

## Who is Dave Wood?

*Station 1 (Kiosk) on the Trail Head gives a short introduction to the freighter and road builder, David Walker Wood (1851-1944) of Ohio, Kansas and Colorado, for which the road and trail are named.*

Better known as Dave Wood, his story relates the rich human history to the environmental story, for better or worse. The beauty of the environment was not lost on Mr. Wood. He described this area, "From Gunnison to the west, southwest, and south into the San Juan Quadrangle is scenery that has no comparison anywhere in the world....From the top of the Continental Divide you look down on mountains in every direction, especially those of the San Juan Basin-probably the richest mining area of its size in the precious metals and iron and copper. The view is a scene of grandeur in every direction."(pp. 83-86, "I Hauled These Mountains in Here!" by Frances and Dorothy Wood).

Dave Wood lived the great westward expansion across the plains. Moving with his family from Ohio to Kansas, he joined his father, Colonel Sam Wood and enlisted in the Union Army and earned the title "the youngest soldier in the Civil War" at age 10. Returning to Kansas after the war, Dave and his brother, Bill in 1871, went into a livery stable business in Cottonwood Falls, Kansas. His father brought back reports of the great opportunities for business in Colorado and in 1876 (25 years old), Dave traveled to Colorado and decided the reports were true. He started with a livery stable in Pueblo, CO and added passenger wagons starting a "fast line." Wood's "fast line" was a big transportation success and his competitors, especially the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad were a bit annoyed. (1979 article in Focus by William D. Harmsen)

The Denver & Rio Grande Railroad made a contract with Wood to move his business to the end of the track. In return, the D&RG forwarded their passenger and freight business to Wood. As the railroad grew, Wood's offices moved as the "end of the line" changed from Garland City, Canon City, Alamosa, Gunnison, Sapinero, Montrose and Dallas. Wood supplied the mining camps 50 to 100 miles from the railroad end year round with passengers and freight. A freight wagon, weighed about 3000 lbs. and carried a load of about 4000lbs., was pulled by 6 teams of mules, 3 sets in tandem or 12 mules. Wood employed agents to search the Colorado countryside for free-roaming mules and bring them in to the corrals. Wood moved hundreds of passengers and as much as 500,000 pounds of freight daily at the peak of his operation, early 1880s. His

biggest operation was the huge supply center in Montrose, with the 1882 arrival of the D&RG there.

It was 1884 that Wood built his road from Montrose to Telluride over the Uncompahgre Plateau near Horsefly Peak. This road cut off 20 miles per trip and put Wood's wagons ahead of the other teamsters. He built the road during a wet, muddy spring when freighting was impossible for a while. Wood took advantage of the dead time by keeping his teamsters busy building the new shorter and faster road. He didn't use much in the way of surveying and engineering equipment to chart the road, but is said to have fixed a heading on Lizard Head Peak and kept going toward it.

The teamsters hauled supplies of all kinds (food, machinery, dynamite, coal – everything needed at the mines.) and passengers to the mines and passengers and ore back to the railroad. The mining communities depended on Dave Wood year round and "thought there was nothing Dave Wood couldn't do with those big, free-wheeling wagons." When the snow was too deep, Wood transferred his loads to sleds. He earned the reputation as the "King of the freight lines" and the "Greatest freighter in the West." These titles give life to the story Wood's daughters tell and used as the title for their father's biography. They relate that Dave gave a visiting lady a ride to Montrose once and when she asked if he had lived in the mountains long, he told her, "I hauled these mountains in here!"

Wood also invested in a whole sale business of selling grain, hay, flour and coal. He had some interests in mining and livestock, a blacksmith shop and wagon repair business. He bought the Dallas Ranch where in 1888 he made a home for his second wife Fannie Parker and 7 children.

In 1893, the demonetization of silver brought many businesses to ruin and Wood's was no exception. The Banks immediately foreclosed on his notes and seized his property and livestock. However, he was able to save his Dallas Ranch. The road was then used by farm and ranch homesteaders that came to the Horsefly area into the early 1900s. Marilyn Cox put together a "Trek to Dave Wood Road and Horsefly Area" in 1989 for a Montrose County Historical Society tour event. This Trek describes many of the ranches, schools, stage stops and families along the road. This historic trek describes many of the families and personalities that have traveled and lived in the area.

Sources:

"I Hauled These Mountains in Here!" by Frances and Dorothy Wood

1979 article in Focus by William D. Harmsen

Marilyn Cox "Trek to Dave Wood Road and Horsefly Area" 1989