

# William Jennings Bryan made 'whistle stop' at Salida 70 years ago

By DONNA NEVENS

SALIDA (C-SJ) — Seventy years ago William Jennings Bryan delivered one of his famous political speeches during a half-hour stop at the Salida depot.

On Oct. 28, 1902, the "great commoner" passed through this part of Colorado, starting with a short speech at Alamosa at 7 a.m. and a brief stop at Hooper about an hour later.

The special train bearing Bryan and his party stopped in Salida just long enough for four Salida Democrats and a committee from Leadville to board, as it was scheduled to stop here on its return from Leadville.

About half way between Brown's Canon and Nathrop, the special car came to a sudden stop, throwing the passengers out of their seats and shaking them up considerably. J. F. Erdlen, editor of The Salida Mail, who was riding in Bryan's car, reported later that, "Mr. Bryan sprang out of the car, and with the others soon learned that we had run into a caboose on the rear end of a freight train, which had been trying for some time to get on the switch at Arena."

Among several passengers on the caboose were a man and his wife from Granite who saw the special coming too fast to be stopped. They jumped off the caboose and up a steep bank, escaping any serious injuries. The caboose was derailed and badly damaged but no one was injured except for a few bruises and scratches.

Editor Erdlen stated that "Supt. Rockwell was aboard the special and soon had Mr. Bryan and his party more or less comfortably loaded in a box car behind the freight engine and speeding again on the way to Leadville." At Nathrop, Bryan and his party switched again to a special car.

During the noon hour, Bryan's train arrived in Leadville, where thousands cheered his speech at every point he made. After making brief stops in Buena Vista and Granite on its return trip, his train reached Salida about 4 p.m., when an enthusiastic crowd greeted his arrival. His car stopped just past the east end of the F Street bridge, and people were everywhere — on, over and under the bridge, on top of the depot and around the

car — to see him and hear him speak.

Although Bryan campaigned extensively when he was a candidate for the presidency in 1900, 1904 and again in 1908, his trip through Colorado in 1902 was made on behalf of the Democratic state ticket.

The Republican editor of The Salida Record did not give Bryan's visit much space, explaining the large crowd at the depot by saying "Their presence was a matter of curiosity just as it would be should any famous man visit the city."

While he conceded that Bryan was a "superb orator," he informed his readers that "His speech was principally on national issues in order to draw the attention of the people from the rottenness and incompetency of the Democratic state government."

Editor Erdlen, on the other hand, conceded that Bryan "made some of his best points here and stirred up the old time enthusiasm of the people."

After leaving Salida, Bryan had plans to stop in Canon City, Victor, Cripple Creek and Florence before midnight.

*Arrived  
1896, 1900, 1908*

