

FIRST DRAFT Railroads changed much more than transportation

The busy train depot in Grand Junction in the 1920s gives an indication of how important railroads and train depots were to communities during the first half of the 20th century.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MUSEUM OF WESTERN COLORADO



BOB SILBERNAGEL

November 18, 1883, was one of those days of momentous change. Most people paid little attention. On Nov. 18, 1883, organizations across North America set their clocks to the same time: Standard Railway Time. Prior to that date, each town or county set its own time, based on the sun, and there were many variations. "For instance, when it was noon in New York City, it was 11:55 a.m. in Philadelphia, 11:47 a.m. in Washington, and 11:35 a.m. in Pittsburgh," wrote communications expert Jonathan Matusitz in a 2009 paper.

The switch to a standard time was driven by railroads, one of the many social changes that railroads wrought around the globe, but particularly in North America.

In the last decades of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, railroads affected everything from how towns were laid out, to social activities in a community to what people read about in their local newspapers.

Only after World War II did the influence of railroads on community lives begin to diminish, even though they remained important in transporting freight. Automobiles had taken over most of the passenger traffic by the 1950s, although passenger trains still criss-crossed the country.

Railroad travel dominated in the 1880s, however. But with trains rolling across state lines every day, and the telegraphs providing instant communication, establishing uniform times became critical.

Prior to the 1883 time change, "Often a train would arrive at one station (say 12:13 p.m.) at an earlier time than it had left the previous one (say 12:08 p.m.)," Matusitz wrote.

The idea to have all railroads in North America shift to four time zones on the same day is credited to Sir Sandford Fleming, a chief engineer for the Canadian Pacific Railway. The time zones were set one hour apart – or 15 degrees longitude – with the starting point at Greenwich, England.

The time zones weren't established internationally until 1893, and the U.S. government didn't officially adopt them until 1918.

Nevertheless, Matusitz said, "Within days (after Nov. 18, 1883) almost seventy percent of schools, courts, and local governments adopted railroad time as the official time standard."

The change didn't merit any

Faster Overnight Train Service to DENVER			
Effective Sunday, September 5			
New Schedule for the MOUNTAINEER			
No. 20			No. 19
9:00 PM	lv. Grand Junction	..... ar.	6:40 AM
9:10 PM	lv. Clifton	..... ar.	6:12 AM
9:25 PM	lv. Palisade	..... ar.	6:01 AM
10:01 PM	lv. DeBeque	..... ar.	5:20 AM
10:24 PM	lv. Grand Valley	..... ar.	4:55 AM
10:55 PM	lv. Rifle	..... ar.	4:30 AM
11:08 PM	lv. Silt	..... ar.	4:02 AM
11:20 PM	lv. Newcastle	..... ar.	3:50 AM
11:55 PM	lv. Glenwood Springs	..... ar.	3:28 AM
12:30 PM	lv. Dotsero	..... ar.	2:41 AM
7:00 AM	ar. Denver	..... lv.	9:00 PM



COURTESY OF PALISADE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

This timetable, published in the Palisade Tribune in 1954, indicates that even as automobiles were overtaking trains as the primary mode of transportation, passenger train service was still important to communities for both regional and statewide travel.

ment in the Grand Junction News, the primary newspaper in this community at the time.

But other newspapers around the country and in Colorado took note. On Nov. 20 the Leadville Daily Herald offered a tongue-in-cheek reminder of the time change.

"The new railroad time standard, which is now in operation on most of the leading lines, has not ... prevented the average traveling citizen from arriving at one end of the depot just as his intended train is steaming out of the other," the Herald wrote. "Neither does the new timetable prevent consequent profanity."

Travelers and communities adapted quickly to the time change, however, just as they adapted to other changes brought by the railroads.

"The railroad long affected communities," wrote historian H. Roger Grant. "The iron horse shaped their physical appearance. Often that included location of streets, transit lines, commercial buildings, and residential housing."

In most communities, it also meant that housing for ethnic minorities and the poorest white families were inevitably on the wrong side of the tracks.

Although the town of Grand Junction was established more than a year before the Denver & Rio Grande Railway reached it, one can see evidence of the railroad's influence, even to this day.

The first hotels, restaurants, and early retail operations were within walking distance of the railroad depot on First Street.

Many industrial businesses, from rendering plants to

salvage yards, were on the other side of the tracks or even across the river. So too was inexpensive housing for workers.

Even so, many railroad workers were solid middle-class citizens of the communities they served. That was true in Grand Junction and around the country.

"Railroaders, especially well-paid locomotive engineers and skilled shopmen, often entered the ranks of the middle class and could afford a comfortable house, perhaps with modern plumbing and later a garage for the family automobile," Grant wrote.

In Grand Junction, old telephone books that listed the occupation of each head of household, give an indication of the importance of the railroads. "There were huge numbers of railroad workers," said Matt Darling, railroad historian for the Museum of Western Colorado and curator of the Cross Orchards historic site.

Often, the train workers got involved in local politics or community activities through groups like the Masons, the Elks, or their own organizations. And those organizations played a role in the community at large, not just for the train workers.

For example, a notice in the Jan. 12, 1900, edition of The Daily Sentinel invited everyone to a rail group's celebration.

"Really the best ball of the season will be held at the Armory tonight," the paper said. "The Railroad Trainmen will be glad to welcome you at their ball tonight."

Many newspapers in the ear-

ly 20th century carried regular railroad columns. For example, the Salt Lake Telegram in 1915 had a regular feature called "Railroad Notes," with brief items on both local and national railroad news.

Other newspapers, including the Sentinel, regularly took note of what railroaders were doing, from a recent wedding to the visit of a railroad executive in town, to the death of a mule hit by a train.

Even today, while fewer people work for the highly automated railroads, "Virtually everyone has some relative who worked for the railroad at one time," said Darling.

For much of the first part of the 20th century, however, railroads were among the largest employers, if not the largest, in Mesa County. There were a number of reasons for that.

First, Grand Junction was an important division point for the trains, Darling noted. Trains and their crews changed in Grand Junction, with one set going to Salt Lake City and another set handling eastbound traffic toward Denver.

Additionally, other crews and trains worked the southern route, to Delta, Montrose, Gunnison and on to Canyon City. For three decades, there were also northbound trains heading over Baxter Pass into Utah on the Uintah Railway.

Also, steam locomotives required far more workers to operate and maintain than the diesel power plants that began to replace them in the 1950s, Darling said.

During World War II, when many young men were heading to war, local draft boards often gave deferments to railroad workers to ensure that trains hauling troops and weaponry kept rolling.

Railroads affected communities in other ways. There were Railroad Restaurants, in Grand Junction and other cities. The Sentinel frequently carried advertisements for railroad watches, considered the best timepieces of the day.

And if you wanted to attend the National Western Stock Show in 1914, the Sentinel informed people of a special train organized by the D&RG just to carry Stock Show spectators.

So next time you're driving, flying or even riding a train, and your smartphone automatically switches time as you cross from one time zone to another, railroads are responsible.

Sources: "The Impact of the railroad on American society: a communication perspective of technology," by Jonathan Matusitz, www.pasosonline.org; "Railroads and the American People," by H. Roger Grant; historic newspapers online at www.newspapers.com; interview with Matt Darling.

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Real estate market still thrives in county

By SENTINEL STAFF

After the first month of the new year, the real estate market in Grand Junction continues to hold strong.

The numbers, however, do show an interesting trend with active listings being down 60% in January compared to the year before.

In 2021, there were 223 listings, and in January 2020 there were 557 listings, according to the Bray Real Estate market report.

However, there was only a 4% drop in home sales with 238 homes sold last month and 247 homes sold in January 2020.

Homes were also more expensive with the average home selling for \$296,000 compared to last January when the median price was \$260,000.

Homes also sold quicker according to the report with properties staying on the market an average of 62 days compared to January 2020 when the average was 76 days.

Active listings in Mesa County were at a high point in 2015 when 989 homes were listed. The next two Januarys had 821 homes listed in each year, and 645 in 2019.

The January report also showed that even though inventory was down, building permits were solid with 52 new permits issued in the month. Last January, there were 35, and there was a high point in 2018 when 70 permits were issued.

Most of the homes sold in January were in the \$200,000-\$299,000 range. There were also nine homes at more than \$750,000 sold.

More high-priced homes are on the market now, with 58 priced at more than \$750,000 and another 48 priced at \$500,000-\$750,000.

Fifteen of the highest-priced homes are in the Redlands area with another 11 in the Collbran/Mesa area.

Another 15 homes in the Redlands are listed at \$500,000-\$750,000. Nine homes now are listed in the city of Grand Junction in the \$300,000-\$399,000 range.

Of the properties sold in January, the most were sold in the north Grand Junction area at 19, followed by 14 in southeast Grand Junction and 13 each in Fruita and on Orchard Mesa, according to the report.

Utah parents drop Black history curriculum opt-out request

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NORTH OGDEN, Utah — Parents who sought to opt out of their children from learning Black History Month curriculum at a charter school in northern Utah have withdrawn their requests.

Maria Montessori Academy in North Ogden experienced a public backlash after announcing plans to make participation optional, the Standard-Examiner reported Saturday.

"We regret that after receiving requests, an opt-out form was sent out concerning activities planned during this month of celebration," a statement from Academy Director Micah Hirokawa and the school's board of directors said.

"We are grateful that families that initially had questions and

concerns have willingly come to the table to resolve any differences and, at this time, no families are opting out of our planned activities and we have removed this option," the statement said.

School officials said a few families requested the exemption from the instruction, but declined to say how many or specify the reasons given.

Betty Sawyer, head of the Ogden chapter of the NAACP, said she contacted the school Saturday morning about the decision to make Black History Month curriculum optional.

Data from the Utah State Board of Education shows that only three of the academy's 322 students are Black.

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