

FIRST DRAFT

Electric streetcars roamed Fruit Belt Route more than a century ago

There was a real estate boom in Fruita in 1910. People from Grand Junction began buying or building homes in the small farming community in anticipation of the opening of the electric train Fruit Belt Route between Grand Junction and Fruita. The train would make it possible for them to live in Fruita and commute to Grand Junction.



BOB SILBERNAGEL

“There was the damndest land boom in Fruita you ever saw,” recalled savings and loan executive Howard McMullin decades later. “They were building houses like mad down there.”

A price war between local lumber yards helped fuel the boom, he added. And the lumber could be shipped on the Fruit Belt Route, which was also known as the Interurban.

McMullin was a boy when the route opened, but worked with some of the mortgage holders after he joined the firm of Home Loan and Investment in the 1920s.

The introduction of electric streetcars in Grand Junction occurred in 1909, six years after the city’s horse-drawn streetcar ceased operation.

It took another year to complete the 12-mile connection to Fruita. But with that link, suddenly the sky seemed the limit for connecting the communities of Mesa County.

An electric streetcar running to Palisade was a foregone conclusion, everyone believed. Rights of way was the only obstacle.

Beyond Palisade, plans were to extend the electric line up Plateau Creek to Mesa and Collbran.

A hydroelectric plant for electric power was contemplated for De Beque Canyon, and there was talk of running the electric train line east to De Beque and beyond.

To the west, the electric line would eventually extend to Mack and connect with the Uintah Railway.

None of these dreams materialized. But for nearly 20 years, the Interurban or Fruit Belt Route provided steady service between Grand Junction and Fruita.

Students at Appleton School could ride the line to and from classes for just a nickel. Sports teams and their fans rode the electric cars to attend contests in the two towns.

Special rates were enacted during the Mesa County Fair, then held in Lincoln Park. Sightseeing trips to orchard lands then prevalent west of Grand Junction were frequent.

Additionally, freight moved regularly between the two communities on the electric line: fruit at harvest time, agricultural and building supplies.

But finances for the Interurban were always on shaky ground. Paved roads and improved motor vehicles eventually made the electric train superfluous.

Passenger service on the Interurban halted in October, 1928. The Fruit Belt Route continued to haul fruit and other freight, but that ended on Jan. 1, 1935.

The automobiles, trucks and buses that would eventually supplant the electric line were still novelties when



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A car on the Fruit Belt Line travels past men picking apples between Fruita and Grand Junction in this 1910 photo.



The front page of The Daily Sentinel touted the opening of the new electric rail connection between Grand Junction and Fruita on July 14, 1910. Photos showed some of the leaders of the effort. Former Grand Junction Mayor Orson Adams, the secretary-treasurer of the railway company, is at top right.



Advertisement for Interurban line, also known as Fruitbelt Route, told Daily Sentinel readers when trains would leave Grand Junction for the grand opening, and how much fares would be from various locations.

a few Colorado men began envisioning electric streetcars for Mesa County in the early 1900s.

Leading the charge was businessman and former Grand Junction Mayor Orson Adams.

In 1908, he joined with four Colorado Springs men and a Glenwood Springs banker to form the Fruit Belt Power and Irrigation Co.

They hired attorney Charles E. Noble, a previous treasurer of the Colorado Midland Railway.

Selling electricity and supplying power to irrigators was the original intent.

The group’s dam near De Beque would produce enough power to light all homes, businesses and farms around Grand Junction and provide irrigation water to cultivate new lands.

However, the company soon changed its focus to electric streetcars. By June 1908, it had announced that it would request a streetcar franchise from the Grand Junction City Council.

The franchise was approved on July 17, 1908, with a requirement that the company have three miles of streetcar line in operation within a year. The franchise allowed the company to operate the line for 25 years.

East-west tracks for the

streetcar line would run on South Avenue, Main Street and Gunnison Avenue, while north-south tracks were to be laid on Second Street, Fourth Street, a section of 10th Street and 12th Street.

A car barn was to be built at the intersection of South Avenue and Fifth Street.

The company reorganized, and became the Grand Junction Electric Railway Co.

By December, 1908, steel rails were ordered, and in January, 1909, a temporary agreement to provide electric power was signed with the Grand Junction Gas, Electric and Manufacturing Co.

A large Westinghouse “railroad type generator” was installed at the electric plant. The last rails were laid on April 12, 1909, while work on the overhead powerlines took another month.

The official opening was on Saturday, May 22, 1909, when 5-year-old Edith Adams, the daughter of Orson Adams, pulled a lever that connected the generator to overhead electric lines.

Two electric cars, each pulling a trailer car, departed from the car barn at 2 p.m., carrying company executives, city leaders, members of the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce, newspaper

reporters and others. The rest of the day, free rides were offered to anyone who wanted a lift.

“Everybody cheered the cars, and handkerchiefs and hats were waved everywhere,” The Daily Sentinel reported.

Even as the opening was being held, efforts were underway to extend the line to other parts of the county.

The company was reorganized again as the Grand Junction and Grand River Valley Railway Co., and it purchased the local electric plant.

Talk continued of pushing east, but rights of way remained an issue.

Soon, folks in Fruita began to realize that if they could overcome those sorts of issues, they could have the first extension outside Grand Junction.

People to the west began pledging to provide rights of way.

By the end of November, company General Manager and Vice President Eugene Sunderlin announced that the firm was ready to build the line to Fruita.

Rather than a straight run, it would zig-zag through farm country between the two municipalities and would be in operation by June of 1910, he said.

Construction crews didn’t meet that deadline, but they worked rapidly, nonetheless.

Beginning in early March of 1910, they pushed the streetcar line north on 12th Street beyond today’s North Avenue, then northwest into the farmlands.

Another crew built a yellow brick building at Mesa and Pabor streets in Fruita, the western terminus of the line. Wooden trestles were built over canals and washes. Overhead lines were installed along the route, and an electric locomotive to pull freight cars arrived in early June.

Finally, on July 14, 1910, the Fruit Belt Route opened to traffic. An estimated 7,000 people gathered in Fruita to celebrate.

There were speeches, bands, baseball games, a barbecue and a parade.

“On this day, July 14, 1910, is opened for operation one of the most modern and fully equipped interurban railways in the West,” The Daily Sentinel announced.

In an editorial, the newspaper said, “We believe this is the entering wedge only of what may become a great system of interurban electric road penetrating to all portions of western Colorado.”

That didn’t occur, but for 18 years, the Fruit Belt Route provided a critical connection between Grand Junction and Fruita.

Sources: “The Fruit Belt Route: The Railways of Grand Junction, Colorado, 1890-1935,” by William L. McGuire and Charles Teed; “Historic Streetcar Systems of Colorado,” by Nick VanderKwaak, Jennifer Wahlers, Dianna Litvak and Ethan Raath, for the Colorado Department of Transportation; historic editions of The Daily Sentinel through www.newspapers.com.

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Utah communities elect women as mayors for 1st time

By SONJA HUTTON
KUER-FM

SALT LAKE CITY — At least four cities and towns in Utah appear to have elected their first female mayors: West Valley City, Park City, Parowan and North Logan.

Only 17% of Utah mayors are women, according to a January 2021 report from the Utah Women and Leadership Project at Utah State University. That’s still a 9% increase from 2017.

“It just represents an embracing of the future,” said Lyndsay Peterson, North Logan’s apparent mayor-elect. “I just have a lot of hope that the perspectives that I have are going to be reflective of a bigger swath of that broader community... and I’m excited for the decisions that are going to come out as a result of that.”

Nann Worel appears to have unseated Park City Mayor Andy Beerman. She said she sometimes came across some pretty explicit sexism on the campaign trail.

“People would tell me

that they would never vote for a woman, and that was kind of hard to hear,” she said. “It was shocking to hear the first time. ... My reaction was, ‘I’m really sorry to hear that. I’d love to tell you about my qualifications.’”

Worel said she hopes her win will encourage other women to run for elected office.

“It’s the role model for other young women that are considering serving their community either as a council member or as a mayor,” she said. “It shows that anything is possible. You can work really hard and accomplish things.”

This year’s election results are part of a larger trend of more women running for office, according to Susan Madsen, the director of the Utah Women & Leadership Project.

“Maybe we’re at that shift where we’re starting to think of a politician and maybe we’re starting to think man or woman,” she said.

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ATTENTION ADVERTISERS

The Daily Sentinel’s advertising deadlines will be moving up to accommodate the **Thanksgiving Day Holiday!** This early deadline schedule is designed to help you plan your advertising around the holiday.

The Daily Sentinel will be closed Thursday, November 25 to commemorate the holiday.

Display Advertising

Publication Date	Deadline
11/28 Real Estate Weekly	11/22 Monday, 12 Noon
11/25, Thursday	11/22 Monday, 2 PM
11/26 Out & About	11/19 Friday, 4 PM
11/26 Friday	11/22 Monday, 4 PM
11/27 Saturday	11/23 Tuesday, 4 PM
11/28 Sunday	11/23 Tuesday, 4 PM
11/29 Monday	11/24 Wednesday, 12 Noon
11/30 Tuesday	11/24 Wednesday, 12 Noon

Classified Liner Ads (Private Party & Commercial)

11/25 Thursday	11/24 Wednesday, Noon
11/26 Friday	11/24 Wednesday, 2 PM
11/28 Real Estate Weekly	11/26 Friday, 12 Noon
11/27 Saturday	11/26 Friday, 10 AM
11/28 Sunday	11/26 Friday, Noon
11/29 Monday	11/26 Friday, Noon

Legals

11/25 Thursday	11/19 Friday, 3 PM
11/26 Friday	11/19 Friday, 3 PM
11/27 Saturday	11/22 Monday, 3 PM
11/28 Sunday	11/22 Monday, 3 PM

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