

## II. EARLY HISTORY OF WEST WASHINGTON PARK

### A. Broadway and Its Early Settlers

Truck gardeners and farmers who supplied Denver with fruits and vegetables in the 1860s had no efficient way to transport that produce to the city from their orchards and gardens far to the south of Cherry Creek. Finally, in 1871, a frustrated Thomas Skerritt and his sons hitched a team of horses to a heavy wagon, locked its hind wheels, and cut a straight track from Hampden Avenue to Cherry Creek, dragging a heavy log back and forth several times over the 100-foot-wide "Broad Way" to level it. The Skerritts then graded the banks of Cherry Creek down and laid heavy planks across the creek's roadbed so wagons could cross without sinking into the sand. Above this bridge they added a plank walk for pedestrians.

With a fine, tree-lined boulevard and access to Denver via the new wooden bridge, settlers who had congregated along Broadway between the creek and Alameda Avenue established the beginnings of a permanent community of mostly truck gardens and homes. In 1881, Avery Gallup built a "country estate" and acres of greenhouses at Alameda and Broadway, and William Butters opened the first grocery store near First Avenue. But, to their dismay the Cherry Creek bridge and the inviting new street beyond also caught the eye of saloon proprietors, and these early home owners were only partially successful in keeping the hated taverns from crawling up Broadway into their neighborhood.

### B. "Rapid Transit"

William A.H. Loveland built the narrow gauge Denver Circle Railroad through South Denver in 1881, hoping to build entire communities on land his company owned along the line; its tracks began at Larimer Street, ran east on Bayaud Avenue, turned south again at Kansas (Logan) Street, and ended at Jewell Avenue. At 5 cents a ride and much faster than horse and buggy, the railroad was popular, but did not convince buyers to purchase lots so far out in the country. To increase usage of the train, Loveland and millionaire stockholder Horace Tabor decided to erect some enticements along the line. They convinced Denver's leaders to hold a Mining and Industrial Exposition on 40 acres of land along the railroad between Broadway and Logan Streets and Virginia and Exposition Avenues. Architect Willoughby J. Edbrooke designed a stunning two-story exhibit hall of nearly 150,000 square feet, and thousands of spectators came to see the gold and silver exhibits when the first

mining exhibition opened in 1881. Loveland later developed the fabulous Jewell Park (now Overland) and extended the tracks west on Jewell Avenue into the resort, but the Denver Circle went bankrupt in 1887.

About the same time, former Governor John Evans built a standard gauge train track through the town. The Denver and New Orleans Railroad originated downtown in 1882, went south along the river, crossed Broadway at Kentucky Avenue, angled through Lincoln, Sherman, Stebbins Heights, and University Park subdivisions, and exited South Denver at Jewell Avenue and South Colorado Boulevard, where it continued on toward Pueblo. This railroad was used into the 1950s and much of the trackage is still visible.

Another route to and from the city was via the "little brown horsecar," which Southsiders boarded at Alameda Avenue and Broadway for the trip to 16th Street downtown. But in 1887, the horsecar company switched to a green car that traveled to 18th Street. This change was met with loud, but futile, protests from the riders. When the horsecar company refused to give back the brown car and old route, angered citizens convinced the Tramway Company to install the new-fangled cable cars on the old route instead, and the first cable car in Denver traveled south on Broadway in December of 1888, full of jubilant merrymakers. The Tramway Company built a depot at Dakota Avenue and Broadway in 1890 and extended the tracks to Englewood.

### **C. Saloons and the Town of South Denver**

When a dozen new saloons sprouted up around the Exposition Building in 1882, Southsiders decided to take action. On August 9, 1886, reformed alcoholic Rufus "Potato" Clark, Avery Gallup, and real estate developer James A. Fleming (Fleming's Grove subdivision), incorporated the Town of South Denver as a prohibition suburb. Boundaries were Alameda Avenue (Denver city limits), Colorado Boulevard, Yale Avenue, and the South Platte River. By levying annual wholesale liquor licenses of \$3,500 and retail licenses of \$2,500, Mayor Fleming and his board of trustees ran many of the saloons out of town within a year. The town even converted one former saloon at South Logan and Center Streets into a jail, which, ironically, housed mostly liquor violators. The Town of South Denver was annexed to the city of Denver in 1894.

#### **D. Landmarks**

Lincoln School was erected at Pearl Street and Exposition Avenue in 1891. The next year the first post office opened in the Jefferson Building at 432 South Broadway and the beautiful South Broadway Christian Church at Ellsworth Avenue and Lincoln Street was dedicated. The Russell "hose house" was built at Center Avenue and Broadway, also in 1892. St. Frances De Sales Catholic Church held its first services at the firehouse before building a chapel and later its existing church structure at Sherman Street and Alameda Avenue. The Presbyterian Reformed Church at Virginia Avenue and Pearl Street was erected in 1893.

#### **E. Washington Park**

In 1890 South Denver's Town Council chose Smith's Lake for park purposes, but detractors insisted the location was too remote. But in 1899 the City of Denver established Washington Park on those same grounds, increased it to 155 acres, and transformed it into the lovely and much-used park of today.