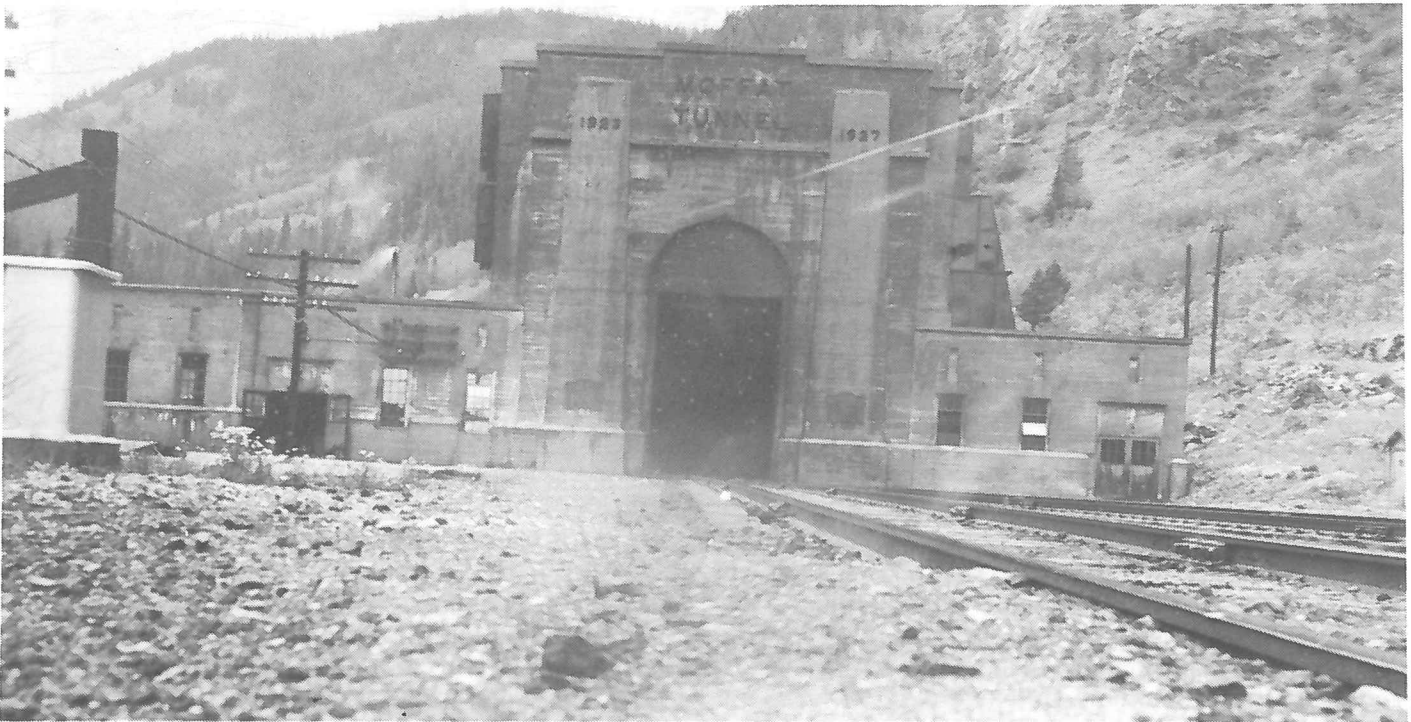


# **"EVERYTHING SEEMED TO CENTER AROUND THE RAILROAD."** BY ROD HERMAN



This story is about the railroad, how it ran years ago, and how much it has changed over the years. The railroad used to have passenger service and it also moved cattle for the ranchers in Routt County to Denver. In addition, it carried various commercial goods to and from Denver for residents of Routt County.

The story begins with a letter and a story written by Errett Albritton on March 29, 1975. The letter was addressed to Dorothy Wither and she turned it over to the Tread of Pioneers Museum in Steamboat Springs. In addition, it is composed of three different interviews. The first interview is with Vernon Summers, a rancher in Routt County. His family has used the railroad to move cattle from the Sidney stockyard to the market in Denver. The second interview is with Dorothy Wither on the way the railroad affected her life. The third part is with Bob Wither who worked for the railroad as a Station Manager for nine years in Steamboat Springs and Denver.

Errett Albritton started his employment with the Denver Salt Lake Railroad at Craig, Colorado in 1918. After working for the DS&L for 19 years he took a position with the Panama Railroad and worked for them from 1937 to 1957.

From 1957 until he retired in 1969, Errett was a safety agent for the Federal Bureau of Railroad Safety.

"My service on the Moffat Road included that of Station Helper at Oak Creek and Craig; Telegrapher at Steamboat Springs (1924), Craig, and Denver; Agent-Telegrapher at Kremmling, Rollinsville, West Portal, Hayden, Oak Creek, and Steamboat Springs; Agent-Yardmaster at Phippsburg, and Train Dispatcher at Denver.

While working as Station Helper in Oak Creek in 1919, at age 15, the people there tagged me with the nickname of 'Davie Moffat, Jr.' due to my reactions to some of the derogatory remarks made by some Oak Creek citizens about the Moffat Railroad and its employees. Most people in Northwest Colorado knew me as Davie Moffat.

I have never lost my respect and high regard for the Moffat Railroad employees. Because of the mountainous terrain and severe weather conditions that existed in the higher altitudes, (especially prior to the completion of the Moffat Tunnel), the train and engine men in my opinion, gained higher skills in train operation in general, and the application of air brakes and power in particular, then did their counterparts on other

**THIS STORY SPONSORED BY THE STEAMBOAT PILOT**

railroads. I have been privileged to work with many fine railroad men in Florida, Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the Panama Canal Zone. But I will always reserve a place at the top for the Moffat men, both their skill and loyalty.

However, there were hundreds of employees who made tremendous sacrifices to keep the railroad in operation and who performed their duties in super fashion despite any exorbitant number of derailments, mud, rock, and snow slides and extreme cold. I have seen it so cold at Phippsburg that a Mikado locomotive (second most powerful steam locomotive on the Moffat) could not move 17 empty gondolas from one of the yard tracks because their wheels were frozen to the rail. Then, there were the many frozen switches to be thawed out and those that had to be dug out before they could be operated. Also, a switchman or a trainman, riding the top or side of a car at a speed of 15 or 20 miles per hour in 35° below weather didn't know much about the chill factor in those days, but he did know that it was considerably colder riding a moving car than it was walking or standing on the ground. Yet, when it became necessary to ride, they did so, if that was what it took to get the job done.

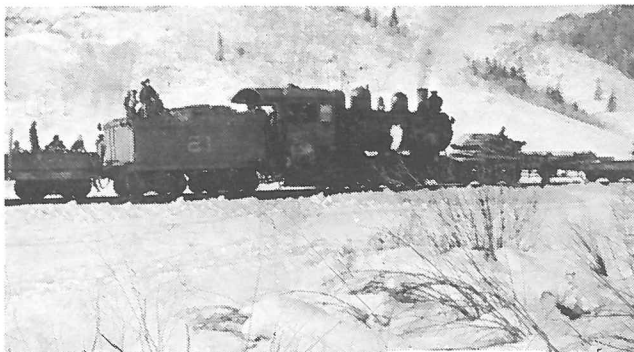
Much has been written about Chief Dispatcher Joe Culbertson. I have known quite a number of Chief Dispatchers and I would rate Culbertson at the top. Train dispatching is a very exacting type of work. The only position comparable is the present day air traffic controller at a busy airport. There is considerable controversy as to which of these two positions cause the most stress and strain mentally.

One thing that I did learn from Culbertson was a certain philosophy of his about working your job that helped me in later years and which I have passed on to many young persons who were just starting to earn their way upward in the world. He told me once, "Keep pushing your work — don't let your work push you. Keep ahead of your work, then, when or if an interruption occurs (like a derailment, collision, etc.) you can absorb it and not get behind with



**"I WILL ALWAYS RESERVE A PLACE FOR THE MOFFAT MEN."**

your work. But if you are barely caught up with your work, or are behind, and an interruption occurs, you get farther behind and you cannot give proper attention to the interruption or to your normal duties."

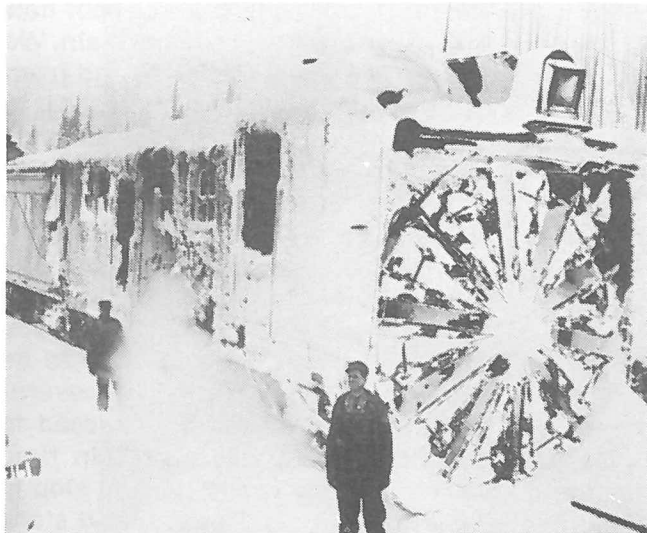


**"FEW RAILROADS CAN SAY THEY ENJOY AS DID THE MOFFAT RAILROAD." SUCH A MONOPOLY ON TRANSPORTATION**

Few railroads can say that they enjoyed such a monopoly on transportation as on the Moffat Railroad prior to the advent of the private auto, trucks, and busses, followed later on by airplane. During the monopoly period, a blockade on the railroad due to snow, mud, or rock slide, or a tunnel cave-in causing an interruption of traffic for more than a few days was of much concern to the people in Rio Blanco, Grand, Routt and Moffat Counties, as in many instances long interruptions would shut down the coal mines and even cause shortages of some food products. More than once, the coal mines sent their miners to the trouble spots to assist the railroad men and expedite the reopening of the railroad so the railroad could get back to the business of hauling coal and other freight and so the miners could get back to hauling coal. During their monopoly, the railroad handled nearly 100 percent of the coal, livestock, and other farm products outbound and practically all of the consumer products inbound and outbound for the four county area. So, in one way, it was an even up arrangement as the people of Northwest Colorado needed the railroad and the railroad needed the people at that time.

The month of February, 1928, holds the record for the most cars of coal ever hauled in one month by the Moffat Railroad. During that month, the Moffat Coal Company at Oak Creek ordered 100 cars each day for each of their two tipples. Victor American, (Oak Creek), ordered 100 cars each day for one tipple, Haybro Mine 50 cars each day and Routt Coal Company at Routt 40 cars per day. The mines at Mt. Harris were also working at the limit of their capacity. The train, yard and engine crews were working nearly 16 hours each day and although they were making good money — they and all of us working at Phippsburg during that period were sort of

glad when business slacked off a bit. Luckily, the railroad had no serious interruptions of service during that month. The empty coal cars were distributed promptly to the mines, based on their need, and the loaded cars were picked up at the mines without any unusual delay, moved to Phippsburg, switched into trains and the coal ordinarily arrived in Denver within 20 hours of departure from Phippsburg.



The Moffat Railroad started operating trains through the Moffat Tunnel in February of 1928. Prior to that time the railroad seldom, if ever, operated at a profit on an annual basis. The cost per ton mile for moving freight was considerably higher than on most railroads. This was due to a number of reasons. Some of these reasons were the nearly 27 miles of four percent grade over the mountain (Rollins Pass an elevation of 11,666 feet) that required helper engine service (with engineer and fireman on each locomotive) For trains moving west up the east side of the mountain, generally two helper engines were required, on trains moving east up the west side of the mountain 3 to 4 helper engines were required. Helper service of 1 to 2 locomotives were required on eastbound freight trains from Mt. Harris to Phippsburg and Phippsburg to Toponas. In addition, plow protection was required on the mountain for most freight and passenger trains during the winter. The extreme cold of winter and the snow slowed up switching activities and train movements. There were numerous 16 and 14 degree curves between Denver and Phippsburg where speed was restricted and the 55 tunnels in the same area caused considerable expense and long periods of interrupted service due to the cave-ins and fires, rock, mud and snow slides, together with an occasional washout were also expensive, in addition to the expense of replacing the track. Poor track maintenance in the early and mid 1920's caused many derailments and restricted speed limits on much of the main track,

however, liberal use of good volcanic ash ballast had the track in good condition by the early 1930's.

Many stories could be told about Steve Dwyer, who was employed by Moffat as a brakeman in the early 1900's, but who had previously worked as a telegraph operator on the Chicago Burlington and Quincy Railroad. Steve liked to smoke cigars and was always bumming them from others — but he was well liked by all and was the victim of numerous pranks because he generally reacted in a blustery way that was funny to his fellow workers. While walking in the snow alongside a moving train up on the "Hill" he slipped and fell, then rolled down the snow bank to the track where his left arm fell across the rail and was severed near the shoulder by the wheels of the moving train. After being released by the hospital, the railroad put him back to work as a telegraph operator and Steve learned to do a real good job with just one arm. However, to illustrate how his friends teased him, Steve's first job as an operator, after the accident, was at Plainview. On his first day on the job, a freight train stopped there to take water on the locomotive. The Conductor of the train walked into the telegraph office, shook hands with Steve and told him it sure was good to see him able to work and make a living even though he was handicapped. Steve took the cigar, lit it, and it blew up with a loud bang — it had a firecracker in it.

He was working as brakeman on a freight train coming up the west side of the "Hill". It was the day of the fight between Corbett and Fitzsimmons for the Heavyweight Championship of the World, and as most railroad men in those days, Steve and other crewmen were anxious to learn the outcome of the fight. This, of course, was before the days of radio or T.V. The train stopped at Arrow and although the office was closed, the men knew that the door was locked with a switch lock and, of course, each trainman had a switch lock key. The office had telegraph instruments so the members of the crew asked Steve to contact the Train Dispatcher in Denver and learn the results of the fight. Steve entered the office, called the Moffat Train Dispatcher and after the Moffat Dispatcher answered his call, this conversation took place. Steve — "How did the fight come out?" Train Dispatcher — "What fight?" Steve — (somewhat angered) "The fight between Corbett and Fitzsimmons." Train Dispatcher — "I didn't even know they were mad."

"One of the best stories told about M.J.McGann, and one that is typical of his quick wit, occurred while he was working as Agent-Yardmaster at Phippsburg. One day he became involved in an argument with a Switchman and

Mac struck the Switchman and knocked him down. However, the switchman got up and gave Mac a pretty good beating including a black eye. After it was over the Switchman said, "Well, I suppose I am fired." Mac replied, "Hell no, I got my satisfaction; if you didn't get yours, that's your hard luck." The news of the fight spread quickly over the whole railroad and it so happened that President Freeman was on his way to Craig the day following the fight and stopped his special train at Phippsburg. Freeman walked into the depot and spoke to McGann, saying, "You sure have a beautiful black eye Mac." Mac replied, "You damned right it is, and I had to fight like hell to keep from getting another one."

Another Irishman named Patrick Flaherty was a Section Foreman. The Roadmaster was continually asking Flaherty to make his messages more brief. After being so admonished several times, it so happened that an unusually heavy run off occurred in the Colorado River during the Spring thaw and rains, which washed out some of the track in the Gore Canyon. As a result, the Roadmaster received this message. "The river is where the track was."

## **VERNON SUMMER**



**"THE TRAIN CURVED SO MUCH THAT YOU COULD SHAKE HANDS WITH THE ENGINEER, WHEN YOU CAME AROUND THE CORNERS."**

As a rancher, it was expensive to send cattle on the railroad. The last two carloads that I shipped cost \$150.00 per car. Most people used trucks to ship cattle from the 50's on. The railroad stopped shipping cattle in the 1960's. During the 30's and 40's there would be complete trains with cattle in the fall.

I thought the railroad would never stop hauling passengers. Nobody would ride the train in later years, but as soon as they wanted to stop passenger trains, people would complain. They were all for it, and still no one would use it. The

last time I rode the train was in 1956, and on the way back I slept in the Pullman. Then we stopped in Bond, and I went to sleep, and when I woke up we were still there. We were there for two hours.

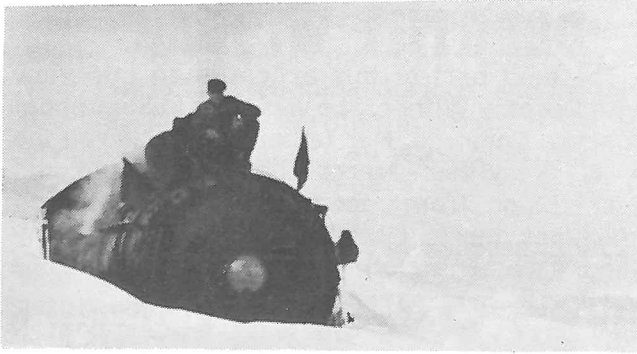
Back in the 20's and 30's and into the 40's we would go to Steamboat on the passenger train. One came in the afternoon and went out in the morning. You could ride from Sidney to Steamboat for fifty cents, and it took about half an hour or less. Quite often we rode the train. We used the railroad for transportation to and from school. Some of the Sidney teachers also used it to get to and from school. Farmers on week-ends would use the railroad to ship their cream to Denver. The creameries would buy it and test it and send back the empty cans along with the checks.

There were lots of cattle drives to the stock yards so they could be moved by rail. When you would get there, your cattle would have to be inspected by the Brand Inspector. The government had some regulations for the railroad to meet. For example, there was a certain time length before the railroad would have to stop to feed and water the animals. The railroad stock yard had a board for the cattle to walk across from the chute into the cattle car and there was this bang board that you would have to shut before you could shut the door. Sometimes some of the cattle would come back down and there was a gate at the bottom of the ramp and you had to make sure that it was not shut because the cattle could pile up and smother each other.

I also went with one shipment of cattle to Denver in the caboose. That used to be commonplace. When someone that had a car load of cattle to go to the Denver market, he got a free pass to come back on the passenger train and he could ride in the caboose to Denver with the cattle train. A caboose full of cattlemen would be with the cattle sometimes. Then they would use their free passes to return on the passenger train.

With cattle on the train, a man boarded at Sidney. His name was Mr. Rehder and he got on the caboose. He was wearing a suit and necktie. When he got on, one of the cowboys cut off his tie and said, "Well, here is another one; we're going to have to initiate him." One time my Dad had some cars of steers and the train stopped at Hot Sulphur to load more cattle. He went back to see if any of the cattle were down. If one was down, they had a bar that they would use to get him up. My Dad went to poke the steer and another one bumped it and my Dad was thrown down over a bank. Another man, his name was Glenn Sheriff from Hot Sulphur, helped my Dad to a doctor to treat the cut on his shoulder.

Before my trip, my father had already made several trips to the Denver market with the



## **DAMN SLOW & LATE**

cattle. The most we ever shipped was two or three car loads of our own and some of the neighbors would get together and make up a car load or two or three, whatever was necessary. Quite often there would be someone with more cattle to ship and they'd have extra passes and room for more cattle. Then someone else with a few cattle could finish filling the car, so it made it real nice.

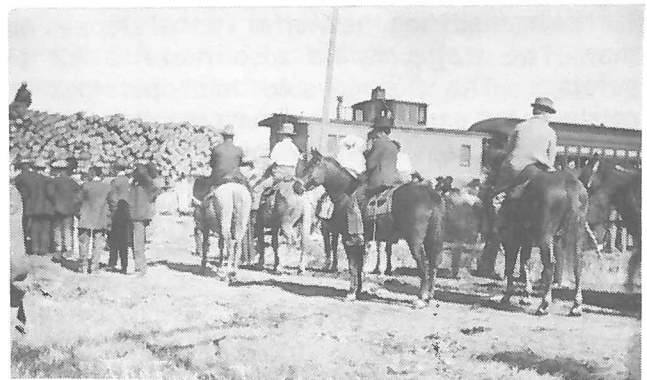
Every fall we used to listen to market reports for the cattle market. In later years, we would ship the cattle on the train and then drive to Denver because it was kind of a tiresome trip on the railroad. You would stop at every stockyard along the way to pick up cattle, and that time I went, we stopped over in Middle Park on this side of Granby. There we waited for two or three hours for another train to help push the cattle train up the Moffat Tunnel.

Riding on the trains for the first time was great. It was not rough at all. I could not believe the tunnels on that railroad. Old timers rode it since it started. My Dad told me when he would ride cattle trains to Denver in the caboose that the train curved so much that you could shake hands with the engineer when you were in the caboose at the end of the train. We left here in the afternoon the time I rode the cattle train. We did not get to Denver until daylight. An interesting incident on that trip was that the back of the caboose had an observation deck, and two of our neighbors, Roland Reed and Russ Utter, were along. They both had cattle on the train, and we all got on here at the Sidney stockyards. The conductor was kind of cranky. When we left Sidney, Roland and I got back on the observation deck where we could see the country. Then this crabby conductor came back and said, "You two get back inside here. If you fall off, you would want to sue the railroad, and we're not going to have this happen, so we don't want you standing out here." And Roland said to him, "This is an awful old caboose and we will probably have to push this thing before the trip is over." This cranky conductor said "What I'm going to do is when we get on the top of the divide between Oak Creek and Phippsburg, I'm going to cut the

caboose loose and coast into Phippsburg." And he cut it loose too soon and we ended up helping push the caboose into Phippsburg. Roland said "I told you that we would have to push this thing."

Then they put on a much stronger caboose. We went on and picked cars of cattle up in Yampa and other points along the railroad. When we got to Tabernash, we had a long train. A brakeman who came on at Phippsburg said "This is such a long train, we are going to have to have a push to get up to the Moffat Tunnel. We were all sitting at the back of the train in the caboose, and here comes this 3600. That was known as one of the biggest locomotives in the world. Another name for them was Malleys. There we sat in the caboose and here came this enormous locomotive right behind us. It was almost scary and it pushed behind the caboose. We could see the steam coming out of it, and it pushed that cattle train right up to the tunnel. Then it backed down to Tabernash, but I will always remember that enormous locomotive coming up and giving that train a push up to the tunnel. They didn't use the 3600 in this part of the country much because they thought the tracks were not strong enough.

There were three types of engines. There was the Malley which had two steam pistons on each side, then there was the Mike. It just had one piston on each side. There were the passenger engines which were the smallest ones. They had one piston on each side too. Before they started using the diesel locomotive, like is used today, they had to get stronger rails clear to Craig.



**"HAYDEN RESIDENTS MEETING FIRST**

There were not any bad train wrecks through this area that I knew of. The only train wreck I can remember was the passenger train that was coming up one morning. It usually had three coaches. It had the smaller locomotive. Every passenger locomotive had 300, 301, 302, or 303 on it. They all had one of those numbers. It would pull a baggage car, an express car, and sometimes two passenger cars or coaches. In later years, there were just two cars, an express or mail car and a coach. The earlier trains had

two coaches and one was the observation car. It cost you more to ride in that. There were seats in there that swiveled. But getting back to the train wreck, one morning a passenger train was coming from Steamboat. It got to Sidney about 10:00 in the morning going to Denver, and just before it got to Sidney, it jumped the track. It went right off the rails, and there the locomotive was — off the rails. It was caused by some fault in the rail or other and there that train was, off the track. The word got around and people came from far and wide to look at the train wreck. Car after car came out from Steamboat, and they parked near the crossing and walked down there and looked. Of course, we were curious too. They brought in a train crew to put that engine back on the track. I was right there when they got it on; they must have had about 20 men with great long pry bars. The boss told them just where to put them and he'd say "Pry," and everyone would pry together. They pried that locomotive back on the rails with those heavy bars. They were men of experience. They knew how to do it. Nobody was hurt at all. They had to get the passengers to their destination in automobiles and the railroad took the responsibility. There were several, but that's the closest I ever came to being around a train wreck.

**"I WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT ENORMOUS LOCOMOTIVE COMING UP AND GIVING THAT TRAIN A PUSH."**

The trains pulled coal, oil, and grain. The snow would get so deep that it could stop the trains for two or three weeks. They had some snow sheds for the trains. Then the Moffat Tunnel stopped all that. The trains would also move a lot of potatoes. The train would haul potatoes in refrigerator cars in below zero weather. Routt County people shipped a lot of grain on the railroad. I can remember seeing men with grain wagons pulled by horses. There in the fall, men with scoop shovels would shovel grain (oats, wheat, or barley) off of horse-drawn wagons into the railroad cars. There would have to be men back in there to shovel it further back into the cars. They would have to put up boards so they could get as much as possible into the cars. At one time, there was a big shed to store the bailed hay near the stockyards before it was shipped out on the railroad. The Sidney store was called the Valley Mercantile. Everything seemed to be centered around the railroad in the fall when hay, grain, cattle and sheep were shipped out. Cans of cream were shipped the year around in the express car on the passenger train. The Post Master (storekeeper) at Sidney would meet every passenger train with the mail bag at the small depot. Now the mail is carried by truck and aircraft. Trains of coal is what is mostly hauled by rail today.

## DOROTHY WITHER

The next part of this article is an interview with Dorothy Wither. She was born in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Her father and uncle ran the A & G Wither Mercantile. You could get everything from toothpicks to thrashing machines there. Dorothy opened the Dorothy Shop, a women's clothing store, in 1939. She rode the first train to leave Steamboat.

"I was on the first train to leave Steamboat. It was in January, 1909. It cost us \$22.50 to go to Denver. When the railroad came, the depot was going to be in the middle of town right across from where the present court house is. So my dad and uncle owned some property up there so they built the big store because the depot was to be up there. Then the men that were in on that were politicians out of Denver and they had some property down where the depot is now. It caused quite a little friction in the town. Everybody thought it was going to be downtown, then they built the Cabin Hotel. People rode the train to Sidney and rode horses back to Steamboat. My father and I went on to Denver and then we went to California. The thing that made the railroad was the coal. So then the coal companies started to develop because there was no way of getting the coal out before the railroad came in. And after that was when Oak Creek came to be, after that Mt. Harris and other coal companies started to mine. Then all the people in business would get their supplies in freight. The freight has always been very expensive.



**"THERE WERE 55 TUNNELS TO GO THROUGH, AND THE BIG ONE WAS WHEN YOU GOT UP ON TOP. THEY CALLED IT A SNOW SHED."**

Freight was always high and it cost a lot to ship cattle out to Denver and the people would buy the cattle from Routt County. The people could tell that they were from Routt County by their black faces because of the tunnels. The cattle were so well fed they were the best in the state.

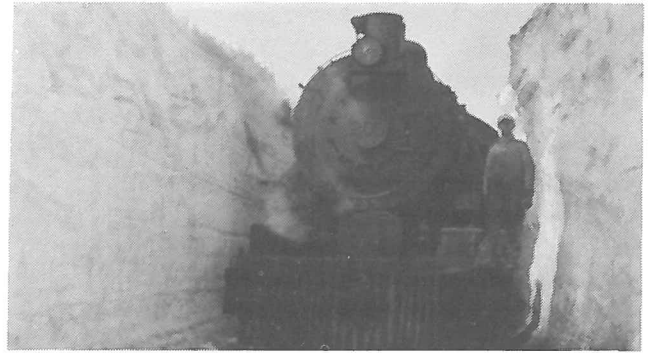
(To go to Denver we would leave in the morning and get into Denver eight to nine hours later.)

The tourists started to come on those first few trains. The one I remember so distinctly, was the people from Chicago that stayed at the Cabin Hotel in the summer. They would stay two to three months. They had to stay a while because it cost so much to get here. They would bring their clothes to stay. My dad had the store and that's the way they would buy things. I remember as a child, one man had crossed the prairie to come to Steamboat. He worked for a big wholesale house and that man came with six trunks, and each day he would open one of those trunks, and every day my mother thought he needed a good meal and fed him. He would sell everything we needed in the store. He sold shoes, furniture, rugs, all kinds of yard goods, stockings, ribbons, men's clothes, sheets, pillow cases and bedding. They worked one to two weeks to get what they needed for the next six months. Now we go to Denver — fly and come back. 2 to 3 days and have enough supplies for the next three to four months.



**"WE HAD A LOT OF WILD TRIPS ON THE RAILROAD."**

We had some wild trips on the railroad. I went out one time when I had just finished college. I would say this was '23 or '24. My mother called, and said if possible get on the train because they were going to stop it because the weather was bad and I was going to school in Fort Collins. There was another girl there from Craig and her mother called her and said her cousin would take us into Denver at one o'clock in the morning. We went to the hotel and slept for about two hours and then we got up and went down to the station. We didn't think to eat any breakfast. So we got



down there and left at 7:30. We started and went up quite a little ways and something happened and we backed down and there we sat. They wouldn't let us out of the train and there we sat until one o'clock. When we started we went all that day, the whole night, the next whole day, and whole night. The next afternoon at four o'clock we got home. Finally they gave us something to eat. We were famished and we needed water and we all were black and sick from that awful gas in the tunnel. That's when we had to go over the top and we thought we weren't going to get home, and sure enough they closed the road then for a while. The road was not closed too often.

The tunnels used to cave in and that would mean they would have to dig it out so they would not have a train coming into town. I can remember five days we didn't have a train. Now there may have been more, but I was impressed about that because I was still in high school and everybody was waiting for their slippers, your little patent leather slippers that we wore to the prom. All the girls had made their dresses. Everybody was waiting for their slippers to come and they came about twelve o'clock and the prom was that night. I remember my dad calling everybody. He was upset and excited because the children didn't have their slippers. He had to do something to help them.

Then one time I came in on the Moffat Road. They stopped on the top. We stopped in there for quite a while. We all were ready to die. We thought the conductor came through and said we were steaming up to hit the snow bank and we went through. As you came out there was a curve. It was a terrible blizzard. There was a terrible snow bank and when we hit it, it wasn't there. The wind blew it away and they couldn't stop the train. Everything on the racks over the seats flew on the floor. The ladies that had their babies were going to throw them out to save them. Oh! It was a terrible situation. After so long they did get the train stopped. It seemed like an hour or two but I'm sure it wasn't anymore than twenty minutes or half an hour. So then they came back and explained. We knew everybody on the railroad as we used to see all the con-



**"THEN WHEN THE RAILROAD CAME IN, WE WERE GOING TO BE MADE OVER NIGHT."**

ductors. We knew them just like they were friends. If we wanted to get out and pick some flowers, they would stop the train, you could pick the flowers, and then get back on the train. It didn't take very long. We would get some place and have coffee and they would bring us some rolls. I traveled so much that they knew me and I knew all of them. So we thought nothing of it. It was just the way we did things. They wouldn't let you do that now. But that was an awful experience. They said afterwards, they came as near as they ever came to upsetting a train.

We used to run trains just for skiers to come to ski carnival. They would come and park down by the depot. Marjorie Perry would ski over the top and the train would pick her up at the bottom. After it came over the top it came into Hot Sulphur Springs, then came down to Gore to Yampa and Oak Creek then into Steamboat Springs. It went on down to Craig. The idea was that the railroad was going to go on through to the coast. But it never did. David Moffat was the one that built it, and he ran out of money, and then the D & R G bought it.

The railroad was very important to the town. Then we knew we were going to have so many tourists. Then the people could get in there. The people could not get in to here. There was no way they could get in there except on the stage. You could bring eight or ten people on the stage. People came in on the stage to develop the country. There were miners or they wanted to get into the stock business or something. Then when the railroad came in we were going to be made overnight. So we thought it made a big difference.

The railroad helped with the strawberry boom, but by the time the strawberries got out too many of them were spoiled. It just ruined the boom. If it wasn't for the railroad it wouldn't have ever happened.

I don't think they had refrigerated cars back

then. If they did I was not old enough to remember. But I can remember what an occasion it was to get bananas in the store when I was growing up, we would get a big bunch of them and they would be packed in straw in a wooden box. Lots of us would go down after school, dad had a great big rope with a big hook. The men would hook the bananas and then pull them up. Then they left the bananas over the summer to ripen. They ripened right in the skins, and they kept them on the stem and they were usually green when they got here. Yes! That was quite a treat. If you got a banana you thought it was much more desirable than candy.

The train was always expensive because there were 55 tunnels that you went through and the big one was when you got up on top. That was what they call the snow shed. That took you up over the top of the divide and it was built of logs and wood and you would get in there. Inside there they had this place where they changed crews and the men would go that far and then go back. But the gas was terrible in that tunnel. I can still remember how terrible the gas was in there. It was so hard on the cattle to take them over. It was so hard on the stock. To get to that high altitude and then if anything happened on the railroad up there. Then they would have to wait in the tunnel with all that gas. You came out of it just black. Then you came out, your face would be black.

The passenger train stopped coming to Steamboat in April 1968. We had lots of trials trying to keep it on and we sent people to New York and some went to Washington to try to keep it on. Mr. Manson was our lawyer, one of the lawyers in town and we had meetings. It wasn't that big of a change to the town when the passenger train stopped pulling into town because everybody had cars. So it didn't make any difference. The tourists weren't using it anymore. That's why it quit.



## BOB WITHER



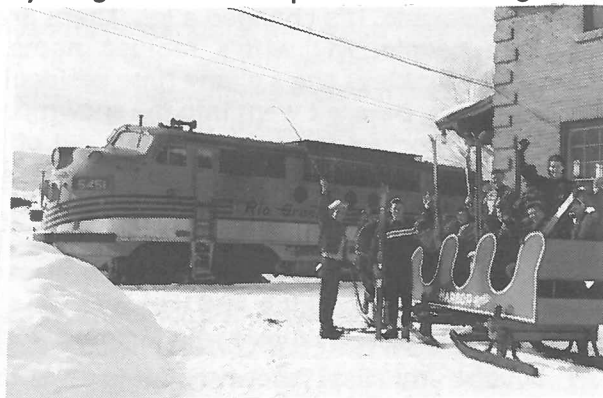
**"WE COULD SEE THE STEAM COMING OUT,  
AND IT PUSHED THE CATTLE TRAIN  
RIGHT UP THERE."**

Bob Wither was born in Steamboat Springs in 1915. During his ski jumping days he took the train to the different ski meets. "When I was a child the railroad was the only way to get in and out of Steamboat during the winter. The roads weren't open, Rabbit Ears wasn't open, and, of course, Gore Pass wasn't open in the winter. I did a lot of jumping in those days and was always riding the train."

Bob got an early start working for the railroad, but didn't become a full time employee until 1937.

"When I was in the eighth grade I delivered telegrams. I got ten cents a telegram and on a good day I would make as much as a dollar. I started, in 1937 making \$100.00 a month, which was pretty good pay in those days. There were no clerk unions on the railroad in those days. I worked as a clerk. They finally got a union in 1941.

Bob Wither talked about working with Albritton. "Erret Albritton's main purpose was working as an agent for the railroad. That meant he was in charge of this depot in Steamboat Springs. I worked under him. He handled everything and he had operations working near



the river, when I worked under him as a clerk. I worked almost ten years. As a boss, Albritton was very good; he taught me telegraphy and all about station work. So when the time came and a job would open up I could bid on it. In fact, I moved to Denver after I worked here a little while because he taught me so well that I could take over and handle the job.

In the station we handled all the train orders so the trains could meet each other and that sort of thing. We also handled all the freight and sold tickets to the passengers. I think the one-way tickets cost, from Denver to Steamboat, probably around \$6.00 or \$7.00; Round trips were a little less than double. So there again things have gone up considerably.

There were some tragic accidents with some trains running into each other. But that did not really pertain to me. I think the worst thing that ever happened was along about 1943 in tunnel ten. It is on the eastern slope. It caught fire and caved in so that stopped all traffic. This was in the fall. This was a big area for livestock then and it is now. That was the only way to move cattle then so they would ship them on the train from here to Rollingsville, which is the other side of the Moffat Tunnel. They unloaded them, put them in trucks, and shipped them down to the stockyards. There were some people who were killed in that fire. It was closed for about six weeks. It was a major tunnel and a major disaster, as far as the railroad was concerned. In fact, they had buses run from Denver up to the tunnel. Then the people would have to walk around it to get to the passenger train and then it would bring them on over this way.

I really enjoyed working for the railroad and I still enjoy watching the trains go by. Of course, in those days there were all steam engines. They made a lot of noise and they smoked a bunch. It was a pretty sight.

The people of Routt County thought the passenger train would never stop. The ranchers believed the cattle trains would run forever and get their cattle over the mountains and to market. Now coal is the main reason the railroad is still in operation. Oil is also one of the reasons the railroad is still in existence. Thank goodness we still have those or the railroad would not be here now.

Photos for this story are from the Routt County collection at Buddy Werner Library and Errett Albritton.