

# Memorializing Mobley

## New monument planned to honor early GJ pioneer

It makes sense that Richard D. Mobley had the first permanent home in Grand Junction, a cabin made of cottonwood logs. When Mobley arrived in the Grand Valley with town founder George Crawford and others in September of 1881, he earned the title “destroying angel among the cottonwoods” for his enthusiastic use of an axe to cut logs.

Mobley would soon acquire other titles in the tiny settlement: He became secretary of the Grand Junction Town Company, with Crawford as president. He was the town’s first postmaster, and Mesa County’s first county judge. His wife, Emma, was reportedly the first female settler.

When he died in 1893, Mobley was buried in the Orchard Mesa Cemetery in Grand Junction. A Civil War veteran, his weathered gravestone says only: “Capt. R.D. Mobley, Co. D, 17th Kans. Inf.”

This year, a group that honors Civil War veterans — Legion of the West Camp 7, Dept. of Colorado/Wyoming, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War — is raising money to purchase a new monument for Mobley. In addition to paying tribute to his military service, it will recognize some of Mobley’s achievements in Grand Junction and Kansas.

As of Aug. 8, the group had raised \$5,015 toward the new monument, and needed another \$720 to meet its goal, said Robert H. Mayer III, Camp Commander

for the group. They hope to have the new monument dedicated in October, near the 130th anniversary of Mobley’s death.

Richard Daniel Mobley was born in Kentucky in 1833. His father served in the War of 1812 and his grandfather was in the American Revolution.

When he was 17, Mobley moved to Texas. After a brief return to Kentucky, he moved to Kansas, where he eventually joined the new Republican Party.

In 1864, he enlisted in the Union Army and became a captain with the 17th Kansas Infantry, helping defend Kansas from Confederate regulars and William Quantrill’s raiders.

While in Kansas, Mobley served as a district court clerk, a justice of the peace and was elected to three terms in the state Legislature. He married Emma Dawson in 1868, and he became friends with Crawford.

In 1880, the Mobleys and Crawford moved to Gunnison. In September 1881, as the Ute Reservation was opened to settlement, they traveled to the confluence of the Gunnison and Grand rivers. A few settlers were already there, but the Crawford Party was the first to stake out a town site.

On Sept. 27, 1881, according to an 1883 article in the Grand Junction News, Crawford, Mobley and others began “relentlessly slaying” cottonwood trees for the foundations for the town site. It was then Mobley won his title for his proficient use of the axe.

Two days later, the group

## FIRST DRAFT



BOB SILBERNAGEL

broke camp and most headed back to Gunnison to restock supplies and conduct necessary business. Several men were left at the site to construct a log office building.

On Oct. 10 in Gunnison, a certificate of incorporation for the Grand Junction Town Company was drawn up and signed by Crawford, Mobley and M. Rush Warner. Attorney James Bucklin, another Grand Junction pioneer, was listed as one of the board members.

Mobley and Crawford returned to Grand Junction on Oct. 31 and occupied the office cabin constructed by William McGinley and J. Clayton Nichols. On Nov. 4, Mobley and two other men began work on Mobley’s cabin, which became the first non-tent residence in town.

They applied for a post office and the Post Office Department agreed, but it named the new site “Ute.” With help from Congress, they got the name changed to Grand Junction, and on May 9, 1882, Mobley became the first postmaster.

Earlier, Mobley had traveled to Gunnison once more. He returned to Grand Junction on Dec. 8, 1881, bringing Emma with him. By then, his log house was ready, and men were at work on a new log building that would be Mobley’s store and Post Office.

In June 1882, residents of the community held an election to determine whether to formally incorporate the town of Grand Junction. Sixty-three votes were cast, all of them for incorporation.

When the first municipal election was held in November 1882, Mobley swore in the election judges. Prior to that, he had been named a justice of the peace by the town company. In October 1882, he dismissed charges against an Indian man for robbing a white man. The Indian proved the white man was lying, according to a newspaper account.

Mobley was also chosen as chairman of a group that sought to establish Mesa County as a separate entity from Gunnison County. On Feb. 11, 1883, when news came from Denver that the bill to create Mesa County had been approved, Mobley issued a call for all citizens of Grand Junction to gather on Main Street for “a grand jollification meeting.”

By October 1883, it was reported that “Judge Mobley is putting up a handsome residence on his ranch next to the town site.” And in November, he was elected as the first Mesa County judge.

Things seemed to be going well for R.D. and Emma Mobley. He served as treasurer of the Pacific Slope Ditch Co., had his own real estate and insurance company and formed an auction business



COURTESY OF LEGION OF THE WEST, CAMP 7, SONS OF UNION VETERANS OF THE CIVIL WAR.

The existing grave monument for R.D. Mobley in the Orchard Mesa Cemetery in Grand Junction.

with J.P. Harlow. While Emma was popular in Grand Junction social circles, R.D. gave lectures on agricultural practices, helped found the Grand Junction Pioneer Society and the local chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Union Civil War veterans.

But there were setbacks. Mobley lost his bid to become first mayor of Grand Junction. In 1886, he was unsuccessful in seeking re-election as county judge.

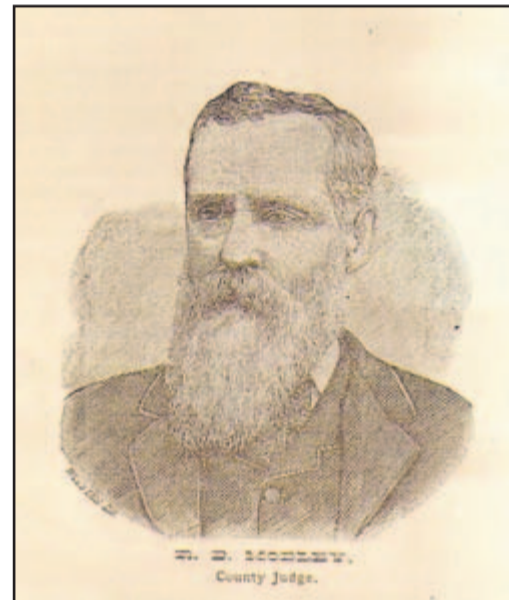
Six months later, Emma Mobley was legally determined to be insane, and was incarcerated at the insane asylum in Pueblo. R.D. traveled frequently to Pueblo until she was discharged.

But Emma’s health didn’t improve. She died at her sister’s home in Topeka, Kansas, in October 1891. Her obituary listed the cause of death as “a complication of diseases.”

Mobley carried on. He was named register of the U.S. Land Office at Montrose in 1892, where he oversaw applications for homesteads. In that capacity, he also argued for smaller boundaries for the planned Battlement Mesa Forest Preserve.

In late 1892, he remarried, to an Englishwoman named Sarah Kesterton. But their life together was brief.

On Oct. 10, 1893, Richard Daniel Mobley was struck by a train car in Grand Junction while he was crossing the tracks early in the morning. The car was being



COURTESY OF GARRY BREWER

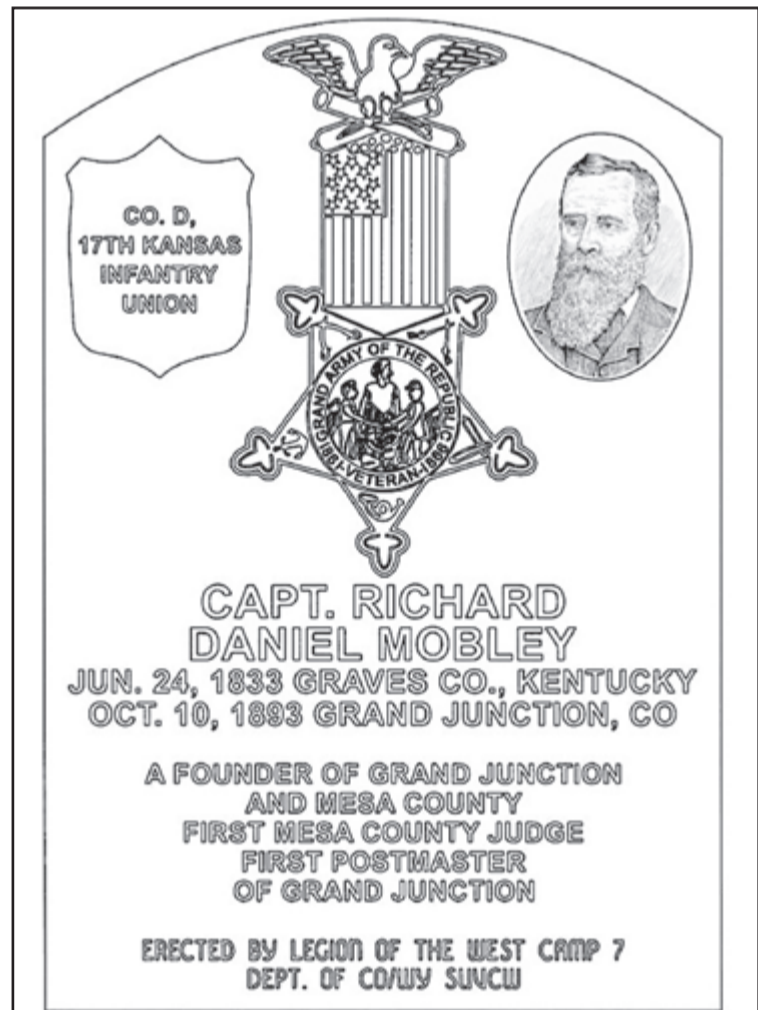
A drawing of R.D. Mobley made when he served as Mesa County’s first county judge.

backed up to connect to an east-bound train. Despite warnings yelled by several people, Mobley was hit by the car and died an hour later.

Those interested in contributing to the Mobley Monument fund can do so through GoFundMe site at [www.gofundme.com/f/krkba-captain-richard-d-mobley-monument-fund](http://www.gofundme.com/f/krkba-captain-richard-d-mobley-monument-fund) or by sending checks to Legion of the West Camp 7, SUVCW, P.O. Box 3035, Grand Junction, Colo., 81502.

Sources: Legion of the West, Camp 7, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War; “Captain Richard Daniel Mobley, First Elected Judge of Mesa County,” by Garry Brewer; “Richard Mobley biography at Kansas Trails, <http://genealogytrails.com/kan/ottawa/bios/mbio.html>; Historic editions of the Grand Junction News at [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com).

Bob Silbernagel’s email is [bob-silbernagel@gmail.com](mailto:bob-silbernagel@gmail.com).



COURTESY OF LEGION OF THE WEST, CAMP 7, SONS OF UNION VETERANS OF THE CIVIL WAR.

The front of the planned new monument that is to be placed at R.D. Mobley’s gravesite later this year. The back of the stone will tell more about his life in Grand Junction and in Kansas.

## The art of encouragement should never be considered cliché

Even the crusty blob of B-mix clay I discovered in my hair when I woke up this morning could not dim the glow of the major good-jobbing I received last night: I really seem to have an eye for glaze.

Yes! An eye for glaze — I really seem to have one!

Cyndi, my extremely kind pottery teacher, gave me one of the best good-jobs I’ve ever received as I clutched yet another very small yet somehow asymmetrical... soy sauce dish? Or maybe a receptacle for about a dollar in change as long as there aren’t too many pennies or nickels?

One of my classmates, a noted candidate for sainthood, exclaimed, “That’s a great earring holder!”

If she has an established 501(c)(3) foundation, I’m bequeathing all my money and earrings to it.

But I’m not here to talk about the challenges of throwing pottery on the wheel, which are many, and how deceived I’ve been by every single feel-good episode of “The Great Pottery Throw Down.”

No, I’m here to talk about the act of good-jobbing and Keith Brymer Jones’ tears.

If you haven’t yet had the pleasure, “The Great Pottery Throw Down” is

basically “The Great British Bake Off,” but with clay. You have your kind and talented Brits being supportive of one another, cheered on by wonderful and non-judgmental judges. Keith Brymer Jones is one of them.

A talented and successful potter in his own right, he is moved to tears pretty much every episode by either the beauty of a piece one of the participants created, or by the fact that they tried their best.

He’ll say something like, “You just really went for it! You put your heart and soul into it!” as he tearfully beholds an object that I would consider a threat if someone gave it to me.

To my mind, though, the point is not the aesthetics, but the good-job.

Even though we’re necessarily dialing back the constant saying of “Good job!” that marked the ‘90s and early aughts — seeing how easily we become lazy praise junkies — I still appreciate the overall impulse to recognize aspects of effort.

I have especially appreciated it in my first pottery class, which sadly ended this week.

As I mentioned, I had been greatly



RACHEL SAUER

deceived by six seasons of “The Great Pottery Throw Down.” People who are very good at things make them look easy, and the potters on the show just seem to slap down some clay, splash a little water and voila! A pot! “Huh,” I observed. “Maybe I could do that?”

So, I signed up for a community education class and spent the next eight Thurs-

day evenings swathed in an apron and warily eyeing a spinning wheel whose speed I was controlling, OR WAS I?? The mind goes to weird places when being bested by a lump of clay that refuses to be centered.

“Would you just...” I’d huff, elbows pinned to my sides, hands clawed around a wet defiance of clay. “Why won’t you... Could you please... It’s like you don’t even WANT to reach your aesthetic apex! And how are you managing this physics-defying density?!”

The clay did not deign to reply. Fortunately, Cyndi is a pro and knew when to swoop in with some necessary good-jobbing: “I think you’re getting the hang of feeling whether the clay is wet enough” or “Small bowls like that are great for

portion control!”

And you know what? I needed that. I don’t think I’m a praise junkie, but sometimes in moments of frustration I appreciate when someone helps me step back from the whole — which isn’t working — and see the various parts that comprise it. A strategic good-job allows me to recognize that some of the parts actually are working! And I’m trying my best! Someone get me Keith Brymer Jones on the horn!

This is why I, too, am a believer in deploying the strategic good-job. One time in India, one of my students submitted a story whose first draft wasn’t great, but I knew how hard he’d worked on it. “This punctuation is SOLID.” I good-jobbed him, declining to add that it also was abundant, and he beamed. With mutual good feeling, we edited the story into publishable shape.

So, I’m not saying a good-job isn’t occasionally absurd if I think about it too hard, but dang it, I DO recognize when clay is too wet or not wet enough. And can you ever have too many receptacles for soy sauce?

Rachel Sauer is at [rs81501@gmail.com](mailto:rs81501@gmail.com) and is wait-listed for the next pottery class; fingers crossed but also curved to get that good bowl shape.