



**2008**

## **THE GOLD DUST LINE**

**Fall 2009**



**1905**

**Friends of the Tanana Valley Railroad, Inc.**

### **\*\*\*END OF THE SUMMER PARTY\*\*\***

September 26<sup>th</sup>, that's the day, to come to the station to work and play! Our annual Fall cleanup and preparation for Spooky Train and Santa Express events will complete our September activities. We need to clean up the shop and move equipment around. Once the work is done it's rumored that some special activities are planned such as Speeder rides, etc.; It should be a fun day of grunting, groaning laughing, etc. The party will start at 9 am or thereabouts and is only for FTVRR members and their friends. Bring some food to share with others, the Coffee Pot, and Hot Water for Tea/Chocolate, etc. will be there for all.

### **OLD GEEZERS GET STEAMED UP!**

Old Geezers get Steamed Up, was the original title for a Class to be taught this summer as a part of the OSHER Life Learning Institute of the University of Alaska. However, it was renamed as these special university classes for those over 50 years and their companions do not ever use anything less than young terminology. So it was called "Get Steamed Up and Blow your Own Whistle, (Or Firing & Operating a Steam Locomotive). The historic Tanana Valley Railroad Steam Engine #1, restored coal fired locomotive, was the keystone of the class.

The class of seven OSHER students each paid \$15 for materials, coal, and handouts. The two, five hour class periods, including a lunch break, were on successive days in early July. Using a Power Point presentation, our President, Daniel Osborne, covered the history, theory of steam power, simple physics of boiling water, steam engines, and locomotion. Explained were the parts of a locomotive, both visible and hidden mechanisms and safety. Instruction in safety and the knowledge and duties of a brakeman, locomotive fireman, and engineer was also discussed. Paper copies of the 74 slide presentation were distributed to each member of the class for ease in note taking.

The second day students moved the engine outside the engine house, inspected the locomotive, laid the fire, started the fire, built up steam pressure, serviced the engine with lubricants, and then took turns as brakeman, fireman, and engineer. The graduation exercise was actual operation of the locomotive by each student under steam as a fireman and as an engineer under close supervision of an experienced engineer on the FTVRR yard tracks. After all had had their turn in the cab of the engine, the students all got more chances to engineer until the time was up later in the day. Students then dumped the fire, cleaned the Engine up and put it away. OSHER provided student feed back from the students; all was very

positive, and many of the students decided to join FTVRR at the end of the class; several have since joined in actual operations on both Governor's Picnic and the Military Appreciation Day. *Daniel Osborne*

### **NEW MEMBERS**

What a year! 13 individuals or families joined FTVRR. President Dan receives the recruitment reward; he cheated by giving good grades to all the members of his class who signed up! Welcome to the following new members: Bruce Stephenson, Art Robson, Jean Tsigonis Family, Alexander Gudschinsky, Gram Hood, George Phipps, Roger Burns, Earl Williamson, Kevin Underhill, and out-of-towners Ray Kreig (Anchorage), Dennis Steffy (Soldotna), and Ken and Kim Zonge (Tucson, AZ),

### **WE'VE BEEN WORKING ON THE RAILROAD!**

YES WE HAVE! Remember, in March we began trying to keep close track of how much time our volunteers are donating to keep FTVRR in operation. As reported, the first month we had a total of 170 hours donated by 16 volunteers. Since then the number has grown to astronomic levels. From April 25<sup>th</sup> to the present, 34 volunteers have donated at least (some forgot to sign in!) a total of 2,157 hours for everything from repairing track, operating Engine #1, restoring and/or repairing equipment, applying for grants, working in the museum, and general business such as reports, writing newsletters(!), etc.

### **TRAIN OPERATIONS**

We need four things to make Engine #1 operate: Fuel, Water, Chemical supplements for the water, and a volunteer crew to do everything from patrolling the track to pulling the throttle. USEBELLI COAL has again provided and hauled the coal (thanks to JOHN KELLS) from their Mine at Healy. AURORA ENERGY provides the water, which is boiler make-up water. Because the water is so clean, we must add chemicals back into it and those are provided by DANA NOVAK of NALCO.

Then we have those stalwart individuals who provide the manpower for repairs, maintenance, and keeping the train on the track!! Thanks to all of you for a great summer: Dan Osborne, Mark Cosson, Bill Stringer, Tim Coahran, Andrew DeBaun, Blair Reynolds, Pat Durand, Ken Russell, Gerge Phipps, Alexander Gudschinsky, Bill Shechter, Andrew Packee, Bill Worthington, James and Garry Farnham, Kevin Underhill, Steve Hormann, Dan Gullickson, Martin Gutoski, Paul Bonnell, Dave Mobraaton, Doug Kenney, Earl Williamson, Gram Hood, Dalis Thomas, Bruce Jaffa, and anybody else who worked but forgot to sign the Volunteer Registry!

### **RUSTY SPIKE REPORT**

Many have asked, now all can know. Engine # 1 travels about 5 Mph while going around the Pioneer Park loop; on the Governor's Day Picnic the average speed, while moving, was 5.2 mph, and on the recent Military Appreciation Day event, the average moving speed was 4.6 mph. The Train made 20 loops including the test loop and final run on Military Appreciation Day for a total of 12.2 miles and burned about ¼ ton of Coal over the course of the whole day.

## **MUSEUM NEWS**

Recent acquisitions include an almost complete set of 1909 WP&WR Playing Cards from the UAF Museum. These cards were provided to passengers heading for the Klondike Gold fields. We suspect that the TVRR did not furnish such amenities, but utilized what others already had! A second donation is a nice little antique Pot-Belly Stove, from the Pioneers Museum. Roy Wilbur of Wilbur Bros Sheet Metal is cosmetically restoring it for us. When finished, it will be installed in the Museum and made to look like it operates (it won't!)

We had a very successful summer with over 26,000 visitors. Based on the information from our guestbook (which less than 13.7% of our visitors filled out), they came from all 53 U.S. States and Territories, 9 Provinces and Territories of Canada, and 28 other countries from all over the world. Now that the main season (**see coming events**) is over, we need to express our thanks to the wonderful folks who donated their time this past summer as Volunteer Museum Attendants, keeping our visitors happy, answering questions, and selling our unique collection of TVRR souvenirs: Bill and Patti Shechter, Bo and Kay Hinckley, Dan and LaVonne Gullickson, Dan and Rita Osborne, Scott and Cherie Stihler, Ken Russell, Mary DeBaun, Kaethe Foersche, Jenny Carlson, and Steve Hormann. Thanks also to our TDL employee, Blair Reynolds, who worked four days a week, rain or shine or smoke!

## **VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES, JUST FOR YOU!** **ON-GOING AND FUTURE PROJECTS**

The following projects are in our plans, waiting to be implemented. Some are concepts, some are actually on the drawing boards, and some are just waiting for funding and/or volunteers!

Flat Car completion

Maintenance Speeder completion

Coal Bunker (waiting for funds; then we need volunteer labor!)

Water Tower Frame (same as the bunker; some parts already purchased)

TVRR History Curriculum: for FNSB Schools; volunteers needed

## **WALK-A-THON RESULTS**

Remember the Alaska Visitor Industry's "Walk For Charity", back in May? We participated and the folks (3) who walked contributed (\$115.00) towards our program! This was the first year that FTVRR participated; hopefully we'll get a larger turnout next time. Wandering through the downtown area and feasting on snacks provided by local businesses is a neat way to raise funds!

## **REMINICES OF A VOLUNTEER**

It was August of 2008 that I became a Friend of the Tanana Valley Railroad (FTVRR) while visiting Pioneer Park after an annual picnic there for our local Fairbanks professional land surveying society. We held our yearly get together at the Moose Pavilion near the Railroad Museum. I had some time after the picnic ended in the late afternoon so I drifted over to the museum that houses old Engine Number One. I had never visited the new museum nor had I seen the little steam locomotive since it was last displayed at Pioneer Park outside during the centennial celebration of the Alaska purchase when the park was named *Alaska Land*

The *Alaska Land* name was changed a few years ago to *Pioneer Park* when the people of Fairbanks wanted to honor the pioneer founders of Fairbanks rather than being confused as a theme park like *Pirates of the Caribbean* at Disney World, an Alaskan RV park or some entertainment ride such as a circus or carnival. The original Alaska land was known by most like me who've lived in Fairbanks for over 40 years as A-67 when it was built to mark the centennial purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1967. It survived the 1967 flood and has emerged as a popular community asset run by the Fairbanks North Star Borough as a free public park used all year long.

The narrow gauge track that was built to circle the complex in 1967 is over a half mile loop starting at the train station, pulling the grade after crossing the east gate of the park entrance, climbing the earthen ramp above the old historical buildings that were moved from around town to become the remake of early Fairbanks streets, going over the bridges above the main south entrance and mining camp, then descending into the back area with the aviation museum, picnic pavilions and canoe launch along the Chena River on the western side. The loop pulls into the station where it began for the 12 minute ride which gives viewers a casual overlook of the entire park.

During the forty year life of Pioneer Park the gas driven replica of the TVRR that was built (named Engine # 67 for the Alaska-67 centennial) has carried visitors around the complex for many generations of children who have grown up and loaded their kids and grandkids on the train ride since the park was founded. I remember taking the train ride with my high school girlfriend when the park first opened up in May 1967. I had been on a few other rides with visiting friends or relatives from the states during the summer months since then but had not visited the new museum since it was built in 2005 nor seen Engine # 1 in operation since it had emerged from hibernation at the Yurkovich Shed where it was rehabilitated for over a decade. I ambled over to the new museum built to provide housing and a workshop for Engine #1 and #67 along with the four passenger cars where I was greeted at the entrance to a display of railroad memorabilia, artifacts of Fairbanks early history around which the TVRR played a critical role in gold mining development that started the towns of Fairbanks and Chena. Pulled onto the tracks that go right into the display area is Old Engine #1 facing the entrance for visitors to not only look at but get a guided hands-on tour in the cab. The light coating of coal dust, soot and lubricating oil gives a hint of the life still in the little engine that was born in 1899 to work in Canada on coal mining and transported to Fairbanks in 1905 to work supporting the mining operations in the gold boom here in interior Alaska. The little engine celebrated its new life in Fairbanks on July 4<sup>th</sup> that year transporting freight and passengers to the goldfields outside of town. It did the job for over a quarter of a century until revenue losses and the regular gauge federally owned Alaska Railroad took over the operation on Aug 1<sup>st</sup>, 1930.

When I first saw Engine #1 at the museum the last time I recalled seeing it was over forty years prior when it was a sad relic on display with a bad case of rust and rot on a short pair of rails next to the old terminal in downtown Fairbanks and again later at Alaska Land for the A-67 celebration at the old terminal built for #67 in now

Pioneer Park. Now it sported a new boiler and rebuilt wooden cab for puffing and chuffing its loop outside the museum during the special holiday runs on Memorial Day, July Fourth, Golden Days, Labor Day, Halloween and sometimes Christmas. I'm not a railroad buff but have assembled some HO scale models of recent Alaska Railroad rolling stock including some specially decorated for the Alaska 67 centennial, North Pole themed Santa Claus holiday trains along with the usual tourist and freight cars used today. With Engine #1 it was full scale love of a classic nature harkening back to an era of Fairbanks history during its formative years as a boom town driven by gold.

I signed up right then to become a Friend of the Tanana Valley Railroad and learn more about this little engine that could. Since then I have helped with the Labor Day and the Halloween Spooky Train. The most enjoyable part is the Spooky Train because that is when winter starts to set in making the steam driven coal fired engine a joy to chug around on the first snowfall usually to stay in Fairbanks. That's when the crisp beginnings of winter seem best suited for running the puffer belly both for the engineers operating the coal shovels and warm steam valves in the cab, but also the conductors entertaining the passengers bundled up in horse blankets sitting on the wooden benches in the open cars.

I was the photographer taking pictures of the children dressed up in Halloween costumes as they exited the train and walked through the station to get hot chocolate, cookies and cider. The annual event is really a hoot as the kids shuffle into the photo booth usually hurriedly taking off their boots, mittens and parkas to pose for the costume contest where three winners get prizes for best dressed. If you ever wanted to see the joy an old train can bring to people of any age, come to the Halloween Spooky Train event and see it happen.

It is proof positive that history links us all in generational ways that are intangible until you hear the whistle, clang the bell, smell soot and ash bellowing out of a hundred year classic old lady who can still chug along under her own steam with help from her friends and lovers. *Martin Gutoski*

## ~COMING EVENTS~

### SPOOKY TRAIN

Our next scheduled operation day is October 24, when Pioneer Park will be visited by a host of Ghosts and Goblins who will be laying in wait for passengers on the Spooky Train!. This is a real fun event: Children (and parents) who are in full costume will be able to ride the train for free and then have some warm refreshments and have their photo taken for the costume contest. Prizes will be awarded for the best boy and best girl, based on the photographs.

### **\*\*SANTA EXPRESS\*\***

Our final operations day, using Whiskey Island and Crooked Creek Engine #67, will be November 28 when we once again bring Santa Claus to Pioneer Park in a Special train all decorated up with holiday lights, etc. The TVRR Museum will offer free refreshments and children can visit with Santa. As before, TVRR Santa pictures will be available at minimal cost.



QuickTime™ and a  
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.