sangre de Cristo Pass was not changed until the railhead had been at La Veta for about eight months. However, plans were being made to establish the terminus of the stage line at La Veta about April 1, 1877.<sup>19</sup>

Barlow and Sanderson's principal office was in Pueblo, headquarters not only for their Colorado and New Mexico lines but also for their operations in California and Oregon. In early February of 1877 Jared L. Sanderson, one of the proprietors, and W. F. Stone, superintendent of the West Coast lines, were in Pueblo, and Sanderson announced that the Post Office Department would probably authorize a daily mail run. Then he went to Saint Louis to buy more horses for the Del Norte-Lake City line.<sup>20</sup>

Time schedules between La Veta and Lake City were published in late March. The overall time from La Veta to Lake City was about thirty-five hours and the return was about an hour less.<sup>21</sup> April 8 was the starting day and on that day a shortened line and reduced fares were published. The time from La Veta to Del Norte was reduced to fifteen hours and from Del Norte to Lake City to sixteen hours. The overall time was cut from thirty-five to thirty-one hours. Unfortunately, it was not stated where the route was cut, nor were the original fares published so that a comparison could be made with the lowered ones—La Veta to Del Norte was twelve dollars, round trip, twenty; through trip to Lake City was twenty-seven dollars, round trip, fifty. The *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain* observed that "this is cutting stage fares down to suit the times," reflecting the lingering effects of the depression in Colorado.<sup>22</sup>

As a stage line terminus La Veta's time was short. By late June 1877 the Denver and Rio Grande tracks had been laid over La Veta Pass to a point near Wagon Creek, where a new

<sup>18</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, June 4, 1876; *Las Animas, Col., Leader*, June 23, 1876.

<sup>19</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, February 20, 1877.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, February 4, 1877; February 20, 1877. Harley Sanderson was superintendent of the Colorado and New Mexico lines and W. F. Stone, formerly with the firm in Colorado, acted in the same capacity on the West Coast. H. C. Griffin was treasurer of the combined interests (A. J. Hertz, "Barlow, Sanderson, & Company: Corruption Enters the Express," *Western Express* 13, no. 3 [July 1963]:29). In 1881 the office was on the east side of Santa Fe Avenue between Fifth and Sixth streets (*Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, March 1, 1881).

<sup>21</sup> The schedule was leave La Veta at 5 A.M., arrive Del Norte at 10:30 P.M. and Lake City at 3 P.M. next day; leave Lake City at 5 A.M., arrive Del Norte at midnight and La Veta at 5 P.M. next day (*Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, March 30, 1877).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, March 30, 1877; April 8, 1877; Brayer, *William Blackmore*, p. 199.

railhead town known as Garland City sprang up, a few miles east of Fort Garland in the San Luis Valley. This part of the Southern Overland Mail and Express system was now entirely west of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the coaches running from Garland City via Fort Garland, Washington Springs, and Del Norte to Lake City in the San Juans.<sup>23</sup>

With the railroad at the eastern edge of the San Luis Valley, attention was given to possible connections southward into New Mexico. The *Santa Fe New Mexican* noted that it was ninety miles shorter to Santa Fe from the new railhead than from the old one at El Moro, east of the mountains and still served by Barlow and Sanderson.<sup>24</sup> Possibly someone already had set up a line from Garland City to Santa Fe, or Barlow and Sanderson had decided not to bother because the railroad would soon be built across the flat valley to a new townsite on the Rio Grande called Rio Bravo, later Alamosa.<sup>25</sup> At any rate advertisements appeared in September for Prescott's Santa Fe and Garland line making weekly trips with four-horse express and passenger wagons. The trip took four days; the passenger fare was fifteen dollars and the express rate was five cents per pound. More frequent runs were to be made when the line was well stocked. And in December F. M. Prescott and Company operated the Santa Fe and Northern Express Line, no doubt the same enterprise.<sup>26</sup>

The financial troubles of the Denver and Rio Grande Railway slowed construction over the thirty-seven miles to the new town of Alamosa. That delay and the competition from Prescott's stage line caused Barlow and Sanderson to start running four-horse coaches between Garland City and Santa Fe commencing January 1, 1878. The fare was thirty dollars and the coaches ran three times a week, leaving Garland City in the morning on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and returning on alternate evenings.<sup>27</sup> Barlow and Sanderson's station in Garland City was the Perry House, a hostelry run by Joe Perry.<sup>28</sup>

In March of 1877 General William Jackson Palmer of the Denver and Rio Grande Railway reported that stagecoaches headed for the Rio Grande were carrying fifteen persons at the flat rate of eighteen cents per mile.<sup>29</sup> Palmer probably cited only

<sup>23</sup> Brayer, *William Blackmore*, pp. 201-3; Luther E. Bean, *Land of the Blue Sky People: A Story of the San Luis Valley*, rev. ed. (Monte Vista, Colo.: Monte Vista Journal, 1964), pp. 57, 66.

<sup>24</sup> *Santa Fe New Mexican* (weekly), June 26, 1877.

<sup>25</sup> Brayer, *William Blackmore*, p. 205.

<sup>26</sup> *Santa Fe New Mexican*, September 25, 1877; *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, December 8, 1877.

<sup>27</sup> *Santa Fe New Mexican*, January 1, 1878; January 26, 1878.

<sup>28</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, July 2, 1878.

<sup>29</sup> Brayer, *William Blackmore*, p. 206.

the best figures, giving no indication of the seasonal fluctuations, which were experienced by stage lines as well. A well-known traveling correspondent of the *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, Levi P. Hensel, was extreme in his praise of Barlow and Sanderson's operation, saying that it was the finest outfit of its kind on the American continent.<sup>30</sup> Signing his articles "Bona," he noted that Barlow and Sanderson employed some veteran drivers from defunct stage lines that once were household words in the West. L. M. Hill and James Billingsley, formerly with Ben Holladay's Overland Mail and Express, drove between Del Norte and Jackson's, while a former Western Stage Company driver, G. W. Stout, handled the reins on a daily round trip between Del Norte and South Fork. And then there were men like Mac Frost, who had been with Barlow and Sanderson east of the mountains in the old days and who was now superintendent of the line from Garland City to Lake City.<sup>31</sup>

Barlow and Sanderson's office at the American House in Lake City was managed by Jared L. Sanderson's nephew and namesake.<sup>32</sup> The Lake City-Saguache connection was made by way of the wagon road opened by Enos Hotchkiss and Otto Mears in 1874. Although Lake City was at the height of its prosperity, the volume of passenger business in the winter was light on the line from Canon City via Bale's Station (or Tavern) in Saguache and Mont. Hill's half-way station. Reduced to a tri-weekly run during the winter, only two-horse vehicles were being used from Saguache to Canon City; Andy Woodruff and John Hock "handled the ribbons" along the Arkansas River on the one-day trip between Bale's Station and Canon City. Similar conditions existed between Del Norte and Lake City, where buckboards were used because of little winter travel.<sup>33</sup>

In March of 1878 Barlow and Sanderson retained their old mail contracts in southern Colorado, and the Post Office De-

<sup>30</sup> For biographical data on Hensel see Eleanor Fry, "The Chieftain Becomes a Daily, April 28, 1872," *Pueblo Chieftain* (100th Anniversary Edition), April 28, 1972.

<sup>31</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, October 14, 1877; Concord coaches were not used on the very mountainous parts of the system. "Bona" Hensel noted that some of the routes used four horses and some six, but he did not say which. He traveled to Lake City, probably from South Fork, in a jerkey, which he said was worse than the four-horse, double-seated buckboard that he rode in from Lake City to Saguache on his way east out of the San Juans. A jerkey (also spelled jerky) has been described simply as a wagon without springs, but it also was a conveyance with two seats, a top supported on six uprights, and a semblance of a boot at the rear (*ibid.*, October 16, 1877; Mitford M. Mathews, ed., *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles* [Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1951], p. 903; Nick Eggenhofer, *Wagons, Mules, and Men: How the Frontier Moved West* [New York: Hastings House, 1961], p. 162).

<sup>32</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, October 16, 1877.

<sup>33</sup> Frank Hall, *History of the State of Colorado . . . from 1858 to 1890*, 4 vols. (Chicago, Ill.: Blakely Printing Co., 1895), 4:155-56; *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, October 16, 1877; October 19, 1877; December 8, 1877.

partment awarded them two new ones—from Garland to Santa Fe and from Garland to Silverton via Conejos. However, their Southern Overland Mail system was not without competition in the San Luis Valley and the San Juan Mountains. The firm of Gilmer and Saulsbury, for example, bid successfully on a contract from Garland to Ouray, crossing the mountains on a new stage road from the Henson Creek Toll Road and then down Bear Creek to Ouray.<sup>34</sup>

In anticipation of the railroad's completion to Alamosa, Jared and Harley Sanderson had meetings in Santa Fe with David C. Dodge, general freight and passenger agent for the Denver and Rio Grande, to plan a daily stage line between the two places, although for a time the mail was to be carried only weekly. The 140-mile route would follow the west side of the Rio Grande, from Alamosa through Conejos, Santa Cruz, Ojo Caliente, and the San Juan Pueblo, where it would cross to the east side for the rest of the journey to the New Mexican capital. In May 1878 work crews directed by H. F. Swope (who had been with Barlow and Sanderson in New Mexico east of the mountains) dug wells, built stations, and improved the road in preparation for a July 1 opening. Through fare was twenty dollars.<sup>35</sup> The Denver and Rio Grande was interested in a good connection with Santa Fe in the hope of competing with the Santa Fe railroad, which had seized control of the Raton Pass into New Mexico in February.<sup>36</sup> There was no doubt about the fast approaching end of Barlow and Sanderson's stub line east of the mountains from Trinidad to Santa Fe.

Abandonment of Garland City in favor of Alamosa, which the Denver and Rio Grande reached on July 10, 1878, must have been a marvel of speedy dismantlement and reassembly. It was reported, for instance, that hotelman Joe Perry served breakfast to his guests in Garland and that night served dinner in temporary quarters in Alamosa. It can be surmised that there was no interruption of Barlow and Sanderson's service, the new Perry House being the point of departure of their coaches for Santa Fe to the south and for Lake City to the north.<sup>37</sup> About

<sup>34</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, March 14, 1878; March 23, 1878.

<sup>35</sup> *Santa Fe New Mexican*, April 6, 1878; April 13, 1878; April 27, 1878; May 18, 1878.

<sup>36</sup> Herbert O. Brayer, "History of Colorado Railroads," *Colorado and Its People: A Narrative and Topical History of the Centennial State*, ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, 4 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1948), 2:654.

<sup>37</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, July 23, 1878. Frank Ford was agent at Alamosa. Coaches stopped at Joe Cuenin's Hotel, Del Norte, where Edward H. Smith was agent. Leaving at 9 A.M., passengers had a hot breakfast at Hill's Ranch, eleven miles along and reached Alden's in time for dinner. John Enfield, who carried the mail and express from Antelope Springs to Silverton, then took them in a spring wagon to Barber's Ranch, the end of the stage line at that time (*ibid.*, October 8, 1878).



a year later in 1879 the distances and the daily running times from Alamosa into the Colorado mountains were published in the *Ouray Solid Muldoon*.

Alamosa to Del Norte,	30 miles	5 hours.
" " Saguache,	65 "	10 hours.
" " L. City,	115 "	20 hours.
" " Ouray,	200 "	34 hours. <sup>38</sup>

However, the readers of the *Ouray Solid Muldoon* had little interest in the Alamosa-Santa Fe schedule.

But the Denver and Rio Grande's hopes of diverting the Santa Fe traffic over its narrow gauge line to Alamosa and then south temporarily by stagecoach were only briefly fulfilled while the Post Office Department routed the mail to Santa Fe through Alamosa. Even then the *Santa Fe New Mexican* complained that "the Alamosa mail continues to arrive very regularly behind time," without saying who was to blame. The paper went on to hope that the "department will hurry up the change and give us our mail via the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe to Otero."<sup>39</sup> Otero was the first division point on the railroad south of the Raton Pass. The Santa Fe railroad commenced mail and passenger service from Trinidad to Otero, and the Barlow and Sanderson stages met the trains at the new rail-head. By summer the Alamosa-Santa Fe stage service, which appears not to have carried many passengers at any time, was reduced to a mail route accommodated by a one-horse buckboard.<sup>40</sup>

Bradley Barlow retired from the partnership in 1878, and the firm became officially known as J. L. Sanderson and Company.<sup>41</sup> But the long and common reference to "Barlow and Sanderson" assured its continued popular use until the com-

<sup>38</sup> *Ouray (Colo.) Solid Muldoon*, September 5, 1879.

<sup>39</sup> *Santa Fe New Mexican*, March 1, 1879.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, March 15, 1879; August 16, 1879; Barlow and Sanderson's stage station at Ojo Caliente (New Mexico) was destroyed by fire on the night of April 8, 1879. The barn, hay, and grain also were consumed, but there was no loss of livestock (*ibid.*, April 12, 1879).

<sup>41</sup> Taylor, *First Mail West*, p. 178.

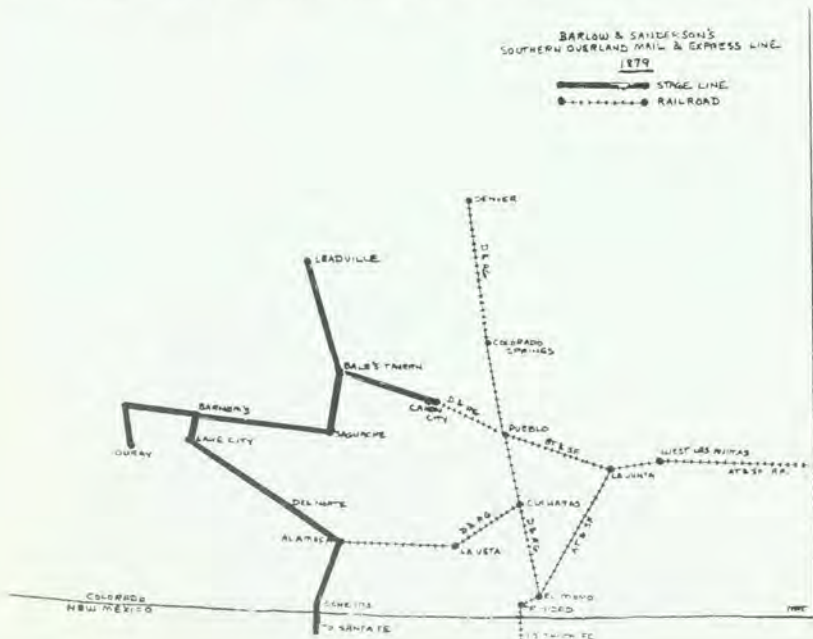
<sup>42</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, September 22, 1878; Hall, *History of Colorado*, 4:83. J. L. Sanderson's nephew, long the agent at Lake City, was transferred to Canon City. After a short time he was succeeded there by W. G. Adams (*Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, September 4, 1878; October 24, 1878).

<sup>43</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, September 22, 1878; *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, September 26, 1879; Hall, *History of Colorado*, 4:311-12. The *Ouray* paper gave the line from Canon City to Ouray by way of Cleora (Bale's Station), Saguache, Camp Sanderson, Camp Barnum, Cimarron, and the Ute Agency, with connections at Camp Barnum for Lake City. By 1879 all runs were daily.

<sup>44</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, July 9, 1878. Barlow and Sanderson's line was one of three running to Leadville. McClelland and Spotswood's coaches came from Denver, while Wall and Witter's came out of South Park. At the peak of the rush those lines together brought in twelve fully loaded coaches a day (Phyllis Flanders Dorset, *The New Eldorado: The Story of Colorado's Gold and Silver Rushes* [New York: Macmillan Co., 1970], pp. 260-61).

pany went out of business. That fall there was a marked increase in business on the line from Canon City up the Arkansas to Bale's Station and South Arkansas (later Salida), where coaches for Saguache and Del Norte crossed the main Arkansas River and went up the South Arkansas through Poncha Pass into the San Luis Valley.<sup>42</sup> The Post Office Department ordered increases in mail service from tri-weekly to daily between South Arkansas and Del Norte and from Saguache to Lake City (over Cochetopa Pass). And from Barnum's Station (also called Camp Barnum), twenty miles north of Lake City, a tri-weekly service was put on over an eighty-mile loop via Cimarron and the Ute Agency to Ouray.<sup>43</sup>

At about the same time the Southern Overland Mail system was extended to Leadville, which was experiencing a spectacular boom. Sam Abbey was the agent there, and his office was in the livery barn of Wall and Witter, well-known stage men in the region.<sup>44</sup> Jared L. Sanderson took a special interest in the Leadville extension. In September 1878 several new coaches and forty-four horses were placed along the line, and in October Sanderson went down from Denver to Canon City, where he announced that all of his lines were prosperous. A tri-weekly in addition to daily service was put on in January 1879 and the



next month Sanderson went to Saint Louis to buy two hundred more horses for the line. It was announced also that approximately twelve new Concords and fifty sets of Concord harnesses had been acquired. In March ten coaches and 156 horses were received. So heavy was the volume of business that the Canon City-Leadville service became a tri-daily one.<sup>45</sup>

January 24, 1880, was an important date in the annals of American stagecoaching. J. L. Sanderson and Company abandoned its last segment along the old Santa Fe Trail between Las Vegas and Santa Fe.<sup>46</sup> From then on "Barlow and Sanderson" operated entirely west of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, excepting the line through them along the Arkansas River and, of course, the lines in California and Oregon. The first exception was removed within a few months when the long struggle with the Santa Fe railroad for control of the Royal Gorge, then known as the Grand Canyon of the Arkansas, was resolved in favor of the Denver and Rio Grande, which quickly laid its tracks on the roadbed prepared by the Santa Fe into Leadville. This meant that Salida (South Arkansas), the new railroad town, became the stage line terminus when Cleora (Bale's Tavern) was dismantled because the railroad ignored it.<sup>47</sup>

Although Otto Mears, the ubiquitous toll road builder, was pushing his Marshall Pass road towards a summer 1879 comple-



tion, the route to Gunnison City was not ready for coaches until the summer of 1880.<sup>48</sup> The line was stocked and the first coach rolled into Gunnison City on July 24, 1880.<sup>49</sup> The turn-off from the old line to Saguache was at a place called Mears Junction, or Station, a short distance south of Poncha Springs from where a branch went to Maysville.<sup>50</sup> Soon after the Gunnison City line was opened, former President Ulysses S. Grant, returning from his around-the-world tour, came up from Salida with his son Fred, Governor Frederick W. Pitkin, and ex-Governor John L. Routt in a Sanderson coach. From Gunnison the distinguished party hired a mule team and a rig and visited the new mining camps of Crested Butte, Irwin (Ruby Camp), and Gothic.<sup>51</sup>

The continued extension of the Denver and Rio Grande tracks into canyons and mountain valleys assured responsive adaptation by the stage line to new circumstances. In 1880 the railroad reached south from Alamosa to the new town of Antonito, and it was expected that by January 1, 1881, a westward branch to Chama, New Mexico, would be completed. Advertisements appeared proclaiming that "J. L. Sanderson & Co. will run the best six horse stage line in the west" from the Chama railhead to Durango and Animas City. Plans to reach Rico and Silverton were announced, but J. L. Sanderson's coaches probably never reached these places from the south.<sup>52</sup> Meserole and Blake's stage line had served Rico since 1879, and there was a mail connection north to Ophir.<sup>53</sup>

A mid-winter opening of the new stage line posed a major problem. Snow was said to be from two to three feet deep on part of the route, so H. C. Griffin, stage line treasurer, hastened to Denver to purchase four large six-horse sleighs for the 110-mile run from Chama to Durango. The special equipment was forwarded by the Denver and Rio Grande in mid-January,<sup>54</sup> and the following public announcement was made.

<sup>45</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, September 17, 1878; October 31, 1878; February 9, 1879; March 25, 1879.

<sup>46</sup> *Santa Fe New Mexican*, January 31, 1880.

<sup>47</sup> Hafen, ed., *Colorado and Its People*, 1:372-73.

<sup>48</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, March 4, 1879; Wilson Rockwell, "Portrait in the Gallery: Otto Mears, Pathfinder of the San Juans," *The 1967 Denver Westerners Brand Book*, ed. Richard A. Ronzio (Denver, Colo.: Denver Westerners, 1968), p. 24.

<sup>49</sup> *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, June 11, 1880; Hafen, ed., *Colorado and Its People*, 1:444; Hall, *History of Colorado*, 4:311-12; Rockwell, "Portrait in the Gallery," p. 24.

<sup>50</sup> Muriel Sibell Wolle, *Stampede to Timberline: The Ghost Towns and Mining Camps of Colorado* (Boulder, Colo.: Muriel S. Wolle, 1949), p. 160.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202; *Elk Mountain Pilot* (Irwin-Ruby Camp, Colorado), August 12, 1880.

<sup>52</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, December 17, 1880.

<sup>53</sup> Sidney Jocknick, *Early Days on the Western Slope of Colorado and Campfire Chats with Otto Mears, the Pathfinder, from 1870 to 1883, Inclusive* (1913; reprint, Glorieta, N. Mex.: Rio Grande Press, 1968), pp. 245, 255; Hall, *History of Colorado*, 4:120.

<sup>54</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, January 18, 1881; March 11, 1881.

### Ho! for Durango

Overland Stage and Express Company is the only company running daily line coaches of six-horse sleighs from Chama to Durango and Animas City.

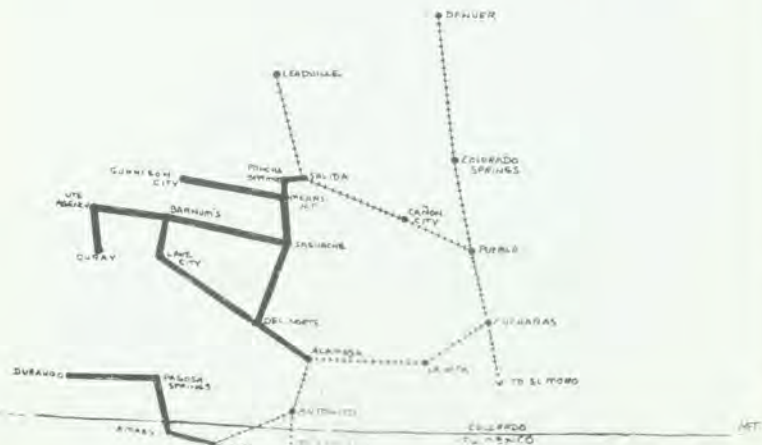
Through tickets on sale at all D.&R.G. ticket offices at usual rates.

J. L. Sanderson & Co.,  
Proprietors.<sup>55</sup>

J. L. Sanderson had some competition on this route. Wall and Witter advertised their fast stage line using four-horse sleighs and taking two days at lower rates than any other route.<sup>56</sup> But they seem not to have survived Sanderson's massive competition. In the first place they provided only a tri-weekly service, while Sanderson's was daily. In April Harley Sanderson went to Saint Louis and purchased one hundred head of stage horses for the Durango road and for a still possible extension to Rico. When the horses arrived, the Chama-Durango line would be served by three daily coaches. As early as March 1, 1881, Sanderson had direct service to, or connections for, Chama and Amargo, New Mexico, and the Colorado points of Pagosa Springs, Fort Lewis, Durango, Animas City, Silverton, Parrott City, and Rico.<sup>57</sup>

J. L. SANDERSON & CO'S  
OVERLAND STAGE & EXPRESS CO.  
1880-81

— STAGE LINE  
- - - - - D. & R. G. RR.



In the spring of 1881 the Denver and Rio Grande was building from Alamosa to Del Norte. J. L. Sanderson and Company set up a route south from Poncha Springs through Bonanza City and the Kerber Creek mining camps to Saguache, but the extension of the Denver and Rio Grande towards Marshall Pass soon made Mears Junction the stage line terminus. The railroad also headed south from that point to Villa Grove in the San Luis Valley, from which the stage coaches then ran to Saguache, Kerber Creek, and Bonanza City. On the Marshall Pass route there was a railhead for a while at a place called Shirley and by mid-June at Silver Creek, which was forty-seven miles from Gunnison City. Sanderson's coaches made that run during daylight.<sup>58</sup>

The Denver and Rio Grande had to contend not only with the Santa Fe railroad but also the Denver, South Park, and Pacific. The Denver and Rio Grande reached Leadville first, but the South Park (the common name for the other road) then started towards Gunnison by going up Chalk Creek, a tributary of the Arkansas. The successive railheads were departure points for hundreds of miners and others hurrying towards rich silver strikes over the mountains, and the Sanderson coaches were there. By November of 1880 the South Park had reached Heywood Springs, and from there the stages ran to Gunnison via Williams Pass and Pitkin over the South Park and Alpine Toll Road. Early the next year Alpine City (on Chalk Creek) was the railhead, from which the Sanderson coaches departed for Forest City (Saint Elmo), Hancock, Pitkin, and Gunnison.<sup>59</sup>

The Marshall Pass Toll Road often was in poor winter condition, delaying stages and the mail into Gunnison and other points.<sup>60</sup> H. R. Hammond was already running a stage and mail line three times a week from Gunnison to Irwin (Ruby Camp) by way of the Ohio Creek road rather than through Crested Butte. In April of 1881 J. L. Sanderson's nephew was planning routes and stations through the mountains to Crested

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., January 29, 1881. It should be noted that the advertisement referred to the Overland Stage and Express Company, dropping the old name of Southern Overland.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., February 17, 1881. Daniel Witter had long been active in mail contracting in Colorado. In 1867, for example, he held ten Post Office Department contracts (U.S., Department of the Interior, *United States Official Register: Register of Officers and Agents, Civil, Military, and Naval in the Service of the United States, on the Thirteenth of September, 1867* [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1868], p. 841).

<sup>57</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, March 1, 1881.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., March 1, 1881; March 16, 1881; June 24, 1881; December 11, 1881.

<sup>59</sup> Wolle, *Stampede to Timberline*, pp. 152-53; *Elk Mountain Pilot*, November 11, 1880; *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, March 1, 1881. Williams Pass is mentioned in Paul D. Harrison, "Toll Roads in Colorado," *The 1962 Brand Book of the Denver Posses of the Westerners*, ed. John J. Lipsey (Denver, Colo.: Denver Westerners, 1963), p. 329.

<sup>60</sup> *Elk Mountain Pilot*, March 31, 1881.

Butte, Irwin (Ruby Camp), and Gothic from Gunnison. That part of the line opened on July 1, 1881, with a daily mail service, and one year later in July 1882 a branch ran from Parlin's Station on the railroad north to Pitkin and Hancock.<sup>61</sup>

The completion of the Denver and Rio Grande into Gunnison was achieved on August 8, 1881.<sup>62</sup> A week later J. L. Sanderson was at Irwin on an inspection trip, and the local newspaper noted that "he travels in a special Concord coach over his lines just the same as a railroad president has his special car."<sup>63</sup> Soon J. L. Sanderson and Company advertised service from Gunnison to Lake City and Ouray as well as to Crested Butte and Gothic.<sup>64</sup> At this time J. L. Sanderson was mail contractor on seventy-eight postal routes, far more than the lines served by his stages.<sup>65</sup>

The Denver and Rio Grande between Alamosa and Del Norte was completed in 1881, and on July 27 of that year the San Juan Division of the railroad was finished into Durango. By the end of the year track had been laid eighteen miles north from Durango to Carson's Ranch (later Rockwood) and a total of fifty-two miles towards Silverton was under contract.<sup>66</sup> That effectively ended Sanderson's service along the Colorado-New



Jared L. Sanderson,  
sole owner of the  
J. L. Sanderson  
and Company stage line  
following the  
retirement of  
Bradley Barlow in 1878.

Mexico line and the possibility of reaching Silverton from the south, even on a temporary basis. From Rockwood (Carson's Ranch) west to Rico a stage line was operated by Meserole and Blake, who apparently had connections north to the gold and silver camps.<sup>67</sup> Also late in 1881 the Denver and Rio Grande built into Crested Butte and planned to extend into Irwin (Ruby Camp) and Gothic. In the planning stage was trackage up the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River to Lake City as well as construction from Gunnison City westward to the Utah line and beyond.<sup>68</sup>

Railroad expansion in 1881 and 1882 forced the J. L. Sanderson and Company's coaches higher into the Silver San Juan, as the region was called, and the Uncompahgre Plateau, where engineering problems might be expected to postpone the appearance of steel rails. Preceding the Denver and Rio Grande, J. L. Sanderson provided service from Gunnison to Cimarron, then to the Ute Agency and the military cantonment on the Uncompahgre River (later Fort Crawford) south of the new town of Montrose, and then soon to Montrose, where the company's stage barn was one of the early frame buildings. Stage fare from Gunnison to Montrose was \$16.50, with fifty pounds of baggage allowed per passenger.<sup>69</sup> First at the cantonment and then at Montrose, a connection was made with H. R. Hammond's stage line for Delta and Grand River Junction (Grand Junction).<sup>70</sup>

However constricted in area, J. L. Sanderson and Company continued to expand their service. The veteran stagers, as the *Ouray Solid Muldoon* put it, purchased the San Miguel route from Meserole and Blake, effective July 1, 1882. Harley Sander-

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, January 6, 1881; April 21, 1881; June 16, 1881; *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, July 15, 1881; July 28, 1882.

<sup>62</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, August 11, 1881; Percy Stanley Fritz, *Colorado: The Centennial State* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1941), p. 292.

<sup>63</sup> *Elk Mountain Pilot*, August 18, 1881.

<sup>64</sup> *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, September 2, 1881.

<sup>65</sup> There were rumors in the Eastern papers, the *Boston Globe* for example, that Barlow and Sanderson were involved in the notorious "star-route" frauds, a scandal involving collusive contracts between postal contractors and politicians. The contracted routes were designated by stars on the postal list. The *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain* came to Sanderson's defense and also pointed out that Barlow could not have been implicated because he left the partnership in 1878 (*Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, October 13, 1881). The investigation of these allegations was beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>66</sup> Bean, *Land of the Blue Sky People*, p. 67; *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, July 27, 1881; December 11, 1881.

<sup>67</sup> Jocknick, *Early Days on the Western Slope*, pp. 245, 255; *Pueblo Chieftain*, December 9, 1883.

<sup>68</sup> *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, December 11, 1881; Brayer, "History of Colorado Railroads," p. 663.

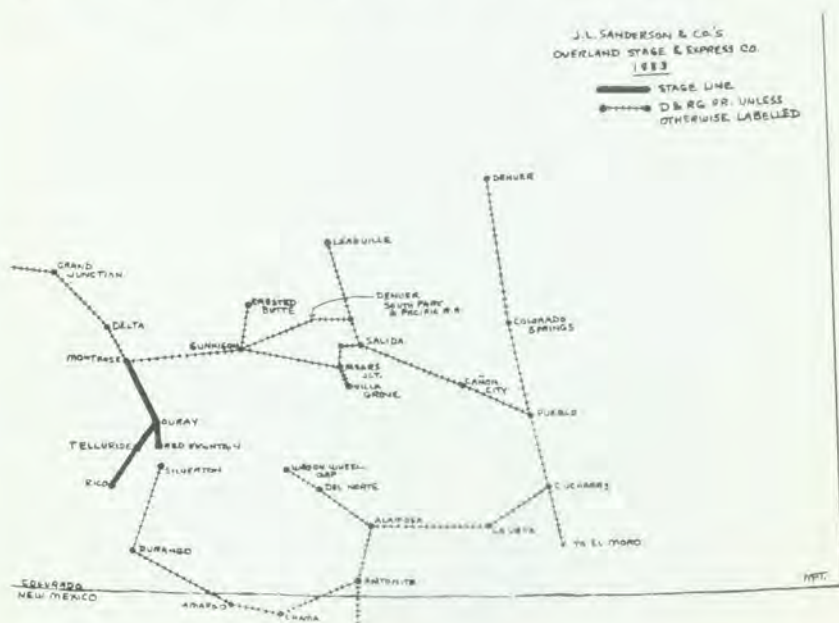
<sup>69</sup> Hall, *History of Colorado*, 4:232-33; *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, March 3, 1882; Lois Borland, "Ho for the Reservation: Settlement of the Western Slope," *The Colorado Magazine* 29 (January 1952):70; *Pueblo Chieftain*, December 9, 1883.

<sup>70</sup> *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, March 31, 1882; Borland, "Ho for the Reservation," p. 68.

son, J. L.'s brother, and George Meserole<sup>71</sup> arranged the transfer in Ouray for the line to Aurora, Placerville, San Miguel, Telluride (Columbia), Pandora, and a connection for Ophir.<sup>72</sup> On July 3 the Denver and Rio Grande was completed into Silverton from Durango through the canyon of the Animas River, and soon thereafter D. F. Watson's Stage Line was operating between Silverton and Telluride.<sup>73</sup>

J. L. Sanderson and Company also revamped its Gunnison-Ouray schedule for improved connections, setting up a twenty-four hour run from 7 A.M. to 7 A.M. The *Ouray Solid Muldoon* observed that "this is indeed an improvement over the old style of roosting on the Cimarron overnight. No more bed bugs for Ouray passengers after July 1."<sup>74</sup>

By early 1883 the spectacular Red Mountain silver strike was beginning to boom, and miners with all their paraphernalia were coming over from Silverton and Ouray.<sup>75</sup> To help accommodate the rush J. L. Sanderson and Company planned to use Concord coaches all the way from Montrose to Telluride, which would be only ten hours from the railroad, and as a special part of the speedup the *Ouray Solid Muldoon* announced that "J. L. Sanderson & Co. will put on their six-horse, twenty-two passenger side and end 'dicky' coaches Tuesday [April 17] and the



ride from Montrose to Ouray will be made in four hours."<sup>76</sup> In November the *Pueblo Chieftain* correspondent "Bona" Hensel made the daylight trip from Ouray to Montrose perched on the "dicky-seat" beside the driver. The coach passed through fine agricultural land, stopping at Portland and pulling up in front of the Mears House in Montrose, where Nat Young, the Sanderson agent, also worked as night clerk.<sup>77</sup>

As expected, Otto Mears undertook cutting a precipitous road from Ouray to Red Mountain (later the Million Dollar Highway), and Sanderson's coaches were ready to roll the minute it was completed. H. C. Griffin and Mac Frost inspected the Red Mountain road on October 24, 1883. Business was good and more expansion was feasible, so that in the summer of 1883 J. L. Sanderson and Company took on the line from Telluride south to Rico, which was advertised as a daylight drive and "the cheapest and most popular route to Telluride, Ames, Ophir, Placerville, Trout Lakes and Rico."<sup>78</sup> "Bona" Hensel made the trip, remarking that the stage driver from Telluride to Ames was called "Windy Bill." Hensel persisted in using the old designation of Barlow and Sanderson in his descriptive articles. In Rico the terminus for Barlow and Sanderson coaches was in the Gilbert and McGraw Building, which also was headquarters for Meserole's stage line to Rockwood on the railroad.<sup>79</sup>

With its northern terminus at Montrose and its southern at Rico, the Sanderson system provided direct service to, or connections for, most of the mining camps of the region. A feature of the scheduled runs from Montrose was that Ouray and Telluride received their eastern mails about eighteen hours earlier than had been the case, and mail reached Silverton from the north several hours sooner than by the Denver and Rio Grande from Durango.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>71</sup> George Meserole was widely engaged in the mail contracting business. The *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, May 22, 1881, noted that he had forwarded a buckboard, a coach, and three teams from Pueblo to Ouray for use on his San Juan routes. See also *Pueblo Chieftain*, December 9, 1883.

<sup>72</sup> *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, June 30, 1882. The paper also said that Meserole and Blake would still headquarter at Rico for their Utah lines (probably meaning mail contracts) and would run coaches from Rico to Rockwood. J. L. Sanderson's son, Fred, was agent at Ouray, and a man named Dresser was in charge at Telluride (*ibid.*, September 22, 1882; October 6, 1882). The company's principal office was moved from Pueblo to Denver in July (*ibid.*, July 14, 1882).

<sup>73</sup> Wolle, *Stampede to Timberline*, p. 425; *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, October 6, 1882; June 30, 1882.

<sup>74</sup> *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, June 30, 1882.

<sup>75</sup> Wolle, *Stampede to Timberline*, pp. 437-39.

<sup>76</sup> *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, February 2, 1883; March 30, 1883; April 13, 1883.

<sup>77</sup> *Pueblo Chieftain*, November 16, 1883.

<sup>78</sup> *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, June 15, 1883; October 26, 1883.

<sup>79</sup> *Pueblo Chieftain*, December 2, 1883.

<sup>80</sup> *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, July 6, 1883. The Ouray paper informed its readers that at Montrose coaches were available for Ouray, Telluride, Rico, Ophir, Ames, San Miguel, Placerville, Trout Lakes, Portland, Lawrence, Ironton, Red Mountain, and Aurora, with connections at Dallas for all points on the Dolores and San Miguel rivers.

The top management of the stage line remained the same at least until the middle of January 1884, when the *Ouray Solid Muldoon* reported that Harley Sanderson, H. C. Griffin, and Mac Frost were in Ouray on an inspection trip and they had ordered a six-hour (six miles per hour) schedule between Montrose and Ouray.<sup>81</sup> But sometime in the late winter or spring J. L. Sanderson and Company sold its Colorado system to the Colorado and Wyoming Stage, Mail, and Express Company.<sup>82</sup> A new general manager by the name of J. Fenton Seymour arrived in late May, and a few days later Fred Sanderson resigned as agent at Ouray.<sup>83</sup> It was reported that Mac Frost probably would stay with the successor company for some time.<sup>84</sup> At the time the Sanderson Company was running special baggage wagons to take care of the large number of travelers—during the last week in May, for example, 2,800 pounds of trunks, valises, and other luggage had been received at the company's office in Ouray. It was expected that the Colorado and Wyoming Stage, Mail, and Express Company would double the number of livestock and the number of coaches because the vehicles were filled every day.<sup>85</sup> The Dixon House and the Hotel Sanderson were stage stations for the J. L. Sanderson coaches and were similarly used by the successors.<sup>86</sup>

Why J. L. Sanderson and Company disposed of its Colorado lines is impossible to say with certainty. It could have been a hard-to-refuse offer coupled with a longer range anticipation of more railroad expansion, which would strip the system of its more lucrative parts. Or there may have been personal matters that forced the decision. Unfortunately, the small amount of biographical data about J. L. Sanderson is so contradictory and questionable that it is of little help, and no company records are available. Death did not remove the top management, however. J. L. Sanderson died in 1915 at the age of ninety-four, and his brother Harley was living then at the age of eighty-eight.<sup>87</sup>

With the disappearance of the popular firm of Barlow and Sanderson, or J. L. Sanderson and Company, the final tie with the great era of stage coaching in the trans-Mississippi West was dissolved. For Colorado the few remaining stage lines were simply isolated and shrinking vestiges.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, January 18, 1884.

<sup>82</sup> *Pueblo Chieftain*, June 19, 1884.

<sup>83</sup> He was probably succeeded by W. G. Adams, an employee of some years' standing. *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, May 23, 1884; June 6, 1884; *Pueblo Colorado Chieftain*, October 24, 1878.

<sup>84</sup> *Pueblo Chieftain*, May 20, 1884.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, June 19, 1884; *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, May 30, 1884.

<sup>86</sup> *Ouray Solid Muldoon*, May 2, 1884; June 20, 1884; August 1, 1884.

<sup>87</sup> *Kansas City (Mo.) Times*, May 11, 1915.