

# Whistle Stop



Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum  
P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN. 37605-0432  
(423) 753-5797

[www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org](http://www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org)



Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

Volume 34 No. 7

July 2014



When driving through the sleepy village of Hampton, TN today, it is hard to imagine it as a bustling mill town full of sound, smoke and activity, serviced by two railroads. Yet such was the case during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Braemar section of Hampton was home to the Pittsburgh Lumber Company and its common carrier Laurel Fork Railway. The story of this lumber operation is one of entrepreneurship, heated competition, the vagaries of the market and its impact on communities, and railroading at its roughest. The story begins on page 4 of this issue. (Pictured above is LF Shay #3 posed near the mill's loading docks; for those of you familiar with the area, that's Iron Mountain in the background. Photo from author's collection.)

## *July 28<sup>th</sup> General Membership Meeting*

The next General Membership Meeting of the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum will be held on July 28<sup>th</sup>, starting at 6:30 p.m., and located at the Johnson City Public Library, 101 West Millard St., Johnson City, TN. This month's program will feature the second part of the UNION PACIFIC Big Boy steam locomotive DVD (part 1 was shown at the May meeting). The program will be presented by Jim Stump. Come out bring a friend and enjoy a great night of railroading with your friends.

## *Member Notes*

*By Nancy Jewel*

Our "Happy Birthday" message is sent to Anna Banner as she celebrates her birthday on August 1<sup>st</sup>. We wish her many more birthdays in the coming years.

Please keep Anna in your thoughts along with the following folks: Art DeVoe, Carrie Denny, Bob May, James Smallwood, Bob Yaple, Walter Byrd and the Jim Calhoun family. As always, let us know of any member, friend, or family to whom a card might be sent or a phone call made. This might make their day just a little bit better. The office phone number is 423.753.5797 or call Nancy Jewell at 423.282.0918. Your help is appreciated.

## *Spring Street Coach Yard Mechanical Report*

*By Bob Yaple*

GENERAL: As stated in the last Whistle Stop, there is renewed interest in expanding the Jonesborough Coach Yard. Talks are ongoing with the landlord in making this happen in the next few months. Drawings and surveys have already taken place.

539 Powhatan Arrow coach: Is still involved with the NS Steam Excursions up north. 529 will be returning to the Willetts Car Company in Spencer, NC for painting of the exterior.

500 St. Augustine coach: Is also on the NS Steam Excursions up North. The 500 will be returning back to the Jonesborough or mechanical upgrades

400 Moultrie diner: Kitchen improvements are on going.

2351 Crescent Harbor sleeper / lounge: The head end power damage has been repaired. The mechanical team has got the new genset already under the car and are in the process of wiring the Auto Start. This project should be wrapping up soon.

CLINCHFIELD 100: Recently an Amtrak Structural Engine visited Jonesborough to inspect the car to see if it is a candidate for Amtrak Certification. We will have the report back soon which will determine whether or not we can proceed with "Amtraking" the car.

## *GSMR SUMMER TRAIN EXCURSION SOLD OUT*

We had a very fast sell out for the Summer 2014 excursion on the GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAIN RAILROAD and will have 10 bus loads this year. All car hosts that volunteered to help on the train will be notified when there will be a safety training meeting.

## *WHISTLE TRUCK TO HELP CELEBRATE 100<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY*

The WVRHS&M Whistle Truck will be on hand for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the ex-NORFOLK & WESTERN RAILROAD Green Cove, VA railroad station. Everyone is cordially invited to attend on Sunday, August 3<sup>rd</sup>, from 2-4 pm. Festivities include music, refreshments, and presentations. For more information and directions to Green Cove, call (800) 628-7210. The station was built by the N&W in 1914 and made famous in O. Winston Link's iconic photograph. Today it serves as a US Forest Service visitor center and adjoins the Virginia Creeper National Recreation Trail. To learn more about the Green Cove Station, go to <http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=65768>.

## *In the News*



### **JONESBOROUGH RAILROAD MUSEUM UPDATE**

Work on the new East Tennessee Railroad Museum in Jonesborough will be started this fall. The Jonesborough Board of Mayor and Aldermen recently voted to put museum construction (re-assembly) in the budget. This is good news for WVRHS&M.



### **FULL STEAM AHEAD: VA GROUP PLANS TRAIN STATION RESTORATION**

[Bill Archer, Bluefield Daily Telegraph, 3/17/2014, via Turntable Times, Roanoke NRHS]

In February, when Dr. Terry Mullins, a member of the Tazewell Town Council, started organizing a committee to advance the restoration effort on the North Tazewell, VA, Norfolk & Western passenger station, he was excited when the mere mention of the project was reported in USA Today as the “Virginia News” item of that day.

On April 18, 2007, NORFOLK SOUTHERN RAILWAY donated the old N&W passenger station to the town. The town commissioned Hill Studio of Roanoke to prepare an assessment of the station’s existing condition, as well as to make recommendations as to how the town should proceed with restoration. Hill completed its study in May 2012. The study revealed several deficiencies in the plumbing, electrical service, heating system, roof and access that need to be addressed to bring the 1920s vintage station up to modern standards. N&W built a wooden station in North Tazewell during construction of the Clinch Valley Line between (then) Graham, VA, and Norton, VA, in the late 1880s. Hill estimated complete restoration of the structure at \$270,000 to \$310,000, based on 2012 costs.

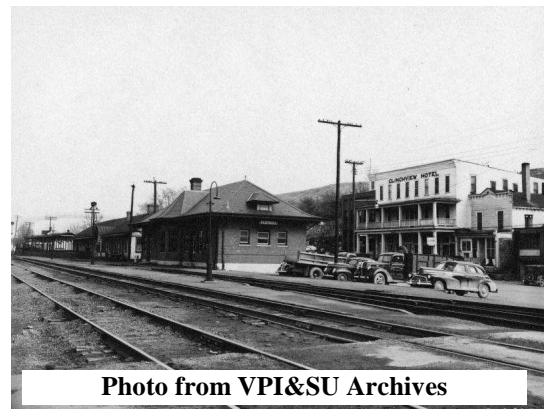


Photo from VPI&SU Archives

The town of Tazewell will celebrate the 150th anniversary of its incorporation by the Virginia General Assembly in 2016. “The challenge for Dr. Mullins is to complete the project in two years,” Todd Day, Tazewell town manager said. “I am very excited about the fundraiser for the train station restoration project. This committee has the support of 100 percent of town council.”

The only other N&W station on the Clinch Valley Line that is still standing is the station at Coeburn, VA. Mullins provided some of his thoughts about repurposing the station, but also said he didn’t want to start “muddying the waters.” “Dream big,” he said to the committee members. “Now is the time.”



### **CINCINNATI UNION TERMINAL AN ENDANGERED LANDMARK**



The non-profit National Trust for Historic Preservation just released its list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. Of note to railfans is the inclusion of the Cincinnati Union Terminal with the notation that the art deco beauty is deteriorating. [USA Today]

## *Logging Along the Laurel Fork – Part 1*

Fred Waskiewicz

[This article first appeared in Volume 63 #1 (1998) of the *NRHS Bulletin*. Since then, new information has come to light which corrects errors in that original publication.]

The mountains of Upper East Tennessee have always been rich in natural resources. The need to move these resources from the isolated mountain ridges and hollows to the industrial centers of the United States gave birth to some famous railroads, such as the Clinchfield and the East Tennessee & Western North Carolina (the "Tweetsie"). These two lines were carved out of this wilderness between the late 19th and early 20th Centuries to haul coal, lumber and minerals to a growing nation.

Several small logging railroads also sprung up during this era in the area's dense forests. Although unknown to the outside world, their importance was no less significant than that of the region's larger roads. It was these smaller roads which brought the natural resources from remote locations to interchanges with the larger lines, from whence they would be shipped to market. One such railroad was the Laurel Fork Railway, short-lived at 15 years and short-lined at 17 miles.

The history of the LF is sketchy. Most company records have disappeared or been destroyed. As those responsible for managing and operating the line are all deceased, firsthand knowledge of the organization and operation of the road doesn't exist. Surprisingly, a few sources of information were discovered: the handful of surviving employees of the LF's parent lumber company. Their incredibly sharp memories of the road and the mill it served, combined with the few related documents that have been found, weave an interesting story that is worth telling - and preserving.

The story begins around the turn of the century with the migration of lumbermen from Pennsylvania and Ohio into the rich, virgin forests of the southern Appalachians. The remote mountains of Carter County in Upper East Tennessee attracted many logging operations, ranging from the large Ritter holdings to several smaller companies such as Whiting, Keystone, Bradley and Buckeye.

In 1903, the East Tennessee Railroad Company was chartered with the intent of running one leg of its line up the Laurel Fork of the Doe River to the timber resources on the Elk River in neighboring North Carolina. Apparently, construction was never started. In 1909, William Flinn, an ex-state senator and head of the prestigious Pittsburgh contracting firm of Booth & Flinn, Ltd., purchased several tracts of land along the Laurel Fork. These purchases, totaling some 12,000 acres, were estimated to contain 150 million board feet of lumber and included some of the small logging operations previously mentioned. Plans called for erection of a sawmill and construction of a logging railroad to that mill.

Before any construction began, Flinn attempted to secure a means of conveying their finished products from the mill to market. The obvious choice was the ET&WNC, which served Carter County. Flinn sent a letter to railroad Vice-President and Superintendent George Hardin, a summary of which is found within a report dated September 8, 1909 to the ET&WNC board of directors by Mr. Hardin. The letter proposed that the lumber "could be taken out by a road to be built by Mr. Flinn in Hampton, or by a road to be built by him to a point one and a half mile above Pardee Point (in the Doe River Gorge) to connect with the ET road at that point, the latter plan contemplating making the Flinn road broad gauge and extending the third rail on the track of the ET road from where it is now at Hampton to about one and a half mile above Pardee Point."

The reference to the ET third rail reflects the fact that the line, primarily a narrow-gauge carrier, was dual-gauge at that point. The ET board elected to refer the matter to the president and vice-president, who would choose a course of action based upon whatever "they deemed advantageous to the company." It was this directive, as will be seen, that pitted two very strong personalities against one another and ultimately gave birth to a mountain railroad.

The matter was not resolved when the Pittsburgh Lumber Company was formed in 1910 with \$300,000 in loans. Senator Flinn was named president, L.D. Gasteiger was named vice-president and general manager, and Flinn's son A. Rex served as secretary-treasurer. As the elder Flinn remained a silent partner for the duration of the enterprise, and as A. Rex was a quiet man with some medical problems, "L.D." became the prevailing force behind the operation.

Among L.D.'s many initial chores was securing the sought-after contract with the ET&WNC. His contact was Superintendent Hardin, and, to the point, the two men never got along and never reached an agreement. The issue between them was the ET&WNC's rates. Locals cite the hardheadedness of both men as the real problem. Other sources claim that the ET&WNC felt that it had Gasteiger "over the barrel." Whatever the reason, bad feelings grew between the two, culminating with Gasteiger reportedly declaring: "The ET can go to hell - Flinn can lay a gold railroad into that timber." Gasteiger refused to ship over the ET&WNC, and the planned route of his logging line was extended from the mill site for an additional six-plus miles into Elizabethton, Tenn. and an interchange with the Virginia & Southwestern (Southern) near the present intersection of Sycamore Street and Johnson Avenue. This single decision transformed the vision of a logging road into the reality of a common carrier. (Relations apparently did improve at some later date as the LF also interchanged with the ET&WNC at roughly the same location.)

Bullheadedness alone is probably not the only reason for this decision. Gasteiger was a shrewd businessman and sources have pointed out that the extension was to the railroad's economic advantage. The line earned extra income as an originating carrier and also at the interchange. While this action obviously benefited the lumber company, it hurt the ET&WNC. Sulzer in *Ghost Railroads of Tennessee* speculates that the ET&WNC lost an estimated \$85,000 a year in revenues as a result of a compromise not being reached.

On April 15, 1910, a charter was granted to the Laurel Fork Railway Company, which received its financial backing from Booth & Flinn. Another Flinn son, George, served as president. Construction began late that year, supervised by L.D.'s brother Harry, a lawyer-turned-engineer. First, 600 men, with only picks, shovels, and wheel barrows, graded a 12-foot right-of-way and laid rails from Elizabethton to Hampton. Ties cut from the small Johnson Mill in Hampton were used. The route of the line left Elizabethton in a southeasterly direction, closely paralleling the ET&WNC for roughly two miles. At Valley Forge, it crossed over the Doe River on the line's only truss bridge and followed the contours of Polly Mountain. Hugging the walls of a small gorge (where the ET&WNC chose to tunnel), it followed this twisting route until breaking into the meadows of Hampton. From there it was but a short distance to Braemar, just east of Hampton and site of the mill and Pittsburgh offices. Class 70-3 Shay No. 1 was shipped by Lima in November, 1910, to aid in the building of this 6.7-mile segment, which was finished in June 1911. Once completed, this rail access to the outside world permitted construction of the mill to begin in earnest. June 1911 also marked the arrival of 70-3 Shay No. 2.

The second phase of construction took the line up into the timber stands and lived up to all contemporary expectations of how a logging railroad should look - rugged and tortuous with steep grades, deep cuts and sharp curves. Leaving Braemar, the tracks snaked through the line's namesake creek bottom for roughly a mile before crossing a long, curving trestle. There it began an ascent into a gorge with breathtaking panoramas. This segment climbed 800 feet in little over two miles with grades of up to eight percent, continuing to parallel the creek (although well above the stream bed) and traveling in a southeasterly direction. Several fills and trestles were used to bridge hollows and streams along the way. A spectacular crossing of Laurel Fork Creek was achieved on a 85-foot-high trestle not far above its falls. Beyond this point, the line leveled out and entered the mountain farming community of Dennis Cove at the foot of Pond Mountain. This segment, completed in April 1912, terminated at a station named Crows, approximately three miles from the mill and 9 1/2 miles from Elizabethton. During 1912, a wye was built at Crows to turn engines.

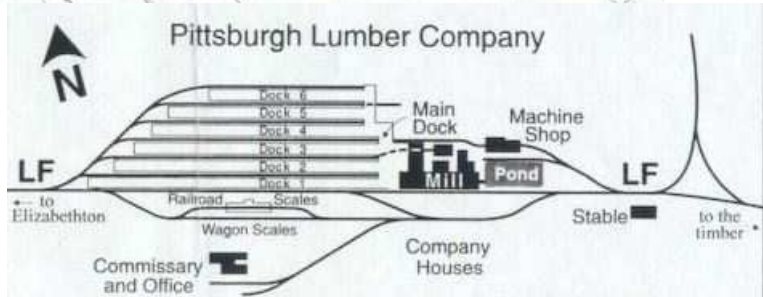
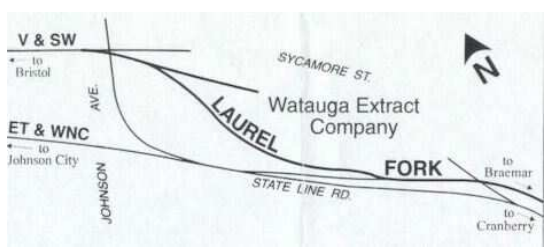
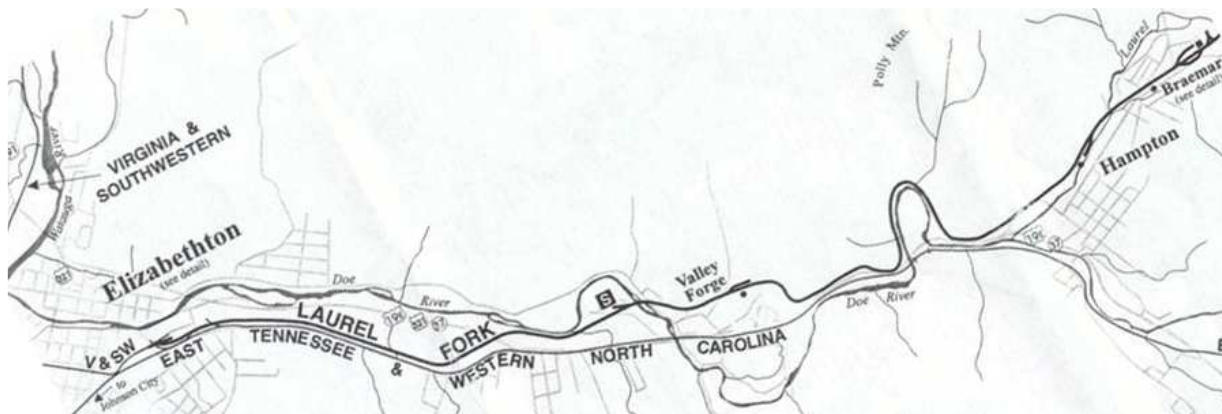
Shortly after the completion of the line into Dennis Cove, Camp No. 1 was established. Skid roads were laid up Coon Den Hollow, and draft horses, some weighing over a ton, were imported from the North to begin skidding logs to the awaiting trains. Harry Gasteiger left the project at this point, returning to Pennsylvania.

The third and final phase of construction extended the LF well beyond Dennis Cove. The road progressed even higher into the mountains, crossing many narrow streams and ravines and continuing to play tag with the creek. Despite the cascading Laurel Fork's rapid change in elevation, the LF's roadbed maintained a good grade with no switchbacks until finally reaching the creek's headwaters in a wide, comparably flat basin. Here, the rail line split, with the left fork ending in "no man's land" at the foot of Buck Mountain and the right fork terminating at Bitter End, approximately 17 miles from Elizabethton. This work was completed in 1916.

The mainline was laid with 70-pound rail and is estimated to have cost \$20,000 per mile to construct. An untold number of trestles were used to crisscross the Laurel Fork and its tributaries, the largest trestle being 200 feet long and 75 feet high. Likewise, countless cribs were constructed to permit the line to cling to the hillsides and the banks of the stream. "Stations" (not depots but rather sidings or survey points) along the completed mainline included Elizabethton, Valley Forge, Braemar, Crows, Keystone, Frog Level and Laban.

Fifteen miles of spurs from the main line were built along all tributaries of any size feeding the Laurel Fork. These steeply-graded spurs were temporary in construction, built with 56- and 30-pound rail. They often extended over the stream bed rather than paralleling it. Some sources have claimed these spurs were narrow gauge, but those reports cannot be verified and the idea doesn't seem practical. What is known is that they provided access to timber on Pond, Walnut, and White Rocks Mountains and their construction costs were no less significant than the mainline's - \$10,000 per mile. In fact, one three-mile-long branch cost \$35,000 to construct.

One of these spurs is worth mention. It was the last spur to be built, which pierced the heart of "Tweetsie Country" - the Doe River Gorge. This spur which connected with the mainline at the wye at Crows (Dennis Cove), utilized three switchbacks to gain access to what is called the "Big Flats" and featured grades of up to ten percent. It was so steep that only two log cars could be pulled at a time! Interestingly, its route coincided with Flinn's original proposal for a junction of the LF and ET&WNC. [To be continued.]



## Upcoming Events



**August 7-9, 2014:** The 2014 Railroad Heritage Alliance Annual Membership Meeting, Summit Pointe Conference and Events Center, Spartanburg, SC. Details can be found appended to this newsletter.



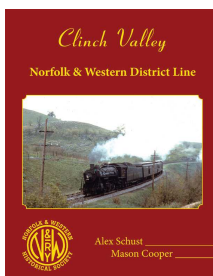
**August 16, 2014:** Watauga Valley RHS&M's Summer Excursion on the GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAIN RAILROAD in Bryson City, NC.



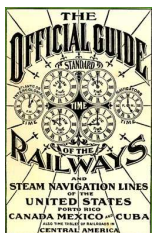
**November 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014:** The very popular Fall Amtrak Excursions, co-hosted by WVRHS&M in conjunction with NCTM. Saturday, November 1, the train will travel from Spencer, NC to Appomattox, VA and return. On Sunday, November 2, a roundtrip from Spencer to Toccoa, GA for their Fall Festival is scheduled. . Details can be found appended to this newsletter.

## Tour of CLINCHFIELD South End

Come join us for a members-only van tour of the south end of the former CLINCHFIELD RAILROAD. Leaving Jonesborough, TN at 7 am on the morning of **August 2, 2014**, we will go straight to Spartanburg, SC where we will take a tour of the Hub City Railroad Museum. We will then drive by the former SOUTHERN RAILWAY Hayne Yard and CSX's Spartanburg Yard. The next stop is the railroaders' favorite eating place, Wade's Family Restaurant. After taking in a great meal, we will head north along the former CRR mainline, hopefully catching some north and south bound trains, visiting various points of interest along the way, ending the railroad portion in Erwin before returning to Jonesborough. The cost is \$32.00 per person (please note: no refunds), which includes round trip transportation. Meals will be on your own. To reserve your seat please contact Nick White as soon as possible at (276) 685-2386 or email him at [nickwhite@hotmail.com](mailto:nickwhite@hotmail.com). For more detailed information about this tour, check out the WVRHS&M message board at <http://wataugavalleynrhs.org/messageboard.php>.



The Norfolk & Western Historical Society has announced that its newest Branch Line series book, Clinch Valley: Norfolk & Western District Line, is expected to be available by September 2014. Projected to be over 200 pages long, it covers the Clinch Valley District mile by mile. There are over 80 photos, 175 drawings and 40 maps to illustrate and guide the reader through the history of the line. To follow its publication, go to <http://www.nwhs.org/commissary/books-nwhs.html>



For you railroad research hounds out there, electronic copies of the Official Railroad Guide from 1874 – 1909 can be found online at <http://www.naotc.org/oldguides/index.html>

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Published Monthly by the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum  
P.O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605-0432  
[wataugavalley@gmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@gmail.com)

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Fred Waskiewicz, Editor



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P.O. Box 432  
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*announcing....*

**Railroad Heritage Alliance, Inc.**

**P.O. Box 432**

**Johnson City, TN 37605-4032**

Lester Collins, President: [lestcoll@bellsouth.net](mailto:lestcoll@bellsouth.net)

Kati Phelps, Secretary: [rha.kati@charter.net](mailto:rha.kati@charter.net)

## **The 2014 Railroad Heritage Alliance Annual Membership Meeting**

**Location: Summit Pointe Conference and Events Center, Spartanburg, SC**

**Dates: August 7, 8 and 9, 2014**

### **Schedule of Events**

Thursday, August 7, 2014

1:00 pm Tour of the new South Carolina Inland Port, Greer SC

Evening. Meet the RHA officers

Friday, August 8, 2014

8:00 am Tour of Republic Locomotive, Greenville SC. Drive a locomotive!

1:00 pm Greenville & Western Railroad, Belton SC. Ride in a caboose on a revenue freight train.

Evening: Speaker to be announced

Saturday, August 9, 2014

8:00 am Tour Russell Museum, Boiling Springs SC. This is a private, not open to the public museum, featuring lots of railroad & NASCAR collectibles, automobiles, and miscellaneous items including an operating moonshine still (sorry, water only). This museum is one of South Carolina's best kept secrets!

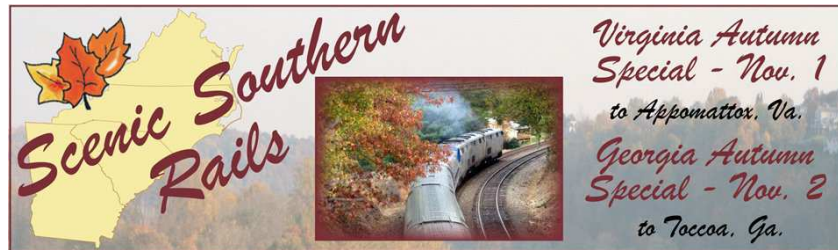
12:00 noon. Eat at the world-famous Beacon Drive In, Spartanburg.

1:00 pm Tour the Hub City Railroad Museum, Spartanburg.

5:00 pm General Membership Meeting followed by dinner. After-dinner speaker Donald Purdee will make a presentation on his famous dad, Bill Purdee of the Southern/Norfolk Southern Railway steam program.

General Notes: The headquarters hotel is the Hampton Inn and Suites at Westgate Mall in Spartanburg. We have negotiated a very attractive rate for the event. Summit Pointe Conference and Events Center joins the Hampton Inn. City Range Restaurant, one of Spartanburg's finest, is located across the parking lot from Summit Pointe and many other restaurants are nearby. All transportation will be by charter bus boarding at Summit Pointe.

For your pre-registration form, please contact [rha.kati@charter.net](mailto:rha.kati@charter.net)



One of the N.C. Transportation Museum's most popular offerings combines the romance of rail travel, a great destination and the convenience of a day trip. Autumn Train Excursions offer the rare opportunity to take a daylight train trip on vintage rail cars through beautiful countryside. Trips typically sell out, so those wishing to purchase are urged to act quickly. These one-day trips are presented by the N.C. Transportation Museum Foundation and the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum and act as fundraisers for both organizations.

**The Virginia Autumn Special  
Appomattox, Va. – Saturday, Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>**

Civil War history will be all around for those traveling to Appomattox, Va. Nov. 1. Departing from the museum grounds in Spencer with additional passenger pick-up in Greensboro, passengers will arrive in one of the nation's most historic towns around noon.

Passengers will disembark at the restored Appomattox Station, once a stop for the South Side Railroad in the late 1800s and now home to the Appomattox Visitor Information Center. This charming small town holds claim to one of the most significant moments in U.S. History -- the surrender of General Robert E. Lee to end the Civil War and reunited a divided nation.

Virginia Autumn Special passengers can enjoy the historic shops and restaurants of Appomattox's quaint downtown, or, for a nominal additional fee, explore either the Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, or the Museum of the Confederacy's Appomattox site. Shuttle buses will provide transportation to both sites. We strongly recommend that passengers planning to visit either of these sites pack a lunch, pre-purchase a box lunch, or plan to purchase lunch on the café car, due to time limitations at the destination.

**The Georgia Autumn Special  
Toccoa, Ga. – Sunday, Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup>**

The Georgia Autumn Special will depart from Spencer, N.C., with additional passenger pick up at the Spartanburg Amtrak Station. Nestled into the foothills of the Southern Appalachian Mountains, the historic town will be bustling with activity during the 38<sup>th</sup> annual Harvest Festival. Passengers will have approximately three hours to enjoy the festival, which features handmade, handcrafted and home-grown items from more than 200 vendors, as well as delicious regional foods, great entertainment on two stages, children and youth activities, buggy rides and much more.

Toccoa Falls, named for the Cherokee word "Toccoah" meaning beautiful, is a must see. Located on the campus of Toccoa College, the 186-foot falls are 26 feet taller than Niagara Falls. Shuttle buses will be making a continuous loop between downtown Toccoa and Toccoa Falls

**Ticket sales are underway now with all seating classes and all options available. Go to**

**<https://www.dynamicticketsolutions.com/nctm/index.cfm> or  
call (704) 636-2889 during business hours, 9 am – 5 pm.**