

## Gypsy Express History

In 1958, George and Linda Bartley brought a mini-train to Gypsy Hill Park. In a truly remarkable display of commitment, they operated the Gypsy Express until 1991, when they sold it to the City of Staunton. The City continued to operate the mini-train until 1998, when it was taken out of service for safety reasons. City leaders were considering whether the train could be safely operated or whether it should simply be removed from the park.

A group of area residents refused to put their memories and fondness for the train aside and, in August 2000, held an open meeting at Montgomery Hall Park to discuss saving the train. About 50 local citizens attended, including George Bartley. As a result, the group formed a non-profit corporation and named it Gypsy Express, Incorporated (GX).

GX contracted with the City to repair and bring the train back to safe service standards, and to provide volunteers to operate the train. The City provided some seed funding, but the bulk of the funding has been provided through private and corporate donations.

Volunteers began the rebuilding process in the spring of 2001 by moving the station house to higher ground and refurbishing it. They then enlarged the track and replaced most of the roadbed, added drainage pipes, and added stone rip-rap to hold the roadbed in place.

The old 8 lb. rail was replaced with new and heavier 12 lb. rail. GX borrowed a rail bender from Maine to bend the new rail. The old rail was sold to a private train operation in North Carolina.

The volunteers also put in all new ties, tie plates and drove in all-new spikes, one at a time. They designed and built two new bridges, replaced the engine house, rebuilt the engine and refurbished the cars. The engine and cars were repainted in Santa Fe Railroad colors, and a newly designed Gypsy Express logo was added.

Dedicated volunteers also landscaped the grounds, added a switch and siding, rebuilt the crossings and added a crossing signal. A flagpole, new fencing, and gates were also installed.





The Gypsy Express again roared to life on August 5, 2001 in a drenching rainstorm, with Mrs. Linda Bartley and Staunton Mayor G. John Avoli in attendance.

GX designed and built a third car that accommodates larger people and wheelchairs. It is the first of its kind in the US, and began operation in 2003. The upper bridge has been made into a covered bridge for storage of this new 'handicapped' car. The loading platform was extended to allow for easy loading of wheelchair riders, and paved walkways were built for easier access to the train.