

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

August 14, 1964

Ike's Old Engine

The historic British steam locomotive which drew Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower's staff train during World War II arrived in New York harbor aboard the freighter "American Planter" recently.

The 122-ton, 72-foot-long locomotive, officially named the "Dwight D. Eisenhower" and bearing his nameplate, was retired by the British railway last year. It was presented to David K.E. Bruce, the U.S. ambassador to the United Kingdom, last April 27 and left Southampton the next day for its eventual destination at the National Railroad Museum at Green Bay, Wis.

The presentation culminated three years of efforts to add the famed locomotive to the museum's collection of 15 historic steam engines. The original contact in behalf of the museum was made in June, 1961, by Arthur E. Stoddard, president of the Union Pacific Railroad, who was in charge of Gen. Eisenhower's train during World War II. But the British Railroad Board decided that the locomotive, which at one time held the world's speed record, "still had many years of sterling service in front of it."

Eventually Harold E. Fuller, chairman of the railroad museum, secured an agreement that the museum would be the first to be considered if the locomotive were retired. However, according to the British government ruling, a donation of this type required payment of its scrap value, in this case amounting to \$9,000.

After the British Railways Board finally agreed to donate the locomotive, Wisconsin businessmen chipped in enough to pay for the engine's trans-Atlantic voyage. It was unloaded on May 11 of this year and was the star of acceptance ceremonies the next day. Following the ceremonies, the locomotive was towed over the tracks of five railroads to Green Bay.

The huge engine is of the type designated "Pacific" in the United States. It has four leading carriage wheels, six drive wheels and two trailing carriage wheels.

At the museum it joined the only other locomotive in the collection from outside the United States. The other is called the "Pershing" after Gen. John H. Pershing, who used it during World War I.

A challenge to our historical societies has been made by Dr. Robert E. Burns, president of the University of the Pacific at Stockton.

Dr. Burns gives this advice: "Although all historical societies are keenly aware of their responsibilities to preserve the past, especially the ancient past, many of them are overlooking a wonderful opportunity to be of service to future historians by preserving as much of the significant present as possible.

"Too many times that valuable, romantic and interesting history occurred only during the Gold Rush period in California. More recent and contemporary events are neglected and ignored in order to space and rework the limited knowledge of what happened in the mining days."

Dr. Burns continues: "Exciting and significant events of the present should challenge the interest and energy of the societies and they should make every effort to preserve the knowledge about them. Never in the history of civilization have there been so many facilities and instruments for preserving history.

"Photography in its many forms will make visual history live for the future generations. Wax records and tapes will preserve the voices of the leaders of the present. Photostats of old pictures and documents, microfilms of old records and newspapers that are crumbling with age, museum collections of artifacts that were used in historical events, are all means by which the events of the present will be preserved for future use of the historian who will be interpreting the 1960's."