

FIRST DRAFT

Bridge that connected Moab, Utah, Grand Junction burned 12 years ago

When the Dewey Bridge was completed in April of 1916, it was cause for celebration -- three days of festivities, in fact. "In commemoration of the completion of the suspension bridge across the Grand (Colorado) River, the residents of Dewey, Cisco, Castleton and Richardson will conduct a three-day celebration commencing with April 15," announced the Grand Valley Times of Moab, Utah, on April 7, 1916.



BOB SILBERNAGEL

The great event was to include "a program, a banquet and a dance every night for several days," the paper reported. "The people of Moab and all other communities of Grand County (Utah) are extended a cordial invitation to attend the festivities."

By the time the old wooden bridge burned on April 6, 2008, -- the victim of a fire started by a youngster playing with matches -- there was a modern concrete bridge next to it on Utah Highway 128 to carry cars and trucks across the river now known as the Colorado.

But the loss of the 92-year-old structure was mourned, nonetheless. "It's too bad. It was really kind of a historical marker for this area," then-Grand County Sheriff Jim Nyland said when it burned. "People are pretty upset because the bridge was still in pretty good shape."

Although it was no longer used for motor traffic, the bridge still carried hikers and occasionally herds of cattle or sheep across the river.

After the fire, a fund was started in Grand County to rebuild the bridge, but the effort eventually stalled.

Dewey sits at a geographically important location, where the Dolores River flows into the Colorado.

A man named Samuel King began operating the first ferry near the junction of the two rivers in the early 1880s. He was also a rancher in the area.

A small community sprang up around the ferry, named in honor of a prospector named Dewey Smith, who camped near the site before the ferry began operating.

It's easy to confuse Dewey with another small community in Utah known as Deweyville -- on the west side of the Wasatch Range near the Idaho border. That town was named for its founder, John Dewey.

The Dewey community on the Colorado River was never large, home only to a few ranchers, farmers, mining prospectors and the ferry operator and his family. But it was important because of the transportation link it provided.

As a modern plaque at Dewey noted, "In the early decades of the twentieth century, Moab and other Southwestern Utah towns were dependent on communities in Western Colorado for everyday supplies, and markets for their agricultural products."

And while the Colorado River provided a natural corridor from Moab to western Colorado, it was not an easy transportation route.

Samuel King's ferry was critical in making that connection. So was a cattle trail beside the river that was pioneered by the Taylor family, which still ranches in the area.

In 1901, King built a toll road along the river from Dewey to Moab, with the approval of Grand County.

A few years later, a man named Richard Westwood was hired to operate the ferry at Dewey, and he moved his family to the isolated community. He also sought a school for his



FROM A PLAQUE AT THE DEWEY BRIDGE SITE

Dewey Bridge as it burned on April 6, 2008.

children.

The Dewey School operated in a log cabin belonging to the Wheeler family for two years. Then, in 1906, Grand County built a one-room school near the ferry landing on the south side of the Colorado River.

The 16-foot by 24-foot building was constructed of local lumber "lined with unbleached muslin to keep the wind, dust and bugs out," according to a plaque that now stands near the old school site. There were nine pupils in the first class for the new school.

Dewey may have been small, but it saw lots of visitors because of its important crossing. The "Dewey Items" section of the Grand Valley News recorded some of those visits:

In May 1909, it reported that "Ray Mendenhall arrived here the first of the week from Grand Junction. He went on to Moab." Also, there was a new ferry operator named George A. Combs. And the Dewey School closed for the season. "All of the students were promoted to higher grades. A dance and supper was served."

In May 1910, three men arrived -- one from Pennsylvania, one from Rochester, New York, and one from Denver -- "to look at the mining property of this section" along with possible oil lands. Additionally, "Misses Ella and Kate Westwood returned the last of the week from Moab, where they had been visiting."

The following month, two men from Rifle passed through Dewey on their way to Fisher Valley to work putting up hay. Also, "A band of Utes passed through Dewey on Saturday en route to the Blue Mountains" near Monticello, Utah.

Later in June of 1910, two men from Palisade visited Dewey, looking at horses to buy. And a man named Benjamin Spencer must have had a miserable visit when he and his wife stopped in Dewey for the night. The couple from Monticello were "on their way to Salt Lake City, where Mr. Spencer will be operated on for appendicitis."

By early 1912, something new was gathering attention in Dewey: the push for a bridge to replace the ferry.

"A bridge is badly needed," the Grand Valley Times editorialized in February of that year. "The ferry boat is out of commission for months at a time" and it cost the county up to \$1,500 a year to maintain it.

"This waste would be eliminated if a bridge were procured."

News items such as this one, from November of 1912, were typical: "The approach to the ferry that was built recently at Dewey has been washed away by a flood in the river."

Even though voters in Grand County had just approved a bond issue to build a bridge



BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel

The remains of the Dewey Bridge today, looking from the north side of the Colorado River. The Dewey School was located to the south and east of the southern bridge abutment.



FROM A PLAQUE AT THE DEWEY BRIDGE SITE

A small steel model shows what the bridge looked like when it was restored by various Utah entities in 2000.

across the Colorado River at Moab the previous year, in 1913 they supported a new bond issue and a separate mill levy to raise more than \$20,000 to construct the bridge at Dewey.

Ultimately, the bridge cost \$25,000. It was constructed by the Midland Bridge Co. of Kansas City, Missouri. It was designed to support the weight of six horses, three wagons and 9,000 pounds of freight.

Later, it would successfully handle the weight of automobiles and small trucks on its one-lane wooden deck.

When it opened, on April 11, 1916, it was Utah's longest suspension bridge at 502 feet, and the second longest suspension bridge west of the Mississippi.

"It is a splendid structure, and residents of the Dewey

section are more than proud of it," the Grand Valley Times noted. "While it is a suspension bridge, it is said that it is as steady and firm as the bridge at Moab."

It served as the primary connection from Moab to Grand Junction for decades. In the 1960s and 1970s, a man named Ballard Harris and his wife, Maxine, operated a gas station and small store at Dewey.

Sources: Grand Valley Historical Society plaques at Dewey Bridge; Utah Digital Newspapers; "A History of Dewey, Utah," by Herm Hoops, The Canyon Country Zephyr, June 4, 2018.

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IN BRIEF SENTINEL STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

Mesa County now at 22 COVID-19 cases

Mesa County had two more positive COVID-19 cases reported on Sunday. The total in the county is now up to 22.

Montrose County now has 32 positive cases, up six since the previous report.

Garfield County had one new positive case to bring its total to 46. Delta County remains at four positive cases.

According to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, the state now has 4,950 cases with 954 people hospitalized and 140 deaths.

State emergency worker tests positive

CENTENNIAL — A member of Colorado's Unified Command Group at the State Emergency Operations Center in Centennial just outside of Denver has tested positive for the coronavirus, officials say.

The Colorado Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management said the worker tested positive on Saturday.

Spokeswoman Micki Trost said staffers who determine they worked in the same area in the last 48 hours are being told to self-quarantine.

Trost said medical screenings of staff are being increased from once daily to twice a day. A decontamination service cleans the facility daily.

Mormon leader: World will conquer coronavirus

SALT LAKE CITY — A high-ranking member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints said Sunday that the world will conquer the coronavirus.

equally committed to freeing the world from the virus of hunger and freeing neighborhoods and nations from the virus of poverty," he said.

"Even as we speak, we are waging an 'all hands on deck' war with COVID-19, a solemn reminder that a virus 1,000 times smaller than a grain of sand can bring entire populations and global economies to their knees," said Jeffrey R. Holland, speaking at the church's signature gathering.

The church has temporarily closed 168 temples around the world to help prevent the spread of the virus. Speeches at the conference had no in-person audiences and were livestreamed to millions around the world.

"When we have conquered it -- and we will -- may we be

On Saturday, President Donald Trump issued a disaster declaration for Utah and ordered federal assistance for the state, tribal and local recovery efforts due to the coronavirus. -- AP

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For information on coronavirus COVID-19 visit: health.mesacounty.us/COVID19

MESA COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

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