

# Whistle Stop



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

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Mike Tilley passed along this photo of the former Clinchfield Railroad General Offices building located in Erwin, TN. Built in 1910, it is still in use at a very limited level by CSXT despite the Erwin Yard closing in 2015.

## *July 27<sup>th</sup> General Membership Meeting*

Our next membership meeting will be held Monday, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at 6:30 pm at the Chuckey Depot/Museum at 110 Second Ave., Jonesborough, TN. Hope everyone can make the meeting; the June meeting was held at the depot and a good time and program was enjoyed by all. Plan on coming out in July; mark your calendar so you will not miss out on this entertaining railfan experience.

## *Member Notes*

*by Edna Kay Carter, Membership Chairperson*

Please keep Gloria Sims and family in your thoughts and prayers in the recent loss of her son Keith.

Remember Billy Walker, Jeanie and family in your prayers as he will be dealing with recovery from an accident. We all wish him a speedy recovery.

Please continue to keep the following in your prayers as they deal with various health concerns. They are Nancy Jewell, George Ritchie, Anita Johnson and Gary Price. As always, let us know of any member, friend of 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 at this time but would welcome anyone who would like to join our group.

Hope everyone is enjoying the summer weather.

## *WVRHS&M 2020 Rail Excursions*

### **TICKETS FOR SEPTEMBER 2020 GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAIN TRIPS**

The Watauga Valley Railroad Museum is planning on putting tickets for our September 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Great Smoky Mountain Excursions on sale over the internet on July 17<sup>th</sup>. We are doing so in hope that North Carolina will have switched over to Phase 3 by then, which will open everything back up.

### **VOLUNTEER HOSTS NEEDED FOR SEPTEMBER EXCURSIONS**

We are in need of volunteers host to help on the Great Smoky Mtn Train Excursions for September 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> and November 1<sup>st</sup>. This is your chance to experience a great train ride and have enjoyable day. Please call office at (423) 753-5797 and leave message if you have not turned in your name yet. For your convenience, a sign up form is available at the end of this newsletter which can be sent to us.

## *Whistle Truck*

Due to the COVID-19 situation, the Whistle Truck has been idle this year as all potential events have been canceled. We hope to have the truck back out soon.

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### **LIBRARY DONATIONS**

Our library collection in Jonesborough is growing fast. We appreciate all the donations that have been made. Please bring your railroad book donations to any membership meeting or call the chapter office at 423-753-5797. If you are finished reading or just want to donate, put your books to good works. We have plenty of room to add more books!

## *Mechanical Department Report*

*by Jim Magill*

We always welcome volunteers to work at the Spring Street Coach Yard on every Tuesday 9 am to 5 pm. If you want to get involved in our great projects, please call (423) 753-5797 or email [wataugavalley@gmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@gmail.com).

### ROLLING STOCK

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

**DUE TO UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES, TRAIN RIDES WILL NOT BE OFFERED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.**

“*St Augustine*” coach (WATX 500) [below, left], “*Crescent Harbor*” sleeper / lounge (WATX 2351) [below, right]: are at the Jonesborough Coach Yard for upgrades.



“*Clinchfield 100*” office car (WATX 100): The Watauga Valley Mechanical Crew has been working hard installing the new generator under Clinchfield 100. Work is ongoing on a new A/C system and installing the new restroom and septic system under the car. 100 may be 109 years old but she is going to be modern again with all the new systems being installed.



# Chuckey Depot and Museum



With the Johnson City Library still closed, and much to the relief and enjoyment of quarantine-weary members, the Depot served as the venue for the June membership meeting. The July meeting will be held there as well as the Johnson City Library will remain closed.



For exciting viewing such as above with the NS Heritage diesels in action, go on line and watch the Watauga Valley Virtual Rail Cams at the Chuckey Depot. They are live, aimed east and west, and you can review past action for up to 12 hours by moving the red bar at the bottom of page. We also have a live radio feed of trains and dispatchers talking. Go to [www.wataugavalleynrhs.org](http://www.wataugavalleynrhs.org) home page and click on the link that says web cam or go to YouTube and search on "Jonesborough Rail Cam". You can also go to [www.broadcastify.com](http://www.broadcastify.com), select the Tennessee map, and click on "Washington County" to hear our new radio at the Chuckey Depot.

**The 2020 NRHS Convention is cancelled due to the health pandemic.**  
Our convention partners are uncertain if they will be open and or available to attendees.  
The NRHS is working on a process for making refunds to members who have already registered for the 2020 Convention.

**The 2020 NRHS Fall Conference in Johnson City TN is cancelled.**  
Be in good health and keep your eye down the line until we meet again.

## *In the News ...*



### *East Broad Top to welcome guests back in mid-August*

[Trains News Wire] For the first time since 2011, the narrow-gauge East Broad Top Railroad in central Pennsylvania will offer public passenger train rides August 13-15.

The reopening of the National Historic Landmark coincides with the 260<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the town of Orbisonia and its twin borough, Rockhill Furnace, home to the company's general offices, machine shops, and roundhouse. It also coincides with the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first reopening of the EBT on Aug. 13, 1960, when it began running public steam train rides after a four-year hiatus following its official abandonment as a coal-hauling line in 1956.

The community's Homecoming celebration will consist of a parade, handicraft and food vendors, and more. Local activities will be coordinated by the Orbisonia-Rockhill Furnace Volunteer Fire Company and the Orbisonia Lions Club. It was to commemorate the community's bicentennial in 1960 that the railroad was reopened the first time.

East Broad Top ran tourist trains each summer and fall season from 1960 to 2011, when the owner, Joe Kovalchick, closed it in order to seek a secure, long-term future for the operation. It was his father, Nick Kovalchick, who saved the railroad from scrapping in 1956, even though the family was in the scrap business. Earlier this year, Joe Kovalchick sold the bulk of the property – 27 miles of main line plus the shops, yards, offices, six steam locomotives, and freight and passenger rolling stock – to the nonprofit EBT Foundation Inc. The foundation was organized to revive, restore, preserve, and operate the railroad.

For the August event, EBT will operate open cars pulled by a diesel switcher. Two Baldwin 2-8-2 steam locomotives are under repair, Nos. 14 (built 1912) and 16 (built 1916), with an eye toward steaming them up for the 2021 season. Other historic EBT equipment will be on display during the three-day celebration.

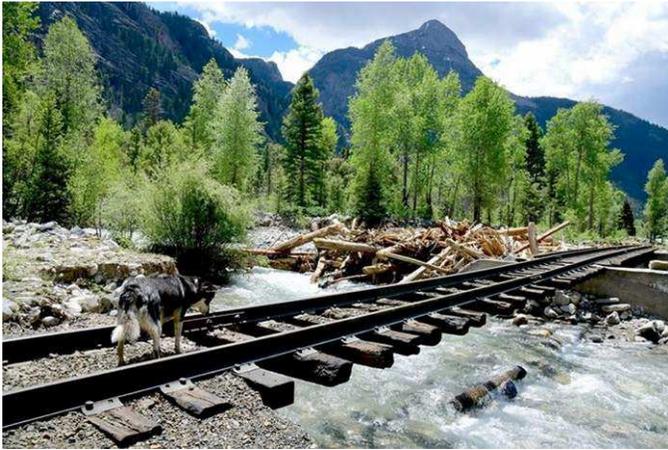
EBT Foundation Inc., will sell joint tickets that include a train ride, tour of the shops and roundhouse, trolley ride at the adjacent Rockhill Trolley Museum, and ice cream. The railroad has announced that tickets are expected to go on sale Monday, June 22<sup>nd</sup> at the website <http://eastbroadtop.com>. With reserved tickets, the number of people on the property at any given time will be limited in deference to the COVID-19 pandemic and public health considerations. In addition, EBT plans to regularly clean and sanitize its cars and bathrooms.

Kovalchick family members expected to attend the event include Joe Kovalchick and his wife Judy, and Joe's sister Millie. As a young girl, Millie dedicated the first train in 1960, and EBT engine No. 12 (Baldwin 1911) is named after her.

Since the sale to the EBT Foundation Inc., in February, the railroad has stabilized buildings, begun the overhaul of equipment, cut brush, and rebuilt track, all in conjunction with volunteers from the Friends of the East Broad Top. The group has held two official work weekends, one in March and one this month, to provide significant help to the foundation's staff.

For more information, go to <http://eastbroadtop.com>.

## *Durango & Silverton hit by washout*



[*Trains News Wire*] A washout has cut the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad's access to Silverton for eight to 16 weeks, the *Durango Herald* reports. A log jam on the railroad's bridge at Elk Creek, about five miles from Silverton, forced the creek to overflow and washed out more than 40 feet of the railroad's track. The railroad hopes to begin removing debris this week [of June 22<sup>nd</sup>], but the repair process will be a long one, John Harper, general manager of the railroad's parent company, American Heritage Railways, told the newspaper. The washout will not affect the

shorter trips between Rockwood and Cascade that are set to begin Tuesday [see "Durango & Silverton to reopen with shorter trips, steam-diesel combinations," *News Wire Digest*, June 17, 2020], but could delay hoped-for full-length trips or excursions from Silverton to Elk Creek or Needleton.

## *Historic Tennessee Railroad May be Abandoned*

[By G. CHAMBERS WILLIAMS III, *The Courier News*, Clinton, TN] A scenic and historic railroad line that runs along New River from Fork Mountain in remote western Anderson County [TN] to Oneida might soon be scrapped and turned into a hike-and-bike trail – or rescued and restored to carry tourist excursion trains.

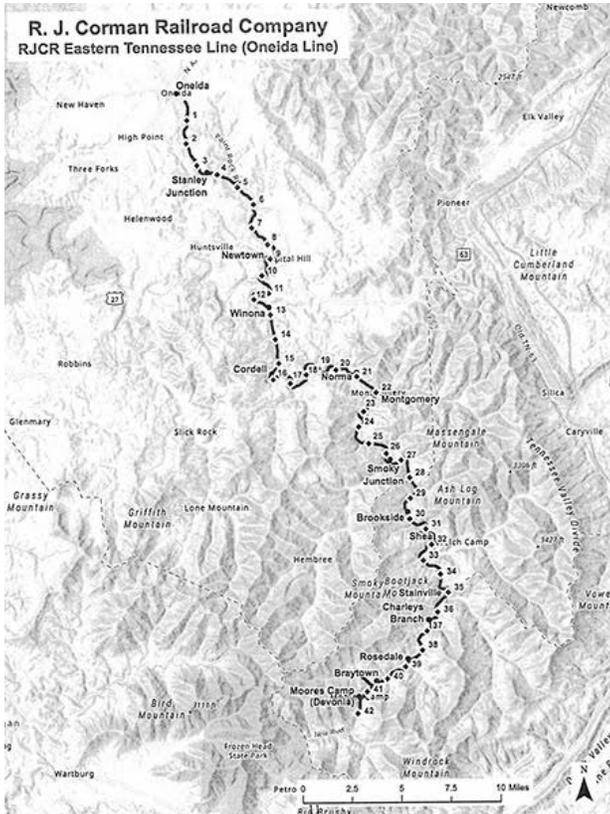
Those are the choices now facing the former Tennessee Railroad, a 42-mile spur off the Cincinnati-Southern mainline in Oneida (operated by Norfolk Southern) as the spur faces abandonment by its current owner, the R.J. Corman Railroad of Nicholasville, Kentucky.

Anderson County Mayor Terry Frank is helping lead an effort to save the line, which was started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to haul timber and coal out of rural Anderson County.

Owned by Norfolk Southern Corp. (formerly the Southern Railway) from 1973 until Knoxville-based National Coal Corp. bought it in 2006 for \$2 million, the line was begun in 1889 and extended to its current terminus at a now-abandoned coal preparation plant at Devonia in 1912.

When National Coal was on the verge of bankruptcy in 2010, it sold the line to R.J. Corman for \$3 million, and it was used to haul coal out of the Fork Mountain area from a deep mine and a surface mine until those operations shut down in 2013. Since then, the line has not been used, and has fallen into disrepair. Part of the line from Huntsville in Scott County to Indian Fork in Anderson County did have a short life as a tourist excursion route from 2008 to 2010 when Scotty Phillips, owner of the New River General Store at Devonia, and a partner started the New River Scenic Railway.

They ran the train – consisting of a vintage 1951 Alco RS3 diesel locomotive and two passenger cars – until shortly after R.J. Corman bought the rail line from National Coal and proceeded to terminate the excursion operation's rights to use the tracks. The former New River Scenic Railway



engine and two rail cars – which Phillips brought here from Arizona -- have sat abandoned on a siding behind the Devonia coal-prep plant since 2010, and all three units have been heavily vandalized.

They still draw a lot of visitors who make the trek by mostly four-wheel-drive vehicles by first negotiating Tennessee Route 116's infamous switchback curves leading in from either Petros to the west or Briceville to the east.

During a recent conversation with *The Courier News* at the country store Phillips has operated since taking it over from his grandfather in 1982, he said he would like to see another tourist train come to the New River on the rail line, which passes just behind his store on the banks of the river.

“But I won’t be the one running it,” he said of a possible new version of the New River Scenic Railway. “We don’t have the money it would take to get back into that business.”

He said it would cost “lots of money” to rehabilitate the engine and passenger cars on the siding in Devonia, and there are estimates that it would cost at least \$600,000 to rehab the rail line itself from Oneida to Devonia, as it has been abandoned and not maintained for the past seven years. There is even a large landslide near the Oneida end of the line that would have to be cleared.

R.J. Corman filed a notice with the U.S. Surface Transportation Board on March 9 of intent to abandon the line, which also runs partly through Campbell County. That followed earlier notices that the company intended to abandon the line, which drew a resolution from the Anderson County Board of Commissioners on Aug. 19, 2019, objecting to the move.

The commissioners approved “A Resolution Authorizing the County Mayor to Enter into Discussions with the R.J. Corman Group, LLC.” about the “possible tourism use of the Tennessee Oneida line.”

On March 19, 2020, the Arkansas-Oklahoma Railroad Co. filed with the Surface Transportation Board a “notice of intent to file an offer of financial assistance” to purchase the line from R.J. Corman, and subsequently was given a price of \$2.75 million.

But Arkansas-Oklahoma Railroad missed a filing deadline in April to make good on its offer, blaming the coronavirus shutdowns and failure of R.J. Corman to provide details about the line that the buyers could use to determine its value.

Subsequently, the STB authorized the use of the line as a trail under control of the Cumberland Trail Conference once R.J. Corman abandons it.

But Arkansas-Oklahoma last week won a stay of that order and an extension of its time period to file an offer for the rail line until June 9, or to file for another extension no later than today (June 3).

“We are hoping that Arkansas-Oklahoma Railroad will come up with an offer, and they have told us that they have a tourist operation that wants to use the line for excursions,” Frank said last week.

She also noted that there are still significant coal reserves left in the areas of Anderson County that are served by the rail line, controlled by National Coal, a subsidiary of a company owned by West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice.

Frank said that the North East Tennessee Railroad Authority, made up of the Scott, Anderson and Campbell county governments, also is advocating for a sale of the line to the Arkansas-Oklahoma group. She and the mayors of Scott and Campbell counties are on the board of that authority, created by the state Legislature in 2010 to help the three counties preserve their existing railroad lines for future economic development purposes.

“Once a rail line is abandoned and the tracks are pulled up, it’s nearly impossible to ever get it back,” Frank said.

The next few days could determine the fate of this piece of East Tennessee history, which has been around more than 130 years, Frank said.

### June 10 update

An Oklahoma-based short-line railroad company has asked the U.S. Surface Transportation Board for an extension of time to file an offer to buy an historic railroad line along the New River in Anderson County that its current owner wants to abandon and remove.

Arkansas-Oklahoma Railroad Co. of Wilburton, Oklahoma, filed its request for an extension with the STB on the deadline date, June 3, and that filing was challenged on June 4 by Nicholasville, Kentucky-based R.J. Corman, current owner of the line.

### *1309 Restoration Restart; Week 1*



[by Ryan Brenneman, *The Automatic Block*, Western Maryland NRHS] The Western Maryland Scenic Railroad is proud to announce that the first full week [of May 18<sup>th</sup>] under the 1309 Restoration Restart has wrapped up. The restoration crew has been making great progress toward the moment of re-wheeling the massive 2-6-6-2 steam locomotive. [Accompanying photos show] one worker has been welding, profiling, and dressing the 12 brake-shoe holders that will bring the locomotive to a stop. Another worker installs pedestals inside front engine frame that will serve as mounting points for the lubrication distribution system.

One of two cross-compound steam-driven air compressors are being prepared for eventual installation on the front of 1309’s massive smokebox.

Front driving wheel assembly for 1309 pilot, lubrication, and rail washing systems have received attention. The momentum builds as shop workers prepare the two driving wheel assemblies for being installed in their rightful location beneath 1309’s big boiler.

Soon the front driving wheel assembly will be re-installed underneath the massive boiler.

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**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

**TIME VALUE MATERIAL**

# EXCURSION BUS/CAR HOST SIGN-UP FORM

I/we would like to sign up as a Bus/Car Host on one of the following excursions below. The trip basically involves serving as a host on the bus and relaxing on the train for a great ride on the Great Smoky Mountains Train Excursion. Please check which dates you can work; bring this form to the next meeting and turn in, mail to WVRHS&M, P O Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605-0432 or email [wataugavalley@gmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@gmail.com).

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, state \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

I/we can work the following dates (please check beside date)

Sept 12 \_\_\_\_\_

Sept 13 \_\_\_\_\_

Nov 1 \_\_\_\_\_