

## *Food, drink among the things once available in Cisco*

By Kathy Jordan

### Part one

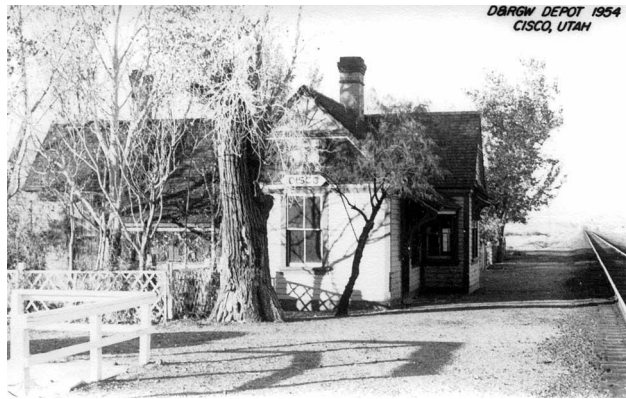
Today if you happen to drive through the tiny hamlet of Cisco, Utah, on U.S. Highway 6 & 50, you might be intrigued to know that the ghost town was once a thriving community.

The present-day Cisco is not the original town. In 1883 the first Cisco was located on the narrow-gauge railroad about two miles northwest of the present town.

John Martin, a surveyor, settled at the original Cisco site and applied for a post office, which was granted March 10, 1887.

Perhaps when Victor Hanson homesteaded 160 acres southeast of the original town, he knew that the railroad was soon going to change from narrow to standard gauge. It was a wise decision on Hanson's part, because that is exactly what the railroad did in 1890.

By then, Hanson had mapped out the new town, building a restaurant and a store, followed by a post office. Soon J.G. McBride opened another store.



*The Cisco, Utah, train depot in 1954. From the Kathy Jordan photo collection*

Cisco didn't survive on those who lived in Cisco. The town depended mostly on the railroad for survival, along with drilling rig crews looking for oil and miners looking for vanadium.

The sheep and cattle industries around the area were also important. Cisco was the nearest shipping point for people from the LaSal Mountain area, the Castle Valley district, the Dolores River area, and the Cisco desert. Miners hauled their ore in freight wagons and pack mules to Cisco, to be shipped by train to mills. All of these made Cisco and the railroad thrive.

What with the miners, drillers, cowboys and shearers Cisco was a bit of a rough-and-tumble town. There were more saloons than other businesses, and apparently there were a few “ladies of the night” to help entertain the boys.

And, of course, there were bootleggers. On one occasion the sheriff, W.J. Bliss, arrested a husband and wife for bootlegging. He fined the husband \$50 and told the wife to move on, as he didn't want to see her back in town.

According to one unidentified source, M.E. Mooreland, owner of the Pastime Saloon, had his own supply of whiskey thanks to a still he owned on Pinon Mesa. It was just inside Utah because Utah had more lenient liquor laws than Colorado then. According to newspaper reports of the era, Mooreland's still was destroyed by federal agents in 1927.

Cisco also had its share of shoot-outs and fights. One murder occurred in 1913 at the Pastime when “Three-fingered Jack” Miller, a gambler from Texas, shot Jose Lujon following a quarrel over a \$10 loan Lujon had made to Miller.

Cisco was also one of the major sheep-shearing locations. Most years, over 100,000 sheep were sheared there. The job required 30 power-shearing machines and 90 men. Four thousand sheep a day could be sheared. Some years Cisco shipped more wool than any other point in the state of Utah.

Cisco had other businesses besides saloons and pool halls. There were the Hotel Cisco, known for a short period as the Hotel De Cisco; the Cisco Mercantile Co.; and a restaurant where you could get a burger and beer.

Cisco was still growing in 1912 when R.M. Handy of Denver, principal owner of the Cisco town site company, sold three lots to W.A. Shideler, two lots and a house to M.E. Moreland, and one lot to the Cisco Mercantile Co. Cisco then had a large enough population to support two pool halls.

By 1912 the Cisco Mercantile Co. had outgrown its original location and was moving into a new building. The business had also grown large enough that the owners needed to build a warehouse.

Cisco also had an ordinary side like any small American town.

A school built in 1898 stayed in operation until there were too few children to attend. It closed in 1934.

Dances were the social activity of the time. Any occasion was a good reason to have a dance. After E.D. Stone, who pumped water from the river for the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad, and his wife completed their new home in 1907, they treated the area residents to a “housewarming” dance on Thanksgiving Day. Apparently that dance went so well that they had another one on New Year's Eve in 1908. In 1910 when the Cisco Mercantile Co. built its new store, you guessed it--another dance and a box supper to celebrate, which lasted until dawn.

Cisco had an adult baseball team that was said to have a worldwide reputation. No other baseball team in the county would accept a challenge from the Cisco team.

Yes, Cisco was booming early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and had something for just about everyone.

(Next week: Growing up in Cisco)