

EAGLE COUNTY  
TOWNS AND GHOST TOWNS

## TOWNS IN EAGLE COUNTY

### AVON

The place named Avon first appeared on a railroad timetable of November 24, 1889 (it had earlier been misspelled as Avin). Prior to that, the site served, for at least a portion of the period 1883-87, as a stagecoach stop between Red Cliff and Dotsero. It was once called Townsend's (for homesteader George Townsend) Post Office, although no official post office was established until Avon's in 1900. In 1887, the Denver and Rio Grande Railway extended its tracks from Rock Creek on Battle Mountain to Aspen via Glenwood Springs, and the first station list identified the site as Buck Creek (for the stream coming in from the north).

From the 1880s through the first half of the 20th century, Avon served as a community center for surrounding ranches, with a depot, store, school, post office, and a community hall operated by the Avon Amusement Association.

During the 1920s and 30s, when lettuce-growing brought quick summer prosperity to the area, the depot was particularly active as a shipping point for the produce. During that period three or four lettuce-packing sheds lined the railroad. After the Depression, Avon remained a quiet ranching community until the 1970s when the development of Beaver Creek brought a surge of new life.

### BASALT

Named for Basalt Peak (10,800 feet), this town at the mouth of the Frying Pan River came into being when the Colorado Midland Railroad, arriving from Leadville via Hagerman Pass and Aspen, laid tracks through the area in 1882. The train engineers, in those days, were especially kind to local fishermen, dropping them off at favorite fishing holes along the Frying Pan, picking them up on the return trip later in the day.

The Colorado Midland ceased operating in 1918, but Basalt, in the southwest corner of Eagle County, survived as a tourist town and a bedroom community for nearby Aspen.

### BOND

The tiny town of Bond was born on June 16, 1934, an auspicious occasion in the annals of railroading. On that day, the Rio Grande Railroad first ran cars on a new route out of Denver west through a series of mountain tunnels to meet the tracks of



the Dotsero Cutoff at Bond. The new route was 175 miles shorter than the former southern one, and Bond took its name as the "bond" where the new route connected.

To celebrate the occasion, state and railroad officials gathered to feast on barbeque and make speeches on national radio. In spite of a sudden snow squall which considerably delayed the trains from Denver, the festivities proceeded and Bond had its day in the spotlight.

## BURNS

Some twenty-five miles north of Dotsero lies Burns Hole, a beautifully-isolated, weather-protected bowl of pastureland used in the late 1800s as winter range for cattle, continuing today under the ownership of a few ranchers, relatives of the original homesteaders. The tiny town of Burns, whose post office was established in 1895, lies on the Colorado River at the mouth of Cabin Creek. Both town and "hole" took their name from James Burns, a trapper who built a cabin in the area in the 1880s.

## DOTSERO

Dotsero began in the spring of 1883 with a rush of eager miners towards the Flattops mining camp of Carbonate where silver had been discovered. Deep snows stalled the rush, however, and the group settled down at the site of Dotsero where the Eagle River empties into the Colorado. When the spring melt water washed out the bridge, most treasure hunters lost heart. Only a few stayed on to operate a saloon, eatery, and store.

George Yost filed a town plat in 1885, but not much happened in Dotsero, with the land too arid for ranching and the railroad bypassing it on the other side of the Eagle River. Dotsero is best known for the Dotsero Cutoff, built down the Colorado River from Bond in 1934 to connect with the D & RGW's mainline (see Bond).

There are many theories about the origin of the name, the most likely of which is that it is "dot zero", the beginning of the survey for the Cutoff. Some of the confusion comes from the fact that the eastern junction of the Cutoff is called Orestod, and there is a persistent question about whether this is simply a reverse spelling of Dotsero or the name of a railroad official.

## EAGLE

In the late 1880s, at the mouth of Brush Creek, William Edwards staked out a townsite he called Castle for the formation now known as Castle Peak. The town changed its name often, using



Brush, McDonald, and Eagle River Crossing before the railroad in 1887 tried the name Rio Aguila (Spanish for Eagle River). Bowing perhaps to pronunciation problems, the railroad in 1891 switched to Eagle.

Eagle grew up as a ranching center and in 1921 wrested the County courthouse from Red Cliff (a fact not forgotten by old-timers). Although it is thought of as a bedroom community for Vail, Eagle's gentle vistas and warmer climate attract increasing numbers of residents to both live and work in the community itself. Since the 1970s Eagle residents have effectively resisted plans to develop a major resort on upper Brush Creek, which flows through the town.

### EDWARDS

A bluff above the town of Edwards marks the site of Eagle County's first dwelling, a log cabin built by Joseph Brett circa 1877-78. Brett operated a resort there at Lake Creek until his death in 1931. Hopefully, the cabin is still standing.

Harrison Berry owned the ranch where Edwards began; the community was first called Berry's Ranch but was later renamed for Melvin Edwards, a Red Cliff postmaster who became Colorado's Secretary of State. For many years, W.H. Wellington faithfully brought the mail from the north side of the river to the post office on his burro.

In the 1990s Edwards began a major boom of development as a mid-valley commercial center and site of "affordable" housing for employees of the upper-valley resorts.

### GILMAN

Even as Red Cliff staked out its first cabins on the south side of Battle Mountain, miners were digging out mines on the north side of the mountain and clusters of cabins popped up all over the cliffs of Battle Mountain. Gilman opened its post office there in 1886, its name a tribute to Henry Gilman, superintendent of the nearby Iron Mask Mine. The town flourished; when a fire destroyed half its business district in 1899, citizens quickly rebuilt it.

By 1915, the New Jersey Zinc Company had bought most of the mines in the Gilman area and operated them until the late 1970s, when declining metal prices forced closing not only the mine but the town itself. Today, Gilman's empty buildings are locked off to the public, and the residue from its mines, polluting the Eagle River, has been the object of a massive superfund cleanup project.

## GYPSUM

O.W. Daggett, later editor of THE HOLY CROSS TRAIL in Red Cliff, pitched a tent along Gypsum Creek in 1882, from which his hunting and fishing forays supplied miners in Leadville. The area soon filled in with ranchers, including the 1600- acre spread of the Doll Cattle Company. The railroad came through in 1887.

Jake Borah, local character and popular hunting guide led highly organized hunting parties out of Gypsum, his declared goal being "the durndest round-up of varmints this country has ever seen". Jake's most famous patron, President Teddy Roosevelt, hunted with him in the spring of 1905.

Bordering the banks of the Eagle River and the tracks of the D&RGW, Gypsum nonetheless remained a small community during Eagle County's first century. The building of a gypsum plant, the greatly-expanded county airport, and the need for affordable employee housing has changed that.

## McCOY

Charles H. McCoy gave his name to this small town 21 miles north of Wolcott. Charles operated a ferry where the stage route from Wolcott to Steamboat Springs crossed the Colorado River (then known as the Grand). When a bridge was built across the river in 1891, McCoy ceased ferrying, but he and his wife Rebecca continued to run a 15-room hotel known for its good dining room and lively dances.

Charles' son John married Julia Dice and moved to the Eagle River, probably around 1898, to homestead the area now occupied by Arrowhead Resort. McCoy Creek, Peak and Park bear his name.

## MINTURN

Settlers homesteading the Minturn area in the early 1880s included John Bocco, Peter Nelson, and John Kolnig, and the town was first known as Bocco's (misspelled as Boco on the railroad station list of 12/3/87; a modern restaurant called Booco's Station also appears to be a misspelling but may be a local mispronunciation).

When the Denver and Rio Grande Railway extended its track from Rock Creek, at the foot of Battle Mountain, down the Eagle River Valley in 1887, the town was re-named for Robert H. Minturn, a railroad board member from New York (both Eichler and Dawson in their books about Colorado place names identify him as "Thomas M. Minturn, a D&RG roadmaster", but the railroad's annual report of



1888 seems more reliable). Minturn became a division point on the railroad, with helper engines (for Tennessee Pass), roundhouse, turntable, and railroad hotel.

Minturn grew up supported by the railroad, the mines at Gilman, and eventually, by Vail and Beaver Creek. Today, with its businesses diversified, with restaurants and art galleries, Minturn looks for its own share of tourist dollars.

### RED CLIFF

Red Cliff grew up at the foot of Battle Mountain where Turkey Creek enters the Eagle River. It was there, in the fall of 1878, that James Denning found silver in the red quartzite cliffs that tower above the tiny valley. He took samples of his findings back to Leadville and by the spring of 1879 the rush was on. At the time of the Meeker Massacre in 1879 and the ensuing flight of the Ute Indians from the White River, Red Cliff was still considered to be in Indian territory and the settlers fortified the rock in the center of town and named it Fort Arnett for one of the early settlers.

Eagle County's first town and its County Seat until 1921, Red Cliff was not only a mining town and railroad stop, but also a "shopping center" for the pioneers of Gore Creek, Avon, and Beaver Creek. The town flourished during the 1940s, then declined, and now Vail supports many of its residents. But Red Cliff, like Minturn, is looking for tourist dollars with restaurants, wood-workers, and bed-and-breakfast establishments.

Nearby Battle Mountain is supposedly named for a battle between Ute and Arapahoe Indians early in the 19th century. Many think it more likely that frequent Indian hunting camps left behind many broken arrow points, the discovery of which often started legends of battles in the West.

### STATE BRIDGE

As the name implies, this community lies on the Colorado River where the stage route crossed and where in 1891 a bridge replaced the ferry. That bridge was the first bridge built by the state on the Western Slope. The first road from the new bridge to the town of McCoy, where the ferry had been located, was built by Cy Herwick, first settler at Avon.

### VAIL

Named for Vail Pass, which in turn was named for Charles Vail, chief engineer for the Colorado Highway Department in the

1930s, Vail has many dates that mark its growth. In 1957, Earl Eaton and Peter Seibert recognized the skiing potential on Vail Mountain and began plans for its development. The resort opened its lifts for skiing on December 15, 1962, the Town of Vail incorporated in 1966, the Lionshead area opened during the winter of 1969-70, and Vail Associates opened its sister area at Beaver Creek in 1980. In 1989, the World Alpine Ski Championships took place in Vail, an event climaxing Vail's growth into a world-class resort.

Vail is Eagle County's newest but largest town, with an active community of permanent residents supporting the resort facilities.

### WOLCOTT

Once known as Russell's Siding, later re-named for U.S. Senator Edward O. Wolcott, this community got off to a lively start with the beginning of a wagon road to Steamboat Springs in 1886, followed by the arrival of the Denver and Rio Grande Railway the following year. Over the next two decades, Wolcott blossomed with livery barns, stockyards, blacksmiths, plus store, saloon, and hotel while serving as shipping point for northwest Colorado cattle and supply point for Routt and Grand Counties. In the 1880s it was one of the largest cattle shipping points on the Western Slope of Colorado.

Its prosperity came to a rather abrupt end when the Moffat Railroad out of Denver built its tracks into northern Colorado and on to Steamboat Springs, providing far easier access to that area than the long haul uphill from Wolcott.

### GHOST TOWNS AND MINING CAMPS IN EAGLE COUNTY

#### ASTOR CITY

One of Eagle County's mystery settlements. Even its location has never been known exactly, although most agree that it was at the base of Battle Mountain near where Two Elk Creek enters the Eagle River. One myth has John Jacob Astor establishing a trading post there in the early 1800s that served as a summer rendezvous for trappers, but there is no evidence that Astor or his mountain men traversed this area.

It appears more likely that the name is that of an early real



estate development. The Leadville Herald of 3/13/80 tells of the staking of "Ute City" at the mouth of the Eagle Canyon in April, 1879. This claim was then "jumped" by men from Leadville who named it Zalida, for the wife of one of them. The following spring the founders returned in 3 1/2 feet of snow to restake it under the name Sherwood. They were reinforced by men from Red Cliff, who then selected the name Astor City.

At any rate, there was at one time a small settlement with a few cabins and a saloon called the "Saints' Rest" (famous for an enormous ridge pole, built shortly after the founding of Red Cliff.

#### BELL'S CAMP

A mining community on Battle Mountain, near Gilman, once home to as many as 100 people. Built in the vicinity of the Black Iron Mine, owned by Dr. W.M. Bell, hence the name. After the water tank burned down, the settlement declined, but several buildings remained there, some occupied as late as 1940.

#### CAMP HALE

Training camp for the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division ski troopers, Camp Hale occupied the Pando Valley from 1942 to 1944 with 400 buildings, 15,000 men, and 5,000 mules, and in addition to training ski troopers, gave a real economic boost to nearby towns of Minturn, Red Cliff, and Leadville. It also served as a prisoner of war camp during 1945. Camp Hale was named for Brigadier General Irving Hale, Denver native and West Point graduate, who died in 1930.

#### EAGLE CITY

Located at the south end of the Pando Valley (where Camp Hale was later founded) Eagle City lived briefly as a supply stop-off between Leadville and Red Cliff in the 1880s. Marked only by a few cabins and tents, Eagle City's single claim to notoriety came when a gambler named "Monte Jim" was shot and killed in a dispute over a card game.

#### FANCY CAMP

A small camp of some twenty cabins on Fancy Creek near Holy Cross City, and a part of its mining boom. Named for prospector Joe Fancy.



## FULFORD

A late-comer among mining camps, Fulford's townsite was laid out in 1889, but the town was not recorded until 1895. Arthur H. Fulford, former town marshall at Red Cliff, gave the town its name and ran a stage stop there called the Halfway House. He was later killed in a slide above the town. Some of Fulford's old cabins are still in use today as summer homes.

## GOLD PARK

Gold Park, a true boom town near Homestake Creek, lasted only a few years, but during its heyday sported two hotels in addition to the usual clutch of cabins and saloons. The Gold Park Mining and Milling Company ran the operation, but company and camp played out as quickly as the mines on French Peak did.

## HOLY CROSS CITY

Four miles beyond Gold Park, Holy Cross City was built closer to the mines at timberline, but its fortunes were similar to its boom-and-bust neighbor. During a brief revival in the 1890s, miners roomed in a boarding jouse with such luxuries as electric lights and a telephone line running downhill to Gold Park.

## MITCHELL

George Mitchell started an inn on his ranch near Tennessee Pass, and the settlement of Mitchell grew up around it. When the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad laid its tracks through the town in 1884, local citizens began a charcoal industry, building brick kilns and using lodgepole pine for the wood. The charcoal was shipped by rail to Leadville where it was used in the process of refining ore. As many as 500 people once lived at Mitchell; now only ruins of the kilns remain.

## PANDO

A settlement located near the tracks of the Rio Grande Railroad at the northern end of the Pando Valley and known specifically for its ice ponds, which provided cooling for produce shipped by rail out of the valley.