

St. Francis turntable now in use at railroad museum

Several years ago, cranes and trucks moved into St. Francis to lift out and carry away the old train turntable which was back in the brush and trees just north of the main tracks. It took a couple of days of maneuvering before the turntable, removed in two sections, was moved to the Colorado Railroad Museum in Golden.

Recently, an article written by Kleran Nicholson, appeared in *The Denver Post* which talked about the installation of the turntable which now helps with restorations of trains.

According to the article, Bill Gould, the executive director of the museum, can move 80,000 pounds of timber and steel with the turntable. Detailed engineering, balance and lots of grease enable Mr. Gould, and others, to spin a massive turntable at the museum, pushing it with a large wooden lever.

“Getting her going is not problem. Stopping is her problem,” Mr. Gould said with a laugh. “We’ll be able to turn a locomotive by hand.”

Recently, the turntable spun a 40,000-pound passenger coach to line it up with track leading to the museum’s roadhouse.

“We spun the coach with two guys,” said Gould. “It was no problem.”

Museum officials plan to keep the 72-foot-long turntable busy, funneling railroad cars and locomotives into the roundhouse to be pampered and restored.

Visitors can watch workers inside the roundhouse from a public viewing area, but a sign warns: “Don’t Stare at Welding Arcs.”

The turntable and roundhouse are the final stage of a six-year, \$1.5 million improvement project at the museum that includes a library built to resemble a train depot and a looped track.

Large wooden doors, 17 feet tall and weighing 1,200 pounds, are attached to five roundhouse bays with custom-made, 40-pound hinges. The doors and surrounding detailed brickwork are true to original roundhouse details.

Before the roundhouse was built, restoration work was done outside.

“It isn’t really pleasant to crawl under a car in the middle of January in the snow,” said Rich Farewell, 54, president of the

museum’s board of directors. “Now it’s a luxury to be able to work in a place that is well lighted and heated.”

The turntable, built in 1927, was hauled to Golden from St. Francis where it took two 70-ton cranes to lift it.

Getting it to Golden was one thing. Getting it to work was another.

“Nobody had a degree in Turntable 101,” Mr. Gould said. “But it has worked out rather well.”

The museum, owned by the non-profit Colorado Railroad Historical Foundation, takes great pride in offering a hands-on experience.

Recently, on a mild November day, children climbed in and out of locomotives, passenger cars and cabooses. The clang of engine bells filled the air.

The museum fires up its narrow gauge, steam locomotive only about four times each year.

Taken from the Oct. 3, 1996 *The St. Francis Herald*

St. Francis is the end of the line for the railroad and, in the early days, the turntable was used to turn the trains around and head them back in the direction they had come from. The turntable was also used when maintenance work was done on the engines.

The turntable in St. Francis had not been used for a number of years as, today, there are two engines — one facing each way — which pull the cars.

In an article which appeared in *The St. Francis Herald* on Oct. 3, 1996, it was printed that Marilyn Holzwarth, Cheyenne County historian, said that the Cheyenne County Rustler reported that the train whistle was heard for the first time on June 26, 1888. At that time, the tracklayers were a few miles east of St. Francis. The turntable and roundhouse were put in soon after.

Ken Quigley, who was the depot agent in St. Francis from 1966 to 1991 said that the turntable was used occasionally while he was still an agent as sometimes, a train would come in with only one engine. The last time he remembered it being used was around 1980.

Tobe Zweygardt, St. Francis, remembers as a child, watching men

turn the table with a large engine which was operated with manpower. Mr. Quigley also remembers using manpower to turn the engine.

Ordinarily, the turntable was powered by air pressure but when it was not used very often, it did not work right and it was necessary to use the long poles on either side of the table to turn the engine. Mr. Quigley also noted that another secret to having the engine work properly was making sure that the engine was perfectly balanced on the table.

The tracks which led to the round house were made of very light metal. Mr. Quigley remembers one very cold morning, the big engine was turned on the table and headed toward the roundhouse when the tracks shattered like glass.

“I suppose it was because of the bitterly cold temperatures that the track shattered,” he said.

A special crew was called and the engine jacked up so new track could be laid.

The round house, which was constructed in August 1888, was torn down round 1970. It was a wooden frame but bricks had been laid between the studs. Mr. Quigley was not sure if the bricks had been laid for insulation or to make it more fire proof.

Mr. Zweygardt remembers when the train depot was a very active place. Besides the depot and round house, there was a windmill and tank with a spout to supply the trains with water, a coal house, section house and an ice house. The ice was cut from a pond near where John Finley now lives and it was used to keep foods cold while being transported.

The June 21, 1888, issue of The Rustler reported that the Burlington and Missouri Company (railroad company) expected to make St. Francis a division station by locating machine shops in the area but this did not happen. Today, St. Francis is still the end of the line.

There were several people who showed up to see the turntable off and it is good to know that the old turntable that once served trains coming to St. Francis is now being put to good use in the museum in Golden.



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