Thomas G. Thompson, Jr. and his train
Tommy was born on October 3, 1923 and raised in Seattle. His father worked in the San Juan Islands.

At the age of 16, Tommy became interested in steam engines when he got a job shoveling sawdust at a steam powered sawmill on San Juan Island.

After high school he worked for the Northern Pacific Railway in Seattle.

During World War II he was drafted and spent two years in Iran as an engineer on a state railroad.
After World War II he studied to become a mechanical engineer at the University of Washington.

By 1949, Tommy and his brother used the boat to travel from Seattle to McConnell Island where they were building a house for their parents. Tommy continued to use it for the rest of his life.

By the mid-1950s, Tommy had become a mechanical engineer and was hired by the Shell Oil Refinery in Anacortes to run and maintain the refineries steam turbines and pumps.

He and his family moved to a home on the north side of Campbell Lake near Anacortes.

Over the years he purchased several steam engines and restored others. He helped restore the Seattle City Light steam locomotive which ran for several years between Sedro Woolley and Concrete. He also built a 9 inch gauge track on which he ran a train on McConnell Island.
## Thompson Train history in Anacortes

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In Planning Stage—
Shell Engineer Asks Okay
For 6,000-Foot Rail Line

By JUNE HARDER

A railroad line bearing the name of Anacortes, the oceangoing ports of the city where the port city is a major rail center and The New York of the West, now seems as close to reality as it ever was in those booming and optimistic times.

Now in the planning stage is the great "Anacortes and Rosario Strait R.R." which, if the necessary miles of roadbed can be surveyed and permission obtained from all authorities involved, may someday see its day along a breathtakingly beautiful waterfront route in western Anacortes.

Thomas G. "Tommy" Thompson Jr., steam engine enthusiast with one miniature train already in operation, has blueprints for the narrow-gauge scenic railroad he's envisioned as a unique tourist attraction for Anacortes. The line would run between the Ship Harbor ferry terminal and Sunset Beach, with a grand total of 6,000 feet.

A steam locomotive patterned after one he has previously built on authentic engines of the 1880's, would be capable of pulling five open cars. Southern-gauge track would be laid on existing ties on what is still railroad right-of-way although no longer in use.

Does Thompson have the knowledge to carry out such a project?

He is, and is now operating a miniature narrow-gauge railroad on a tiny piece of property on the San Juan Island owned by his family. Thus, though probably the dreams of every youngster who ever played with model trains, is not just a toy. The sturdy quarter-sided line which so far includes a locomotive, tender and gondola car all are designed and built by Thompson, supplies and delivered to the beaches, and provides trans-island transportation.

Sleeping cars, planned for the next addition to the still-expanding line, will serve asowy camp-out beds for young Anacortes, Rosario, LaConner and Badger Ford children. Thompson.

The first track for this latter idea, a nine-inch-gauge, is described by Thompson as "a composite of all the things I have heard since I was a small child," was laid in 1953. Ties constructed from hemlock lumber have been used, and engine parts made from iron found on the site in a horse-drawn plow which averages 3 1/2 miles and a half per hour.

The WEATHER

Washington, Washington — Generally clear skies and mild weather today, with a high of 70 degrees. A slight breeze began early morning, clearing up and out of the east. Low tonight to 56 degrees. Coastal areas are expected to remain in the 50's and 60's. 

SWALLOW'S SALES, INC.

Union Oil Distributors

Open Saturday mornings
The project was begun in 1965, with the inaugural run in the summer of 1979

“In 1965, inquiries about a used engine at the Homestake Mining Company in South Dakota led Thompson to “a hasty change in vacation plans (that) took me and my family to Lead where we inspected #22.”

“I immediately started to plan how I would transform this ugly duckling into a swan.”

Tommy Thompson brought working passenger trains – miniature ones – back to Anacortes in 1979. For the rest of his life he operated the Anacortes Railway, which he painstakingly built himself and ran with the assistance of his wife Anne and their children.
Ship Harbor railway by ’82 eyed

By JOHN FORTMEYER
Editor, the American

It may not be 3.1 miles, but to Tommy Thompson, 3,500 feet is a good start.

That’s why Thompson, local railroad enthusiast, is now concentrating his efforts on establishing the first segment of his proposed Anacortes steam railway in the Ship Harbor area by 1982.

“The first extension would operate solely as an attraction for ferry passengers waiting at Ship Harbor,” Thompson wrote last week in a letter to Dick Berg, manager of Washington State Ferries. “The intent of this short operation is to establish credence and good financial base for the future three-mile extension, and to perfect engineering detail and operating procedure.

Thompson has long promoted his dream of a steam railway running the entire 3.1 miles along the Guemes Channel from Ship Harbor to downtown Anacortes.

That vision has amassed support throughout the community since Thompson’s special four-block steam rail operation attracted huge crowds at last August’s Anacortes Arts and Crafts Festival.

However, hopes of establishing the steam run the entire length of the channel were recently impaired when Burlington Northern Railroad said it would be unwilling to lease or sell any of its right-of-way in the area.

Thompson’s letter was written to Berg in hopes of obtaining Washington State Ferries’ approval for a Ship Harbor operation, which would run largely on property the state leases from the Port of Anacortes.

Thompson said he is also negotiating with the port for a possible lease of property by his railway, as well as with a private group planning to make public in the near future its development plan in the Ship Harbor area.

The rail operation could not be established at Ship Harbor before 1982, said Thompson, because sufficient time would be needed for him to build the full five-car train.

In the meantime, he said, a shortened version of the train will run again on Commercial Avenue both this August and in August of 1981 in the annual arts festival.

As envisioned by Thompson, the Ship Harbor operation would include a turntable at the end of the line, a small depot and a 20-foot by 76-foot carhouse in which the trains would be stored.

“The port has said that they might consider building the carhouse if it is designed as a multiple-use facility,” said Thompson.

Thompson’s proposal also received a significant boost last week when it was announced that the state legislature had approved a $10,000 feasibility study of the steam railway plan.

That study will concentrate on the steam railway as a means of relieving overcrowded conditions on San Juan ferry runs.

Operation of the train from the ferry terminal to the downtown area would, in Thompson’s hope, eliminate the need for island residents to use cars when coming to Anacortes.

THE SKETCH above shows the depot and steam train envisioned by local railroad enthusiast Tommy Thompson for the Ship Harbor area in front of the state ferry terminal. Thompson, now negotiating with those controlling property there, would like to see the first segment of his Guemes Channel run going by 1982 with a five-car train.
Railway makes inaugural run
Anacortes Arts and Crafts Festival runs

New plan pushed for steam train

By JOHN FORTMEYER
Editor, the American

 Tommy Thompson, whose steam train carried a record number of passengers last weekend in a temporary run at the Anacortes arts and Crafts Festival, is now presenting a revised plan for permanent operation of the railway.

 Abandoning efforts to establish the narrow-gauge, steam-powered Anacortes Railway on port property at Ship Harbor, Thompson now proposes operating it on railroad rights-of-way near downtown. The city is now negotiating with the Burlington Northern Railroad on acquisition of that right-of-way.

 Thompson’s proposal, which has the support of Mayor Jim Rice, has been submitted to the city. It calls for no expenditure of public money.

 The plan would see the train operated under a 20-year concession agreement with the city, effective June 1, 1986 and extending to Oct. 1, 1984. That schedule would enable the train to take advantage of the high tourist trade expected in this area in 1984, when Vancouver B.C. holds its World’s Fair.

 By making Anacortes more inviting, it will spark the prosperous tourist boom, which is the ultimate destiny of Anacortes,” Thompson writes in his

But Thompson estimates $46,000 total material and labor cost to get the railway going. He foresees total first-year operating expenses of $37,000, and anticipates revenues of $75,000 in first-year ridership of 7,000 persons.

 Subtracting cost for capital improvements from net return, Thompson projects an annual return to the city of $7,000.

 Long-range plans call for extension of the railway from 1 Avenue to the Depot near Cup Sante, where the city proposed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ storm-wheeler “Fresno” be located.

 It’s that possible link to tourist efforts here that now excites the mayor about the railway.

 Rice, who only months ago told Thompson at a mayoral campaign meeting that public support for the railway “just isn’t there,” now says he has taken a new stand on the issue.

 He now supports Thompson’s plan, and believes the public is getting supportive.

 “I think the feeling of the community has changed,” said Rice. “I think the city is coming more toward tourism.”
Thompson’s train approved

By RON JUDD
American staff writer

Tommy Thompson’s 23 tons of railway equipment won’t be stashed away in a Port of Anacortes warehouse much longer.

The Anacortes City Council Monday unanimously approved the concept of Thompson’s Anacortes Railway, laying the tracks for a construction start as early as September. Thompson, after a more than 20-year effort to see his home-built steam locomotive and three cars running up and down Anacortes streets, now only must work out construction details and an exact route with the city.

The proposed route for the railway begins at the old Great Northern Railway Depot, currently used in part as an office for the Anacortes Arts Foundation. Thompson hopes to use part of the depot for a ticketing and waiting area.

From there, the train would travel north on R Avenue to Third Street, then turn and follow Third Street to N Avenue. Turntables at each end of the route would allow the train to turn around and reverse course, he said.

Thompson said he hopes his train will help revitalize the downtown area and draw more visitors to the historic depot and the nearby W.T. Preston.

Thompson now is working with the city building inspector designing an engine and house to be located north of the depot. The building, which would serve as a base for the train, will be styled in the architecture of the early 1900s.

Work on the building should begin by September, he said, and the train streets will be moved there when it is complete. In the meantime, Thompson said he will spend most of the summer at a San Juan Islands saw mill, sawing ties for the railway. The ties and the rails, dating to 1915, then will be laid in a 23-inch trough filled with concrete and foam rubber, which muffles noise and vibration.

The railway could be completed in time for Heritage Days next year, he said. Recruiting help shouldn’t be difficult, he added.

“It’s kind of like Tom Sawyer’s fence,” he said.

Thompson thanked council members for their help in getting the project rolling.

“You did a beautiful job,” he said. “Now I’m determined to give you cause to be pleased with the results.”

The council’s action drew audience applause and three cheers from Bill Mitchell, whose historical murals will be visible along the route.

In other action Monday, the council:

— Approved the lease of an “under-utilized and underdeveloped” park at 38th Street and H Avenue to local veteran’s groups to serve as “Veteran’s Park.”

The park will be leased to veteran’s groups for $1 per year, and the veterans in return will maintain the park and construct a building for a public meeting place.

1985
1985 - City grants franchise for Anacortes Railway to operate on public land for 25 years

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF ANACORTES, GRANTING TO THE ANACORTES RAILWAY COMPANY, ITS SUCCESSORS AND ASSIGNS, THE RIGHT, PRIVILEGE AND AUTHORITY TO LAY DOWN, CONSTRUCT, MAINTAIN AND OPERATE A RAILROAD TRACK OR TRACKS ON, ALONG OVER AND ACROSS E AVENUE, THIRD STREET, AND ON THE DEPOT GROUNDS IN THE CITY OF ANACORTES, AND GRANTING TO SAID COMPANY, ITS SUCCESSORS AND ASSIGNS, A RIGHT OF WAY FOR SUCH TRACK OR TRACKS.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ANACORTES AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. The City of Anacortes does hereby grant to the Anacortes Railway Company, its successors and assigns, the right, privilege and authority to lay down, construct, maintain and operate for a period of twenty five (25) years from the date of this grant, an 18 inch gauge railroad track or tracks, together with all buildings, turntables, yard, tracks, and station platforms alone, over and across "E" Avenue, third Street, and the Great Northern Depot grounds, in the City of Anacortes, and also a right of way for said track or tracks, described as follows:
Tommy’s railroad expands with additional track and turntable

By NANCY WALBECK
American staff writer

Tommy’s train is moving uptown.

The hilltopian tourist attraction is expanding its tracks up to Ninth Street and Commercial Avenue, gracing a wide boulevard dotted with trees and marigolds. This current expansion now means a 3/4 mile round trip, with matching turntables at either end.

“Goodness only knows where it’s going to go from here,” conductor and railroad raconteur Tommy Thompson said, while ballasting the small-gauge tracks.

The Anacortes Railway, long a favorite of locals and tourists, will get to come and go with the engine in front, Thompson pointed out. The turntables are exactly that, turning devices on slick ballbearings that allow the engine to swivel at the touch of a finger, Thompson added.

At the Ninth Street turnabout, Thompson plans to erect an ornamental steel pergola with a half-barrel shaped, translucent roof.

“It will have 4 1/2 tons of steel and we’re going 7 feet, 6 inches,” Thompson said, pointing skyward.

His helper, and general assistant, Annie Thompson, added her opinion, too.

“He is creating it himself,” she said.

Because the Thompsons are the administrators, laborers and management, the costs are minimal to maintain and operate the 18-inch, narrow-gauge railroad. The Port of Anacortes donates its debarked leavings to fuel the Forney-type steam engine and Thompson said the city and port have been generous with the use of their properties.

“We burn the bark from the waste of the log dump and the city gave the railroad a free franchise,” Thompson said. “It allowed the railroad to be constructed on city property because it would enhance the whole economy.”

The Thompsons put all railroad revenues back into maintenance and building programs. Thompson admits to being somewhat of a scavenger, bargaining and dickering for parts for his small line. He designs and executes what he can’t find in the marketplace in his own backyard — in his foundry, welding or machine shops.

For instance, the tracks date from the 1950s and he picked them up for scrap from the timber giant. Weyerhaeuser. For the warning gates for the current expansion, Thompson said he bought the flashing signal barriers from the Port Townsend Paper Co. for $50.

In the Brick Wall of The Depot and will enhance the Ninth Street turntable and pergola used to be part of Anacortes’ city streets.

The Thompsons said the expansion will be finished soon, but they disagree as to how quickly that will be.

“We’re shooting for the Fourth of July,” Tommy Thompson said. Annie didn’t agree.

“Let’s say the Arts and Crafts Festival,” she suggested, diplomatically.

But Tommy responded: “Mayor Rice said the Fourth of July,” which seemed to temporarily settle the question.

Tommy Thompson, alongside the locomotive turntable on Ninth Street, describes how the engine will glide around on ballbearings at the mere touch of a finger. He predicts completion of the project by the Fourth of July.

1989 — expansion to 9th & Commercial Ave.
We ask the City Council to prioritize a park, recreational, pedestrian and bicycle facility.
My personal interest in the railroad has always been as a hobby from which I derive a great deal of pleasure.

This railway is fun for me, and as you are aware, I am driven to complete it while I am still able. My wife and many of our heirs within our large family are not-only experienced in steam railroading, but they are more business oriented and trained. Therefore, the future of the extended Anacortes Railway after I am gone should not be a concern.

But for the survival of the Railway in Anacortes as it presently exists, I sense that it could be lost to a fine museum.

- Thomas G. Thompson, Jr.
Community loses one of its star attractions, Tommy and his train

Saturday morning, Jan. 23, Anacortes lost one of its esteemed citizens. Thomas Thompson, owner and operator of the downtown train, passed away at age 75. Thompson was a long time Anacortes citizen who graduated from the University of Washington and worked as an engineer at Shell Refinery (now Equilon) from 1955 to 1984.

“He was a doer and a very persistent man,” said his surviving wife, Ann Thompson. “He didn’t take no for an answer, he couldn’t otherwise we wouldn’t have the train in Anacortes.”

His train was a popular tourist attraction, running in the summer time and on special events. Ann was unsure of its future.

“Thomas loved that train,” she said.

Thomas Thompson leaves behind his six children and a community that feels his loss.
RESOLUTION NO 1495

A RESOLUTION HONORING TOMMY THOMPSON AND DEDICATING A PORTION OF THE FORMER BURLINGTON NORTHERN RIGHT-OF-WAY IN HIS NAME

WHEREAS, Tommy Thompson by his talent, perseverance, and dedication has inspired the entire Anacortes Community by setting an example of what can be accomplished by hard work and perseverance, and

WHEREAS, Tommy Thompson has demonstrated that dreams can be the catalyst for action and accomplishment, and

WHEREAS, the Anacortes Community wishes to express its pride and appreciation for having Tommy Thompson live, work and dream among us, and

WHEREAS, it is appropriate and fitting to acknowledge Tommy Thompson and his contributions by providing some measure of permanent recognition, now, therefore,

IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED by the Anacortes City Council that a portion of the former Burlington Northern Railroad right-of-way as it now exists or may hereafter be relocated from 9th Street southward be known as the Tommy Thompson Parkway

PASSED AND APPROVED this 19th day of January, 1999

CITY OF ANACORTES

[Signature]

H. Dean Maxwell, Mayor