

“Readers Refuge” article for March 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 history of the Trolley Car system from 1900 to its conclusion in April, 1932.

Stratton planned a lovely pleasure park for the people of Colorado Springs, one which would be free of charge to all comers. The Dixon Ranch Tract at the mouth of the two scenic canyons, North and South Cheyenne, seemed just the place to him, and he promptly bought it for \$40,000. The park would be situated not far from the terminus of CSRT's Broadmoor line, and it was this very fact which both pleased Stratton and, at the same time, began making him uneasy. The street railway system, as then constituted, didn't do a very good job of moving crowds. Stratton could foresee occasions when several thousand people might patronize his proposed park in one day. This may have been and probably was the catalyst which turned his thoughts in the direction of doing something about the local urban transportation problem.

In late November or early December of 1900, Stratton finally decided to purchase Colorado Springs Rapid Transit. Stratton astounded the CSRT president, Edwin Eaton, saying that he wished to buy the trolley system. Stratton offered \$500,000 for their trolley system, and agreed further to assume the company's entire \$500,000 bonded indebtedness.

There was little discussion by the Directors. Someone moved that they unload their white elephant on Winfield Scott Stratton, though doubtless expressed in more formal terms. The motion was seconded and passed, probably unanimously, and Stratton had his street railway. According to current publications, the actual transfer of the property was made January 1, 1901. Since this is a legal holiday, it is probable that the transfer was made a day or two later.

Stratton conferred with Superintendent Macaffree, told him he wanted Colorado Springs to have a street railway as fine as any in the United States, and asked what would be required.

Macaffree told him the system needed extending into newly-developed neighborhoods, complete rebuilding of the existing track structure, an entrance into the heart of Manitou Springs, a carbarn to store equipment under cover when not in use, shops worthy of the name, greatly expanded power-generating facilities, and increased carrying capacity through acquisition of large double-truck cars which, he said, could be upgraded for service on lines with low traffic density.

All this, Macaffree advised, would be most costly. Stratton waved this aside. He ordered Macaffree to take charge of the rehabilitation program, and placed his vast financial resources behind the project. Ultimately, Stratton spent about \$2,000,000 in rehabilitation of the system, a vast sum for improvements to a small city street railway at the beginning of the 20th century. In the years following his death, additional sizeable sums were invested in the system by the trustees of his estate.

On the legal front, the trolley system became known as The Colorado Springs & Interurban Railway Company.

New construction and improvements were quickly begun throughout the trolley system. Among the improvements, Stratton and company engineers had decided to build an entirely new line to Stratton Park. Since Tejon had now become an improved and dedicated street out through Ivywild, existing facilities were double-tracked from Kiowa Street south to Las Vegas. Construction included an underpass carrying trolley and vehicular traffic safely under the Denver & Rio Grande and Colorado Springs and Cripple Creek District tracks. The line then veered southwest via Cheyenne Boulevard, passing through a developing suburban neighborhood growing up along Cheyenne Creek, and ended at a loop terminus set in the heart of Winfield Scott Stratton's lovely pleasure park. The Stratton Park terminal facilities included a many-windowed steel waiting room and station, and a "lie-by" track for cars awaiting the end of band concerts and other events so that patrons could be carried back to town.

By the summer of 1902 rebuilding and re-equipping the system had progressed to the point that system capacity and service was dramatically improved. The CS&I began carrying more passengers, both permanent residents and tourists, than ever in the history of its predecessor companies. For the first time since early in 1894, the system was earning fair sized profits.

Stratton managed to live long enough to see the street railway become a successful, first class operation, and to see his planned pleasure park completed. On Sundays, holidays and many weekday evenings, various attractions lured thousands to Stratton Park, attractions which included the Colorado Midland Band. They were carried there quickly, economically and safely by the rejuvenated and extended trolley system.

Though a very sick man by the summer of 1902, Stratton would drag his afflicted body out to Stratton Park, which was called Cheyenne Park until after his death. There, hiding behind trees, he took one of his few pleasures, that of watching people enjoying themselves to the full in the lovely play spot he had created for them.

But the sands of his earthly life were fast running out. He died on the evening of September 14, 1902, off on the next step in the Great Adventure.

While Stratton was still living, one of his first acts was to considerably increase the salaries and wages of company employees. He also had his motormen and conductors furnished with new, well tailored uniforms at company expense. After Stratton's death,

the company took out a \$225,000 group life insurance policy on its employees, the first street railway company in the United States and the first corporation in Colorado to do so. The company also set up and financed a home buying plan for all employees who wished to participate. Within a decade after this plan was inaugurated, 85% of all company employees owned their own homes.

Despite the CS&I's strenuous efforts from 1917 onward to cut costs and earn additional revenue, the financial picture worsened. Between the Stratton takeover and rebuilding of the property and 1914, the bottom line on the company balance sheet had always been in the black, usually quite comfortably so. In 1926, the size of the annual deficits began to grow alarming. It was easy to see why. The automobile population in Colorado Springs and suburbs, which had been a modest 932 in 1906, had zoomed to 12,885 by 1926, an auto for every family in the area.

By the summer of 1930, the Great Depression was upon the land and the Trustees of the Stratton Estate were compelled to take a good, hard look at the future of the Colorado Springs & Interurban Railway Company. The basic purpose of all of the Stratton Estate properties was to support the operations of the Myron Stratton Home.

Reluctantly, the Stratton Estate Trustees decided that operation of the CS&IR must be terminated. The last day of operation, April 30, 1932, every car the company owned was out on the streets. Topping it all off was the fact that no fares were collected, everyone rode free. Thousands took advantage of the free rides, not just to get something for nothing but as a means of saying "goodbye" to a beloved institution.

The Trolley cars have departed from Colorado Springs, but if one listens closely on some quiet evening, one can hear the humming of the electric motors and the mellow clanging of the bells.

(Following: two quotes from Lloyd Shaw's column "Half a Century of Memories" relating to trolley cars.)

So the street car, in those days, was the thing. On Sunday afternoons in the spring of the year, hundred and hundreds of big trolley cars would ride out to Manitou or to Stratton Park, and each car was crowded to the gun-wales. I think a real car would normally hold about eighty people. But on Sunday afternoons a great many more than this would crowd into each car.... Every seat crowded beyond capacity, and folks standing on the running boards for the full length of the car, and bulging out and hanging on for dear life. (5/24/56)

The chief means of transportation for the great masses of our people, of course, was the beautiful street car. Once every half hour you could catch a street car for Manitou, and every half hour you could catch a car back. In rush hours, with trailers behind them, doubling their capacity, they would increase their schedule to one every 20 minutes. When there was a real crowd for anything, the cars would be lined up in abundance to carry them all home as quickly as possible. Sunday afternoons, the great crowds at Manitou, or at Stratton Park, would be carried home by crowded street cars, as fast as they could load them, each dragging a huge trailer. Each car and trailer was good for about 160 passengers – each carried home or within a comfortable four to six blocks from home, which was just as good!... How sensible, how really sensible, compared to today.
(6/13/57)