Thomas G. Thompson, Jr.
and his train

Part 2

1999 to 2012
On May 1, 1999, the Thompson family ran the train for the last time.
The final runs of the train were interrupted by a mishap: “The derailment, caused by a misaligned switch, even had some meaning for Anne Thompson. “I’ve got new respect for how Tommy did things,” she said.
The Anacortes Train Committee formed in 1999 to run a different train on the right of way.

Committee looking at options for new train

American staff

Although fans of the Anacortes Railway likely said their goodbyes to Tommy’s Train Saturday, some of those same fans hope that the days of rail haven’t ended in Anacortes.

A group of railroad enthusiasts who want to continue the effort fostered for so many years by Tommy Thompson hope they can build or purchase a steam or diesel train that will run on the same tracks Thompson’s train used and possibly extend the course to Weaverling Spit, another goal of Thompson’s.

Margaret Thomas, one of several members of an “Anacortes Train Committee,” said the group has met twice already and will meet again soon to continue exploring options for operating a new train as an attraction in Anacortes.

Thomas said the loss of Tommy Thompson has spurred many in the community to offer their talents to such an effort, because of the realization of how important Thompson’s train was to the community. (The Thompson family is honoring Tommy Thompson’s wish that the engine and train he built almost from scratch be preserved for possible display in a museum.)

“We want to respect the family’s wishes, but at the same time continue what Tommy started,” Thomas said.

A large group of residents have pledged time and effort. Thomas said, from adults to children.

Among those at Saturday’s farewell ride on the Anacortes Railway were Lillie Natto, 9 and Sarah Moses-Winyard, 8, of Island View Elementary.

Roxane Heffelfinger’s class at the school have offered to put on a play of local history for area groups in return for donations to the train effort.

It’s important that a train run in Anacortes, Sarah said.

“So we can ride it and not miss the old one,” she said.
1999 – Train Retired

It was Thompson’s wish that the engine and hand-built cars be preserved rather than used after Thompson could no longer man the throttle.
The Thompson family moved their train from Anacortes after Tommy’s death. It stayed at the Georgetown Powerplant Museum in Seattle for twelve years.
Random Notes From Train Meeting: April 15, 1999

Meeting was conducted by Frank Orr, Jeanne Robinette and Cynthia Richardson

Tommy and Annie Thompson’s dream is alive and well. Tommy accomplished what most would consider impossible. He was a man with vision and he was relentless. He never gave up and he left us with inspiration; to continue his legacy with spirit. We intend to have an Anacortes recreational train that will run all the way to Weaverling Spit. The Anacortes Train Committee has held regular meetings and has organized since we last met as a community on April 15, 1999.

When is the next community meeting?

We have reserved the date of June 29, 1999, 7:00 p.m. at the Depot. Please come and share your interest and ideas. We need your enthusiasm, input, talent and skills.

What has been accomplished?

The ATC is now an organization formed under the auspices of the Depot Foundation, a non-profit 501(c)3 corporation. The adopted mission statement is: “The Anacortes Train Committee has a primary purpose to foster and develop an appreciation for railroading with a train in and around Anacortes, thus promoting the art and craft of railroading through the use of a recreational rail line.”
The Anacortes Train Committee changed its name to Anacortes Train & Rail. Its mission was to "foster and develop an appreciation for railroading with a train in and around Anacortes and the surrounding community, thus promoting the art and craft of railroading with a recreational line."
THE LITTLE TRAIN THAT COULD ...

The Anacortes Train & Rail (formerly the Anacortes Train Committee) has sent out a press release to kick-off its new campaign, “The Little Train That Could.” If you haven’t seen the artwork created by Bill Mitchell, you don’t want to miss it. It is currently hanging in front of the Anacortes Chamber of Commerce building at 9th and Commercial. The campaign promotes the vision to bring back a small gauge train operation to Anacortes. We want citizens and visitors to know that we need their donations and kind support. As support comes in, the AT&R becomes a reality. AT&R Board members have been working hard to find the best train for Anacortes, to run on track from the Depot to Weaverling Spit. The following trains represent options that have been considered:

The “Nut Tree” has a diesel locomotive and seven cars, including a caboose, and has operated since 1947. This train is still available.

In Maltby, members looked at a train that is a steam locomotive called “The General” with several passenger cars. The AT&R Board decided that this locomotive didn’t have the power to pull the number of passengers needed for our run.

In Oregon, we located both a five and eight ton locomotive. Unfortunately, before we were able to act, they were sold for gold-mining operations.
Anacortes Train & Rail held meetings and events between 1999 - 2000
Because the Thompson Train was retired, the goal of Anacortes Train & Rail was to raise funds to purchase a train and run it as the Thompson family had. The group also wanted to extend the line on the Tommy Thompson Trail. By 2001 the group had become inactive.
Some of those involved in the railroad effort staged the Antique Machinery Show, which occurred one weekend each summer for 20 years.
Anacortes Railway Cannery & Sawmill Machinery Museum

Building Interior
May 2007

Bill Mitchell and others proposed converting the vacant train barn into a machinery museum.
In 2008, Anne Thompson transferred ownership (by way of donation) of the Tommy Thompson Train House to the City of Anacortes. The structure is located on City property that was once the grounds of the Burlington Northern Railroad, located on the east side of the intersection of 7th Street and R Avenue.

The donation relieved the donor of the responsibilities outlined in City Ordinance #1995, and amending Ordinance #2114, which stipulate that the site be returned to its original condition in the event the train ceases to operate.

The donation of the building will allow the City to use this beautifully crafted structure for some worthwhile purpose.
Anacortes Museum Director, Steve Oakley, reported to the museum foundation that Ann Thompson proposed to return to the City of Anacortes the Tommy Thompson Train Engine and 3 Rail Cars. They were stored in Seattle at the Georgetown Steam Power Plant Museum, and need to be removed from there by the end of June 2012.
After negotiating the 2012 donation agreement with Anne Thompson, Museum Director Steve Oakley collaborated with the Anacortes Museum Foundation President Tom N. Thompson (no relation to the train’s creator) and arranged volunteers to return the Thomas G. Thompson, Jr. Train to Anacortes and City ownership.
June 21, 2012

Mrs. Anne Thompson
9094 47th Street
Seattle, WA 98116

Dear Anne,

Thank you for contacting the City of Anacortes to discuss the future of the Tommy Thompson Train.

It is our understanding that:
- you are offering to transfer complete ownership of the Tommy Thompson Train, comprised of one engine and three cars, to the City of Anacortes by way of donation.

The City of Anacortes agrees:
- the “Train” will be cared for and safely stored in Anacortes;
- efforts will be made to raise funds for an eventual display structure;
- all expenses for moving the train to Anacortes will be borne by the City of Anacortes and the Anacortes Museum Foundation; and
- the callopio and music (upon determining that the callopio is in good working order) shall be purchased by the Anacortes Museum Foundation for the sum of $400.

Per your wish, the City’s intent with the gift of the Train is to establish a static display for the enjoyment of the community.

If you agree to donate the Train based on these provisions, please sign and return one copy of this letter and retain the other for your records.

The Tommy-Thompson Train is an iconic piece of Anacortes history and a very generous gift. We look forward to its return to Anacortes.

Sincerely,

H. Dean Maxwell
Mayor
City of Anacortes

I agree to the provisions outlined above:

Anne Thompson

Thanks to Lakeside Industries (Billy Campbell)
Tonka Ground Work (Lloyd Watson)
NCM Contracting Group (Scott Thompson) &
Brad Breckinridge (Dakota Creek Ind.)
Let's get on board: Tommy Thompson's train needs home

The Fourth of July parade will be even more festive this year with the expected return of Tommy Thompson’s narrow-gauge train.

This steam-powered piece of modern-day Anacortes history has been down in Seattle at the Georgetown PowerPlant Museum for the past 13 years, but it’s coming back thanks to the generosity of Anne Thompson and her sons, who are giving it to the city — with no strings but bells and whistles attached.

The late Tommy Thompson built the train about 50 years ago, and many here have fond memories of it chugging along R Avenue and over to Ninth Street. You can still see the tracks.

Now this piece of Anacortes history will be back home. Exactly where is a good question.

We agree with Steve Oakley, director of the Anacortes Museum, who helped engineer this gift.

Let’s not warehouse the train. Rather the city and community should forge a plan to find a long-term home for the train while it’s in the spotlight. Take advantage of the momentum and find a place where the train can be visible but also protected.

That will take some money. As the museum and city know well, the gift is usually just the start. There is a cost for the display, and then there comes the inevitable upkeep costs.

It’s like the parks and open space we create, for example. Someone has to take care of them — for years and years.

But if Tommy Thompson was ingenious enough to convert a compressed-air mining engine from a South Dakota gold mine into a bark-burning steam engine, we should be able to figure something out and honor his creativity and community spirit.

Come down to the parade July 4 and check out the train and especially the calliope. The plan is to have the train’s music car, which the Anacortes Museum Foundation purchased for $4,000, there as well.
Thanks to the Port of Anacortes, the train was temporarily stored at Port facilities, while the main focus of the museum in 2012 was emptying the Train Shed (or car house) so that the train could be stored inside; it was designed by the train’s creator for this purpose.
Back home

The Tommy Thompson train engine and cars were moved from the Port of Anacortes tent at Pier 2 into the Anacortes Railway shed just north of the Depot late last month. Crews from Dakota Creek Industries, along with Museum Director Steve Oakley, moved the train to its new home using a forklift with a custom-made steel plate with tracks.

Oakley said the shed is a good place for the engine. The museum will have easier access to it, and it brings the engine full circle. Tommy Thompson built the shed to house the engine when it was still operational years ago. He said the Museum Foundation is looking to raise money to preserve and display the train. He also said the engine may make appearances in future parades and special occasions in town.