

Whistle Stop



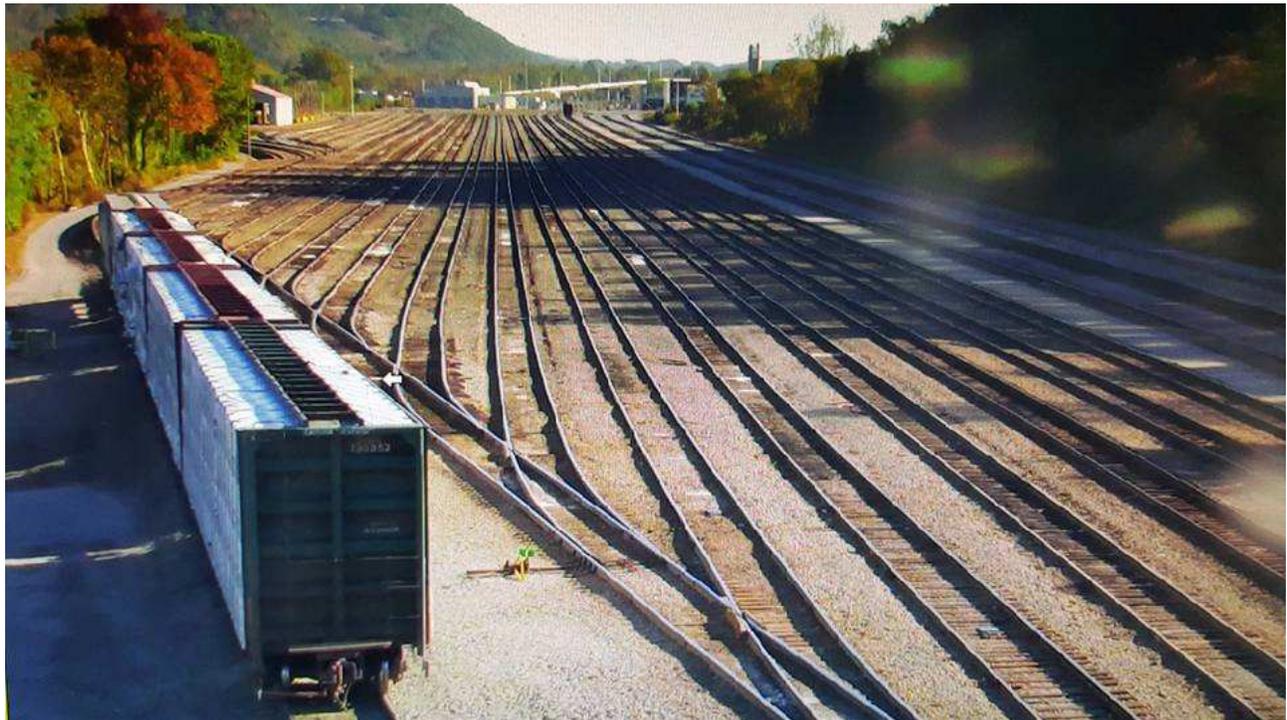
Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum
P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN. 37605-0432
(423) 753-5797
www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org



Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

Volume 35 No. 10

October 2015



The end of an era. While the CLINCHFIELD RAILROAD ceased to exist decades ago, its legacy lived on through massive rail activity in its headquarters town of Erwin, TN. Now even that activity as well has been relegated to the memories of former employees and area railfans and to the research and archives of historians. On October 15th, CSX unexpectedly and completely shut down the Erwin yard, citing the downturn in coal production as a reason, ending over a century of bustling rail activity. In the photo above, Mike Tilley captured the haunting scene in Erwin on October 17th after all cars had been shipped out. The full story of its impact is on page 3.

October 26th General Membership Meeting

The next WVRHS&M General Membership Meeting will be held on Monday, October 26th, starting at 6:30 p.m., and located at the Johnson City Public Library, 101 West Millard St., Johnson City, TN. The mandatory Excursion Safety Meeting, as required by AMTRAK, will be conducted. All workers are required to attend to be trained on the safety rules; all names will be turned into Amtrak. Besides the Safety Meeting, we will also discuss details about the trip and other helpful items. **EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT WORKING THE TRAIN, YOU ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND.**

Member Notes

By Nancy Jewel

Our sympathy is extended to Janice and Bob McPherson in the death of Janice's brother, Keith Teague, on October 1, 2015, in Hickory, NC. Our sympathy is also extended to Billy and Jeanie Walker in the death of Billy's mother, Belva Walker, on September 13, 2015, in Nashville, TN. On a happier note, congratulations to Billy and Jeanie as they welcome their new grandson, John Hamrick, born October 7, 2015, to Jessica and John Hamrick, in Johnson City.

Please keep the following folk in your thoughts as they deal with various concerns: Jim Calhoun, Sydney Blankenbeckler, Gary Price, Carrie Denny, George and Margaret Holley, and Bob Yaple.

As always, let us know if any member, friend or family to whom a card might be sent or a phone call made. The office phone number is (423) 753-5797 or call Nancy Jewell at (423) 282-0918. Your help is appreciated.

2016 OFFICER and BoD NOMINATIONS

The WVRHS&M Nominating Committee presented the following slate for officers and directors for 2016. All nominees must meet the following qualifications: he or she has attended 3 general membership meetings since January 1, 2015; and he or she has performed 24 total hours of volunteer work at a WVRHS&M activity since January 1, 2015 (e.g., excursions, coach yard work, museum, or other events). Note that officers and directors are required to attend a specified number of board meetings throughout the year. Ballots will be mailed out very soon.

PRESIDENT - MIKE TILLEY
VICE PRESIDENT - BOB SCHUBEL
SECRETARY- JIM SMALLWOOD

TREASURER - JEANIE WALKER
HISTORIAN - GARY PRICE
BOARD MEMBER – ART DEVOE

WATAUGA VALLEY RHS&M MEMBERSHIP DUES

Your WVRHS&M membership will be expiring at the end of the year – coming sooner than you expect with all of the upcoming holiday activities. Members enjoy participation of all WVRHS&M functions and receive 12 issues of the “Whistle Stop”, our monthly newsletter. Our dues are \$20.00 for an Individual Membership and Family Membership at \$5.00 per family member.

Remember that you will also have the opportunity to renew/join membership in the Railroad Heritage Alliance and National Railway Historical Society. Both organizations will be sending you dues notices separate from WVRHS&M notices; you’ll remit dues to each of these organizations separately from remitting your Watauga Valley RHS&M dues.

**WVRHS&M PRESIDENT MIKE TILLEY HAS NEW PHONE NUMBER: (423) 335-1100.
Please update your address book.**

In the News



CSX CLOSES ERWIN RAIL YARD

[Sue Guinn Legg, “*Johnson City Press*”, October 15, 2015] The last coal train to leave Erwin rolled slowly out of town just after at 3 p.m. [October 15], less than eight hours after CSX Transportation employees heard the news that rocked all of Unicoi County. “Its a hard pill to swallow,” county Mayor Greg Lynch said. “Of course, we heard rumors that something was coming down. But never in my wildest dreams did I imagine they would just shut down and leave town.”

CSX delivered the news of its decision to immediately close Erwin’s 175-acre rail yard and abruptly end the employment of the facility’s 300 workers in a series of meetings with employees conducted at the start of their morning shifts. The company’s official notification to county leaders came by courier during the lunch hour. But by then, the shockwave of its departure from a town built around railroading had already reverberated across all of East Tennessee. A statement posted at the company’s web site Thursday morning cited significant declines in the coal industry as the reason for the closure of town’s 135-year-old rail terminal.

CSX security, communications staff and employment specialists from its headquarters in Jacksonville, FL, remained at the terminal throughout the day, meeting individually with workers who had questions about their severance and the opportunity to bid on jobs at other CSX locations across the country, and fielding questions from community leaders and media outlets from as far away as Knoxville.

About a dozen rail yard shop workers and contractors who for decades have provided services and supplies to the terminal remained on site through the afternoon, shutting down the shops and building the last trains of railcars to be assembled in the yard. Most of 300 employees impacted by the closure left the facility immediately after the 7:30 a.m. employee meeting.

Despite the workers’ efforts to remain positive, the mood was grim among the employees who remained outside the eerily quiet terminal building and in downtown Erwin as well. Few of the workers would talk to the media, and those who spoke with the *Johnson City Press* chose not to give their names. “It’s just the nature of the business, the nature of the industry,” said an 18-year employee of CSX who chalked up Thursday’s closure as his third layoff. “It’s technology. Before people burned coal they burned wood and shipped it. You got to look at it optimistically. Gloom and doom won’t get you anywhere.”

A yard taxi driver employed for many years in Erwin by a company contracted by CSX to deliver workers to trains across the region said he expected to lose his job as well. “It’s going to impact a lot of contractors also,” he said. “There are companies who deliver ice and bottled water for the trains here every day. Diesel fuel suppliers. All sorts of different services. It’s widespread.”

Tish Oldham, director of Unicoi County Joint Economic Development Board, came to the terminal Thursday to learn what she could about the company’s plans for rail service to industries in the county that depend on it, and was assured by CSX that service will continue. “It’s going to have a regional impact not just in the town [continued on next page]

and county," she said. "There's a percentage of people who drive here from Johnson City and other places to work at CSX. And more than just here, the railroad has been an important part of the economy of this region for 100 years. It's a regional economic issue. I talked to them today about the line still being available to manufacturers and my understanding is the rail line will be available." At this time, Oldham said the primary concern is for the loss of CSX jobs by "a set of very skilled workers and figuring out how those skills can be used in other segments of the economy. These are people who know how to build things, design things and make things happen," she said.

The CSX property, which extends several miles from Highway 107 at Exit 37 of Interstate 26 to the industrial park on the southeast edge of Erwin, will also be an issue. Mayor Greg Lynch said CSX's 175-acres of level land with utilities running through the heart of the valley is "something the county has very little of" and something he believes the economic development board will be looking at purchasing an option on.

Lynch said he learned Thursday afternoon federal grants are available to assist with the retraining of workers displaced from jobs because of decline of fossil fuels, and will be pursuing those grants in the coming days as well as assistance for the workers available through the state Department of Economic Development. As for CSX presence on the property, company spokeswoman Melanie Cost said "At this time, we don't expect to come back or to return operations to Erwin."



Chuckey Museum Restoration Update

Work continues on the Chuckey Railroad Museum at Jonesborough. Plans in the coming weeks include a new roof and HVAC and electrical work inside the depot.



CSX CLOSES CORBIN MECHANICAL SHOPS

[LEX18.com, October 20, 2015] Approximately 180 active CSX employees have lost their jobs after CSX closed their mechanical shops in Corbin, KY. CSX confirms that the rail yard will remain open but that the mechanical shops used to maintain, inspect and service locomotives and rail cars for coal trains moving from Central Appalachia will close.

A press release from the company confirms that approximately 180 active CSX employees who work at the facilities and in support roles will be affected. All affected employees at Corbin will receive at least 60 days of pay and benefits. Union employees also may have other benefits available in accordance with their labor agreements. CSX says that furloughed employees will be eligible for jobs in higher-demand areas on CSX's network.

"The Corbin rail yard will remain open and train operations will continue. Approximately 100 engineering and transportation employees will remain at Corbin to support and manage the yard traffic. A small number of mechanical employees will also remain to support train operations. Corbin continues to be an important part of the CSX network for the movement of automobiles, consumer products and other freight," reads the release. "CSX remains committed to delivering strong service to customers in the region. CSX also remains committed to the Commonwealth of Kentucky, with more than 2,900 miles of track in the state, an automotive distribution center in Louisville and the new Casky rail yard in Hopkinsville."

Elmore Rail Yard to Stay Open "for now"

[ED. NOTE: The following news item is provided to offer a broader perspective on the impact of the downturn of coal production on all of the region's railroads.]

[Pamela Pritt, The (Pineville, WV) Register-Herald Report, October 5, 2015]

A spokesman for Norfolk Southern said recently that the Elmore rail yard in Wyoming County, WV will remain open "for now." Dave Pidgeon, manager of NS Public Relations, said the rail line "from time to time" looked at travel plans and rerouted trains. The most recent plan will leave the Wyoming County facility open as usual, he said. "They remain open and employment levels are to remain about the same," he said. Pidgeon said 84 people are employed at Elmore. He would not disclose which lines are being changed or any new routes because of "safety and security reasons."

Trains News Wire's Chase Gunnoe reported last week that declining coal traffic had caused the phase-out of the mainline between Elmore and Princeton, according to NS spokesperson Susan Terpay. Princeton customers will be served by the Kellysville connection; and coal trains will move in and out of Elmore via the Guyandotte Branch, Terpay told Gunnoe. Gunnoe reported that all trains to and from Elmore will be routed via Gilbert

Spring Street Coach Yard Mechanical Report

By Bob Yaple

GENERAL. All cars passed their AMTRAK PC-1 inspections and are AMTRAK certified.

ROLLING STOCK.

"Powhatan Arrow" coach (WATV 539): Scheduled trips are: the New River Train; "Fall AMTRAK Specials" and the "Polar Express" at NCTM.

"St Augustine" coach (WATV 500): All systems were checked out for a busy autumn season before it left the yard. Scheduled trips are: the New River Train; "Fall AMTRAK Specials" and the "Polar Express" at NCTM.

"Moultrie" diner (WATV 400): An extensive cleaning session was done by the membership on Saturday, [September 26](#) by the membership. All systems are being checked out for the up coming excursion season.

"Crescent Harbor" sleeper / lounge (WATV 2351): All systems checked out. Included in the "New River Train".

"Clinchfield" business car (WATV 100): Amtrak has notified WVRHS&M that Car 100 is a candidate for "AMTRAKing".

A lot of upgrade work is planned for the future which will be announced at a later date.



Passengers enjoying the comfort of the Crescent Harbor during the October 17th "New River Train".

Upcoming Events



OCTOBER 31 – NOVEMBER 1. NCTM / WVRHS&M Fall AMTRAK excursions. See <http://tinyurl.com/oq443aq>



NOVEMBER 7-8: 27th Annual Railfest model train show, Bluefield, WV. See <http://tinyurl.com/ptndyqs>.



NOVEMBER 14: Roanoke Valley Model Engineers Open House. See <http://rvmehome.org/>



NOVEMBER 21: 73rd Annual CSX "Santa Train" over ex-CLINCHFIELD from Kentucky to Kingsport, TN.



NOVEMBER 21, 27-29, DECEMBER 4-6, 11-13, 16-22: "The Polar Express" train ride, NCTM, Spencer, NC. See <http://tinyurl.com/nek1b5b>



DECEMBER 5-6: TCA Southeastern Division model train show. Raleigh, NC. See <http://www.se-tca.org/index.htm>

Railroad Safety

[ED. NOTE: The following has been circulating throughout the railfan community and is being shared here, neither for dramatic effect nor sensationalism, but rather to join that community and the railroad industry as an outreach in reminding all of the inherent dangers of trespassing on railroad property.]



On September 14th, John DeReggi, Jr., 16, and his girlfriend Natalie Crim from Clarksburg [MD] High School, posed for pictures taken by the latter's twin sister on the railroad tracks in Boyds, MD. According to family members and friends, some of the pictures were intended for a school photography assignment. Shortly after this photo was taken, John was hit and killed by AMTRAK's outbound "Capitol Limited" traveling at a speed of 70 mph.

Posing subjects on railroad tracks has become popular among both professional and amateur photographers alike, its symbolism suggesting moving on with life. Unfortunately, attention becomes focused on taking pictures, ignoring or forgetting the fact that the setting is an active rail line, and, tragically, resulting sometimes in death or injury. Folk expose themselves to this danger,

incorrectly believing they can jump out of the way of an oncoming train in time.

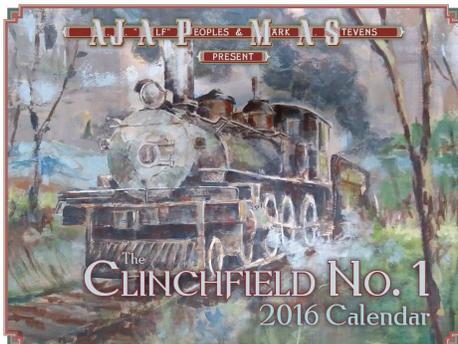
Enjoy all aspects of our wonderful hobby, BUT PLEASE BE CAREFUL!

From the Vault



Above you'll find a photo, from much happier railroading times given current events, of CLINCHFIELD No. 1 at Johnson City, TN on its inaugural November 23rd, 1968 CRR excursion run. Old No. 1 is shown on its northbound trip from Erwin taking on water at Johnson City. Besides CRR 1, the consist included coach 101, coach 103, and business car 100 (now being restored by WVRHS&M). One of the coaches was left in Kingsport, TN on the return trip to Erwin. The photo was shot from the platform of the former CRR depot where Tupelo Honey Restaurant now has their outside dining. The fellow in the yellow jacket looking at the engine is your WVRHS&M president. [Photo: David Devault]

CLINCHFIELD No. 1 CALENDARS AVAILABLE



Copies of the new, limited-edition 12-month calendar all about the fabled steam locomotive CLINCHFIELD #1 are still available for purchase. The glossy calendar features rare photographs. In fact, some of them may not have ever been seen other from the photographer who snapped them. The cover of the calendar, a painting by Kenneth Ferguson, was once displayed at Virginia's Rikemo Lodge when owned by the Clinchfield Railroad. The calendar is available for \$14.95 and will be available at the WVRHS&M General Membership Meeting on October 26th.

ONLY 45 CALENDARS LEFT AS OF PRESS TIME - GET YOURS NOW.

Whistle Stop

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

Opinions or viewpoints are those of the writer and may not necessarily reflect those of the organization members, officers or directors. Items of interest are welcome and will be credited to the author; however, because of space constraints, all submissions are subject to editing. Permission to reprint *Whistle Stop* articles with the exception of photographs is granted if proper credit is given. Reuse of photographs must receive permission by the editor and the photographer.

Fred Waskiewicz, Editor



**Watauga Valley RHS & Museum
P.O. Box 432
Johnson City, TN 37605-0432**

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

TIME VALUE MATERIAL