

Green River

The first known settlement at the site of present-day Green River came in 1878 when a mail route was established between Salina and Ouray, Colorado by way of Moab. The first mail station was kept by a man named Blake and was known as Blake City, with houses predominately on the east side of the river. Blake maintained that name for about eight years until the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad came to town. The town was renamed Greenriver (one word) although it has since been written as Green River.

The site was important long before the settlement era since it was the most accessible crossing point on the Green River south of the Uintah Basin. The Spanish Trail, a trade route between Sante Fe and Los Angeles in active use during the 1830s and 1840s, forded the river about three miles upstream from the present town, as did the 1853 railroad survey under the direction of Captain John W. Gunnison. The site's accessibility also made it a natural staging and supply point for travel on the river.

The completion of the railroad in 1883 made Green River a shipping point for livestock and mining equipment and supplies. The railroad built an engine house, switching yards, and a three-story hotel called the Palmer House. The influx of railroad workers gave the town 375 residents by 1890, in addition to a fluctuating population of cowboys, sheepherders, and prospectors from the Book Cliffs and the San Rafael Desert. The railroad succeeded the ferry boat for transportation across the river. The first railroad bridge was a wooden structure and was soon replaced with an iron one. These bridges were both narrow-gage type. The railroad was a major factor in Green River's history for many years, but modernization of the railroad changed that. The round house was torn down, the ticket depot closed, and the railroad passed Green River by.

With the coming of the interstate highway system, Green River again became a major rest stop for the traveling public, and today's tourism is the lifeblood of Green River's economy. Early attempts to establish commercial riverboat operations between Green River and Moab ended in failure, but ferry service was established. However, pioneer "river rats" like Bert Loper laid the foundation for a recreational boating industry. The town hosts an annual "Friendship Cruise" in May for boaters to travel down the Green River to Moab. The town's river heritage is celebrated in the John Wesley Powell River History Museum. When the first river trips were made by Major John Wesley Powell and his contemporaries, it was serious exploring business. Major Powell made the first recorded trip in 1869-1871. He and his party very likely made one of their camps at the Spanish Trail Crossing. From 1869 to 1946, exploring voyages on the Green River were common. Ferry service with boats like the "Galloway," a flat-bottom boat for running the rapids, and paddle-wheel boats such as the "Cliff Dweller" as well as the "Undine" and the "Black Eagle" are all a part of Green River's colorful river history.

Green River has a rich history of cattle ranching, farming, mining, and outlaws. The town's location on the "outlaw trail" between Robbers Roost and Browns Park contributed to its "wild west" reputation during that period of time. Before 1900 Green River boasted 15 saloons, with neither law nor order available. The first outlaw to start any serious trouble in the saloons was Jack Winders, a member of the Jesse James gang. The Robbers Roost gang got their supplies at Green River. They had their hideout on the Blue Mountains and did a variety of work, stole

cattle and horses, held up trains, and robbed banks. These outlaws also did some good deeds. They helped the needy and had a great respect for women and children.

As the town gradually grew, hotels such as the Metropole, Midland, and Palmer House were built, along with an opera house, schools, banks and other businesses. Water wheels, ferries and dams were also built and provided much needed support to the community's economy. Green River experienced several boom and bust cycles, from the railroad boom in the 1880s to the oil boom in the 1900s and uranium boom in the 1950s. The establishment of the Utah Launch Complex of the White Sands Missile Base in 1964 brought the town's population to a high point of almost 2,000 and provided new schools and civic organizations to the community before closing of the complex in the 1970s led to yet another economic downturn.

Agriculture also provided its own type of boom and bust cycle. In 1906 a land developer began promoting Green River as a fruit-growing area comparable to the Grand Valley of Colorado. Hundreds of acres of peach trees were planted on both sides of the river, but problems with the irrigation system and harsh winter temperatures killed most of the trees before they could come into production. This boom caused settlement to the north and west, called "upper town" and led to Green River's incorporation in 1906.

Green River is more well known for its watermelons, and an annual Melon Days celebration in September is the highlight of the local social year. Melon-day activities date back to 1925 but melon busts were happening in the early 1900s. The Denver & Rio Grande Railroad even ran special trains to Green River for the melon celebrations. Many town residents were employed during the growing season, including Navajo Indians, and Japanese-Americans sent by the government during WWII.



Green River - Swasey Blacksmith Shop (L: Charles Swasey , Jr. and R: Chris Halverson)



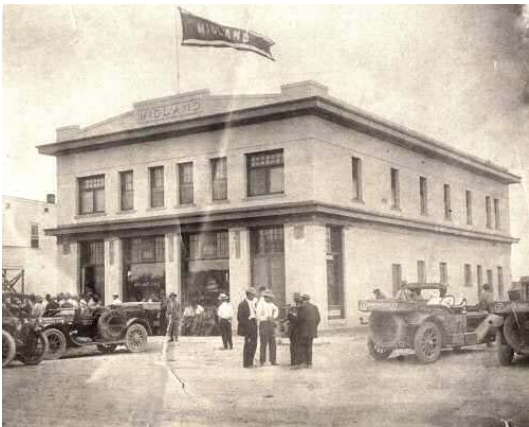
Green River - Broadway 1908-1909



Green River - Opera House 1907



Green River - Palmer House Hotel 1883



Green River - Midland Hotel 1912



Green River - Metropole Hotel



Repairing the Dam 1932
Supervised by George Thurman
Left front facing camera, Hawley Seely, at Hawley's right, John Vetere Sr., 3rd on right,
Clifford Phillips; 4th on right, Joe Chido. Remainder unidentified.

Green River - Repairing the Dam 1932



Green River - One of the first water wheels on the Green River (use of water wheels to take water from the river was a very slow process - Green River had five water wheels)



Green River - Wagon Bridge at Dedication 1910 - notice people full length of bridge



Green River - 2nd Railroad Bridge 1900 (the 1st railroad bridge was a wooden structure)



Green River - School built in 1910 (notice horse drawn school bus in lower corner)



Green River - First school bus used in Green River - an iron tired wagon pulled by a team of horses.



Green River - Oil rig being pulled by six span of horses/mules 1915



Green River - 1917 Red Cross Parade Float



Green River - Train load of cannons and troop cars WWI - 1917