

“Readers Refuge” article for February 17, 2010, meeting at 7:00pm at the Cheyenne Mountain Heritage Center, 1118 W. Cheyenne Road

The following piece is taken from the book *Pikes Peak Trolleys* by Morris Cafky and John Haney. This piece covers the early years of the Trolley Car system up to 1900. In a later gathering we will read about the final years of the system.

That interesting and unusual empire builder, General William Jackson Palmer, could and did possess a feeling of great satisfaction when, a decade after its founding in 1872, he looked over his dream community of Colorado Springs. Beautifully located and idealistically conceived, the town, in the General’s opinion, had everything. It had a beautiful location, just east of magnificent Pikes Peak and the lesser upthrusts of the Rampart Range. It had a salubrious climate. It had the advantages of being a planned community with wide streets (most named by the General); it had growing trees and vegetation, nourished by an irrigation system constructed, like everything else there, by the General’s Colorado Springs Company. It had an unusually cultured assortment of people. Many sprang from prominent eastern and British families, so many of the latter, in fact, that the city was nicknamed “Little London” until relatively recent years.

The only real scheduled public transportation in this unusual urbanized area was provided on the Rio Grande’s Manitou branch. Several suburban trains a day plied between Colorado Springs and Manitou. Otherwise, all that was available to those without private conveyance were a few horse-drawn cabs, expensive than as now, and omnibuses belonging to the various hotels and inns. These, of course carried only hotel guests and ran to and from the Rio Grande station at irregular intervals, meeting various trains. Thus, getting about was more than a little difficult.

It was the establishment of Colorado City saloons which, to a very considerable degree, was responsible for the birth of the area’s street railway system. Colorado Springs, with all property deeds prohibiting the sale of liquor by the property owner, had no saloons. Colorado City, right next door, had more than 30 saloons, plus assorted gambling halls and brothels. A sizeable number of commuters daily, bent on dalliance, began taxing such transportation facilities as existed. It was plain that a street railway, operating cars on frequent headways, was a vital necessity. It was also becoming increasingly evident that transit service was a crying need for the community as a whole. Travel to and from the fleshpots of Colorado City served to bring this all to a head.

Misters Hagerman, Jackson and Hayes, along with the other backers, Irving Howbert, J.E. McIntyre, A.D. Davis and Louis R. Ehjrich, incorporated the Colorado Springs & Manitou Street Railway Company, legally empowered to operated a horse-powered street railway which would provide passenger transportation in Colorado Springs and its suburban satellite communities.

Construction first got underway during the latter part of 1887. Curiously, since the saloons and parlor houses of Colorado City and travel thereto had sparked the idea of a street railway, the first line to be completed was not intended to serve them at all. The north-south Tejon Street line from Costilla Street north through the Colorado Springs business district to Cache La Poudre Street at the south boundary of the Colorado College campus was completed late in October. On November 2nd, 1887, the first street car to operate in the Pikes Peak region rolled north on Tejon, behind a plodding horse, to the college.

On February 8, 1888, work began at Pikes Peak Avenue and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Depot on the Colorado City line. Track was laid west on Pikes Peak to Cascade, south one block to Huerfano (now Colorado) and west across the Rio Grande tracks and Monument Creek to Seventh St. There, Huerfano veered to a northwest-southeast axis and became Colorado Avenue. Car service began on May 15th. The line got no closer to Manitou Springs during the brief era of animal traction.

Growth of the city's north side brought about further system expansion. During 1888, the Tejon Street line was extended northward. Track detoured around the Colorado College campus via Cache La Poudre to Nevada, north on Nevada to Uintah, west on that street to Tejon and north once more on that thoroughfare to Fontanero Street. According to the local newspaper, service was to be extended to Van Buren and in operation to that street by September 29, 1889.

The single track construction on both routes was varied by turnouts at intervals. Ties were laid on the trenches excavated for the track without benefit of ballast; to these were spiked the rails, weighing 18 pounds to the yard.

The street railway section of *Poor's Manual of Railroads* during this period indicated that the company owned 10 cars with motive power being provided by 42 horses. In the era of animal traction, the average street railway owned four steeds for each car on the roster; the Colorado Springs & Manitou Street Railway thus adhered faithfully to the rule of thumb industry statistic.

Yet, even before the animal traction system had achieved its maximum growth in Colorado Springs, a great technological breakthrough in the street railway industry had numbered days of horse on the local system. The successful electrification of the Union Passenger Railway in Richmond, Virginia, using Sprague technology, convinced street railway men that their industry's future lay with the magic of electricity. Messrs. Hagerman, Jackson and Hayes realized this very quickly.

Early in 1890, Martin, Eaton, Lawton and McGovney incorporated the Colorado Springs Rapid Transit Railway. Martin became President, Eaton, Vice-President, and Lawton, Secretary-Treasurer. The principals invested some of their own money in the new company, and placed a \$500,000 bond issue with the Central Trust Company of New York.

At the same time, orders were placed for large quantities of steel rail weighing 30 pounds to the yard, since the 18 pound horse car rail would be inadequate even for the small cars of the early electric era. Ordered also were ties, poles to support the overhead, span wire, miles of copper trolley wire, and rolling stock. Since the local electrical utility, the El Paso Electric Company, could barely supply increasing demand, Colorado Springs Rapid Transit realized it would have to generate its own power. The company also ordered the necessary boilers and electrical gear.

At first, single track construction prevailed throughout with occasional turnouts for passing. Once the line was electrified to Colorado City, the Manitou city council facilitated matters by granting CSRT right-of-way into the city.

The Manitou line was apparently completed late in October, 1890, for *The Weekly Gazette* of November 1 tells us that the first car made a test run to Manitou on October 30. Car No. 9, manned by motorman James Barnes, left downtown Colorado Springs at 5:00 P.M. with company officials and other dignitaries aboard. The run was made without incident, and regular service began the following day.

Plans had called only for electrification of existing trackage on South Tejon Street as far as its terminus at Fountain Street. However, the company suddenly found itself undergoing severe and persuasive arm-twisting by a dynamic German nobleman, Count James M. Pourtales. He had purchased the Broadmoor Dairy Farm, located on a mesa south of Colorado Springs and almost at the foot of Cheyenne Mountain. The Count formed the Cheyenne Lake Land and Development Company, turned over a large portion of the dairy to his new firm, and began subdividing the area. Cheyenne Lake was formed behind an earthen dam and a refined pleasure dome, the Broadmoor Casino, was planned and later constructed.

Pourtales realized that his investments at Broadmoor would be worthless without dependable transportation. His initial request that CSRT extend its Tejon Street line to Broadmoor was first refused. The Rapid Transit officials and backers should have known better; the energetic German was not one to take “no” for an answer. He kept putting on the pressure, and finally made use of that ultimate weapon, the coin of the realm. When the wealthy Count pledged and paid \$20,000 to CSRT the die was cast for a Broadmoor extension.

The Broadmoor line wasn't easy to build in some respects. Tejon wasn't even a dedicated street south of Fountain, and the only thoroughfare leading toward Pourtales' mesa was Nevada Avenue one block to the east. Track was laid on Las Animas Street from Tejon to Nevada, thence south on the latter to the Rio Grande tracks. The dangerous grade crossing here was eliminated by an extensive bit of construction. A cut was made in the hill and an underpass developed which carried both the streetcar tracks and Nevada Avenue safely below the Rio Grande's busy rails. The line continued south on Nevada, thence by a winding route on private right-of-way which followed what later became Old Broadmoor Road, Pine and Oak Avenues to the top of Broadmoor mesa. Once that eminence was achieved, street running was resumed on 7th Street to Lake, on Lake to

Lake Circle, thence north and west of the Casino site via what is today Pine Grove Avenue to a terminus almost at the entrance of South Cheyenne Canon.

Colorado Springs Rapid Transit needed a site for its power house and for shops and car storage purposes. The company acquired an entire city block bounded by South Tejon Street, Cascade Avenue, Moreno Avenue, and Cimarron Street. This would enable the complex to be served by steam railroads, since both the Colorado Midland and the Denver Texas and Gulf had tracks on Moreno. Direct physical connections would even be possible. It should be mentioned here that whereas the Denver and Pueblo street rail systems were laid to a track gauge of three and one half feet and four feet respectively, Colorado Springs always boasted a standard gauge (four feet eight and one half inch) system.

The original 28 pieces of rolling stock were a variegated lot, and all single –truck. Eighteen cars were motors, the other 10 were trailers. Some of the motors were closed cars, the others open summer cars, as were all of the trailers. Later equipment orders would bring the roster total to 44 pieces of rolling stock by 1900. Some cars were indeed tiny by later standards; ten of the closed motors held but 16 seated passengers (and may have been the old horse cars converted to electric propulsion), while the other closed cars could seat 24 persons. The eight-bench open cars, both motor and trail, could seat 40.

By the summer of 1890, all the expansion and improvement work was virtually complete, and Colorado Springs and suburban environs were enjoying the advantages of electric transit. Generally prosperous business conditions, plus the very novelty of an all-electric street railway system, made for heavy patronage.

But 1893 brought with it the worst business depression thus far in the American experience, and its impact in Colorado was further increased by the demonetization of silver. Though growing activity in the newly discovered Cripple Creek gold mining area cushioned the shock somewhat for Colorado Springs, the community was still fairly hard hit.

Riding sagged, and deficits replaced surpluses in the company's accounts. Also, the invention of the new-type bicycle with wheels of identical size had made bikes manageable even for non-athletes. A craze for riding bikes swept the nation, and CSRT lost riders in droves to bicycles, a curious foretaste of what the automobile age would do to the transit industry in future generations.

A thoroughgoing rehabilitation and modernization of the system would take far more money than CSRT and its owners could possibly muster. As the various company directors read fairy tales to their children and grandchildren, they must have wished that a Fairy Godmother could rescue their mechanical Cinderella. Good fairies with gossamer wings and magic wands were not to be found on Colorado Springs census rolls. But another rescuer had been overlooked: a little, black-suited man with white hair and moustaches, who had begun casting his tired eyes upon their street railway system.