

FRIENDS OF THE 457

By Ben Merta, Eastern Iowa Division

“The Friends of the 457 is a volunteer organization dedicated to the preservation of the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad steam locomotive in East Park, Mason City, Iowa.”

That is the first sentence you read on the web site www.friendsofthe457.org. There is also an excellent photo of the well preserved #457, shown to the right.

Minneapolis & St. Louis (M&St.L) locomotive #457 was built in 1912 at a cost of slightly more than \$18,400. It is a 2-8-0 Consolidation type locomotive that was part of a 12 locomotive order that were numbered 450 through 461. All of the locomotives in this order were identical.

Over the years, improvements were made to the locomotive, including increasing the tender coal capacity, seats in the cab, mechanically operated firebox door, air pipes, a power reverser, mechanical stoker, and other miscellaneous items were added for safety and comfort. Foot boards and a rear headlight were added sometime after 1944 so that the locomotive could switch cars in the various yards where it was assigned.

In 1950, the M&St.L sold #457 to the American Crystal Sugar Company in Mason City. American Crystal Sugar used the locomotive to switch carloads of sugar beets during the harvest season. Although records have not been found, it is believed that #457 ended its career when its federally required boiler certification expired sometime around 1959. But during its working years, it plied the rails from Albert Lea, MN to Mason City, and Marshalltown to Oskaloosa, IA.

M&St.L engine #457 has been on display in East Park since 1959. The Mason City Noon Rotary Club funded the relocation of #457 and from then on, it was dubbed “The Rotary Cannonball.” It is open to the public on weekend afternoons. You can ring the bell and you can hear the



This photo appears on the home page of The Friends of the 457 web site. Photo – The Friends of the 457



This engineer's side view shows the running gear and piping very well. Note the footboards on the front pilot.

Photo – Mason City Globe Gazette

Nathan 5-chime whistle blow! For special viewing, go to the web site and contact one of the individuals listed to make an appointment.

A project underway right now includes increasing the hard surface all the way around the locomotive and extending the rail bed ahead of the engine to simulate a 1940s grade crossing. The hard surface project is designed to provide accessibility, increase safety, and for the convenience of the viewing public. The crossing will minimize hazards to pedestrian and wheelchair traffic.

Another project underway includes repairing the tender and making it weather tight. The tender is used to store tools and other essential items for the repair and maintenance of the display. Underground wiring is being installed and a security camera is now in place and functional.

A fund raiser is taking place to raise an estimated \$118,000 for the construction of a shelter, or roof, to help protect and preserve the locomotive. The shelter will have a partially translucent roof allowing light to pass through for photography purposes and architectural embellishments reminiscent of the 1940s. The web site has information on donating to the project. An architectural rendering of the proposed shelter is shown here.

The Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad ran primarily between the Twin Cities and Peoria, IL. It was billed as the route for freight to bypass the congestion in Chicago and sometimes referred to as the "Peoria Gateway." The M&St.L had lines in Iowa and it extended as far west as South Dakota.

The M&St.L began life in Minneapolis in 1870. Its sister railroad, the Iowa Central, began in Iowa in 1866. The

two roads merged in 1901 and the system was further solidified when several smaller railroads were acquired and assimilated into the M&St.L. The purchase of the Iowa Central truly occurred in 1912 and some of its rolling stock maintained its colors for many years. The railroad went bankrupt in 1923, went into receivership in 1935, and reorganized in 1942.

The M&St.L was primarily a bridge route for traffic originating in Minneapolis (its headquarters was located there). The real source of revenue for the M&St.L was hauling a wide variety of agricultural products, since that was the lifeblood of the economy in the areas that it served. Mason City was a major source of traffic as Decker's Meat Packing plant and several cement plants were located there. The Chicago & North Western Historical Society reports that the steam power on the M&St.L "was a collection of unremarkable, Granger road power". The Chicago & North Western absorbed the Minneapolis & St. Louis in 1960. 



M&StL #457 prior to renovation.

Photo – Mason City Globe Gazette

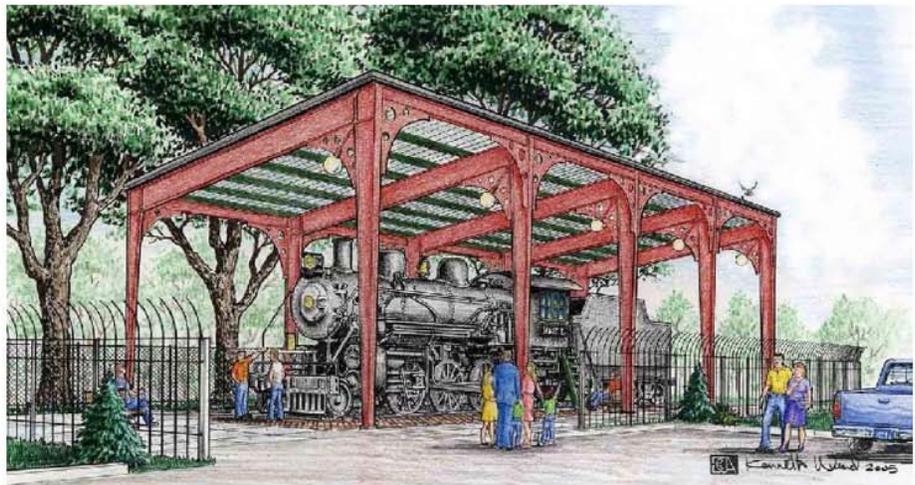


Image – The Friends of the 457