



**TWO AMUSEMENT AUTHORITY** members, Floyd Lotker (above left) and Wes Gaumer, gave a hand to Marlin Uhrich of Strasburg, Colo., as he prepared to unload the train engine 25 years ago. Harry Schrammel stood proudly in front of the locomotive at the dedication ceremonies held during the 1980 Decatur County Fair.

— Floyd Lotker photos



**KANSAS GOV. JOHN CARLIN** (above) was on hand to drive in the golden spike at the dedication of the Tumbleweed Express No. 80 in August 1980. The train was purchased by the late Harry and Betty Schrammel for the Decatur County Fair. The Schrammels (below) took time out for a break from after giving train rides to fairgoers.



## Decatur County Fair crowd enjoys train for 25 years

By MARY LOU OLSON

It was just 25 years ago this month that fairgoers had the thrill of riding the "Schrammel 80" train for the first time at the Decatur County Fair, but few who enjoy the train today realize just how it all came to be.

Although the county Amusement Authority had wanted to add a train to the carnival rides for several years, the cost was prohibitive, said Floyd Lotker, who was serving as president of the group at the time.

The board did decide to go to Colorado to check on a train at Boulder, he said, but found it was too big. However, on the way home, Bus Wurm told them that he knew about a place in Strasburg, Colo., east of Denver on I-70, which built trains. They decided to stop and check it out.

Although they were impressed with the trains built by Uhrich Locomotive Works, they felt they were too expensive to even consider.

Mr. Lotker said he had a real surprise a few weeks later, however, when Oberlin electrician Dwight Wenger stopped him on the street downtown.

"What would you say if I told you I know of someone who would buy you a train?" Mr. Wenger said.

Of course, Mr. Lotker said, he was taken back, but nothing more was said. He said a few days later when he stopped in Mr. Wenger's shop, Harry Schrammel, a retired farmer from Herndon who helped Mr. Wenger part-time, walked over to him and said, "I'll buy you a train."

Shocked, but thrilled, Mr. Lotker replied, "What do you have in mind?" to which Mr. Schrammel replied, "I have no idea."

Mr. Lotker said that he told Mr. Schrammel that he would meet with the amusement board and he invited him to join them. After Mr. Schrammel told the board that he was interested in buying a train for the fair, plans were made to take him



to Strasburg and see what the Uhrichs could do. Joining them on the trip were Wesley Gaumer and Mr. Wurm, Mr. Lotker recalled.

After looking things over, Marvin Uhrich told them that he felt they would be better off with a gasoline-powered locomotive instead of a steam engine. He could mount a motor on it and attach it to the main engine, so that is what they decided to order.

Mr. Lotker said that by 3 p.m., they had a contract drawn up and signed by Mr. Schrammel and plans made with Mr. Uhrich to build the train.

Although he made the commitment to buy the train, Mr. Schrammel told the board that they must furnish the track and the railroad.

So with much help from the amusement board, fair board and volunteers, the project began.

After it was decided to put the railroad on the northwest corner of the fairground, Stuart Euhus took his transit and stakes and went around and put down how much ballast would be needed. The county crew brought in the dirt for the roadbed, Mr. Lotker said.

The roadbed was built first, then the ballast, donated by Lynn Morford from his sand pit, was hauled and spread using a scoop furnished by the county. It took a 3-foot-long flatbed trailer to haul the rails, Mr. Lotker said, and when it came time to drive the railroad spikes into the ties, to hold the rail, they had to pre-drill holes just a little smaller than the spikes.

With over 2,000 ties, requiring four holes each, they borrowed a generator run by a gas engine, which they pulled around in a pickup as they pre-drilled all the holes with an electric drill. The last spike was driven in on March 27, 1980.

In the meantime, Mr. Lotker said, they were making trips to Strasburg to check on the train. They began to wonder where they were going to store it once it was ready. It was decided to take a hog shed and place it on a cement base so the door would be high enough for the train to go through, using it as a tunnel as well as for storage.

After the track and tunnel were completed, the next project was to build the station. This was accomplished with the help of Don Stapp, who, along with Mr. Lotker, devised

a plan to build it out of bridge planks.

When everything was completed, plans were made for Gov. John Carlin to dedicate the train on the first evening of the 1980 fair. When that day arrived, everything had been delivered except the engine, so there was much anticipation as everyone waited.

Around 5 p.m., when Marlin Uhrich pulled into the fairground with the engine, it was unloaded on a ramp to loud cheers from a huge crowd.

Gov. Carlin drove in a gold spike, made by the FFA class at Decatur Community High School, and Betty Schrammel broke a bottle of champagne over the front of the engine for the official dedication.

With Mr. and Mrs. Schrammel as the first passengers, Mr. Uhrich took them on the train's first trip around the fairground.

The railroad is called the Decatur County Amusement Authority Railroad and the train was named the Tumbleweed Express, the engine No. 80 denoting the year it was completed.

"I called Marlin Uhrich last week," Mr. Lotker said, "and he told me that their company is still making trains and he recently priced just the engine to someone for \$96,000 for the same train. Total cost paid by the Schrammels for the complete train in 1980 was \$25,000, so the timing was right for us.

"It seemed we had an angel that directed us throughout the building of all of the home-owned carnival, as whatever was needed was always provided."

He said that in the past 25 years, the train has proved to be a wonderful asset to the carnival. He thanked all who helped with not only the train, but all of the other carnival rides.

Since the Decatur County Fair first opened its home-owned carnival in 1973, the event has continued to draw crowds from near and far to Oberlin for food, fun, games — and a train ride.