

# Whistle Stop



Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum  
P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN. 37605-0432  
(423) 753-5797

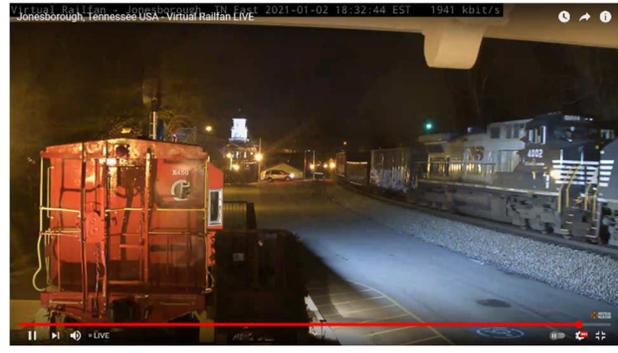


[www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org](http://www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org)

Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

Volume 41 No. 2

February 2021



The collage of shots above from the Chuckey Depot webcam offer different sights and moods along the NS line in Jonesborough. Clockwise from upper left: a grey, wintry, snowy day; yet more proof that Santa is a railfan; night action; and NS SD70ACC #1801, a DC to AC traction conversion locomotive.

## *January 25<sup>th</sup> General Membership Meeting*

Our next General Membership meeting will be held on Monday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 6:30 pm at the Chuckey Depot / Railroad Museum, 110 South Second St. Jonesborough, TN (at the railroad crossing). Our program this month will be on the "Virginia Creeper - then and now", offering some rare footage of the movement of trains. Please note you will have to wear a mask and social distance 6 feet. We want everyone to be safe and have an enjoyable time at the meeting. Bring a friend out for a relaxing evening with your fellow members.

## *Member Notes*

### *By Edna Kay Carter*

Please keep those who have lost loved ones and those who are sick or in the hospital in your thoughts and prayers.

Our sympathy to Mike and Lois Tilley on the passing of Mike's sister-in-law, Karen Tilley. Keep George Ritchie, Nancy Ritchie, Sharon Slagle, Gary Price, Scott Wise, Fred Phofl, Bob and Norma Hand, Billy Walker, Jim Calhoun and Joy Foster in your thoughts and prayers as they deal with various health concerns. 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.

Welcome new members William Sam & Sherry Smyth, Les Billings, Ronald & Janet Schol, Cary Lynn Holtclaw and Greg Bobich. We welcome you and look forward to having you as a member and to anyone who would like to join our club.

The following has been elected for the year 2021 for the Watauga Valley Historical Society and Museum. They are Mike Tilley, President; Bob Schubel, Vice President; Jim Smallwood, Secretary; Jeanie Walker, Treasurer; Gary Price, Historian; and Board Members Frank Gricus, Tony King, and Scott Wise.

Hope everyone will stay healthy and safe during this pandemic.

---

### **LOOKING BACK AT 2020 AND FORWARD TO 2021**

The year 2020 has not been a good year for anyone. We are hoping and praying for a better 2021 for the Watauga Valley Railroad Museum members. We hope everyone will join up and be part of a busy year in 2021. Please get your dues sent in ASAP to Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum, ATTN: Edna Carter, P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605. You can join the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum for \$20.00 individual and add family members at \$5.00 for each member. Any questions, email [wataugavalley@gmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@gmail.com).

### **LIBRARY DONATIONS**

Our library collection in Jonesborough continues to grow. We appreciate all the donations that have been made. Bring your railroad book donations to any membership meeting or call the office at (423) 753-5797. If you are finished reading or just want to donate, put your books to good use. We have plenty of room to add more books!

### **PROGRAMS NEEDED FOR 2021**

The WVRHS&M program directors Howard Orfield and Brad McCroskey are looking for General Membership programs for 2021. Please call 423-753-5797 if you have an interest in showing a program or let us know at the next General Membership Meeting. We are looking for speakers; also someone who would come and present a railroad related program. And as always we're looking for DVD and slide programs.

### **Digital "WHISTLE STOP"**

We are still asking members receiving print copies of this newsletter to switch over to the electronic version. Call the office at 423-753-5797 and give us your e-mail address.

## *Mechanical Department Report*

*by Jim Magill*

The Watauga Valley Mechanical Team is looking for more volunteers. As most of you know the team is composed of volunteers with all kinds of experiences. We now have five operating passenger cars and it takes a lot of manpower to keep the equipment up and running. We need volunteers to help with a variety of projects, even if you do not have specific skills or experience. Team members are all volunteers, retired and many still working. The team is a great bunch of guys enjoying working together to keep our equipment up and running on the rails. If you're interested, please email us at [wataugavalley@gmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@gmail.com) or call the Watauga Valley office at 423-753-5797 and leave a message that you are interested in volunteering at the Jonesborough Coach Yard. Work days are Tuesday's 9 am to 5 pm. If you're tired of lying around the house during the winter months, please give us a call; we will get you scheduled wherever you can help.

### ROLLING STOCK

**“Powhatan Arrow” coach (WATX 539); “Moultrie” diner (WATX 400):** both cars have been in excursion service at the North Carolina Transportation Museum over the past couple of months and will return to our coach yard in Jonesborough soon!

**“St Augustine” coach (WATX 500):** is at the Jonesborough Spring St Coach Yard for repairs.

**“Crescent Harbor” sleeper / lounge (WATX 2351):** has returned to Jonesborough after serving on the (modified) CSX Santa Train in November, 2020.

**“Clinchfield 100” office car (WATX 100):** The Mechanical Team has put in many hours in getting the interior of the car ready for the major upgrades that are coming soon.

## *Chuckey Depot and Museum*

Things at the Chuckey Railroad Depot Museum in Jonesborough are going great. It was another year of growth for the museum and its programs. The museum had 5,584 visitors in 2020 and 2,063.70 volunteer hours logged. Thanks to all the Watauga Valley Volunteers at the Chuckey Depot who made this happen.

We now have 87 volunteers trained to host in the Depot. Most volunteers are working approximately one day a month at the depot. We will have another training session for hosts in late March. If you're interested, please email [wataugavalley@embarqmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@embarqmail.com) or call the office at 423-753-5797. We will also be changing out displays in March; if you have items that you would like to loan for display in regards to area railroads, please call 423-753-5797 for information.

**August 23-28, 2021**  
**2021 NRHS Convention**  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

**October, 2021**  
**2021 NRHS Fall Conference**  
Ronkonkoma, New York

## In the News

### *C&O #1309 Moves Under Its Own Steam*

[“*The Automatic Block*”, Western Maryland Chapter NRHS] On Thursday, December 31, shop crews in the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad Yard at Ridgeley, WV, were busy making final preparations to run the 1309 steam locomotive on rails for the first time since 1956. The GP30 diesel locomotive, WMSR 501, pulled the massive 2-6-6-2 articulated compound steam engine out of the shop where it had been reassembled. A front-loader was used to top-off the 16-ton capacity coal bin in the tender. The fireman opened the butterfly door of 1309’s firebox and lit the kindling to start heating the water in the forty-foot long boiler. It took several hours to raise the boiler pressure to 210 psi. At around 8 pm, the desired boiler pressure was reached. The cylinder



cocks were opened to drain any condensation that accumulated there, so the smokebox and boiler were enveloped in clouds of steam. The locomotive engineer blew the distinctive steam whistle and the surrounding mountains reverberated with the sound of its echo. He then slowly opened the throttle, and the pistons inside the four cylinders began to move back and forth, and

the six pairs of driving wheels started to turn. Engine 1309 was moving once again under its own power along the pair of rails in the WMSR Yard. Two days later on Saturday, January 2, around 11 am, 1309 was again operating by its own steam, traveling slowly eastward out of the WMSR Yard onto the mainline track in Ridgeley. The steam engine traveled about a half-mile through the small West Virginia town, passing through the Main-Ridgeley streets crossing, and going over the Mulligan Street underpass, finally stopping when the 1309 locomotive reached the south bank of the Potomac River. Here the steam whistle was blown several times in salute to Cumberland on the other side of the river. After some moments, 1309 was put into reverse, and ran back to the WMSR Yard.

Many local railfans viewed the 1309 steam locomotive on its first days of operation in sixty-four years. There were also several out-of-towners on hand for the event, which was touted by *Trains Magazine*. In fact, the magazine’s editor, Jim Wrinn, was present to video graph and narrate some of the footage that features the 1309 steam locomotive in motion as seen in aerial views filmed by a drone camera. Kalmbach Media will be producing a fifty-to-sixty-minute DVD that will show the highlights of the restoration project involved in steaming the last Baldwin-built steam engine. To view this historic event, go <https://tinyurl.com/ya93oudb>.

### *N&W 512 “Jim Crow” Car Restoration*



[report from “*Turntable Times*”, Roanoke NRHS. Photo by Lewis Foster] Once the 512 was moved inside the car shelter, we began the process of removing the bottom edges of the side sheets to replace some extensive rust damage and expose the side sills of the car.

Unfortunately, when

we got the sides opened up it confirmed what we were afraid of. The 512 has had quite a lot of water damage

over the years and the side sills will likely need to be replaced entirely. We’re currently planning this process and will begin working on it over the winter.

## *Southwest Virginia Moving Closer to Amtrak Service*

[*Trains News Wire*, Jan. 21, 2021] The state of Virginia is close to an agreement with Norfolk Southern that would allow Amtrak service to be extended from Roanoke to Bristol, Va., according to the state's transportation secretary. WDBJ-TV [Roanoke] reports that Transportation Secretary Shannon Valentine told the state's House Appropriations Committee that "we have never been as close as we are to getting this accomplished." Last month, Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam included \$50 million in his proposal for the state's two-year budget for the service to the New River Valley region, which would serve Virginia Tech and Radford universities, among other customers.

## *COVID Impact on Preservation, Tourist Lines*

[By Jim Wrinn, *Trains Industry Newsletter*, December 31, 2020] North American railway preservation hit its most difficult foe — more potent than time, rust, and neglect — in the deadly COVID-19 pandemic that closed tourist railroads and museums across the continent. Nobody could have seen such a major impact coming. No place was prepared. And no venue was spared.

For-profit and non-profit railway preservation efforts may have been set back five to 10 years as venues shut their gates, restoration projects lagged, and staffs were laid off. Some railroads and museums, deprived of income from visitors, will find it immensely difficult to reopen without infusions of donations or government bailouts. The devastation will result in permanent closure of some railroads, disposal of rolling stock, and experienced staffs and volunteers finding work outside the industry.

Without major money-makers like Polar Express and Thomas the Tank Engine events in 2020, many railroads and museums will start 2021 behind on utilities and bank notes and struggling for survival. At some railroads, special-event revenue is more than 50% of operating budgets. With 62 locations in 2019, 44 handled by licensees, the Polar Express program is the biggest U.S. licensee of rail-based performance attractions. Many tourist railroads are highly dependent on revenues generated by the Polar Express, which drew 1.4 million customers in 2015.

The major preservation event of the year, the much anticipated and mostly sold-out Victorian Iron Horse Roundup celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, was postponed from August 2020 to August 2021. Special event revenue, a critical lifeblood for railway preservation, was in short supply due to the virus.

The Heritage Railway Association hurriedly prepared guidelines for its member organizations, but for the most part, in the absence of a federal policy on the virus, tourist railroads and museums had to follow the direction of state and local health officials. That led to venues that were open and closed within days or weeks. The C&TS operated much of the year in Colorado, but only late in the season did trains return to New Mexico, which had imposed strict lockdown restrictions.

The railroads and museums that operated run in 2020 found themselves working to earn the trust of a public reluctant to travel for pleasure. They reduced train capacity, added cars for social distancing (Strasburg and Great Smoky Mountains ran extra-long trains), and shifted staff to become car cleaners between trips. Sealed-window cars were out. Open-air cars were in.

Some railroads took advantage of the pandemic to get projects done without the interruption of operations. Illinois's Monticello Railway Museum, while closed to the public, moved up the 1,472-day inspection on Southern Railway 2-8-0 No. 401 from the end of 2020 to the spring and acquired two historic diesels. Wisconsin Great Northern tackled a track relocation project to keep staff busy and accomplish a long-standing goal. Western Maryland Scenic Railroad, funded with donations

from *Trains* readers and the John Emery Rail Heritage Trust, reactivated and made major progress on its restoration of the last Baldwin steam locomotive built, 1949 2-6-6-2 No. 1309.

Operations with endowments, vigorous and generous trustees, creative staffs, and major financial supporters (including public assistance) were most likely to come out of the pandemic OK. But many will not be so fortunate. The final evaluation of the pandemic's impact on railway preservation will be seen in the first and second quarters of 2021, when railroads and museums meet with their accountants, trustees, public agency officials, and other stakeholders. This major health event will forever change railway preservation. 2020 will be remembered as the year a microscopic virus was strong enough to stop in their tracks giant locomotives, huge trains, and entire railroads and museums with crippling and potentially fatal impacts.

### *Won the Lottery? Buy a Circus Rail Car*

[Article by Richard Stradling, "The News & Observer", Raleigh, NC] The state's online auction of nine railroad cars once owned by the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus failed to generate a buyer, but the N.C. Department of Transportation says it will try again.

NCDOT put the cars up for sale last month, along with seven other old rail cars it determined it no longer needs. All 16 cars were listed on an auction page on the State Surplus Property website, which accepted bids until Monday morning.

The state received one offer each for two of the cars, both passenger cars built in the 1960s with an asking price of \$75,000 apiece. The state is still evaluating those offers, said Jason Orthner, director of NCDOT's Rail Division.

The state will organize another online auction for the other 14 cars, probably by the end of the month, Orthner said. NCDOT will consider lowering the asking prices and revising the terms and conditions of the sales to try to entice more bids, he said.

"What we have here is a very unique product, and you don't have just your normal folks who are interested," he said. "It's difficult to nail down what the price point is for this market."

The state set minimum bids that ranged from \$9,000 to \$200,000. The state was asking \$45,000 for each of the circus train cars, except for a baggage car that's filled with various hand and shop tools. The opening bid for it was \$55,000. Seven of the nine circus cars were built in 1964, while the other two are older.

NCDOT paid \$383,000 for the Ringling Bros. cars shortly after the circus gave its final performance in 2017. They are parked on a state-owned rail line in the woods of Nash County. NCDOT painted over the Ringling Bros. name and logos, though faded "The Greatest Show on Earth" insignia still appear on some of the cars and someone painted an elephant, gorilla and tiger on one side of the baggage car.

As with most of the other old cars, the department expected to have them refurbished for use on the Piedmont, the state-owned passenger train that runs between Raleigh and Charlotte. All 19 cars now in the Piedmont fleet — 14 passenger cars and 5 baggage/cafe cars — were originally built in the 1950s and 1960s for other railroads.

The state has since received two federal grants, totaling \$157 million, that will allow it to buy six locomotives and 26 passenger cars, all new. Last summer, the General Assembly passed a bill requiring the department to develop a plan for its fleet of rail cars and put those it doesn't plan to refurbish up for sale by Dec. 31.

Orthner said NCDOT received lots of calls and inquiries about the cars, including visits from several prospective buyers who wanted to see them in person. He said the market for old rail cars includes private collectors, companies that operate excursion trains and even developers or business owners who want to place a car on their property for show.

“There’s a wide variety of different folks that could get them, including railroads that want to put them into their fleet,” he said.

He said the state doesn’t intend to keep them, saying, “It’s our intent to move these cars.”

## *Former Tennessee Loco Under Steam*

[“*The Cincinnati*”, Cincinnati NRHS] Little River Railroad (Coldwater, MI) locomotive No. 110 is a 4-6-2 “Pacific” type steam engine built by the Baldwin Locomotive Works in 1911 for the Little River Railroad. This locomotive served as a logging engine on the railroad that operated between Maryville and Elkmont, Tennessee. It is interesting to note that the railroad typically built a line into an area, completed the logging there, and then removed the line. In all, the LRR built 150 miles of track...none of which remains. Locomotive No. 110, reputedly the smallest standard gauge Pacific type locomotive ever built, went to the Smoky Mountain Railroad after serving many years on the Little River Railroad.



At the Smoky Mountain Railroad, she worked out her final common carrier revenue days. After many years laying in the weeds and rusting away, the 110 was saved from the scrapper by the Bloom Family, who restored the locomotive to operating condition. No. 110 ran for several years on excursions over the tracks of the former Ft. Wayne and Jackson Railroad out of Pleasant Lake, Indiana. Just last month, a test run with an empty train and a newly overhauled 110 was successfully held. Locomotive 110 was then ready to power this season’s Christmas Trains. The Little River Railroad had been running their “*Holiday Express*” trips since December 5. They successfully ended on December 13. The excursions lasted 45 minutes on trips out of Coldwater, Michigan. Welcome back, No. 110.

## *Reading 4-8-4 No. 2102 Passes Steam Test*



[Scott Hartley, *TRAINS Newsletter*, Jan. 13, 2021] Reading & Northern’s former Reading Co. 4-8-4 No. 2102 came several steps closer to its long-awaited return to service after steam testing at the railroad’s steam shops in Port Clinton, PA on Tuesday. All went well. “The engine is like new,” said R&N owner and CEO Andrew M. Muller, Jr. Following the testing, he blew the T-1’s Reading “Hooter” whistle at 11:00 a.m., signaling lunch time for the steam crew, volunteers, and invited guests. The big Northern, built by the Reading at its home-

city shops in 1945, is one of four of the T-1 class remaining. Muller hopes that the engine will be running this spring, after being stored 29 years ago.

***Whistle Stop***

Published Monthly by the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum  
P.O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605-0432  
[whistlestop.editor@gmail.com](mailto:whistlestop.editor@gmail.com)

Opinions or viewpoints are those of the writer and may not necessarily reflect those of the organization members, officers or directors. Items of interest are welcome and will be credited to the author; however, because of space constraints, all submissions are subject to editing. Permission to reprint *Whistle Stop* articles with the exception of photographs is granted if proper credit is given. Reuse of photographs must receive permission by the editor and the photographer.



**Watauga Valley RHS & Museum  
P.O. Box 432  
Johnson City, TN 37605-0432**

**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

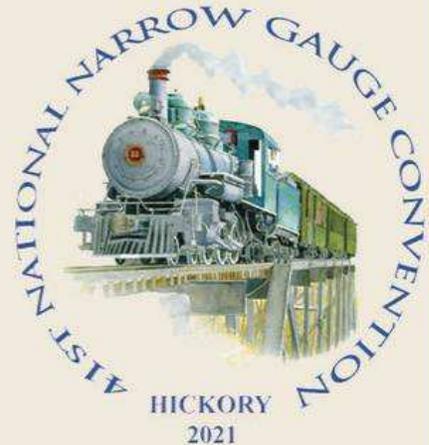
**TIME VALUE MATERIAL**

# 41st National Narrow Gauge Convention September 1-4, 2021

Hickory, NC 28601

[www.41nngc.com](http://www.41nngc.com)

[41nngc@gmail.com](mailto:41nngc@gmail.com)



You've seen the ads for years ... but never gone.

*What are you missing?*

- 45+ Clinics presented by the gurus of model railroading on scenery, structures, rolling stock, motive power, and history.
- 300+ Vendor tables all in one big room. Meet the manufacturers of exciting model railroading items, from craftsman structure kits to rock formations to cars and locomotives to electronics.
- 30+ Home layouts to visit at your own pace, which will take your inspiration to the next level.
- Modular railroads in the vendor hall and a model contest that attracts some of the best scratch builders in the world together.
- Convention week will also include special events at the steam tourist railroads in the region.



Registration is \$100, \$125 after August 1st, spouses & children under 16 free.

For more information and to register, visit [www.41nngc.com](http://www.41nngc.com)