

Grand Junction and Mesa County truly began to blossom in 1883

BIZ BUZZ

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Twenty-five of the leading citizens of Grand Junction loaded into four large wagons on May 16, 1883 and rode to the east end of the valley where the town of Palisade would eventually be built.

They went to celebrate the opening of the Matt Arch ditch, which would later become known as the Grand Valley Canal and would be critical to the agricultural development of Mesa County.

"It was Matt Arch's day of triumph, and he stood it well," the Grand Junction News reported. About 2 p.m., wooden barricades were raised to allow water from the Colorado River to flow into the canal "and the first flood of the second largest ditch in Colorado began its overland trip."

It was less than two years since the first settlers had arrived in the Grand Valley and a small group of men led by George A. Crawford had created the Grand Junction Town Company.

It had been a busy time. Throughout the autumn of 1881, after Ute Indians were forcibly removed from most of western Colorado, immigrants steadily rolled into the Grand Valley from mountain communities such as Gunnison, Lake City, Ouray and Silverton.

By January 1882, there were an estimated 300 men (and a few women) in tent camps along the Grand River, or living in one of five log cabins.

In February 1882, a post office called "Ute" was established in the Grand Valley. Crawford worked quickly to have it renamed Grand Junction to match the name of his town company.

Grand Junction became a municipality later that year, and the first city election was held in November, 1882, at the office of attorney James

Bucklin, a member of the Grand Junction Town Company. A poll book shows 247 men voted in the election.

Bucklin later described efforts to attract more people to the town, and the rather bleak economy in 1881 and 1882.

"The town company were giving away the best business lots on Main Street to anyone who would build a log cabin on them," he recalled. "The saloon business was the principal business of the town. Colorado Avenue, which was at that time the principal street ... was known to everybody as Hoodoo Street."

Bucklin also said, "There were no houses in town except log cabins, the windows and doors were made out of gunny sacks, the roofs out of dirt." Things began to change



PHOTO COURTESY OF GARRY BREWER

Grand Junction's first Post Office, originally called "Ute" but later renamed "Grand Junction," as it appeared in the early 1880s.

significantly in November 1882, when the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad arrived in town, linking Grand Junction to Colorado's front range by rail.

Also in November of 1882, the Grand Junction News began publishing, the first newspaper in the community.

However, 1883 was a year of even greater change.

In February 1883, a bill establishing Mesa County as a separate legal

entity was passed by the state Legislature. No longer would Grand Junction be an isolated section of Gunnison County.

Martin Florida was appointed Mesa County Sheriff, M.S. Allison was named Clerk and Recorder, and Robert Cobb became the first Mesa County Judge. Shortly thereafter, Gov. James Grant appointed T.B. Crawford (George Crawford's brother) as county commissioner, along with George Thurston and B.F. Carey. William Keith was named assessor.

On March 20, the growing community witnessed its first marriage, between Moses Graham and Rachel Gordon, both Grand Junction residents.

On April 2, 1883, a just-completed census showed a population of 1,100 people in Grand



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Looking northeast to the Bookcliffs from Grand Junction's Main Street in 1884.

Junction, nearly quadrupling the number from the previous year.

That summer, the total value of real estate and personal property in Mesa County was estimated at \$1.25 million, an exponential increase over the \$53,000 listed in 1882.

By May 1883, Mesa County had four post offices: at Grand Junction, Bridgeport, Mesa and Leon, which was near Leon Creek on Grand Mesa.

The Grand Junction Town Co., advertised in mountain newspapers that it had lots for sale for as little as \$25. Exaggerated claims of a balmy climate were a selling point: "No snow, scarcely any winter," the ads said.

Not everyone was enamored, however. A letter in the Buena Vista Democrat in March 1883 said, "There is at least ten inches of alkali dust in the streets" of Grand Junction, "fine as the finest flour, and the gales envelope the town in one continuous cloud."

A Delta newspaper warned that members of the Church of Latter Day Saints, the Mormons, were planning to move into Mesa County and would soon have political control of the county.

But published criticisms were few. More articles touted the county's abundant natural resources, such as coal in the Book Cliffs and soil ideal for making bricks. One could even find rocks that burned "like a pile of pine knots," said the Fairplay Flume in early March, perhaps the first reference to oil shale in Grand Junction.

But the greatest potential for the town and county lay in agriculture. That's why several irrigation projects were under construction even before the Matt Arch ditch - the Pioneer, the Pacific Slope and the Ranchmen's ditches.

But Matt Arch's was the largest and would irrigate the most land. "When water runs down the twenty-six miles of its entire length, there will be great rejoicing," the News proclaimed.

The men who planned the Grand Valley Ditch sold the entire project to Arch in January 1883. By late February, 150 men and 110 teams of horses were working on the project.

Arch was a native of Prussia who moved with his family to Michigan. In 1879 he moved to the Gunnison area, where he began farming and selling his goods to miners in nearby towns. He also began constructing irrigation ditches to serve his and other farms.

What led him to Grand Junction and the purchase of the canal project is unclear. But he did and nearly completed a project that some people thought could never succeed. However, it was money, not physical problems, that proved to be the greatest obstacle.

By August 1883, Arch was broke and couldn't pay his workers. He obtained a loan of \$75,000 from Colorado Loan and Trust, then sold the entire project to the bank's president, Theodore Henry.

Arch went on to build more irrigation projects in Delta, Montrose and Gunnison counties. He died near Gunnison in 1897.

Grand River Ditch changed ownership several times over the next decade, mostly to out-of-state owners, until the Grand Valley Irrigation Co. was formed in 1894 and locals were able to purchase all of the assets.

Mesa County continued to grow in 1883. By September, the News reported that "perhaps two score of farmers, along a narrow strip of country," had successfully grown vegetables, grain and grass that year. And with Arch's canal ready to assume full operation the following year, things would only get better.

"Under it next season there will be a hundred farms, where at this writing there are not ten," the paper said. Earlier, the News said the ditch would bring "prosperity that shall know no end."

Sources: "The Grand River Ditch," by Don Davidson, Journal of the Western Slope, Winter, 1986; "Recollection of James Bucklin," Colorado Historical Society, reprinted by the University of Northern Colorado, www.unco.edu/hewit/doing-history/colorado-cities; historic newspapers at www.newspapers.com and www.coloradohistoric-newspapers.org.

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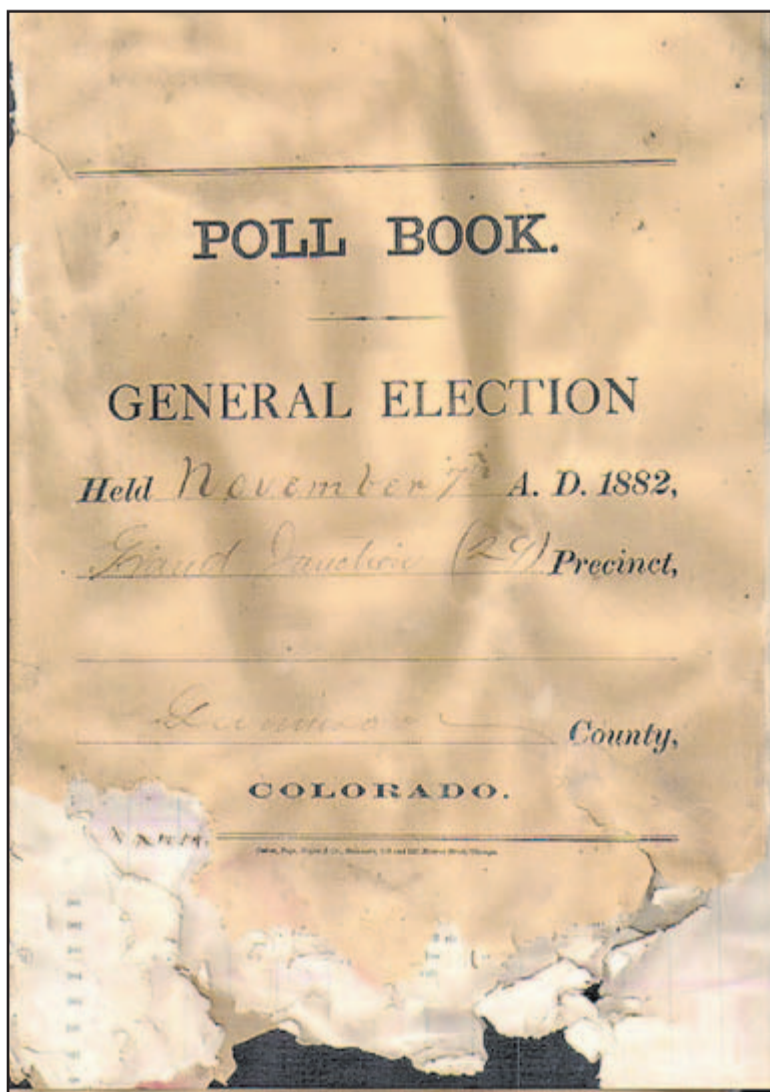


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The cover of the poll book that was used to record voters and the outcome of the first Grand Junction municipal election in November, 1882. Note that the town is listed as a precinct in Gunnison County. It was three months before Mesa County was established.

Eight local middle and high school students graduated from the **Grand Junction Area Chamber of Commerce's Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!)** on Tuesday at the **Maverick Innovation Center at Colorado Mesa University**.

The graduation was the culmination of 28 weeks of hard work, resulting in graduates owning and operating their own businesses.

This year's class of new CEOs and their businesses includes **Korbin Henson (KRH Clothing)**, **Kylee McLaughlin (Sarah's SheShack)**, **Caden Motz (Custom Strings)**, **Alivia Nicodemus (HomeTown Macrame)**, **Brayden Rooks (S'More and More)**, **Alaina Scripps (Alaina's Studio)**, **Brayden Urlacher (Moko Manta Ray)** and **Sienna Wright (Tyne Metal Works)**.

■ In honor of Mother's Day this month, the **St. Mary's Breast Care Center** is opening Saturday appointments to make it easier for women to receive potentially life-saving screenings.

The Breast Care Center is hosting **Mammo's and Mocktails** on Saturday, May 20. To make an appointment, call 970-298-6900.

Mammograms are key to early detection for breast cancer. A mammogram can detect a lump in one's breast months — even years — before they can feel it themselves.

■ **CoorsTek**, a Golden-based manufacturer with a hub in Grand Junction, has been selected as a **2023 U.S. Best Managed Company** through a program sponsored by **Deloitte Private** and the **Wall Street Journal** that recognizes outstanding U.S. private companies and the achievements of their management teams.

"We are honored to be recognized as a best managed company for the third year in a row," said CoorsTek CEO **Jonathan Coors**. "This award is a tribute to the dedication and resiliency of our CoorsTek team members across the globe over the past several years. It also speaks to the strong values that guide our daily activities and actions, and our focus on delivering essential products and services to the marketplace."

The Best Managed Companies program recognizes companies with revenues of at least \$250 million and determines its recipients through the evaluation of four criteria: strategy, execution, culture, and governance/financials.

■ Nearly 30 dogs, including several puppies, will be up for adoption Sunday, May 21, at the **Family Fun Day** event being held at **Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church** at 3133 F Road in Grand Junction.

For The Howl of It, a non-profit organization dedicated to rescuing dogs from euthanasia, will feature the adoptable furry friends between 3-5 p.m. The event will also include a bump 'n jump for children under five, lawn games for adults and kids, and ice cream for all.

With the assistance of a **Thrivent Community Grant**, Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church will also be donating \$250 to **For The Howl of It** at Family Fun Day to assist them in their mission of rescuing dogs and finding homes for them.

"Shepherd of the Valley really wanted to have a family oriented event plus support our community at the same time," said Shepherd of the Valley Deacon **Gail Britt**. "What better way to do that than with oodles of puppies, children, lawn games and ice cream?"