



C & TS Dispatch

Vol. 2,

SPECIAL ISSUE

March 1989

TRAGEDY STRIKES DURANGO

DAMAGE NOT AS EXTENSIVE AS ORIGINALLY FEARED

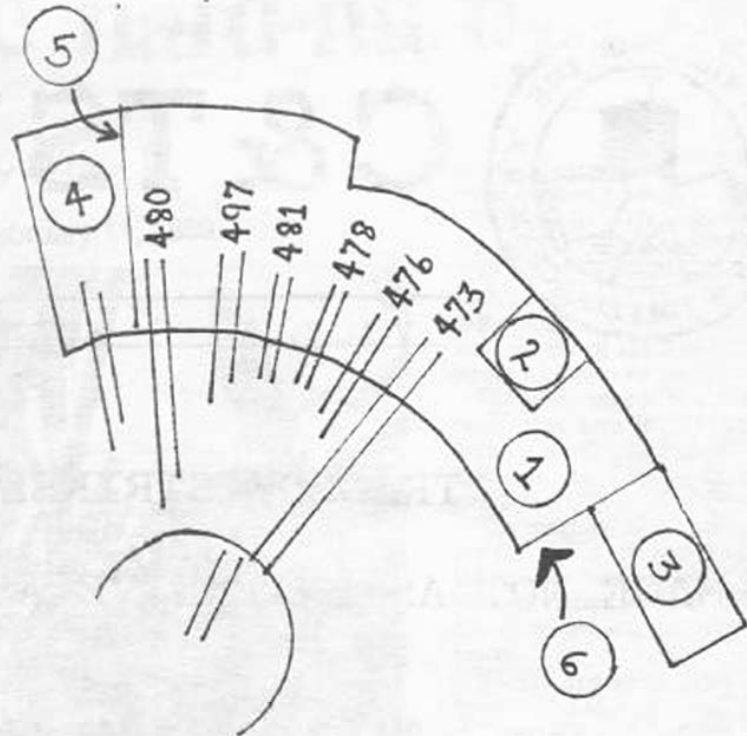
In the early morning hours of Friday, February 10, 1989, a tragic fire hit the roundhouse of the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad in downtown historic Durango, Colorado. Inside the roundhouse were all six of the currently serviceable steam locomotives of the Durango & Silverton line, formerly a part of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railway narrow gauge system. Because of the concerns that the members of the Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad have for this beautiful and historic operation, this special issue of the Newsletter of this organization has been produced using all of the available latest information about this event, its cause and its repercussions. If you receive an extra copy of this Newsletter, please feel free to pass it on to a friend. Membership in the Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec can be obtained by an annual contribution of \$15.00 to Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec, P. O. Box 222, Chama, NM 87520.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks so much to many people who have contributed information and encouragement for this special issue. Particular thanks should be given to Rae and Jim Haynes of Durango who have provided copies of all of the articles from the Durango Herald and other papers. In addition, Christina Tebbens of Denver has provided copies of the Denver Post, and most importantly, she fortuitously was in Durango the weekend of the fire and provided the excellent photographs that appear on page 3 of this issue. Thanks also to Bob Shank of the 9th National Narrow Gauge Convention (to be held in Durango starting on September 20, 1989) who furnished the information on the engine placements, as well as the D&S which supplied additional details of the repairs.

KEY

1. Machine Shop
2. Heat Treat Oven
3. Machine Shop
4. Foreman's Office
4. Fluids Storage Area
- 5,6. Fire Walls



LATEST NEWS FROM MR. CORDOVA, VICE PRESIDENT OF D & S

March 10, 1989

The fire started in the southeast corner of stall number one, nearest the machine shop, behind a metal treating kiln. The actual cause may never be known, however the fire traveled immediately up to the ceiling and roof, thus causing considerable damage to the top side of the locomotives as the estimated 3000 degree heat and burning roof fell on them.

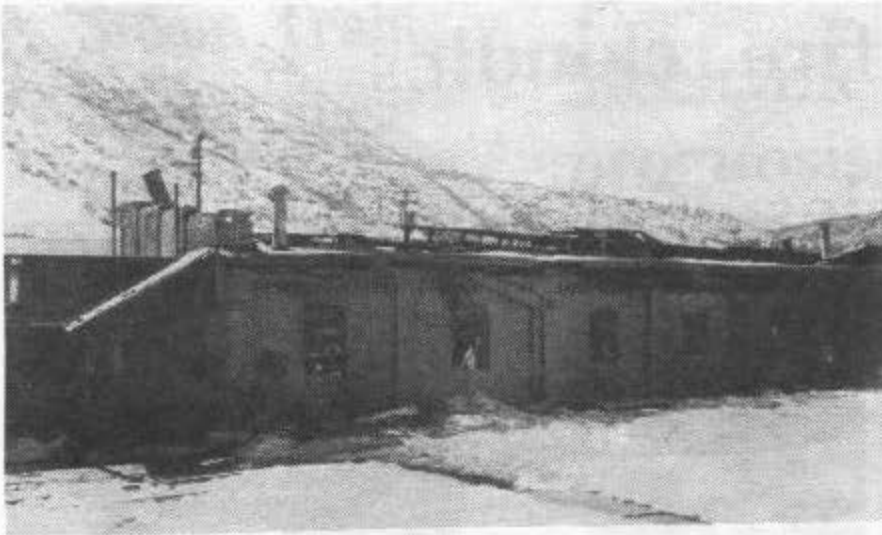
All six engines suffered fire damage in various degrees, especially the engine cabs. Roof smoke jacks fell in over the engine stacks breaking off the head lights. There was slight or no damage at all below the running boards of any of the engines.

Engine 497 was the least damaged, although it had some cab damage. At this writing it is nearly restored except for annual work that was underway before the fire. A new tender tank was in the making and it appears that this engine will be operable in about three weeks, if the tank is done by then. Stay bolts and caps, flues, smoke box have all been done, and side rod bushings are being made.

Engine 473 was the most severely damaged and will no doubt take the longest to be repaired. The cab was totally destroyed including gauges and piping. Some internal damage occurred to the steam dome. This engine was ready to be fired up prior to the fire, thus the boiler was half full of water, eliminating any serious damage.

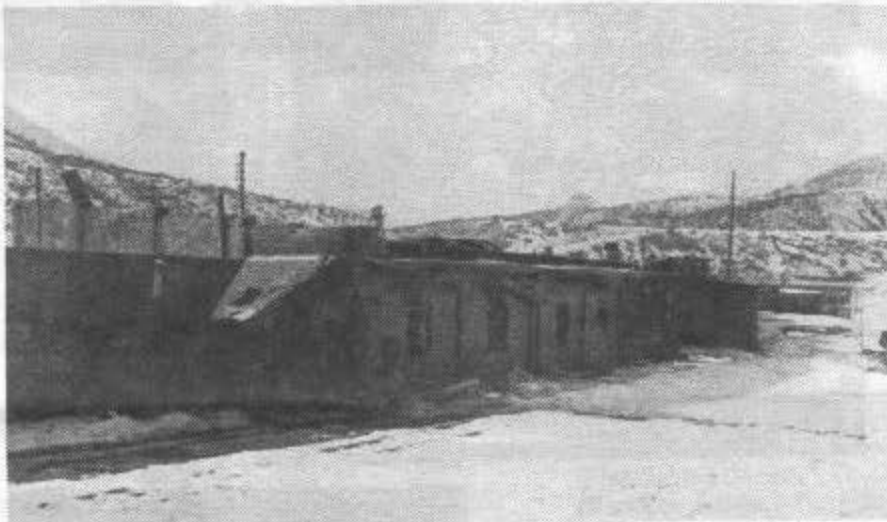
The 476 and 478 suffered cab damage and damage to the upper portion. Dynamos to all the locomotives have been cleaned and inspected and other than electrical wiring no other damage occurred. Headlights are being repaired; we had reflectors. The 481 had no lagging or flues and the front end was open, so the heat went through it. The others had lagging and jacket and it appears that there is no boiler damage. however, all will have to be hydroed to be sure. We will have at least 5 locomotives available this summer.

A new roundhouse will be built sometime this summer, as plans are now being formulated to do so. Our scheduled train service will begin on May 6.



Graphic views of the damage done to the historic D&S Roundhouse can be seen in these pictures by Christina Tebbens taken the afternoon of the fire, February 10, 1989.

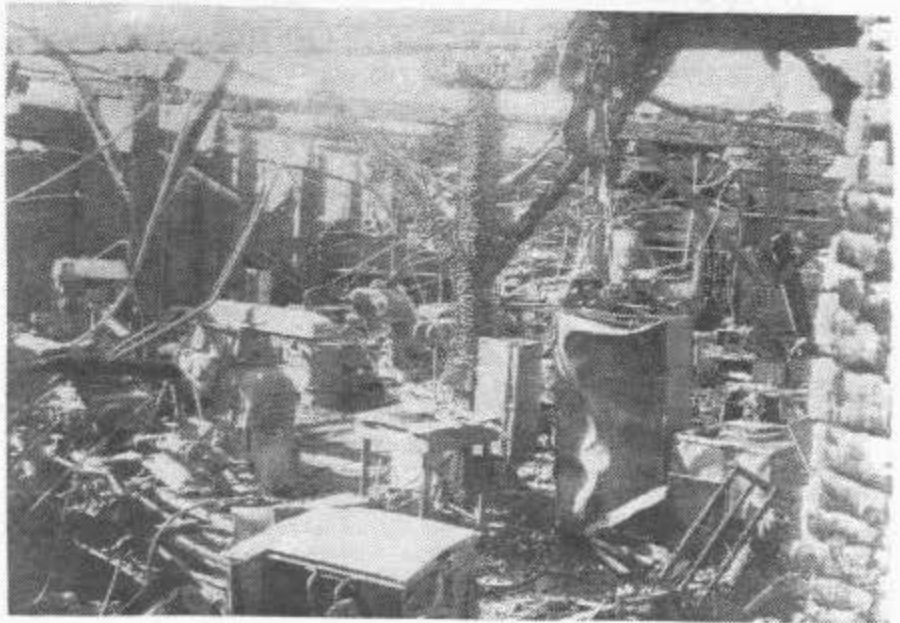
Left Top - looking westward from the east side of the yard.



Middle Left - looking northwest from further south shows the entire roundhouse damage.

Photo Credits: Christina Tebbens

Right: One of the greatest tragedies was the total destruction of the D&S machine shop and all of its tools. Just a few charred beams remain of the roof.



Roundhouse fire rekindles

memories of downtown blaze

Fire chief moves cautiously to protect firefighters' lives

By Amy Malick
Herald Staff Writer

Durango native John Dunn felt a greater sense of urgency than usual when he responded to the early morning fire that destroyed a key part of Durango's heritage.

"Right here is Durango," the exhausted firefighter said standing amidst the charred rubble of the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad roundhouse destroyed by fire early this morning.

Dunn was one of the four Durango Fire Department firefighters first on the scene shortly after 3 a.m.

"I felt like this was a fire we really needed to get out. This one I felt a greater sense of urgency because I knew this was a great part of Durango's livelihood," Dunn said.

Dunn, Captain Pat Kelley, Tom Dorr and Mike Schlarb were on duty at the fire station seven blocks north of the railroad when the call from dispatch came in. They were on the scene in minutes.

Chief Mike Dunaway heard the dispatch call at home and left immediately for the railroad station.

"When we got there, the building was already totally involved," Dunaway said.

He then put in the call to all 20 firefighters and the Animas Fire Protection District. The city employed two aerial trucks, four pumpers and two rescue units. Animas responded with four engines, a ladder truck and 30 volunteers.

The firefighters were able to contain fire in the building and save nearby passenger cars resting on tracks.

The blaze was physically and mentally exhausting for the firefighters, Dunn said.



HERALD/DAN HYDE

THE DURANGO HERALD

Friday, February 10, 1989



HERALD/CINDY BROVSKY

RAILROAD OWNER Charles Bradshaw stood in 20-degree temperatures and watched firefighters control the blaze. Bradshaw was visiting Durango from his home in Florida where temperatures were in the 70s and 80s.

Steam Train, Roundhouse Fire Traced To Welding

ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

FROM JOURNAL STAFF
AND WIRE REPORTS

2/15/89

DURANGO, Colo. — A fire that destroyed the historic Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad roundhouse and damaged six steam locomotives likely was the result of sparks generated by workers doing welding, Durango Fire Chief Mike Dunaway said Tuesday.

Fire officials had previously blamed last week's blaze on spontaneous combustion in the dry wall behind a kiln used to harden metal parts.

But Dunaway said he now believes the fire came from sparks generated from welding that was being done on a machine used to tamp down railroad beds in order to lay railroad ties.

Sparks likely flew inside a section of the wooden roundhouse wall and slowly began to build into a fire, Dunaway said. He said it was unlikely such a mishap could have been prevented.

"It could have been one little spark or it could have been a thousand," he said. "But if one embeds itself in the fiberboard it could ignite and just take off."

Fire officials said Monday they had recommended for several years that the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad install a dry fire hydrant system in the aged roundhouse because of a lack of nearby hydrants.

Dunaway said Monday he knew it would be disastrous if the 100-year-old roundhouse ever caught fire, like it did Friday.

"It was a fire that if it got started — and it did — it would be a big one," he said at a news conference Monday. "But as far as a fire waiting to happen, I wouldn't say that."

Fire officials, for many years, recommended that railroad officials install a dry fire hydrant system on the property, and had been working with the railroad since last summer on installation of such a system.

Dunaway said the fire department could only recommend installation of hydrants, not require them.

Mechanic has optimistic prognosis for engines

By J. Michael Smedley
Herald News Editor

THE DURANGO HERALD
Friday, February 17, 1989

Good news for the railroad: Fire damage to the six Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad locomotives is less than feared, a mechanic said Thursday.

Mechanic Steve Jackson's "preliminary inspection" this week found no damage occurred to the frames, running gears or driving gears.

All six locomotive were inside the D&SNG roundhouse when a hot nub of metal touched off an early morning fire that burned the 101-year-old building and destroyed the train's machine shop and precision tools.

Fire and insurance investigators estimated that temperatures reached 1,500 to 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit at floor level and 3,000 degrees near the roof.

Such heat can warp even the toughest portions of the hulking locomotives, and frame damage is considered engine-killing.

"Frame damage was our major concern," Jackson said Thursday. "Now we're looking at the boilers."

Firefighters sprayed a "wall of water" on four of the six locomotives in an effort to keep them cool in Friday's blaze, but locomotives on the outermost edges were completely exposed to searing temperatures.

"The uppermost parts were exposed to extreme heat," said Jackson. "But the boilers heated evenly and hopefully there is no undue stresses. But it doesn't appear there is any boiler damage" to any of the six locomotives.

In addition, he hasn't seen other signs of heat damage, such as scaling or blistering of the metals.

Tough initial damage estimates are lower, the final verdict is pending more thorough examinations and tests, Jackson said.

He and the D&SNG's 11 other mechanics are confident they can repair all six locomotives. "The guys are great. They've jumped right in and are salvaging parts," Jackson said.

D&SNG vice president Amos Cordova said Wednesday that "on the surface it looks pretty good," but said the cabs of some engines are gutted.

Meanwhile, five of the six locomotives have been removed from the burned roundhouse, Jackson said.

The sixth locomotive, No. 481, was undergoing suspension work and couldn't yet be moved, Jackson said.

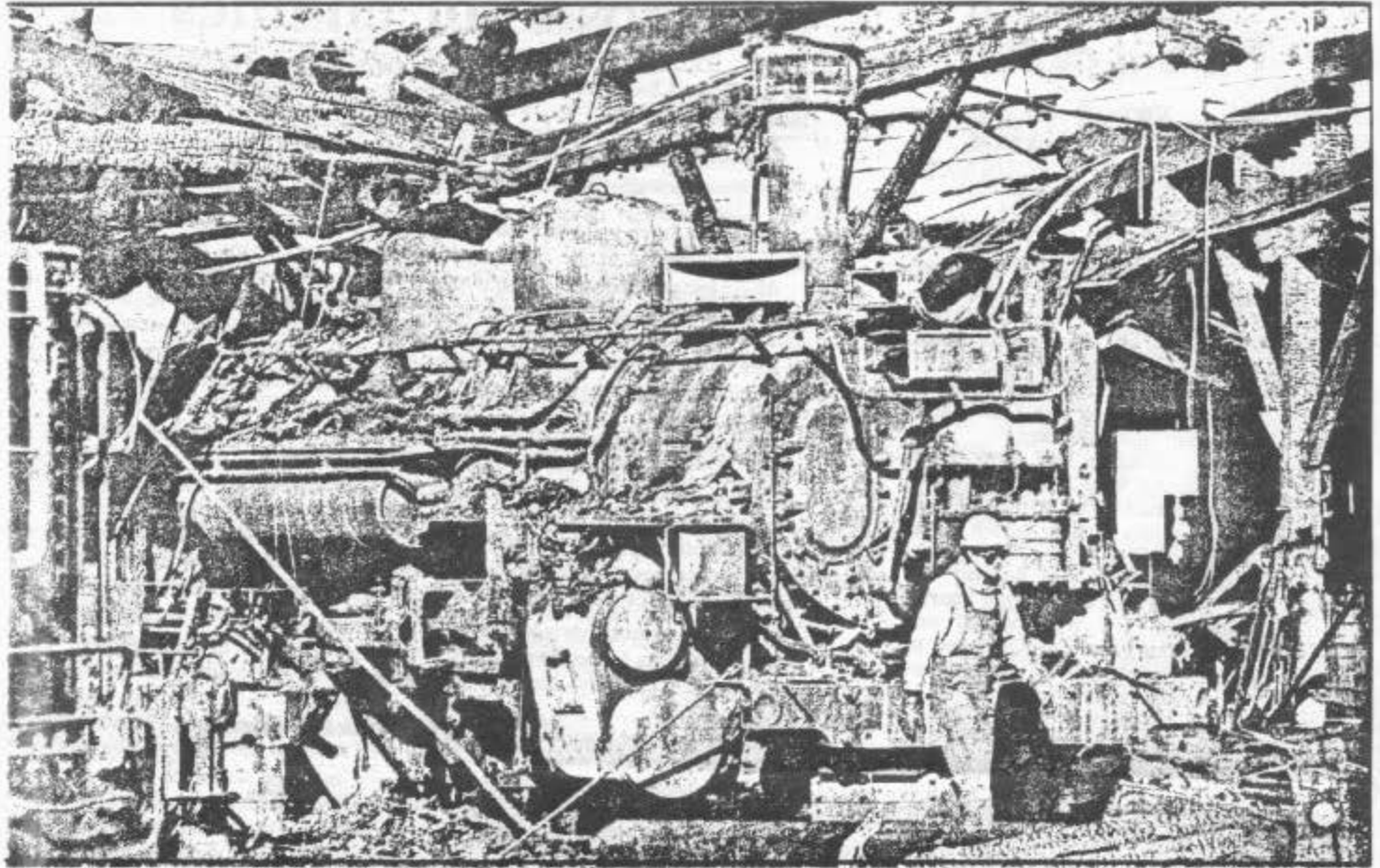
Asked to evaluate the whole situation, Jackson said, "It was bad, but it could have been worse."

Now the big problem is repairs. The fire destroyed the machine shop and its precision tools, lathes, drills and presses. Without a roundhouse, crews lack a covered, heated area in which to work.

"With no facility, no machine tools, compiled with the elements, it's a big job to overcome," said Jackson.

The loss is a major setback for the mechanics. "We're looking at two years to get back to where we were with our tools and machines."

But Jackson and his crew see a bright side in the roundhouse disaster. "I look at this as an opportunity to rebuild (the roundhouse), eliminate some inadequacies and come up with something better."



EUGENE BURTON/JOURNAL

Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge workers sift through debris from last week's fire that damaged six locomotives.

Durango Train Thinks It Can

ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

Fire-Damaged Line Will Run, Official Vows

By Chuck McCutcheon

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER February 16, 1989

DURANGO, Colo. — Not far from the heap of blackened rubble that was once the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad's historic roundhouse is a neatly lettered sign: "THROUGH SERVICE TO SILVERTON WILL RESUME SATURDAY, MAY 6."

Despite last week's fire that burned down the building and inflicted heavy damage on the six antique locomotives inside, railroad officials say they won't need to take down that sign.

Exactly how they will do it, or what it could cost, remains a mystery until they finish

assessing the damage. But they vow the railroad will be ready by May to make its twisting, scenic run through the Rockies north to Silverton — a little worse for wear, maybe, but still ready.

"We will be running on schedule," railroad vice president and traffic manager Amos Cordova said from the railroad depot in this southern Colorado resort town's downtown historic district.

"We have confidence everything's going to

be all right. What we really want to get across to people right now is that we are here to stay."

For the moment, Cordova's upbeat attitude seems to be more than just wishful thinking.

Workmen began digging through the charred wood this week to pull out the locomotives, and Cordova said damage to Engine 497 — the first one recovered — is not as bad as he first feared.

Such reports have given worried residents of tourist-dependent Durango and Silverton confidence that the trains indeed will be running again in May.

MORE: See TOURIST on PAGE A3

Tourist Train Will Rise From Ashes, Officials Say



EUGENE BURTON/JOURNAL

Despite the fire, railroad officials think the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge tourist train will roll again for its May 6 opening.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

The railroad, with its passenger depot and brick-and-wood roundhouse, was built in the early 1880s as part of the Denver & Rio Grande Railway.

At first, it was used to carry ore between Silverton's mines and Durango's smelters. By the 1950s, however, tourists became its main cargo, and it had a part in such films as "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" and "Around the World in 80 Days."

In 1981, Florida citrus tycoon Charles Bradshaw bought it for \$2.2 million and rechristened it the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad as an homage to its tracks, which are 3 feet wide instead of the standard-gauge 4 feet, 8½ inches.

Last year, in its most successful season, more than 186,000 passengers paid \$32.30 for an adult ticket or \$16.25 for a children's seat to ride its rails between May and October. New Mexico residents were its fourth heaviest users, trailing Californians, Texans and Coloradans, Cordova said.

The fire struck the roundhouse in the early-morning hours last Friday, the likely result of sparks caused from welders working on a machine used to tamp down railroad beds, said Durango Fire Chief Mike Dunaway.

The fire did more than just damage the building — it inflicted a heavy burden on the railroad's many fans from around the country, Cordova said.

"People are really heartbroken about it," he said. "I got a call just this morning from a guy from the Bronx saying, 'What

happened to my train?'

"To some people, it seems like it's like losing an old friend. It's something that's always been here."

On a physical level, the biggest blow to the railroad is the loss of its machine shop, used to fabricate parts and repair the steam-engine locomotives, said Bob Richardson, director of the Colorado Railroad Museum in Golden, Colo.

"It's too bad the shop had to go up with the building," Richardson said. "It's going to take some time for them to get all of those parts for those locomotives."

But Richardson added that those parts, while hard to find and expensive, are still around. Among the items that will need replacement are brass and copper fittings, including injectors that lift water from a railroad car's tender and forces it into the boiler so the water can evaporate.

The railroad also will have to scramble to find — and likely pay thousands of dollars for — such items as piping, valves, gauges and assorted steam pressure equipment, he said.

"You have to realize that even though they look sad and ruined . . . that locomotives are pretty solid pieces of material," he said. "But it's going to take them a lot of work."

City officials in Durango say the railroad generates an estimated \$25 million in business for their city each summer.

"From all I've heard from all the people I talked to, why shouldn't I be optimistic?" asked Rich Olsen, manager of Silverton's Chamber of Commerce.

Throughout history, train survives disasters

By Mollie Miles
Herald Staff Writer

February 12,
1989

Triumph over adversity.

In a 1980 feature on the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, a former Durango Herald reporter remarked how stories of the train always seemed to carry with them accounts of beating impossible odds.

If so, Friday's story about how a fire raged through the railroad's roundhouse might be added to the list.

The Denver & Rio Grande narrow gauge railroad tracks reached Durango in July 1881 and reached Silverton in 1882.

Silverton was a thriving mining town then, and the train was used to carry freight, ore and passengers between the two communities.

In the years to follow, the train would withstand numerous natural disasters and man-made accidents.

According to the book "Narrow Gauge to Silverton," by John B. Hungerford, a flash flood in 1909 "roared down a gulch north of Elk Park and dammed the river to form a lake which covered 1,000 feet of track to a depth from 18 to 20 feet." It took a month to repair the line, only to have another flood come shortly afterward and wash out the new fill. It took another month for repairs.

Two years later another flood destroyed more than 12 miles of line; it took two months for crews to restore the track. The 1911 flood also wiped out half of the Silverton line railroad bridge.

Hungerford also recorded an earth and rock slide in 1951 that created a lake at mileposts 488 and 489. The lake had to be bypassed on solid ground, and Hungerford wrote that the old track under the water still can be seen.

By the 1960s the train ceased operations as a source of transportation for ore and freight and became a full-blown tourist attraction. But the change in emphasis didn't change the train's history of facing adversity.

In September 1970 the Durango Herald reported on a severe flood in that closed down the train one month earlier than planned.

The Herald reported Sept. 8, 1970, that the train had sustained at least \$250,000 in damage to the tracks between Durango and Silverton.

Train officials shut down the railroad, even though it was scheduled to operate through Oct. 4. Officials estimated that they lost revenue from about 10,000 passengers.

Torrents, however, aren't the only natural disaster to strike the train. When the railroad had a winter run, avalanches were a constant source of trouble.

During a particularly bad year in 1932 numerous snowslides shut down the track from February to May and train crews had to use picks, shovels and dynamite to remove snow from the track, according to Hungerford.

Winter train travel was suspended in the early 1950s.

But in 1981 winter travel was restored daily to the Cascade Canyon. Charles Bradshaw purchased the train for \$2.2 million and changed the name to the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad. Winter travel was canceled again in 1986, however, due to financial losses.

In 1983, two apparent attempts to derail the train were reported when officials found piles of rocks deliberately placed on the tracks. No one was injured in either incident, even though one locomotive derailed and another suffered a damaged brake mechanism.

In June 1987, a fully stocked and pressurized locomotive was hit broadside by a diesel truck carrying a load of potatoes after the truck lost its brakes on U.S. Highway 160 and barreled into the train yard.

Engine No. 473 (which was the engine closest to the source of heat in Friday's fire) suffered extensive damage, but mechanics repaired No. 473 in 20 days.

The train's history is familiar to many long-time area residents, who think the train's latest trial by fire will also be overcome.

Railroad line rich in history

By Joanne Diltner
Denver Post Staff Writer

February 11, 1989

The narrow-gauge railroad not only sustains Durango, it made Durango.

When the little southern Colorado town of Animas City wouldn't meet the railroad's terms in 1880, the Denver & Rio Grande Railway moved its railhead a bit to the south, and Durango was born.

When the first train came chugging into town during the summer of 1881, it was cause for celebration. Finally, the ore from Silverton's mines could be delivered to Durango's smelters easily and reliably.

Silver was the lure that attracted the railroad and it was the lifeblood of the towns. In mining's heyday, more than \$300 million in ore came over the tracks.

Colorado's narrow-gauge railroads, with tracks three feet apart instead of the standard 4 feet, 8½ inches, were born of necessity. It was cheaper and easier to cut the narrower lines through the rugged canyons and high passes of the Rockies.

At one time it was possible to travel all the way from Denver to Silverton on the Rio Grande's steam cars, via Alamosa and Durango.

Colorado's silver boom began to fade in the 1890s with a change in government monetary policy. But the Durango-Silverton line managed to hang on into the 20th century while many of the other lines that had crisscrossed the Rockies collapsed into bankruptcy and receivership, their light iron pulled up and sold for scrap.

The Durango-Silverton line hauled its last ore in the 1950s and last freight in the 1960s, but by then it had caught on as a tourist attraction and movie location.

But the line's future clouded in the 1970s when its owner, the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad, wanted to get out of the passenger business.

After years of maneuvering and government hearings, the railroad was saved in 1981 when Florida citrus grower Charles Bradshaw bought it for \$2.2 million from the Rio Grande and rechristened it the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad.

Engine repairs: The attitude is 'I think I can'

SPECIAL EDITION (3-89) - Page 9

By Amy Malick
Herald Staff Writer

Sunday, February 12, 1989

Repairing the six historic locomotives damaged by Friday's fire will be a difficult and expensive — but not impossible — task, according to railroad buffs.

Manufacturers who made parts are no longer in business, very few — if any — similar locomotives exist and the roundhouse machine shop where mechanics forged their own parts was destroyed.

But one longtime Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge watcher has no doubt the train will run May 6 as promised.

Bob Richardson heard the optimistic prediction on Denver television news Friday night. The director of the Colorado Railroad Museum in Golden, a known train expert, has watched the railroad's operations here for 40 years.

"I agree they'll be running by May 6. It'll take awhile. They'll have to make or scrounge parts," Richardson said.

Richardson has a stake in the outcome. He has chartered a private car on the train this summer. Richardson has ridden the train at least once every summer since his first trip with one other passenger on July 4, 1941.

Fortunately for the mechanics, Richardson says, the D&SNG has been using the current engines so long they are accustomed to needing, and finding, parts.

Railroad officials haven't yet determined the extent of the fire damage. Other than cosmetic damage, which is obvious, flames consumed the wooden parts of the engines, such as the paneled interiors.

Investigators say the heat reached 3,000 degrees, a very hot flame. Richardson speculates the heat most likely damaged brass and copper parts, including gauges. Intense heat could have warped the frames or boilers, which experts say would be more serious if not devastating.

Jim Trowbridge of the Rocky Mountain Railroad Club said the only place in the world that still makes steam engines, a company in China, is discontinuing business.

"You could make them here, but it would be fabulously expensive," said Trowbridge, who edits the club's newsletter.

The D&SNG uses six steam-powered narrow gauge engines to pull passenger cars to and from Silverton. The three K-28 engines (Nos. 473, 476 and 478) were manufactured by the American Locomotive Works in 1923.

They are the only K-28s left in the world. Seven others manufactured with the Durango engines were sent to Alaska during World War II and have since been scrapped.

The railroad's two K-36 locomotives (Nos. 480 and 481) were manufactured by Baldwin Locomotive Works in 1925.

The Cumbres & Toltec railroad from Chama, N.M., to Antonito, Colo., owns four operative K-36s and two others that are not in service, according to Trowbridge. He said another K-36 is on display at the Royal Gorge near Canon City, Colo.

The sixth D&SNG engine is a K-37 (No. 497), which was built as a standard gauge by Baldwin in 1902 and narrow gauged with nine other engines by the Denver & Rio Grande Western in 1930. The D&SNG owns three inoperable K-37s, which are stored in the yard. The Cumbres & Toltec also owns two or three out-of-service K-37s, which take "an incredible amount of work" to put in service, according to Trowbridge.

Other narrow gauge railroads in Colorado are located in Georgetown, Central City, Cripple Creek and Golden. But those lines either use smaller engines or a narrower track, Trowbridge said.

Since no other K-28s exist, the mechanics will have to make parts, which they have been doing for years, Richardson said. As a further help, companies that have made parts for the railroad probably kept the patterns, he said.

Mechanical foreman Steve Jackson said Friday that No. 473, a K-28, was closest to the source of the fire and "looked bad."

Some parts for the other two kinds of engines are interchangeable, Trowbridge said. Railroad vice president Amos Cordova said their mechanics previously have exchanged a few parts for those engines with Cumbres & Toltec.

The state of Colorado may be able to help the railroad, said Rep. Jim Dyer, D-Durango. Colorado and New Mexico jointly own the Cumbres & Toltec line, of which a mile runs through Dyer's district in Archuleta County.

Richardson admitted the fire was a disaster.

"You hate to see it happen to a landmark that's known to hundreds of thousands of people," he said of the roundhouse.

But he said hope for the engines is not in vain.

"You have a very competent force down there. Steve Jackson has done a fine job of maintaining the engines," he said. "I don't anticipate they'll have any problems they can't surmount."

"Everything in here is burned beyond repair," mechanical foreman Steve Jackson said, standing in the roofless, debris-littered shop next to the fire-scarred locomotives, most of which date from the 1920s.

Asked about the difficulty of repairing the locomotives, Jackson shrugged.

"You can't buy parts at Sears, or Monkey Wards either. We made a lot of them right here. Now we don't have a place to repair them, and we don't have the machinery to make the parts to make the repairs."

Jackson and other officials hope the two or three locomotives farthest from the machine shop, where the fire apparently started and burned most intently, can be fixed fairly quickly.

Before they are used they'll have to be inspected by Colorado state boiler inspectors, he added.

Rebuilding the Narrow Gauge

Railroad machinists, carpenters work feverishly

By Amy Malick
Herald Staff Writer

Behind Amos Cordova's office desk in the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge railroad depot hangs a picture of a wet, mangy cat that looks as if its paw got stuck in an electric socket.

"It's been a great year," reads the sardonic caption.

"That's how we feel sometimes," says Cordova, railroad vice president.

That may be how employees of the train feel since fire destroyed the roundhouse where all six engines were stored Feb. 10, but 25 train machinists and carpenters are harnessing their feelings of shock and sorrow to forge triumph from tragedy.

One week after the early-morning blaze obliterated the roundhouse and machine shop and tools, the men had the rail yard cleared of twisted debris and the charred engines pulled from the rubble.

Now, only 24 days later, engine No. 497 is one week from restored. Durangoans can expect to see the familiar iron horse chugging through town by April, Cordova said.

The other five engines have been pulled back over the work pits where they were sitting for repairs at the time of the blaze.

Rebuilding the roundhouse and restoring engine cosmetics have taken a back seat. The railroad has one driving goal: make the engines work by summer.

Already, 22,774 tourists have signed on for the summer ride. As many as 800 reservations per day have come in since the fire. The first daily train leaves the station at 8:30 a.m. May 6.

Crews have no choice but to painstakingly repair the engines part-by-part in the open air. The car shop, where crews are repairing No. 497, is full. At one end, machinists are installing a new motor in the railbus. At the other, mechanics do routine winter maintenance on the coaches.

"We have the only air-conditioned, open-air roundhouse in the United States," Cordova jokes.

All joking aside, the open air poses enormous problems. Cold temperatures freeze unprotected water lines to the roundhouse. Crews must have water to test the boilers. Temporary electricity had to be installed.

Until Thursday's storm, progress zoomed along on the engines outside. But the engines sat idle during the weekend's sleet and snow.

"Pray for good weather," said general mechanical foreman Steve Jackson.

Words fail to convey the difficulty of the task challenging the D&SNG. Although clean of debris, the stark roundhouse site resembles a war zone. The pungent smell of char permeates the air. The engines are burned beyond recognition; disassembled parts sit on the ground, identified by engine number in white paint.

"The hardest obstacle is not having tools," Jackson said.

The crew is using the mechanical and wood tools in the car shop, a separate building not affected by the fire.

Each day new specialized tools for the engines arrive to fill a makeshift machine shop walled and roofed-in at the west side of the roundhouse shell. Machinist Les Welch slowly makes valves on a metal lathe shipped in from Albuquerque.

"Sometimes you have to scratch your head and dig in," Welch said when asked how he knows where to begin.

Making do is nothing new for these mechanics who have scrounged and made parts for the engines — among the last of their kind in the world — for years.

But making do for six engines all at once, with few tools, on top of what normally is a busy spring schedule, is new.

"You have to jump in the middle and start somewhere," Jackson said.

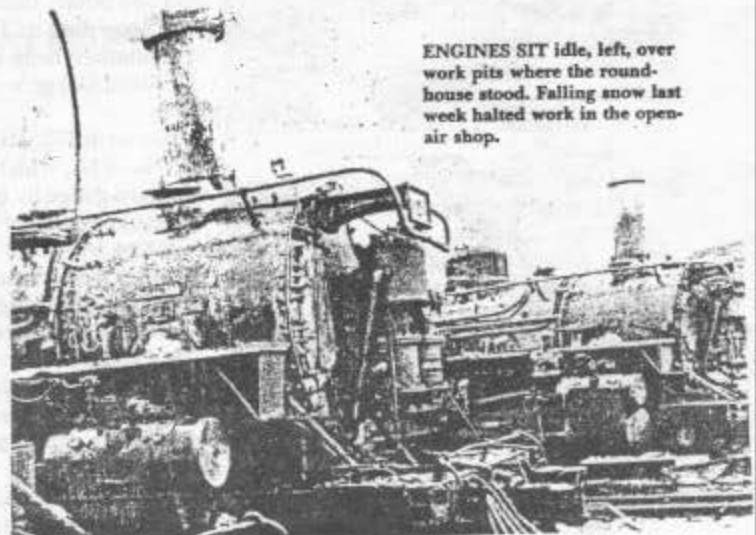
The railroad won't have a dollar figure on the fire damage for weeks. Insurance adjusters are researching the historical buildings and machines to determine the replacement costs in today's market.

But Jackson has surveyed the damage to the engines and submitted a repair schedule to the State Boiler Inspector, who regulates steam-driven trains. Jackson said all six engines can be salvaged. The goal is all six by summer, but the train has run with four — with difficulty — in the past, Jackson said.

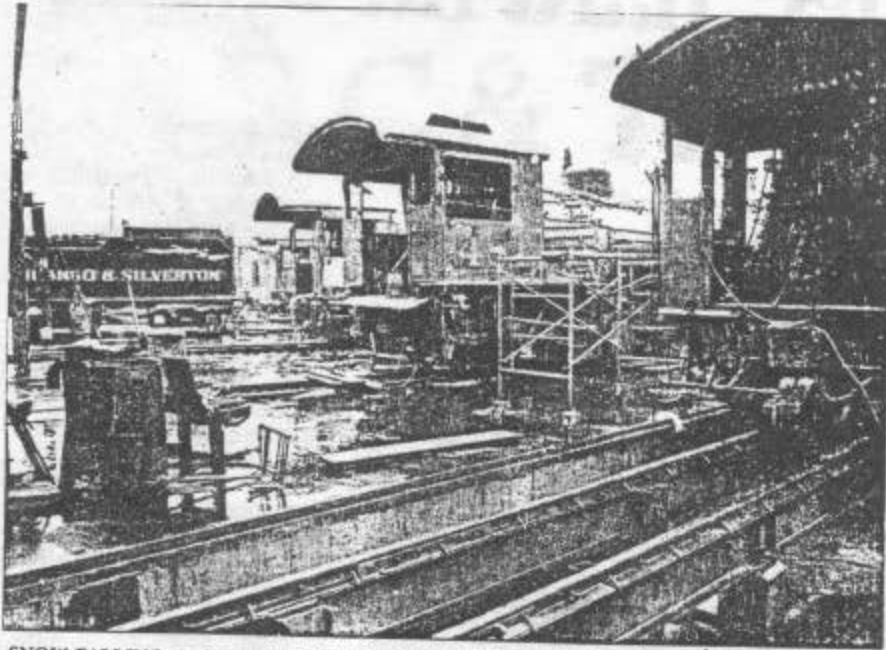
His men, compelled by love for the historic train, are toiling six days a week. Every minute is precious, they say.



STEVE JACKSON, above, takes time from his monumental task of putting the six D&SNG engines back on track to smile for the camera from the back of Engine No. 497.

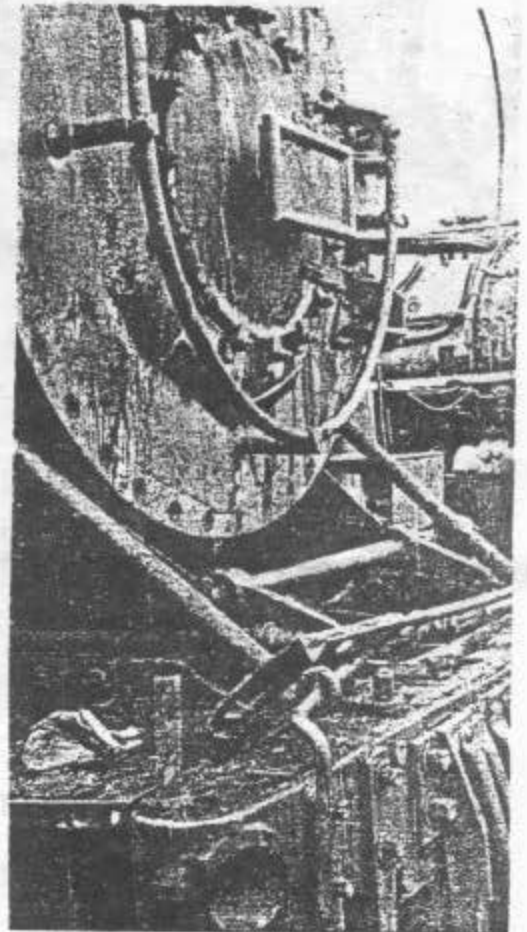


ENGINES SIT idle, left, over work pits where the roundhouse stood. Falling snow last week halted work in the open-air shop.



SNOW FALLING on the outdoor D&SNG work yard on the site of the burned roundhouse stops work on the engines. Crews had the site cleared of fire debris a week after the blaze.

ENGINES SIT idle, left, over work pits where the roundhouse stood. Falling snow last week halted work in the open-air shop.



MELTED SNOW, left, reflects from the walls and floor of the gutted machine shop in the roundhouse. All the tools also were destroyed in the early-morning blaze. Machinist Les Welch, below, works in the makeshift machine shop built after the fire on the west side of the roundhouse shell. The metal lathes pictured came from Albuquerque.

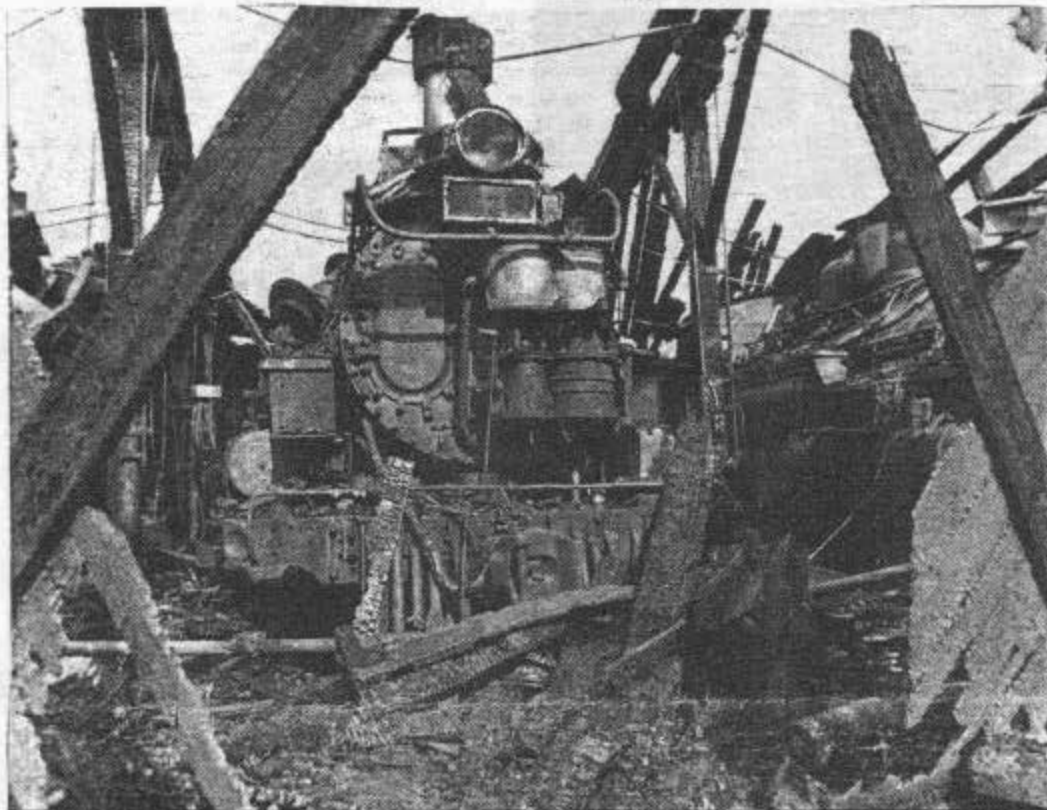


All photos by
Amy Malick

Narrow gauge hard-hit by fire

Durango vows to open line May 6

THE DENVER POST February 11, 1989



Special to The Denver Post / John Betancourt

HISTORY DESTROYED: Roundhouse of narrow-gauge railroad was destroyed by fire.

By Kit Minciler

Denver Post Staff Writer

DURANGO — The trains will be running May 6, officials of the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad vowed Friday after a fire destroyed an historic roundhouse with all six of the line's working steam locomotives inside.

The long-range impact of the disaster was hard to assess Friday, because it will take several days to calculate the damage to the engines.

The machine shop, where parts are fabricated and repairs made to the antique locomotives, was a total loss, raising worries about how the damaged engines will be repaired.

Visibly saddened, railroad Vice President Amos Cordova still predicted the line would be ready for business as scheduled May 6.

"There is no way to assess the historic value" of the roundhouse and its contents, commented railroad owner Charles Bradshaw, who lives in Florida but happened to be in town when the fire broke out early Friday.

The railroad, which follows a twisting and spectacular route between Durango and the old mining town of Silverton, and Mesa Verde National Park 40 miles to the west are southwestern Colorado's major tourist attractions.

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