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Steam, Sparks, & Steel:

Railroads In Superior

In years gone by, trains of all sorts, passenger, freight, electric motor cars, rode ribbons of steel through Superior during the heyday of Colorado rail service.

Imagine traveling from Superior to Denver by rail in about an hour — a reality almost 100 years ago. Residents of Superior in the early twentieth century could ride the rails to Boulder or Denver by boarding an interurban rail car at Superior's Colorado & Southern Depot at the southern end of Third Avenue. This pattern from the past comes around again. With the passage of FastTracks legislation in 2004, this 100 year old scenario is now a possibility for the future.



C & S gondola cars being loaded with coal at Superior's Industrial Mine. View is from the west.

The first rails laid into Superior were for hauling coal from the mines there and Marshall. The Denver Marshall & Boulder Railroad began laying track northwest from Denver in the 1880's. The road builder's progress took them from Coalton (just west of present day Broomfield) to Superior in 1885 and on to Marshall in 1886. The link from

Marshall to Boulder was completed and freight service from Denver to Boulder began August 1, 1886 and passenger service by 1890.

The Colorado and Southern Railroad was created in 1899 by consolidating a variety of railroads into one larger company and the Denver Marshall & Boulder was a part of that consolidation. From that point until 1947 C & S trains hauled coal out of Superior's Industrial Mine, one of the most productive mines in the Northern Coal Fields.

Superior Historical Commission Announces Its First Evening Historical Program

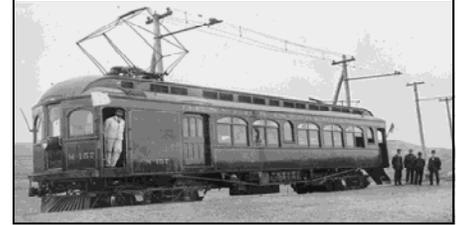
“History of Railroads in Colorado”

Slide Presentation
by Larry Dorsey

April 21, 2005 in the Town Hall
At 7:00 PM

In the early 1900's, rail traffic was being held up at Superior due to the presence of coal cars being loaded at the Industrial Mine tipple while still on the main line. So in 1904, the C & S built a passing track long enough to hold 40 cars, thus allowing traffic to proceed on through to Marshall and beyond. This right of way is still visible from McCaslin Boulevard looking either east or west.

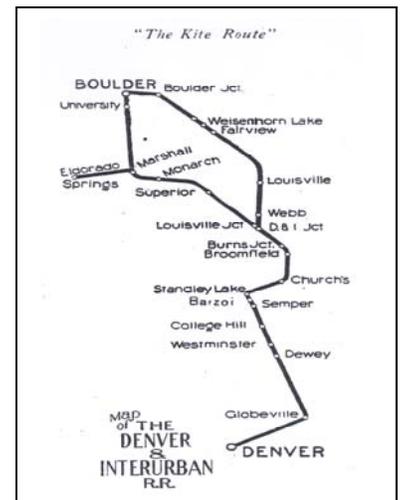
Hauling coal was linked to the economic life blood of Superior and Marshall, but carrying passengers became the most colorful part of this rail line. A headline in the June



Here we see Denver & Interurban car M-157 on its inaugural run in 1908. Note the important railroad officials at the rear of the car and imagine cars like this clattering through Superior until 1926.

24, 1908 Denver Post declared that “Beautiful Boulder Is Now Within 55 Minutes of Denver” as it explained the opening of the Denver & Interurban electric car line between the two cities.

This line became known as the “Kite Route” because the outline of its path on a map left the appearance of a child's kite. The tail of the kite extended out of Denver to the D & I Junction (also just west of Broomfield) where it split into two courses, one through Superior and Marshall (with a branch to Eldorado Springs) to Boulder and the other going to Boulder via Louisville. Boulder was the point of the kite and these two routes made the outline of its diamond shape.





Although this locomotive, currently on display at Leadville, Colorado, probably did not operate through Superior, it is typical of the engines used by the C & S for freight and passenger service in this region.

The Denver & Interurban was a subsidiary of the Colorado & Southern and the same Denver Post article went on to extol some of the assets of this new service. It explained that as the electric rail cars ambled through the countryside they attained a speed "in excess of a mile a minute," and that "on the electric cars passengers are not annoyed by cinders, smoke, or dust." The Denver terminus of the Kite Route was at 14th and Arapahoe and the D & I promised that cars would leave for Boulder every two hours.

In fact, according to the 1910 Kite Route timetable, the northbound electric cars passed through Superior every two hours beginning at 6:49 am. There were eight northbound trains and eight southbound trains per day and that, along with freight traffic and setting out cars at the Industrial Mine, made for busy railroading in Superior. Also 16 trains per day used the Louisville route according to the 1910 timetable.

Many interesting and unusual stops along the route might be surprising to today's Superior residents. For example, after departing Superior, the electric cars had stops at Monarch Mine #1 and the Gorham Mine both en route to Marshall. Another station lost to time is the one on the University of Colorado campus. Students, faculty, and others destined for the university detrained at a small covered platform located near the old University Hospital just west of today's Folsom Field.

Eldorado Springs was a bustling resort in the early 1900's, sporting a hotel, swimming pool, and resident tightrope

walker Ivy Baldwin, and was also a popular honeymoon destination. The young West Point graduate, future five-star general and president, Dwight Eisenhower and his bride Mamie honeymooned at Eldorado Springs after their Denver wedding and electric rail car ride to their destination. Imagine the Eisenhowers passing through Superior in 1916 as they started what was to become an eventful and important life together.

A disaster of the greatest proportion occurred June 23, 1920 when two motorcars collided head on near Globeville in north Denver. A breakdown in communication and confusion about the proper time led to the catastrophe. The speeding cars struck each other with such ferocity that they telescoped into each other and the sound of the splintering cars was audible for miles. The tragic results were 12 people dead, 214 injured and the D & I facing payment of personal injury damages to the tune of \$145,000.

This ruinous calamity along with the rise of automobile usage and the increasing popularity of inter city bus lines spelled doom for the Kite Route. The D & I leadership jockeyed for position for a few years and once they had their own bus line in place, permission to cease electric railcar operation was granted, the stoppage taking place on December 15, 1926.

The C & S continued freight and passenger operations on the line for quite a few more years, but omens of the impending demise were present. The line from Boulder to Marshall was discontinued in 1932. From that time on, coal trains came to Superior from the east in order to bring out the coal from the Industrial and Crown Mines. By 1936, the line from Superior to the Crown Mine was abandoned. Once World War II ended and the wartime demand for coal declined, the Industrial Mine closed in 1945 and the end of the line for the Superior branch was in sight. The Public Utilities Commission allowed the C & S to abandon the line from Louisville



The former railroad grade through Superior looking west from McCaslin Boulevard. Original Superior to the right and Industrial Mine site to the left.

Junction (slightly east of the present day StorageTek plant) to Superior thereby ending the rail era in our town.

Many Superior old timers recall the C & S freights trundling through town or placed on the siding to the Industrial. Much of the roadbed from near the Superior Cemetery to Marshall is still evident as is the variety of roadbed in Marshall itself. Some of the old right of way is now a part of the Boulder County trail system and promises to be preserved for the future.

An exciting chapter of the railroading in Boulder County has been closed for nearly 60 years, but another chapter is opening as the needs of the 21st century result in the commuter trains shuttling people on the old C & S right of way from Boulder to Denver via Louisville. Will it be possible to travel from Boulder to Denver by rail in about an hour again? Only time will tell.

Sources: Jones and Holley, The Kite Route; Superior Historical Commission, Lost Superior.

Superior Historical Commission

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