

Bound by Steel and Stone – The Colorado-Kansas Railway and the Frontier of Enterprise in Colorado, 1890-1960, by J. Bradford Bowers. Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2021. 305 pages, maps, photos, biography, index. Hardcover \$26.65

Bound by Steel tells the story of the Colorado-Kansas Railway (later the Colorado Railroad) that was destined to fail from the start, but persevered for nearly fifty years.

Author J. Bradford Bowers tells the story of the “schemers and dreamers” that envisioned building an electrified interurban railway to connect Colorado and Kansas. The visionaries imagined bringing coal from Cañon City and Florence to a series of planned power plants along the Arkansas River. These would then provide the electricity needed for the electrified railroad and most importantly to farmers much in need of the water that could be pumped from wells all along the planned route.

Bowers follows the ambitious plans of the Colorado-Kansas Railway that got underway with a ground-breaking west of Pueblo in 1908 to its liquidation in 1957. He provides extensive details about the many bankruptcies suffered by the railroad, the first of which occurred after laying only one-and-a-half miles of track. Included are details of the fight between the railroad and the local entrenched political machine in Pueblo and the many efforts to re-envision the railroad.

Inadequate capital, a limited revenue base (the railroad ran deficits for most of its existence) and extensive competition doomed the enterprise from the start. However, the railway survived with much revised expectations. There would be no power plants; they reverted to traditional steam power provided by a used locomotive and would only build track in the switching yard and to the Stone City quarry twenty-two miles from Pueblo. In its final years the enterprise relied on revenue provided by its switching operation in Pueblo.

The railroad enthusiast will find much to appreciate in the detailed description that Bowers provides about the difficulties that the Colorado-Kansas Railway faced and the herculean efforts by Irma MacDaniel, its final manager, to keep it afloat in its last years.

Also included and enhancing the narrative for railroad enthusiasts is a roster of the rolling stock and engineering notes.

— Jim Donohue

