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THE WALLS CAME tumbling down at the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad Depot in Salida early Wednesday

morning. The building was constructed in 1941, replacing an earlier structure built in 1919.

Depot is demolished

by Arlene Shovald
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Rumor became fact early Wednesday morning when the telephones began ringing in The Mail office, saying the old Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad Depot was, indeed, being torn down.

Efforts by the Mail to substantiate the rumor Tuesday afternoon had proved futile with just about everyone who was supposedly "in the know" about such things being "out of town" or otherwise unavailable for comment.

Razing of the building began early Wednesday morning, and by the time the Mail arrived on the scene around 9 a.m., the building was already about half torn down. The "Heart of the Rockies" sign that welcomed travelers on the D&RG line to Salida for so many years was buried in a pile of rubble and bricks.

Avery Structures Inc. of Buena Vista was the contractor for the razing.

Efforts to compile a history on the depot on such short notice was difficult. The 1941 Salida Daily Mail carried no mention we could find on the move into the building, but according to Ted McDowell, Salida, a conductor who was employed 48 years by the D&RG railroad, the depot was built in 1941.

Stu Sexton, who worked in the express office for the railroad, remembers he and Dewey Matthews, another office worker, moved into the then "new" depot in the fall of 1941.

The building contained ticket sales offices, the express office, and waiting room for passengers on the first floor, with offices for the train master and dispatcher and a locker room upstairs.

At about the same time the "new" depot was opened, the old depot, built in 1919, was torn down, along with the historic Monte Cristo Hotel, which was also built by the railroad.

The hotel, built in 1883, offered

lodging and meals for travelers and railroad employees.

Stangely enough, a historically minded citizen, Frank Gimlet, made an attempt to preserve the "old" 1919 depot for posterity in 1941 when the new depot was built, but his efforts apparently were to no avail.

In a Sept. 19, 1941, article, Gimlet, an early contractor in the area, said the old depot was unique and probably the only building of its kind left in the state. The stone was hauled in from Nathrop and cut on the site by expert stonecutters.

Each piece was cut to fit its own place in the walls. The sizes of the stones varied, with the object being to give the structure an artistic finish.

"The stonecutters are all gone," Gimlet said, "and with them died their art. If this building is dismantled, it will be as difficult to put it together again as to work a picture puzzle."

His idea was to turn the old depot into a museum.

THE CHAMBER OF commerce discussed the idea and there was some enthusiasm about it, but apparently Gimlet's idea did not come to pass.

A Sept. 23, 1941, article stated Secretary Wilbur B. Foshay of the chamber of commerce had received word from E.A. West, general manager of the railroad, saying the plans adopted for the railroad yard changes in Salida made it impossible to let the old depot stand and removal of the old depot could not be avoided.

In recent years, there has been a lot of talk in Salida about what to do with the "new" depot, which has been vacant for many years. Among the ideas mentioned were turning the depot into a museum and developing it as a restaurant or supper club.

Alas, those plans went awry also, as "the walls came tumbling down" the morning of Wednesday, Jan. 23, 1985.

History, it seems, has repeated itself.