



Reflector-Chronicle

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Photo courtesy Visit Abilene Kansas Facebook page

With a history involving wartime by the U.S. Army, this renovated 1940 General Electric center cab diesel engine was unveiled Sunday as it become the latest member of the Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad’s lineup of antique locomotives. Because of its military wartime background, A&SV officials christened the locomotive as “Ike” in honor of General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Another antique engine now on the rails in Abilene

By Steven Smethers

Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad

A renovated 1940 General Electric center cab diesel engine was unveiled Sunday, June 8 during a special ceremony at Abilene’s Rock Island Depot, becoming the latest member of the heritage railroad’s lineup of antique locomotives.

Rebuilt after sitting idle in the Abilene railyard for over two decades, the 85 year-old engine has a compelling story that is primarily defined by a long career of service that resulted in the locomotive earning a very special name.

“This engine was once a workhorse for the United States Army,” A&SV President and General Manager Ross Boelling explained to a crowd of onlookers gathered to witness the dedication ceremony.

“Considering its military background, we thought it appropriate to name the engine in honor of Abilene’s favorite son, Dwight Eisenhower. So, on this D-Day weekend, the locomotive is being christened ‘Ike’ in the General’s honor.”

Adding to the significance of the christening, Mary Eisenhower of Abilene, President Eisenhower’s granddaughter, broke a bottle of champagne on the bow of the engine to the delight of the crowd.

“Trains were always my grandfather’s mode of operation,” Eisenhower recalled in reminiscing about her famous ancestor’s military and Presidential years.

“The fact that this was a World War II engine is really special. This would certainly get my grandfather’s attention and be exciting to him,” she told the gathering.

Indeed, “Ike” had a remarkable career before finding its way to the A&SV’s railyard. It was the sixth center cab engine to be manufactured by GE and today, it is the oldest surviving unit of its class. The Arkansas Valley Interurban Railway in Wichita purchased the engine in 1940 to haul passengers between Wichita and Hutchinson until the line shut down two years later.

The locomotive was promptly acquired by the U.S. Army for wartime use and was shipped to San Bernadino, California, for use

at the Norton Air Force Base.

In 1969, the engine was transferred to the Hill Air Force Base in Ogden, Utah, for storage, until it was purchased the following year by Houston Track and Equipment in Texas. It was then acquired by Ideal Portland Cement in Superior, Nebraska, where it worked hauling rock trains between quarries and the company’s processing plant for several years.

In 1995, Dan Rohrback, a collector in Wichita, acquired the 44-ton engine from Ideal Cement. Needing a place to store the vehicle, Rohrback worked out an agreement with Joe Minick to store the engine in the A&SV’s Abilene rail yard, with the understanding that the railroad could use the engine for excursion runs as needed.

Rhorback later donated the engine, which was used sparingly until 2002, when sporadic problems forced the railroad to discontinue its use.

Interest in restoring the engine began two years ago, as the A&SV began to look for alternative sources of power to back up the railroad’s much-used Alco S-4 switch engine, which has powered most of the A&SV’s trains since 1993.

An examination by technical consultants from the Durango and Silverton in Colorado revealed that the locomotive’s engine could easily be repaired and placed in service. But the wheels, which were manufactured with the engine in 1940, were so badly worn beyond repair, and new ones would be required before the engine could be put into service.

The A&SV Board of Directors purchased new wheels last year and restoration work began.

“It was one step after another mechanically, then we started stripping paint off, last summer” said Dr. Steve Schwarting, coordinator of the restoration project.

“By the time we got the old paint removed, it was too cold to apply new paint, so we turned our attention to the inside of the cab. When the weather got warmer, we were able to apply new paint and do cosmetic work.”

The engine has been painted in maroon and gold, a color scheme that was adopted

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Kansas’ first Texas cattle shipping point is topic

‘Memories of the Prairie’ program begins at Heritage Center

By Karman Diehl

Dickinson County Historical Society

Marvin Burris will speak on the development of Abilene as Kansas’ first major shipping point for Texas cattle on Saturday,

June 14 at the Dickinson County Historical Society’s Heritage Center, located at 412 S. Campbell Street in Abilene.

The doors will open at 6:30 p.m. with the presentation beginning at 7 p.m.

Born and raised in Abilene, Burris has served on the Kansas Board of Regents, and before his retirement, was in public accounting for many years.

This event is part of the historical society’s “Memories of the Prairie” program. There is no cost to attend..

Even in Kansas cattle country, locals oppose a mega feedlot

By Calen Moore

Kansas News Service

PAWNEE COUNTY, Kansas — The western side of Kansas is a great place to produce beef.

It has wide open spaces that seem to go on forever and low humidity. The region has embraced its beef culture and is now home to 75% of the state’s feedlots.

These facilities are where cattle are sent to be fed a high-energy diet to gain weight before being sent to a beef packing plant.

Outside of small towns these feedlots look like miles of fences with cattle standing end to end. But some people have started to be wary of these expansive developments.

“It’s good to live in beef country, as long as it ain’t too close. They’re able to stir up enough dust and stink,” Merrill Cauble said.

Cauble is a farmer who lives near the town of Larned in Pawnee County. He has been skeptical of the increase of feedlots near where he lives.

Pushing back against the norm

The company Innovative Livestock Solutions has feedlots across central Kansas and Nebraska. There are three in Pawnee County with a combined capacity of 72,000 cattle.

They are looking to

expand and proposed a new facility that can hold 88,000 cattle. That’s a lot of livestock for a county with only about 6,000 people. It would be one of the biggest feedlots in Kansas.

All those animals are estimated to produce over 5 million pounds of manure every day. Beef cattle eat high protein diets, which can produce nitrogen heavy manure. That poses a risk if it gets into waterways or seeps into the aquifer underground where people get their drinking water.

“It’s not going to do the community any good whatsoever, and that’s why we decided to push back,” Cauble said.

After the Kansas Department of Health and Environment reviewed the feedlot’s plans, the agency held a public hearing in Larned to see what the town had to say about it.

Cauble teamed up with the Kansas Sierra Club, an environmental advocacy group. The duo along with those critical of another huge feedlot were vocal about their concerns to KDHE.

“These feed yards have been polluting our waters for years, and their recommendations haven’t improved the problem to the extent to where we have safe nitrate levels,” Cauble said.

They gained quite the following of locals questioning the safety of another large feedlot near the community.

Something in the water

Pawnee County and other central Kansas counties already have an established history of high nitrate levels in their groundwater.

The soil in this region is very sandy, so things can easily leak through. The community also sits above the Ogallala aquifer. Towns like Larned rely almost exclusively on the aquifer for drinking water.

Late last year, student researchers from three Kansas colleges found that nitrate levels in private wells in south-central Kansas are as much as five times higher than Environmental Protection Agency limits for healthy drinking water, which is 10 milligrams per liter.

High nitrate levels in water can cause “blue baby syndrome” where children under six months have their blood deprived of oxygen.

There are also some studies that link high nitrate levels with increased risk of some colon and kidney cancers.

The researchers say the pollution is likely due to fertilizer leaking into the groundwater. But some Larned residents believe that fresh feedlot manure is contributing to that as well, but it’s not clear if that has been proven.

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Calen Moore/Kansas News Service

Cattle stand in pens awaiting their feed in a feedlot near Garden City, just west of Larned. The cattle feedlots on the western side of Kansas produce a significant amount of the beef in your grocery store. But a small town in the region is now opposing a feedlot because of health and environmental concerns.

Weather Watch

Record

Today’s forecast high — 93
Today’s forecast low — 65
Tuesday’s high — 87
Overnight low — 66
Precipitation — .00
2025 precipitation — 45.99
Sunset Weds. — 8:53 p.m.
Sunrise Thurs. — 6:01 a.m.



Thursday

High: 86
Low: 64
Mostly cloudy



Friday

High: 91
Low: 68
AM clouds & PM clouds



Saturday

High: 92
Low: 69
Partly cloudy



Sunday

High: 92
Low: 71
Partly cloudy

