

# Whistle Stop



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

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## Merry Christmas!

During a recent visit to Ft. Worth, TX, your Editor discovered that Santa has traded in his reindeer and sleigh for a far more elegant way to travel.

The event was the BNSF-sponsored "Holliday Express", a rail excursion using their business train, which pays tribute to members of the military and their families (many with a member deployed overseas).

While on board the "Holiday Express", families are treated to special holiday snacks, given a commemorative holiday ornament and visited by Santa. Approximately 350 military family members were expected to take the special ride, which is offered during the holidays in several cities serviced by BNSF.

In this photo we see The Man waving from the rear platform of (ex-GN) business car "Red River".

### *No December Meeting!*

The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will not have a regular Membership Meeting this month due to the Christmas holiday. Our next regular Membership Meeting will be held Monday, January 28, 2013.

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## *Member Notes*

By Nancy Jewell

A large number of members and guests enjoyed the annual Christmas dinner on December 15th at the Jonesborough Visitors' Center. There are many good cooks in our group.

Please keep Suzie Price, Coy and JoAn Edwards in your thoughts as they deal with health concerns. As always, let us know of any member, family, or friend to whom a card might be sent or a phone call made to help brighten a dreary winter day. The office number is 423.753.5797 or call Nancy Jewell at 423.282.0918.

As the last few days of 2012 are passing by, we wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy New Year.

## *2013 WATAUGA VALLEY OFFICERS and BOARD ELECTIONS*

The Nominating Committee reports that the following were elected as 2013 Officers and Director:

Mike Tilley – President	James Smallwood – Secretary	Historian – Gary Price
Bob Schubel – Vice President	Jeanie Walker – Treasurer	Board of Director – Art Devoe

## *DUES RENEWAL NOTICES*

Watauga Valley dues renewal notices have been mailed. Please respond with your renewal soon. Your Watauga Valley membership expires 12/31/12.

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## *Spring Street Coach Yard Mechanical Report*

By Bob Yaple

**General.** The Track work is now complete and tested with the return of the diner (Moultrie). For the first time, we have a straight and level track on which to make the critical clearance measurements. In the process, we have also been able to improve the walkways around the cars.

**Rolling Stock.** The Moultrie diner and the Crescent Harbor sleeper/lounge are now back in the yard. The two coaches remain in service at the N.C. Transportation Museum in Spencer, NC.

**“Moultrie”.** A diesel fuel leak developed on the return trip from Spencer that was discovered in Knoxville. A private company was called in and they drained all the tanks and filled barrels with 200 gallons of fuel. Members of the mechanical crew went to Knoxville, finished final tank draining and trucked the barrels back to the Jonesborough Coach Yard. The fuel tank has now been repaired. Much has been done on producing wiring diagrams. For the primary power supply work that was done several years ago, diagrams will be put on a CD for reference and storage.

**“Crescent Harbor”.** Work continues on final completion of the restoration and problems that show up from use. Stainless steel kick plates are being installed along the floor line in appropriate areas, some of which are replacements of existing plates that were damaged or painted over. The power generator support frame is being modified to meet the unrestricted Amtrak Clearance diagram. Final installation will follow.

The logo for Designated Production Gang (DPG) is written in a stylized, cursive font.

By Gary Price

Seniority is one of the most valuable assets that we railroaders accumulate throughout our careers. At times, it can be more valuable than money, especially when the end of the year draws to a close and the gangs start shutting down their operations in preparation for the coming years. The more seniority you have guarantees whether you are able to work during the waning days of December or sit at home waiting on next year's schedule to start. Your name is entered into a roster that eventually will determine where or how you work. My name is located on four separate rosters.

With that being said, even though the big black locomotives are proudly adorned with the NORFOLK SOUTHERN corporate logo, the inner workings of the M-O-W department reveal that employees are still governed by three separate railroad regions. The Southern region is as it states, the former SOUTHERN RAILWAY and its operating subsidiaries; the Eastern / Western region are the former NORFOLK AND WESTERN subsidiaries; and lastly, the Northern Region consisting of all employees that we gained in the 1999 split up of CONRAIL. Here is where it gets interesting or complicated, however you may view it. As part of the merger, a fourth roster was expanded upon - the Eastern / Western and Northern roster was "dovetailed" together to form a DPG roster (Designated Production Gang), allowing employees of both rosters to be able to cross region lines and work without the fear of penalties or re-advertisements of jobs. This newly expanded DPG roster allowed younger seniority employees the ability to seek work and obtain advancement on jobs not obtainable before 1999. However, the Southern region did not join the DPG roster, and there were strict procedures in place before you could cross into the Southern Region and work regardless how old your seniority was. All Southern Employees had to be holding active positions before we could cross the region lines and continue to work in warmer weather during the winter months.

This process worked well until recently, when a large number of former SOUTHERN, N&W, and CONRAIL employees reached their 30 year mark and began their mass exodus into retirement. This gap in employees left NORFOLK SOUTHERN with no other option but to hire a large amount of new employees to fill these openings system wide, and because of this people that belonged in one region, ended up being placed in the opposite regions and vice-versa, so something had to be done to get all these employees working steady regardless of where the railroad needed them at the moment.

Then came the 2011/12 BMW contract negotiations, and NORFOLK SOUTHERN insisted upon having the Southern Region join the DPG roster to allow easier mobility of the M-O-W employees from different regions and gangs. The contract passed, and on July, 1 2012 all NORFOLK SOUTHERN gangs system wide with 10 or more men became part of the DPG roster. This is NORFOLK SOUTHERN's first viable attempt at a unified roster since the 1982 merger of the SOUTHERN and NORFOLK AND WESTERN. The first set of system-wide job bids came out the first week of November 2012. A total of 900 machine, foremen, and track-men jobs were open to bid on, as all existing regional gangs on the railroad (including mine) would be phased out on December 31, 2012. With several older men from the Southern Region "dovetailed" into the roster, I wasn't even sure if I would be able to hold my machine, much less the gang I have been on for the last 10 years. The word from Atlanta came that 1300 people had bid in an effort to secure one of the 900 jobs available. This sent a shock-wave through the employees [continued on next page]

with the realization that 400 people could end up without work, or scrambling to find a job in some of the non-DPG regions.



So, you could imagine my relief when the awarded jobs were posted and there was my name listed, on my machine [photo at left], and my gang for the 2013 operating season. It, of course, was my number one pick on my bid form. As I looked down through my newly formed 2013 gang, I saw several names that have been a part of my gang for years, a few former employees returning that I haven't worked with in years, and yes, several names that I did not recognize coming to my gang from other regions. Several employees are having to leave and make new homes on other gangs; a few did not have enough seniority to draw one of the 900 jobs. Hopefully they will be able to find work on local division jobs.

I was pleased to see that my 2013 schedule starts on January 2, 2013 at mile post N8 in Norfolk, Virginia. I look forward to the opportunity to see the new Norfolk Amtrak service that started on 12/12/12. Once again I will be working almost a full year in Virginia, in familiar places, with some new faces.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the entire Price Family.

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## *Chucky Depot*

It was announced by Jim Rhein, town planner for Jonesborough, that the Chucky Depot will be going up in the Spring 2013 on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Jonesborough. The location is along the NS track just across the site of the original depot. The Watauga Valley RSH&M is looking forward in being a team player with the town of Jonesborough on the restoration work of the depot.

## *Coalfield Tour*

All members and guest that took the coal field tours on Saturday, December 8 had an excellent time. Everyone experienced the coal country and railroading that we had not seen before. Plans are in the works for a Part 2 tour in Spring 2013 as we did not see everything originally. Thanks to Nick White and Randy Moore for putting the tour together.

*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, Everybody!*

## *WATAUGA VALLEY CHRISTMAS DINNER*

Great food, fun and fellowship were had by all at the Watauga Valley Annual Christmas Dinner on Saturday, December 15<sup>th</sup> at the Jonesborough Visitors Center. There were close to 100 attendees packing the house. President Mike Tilley conducted a short business meeting. Gary Price gave out door prizes and Nick White gave out gifts for the youth volunteers for their hard work in the supply operation on the November excursions. We want to thank Helen and Jim Calhoun for all the hard work they put into organizing this gala Christmas Event.

Pictured below are some snapshots of the festivities courtesy of Don Findley.



NOTE: The photo at the lower right is of the youth volunteers who kept two excursion trains well supplied.



# Photo Section



LEFT: As if further proof was needed that Santa indeed gets around this time of year, we nevertheless offer this photo of him waving from the rear of this year's CSX Santa Train as it rolls through the Virginia coalfields. Watching intently from trackside are Clara and Audrey McGee, granddaughters of WATV member Melina McGee.

BELOW: In honor of America's veterans, NORFOLK SOUTHERN repainted SD60E #6920 in patriotic livery.



RailPictures.Net - Image Copyright © Norfolk Southern Corp

In this era of over-the-top corporate greed, it is refreshing to see the humanity exercised by railroad giants such as CSX, NS and BNSF. The skeptical will say it is just business; your Editor says it is compelling community service.



Catching the last rays of the evening sun, the “Crescent Harbor” splits the Colored Position Lights (CPLs) at Stuarts Draft, southbound on the NS Roanoke District as part of Roanoke NRHS’ excursions a week after ours. [Copyright Chase Gunnjoe; used with photographer’s permission.]

## *Railfan News*



The Rural Retreat Depot Foundation has a limited number of prints of a photo of the depot last Christmas during a snowstorm. They are sending out free copies of the print as a thank you for donations of \$25 or more. If you are interested visit their website, [www.theruralretreatdepot.com](http://www.theruralretreatdepot.com), and go to the Battery Room page.



The [Craggy Mountain Line Railroad](#) in Woodfin (Asheville), NC will operate its first annual "Jingle Bell" trolley train ride on Saturday, December 22. Rumor has it that Santa and Mrs. Claus will be there to see the children on their special Christmas train with hot chocolate and cookies for everyone.



Some truly remarkable, vintage shots of the VIRGINIAN RAILWAY can be viewed on a MS POWERPOINT slide show taken during the 1957 NRHS Convention in Roanoke. Go to [http://nwhs.org/qna/1957\\_NRHS\\_Convention.pps](http://nwhs.org/qna/1957_NRHS_Convention.pps). It can be viewed on an iPad as well as a PC.

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Fred Waskiewicz, Editor



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