

# 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

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On November 1, 2015 we sponsored a joint excursion with NCTM into Asheville, NC, up the famous "Old Fort Loops", not knowing this would be our last trip into that city, or, given changes in NS policy, on any mainline. Disappointment with excursion availability is nothing new, but there was always hope opportunities would return. However, with NS ending through freight service on their "S-line" (Morristown, TN – Salisbury, NC) hope of this scene ever returning seems slim to none. Related story on page 5.

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## *May 25<sup>th</sup> Membership Meeting Canceled*

Due to COVID-19, the Johnson City Public Library will be closed through the month of May, which of course means the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum will have to cancel our Monday, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020 meeting. We are hoping to have our June meeting, which is tentatively scheduled to be held on Monday, June 22<sup>nd</sup> at 6:30 pm. Members will receive notification verifying this meeting; details will be included in the next newsletter. Please stay safe in the meantime.

## *Member Notes*

*by Edna Kay Carter, Membership Chairperson*

Please keep the following in your thoughts and prayers as they deal with various health concerns. They are Gary Price, Nancy Jewell, George Ritchie and Anita Johnson. We are sad to report the recent passing of Anita Johnson. As always, let us know of any member, friend or family to whom a card might be sent or a phone call made. The office number is (423) 753-5797 or call Edna Carter at (423) 571-4612. Continue to remember those who have lost loved ones.

We would like to welcome new members Gerald and Linda Feeney from Sunnyvale, CA to our club.

Hope everything will return back to normal soon.

## *WVRHS&M 2020 Rail Excursions*

### **SPRING 2020 GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAIN TRIPS**

We had to cancel the Great Smoky Mountains train excursion for March and May due to the mandate of the Governor of North Carolina. The bright side is that we were able to reschedule for Saturday, September 12<sup>th</sup> and Sunday, the 13<sup>th</sup>. We either transferred the ticket holders for March 28<sup>th</sup> and May 16<sup>th</sup> over to the September dates or give them a refund. The tickets that were refunded will be put back on sale in June to the General Public on our web site at [www.wataugavalleynrhs.org](http://www.wataugavalleynrhs.org).

### **VOLUNTEER HOSTS NEEDED FOR SEPTEMBER AND NOVEMBER EXCURSIONS**

All members interested in hosting the September 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and November 1<sup>st</sup> trips on the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad are asked to email [wataugavalley@embarqmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@embarqmail.com) stating your name and specifying which day(s) you want to volunteer. A sign-up form is attached to the end of this newsletter.

### **WATAUGA VALLEY MEMBERSHIP BROCHURES HAVE BEEN UPDATED**

New WVRHS&M membership brochures are available to our members to hand out to potential members. Brochures are available at all meetings or you can call the office at (423) 753-5797. If you know of someone who might make a good member, please give them a brochure and invite them to the next meeting.

## *Whistle Truck*

COVID-19 has taken its toll on Whistle Truck rentals; we have not had any as of this date.

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*"One thing about trains: It doesn't matter where they're goin'. What matters is deciding to get on." [from the motion picture "Polar Express"]*

## *Mechanical Department Report*

*by Jim Magill*

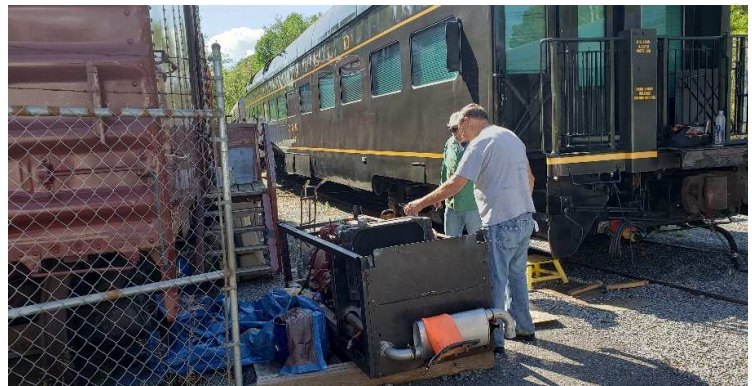
Summer is knocking on our door and the weather has been good, allowing us to finally get some work done. If you would like to help out at the Jonesborough Coach Yard on Tuesday's between 9 am to 5 pm or Saturdays 9 am to 12 noon, please call the office at (423) 753-5797 or email [wataugavalley@embarqmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@embarqmail.com).

### ROLLING STOCK

**“Powhatan Arrow” coach (WATX 539), “Moultrie” diner (WATX 400):** are in service at the North Carolina Transportation Museum.

**“St Augustine” coach (WATX 500), “Crescent Harbor” sleeper / lounge (WATX 2351):** are at the Spring Street Coach Yard in Jonesborough

**“Clinchfield 100” office car (WATX 100):** Major work has been ongoing with the 100. A new extended platform railing was installed to make it safer. A new restroom is being installed; new gen set, air conditioning and heating system are planned for this summer.



[Left] Mike Dowdy cutting out the old hot water compartment; [right] Mike and Art Devoe working on Perkins Genset.



[Left] Don Findley working and Gary Lombardi “supervising”. [Right] Gary Lombardi and Art Devoe working on installing new upgraded platform railing.

## *Chuckey Depot and Museum*

Due to COVID-19, the Chuckey Depot at Jonesborough had to be closed. The Depot Advisory Committee will meet on June 1<sup>st</sup> to review what mandates the CDC and the Governor of Tennessee have in force. We hope to open the depot sometime in mid to late June.

The next training host session for the Chuckey Depot will be in September. To get involved to volunteer at the depot/museum one day a month, please call the office at (423) 753-5797 or email [wataugavalley@gmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@gmail.com) to get your name on the list. We hope you will volunteer.

## *In the News ...*

### *N&W Y6a to Return to St. Louis After Five Years in Virginia*

[Chris Anderson, *Trains News Wire*] Coby Ellison, curator at the National Transportation Museum, says the 2156 is being prepped for shipment back to Missouri after being on loan to the Virginia Museum of Transportation since 2015. Officials at the Virginia museum said in January that discussions were being held to potentially extend the five-year loan/lease of the 2156, but Ellison has confirmed that the locomotive will be returned in the near future.

Ellison says there currently is no timeline for the locomotive's return. He says the National Transportation Museum is currently closed due to the ongoing the COVID-19 pandemic, and the restrictions associated with the pandemic have made the timeline for the return of 2156 uncertain. He says he hopes the museum will open by June 1, but it remains uncertain if the locomotive will be returned by that date. "We're just excited to bring it back," Ellison says.

The 2156 was leased to the Virginia Museum of Transportation by the St. Louis museum in May 2015 in exchange for the Virginia museum's EMD FTB demonstrator diesel. The steam locomotive was pulled dead in tow across Norfolk Southern trackage to Roanoke, arriving in time for the return of famed Class J steamer N&W No. 611 to operation in late May 2015.

Built in 1942 in Roanoke and retired in 1959, the 2156 is one of only two N&W 2-8-8-2s that survive. The arrival in Roanoke of the Y6a in 2015 marked the reunion of N&W Class J No. 611, the 2156 and N&W Class A No. 1218, the first such reunion of N&W's three famed locomotive types built in Roanoke in more than a half-century.

Will Harris, a board member and former Virginia Museum of Transportation president, says the museum made an attempt to keep the 2156 in Roanoke. "We made a substantial offer to purchase it and included some exchange, but we just weren't able to come to an agreement," he says. "They couldn't have been any nicer to work with. Hopefully, in the future, we can work out another exchange and possibly have it back here again alongside its two sisters."

Harris said the 2156's visit to Roanoke would not have been possible without the assistance of Norfolk Southern and former NS CEO Wick Moorman. He also said Bob Saxton with NS helped make the project possible.

Ellison says the 2156 will again be shipped via Norfolk Southern, and the Virginia museum's FTB diesel will also be shipped back to Roanoke. Harris says the 2156 will be prepped for shipment at the Norfolk Southern Schaffer's Crossing shops. He says the locomotive's connecting rods will be removed from its drivers, and greasing and inspection will then be performed prior to shipment.

## 2020 NRHS Convention Dates Changed

[from John Goodman, National Convention Chairman NRHS] The National Convention Committee wishes to announce that the new dates for our upcoming convention are August 31 thru September 5, 2020. The June 8-13 Convention has been affected by the COVID-19 virus sweeping the nation and the world. Due to this situation, we have decided to move the dates forward. This is a Monday thru Saturday time frame as were the previous dates.

Please be aware that due to the COVID-19 situation in the state of California at this time, the Knott's Berry Farm Hotel in closed. They expect to reopen on Monday, June 1.

The Convention Committee Chairman and the Senior Officers of NRHS are planning to have a Conference Call on Monday, June 1, to again review the COVID-19 situation. If anything changes in this plan, we will put out an immediate notice to all members. Thank you for your understanding. Stay well.

## Downgrading Norfolk Southern's Asheville line

[Blog posted by Jim Wrinn on *trains.com*, Tuesday, May 5, 2020] Most of you know that North Carolina is my home state. Most of you know that I was blessed to grow up in the western part of the state, where mountains touch the sky and railroads follow. Railroading there has been an art form for 141 years, since the first railroad arrived in Asheville. The names and places are legendary: Saluda, Murphy Branch, Clinchfield Loops. Many of you know I have a special affinity for the Loops near Old Fort, N.C. This is a love letter to that line at a critical point in its history. Later this week, an engineer at Spencer Yard near Linwood, N.C., will knock off the 26 brake and begin his westward trek with manifest through train 135 for the last time. The hump yard built in 1979 is closing, due to weak traffic, and through freights on Norfolk Southern's S-line will no longer run. It is a sad day in Tar Heel railroad history. A sad day for me, as a fan, and on a personal level.

If you have never been to the loops, I pity that you've never had the experience. It is a 13-mile section of railroad built to twist, and wind, and curl from the foothills of the rolling Carolina Piedmont to the summit of the Blue Ridge. It follows Mill Creek to a point marked by the railroad-made Andrews Geyser, where three loops climb the mountain and trains on High Fill tower over the tracks directly below. And then it's tunnel after tunnel to the top. It's a model railroad come to life. Seven tunnels and as many bridges and carry the rails to the summit at appropriately named Ridgecrest. This is the land of 2-10-2s on freights, 4-8-2s on passenger trains, and a whole lot of diesel horsepower for almost 70 years. It's been retainers and dynamics on the downhill and reducing tonnage and breaking knuckles or pulling drawbars on the climb. It is scenery, and mountain views, and nature at every bend. Bears and deer. Lavender rhododendron and flame azalea galore in the spring, a rainbow of colors in the fall. That's the quick story. That's the fan story.

Now this is where it gets personal. I grew up knowing that my great-grandfather had been a construction laborer on what is now the NS mainline through northeastern Georgia through Gainesville and Toccoa. But what I did not know until recently when my wife, Cate, went looking into my ancestry that he and his father had both worked on the loops near Old Fort in the 1870s. I don't know exactly [w]hat they did, but I suspect it was hard labor alongside the many convicts who helped build this line. A lot of sweat, a lot of dirt, a lot of profanity as men struggled to build a railroad where there was none. I have always admired this railroad [continued on next page]

and the people who run it with such professionalism, but now I think about standing at Jarretts Tunnel or atop High Fill and wondering if Jeremiah or Cornelius may have stood in the same places admiring their work. I hope they did.

After this week, there will only be locals on this crossing of the Appalachians. Industry in Western North Carolina has long ago faded away, and all that is left is the paper mill at Canton that Watco's Blue Ridge Southern serves. NS will run fewer mountain miles. Fans will snap fewer pixels at Point Tunnel, Graphite, and the geyser. But my ancestors will always be a part of this route no matter how many trains polish its rails. And the Loops at Old Fort, humming with six-axle motors or quiet without the joyous noise of a passing train, will always be a part of me.

## *Charges Reinstated against Amtrak 188 Engineer*

[*Trains News Wire*] Criminal charges have been reinstated against Brian Bostian, the latest twist in the legal saga of the engineer who was at the controls for the fatal Philadelphia derailment of Amtrak train No. 188 in 2015. Charges against Bostian were dropped for the second time in July 2019 when a judge said his actions did not rise to the level of criminal recklessness [see "Charges against Amtrak 188 engineer again dropped," *Trains News Wire*, July 23, 2019], but on Thursday, Pennsylvania Superior Court Judge Victor Stabile said the judge who issued the prior ruling improperly considered evidence that should be litigated at trial. The New York Times reports that Pennsylvania's attorney general issued a statement saying the judge "ruled the Attorney General can move forward in our work to deliver justice," while Bostian's lawyer said, "This was an accident and not a crime, and we will appeal."

## *End of an Era for Roanoke*

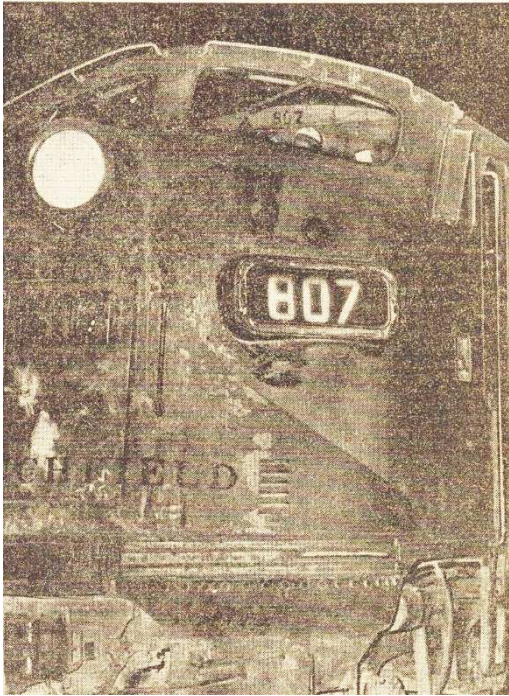
[DAVID HUNGATE, Special to *The Roanoke Times*] [May 18<sup>th</sup>] is a red-letter day in the history of Roanoke. Today is the last official day for Norfolk Southern's locomotive shop - once the economic engine that powered Roanoke. Founded in 1881 as the Roanoke Machine Works (and acquired by Norfolk & Western in 1883), "the shops" date back to a time when Roanoke was still Big Lick. If you had to tell the history of the city from just one location, that would be the place to do it from. In the 1930s, the railroad employed more than 6,000 workers in Roanoke — one of every 11.5 people in the city. On any given day, as many as four locomotives and 20 rail cars were being assembled in those shops. Roanoke was the Detroit of the rail industry, at a time when being compared to Detroit was still a compliment. Those Roanoke shops were on the cutting-edge of technology for their day, producing the J-Class engines that were the most advanced class of steam locomotives ever built — the railroad equivalent of a Saturn V rocket. Today just one of those fabled engines survived — our beloved 611 — and it's literally a museum piece. And now the shops themselves are shuttered, fallen victim to a changing economy and a Norfolk Southern restructuring that has seen those jobs moved to Altoona, Pennsylvania. [ For the complete article, go to <https://tinyurl.com/ydgxzcs9> ].

## *What to do with a Circus Train?*

"High Green", Chesapeake Railway Association's newsletter, passed along a Charlotte Observer article on NCDOT's dilemma on what to do with nine ex-Ringling Bros. train cars it purchased in 2017. Too lengthy to be printed here, the article can be found online at <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/article240619297.html>.

## THE DAY THE CLINCHFIELD RAILROAD LEFT DOWNTOWN JOHNSON CITY.

[This article by Bill Tigue published in the *Johnson City Press Chronicle* on January 28, 1971, is a writeup on the last Clinchfield train through downtown Johnson City on the preceding day. If you're not aware, the original CRR main line (starting in West Johnson City) ran from Embreeville Road to near where Earth Fare and Kroger are today, then on to where the ETSU parking garage exists, past the mini Dome and then on to the present location of State of Franklin Road. It continued behind Harmon Ice Company, crossing Watauga and Sevier avenues, and then in front



**The figure above, accompanying the original article by staff photographer Rupe and reproduced here from the newspaper, while admittedly of poor quality, is the only known photo of that last train.**

of the Clinchfield Railway Station, and continued to Roane Street where it followed the ET&WNC until Maple Street. From there it headed toward Erwin, crossing the Milligan and Erwin Highways. The line was replaced by The High Line, engineered by past WVRHS&M member Jim Goforth and opened by Mr. T. D. Moore with a special train including Watauga Valley's CRR 100 as the marker car for the trip from Johnson City to Erwin.]

The Clinchfield Railroad First No. 93 last night closed a chapter in local history for the last train to use the lines track through downtown Johnson City.

First No 93 carrying heavy freight train left Erwin Yard TN bound for Elkhorn City, KY at 635 pm the reporter boarded the train in Johnson City for the last trip on the downtown tracks. After this train all traffic was diverted to the new high line through the East Tennessee State University Campus.

About one hour later the reporter jumped from the diesel at Kingsport, TN as the crew added more cars for the trip through Southwest Virginia and Eastern Kentucky. T. D. Moore reported the tracks would be removed immediately from Johnson City to Okolona. Mr Moore announced yesterday that the line in Unicoi had been completed and the tracks on the ole main line would be removed. A small

section of the line on the east side of Johnson City would be retained to get freight up to the High Line.

There will be no essential changes in the railroad's operation after last evenings nostalgic trip. Nor will Johnson City be radically altered in the near future. However, no longer will the dark behemoths roar past [sic] each other near General Mills, Johnson City Machine and Foundry Works, Harris Manufacturing, the trailer courts near East Tennessee State University and many other landmarks clustered about or near the former Clinchfield main line through our city.

Seeing- for the first time , the picture of a freight train from their view point rather than ours was a unique thrill.

Conceding traffic will be easier to manager [sic] now that the trains (or at least some of them) are gone, one must also suffer just a pang or two of regret for the hug[e], noisy, oftent [sic] dirty and many times inconvenient freight trains which caused many a good man to let fly with impatient epithets when blocked at an intersection by one of them. [Continued on next page.]

I say [sic, saw?] a different Johnson City than ever before as we passed back yards, refuse piles, behind factories, discarded remnants of autos, equipment and many rear windows of homes in which hundreds of local residents were probably not aware the shaking rumblings were the last they were to experience.

From now on, students, faculty and even ESTU President D. P. Culp are to serenaded, shook, whistled at and will listen to hisses, bangs, creaks and groans.

Other homes on the southern side of town will show their back doors back porches, and back windows. ETSU gleaming in the night will be cut daily by the lumbering creatures carry much of the nations vital supplies northward and southward.

Crew members Doug Orren, Doug Piercy, R C Tipton and J. O. Casteel will undoubtedly work many more nights rolling through the area on Train No 93 and 97. The switching will occur, the destinations will be met, the vital goods will be transported. But no longer through downtown Johnson City, TN.

*Photo Gallery ...*



Here's a couple shots from the past submitted by WVRHS&M members Mike and Betty Jackson. Upper left shows ET&WNC ALCO RS-3 #209 in Elizabethton in 1984 waiting for the scrapper's torch. At right 2-4-4T "Rachel" is ready to power 2003 ET&WNC Convention attendees through the Doe River Gorge. Shortly after, the engine would find its way to the Gaylord Resort in Grapevine, Texas (where a search couldn't find any current mention). Diesel-powered excursions are still periodically offered by the Doe River Gorge Christian Camp.

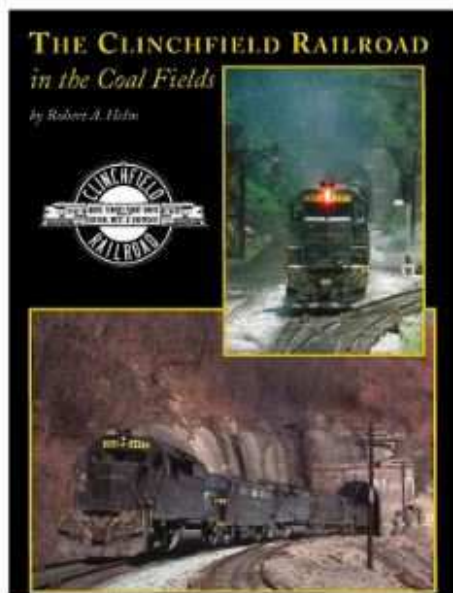


C.K. March found ET&WNC ALCO RS-3 #210 idling behind the Tri State Box Co. in Elizabethton in 1968.



[The following posted by the C&O Historical Society, <https://cohs.org/>]

## The Clinchfield Railroad in the Coal Fields



As we clear out our warehouse we have found the LAST 18 copies of this book, long out of print. First come- first served.

Hardbound, 126 pages, 100-lb. paper, COLOR throughout.

Author Bob Helm takes a detailed look at the great Clinchfield Railroad, so important as a connecting bridge-line for C&O in the mid-20th Century. The book deals with this short but important railroad in the diesel era, with material on it from F-units to CSX.

A series of track charts/diagrams show the grades and track layout at all major parts of the line in the coal fields of southwestern Virginia, along with good pictures of coal mine tipples, yards, terminals, trains, and facilities in this once prosperous coal region.

It also includes first-hand accounts of riding and working some of the actual jobs, written in railroad "lingo." Interviews with railroad employees also give the reader a first-hand look at Clinchfield in the late steam and early diesel era. Operations are heavily documented, including the "turn" jobs.

Built late in the railway age, the Clinchfield was an engineering marvel with tunnels, cuts, and high bridges that made it a wonder of the engineering community.

Published in 2004 and long out of printed, we have only 18 books!

**BK-20-957 \$32.95 Sale Price \$25.95**

### *N&W and VIRGINIAN Films by H. Reid on YouTube*

[Posted by the N&W Historical Society] There have recently been several historical films, allegedly shot by none other than H. Reid, posted on YouTube which should interest everyone with a fondness for the N&W and Virginian. There is also footage of other Virginia lines. Go to YouTube and search "H Reid Film Collection".

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**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

**TIME VALUE MATERIAL**

# EXCURSION BUS/CAR HOST SIGN-UP FORM

I/we would like to sign up as a Bus/Car Host on one of the following excursions below. The trip basically involves serving as a host on the bus and relaxing on the train for a great ride on the Great Smoky Mountains Train Excursion. Please check which dates you can work; bring this form to the next meeting and turn in, mail to WVRHS&M, P O Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605-0432 or email [wataugavalley@gmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@gmail.com).

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, state \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

I/we can work the following dates (please check beside date)

Sept 12 \_\_\_\_\_

Sept 13 \_\_\_\_\_

Nov 1 \_\_\_\_\_