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Pikes Peak
Photo by David Martinek

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The Life and Times of Jesse Higgins Waters

FORWARD: According to the *Rocky Mountain Sun*, one of many newspapers published in Aspen during its silver days in the 1880s and 90s, Jesse Higgins Waters was “as fat and jolly as ever” and a “born railroad man” (from an article dated February 9, 1895). Whether he was fat and/or jolly depends on one reporter’s opinion, but the fact that he grew up in the railroad business is beyond dispute. Throughout his 52 years until his death in 1914 in a train accident, Waters represented the Denver and Rio Grande and the Colorado Midland railroads, as well as several freight companies, and eventually became superintendent and president of the Midland Terminal railroad and most of its consolidated operations serving the Cripple Creek and Victor gold mining district. This is his story.

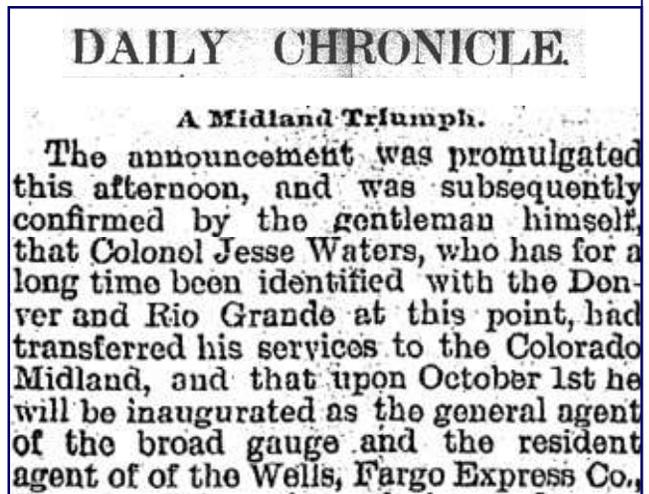
Although not much is known about Jesse Waters’ early boyhood life, except that he was born in 1862 (noted on his tombstone in Evergreen Cemetery in Colorado Springs), there are accounts that as an early teenager he was seen “parading the platform at Parson, Kansas” working as a porter at \$20 a month “under the supervision of his father.” Parsons is located in the southeastern area of the state about 35 miles northeast of historic Coffeyville, as the crow flies.

A little later, at age 16, he was given his first real job as chief clerk of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad in Parsons, a position he held with distinction until he was called to be a messenger for the Adams Express Company, a freight enterprise that was founded in the 1840s and is still around today as an investment trust. His messenger duties put him in contact with a variety of railroad companies where he learned valuable skills and the “subtle details of a complicated business.”

He was stationed in Chicago in 1883 when the Denver and Rio Grande Express Company hired him as their assistant general agent in Leadville. He was 21 years old at the time. He remained in “Cloud City” until after Aspen began to develop as a prominent silver mining district. In 1885 he came to Aspen to serve as the Denver & Rio Grande’s representative for the passenger and freight departments and also as agent for the Rio Grande Express and Carson’s stage line.

During his early days in Aspen, Waters became a figure in the community, at one time elected in 1887 to be a delegate to the Democratic county convention (for the 2nd Ward). He also got into a few scrapes.

One example was in September of 1888 while the Colorado Midland and Denver & Rio Grande were fighting it out for the silver ore transport business. Waters and 15 other men were arrested for contempt of court for refusing an order to “clear the road” of a D & R G train engine, supposedly to allow the Colorado Midland to finish laying their tracks into town from Maroon Creek or to bring one of their own engines into the city (reported by the *Leadville Daily and Evening Chronicle*). It is not certain how that melee ended, but it is ironic that on October 1st of the same year, Waters had “transferred his services” to the Colorado Midland as their general agent in Aspen, as well as the resident agent for the Wells Fargo Express Company.



The announcement in September 1888 in the Aspen Daily Chronicle of “Col. Jesse Waters” appointment as general agent of the Colorado Midland.

Jesse Higgins Waters - continued from page 1

His work with the Rio Grande Express Company was audited prior to his leaving, as confirmed by a newspaper article in the *Aspen Daily Chronicle* on October 5, 1888, which reads that a "Mr. F. C. Smutzer, one of the traveling auditors of the Denver and Rio Grande Express Company, has just completed his labors in this city in checking Colonel Jesse H. Waters out and Colonel Frank I. Smith in (Waters' replacement). He reports Colonel Jesse Waters "O.K." in all his dealings between the corporation and the people and says the narrow gauge will soon be broad" (a reference to the D & R G's plans to add a third rail to their narrow gauge lines.)

It was also reported that "Mr. L. P. Wolfe, the brilliant lieutenant of Colonel Jesse H. Waters, goes with him into the service of the Colorado Midland railway."

The title "colonel" appears to be an honorary attribution favored by the newspapers in Aspen, and reserved for outstanding members of the community. It appears in no other newspaper articles elsewhere.

So now at the young age of 25, Waters has a decade of experience in the railroad industry and is working for two companies and drawing two paychecks. Around Thanksgiving in November 1888, the *Aspen Daily Chronicle* printed comments from local

residents featuring those things they were most thankful for. Jesse Waters is quoted as being "thankful for his \$5000 salary."

Though it is unclear what relationship Water retained with the D & R G after 1888, later newspaper stories cite him as being "joint agent" for both railroads. Perhaps he left the Denver & Rio Grande Express Company but stayed on as the railroad's agent. At least that is what later newspaper stories indicate. What is known is that in April 1893, during a rate war between the two railroads, Waters resigned his position (or positions) and was appointed general freight agent for the Colorado Midland, presumably causing a move to Denver. This was three years after the Santa Fe purchased the Colorado Midland from James J. Hagerman and his host of investors.

His new position as general freight agent apparently lasted less than eighteen months. Newspaper accounts in the *Aspen Morning Sun* and the *Denver Times* in 1895 list Waters as the general agent in Cripple Creek for the Midland Terminal Railroad, a standard gauge line connecting the gold district with the Colorado Midland at Divide. The Midland Terminal had a strong relationship with the Colorado Midland and would complete its construction all the way to Cripple Creek by December of that year, the last leg from Victor helped along by Waters' considerable efforts.

Later, Waters was also promoted to superintendent of the Midland Terminal. An article in the April 24, 1895 issue of the *Denver Times* spelled it out.

"For the past few days it has been rumored that a change would take place in the superintendency of the Midland Terminal, but nothing definite could be learned about it until today, when the announcement was made that instructions had been issued by Mr. Collbran, now in Chicago, for the publication of a circular announcing the appointment of Jesse Waters as superintendent, to go into effect on May 1. Mr. Waters is the general agent for the company at Cripple Creek, and the appointment of superintendent adds to his duties. In fact, he will be monarch of the entire outfit, occupying a dual position of general agent and superintendent."

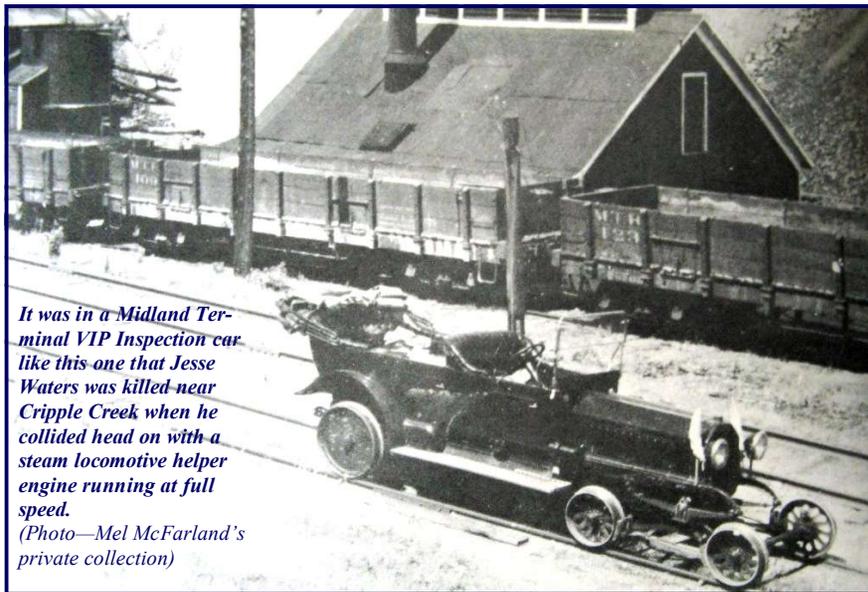
Ironically, a story in the *Cripple Creek Morning Times*, dated January 1, 1898, charts Waters' route to Cripple a little differently, saying that he left Aspen in 1893 "and on the death of young Collbran (President of the Midland Terminal from 1895 to 1898) he was appointed general freight agent with offices in Denver. Thereafter, in February 1895 "he came to Cripple Creek as superintendent and general agent for the Midland Terminal, the line then being built to Victor."

Regardless of when he got to Cripple Creek,

once there he made his presence and his "immense reserve of personal courage" known by fighting to complete the construction of the Midland Terminal lines through the Portland Mine and Strong Mine properties above Victor and on across to Cripple Creek. He also helped to insure that his railroad had access to the samplers and ore bins of surrounding mines where competition with the Florence and Cripple Creek narrow gauge railroad, the first line to reach the gold district in 1894, was fierce. Sometimes, those efforts were nothing short of shenanigans - tracks laid over a competitor's tracks on weekends or in "the dim light of early morning."

But Waters survived all these antics with a good reputation and earned the respect of railroaders and mine owners alike. He was popular, gregarious and very social, and is mentioned repeatedly in the *Morning Times* as attending parties and teas and other events regularly.

His son, Harry, even made the news in May of 1898 when the young lad swallowed a tack. There's a full story about how physicians tried various feeding techniques to induce the little nail to "come out into the open." Eventually, nature apparently took its *normal* course and the issue was resolved in due time; there was no follow up story about the incident.



It was in a Midland Terminal VIP Inspection car like this one that Jesse Waters was killed near Cripple Creek when he collided head on with a steam locomotive helper engine running at full speed.

(Photo—Mel McFarland's private collection)

Jesse Higgins Waters - continued from page 2

In 1911 Waters had to contend with labor disputes and threatened strikes by trainmen and enginemen over wages. The Colorado Midland had averted a strike by granting increased wages through an agreement with their workmen's "grievance committee." Firemen on all the Denver & Rio Grande lines were also demanding more money at the time. Waters, on the other hand, held the line and refused to increase trainmen salaries on both the Midland Terminal and the Colorado Springs and Cripple Creek District (the "Shortline") railroad lines, which were by then under the same management - and of which Waters was president.

Life for Jesse Higgins Waters was cut short in 1914 when an early version of his Midland Terminal VIP inspection car met a steam locomotive helper engine running at high speed near Cripple Creek. A story in the *Colorado Springs Gazette*, dated December 19, 1914, lists the condition of J. T. Lendrum of the Short Line as steadily improving. Lendrum "sustained a fractured skull in a railroad accident in Cripple Creek, which resulted in the death of Jesse H. Waters, president of the line."

His burial at Evergreen Cemetery in Colorado Springs was well attended. After Waters' death, the Midland Terminal tunnel just before Gillette (now located at the Horse Thief trailhead on Colorado Highway 67) was renamed the Waters Tunnel in his honor. The former name of the tunnel has been lost but there had been a siding nearby named for Waters.

EPILOGUE: The *Cripple Creek Morning Times* summed up Jesse H. Waters' life and accomplishments by saying the "he never faltered in any particular in his line of duty, and much of the success of the Midland Terminal has been due to his efforts." A born railroad man for sure.

Sources: *The Cripple Creek Road— A Midland Terminal Guide and Data Book* by Edward M. "Mel" McFarland; historical newspaper stories from *The Colorado Springs Gazette*, the *Denver Times*, the *Rocky Mountain Sun*, the *Aspen Daily Chronicle*, the *Aspen Morning Sun*, the *Aspen Weekly Times*, the *Leadville Daily and Evening Chronicle* and the *Cripple Creek Morning Times*. I could find no photos of Jesse Waters.



Waters tunnel today at the Horse Thief trailhead along CO Highway 67 south of Divide and just before Gillette Flats. After the railroad the tunnel was used for one-lane automobile traffic until the roof collapsed. Both portals are now barricaded. (Photo by D. Martinek)

Eagle Scout project produces new kiosk for the Divide Midland Depot.



The Midland Depot at Divide is a Teller County historic landmark. Recently, an informational kiosk was erected to tell the story of how the depot came into existence, as well as the important role it played in the life of the Colorado Midland and Midland Terminal railroads. Visitors can view the kiosk along Weaverville Road at the south corner of the depot property just beyond the entrance. The kiosk was an Eagle Service Leadership Project of Zachary Menz (pictured above) of Woodland Park Scout Troop 230. One of the final requirements for earning Eagle Scout status is to plan and execute a project that will benefit the community. Menz' project involved coming up with the design, securing the funding and materials and leading a construction team of fellow scouts to erect a kiosk which tells the Midland Depot story.

The plan was approved at the beginning of the year by the Teller Historic and Environmental Coalition (THE Coalition), the non-profit group currently preserving and renovating the Midland Depot. Menz' project was completed, sign off and accepted by THE Coalition in early July.

"It was a fun project," said Menz. "Now people who pass by will understand the history of the building."

Menz worked with Miriam LeBold, a Woodland Park graphic designer who generously contributed her time and efforts to design and print the signage. THE Coalition provided the photos and interpretive text, while Foxworth Galbraith donated most of the materials. Menz and his fellow scouts provided all the labor.

The result is a fine addition to the depot. The informational kiosk is a two-sided affair providing a pictographic history of the depot from its initial construction in 1904 to the present. Also included is information about the first depot, built in 1887, which burned in the 1890s and was replaced by the current building a decade later when the Santa Fe owned the Colorado Midland. Unique in its time, the Midland Depot at Divide served two railroads and was active until the Midland Terminal ceased operations in 1949. After complete renovation, the depot will someday house historic exhibits, interpretive signage, education programs, trailhead facilities and a visitor's center.

Zachary, son of Steve and Mary Menz, graduated from Woodland Park High School in May 2013 and will be attending Colorado State University in Fort Collins in September.

Dave's Buyers' Guide

Cabins, second-homes and land specials from Coldwell Banker 1st Choice Realty



Prices and status effective as of July 31, 2013



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(Martinek Team listings are BOXED)



\$310,000

214 Patience Pt, Victor
Under Construction! Buy it and finish it yourself. Nearly a 4,000 S.F. home on 10 acre mining claim. 3BR/2BA/2GA Solid oak timbers in great room. So much here and so much potential! #771855



Reduced to \$340,000

14275 Westcreek Rd, Sedalia
Quaint Home! 2BR/1BA/2GA, 1306 S. F. Zoned A-1, 81 acres w/ 2 wells. In Hayman burn area; re-vegetation in progress. Stone tile in kitchen, upgraded appliances. Views of Bell Rock. #731909



Reduced to \$299,900

609 Cochetopa Rd, Florissant
Low Maintenance! 0.71 acres in Trout Haven. 4BR/3BA/0GAR. 3144 S.F. Treed lot. Open floor plan w/ huge LR and MBR w/ walk out deck, 5-piece bath. Walk-out bsmt, family room. #718434



Reduced to \$285,000

221 Potlach Tr, Woodland Park
Cedar Sided! Mature aspen/pine and mountain views. 2520 S.F. on 0.88 acres. 3BR/3BA/2GAR. T&G ceilings, great room, lots of windows. Gas-log stove, wood deck, lower level family room. MBR walks out to deck, too. #737841



Reduced to \$210,900

2001 Julia Rd, Guffey
Large Loft! Step back in time to see historic Guffey. Home is well maintained/private. Hdw floors in kitchen/dining. 3BR/2BA/0GAR, 1944 S.F. on 19.18 acres. Lots of trees and windows to see views of Black Mountain. #793640



\$198,500

39 Shawnee Creek, Florissant
Secluded! 3BR/2BA/2GAR w/ 1740 S.F. on 2.09 acres. Log-sided, fully fenced. New roof, carpet, maple cabinets and other amenities. Move-in ready! Two wood decks. 20 x 40 garage/shop and 2 sheds. Zoned for horses. #770554



\$295,000

144 Pine Bluff Rd, Divide
Horse Property! A stunning view of Pikes Peak from the back deck of this custom log home on 2.12 acres not far from U.S. 24. Spacious open floor plan features vaulted ceilings, custom doors, main level master and a finished walk out family room on the lower level. 3BR/3BA/2GAR & 2310 S.F. The barn & stables have a separate workshop. Kitchen cabinets refinished and new carpet in some areas make this a mountain home priced right! #784453



\$6,000

320 Beaver Pond Rd, Divide
Peaceful! One acre of meadow and trees suitable for a building site with a great view of the Beaver Pond valley. Priced to sell, this lot is sloping and has the road running through it. #764924



\$11,500

207 Monument Ln, Florissant
Ideal Building Site. Half acre lot with good trees, and a gently sloping building site very close to Teller 1. Utilities at property line; Nestled in the heart of Colorado Mountain Est. #753389



\$14,000

1001 S. Mtn Est. Rd, Florissant
Meadow! Two acres of meadow and trees and some nice building sites in beautiful Colorado Mountain Estates, south of Florissant. Easy access to nearby Fossil Beds and Cripple Creek. #530773



Reduced to \$625,000

115 Trull Rd, Woodland Park
Mountain Lodge! Bright/spacious rooms with many details & spectacular views of Pikes Peak. 4BR/3BA/3GAR, 4458 S.F. on 2.5 acre lot. Open floor plan, knotty alder cabinets, floor to ceiling FP. Huge MBR with heated floors. Jetted tube in adjoining bath, walkin closets. Large patio in back. #791992



\$9,999

0 McKinney St, Cripple Creek
Three Lots! Here are three small lots sold together in the Montrose Addition of Cripple Creek, and located across Hetig Avenue from the Retirement and Rehabilitation Center. #738052



\$9,000

92 May Queen Dr, Cripple Creek
Corner lot! 1.7 acres of gently sloping meadow makes a nice building site. Rock formations are across the road. A few trees add character. Just the right lot for that dream home! #791533

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