

A Short History of the Colorado Midland and Midland Terminal railroads

The Colorado Midland Railroad operated through the central mountains of Colorado from 1887 until 1918 and was the first standard gauge line through the Rockies. It ran west from Colorado Springs to the coal mining town of New Castle, west of Glenwood Springs. From there, the road merged with the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad and continued to Grand Junction.

The company's terminus was actually in Colorado City (now Old Colorado City), a few miles west of Colorado Springs. Along its 222 miles of mainline track, the "Midland" served the communities of Manitou Springs, Cascade, Ute Park (now Chipita Park), Green Mountain Falls, Woodland Park (originally Manitou Park Station), Divide, Florissant, several communities in the Eleven-Mile Canyon area, Hartsel, Buena Vista, Leadville and the communities along the Frying Pan River valley to Basalt. From Basalt there were two branch lines. One branch extended to the rich mining town of Aspen (the 18-mile Aspen Short Line) while the other (main) branch followed the Roaring Fork River valley to Glenwood Springs, terminating at New Castle.

The Continental Divide was crossed at Hagerman Pass just west of Leadville, named for the railroad's driving force - James J. Hagerman. Later, much of the line over the pass was abandoned, in favor of the lower, Busk-Ivanhoe Tunnel through the Sawatch Mountains.

Hagerman was responsible for gathering the twenty million dollars needed to build the railroad, primarily from investors on the east coast and in England. Hagerman also had financial interests in a silver mine in Aspen, a gold mine in Cripple Creek and in the rich coal reserves southeast of Glenwood Springs. He sold his interests in the Colorado Midland to the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad in 1890, who then became the majority owners of the railroad.

In 1893, after the Silver Panic and with the confirmed discovery of gold in the Cripple Creek/Victor area, entrepreneurial owners of the Colorado Midland began construction of a spur line between Divide and Cripple Creek, called the Midland Terminal Railroad. The line reached Cripple Creek by December, 1895. Prior to this time, a toll road was constructed between Divide and the goldfields. Passengers, miners and prospectors destined for Cripple Creek, would disembark the Colorado Midland train at Divide and take the Hundley Stage to the district. Before 1895, ore and freight were transported by wagon using the same toll road (the toll gate was at Midland), as well as the road between Florissant and the goldfields which linked up to the old "Leadville road."

Narrow gauge railroad tracks had reached the goldfields ahead of the Midland Terminal in 1892 via the Florence & Cripple Creek Railroad by way of Canon City. Another railroad followed later. However, the Midland Terminal was the only standard gauge railroad serving Cripple Creek and Victor. Its connection with the Colorado Midland tracks at Divide allowed for convenient transport of ore to the processing mills in

Colorado City, as well as easy connections with eastern companies shipping mining equipment and supplies to the district.

The early 1900s were tumultuous years for the Colorado Midland. It experienced growth and financial profit, as well as turmoil. Beginning in 1908, it began to suffer from declining traffic, competition, absentee ownership and mounting debt. By 1911 the "Midland" had lost its share of the Cripple Creek ore business when ore freight from the goldfields was diverted to a competing small railroad, the Colorado Springs & Cripple Creek, to reduce freight costs. The CS&CC ownership (the mine owners) opted to use their direct rail lines between the goldfields and the reduction mills in Colorado City because they considered the Colorado Midland (and Midland Terminal) shipping rates to be exorbitant. The track bed of the CS&CC is now the primary roadbed for Teller County 8, the Gold Camp Road. Other business ventures upon which the Colorado Midland was dependent for revenues were also reduced or disappeared. During this period, the railroad went into receivership and was ultimately purchased by its competitors.

By 1917, the Colorado Midland was in foreclosure. On April 21, 1917, salvage dealers gathered at the Colorado City rail yard to bid on the assets. However, Albert E. Carlton "with a cigar in his mouth and his hat pulled low over his eyes, leaned against the wall of the Colorado City depot and outbid all of the wrecking company representatives present." He purchased the entire Colorado Midland assets for \$1,425,000. He also invested a significant amount of his own money into the company for improvements in an attempt to revive the railroad.

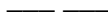
By summer, all ore traffic from Cripple Creek was diverted back to the Midland Terminal line, also owned by Carlton, which connected with the Colorado Midland tracks at Divide and ran down Ute Pass. Carlton planned many improvements to the company, including new, more powerful motive power, new rolling stock and upgrades to the roadbed and track up Ute Pass and on the "Midland's" western route (i.e., strengthening the tonnage capacity and reducing some of the railroad's 4% grades). There were even plans to extend rail lines all the way to Salt Lake City (Hagerman's original dream).

In December 1917, President Woodrow Wilson established the United States Railroad Administration (the "U.S.R.A.") to take control over all American railroads in an attempt to make military and civilian rail traffic more efficient and relieve the congestion caused by the diversity of railroad competition and the transport of war (WW1) supplies and material. After some good old fashion lobbying, the U.S.R.A. was convinced that the Colorado Midland was a shorter route through central Colorado than that of other rail companies and a great deal of war traffic was diverted to it. Unfortunately, Carlton's planned improvements, including track and roadbed rehabilitation and new motive power, were not completely in place in time to adequately accommodate the extra tonnage and traffic directed by the U.S.R.A. As a result, expenses mounted (around \$1,500 a day), revenues plummeted, and the railroad's operations soon began grinding to a halt.

The railroad went into receivership again in July 1918 and ceased operations all together in August. Thereafter, the railroad sat inactive until the early 1920s when all the western tracks beyond Divide were torn up, and the locomotives, rolling stock and all physical assets, including the Busk-Ivanhoe tunnel, were either scraped or sold to various companies (all except those assets retained by the Midland Terminal). The Colorado Midland Railway Company was legally dissolved in May, 1922, with most of the rail rights-of-way deeded to the State of Colorado for highway purposes.

The former Colorado Midland line from Divide to Colorado Springs, however, was retained by the Midland Terminal Railroad and linked to the MT line running from Divide to Cripple Creek. The Midland Terminal was later purchased by the Golden Cycle Corporation, owner of the only surviving reduction mill in Colorado City. Their mining and milling operation was responsible for 90% of the railroad's business after 1934.

Midland Terminal trains running between Cripple Creek and Colorado City carried mostly ore and freight, as well as mail and some passenger service. The last steam passenger train to Cripple Creek ran in 1931. Thereafter, ore and freight trains still ran during WWII but were more infrequent after the war. Two special gasoline powered trolley cars were built for passenger and mail service, which continued until the last days. As ore production from the district decreased and smaller, more modern mills were built in the district, the Midland Terminal finally ceased operations in early 1949.



In the Articles of Incorporation of the Colorado Midland Railway Company, dated November 23, 1883, the company proposed to build the first standard gauge railroad through central Colorado and over the Continental Divide, thoroughly alarming their railroad competitors. They accomplished that goal. Eventually, all the major narrow gauge railroads would convert their tracks to standard gauge. By penetrating the Rockies, the Colorado Midland stimulated the economic development and growth of that rich territory. The days of the Colorado Midland and Midland Terminal railroads are gone forever, but their impact on the region can never be denied. Though the railroads died away, their influence on our history and culture has preserved their immortality.

*Compiled from various sources by
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