

# 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

Volume 40 No. 3

March 2020



This photo serves as a reminder that despite all of the advances in technology railroading remains a dangerous industry. On February 13<sup>th</sup> a southbound CSX train struck a landslide at Draffin, KY, derailed and caught fire. Two crew members were injured but thankfully survived. Complete story on page 4. [Photo by Chris Anderson; used with permission.]

## *February 24<sup>th</sup> General Membership Meeting*

The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will conduct our monthly General Membership meeting at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at 6:30 p.m. at the Johnson City Public Library, 100 West Millard St. This month's program, offered by Gary Street, is a DVD entitled "*18 Wheels of Steel*". This 55-minute DVD's star is Norfolk & Western Class A 2-6-6-4 No. 1218 and is filled with spectacular scenes of her very first excursion runs.

## *Member Notes*

*by Edna Kay Carter, Membership Chairperson*

Keep Lou Nelson and family in your thoughts and prayers in the recent loss of his mother. Also keep the following in your thoughts and prayers as they deal with various health concerns. They are Gary Price, Nancy Jewell, George Ritchie, Don and Diana Brewer, Don Findley, Anita Johnson, Jim Magill and Wayne Davis. As always, let us know of any member, friend or family to whom a card might be sent or a phone call made. The office number is (423) 753-5797 or call Edna Carter at (423) 571-4612.

We have no new members to report at this time.

Spring is only days away and we can look forward to the changing season.

### **LATE 2020 WVRHS&M DUES**

Late dues notices were recently sent out to all members that have not renewed for 2020. Please act fast and get your dues mailed back to WVRHS&M, P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605-0432. Time is running out and your name will be removed from the membership list on Feb. 29<sup>th</sup>.

### **PROGRAMS NEEDED FOR 2020**

Our program director, Megan Kegley, is looking for General Membership Meeting programs for 2020. Please call (423) 753-5797 or let us know at the next General Membership Meeting if you have an interest in presenting a program. We're looking for DVD and slide programs and also speakers who could present a railroad-related program.

## *WVRHS&M 2020 Spring Rail Excursions*

We are happy to announce that the March 28<sup>th</sup> GSMR excursion has sold out and that a second excursion has been added for May 16<sup>th</sup>; tickets will go on sale on February 24<sup>th</sup>. Both trips will travel the operating length of the railroad from Dillsboro, NC to the Nantahala Gorge. We are still in need of hosts to sign up for these trips. Please email [wataugavalley@gmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@gmail.com) to sign up. If you've already signed up for Host Training for the trip, please come to the Host Training Meeting on the General Membership meeting night of Feb. 24<sup>th</sup> at 5:45 pm. We will be finished before the regular meeting at 6:30 pm. It is very important that you attend this meeting since several things have changed since last year. Future excursions are scheduled for September and November.

## *2020 Railfan Event Calendar*

|   |  |
|---|--|
|  | <b>FEB 28-29:</b> Asheville Train Show, WNC Agricultural Center. Info: <a href="http://www.asheville-trainshow.com">http://www.asheville-trainshow.com</a> . |
|  | <b>MAR 28, MAY 16:</b> WVRHS&M Spring Rail Excursions, GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAIN RAILROAD, Dillsboro, NC.   |
|  | <b>MAR Saturdays:</b> "At the Throttle: Steam", NCTM, Spencer, NC. See <a href="https://tinyurl.com/sg88gfj">https://tinyurl.com/sg88gfj</a>                 |

## *Mechanical Department Report*

*by Jim Magill*

We have three cars at the Spring Street Coach Yard which are WATX 100, WATX 500 and WATX 2351. The restoration projects on the cars are going great. A lot of updates will be going on with the Watauga Valley Railroad Museum equipment. The Watauga Valley Mechanical Department is looking for volunteers on Tuesdays to help maintain our passenger cars. If your spouse wants you out of the house after a long winter, please call the office anytime and leave message at (423) 753-5797.

### ROLLING STOCK

**“Powhatan Arrow” coach (WATX 539), “Moultrie” diner (WATX 400):** both cars are in service at the North Carolina Transportation Museum.

**“St Augustine” coach (WATX 500), “Crescent Harbor” sleeper / lounge (WATX 2351):** both cars are in the shop at the Spring Street Coach Yard.



Here's an interesting historical tidbit not all members might know about the “St. Augustine”. Beginning on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1963, the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) sustained a 14-year, violent strike. The strike was one of the worst in railroad history and our coach “St. Augustine” was right in the middle of it. In 1965 the Federal Court ordered the FEC to operate passenger service as no authority was ever given to stop service but everyone was afraid to ride the train because of being shot at or involved in derailments; it was always an empty train.

The strike, which began as a dispute over wages, was characterized by hard feelings, mutual recrimination and more than 200 acts of vandalism and sabotage. The right of way from Jacksonville to Miami was dynamited during the strike and derailments happened everywhere. The “St Augustine” was used as the strike car to transport company officials into work. They would park their automobiles at a specified location so their cars would not get vandalized; FEC would then transport the company men in by passenger train to work. The “St Augustine”, however, didn't avoid vandalism as seen in the photo above left; it took some gun shots in the fluting during the strike. We never changed out the fluting because it was involved with history of the strike. Fortunately, the car is still riding the rails today with thousands of happy AND SAFE passengers.

**“Clinchfield 100” office car (WATX 100):** is at the Spring Street Coach Yard undergoing major upgrades.

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### LIBRARY DONATIONS

Our Railroad Section at the Jonesborough Library is growing every day but we can always use new material. If you are finished reading or just want to donate, put your books to good use. Please bring your railroad book donations to any membership meeting or call our office at (423) 753-5797. We have plenty of room to add more books.

## *Chuckey Depot and Rail Museum*

Things are ticking at the Chuckey Depot Railroad Museum at Jonesborough. Even though the cold and rainy weather has been around the last couple of months, attendance at the museum has been good. On Thursday, February 8<sup>th</sup>, we had over 250 people who came through the museum for Jonesborough's "Chocolate Fest". We had seven hosts work that day to welcome the crowd. We now have 86 Watauga Valley members who are trained to volunteer at the Depot. If you're interested in volunteering one day a month, please call Mike Tilley at (423) 753-5797 or email [wataugavalley@embarqmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@embarqmail.com).

### **NEW DISPLAY COMING TO THE CHUCKEY DEPOT**

A New Artifact Display will be coming March 4<sup>th</sup> to the Depot. Make plans to come and see these new artifacts from your favorite railroads.

### **RAILROAD SCANNER ON LINE AT THE CHUCKEY DEPOT.**



By now you should know we have cameras to watch Norfolk Southern trains passing the depot. A link is available on our web page. You can also go to Broadcastify, select Tennessee, click on Washington County, then click the NS A LINE to hear the Radio.

## *In the News ...*



### *CSX Derailment on Russell Fork*

[Everett Young offered the following report on the internet.]

No doubt many of you heard about the big derailment at Draffin [KY] this morning [Feb. 13<sup>th</sup>]. A southbound, loaded ethanol train with 96 tankers and two buffer cars struck a big slide just south of the new Pond Creek bridge off US 460. Draffin is between Shelby and Elkhorn City. This segment used to be the Big Sandy Sub., but now it is part of the Kingsport Sub. The estimated time of the derailment was 7:05 AM. One report said two engines and another said three. It is such a mess that all I can confirm is two. The CSX news release said 4 ethanol tank cars and the front buffer car derailed. As the engines slid down the embankment and nosed into the rain swollen Russell Fork the fuel tanks ruptured causing a huge fire. From the cell phone videos that I saw the crew came out the front door with the fire raging behind them and the rushing river covering the coupler!! They were rescued by boat with non-life-threatening injuries. [The following pages contains several photos of the accident.]

The following photos were taken by Everett Young and Chris Anderson. Published here with permission.



 *Nonprofit Buys East Broad Top Railroad*

[Press Release from the East Broad Top Railroad] Pennsylvania's storied East Broad Top Railroad has a new owner, a nonprofit foundation organized by a small group of prominent rail-industry figures and longtime EBT fans. The new organization will offer several EBT events in 2020 — the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of tourist service on the railroad — and hopes to resume regular operation in 2021.

The organization, called the EBT Foundation Inc., will own approximately 27 miles of the line, from the south end of the concrete-arch bridge over the Aughwick River below Mount Union to the road crossing in Wood Township. The foundation will also own the narrow-gauge railroad's shops, rolling stock, and equipment. The East Broad Top is a National Historic Landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"This is the best possible outcome for the railroad, which has been in my family for two generations," says Joseph Kovalchick, whose father, Nick Kovalchick, purchased the East Broad Top Railroad & Coal Company after its coal mines closed in 1956. "It is with a combination of pride and relief that we pass the torch in its second reincarnation." The Kovalchicks will continue to own coal-company property that had been jointly owned with the railroad.

"When my father bought the company, it was never his intention to scrap the railroad. At the time he was the only one to stand for the EBT, and his role in the history books is assured. My generation has struggled to balance the need to preserve this national treasure with running it as a business, and I take pride in our role in its survival. But it is clear that a for-profit business model is not sustainable. Our faith in the new model is reflected in both the sale and the Kovalchick family's ongoing role on the board of the new non-profit."

Financial details of the purchase will remain confidential.

Brad Esposito, a 20-year veteran of the Buffalo & Pittsburgh Railroad, a Genesee & Wyoming, Inc. Company, led the effort to purchase the EBT, along with longtime EBT enthusiasts David Brightbill, Lawrence Biemiller, and Stephen Lane.

Backers of the new organization include three rail-industry and rail-preservation heavyweights: Wick Moorman, former chairman and CEO of Norfolk Southern and former CEO of Amtrak; Henry Posner III, a former Conrail manager who is chairman of the Iowa Interstate Railroad and the Railroad Development Corporation, of Pittsburgh; and Bennett Levin, a retired mechanical and electrical engineer who owns the Juniata Terminal Company, which operates two Pennsylvania Railroad E8 diesel locomotives and three private cars.

Esposito will become the general manager of the railroad. He says the EBT Foundation has a three-part mission. It's committed, first, to preserving and operating the East Broad Top as a steam railroad; second, to educating visitors about the role of railroads in local and national history; and, third, to promoting local and regional tourism and economic growth.

Esposito says the new organization will immediately begin work on several fronts. The EBT has been closed since late 2011, and before operations can resume, the railroad will need to overhaul track and equipment, including locomotives and passenger cars. A fire-suppression system will be installed in the historic machine shops and roundhouse, and several structural stabilization projects will be undertaken in the railroad's Rockhill Furnace complex.

“The East Broad Top is a unique national treasure unmatched anywhere in the United States,” says Esposito. “It has been impressively preserved for over 60 years by the Kovalchick family. We are excited to pick up the torch and ensure that the railroad is preserved for future generations.”

“Our close partners will be the volunteers of the Friends of the East Broad Top,” he says. “They have contributed countless hours of work and significant amounts of money to help preserve the historic fabric of the EBT since 1983.”

“Also, we look forward to working with the Rockhill Trolley Museum,” says Esposito. The all-volunteer trolley museum dates to 1960 and operates over the former Shade Gap Branch of the EBT. “This will be an exciting opportunity to promote and further develop tourism in the area.”

“The East Broad Top is a remarkable survivor from the age of steam railroading,” says Moorman. “I’m delighted to have the chance to be a part of its revival, both for the preservation of such an important part of our industrial heritage, and for the economic benefits that it will provide to an area of Pennsylvania that is so closely linked to the railroad industry.”

Levin notes that the EBT runs through a bucolic landscape almost unchanged since the early 1900s. “The railroad’s historic fabric is an important component of the region’s industrial archaeology, and the educational possibilities here are almost limitless.”

The new organization’s advisors include Linn Moedinger, former president of the Strasburg Rail Road — one of the most successful tourist railroads in the U.S. — and Rod Case, a partner at the consulting firm Oliver Wyman who leads their railway practice. Among the organizations providing support is the Allegheny Ridge Corporation, which manages the region’s state-designated Heritage Area. The corporation “is thrilled to participate in the rebirth of this great asset,” says Astride McLanahan, a longtime board member of the organization. “The EBT is a jewel in the Allegheny Ridge Heritage Area and its revitalization will bring economic opportunity to this rural community.”

Built from 1872 to 1874 to haul coal to a new iron furnace in the center of the state, the 33-mile-long East Broad Top survived the collapse of the local iron industry at the turn of the 20th century because the top-quality coal it carried had found other markets, thanks in part to close cooperation with the Pennsylvania Railroad. When the last of the coal mines closed in 1956, the East Broad Top was purchased by the Kovalchick Salvage Company of Indiana, Pa. Despite being in the scrap business, the company left the railroad intact and in 1960 reopened a portion of the line for steam-powered tourist trains that proved widely popular.

With rails just three feet apart — 4’ 8 1/2” is the industry standard — the EBT is the only original narrow-gauge railroad surviving east of the Rocky Mountains, and it is well known as one of the world’s finest preserved railways. The railroad’s shops complex, which dates to the 1880s and was greatly expanded from 1905 to 1907, is among the most complete early-20th-century industrial facilities anywhere in the U.S.

Still in the railroad’s roundhouse in Rockhill Furnace are six narrow-gauge steam locomotives built for the EBT by Philadelphia’s Baldwin Locomotive Works between 1911 and 1920. They share the building with the unique M-1 gas-electric, constructed at the railroad in 1927 with plans and parts from Philadelphia’s J.G. Brill Company, a leading streetcar manufacturer, and Westinghouse Electric. Other EBT equipment includes several passenger cars believed to date to the 1890s and numerous steel freight cars built in the EBT shops. The East Broad Top was the only American narrow gauge to convert to an all-steel freight car fleet.

Remarkably, track remains in place over nearly the entire 33-mile main line, which connected the coal mines in Robertsdale to the Pennsylvania Railroad's Great Broad Way in Mount Union. The former PRR main line is now Norfolk Southern's core east-west route between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh.

"The East Broad Top Railroad is a unique historic asset that is a national treasure representing our area's rich railroad heritage," says Sen. Judy Ward, who represents southern Huntingdon County in the Pennsylvania Senate. "The sale of this railroad to this group of longtime EBT enthusiasts who are committed to preserving and operating it as a steam railroad is very exciting news for the region because it preserves this irreplaceable treasure for future generations while opening up significant tourism and economic development opportunities."

Says Posner: "August 13, 2020, will be the 60th anniversary of the East Broad Top's first reopening, which took place during the bicentennial of the founding of what became the 'twin boroughs' of Orbisonia and Rockhill Furnace. This was an era of revised expectations in the face of the decline of the railroad industry nationwide. At that time Nick Kovalchick could not have imagined the possibility of reopening the entire line, but fortunately our industry's renaissance has helped create an environment in which this important and audacious project can succeed. We are honored to follow in the footsteps of two generations of the family that has made this all possible."

"This will be a monumental undertaking," says Esposito, "and I encourage anyone interested in helping us to join the Friends of the East Broad Top and come work on buildings, track and equipment."

The railroad's new website can be found at <http://eastbroadtop.com>.

## *Abandonment of Former Tennessee Railroad Line*

[ihoneida.com] One hundred and thirty years of railroad history in Scott County could soon be over.

RJ Corman will inform the federal government next week of its intent to abandon the former Tennessee Railroad line from Oneida in Scott County to Devonia in Anderson County. The Nicholasville, Ky.-based company will file with the Surface Transportation Board in Washington, D.C. a notice that it is going to abandon the 41-mile rail line that once sent trains into the heart of the Cumberland Mountain coal country.

Trains long ago ceased to run on the rails of the rail line, but by filing a notice of abandonment with the federal government, RJ Corman could officially number the days remaining for the historic rail line.

While Scott County has had five railroads, totaling more than 100 miles of track inside the county's boundaries, the Tennessee Railroad is the longest-running railroad besides the Norfolk Southern — the latter of which is the only railway still in service in Scott County. The Tennessee Railroad is also the last remaining railroad besides the Norfolk Southern.

The Oneida-to-Devonia line dates back to 1889, when the Paint Rock Coal & Coke Co. began construction of a short-branch coal railroad from the Oneida depot on what was then the Cincinnati-Southern Railroad — now the Norfolk Southern Railroad — to Morning Glory, near where Stanley Creek empties into Paint Rock Creek. The railroad's construction began after large coal deposits were discovered along the headwaters of Paint Rock Creek.

The initial construction of what would become the Tennessee Railroad line included the cutting of the tunnel at Tunnel Hill east of Oneida, a 402-ft. long, timber-lined tunnel along a grade that frustrated railroad operators for decades.

In 1902, the Paint Rock Coal & Coke Co. was sold to investors from New York. By that time, the New River Lumber Co. — headquartered in Cincinnati — had opened a mill at Norma to harvest its vast timber reserves in what were known as the Bird Lands in the New River Valley. In 1905, the lumber company purchased the railroad from the coal company, and expansion south from Stanley Junction — located just east of where Cherry Fork Road meets Tunnel Hill Road today — soon began.



By 1912, the rail line had reached Fork Mountain near the Anderson County-Morgan County line, where the Devonia depot would serve as the end of the line. It was 41 miles from the interchange with the Cincinnati-Southern Railroad at the Oneida depot.

For the duration of logging operations in and around Norma, the Tennessee Railroad served as an exclusive means of transporting timber through and out of the mountains. Several branch lines were built along the main route, serving both timber operations in the Bird Lands and the nearby Newlands, while also serving coal mining operations that were beginning to flourish at places like Roach Creek, Montgomery and Clinchmore.

Three locomotives — one owned by the New River company and two more that were leased to the timber company — transported felled timber to the mill at Norma, and finished lumber to the Cincinnati-Southern interchange at Oneida. The trains also used the Tennessee Railroad to continue transporting coal from the mining operations along Paint Rock Creek.

Eventually, the timber played out and the Norma mill closed, and the Tennessee Railroad became primarily a coal railroad once more, serving the extensive mining operations in the Cumberland Mountains, in parts of Scott, Campbell, Anderson and Morgan counties.

The railroad was thought to be severely damaged by the Great Flood of 1929; initial estimates were that it would require six months for repairs to make it serviceable again. But crews had trains rolling along the Oneida-to-Devonia route within two weeks.

In 1955, the first Diesel engine rolled along the Tennessee Railroad, and by 1963 all of the railroad's steam engines had been scrapped.

The Tennessee Railroad was purchased by the Southern Railway Company — which would become Norfolk Southern — on February 20, 1973. And so, began the last heyday of the rail line, which was by that time nearly 100 years old. As recently as 1980, trains still pulled 125 cars per day along the route, hauling coal from a washer in the mountains to Oneida. Coal continued to be transported via the Tennessee Railroad until 2004, and Norfolk Southern soon after declared that it was abandoning the line.

The completion of this article can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/ws2f23s>.

***Whistle Stop***

Published Monthly by the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum  
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**TIME VALUE MATERIAL**