

THE TIBURON ENGINE THAT FELL IN THE BAY

By Susan Cluff

Ever had a really bad day? For John Selvage, engineer on Locomotive No. 112 of Northwestern Pacific Railroad, that day was June 30, 1913 when the train he was driving fell through the dock at Tiburon into the bay. It had seemed like a simple enough job that morning. Just push out a few empty rail cars for some incoming freight onto the long schooner dock then back the engine up again into the yards. The Tiburon terminus was now mostly freight, much of the passenger service having moved over to Sausalito in 1909.

Although the dock had been rebuilt only six months before, some of the piers suddenly collapsed sending the locomotive plunging into 25 feet of water. Newspapers reported the next day that engineer John Selvage and fireman Harry Sykes were both in the engine cab when the engine sank and Sykes escaped by climbing through the window and swimming to the surface. But Selvage, who'd managed to pull the engine-whistle to summon help before it fell, was still trapped in the cab underwater.

In his 1993 oral history, Frank Brooks (1922-2012) says his father Vincent, an NWP fireman working nearby, dove in and pulled out the engineer. "Everyone had the bib overalls on and the engineer's got caught in one of the brake levers," Brooks explained. With the men safe on land, NWP railroad crews used a barge-mounted crane to fish the 120-ton engine and fuel tender out of the bay then dried it off and cleaned it up. No. 112 and Selvage were back on duty in a week.

Later, it was found that the dock pilings had been eaten by shipworms (teredos), a type of mollusk that bores through wood submerged in salt-water. After that, dock piers in Tiburon were always built with metal casings and their timbers painted with copper-based preservatives or creosote. If you look carefully at low tide, you can see some of the old dock pilings offshore near the Depot Museum.

And Locomotive No. 112? Built in 1908 in Schenectady, New York for \$14,000, it hauled passengers and freight throughout the northern Redwood Empire until 1952. Southern Pacific Railroad then donated the oil-burning steam locomotive to the Pacific Coast Railway & Historical Society who restored and repainted it. In 1969, the Society gave it to the California State Railway Museum in Sacramento.



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1. Locomotive No. 112 falls through the pier in 1913.

2. After the schooner pier collapsed, NWP crews fished the locomotive out of the bay and cleaned it up. It then went back to work for 39 more years.

3. No. 112 was built in 1908 by the American Locomotive Company and retired in 1952. Here it is restored and repainted at the Tiburon yard in 1955.

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