

*Shade trees were a priority for Junction town founder*



*The irrigation ditch running in front of 440 N. Seventh Street supplied the water for the trees planted in front of the house. The photo shows a small pipe going from the ditch that supplied water to the tree in the middle. the trees to the right of the boardwalk remain today. Kathy Jordan photo collection.*

By Kathy Jordan

In July and August, when thermometers around town often register well over 100 degrees for days on end, there are plenty of shade trees around to get out of the blistering desert sun and cool down.

That wasn't the case for the first settlers who arrived here in the summer of 1882.

The only trees were those down by the river. If there was a tree in the original square mile, it was a freak of nature.

Planting shade trees in the new city became a high priority for George Crawford, Grand Junction's founder. By March 1883 the City of Grand Junction had adopted an ordinance requiring trees "to be planted and maintained along the sides of each and every street in the town of Grand Junction and in each of four public parks".

Not all residents were thrilled with the ordinance. The Grand Junction News ran a small item reporting, "There is some kicking going on against the tree ordinance and a prominent citizen sent us a communication with blood in it. As the gentleman neglected to sign his name we are obliged to omit his letter".

Despite the naysayer, George Crawford ordered a carload of trees through the new city forester, D.S. Grimes.

Among trees in the order were 725 maples, 85 elms, 44 ashes, 43 poplars, and 175 box-elders.

Grimes arrived in Grand Junction before the trees so he could survey the town for their placement and supervise the digging of small irrigation ditches along the streets.

Trees from the first shipment were planted on the streets between Grand and Ute Avenues, First and Seventh streets, and in the high school square (the corner of Sixth and Rood Ave.), and Cottonwood Park (now Emerson Park).

The ordinance, most certainly drafted to protect the trees, mandated that if a person used a tree to hitch an animal and that animal caused damage, its owner would be responsible for the cost of replacement. It also mandated that if a person were to harm a tree or the box that was built around it he would be fined anywhere from \$1 to \$100.

It also specified that it was the duty of each lot owner to obtain and plant trees in front of or along the side of his lot or lots. Property owners were given 15 days after the first publication of the ordinance to get this done. If the property failed to do so the city forester would do it at the expense of the property owners.

Grand Junction celebrated its first Arbor Day May 5, 1883, with a proclamation which read:

"Our people can well afford to give one day to tree planting. We ought to set apart one day at least during the month of May for this purpose. Let us make it a general 'gala day' in which everybody can take a part. We now have a population of say 1,200; out of that we have 750 men, if all will turn out and plant one tree each, we could plant as many trees; then let it be, the duty of each person to see that his or her tree is kept alive, and should it die to replace it. Should we do this what a difference it will make in the appearance of our town in two or three years. And it will only cost you one day. No doubt enough enjoyment and pleasure can be derived out of it to pay you. An entertainment or support can be had in the evening to wind up with. Grand Junction, of all other towns in the State must be made beautiful by her shade trees."

Perhaps George Crawford's theme song could be the one done by Mama Cass, "Stars shining bright above you; Night breezes seem to whisper I love you? Birds singing in the sycamore tree. Dream a little dream of me".