

It owes its ingenious design to a Frenchman, its sturdy construction to one of the country's best-known locomotive works, its proud history to the glory days of steam railroading, and its survival to a group of determined Huntington rail fans.

Former Chesapeake & Ohio (C&O) Railway steam locomotive 1308 is the handsome centerpiece of an outdoor display of railroad artifacts at Memorial Boulevard and West 14th Street in Huntington. This minimuseum, created by the Collis P. Huntington Railroad Historical Society, is located only a stone's throw from the C&O mainline. Visitors admiring the historic steam engine can't help

but look up when a modern CSX diesel locomotive rumbles by with a long string of coal cars behind it.

It was, of course, the arrival of the diesel age that sent engine 1308 into premature retirement. During World War II, the nation's railroads were challenged as never before by hauling thousands of men and mountains of cargo for the war effort. Faced with the unprecedented demands of war, the C&O and other railroad companies pushed their fleets of steam locomotives to the limit. When the war ended and American

industries returned to peacetime production, railroads began replacing their old locomotives—most of which were more than ready for the scrap yard.

Like other companies, the C&O introduced diesel locomotives to its fleet, but it continued to use steam engines to haul coal from mines. The decision was a logical one. At that time, unlike diesel power, steam was a tried-and-true technology. Moreover, the coal that fired the boilers of steam engines was the same fuel that accounted for an outsized share of the C&O's revenue.

In 1948, the C&O ordered 25 new Mallet-type steam engines from the Baldwin Locomotive Works in Eddystone,

Pennsylvania. But postwar labor problems in the coalfields drastically reduced coal production and the C&O's revenues—forcing the railroad to cut its order for new Mallets from 25 to 10. Numbered 1300 through 1309, these 10 locomotives were the last mainline steam engines that Baldwin produced for use in the United States.

French engineer Anatole Mallet had designed the first Mallet-type engine in 1889. It combined the power and traction of two steam engines in one chassis, making it ideal for hauling extremely heavy loads over

Saved from the Scrap Yard

By James E. Casto
Photographs by David Fattaleh

mountainous terrain. Overseas, Mallet engines quickly proved their power in the mountains of Switzerland and Russia. In the United States, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad was the first company to try Mallet-type engines, followed by the C&O. In 1911, the C&O received its first shipment of Mallets. This first generation of engines served the company for more than 30 years, and, by the end of World War II, they were overdue for replacement.

The C&O received the first of its 10 new engines in September 1949. Assigned to the C&O yards at Peach Creek, near Logan, 1308 and its sister engines were used mostly to deliver empty cars and pick up loads at local mines. Occasionally, they handled trains between Peach Creek and Russell, Kentucky, or Hinton, West Virginia.

The days of steam power were numbered, though, and after only seven years of service, the steam engines were retired. The 1308 made its final run on February 29, 1956. Afterwards, it went into storage in Russell, where it languished until a fledgling group of Huntington-area rail fans discovered it.

The Collis P. Huntington Railroad Historical Society was organized in 1959 and named for the famed rail tycoon who, after playing a key role in the construction of the first transcontinental railroad, was primarily responsible for routing a C&O line through the rugged mountains of West Virginia. Huntington's efforts secured rail service between the James and Ohio rivers, including service to his new town and namesake on the banks of the Ohio.

The locomotive and tender combined measure more than 98 feet in length and, the specifications say, weigh more than 640,000 pounds. The 1308 had a working distance of 150 miles, operating with 12,000 gallons of water and 16 tons of coal. Its "sticker price" in 1949 was \$207,129.12.



Today, the nonprofit rail group is perhaps best known for the New River Train. They have offered this 300-mile rail excursion between Huntington and Hinton nearly every autumn since 1966. But, from the outset, one of the aims of the group was to acquire and restore railroad rolling stock for display and operation. At the top of its shopping list was a mainline steam engine.

The C&O donated steam engine 1308 to the group in 1962, and it's been on display at West 14th Street ever since. Over the years, it has become something of a local landmark. The engine, protected along with the rest of the museum's collection by a chain-link enclosure, is clearly visible to passing motorists. But it is even more impressive up close. Standing near the locomotive, visitors get a sense of 1308's mammoth size. The

locomotive and tender combined measure more than 98 feet in length and, the specifications say, weigh more than 640,000 pounds. The 1308 had a working distance of 150 miles, operating with 12,000 gallons of water and 16 tons of coal. Its "sticker price" in 1949 was \$207,129.12.

Because the 1308 was in service for only a short period of time and was carefully protected during its retirement, its appearance has changed very little over the years. It is painted standard locomotive black with "Chesapeake & Ohio" lettered in yellow on the tender and white edging on its running boards and tires.

The old engine now sports a new paint job, paid for with a state grant and private donations, in celebration of its addition to the National Register of Historic Places in




January 2003. Placing a locomotive on the National Register isn't uncommon.

According to the West Virginia Division of Culture and History's Historical Preservation Office, there are more than 40 steam locomotives listed nationwide. The 1308 was the first West Virginia locomotive to be listed individually on the register. The original Shay locomotives of the Cass Scenic Railroad in Pocahontas County were added as a group in 1974.

The listing is a fitting tribute to a piece of West Virginia's railroad history. The only other surviving locomotive from the C&O's postwar Baldwin order, the 1309, is part of

the collection at the B&O Railroad Museum in Baltimore. The other eight engines ended up in scrap yards.

To learn more about the Collis P. Huntington Railroad Historical Society, visit their Web site: www.newrivertrain.com. 

James E. Casto is associate editor of the Herald-Dispatch in Huntington and a frequent contributor to Wonderful West Virginia.



With the help of private donations and a grant from the State of West Virginia, the 1308 received a new coat of paint.