

RIO GRANDE SOUTHERN RAILROAD, RICO RAILROAD WATER
TANK
Off River Street
Rico
Dolores County
Colorado

HAER CO-99
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

RIO GRANDE SOUTHERN RAILROAD, RICO RAILROAD WATER TANK

HAER No. CO-99

- Location:** Off River Street, Rico, Dolores County, Colorado
- Date of Construction:** between 1880 and 1900
- Original Owner, Use:** Rio Grande Southern Railroad, steam locomotive boiler system
- Current Use:** Privately owned
- Significance:** Rico was an important water stop along the Rio Grande Southern Railroad route. The extant wooden water tank is an example of the type employed by railroads in the American West from the 1880s through the 1920s.
- Description:** The Rico Railroad Water Tank is located in the mining town of Rico. This tank is 22' in diameter and 15' tall. The capacity is about 40,000 gallons. Wooden staves measuring 2-⁵/₈" thick form the sides of the tank. These staves are held together to form a circular tank by malleable steel bands 4-¹/₂" wide. The use of these bands was discontinued in the early 1900s when it was realized that they would rust from the inside.
- History:** The 172-mile-long Rio Grande Southern Railroad was completed in 1891 by Otto Mears, a well-known toll road operator in Colorado and the railroad's first president. The narrow-gauge railroad twisted through the mountains of southwestern Colorado connecting towns and mining camps of the area with the main line of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad in Durango. Unfortunately, the railroad fell into receivership only two years after it was completed. The Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad controlled the railroad after its financial failure.
- The line was discontinued at the end of 1952, but the Rico water tank still stands.

Sources:

Athern, Robert G. *Rebel of the Rockies & History of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962.

Freeman, Ira S. *A History of Montezuma County, Colorado*. Boulder, CO: Johnson Publishing Company, 1958.

Overton, Richard C. *Gulf to the Rockies, the Heritage of the Fort Worth and Denver-Colorado and Southern Railways, 1861-1898*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953.

Historians: Steve Rae and T. Lindsay Baker, July 27, 1971

Project

Information: The Rio Grande and Southern Railroad, Rico Railroad Water Tank was inventoried for the Historic American Engineering Record as part of the Southwest Water Resources Project, a joint project with the Texas Tech Water Resources Center. The survey was subsequently published as *Water for the Southwest: Historical Survey and Guide to Historic Sites* by the American Society of Civil Engineers in September 1973.