

June 1, 2024, was the 70th Season of the operation of the Last Chance Tour Train. The Tour Train was founded by a group of Helena Citizens who had an interest in preserving the history of Helena and presenting it to visitors. Helena Unlimited was the organization and was chartered as a 501(c)(3)

educational organization. They purchased the Brewery Theater and collected funds to build the first Last Chance Tour Train.



An organizational meeting was held, and shares were purchased for \$1. Each share allowed one vote for the direction of the organization. The smallest purchase was \$1 and the largest was \$250. Sixty-four members were counted at the initial meeting, including several businesses who desired to promote Helena's history.

The Brewery Theater and the first Last Chance Tour Train



Montana State Trade School located in Boulder built the cars you see pictured here. The Jeep ran the train the first year 1954 and during the winter the jeep was skinned over with the following picture.

The first engine built and used part of the first season.



The following year, the attached engine was built and premiered in in 1956.

This engine ran for 10 years, and the exterior was replaced. The engine covering seen here was lost to some unknown place until it was spotted the summer of 2015 in a yard near Jefferson City, Montana.

Unsure of this sighting we did not return until the next summer. With a closer look it was determined that it certainly was the original Tour Train. Upon pondering the idea of restoring the structure, we inquired of the owner of the property to determine if there might be the possibility of purchasing the shell. The family quickly agreed to donate the shell if we would inscribe the name of the Grandmother who secured the shell for her grandchildren for a yard toy. Her name is inscribed on the brass bell of the restored train, Beth Edith Madison Hohn.

The welding class at Helena High School was then contacted to see if they might have interest in restoring the shell and convert it to a structure which could be used to those who might enjoy the driving the Train but were not old enough. The quickly agree and Nitro-green of Helena agreed to transport the shell to Helena High School. The task was an interesting attempt to keep the shell intact as it was been sitting in the yard exposed to the weather for nearly 50 years



Restoration of the train was started and financed by Helena Unlimited dba Last Chance Tours. All the Labor donated by the Helena High Welding Class led by Cinde Galbavy. The structure was reinforced and made workable with the steering wheel and bell working.







A credit to those 16 students who worked on the restoration. They would love to see their work on display.

Founders, Key Individuals in the Early Days

Hi Dodson, was the founder of the Last Chance Tour Train, along with Jim Dion, under the umbrella of Helena Unlimited, along with the Old Brewery Theater. Walter and Doris Marshall were **also** involved in the organization of Helena Unlimited. Walter served as President and Bill Brown served as Vice President for many years.

Key Events, Conditions in the Early Days

In the early days, five governors participated in the opening of the season. Among the passengers have been John F. Kennedy, Ted Kennedy, Herbert Humphrey, Gary Cooper, Robert Wagner and Dinah Shore

Interesting Anecdotes, Stories from the Early Days

In the early days if you wanted to ride the train, you brought \$1 and gave it to the driver. You had a choice of 4 tours a day from July 15th through Labor Day. The first train was built for \$4500. It was insured for \$156. In 1976 insurance cost **was** \$900. In 2014, the cost **was** \$7,500 and today **is** \$8,500.

Historical Facts About Organization, Especially with Local Impact

As Helena Unlimited is a non-profit organization, the bylaws require a percentage of the profits to be expended on community involvement. Contributions have been made to the Helena YMCA, the Helena Symphony, the Helena Civic Center, Lewis and Clark County Fairgrounds, the Montana Historical Society, and numerous personal benefits for members of the community. The Tour Train has been and always will belong to HELENA, the community.

Location of Present Headquarters and Other Sites

Tours depart on the Capitol Complex with the trains stationed outside the Montana Historical Museum and across the street from the Capitol Building.

Size of Organization and Local Operations

The organization began with one 48 passenger hand-built train and now operates, in addition to the original train, and a second 62 passenger train and a fully enclosed, climate-controlled Trolley. Revenue began collection **at** about \$2,000 the first year with a net revenue flow of a little over \$169,000 per year. Currently there are 8 employees, all part-time.

