

CAR No. 25 WHERE ARE YOU? WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND



Car 25 going into Golden at Ford and Jackson Streets with St. Joseph Church in the background.

Photos courtesy Rocky Mountain Railroad Club

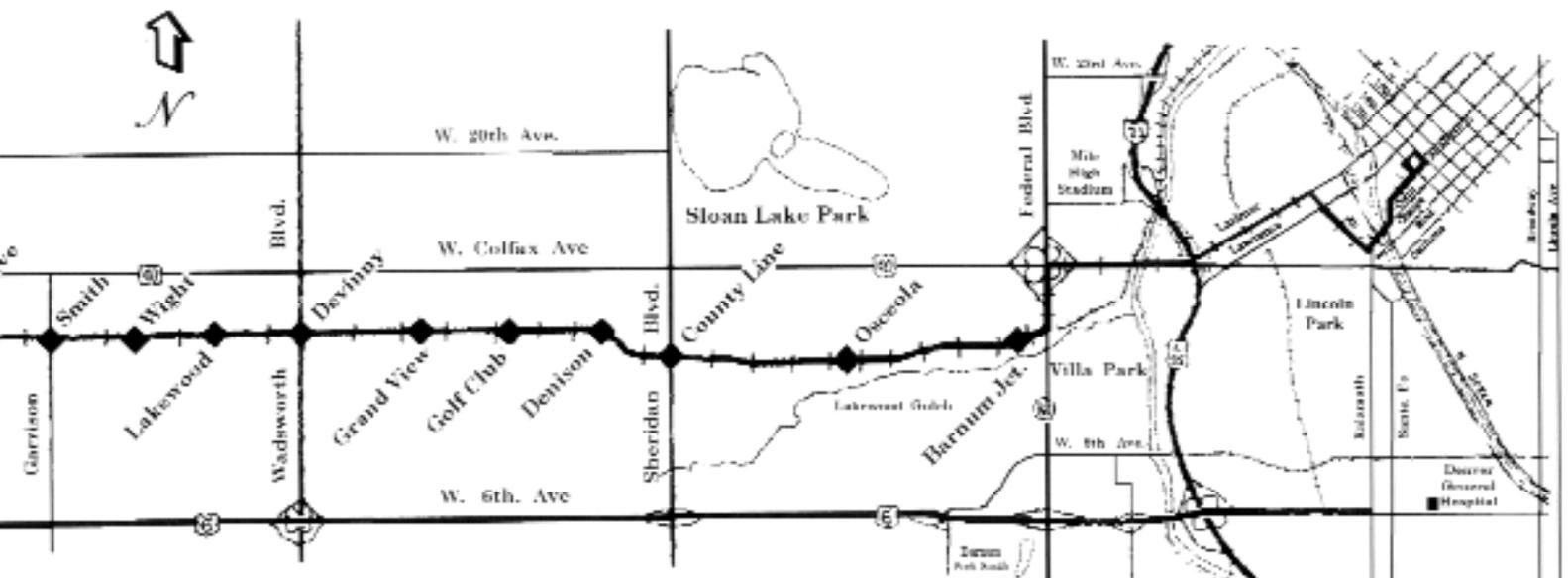
by Jerry Grunski

It may be hard for a citizen to visualize rails and steam engines in the countryside and on city streets, but before there were autos

there were trains. Before there was light rail there was heavy rail. Tracks of narrow gauge railroads weighed 60 lbs per yard, whereas more substantial rails hefted at

80-90 lbs per yard on standard gauge tracks (4'8" wide).

Several lines extended west and northwest like spokes from downtown Denver out to Golden,



Leyden, and to Boulder. They were built in the 1880s and 1890s, to carry freight and passengers to and from outlying communities, coal from Leyden and produce from farms beyond the city. One standard gauge line went through Arvada between North and South Table Mountains.

Another route, No. 84, pulled into Lakewood Gulch at the South Platte River, near where the Zuni Power Plant now stands. This line wound its way from Denver to 13th Avenue from where it continued and struck through today's Denver West Shopping Center, crossing over a southwest bearing Colfax Avenue. It then went through Camp George West, where the only station remains, a stone arched protective shelter. Old Golden Road into Golden is on the bed of this rail Route No. 84.

This 13.1 mile route featured 15 original stops, basically at major road crossings, moving through Lakewood before skirting South Table Mountain and then bending northwest into downtown Golden. Some of the stops were Barnum Junction west of Federal Boulevard; County Line at

Sheridan Boulevard; Deviny at Wadsworth; Smith at Garrison; Bee Hive at Kipling; Daniels at Simms Street; Wide Acres at Orchard Road; Landon Hills where Colfax crosses, aiming southwest; Industrial School in Golden; and 13th Street Terminus in Golden.

The line was electrified in 1909, and by then a viaduct had been built to carry trolleys across the South Platte River and into the "Loop" around Arapahoe and Curtis Streets, between 13th and 14th Streets.¹ All tramways in Denver connected at this point.

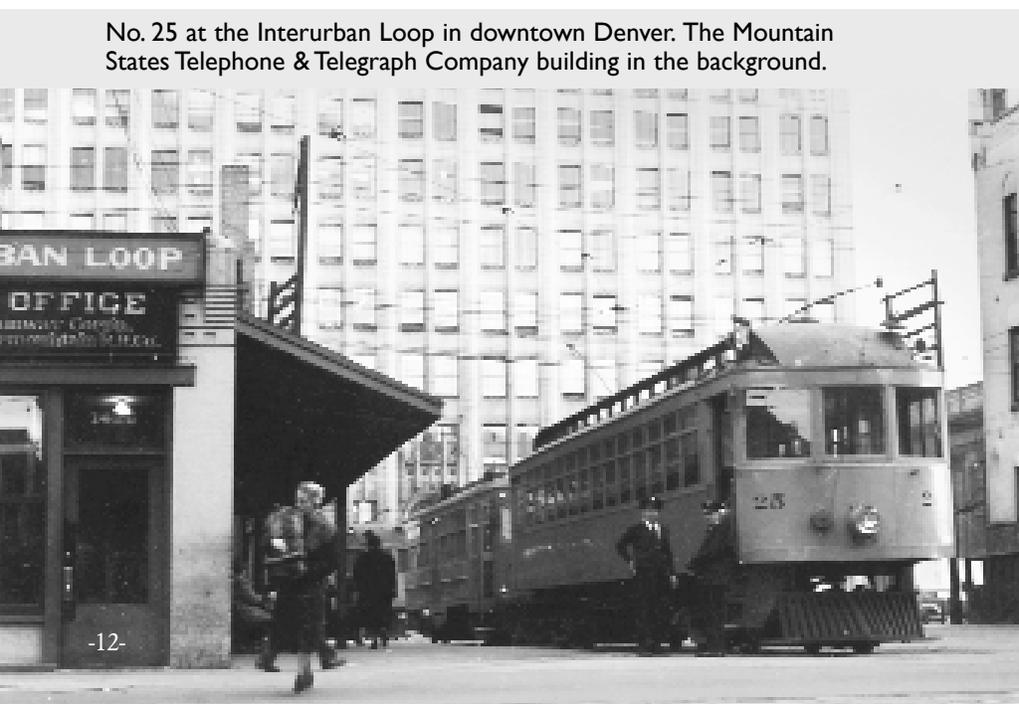
"The interurban line to Golden was more than just a mode of travel; it was a social institution. Youngsters rode to school on it, including college students headed for Colorado School of Mines."² Doctors, nurses, attorneys, teachers, engineers, newspaper employees, and other city workers traveled from rural communities to the city each day. The Wide Acres station was placed at Colfax and Orchard Road so Governor John C. Vivian could board a car without having to walk very far from his house. He became a "strap-hanger" cruising to the State



Capitol with one transfer at the Loop.³ Soldiers often packed the cars to reach Camp George West. Stations were wooden shelters beside the tracks. The station shelter of Wide Acres can now be seen at the Lakewood Heritage Center.

One car has been rescued from the original 317 built by the Woeber Car Company of Denver. Car Number 25 is being restored by the Rocky Mountain Railroad Historical Foundation at the Federal Center in Lakewood, the former Remington Arms plant, where a spur of Route No. 84 led into that facility. This car has been stripped of its Tramway yellow and repainted in the original forest green. Its four 50hp motors have

No. 25 at the Interurban Loop in downtown Denver. The Mountain States Telephone & Telegraph Company building in the background.





Route 84 trolley car shown crossing the South Platte River.

been rebuilt, rattan seats refurbished, all interior wood paneling refinished, and even the bell, horn, and a massive headlight put in working order. It runs and has been outside the shed for trial excursions.

Darrell Arndt, project chairman for the Interurban No. 25 Restoration Project, says that conductors used to tease the drivers of the newfangled horseless carriages when they first came out in the early 1900s. "Conductors would slow down when they spotted an auto approaching an intersection so that the flivver would have to stop and let the electric car pass." "When I was a boy delivering the Denver Post on my bike in the forties, I picked up

my bundle of papers every morning from the Wadsworth stop on the Interurban," said retired supermarket manager Jack Raven recently.⁴ Trains ran from 6AM til midnight daily, and the single car beneath the overhead wires could reach a speed of 60 mph on the straightaway past Kipling Street. The trip to Golden took 40 minutes. The entire operation shut down along with Denver streetcars in 1950, never to run again. Cars sold for scrap; gone, but not forgotten.

But hold on. The

line may rise again, at least part way. The tracks were never taken up completely. A remnant still exists along the South Platte, with one car running as a tourist novelty - also shuttling Bronco football fans to the stadium from distant parking lots on game days. Cross 13th Avenue on Garrison, Carr, Sheridan or any other north-south thoroughfares and the tracks still show through the weeds. Currently there is a proposal to use this right-of-way for a commuter line, the popular RTD Light Rail zipping along old Route 84 as far as Simms. After slumbering for half a century, car 25's former steady path may witness resurrection.

- 1 Forrest, Kenton , *Take a Ride*, 76 Stories of Lakewood, 1976, pp. 124-125 and Kenton Forrest, *Lakewood's Public Transit*, Lakewood-Colorado, *An Illustrated Biography*, Patricia Wilcox, editor, published by Lakewood 25th Birthday Commission, 1994, pp.145-146
- 2 Darrell Arndt, Slide Show Narration, Rocky Mountain Railroad Historical Foundation
- 3 Martha N. Martin, personal communication, September 2001
- 4 Darrell Arndt, personal communication, September 2001

Car 25 near Golden.

