



# THE MOUNTAIN MAIL

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# More Salida Library District history

I promised more library history, and in particular the growth that followed library construction in 1997. We'll get to it. The history of change is fun. Change itself might be more fun. And change involving history is most fun.

A big change for anyone interested in local history is underway. The oldest issues of The Mountain Mail (also the Salida Mail) are being added to the Colorado Historic Newspaper Collection online.

At this moment, only 1880-82 are there, but by the end of the month the years through 1915 should appear. Next spring, we'll get 1916 plus the Chaffee County Record 1898-1901 and Salida Record 1901-1916. Go to [salidalibrary.org](http://salidalibrary.org) or [salidaarchive.org](http://salidaarchive.org) for a link.

First, some history. The collection has been around for years. Take a look. Some Buena Vista newspapers have been online for awhile; also Leadville and Saguache. Many of the state's oldest.

Most of the collection is pre-1923 because copyright is completely clear before that date. The papers are indexed and keyword searchable.

We've talked about this a long time, and last winter Joy asked if she could look for grants. I said sure but didn't think anyone would be interested, since "digitization" is a bottomless pit.

But suddenly Joy had \$6,500 in hand from SIPA, the State Internet Portal Authority. Amazing. In the end, we put in another \$17,000 to make a project of ample scope. Thank you, Joy and SIPA.

The collection was moving to a new platform as we made our order last spring, and while this delayed our start it also proved to be cheaper and greatly extended the reach of our dollars to include the extra issues mentioned above.

The digitization process is largely automated and uses the negatives of microfilm from the History Colorado newspaper collection. Special software gathers the text using optical character recognition (OCR), indexes it and then maps it to the original image. You'll see when you



try it.

OCR is not perfect, especially from old papers in poor shape, or from poorly micro-filmed images. "In ancient times" might easily become "fn ancient times." Sometimes, whole paragraphs are gobbledygook.

There's a lot of this in our early papers, but it can be fixed. In fact, you can help correct text. Humans can easily read what machines can't. See Joy for a demonstration and for more info.

This story is not without drama. It turns out the microfilm of the earliest years of The Mountain Mail were not held in the History Colorado collection, and so they did not have the negatives to scan.

Salida Regional Library has the positive microfilm, purchased years ago from a division of Bell & Howell, but the digitization process requires the negative. We found the company with the Bell & Howell assets, but they could not find the negatives we needed.

It was discouraging, but eventually the Colorado State Library found the negatives at the Kansas State Historical Society and was able to acquire them. Yay! Now those early years are the first to come online ... except that Issue No. 1, June 5, 1880, is missing.

It seems June 5 is not on their negative, even though our positive, marked as scanned by Kansas State Historical Society, definitely includes it. Experts are looking into some way of using the positive to get the info into our collection.

We happen to have the first issue in paper, but it's in bad shape, disintegrating out of an old bound volume that was given to the library. We might have to scan what we can from that. Somehow, though, we'll get back to the beginning.

*Jeff Donlan is Salida Regional Library director.*