

The Holy Grail of Railroading— A Most Unusual Find

Article by: *James LuBrant, CMO, The New Jersey Museum of Transportation, Inc.*

By now, the episode of Deep-Sea Detectives featuring the Sunken Locomotives off the coast at Long Branch, NJ has aired. Our involvement began about two and a half years ago. Members of the New Jersey Historical Diving Association, Dan Lieb and Neil Norell stopped in the shop on a cool autumn day to see if we could provide any information that might be of help to them about two locomotives that they were researching. As we learned more about their project, we discovered that these were very unusual artifacts.



Photo by: Dan Lieb

As we talked, it became clear that these were among some of the earlier examples of locomotive construction. Through photos taken on sight, we discovered that they were Planet Class 2-2-2 loco's. In later meetings, we were able to get a better idea of details of construction. On one occasion, we were shown a digital film of

the sight and some of the artifacts that had been recovered. In the film, we noticed that these locos had canted cylinders, Crosshead feedwater pumps and some equipment that would help in narrowing the time frame of construction. We noticed that they were equipped with riding cutoff valve gear as was apparent by the two rods in each valve chest. They also had wagon top boilers. In later meetings we were shown try cock valves and brass tallow cups as well as brass trim rings that we believe to have adorned the wheel fenders.

In all of the research, the only markings that were found were on the whistle. The marking read H.N. Hooper, Boston, #3. The beautiful bell is a typical shape for locomotive use, but has very ornate rings on the casting. The bell weighs about twenty-five pounds and is in remarkable condition. In inspecting some of the valves, it appeared that there was virtually no wear on them. Stems were unworn, threading was as if they were brand new.

As we became more involved we were able to shorten the time frame for possible construction date. The wagon top boiler design showed up about 1850 and the riding cutoff valve gear fell out of favor about 1855.

Through connections of



One of the Locomotive Bells after it was recovered and restored. *Photo by: Dan Lieb*

NJHDA, KPI Productions and the History Channel became involved. Several of the interviews were filmed at NJMT. The interior of the coach was used as was #26 and the Ely Thomas #6 Shay for background. It was at this point that NJMT began to discuss the possibility of arresting the sight in an effort to protect these rare finds.

With the help of Peter Hess and US District Court Judge Irenas, We were given the arrest. Due to rough seas, we postponed the attaching of the arrest papers to the site. I am happy to report that members of NJHDA and NJMT were able to serve the papers to the sight on Saturday, September 25, 2004 at approximately 5:15 PM. On the deck of Venture III operated by Paul Hepler, the one that originally located the locos, We rang the bell of one of the locos in celebration.

Out of Place—Out of Time

Article by: Dan Lieb, President, New Jersey Historical Divers Association, Inc.

In the late 1980's, dive boat captain Paul Hepler asked me if I wanted to go diving a see a couple of locomotives on the bottom of the ocean. At the time I thought to myself, "I dive to see shipwrecks. If I wanted to see locomotives I'd visit a trainyard." Several years ago, a friend reminded me about the locomotives and asked if I'd like to see them. Now, a shipwreck investigator and historian, I said, "Yes."

It only took several dives to record some basic information about the two locomotives, which sit upright and next to each other in nearly 90 feet of water 5 miles off Long Branch, New Jersey. Photography and video followed. The information we brought back was shown to members of the NJMT and other railroad historians around the world. In short order, the results came flooding back. What Paul Hepler discovered back in 1985

were two of the oldest remaining steam locomotives ever built in the United States. Part of what makes them unique is that they are a matched set. What makes them even more unique is that they most likely have the original hardware they were equipped with when they left the factory floor some 150 years ago.



Photo by: Dan Lieb

The New Jersey Historical Divers Association (NJHDA), who were investigating the locos, quickly realized that this find was of national historic significance, and that something had to be done to preserve and interpret these two, rare steam engines. NJHDA preserves shipwreck history, not shipwrecks. If these locomotives were going to be raised,

conserved and interpreted, we were not the organization to do it. Fortunately for all involved, the NJMT stepped up to the plate and took on the task.

Members of the NJHDA have now joined NJMT to act as technical advisors on this tremendous effort to preserve these valuable pieces of railroad heritage. We have made contact with archaeologists that are involved in the CSS HUNLEY submarine conservation and world renowned railroad historians from across the Nation that were involved in the interpretation of the steam locomotive PIONEER. If successful, these locomotives will be raised, conserved, interpreted, and maybe one day replicated to run on the tracks of the Pine Creek Railroad at Allaire State Park. With a practical, common-sense approach along with contacts with solid experts in the applicable fields, this effort will not only be successful, but rewarding to everyone involved.



Photo by: Dan Lieb

Old trains discovered off NJ coast are called 'real archeological find'

As printed on Sun, Sep. 19, 2004 in the Philadelphia Inquirer

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By John Shiffman Inquirer Staff Writer

Two rare, pre-Civil War steam locomotives, almost completely intact, have been discovered sitting upright, side-by-side, at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, several miles off the central New Jersey coast.

The submerged engines were discovered in 1985 by a charter-boat captain. But the significance of the find was not realized until two years ago, and not made public until Friday, when a federal judge ordered the relics protected.

In the next few days, a surrogate U.S. marshal will dive 90 feet to the ocean floor a few miles east of Asbury Park, to attach a laminated notice to one of the locomotives. The notice includes a marshals' warning that tampering or poaching is now illegal.

Two organized groups of amateur railroad and diving enthusiasts obtained the court order. They hope to retrieve and restore the distinctive and decorative steam engines, which are encrusted with a century and a half of barnacles and other sea life.

"It's a real archeological find - there are only a handful from that era that still exist," said David Dunn, director of the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, which is not involved. The six-wheeled engines are among the earliest American workhorse locomotives, designed during "an era when these machines were considered the space shuttles of the mid-19th century." Jim Wilke, a railroad

historian who lives in Los Angeles, said the find is unusual because "these machines are exactly as they were when they went down in the early 1850s." Most similar engines that survived to become museum relics, he said, were refitted again and again over decades, and represent hybrids with modernized parts.

"These engines are extremely rare," he said. The Smithsonian Institution, for example, owns a similar one, the Pioneer. A somewhat smaller, slightly younger, eight-wheeled steam engine, the People's

Railway No. 3, is on display at the Franklin Institute.

John H. White, a former railroad curator for the Smithsonian, described the discovery of the two steam engines near New Jersey as "unusual, an oddity."

"They don't tell anything we don't already know," White said. "It's just interesting that they survived all this time. We don't have much from the 1850s. These are new pieces that were unknown."

To recover the steam engines from the Atlantic, the leaders of the diving and train enthusiast groups acknowledge they will need professional help.

"This is, really, out of our realm," said Victor Crisanto, chair of the New Jersey Museum of Transportation, which won the legal protection for the engines. The private museum has operated the Pine Creek Railroad, a railroad preservation organization at Allaire State Park, since 1952.

The group took the first legal step on Friday, when it appeared before U.S. District Judge Joseph Irenas to ask for custody of the

abandoned steam locomotives.

They presented him with several pieces of physical evidence removed from the engines, including a foot-long bell and a 38-inch piece of decorative trim that hung above a wheel.

"They could probably raise this thing without a court order because they are outside of New Jersey waters, but the real reason to do it is to protect their rights and keep interlopers away," said Peter E. Hess, a Wilmington lawyer who represented the group.

The discovery is bound to become more publicized this month, Hess said, and will be featured on a History Channel documentary tomorrow at 9 p.m. "Everyone and their brother will want to go and try to grab a piece of brass off the trains," Hess said.

Crisanto and historians said they have little information about the engines' history - the precise year they were built, for example, or how they landed at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

But by analyzing certain clues - the wagon-top boiler and the valve controls, for example - historians believe the steam locomotives were manufactured in New England, probably Boston, between 1851 and 1854. Beyond that, they say, little is certain, because railroad records were poor. Some historians suspect the engines slipped off a freighter headed south during a storm. But that is just a guess.

Apparently, the engines sat undisturbed several miles from Asbury Park for more than a century, until 1985, when a charter-boat captain, Paul Hepler, found them while checking

Old trains discovered off NJ coast are called 'real archeological find' (continued)

netting.

"The captain told me about them years ago," said Dan Lieb of Neptune, the president of the New Jersey Historical Divers Association. "We were out on his boat, looking for lobsters, exploring shipwrecks. And when he told me about the locomotives, I thought, 'I don't want to look at trains,' I want to see shipwrecks."

Years later, Lieb said, he finally decided to see the trains for himself. He and fellow divers soon became infatuated. They took pictures and made drawings. Then he began making inquiries via the Internet.

At first, some speculated that the trains were sunk by the Germans during World War II, citing well-known attacks in the area at the time.

Eventually, the divers' information and details reached White, the former Smithsonian curator.

"They finally sent me a videotape - and I said, 'Aha! I think I know what these are,' " White said. "The cylinders were on an angle, a very antique feature. The double valves, one on top of each other, another antique feature."

They were tank engines, circa 1850.

Lieb, who had been reading White's book, *American Locomotives: An Engineering History, 1830-1880*, took the news to Crisanto and his fellow train enthusiasts. "They came to one of our board meetings and brought drawings, pictures, a few artifacts," said Crisanto, the all-volunteer museum's chairman. "And... our jaws kind of hit the ground."

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