

Whistle Stop

Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum

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Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

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On Saturday, November 23rd, 2024, CSX once again brought Christmas cheer to the Appalachian coal fields with the 82nd running of its *Santa Train*. Full story on page 5.

No General Membership Meeting in December

The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will not have a General Membership Meeting in December due to the Christmas and New Years holidays. Our next regular General Membership Meeting will be held on Monday, January 27th, 2025.

Member Notes

Please keep the following members in your thoughts and prayers: Gary Price, Lois Tilley, Jim Calhoun, Coy Edwards, Ralph Pappacent, Mike Jackson and Kathy Billings on the loss of her father.

Welcome Aboard! Jesse Felan – Greeneville, TN. See you around the Depot!

If anyone knows of a member that needs a card, thoughts for various concerns, or to request that one of our members or family be reported for various concerns in the *Whistle Stop*, email a request to wataugavalley@gmail.com or wataugavalley.membership.com.

Note to Members: If anyone’s address, phone number or email address has changed , please contact Les Billings at wataugavalley.membership.com for correction. This will make it better so no one misses mailings, phone calls or emails. Thank You.

2025 OFFICER AND BOARD ELECTION RESULTS

Officers

President -----	Mike Tilley	Incumbent
Vice President -----	Howard Orfield	Incumbent
Secretary-----	Connie Hunt	Incumbent
Treasurer-----	Jeanie Walker	Incumbent

Board of Directors

Art Devoe, Ralph Clarke, and Bob Hand

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING: The next Board of Directors meeting will be held Tuesday, January 14th, 2025.

2025 WVRHS&M DUES

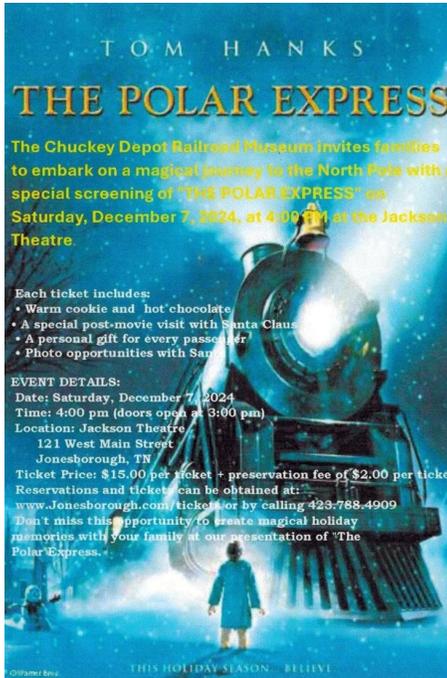
2025 will be here before you know it. Please renew your membership before it expires December 31st by returning your dues ASAP (check only) to the Membership Chairman at Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum, P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605. You can join the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum for \$20.00 individual and add each family member at \$5.00 each. For questions, email wataugavalley@gmail.com.

- Benefits:**
- 12 issues of the “*Whistle Stop*”, Watauga Valley’s newsletter.
 - Membership in the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum.
 - Participation in all Museum functions and events.

WATAUGA VALLEY CHRISTMAS GALA

Great food, fun and fellowship were had by all at the Watauga Valley Annual Christmas Dinner on Saturday, December 14th at the Food City Depot Banquet Room in Kingsport.. There were approximately 80 plus attendees packing the house. President Mike Tilley conducted a short business meeting followed by local rail historian Ron Flanary presenting a program discussing his latest book on L&N’s class M-1 2-8-4s (see <https://shop.kentuckysteam.org/product/big-emma-book/140>). If you missed this event, you missed a good time

Mechanical Report



ST. AUGUSTINE COACH (WATX 500), MOULTRIE DINING CAR (WATX 400), POWHATAN ARROW COACH (WATX 539), CLINCHFIELD 100: all cars in service at the NC Transportation Museum in Spencer for their Polar Express Excursion trains.

CRESCENT HARBOR LOUNGE/SLEEPER (WATX 2351): at the Spring St Coach Yard receiving upgrades.

Chuckey Depot / Museum

Attendance at the Chuckey Depot/Museum in Jonesborough has been very good during the holidays. Many Watauga Valley members have taken the host training session to work the depot. We plan on having another class in January. Volunteering at the depot is a good way to start out 2025. If you would like to volunteer a day a month at the depot, please email wataugavalley@gmail.com or phone (423) 753-5797 to get signed up. Everyone who hosts enjoys volunteering at the depot.

We have several members that have not volunteered at the depot in a while. We sure would like to have you back again.

CHUCKEY DEPOT EVENTS: "THE SANTA CABOOSE"

The WVRHS&M Santa Caboose will be held on December 21st at the Chuckey Depot from 3pm to 6pm. The Museum and the Town of Jonesborough will sponsor the exhibit. Everyone is welcome to come out and bring their children to our restored Southern caboose X450, meet Santa Claus, and tour the Depot. We want to thank all WVRHS&M members who have volunteered so far to help with this event and Junior Risner, who will play Santa Claus.

WVRHS&M VOLUNTEERS STILL NEEDED AT THE SANTA CABOOSE

As we are planning a big crowd, we still need volunteers to help support the event by staging visitors around the caboose. Please volunteer by emailing wataugavalley@gmail.com or calling (423) 753-5797. This event offers great publicity.



In the News

Whistle Truck a Big Hit at Parade

Watauga Valley's *Whistle Truck* was a big hit at the 2024 edition of Jonesborough's Christmas Parade. The photos below show the truck being prepared for its showtime; the WVRHS crew manning the whistles (left to right: Thomas Pittman, Jim Sutterlin, Mike Tilley, Les Billings); and the truck's great showing at the parade. It's good to see the *Whistle Truck* back on the road.



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



CSX Santa Train



[Extracted from the “Visit Kingsport” web site] The *Santa Train* returned Saturday, November 23rd for its 110-mile journey throughout Kentucky, Virginia and Northeast Tennessee. Each year the *Santa Train* delivers more than 15 tons of toys, gifts and winter accessories to thousands of families. This year marks the 82nd year of spreading Christmas Cheer throughout Appalachia.

The *Santa Train* is rooted in tradition and carries lifelong memories for families along the route. It began in 1943 when a small group of Kingsport, TN businessmen decided to create something special to thank their neighbors for their patronage. After coming up with the idea for the “*Santa Special*”, the men worked with Clinchfield Railroad officials to create what we now know as “*The Santa Train*”.



Over the years, countless lives have been touched by the *Santa Train*. Whether a member of the media writing a story about the train, a volunteer on the assembly line packaging the gifts and candy or an excited child waiting along the tracks, this one simple act that began in 1943 has left a legacy for 82 years.

The presence of Santa has been a staple on the train since day one. The late John Dudney once said his biggest reward as Santa Claus for 38 years was looking into the faces of children along the railroad and seeing the wonder in their eyes as he proclaimed over the sound system, “Merry Christmas girls and boys, ole Santa sees you.”



Throughout its 82-year tenure, The *Santa Train* has received global media attention from ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, CNN and more. Over the years, a number of celebrities have also ridden on the Santa Train route. They include Travis Tritt, Naomi Judd, Amy Grant, Patty Loveless and Wynonna Judd, among others.



The photo above finds the train rolling during CRR’s “Seaboard years”. And if there is any question on what level of corporate support the *Santa Train* receives, that smiling chap at right spreading Christmas Cheer and Goodwill is CSX CEO Joe Hinricks.

Helene Disaster Update: CSX at Poplar, NC

Thomas K. Pittman

An update from Poplar today (12/7/24). I had the opportunity through the trucking company to play a very small part in the rebuilding of the Toe River Bridge with a delivery of crane parts for the project. Saying things were full steam ahead down there this morning is a bit of an understatement.

A very big misconception of the Poplar site was that the big yellow crane that's been at the boat ramp for the past month was going to be the one to re-set the girders. I delivered 1 of at least 12 truckloads of a Manitowoc 999 crawler crane that was being moved up from the CPKC International Gateway Bridge project in Laredo, Texas. The owners of the crane (OCCI) are moving in 3 of these 250 ton capacity cranes in addition to the big yellow one already there. That's probably close to 40 tractor trailer loads of crane assembly for those three.

But it doesn't end there. A 1,000 ton capacity crane is coming to the job as well. The crane guys said that was a big boy, which means it's probably a pretty dang big crane coming out of their mouths. Google "1000 ton crawler crane" and you'll start to get an idea of what kind of beast they're bringing in for the heavy lifting. I don't have a model number to research the specs on it but I think it'll have around 500 tons of counterweights alone. So we're probably looking at another 40 or so trucks to haul that machine in. The reason such a big crane is needed is not so much due to the weight of the spans, but due to having to reach them to the other side of the river to place them. A crane exponentially loses capacity when you start reaching farther out (increasing radius).

There's lots of things to consider in light of that. Among those is the fact that the pile of iron laying in the river that used to be the Toe River Bridge is still valuable enough to bring all this equipment in to re-erect it vs. completely starting from scratch; a true testimony to it's original fabrication over 100 years ago. I'm also starting to think this will probably be the costliest chunk of the rebuild.

Around the time I arrived at the boat ramp with my load, a barrage of tandem dump trucks began to pour in with rock loads heading towards the South End of Poplar. The timing would be about right for them to be getting there after loading at the quarry when they first opened. I'm guessing around 30 Summers-Taylor trucks came and went in the hour and a half I was there with anywhere from 10-20 other contractor trucks on top of that. I met 10-15 more trucks bringing in loads as I went out. All this traffic is going in and out of Poplar via Rock Creek/Unaka Mountain so it's pretty rowdy through there during working hours. I seen a post on Summers-Taylor's Facebook page this week of a bunch of their trucks lined up at the quarry in Watauga, TN, so I assume that's were all the rock going to Poplar is coming from at the moment.

I didn't get any kind of time frame on anything here but I imagine it'll take 2 weeks or better to just get all the cranes here and setup. That's going to be some sight to see once they start setting the spans.

In the News ...



CSX Ordered to Stop Removing River Rock

UNICOI COUNTY, Tenn. (WCYB) — The organizations suing to stop rail company CSX from pulling rock out of the Nolichucky River have withdrawn their motion for a preliminary injunction. It comes after Tennessee and federal officials ordered CSX to stop using river rock, but the lawsuit itself isn't over just yet. [continued on next page]

CSX Ordered ... (continued)

A federal judge approved withdrawing the motion for an injunction late Monday after attorneys for the environmental organizations said it's no longer necessary. Wednesday, News 5 (WCYB) reported the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation ordered CSX to stop pulling rock out of the river to repair its rail line destroyed by Helene. The Army Corps of Engineers issued a similar order.

"Instead of having the court order the agencies to do something, they had instead agreed to voluntarily do this on their own," said Patrick Hunter, attorney for the Southern Environmental Law Center.

In a notice of violation, Tennessee officials said CSX "admitted... they had over enthusiastically excavated the cobble bars within the river."

"I'm extremely relieved," said Kevin Colburn, national stewardship director for American Whitewater. "I think it's a really good sign, and hopefully we've reached a turning point where we can start to relax, and they can start to build the railroad, and we don't have to worry about the river as much."

Those worries were not just about recreation but the potential to worsen future floods downstream. "If that river floods again, between that debris and how close that river is to some of our roads, we just need to stay very vigilant," Washington County, Tennessee commissioner Jodi Jones told News 5 on November 26.

Now attorneys will be vigilant to see what permits CSX receives. Their lawsuit continues for now, alleging the original approvals were improper.

"There needed to be more work between CSX and the agencies," Hunter said. "so that the agencies were saying, we're going to work through this in real time, but there are just some things you cannot do."

CSX Holiday Train



Last month CSX treated the area to their Holiday Express (see last month's Whistle Stop for story). Below we see the train crossing the Bonne's Creek trestle at left and outside Erwin at right.



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