



Press Release

Republic of West Florida Historical Association

And

Old Hickory Railroad

On Saturday, February 9, The Old Hickory Railroad took a big step toward restoring the railroad to operation when the narrow gauge locomotive's boiler was lifted off its frame and placed on a flatbed trailer for transport to a local boiler repair shop for evaluation. The railroad shut down four years ago over concerns, among others, about the condition of the boiler, which was manufactured in 1963, making it 50 years old this year.

The effort to restore the railroad is being headed by Jackson businessman Mike Salmon, who chairs the Republic of West Florida Historical Association's board of directors. The Historical Association owns the railroad and the twelve-acre site in Jackson where the Republic of West Florida Historical Museum and the Old Hickory Railroad depot are located. Until it shut down, the train ran each Saturday and Sunday from March through November, carrying passengers on a scenic and historic ride through Jackson. The route included a stop at Old Centenary College, the original site of Centenary College, and today a State Historic Site.

Andrew Martin, a member of the Historical Association's board, said that the effort to restore the locomotive is the lynchpin of the project, but that many other tasks will have to be undertaken to get the railroad back in operation. "We know we have a lot of work in front of us," said Martin. "The passenger cars must be refurbished, the track has to be cleared, inspected and restored, the locomotive has to be converted from propane to a yet undetermined fuel, and a crew has to be trained to operate and maintain the steam locomotive."

As for the boiler, it is to be sent to Furnace and Tube Service, Inc. in Gonzales, where its condition will be evaluated, and, if necessary, repairs will be performed. Historical Association board member and boiler specialist, Charlie Beene, oversaw the lift and is supervising the repairs to the boiler. While the boiler is off the frame, other restorative work on the locomotive can be performed.

Martin added that the project going forward will be heavily dependent upon volunteers. "We simply don't have the funds for a paid staff," he said. "Eventually we're going to need engineers, firemen, narrators, mechanics, ticket sellers, track workers and anyone else who is excited about the train and willing to pitch in. We can even use people to mow the grass around the depot."

Anyone interested in becoming part of the restoration of the Old Hickory Railroad should email Andrew Martin at maczilla1@bellsouth.net. Said Martin: "We will begin

compiling a list of volunteers whom we can call upon when we reach points in the project where their expertise and talents will be helpful.”

“Right now, we need to get the track cleared so it can be inspected. It’s covered with four years of dead, matted grass and weeds, and shrubs and small trees growing up between the rails. Anyone with a gas string trimmer, small chain saw, loppers, pruners and similar tools, willing to come out and spend a few hours on the line, would be most welcome.”

Photo Caption

The fifty-year-old boiler from the Old Hickory Railroad’s steam locomotive, “The General Jackson,” is lifted off its frame in preparation for its transport to Furnace and Tube Service, Inc. in Gonzales, for evaluation and repair. The locomotive was one of twenty-one built by Crown Metal Products of Wyano, Pennsylvania, in the 1960s and 70s for amusement parks around the country.