

A Short History Of the Midland Depot at Divide

Unfortunately, the only remnants of the 60-year era of the railroads along Ute Pass are the former rail beds along the roads, some of which are not readily noticeable, *and* the deteriorating Midland Depot at Divide.

In the past, between 1887 and 1949, when the Colorado Midland and Midland Terminal railroads were operating, there were many depots and stations along their tracks. Among all the depots along the Colorado Midland rails from Colorado Springs to New Castle, only two survive as stand-alone structures and only one is in the Ute Pass area. None survive west of Hartsel.

Most are long gone or compromised, victims of progress, like the stone depot at Manitou Springs which is a residence, or the depot in Basalt is which now the Alpine Bank. Others were torn down or burned down. The last depot in Woodland Park burned in the mid-1930s. One end of it was saved and later repaired. It now sits, painted yellow and white, in Memorial Park by the lake. A fairly good replica of the Woodland Park depot was (much) later constructed in a small park along U.S. 24, used as a rest stop. The depot in Colorado City burned in 1931. After 1918, the depot in Florissant was moved to the Fossil Beds and used as offices. In the 1970s, the National Park Service tore it down and the wood was used to build a house in Divide. The large station house in Leadville (taking up a whole city block) was torn down.

The depot at Hartsel still stands. While there has been occasional talk of preserving the Hartsel depot, it remains abandoned. The Midland Terminal depot in Victor has been restored but is unused. The terminal depot at Cripple Creek is now a museum. The **Midland Depot at Divide** is the only remaining monument to the railroads' history along Ute Pass.

The Midland Depot at Divide was a unique depot at the height of its operation, serving two railroads – the Colorado Midland and the Midland Terminal – with tracks (or bays) landing on both the north and south sides. In the early 1900s (the busiest times), it had two ticket agents, a telegraph operator (the original telegraph pole is still on site) and common waiting and baggage areas. A brick platform surrounded the depot, extending well beyond the building to the east and south to accommodate passengers and baggage.

Initially (i.e., 1887), the Colorado Midland had only a side-track in Divide, but later a depot was erected – housing an agent and telegrapher's office and passenger and freight facilities. It burned to its foundation in 1896 along with several other businesses in Divide. Legend holds that the fire was caused by sparks from train engines. At that time, the Colorado Midland trains used impure lignite coal to fuel their boilers, mined in the Rockrimmon area of Colorado Springs. The coal produced lots of sparks.

The second Depot was finished in 1904 when the "Colorado Midland's" facilities in Divide were greatly updated. Built on the old foundations stumps that survived the fire,

the new depot was exactly 20 feet shorter in size than the first depot. That depot, a 105 year old structure, is what remains.

Adjacent to the Depot was a storage shed to the east and an outhouse to the west (the location of the outhouse is probably now partially under Weaverville Road). There was also a powder magazine on the south side of the depot where the railroad stored explosives – used, among other purposes, to remove snow and debris from around the tracks in winter. There were other buildings associated with the Depot, including a section house, an engine house (located approximately where the Teller County Sheriff's offices are now), a “Y” for turning engines around and other rail yard assets.

In the 1930s, during a coal strike, the Midland Depot at Divide was not used as a depot, but rather became a coal storage facility for the railroad, as were most other depots along the Midland Terminal line. When the impact of the strike was over, the Depot resumed near-normal operations.

When the Midland Terminal railroad ceased operations in 1949, the depot and surrounding property, as well as the section house and rail yards, were purchased by the Weaver family. Ted Weaver was the section manager at the time operations ceased. The Weavers used the Depot as a residence for a short while until they were able to move into the section house, which now sits across Weaverville road west of the Depot. A descendent of the family recently reported that they used the powder magazine as a fruit cellar.

Thereafter, the Depot sat empty for many years until Ted Weaver opened an antique shop in it in the 1960s, primarily selling artifacts and memorabilia he had accumulated from the Colorado Midland and Midland Terminal years. In the 1980s, the Depot was purchased and eventually opened as a roadhouse and bar, call the Whistle Stop.

In 1985, a new non-historic east wing was built (or at least begun, according to a recently discovered building permit) and served as residence of the owner of the Whistle Stop. In 1999, the Depot was purchased by a local Divide developer (who is the current owner) to save it from being demolished.

Currently, the Depot at Divide is in pretty bad shape. The foundation (mostly tree stumps) has been eroded and rotted by years of water running into and under the main structure. The siding of the depot is greatly weathered and the infrastructure is suspect. Most of the four acres surrounding the depot has changed contour over the years, the result of the burial of aqueduct pipes serving the water needs of Colorado Springs, the roadbed and drainage of U.S. Highway 24 and Teller County's growing administrative and maintenance complex to the south. However, evidence of the railroad beds and the “Y” (where the Colorado Midland and Midland Terminal tracks met) can be clearly seen east of the Depot, as well as a water well which was probably dug in the 1950s.

Preservation Efforts

Earlier, in this decade, the Teller Historical and Environmental Coalition (T.H.E. Coalition), along with other interested organizations, began a project to preserve the Midland Depot at Divide. An historical review was anticipated in order to place the Depot on state or local historical registers. By 2004 with help from a grant, a Historic Structure Assessment and a Master Plan were in place, and Teller County had declared the Midland Depot at Divide a historic site (2003). The State of Colorado would not issue an historic designation, presumably due to the attached 'non-historic' addition and the perceived small historic footprint around the Depot. Activities at the Depot were held to garner community support.

However, after 2004, the project languished until spring 2007 when T.H.E. Coalition once again organized a meeting at the Depot of all interested parties, including the Divide Chamber of Commerce, the Divide Park Board, the Rampart Range Library District and the Ute Pass Historical Society, in an attempt to re-energize the preservation effort. The meeting was successful and the effort is now moving forward.

A Midland Depot at Divide working committee has been established, under the auspices of T.H.E. Coalition, which includes community volunteers with expertise in historical issues, structure preservation, grant writing, public relations, architectural design, construction and legal issues, as well as planning and project administration. In May, 2008, T.H.E. Coalition acquired a second grant from the Colorado State Historical Fund to conduct an archeological survey of the Depot and ground.

The results of the archeological study were both exciting and promising. For one, it was discovered that the brick platform around the depot extended much further east and south than once suspected. The powder magazine was discovered on the south bank (on Teller County property), as well. It is thought that the actual historic footprint around the Depot is, therefore, much larger.

The long-range preservation plan for the Depot spans a number of years – from the present through 2011, or beyond. After acquiring the property, funding for the preservation is planned through state and local grants, often requiring matching dollars. The first step will be to stabilize the Depot structure, followed later by reconstruction to nearly its former state. The historic preservation effort alone is predicted to be a one million, two hundred thousand dollar (\$1,200,000) project. Ultimately, the preserved Depot will house a visitors' center and a section for historic displays and railroad exhibits – complete with outside tracks.

The 2004 MDAD Master Plan has been revised to include a number of other projected historic, recreational and commercial uses. Teller County has re-designated the Depot and 4.26 acres surround the building as an historic site.

In addition to the historic preservation of the Depot, the non-historic addition to the east has already been renovated to serve as a project office and meeting space for T.H.E. Coalition and other local non-profit organizations. The open field to the south is reserved for commercial purposes.

Besides the historic and commercial components of the project, there is also a recreational aspect, including settings for picnic areas and other activities. In addition, the grounds surrounding the Depot lead into the Hayden Divide Loop Trail, which is a local segment of the American Discovery Trail extending coast to coast.

The Colorado Midland and the Midland Terminal railroads are a legacy of the both the Pikes Peak/Ute Pass region and the central Rockies. The railroads are as much a defining aspect of our local community culture as were logging and sawmill activities, ranching, the Ute Indians, the Cripple Creek/Victor gold mining district or any other element of local history - arguably one of the *most* important aspects. The Midland Depot at Divide was an integral part of the railroads' transportation system where thousands of passengers and tons of ore and freight passed by its unique double bays. The glory days of the Colorado Midland and Midland Terminal railroads are gone forever, but we can honor their legacy by preserving one of the last remaining symbols of that time. Preserving the Midland Depot at Divide is a natural and logical effort to conserve and maintain a historical site, and to protect it as part of our regional heritage for future generations.

“It’s time to get the Midland Depot at Divide back on track.”

*History compiled from various sources by
David Martinek, MDAD working committee for T.H.E. Coalition
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