

Monte Holm's engine: A Moses Lake connection

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Submitted by Erin Shaver

MOSES LAKE - The Engine 557 restoration in Alaska would not be occurring if it weren't for longtime Moses Lake resident and Moses Lake Steel founder, the late Monte Holm. When the Alaska Railroad sold this final vestige of its steam program Holm purchased the engine and prevented it from being melted as scrap.

During the depths of the depression, the teenaged Holm traveled around the country as a hobo. His autobiography, "Once A Hobo..." details that life. He later became a successful businessman, and 557 was said to be one of his most prized possessions and a reminder of his days riding the rails.

Longtime residents and visitors to Moses Lake may remember the engine. It arrived in 1965 and Holm ran it several times in Moses Lake until the mid-1970s when liability issues made operation inadvisable. After that, 557 remained as a featured display at his House of Poverty Museum, which displayed antiques, collectibles and heirlooms, including several other rail cars.

Holm passed away in 2006, and a few years later Holm family friends Jim and Vic Jansen, of Lynden Transport, bought the engine with the goal it would operate again in Alaska. They donated 557 back to the Alaska Railroad in 2012 with the stipulation that it would be returned to working condition.

Carrying on another part of Holm's legacy, Engine 557 Restoration team members offer Werther's candy to their engine house guests, continuing Holm's practice of giving a "gold hobo coin" to his museum visitors over the years.

To learn more about the restoration, visit <http://alaskarails.org/pix/former-loco/557/restore/index.html>.