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BOISE RAIL SERVICE
(Advertiser Column by Judith Austin)

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Since we are about to say farewell to passenger train service in Boise [in 1971], it seems only right to look back over a hundred years and make some note of the strenuous efforts our predecessors made to get railroad service here at all.

Theirs was a long and frustrating effort, spanning some fifty-five years from the first urgings that Boise be connected with the transcontinental railroad then under construction to the final arrival of the main line of the Union Pacific in April of 1925. Actually, that was the third "coming of the Railroad to Boise."

In late 1867, James S. Reynolds--then editor of the Statesman began a series of editorials in favor of bringing a railroad to southern Idaho. In December of that year, he called for a convention of businessmen and other interested citizens; and in early January a group of elected delegates from all over the state passed a resolution urging not only that a railroad be built in this part of the world but that a main east-west line come specifically through Boise. Part of the argument, of course, was that this rapidly growing area deserved railroad service; but Reynolds also delighted in calling the world's attention to winter weather that forced the closing of more southerly rail lines across the Sierras.

Reynolds' successor, Milton Kelly, carried on the fight, and each new rumor of a line to come near Boise was eagerly grasped at. The mood of the community was summed up:

We do not suppose it is necessary to argue in favor of a railroad; all admit the necessity, and some go so far as to say the country is worth nothing, and they don't want to stay here unless we are going to have a railroad soon. Others say they are willing to give half they have, and pledge the territory for all it will bear, rather than fail in securing a road.

But not until 1887 did a train actually appear in Boise--and then it was on a stretch of track from Nampa affectionately called "The Stub." A photograph in the files of the Idaho State Historical Society shows that train, as it appeared on the bench--actually outside the city, but close enough for the city to claim it--on September 5, 1887. On the 13th, a great celebration with speeches and a free excursion to Nampa took place.

Another photograph shows the station which that train and its successors used until 1893. Its location was very close to the present station. At the left is a hotel hack, used to transport passengers into town; and there were some comment, when the railroad finally arrived downtown, that hack drivers were being put out of business!

The "new station" was not even finished when track was finally run down Front Street. But when it was completed, it--like its successor--was a source of great pride to both the city and the Union Pacific.

Another picture in the ISHS Collection shows that station as it appeared on one of those great "community occasions" for which railroad stations seem well suited. The banner on the car reads "Idaho Remembers the Main"; and townsfolk were saying farewell to troops being sent to the Spanish-American War.

And soon we will be saying farewell, too. But if readers had been alert thirty-five years ago, they would have seen this coming. In a section of old pictures run in 1936, the Capitol News showed one of the first trains to come in on the main line in 1925; the paper's comment was "Not such an old tub after all--maybe we'd better put it back in the morgue until 1976 when streamliners are also outdated."

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