



THE MOUNTAIN MAIL

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No. 844 steams through Salida

☐ Historic steam engine probably the last Salida will ever see

by Chris Hunt
Mail News Editor



It's been nearly 50 years since folks in Salida had a really good reason to gather at the site of the old railroad depot.

Perhaps the last time Salidans flocked to the train tracks just across the Arkansas from Riverside Park was when President Harry S. Truman stumped through on the campaign trail back in September of 1948

But, Sunday, under the heat of the central Colorado sun, approximately 1,000 people pressed up against a strip of yellow police tape, waiting patiently for what was to be an important moment in Salida's history.

They all had an 11:30 a.m. date with a train.

And, although fashionably late, Union Pacific's Engine No. 844 pulled into Salida to the delight of the large crowd.

The steam engine, built in 1944 and since refurbished, is pulling perhaps the last passenger train along the Malta line from Pueblo to Minturn. The train will arrive at its final destination, Salt Lake City, Utah, sometime Tuesday.

If Union Pacific cannot find a legitimate buyer for the line, the tracks will be torn up. All rail service is scheduled to stop later this fall, so Engine 844 is, in all likelihood, the very last steam-powered engine to pull a train through Salida.

Billed as a "nostalgic trip through the Rockies," the tour attracted some 640 passengers willing to shell out about \$500 each for the honor of riding along.

From Pueblo, the train traveled due west to Cañon City and then through the Royal Gorge. From there, it motored through Cotopaxi and stopped in Salida at about 12:20 p.m., 50 minutes behind schedule, but not unappreciated by the overheated masses lying in wait.

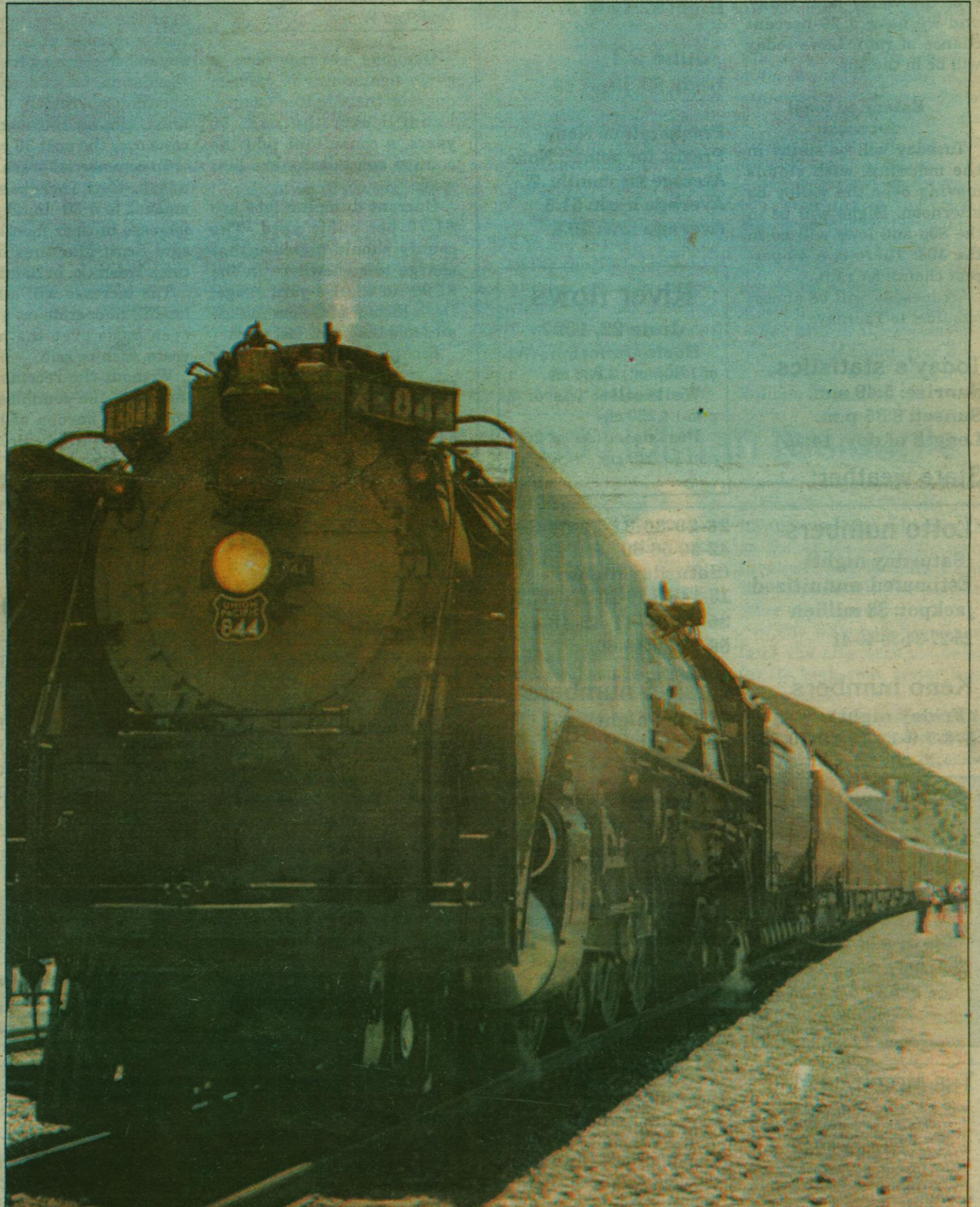


Photo by Chris Hunt

Engine No. 844, Union Pacific's ambassador of goodwill, made a quick stop in Salida Sunday en route to Salt Lake City. The engine was built in 1944.

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Train likely the last of kind for Salida

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When the engine appeared around the bend in the rails south of town, whistling mightily and expelling black smoke from its stack, the crowd let out a cheer.

Old timers who remembered the old steam engines rubbed elbows with the younger generations, taking advantage of their chance to get a glimpse of railroad history.

The engine's big drivers slowed, and the black smoke poured from the stack as it geared down, preparing for a brief stop in Salida, a town the old engine had never visited before.

Once it rolled to a stop, the yellow police tape was quickly disregarded, and the folks who had waited under the sweltering first-day-of-summer sun for an hour or more began to mill about the old engine, taking care not to get too close.

The engine weighs 454 tons, and each iron wheel, or driver, has an 80-inch diameter. The inside boiler, fired by fuel oil, can hold 300 pounds of steam pressure, which powers the train.

Engine 844 is the last steam engine ever built for UP. It was built for high-speed passenger service, and in its lifetime, it's pulled trains like the Overland Limited, the Los Angeles Limited and the Portland Rose.

In 1957, when UP made the switch to diesel-powered engines, 844 was removed from passenger service and put to work hauling freight in Nebraska for two years.

After that, it was put into service as the company's "ambassador of goodwill," making appearances at Expo '74 in Spokane, Wash., at the 1984 World's Fair in New Orleans and at the 50th anniversary of L.A.'s Union Station in 1989.

At the time of its construction, No. 844 represented the "state of the art" in railroad equipment. It can, and according to a Union Pacific press release, has exceeded 100 mph while in service. Back when it was hauling passenger trains, the engine routinely cruised at 80 or 90 mph.

One of the major problems with the old steam engines, though, was their unquenchable thirst for both water and fuel.

And, the UP release said, the engines needed to be constantly maintained — a full operating check-up must be performed every 150 miles or so. It must be refueled every 250 miles, and today, the engine pulls a water car to extend its operating range.

No. 844 is the smaller of two steam engines still in operation for UP today. The larger engine, No. 3985, weighs 537 tons, and was completely restored in 1962. It, too, pulls nostalgic train trips throughout the country.

While in Salida, two steam engine machinists gave No. 844 the once-over. Most of the work consisted of lubricating the ball bearings in the drive rod, the iron pole that connects and turns the drivers.

The two machinists, Bobby Lockman and Jim Adams, are two of eight steam engine machinists employed today. They work on No. 844 regularly.

For Lockman, the work is simply family business. "My dad's dad did this very same thing for 46 years," he said, over the pneumatic hissing and popping of the lubricator. "My dad did this for 45 years, and I've been doing this for four years. It sort of runs in the family."

It certainly does. Bobby's father, Art, was so adept at

keeping the old steam engines on the lines that he earned the nickname "Mr. Steam."

When he retired, just a few years ago, the company named the tool car that accompanies No. 844 wherever she goes the Art Lockman Tool Car.

Adams has been maintaining the steam engine for six years, and he worked with Bobby's dad. "He knew all there is to know," Adams said of the senior Lockman. "He taught us, and we're the last of a dying breed."

Fireman for the nostalgic tour through the mountains is Lynn Nystrom. "Normally, I'm a conductor, but this is special duty," he said. "It's really something to get to come up through here. We've never been here before."

Nystrom said the trip to Salida was highlighted by the excursion through the Royal Gorge. "That was breathtaking," he said. "I've never seen anything quite like it. The whole route has been just beautiful, though. It's a shame

they're going to close this line."

Nystrom said he understands why UP has made the decision to abandon the Malta line, though. "It's an operating nightmare," he said.

"Where it takes nine operating units to pull a train through here, it only takes four to go up through Wyoming. And at \$1.5 million a unit, it makes sense to get off this line."

As a fireman on No. 844, Nystrom's duty is to assist the engineer and keep the train running as smoothly as possible.

"On the new trains, everything's easy to operate," he said. "On these older engines, you really have to know what you're doing."

Hauling 640 passengers and dozens of yellow passenger cars on one of the most treacherous mountain lines in the country isn't easy. So, in order to help No. 844 along, a handful of diesel engines were lined up behind the old iron beast.

But, in keeping with the nos-

talgic aspect of the tour, the diesels are also a bit historic, built in 1955. "They're pretty good, for diesels," Nystrom said. "But there's nothing quite like this old thing," he said, patting the flat black surface of No. 844.

The UP crew used the Salida stop to serve lunch to its passengers. No swank dining car was in line behind the old engine. Instead, tour customers were served boxed meals from Pueblo to Salt Lake. "They're not bad, though," Nystrom said. "There's just no way we can cook for 640 people."

After about 30 minutes sitting at the site of the long-raised Salida Depot, Old No. 844 fired up her engines.

With a whistle and belch of black smoke, she started moving again, leaving behind the crowd of onlookers.

Then, the old engine seemed to pick up some steam, and she and her cargo left Salida for the first and, probably, the very last time.



Photo by Chris Hunt

Jim Adams, left, and Bobby Lockman, lubricate the ball bearings in the drive rod on No. 844 Sunday.

June Specials



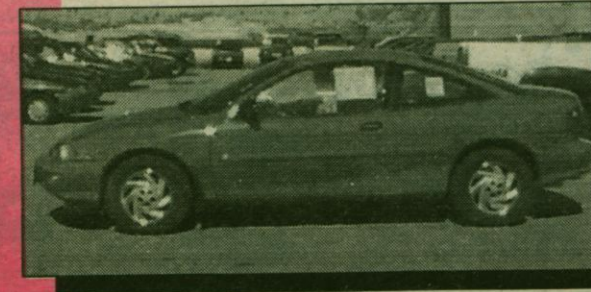
**1997
Le Sabers**



**1997
Pontiac
Grand AMs**



**1997
1/2 Ton
Pickups**

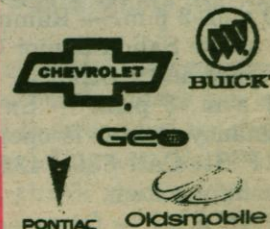


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Steam engine reminds many of days gone by

by Arlene Shovald
Mail Staff Writer

Older folks gathering at the former site of the Salida Depot Sunday to watch the last steam engine passenger train pass by were reminded of by-gone days when the depot was the hub of town and any important visitors arrived by rail.

For younger folks, the gathering represented a chance to get a "live" glimpse of the past.

Many Salidans still remember the last time there was such excitement at the depot (back when there still *was* a depot).

That was Sept. 20, 1948, when President Harry S. Truman arrived in Salida on a 17-car special at 9:35 p.m. He was greeted by a crowd of about 2,500 people, including the Salida High School band and the Legion Drum and Bugle Corps.

State patrolmen, local police and FBI men from Washington, D.C., kept the crowd behind the lines and the president received a huge ovation as he made his appearance on the platform of the observation car.

Mrs. Marguerite Thompson presented floral bouquets



Photo by Ron Slaughter

Old No. 844 fires up and leaves Salida for the first and last time Sunday. The old steam engine's appearance in Salida drew a crowd of several hundred to the site of the old Salida Depot.

from local organizations to the president, as did George Everett of the Farmers Union. Lorraine Cicerelli, representing the Jane Jefferson Club, presented flowers to Mrs. Truman.

The special train remained

in Salida until 1:55 a.m., when the engine fired up and chugged on into the mountains. Like Sunday's "last train," the route included Minturn, Glenwood Springs, Grand Junction and a stop at Salt Lake City.

Ten years earlier, on July 12, 1938, the Salida Depot saw another capacity crowd, when an estimated 3,500 to 4,000 turned out to greet President Franklin Roosevelt, who arrived at 12:30 pm. on a special 10-car train for a 10-

minute stop.

"The town was practically deserted, as the crowd gathered to greet the distinguished visitor," *The Salida Daily Mail* reported.

Gov. Teller Ammons addressed the crowd from the rear platform, welcoming the president to Colorado and, a few minutes later, President Roosevelt delivered a five-minute address.

"When the president appeared, hats were doffed and the crowd set up a cheer. Sound amplifiers made his speech audible to everyone in the audience."

The president's private car, the last on the train, was the pullman Marco Polo, appropriately named for a president who loved to travel and keep in touch with every part of the country. His address included mentions of the importance of conservation of natural resources.

Secret Service men were on the train and in the crowd, but there wasn't the slightest disorder. The president was presented with flowers from the Salida Greenhouse, which is still in operation in Salida.

The president's special was in charge of Conductor John Rawlings and Engineer William Thompson.

County wants meeting between Wal-Mart and Holman residents

UP to terminate through freight service Saturday

□ Another 'last' for Tennessee Pass line: Last through train due to blow by Salida Saturday.

by Ron Slaughter
Mail Copy Editor

The last through train on the Tennessee Pass line, which runs from Canon City to Malta on the old Denver and Rio Grande Western right-of-way, is scheduled for this Saturday.

The last passenger train steamed through Salida last

month.

Ed Trandahl of the Union Pacific Railroad said local service will continue for some time, yet.

"There will continue to be traffic on the line for some time, maintenance and local service, mostly, after the supposed stop of through traffic," Trandahl said.

He said the hedging word "supposed" in his comment was in recognition of the fact that the corporation could schedule another through train between Saturday and official abandonment of the line.

The previously reported October date for termination of through service, he said, wasn't etched in stone — it was just an approximation.

Jaime Gomez of the state Office of Business Develop-



ment, which is overseeing the track closure, said UP's agreement with the state regarding local service, however, is etched in stone. "We have very firm commitments, in writing, regarding when UP will be able to terminate local service on the line."

That date is in October, Gomez said.

Regarding the fate of the line after UP's scheduled rail service stops, Gomez said the OBD is currently studying the five formal proposals submitted by rail operators prior to the July 21 deadline.

He noted that two of the proposals are for purchase of the entire Tennessee Pass

line and the Towner line in eastern Colorado; two more are for purchase of 9.9 miles of track from Cañon City to Parkdale; and the fifth was for purchase of approximately 24 miles of track from Cañon City to Texas Creek.

"When we finish reviewing the submissions for initial compliance with the state's RFP (request for proposals), we will turn them over to an independent panel of experts on rail finance and operations for a report on the feasibility of each proposal," Gomez said.

The panel has been set up, but the state is not releasing the names of its individual members, to protect them from being annoyed by people with an ax to grind.

"We expect their report by mid-October," Gomez said.

A speculation that UP has withdrawn through traffic from the Tennessee Pass line ahead of schedule because recent heavy rains have undermined the track on the pass apparently are unfounded, according to Trandahl. "This is the first time I've heard that rumor," he said Thursday.

Trandahl did say that UP was going to have no difficulty proving to the federal Surface Transportation Board — the agency that will ultimately rule on abandonment of the Tennessee Pass and Towner lines — that traffic can be removed from the lines without causing congestion in other parts of the rail system.

Such proof was one of the criteria STB set for abandonment.

Proposed county jail appears on planners' agenda