

## By CHARLIE MCCANDLESS

For 36 years Cimarron had the benefit of rail transportation. Trains of the Saint Louis, Rocky Mountain and Pacific Railroad first entered the city in 1906 after four years of planning.

Surveys of railroads through Cimarron began as early as 1902 when the Cimarron and Taos Valley Railroad had one made from Maxwell to Farmington through Cimarron. Nothing happened other than the survey team collecting a fee for its efforts, and citizens of the area wondering if a railroad would ever reach Cimarron.

However, the St. Louis Company started plans in 1905 with tracks into Cimarron in 1906. There were hopes of building on to Taos and beyond. The railroad got only as far as Ute Park although David F. Myrick in his book "New Mexico Railroads" (Colorado Railroad Museum Press 1970) reported construction began on a railroad running near Eagle Nest. The railroad also built east to Des Moines from Raton reaching a total length of 105 miles in 1907. Des Moines was the closest the SL, RM & P rails came to St. Louis. Ute Park was the closest the rails came to the Pacific. The Rocky Mountains were touched at the Koehler mine and from Cimarron to Ute Park.

Hugo and Harry Koehler, Jan Van Houton and Charles and Frank Springer were active investors in the railroad.

This line was run as an independent carrier until August 1, 1913 when the original investors sold out to the Santa Fe and remained in the coal and other business.

### Rail worker recalls

Garland Arnold worked on the Santa Fe Railroad from 1929 to 1971 on the Raton-Las Vegas Division of which the old SL, RM & P was a part. He made several trips on the line.

"The run was what was known as a preferred job," Arnold said. "The railroaders would call it a bankers job. All the senior men got it because they got 126 miles of local pay."

The crews were paid local pay, the highest pay in the engine and train service because of the switching involved on the job.

Arnold said the train ran every day and was known as a mixed train. This meant the needed freight cars would be coupled on directly behind the engine with a combination baggage and passenger car behind the last freight car. The passenger car was heated by a coal stove because no steam line could be brought back from the engine.

Leaving Raton at 10 a.m., the train would run on the main line to Hebron following westbound passenger train 13. At Hebron, the mixed train (known in the timetable as train 85) would leave the main line picking up the old Rocky Mountain grade on property owned by the National Rifle Association.

The Santa Fe changed the track plan after they took over the line, getting onto the newly acquired railroad from Hebron, rather than branching off the Des Moines railroad at a spot near the Taos interchange of Interstate-25. The Des Moines branch still went that way, leaving the main line at new Dillon, just behind what is now La Mesa Park.

Train 85 would proceed to Koehler Junction with coal runs branching off to the mines. There was a small yard for switching and also a water tank should the locomotive's tender, some holding up to 9,000 gallons of water, need filling. Arnold said with a light train the hoghead, slang for locomotive engineer, could make it to Cimarron without filling his tender tank. However, they usually stopped if they had a heavy train.

### Colfax crossing

A level grade crossing was made at Colfax with the El Paso and Southwestern Railroad, which was later owned by the Southern Pacific. The SP had the right of way over the Santa Fe at that point and the crossing was controlled by a gate. Trains of both railroads stopped at the crossing with the head brakeman unlocking the gate and swinging against the opposing right of way.

As the SP ran more runs into Dawson for coal, the gate was usually aligned against the Santa Fe. While the roads crossed at Colfax, no freight was interchanged at that point. This was done at French to the east. The Santa Fe currently owns the old Southern Pacific right of way using it for the York Canyon coal run.

Ute Park was made at about 1 p.m., lunch eaten and the engine and cars turned around.

### Freight

Freight on the line was agricultural products and minerals from the Moreno Valley and Elizabethtown freighted in by wagons.

Cimarron generated freight included quite a bit of lumber products, mostly railroad ties.

At the east end of town, about where the road to Springer intersects with the Taos road, ran the Cimarron and Northwestern Railroad. This line was a lumber road running its trains with a very light engine railroaders would call a teakettle. Arnold remembers the engine derailing just off the

main line in the 20's.

Extra spending money was put in the trainmen's pockets when the C&NW engine had to be repaired. Even though the Santa Fe had a small roundhouse in Cimarron on the east side of the track, heavy repair work was done in Raton. This meant an extra crew deadheaded up from Raton to take the engine back for inspection and repairs.

Another lumber mill operated in west Cimarron with a house track going off the main line just before where the road to Philmont Scout Ranch crosses the highway. The depot was on the west side of the right of way, about a block from the current city park and city hall-library complex.

The Raton bound train was eastbound on the time card number 86. Connections were made with mail and passengers at Hebron for the east while westbound mail and passengers were taken into Raton.

#### Veteran Railroaders

Jim Rush was the veteran Santa Fe engineer who held down the Cimarron, Ute Park run in the 1920's although other engineers ran the train when Rush laid off. Andy Olsen was the hoghead who got the call after Rush retired. The daily run returned to Raton about 5 p.m.

This schedule, plus the 52 cents per 100 miles more for the engineer and 41 cents per hundred miles more for the fireman than a regular freight run, made the run very enjoyable for the crew.

Operating procedures changed in the 1930's. Ute Park merchandise revenue dried up and the railroad lost the mail contract. Andy Olsen transferred to Clayton to become the engineer on the Boise City-Farley run and the proud daily mixed train became a tri-weekly motor car. The motor car was actually a combination baggage-passenger car powered by a gasoline engine. Later steam returned to the Cimarron line.

Being a three day a week run the extra board got the call. The extra board was composed of young railroaders kept on hand for peak traffic periods. These men would sometimes be on call for years before getting regular run. The Cimarron crew would also handle the Des Moines run when the traffic warranted.

Many of the men still working on the Raton-Las Vegas division were on the extra board and this is where they got their experience on the Cimarron run.

"We would have a 45 mile per hour run into Cimarron," Arnold remembered. "From Cimarron to Ute Park it was slower, about 30 miles per hour. Cimarron to Ute Park and Koehler Junction to Preston had grade steep enough to keep the fireman hurling coal, but most of the run was easy. About eight tons of coal were used for the round trip.

Arnold said while the track was rated at 45 into Cimarron, as traffic declined the ride got rougher. After one run young fireman W.C. Burton, now the second senior engineer on the La Junta-Raton run, complained to a trainmaster the engine rolled excessively on the run. The trainmaster assured him the rolling was normal, he should get scared only if the engine started to whip.

#### Track deteriorated

The track had deteriorated quite a bit by the time the last train went over the line in 1942. All Raton-Las Vegas crews were out, so an extra board crew, consisting of Raton-La Junta railroaders was assembled for the last trip. A brakeman on the run was Lyle "Woody" Woodworth, husband of Raton Range Columnist Lil Woodworth. The train went to Ute Park where the station was closed and all valuable railroad property was loaded aboard. The same was done at Cimarron.

Since the line lay abandoned for some time prior to the last run, the crew had to take its time. Cows had to be run off the track and by the time the last train arrived at Colfax, 16 hours had passed. Train crews were not allowed to work the line more than 16 hours then, so the crew stopped and waited for a replacement crew to pick them up from Raton.

Woodworth does not remember when the last run was made or who was on the crew other than the conductor, Vic Barrent. Although Woodworth saved the orders from the last run, he could not locate them.

Coal runs into Koehler continued until the 1960's and the tracks to the mine are still in place. While most of the line went to the mills to feed a scrap hungry war time America some old railroad iron still is laying around rusting in the desert sun.

Mostly though it is cinders and rotting railroad ties and traces of old railroad grade. Photos of the line are in area museums. The railroaders themselves have either died or went on to other things.

Arnold retired after running the Super Chief and later Amtrak's Southwest Limited. Woodworth became a passenger conductor and both he and Burton were on the crew for President Harry S. Truman's presidential special over Raton Pass in 1948.