

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

BOISE, NAMPA, AND OWYHEE RAILROAD

Number 218

January 1993

Large-scale lode mining at Silver City created a serious need for rail transportation to come closer than Nampa, so as soon as a severe national economic depression (Panic of 1893) no longer paralyzed eastern capital investors, William H. Dewey managed to get J. M. Guffey of Pittsburgh to join other investors there in funding a line headed that direction. Reaching Silver City was totally impractical, because any such line would have to climb almost a vertical mile above Snake River. But construction to a point below that steep ascent clearly could succeed. Guffey and his associates managed to fund Dewey's project in 1896, so construction began in Nampa that September. Its primary feature, built a year later, was a 500 foot, two span bridge across Snake River. A concrete pier at midstream supported two Parker truss (a variety of Pratt truss) spans that constitute Idaho's only major surviving railroad example of such a structure. On August 7, 1898, rail service commenced to its terminal in Murphy. From there on, stages and freight wagons had to continue their steep ascent to Silver City.

Lode mining continued in Dewey's Black Jack and an interconnected Florida Mountain Trade Dollar property for more than a decade after 1898. By 1912, important operations there ceased, but Boise, Nampa, and Owyhee passenger and freight service continued until September 15, 1947. Livestock and irrigated farm crops provided freight traffic for many years. Then as highway access allowed trucks to reach local ranches, small branch railroad lines lost their function and attraction. A half century of rail service came to an end, and Melba displaced Murphy for Boise, Nampa, and Owyhee rail terminal. Guffey Bridge has been preserved as a substantial historic relic from a bygone era, but tracks no longer extend beyond Melba toward Guffey Bridge and Murphy.

(This information has not been edited.)

Publications--450 N. 4th Street, Boise, ID 83702--208-334-3428