

Whistle Stop



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

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... to submit your favorite railfan photos to the newsletter.

March 23rd Membership Meeting Canceled

By now you should have received an email notice that our Monday, March 23rd, 2020 General Membership Meeting has been canceled. As of press time, it is not clear whether or not we'll have an April 27th meeting. You'll be provided with an update once meeting space availability is determined.

Member Notes

by Edna Kay Carter, Membership Chairperson

Please 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, Anita Johnson, Wayne Davis and Bob Hand. 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. Continue to remember the members and families who have lost loved ones.

We have no new members at this time. If you know of someone who did not renew their membership encourage them to rejoin. We appreciate all our members and look forward to working with them.

Spring is almost here and I am looking forward to it.

PROGRAMS NEEDED FOR 2020

We're 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 Rail Excursions

Our March 28th GSMR rail excursion has been canceled due to health concerns for our passengers and members. As of press time, the May 16th excursion is still a go with only Coach Class tickets still available.

The volunteer list for the September 15th and November 3rd excursions will be circulated at our next General Membership meeting.

2020 NRHS Convention

As of press time, the 2020 NRHS National Convention is still being held from Monday, June 8th through Saturday, June 13th in southern California at Knott's Berry Farm in Buena Park. Come west on Amtrak's *Southwest Chief* trains to and from the nearest station at Fullerton. Amtrak's *Sunset Limited* and *Texas Eagle* also serve Los Angeles. The convention hotel will be the Knott's Berry Farm hotel, located in Buena Park. The rate will be \$119.00 per night, excluding taxes. The phone number for the hotel is 1-866-752-2444; be sure to mention the code "NRHS block" to reserve your room. Planned events include visits to the Orange Empire Museum, the Fillmore & Western Railroad, the Rail Giant Museum, the Travel Town Railroad Museum, the Los Angeles Union Station, a night photo session at the Rail Giant Museum, and a tour of the Queen Mary in Long Beach or a tour of Amtrak-California to San Diego and return. The convention will also have Advisory Council, Board of Directors and Annual Membership meetings on Tuesday, June 9th at the hotel. The annual Banquet will be held at the hotel on Friday evening, June 12th. This is the link to the convention website: <https://nrhs.com/convention/>. The Convention website has the full 2020 NRHS Convention Registration Booklet with complete event information and a mail-in form. There is also a link on the website to place your order online.

Mechanical Department Report

by Jim Magill

The weather has been good to the Watauga Valley Mechanical Team and there have been a lot of good working days at the yard over the last several weeks. Looks like spring is knocking on our door and we can finally get some work done. If you would like to help out at the Jonesborough Coach Yard on Tuesdays between 9am to 5pm or Saturdays 9am to 12noon, please call the WVRHS&M office at (423) 753-5797 or email wataugavalley@embarqmail.com.

ROLLING STOCK

“Powhatan Arrow” coach (WATX 539): is in service at the North Carolina Transportation Museum.

“Moultrie” diner (WATX 400), “St Augustine” coach (WATX 500), “Crescent Harbor” sleeper / lounge (WATX 2351): all three cars are back at the Coach Yard.

“Clinchfield 100” office car (WATX 100): Is under a major restoration project. Please watch the progress on the Watauga Valley Facebook page.

Whistle Truck

We are now taking reservations for the Whistle Truck now. If you know of an event interested in renting it, call (423) 783 5797.

In the News ...



Amtrak Names William Flynn as CEO and President

WASHINGTON – Amtrak announced that it has named William J. Flynn as its next Chief Executive Officer and President. Flynn, a seasoned business leader with four decades of transportation and logistics experience, will begin his role on April 15, 2020. Flynn succeeds Richard Anderson, who joined Amtrak as CEO in July 2017. Anderson, who fulfills his three-year commitment to the company this year, will remain with Amtrak through the end of the year as a senior advisor to Flynn.

Flynn, 66, has been a successful leader across multiple modes of transportation, including rail, maritime and aviation. Most recently, he served 13 years with Atlas Air Worldwide Holdings, Inc., which serves the global air freight, military charter and passenger charter markets, as President and CEO and Board Chairman. He also held senior roles with CSX Transportation, Sea-Land Services, Inc., and Geologists Corp.

“Bill is the right executive to lead us into the future,” said Amtrak Board Chairman Tony Coscia. “We’ve never been stronger as a company than we are today. We are modernizing the customer experience and delivering our service to more people. Bill has a consistent track record of growing and improving complex transportation businesses. We are confident he will build upon the strong foundation of record-setting growth and improvement set by the Board, Richard and the entire Amtrak team.”

In fiscal year 2019, Amtrak set new records in ridership, revenue and earnings. In 2020, Amtrak is on pace to achieve operational breakeven for the first time in the company's 49-year history. Additionally, Amtrak is investing billions in capital assets and is undertaking the largest fleet renewal in company history, with new high-speed Acela trains entering service on the Northeast Corridor next year.

"Amtrak's future is incredibly bright and I'm excited to join the team," said Flynn. "Amtrak service is vital to millions of Americans across the nation and by improving the customer experience, driving safety, and strengthening our partnership with states and other stakeholders, we can do much more for the American people. Tony, Richard and Amtrak's dedicated employees have done an amazing job modernizing the company for the 21st Century. It's a privilege to join them in continuing this work and advancing something as important as Amtrak's mission."

"I congratulate the Board on selecting Bill to lead Amtrak into its 50th year and beyond," said Anderson. "Bill brings deep expertise across all aspects of transportation and a true passion for the customer. As the company refleets our equipment, expands our services and advances key infrastructure projects like the Gateway Program, it will require the steady leadership and relentless drive for improvement that I know Bill can provide."

Norfolk Southern Innovative Track-inspection Technology

[NS Press Release] Norfolk Southern announced [on March 5] that it has achieved a breakthrough in track inspection technology that will enhance railroad safety and operating efficiencies.

Combining ingenuity and innovation, the company is the first North American freight railroad to develop and deploy an autonomous track geometry measurement system that is mounted on a locomotive. In contrast, autonomous track-inspection systems commercially available today are installed on converted freight or passenger rail cars, which require an external power source to operate and occupy space on a train that could be used to move revenue-producing freight.

"With our locomotive-based system, we use an existing asset to increase the frequency of our track inspections, without adding another piece of equipment that has to be run across the railroad," said Ed Boyle, vice president engineering. "This innovative approach enhances our safety practices by permitting us to have precise and quality track inspections done under load at track speed. With this system, Norfolk Southern will provide service safely, efficiently, and cost-effectively."

Norfolk Southern's track inspection group, part of the Engineering Department, developed this mold-breaking system. It provides a more robust and cost-effective way to continuously monitor track performance in near real-time. The system is mounted in a ruggedized box under a six-axle road locomotive between the snow plow and the first set of wheels. A computer that powers the system is housed inside the electrical locker in the locomotive cab.

The autonomous system supplies timely and accurate data used for track maintenance activities and capital budgeting. The system facilitates compliance with both Norfolk Southern and Federal Railroad Administration track safety standards.

As part of a pilot, Norfolk Southern is operating the autonomous system on a mainline between Norfolk, Virginia, and Portsmouth, Ohio. The route offers a comprehensive range of track and operating conditions, including straight and curved track, hilly terrain, and high-tonnage loads. "With this innovative system, any time this locomotive is moving and pulling freight, it is testing track at the same time," said Mike Allran, manager track inspection and development, who helped

lead the initiative. "This gives us more robust data for use in predictive-modeling to determine track maintenance intervals, which enables us to maximize efficiencies that will generate significant cost savings."

Norfolk Southern turned to defense industry firms to find commercially available components to build the system, which consists of lasers, gyros, accelerometers, and global positioning system sensors. The system can detect defects or anomalies in track geometry, including track gauge, or the distance between rails, and the elevation and curvature of track. The system transmits inspection data wirelessly to office locations, where track geometry engineers confirm potential defects and notify track maintenance personnel.

The autonomous inspection system will supplement testing done by the company's existing fleet of manned track geometry cars and hi-rail trucks. Norfolk Southern plans to equip additional locomotives with the system and potentially upgrade its capabilities, including adding an optical system to evaluate track components such as fasteners, rail welds, and switch points.

"Our team is committed to helping Norfolk Southern achieve industry leadership in the use of advanced technologies to enhance safety, increase operating efficiencies, and better serve our customers," Allran said. "The development and deployment of our autonomous track-inspection system is one more way we are making progress toward that goal, generating benefits for us and all our stakeholders."

Watch this Norfolk Southern video at <https://tinyurl.com/udqs5cc> for more information about the railroad's innovative track-inspection system.

#1309 Restoration Update

[ED. NOTE: Well, despite my pledge not to post any more #1309 updates, here's yet another.] A January 7th article in the Cumberland (MD) *Time-News* stated 1309 restoration is 80% complete, needing \$300,000 for completion.

Within a page-and-a-half *Trains Magazine* article, writer Jim Wrinn states that the famed Appalachian articulated 2-6-6-2 engine can run in less than six months if supported by adequate funding, and lays out a plan how the magazine's readers can provide financial help.

"For the first time in the 80-year history of this publication" Wrinn writes, "we are committing to an ongoing fundraiser for a preservation project." He asks the readers to help steam the Baldwin Locomotive Works' last engine that was built for domestic use: Chesapeake & Ohio No. 1309, a rare 2-6-6-2 articulated, compound steam locomotive now undergoing restoration by its current owner, the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad (WMSR) based in Cumberland MD. This restoration project stalled last August and shut down for lack of funding.

"The locomotive is 85 percent complete," says the rebuild contractor, Gary Bensman of Diversified Rail Services. "It's tantalizingly close to completion." He and the WMSR have stated that the completion price is \$390,000. You can support the "1309 Restoration Fund" by mailing your donations to The Western Maryland Scenic Railroad, 13 Canal St. Cumberland, Md. 21502, or donate online at www.wmsr.com/1309. Mark your donation "for 1309".

 *Union Pacific #3985 Officially Retired*

Since its last excursion nearly 10 years ago, questions and speculation have been rampant about when 4-6-6-4 "Challenger" #3985 would be back in steam. Since that last wonderful trip in 2010, the UP Steam Shop acquired and restored Big Boy 4014 to much applause, while 3985 remained stored at Cheyenne, WY. Recently Union Pacific released this statement:

"There are no plans to restore 3985. Many years of hard operation have resulted in the locomotive requiring a complete frame-up restoration similar to what was needed to make 4014 operational. Historically, Union Pacific's steam program has had two steam locomotives on its roster, and that count will remain the same moving forward."

Where 3985 will ultimately reside is still in question, but it's safe to say the locomotive will remain officially retired from service.

This news was not a complete surprise since words to that effect came from UP Steam Program Senior Manager Ed Dickens. It's tough to hear this officially but the decision is understood in the railfan community. Let's hope this magnificent beast finds a good home with the same level of care that 4014 received from the good folks at the RailGiants Train Museum before she was brought back to life!

 *Norfolk Southern to Cease Operations at Two Roanoke Facilities*

[NS letter to all employees] As part of ongoing transformation at our company, Norfolk Southern today is announcing plans to close the Roanoke Distribution Center and transfer the work and positions at Roanoke Locomotive Shop to Altoona, Pennsylvania.

"These are difficult but necessary decisions to ensure that we maintain the right mix of people and facilities, in the right locations, to operate efficiently and deliver best-in-class service to our customers," said Chief Operating Officer Mike Wheeler. "As we build a railroad for the future, these actions will strengthen our company's competitiveness in the marketplace and generate long-term benefits for all of our employees."

Approximately 85 mechanical positions at the locomotive shop will be affected. These employees will be offered the opportunity to transfer to our Juniata Locomotive Shop in Altoona and will be eligible for relocation benefits. Nineteen clerical positions between the shop and the distribution center will be eliminated. The furloughed clerical employees will have the opportunity to apply for available positions elsewhere on the Norfolk Southern system.

Wheeler acknowledged that the decision to close the Roanoke Locomotive Shop represents a historic change for the company. Norfolk Southern predecessor railroad Norfolk & Western began operating the shop, then Roanoke Machine Works, in 1883. The shop once built steam locomotives.

Currently, it is anticipated that employees at the Roanoke Locomotive Shop will continue working there through approximately May 18, while distribution center personnel will work through approximately April 18.

Roanoke will remain a vital part of Norfolk Southern's network. The company will continue its presence and operations there, with more than 650 employees in the Roanoke Valley.

Last Two NS F-units Sold to North Carolina Short Line

[Jim Wrinn, Trains Industry Newsletter] The last two of Norfolk Southern's four executive F-units now have a home. F9A No. 271 and F7B No. 276 have been purchased by North Carolina's Aberdeen Carolina & Western, a 150-mile short line that runs on original Norfolk Southern Railway trackage between Charlotte and Aberdeen, N.C. It was featured in TRAINS' June 2017 edition as a model for the future with welded rail, unit trains, and modern power.

Chuckey Depot and Museum

Gary Price posted these photos of the new museum display items on our facebook page. Visit our page often to stay up-to-date on the latest railfan news. And be sure to check out these wonderful items by visiting the museum.



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