

Full-Size Steam Locomotive And Reproduction Western Town Now Operating In Eastern Kentucky



"Number 77" is shown as she climbs a steep grade coming into the depot at Tombstone Junction, near Cumberland Falls, Kentucky. The giant steam locomotive is only one of three such engines operating East of the Mississippi River and has the distinction of being the only full-size steam locomotive operating in Kentucky.

Wheeeeeoooooooo!!!!

A startled motorist, who had been in danger of dozing, sits bolt upright at the wheel.

"What the . . .," he starts, almost unconsciously. Smiling at his alarm, he thinks, "If I didn't know better, I'd swear that was a train."

But what the motorist heard was not just a train . . . not the monotonous "honk, honk" of the familiar diesel engine . . . but the loneliest sound in the world . . . the mournful wail of a "wildcat whistle on a steam locomotive."

His shock is understandable. Driving along Highway 90, he passes the entrance to Cumberland Falls State Park. For some time he has been winding in and out of the curves of this unfamiliar road that connects Interstate 75 with Highway South 27. Both sides of the road have been lined with the shadowy green depths of lush woodland . . . Daniel Boone National Forest.

Preoccupied with his contemplation of the beauty of the budding dogwoods and redbuds hovering over blankets of wild flowers, it is only natural that he is shocked by the unfamiliar sound. Is he

dreaming or has he mistaken some other sound for the wail of a steam whistle?

No, there it is again. Wailing like a thousand banshees, the sound echoing and re-echoing up the steep ravines and valleys which make up the Cumberland River basin. Whether he realizes it or not, he is listening to a sound of vanishing Americana . . . a sound from the past.

Actually, his hearing is quite accurate. Old Number 77 has just rolled out of Tombstone Junction and is making her way downgrade,

around the side of a mountain, and through a nearby cut. Making one of her approximately 20 trips a day, Number 77 puffs away, chugging up a 5 percent grade, punctuating the labored "clickety clack" of her wheels with an occasional blast of the whistle.

Just An Idea At First

The story of old Number 77 and Tombstone Junction started many months ago in the fertile mind of Morris Stephens, a businessman who operates the Falls Motel located on Highway 90, just a few yards west of Cumberland Falls.

Most men would have been satisfied with the successful operation of a modern motel. A miniature golf course, a swimming pool, a camping area, a restaurant, and a 65-unit resort center would seem to be sufficient to keep several ordinary people busy. But Morris Stephens is not an ordinary person. Although quite successful in business, he considers himself more of a builder than a businessman. Once he has started a business and has seen it well on its way to success, his active mind turns to new construction projects . . . new ideas. He becomes restless and impatient, a sign that his family has come to recognize as the birth pains of a new project.

Therefore, it came as no shock when Morris calmly stated to his father, Millard Stephens, and his son, Rick, one evening that it was about time that they went into the railroad business. They waited patiently for Morris to continue, curious to know what fantastic



These three men conceived the idea for Tombstone Junction and then carried the plan to completion. They are, from left: Morris Stephens, Millard Stephens (Morris' father), and Rick Stephens (Morris' son).

plan his mind had conceived this time. Both listened quietly, occasionally exchanging rather dubious looks, as Morris outlined his plan for not only a new railroad, but also for a new town, patterned after the old western towns of post-Civil War days. Skeptical at first, they eventually became infected with Morris' contagious enthusiasm and before the evening was gone, both were joining in with ideas of their own. "Why not have a saloon patterned after the old western bistros?" "How about shoot-outs on the street?" "We'll have to have a jail, a trading post, a leather shop, a restaurant" . . . each contributed his ideas of what a western town should have.

Without realizing it, these three men were laying the foundation for a tourist resort complex that was to cost nearly a million dollars and would consume many months of hard labor and countless hours



Cecil Sutton is the man who built Tombstone. His creative carpentry skills transformed Tombstone from a dream to a reality.

of planning. However, spurred on by the encouragement of Morris' wife, Fayrene, and his 16-year-old daughter, Ginny, the three men moved ahead with their plans.

They already had a good start toward a complete resort complex. The modern motel with its attendant facilities provided a good nucleus. The Stephenses owned 500 acres of land that fronted on Highway 90, as well as extended to the river just above famous Cumberland Falls. Now, all they had to do was to construct the town, build the railroad, find a steam locomotive, and tend to a multitude of other details which would have caused the average man to throw up his hands and shout, "Impossible."

However, "impossible" isn't a word in the Stephenses' vocabulary. They had no doubt that they could do the job and they set about it with the calm assurance of men who have complete faith in themselves and their ideas.

The thought of a modern railroad

construction engineer looking at the potential location of the track would bring a smile to the lips of even the most casual observer. The terrain was so rough and hilly that to-



Engineer Charlie Penny-cuff gazes out the locomotive window as he pulls a long blast on the "wildcat whistle." Jerome Marcum also is an engineer on Number 77.

day's experts would have turned away in disgust and snorted that inevitable word, "Impossible." The steep hills descended abruptly, forming a sharp "V" rather than a valley. The thick limestone rocks were barely hidden by the thin layer of earth. Thick entanglements of ivy and undergrowth threatened the existence of the huge trees which stuck out at dangerous angles from the bluffs and hillsides. Anybody with one grain of knowledge would know that the entire project was absurd.

The only trouble was that the Stephenses family didn't know a thing about railroads, at that time; therefore, they didn't know that the whole thing was impossible. Happy in their lack of knowledge, they merely proceeded to do whatever everybody said was impossible to do.

They hired a bulldozer operator but soon found that dynamite would be more useful. As a matter of fact, they used 40 tons of dynamite to blast their way through the solid rock that barred their path. They bought some used ties for their tracks, but the new ones were cut from the timber on their own land. Treated ties were expensive, so they installed their own treatment plant, cutting their cost per tie from approximately \$7.00 to about \$2.00. As they blasted away the solid rock, they used it for the bed of their railroad.

Morris Stephenses had decided that he was not going to accept substitutes. If he was going to have a railroad, he wanted the real thing. Therefore, he insisted that regulation 56½ gauge track be laid rather than the usual 36 gauge used on most tourist railroads. Everything had to be authentic to suit Morris and his railroad was to be no exception.

He used local labor for much of the work, utilizing the skill of retired railroad men from nearby towns and communities for advice and counsel. Finally, the two-and-one-half-mile track was completed.

Old "Seventy-Seven"

However, the Stephenses family, not noted for putting things off, had already gone "train" shopping. It was during this time that they first made the acquaintance of old Number 77. Built in 1944, in the same style that distinguished
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This photo shows only a small part of the authentic western town, Tombstone Junction. Taken in early May before tourists began vacation traveling, the photo shows the Mercantile Company, Red Garter Saloon, and Train Depot. The town also has an Indian Museum and a host of other shops designed as replicas of the post-Civil War era.

"Old 77" Has A Proud Past, Will Now Run For Many Years

steam locomotives at the turn of the century, the proud giant had been retired to a shed in Morehead, Kentucky, by the Morehead and North Fork Railroad. She had long since been replaced by a shiny new diesel.

Old Number 77 had a proud past. For years she had roared along the tracks from Morehead and Clearfield in Morgan County, through Clack Mountain and Poppin' Rock Tunnels, past the Winding Stairs and Twin Tunnels to Wrigley in Morgan County. Her wailing whistle sent shivers up the spine on a dark, stormy night as the 150-ton behemoth flung her weight against the wind and rain. She had fought the good fight, but progress began to catch up with her. At last, she joined her predecessors in retirement, the final victim of the diesel locomotive. However, old Number 77 was stubborn as she was powerful. She was the last steam locomotive to operate actively in Kentucky.

The proud possessors of a full-size steam locomotive, the Stephenses were now faced with the task of getting their new possession back to Cumberland Falls. Old Number 77 traveled to Stearns by rail and from there to Tombstone Junction by a "heavy equipment hauling" truck. This was no easy job. Starting early one morning, the 18-mile trip from Stearns required almost a full day. You can imagine the consternation of motorists when the flagmen asked them to be careful when the train coming up the highway passed. One truck driver was heard to comment, "My wife is never going to believe me when I tell her I had to pull over to make room for a train to pass me on the road."

A distinguished locomotive deserved an equally distinguished engineer, and Morris found two in the persons of Charlie Pennycuff and Jerome Marcum, both retired engineers who had worked for the Kentucky-Tennessee Railroad, operating out of Stearns. Old 77 and the two men had something in common. All three had honorably retired and had thought their "running" days were over. Now, here they were back on the job,

hauling passengers in the six cars the Stephens family had made out of train cabooses.

Practically every day, during the tourist season, crowds line up to enjoy a ride on this real-life, full-size train. More than 27,000 persons took rides last year, the first year of operation. Parents are anxious to have their children enjoy the experience before the steam locomotive becomes extinct. Adults like to recapture some of the excitement of their long-ago "first train ride." And always, there is the old-timer who stands on the outskirts of the crowd gazing at old Number 77 with a far-away look in his eyes. And you know that another retired railroader has come to look and to remember. Who knows what thoughts go through his mind? Is he remembering past experiences when most of his life was consumed by another locomotive? Is he recalling past acquaintances who spent their lives working on trains like this? Are names like Old 97, Casey Jones, or the Wabash Cannonball spinning through his head? Only he knows . . . and he isn't talking because he is conscious of the lump in his throat and the hint of moisture in his eyes.

Authentic Western Town

While the railroad was being com-

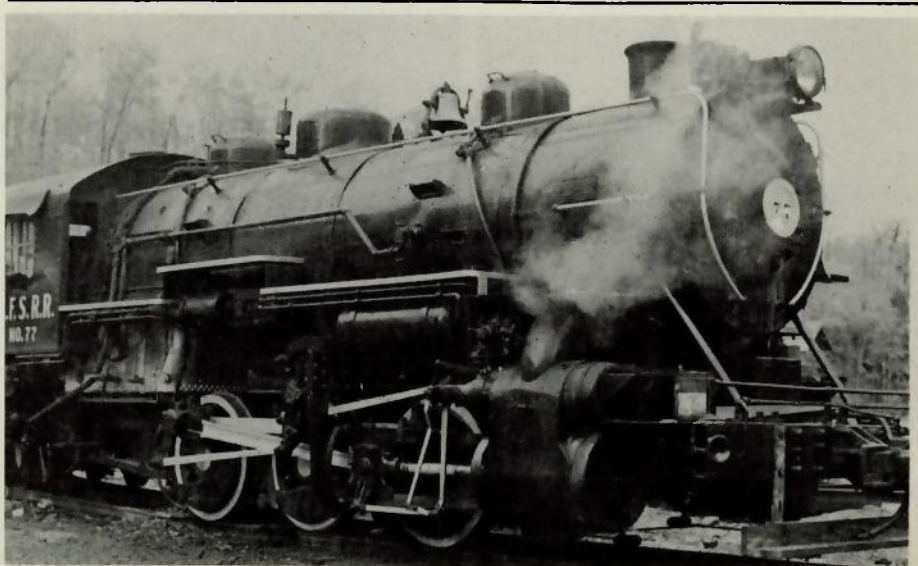
pleted, work was progressing rapidly on Tombstone Junction. Under the skilled hand of the carpenter Cecil Sutton, an authentic western town replaced the rocks and undergrowth in the valley. Hills were leveled and ravines were filled to make room for the townsite. A handcrafted leather working shop, train depot, a photo shop, a restaurant, an undertaking parlor, a post office, a mercantile company, an Indian trading post, the Red Garter Saloon, and several other buildings line the wide street. Store roofs cover board sidewalks and chairs sitting in front of the stores make everything so authentic that one wouldn't be surprised to see the ghost of Wild Bill Hickok or Wyatt Earp striding up the street, holstered pistols strapped to their sides and a malicious glint in their eyes.

Concessions are leased out and practically every lease to date has been taken by local businessmen. Tombstone Junction promises to be an economic asset to this depressed area of McCreary County not only because of the numerous tourists it will attract, but also because it will provide employment for more than 60 persons.

Tombstone Junction offers something for the entire family — gift shops for Mom, gunsmith shops and leatherworking handicraft for Dad, and regular shoot-outs on the street and train robberies, all staged in the most authentic manner, for the youngsters. Of course, the train ride is for everybody.

When you visit Tombstone

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Number 77 is shown here as she sets idle in the depot at Tombstone Junction. Even when not running, the boilers on the 150-ton giant are steaming . . . it's almost as though the train were breathing. By keeping the boiler fired constantly, the train can be ready to run within 10 minutes.

removable, elevated inner baskets with dividers and handles.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

An ideal device for fishermen, hunters and campers is "Eye-Lite." Made by a New Jersey firm of the same name, the Eye-Lite is actually two battery-operated lights attached to an eye-frame. Eye-frames and battery case are made of lightweight plastic and may be worn over glasses. The device is a perfect way to obtain extra illumination while leaving your hands free.

RELIGIOUS SERVICE

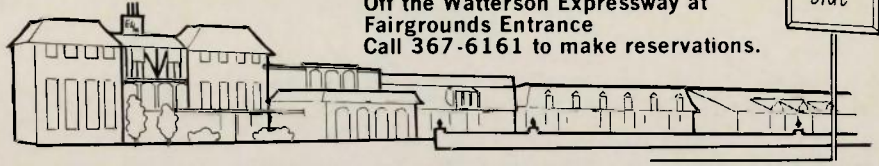
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Tombstone Junction

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Junction be prepared for a pleasant surprise. As you turn off Highway 90, go up a slight grade, and then drop over the crest of a hill, you can hardly keep from being impressed by the picture from the past you will see in the valley below. Rough oak lumber and hand cut shingles give a rustic appearance, but the briefest glance will be sufficient to assure you that every building has been skillfully and sturdily constructed. When you step into the Red Garter Saloon, you will see a replica of the old West so real that you will gaze up the steps to the balcony to see if "Miss Kitty" is coming down. Beautifully costumed "Can-Can" girls perform on the stage and then double as waitresses. You can order anything from sarsaparilla to "three fingers of red-eye" — but no matter what you order, you'll get root beer. A band has been engaged to provide that "good old western music."

When you consider the work, the investment, and all the effort which

have gone into Tombstone Junction, you might think Morris Stephens and his partners—father, Millard; son, Rick; daughter, Ginny and wife, Fayrene—would be ready to rest awhile. However, a conversation with Morris will dispel this notion. Already he is talking about a natural amphitheater that will seat more than a thousand persons. He plans to book acts from the "Grand Ole Opry" in Nashville, Tennessee, along with other stars. There are also expansion plans for Tombstone Junction. An Indian fort to be secluded in the woods near the railway is in the planning stage. These are just a few of the future plans which are being made. Immediate projects include an enlargement of the present 500-car parking lot to one that will provide space for about 1500 cars. And, in addition to this ambitious schedule, Morris still has time to be an outstanding director for South Kentucky RECC.

Remember, Morris Stephens is a builder. When you hear many of these ideas, you're tempted to say "Impossible." But when you get to know the Stephens family and become affected by their

enthusiasm, you have no doubt that they will do everything they are planning. The question is not "how?," but "when?" Judging from past records, the answer is "very soon."

Current Living

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who said, "As long as there are 345 calories in a piece of apple pie, I'll have a large piece." Her large piece would have more than 345 calories!

It's the same thing with every kind of food we eat. If we were to eat a cup of cottage cheese, we'd be having from 200 to 240 calories (depending on whether the cottage cheese was creamed or dry). It's the same with any food—low-calorie or not.

So maybe the best advice for dieters is still that given by our old family doctor: "Take small helpings — then exercise by shaking your head from side to side when offered a second helping."

Let's meet by the yogurt counter — and exchange diet recipes!

JUNE IS DAIRY MONTH!



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