

Whippany Railway Museum

"Preserving New Jersey's Railroad History"

1 Railroad Plaza

P.O. Box 16, Whippany, NJ 07981-0016

(973) 887-8177



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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100-YEAR OLD STEAM LOCOMOTIVE DONATED!

Whippany Railway Museum Announces the Donation of 100-Year Old Steam Locomotive No. 385 to the Museum Collection

WHIPPANY, NJ – For about 50 years, **Old Number 385** pulled freight trains through the rural landscape of North Carolina and Virginia. She had worked faithfully for two separate railroads and sadly, the time had come in the mid 1950's when she was set aside to be scrapped on a small railroad in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia.

Let us go back through the mists of time to the beginning...

The year is 1907, the place, the sprawling Eddystone Plant of the world renowned Baldwin Locomotive Works, just outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It is the month of November, and it is here that the story begins. Twenty-five "Consolidation" type locomotives have just been constructed for the **Southern Railway (SR)** for use on fast freight trains. Among them is **Southern Railway Number 385**.

No. 385 (along with her sister engines), is a **Class H4 2-8-0** locomotive based out of Spencer, North Carolina. No. 385 powered freight trains along the SR rails for 45 years. By the end of her career on the Southern, No. 385 was pulling smaller, local trains, as the larger, long-distance ones were now being led by new, powerful diesel locomotives.

By the 1950's many of the old steamers were heading off to the scrapper; some were lucky, such as No. 385. In November 1952 the **Virginia Blue Ridge Railway (VBR)** of Piney River, VA purchased No. 385 and renumbered it as their Number 6. The VBR took the engine out of service after a very short time due to parts scarcity, and also owing to the fact that she was just too BIG for their use. The old engine was due to be scrapped, but in 1963, she was rescued (for the first of two times over the next 36 years) by the late **Earle H. Gil, Sr.** (then residing in Parsippany, NJ).

Gil, having had a life-long fascination with both full-size and model railroading conceived the idea of restoring one of the magnificent steam locomotives of the past to full operation and eventually running a vintage early-20th century passenger train in New Jersey. In 1963, Gil ultimately selected VBR No. 6 and had it transported from Virginia to Morristown, NJ...where he completely restored the locomotive to active service in an incredible 3 months time. Nearly two years would pass before his excursion railroad, named the **Morris County Central Railroad (MCC)**, would begin full operations on May 9, 1965. Based out of Whippany, NJ from 1965 until 1973, Gil moved the operations of the MCC to Newfoundland, NJ in 1974. The economics of the time were hard on the MCC, and the line went out of business at the end of 1980.

Throughout the 15-year life of the MCC, No. 385 could be found pulling passengers, many of whom had never encountered a live steam engine. In 1978, No. 385 was taken out of service, at age 71. She needed major repairs that the MCC just could not afford at that time. She has not been under steam since that time, 30 years ago.

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In 1982 the **Delaware Otsego System – DO** (parent company of the **New York, Susquehanna & Western Railway - NYSW**) acquired the assets of the Morris County Central, including No. 385. After many subsequent years of storage, and taking on the sad patina of neglect, the NYSW donated the old locomotive to the **Bergen County Vocational & Technical High School** in June 1990.

In October of 1990, the late, **Joseph Supor, Jr.**, founder of **J. Supor & Son Trucking & Rigging Co., Inc.** donated the cost of rigging and trucking *Old No. 385* nearly 2 miles from the rails of the NYSW to Bergen Tech, where the locomotive was lifted into place on a panel of display track in area adjacent to the school athletic field, alongside the Hackensack River.

The donation of the locomotive from the NYSW to the school was brought about when several staff members and instructors expressed the desire of the school to acquire the locomotive for instructional and educational purposes within Bergen Tech's "Stationary Steam Course". The intent of the donation would be for students to have a "hands-on" learning experience while working on a unique, early 20th century locomotive restoration project.

By 1999, the direction had changed drastically at Bergen Tech, when the "Stationary Steam Course" (which had been established in 1952) was totally eliminated and all facets of the program were disassembled and removed. Reportedly, preparations were being made to immediately dispose of *Old No. 385* by scrapping her.

At this point, Mr. Supor became aware of the dire situation and thereby became the next person to step up, and once again, save No. 385 from being scrapped. Mr. Supor literally saved the engine at the very last minute, as it was due to be cut up for scrap within hours of his acquisition. Mr. Supor's men carefully trucked the old engine to his huge facility in Harrison, NJ.

Mr. Supor stored No. 385 with intentions of cosmetically restoring the old locomotive for display at his Company headquarters. Due to constraints of available time, Mr. Supor's project never came to fruition. There were many discussions on what to do to ultimately preserve this unique relic from our Nation's industrial past.

At some point in 2005, Earle Gil and Joe Supor met and found that they had a lot in common, especially No. 385. The seeds were sown for the eventual donation of No. 385 to the **Whippany Railway Museum**.

www.WhippanyRailwayMuseum.net

Unfortunately, neither Earle Gil, Sr. (who passed away in June 2007), nor Joseph Supor, Jr. (who passed away in September 2007) lived to see No. 385 preserved at the Museum, where Earle was a Charter Member and Trustee.

In the Fall of 2007, **Joseph Supor, III**, President of J. Supor & Son, and the Estate of Joseph Supor, Jr. formally donated No. 385 as a gift to the Museum. The donation, transportation and eventual display of the locomotive at Whippany is an effort by the younger Supor to not only give the public a chance to view this unique Transportation treasure, but to also honor the preservation efforts and memory of his Father. The elder Supor had been instrumental in saving many historic rail vehicles by providing transportation for these relics and thereby assisting a variety of transportation-related museums and organizations throughout the Northeast.

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Monday, February 4, 2008 is the day that *Old No. 385* is expected to travel from Supor Industrial Park, 500 Supor Boulevard, Harrison, New Jersey through various New Jersey roadways until its final destination at the Museum site along Route 10, Whippany, New Jersey. The locomotive will be offloaded by large J. Supor & Son Trucking & Rigging cranes at East Frederick Place in Cedar Knolls, New Jersey. Once it is placed back on the rails, No. 385 will be towed approximately two miles to the Museum site in **Whippany** by the **Morristown & Erie Railway**.

The **Whippany Railway Museum** is a 501 (c) 3, not-for-profit, educational / historical organization dedicated to the preservation and restoration of New Jersey's rich Railroad & Transportation Heritage. The Museum is located at **1 Railroad Plaza, (intersection of Route 10 West & Whippany Road) in Whippany, NJ.**

The Museum may be contacted at: **(973) 887-8177** or visit the website at: www.WhippanyRailwayMuseum.net

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