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A Documentary History of the South Park Line: Vol. 2: The Leadville District, 1879-1928

Daniel W. Edwards

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The South Park Line's early history is known for a paucity of information and surviving records—there IS data out there, but it is scattered around far and wide. Dan Edwards has been relentlessly hunting down varied sources to painstakingly assemble this chronology of Colorado and Southern Railroad history. This, Dan's second book (in a planned series of seven), is another major step forward into unravelling the history of the South Park line. Focusing on the Leadville and Breckenridge areas, this book also touches on the upper portion of the Clear Creek line above Georgetown and the plan to connect that "high line" to the other "high line" at Montezuma, near Dillon. The present work fills in many gaps, highlights new information, and of course raises new questions. Like his first book, this effort presents events primarily in chronological order as recorded by newspaper reporters, company officials in internal correspondence, and court records and documents. Also, many facts are gleaned from additional sources as found in archives and library records and railroad commissioner reports. The text is sometimes dry, sometimes riveting, but SO MUCH IS HERE!—rate wars; court battles; market crashes; titanic egos; railroad (strategic) and crew (tactical) confrontations; starry-eyed grand plans never realized (like standard gauging, ambitious extensions, and loooong tunnels); brutal mountain winters shutting down the road and isolating towns; avalanches and all-too-often train wrecks; strikes; sabotage; desperados; fires; profound corporate maneuvering both public and private; bankruptcies and reorganizations; and much, much more. And even some comedy—the embarrassing results of George C. Wortman's (of Wortman's Spur) determined search for a mail-order bride, the railroad employees using the Rotary snow plow's blades as a roulette wheel, and other "episodes" that are hilarious and fall firmly into the realm of "you just can't make this stuff up." Tying names and dates to places and events and clarifying some myths and rumors—while debunking others—brings the mosaic of nebulous South Park history more clearly into focus. Dan occasionally provides background information to many of the reported events that helps to connect the dots. There may be a few "red herrings" thrown in, but these curve balls are few and usually are reported but once. After reading all the history books written in the usual past tense, it is actually entertaining to read an account of the history of the line "as it is unfolding." I look forward to, and am grateful for, Dan's continuing research into the history of this road. We have been hungry for this information for far too long. Students of South Park history, whether serious or merely curious, will find the results of Dan Edwards' research helpful and enlightening. Bob Schoppe President, The Denver, South Park & Pacific Historical Society Fairplay, Colorado

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