

2016-03 PT. 2

Patrick Durand, Martin Gutoski, and Steve Hormann talk about Patrick's role in founding the Tanana Valley Railroad Museum

January 21, 2016

Series: Pioneer Park Railway Museum Rail Tales Lecture series

Martin Gutoski introduces everyone again.

Gutoski asked Patrick Durand why it is important to restore engines like this and other railroad artifacts. Gutoski said their engine was the first engine in the Interior and Durand is working on the last engine. Durand said these are all technologies that brought us to where we are today. People can get involved and learn how to work those same technologies using some modern techniques. He said there is self satisfaction. He said most people have no concept of the hundreds or thousands of hours in projects. They have probably put in more than 30,000 man hours in their project 557. Volunteers give different reasons for volunteering but they all want to be part of it. He said that goes for their sponsors too. Leslie McCartney commented that some of the volunteers don't even live very close to the project. Durand said that is true. He said volunteers drive from Anchorage to Wasilla. The site they are working on is owned by the railroad. It was a former lumber warehouse. The railroad acquired it. He said he likes to think that the project has its own major supporters. Their other possible site was in Anchorage and the building was collapsed by snow before they had to make their decision about site selection. They ended up going with their Wasilla site. The community support in the valley has been phenomenal. Gutoski talked about their museum which was a DOT project with facilities. Gutoski said there is a big thrill about restoring something, but then you have to maintain it and keep it operational. He asked about keeping volunteers motivated. Durand said the people who with his project from the very beginning are still there with the project. They have had 24 consistent volunteers over the past year. Some have been there since 2012. The transition from building to its operation takes different skills. With 557 it will never be done. There will be continuing maintenance and they are grooming people to do this. He is gratified for the young people who are showing up. There are firms who volunteer their employees who are paid for the day. Steve Hormann said they do have a handful of younger people who are involved. Steve remembers the locomotive when he was a child. He has an interest in 557. Durand said 556 was maintained as playground equipment for a while. People remember it when they were children. He said it is a demonstration of the technology of the day. Now it is behind a fence and it makes a nice display. Hormann talked about their family link to the railroad. Durand said people question the importance of railroads, but in the past people drew a paycheck from working on the railroad or a navigation company. Those were the industries that produced regular jobs.

[break in interview]

Gutoski said people going through the museum have a connection with railroads including internationally. Durand said there is an international language in railroads. Gutoski talked about a Japanese group visiting the museum and the Japanese interest in railroads.