

Whistle Stop



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



Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

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Just another beautiful East Tennessee autumn day finds NS AC44C #4433 gliding into Johnson City at the lead of train 126. [Les Billings photo]

November 27th General Membership Meeting

Our next General Membership meeting will be held on Monday, November 27th, 2023 at 6:30 pm at the Chuckey Depot / Railroad Museum, 110 South Second St., Jonesborough, TN (at the railroad crossing). The program will be on the American Freedom Train which Lou Nelson got to work on when it was operating. We will also be discussing our 2024 Train Excursions. Note that we are hoping to once again offer bussing out of Johnson City and Asheville. Bring a friend out and enjoy a great program.

Happy
Thanksgiving

A decorative logo for Thanksgiving featuring the words "Happy Thanksgiving" in a cursive font, with a small illustration of a turkey and pumpkins to the right.

Member Notes

Please wish Jim Calhoun, Paul Bultman, Jack Maloney and Lois Tilley a speedy recovery.

If you know of a member that needs a card, thoughts for various concerns, or 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 or railfan04041961@gmail.com.

2024 OFFICER AND BOARD NOMINATIONS

At the October General Membership Meeting, Nominating Committee Chairman Les Billings asked for nominations from the floor. As there were no nominations forthcoming, it was voted to close the nominations. The following are now presented as candidates for office:

Officers

President -----	Mike Tilley	Incumbent
Vice President -----	Howard Orfield	Incumbent
Secretary-----	Connie Hunt	Incumbent
Treasurer-----	Jeanie Walker	Incumbent
Historian-----	Gary Price	Incumbent

Board of Directors (vote for 3)

Tony King – Incumbent, Frank Gricus – Incumbent, and Jim Sutterlin.

Ballots were mailed out recently and must be returned by 12:01 pm, December 9th, 2023. A ballot box will be available at the November meeting, or you can mail to Nominating Committee, Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society, P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605-0432.

Note to Members: If anyone’s address, phone number or email address has changed in the last years’ time, please contact Les Billings at railfan04041961@gmail.com for correction. This will ensure that no one misses mailings, phone calls or emails. Also, if this info changes at any time please send us the correction. Thank You.

WELCOME ABOARD! To new “*Whistle Stop*” contributor Scott Jessee. Scott hired on as a *Clinchfield Railroad* clerk/operator in 1980 and worked at Dante, VA and Elkhorn City, KY. After a short stint as an extra board Erwin dispatcher, Scott became an officer holding positions as Dante Yardmaster, Kingsport and Kingsport Sub Trainmaster, and Director of Train Operations at Erwin. Scott retired from CSX in 2016. Scott’s interest in *Clinchfield Railroad* history was piqued by conversations with Hank Robinette of Carfax, VA and his friendship with *Clinchfield’s* Chief Engineer James Goforth.

2024 EXCURSION SEASON. Watauga Valley’s 2024 excursion season will start in late April with a trip on the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad. Details available in the coming weeks.

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Membership Dues Statements for 2024 will be emailed or sent by US mail in November. Dues are as follows: Individual Membership \$20.00, Family Membership \$5.00 per family member.

Benefits:

- Membership in the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum.
- Participation of all functions of the Museum.
- 12 issues of Watauga Valley’s newsletter, the “*Whistle Stop*”.

Mechanical Department Report

by Art Devoe

GENERAL

If you would like to help at the Jonesborough Coach Yard on Tuesdays between 9 am to 5 pm or Saturdays 9 am to 12 noon, please call our office at (423) 753-5797 or email wataugavalley@gmail.com.

ROLLING STOCK

“Moultrie” diner (WATX 400), “St Augustine” coach (WATX 500), “Powhatan Arrow” coach (WATX 539) and “Clinchfield 100” office car (WATX 100): all four cars are at the North Carolina Transportation Museum in Spencer, NC serving on their *“Polar Express”*. The 100 will have extensive truck repair during the first quarter of 2024 at Spencer.

“Crescent Harbor” sleeper / lounge (WATX 2351): at the Virginia Museum of Transportation.

Chuckey Depot / Museum

BREAKFAST WITH SANTA

Ho, ho, ho! *Breakfast with Santa* is back at the Chucky Depot Museum on Saturday, December 16th. This event was a sell out in 2019, and the Town of Jonesborough is excited to see it return. Breakfast times are 8:30, 9:30, and 10:30 that Saturday morning. Guests of all ages will enjoy a meal from Chick-fil-a. They'll meet Santa Claus in the Depot and listen as he reads a holiday classic that features a magical train. Each family that attends will also receive a special Christmas ornament for their tree. All of this is included in the ticket price of \$20.00. Breakfast times are limited to 25 people, so make sure you get your tickets before they're gone. Tickets for *Breakfast with Santa* can be purchased online at [Jonesborough.com/tickets](https://jonesborough.com/tickets) or by phoning the Jonesborough Visitors Center at (423) 753-1010.

Volunteers Needed for “Santa Claus at the Caboose”

WVRHS&M and the Town of Jonesborough will sponsor this year's *“Santa Claus at the Caboose”* on December 2nd at the Depot from 3 pm to 6 pm. Everyone is welcome to come out, bring their children, see our restored Southern Caboose X450 and greet Santa Claus. We will need volunteers to help assist with the event by getting visitors staged around the caboose. Please express your interest in helping by signing up at the November 27th General Membership meeting, emailing wataugavalley@gmail.com, or calling (423) 753-5797.

Host Training

We are getting ready to schedule host training sessions for any WVRHS&M member who is interested in hosting at the Chuckey Depot. If you would like to attend one of the host training sessions, please call the office at (423) 753-5797 or email wataugavalley@gmail.com.

TRAIN TRIVIA: What is the standard definition of a “long train”? A.) 7500 feet B.) 8000 feet C.) 8500 feet. Answer on page 8.

CC&O Trainmaster Mel Weiler

By Scott Jessee

Several Clinchfield Railroad predecessors' time tables indicated Mel Weiler was the Johnson City, TN trainmaster.

General John T. Wilder had ambitious plans to make Johnson City an industrial center. General Wilder's business activities included iron ore, lumber, real estate, coal, and a railroad. General Wilder lobbied powerful financial companies to bankroll his enterprise. For all intents and purposes, General Wilder informed close friends and fellow Civil War veterans about Johnson City's potential.

Sergeant J. J. Weiler was a member of the Seventeenth Indiana Regiment alongside John T. Wilder. In September 1861, Sergeant Weiler garnered notoriety when he killed Colonel John A. Washington, George Washington's great-grand-nephew, at the Battle of Cheat Mountain, VA.

In 1887, Sergeant Weiler moved his family to Johnson City and became proprietor of the Piedmont House. His son, Mel, was 18 years old when they arrived in East Tennessee.

Mel Weiler's railroad career promptly began as an East Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia Railroad telegrapher. Mel worked at Johnson City and Talbot, TN "manipulating the lightning". Sergeant Weiler's service on the TN 3rd Regiment executive committee with ETVG Superintendent F.K. Huger probably helped Mel get the telegrapher's job.

March 1888 was Mel's first connection with the Three C's as he worked alongside Captain H. T. McDaniel doing preliminary survey work. Two years later Mel became Three C's Chief Engineer A. N. Molesworth's clerk, or as the newspaper reported "doing the typewriter act".

1893 presented challenges and memorable moments for Mel. Three C's economic woes were in full force as were Three C employees' worry about their jobs. Charles E. Hellier acquired the Three C's assets and formed the Ohio River and Charleston.

O. R. & C. retained Mel as an employee. This was good news as Mel, his wife of one year Birdie, and newborn daughter Emma Lee moved into a new home at 423 Locust Street. Birdie's brother, Ike T. Jobe, operated Jobe's Opera House and served as Johnson City mayor on a couple of occasions.

Mel's prestigious railroad position provided connections with business leaders and entrepreneurs who planned to profit from Johnson City's financial outlook. In 1893, Mel joined attorneys S. C. Williams and J. H. Bowman along with A. N. Molesworth to incorporate Intermountain Iron and Timber Company.

April 1901 O. R. & C. President Samuel Hunt accompanied Mel over the newly opened Hunt Dale Extension. O. R. & C. was plotting their trek to the coast and also contemplated a branch line to Asheville, NC.

Ohio River and Charleston Railway, already a fledgling enterprise, struggled to survive. The Hunt Dale Extension was destroyed and the O. R. & C. was in dire need of cash and revenue. Mel most likely focused on proving his mettle by servicing industries and coordinating work trains, equipment, and materials to rebuild the railroad.

Once again Mel faced the likelihood of losing his job. However, on August 7, 1902, he was named "master of trains" by George L. Carter's South and Western Railway. Perhaps in a sign of

celebration, Birdie with daughters, Emma Lee, and Melba, spent two weeks at the Austin Springs resort.

May 1903 the S&W dispatched Mel and B. J. Sitton, who was described as an expert machinist, to Cincinnati. Mr. Sitton was affiliated with the Johnson City Foundry but previously had been the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap, & Louisville Railroad's master mechanic.

Their intention was to purchase engines and passenger cars to be used for a double daily passenger service. Likely candidates for purchase might have been 20-year-old Baldwins that would be numbered S&W 34, 35, 36, and 37.

South and Western railroad men respected and held Mel Weiler in high esteem. In December 1904, they presented him with a handsome gold Waltham watch monogrammed "M.H.W." Most railroad workers are lucky to get an obligatory retirement watch, less along a gold watch in the prime of their career.

A railroad career cannot be perfect or come off without a hitch. August 1905, while returning from Spruce Pine on his motor car, Mel along with a party of railroad officials, rounded a curve at 25 MPH and struck a lever car. All parties leapt to the ground prior the ensuing collision. Mel suffered the only injury, that being a dislocated ankle and small bone fracture in his right leg. Mel returned to his duties in October.

Often after an unfortunate event, sometimes there is a chance for redemption. Mel's redemption may have occurred in February 1908, when an early morning fire destroyed the S&W Johnson City machine shop. But, then again, the railroad probably expected Mel to comply with the General Rule that states: "In case of danger to the company's property, employees must unite to protect it".

Either way, Mel sprang into action and along with Master Carpenter E. J. Vandergrift, Master Mechanic H. L. Hobbs, and Conductor Lynch Thompson, they shifted rolling stock out of harm's way.

The Johnson City Comet bragged on this exploit: "The higher officials can congratulate themselves that while absent from the city their interests were in the hands of the faithful employees of the operating department who performed valuable assistance in protecting the railroad's property at the cost of much physical suffering to themselves".

In New York, General Manager M. J. Caples wired Trainmaster Weiler to put a force of men on to immediately rebuild.

Aug 1908 Weiler was involved in several projects. Work trains needed to be coordinated to move steel, materials, and equipment to the Boone Creek viaduct construction area. Plans and agreements were being made to close Carnegie station and for passenger trains to use ETWNC tracks to the downtown station. Schedules and equipment were being readied for passenger trains to operate between Johnson City and Marion, NC.

The big push was to connect George L. Carter's railroad from Dante, VA to Johnson City to Marion, NC. CC&O Timetable No. 5 became effective February 15, 1909. The first train from Dante to Johnson City departed with much fanfare as 200 people showed up for the occasion. CC&O steel rails now reached the Russell County, VA coalfields.

Railroad business and job prospects seemed to be at an all-time high. Mel must have been proud of his hard work and perseverance through the railroad's financial crises, the 1901 May flood, and

other challenges. Mel could take solace on a job well done as the railroad was now completed. However, that would not be the case.

June 3, 1909, Johnson City Comet reported: "The office of trainmaster that had been efficiently filled for a number of years on the CC&O and ancestors by Mel H. Weiler has been abolished as of June 1. Mr. Weiler was offered an assistants job at Dante but declined. He was a faithful and trustworthy official for many years and worked in and out of season to keep the struggling Three Cs and S&W out of hands of receivers."

This might had been the first time a Clinchfield rail worker had been threatened with Dante and went elsewhere. What better way to get rid of someone than to offer him a job that everyone knew he would not take?

Mel and family were well established in Johnson City and Mrs. Weiler was routinely mentioned in societal news. It would be a culture shock to move from Johnson City to a coal camp in Dante, VA.

A couple of "my conspiracy theories" may have also played into Mel's demise. Mel was one of the last officials associated with the failed Three C and O. R. & C. railroads. Newly assigned upper management might have wanted to get rid of one of the last links to those organizations.

In 1905, M. J. Cables was hired from the Norfolk and Western Railway to become S&W General Manager and Chief Engineer. An influx of former N&W employees would enter CC&O service filling multiple positions.

L. H. Phetteplace, a protege of M. J. Caples, arrived off the N&W in 1908 to become the superintendent.

Mr. Goforth's "Building the Clinchfield" indicates Mel Weiler was the superintendent from 1905-1908. The Johnson City Comet reported Mel's job as trainmaster, but nevertheless, the writing was on the wall. Getting rid of Mel would allow the N&W consortium to bring fellow N&W personnel on board, and that is exactly what occurred.

July 1909, Clinch Valley News reported W. T. Wohlford, a N&W railroad man had been named Dante trainmaster. Mr. Wohlford eventually became CRR superintendent in 1945.

Mel Weiler did not stay unemployed for long. In September 1909, he became the Black Mountain Coal Company's general agent in the Carolinas. In 1910 Mel incorporated a boiler company and in 1912 was appointed receiver for the Johnson City Foundry. Another career change occurred in 1914 when he manufactured ice machines.

In 1916, a big change took place when Mel Weiler applied for his California voting rights. It appears Mel moved to the West coast to be near his father. Mel's third daughter, Lena W., had been born in 1915 and his second daughter, Melba, moved with the family to California. Sergeant Weiler would pass on September 24, 1919.

When in California, Mel's occupations included chicken farming and a book-keeper at a packing house.

Johnson City's 1935 city directory indicated Mel and Birdie had returned to East Tennessee. Eldest daughter Emma Lee, who had remained in Tennessee, married John Barton and she would become a drama teacher at Science Hill HS and ETSU. Watching shows at Uncle Ike's opera house might had influenced Emma Lee's career.

On January 6, 1940, at age 71, Mel Weiler passed. The death certificate showed his occupation as “railroad.” Death certificates are to show the deceased’s current job or if retired, their main occupation when working.

Somehow, even after a 31-year absence, instead of just filling in the death certificate’s blanks; I want to believe Mel’s family thought he was still respected and dedicated railroad man.

[Resources: Johnson City *Comet*, *Clinch Valley News*, US Census, City Directories, James Goforth’s “*Building the Clinchfield*,” and *ancestry.com*.]

In the News ...

CSX Adds Updated Car to “Santa Train”



[Information extracted from Ron Flanary on *trains.com*. Photo posted by Aaron Bryant on WVRHS&M Facebook.] This year’s CSX Santa Train carried a new “Santa Car”, CSXT 994528, converted former *Pan Am Railways* office car No. 100, replacing our car 100 and CSXT office car “*West Virginia*”. The “new” Santa Car was built by ACF in 1914 as diner No. 1011 for the Norfolk & Western. Rebuilt as office car No. 102 in 1934, and again in 1957 (streamlined this time), it was sold to the Delaware & Hudson in 1976 (and renumbered No. 100), and eventually

became Pan Am property in the evolution of the former Guilford system. The interior of the car was completely gutted to hold gifts. Two large baggage-type doors were installed on the “B” end to speed loading and unloading (most gifts are handed out by volunteers on the ground to handle the volume).

American Freedom Train Locomotive to be Cosmetically Restored

[*Railfan & Railroad Magazine*] The B&O Railroad Museum announced last week that it would cosmetically restore Reading Company T-1 4-8-4 2101 to its *American Freedom Train* appearance ahead of the 250th anniversary of the United States in 2026. In late October, the locomotive was moved from its long-time display site to the museum’s restoration shop.

Reading 2101 was built in 1923 from an older 2-8-0 locomotive. In the late 1950s, it was used as a backup locomotive for the iconic “*Iron Horse Ramblers*” excursions before being retired. In 1975, it was restored to service to haul the *American Freedom Train* throughout the eastern United States. Later it led the *Chessie Steam Special* before a roundhouse fire forced its retirement and it was put on a display in Baltimore. [Continued]

For decades the locomotive has worn its *American Freedom Train* appearance and number (No. 1), but the elements have taken a toll on the locomotive. The locomotive is expected to be restored cosmetically before 2026.

The move wasn't without incident. At one point it appeared as if the locomotive hit a passenger car that was too close to the big locomotive on another track. The incident was live-streamed online but if there was any damage it was minor.

GSMR Rebuild of SRR #722 (ET&WNC #208)



#722 along with S&A #750 in August 1971 excursion service.

You can follow the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad rebuild of ex-SOUTHERN #722 (ex-ETWNC #208) on the GSMR web site at <https://www.gsmr.com/category/722rebuild/>.

#722 was built in September 1904 by the Baldwin Locomotive Works for the Southern Railway as a K class 2-8-0 Consolidation type with Stephenson valve gear, sliding valves, alligator crossheads, and a saturated boiler. #722 was assigned to work on SOU's Murphy, NC Branch, where it was primarily used to haul freight trains between Asheville and Murphy. In 1952, it was purchased by the ET&WNC, alongside its

sister locomotive #630, where they served as switchers around Johnson City and Elizabethton. In 1967, #722 and #630 were both traded back to the SOU for use in their steam excursion program until 1980, when they were sent to TVRM in Chattanooga to make way for larger steam locomotives to haul longer and heavier excursion trains. In late 1985, #722 was taken out of service and was eventually purchased by the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad in late 2000, where it is being restored to operating condition, anticipated to be completed around 2026. [Text and photo source: *Wikipedia*]

WMSRR 2-6-6-2 #1309 Back in Service

After extensive running gear maintenance, former Chesapeake & Ohio #1309 is back on the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad in time for the tourist railroad's busy *Polar Express* season! Holiday Schedule: Dec. 8-10, departing Frostburg, MD; Dec. 18-24, departing Cumberland, MD.



41st Annual Christmas Luncheon



If you haven't already done so, you have until Thursday, November 30th, to make your reservations for this year's Christmas luncheon. Information on the menu, making reservations and directions is attached to the end of this newsletter.

TRAIN TRIVIA ANSWER: Trick question - there is no standard definition of a "long train." Recent legislation defines a long train as 7,500 feet. In 2021, the median length of a train on Class I railroads (meaning half were longer, half were shorter) was 5,400 feet. Just 10% of trains were longer than 9,800 feet, and fewer than 1% of trains were longer than 14,000 feet. [source: AAR]

Display in the Block
By Les Billings

A Rainy Day at The Museum

On this museum hosting day in October, it was a cloudy rainy day. NS 126, eastbound, made its presence just before I opened the Museum, #14399 light shining and reflected on the rails as it heads toward Bristol to switch some cars and continue its journey. As the lead locomotives, gondolas full of zinc, rusty covered hoppers and 2 DPU's passed the Chuckey Depot, it passed out of sight to return another day full of freight headed east. **Happy Thanksgiving**



Whistle Stop

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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.



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

TIME-SENSITIVE MATERIAL

Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum Annual Christmas Luncheon

Date: Saturday, December 9, 2023

Time: Meal at Noon; may arrive 11 a.m. for socializing

Location: Same as last year; Depot Room at Food City Franklin Commons,
920 N. State of Franklin Rd, Johnson City, 37604

Reservation & pre-payment deadline: Thursday, November 30, 2023

Cost: \$15.00 each; make check payable to WVRHS & M and specify "Christmas Luncheon"

See Reservation Form below

Menu

Oven Fried Chicken -or- Roast Beef Au Jus
Tossed Salad with choice of dressings
Twice Baked Potato & Green Beans Almondine
Rolls & Butter
Coffee, Tea, Water, Coke products
Dessert: choose from 2 pies and 2 cakes

A Veggie Tray and a Cheese Tray will be available during the social hour (11 - 12 noon)
buffet line will be ready at Noon

Registration & payment form for Christmas Luncheon:
detach & mail to: WVRHS & M; PO Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605-0432
We must receive your check & form by Thursday, Nov 30, 2023

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone #: _____ Email: _____

Number of persons attending _____ x \$15. Per person = \$ _____ (enclosed)

- Make check payable to WVRHS&M, and designate as Christmas Luncheon
- Mail to WVRHS&M, PO Box 432; Johnson City, TN 37605-0432

We must receive your reservation and your payment by Thursday, November 30, 2023

We cannot accept payment or reservation at the door !!

Our annual Christmas Luncheon and program are something we all look forward to; it's a time to enjoy a good meal and socialize with friends while leaving all of the work to the Food City Catering Service. We've tweaked our menu this year, and we trust you will enjoy the choices we've made. The Food City catering group do such a great job with meals for "Dinner on the Diner", and we felt they are our best choice for our annual Christmas Luncheon.

- Note: The WVRHS & M is paying a portion of the cost of each meal, so your portion is a very reasonable \$15. each.