

FIRST DRAFT

Canal expands valley agriculture

A century ago, there was trouble among the crew building the Highline Canal and the Grand Valley irrigation project.



BOB SILBERNAGEL

Valley's history. However, nothing substantial occurred until 1902, when the Reclamation Act was passed by Congress. The act created the U.S. Reclamation Service, predecessor

of today's Bureau of Reclamation, and set aside \$31.5 million for the Grand Valley project, according to the Historical Society.

"Race Battle At High Line Fought Today," proclaimed a front-page headline in the Jan. 22, 1915, edition of The Daily Sentinel.

The article revealed the racial animosity was "between Americans on one side and Greeks and Italians on the other."

However, it did not slow progress of the project of what is arguably the most important public works project ever undertaken in the Grand Valley — the Highline Canal, the roller dam in De Beque Canyon and tunnels, siphons and other facilities associated with it.

The federally funded project was officially dedicated on June 29, 1915. Water began flowing through the canal then, greatly expanding the amount of irrigated land in the valley.

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the project, The Palisade Historical Society is preparing a book on the project. It will host a ceremony in June and show a Grand River Diversion Dam documentary film produced by Larry Seibert of InFilms & Design Inc.

As the Historical Society's book on the project says, "Without irrigation water provided by the Grand River Diversion Dam ... life as we know it in the Grand Valley would not be possible."

Previous projects

There was irrigation in the valley prior to the Highline. Ditches were constructed on Rapid Creek. The Price and Stubb ditches were built at the east end of the valley. And efforts were made to irrigate Orchard Mesa. But all of these projects were plagued by unreliability, and crops frequently had to be irrigated with water pulled directly from the river and hauled to fields and orchards.

The Grand Valley Canal, a private project, began operating in 1883 and was more successful. However, because its diversion dam was just outside of Palisade, it did not provide irrigation water to the valuable fruit lands east and north of Palisade. Nor did it offer water as far west as many farmers hoped.

Dreams for a project that would irrigate more of the northern and western desert began early in the Grand

In the midst of the planning for the government project, however, a Grand Junction group proposed private financing for the dam and canal. As a result, government backed away and the project was delayed for nearly a decade.

Finally, in 1909, when President William Howard Taft was in Montrose to dedicate the Gunnison Tunnel, Grand Valley residents lobbied him to get the project going once more.

There's no question people in the valley eagerly awaited the project. Maude Griffith, who lived in Palisade, wrote in a notebook, "Hope to have [the Highline] completed in 1911 and water on the ground in 1912 ... Lands are more productive and can support more population by irrigation than by any other way."

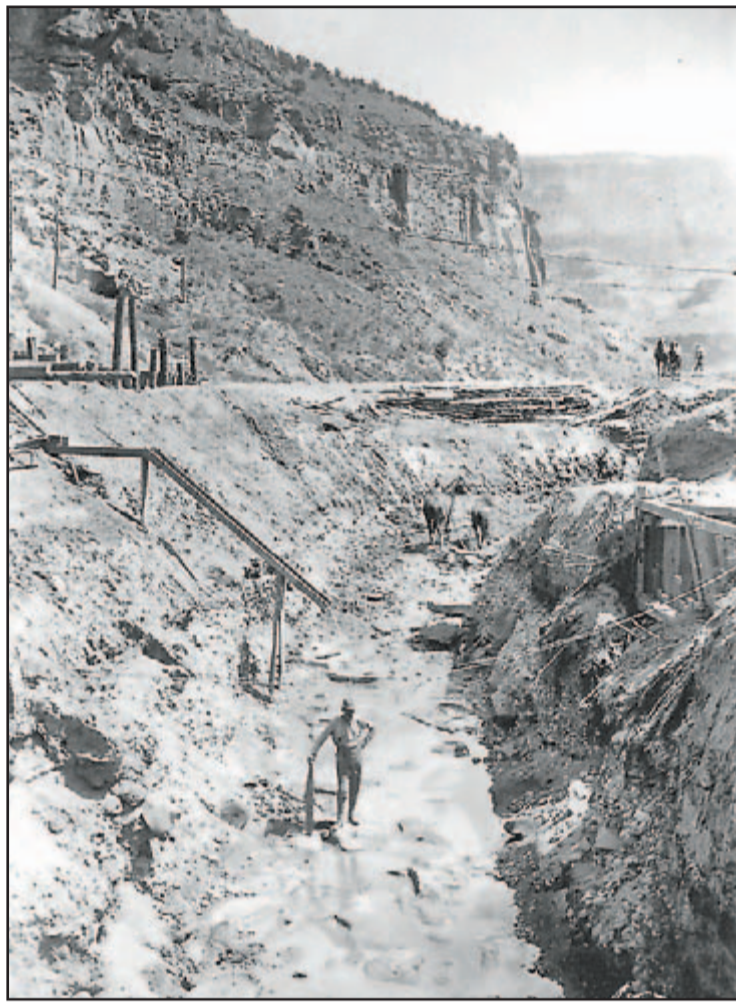
Griffith would later marry Horace Russell, and the couple would own and operate a large orchard west of Palisade, just below the Highline Canal.

Her notebook was discovered by Dan and Nola Erickson, the current owners of the old Russell house, when they were remodeling it in the 1990s. Construction on the Grand Valley Project was finally authorized on Sept. 23, 1912. The Grand Valley Water Users Association was created and would eventually assume management of the roller dam and the canal. Its members would also repay the government for the cost of the project.

Also, the irrigation districts served by the Stubb and Price ditches, as well as the Orchard Mesa Irrigation District, would all receive their water through

Immigrant workers

the Highline Canal, improving their reliability. First, though, the dam and canal had to be constructed, along with three tunnels to carry the water through portions of De Beque Canyon. Immigrant workers were added to construction crews.



PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL/Palisade Historical Society, courtesy of Danny Williamson
Horses and men work on a portion of the Highline Canal near Palisade. BELOW: A crane is at work during the project.



Courtesy of the Museum of Western Colorado, Palisade Library Collection

But, as the Sentinel noted, that created bitterness between the immigrants and others. On the morning of Jan. 22, 1915, that animosity broke out "in a free-for-all combat in which participants emerged with sundry bruises, cuts and occasional dislocations of fingers and knuckles," the Sentinel said.

Despite some claims that nearly 70 workers were involved in the fracas, supervising engineer Sinclair Harper said no more than 10 fought, and they were quickly separated.

The next day, the Sentinel reported all was quiet. No more incidents of worker warfare on the project made the news.

Thanks to Priscilla Walker with the Palisade Historical Society for her help on this article, and to Dan and Nola Erickson.

Email Bob Silbernagel at bobsilbernagel@gmail.com.

City of Aspen, Pitkin County acquire mining claim assets

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ASPEN — Aspen and Pitkin County's open space programs have secured mineral rights beneath the jointly owned Smuggler Mountain Open Space.

Representatives submitted a winning bid of \$34,000 at an

auction in Glenwood Springs. Acquiring the Smuggler mineral rights eliminates the potential for mining operations in open space.

Smuggler Mountain is dotted with the remnants of mines from Aspen's silver boom.

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2015 THIS WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

This week's activities under the gold dome will start with guns, guns and more guns. Two legislative committees will hear several gun measures introduced by Republicans, most of which are designed to repeal the controversial gun laws that Democrats approved in 2013.

■ **Today:** The House Agriculture, Livestock & Natural Resources Committee will hear a bill to create a grant program to help manage tamarisk and Russian olives. The measure, HB1006, was introduced by Rep. Don Coram, R-Montrose, and is available for remote testimony.

■ **Tuesday:** The Senate Local Government Committee will debate Sen. Ray Scott's bill to allow counties such as Mesa to schedule ballot measures asking voters if they want to transfer foreclosure duties to the county treasurer and do away with governor-appointed public trustees.

■ **Wednesday:** The House Transportation Committee will hear HB1098, a controversial idea to prevent local communities from using red-light cameras to issue traffic tickets.

■ **Thursday:** The House Judiciary Committee will debate HB1043, which would make someone's third

DUI offense a felony.

■ **Next week:** The House State, Veterans & Military Affairs Committee will hear HB1040 by Rep. Dan Thurlow, R-Grand Junction, which would do away with some homeowner association licensing requirements. The bill is available for remote testimony.

Floor and committee proceedings can be watched or heard at www.leg.state.co.us. Check that website to see which measures are available for remote testimony at Colorado Mesa University.

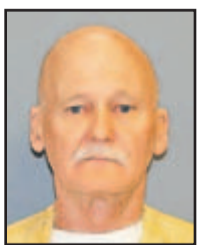
— Charles Ashby

BLOTTER COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

Sexual assault suspected

A Grand Junction man confessed to Mesa County's Department of Human Service that he inappropriately touched a 9-year-old girl sometime in December, according to the Mesa County Sheriff's Office.

John Pierce, 65, was arrested on a warrant on suspicion of several charges of sexual assault. He agreed to be interviewed by police, according to the warrant for his arrest.



JOHN PIERCE

Police stop vehicle, seize cash

Jose Morgan-Rodriguez received a summons on suspicion of having a revoked license after being pulled over in his vehicle for a lane violation on Tuesday, according to the Grand Junction Police Department.

After Morgan-Rodriguez consented to a search, officers found a large amount of money in the vehicle and seized it, claiming it as a possible civil forfeiture.

According to the Grand Junction Police Department:

- Someone attempted to break into a coin-operated washing machine in the 2600 block of Little Bookcliff Drive on Tuesday, causing damages of less than \$1,000.
- Someone broke into a home in the 200 block of Lauralee Avenue and stole items on Jan. 25.
- Rosalind Rollaine, 18, was arrested Wednesday on suspicion of being in possession of drugs and drug paraphernalia.
- Richard Gallegos, 37, was arrested Thursday on suspicion of violating a restraining order, violating bail bond conditions and stalking in the 100 block of Main Street.
- Juan Delgado, 24, was arrested Thursday on suspicion of harassing his ex-wife in the 2400 block of U.S. Highway 6&50.
- Someone robbed another person and stole property valued at less than \$5,000 in the 1100 block of North Avenue on Friday.
- Wallace Smith, 54, received a summons Friday on suspicion of punching a person in the 1800 block of North Seventh Street.
- Someone unlawfully and needlessly killed a dog in the 400 block of Tanner Street on Friday. Police have no suspects.
- Someone broke into a vehicle in the 500 block of 25 1/2 Road and stole property valued at less than \$2,000 on Friday.

The Mesa County Sheriff's Office did not provide crime reports Sunday.

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