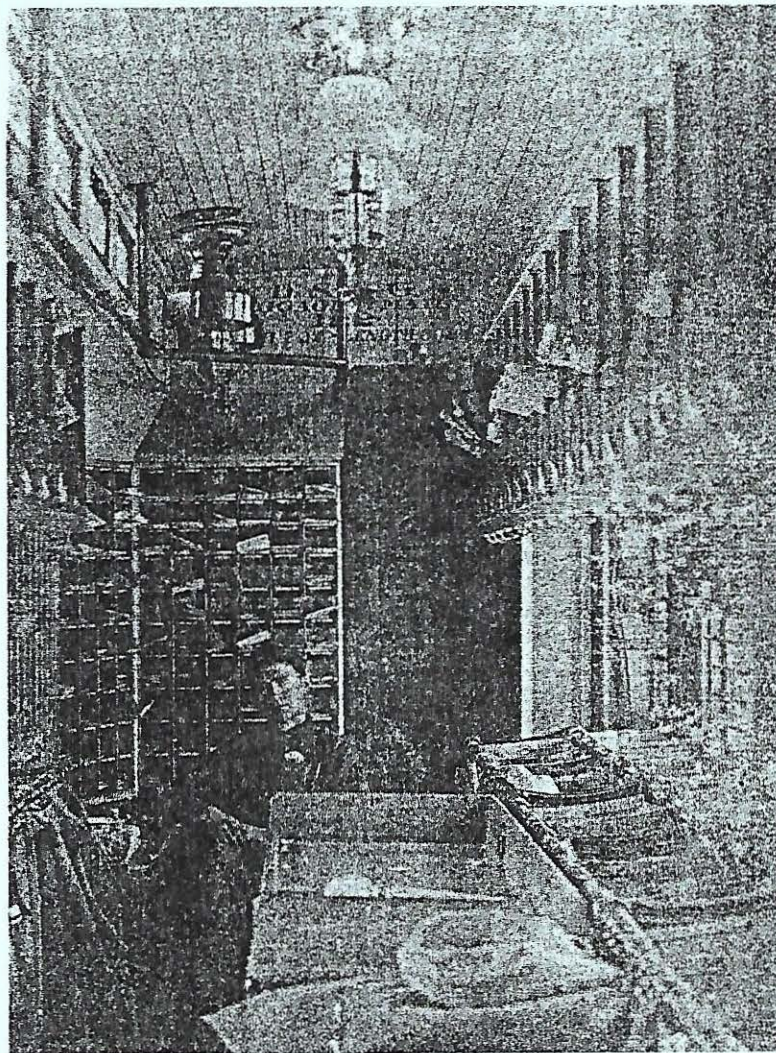


# **U. S. NARROW GAUGE MAIL ROUTES & POSTAL MARKINGS**

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## **ROUTE AGENTS RAILWAY POST OFFICES STATION AGENTS**



Clerk Alfred V. Paulsen at "work" on Alamosa & Durango R.P.O.  
Train 116 at Durango, Co. in 1917

## **MOBILE POST OFFICE SOCIETY**

## CONTENTS

PREFACE	iii
ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
NARROW GAUGE ROUTES IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER	1
STATION AGENTS	68
NARROW GAUGE ROUTES BY STATE	70
REFERENCES	74
TERMS AND CONVENTIONS	75

## PREFACE

For those who are susceptible, it may take just one good look at something like a William Henry Jackson photograph of tiny trains amid spectacular western scenery. Do you know the one showing the passenger train scaling a narrow ledge along Las Animas canyon wall, the same spot where *Breakheart Pass* was filmed a century later? Jackson captured many unforgettable images on his glass plates, sharply focused due to long exposures in the clear, thin mountain air.

Since you are reading this, certainly you have fallen under the spell of trains, and would surely view any of Jackson's railroad photographs with pleasure, for they are special. Pick some of his best photos, among the finest railroad photos ever taken. Undoubtedly there is something even more special about these that may not be evident. The best of Jackson's railroad photographs show narrow gauge trains. For the narrow gauge enthusiast these images are icons.

Narrow gauge is simply track with the rails closer together than the 4' 8½" width of standard gauge. From the beginnings of the railroading there were many gauges, some as wide as five, even six feet. When railroads first started, they did not connect and there was no interchange, so the choice of gauge was an individual matter. Before long the railroads had to face the interchange challenge, getting goods and passengers from one railroad to the other to continue the journey. It was apparent that railroads using compatible equipment could connect their tracks to minimize that problem. Specifications for the first transcontinental railroad called for 4' 8½" gauge and it then became the North American standard.

As the first transcontinental railroad was completed, the idea sprang up that a railroad could be built and operated more cheaply if the gauge were smaller. The theory went that a 2-foot or 3-foot gauge railroad would be significantly cheaper because a narrower right-of-way and roadbed need be obtained and prepared, lighter rails would be used because of smaller equipment (that would cost less to build and run cheaper since they were smaller), and laid on shorter ties. The theory was put to the test in some far outposts of the British Empire and most famously in the Festiniog Railway in Wales — and it worked.

In the 1870s this alternative to conventional railroads attracted so much attention that it was said "narrow gauge fever" had broken out. Railroads had become the dominant mode of transportation and means of connecting with expanding markets. Any community hoping to survive and prosper, any producer of raw materials or agricultural products, any manufacturer needed a railroad connection; those without a connection scrambled to encourage one, and if it could be done a little cheaper, so much the better. Narrow gauge tracks were set down in every part of the country, inspired by the success of narrow gauge in the Rocky Mountains as seen in reproductions of the dramatic Jackson photography. Though the gauge was narrow, some dreamed in wide screen Cinemascope. For a brief period it was possible to travel solely by 3-foot gauge railroads from New Mexico to Montana and from Ohio far into Texas (ferrying across the Mississippi). The Denver & Rio Grande had originally set sight on connections through to Mexico City — until the Santa Fe blocked that possibility — to give a hint of "what might have been."

By 1900, if the line had any economic or geographic value, most narrow gauge railroads were converted to standard gauge, or were abandoned, a trend that would continue. In some cases the intent was eventually to convert. Some of those lines merged with larger railroads and may still serve the national rail network. Those narrow gauge railroads still operating served markets that could not justify the expense of upgrading. The number of narrow gauge common carriers could be counted on one's fingers. What went wrong?

Put bluntly, the narrow gauge premise was mistaken. Its promise of profits through lower capital requirements and operating costs was proven false. While it may have been cheaper to construct and equip a narrow gauge railroad, for any railroad to make money it must have traffic. If the railroad had competitors, it had to be competitive in price and service. By the time narrow gauge fever raged, the best routes were already taken and the best markets were already served by standard

DELPHOS & VEEDERSBURGH 175mi OH - IN  
 TOLEDO CINCINNATI & ST LOUIS  
 JY 11 1882 ROUTE AGENT ESTABLISHED  
 AU 1 1882 TO RPO  
 DE 16 1882 TO DELPHOS & CHARLESTON

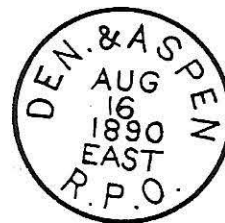
DELPHOS & WARREN 64mi OH - IN  
 TOLEDO DELPHOS & BURLINGTON  
 JA 15 1880 ROUTE AGENT ESTABLISHED  
 AP 1 1880 TO HOLGATE & WARREN

DELTA & BALTIMORE 46mi PA - MD  
 YORK & PEACH BOTTOM / MARYLAND CENTRAL  
 JA 21 1884 RPO ESTABLISHED  
 SP 21 1889 TO YORK & BALTIMORE  
 207-B-1 DELTA & BALTO. / R.P.O. 27.5 1887 IV  
 207-E-1 DELTA & BALT. / R.P.O. 27.0 1889 IV  
 207-F-1 DELTA & BALTIMORE / R.P.O. 28.0 1889 IV



DENVER & ALAMOSA 302mi CO  
 DENVER & RIO GRANDE  
 OC 9 1879 FR DENVER & EL MORO  
 JA 24 1881 TO DENVER & SANTA CRUZ

DENVER & ASPEN 401mi CO  
 DENVER & RIO GRANDE  
 MY 14 1889 FR SALIDA & ASPEN + DENVER & CANON CITY  
 1890 STANDARD GAUGED  
 NO 25 1890 TO DENVER PUEBLO & LEADVILLE  
 + DENVER & OGDEN  
 + COLO SPGS & ASPEN  
 953-Z-1 DEN. & ASPEN / R.P.O. 28.0 DIR 1890 IV



DENVER & BAILEY 54mi CO  
 DENVER SOUTH PARK & PACIFIC  
 1878 FR DENVER & DEER VALLEY  
 FE 6 1879 TO DENVER & GRANT

DENVER & BLACK HAWK 36mi CO  
 COLORADO CENTRAL  
 FE 28 1873 FR DENVER & GOLDEN  
 NO 22 1877 TO DENVER & GEORGETOWN  
 952-B-1 DEN. & BLACK H. / AGT. 26.0 Banknote VI

