

Whistle Stop



Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum

P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN. 37605-0432

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Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

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The first CSX freight train to traverse the Blue Ridge Subdivision in a year heads south over the rebuilt Poplar Bridge on Thursday, September 25, 2025. The original bridge was destroyed by Hurricane Helene and took almost a year to replace. Story on page 5. [photo posted on Facebook]

October 27th General Membership Meeting

The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will have our regular General Membership Meeting at 6:30 pm on Monday, October 27th, 2025 at the Chuckey Depot, 110 South Second Ave., Jonesborough, TN. The Program will highlight "The Forgotten Caboose." Bring a friend out and enjoy an evening of railroading with your fellow railfans.

Member Notes

Les Billings, Membership Chairperson



Jim Calhoun, long-time Watauga Valley member and major contributor to our success, recently celebrated his 100th birthday. Here we see Jim flanked by Mike Tilley, Don Finley and Art Devoe sharing this joyous occasion. Many happy returns of this special day, Jim.

2026 OFFICER AND BOARD MEMBER NOMINATIONS

A slate of nominees has been presented to the Nominating Committee. Additional nominations will be accepted during the general meeting on October, 27th. At that point nominations will be closed and elections will follow, concluding at the general meeting/dinner in December. Ballots will be mailed out in next month. Nominees presented thus far are listed below.

OFFICERS

President	Mike Tilley, Incumbent	Vice President	Howard Orfield, Incumbent
Secretary	Harold Wilson	Treasurer	Jeanie Walker, Incumbent

DIRECTORS

Rick Chinnouth, Incumbent	Bob Mushet, Incumbent	Les Billings, Incumbent	Harold Berry
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WATAUGA VALLEY CHRISTMAS GALA

The Christmas Gala will be held on Saturday, December 13th at the Johnson City State of Franklin Food City. The speaker will be announced in the December newsletter. The cost will be \$15.00 per person. Mark your calendar for the special event. More information, including speaker introduction, will be in the December newsletter. A reservation form will be mailed out with the election ballots.

HIWASSEE RIVER GORGE TRIP A SUCCESS

The Hiwassee River Gorge Trip was operated on Saturday, October 11th, and was an overnight sell out. Everyone enjoyed the beautiful fall colors.

JONSBOROUGH TRAIN SHOW

The Jonesborough Train Show has been scheduled for November 15th, 2025 and will be held at the Jonesborough Visitor Center at 117 Boone Street. Vendors wishing to participate should call (423) 753-5797 or email wataugavalley@gmail.com for more information. An Event Flyer is attached to this newsletter for more information.

Mechanical Report

Thanks to all who have served on the Mechanical and Cleaning Committees: Art Devoe, Don Findley, Jim Sutterlin, Cline Knowles, David Billings, Mike Tilley, David Denny, Jan Edwards, Gary Lombardi and Frank Gricus (here's hoping no one was forgotten) for all the work they have done over the past year on our passenger cars. If you would like to volunteer at the Jonesborough Coach yard, please call the WVRHS&M office at (423) 753-5797 and leave a message; we will call you back.

Rolling Stock

Moultrie diner (WATX 400), **Powhatan Arrow** coach (WATX 539), **St. Augustine** coach (WATX 500) and **Clinchfield 100**: in service at the NC Transportation Museum in Spencer, NC on their "Polar Express" trains.

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

WATX 6219 coach: being prepared for its move to Jonesborough on NS.

CLINCHFIELD MOTOR CAR



At left we see Terry Worley running trials of our restored ex-CRR motor car over Yard tracks.

WHISTLE TRUCK

The Whistle Truck is now available for rent; call (423) 753-5797 if interested .

Chuky Depot / Museum

We have appointed members who open and close the Depot throughout the week. We need a volunteer to open and close every other Thursday. If you can help, please call (423) 753-5797 or email wataugavalley@gmail.com.

The **Virtual Railfan Cameras** at the Depot are back online after being down for almost 3 weeks. We worked very hard on getting them back online with help from V.R.. They installed some new and updated equipment. We feel this will help with the overall experience. Thanks to everyone for your patience and interest.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED AT THE SANTA TRAIN EXHIBIT AT THE DEPOT

Our annual **Meet Santa on the Red Caboose** will be held on December 20th at the Chuky Depot from 3pm to 6pm. WVRHS&M and the Town of Jonesborough will sponsor the event. Everyone is welcome to come out to the restored Southern Caboose X450, bring their children, and meet Santa Claus. We will need volunteers to help man the event, helping visitors lining up around the caboose.

If interested, register your intent by signing up at the next General Membership Meeting, emailing wataugavalley@gmail.com, or calling (423) 753-5797. This event offers good publicity for us as we are expecting a lot of people to come aboard our beautiful red caboose and Depot.

In the News

CRR 56338



NCTM performed a beautiful job on the ex-CRR 56338 hopper which was recently donated to the museum by WVRHS&M.

2025 Edition of the CSX Santa Train

The annual CSX Santa Train trip is set for Saturday, Nov. 22nd, 2025, the railroad has announced. The 83rd running of the train, a tradition dating to 1943, will again feature a 110-mile trip from Shelbiana, KY to Kingsport, TN, distributing more than 15 tons of toys, gifts, and winter apparel to thousands of families.

"What makes the CSX Santa Train special isn't the miles it covers, but the moments and memories it creates for families," Bryan Tucker, CSX vice president of stakeholder engagement and sustainability, said in a press release. "We're touched by the generations of families who gather to welcome the CSX Santa Train year after year and by the overwhelming support it receives across the country." Supporting the communities where we live and work is at the heart of our ONE CSX culture. It's about bringing people together, sharing joy, and honoring a tradition that helps connect families across the region. It's a privilege to help carry this legacy forward and share in the joy it brings." A video announcing this year's train can be found at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBMO4mN4W8E>.

(Check out the run over Copper Creek trestle in the final shots.) A full schedule and additional details are still to come. Follow the CSX Santa Train page on **Facebook** and **Instagram** for updates.



Come See Santa in His Red Caboose

The Historic Southern Railway X450 Caboose at the Chuckey Depot/Museum at Jonesborough will be open for everyone to see Santa Claus greeting guests on Saturday, December 20 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Santa will greet all his guests from outside the caboose, providing the perfect photo opportunity, before visiting with children inside the caboose.

The caboose and Chuckey Railroad Museum will also be open prior to the greeting of Santa on the same day from 10am to 3pm for tours of the depot and this historic piece of equipment. Santa will arrive at 3pm at the caboose. Many railroad enthusiasts in the area are likely familiar with the caboose as the Southern Railway x450 which was used for many years on Southern Railway trains traveling through Jonesborough.

There is no charge for this event which is located on 110 South Second St. in Jonesborough. For more information, call Jonesborough Visitors Center at (423) 753-1010.

Helene Disaster Recovery



BLUE RIDGE SUBDIVISION IS BACK UP AND OPERATING

If you have not heard or read the news, the old Clinchfield is back up and operating. Freight and coal trains are operating again with a big change as crews are now called out of Erwin instead of Kingsport.

[From Google AI] About the Poplar Bridge and Hurricane Helene:

- The bridge spans the Nolichucky River, also known as the North Toe River, near the community of Poplar in western North Carolina.
- Hurricane Helene, which struck on September 27, 2024, caused catastrophic flooding in the area that completely washed out miles of track and destroyed the original Poplar Bridge.
- CSX completed the rebuilt bridge in June 2025, a critical step towards reopening the line. The new structure was designed to be stronger and more resilient to future severe weather.
- The overall project involved rebuilding nearly 60 miles of the Blue Ridge Subdivision that had been severely damaged.
- The first CSX freight train to pass over the rebuilt Poplar Bridge since Hurricane Helene was a coal train that traversed the Blue Ridge Subdivision on Thursday, September 25, 2025. This marked the restoration of a vital rail corridor after a year of extensive repairs.

The photo below was taken from a special train for local officials of Mitchell County and Spruce Pine, NC who joined Tennessee dignitaries and railroad workers who rebuilt track from Erwin, TN to Poplar, NC. [From the *Mitchell News-Journal*, October 21, 2025]



Display in the Block

by Les Billings

Happy Fall Y'all. I am very thrilled to be presenting in this month's *Display in the Block*, photos of CSX trains running down the tracks. After a long year of reconstruction in the Gorge, trains are once again rolling through to the south. Coal and Ethanol trains at first and then Freight. I have made it a point to concentrate on CSX.

We also want to encourage others to submit their photos to the Whistle Stop. Please email them to: whistlestop.editor@gmail.com or railfan0404191@gmail.com. Would love to publish.



[Above] A trip to North Carolina a few weeks ago, I was lucky and caught CSX C406, Coal Drag, with #851 leading just south of Relief, NC heading up toward the first tunnel south on Erwin. It was a great sight because I had not seen any all day.



After a trip over in the Gorge, I stopped in Erwin to see if there were any activity, I found that they were switching & repositioning some locomotives to build a empty scrubber train to head north.



Once all the locomotives were placed in Erwin, the Scrubber train moved north through J.C. with 6 lead units.



Empty Coal train heading north as it will be exiting the “High Line” in Johnson City and heading north towards Kingsport and then on to be refilled and heading back south once again.



[Left] I was unable to catch the first Coal train coming down the line, but this was the second. It is rolling through Johnson City near my house at MP 118.3.

[Left] Also while in Erwin, I saw this poor CSX Caboose setting rusting away on a siding. It look as if was begging to be restored. Maybe, someone will some day.



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Published Monthly by the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum

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TIME-SENSITIVE MATERIAL