

Whistle Stop



Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum
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Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

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One of the worst wrecks on the Clinchfield occurred on October 25, 1970, resulting in two deaths and one injury. The story can be found on page 4.

January 24th General Membership Meeting

Our next General Membership meeting will be held on Monday, January 24th, 2022 at 6:30 pm at the Chuckey Depot / Railroad Museum, 110 South Second St., Jonesborough, TN (at the railroad crossing). Our program this month will be on N&W 611 with some rare footage of the movement of trains. Please note you will need to wear a mask; we want everyone to be safe and have an enjoyable time at the meeting. Bring a friend out for a relaxing evening with your fellow railfans.

Member Notes

Prayers for the following with health issues: Gary & Suzie Price and family, Linda Modica, and Connie Hunt. Also, your thoughts and prays for Nancy Ritchie and family in the loss of her daughter Sharon Slagle recently. Please call the Watauga Valley Office at (423) 753-5797 or email wataugavalley@gmail.com to report any health concerns.

2021 was not been a good year for anyone. We are hoping and praying for a better 2022 for the Watauga Valley Railroad Museum and hope everyone will join up and be part of a busy year in 2022.

DONATION NOTICE

Thanks to Frank Gricus for the donation of the DVD Player at the Chuckey Depot Museum and the laptop computer for our Broadcastify on Holston Mountain, Thanks Frank!!!!!!

LATE DUES NOTICE FOR 2022

If you have not paid your dues as of press time, your membership expired December 31, 2021. Please submit your dues ASAP so our membership chairman will not have to send you a LATE NOTICE and to keep receiving your issue of the "*Whistle Stop*".

Membership Dues for 2022 are:

Dues: Individual Membership	\$ 20.00
Family Membership	\$ 5.00 per family member

Benefits: 12 issues of the "*Whistle Stop*", Watauga Valley's newsletter.
Membership in the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum.
Participation in all Museum functions and events.

Dues should be sent to Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum, P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605. For questions email wataugavalley@gmail.com.

PROGRAMS NEEDED FOR 2021

WVRHS&M program directors Howard Orfield and Brad McCroskey are looking for General Membership programs for 2022. Please call (423) 753-5797 if you have an interest in showing a program or let us know at the next General Membership Meeting. We are looking for speakers; let us know of someone who would come and present a railroad related program. And as always, we're looking for DVD and slide programs.

2022 WVRHS&M Train Excursions

The Watauga Valley Excursion Committee is working on several excursions for 2022. The dates and destination of trips identified so far are as follows:

April 2	Hiwassee Gorge
May 14	Great Smoky Mountain Railroad
Sept 17	Great Smoky Mountain Railroad

We are hoping to be able to bring buses back into play for these trips.

Chuckey Depot / Museum

ITEMS NEEDED FOR NEW EXHIBIT

The Chuckey Depot / Museum is gathering items for display at the upcoming new exhibit in March. The theme is "The Railroad's Influence on American Pop Culture".

We will feature anything having to do with railroad-related movies (VHS or DVD movie boxes), songs, books, toys (including older Lionel models through newer model years), vintage wind-up railroad locomotives, railroad-themed lunch boxes, etc. If you would like to bring your items for display to the January meeting on the 24th, I can accept them then to save you a trip. Pictures of your items sent first to my phone (423-612-7647) or email (chinouthome@yahoo.com) would be helpful, but we can just decide on being able to use them when we're at the meeting. too.

I know many of you have items at home that would fit what we're looking for.... please let me know about them sooner rather than later. The exhibit opens March 3rd, but we need at least two weeks prior to create the displays. That means we need to have everything in hand by the middle of February at the latest!

Thanks for helping make this new exhibit special!

Rick Chinouth
Chuckey Depot Exhibit Committee Chair

Mechanical Department Report *by Jim Magill and Art DeVoe*

GENERAL

The Watauga Valley mechanical team is looking for more volunteers. As most of you know the team is composed of volunteers with all kinds of different experiences. We now have five operating passenger cars and it takes a lot of manpower to keep the equipment up and running. We need volunteers to help with all kinds of projects, even if they do not have any experience. The mechanical team is all volunteers and most of them are retired while many still work. The team is a great bunch of guys enjoying working together to keep our equipment up and running on the rails. If you're interested, please email us at wataugavalley@gmail.com or call the Watauga Valley office at 423-753-5797 and leave a message that you are interested in volunteering at the Jonesborough Coach yard. Work days are Tuesdays 9 am to 5 pm. If you're tired of lying around the house during the winter months, please call and let us know and we will get you scheduled to see what you can do to help.

ROLLING STOCK

"Crescent Harbor" sleeper / lounge (WATX 2351): Having upgrades at the Jonesborough Coach Yard.

"Powhatan Arrow" coach (WATX 539), "Moultrie" diner (WATX 400): "Clinchfield 100" office car (WATX 100), and "St Augustine" coach (WATX 500): all four cars have been in excursion service at the North Carolina Transportation Museum over the past couple of months. These cars will return to our coach yard in Jonesborough in soon!

Clinchfield Railroad Disaster

ONE OF THE WORST WRECKS ON THE CLINCHFIELD RAILROAD

About 1:15am on October 25, 1970, a head-end collision occurred between two Clinchfield Railroad freight trains, 4403 feet south of the station at Green Mountain, NC near mile post 160 which is 24 miles south of Erwin Yard, TN. The engineer and brakeman on the northbound train were killed and the brakeman on the southbound train was injured.

The collision was caused by failure of the engineer to operate the southbound train in accordance with restricting signal indications at the south end of Green Mountain, due to the engineer neglecting to see the approach aspect displayed by a signal and being erroneously informed by the front brakeman that the signal had displayed a clear aspect.

The Northbound train departed Spartanburg, SC at 6:25 pm with the following consist engines 808, 903, 863, and 804 plus 60 cars and a caboose with train crew engineer Jake Hartsell and head brakeman Jerry Eller.

The Southbound train departed Erwin Yard, TN at 12:05 am with following consist and engines 822, 868, 907, 810, and 806 with engineer Frank Duncan and head brakeman M. R. Leonard and 135 cars of coal (13,600 tons) along with 3 pushers and a caboose. The crew caller in Erwin on second shift had run out of engineers off the call board and called engineer Duncan to see if he would accept an early call since he arrived in Erwin earlier from Spartanburg on Train 97. Mr. Duncan took the early call.

Neither crew was calling signals that night and the last radio transmission was head engineer Duncan talking with pusher engineer Arnold Williams that he was having wheel slippage on 822. Mr. Williams responded back that he had 822 a couple of days earlier and it was bad about doing that. When Southbound 822 passed the south signal at Green Mountain, NC the engineer asked the head brakeman what the signal indication was when they passed it since for some unaccountable reason he did not see it. The head brakeman told the engineer that the signal was clear and their southbound train proceeded on through Green Mountain down the main line at the speed of 30 mph estimated by the engineer to the south end signal which they noticed was red, meaning STOP. The northbound train had an approach signal and a signal into the Green Mountain Siding At that point the southbound engine crew noticed a reflection of a headlight in the distance and immediately put the train in emergency and jumped off the train. Because of the of its excessive speed, there was insufficient braking distance for extra 822 to get stopped at the south signal. Northbound Extra 808 crew was not so lucky to jump from the locomotive. Engine 808 and 822 met head-on 168 feet from the south signal at Green Mountain. The crew members on the northbound train died in the explosion and fire of the diesel fuel. The head crew on the southbound jumped off their train with only injuries to the head brakeman. No injuries to the pusher crew or crew on caboose.

Equipment damage was at that time a loss of \$264,300 and the loss of two crew members. On the southbound engines 822 and 868 were destroyed and scraped on the scene. Engine 907 had damage but was repaired in the Erwin Shops. Reports were engine parts from both 822 and 808 were laying down the bank. On the Northbound consist, engines 808 and 903 were destroyed. Reports were that parts of the 903 were used at Erwin shops to rebuild the 907. On the southbound train a total of 12 cars derailed and on the northbound cars 1, 7, 8 and 9 derailed. The frames on the 808 and 822 were reported bent nearly 180 degrees.

Signal tests were run after the accident and the signal system and the dispatcher were cleared of any errors. The engineer and head brakeman of the Southbound were dismissed from the railroad.

The ICC REPORT states the reason for the wreck was that the southbound train failed to go by the signal indication and hit the northbound head on.



All photos courtesy of Phil Laws.

In the News



CLINCHFIELD RAILROAD KNOB CREEK TUNNEL WILL BE SAVED

If you have lived in Johnson City or Jonesborough, TN, you have probably driven through the Knob Creek Road Tunnel. If you worked for the Clinchfield Railroad you have been over the top of the tunnel. The 114-year-old tunnel, built by hand when the CC&O was passing through the area in 1907, is under the longest fill on the Clinchfield Railroad at 85 feet high and 3000 ft long.

It was announced recently that with so much traffic on this country road (Knob Creek) the tunnel will be saved as a walk-through tunnel to safely allow people to pass under the railroad. An overpass will be built over the railroad just south of the tunnel to meet traffic demands.

The tunnel started out moving horse and buggies under the railroad, then came T models, A models, then came the 40's, 50's, 60's, 70's, and modern traffic up to today. As far as the railroad, steam engines, F units, Geeps, SD units and modern-day engines have passed over the top. Millions of tons of coal and freight has crossed over this tunnel as well.

Pictured bottom left is the tunnel circa 1957; pictured bottom right is the tunnel as it appears today and from about the same spot. When you pass under this tunnel, give it a thumbs up. It has witnessed a lot over the years.



Photo: Gilbert Family Collection



Photo: Mike Tilley



CSX Adds Trains

CSX has added two new trains on the former Clinchfield, Q652 and Q653, which are Cincinnati to Hamlet trains. The old Clinchfield has been busy lately with coal, grain, and ethanol trains along with four freights.

VMT Seeks Virginia State Status

[Luke Weir, *Roanoke Times*] Of planes, trains and automobiles, recognition as an official state agency would help keep operations on track for the Virginia Museum of Transportation as the organization works to bridge challenges brought on by the coronavirus.

Conducting the museum's request for state funding is Sen. John Edwards, D-Roanoke, who filed Senate Bill 72, which would establish the Virginia Museum of Transportation in downtown Roanoke as a state-sanctioned institution of public education.

The museum is housed in a 1918-built former freight station, and is a crucial link to Roanoke's railroad origins, Edwards said.

"It's very important that the Virginia Museum of Transportation be a state agency. A lot of people think it already is," Edwards said. "It is the official transportation museum of Virginia, but it's just never been a state agency." [D]esignation as a state agency would help the museum accrue funding, build up staffing and generate new programs to draw additional visitation, he said.

"It's very important to the economy of the Roanoke Valley to have tourism," Edwards said. "This is a key agency of Roanoke to attract tourists."

He cited data that said the museum attracted more than 22,000 out-of-state visitors in pre-pandemic years, resulting in \$14 million of local economic impact.

"If we become this state agency with an additional \$2 million from the state, the museum could bring in 95,000 visitors and create \$24 million in economic impact," Edwards said. "It means something economically in terms of tourism ... and also from a cultural standpoint, Roanoke is known as a railroad town."

On a recent weekday, the museum's guestbook showed signatures from the countries of Bahrain and the Czech Republic, as well as the states of Colorado, New York and Ohio, among other locations at home and abroad.

Affairs of the museum have been challenged in recent years, especially with the coronavirus arriving two years ago, resulting in decreased visitation and a drop in donations, said Deputy Director Mendy Flynn.

"For big events in particular, I would say we probably had, I think 50% of what we usually have," Flynn said, adding that event rentals for birthdays, weddings and corporate events are gradually returning in the wake of 2020 coronavirus shutdowns. "We're very positive. We're moving forward as if this thing is going to end."

Even in 2018 and 2019, before the coronavirus, nonprofit documents show the museum operated at a deficit.

In the past four years, three people contracted to become the museum's executive director have departed. Former museum board president Ken Lanford, who has sat on the board since 2008, said finding a lasting director is a work-in-progress.

"For whatever reason, we just couldn't find ways to get things to work out with the different directors that we bought in there," Lanford said during a phone call. "That's probably as much to do with the environment we're in with COVID, trying to deal with that."

Flynn said state support to the Virginia Museum of Transportation would mean increased benefits for the staff of 10 employees, and likely help restore in-kind donations to the facility.

“Especially with the bus station coming, we’re afraid it may hurt us,” Flynn said, adding that the new bus structure under construction next door might impede museum visibility for passersby. “We’re going to need to do something to beef up our presence on the outside, to be more drawing.”

Some aspects of the former Norfolk and Western Railway station at 303 Norfolk Ave. S.W. are simply outdated, like the restrooms, and the 75-year-old boiler, she said. Other areas and exhibits between the automobile, rail and aviation rooms just need a bit of touching up, repainting and reconsideration, while additional operational aspects could be renewed entirely.

“We don’t have an advertising budget,” Flynn said. “That’s not somewhere we can put the money we have. All our money is in operations.”

Edwards said both the state secretaries of education and transportation are supportive of turning the museum into a bona fide state agency, but outgoing Gov. Ralph Northam did not include the transportation museum funding in his final proposed state budget.

If SB 72 passes votes in the state Senate and House of Delegates, incoming Gov. Glenn Youngkin’s administration will make the final decision whether or not to make it law.

“It kind of depends on this governor and his administration, whether they want to support this or not,” Edwards said. “But of course, first of all to get it in the budget, you got to get it through the General Assembly. So, we’ll see what happen



James Glenn posted the photo above and the following commentary on our Facebook page. A bird's-eye view of the northern portion of Erwin Yard taken this afternoon (1/13/22). Heartbreaking to see how many tracks have been ripped up, where shop buildings stood, and how quiet things have become. However, it's still awe-inspiring to imagine how much activity and history this special place has seen.

Display in the Block *by Les Billings*

Happy New Year to all. This month I would like to illustrate some of the Norfolk Southern Heritage units that I have photographed in my many outings. These are always fun to shoot and challenging to catch. As most of you know, these Heritage units were a way that Norfolk Southern honored its predecessor railroads during 2012. There were a total of 20 locomotives painted with these schemes. This was an event to celebrate their 30th anniversary.



Southern Railway - 8099 (GE) - Johnson City

This unit was involved in an accident on Dec. 12th in the Pittsburgh area.



Virginian Railway 1069 (NW, EMD)
– Johnson City



Central of Georgia Railway 8101 (SR, GE)
– Johnson City



Pennsylvania Railroad 8102 (CR, GE)
– Johnson City



Central Railroad of New Jersey 1071 (CR, EMD)
– Piney Flats



Lehigh Valley Railroad 8104 (CR, GE)
– Jonesborough



Reading Company 1067 (CR, EMD)
– Johnson City



New York Central Railroad 1066 (CR, EMD)
– Johnson City



New York, Chicago, and St. Louis Railroad 8100(NW, GE), "Nickel Pate Road"
– Watauga, TN

In closing, I have been told that if any of these locomotives needs repainting, that they may go back to the familiar black paint scheme. This would be unfortunate. We can only hope not.

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TIME-SENSITIVE MATERIAL