

Introduction

This paper provides an explanation and supporting text for the map series, "Boulder County Colorado: Major Transportation Routes." The maps were prepared for the Boulder Historic Context Project under the historic theme of Transportation, ca. 1840 to present. They note major transportation corridors used during

BOULDER COUNTY COLORADO Major Transportation Routes, Pre 1860 to 1920

A paper accompanying the map series.

Prepared for the Boulder Historic
Context Project by

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May, 1992

Introduction

This paper provides an explanation and supporting text for the map series, "Boulder County Colorado: Major Transportation Routes." The maps were prepared for the Boulder Historic Context Project under the historic theme of 'Transportation, ca. 1540 to Present.' They note major transportation corridors used during four periods in Boulder's history; Pre 1860, 1860 to 1880, 1880 to 1900, and 1900 to 1920.

The map series is in keeping with the project as it delineates routes that provided important connections for Boulder with surrounding communities. Some of these routes have remained unchanged, such as the Colorado and Southern Railroad, and some, such as the Old Laramie Trail, have faded away in disuse. As far as the author can tell, except for the Switzerland Trail, none have been marked for remembrance. This collection of information will hopefully prove useful for future preservation and landmark location under the theme of historic transportation.

The time periods covered by the series extend from pre settlement times to 1920. These periods were chosen because they fit in well with the historic context theme, and illustrate the changing nature of transportation in Boulder that occurred along with its changing community and industry. The twenty year periods roughly correspond with major transportation developments from, prairie wagon, ^{to} mountain wagon, prairie railroad, and mountain railroad.

Due to the extensive spatial nature of transportation the map series was designed to look at Boulder within the context of surrounding Boulder County. Boulder thrived serving the mountain communities during the booming mining days, and had many connections with them. Later, railroads provided access to markets for the busy eastern Boulder County farming communities, and the coal mines southeast of Boulder. Boulder also had many connections with Denver to the south, and was linked to the tourist towns of Eldorado Springs and Corona by rail in the early 1900's.

Research

Several primary sources were used to locate and name the routes recorded on the maps. These are listed in the endnotes section of the paper, however, some explanation of research technique is in order. Information for the 'Pre 1860' map was especially hard to come by, since this period was, for the most part, before settlement of the area. Maps made at this time are rare. General Land Office township surveys (1859) offered the most information for the period. They showed and named the major wagon trails, such as the Cherokee Trail, and several small unnamed roads. Other information for this period came from secondary sources, which the author tried to verify. For the second map, '1860 to 1880', a combination of secondary sources was used. The third and fourth maps mainly used information from the Colorado Historical Society Office of Archaeology and

Historic Preservation's database. This database is based on primary research.

Products

The products of the series are four maps at 1:90,000 scale. They show Boulder County at four different periods in history, and show the city of Boulder as it grew in size. The maps contain indian trails, wagon roads, railroads, towns, and stage/railroad stops. The towns on the map are named with the name they had during the map period, and appear or disappear accordingly. The author recorded the names of the transportation routes on the map in which they first appear, along with the date of their construction, if known. Also, changes in their use are noted, and they are removed if they had been abandoned. The maps also show stage stops or railroad stops where known.

The Maps

A short description of each map now follows, including the main occurrences in transportation and relating history that occurred during each period, and a brief explanation of the major routes depicted on each map.

Pre 1860

The first map, 'Pre 1860', occurred during the time before

major settlement of Boulder County. Indians had occupied the area throughout the eighteenth century, and had established mountain and plains trails. However, as mentioned, these were hard to document. The resources that were looked at did provide some locations of old indian game trails, such as the trail over Arapaho Pass, which "originally served various tribes in the region."¹ The old Boulder/Rollins wagon road was also known to be a route followed by indians into Middle Park.

In the mid 1800's settlers bound for Oregon travelled the Oregon Trail through what is now Nebraska, fulfilling the ideology of "Manifest Destiny" that gripped the country. A spur of this trail, called the Cherokee Trail, passed near Boulder to the east. It continued southward to Denver where another spur went northeast to Julesburg. It was probably the later trail that the (Thomas) Aikins party, who first "discovered" Boulder, travelled on. The Cherokee Trail was named in 1849 for a prospecting party of Cherokee indians who followed it, although it had been used by early mountain men and trappers. It was "a branch of the Santa Fe Trail that left the roadway near Bent's Fort and headed west by northwest to the Front Range."² The Old Laramie Trail was also a wagon trail across the plains used by settlers and prospectors.

In early 1859 the first gold mining district at Gold Hill was established in Boulder County. Boulder established its own mining district later in the year. In order to reach the mountain communities with supplies and to pack timber out of the mountains good roads were needed. Many of the mountain canyons were thought

to be impassable, but, roads were attempted up Left Hand Canyon and Gregory Canyon during this time. "Late in 1859, the St. Vrain, Altona, Gold Hill, and Gregory Road Company was formed to build a road up Left Hand Canyon to Altona and above."³ Neither canyon road was a success.

1860 to 1880

The period of the next map, '1860 to 1880', was marked by rapid expansion of wagon roads into the mountains, as eight new gold mining districts with their accompanying camps and towns were established in the region. The new network of roads was impressive, with large communities such as Jamestown and Ward at the hub of many of them. The old indian trails through the mountains were incorporated into these roads, since the indians who once used them were being forced out of the Front Range area by a series of treaties. In the early 1860's the Gordon-McHenry road was financed by the U.S. Army to provide protection to the mountain miners from any remaining local indians. It was meant to go over Arapaho Pass and into Middle Park from Boulder, but was never completed.

On the plains in Boulder County coal mining communities, such as Marshall and Superior, were growing. The Colorado and Central Railroad was built in 1873 to serve communities like these. The Union Pacific Railroad was built to reach the Erie coal mines and Boulder. Another development on the plains at this time was the newfound status of the Cherokee Trail as an Overland

Stage and Pony Express route.

Early in July, 1862, permission was given to the contractor by the Postmaster-General to change the mail route so as to leave the road then traveled, (which crossed the South Platte, at Julesburg), and keep along the south side of that stream for about 140 miles westward; thence fording the river and diverging in a northwesterly course, following the "Cherokee Trail," via Bridger's Pass...While this proposed change did not save anything in distance, it was claimed that it was a better route and comparatively free from Indians.⁴

Several stage stops along this route were located in Boulder County. They lie along the rivers, and provided a place for drivers to change and water horses.

1880 to 1900

This period saw the construction of many new railroads on the plains in Boulder County, and the changing of ownership for many. Other railroads at this time were attempted and failed. The railroads were built mainly to ship coal from the coal mines on the plains, and to bring supplies to the miners. In 1881 the Denver, Longmont, and Northwestern Railroad Company constructed a "10 mine narrow gauge track from Longmont south to the Rob Roy Coal Bank and east to Erie."⁵ This line continued south to Denver as well. A spur of this line under the name Denver, Utah, and Pacific was continued on to Lyons from Longmont in 1885. It supported the growing sandstone industry there. The old Colorado Central was consolidated in 1890 by the Union, Pacific, Denver, and Gulf. This move was "led by the Governor John Evans...and lasted eight years,"⁶ when it fell into receivership.

Along with the construction of new railroads on the plains

came the beginning of railroad access into the mountains. The mining industry was still booming in the mountains, and new discoveries were being made throughout the period at places such as Copper Rock (1891) and Happy Valley (1890). "The slow, expensive system of freighting retarded the exploitation of the county's mineral deposits,"⁷ and demand for the faster rail service was high. A number of railroad companies, thus, began to build into the mountains. In 1881 the Greeley, Salt Lake, and Pacific Railroad, which was a subsidiary of the Union Pacific, laid a track from Boulder to Sunset. Then in 1890 the Colorado and Northwestern Railway continued from Sunset to Ward. These tracks eventually made up the famous Switzerland Trail.

A couple of railroads were attempted during this period, but never were used. They succumbed to competition from larger railroads often financed by wealthy eastern capitalists. One of these railroads was the Boulder, Left Hand, and Middle Park Railroad, attempted in 1881. Another such railroad was the Denver, Utah, and Pacific Railway, which was supposed to cross the Continental Divide at Rollins Pass.

1900 to 1920

From 1900 to 1920 railroad service into the mountains expanded even more. The mining industry was slowing somewhat, but a new boom of tungsten at Dayton (Nederland), and the industry of tourism kept the lines in business. Tourism and travel also prompted the addition of the Denver and Interurban electric rail

system on the plains from Boulder to Eldorado Springs and Denver.

The Colorado and Northwestern Railroad Company, prompted by the tungsten boom, extended a line from Ward to Happy Valley (Eldora) in 1904. Tourists also utilized the new line traveling by handcar.

The men would take turns pumping the open car; up the mountain they would go to Eldora, Wallstreet or Sunset—perfect spots for an elegant picnic luncheon. The ride down was quite a bit faster as they coasted down the slopes.⁸

In 1909 the whole section of train lines in the mountains was reorganized as the Denver, Boulder, and Western Railway, but in 1919, after many years of financial deficits, the rails of the tracks began to be removed.

Another mountain train route that went through part of Boulder County was the Denver, Northwestern, and Pacific Railroad, which is now the Moffat Road. It began to operate in 1904, and connected Denver with Middle Park. This railroad was also a tourist attraction, and "excursions were planned in to throw snowballs at Corona, atop the continental divide, during the summer."⁹

The Denver and Interurban Railroad Company built an electric rail from the Colorado and Southern lines at Marshall to Eldorado Springs in 1907. Eldorado Springs was the site of the Moffat Lakes Resort Company after 1905. The resort had a spa and was touted as being "mineral-free and health-producing."¹⁰ "Eight daily trains brought guests to the resort area."¹¹ The Denver and Interurban, known as the Kite Route, also followed the C & S tracks south to Denver, and looped north through Boulder.

In addition to rails for tourism and travel, the Great Western Railway, which runs east from Longmont, was built in 1906 to support the sugar beet industry in Weld County. A processing plant in Longmont processed sugar beets from the farms there.

Map Weaknesses

The maps in the series have ~~a~~ two weaknesses which the viewers should be aware of. First, as the title suggests, they do not show all of the transportation routes that were in existence during these periods, nor do they necessarily represent the time of abandonment of all routes. In addition to this, the locations of routes are not exact in all cases, especially where secondary sources were utilized to locate them. However, some of the sources mentioned, such as the General Land Office quads, and the Colorado Historical Society database, did provide accurate locations for some routes.

Suggestions for Further Projects and Research

This project is ideally suited for computer storage and manipulation. Using computer storage, each year described could have its own layer. These could be constantly added to as new information was found, and displayed singly, or in tandem with other years. Also, enumerations could be performed on the maps using GIS. For example, how many miles of railroads there were each year, versus miles of wagon roads could be calculated.

Some further areas for research are; roads that serviced the oil wells in Boulder County in the early 1900's, additional indian trails, and tramways in mining communities.

Endnotes

¹Manuel Weiss, "Boulder County Historical Site Survey," 1981, U.S. Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service Project, Carnegie Library, Boulder Colorado.

²Colorado Historical Society, History of the Plains Area of Colorado: Trails and Transportation, 1859-1870 (Boulder, Colorado: Colorado Historical Society, 1983)

³Phyllis Smith, A Look At Boulder: From Settlement to City (Boulder, Colorado : Pruett Publishing Company, 1981), p. 33.

⁴Frank Albert Root, The Overland Stage to California: Personal Reminiscences and Authentic History (Columbus, Ohio : Long's College Book Co., 1950), p. 92.

⁵Manuel Weiss, "Boulder County Historical Site Survey," 1981, U.S. Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service Project, Carnegie Library, Boulder, Colorado.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Phyllis Smith, A Look at Boulder: From Settlement to City (Boulder, Colorado : Pruett Publishing Company, 1981), p. 127.

⁹Manuel Weiss, "Boulder County Historical Site Survey," 1981, U.S. Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service Project, Carnegie Library, Boulder, Colorado.

¹⁰Phyllis Smith, A Look at Boulder: From Settlement to City (Boulder, Colorado : Pruett Publishing Company, 1981), p. 142.

¹¹Ibid., p. 143.

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