Plush boxcar among collection

Museum draws railroad fans

NOBLESVILLE, Ind. (AP) — Multimillionaire Henry Morrison Flagler, a New York native who made a fortune as one of the founders of Standard Oil Co., knew what he wanted when it came to building a miniature mansion on wheels.

"This is one of the most opulent and plush private rail cars ever built," said John D. Horachek during a tour of the rolling palace at the Indiana Transportation Museum.

With about 500 members and thousands of visitors each year, the museum with its collection of railroad equipment and other transportation artifacts gets plenty of exposure.

Imagine something the size of a large box car. Fit the inside with stained glass windows near the ceiling, and the walls with ornate white Florida satinwood. Run the finest carpeting from the sitting room at the back, to the front dining room with the bronze and onyx fireplace, and Flagler's stateroom in the middle.

There's even a set of electric bells for getting the attention of the help in the servants' quarters.

Flagler, who sold his share of Standard Oil in 1881 for $200 million, wanted only the best.

"This car is an eye, a window onto a world we can only imagine," said Horachek, operations manager of the museum.

The more than 60 rail cars are the focus of the museum's collection at Forest Park, sitting in large sheds and a miniature rail yard, ever ready for walking tours.

"It's not a museum of display cases where everything is stuffed and mounted," said Horachek, explaining that the museum's two diesel engines and assorted dining and passenger cars have mostly been bought at scrap prices for restoration.

"It's the historical process," he said as he watched two workers carefully rivet a former interurban electric car. "We're not simply putting paint on things, we're going back and restoring it to just the way it was."

Railroad buffs, particularly, have been attracted to the museum's cause.

The group bought the diesel engines in Chicago, where they had been shunted off to a siding awaiting a trip to the scrap yard. Paying less than $8,000 for each of the behemoths, volunteers, including present and former Conrail workers, refurbished the locomotives completely.

Craig Presler, a volunteer who sits on the museum board, remembers the dining cars the group restored.

"It's a fascination with this kind of thing to take apart a 91-ton piece of equipment, put it back together, get it going 60 miles per hour and serve dinner on it," Presler said.

The point of such restorations, the museum members say, is to eventually run the equipment on regularly scheduled excursions from a central location, such as Union Station 20 miles south of here in Indianapolis.

Interest in such rides has been demonstrated by the success of the group's Fairtrain, which has carried thousands of people from Carmel to the Indiana State Fair each August since 1983.

The museum's office is located in a tiny railroad station transplanted from Hobbs, Ind., and a working 1924 interurban car carries visitors on a 1-mile track.

Many members talk wistfully about days gone by, when the electric interurban network carried passengers throughout Indiana, and train equipment of the type on display was considered high-tech.

"People have a jet-set mentality today," Horachek said. "They don't want to enjoy traveling, they want to be there yesterday instead of tomorrow."

But some visitors, merely curious at the out-of-place railyard in the city park, leave the museum with a greater sense of history, Horachek believes.

"You're touching items that were a way of life, the care and concern of people who are now dead," he said. "You're reminded of how many people have gotten on and off these trains, what their lives were like."

The collection, which includes a working 1898 locomotive used in the Singer factory in South Bend, focuses on the period from the turn of the century to the 1940s.

"It's a time period during which America became a world power through the use and development of the machinery we are preserving," Presler said.

And Flagler, who helped form the Florida East Coast Railway after selling his interest in Standard Oil, would be pleased were he to visit the museum today, the group's members believe.

"If he were to walk in here today, at the age of 100 and something, I think he would smile," Horachek said. "I think he would be quite at home."

Residents remember town sacrificed to Army in WWII

In 1942, the government purchased the property of those Beagle families, and destroyed the school, post office, homes, barns and fences.

EAGLE POINT, Ore. (AP) — A drive along Antioch Road northwest of Eagle Point reveals a few clues to how a happy rural community became a casualty of World War II.

Pocked concrete pillboxes and overgrown infantry trenches mark a strange and fatal seven years in the history of the pioneer community called Beagle.

Before 1942, Beagle was a friendly settlement of 100 families who farmed, logged, worked orchards and lived mostly on what their hard work and dry land would yield.

At its peak, Beagle had a post office, a general store, a grade school, weekly Sunday School meetings, and the Beagle Stickies, a ball team that played Sams Valley and Table Rock teams.

But Beagle's idyllic days ended with Pearl Harbor and the United States' participation in the war, when the U.S. Army decided to put the Camp White cantonment on the Agate Desert and turn Beagle into a training ground.

In 1942, the government purchased the property of those Beagle families, and destroyed the school, post office, homes, barns and fences.

But some Beagle families never lost faith. They gathered one year after leaving — July 4, 1943 —for a picnic in Grants Pass. And they kept gathering every July, and these last dozen years they've picnicked in the shady front lawn at Thelma Beers' Sweet Lane farm.

More than 100 people attended some of those early picnics. Nineteen attended this year.

When the United States joined the war, Beagle families felt a responsibility to Uncle Sam. But they also felt frustrated and angry being forced to leave behind their lives and lands.

"We weren't happy, let's put it that way," Mrs. Beers says. "We didn't want to move out of our homes. But you didn't fight the government."

Beers moved to Beagle in 1914, at age 4.

"This had always been home to me," she says. "All but 10 years of my life I've lived within a mile of right here."

Boys were sacrificing their lives, says Charlotte Sweet; it wasn't right for them not to sacrifice.

"We had to be casualties of the war just like they were," she says.

The relocation was hard for the Sweets. Sweet and her husband Marshall had just built their home and just gotten rural electrification. Marshall had lived there since 1910; he died 4½ years ago.

There wasn't time or space to relocate the Antioch Cemetery, which sat at the heart of Beagle. So the Army laid the stones face down and buried the entire cemetery 6 feet under. The earth protected the cemetery through the years of mortars and maneuvers, and in 1949, the Army hauled the dirt away, put the stones back in place and polished them clean.

In 1949, the government offered the land to the old owners, at about the same price they'd sold it for with fences, barns and homes.

"When we bought it back, it was all down and destroyed," says Beers, 76.

Sweet, 71, says, "Yes, we were all delighted to come backet."

The Sweets got their 38.8 acres for about two-thirds of the $2,309 they received from Uncle Sam in 1942.

"And boy, was it bare," Sweet says. "There wasn't a scrap of lumber left in the whole area."

Most trees still stood, but they'd been pelted by shrapnel. The land was full of potholes. Farmers who returned to their fields tilled up shell after shell. There are lots of stories about disasters and near disasters.

When Beers moved into her place, she filled three shell craters with dirt and decided to plant seedlings. Today a locust and two cedars help shade her home.

When her husband Lloyd plowed that first year he hit a phosphorous shell. It sputtered and arced like a sparkler, but mercifully spared the new tractor. Spades and even digger squirrels helped the Beers unearth about 11 more shells in the next few years, she says.