

A Brief history of the Denver and Southwestern Railroad

Although the history described below is fictitious, the people named in the following history are real people who are either friends or relatives of Don Paulson.

The Denver and Southwestern Railroad (D&SW) is a standard gauge railroad that runs from Denver to Santa Fe via Gunnison and Salida. It also has a narrow gauge branch that serves the cities of Ouray, Silverton, Placerville and Montrose and which interchanges with the standard gauge D&SW at Montrose.

The history of the D&SW begins with the emigration of Nels Paulson from Sweden to Canada in the early 1860s. He made a small fortune in lumber while in Canada and then emigrated to the United States in the early 1870s. In 1882 Nels constructed the narrow gauge Denver and Southwestern Railroad to serve the San Juan mining communities of Ouray, Ophir, and Silverton and the livestock shipping community of Placerville. He had learned about narrow gauge railroads from his logging business in Canada.

In the late 1890s Nels built a standard gauge D&SW line from Denver to Santa Fe via Gunnison and Montrose where it interchanged with the narrow gauge D&SW. The railroad prospered and Nels turned over the management to his son Frank Paulson just before Nels died in 1910. Frank guided the railroad through the depression years when most other narrow gauge lines were in deep financial trouble. By the late 1940s Frank's son Robert Paulson was managing the railroad system. Frank passed away in 1951. While other railroads were abandoning steam in the 1950s Robert never gave up on steam and steam is still a major part of the D&SW motive power to this day. By the time of Robert's death in 1981 he had turned over management to his son Donald Paulson. In 2017 Don is still a daily hands on manager of the railroad.

Don Paulson has had many loyal employees who have helped run the railroad in the 21st century. These would include construction engineer Keith Koch and track supervisor Bob Schaeffer. Locomotive engineers have included Tom Hillhouse, Bob Schaeffer, Connie Schaeffer, Robb Ruyle, Rod Holloway, Bill Tipton, Greg Posta and Bob Meyer. Business is so good that the D&SW has had to lease numerous engines from the Santa Fe, Union Pacific, Denver and Rio Grande Western and Southern Pacific.

The railroad ships out sheep and cattle on the standard gauge from Ridgway and from Placerville on the narrow gauge. Gold, silver and base metal ore is shipped from the newly reopened Revenue Mine in Ouray as well as from a few smaller mines. The railroad still has a good LCL business, manufactured products from Denver as well as unit coal trains from the Belden Mine on the Montrose to Salida main line.

In order to help employees understand the rich history of the D&SW Don Paulson Maintains a 30' x 40' HO/HOn3 model railroad that depicts the major sites on the railroad as they would have appeared on June 15, 1952. Many of the businesses are named after friends many of whom who have contributed to the railroad. These include Tube's TV and Radio Repair and Schaeffer and Son Engineering in Silverton; Pfaff's Phine Phurniture, Tipton Chair Company, Hillhouse and Sons Manufacturing, and Andrew Paulson Investment Real Estate in Salida; Matt Paulson – Attorney at Law, M. Graff Wholesale Groceries and Posta Communication in Gunnison; Zanett Mining Company's Grizzly Bear Mine in Ouray; and Hotel Bennett in Ophir.