120-Year-Old Steam Locomotive Revived

Ed Marcum, Associated Press Writer

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A 120-year-old steam locomotive that spent 55 of those years sitting out in the weather at Chilhowee Park will be back on the tracks this weekend for the first time since 1953, hauling passengers for the Three Rivers Rambler train excursion.

Locomotive No. 154 will make its first run in 57 years at 11 a.m. Saturday during a private unveiling at Volunteer Landing on Neyland Drive. On Sunday, the public will be able to ride as the locomotive takes them on excursions at 2 and 5 p.m.

The Three Rivers Rambler, owned and operated by Gulf & Ohio Railways Inc., has been using a 1925 Baldwin Steam Engine called Lindy for some of its excursions, and Pete Claussen, chairman of Gulf & Ohio, said he is pleased to add a locomotive of even greater vintage. Claussen noted that it's remarkable a piece of machinery that old can still do the job it was built to do.

"If there was a 120-year-old airplane, I don't think you would want to fly in it," he said.

Locomotive No. 154 was built in 1890 by the Schenectady Locomotive Works in Schenectady, N.Y. It is a 2-8-0 'Consolidation' type locomotive and is one of only 10 Schenectady-built locomotives remaining, according to a history of No. 154 compiled by Gulf & Ohio Railways. It first served as No. 466 with the East Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia railroad, which in 1894 merged with the Richmond and Danville Railroad to form Southern Railway, which renumbered the engine No. 154.

It served the East Tennessee region until it was given to Knoxville in 1953 and put on display at Chilhowee Park.

Its restoration came about through the efforts of Claussen and Jeff Parrott, a South Knoxville resident who said he became fascinated with the locomotive when he saw it on display as a child about 30 years ago and vowed he would one day restore it. In 2008, Claussen acquired the engine and Parrott, an independent contractor operating as Restoration Solutions, had his chance. Parrott already had done work for Claussen — overseeing the restoration of Lindy.

The first challenge was moving No. 154 about seven miles from Chilhowee Park to the Gulf & Ohio rail yard off Central Street. Contractor David Foster oversaw the hauling of the 65-ton engine on a flatbed truck.

"I was amazed at how smoothly it went," Foster said. "No one was hurt; nothing was damaged."

Parrott and about 14 other contractors and Gulf & Ohio employees spent two years restoring the locomotive. Spare parts for the project are virtually nonexistent and Parrott said anything damaged had to be repaired or a brand-new part made in the railroad shop. They took the entire locomotive apart down to the boiler and chassis.

"It was in strange condition for something that had sat outside so long," Parrott said. 'Some parts were in almost new shape and others were about shot, without any rhyme or reason."

Claussen said No. 154 had been well-maintained by Southern Railway and generally was in fine shape for a locomotive its age. Gulf & Ohio Railways declined to say how much the restoration cost.

Parrott said No. 154 will be used along with Lindy and more modern engines and will probably make 10 to 12 runs a year and will be one of the oldest operating locomotives in the United States.

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