

At the junction of the Grand . . .

When compared with most other American "Old West" locales, the settlement that developed at the junction of the Grand (now Colorado) and Gunnison rivers is fairly new. However, thousands of years of fascinating history occurred long before the first town builders arrived in the Grand Valley in late 1881.

While living in simple pit houses from 800 to about 1375 A.D., the Fremont people left behind colorful, mysterious rock art. Starting around the 17th century, various Ute tribes lived and hunted across most of today's states of Utah and Colorado. Archeological sites, wild horse herds and dozens of unusual Ute words, such as Unaweep, Ouray and Uncompahgre are everyday reminders that the Ute spirit still touches the land.

Trespassing through Ute territory and the Grand Valley began in the 1700s with Spanish explorers, treasure seekers and priests. By the early 1800s trappers and traders had joined the parade. They were quickly followed by U.S. government survey teams and Army explorers.

When the last of the west-central Ute tribes were forced out of the area, the event made national news. An entire, undeveloped region was now open for ranchers, homesteaders and town builders. Kansas politician and town builder George Crawford already had two Kansas towns on his resume. With the backing of investors, he formed the Grand Junction Town Company and began mapping out a one-square mile city site just north of the junction of the two rivers.

Primarily because of its key geographic location, the town grew at a decent rate. Other events and activities helped: becoming the seat of the new County of Mesa in 1883; the arrival of railroads in 1882 and 1889; the development of area coal and fruit industries; the establishment of the Colorado National Monument in 1911; becoming the center of the radium, vanadium, uranium, oil shale and natural gas drilling and mining starting in the 1920s.

Many businesses and people have come and gone in Grand Junction in the last 125 years. Many of the original downtown area buildings still stand and help their stories to live on.

Walking Tour of Historic Downtown Grand Junction



downtowngj.org



museumofwesternco.org

The History of Downtown Grand Junction



Denver & Rio Grande Western/Colorado Midland Union Station - 119 Pitkin Ave Date of Construction: 1905

This Renaissance Revival-style building features front entry Tuscan columns, terra-cotta foliage trim and ceramic red roof tiles. This is one of the few existing structures from Grand Junction's past as a major railroad center. It has been unused since the late 1980s. Local residents formed a "Save The Depot" committee in the early 1990s to help keep the station from being torn down. The building has been slowly undergoing preservation by different private owners since 1994 and is listed as one of Colorado's most endangered historic places.

Fascinating Fact: This is the first major public building designed by Chicago architect Henry Schalk, who later started the architectural department at Notre Dame University.



Whitman Park - 4th & 5th Streets, Ute & Pitkin Avenues Date of Construction: Part of the original 1881 city plan

The park was first named Cottonwood Park then changed to Whitman Park in 1922. Oregon Territory pioneer Dr. Marcus Whitman and a guide crossed the Grand River just south of the park during the winter of 1842. Whitman was traveling from his mission near today's Walla Walla, Washington to the east coast. Severe winter weather and warring Native American Indian tribes forced the men to travel on a more southern route instead of taking the Oregon Trail.

Fascinating Fact: During the early 1900s there was a small bandstand for live performances by local musical groups. Audiences parked horses and buggies along the streets on the sides of the park.



Whitman School/Whitman Educational Center - 248 S. 4th Street Date of Construction: 1925

This structure was used as elementary school until 1965, and then sold to the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber rented the building for \$1 a year to a brand new Museum of Western Colorado. It remained the main museum building until 2000, when the museum moved into the larger C.D. Smith building half a block east. Recent restoration uncovered much of the original exterior, including the school name lettered in stone over the front door. The museum won a special award in 2001 from the Colorado Historical Society for the building's rehabilitation. It now houses offices and conference rooms.

Fascinating Fact: Some believe the old school is haunted by an early-day female teacher. However, a male janitor who died from a heart attack while shoveling coal into the boiler during the 1930s is the only documented death to have occurred in the building.



Elks Club Lodge #575 - 249 S. 4th Street Date of Construction: 1913

The town's first Elks Lodge meeting took place in 1900 and the organization grew at a fast pace. Thousands of club members from Colorado and Utah attended the opening day ceremonies at the present-day building which is a modified Italian Renaissance-style structure.

Fascinating Fact: The second floor interior ceiling is composed of numerous small stained glass panels, each bearing the name of a deceased lodge member.

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Grand/New Grand/St. Regis Hotel - 359 Colorado Avenue

Dates of Construction: The original two-story east wing was built as the Grand Hotel in 1895. The third floor east wing and cupola enlarged it onto Colorado Avenue. The front of the building and two-story west wing were added in 1906.

This Hotel was known in Grand Junction as a place for good rooms and meals at a lower cost than the town's fancy hotel, the LaCourt (no longer standing). The Oriental Room and Cocktail Lounge - added in the 1930s - offered a spacious dance floor and live music. The switch from railroad travel to automobiles hurt business. From the 1970s on, the hotel opened and closed several times. Extensive interior rehabilitation in the 1990s resulted in the present-day use as offices and apartments. The corner is home to a thriving restaurant.

FASCINATING FACTS: Beginning in 1932, western Colorado's first commercial radio station, KXFJ, operated from the hotel for several years. In 1915 Jack Dempsey, then fighting around Colorado as "Kid Blacky", punched out four crooks as they walked up to the hotel bar. These same bad guys had robbed Dempsey and his new manager along the road from Delta several hours earlier. Dempsey recovered all the stolen money.

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Enterprise - Electric Building - 101 S. 3rd Street

Dates of Construction: The first two floors were built in 1913; a third floor was added in 1918.

This is one of the first all-steel frame structures in western Colorado. It was primarily built to house the massive Ideal Engine which provided electricity to the town's trolley system, the Grand Junction and Grand River Valley Railway. Offices for the trolley company and early electric & gas utilities were also in the building. After the trolley system ended service in the early 1930s, dozens of various businesses utilized the structure, including the Hoel-Ross Business College. Detailed restoration in 2004 returned the exterior to its 1918 appearance.

Fascinating Fact: The steel frame was originally designed to support five floors. Why the fourth and fifth floors were never added is unknown.

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Reed Building - 362 Main Street

Dates of Construction: The first floor was built in 1903; the second floor was added in 1908.

This is the site of one of the town's early hotels, the Crawford-Brunswick House. Town founder George Crawford passed away in his hotel suite in 1891. That hotel was torn down in the early 1900s. Colorado Springs businessman and multi-millionaire Vernon Z. Reed bought the property and built the present-day structure in two stages. In 1915 one of the early stores in the JC Penney system opened in the building and remained until 1981. The structure later housed Dinosaur Valley, the first separate paleontological

division of the Museum of Western Colorado. Extensive reconstruction in 2004-2005 resulted in an exact reproduction of the 1908 exterior. There are new apartments and condominiums on the second floor; stores, offices and restaurants on the first floor. The restoration effort resulted in awards from the Colorado Historical Society.

Fascinating Facts: The original illegal Biltmore Club, a well-known gambling hall, owned and operated by Walter "Big Kid" Eames, occupied much of the second floor in the late 1920s and 1930s. During an attempted robbery in December of 1938, Eames was murdered by one of three masked men using a sawed-off shotgun.

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Sampliner's/Rockslide - 401 Main Street

Date of Construction: 1890

Portions of the existing building probably date to the original 1890s brick bank. The Sampliner brothers opened one of the town's first all men's clothing stores in 1895. The clothing lines offered were expanded by a second company, Rush-Sanford, and again later by Brownson's. Instead of tearing the old building down, the owners of the present day-Rockslide Restaurant & Brewery went through a full-scale rehabilitation in 1994.

Fascinating Fact: The original blue and white tiled "Sampliner's" is still intact in the front entry floor.

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Mesa Drug/City Market #1/Il Bistro Italiano - 400 Main Street
Dates of Construction: Some of the first floor is possibly part of an original 1890s building. Additional construction was done in 1906.

The first structure housed a general store on the first floor with "furnished rooms" on the second floor. Mesa Drug opened inside the structure in 1918 and remained until 1987. It was one of the last true soda fountain/lunch counter businesses in town. The current restaurant opened in the mid-1990s.

Fascinating Fact: The Prinster brothers opened the very first City Market, in what is now the largest multi-state grocery store chain, in the back half of the building in the 1920s.

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Bannister's - 436 Main Street
Date Of Construction: 1890

William Bannister opened a furniture store/undertaking business here in 1897. Ignoring the two small original city burial grounds on the north side of town, Bannister established a small cemetery just for his customer's use on Orchard Mesa. The City eventually bought out and enlarged that cemetery. The undertaking business died out, but the furniture store was continuously operated by various family members until 2002.

Fascinating Fact: The original freight-type elevator used to haul caskets up and down to the basement is still located in the back of the building.

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Grand Valley National Bank/ First National Bank/Dalby Wendland Building - 464 Main Street
Dates of Construction: 1910 and 1921

This is one of the most important, intact, original architectural exteriors in Grand Junction. The original part of the building, constructed in 1910 to replace a smaller stone bank on the same location, was the first section of the current building. It was constructed with ornate terra-cotta egg-and-dart motif pilasters and a projecting cornice, which was an unusual style for the area. Grand Valley National Bank closed during the Great Depression for a "bank holiday." A re-organized First National Bank opened in 1934. The first Dalby Wendland business opened in one room in the building in 1949. The building houses many offices.

Fascinating Fact: The original north-south building along 5th Street was only two rooms and one hallway wide. A two-room wide addition facing Main Street was added in 1921. The seams where the two brick sections meet can be seen from Main Street.

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Benge's Shoe Store - 514 Main Street
Date Of Construction: 1890

This is Mesa County's oldest continuously owned and operated business and one of the oldest shoe stores in Colorado. After moving here from Iowa, Bert "The Shoeman" Benge opened the first store in the 400 block of Main Street in 1911. He moved to the present location about 1921. Business was continued by his son Harry and then by grandson Bruce. The oldest horse in Mesa County, a carousel animal bought by Harry in the early 1950s, is still an attraction in the store.

Fascinating Facts: The structure is a narrow building on a typical lot size first offered by the original Grand Junction Town Company. In 1881 town officers purposely mapped out narrow, 25-foot wide downtown lots, hoping businessmen would buy at least two or more lots for larger buildings.