

Insider

For August 20, 2008

By Kim Burger

The Annual Old Time Power Show will fire up for the 44th time this Friday through Sunday, August 22nd through the 24th. The event takes place on the Antique Acres grounds located at 7610 Waverly Road, just north of town in the neighborhood of the Cedar Falls Race Way and Gun Club. The great floods of June have presented an extra challenge, but this small group of incredibly devoted volunteers is committed to putting on a quality event and has been cleaning and polishing for weeks now to accomplish the task.

Special activities include a parade Friday and Saturday at 4pm and Sunday at 3pm. A State Plowing Contest will take place on Saturday at 10am with a Stock Antique Tractor Pull at 11am followed by the a Farmer's Pull at 4:30pm. On Sunday a Modified Antique Tractor Pull takes place at noon with a Horseshoe Tournament in the afternoon. Home cooked meals, a flea market and souvenir booth will be available throughout the weekend as will an additional attraction of importance that many of our readers may know little about – Iowa's Merci Forty & Eight Boxcar.

Iowa's Merci Forty & Eight Boxcar is located on the Antique Acres grounds and will be open during the Old Time Power Show. The Iowa Boxcar was presented to the people of Iowa in 1949 in Des Moines by the citizens of France and is maintained by the Forty & Eight – an independent, by invitation only, honor organization of male and female U.S. veterans, officially known as the La Societe des Quarante Hommes at Huit Chevaux. They have become the “Keepers of the Flame”, as far as these historic boxcars are concerned.

During WWI, Americans were transported to the frontlines in France in boxcars titled 40/8, named so because of the amount of cargo they could carry – forty men or eight horses. The Merci Boxcars were originally made between 1872 until 1885 and used to haul freight. Later they were converted to haul horses and men during times of war. Standing room only, this was the uncomfortable mode of transportation for our soldiers fighting in the trenches, defending France as well as the rest of the world.

France wanted to find a way to thank our country for the sacrifices we made and in the late 1940's brought the Gratitude Train to the United States, awarding the existing 48 states and Washington D.C. a Merci Boxcar, giving each state one of the actual box cars used to transport our soldiers to the frontlines during WWI. These boxcars were filled with valuables and mementoes symbolic of the gratitude the French people felt towards our soldiers and our country.

Through several chains of events and the persistence of seven local members of the 40 & 8, that boxcar presented to Iowa came to the Cedar Valley in 1958 and now resides at Antique Acres in Cedar Falls. Antique Acres made an agreement with the local 40 & 8 to

become a home to the car about 25 years ago. They built a shelter to protect the boxcar and members of the 40& 8 have been tending to it ever since.

Junior Grimm, past Grand Chef de Gare of Iowa 40 & 8, and John Kelly, both veterans of WWII, are among our “Keepers of the Flame”. They, along with other members of the 40 & 8 carefully restored the Iowa boxcar, replacing rotted wood, painting it inside and out, have replaced the decals as they became weathered and worn, have collected artifacts and collectibles from past wars to display, turning the boxcar into a museum.

Stop in to meet Junior Grimm and the other volunteer caretakers who continue to serve our country by preserving the memory of this fascinating “gift” to the citizens of our state.