

RUSTED BOAT LEADS TO FORGOTTEN LOCAL HISTORY

Historians hope someday to restore the "Aha"

By Brandon Hubbard News-Review Staff Writer

Harbor Springs – Acclaimed inventor Ephraim Shay made a name for himself by creating the most widely used geared steam locomotives.

Shay, who moved to Harbor Springs in 1888, spent a lifetime forging his steel dreams into reality with no fewer than five original train designs to his name and a legacy of some of the toughest steam engines ever built.

Even his **tamp-steel, hexagon shaped home still stands in downtown Harbor Springs at 396 East Main St.** today as a testament to the longevity of his work. But, a lesser known creation by Shay is also still floating around – or at least trying to.

Propped on planks behind the Harbor Springs Department of Public Works building on Fairview Street, the rusting wreckage of what was once Shay's self-designed yacht the "Aha" is all but forgotten. Its hull oxidizing, its sides covered with bullet holes, the "Aha" is far from seaworthy, but remains relatively intact.

BUILDING A DREAM

If visionary Howard Hughes later had his giant wooden airplane the "Spruce Goose," Shay had the stamped-steel yacht the "Aha." Built in 1891, Shay began working on the vessel just after moving to Harbor Springs in his storage and workshop on the downtown shoreline, the same location where the Irish Boat Shop is today.

When Shay finally unveiled his first version of his yacht, it was 40-feet long and entirely built from stamped-steel.

The heavy boat was able to move more than 23 miles per hour {20 knots} using a triple expansion engine, according to writer Michael Koch in his book "The Shay Locomotive: Titan of the Timber."

The hulking narrow design featured a six-foot steel exhaust stack and three circular windows recalling Jules Verne's fictional submarine the "Nautilus" from "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea," though the origins of its inspiration and name remain a mystery.

In one of the few images of the boat in the water, Shay stands on the deck with his fists on his hips, standing triumphant. The heavy yacht rides low in the calm Little Traverse Bay waters, like an overloaded freighter.

"According to family accounts, {the Aha} won many races and set records in speed runs on Little Traverse Bay and Lake Michigan. With his puckish sense of humor at work, the inventor dubbed his craft the Aha." Koch states in his book. "Perhaps nothing tells us more about his independent spirit and his attitude toward the world and its foibles than the name he gave to his unusual boat."

But the vessel was never without its flaws.

"According to some who remember it, the Aha tended to be somewhat top heavy and, at speed, had a decided tendency to point her nose under," Koch said. "Despite several rebuildings, during which the superstructure was entirely remodeled, the design was never perfected."

But, it seems being simple fast wasn't enough for Shay. Over several years he would design and redesign the boat. Stripping the cabin and other details from the steel frame and revising his vision for the perfect Yacht.

In later versions, the circle-porthole windows became rectangles. The narrow captain's area became taller and more like a tugboat cabin on a long-sleek frame.

The boat was the subject of his creativity and sheer abilities as an inventor, said Mary Cummings, Harbor Springs History Museum executive director. "It must have been a massive amount of money spent at the time," she said.

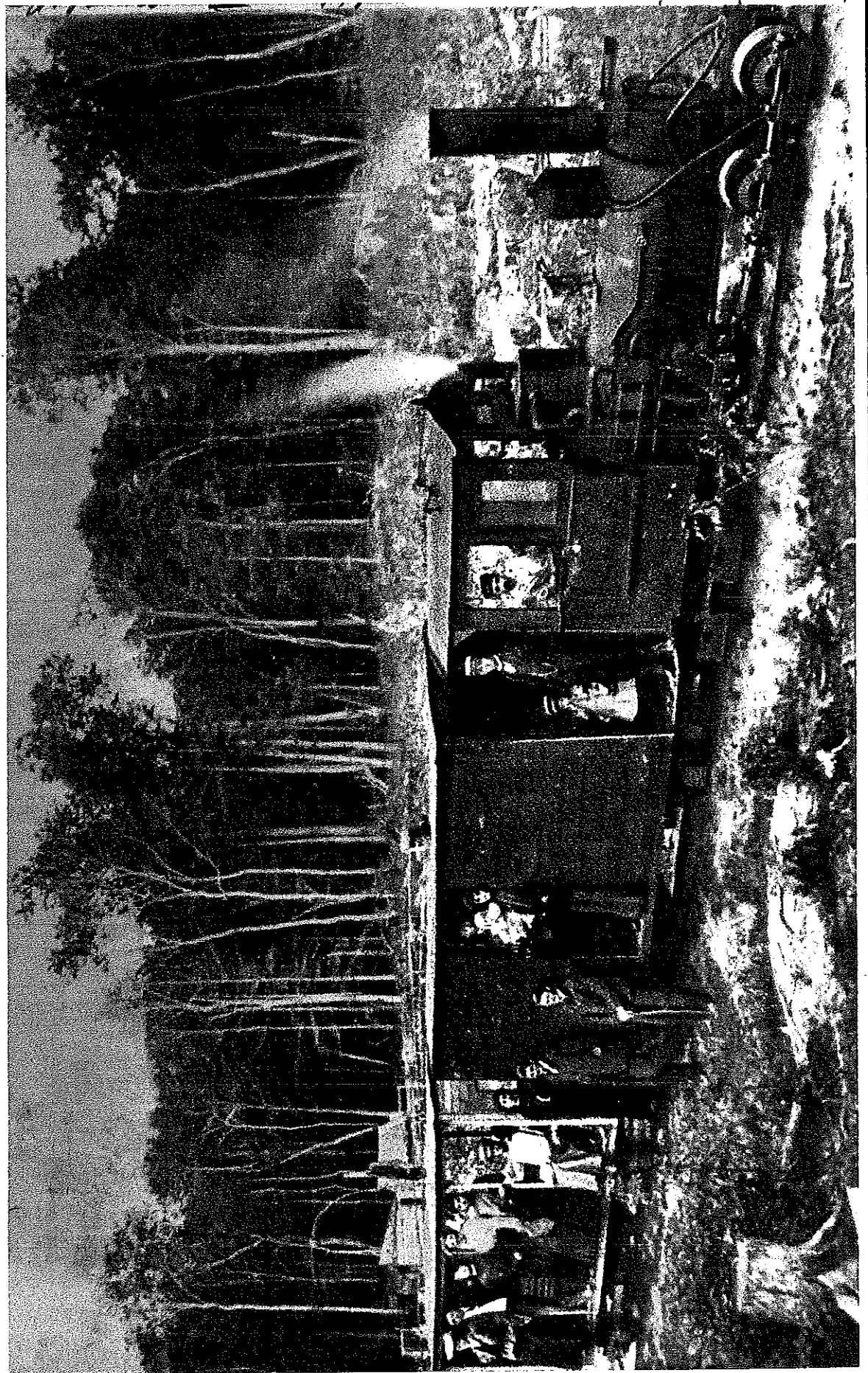
LATER YEARS

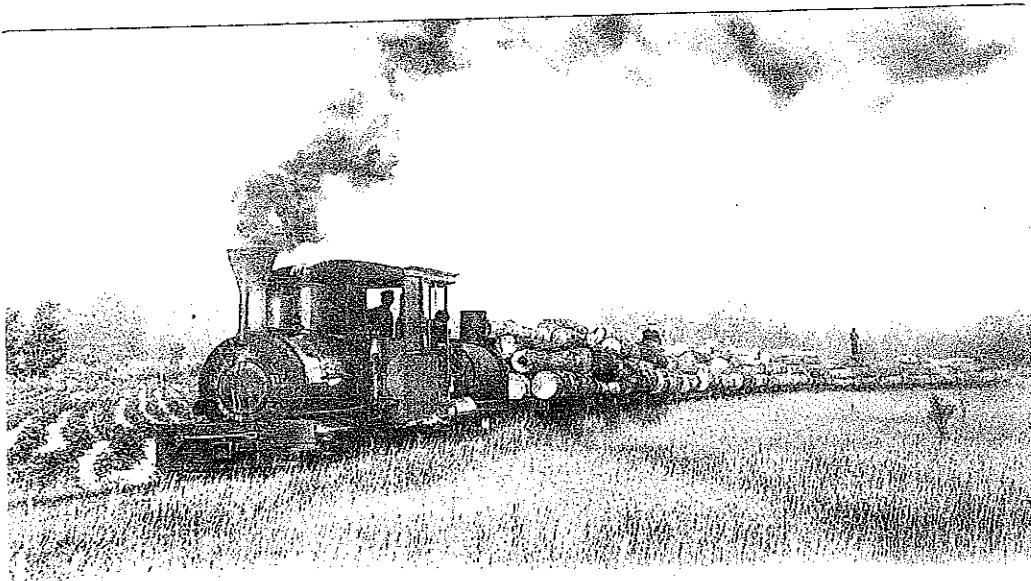
After Shay's death in 1916, the boat's history is somewhat lost. At some point in the 1930s family members elected to move the boat to a storage facility on Cecil Bay. However, after being towed to its new home, the Aha began taking in water and had to be grounded north of Sturgeon Bay at Sucker Creek, according to history collected by Cummings.

For the next several decades, the Aha sat abandoned at the creek where fishermen used the steel structure for as a make-shift shelter and occasionally an object for target practice.

In a Harbor Springs Area Historical Society newsletter from December 2004, Stan Stutsman recalls studying the skeleton-of-a-boat with his father on fishing trips for smallmouth bass with his father Rhinard R. Stutsman, who was a brakeman for the Shay-owned Hemlock Central Railroad in Harbor Springs.

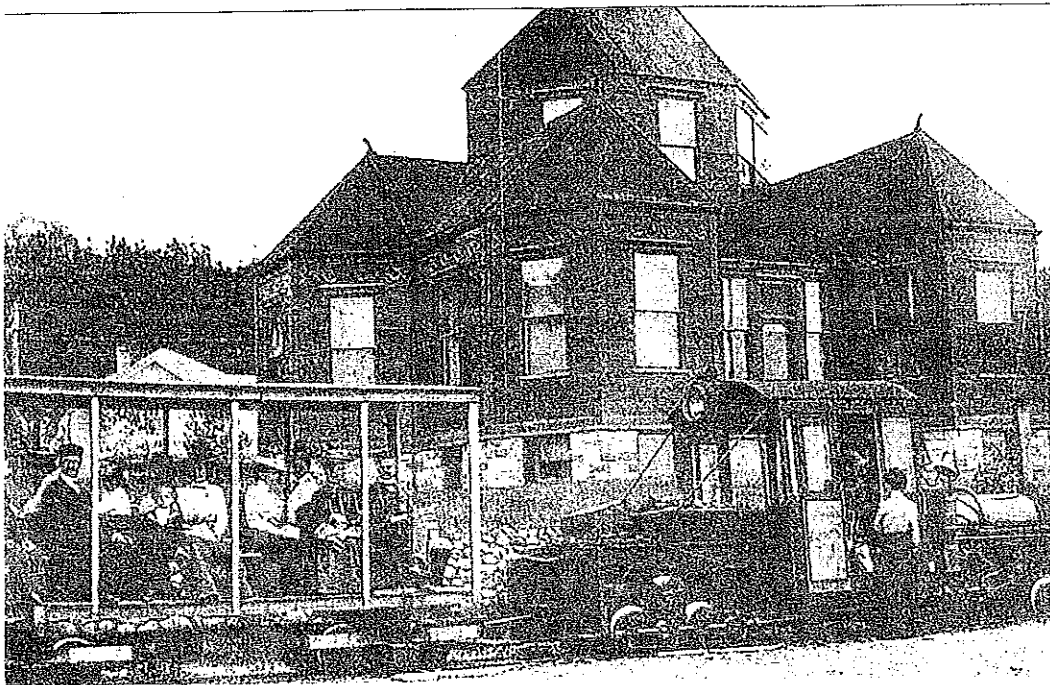
Hemlock Central # 1
Home built Shay Locomotive "Baby"
Harbor Springs, Emmet County, Michigan





Returning from the woods, Hemlock Central, Harbor Springs, Mich.

**Published by Tanner Souvenir Co. New York and Germany
For W.S. Darling, Harbor Springs, Mich.
Made in Germany**



**1905 the "Hemlock Central" excursion train in front of the
Ephraim Shay Hexagon House, built in 1891. Harbor Springs, Mich.
Published by Harbor Springs Area Historical Society, 1990**



Ephraim Shay designed and built this *hexagonal shaped* house with six wings opening off the central core with a tower on top. The interior and exterior walls were stamped steel. It is still in existence at 396 East Main Street, Harbor Springs, Michigan.

Ephraim Shay

Ephraim Shay lived out his years in Harbor Springs with the zeal of an active young man.

When he arrived here in 1888 at the age of 49, Shay had already established himself as an inventor, patent holder, engineer, lumber man and business man. His patented locomotive design had made him a wealthy man, but his local railroad would have to wait. Shay first immersed himself in other projects including designing his stamped-steel home, outfitting his machine shop and crafting a 40-foot steel yacht. What would prove to be his most lasting project, however, was the Harbor Springs Water Works. Recognizing the increasing demand for running water, Shay designed the water works and its 12 miles of water mains. After lengthy negotiations, Shay sold the water works for \$22,000 to the Village of Harbor Springs in 1911.



Exhibit at the Harbor Springs Area Historical Society

PLACE OF DEATH
Detroit
or
Harbor Springs

CERTIFICATE OF DEATH
No. 1118
Registered No. 110

Sex: (M) (F) (O) (N) (S)
Word: (M) (F) (O) (N) (S)

FULL NAME
Ephraim Shay

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS

1 COLOR OF HAIR
White

2 SEX
Male

3 AGE
76

4 DATE OF BIRTH
July 17, 1839

5 OCCUPATION
Lumberman & Machinist

6 PLACE OF BIRTH
Kentucky Ireland

7 NAME OF FATHER
James Shay

8 MOTHER'S NAME
Probsa Probasco

9 PLACE OF BIRTH OF MOTHER
New York

10 NAME OF DECEASED
Lettie Shay (son)

11 PLACE OF DEATH
Harbor Springs

12 SIGNATURE OF REGISTRAR
O. F. DEWAIN

MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

13 DATE OF DEATH
April 20, 1916

14 I HEREBY CERTIFY, THAT I attended deceased from
April 20, 1916 to April 20, 1916

15 THAT I last saw alive on April 20, 1916

16 THE CAUSE OF DEATH was as follows: *congestive failure of the heart*

17 *because of over-exertion*

18 *due to a cold*

19 *due to a cold*

20 *due to a cold*

21 *due to a cold*

22 *due to a cold*

23 *due to a cold*

24 *due to a cold*

25 *due to a cold*

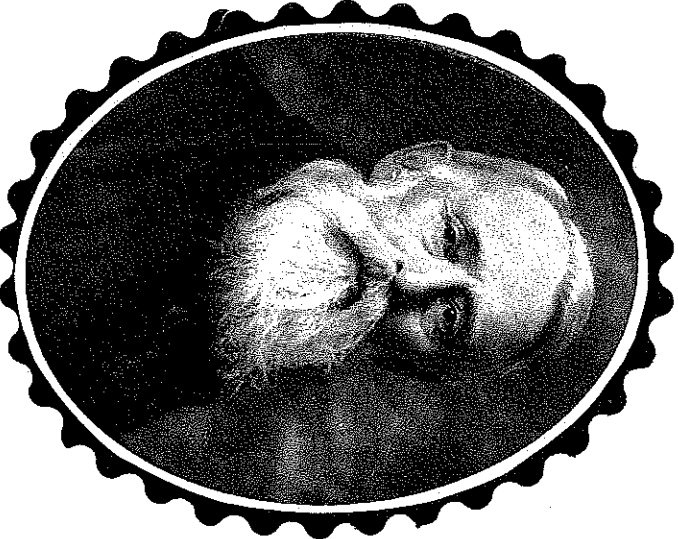
26 *due to a cold*

27 *due to a cold*

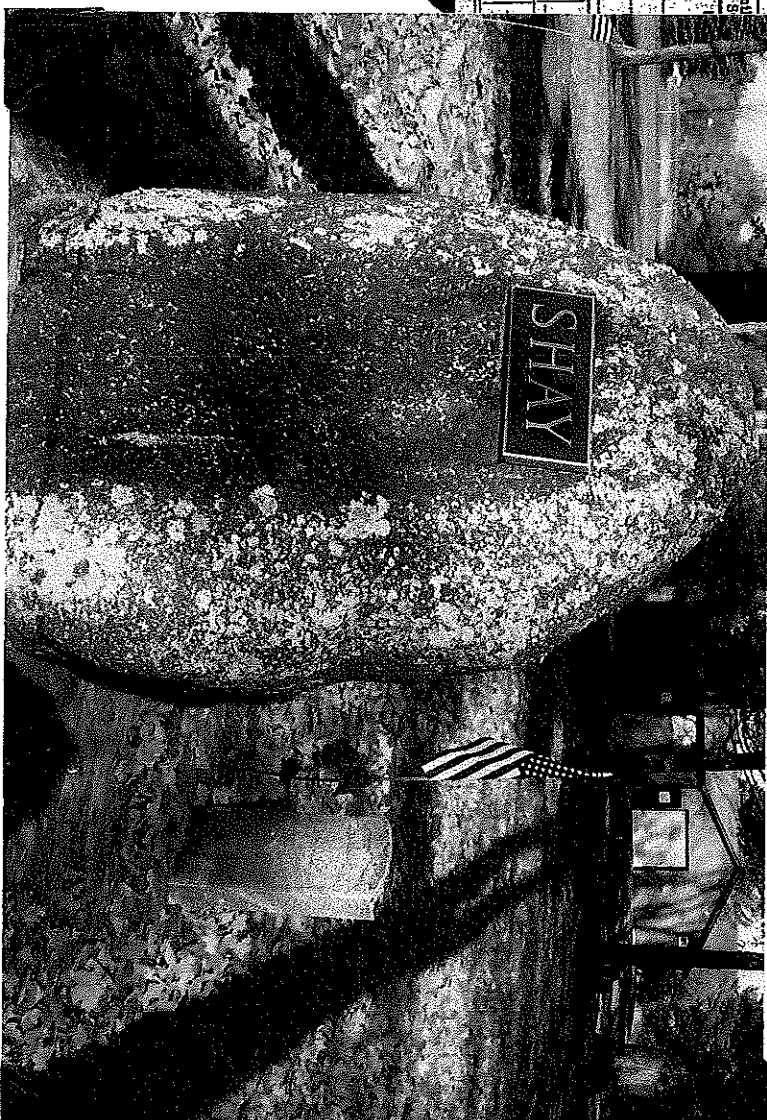
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29 *due to a cold*

30 *due to a cold*

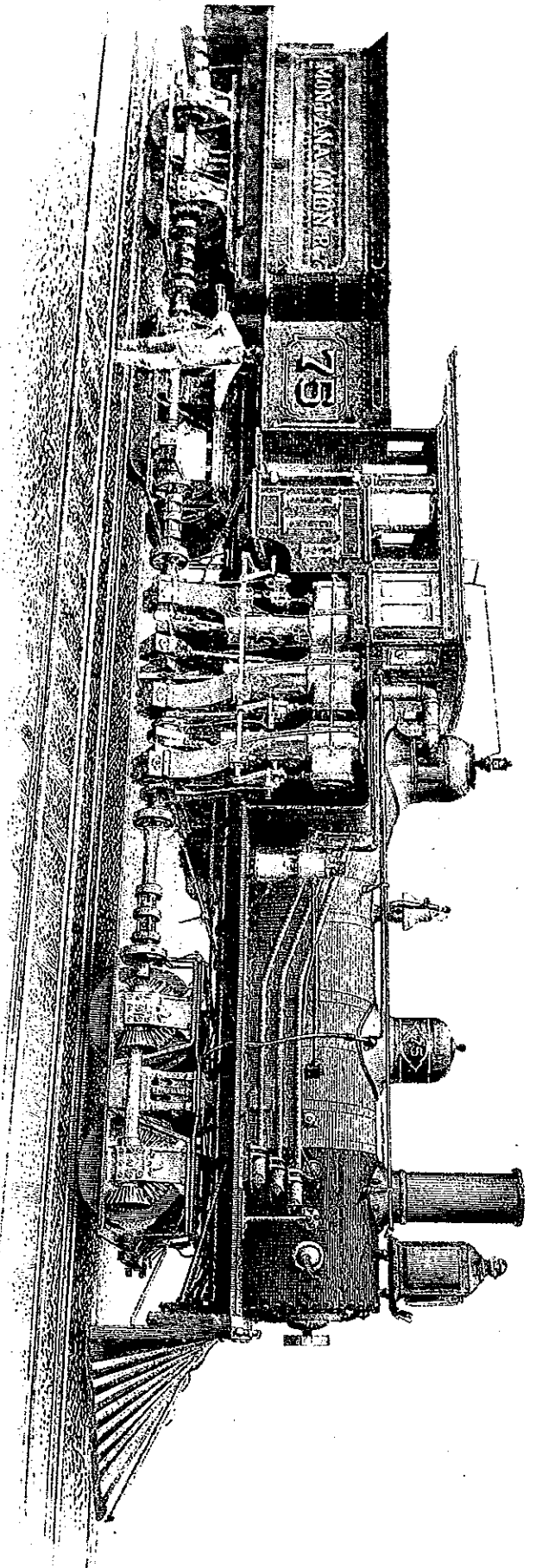


Ephraim Shay
B. July 17, 1839
D. April 20, 1916
Age 76
Buried April 24, 1916
Lakeview Cemetery, Harbor Springs, MI.



E. SHAY.

L. SHAY.



THE SHAY PATENT LOCOMOTIVE, BUILT BY THE LIMA LOCOMOTIVE WORKS, LIMA, PERU.

E. Shay & Son,

PROPRIETORS HARBOR SPRINGS WATER WORKS.

HARBOR SPRINGS, MICH.