

Whistle Stop

Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum

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

(423) 753-5797

www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org



Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

Volume 45 No. 8

August 2025



The newest member of our car fleet is seen here in service as Seaboard's coach #6219.

July 28th General Membership Meeting

The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will have our regular General Membership Meeting at 6:30 pm on Monday, July 28th, 2025 at the Chuckey Depot, 110 Spring Street, Jonesborough, TN. For this month's program we will be treated to a video on Norfolk Southern (ex SRR) FP7s in the 1980s.

Member Notes

Les Billings, Membership Chairperson

CONCERNS: Please keep the following members in your thoughts and prayers for various reasons: Gary Price, Fred Phofl, and Jack Maloney. If you wish for one of our members or family member to be reported for various concerns in the *Whistle Stop*, email a request to wataugavalley@gmail.com or wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com.

NEW MEMBERS: Matthew Blair, Mark Blair and Karen Cooley, Tallahassee, FL. **Welcome aboard!**

ADDRESS CHANGES: If your address, phone number or email address has changed, please contact Les Billings at wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com for correction.

SEPTEMBER GSMR EXCURSION TICKETS GO ON SALE

Tickets for the GSMR steam train excursion, scheduled for September 6th, 2025, go on sale Friday, July 25th. For complete trip information and to purchase tickets, go to the trip excursion page at <http://www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org/excursions.php>.

“DINNER ON THE DINER” CANCELLATION

We are very sorry to announce that our *Dinner on the Diner* event had to be canceled due to a major A/C wiring problem that happened on the *Moultrie* just three days before the event. The Mechanical Team worked very hard to get the Air Conditioning repaired but with several wires burned up, they could not get it repaired in time. **We appreciate their efforts.** Luckily we were able to contact the 160 people who signed up for refunds.

“FALL FOLIAGE SPECIAL”

The “*Fall Foliage Special*” (previously reported as the “*Hiwassee Loop Excursion*”) has been planned for Saturday, October 11th, 2025 that will offer a scenic ride through the famous Hiwassee Loop and delight riders in a 50-mile roundtrip journey through the stunning lower Hiwassee River Gorge. This 4.5-hour adventure will take passengers to the apex of the renowned Hiwassee Loop with the tracks intriguingly crossing over themselves as they spiral up the mountain. Notably, there are only 6 such loops in North America, with this one being the sole example east of the Mississippi River. Note that there is no layover on this trip; passengers will enjoy the entire duration on the train. The rails over which this train travels were formerly part of the *Louisville and Nashville Railroad’s* Atlanta Division stretching between Etowah, TN, and Marietta, GA. More information to follow.

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. A **Vendor Registration Form** is attached to the end of this newsletter.

PROGRAMS NEEDED FOR 2025

The WVRHS&M Program Committee is still looking for General Membership programs. Let us know at the June meeting or email wataugavalley@gmail.com if you can present a program. We are looking for speakers who would talk on a railroad-related topic. As always we’re looking for DVD and slide shows.

Mechanical Report

Good weather over the last several weeks continues to provide the Watauga Valley Mechanical Team with excellent work conditions at the yard. 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 the WVRHS&M office at (423) 753-5797 or email wataugavalley@gmail.com. You do not have to be specialized in any field; just come down and we'll have a job for you.

Rolling Stock

Powhatan Arrow coach (WATX 539) and **CLINCHFIELD 100**: in service at the NC Transportation Museum in Spencer, NC.

St. Augustine coach (WATX 500): at the Coach Yard receiving restroom upgrades.

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

Seaboard 6219 coach: being prepared for its move to Jonesborough on NS in September.

Moultrie diner (WATX 400): at the Coach Yard receiving electrical repairs. The photo below shows the burnt wires forcing cancellation of the dining event.



Chuckey Depot / Museum

The next Host training session for volunteers will be held in September. If you would like to get involved and volunteer at the depot/museum one day a month, please call our office at (423) 753-5797 or email wataugavalley@gmail.com to reserve a training spot. We are in need of more hosts as the hours of operation at the depot will be extended during the summer months



Les Billings sent in this picture of the Depot at its former location at Chuckey, TN appearing in the *Greenville Sun* (date unknown).

In the News



ETRY #214 Future Uncertain



Per EAST TENNESSEE RAILWAY's General Manager, their EMD SW 1200 #214 recently dropped a main bearing and consequently may be retired and scrapped. No decision has been made at this time.

The #214 was originally built for the Missouri Pacific as their #1179 in 1964; 61 years later it was still earning its keep performing switching duty in Johnson City.

Locomotive main bearings are crucial components within the locomotive's piston engine, specifically supporting the crankshaft and allowing it to rotate smoothly. They are typically plain bearings (also known as journal bearings) that are housed within the engine block and secured by bearing caps. Their primary functions are to provide support, reduce friction, absorb shock and vibration, and transmit loads from the rotating shaft to the surrounding structure.



Report: UP/NS Merger Afoot?

[Marybeth Luczak, *Railway Age*, July 18] Union Pacific (UP) is in early-stage discussions to acquire Norfolk Southern (NS), "according to people familiar with the matter," *The Wall Street Journal* reported July 17. "[T]here are no guarantees they will result in any deal or receive regulatory signoff, the people said," according to the *WSJ*, which noted that another "suitor" could come forward.

UP, with 32,693 route-miles in 23 states, has a market value of roughly \$140 billion, the *WSJ* said; NS, with 19,500-plus route-miles across 22 states, has a value of approximately \$60 billion. A merger would create the largest U.S. Class I from coast to coast

UP told *Railway Age* that it "does not comment on rumor and speculation." NS did not immediately respond to a request for comment. According to the *WSJ*, UP CEO Jim Vena "has spoken publicly in recent months about the benefits of a transcontinental railroad" improving service and "smoothing out current delays at interchanges."

As the *WSJ* noted, a UP-NS combination would be scrutinized by not only the STB*—which adopted more stringent merger rules in 2001 requiring merging railroads to provide pro-competitive evidence in their application and demonstrate possible impacts from so-called "downstream effects"—but also the U.S. Department of Justice, unions, Amtrak and investors.

* Surface Transportation Board



N&W #611 to Run Trips in Virginia

Ex-N&W 4-8-4 #611 will run trips, tagged the "*Shenandoah Valley Limited*", for five consecutive weekends starting September 26, 2025, over the Virginia Scenic Railroad in Staunton, VA. For more information, go to their web site at <https://www.virginiascenicrailway.com/>.

Helene Disaster Recovery



At left, the CSX Poplar bridge reconstruction has been completed. [James Glenn photo.]

Thomas Pittman Blue Ridge Rebuild Update: 7/16/25

Poplar: The bridge may be back in at Poplar, but it's still a very busy place! I've been hypothesizing ever since that grading began on the mountainside on the Mitchell County side of the river that a new alignment coming off the bridge may be in store. Once the bridge crew moved out, the quarry crew went to work clearing more trees facing the bridge and reclaiming the crane area north of the creek. The drone photos from today sure looks like they're beginning to take out the mountain to the outside of the curve coming off of the bridge. The reduction of the curve along with the possibility of the removal of the greaser just north of the bridge would make a tremendous improvement for tonnage trains coming out of the Gorge. Here's to hoping that's what's going on.

It may be worth noting that the outfit contracted to do the mining at Poplar has put in for a 3 year permit. I'm speculating that lots of rip-rap is going to be sourced here in the coming years to cover all the rebuilt riverbank and wherever else the line had/has to be shored up or backfilled. Grading/fill work was also underway on the roadbed near the intersection of the boat launch road and 197. And, a Tamper and a Regulator were hard at work conditioning track midway through the Poplar area.

Pigeon Roost- the final form of what the Pigeon Roost Flood Wall will be is starting to take shape. I'm not sure yet if they're planning on doing anything to pipe the water down from the culverts that go under the track to the pipes that are built into the wall. They may just build catch basins in the top of the wall to catch all runoff.

Signals- the SAS NE Green Mountain signal has be truncated down to 2 brackets. The top head is the original 3 light and I assume the bottom (old middle) will be a 4 like the SE. The bottom head has not been installed. A 2nd head has been added to the Toecane Intermediate as well. I hope this is not the case, but I'm tempted to think that this is a sign that the Intermont Intermediate will not be replaced. That'll be roughly 4.5 miles between Toecane and NE Kona with no signal.

Display in the Block

by Les Billings

It's hard to believe it is almost August. Time flies when you are having fun. I am displaying this month a sample of some photos that I think will be of interest. The locations range from Johnson City to Murfreesboro. A little mixture of NS and CSX. CSX is very hard to come by these days with the Gorge washout and all. There are a few locals and rock trains traveling. *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.*



[June 29, 2025] On the way to Greenville on a Sunday morning I was able to catch the NS Pennsylvania Heritage Unit at the Green Pond Crossing in Johnson City. I saw it pass the Chuckkey Depot from home and did not think that I would have enough time to catch it, but it had to stop between Jonesborough and Green Pond road (JC). I has lucky.

[June 21, 2025] On a return trip home from Knoxville, I was able to catch this westbound freight at the Hal Hebard Road crossing in Greene Co. I heard it clear MP 56 on my car Ham Radio. I also scan the RR freq.'s on it. I pulled over the crossing, from the John Deere plant and waited.



[June 1, 2025] As I listened on my scanner that Sunday afternoon I heard a CSX Local coming towards Johnson City. As I heard him pass the defect detector around MP99, I jumped in my car and went over to the track near my house and got him as he passed by and then chased him to the Johnson City yard where he set a few cars off and then headed to Erwin. This shot was taken as he was leaving the Johnson City yard.



[May 4, 2025] On another Sunday afternoon, I captured this Local returning from it's day of work in Johnson City and Erwin. As you can see, it was traveling in the Southern Style (Long Nose Forward). It had a few cars and was headed back to Kingsport. This is a good place to view CSX trains except for a few small trees I would like see cut down.

[July 6, 2025] On a most recent trip to Murfreesboro, I photographed this short CSX train waiting on the siding across from their depot. I was visiting my daughter and we were on our way shopping. I told them I was going to go by the depot and see if there were anything there or coming through. Low and behold there was a train just waiting for me. I jumped out and took a few shots.



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whistlestop.editor@gmail.com

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TIME-SENSITIVE MATERIAL

WATAUGA VALLEY RAILROAD HS&M

— TRAIN SHOW —

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15TH, 2025

8:00AM—5:00PM

- To be held in the Jonesborough Visitors Center 117 Boone St. Jonesborough, TN
- Visit Beautiful Jonesborough, TN (Oldest Town in Tenn.)
- Show set up 10am to 6p m Friday, November 14th, 2025
- Free parking
- Reserve your tables early, the vendors tables will fill up fast.
- Hotel information please call the Visitors Center 423-753-1010
- Additional Information concerning set up will be emailed to you.
- Sorry no refunds on vendor tables.



TRAIN SHOW VENDORS

Please complete this form to register as a vendor for Train Show, November 15, 2025

Name _____

Address: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone _____ Email: _____

_____ Number of Tables Requested @ \$30 each 8 ft tables Total enclosed \$ _____