

1 RAILROAD - I purchased this historical essay \$30.00  
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Gary D. Martin Pay by June 1st  
1989 GDM

Rail service to Westcliffe was provided by the Denver & Rio Grande as detailed in the Railroad's May 1911 descriptive time tables. I discovered a copy of the time tables at a flea market in Indianapolis and for 25¢ it became mine.

Train #5 departed Denver at 9:00 a.m. and arrived in Pueblo at 1:10 p.m. Train #51 departed Pueblo at 1:25 p.m., stopped at Texas Creek and arrived in Westcliffe at 6:35 p.m. The traveler devoted more than 9½ hours and covered 209 railroad miles. For the trip to Denver using the same route, Train #50 departed Westcliffe at 11:00 a.m. and arrived in Pueblo at 3:30 p.m. Train #2 departed Pueblo at 3:40 p.m. and arrived in Denver at 7:45 p.m.

Train #5, the Chicago-San Francisco Express, was one of three westbound Denver & Rio Grande trains providing service from Denver to Ogden, Utah - a trip of 779 miles, scheduled to be completed in 30½ hours. The main line of the Denver & Rio Grande was laid out from Denver, through Pueblo, Cañon City, Texas Creek, Buena Vista, Provo, Salt Lake City to Ogden. Service to San Francisco was provided by the Western Pacific Railroad via connection at Salt Lake City. A new Denver & Rio Grande and Western Pacific Union passenger station, Salt Lake City, opened August 20, 1910.

The end of the spur track which started at the main line in Texas Creek and was routed through Rito, Palo, Hillside and Verdemont was Westcliffe. Gary Martin of Martin & Tope Realtors told me that since Westcliffe was the end of the line, a turntable was constructed so that the engine could be turned around for the return trip to Pueblo.

The Denver & Rio Grande narrow gauge railroad from Texas Creek reached the Wet Mountain Valley in 1881, but instead of terminating in Silver Cliff the track ended a mile to the west. This was in keeping with the practice of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad according to p. 71 From Trappers to Tourists, 1972 Century One Press, Colorado Springs. R.W. Campbell states: "When William Palmer built the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, he cannily kept his rails outside any existing community. He and his various companies invested in thousands of acres of inexpensive land... This practice of bypassing previously established settlements caused much disgruntlement in the affected communities." This terminal city originally called Clifton was re-named Westcliffe to commemorate the hometown in England of William A. Bell, Vice-President of the Denver & Rio Grande. Mr. Bell was a Wet Mountain Valley landowner. It should be noted that in 1890 the Denver & Rio Grande took up the original narrow gauge track and left the Valley, but in 1900 returned with a line of standard gauge. Evie Miller of Evie's in Westcliffe told me that her family bought the railroad station after the Denver & Rio Grande no longer provided service here. ~~He~~ ~~now~~ ~~live~~ in the old train station.

SHE AND HER SON

The location of the railroad terminal in Westcliffe was one of three or four major forces which caused the fall from power of Silver Cliff - which in 1880 was the third largest city in the State and contended with Denver, Golden and Aspen to be designated the State Capitol. "When Silver Cliff showed signs of slumping, the large and elegant St. Cloud Hotel, ..., was torn down. All the dimension lumber and cut rock was hauled down the Oak Creek Grade to Cañon City. The St. Cloud was rebuilt in 1888 at 631 Main Street..." Ibid., p. 128

In 1928 Westcliffe became the Custer County Seat, replacing Silver Cliff which had been the County Seat since 1887.

Custer County was formed from part of Fremont County in 1877 and contains 738 square miles. With a population of about 1500 people spread thinly over its domain, the County has about two people on each square mile, i.e. 640 acres. Tracey Elkins of Martin & Tope Realtors, ~~1910/11~~ ~~that, of all the counties in the United States, our Custer County, is the 7th least populated.~~ Part of the reason for the sparsity of population is the terrain and the fact that nearly 36% of the total land area is covered by the San Isabel National Forest. ~~and that the population is~~ ~~very low.~~

With an area of 737 square miles, Custer County is one of 23 Counties out of over 3,000 in the Country with a density of under 2.1.