

The Birth of a City and Railroad in the Rocky Mountains

The Boom The birth of Georgetown came in the summer of 1864 when three miners discovered silver. They discovered a rich quartz ledge. Fifty pounds of quartz, from this ledge gave them 1000 ounces of silver to the ton. This was a great return. Once news of this find spread, a stampede began, as miners left the gold camps to seek the riches that this silver might provide.

In the spring of 1864, there were only four cabins, a couple of tents, and one or two dugouts. However, by the end of summer, miners had used all the trees from the densely forested mountain slopes in order to construct cabins along two mountain streams. Originally two towns were built: one at the juncture of the two streams and one to the south at the base of the Leavenworth Mountain. The town at the juncture (meeting) of the two streams was known as the Griffith settlement, and the one at the base of the mountain was known as the Elizabethtown—named after Griffith's sister-in-law. She was thought to be one of the only women in the camp at that time. In 1866, at a public meeting to grant a Post Office, the two towns were combined and the name Georgetown was adopted.

The silver craze was in full swing, and by 1867 Georgetown was the center of the silver craze. During 1867, the Anglo-Saxon mine was discovered. The Anglo-Saxon Mine assayed ore at \$23,000 dollars a ton. This find brought on the silver rush and 5000 miners were now located in the town at the juncture of the two streams.

Roads were built to bring coaches from Denver, banks were opened, fine hotels were built, and churches were opened. Georgetown was quickly becoming a center of wealth.

In 1868, Georgetown became a city. In just four years, what had once been a small mountain encampment had turned into a center of city life. Georgetown was the fastest growing city in Colorado and the great silver finds earned it the name of "The Silver Queen of the Rockies." Between 1860 and 1893, the mines in the area brought more than \$200,000,000 in gold, silver, copper, and lead.

However, the booming mining town faced a serious problem. Many mines were located in remote places. These mines needed to transport their ore great distances to smelters to make a profit. Enterprising merchants had opened wagon roads over which their wagons carried people and supplies for a fee. Other people who wished to use the roads had to pay a toll. One of these merchants was named W. H. Loveland. Loveland and a group of merchants planned a railroad from Golden to the mines at Central City and Georgetown. Loveland employed a Swiss engineer named Edward Berthoud who together with a mountain man, Jim Bridger, explored numerous trails and Indian paths along the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains. In 1861, they discovered the pass through the Rockies that now bears Loveland's name, the Loveland Pass.

Loveland incorporated the Colorado and Clear Creek Railroad Company in 1865 in the hope that the Union Pacific Railroad would want to be connected to an already

operating railroad. Loveland pursued his dream and in 1877, with financial help for materials and supplies from the Union Pacific, the Colorado Central Railroad reached Georgetown. The railroad connected Denver and the Georgetown mines.

Building the railroad was a feat in engineering. To get the railroad from Georgetown to Silver Plume, another silver rich town, the elevation rose 638 feet in a 2.5-mile distance. This meant a six-percent grade, which was too steep for a locomotive to pull. The narrow valley walls were too steep for a switchback system, so another answer had to be found. The Georgetown loop was born. The Loop is a snake-like arrangement of track that lessens the steepness of the climb. The railroad crosses over itself on Devil's Gate Bridge. The bridge spans a 300-foot gap across the valley. It is 95.6 feet in distance from the creek below and stands 75.5 feet above the track below. Building this high bridge was truly a feat of bravery and engineering, especially by the standards of its day. Once the "High Bridge" was built, the next challenge became the hairpin bend not quite one mile ahead. To overcome this challenge, the railroad had to circle again. In all, the railroad completed three-and-one-half circles to get from Georgetown (altitude 8476 ft.) to Silver Plume (altitude 9,114 ft.).

The Bust The railroad served the needs of Georgetown and its mines for many years. Changes in the federal silver laws made silver less available. Colorado's mining was bust. The growing popularity of the automobile took its toll also, and passenger traffic on the railroad dwindled. The railroad went bankrupt and was reorganized as the Union Pacific, Denver and Gulf in 1890. By 1899 it was in trouble again and then became a part of the Colorado and Southern Railroad.

The Colorado Historical Society has revived the railroad, and it has become one of today's most famous tourist attractions. The bridge has been rebuilt and the steam train takes tourists on a breathtaking and sometimes, heart-stopping journey between Georgetown and Silver Plume.

The Birth of a Rocky Mountain Railroad: The Birth of Georgetown and the Loop Railroad

Letter writing prompt:

"You are a prospector in the silver mines writing a friendly letter home to your parents describing what it has been like to live in Georgetown during the silver boom to its bust."

Checklist:

Be sure to keep your writing in time order so the reader can see how Georgetown was created and changed.

Be sure to write about how the natural landscape of the Rocky Mountains was changed by the humans mining the silver, creating towns and building the railroad.

Your letter is to include at least **three** of the events below. One of your choices **MUST** be the development of the town.

- First discovery of silver
- News of the find caused a stampede ...BOOM
- Two settlements: Griffith and Elizabethtown
- Development of Georgetown (Must be included)
- New mines found
- Roads built to bring coaches from Denver
- Necessity for a railroad
- Building of the railroad
- Silver is not as valuable ...BUST

Your writing is to be in the form of a friendly letter and will be graded using the six-trait rubric for ideas and content, organization, and voice. Work carefully and be original.