
Caboose donated to Baker Museum

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BAKER — From the days when the village was a mere whistle stop to the early 20th century, when a “work train” transported local residents to and from Standard Oil’s refinery, the railroad has played a major role in the development of the city of Baker.

Recognizing the contribution the railroad made in the early industrial and commercial growth of the city, the trustees of the Baker Heritage Museum attempted from the beginning to obtain a donated railroad car for display on the museum grounds.

“Since we started the museum, we tried to get a car donated,” said Jean Byers, the museum’s director. “Finally, an Illinois Central Railroad executive who was retiring told us, as his ‘swan song,’ he would get one for us and one for a museum in Ponchatoula.”

Several months ago, a tired old caboose was unloaded at the museum and placed on a short section of tracks built especially for the museum piece.

“The railroad is phasing out cabooses on its trains, so we were able to get this one,” Byers said.

Now it’s time to restore the rail car.

The museum is planning an antique show and sale Aug. 27-28 at the Baker City Hall Auditorium on Groom Road to raise funds for the project.

Byers said about $2,500 will be needed to sandblast the caboose and have it repainted with the proper Illinois Central logos and markings, and additional funds will be raised to convert the car to its final use, either a discovery center for children or a mini-museum of railroad history.

About 40 area dealers and collectors are expected for the sale and show, which will be open from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Aug. 27 and from 1 to 6 p.m. Aug. 28, Byers said.

Dealers will be showing and selling antiques and collectibles, including Victorian period furnishings, linens, glassware, china and silver, dolls and toys, farm and home implements and appliances, kitchen primitives and other items.

Admission to the show will be $2.

The museum, located at 1606 Main St., La. 19, is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday and on Sundays from 1 to 4 p.m. Admission is free.

The main building, built in 1906 as the residence of Dr. Willard S. Cushman, was purchased by the city of Baker in 1974 and restored as a project of the American Revolution Bicentennial to reproduce turn-of-the-century life in the small farming community of Baker.

It includes home and rural exhibits, including dolls and toys, as well as occasional special exhibits. Other buildings surround the Cushman house to form a Heritage Village.