

# Whistle Stop



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

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Reminiscent of the Glory Days of Steam, Mike Pierry, Jr. caught TVRM's 630 (ex-ET&WNC 207) departing Bristol on its March 9<sup>th</sup> journey to Radford, capturing the beauty, drama and wonder of a steam locomotive in action. QUIZ: Why, in 2013, do we see a caboose in active service? (Answer on page 4.)

## *April 22<sup>nd</sup> General Membership Meeting*

This month's General Membership Meeting of the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum will be held at 6:30 pm on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 at the Johnson City Public Library, 101 West Millard St., Johnson City, TN. Our program this month will be on "Steam Trains in the United States", a fun and informative video. Bring a friend out for a relaxing evening with your fellow members.

## *Member Notes*

By Nancy Jewell

Please keep the following folks in your thoughts as they deal with various concerns: Jane DeVoe, Jack Cope, and Bob Yaple.

As always, please let us know of members, families, or friends to whom a card might be sent or a phone call made. Call the office phone at 423-753-5797 or Nancy Jewell at 423-282-0918.

Thanks for help us keep in touch.

## *Spring Street Coach Yard Mechanical Report*

By Bob Yaple

**GENERAL.** Finally, some weather that's fit to work in. Now, if we could all get healthy, we might get something done!

**ROLLING STOCK.** The two coaches are out roaming the countryside on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Steam Program.

**MOULTRIE DINER.** We are working our way through the punch list. Items being done are cleaning and painting of the interior of all the storage closets and cabinets; removal of the unused commode and its accessories; completing overhaul of the Electrical Closet started several years ago; providing emergency lighting; and updating the exterior marker lights.

**CRESCENT HARBOR SLEEPER/LOUNGE.** Work continues on the punch list to complete the restoration started in 2002. We have procured an original strike plate for the B-end door latch so the car can now be locked by using keys we made duplicating the original. All cabinets and closets are being cleaned and painted. We procured the last of the missing original light diffusers for the berths. Work will now continue on generator installation and wiring of the auto start system. This will be a first for our cars.

**MOTOR CAR.** We have a design and approval to purchase and erect a metal building behind the existing container to house the motor car and several other large pieces of equipment. The motor car has been stored off-site for several years.

## *Future WVRHS&M Rail Excursions*

**Summer Excursion on the Great Smokey Mountain Railroad.** Our Summer 2013 Excursion will be on the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad on Saturday, August 17. The trip will operate from Bryson City, NC to Natahala Gorge, NC via Fontana Lake.

**Fall Excursions – Charlottesville, VA and Asheville, NC.** We are happy to announce our Fall Excursions for the 2013 season to Charlottesville, VA and Asheville, NC on October 12 and 13.

Mark your calendar for all three special excursion dates. Fall Excursion Car Host worker forms will be available in June; make plans to volunteer on these two special excursions.

## *Spring Rail Excursion Seats Still Available*

The North Carolina Transportation Museum and the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum have partnered to sponsor a great rail excursion this spring to Charleston, S.C. for a 3 day / 2 night trip that will be unforgettable! **May 17-19, 2013**. Charleston is brimming with history, culture and charm. Join us for a 3-day weekend getaway to enjoy a sampling of what the Lowcountry has to offer.

### **The Lowcountry Limited Trip Overview**

Consisting of both vintage parlor and passenger cars as well as modern Amfleet cars, a specially chartered train leaves the N.C. Transportation Museum on Friday morning for a scenic ride through the Piedmont of both North and South Carolina before heading to the coast. Upon arrival at the Norfolk Southern railyard in North Charleston, motorcoaches will provide transportation to the hotels before heading into Downtown Charleston for dinner on their own at one of Charleston's remarkable restaurants.

On Saturday, passengers can embark on one of two different sightseeing tours for an additional fee or opt to explore historic Downtown Charleston on your own. Tour options include:

- A. Charleston Sampler – Tour of Magnolia Plantation and Gardens, Fort Sumter and USS Yorktown; includes a box lunch. Cost is \$65/person.
- B. Land & Sea Tour – 2-hour guided stroll through the heart of Downtown Charleston and a 90-minute guided harbor cruise; Time on your own in the afternoon; Lunch not included. Cost is \$40/person.
- C. On Your Own – Spend the day exploring beautiful downtown Charleston. Complimentary transportation is provided from the hotel in the morning to the Custom's House/Old Town Market. Charleston also has a free trolley service that runs within the downtown area.

Saturday evening, motorcoaches will provide continuous service from the hotels to Downtown Charleston from 6pm until 10pm, so passengers can once again enjoy a fun evening and dinner on their own.

Passengers will board the train Sunday morning for an enjoyable train ride back to North Carolina.

Tickets include the round trip ride to Charleston, SC, motorcoach transportation, hotel accommodations and hot continental breakfast meals on Saturday and Sunday mornings. Tour options and box lunches must be purchased in advance.

### **Ticket Options and Amenities**

<b>Premium First Class</b>	<b>Deluxe Coach</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Amenities include:</b></p> <p>Lounge seating aboard restored, vintage rail cars. Meals are provided in a vintage dining car. Friday - Breakfast and lunch (included with ticket purchase). Sunday - Lunch (included with your ticket purchase). Snacks and drinks (water, coffee, soft drinks) provided.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>General Public:</b> \$775/person Single Occupancy \$675/person Double Occupancy</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Special Rates:</b> <i>Only for members of the N.C. Transportation Museum and the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society:</i> \$750/person Single Occupancy \$650/person Double Occupancy</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Amenities include:</b></p> <p>Comfortable, adjustable seating aboard vintage passenger cars and modern Amfleet cars. Optional box lunch - must be ordered prior to the trip at additional cost. Snacks and drinks (water, coffee, soft drinks) provided.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>General Public:</b> \$675/person Single Occupancy \$575/person Double Occupancy</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Special Rates:</b> <i>Only for members of the N.C. Transportation Museum and the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society:</i> \$650/person Single Occupancy \$550/person Double Occupancy</p>

No refunds except in case of medical emergency (physician's note required).  
All refunds subject to a \$50 processing fee per ticket will be limited to 10 days following the date of the trip.  
We reserve the right to cancel trips if the minimum capacity requirements are not met.

**TICKETS ARE ON SALE BY PHONE ONLY: Please call 704-636-2889 ext. 237.**

## *In the News*



### **East Broad Top Railroad Selling Historic Narrow Gauge Hopper Cars**

The East Broad Top Railroad is offering 100 narrow gauge hopper cars for sale, according to railroad President Joe Kovalchick. These cars, with a capacity of 30 or 35 tons, have been in storage since the railroad shut down in 1956. The asking price is \$7,500 each.

Kovalchick says an ad placed in a trade magazine has generated lots of interest. "We're getting responses," Kovalchick tells Trains News Wire. "They want them primarily for the undercarriage, the trucks, couplers and center sills." There was even a call from someone in California who wanted two for his back yard. "Maybe he wants them for planters."

At its peak, the EBT had about 275 steel hoppers in service, hauling coal from mines around Robertsdale to Mount Union, where the coal was prepared and loaded into standard gauge cars for shipment. The 33-mile East Broad Top put its first steel hoppers in service 100 years ago. The shops at Rockhill Furnace were kept busy rebuilding hoppers right up to the end of freight service in April 1956.

After the railroad closed, a few hoppers were sold to museums and other narrow gauge lines. The White Pass & Yukon purchased 15 cars in 1968 for ballast service, and the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic got five cars about 10 years ago. Many of the cars stored in Mount Union have had their journal brasses stolen over the years and most are entangled in trees and brush that has grown up in the past 57 years. (From Trains News Wire.com March 26, 2013 via CENTRAL PA NRHS)

## *For Your Railfan Viewing Pleasure ...*



Tweetsie Opening Day 2013 with 2-8-2 #190 in action (via Kati Phelps)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yo663nJwRic&feature=share>



Interesting home videos on YouTube of ex-N&W #611's 1992 excursion into Asheville. Shots include fighting the grade at Old Fort and Andrew's Geyser. (via Kati Phelps)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XYubcZV0Uc&list=UUKnU1dumGCrDO2v3p0sMoNg&index=43>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ife2UnvQe6U&list=UUKnU1dumGCrDO2v3p0sMoNg>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Dc38g2Tz88&list=UUKnU1dumGCrDO2v3p0sMoNg&index=42>

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**Answer to Caboose Quiz** (from Gary Price): Any reverse move that goes over a mile requires a caboose on the rear to protect the train through crossings. Gary notes that there are several "cabeese" across his division assigned to locals that may have to run in reverse until the train can get to a run around siding.

***MEMORIES OF BEING FORCED UP-THE-ROAD FIFTY YEARS AGO***

by Abram Burnett © March 23, 2013

[ED. NOTE: Gary Price is taking a well-earned sabbatical from his monthly articles and has asked an acquaintance, “Abe” Burnett, to share his memories of working the N&W in SW Virginia.]

I grew up in a railroad family in Roanoke. When I finished high school at age 18, the N&W would not hire a man for Train & Engine service until age 21 in Virginia, but would hire at age 18 in Ohio. So I got a pass to ride No. 3 to Portsmouth and hired out on June 3, 1964, as a fireman on “The Valley” of the Scioto Division, the district between Portsmouth and Columbus. I did not relish the life there and several months later when I heard that the N&W would now hire at age 18 in Virginia, I resigned from the Scioto Division and returned to Virginia and hired as a brakeman on the Radford Division, where my Grandfather and namesake had been employed six decades earlier.

I was the fourth generation of my family to work on the N&W, and when I hired my father said to me, “Son, the railroad is like a great womb – do your job and it will take care of you from the cradle to the grave.” (My, how things have changed over the last half century!)

My “training” for the brakeman’s job consisted of riding (without pay) one round trip to Bluefield on an empty train west and a coal train east, riding one round trip on a Time Freight to Bristol, and spending one day on the Salem Shifter. My first call for a “paid trip” was for Extra 367 West at 6:30pm on August 11, 1964, a hopper train with 225 empties, engines 367-317-915-912-854-309. Ralph H. Thompson was the Engineman and I was the Head End Brakeman. Conductor C.J. “Musty” Hayes and Flagman Bob Guill were on caboose 518203 at the rear of the train. Our train was on #1 Empty Side Yard at West Roanoke and we departed at 7:28pm.

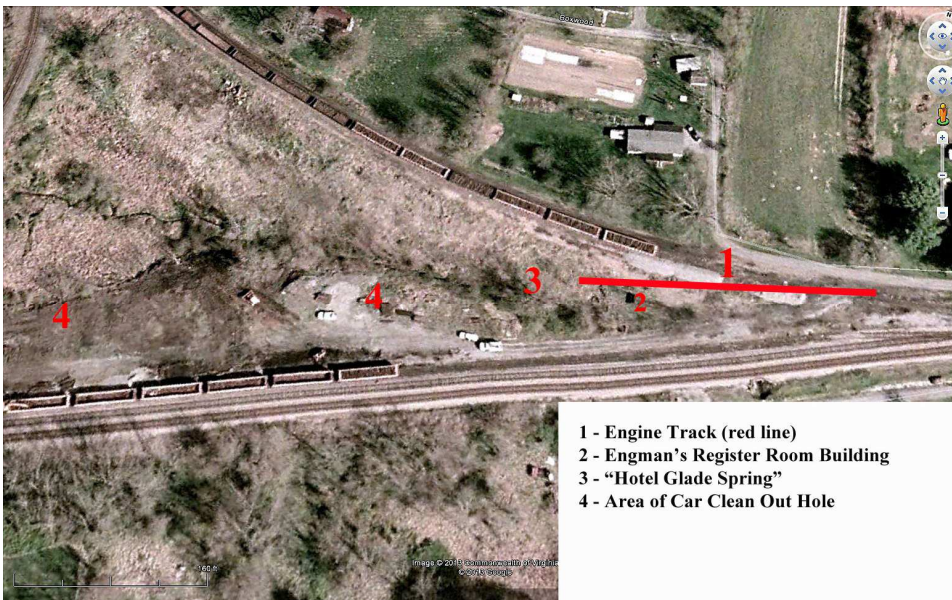
We passed Salem at 7:53pm and were delayed at the west end of Balls Hole from 8:14 to 8:23pm for a sticking brake on the second car and for a low oil alarm on engine 309. We passed Christiansburg at 9:20, met No. 16 at Belspring, passed Glen Lyn at 11:05pm, and hit the Yard Board at East Bluefield at 12:01am. I dropped off at the Bluefield East Yard Office and was relieved 25 minutes later, along with the conductor and the flagman, while the engineman took the train to West Yard alone (standard practice.) All Radford Division crews arriving at Bluefield cut their cabooses off on the fly and dropped them into either the Slow Freight Cab Track or the Time Freight Cab Track at the East Yard Office.

**“Forced Up-the-Road”**

I was having a great time riding the through freights and did not know of the little “scam” that went on amongst the Train Service employees regarding job assignments. The deal was that there were certain undesirable “up-the-road” (away from home) assignments and the youngest men were usually force-assigned to them because none of the older men would bid on advertised vacancies. One of those up-the-road runs was the Second Saltville Shifter, a night local that ran between Glade Spring and Saltville. There were very few trainmen living at the west end of the Bristol Line, and the two newest Brakemen on the Roanoke Extra List were invariably forced onto the jobs. The “up-the-road” locals were undesirable in that they caused one to live away from home, and also because they were only five day a week assignments. If a trainman could hold the extra board out of Roanoke, he generally worked six days per week (three round trips,) frequently worked seven days per week, and if business were really good he could occasionally make an eighth day’s pay in one week by “doubling the road” (getting two calls [continued on next page])

within the same twenty-four hour period), getting minimal rest and little time at home, I should add. The Hours of Service Law allowed us to work sixteen hours per day at that time.

Early on the morning of August 17, the crew caller called with the unexpected news that I had been force-assigned as middle brakeman on the Second Saltville job and should deadhead to Glade Spring on Train No. 41, "*The Pelican*", which left Roanoke around daylight. This I did, and thus began my introduction to life in quiet little Glade Spring.



**Aerial view of Saltville Branch cutoff from Bristol line as seen today.  
 Legend identifies locations of features mentioned in this article.  
 (A. Burnett using Google Maps)**

There were two locals that ran between Glade and Saltville. The First Saltville Shifter reported at 7:00am and made a trip to Saltville and return, switching Plasterco en route. The Second Saltville Shifter reported at 3:00pm, used the same engine and caboos, and made an identical trip to Saltville and return. Other than U.S. Gypsum at Plasterco and Olin Matheson at Saltville, there were no patrons on the Saltville Branch. In steam days, these jobs always used Y-class 2-8-8-2s.

My first trip on the Second Saltville Shifter was on August 17, 1964, and we reported at the Telegraph Office in the Glade Spring station at 3:00pm. The engineman was R.O. "Frog" Lester, the conductor was Saylor F. Beard (who was filling in, off the Roanoke Conductor's Extra List, for regular conductor Howard L. "Nip" Eller,) the flagman was C.E. Meredith (also force assigned from Roanoke.) The head end brakeman was Vernon "Peco" Norris. The caboos on this run was 518172.

On this run we had engines 870 and 334. We switched out the required number of empty box cars from the Clean Out Hole at Glade, coupled to the inbound cars that had been set off for us by the through freight runs on the "Hill Tracks" west of Glade, and departed Glade at 4:13pm. We switched at Plasterco from 4:31pm to 7:55pm and then switched at Saltville from 8:02pm to 11:50pm. We arrived back at Glade Spring at 12:15am, set out our "east cars" and "west cars" for pick up on the Hill Tracks, and were relieved a half hour later. My pay was \$17.76 for 8 hours, or about \$2.22 per hour. In Through Freight service, the rate of pay for eight hours or a hundred miles was \$17.56, but the Saltville Shifters paid two and one-half cents more per hour since they were heavy switching jobs and were classified as "Local Freight" for pay purposes

Unfortunately, I did not record the number of cars handled on my first trip down the Saltville Branch. But on August 30, with the same crew and engines 755 and 530, we handled 32 loads and 20 empties, 3296 tons (written as "32x20-3296") on the trip to Saltville, and on the trip back to Glade we handled "2x17-562." What made this particular westbound [continued on next page]

train so heavy were the loads of coal going to Olin, a lot of which came off the SOUTHERN at Bristol, with the balance coming off the N&W Pocahontas Division. If there was no coal being handled on a particular day, the westbound trains into Saltville would be almost all empties, and the eastbounds back to Glade would be almost all loads.

Frequently we had to "double out" of Saltville on account of too much tonnage for the grades for one trip. This was the case on December 31, 1964, with engines 654 and 778. On the first trip we brought out 20 cars, 1176 tons, and on the second trip we brought out 26 cars, 1927 tons, with a total of 9 hours 55 minutes on duty.

The men on the First and Second Glade Spring Shifters all lived locally, except for two of the three brakeman jobs on the Second Saltville Shifter, and these two vacancies were always filled by force-assigning the youngest trainmen out of Roanoke. That meant that the Second Job always had two force-assigned green-horn brakemen on it. The regularly assigned conductor on the Second Job was Howard L. "Nip" Eller. The head end brakeman was Vernon "Peco" Norris, and the engineman was Robert O. "Frog" Lester, who was Norris's cousin.

The first time I was force-assigned to the Second Saltville run, it was as the middle brakeman, and then later I was force-assigned again, this time as the flagman. I also caught one-week vacation relief assignments on Saltville jobs several times later while working the Roanoke Extra List, and usually deadheaded down on No. 41 to cover them. If I was sent down for a week on the First Saltville Shifter, the 7am job, I would ride No. 17 out of Roanoke at 9:16pm the night before. We always deadheaded by passenger train back then, and sometimes by freight train, riding in the caboose. Any conductor would haul you as long as you told him you were deadheading.



The Saltville Branch as seen from an engine cab.  
[A. Burnett photo.]

Naturally, Conductor Nip and Head End Brakeman Peco on the Second Saltville job were not enthusiastic about always having to work with the two most recently hired men, but that was the luck of the draw for them. And of course, any force-assigned green-horn immediately filed a telegram to the trainmaster asking him to please, please, please advertise his job as soon as some new man was marked up, so he could go back home!

Why did the Saltville jobs (and some of the other locals) have a "middle brakeman"? Well, this was in the days before radios, and it was the middle man's job to ride on top of the train and, when switching, to pass signals (relay hand signals) from the conductor and brakeman in the field to the engineman. This was especially necessary when switching on the curves at Plasterco. At Plasterco, we usually carried the caboose next to the engine, so the middle man would have a decent place to ride while passing signals. (Yes, we rode on top of the caboose and held onto the grab irons atop the cupola.) The caboose or a load of coal next to the engine afforded a good place to ride, but a box car was too high and the overhead obstructions across the track at Plasterco would not clear a man on the top. [To be continued next month.]

 *Photo Section* 



In last month's newsletter we published this photo of March excursion workers after a hard day's work. Your editor was curious as to why it was dark outside as the windows clearly indicate (the train arrived in Bristol ahead of schedule). Well, now, as Paul Harvey would have said, is the rest of the story. The train headed back to Bristol with two merchandise trains following behind. Upon arrival in Bristol, it was imperative to get passengers unloaded as quickly yet safely as possible in order to move it off of the single-track main, clearing it for the merchandisers. NS did so proficiently, backing the excursion train into the yard. But with an oncoming train, safety dictated that the workers remain onboard until the first merchandiser had cleared. That took a little while, giving our folk ample time to relax and pose for the camera. They were allowed to disembark prior to the second merchandiser passing through Bristol. This piece is added as a reminder to all that the utmost diligence and safety must be exercised when around active rail lines and yards.



Don Finley caught ET RWY SW1200 #214 returning to its "barn" after a hard day's work. The once legendary line is now reduced to a single locomotive and 6.5 miles of track within the Johnson City limits with its core business of switching between NS and CSX and serving a few local industries and a transloading facility.



On a visit to Roanoke shortly after the March excursions, Mike Tilley was able to capture images of vintage rail cars not only in current service but also under restoration for future use.



NS 42 "Tennessee". The new excursion coach and power car.



WATV 500. Note that WATV on the letter board has been removed in preparation to adding FEC markings when the car is renamed to its legacy "St. Augustine".



Ex-N&W coaches 534 (left) and 538 (right) undergoing restoration at the Roanoke Coach Yard.

## *Seats Still Available for the May Coalfields Field Trip*

Seats are still available for the May 11<sup>th</sup>, members-only Appalachian Coal Fields Tour. For trip details, go to <http://www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org/specialevents.php>.

**ALL PAYMENTS MUST BE MADE NO LATER THAN THE APRIL MEMBERSHIP MEETING.  
PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO NICK WHITE.**

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Fred Waskiewicz, Editor



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**TIME VALUE MATERIAL**