

# Rocky Mountain Express

Where preserving railroading in the Rocky Mountain States begins and will never end...

October 2014

Rocky Mountain Railroad Heritage Society

Volume 2014, Issue 8

## And Now It's Time to Celebrate: Como Railroad Depot Restored

Submitted by Bob Schoppe, President of the Denver South Park & Pacific Historical Society



The Como depot was built in 1879 by the Denver South Park & Pacific Railroad as the tracks reached Como in June of that year on their way to the Gunnison Valley. It appears that the depot was "pieced together" from earlier buildings, very unusual for South Park Line depots, and added to the complexity of restoration. The depot served the railroad and the town well for the next 58 years. The building was extended twice in an "L" design, probably in 1881-82 when Como became a major junction point with construction of the "high line" to Leadville through Breckenridge. It was also moved, at least once, when the Gilman hotel became the Pacific hotel in 1885. In 1889 the railroad was reorganized as the Denver Leadville and Gunnison and in December of 1898 it became part of the Colorado and Southern.

After 1910 business tapered off dramatically and the road was finally abandoned in April of 1937. One year later the rails were taken up from Fremont Pass to South Platte and Como and its depot were all but forgotten. In the 1940's the Cooley Brothers ran a well drilling business and transformed the depot into a garage. Various other owners used it for storage over the years but the depot received virtually no maintenance over all those decades. At the dawn of the 21st century things were looking grim for the depot whose owners showed no interest in any effort to save it. The west face (trackside) had sunk nearly two feet and the building was leaning precariously in that direction. With half of the roof and all of the windows missing there was little to keep the depot from collapsing in the near future.



In February of 2008 the fortunes of the old depot took a dramatic turn for the better. David Tomkins and Moya Cleaver acquired the property (which included the railroad hotel and eating house) and were VERY interested in saving it. In June of that year David and Moya partnered with the Denver South Park & Pacific Historical Society and

the Park County Historical Preservation Advisory Commission (PCHPAC) and stabilized the building. Over the next several years grants were obtained from the Colorado State Historical Society (known today as History Colorado) to begin with the foundation work to raise the building back to level, repair the rotted joist and install a new foundation. The Denver South Park & Pacific Historical Society, as a registered non-profit, sponsored the fundraising drives for the required cash matches. The next grant finished up the foundation work, installed an original style wood shingle roof, and rebuilt the chimneys. Finally two large grants were obtained from History Colorado and Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and with the matching funds this provided enough capital to finish the depot. After two summers of effort the work was completed the first week of October 2014.

In Spring of 2015 the building will be outfitted as the Como railroad and local history museum. The grand opening and dedication will take place at "high noon" on Saturday, August 22, 2015, in conjunction with the 20th annual Boreas Pass Railroad Day.



The restoration process took 6 and ½ years, many partners, over \$400,000, numerous grants and contracts, and more than a bit of luck. Mike Perschbacher and his crew of "Older than Dirt Construction" were the primary contractors throughout the process. Mike also had a "familial interest" in the depot as his great grandfather and great uncle worked for the railroad out of this very depot! Mike also restored the Buena Vista depot and has worked on many projects for History Colorado. The Denver South Park & Pacific Historical Society has entered into a 25 year lease on the depot and will maintain it as a museum in a partnership with the owners.



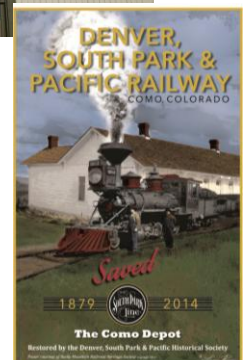
Above and below - Como Depot prior to 1938



Como Depot and Hotel as it looks now



Current photos by Bob Schoppe







## Update on the Historic Depots and Buildings RMRHS is striving to preserve

### The Kansas Pacific Engine House and Well House

Reported by Penny McPherson

Perhaps the last structures of the Kansas Pacific Railway are in Kit Carson, Colorado. These structures are the stone engine house and attached well house. Collectively, the structures are referred to as the Kit Carson Pumphouse. The site was listed on the Colorado Register of Historic Properties (5CH114) in 1995. Colorado Preservation, Inc. also lists it as one of Colorado's most endangered structures.

In 1956, shortly after Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP) discontinued the use of steam engines through Kit Carson, the pumphouse and site were leased to the Kit Carson Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber maintained the lease until 1981 when it was transferred to the Kit Carson Historical Society. The pumphouse was donated to the Historical Society by UP, but UP maintained ownership of the land. Therefore, the ownership of the land is separate from the ownership of the building.

The Kit Carson pumphouse is very rare. It is a utility building that remains in its original location next to the railroad tracks. *It appears to be the only building of its kind in Colorado.* The engine house is a one-story, rectangular structure constructed of limestone block and brick. The stone portion of the structure is original with arched brick headers, double "X" hand-built doors and window shutters. The interior is a single room containing vestiges of the original plaster and paint. Changes to the west side of building appear to be related to changing engine technologies. The well house is a wood frame addition extending west of the stone building. This addition is board and batten construction. The well house appears to have been remodeled at least once to protect the well and pump from freezing. The derrick through the roof of the well house appears to have been constructed in about 1900 (1906 inventory report) and supported a 25 ft. diameter Eclipse windmill. The 1906 report cryptically states that "windmill cannot be used with softener."

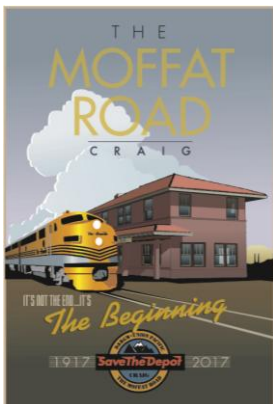
It is unclear when the pumphouse was constructed. The Kansas Pacific railroad entered Kit Carson in 1869 and, Kit Carson remained central to the construction of the Kansas Pacific railroad to Denver as well as the Las Animas Spur until both were completed (the Las Animas Spur is also known as the Arkansas Valley Railway). In 1880, Jay Gould sold the Kansas Pacific to the Union Pacific and, the pumphouse appears in the Union Pacific resource inventory of 1885. Working under the premise that Union Pacific would have an earlier record if they had built the pumphouse, it is likely it was constructed in the 1870s prior to Union Pacific's acquisition of the Kansas Pacific.

Further support for the construction of the pumphouse in the 1870's is found in a January 1871 report of the Kansas Pacific Railway. This report states, "The engine houses, repair shops and station buildings are of wood and of a temporary character...there is no stone on the line and all stone used in foundations...have been transported from one hundred and twenty miles to two hundred and fifty miles upon the line of road from Sheridan to Denver...The standard requires engine houses and repair shops at the principal stations to be in all cases of stone or brick, with good stone foundations" (Kansas Pacific Railway abstract of Prin's report of January 13, 1871).

Of course, the purpose of the pumphouse was to provide the steam engines with water. However, the water at Kit Carson was determined to be of "medium" quality with a concentration of alkali. (Reports of the Preliminary Surveys for the Union Pacific Railway, Eastern Division; January 1866 and Industrial Resources of Western Kansas and Eastern Colorado. Kansas Pacific Railway; 1971). Therefore, before the Kit Carson water could be used by the steam engines, it had to be chemically treated by the cold lime softening process to prevent scaling in the engines' boilers. The pumphouse served a dual role, providing the power to bring water to the surface and then, treat it and store it for the engines. All the structures and tanks related to the cold lime softening process have been removed from the property.

The pumphouse is endangered because of neglect, land ownership issues and lack of funds to preserve it. Locally, both the town and the historical society would like to save the site to help beautify the south end of Main Street. At present, the goals to save the site would be to highlight the structure as the remaining in-situ component of what was once a fairly large railroad complex (including a depot, residences, coal chute, stock yards, and water delivery system). The Kit Carson Historical Society welcomes the assistance offered by the members of the Rocky Mountain Railroad Heritage Society.

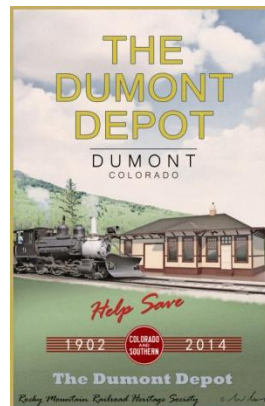
### Craig Depot Update



A meeting which included all key players in the discussions to move the depot to another location in Craig was held September 16, 2013. Among those present were Greg Larson of the UP, Craig Mayor Terry Carwile, Craig City Manager Jim Ferree, representatives from Sen. Udall's office and Rep. Cory Gardner's office, Bill and Mary Davis of Mammoth Structural Movers, Dan Davidson of the Museum of NW Colorado, and Jim Jordan, Bret Johnson, and Mike and Sigi Walker of the Rocky Mountain Railroad Heritage Society.

Central to the discussion was the UP's concern that the building posed a serious safety hazard and therefore a liability issue. We are awaiting UP approval to extend the moratorium on demolishing this endangered brick depot.

### Dumont Depot Update



A contract is currently pending to facilitate the purchase of the building, which is privately-owned and leased by a rafting company for storage of their rafting equipment. Preparations are being made for a subsequent move to Mill Creek Valley Historical Society's "Dumont Schoolhouse" site.

The Mill Creek Valley Historical Society has a history of being given and preserving historic buildings: the one-room Dumont Schoolhouse, the Coburn Cabin, and the Mill City House, a unique 2-1/2 story log cabin which once housed 20 or more miners. The Society is also

the guardian of the Dumont Cemetery, resting place of many area pioneers, and the Mill Creek Arastra site.

**The posters shown above and on page 1 are available from the RMRHS for \$20.00. All proceeds will be used to further the activities of the RMRHS.**

Errata: Vol 2014 Issue 7 (September 2014) incorrectly stated that the Rock Island Depot in Calhan served as Cadillac and Lake City Railway headquarters. Howard Noble, the former president and general manager, has provided the following corrections: "The Cadillac and Lake City had freight clients in Simla, Calhan, Peyton, Falcon, and Colorado Springs. The railroad's headquarters was always in Colorado Springs. Operational headquarters was in Falcon. The Calhan Depot was used only during the El Paso County Fair. Dinner train excursions ran from Falcon to Matheson. Operations ceased in January 1990.



## Train Treks with Mike and Sigi Walker: Outstanding Preservation in Castle Rock



We visited Castle Rock in early September, looking for possible places for an RMRHS meeting, and discovered the wonderfully conserved 1875 D&RG depot there. Some facts of note we discovered are:

- It's on the National Register of Historic Places
- It's designated a Historic Landmark by the Castle Rock Historic Preservation Board
- It's part of the Historic Downtown area as designated by Castle Rock Historical Society
- It's both a museum and visitor information center
- It was built by General William Jackson Palmer's Denver & Rio Grande RR from locally-quarried Rhyolite
- In 1970 it was moved six blocks from Third and Front Streets to its present location near Fourth Street at 420 Elbert Street
- All the employees of the station inscribed their names on the walls of the depot
- It was purchased in 1996 by the Castle Rock Historical Society and carefully restored
- It still retains original interior features such as the old ticket window and baggage area
- It is the point of origin of an extensive and annotated Walking Tour of Historic Downtown Castle Rock



**Museum Hours:**  
Wed: 12 - 5  
Thurs: 12 - 5  
Fri: 12 - 5  
Sat: 11 - 4

At left: View of "trackside" of depot and new walkway for visitor entry.

Mike Walker photos

## ALL ABOARD – Grandfather Brown, Silverton, and the Narrow Gauge Railroad Passes

By Frank W. Allen

In 1881, my 20-year-old grandfather returned to Denver (after visiting in 1880) from his home in St. Louis, Missouri. Upon arrival he heard the big news that the "narrow gauge was through." He went to Durango, rode the train to Silverton and lived there until 1918 when he and his wife returned to Colorado Springs, where my mother was a Colorado College student.

My father obtained employment in Silverton in 1881 in the mining supply section of the local hardware store right away, but found lodging only some days later. He hung out for several nights in the back of the store and slept on the counter. The store delivered purchased mining supplies from 9,300 foot high Silverton to the prospecting sites and working mines located at 10,000 to 11,500 feet on the mountains that completely surround Silverton. Burros were used on the narrow, dangerous trails for these deliveries. One time the burros fell off the trail – a great loss. Ore was brought down the mountain-side in tram buckets, hoisted and lowered on long cables. My mother recalled being reprimanded, along with her brothers, for riding in a tram bucket.

My father soon realized he might augment his income by grubstaking carefully selected prospectors who came into the store. His most successful grubstake was the Gold Prince mine. This extra income enabled him to provide financial aid to his daughter's family of five during the Great Depression.

By 1888, three separate 2 to 2½ mile narrow rail lines were built up to the mining areas. These rail lines were then used for deliveries and to bring ore down to the smelters near Silverton. Otto Mears, who built the three rail lines, also owned an interest in the narrow gauge railroad between Durango and Silverton. All four railroads issued seasonal passes annually to customers of these railroads and their selected employees. My grandfather received those passes each year for about 20 years. He saved most of them because they were becoming collector's items. The 1889 pass was made of copper. All the subsequent passes were pasteboard, except the 1892 passes. They were silver filigree, costing \$4.00 apiece. All passes had the year, name of person issued to, and name of the railroad(s) it applied to.

When my mother died in 1999 at age 100, she left all the passes she had inherited to her three sons. My brother Philip inherited the 1892 silver filigree pass. In 2008, he gave that pass and four other pasteboard passes to the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad Museum. This interesting museum is located about 100 yards from the train station in Durango. These passes are nicely displayed in the museum today.

When my daughter and I visited the Museum in October 2013, we learned that the 1892 silver filigree pass was still valid for free passage for descendants of Mr. Brown, and we each got a free train ride that day.



Mike Walker photo

The train ride from Durango to Silverton and back takes about three hours each way. Some of the enclosed coach railcars have a narrator aboard. These narrators are very knowledgeable, and provide a lot of information about the history of the narrow gauge and about the magnificent scenery. Be sure to ride one of these coach cars when you go.

## September 2014 Update on the Colorado Eastern Railroad

Submitted by Doug Cohn

New information has been discovered about the Colorado Eastern Railroad. Did you know about the different kinds of coal? There is anthracite, bituminous and lignite. When first dug out of the ground, they look alike, but they burn very differently. When Mr. Anderson found the coal in 1886, he thought he had found the mother lode near Denver. He and the investors would be rich since it would be one of the closest supplies to Denver. Only after the RR built the line and the first 30 thousand tons were shipped was it discovered that it was lignite coal and would not burn. From my research, it seems if coal stays in the ground long enough, it will mature from lignite to bituminous to anthracite, but that takes a few hundred thousand years. Today, lignite coal is used extensively for water purification, but it still won't burn. The 15 million tons has value in 2014, but did not in 1886.

The other new information has to do with the connection between the High Line Canal, which runs from the South Platte River west of Denver 71 miles to the eastern plains close to the Colorado Eastern rail terminus, and developers. The Kansas Pacific Railroad, The UP, the CE, and land developers all saw the opportunity to sell railroad land for development. The mistake they made was assuming they would have enough water to irrigate the dry plains. The towns they platted - Independence, Berlin and Ebert - did not work for lack of water; they are now called Commerce City, Montbello and Green Valley Ranch.

Come hear the whole story at the Forney Museum of Transportation on Saturday October 11<sup>th</sup> at 1 PM.