

Whistle Stop



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



Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

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Mike Tilley captured ex-NKP Berkshire #765, truly a graceful, poetic machine, in this beautiful action shot, taken at Wolf Creek, WV on August 5 as it led a NORFOLK SOUTHERN Employee Special. NS Heritage Unit #8100, in complementary NICKEL PLATE livery and providing auxiliary power, can be seen behind the second tender. Watauga Valley members Tony King, Chris Starnes, Nick White, Mike Tilley and Randy Moore set out on August 4 to chase the 765-powered NS Employee trips around the Williamson, WV area. All five members took some beautiful photos and video of this magnificent engine. Perhaps we'll be treated to a 765 program in the near future?

August 27th Membership Meeting

The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum will have our regular meeting on Monday, August 27, 2012 at the Johnson City Public Library, 101 West Millard St., Johnson City, TN. Our program this month, presented by Howard Orfield, will be on special and unique railroads. Also hear details about the upcoming fall excursions to Appomattox, VA and Toccoa, GA. Bring a friend out for a relaxing evening with your fellow members.

Member Notes

By Nancy Jewell

Please keep Jane DeVoe and Bonnie Smitter in your thoughts as they deal with health concerns. As always, let us know of members, friends or family folk who might be remembered with a card or phone call. The office phone number is 423-753-5797 or call Nancy Jewell at 423-282-0918. Let us hear from you. We do want to keep in touch.

Spring Street Coach Yard Mechanical Report

By Bob Yapple

Rolling Stock.

The two coaches are still at TVRM seeing service on the NORFOLK SOUTHERN Steam train.

400 Moultrie Dining Car

The drapes have been cleaned – they look great! The blinds are mostly done and cleaned but somewhat discolored from years of exposure. Rewiring of the electrical and lighting circuits in the galley is in progress.

2351 Crescent Harbor

Interior detail work is ongoing. Shims for the truck equalizer pads have been made and are ready to install. This will raise the car to compensate for the worn wheels. Shock absorber mounts have been altered to receive the new shocks. With this change we can use the same shocks on all cars. New rubber seals have been installed on the provision doors and for the first time in years they don't leak. The same seal fits the diner's provision doors and the vestibule doors on both coaches.

Trip Report: 2012 Rails and Sails

By Nick White

Thirty two Watauga Valley RHS&M members joined us for the 2012 Rails and Sails Field Trip on Saturday, July 21. We started our fun-filled day by looking around the Knoxville, TN train depot and taking photos of the Old Smokey Chapter's historic passenger coaches and cabooses. Then it was time for our buffet lunch cruise on the Star on Knoxville, where we enjoyed a wonderful buffet lunch while viewing the scenery that passed by. Then it was off to a train ride, operated by the Southern Appalachia Railway Museum. The Secret City Train ride featured a unique look at the large complex at Oak Ridge, TN that split the atom which started the Atomic Age. Then we were informed to our great surprise that the staff of the Southern Appalachia Railway Museum was extending our train ride, especially for us! We got to ride on some rare mileage around the Oak Ridge complex that was not offered to the public. What a treat!

If you missed this trip, please keep in mind we are working on a coalfields field trip tour featuring Southwest Virginia & Southern West Virginia coal mines and communities in November. (But this trip will not be for the faint of heart!) If you are interested in joining us on this trip, please contact Nick White at 276-685-2386 or nickwhite_@hotmail.com in order that we can properly calculate our transportation needs. [Check out the Photo Section for some fun pictures.]

**“The Switchback Scenic Route ~ A History of The Marion and Rye Valley Railway”
By: Gary P. Price**

[This is the fourth installment of the serialization of Gary's Book on the M&RV. ©Gary. P. Price, 1998. All Rights Reserved.]

Chapter IV - WRECKS

Wrecks, derailments and mishaps were a common part of everyday life for the early railroader. Derailments stopped movement on the railroad and held up money-making trains. They destroyed track, damaged customer's merchandise, demolished locomotives and rolling stock, and unfortunately, caused death to visit the rails. The bottom line ... it cost the railroads money.

Even in today's modern mega-railroads, accidents can and do happen. Railroad management “preaches” safety every single day that employees work. Early railroad management did not put emphasis on safety. Most officials thought that the only important thing was to move the goods on down the line, no matter what the cost.

Most of the Marion and Rye Valley Railway was built over solid land with a good roadbed and tracks. But the logging part of the railroad was built by laying rails on top of small trees on rough ground with steep grades. This posed the problem of rough track, bad gauge and hazardous conditions for employees operating trains up and down the switchbacks of Pine Mountain. This is a brief look at the dangerous side of railroading.

The Wreck of No. 9

When it comes to American folklore, railroads played an important role in the influence of songs, poetry, bragging rites and tall tales. Songs like “The Ballad of Casey Jones”, “The Wreck of Old 97”, and heroes like “John Henry”, or even the spiritual “Life's Railway to Heaven” made the railroads a common subject around the early 1900's dinner table and anywhere the old timers gathered to “shoot the breeze”.

After September 10, 1912, all of Southwest Virginia was abuzz with the news of a derailment. A train had runaway on one of the steepest grades in the area. Death had paid a visit to the Marion and Rye Valley. The following is an actual account of the wreck handed down from generation to generation (compiled by Ben Blevins).

On Tuesday, September 10, 1912, the worst week in the history of the Marion and Rye Valley Railway occurred. It took place on Pine Mountain in Grayson County, near Troutdale, Virginia.

It was just any ordinary day in the mountains with business as usual. Engineer Kent Steffey and his fireman, Nute Batemen, climbed aboard Shay #9 with Fields Anderson climbing aboard the rear of the work train to assume his duty as conductor of the morning work train.

Anderson gave his signal and the train left Fairwood Station for a five mile journey to the crest of Pine Mountain. This trip took around an hour, which was common with the slow moving Shays and the numerous switchbacks. But this was to be no ordinary day!

After dropping off the work crew on top of the mountain at what is known as the “Scales”, the crew switched the locomotive as it would be leading the train back down the mountain, even though the locomotive would be backwards. This was necessary so that Steffey could see where they were going. The weight of the 65 ton Shay helped in slowing the train as well. [Continued on next page.]

Steffey was no greenhorn. He was 45 years old, and a member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers union. It is easy to assume that he prided himself in his skills as an engineer.

Steffey, Bateman and Anderson all climbed aboard and headed back to Fairwood to drop off the crew cars and couple to a load of logs. As the train left down the mountain, it began to gain speed. Steffey applied the brakes; a brief hiss of air was released, but no brakes! The train then began to hurl out of control down the 6% grade off the mountain. Steffey whistled for help from the brakeman, but he had already jumped. At this point, the gears stripped off the wheels, causing no resistance and the train rolled even faster. Fields Anderson locked down the hand brakes on the last car and jumped to safety.

Steffey wrestled the locomotive's emergency brake. Bateman tried to help, but he too saw it was hopeless. So he tied off the whistle (to warn of impending danger) and leaped from the speeding locomotive. Steffey was left alone, but was not about to give up.

Both Bateman and Anderson watched as the train disappeared from view, with only the screaming and shrieking of the train to tell them what was happening.

Suddenly, an ear piercing shriek, several crashes of twisting metal and an explosion of steam. And then: dead silence.



Above: Looking more like a tank car than a locomotive boiler, the remains of #9 are inspected by this officious-looking crew.

His body was lifeless. No one knows what really happened in the last thirty or so seconds. No one was with him and no eye witnesses saw the wreck.

Right: No. 9's running gear can barely be made out in the wreckage debris.



The two men ran down the tracks hurriedly to find the train. Soon they came upon an overturned boxcar (used to transport crews). As they drew closer to the locomotive, they could see smoke and steam. The 65 ton locomotive had been reduced to a smoldering pile of scrap. There were no signs of Steffey.

As they searched through the debris, they found Steffey under the remains of the locomotive's boiler.

The Wreck of Ole Number Nine
--Anonymous

*Kent Steffey was an engineer;
The best one on the line.
Each morning he left Fairwood
With his Engine Number Nine.
To the mountains he would go
And make his run on time.
Not knowing that his fate
Relied on his lucky Number Nine.*

*Fields Anderson was conductor
On the train that awful day.
The autumn sun was shining
On the world of color gay.
Beneath the sky so bright and
blue,
It seemed no danger lay
His engines brakes refused to
work,
Poor Kent's train ray away.*

*On brakes, on brakes, he whistled,
But his brakemen all were gone
And his fireman, Nute Bateman
Thinking of his home
Leaped from his cab, his life to
save,
As Nine dashed madly on.*

*Still on the rails the bell
Began its pondering clang,
And out upon the mountain air
The mourning whistle rang.
"Farewell, farewell", it seemed to
say
And the wheels like death did sing.
It struck the curve with an awful
shock
And from the rails she sprang.*

*Beneath the wreck now cold and
dead
The engineer was found.
His body crushed and mangled
And buried beneath the ground.
And now poor Kent is sleeping
Beneath the sod.
His body lies cold and bruised,
But his soul has gone to God.*

Other M&RV Wrecks

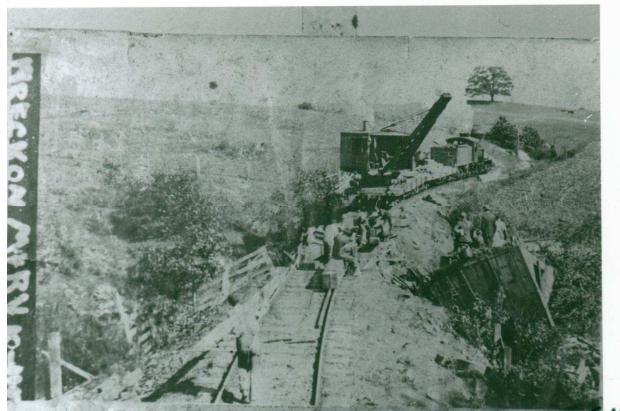


Upper left: M&RV No.7 jumped a the track at a high rate of speed, just outside the town of Marion. An improperly lined switch was to blame.





Upper right: A broken coupler was to blame for this derailment in which a log train ran away backwards until the train jumped the tracks.


Right: Springtime's melted snow running off the mountains and swelling streams weakened this bridge at Teas and it collapsed, sending a boxcar into the ravine.




In the News


 CSX Intermodal Terminals, Inc. (CSX) and EMH&T have won the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) of Ohio "2012 Engineering Excellence Outstanding Achievement Award" for the design of CSX Intermodal Terminal's Northwest Ohio intermodal terminal. The Northwest Ohio facility is a key component of the National Gateway initiative, a public-private partnership which supports the movement of double-stacked intermodal containers on rail cars by raising bridges, increasing tunnel clearances and building new terminals along existing rail routes. When complete, the National Gateway will improve service reliability and transit times, reduce highway congestion, and enhance the environment by converting more than 14 billion highway miles to rail and decreasing fuel consumption by nearly 2 billion gallons. [CSX Press Release]

 The creative juices are certainly overflowing at NORFOLK SOUTHERN Public Relations these days. NS has released a wonderful, beautifully creative (some would say sentimental) video commercial which seems to draw inspiration from the "Toy Story" and "Polar Express" movies. You can view it on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zbXarZtgJo&feature=plcp>.

 There's a letter circulating from GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS RR CEO Al Harper defending his decision to dismantle steam locomotives #722 and #1702 in preparation for restoration. He cites poor advice (and, admittedly, poor judgment) in determining the cost of such restoration as the cause of effort having stalled. He emphatically denies rumors that the engines will be sold. The purchase of the ex-Swedish train set in Maine [see January 2011 Whistle Stop] is being re-evaluated due to rising costs in moving it to NC. In the meantime, GSMR is investigating a lease option to bring steam to the operation. The full text of the letter can be found on the GSMR web site at:

<http://www.gsmr.com/about/news/letter-mr-allen-c-harper/fellow-steam-patrons-and-railroad-fans>.

 The Western Maryland Scenic Railroad is sponsoring two Steam Freight Photo Specials on Monday, October 22 and Tuesday October 23, 2012. Railfans and photographers will have outstanding video and photographic opportunities along the sixteen miles of track between Cumberland and Frostburg, MD. The star performer is 1916, Baldwin-built, 2-8-0 #734 dressed in a Western Maryland paint scheme. The vintage freight train will consist of ten freight cars and a caboose. Passengers will ride in a coach and a dining car pulled by a WESTERN MARYLAND GP30 diesel Passenger cars will be dropped out of sight for the 25, or more, photo runbys. The cost of the Monday trip (55 to 60 patrons) is \$139.00. The Tuesday trip (35 to 40 patrons) is \$189.00. Optional hot lunches are available for \$11.00. Note: these trips were 70% sold on July 24. For additional information or reservations, please contact Carl Franz at: cmfrr@aol.com or call 240-720-8686. [AUTOMATIC BLOCK, Western Maryland NRHS]

 The Railroad Heritage Alliance has announced the creation of a web page, which can be found at www.railroadheritagealliance.com. The site is currently in its formative stages but is growing. The group, which just held its first annual meeting in Asheville, also has a photo album on Facebook. Check out our own Photo Section (next page) for a few shots from their recent meeting.

Volunteers are still needed for our Fall Excursions! Sign up at the next Membership Meeting if you haven't done so. Don't miss out on two very unique trips.



Photo Section



Mike Tilley instructs Mary Ann Guer on the operation of our Ghost Train whistle machine at the First Annual Railroad Heritage Association meeting in Asheville, NC on August 4th. Attendees were also treated to "speeder" rides on the Craggy Mountain Line tourist railroad.

Just a few photos, taken by Nick White, at our recent Rails and Sails field trip. Starting clockwise at the upper left: (1) waiting to board the River Boat; (2) CSX U23B engine that pushed/pulled our train; (3) Knoxville Station platform with Smokey Mountain NRHS vintage coaches; and (4) boarding the train at Wheat Station, which is the Oak Ridge Station for the Secret City Train Ride.



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wataugavalley@embarqmail.com

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Fred Waskiewicz, Editor



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