



TIMELESS TRAVEL

BRINGING TRANSPORTATION HISTORY TO LIFE



“If I could save time in a bottle ...”

This nostalgic lyric, poignantly captured in a classic 1970s song, echoes in my mind during a recent visit to three transportation museums in northern Indiana. While I couldn’t save time in a bottle, I accomplished something equally special: capturing time in trains, aircraft and classic cars. Each contain stories of their own, woven into Indiana’s transportation history.

National New York Central Railroad Museum (NYCRR) (Elkhart)

The wind is brutal as I climb a long wooden ramp leading to the NYCRR’s entrance. But the museum, located in New York Central’s freight house complex, exudes warmth. Stepping inside, I’m greeted by the rhythmic ticking of a clock – its hands stretched to 1:17 p.m.

In its heyday, the New York Central System (NYCS) was the nation’s second-largest railroad, spanning 11,000 route miles of track in 11 states and two Canadian provinces. Today, Norfolk Southern operates a massive rail classification yard in Elkhart and runs trains out of a depot (built in 1900)

across the tracks from the museum.

“This is still one of the busiest lines in the United States right in front of us – 120 trains go through here a day,” shares museum coordinator Robin Hume as she sits in a sun-filled observation car constructed in 1937. Today, the museum hosts a variety of events and gatherings.

As if on cue, a train bellows.

“We’ve had trains going by here since 1851. That’s when the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railway started to run (in Elkhart). Interestingly enough, the first train was called ‘The Robin!’ ” she reveals, clearly tickled by the coincidence.

Relics large and small line the museum’s floors and walls. Opulent china from New York Central’s Mercury train (in operation from 1936 to 1959). A display honoring gandydanders (people who work on railroad track construction or repair) adorned with historic photographs and tools of the trade: a sledge hammer, rail tongs, spike puller, tie carrier and others. A huge electric model train. A locomotive constructed out of toothpicks – 421,250 to be exact – over seven years by a Warsaw resident.

I approach an interactive display featuring the L-3a 3001 Mohawk steam locomotive (the actual train, impressive and imposing, stands with other rolling stock outside). With



National New York Central Railroad Museum: Children can blow off steam at a toy train display. A stationmaster’s office and meal car (currently under construction) are among the nostalgic stops.



Mementos and aircraft tell the story of a Vietnam War pilot's heroics at the Hoosier Air Museum. An on-site banquet hall celebrates service men and women amid wedding receptions and other special events.



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a turn of the throttle knob, the train starts moving – faster and faster. Sounds of the escaping steam and the throb of the steam-driven pump surround me.

“We want to show Indiana what great, rich history it has and the things people need to be proud of. For some people, a blue-collar history isn’t what they want to hear about, but that’s what built America,” Hume declares, pounding the table for emphasis. “The railroads built America.”

Hoosier Air Museum (Auburn)

Inspiring stories of heroism endure at the Hoosier Air Museum. It’s run by a volunteer group of aviation enthusiasts known as the Hoosier Warbirds.

The 10,000-square-foot hangar holds aircraft from, among others, World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Among the most touching is a 1967 AH-1F Cobra helicopter. Bearing bullet and shrapnel holes, it carries pictures, maps and more that belonged to a veteran named Rick Lukens.

Lukens found a photo of the aircraft online and traveled to the museum from his home in Texas after confirming that the serial numbers matched.

“That’s him sitting in the cockpit,” remarks volunteer Mike Mapes as he points to a photo that captures the reunion. “We all got teary eyed. He patted the instrument panel and said, ‘I made it home, but I never knew you did. I’m so glad you’re here.’ ”

Visitors can sit in that same cockpit or climb into an F-16 ejection seat training simulator, which begins to hum as Mapes turns it on.

A sampling of the many other highlights:

- 1918 German fighter Fokker D. VII full-scale replica. It was the first airplane that could fly sustained upside down.
- 1941 Pratt-Read LNE-1 U.S. Navy training glider. In 1952, the glider set a world altitude record of 44,255 feet. The record held for decades.
- 1944 Cessna T-50 Bobcat. “They called it a Bamboo Bomber during the war because it was made out of wood to save metal for the war effort,” Mapes reveals.
- Variety of engines, including one manufactured by Indiana’s own Allison Engine Company

Storytelling continues in the museum’s library, located in an attached 6,375-square-foot facility that includes a banquet hall. A book written by Fort Wayne native Margaret

Ringenberg, who served in World War II’s Women Airforce Service Pilots, is among the treasures.

Studebaker National Museum (South Bend)

“Always give more than you promise.”

The Studebakers lived by that motto – both in their blacksmith business (which they founded in 1852 in South Bend and built into the world’s largest wagon maker) and their automobile company.

The slogan is carved onto a wooden sign in a display honoring their roots. A blacksmith, donning a hat characteristic of the era, is hard at work. Red wagon wheels sit beside him. The sounds of a hammer striking hot metal echo.

A presidential carriage collection – the world’s largest – soon catches my eye. They belonged to presidents Grant, Harrison, Lincoln and McKinley. Lincoln, dressed to the nines for his evening at Ford’s Theatre, stands beside his barouche.

Elsewhere, an engine roars at a display called “Studebaker Incorporates the First Automobiles,” which took place at the turn of the 20th century.

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The Studebaker National Museum's diverse displays – ranging from an interactive super service center (top), 1951 Commander (bottom left) featured in *The Muppet Movie* and Lincoln's last carriage ride – draw 40,000 visitors annually.



Moments later, I explore the *Hoosier Made: World Driven* exhibit, running through October 3. Celebrating Indiana's Bicentennial and the state's rich automotive history, it's presented at the Studebaker Museum (celebrating the "Brass Era" of the early 1900s); Kokomo Automotive Museum (touting the "Jazz Era" of the late teens and early 1920s); and Auburn Cord Duesenberg Automobile Museum (focusing on the 1930s "Classic Era").

One of my favorites is a bright yellow 1910 Marmon Speedster. It was "one of the first to make extensive use of aluminum." The roadster's price tag at the time: \$2,400.

Cruising along, 1950s hit "Rock Around the Clock" plays overhead. Classic cars flank a root beer stand, complete with floor-length mirrors, a milkshake menu, blue swivel chairs, jukebox and more.

Before leaving, I meet Holly, her husband and two young children.

What brings them to the Studebaker Museum?

"I used to live in Elkhart," she recalls. "My parents worked at the old Studebaker mansion (the current-day Tippecanoe Place Restaurant). The last time I was here I was 11 and I'm 27 now. I was in school (then), and now I'm teaching my kids," she says with a laugh.

Studebaker rolls on.



RESOURCES: Robin Hume, National New York Central Railroad Museum, at www.elkhartindiana.org | Mike Mapes, Hoosier Air Museum, at www.hoosierairmuseum.org | Studebaker National Museum at www.studebakermuseum.org