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11th-hour effort made to save railroad bridge

Efforts continued Thursday to save the D&RGW's Monarch Spur bridge in downtown, even as A&K Railroad Materials crews began work to cut the bridge into scrap.

City officials met with local business and civic leaders Thursday to see what could be done to salvage the 95-year-old railroad bridge spanning the Arkansas River.

Rocky Smith, project foreman for A&K, a Salt Lake City railroad salvage firm, said his crew plans to pull the 100-ton bridge across the river in the next few days. Once on dry land on the south side of the Arkansas, between Sackett Avenue and the river; Smith said plans are to cut it into 5-foot sections and sell the metal for scrap.

"There isn't much you can do," Smith said, "when the president of the railroad calls and says he wants it (the bridge) taken out."

A&K crew members, he said, would not be out working in 10° weather if they had not been ordered by the railroad to take the bridge out.

Smith said that once the bridge is across the river, it becomes the exclusive property of A&K, although it would still be on the right-of-way, property owned by the railroad.

Deacon Robert Cantwell, who has led a drive to save the old bridge, said it still may be possible to save the structure, particularly if it can be obtained from the salvage company.

Cantwell said he did not know what could be done with the bridge if a historical group or the city

ultimately obtain rights to the structure.

Cantwell met with Dick Bondurant, the mayor pro tem, acting for the city in the absence of Mayor Ed Touber; Joanie Padoven, Salida city councilmember; and Alan Sulzenfuss, city attorney. Also present were John Brejcha, president of the Heart of the Rockies Chamber of Commerce, and Merle Baranczyk and Ray James of The Mountain Mail.

Brejcha asked for the meeting with the city Thursday morning to check on what options were available for preserving the bridge intact. He said the bridge represented the last remaining tangible symbol of Salida's railroad history.

"It would be a shame to see this last bit of our railroad history destroyed without anyone making an effort to save it," Brejcha said.

At the city council meeting on Monday, Feb. 4; Salidans and the council are expected to hear options for the city's purchase of railroad right of way from the railroad. Sulzenfuss and Touber have led the negotiations for the city with the railroad.

Cantwell said it may be possible for the city to obtain the right of way where the bridge may rest after being pulled from its moorings in the river. If this happened, then the bridge would not have to be moved.

Another option likely to be discussed Monday is trading the F Street bridge for a portion of the right



HORSEFEATHERS — One of the horses at the Little River Ranch had frosted whiskers Thursday morning during a rehearsal for hayrides to be held this weekend to celebrate Little River's grand opening. Hayrides from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday and special hayrides for teens from 9 to 10 p.m. Friday. A full buffet lunch and dinner will be served Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and there will be an indoor flea market in the barn from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. The celebration marks Little River Ranch's "going Western." It is now operating as a dude ranch and will be open weekends. The business is located on U.S. 50, west of Salida. Hay rides are \$2 for students and senior citizens, \$1.50 for children under 6 and \$2.50 for adults.

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Bridge

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of way. The D&RGW had told Sulzenfuss earlier that it would like to obtain the bridge, although it is not certain why railroad officials want the bridge.

Also on Thursday, railroad crews completed construction of a chain-link fence and gate on the north side of the F Street Bridge. With installation of the fence, the only opening to the railroad yard was a small passageway for pedestrians.

THE RAILROAD BRIDGE was built in the summer of 1889, replacing a wooden structure.

Ever since the bridge spanned the Arkansas, it has attracted youngsters with daring ambitions.

One early incident occurred May 29, 1900, when Earl McKelvy and Gilbert Hathaway jumped into the river on a \$10 wager that they wouldn't do it.

No. 5 engine had just left the station and there was a large crowd at the bridge.

Marshall Howe, getting word of what was going on, attempted to prevent the jump, but was too late. The boys saw him coming and swung under the bridge and jumped foot first into the raging waters.

The boys entered the water under the bridge and came out about 100 yards downstream near the railroad oil house. At first both were out of control, being tossed about in the waters which were the highest they had been in many years.

"Had either struck a piece of the bridge or a projection of rock," the Salida Mail said, "the result could have been serious or fatal."

As luck would have it, the two came out of the water unharmed, collected their \$10 bets, and hurried into a boxcar where they changed and then disappeared before the marshal could catch them.

"It was a thrilling experience and it is not likely either of the two will repeat it again," the newspaper concluded.

Now it is nearly assured it will never happen again, for the railroad bridge is about to become a thing of the past.