

Whistle Stop



**Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society &
Museum**

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Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

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NS Heritage Unit 8100 cruises into Bristol at the lead of train 729 on a sunny winter's day.
[Mike Pierry, Jr. post on our Facebook page.]

January 23rd General Membership Meeting

Our next General Membership meeting will be held on Monday, January 23rd, 2023 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 an excellent DVD on the history of railroads, narrated by Johnny Cash. Bring a friend out for a relaxing evening with your fellow railfans.

Member Notes

Please keep in your thoughts and prayers the following Watauga Valley members: Richard Baker, whose mother recently passed away; Jim Calhoun, who recently broke his hip but is doing well per Leland Calhoun; David Crabtree on the loss of his father; John Dabbs, whose father recently passed away; Art DeVoe, who has been under the weather; Mike Dowdy, who is having some medical issues; Bob Mushet, who has been under the weather; Fred Pfohl, who recently had surgery but is doing well in Rehab; and Terry Worley, who recently had surgery.

To request that one of our members or family be reported for various concerns in the *Whistle Stop*, email a request to wataugavalley@gmail.com.

Welcome Aboard! to our newest member, Sandhi Kosuch of Gainesville, GA.

2023 WVRHS&M DUES LATE NOTICE

If you have not paid your dues as of press time, your membership expired December 31, 2022. Your dues payment should be sent by check to the Membership Chairman, Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum, P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605. You can join the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum for \$20.00 individual and by adding each family member at \$5.00 each. Please get your dues in today so our membership chairman will not have to send you a LATE NOTICE and to keep receiving your copy of the *Whistle Stop*. For questions, email wataugavalley@gmail.com.

2023 WVRHS&M APPOINTEES

Last month's newsletter listed elected officers and directors for 2023. This month we offer the list of appointees for the new year.

Jim Magill, Chief Mechanical Officer
Art DeVoe, Asst. Chief Mechanical Officer
Fred Waskiewicz, Newsletter Editor
Les Billings, Asst. Newsletter Editor
Ralph Clarke, Airbnb Director
Les Billings, Membership Chairman
Jeff Forrester, Webmaster
Cline Knowles, Whistle Stop Circulation
Mike Tilley, Trip Director
Frank Gricus, Grant Director
Frank Gricus, Camera Director
Robert Mushet, Broadcastify Director
Mike Tilley, Chuckey Depot Advisory Board
Terry Worley, Director of Signals at Yard and Depot
Rick Chinouth, Chuckey Depot Advisory Board and Sub Committee Chairman
Sarah Valk, Chapter Attorney

Mechanical Department Report

by Jim Magill

GENERAL

The Watauga Valley mechanical team is looking for more volunteers. 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 you do not have any railroad experience. The mechanical team is composed of volunteers, most of whom are retired while many still work, with all kinds of different experiences. 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 in joining us, 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. Work days are Tuesdays 9 am to 5 pm. If you're tired of lying around the house during the winter months, give us a call and we will get you scheduled to help.



ROLLING STOCK

The *Railroad Passenger Car Alliance* held their annual convention at the North Carolina Transportation Museum during the weekend of January 14th. We are happy to announce that *Clinchfield 100* and *St. Augustine* were on display for the members to tour at the event.

“Moultrie” diner (WATX 400), “St Augustine” coach (WATX 500), and “Powhatan Arrow” coach (WATX 539): All three cars have been at the NCTM in Spencer, NC serving on their annual “Polar Express Train” and will return to Jonesborough soon.

“Crescent Harbor” sleeper / lounge (WATX 2351): At the Coach Yard for upgrades. It is anticipated that its use in our Airbnb project will begin the first of March 2023.

“Clinchfield 100” office car (WATX 100): Also at the NCTM for their “Polar Express Train”. The 100 will receive extensive truck rebuild and update during the first quarter of 2023 at NCTM. [See below, James Glenn photos.]



Chuckey Depot / Museum

Things at the Chuckey Depot / Museum in Jonesborough are going great. Most volunteers are working at least one day a month at the depot. We will have another training session for hosts in February. If you're interested in hosting, please email wataugavalley@gmail.com or call the office at (423) 753-5797 for information.

New Exhibit Announcement

The theme of the March, 2023 Exhibit at the Chuckey Depot / Museum will be the influence of women and African Americans on the railroad industry. It will include notable railroad inventions by women and African Americans; the roles of each group in the railroad such as service roles (porters, dining car servers, the "Harvey Girls" connection to the ATSF, etc.); and modern-day roles in transportation and administration.

If any members have artifacts or pictures which illustrate any of the above roles, including posters, caps, insignias, uniforms, etc., please contact Rick Chinouth at (423) 612-7647 or chinouthome@yahoo.com. He will need to hear from everyone by the end of January in order to arrange pick up of items and allow enough time to prepare the exhibit displays during February.

Thanks to all members for any help they can give! Many of our best displays come directly from our own members!

Rick Chinouth, Chuckey Depot Exhibit Committee Chair



Crossing Signal is on at Chuckey Depot

The crossing signal is blinking at the Chuckey Depot / Museum to welcome guests when the museum is open. Thanks to the following who made this happen: Jack Gaut, pole and cross buck donation; Rocky Hollyfield, signals; Terry Worley, rebuilding signals and directing the installation at the depot; and the Watauga Valley mechanical team for erecting the signal.



COME BY THE DEPOT AND SEE THE SIGNAL BLINKING DURING OPEN HOURS.

TRAIN TRIVIA: When was the first commercially produced diesel-electric locomotive sold in the United States? a.) 1920 b.) 1925 c.) 1930. Answer on page 9.

Holston Mountain Radio

By Bob Mushet

Some of our readers would like to understand just how the Holston Mountain monitor came to pass and how it works. A couple of years ago Mike Tilley suggested to me that it would be really neat to have extended radio coverage of the region. The ensuing investigation led to an affiliation with the Carter County Amateur Radio Club which had a radio repeater site on the 4400 ft Holston Mountain next door to the Ch 5 TV transmitter. At this point we found that normal wifi and stable 4G/5G links do not exist on the mountain due to very high interference. An easy and cost-effective way to connect the radio to the internet would not work. A solution was found by purchasing a microwave radio link to bring wifi/internet service to our site from down the mountain at Bluff City. Getting this link to work was a very involved task due to foliage and terrain issues. Finally, it all came together and the "NS Railroad A-Line Central Division NE TN and SW VA with 4 channels became a reality on "Broadcastify" which is a scanner service on the internet. Besides myself there were others who played very significant roles in this project: Larry Davis, president CCAR; Mack Muir, ATCS expert; Carl Drager, Bluff City site; and Frank Gricus, "Mr. Fixit".

When the system first started to work it was evident that there was considerable interference from a very high-power station nearby which is the NOAA Weather Radio. After much frustration and research, a very narrow bandpass filter was purchased and the problem was solved. With 4 channels going it is quite busy with CSX switching going on in Kingsport. The reception range is good because of the 4400ft elevation with units heard out past Glade Springs to the east, past Morristown out west, above Gate City to the north and down past Erwin to the south. Additionally, the system supports the ATCS monitor effort.

Just before Christmas the whole system failed! Investigation revealed that foliage had grown up into the microwave beam path and the link failed. Recent changes in Forest Service regulations have now prevented us from raising the tower height above the foliage which would fix the issue. A new approach to getting the scanner data to "Broadcastify" on the internet had to be made. Working with a great T-Mobile Rep, a viable solution has been met utilizing the 4G data network. The proposed hotspot/router system has been tested at the mountain site and appropriate equipment consisting of a MTM Networking Router and supporting Log Periodic antennas have been purchased. All of this is being bench tested now. We are hoping to get it all up the hill soon, weather permitting. I would like to thank all those who so generously contributed to "Go Fund Me" supporting this effort for the Railfan community.

2023 WVRHS&M Rail Events

Our 2023 Spring Excursion on the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad has been scheduled for May 6th. Visit our web site, <https://www.wataugavalleynrhs.org/excursions.php>, for more information and to purchase tickets, which go on sale on that site on January 20th. We will be signing up hosts for the trip at a later date.

Tentative plans call for an additional GSMR trip on September 16th powered by steam!

Travel to Bryson City, NC via motor coach IS NOW AVAILABLE for both trips.

Display in the Block

By Les Billings

Happy New Year to all. I hope it has started out well for all. This month I have decided to share my Santa Train 2022 experience. I was not going to do this and already had something else completed, but the more I thought about it, this is what I want to do this month. My wife and I got a late start on Saturday of the Santa Train and proceeded to head to Kermit, Virginia, then to Kingsport and lastly Johnson City. The weather was great all day, but a little chilly in the late afternoon. So, sit back and hold on.

[Right] This shot was taken as the Santa Train was leaving Kermit, VA after one of its scheduled stops. I tried to stop at Kermit, but the crowd was too large, and I could not find a good place to park. So, I turned around and proceeded to go down track and find a good place to stop. We found a private crossing off Yuma Rd. where several people had gathered. I found a good place and waited. Our stop was the south end of Kermit siding. We heard the whistle blow and knew he would be coming soon. A few minutes later it rounded the bend and we all jumped into action. When they got to us, he was ballin' the jack.



[Below] Once the train had passed, I turned around to find Santa waving and wishing us a Merry Christmas. It was 2:15pm and there were two more stops awaiting him. Next up was Waycross, VA, then finally a stop in Kingsport. As mentioned earlier, P001-19 was moving quickly, he was running a little late. I jumped in the car, hoping that I had gotten some good shots and headed to Kingsport.



[Right] The Santa Train rolling into Kingsport to a large crowd eagerly waiting to see Santa. The conductor is waiving to all who waits. Unfortunately, several CSX workers asked us to stand back off the ballast along the track in the foreground as we were a little too close. In the crowd unknown to me were Hobo Shoestring and Jaw Tooth [YouTube videographers]. I would like to have met them both. After all the festivities had ended, the train would head south to



[Left] After leaving the downtown Kingsport area, I proceeded to find another vantage point to view as the train leaves. Driving down Lincoln St., I saw a little crowd of Railfans with their cameras and thought this should be a good spot. We had to wait a pretty good amount of time while the train was off loaded, and a rear viewing car added to the end. After a lot of good talk, it made it down our way and the shutters started to click. It was a nice sight because it was getting very chilly.

[Right] Once we were finished in Kingsport, on our way back home to Johnson City, I decided I needed to get another shot of the train before it left the area. So, as I drove down I-26, I decided that the trestle in Boones Creek would be a very good place. Boy when I got there, there was a lot of people who had the same idea. Just before it arrived, there were about 7 or 8 drones launched to get a bird's eye view. It was a great sight to see it cross as if it were flying.



In the News ...

Railroad Freight Outlook Isn't Good for 2023

[By Bill Stephens, *trains.com*, January 12, 2023] Rail traffic is expected to have another tough year as intermodal, carload, and coal traffic will all struggle to show growth.

That's the view of Todd Tranausky, vice president of rail and intermodal at freight forecasting firm FTR Transportation Intelligence.

North American rail traffic was down 1.9% overall last year, according to the Association of American Railroads.

International and domestic intermodal aren't likely to grow this year as imports are down, rail service hasn't fully recovered from the impact of ongoing crew shortages, and rates are not competitive with trucks, Tranausky said on a webcast today.

Compared to its five-year volume average, intermodal traffic has slumped for most of the past 18 months, Tranausky noted.

Congestion and labor uncertainty at West Coast ports has prompted shippers to seek alternatives on the East Coast and Gulf Coast, which are less friendly for intermodal moves because of the relatively short length of haul.

The congestion is gone at West Coast ports, but shippers are unlikely to shift volumes back until a new labor agreement is reached, Tranausky says. And the longer labor negotiations drag on the less likely it is that shippers will divert all of their volume back to the West Coast, he says.

Overall carload traffic is expected to be flat this year, Tranausky says, as a slowing economy will reduce freight demand. When coal, agriculture, and petroleum products are stripped out of the mix, however, the remaining carload segments may grow by 1% to 3%.

"It's not gangbusters growth," Tranausky says.

Coal traffic was up 3.3% last year as a surge in natural gas prices prompted utilities to burn cheaper coal. That trend won't continue, Tranausky says, because of the scheduled retirement of coal-fired power plants this year, which will permanently reduce the market for thermal coal.

A wildcard for railroad volume remains how quickly railroads can reach full train and engine crew staffing levels and return service to normal levels, Tranausky says.

The U.S. railroads are not yet back to pre-pandemic employment levels, Tranausky notes, and average train speeds were below their five-year average throughout 2022.

A bright spot was an improvement in average train speed in the fourth quarter. But Tranausky says a threat to continued improvement is the potential for engineers and conductors to pocket their back pay and bonuses from the new labor agreement and then quit. That would put railroads back into deeper crew deficits, which would hurt service and rail volume, Tranausky says.

From the Archives ...



Mike Tilley dusted off these two photos of past area rail activity. Upper left finds the “*Spirit of Tennessee*” train parked on ETRY property in Johnson City in 1996. This special train celebrated Tennessee's bicentennial by traveling the state with a collection of historical items. Pictured is the train's motive power (ex-BN E9s numbered 1796 and 1996). Upper right we see SOU #4501 at the Bristol Station primed to head west with a 1992 Watauga Valley excursion.

Photo Gallery ...



Looking for a good, scenic spot to capture NS full-train action? Member Bobby Hand found just the spot on the recently replaced Wall Street pedestrian bridge in Abingdon, VA.

Member Terry Worley gives the green light after installation at the Chuckey Depot / Museum.



TRIVIA answer: On October 20th, 1925, the American Locomotive Company sold the first commercially produced diesel-electric locomotive in the United States to the Central Railroad of New Jersey, which assigned it the number 1000. [Source: NPS Steamtown]

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TIME-SENSITIVE MATERIAL