

# Golden's Rail Heritage

## Colorado Rail Annual No. 35: Rails Around the Table Mountains— The Railroads of Golden



COLORADO & SOUTHERN 2-8-0 NO. 638 POSES WITH A ROCKY MOUNTAIN RAILROAD CLUB EXCURSION IN GOLDEN NOT FAR FROM THE THE NEWLY RELOCATED COLORADO RAILROAD MUSEUM ON OCTOBER 15, 1961. NO. 638 SURVIVES TODAY AND IS ON COSMETIC DISPLAY IN TRINIDAD, COLORADO. COLORADO RAILROAD MUSEUM COLLECTION.

Those of us who consider the Colorado Railroad Museum a second home know that the Museum's location in Golden is undoubtedly one of its greatest features. The surrounding scenery provides a picture-postcard backdrop to the museum collection, and of course, being adjacent to not one, but two busy railroads makes for a fitting neighborhood that has made the Museum feel right at home since 1959.

Today, Golden is considered a favorite amongst Coloradans and tourists alike who flock to the foothills town to take in its iconic main street, cultural and educational institutions, breweries, and outdoor offerings. While the city has changed a great deal since its modest beginnings in 1859, it still manages to evoke a western atmosphere reminiscent of its earlier days as a crossroads for those coming in and out of the canyon cut by Clear Creek. The strategic location of Golden at the base of the mineral rich Front Range and

later, as a gateway into Denver, is central to the city's history and success. Of course, these features and their economic potential are also what lured railroads to the area, bringing with them the growth and development that would turn Golden into the place it is today.

The history of these railroads and their important contributions to Golden's development, and more broadly to Colorado, are the focus of the museum's upcoming Colorado Rail Annual No. 35. *Rails Around the Table Mountains—The Railroads of*

*Golden* is the byproduct of nearly a half century of research and writing by railroad historian and Golden author Dan Abbott, who has generously provided this work to the Museum for publication.

Those somewhat familiar with railroad book publishing will likely know Dan's name. For most of his professional life, Dan has been a loyal student to Colorado rail history, having authored numerous books including *Colorado Midland Railway: Daylight Through the Divide* (1989), *Stairway to the Stars: Colorado's Argentine Central Railway* (1977), *Colorado Central Rail Road: Golden, Central City, Georgetown* (2005), and *The Gilpin Railroad Era: Black Hawk, Central City, Nevadaville, Russel Gulch* (2009). His latest endeavor has culminated in the most definitive rail history on Golden ever produced, representing Dan's exhaustive efforts to properly chronicle this often overlooked Colorado rail mecca.



Dan's interest in railroads was first sparked by his family's move to Henderson, Colorado in 1954 from Amarillo, Texas. Not far from his family home, Dan watched from the trackside as the final days of steam on both the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy and Union Pacific played out on the mainlines into Denver. By fourth grade, Dan recalls being somewhat of a "challenging" student who was quick to get his school work done, only then to be caught up in mischief. To keep him occupied, a teacher prompted Dan to read history books about Colorado, starting a lifelong obsession with the state's colorful past. Throughout high school, Dan continued to be an avid reader of Colorado history books, especially those about trains. When the vice principal of Adams City High School took notice of Dan's interest in a book on the Colorado Midland, he sponsored Dan's membership in the Rocky Mountain Railroad Club, further solidifying his burgeoning enthusiasm for Colorado railroads.

In 1967 Dan took a job with Coors, in the engineering department. In 1971, he built a house in town and joined the city's volunteer fire department. While researching local history for a book on Golden's fire department (*100 Years and Counting: The History of Golden's Volunteer Fire Department*, 1990), Dan became increasingly interested in the area's railroad history.

Nearly a half-century before Dan's arrival, Golden had been a formidable rail hub with not just two railroads (discounting the Museum's operation), but 10 unique lines feeding into the city. Golden's railroad empire had reached its height in the early 1900s, but its decline had gone little noticed by those who saw the disappearing railroads as a mark of progress, the start of a new modern era characterized by a rapid disappearance of the frontier and the iconic iron horses that had settled it. However, rail enthusiasts enamored by the legendary status of these railroads and the era they had defined would go on to publish numerous histories in the ensuing decades. These biographical accounts helped to further solidify the fabled nature

of Colorado's railroads, and continue to provide a major source of inspiration to historians who continue to further probe and recount Colorado history.

While many of Golden's railroads both past and present have received written histories of their own, no one had yet compiled a railroad history specifically trained on the city itself. The fabled narrow gauge of the Clear Creek Line is one such railroad that, despite originating in Golden, is perhaps best remembered through scenes captured on black and white film of diminutive Moguls and Consolidations making their way through the canyon to service mines in Idaho Springs, Georgetown, Silver Plume, Black Hawk, and Central City. Seldom do images

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the streets of Golden's downtown and suburbs.

Walking down Golden's Washington Avenue today, one would be hard pressed to imagine the sheer volume of railroad traffic that was commonplace in the era before the automobile. The sight of narrow gauge freight trains bound for the mining districts, interurban cars headed for Lakewood and

Arvada, funicular railways climbing the surrounding mesas, and bustling stock yards all sound more like a fictional rail-topia conjured up by the imagination of an idyllic railroad enthusiast. Yet, this was the status quo for nearly a century of Golden's history.

Thanks to the efforts of Dan Abbott, this fascinating railroad history will be



COLORADO & SOUTHERN NO. 70 WESTBOUND WITH A TRAIN LEAVING GOLDEN ON JANUARY 1, 1944. COLORADO RAILROAD MUSEUM COLLECTION.

surface of the railroad further down the canyon at its inception in Golden. The thought of a Colorado & Southern 2-8-0 taking water beneath the mesas that now frame the Colorado Railroad Museum's own collection of iconic motive power are an increasingly remote memory, as are recollections of the vast dual gauge network that once sprawled through

accessible again as Colorado Rail Annual No. 35. With more historic unpublished images of Golden and its railroads, *Rails Around the Table Mountains—The Railroads of Golden* is bound to be widely enjoyed by Colorado history buffs, Golden locals, and rail enthusiasts alike. See more information on page 3 of this issue.