

Vacation week got off to good start. Page 20

The Conway Daily Sun

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The Flying Yankee, a 1930s-era stainless-steel electric diesel train, is currently being stored on the grounds of the Hobo Railroad in Lincoln. But if negotiations between the state and the Flying Yankee Association go well, it may come to Conway for restoration and display. (BRIAN SOLOMON PHOTO)

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The Flying Yankee may be returning to valley

By TOM EASTMAN
THE CONWAY DAILY SUN

CONWAY — Could a gleaming stainless-steel train that once glided through our mountains in the 1940s be returning?

That's the dream of hundreds of rail fans and the potential outcome of talks between the New Hampshire Transit and Rail Bureau and a Nashua-based non-profit organization that is trying to acquire from the state the sleek, electric diesel train known as the Flying Yankee. The idea is then to bring it to Conway for restoration and display while it is being worked on.

And that's not all. Conway Scenic officials say, if the above plan comes together, the local heritage railroad would love to have it operate for special runs on CSRR tracks and be on display as a draw to its Conway Village depot — a cluster of buildings on railroad-owned property across from the Ham Arena on West Main Street.

"We'd love to have the Flying Yankee back in the valley," said David Swirk, owner of the Conway Scenic. "There's a lot to make it come together, but we are all working on it."

The historic train is currently being stored at the Hobo Railroad in Lincoln. That heritage railroad and the Winnepesaukee Scenic Railroad were purchased in August by Patriot Rail Co. LLC of Jacksonville, Fla.

The state of New Hampshire — which owns the train, having acquired it for \$1 from late Story Land co-founder Bob Morrell — last November put out a request for proposals, seeking qualified applicants to submit their plans to restore it. The submission window closed Jan. 3, and the winning applicant will assume ownership of the train.

N.H. Department of Transportation Public Information Officer Richard Arcand recently confirmed to the Sun that the state is reviewing the submitted RFPs and has 60 days to make its choice.

He would not say how many submissions they received, but one was certainly from the Nash-



The Flying Yankee, seen in Boston in an undated photo, ran a regular route to Portland, Maine. (COLLECTION OF ROBERT A. BUCK)

ua-based Flying Yankee Association. Jacob Eidsmoe, a spokesman for the group, told the Sun last month they are hoping their submission is selected.

He referred a reporter to the group's Jan. 4 press statement, in which chair Brian LaPlante said, "We believe we've put our best foot forward with our submission to the state. The FYA was well-prepared for this opportunity; the past few years have been spent laying out strong plans, forging valuable partnerships and seeking various resources to help create

a solid proposal for the future of the Flying Yankee.

"Whatever the outcome of the RFP, we are excited to learn that the Flying Yankee will soon have a new purpose and direction. Sitting untouched for over 20 years has been a long time to wait," LaPlante said.

Owner of a web advertising firm in Watertown, Mass., Eidsmoe, 50, joined the group a year ago and runs its public relations.

see **YANKEE** page 3

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YANKEE from page 2

The father of two young sons, he says he has often taken trips to Lincoln with them to see the Flying Yankee and that they also often visit North Conway to ride the CSRR's trains.

Like other train buffs, he waxes poetic when talking about the Flying Yankee.



Jacob Eidsmoe

"It marks a time when the railroads were giving up steam and moving to diesel. It was an iconic change at that time when it came out in '35 and it was in its heyday at the start of World War II. There were other steamliners but the Flying Yankee was truly distinct," he said.

Eidsmoe added that his group is not the same outfit that previously led efforts to restore the train — that one, led by Morrell (1920-98), was known as the Flying Yankee Restoration Group.

Morrell had acquired the then 58-year-old train in 1993 from the Edaville Railroad of South Carver, Mass. where it had sat for over three decades, and had it moved via flatbed to a siding in Glen in hopes of restoring it; however, he never saw those efforts pan out. Morrell and partners had hoped to get the lease from the state of New Hampshire to the former Maine Central-owned Mountain Division



A crew member at the Concord and Claremont Railroad is shown working on the Flying Yankee in August 2002 after it was moved to Claremont in 1997 from Glen before finding a home at the Hobo Railroad in Lincoln in 2005. (TOM EASTMAN/MOUNTAIN EAR PHOTO)

line through Crawford Notch but the state instead awarded that lease to the Conway Scenic Railroad in 1994. Morrell sold the train to the state for \$1 in 1996, the same year the Flying Yankee Restoration

group was formed.

It was moved the next year to the Concord and

see **YANKEE** page 6

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History of B&M's groundbreaking train, No. 6000

By TOM EASTMAN
THE CONWAY DAILY SUN

LINCOLN — Prior to 1935, the name Flying Yankee referred to a passenger train that ran between Portland, Maine, and Boston, Mass., at least back to 1891. The train was pulled by an early Pacific steam engine; cars were standard heavy-weight construction.

The new Flying Yankee was lightweight, made of welded stainless steel using by the Edward. G. Budd Co. of Philadelphia's patented process.

According to the Flying Yankee Association of Nashua, the 1935 train was a significant departure from other trains at the time. While typical passenger cars could weigh 120 tons, the three-car Flying Yankee train set weighed only 113 tons and featured the newest technology available at the time.

All three cars were "articulated," meaning each was semi-permanently attached to the other to provide for a smoother ride.

The engine was an 8-cylinder Winton 201-A diesel, driving a generator; the lead truck was equipped with traction motors.

The Flying Yankee had air-conditioning in all cars. No dining car was provided; instead, meals were prepared in a galley and served to passengers in trays that clipped to the back of the seat in front.

It was the third streamliner in service after the Union Pacific Railroad's M-10000 and the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad's Pioneer Zephyr. The Flying Yankee was a virtual clone of the latter, except that it dispensed with the baggage/mail space to seat 142 in three articulated cars.

The train was delivered in February 1935 and toured the Boston & Maine-Maine Central Railroad system before entering service on April 1 of that year. The daily route served began in Portland Maine, then to Boston, followed by a return to Port-



The Flying Yankee, then known as The Mountaineer, is seen on the Crawford Notch tracks in 1944. (WIKIPEDIA PHOTO)

land and continuing to Bangor, Maine. The route was then reversed to Boston, with the train finally returning to Portland late in the day, a distance of 750 miles per day.

This schedule was kept up six days a week; the train spent Sundays undergoing maintenance. The train proved extremely successful, attracting new ridership and earning a profit for its owners.

Later on, as newer equipment replaced it on one route, it would be switched to other routes, bearing the names The Cheshire, The Minuteman, The Mountaineer and The Business Man.

As railroad passenger ridership declined in the 1950s, the Yankee was also getting old, and thus the

see HISTORY page 5

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HISTORY from page 4

train, then called The Minuteman, was retired, running its last on May 7, 1957.

The Flying Yankee Association notes: "In its celebrated 22-year career, B&M No. 6000 ran just over 2.7 million miles before it was retired in 1957. The railroad donated the train — consisting of the engine and three cars — to the Edaville Railroad tourist/museum operation in South Carver, Mass., where the train remained on static display there for about 35 years until it was moved in 1993 to Glen, after being purchased by local visionary businessman Bob Morrell (1920-98), owner of Story Land.

Morrell had hoped to restore and operate the train on the state-owned Mountain Division line through Crawford Notch, but his group lost their bid in 1994. The Conway Scenic Railroad opened that still-operating line in September 1995.

Morrell was not successful in obtaining the contract, and in July of 1996, he sold the Flying Yankee to the New Hampshire.

That same year, the Flying Yankee Restoration Group was formed. The plan was for the state and the group to work together to raise funds and restore the train to operation.

The restoration began in November of 1997 at the Claremont & Concord Railroad's shops in Claremont. As the skilled staff in Claremont began the work, it became apparent that nearly four decades outside had not been kind to the Yankee, and the train was in much worse shape than anyone had imagined.

Despite donations from the Morrell family and grants from the Federal Highway Administration, funding fell short of what was needed.

By 2003, the FYRG was out of money, and work ceased. The working relationship between the FYRG and the Claremont and Concord deteriorated, and the restoration group made the decision to relocate the train. It ultimately decided to move it to Plymouth & Lincoln Railroad (better known as the Hobo Railroad) of Lincoln, for the next phase of res-



The Flying Yankee is seen on tracks in Malden, Mass, in this undated photo. (FLYING YANKEE ASSOCIATION PHOTO)

toration. Arrangements were made, and the Yankee was moved to Lincoln by road in August of 2005.

As the Sun profiled in several stories in the 2000s, among those involved was Carl E. Lindblade of Stow, Maine, former general manager of the Red Jacket Mountain View Resort and a longtime local historian who served as the FYRG's director.

The plan then was to start a multimillion-dollar capital campaign to provide funds for restoration and create an endowment fund to ensure the maintenance of the Flying Yankee.

Major funding was found to begin work on the train while the capital campaign ramped up. Res-

toration of the chassis began in January 2007 and completed in July 2008.



Then the project stalled again. But thanks to the generosity of the Plymouth & Lincoln Railroad, the Yankee remained in their yard for over 17 years. In 2021, a new group stepped forward to rebuild the board. As part of that, the name of the organization was changed to the Flying Yankee Association.

The new board intends to make fundamental changes in the management of the restoration so the famous Flying Yankee can ride the rails again.

For more, go to flyingyankee.org.

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Rhonda and David Swirk, co-owners of the Conway Scenic Railroad, are seen by the freight house at the Conway Village depot of the Conway Scenic Railroad on West Main Street on Wednesday. (RACHEL SHARPLES PHOTO)

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YANKEE from page 3

Claremont Railroad's shops in Claremont where it underwent some work and grants were obtained but not enough to complete the entire work. It found a home in Lincoln in August 2005.

Then, this year, during his report Jan. 30, Conway Deputy Town Manager Paul DegliAngeli mentioned the Flying Yankee group while updating selectmen on talks between the state, town and Swirk about a parcel that was sold by the town to Swirk at auction but which they since discovered belongs to the state.

DegliAngeli said the hope is that the state, once it completes its appraisal, will sell the land to the town, which would then sell it to Swirk.

The land, once home to a salt storage shed, is on the west side of the tracks off West Main Street

across from the Ham Arena.

"Nothing is ever uncomplicated," Swirk responded when asked about the parcel by the Sun. "It is located near our property, and it just makes sense to own something that close versus having someone else do something with it."

District 1 Executive Councilor Joe Kenney (R-Wakefield) said negotiations are continuing between the DOT and the town and it is hoped that things will work out to allow the CSRR to acquire the land.

"I think it would be great to have the Flying Yankee in Conway and David Swirk's vision for a museum down that way. I live across from a railroad museum in Union, and it's a great facility," he

see **YANKEE** page 7

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A menu from the 1940-era train. Food was catered by the Armstrong Co. as there was no dining car. Note that a club sandwich cost 60 cents, a Budweiser was a quarter. (BOSTON & MAINE PHOTO)

YANKEE from page 6

said this week.

Swirk shared his vision for transforming that part of West Main Street at the southern terminus of the CSRR's line. Once part of the Boston & Maine the station was once used by the Flying Yankee's northern run.

"I think this would really be good for our community and for our railroad. We are all about partnering with our neighbors. This would be a world-class attraction that would add to this end of our Conway line," said Swirk on Wednesday morning on a tour of the site with wife and fellow CSRR co-owner Rhonda Swirk.

David Swirk and CSRR Marketing and Events Coordinator Brian Solomon (author of more than 60 books on railroading, including one on the

Flying Yankee) underscored that the CSRR's role would be to provide the real estate that would house the historic train as it undergoes restoration and CSRR would share its railroad maintenance and repair expertise with the Flying Yankee Association.

The CSRR would not, however, own the train nor be responsible for raising funds for its restoration.

The train would be on display during the restoration and would add to what Swirk, Solomon and crew are trying to create at the old freight yard.

The CSRR received conditional site-plan approval from the Conway Planning Board in 2020 for a 4,840-square-foot railcar/events facility there.

To add to that effort, the CSRR

see **YANKEE** page 8

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Cioppino -36
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LEFT: The interior of the Flying Yankee shows that substantial work remains to restore it to its former grandeur. (FLYING YANKEE ASSOCIATION PHOTO) RIGHT: Late Story Land co-founder Bob Morrell (left) is seen with George Howard in Glen after the 1935-vintage Flying Yankee was moved to Howard's property in October 1993. (TOM EASTMAN/MOUNTAIN EAR PHOTO)

YANKEE from page 7

moved the historic David Baker Upholstery Building from Greenwood Avenue (across from the Conway Public Library) to the freight yard last summer after the house on the lot where the upholstery building stood was sold.

The CSRR has run Pumpkin Patch excursions every fall to the Conway location and other similar events and hopes to add to those happenings.

A new building would be required for the Flying Yankee to be serviced — the CSRR would need to go to the planning board for approval for that structure, pending the finalization of agreements between the CSRR, the state and the Flying Yankee group.

Having the world-renowned Flying Yankee (for its history, see related story) would be a big draw to add to those amenities during its planned restoration — and were those efforts successful, just imagine what it would be like to have the historic train back riding the former B&M tracks as it did back in the day.

“Guests by train love to see those kinds of things (having it on display during the restoration work). Those trains were futuristic and ahead of their time,” said Swirk, referring to a display of the Zephyr Pioneer — one of the Flying Yankee’s sister class trains — at the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry. As for the planned restoration?

“I commend those folks. They are very committed to taking that historic train that has been languishing for years and to try to bring it back,” said Swirk, a lifelong railroad enthusiast who with Rhonda purchased Conway Scenic in January 2018 from Russ and Dot Seybold, who had purchased it from co-founder Dwight Smith and Kay Reed in 1999.

Stay tuned, rail fans young and old. Maybe, just maybe Bob Morrell’s dreams for the silver-streaked beauty that he saw as a symbol of America’s know-how and entrepreneurial inventive spirit will ride the local rails again.

Count this grandson of a conductor and great-grandson of an engineer in on the inaugural ride, just as I got to ride the reopened Mountain Division on its first excursion through Crawford Notch in September 1995. All aboard!!!

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