

Way We Were
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The Photographic Exploits of Dick Steinheimer

In February 1953 Richard "Dick" Steinheimer rode the Union Pacific "Park City Local" from Ogden to Park City (train number 226). Though the Union Pacific still offered passenger service to Park City (population less than 2000), Train 226 existed to serve the town's mines. The passenger car was the caboose, allowing you to ride with the crew.

Dick was 24 years old at the time of his visit, and while the train conducted its local business Dick walked around town taking extensive photographs. Perhaps sparking a passion in his life, he went on to become a preeminent railroad photographer/journalist, author, poet, and Silicon Valley entrepreneur. One of his first pictures from Park City used the east portal of the Silver King Coalition Building to frame Train 226 performing its switching operations.

The Silver King Coalition building is Park City's prime example of a tipple, or a structure where containers are tipped to unload their contents. In the case of the Silver King Coalition Building, the tipple received ore via an aerial tramway. Both were a vital part of the mining infrastructure to move ore cost effectively from the mines for shipment (via rail) to processing facilities. The tipple served as an icon of Park City through good times and bad. It was constructed in 1901, and was the tallest structure in town until it burned down in 1981. However, in its heyday, the Silver King was one of the largest and most profitable mines.

What can we learn from Dick's photograph?

First, we are looking north through the east portal. Today this area includes the Town Lift, Marriott properties, and various retail shops.

Second, the train is not yet leaving Park City. This tells us it is still switching the remaining local mine, United Park City Mines Company, as the number of gondola cars (an open railroad freight car with low sides, for transporting bulk freight, such as mine ore) is limited, and there is no caboose coupled on the end.

Third, a close look at the photo indicates that the tipple and aerial tramway are no longer in use. Notice the undisturbed snow covering the tracks. The aerial tramway and tipple were shutdown in the fall of 1952, mere months before Dick's visit.

The closure of the tramway and tipple foreshadows the declining mining fortunes of Park City. Indeed - the following decade would prove challenging for the town - population and economic decline along with a total collapse of the real estate market. By the end of the decade less than 1000 people would call Park City home. However, for Train 226, its crew, Dick Steinheimer, and Park City, those difficulties are in the future. On this sunny, cold day in February 1953 it's business as usual.

This is the first in a series of five articles highlighting Dick's Park City photographic exploits. If you are interested in the availability of Dick's prints please email Shirley Steinheimer at railwomen@earthlink.net.



Credit: Richard Steinheimer, S. Burman Collection.