



John J. Lumsden. Loyd Files Research Library Museum of Western Colorado photo

Lumsden Made His Mark in Early Construction in GJ

By Kathy Jordan

When John J. Lumsden and his partner, J.H. Ackerman, came to Grand Junction from Colorado Springs in 1883, there were no buildings on Main Street and only a few tents housing businesses on Colorado Avenue.

But Lumsden and Ackerman, who were building contractors, began to take care of that aspect of Grand Junction quickly. The two men broke up their partnership in 1887, but Lumsden continued in the construction business.

In the 1905 publication, *Progressive Men of Western Colorado*, Lumsden was described this way:

“The oldest, most extensive and most prominent now and for a number of years, and having erected many of the most notable structures in the city and county, John J. Lumsden may be said to have an enduring monument in the work he has done, and to have been one of the most potential factors in the improvement of the section of Colorado in which his lot has been cast.”

This is a short list of the buildings he constructed: The beet sugar factory; principal school buildings in town including the Lowell School which now houses R-5; numerous churches; Samplers, now the Rockslide; the Fair Building; the Reed Building; Grand Junction Printing; the Odd Fellows Building; and the Avalon Theatre. He constructed George Crawford tomb and also many private homes and bridges throughout the county.

In 1890, when Lumsden was putting in the vault floor for the First National Bank, two immense flat stones, each measuring about 8 by 8 feet and 10 inches thick and weighing nearly 4,000 pounds, were being loaded on a ferry boat from the quarry south of the Grand (now Colorado) River. According to a news story then, as the team was driven onto the ferry boat, the wagon wheels cut through the upper floor of the boat. There was no mention how severe the damage to the ferry was.

During those early days, construction jobs were most plentiful, and Lumsden and Ackerman provided constant employment for more than 25 men.

The granddaughter of one of the carpenters who worked for Lumsden said her grandparents felt that Lumsden was a good boss who was considerate of his workers. Her grandfather was injured on the job and off work for several months, during which time Lumsden kept him on the payroll until business slowed to a point where he could no longer continue to pay him. Keep in mind this was before workmen's compensation, when a boss could easily have said "Too bad, so sad."

In 1901 Lumsden's company raised the bridge at De Beque nine feet above the old piers and placed it on new piers. Travel over the bridge was stopped only twelve hours, which was considered quite an engineering feat, as the bridge weighed 180 tons, was 250 feet long, and had trusses 40 feet high.

Of the structures I know his company built, my favorite is the red brick home put up in 1907 at 861 Grand Ave. for his wife, Cinderella. When new, the house was gas-lit and heated with hot water radiators. It appears that originally the home had two water closets indoors and a privy in the back yard. The home has the original 80-by-80-inch windows with leaded glass tops and one of the most beautiful entry staircases I have ever seen, along with the original maple floors. After all these years, the home remains a true showcase.

Lumsden served as a member of the Grand Junction City Council for a number of years, and in the spring of 1903 he was nominated for mayor but was not elected. Apparently he had no desire to be mayor because he was in Denver during the campaign and made no effort to win. But, even at that, he lost by only eleven votes.

Lumsden died March 2, 1935, two years after moving from Grand Junction to the Boulder area, when he fell 80 feet into a mine shaft in the Sunshine District near Boulder. He was 77 years old.

Lumsden helped build this city with stone, brick and mortar, and there still remain today many of his beautiful buildings that have survived a present-day developer's wrecking ball.

A mystery solved. I was unable to identify one of the people that were standing behind the ticket counter in the photo last week. Thank to a reader the other man now has a name, he is Don Allerheiligen, who worked for many years with Jerry Erskine.