

# Throwback Thursday: Rail history as Mesa line opens

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*Celebrate the opening of the light rail line to downtown Mesa on Saturday, Aug. 22*



*(Photo: Pat Shannahan/ The Republic)*

It's hard to say which was more exciting — June 19, 1887, when the first train arrived in Tempe from Maricopa Junction and connected the Valley to the rest of the nation; or Dec. 27, 2008, when futuristic light rail linked Tempe to Phoenix and Mesa.

Newspaper accounts of the 1887 arrival was festive — a town absolutely beside itself with delight — not unlike the excitement generated by the inauguration of light rail 120 years later.

Now it's Mesa's turn. Since 2008, light rail has terminated at Sycamore, in an area somewhat devoid of activity. On Saturday, the city will turn out, even in the middle of August, to finally be able to cheer light rail's extension into downtown in a celebration not unlike the one that occurred in 1895 when the train first arrived in town.



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[Makeover ahead for downtown Mesa](http://www.azcentral.com)

[\(http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/mesa/2015/08/03/makeover-ahead-downtown-mesa/30953603/\)](http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/mesa/2015/08/03/makeover-ahead-downtown-mesa/30953603/)

Just like in the 19th century, and tomorrow, Tempe has played an important role in bringing trains to Mesa. And that's why Tempean's are invited to journey east for a giant grand opening party.

The inauguration will be a history-making event. The sleek train will certainly be the star of the day. But the light rail platforms are stunning themselves. Each has a unique signature art installation that makes the stations a destination unto themselves.

Along with the train and the art is a unique nod to Mesa's past in the form of colorful, informative panels conveying some interesting stories of people, places and events in the vicinity of each light rail stop.

Passengers can explore the past while awaiting the next train. Also on the panels are QR Codes, those odd-looking squares with indecipherable patterns that smartphones translate into Internet connections.

Thanks to an innovative program created by Arizona State University public history associate professor Mark Tebeau and his students, the QR Codes will link visitors to more photos, videos and information. It's like having a whole museum on the light rail platform. No reason to be bored while awaiting a train.

## **FIVE PLATFORMS, FIVE PANELS**

Each offers snippets of the past from around the station.

What can you discover?

- Well, do you know what 1906 church, after its religious life, served as the first home to Mesa Community College? And later as a restaurant with an iconic Salad Room. You'll find the answer on the Alma School platform.
- Tempe was not the only community with a thriving flour industry. The Mesa Flour Mills once had towering silos that could be seen from a great distance. All this in downtown. Find out where by visiting the Mesa Drive station.

Here's your chance to be part of history. Join the ribbon cutting from 8 to 9am. Then between 9am and noon ride the rails with a commemorative free pass, which will give you an opportunity to explore each station's history panels, have some food and be entertained. See [details](http://www.visitmesa.com/includes/events/central-mesa-light-rail-extension-opening-celebration/17918/) (<http://www.visitmesa.com/includes/events/central-mesa-light-rail-extension-opening-celebration/17918/>).

We'll see you Saturday.

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