



The ET TIMES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ET&WNC RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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31st Convention to Feature Centennial, Sesquicentennial and Riddle

The 31st Annual ET&WNC Railroad Historical Society Convention takes place May 31-June 2. As has been our custom over the last several years, the Carnegie Hotel will serve as our headquarters. This year marks the centennial of train service to Boone which "completed" the route of the ET&WNC/LR. Boone, which was once considered so isolated that "the only way to GET to Boone was to be born there", was the proposed destination of two other railroads—the Virginia-Carolina, which later became famous as Norfolk & Western's Abington Branch which made it as close as 30-odd miles away in Todd, NC, and the Watauga Railroad, building out of North Wilkesboro which made it to Darby before the Yadkin River exacted its revenge on those foolish enough to build too close to the river bank. The prize-winner ET&WNC was content to operate to Shull's Mills where it was shipping lumber logged from Grandfather Mountain's lower slopes. The Dougherty brothers, who ran what later became Appalachian State University, raised the necessary bonds to entice the railroad to push the 8 remaining miles over Hodges Gap into Boone.

At the other end of the line, Johnson City marks 150 years as a chartered municipality. In 1854 Henry Johnson purchased a large lot from Tipton Jobe so he could have a store, depot, post office and residence where the line of the East Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia Railroad would pass. The location became known as Johnson's Tank, later Johnson's Depot.

The ET&WNC began construction of its ill-fated 5-foot gauge line in 1868 establishing a junction with the ETV&G. The location was chartered as Johnson City on December 1, 1869. We'll mark both anniversaries appropriately at this year's convention. As of press time, here's what we've got planned:

Friday May 31: The Carter Museum at ETSU will be open at 10 am. The third annual train show will open at the Mini-Dome at noon. Convention Registration opens at the Carnegie at 3 pm. Business meeting at 5:30 followed by the Banquet. This year's program features Ken Riddle and friends. WE'LL MEET DOWN-STAIRS THIS YEAR. It's on your left just inside the Lower Level coming in from the parking garage.

Saturday June 1: 9 am, Johnson City Sesquicentennial talk at the Carnegie. 10 am, Carter Museum and train show opens. 3 pm, Johnny Graybeal hosts a program on the centenary of train service to Boone at the Watauga County Library in Boone. 4 pm, Tweetsie will begin admitting conventioners. 6:15 pm, train ride at Tweetsie followed by supper at the Palace catered by Dan'l Boone Inn and a short program.

Sunday June 2: Train ride in the Doe River Gorge. Train must leave at 9:45 am sharp as Christian Camp services begin shortly afterward. After lunch, Fred Alsop will be available to lead an informal tour of some right-of-way sights along the Tweetsie Trail (the main between Johnson City and Coal Chute).

Curtis Brookshire, Editor

News From Around the ET&WNC Preservation Community

Linville Depot & Caboose 505 at the Avery County Museum

Society Vice-President Jerry Turbyfill and Tense Banks send the latest from Newland, NC –

The Avery County Museum tells the story of the mining and timbering industries of the mountains of Western North Carolina, especially the roles of the Cranberry Iron Mine, the ET&WNC Railroad, the Camp Brothers, Ritter Lumber, the Linville River Railway, and the 1940 flood and other causes of the industries' ends. When the trains left Avery and Watauga counties, the parts and pieces of the system were scattered. But the love for and the memories of the railroad days could not die. With the gift of the original Linville Depot from Susan and Mike Brown many of these items have found their way to the Avery Museum. From the #505 Caboose to a tiny light bulb, donations large and small are contributing to a museum of which to be proud.

Another piece of railroad history joined the growing collection in January. Though not the largest or the smallest, it was certainly one of the heaviest – the original safe from the Linville River Railway Depot. Thought to have been in the Boone office when the trains ceased operation, it came into the ownership of Glenn Wilcox of Wilcox Travel Agency where it was housed in his top-floor office in the highest building in Asheville at the time. When Mr. Wilcox moved his office years later, he felt it was time for the safe to find a new home. He immediately thought of Tweetsie Railroad, founded by Grover Robbins around another ET&WNC relic, Engine #12. Having been good friends with Robbins for years, Mr. Wilcox gave the LRRy safe to current president Chris Robbins. With no museum on Park grounds at this time, Mr. Robbins has placed the artifact in the Avery County Museum.

Robert Trice of Bud's Auto was selected to move the nearly 1000-pound safe. The Tweetsie Railroad engine crew loaded the safe onto a rollback driven by Robert Brewer, and his crew and men from Gragg's Construction unloaded and positioned the safe in the Depot. Our thanks to all those volunteers! Credit and thanks for the safe's preservation goes to the Wilcox family. A very special thanks to Chris Robbins and Tweetsie Railroad for this artifact, highly sought after by railroad buffs and other collectors.

Jerry continues his work on the #505 caboose as weather permits. It has a new tin roof, 18 new windows and the doors are being refurbished. Any of the old wood parts that can be saved are kept in use.

The Avery County Museum and Historical Society will host a Heritage Festival on the Square in Newland on June 15th that will include genealogy of over fifty local families, displays, crafts, demonstrations, books and authors, music, and old-time games. For info or to participate, please email averymuseum@gmail.com or call the Museum at 828-733-7111, Tues-Fri, 10 am-3 pm. The new website is: www.averycountyhistoricalmuseum.com 🚂

George L. Carter Railroad Museum at ETSU

Fred J. Alsop III, Director of the museum, sends us this –

The 150th Anniversary of the founding of Johnson City kicked off in January. The George L. Carter Railroad Museum was chosen as a center for the festivities with two special Heritage Day Events, one featuring the HON3 ET&WNC layout on January 5, and the other featuring the Clinchfield and Southern railroads on January 26th. On the two intervening Saturdays the museum played host to visitors again, focusing on the "Tweetsie" layout followed by special events downtown in the afternoon. The first event was long-time Historical Society member Ken Riddle narrating several silent ET&WNC archival films at the city's senior center. All the events enjoyed big turnouts with over 100 visitors each Saturday at the Carter RR Museum and standing room only for Ken's program. Johnson City traces its origins to the ETV&G railroad and it was very fitting for our little railroad museum to be the kickoff spot for their birthday celebrations.

The museum's work on the ET&WNC layout has continued with landscaping of the Doe River section between Roan Mountain and Crabtree. With most of the scenery in place, including a log cabin on the hillside, work has begun on the 3 houses and a church that will represent Crabtree. A stub siding there will host a loading dock for shipping rhododendron bushes to Johnson City and other points west. Scale drawings of all 4 buildings have been done and the church has been built from materials cut by John Edwards on the laser knife. One house will have the floor and walls standing with an unfinished roof. The church and the house owned by the Greens still stand in Crabtree, but the others exist only in old photos. Many long-vanished structures on the layout have been "brought back to life" using early photos.

May 31-June 1 will bring the 4th Annual Big Train Show to the ETSU "Mini-Dome" across the street from the Historical Society Convention at the Carnegie Hotel. We look forward to many of the Society members visiting the train show, and the Carter RR Museum will be open extended hours on both Friday and Saturday to receive visitors.

Visit our website: www.memrr.org 🚂



The Boling Chapel Methodist Church sits right next to the ET&WNC mainline, just like the prototype at Crabtree (formerly Crab Orchard). Photo courtesy of Fred Alsop.

Southeastern Narrow Gauge and Shortline Museum

Matt Bumgarner has this news from Newton, NC –

At the SE Narrow Gauge Museum in Newton work continues on:

a) Surface prep and priming of Virginia-Carolina 2-6-0 #50. She will likely have her paint completed by early June, at which point we will turn our attention to her brakes and wheels, with an eye to being able to roll her in and out of the car barn.

b) Body work is 99% complete on West Virginia Midland #1. She will be moving to the museum from our off-site car shop by early June as well.

c) Tongue & Groove yellow pine siding has been cut and primed for Lawndale boxcar #311. After WVM moves out of the shop, this boxcar will move in. We expect a very fast turn around on this restoration, as her "bones" such as sills, roof, and interior framing are all in excellent condition.

d) An inspection of our latest acquisition, the three Lawndale cars from Cruso, North Carolina reveals that one of the cars will need nearly no work at all to be ready for display. The replacement of about only a quarter of the car's siding will be required, along with paint.

Visit us at: www.newtondepot.com 🚩

News from the Historical Society Modeling Committee

Carolina Craftsman is in the early production stages of their HO scale Laser kit of the Cranberry Company Store, using plans from a 1995 Stemwinder by Chris Ford. Western Rails is moving to a new home on or about June 1st, so ET&WNC rolling stock will be on hold until they get settled. On Saturday, April 6, the Alexander Chapter NRHS will have their annual train show in Hickory, \$5 admission, 9-3 at the Hickory Metro Convention Center. One item not directly ET related, but something that will affect many modelers: Northwest Shortline will close on August 30th. They'll accept orders on remaining stock through July 1st. 🚩

One thing I would like for everyone to know is about what a nice old guy Mr. Clarence Hobbs was.

Mr. Hobbs came from a mechanical family I heard. First I knew if him being on the narrow gauge payroll was in the early 1920's when he and Ike Ray got their picture made outside the shop in Johnson City with the contraption they made out of a Johnson City streetcar and a Mack truck that was supposed to be a jitney car to run from Johnson City to Elizabethton. It was probably the biggest failure in railroad history. It wouldn't stay on the track at all. Every time it moved it derailed. But it did make a good picture. They sold it to the poor gullible East Broad Top.

Mr. Hobbs was running the shops in Cranberry during the time after Mr. Hardin died and Cap Allison was the superintendent. A lot of speculation has gone on in the sand house about that time but the facts are that Mr. Hardin was a strong personality during his time at the helm. His men, while they did seem to respect him and kept a tight ship, did not much like him, but they did know that he was all business and expected his directives to be followed. He died and the man in the front office was now a little bean counter who was just weak in managerial skill and wouldn't make a move without Philadelphia signing off on it.

After the big blowup over Cap Allison, Vance was forced by the men and their union to change things and Cap was gone. It is most unfortunate that it all came to that but it did. Francis M. Allison was a fine man, a first class machinist, and a great steam man. He also had the foresight and backbone to let a young black guy named Andy Kern not only work in the shop but educate himself and hone his skills such that in a different time he would have been completely competent and comfortable running a big shop for a big railroad.

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Tentative Convention Schedule May 31-June 2

Friday, May 31

Carter Railroad Museum Open House –
ETSU Campus 10 am-5 pm

4th Annual Big Train Show –
ETSU Mini-Dome..... Noon-6 pm

Convention Registration/Meet and Greet –
Lower Level Ballroom
Carnegie Hotel 3-5:30 pm

Business Meeting –
Lower Level Ballroom
Carnegie Hotel 5:30 pm

Banquet –
Lower Level Ballroom
Carnegie Hotel 6:30 pm

Guest Speaker –
Ken Riddle and Guests
Lower Level Ballroom
Carnegie Hotel 7:30 pm

Saturday, June 1

Wellington's at the Carnegie Hotel –
Open for breakfast 7:30 am

Alan Bridwell Presentation –
The Johnson City Sesquicentennial
Lower Level Meeting Room
Carnegie Hotel 9 am

Carter Railroad Museum Open House –
ETSU Campus 10 am-4 pm

4th Annual Big Train Show –
ETSU Mini-Dome..... 10 am-4 pm

Lunch On Your Own –

Johnny Graybeal Presentation –
100 Years of Train Service to Boone
Watauga County Library
Boone..... 3 pm-4 pm

Park Opens to Convention Attendees –
Tweetsie Railroad..... 4 pm

Convention Train Ride Departs –
Tweetsie Railroad..... 6:15 pm

Dinner Catered by Dan'l Boone Inn –
Tweetsie Palace 7:15 pm

Sunday, June 2

Gorge Train Ride Departs Sharp –
Doe River Gorge 9:45 am

Informal Afternoon Guided Walks –
Agenda TBD
Tweetsie Trail - Green Bridge Landing ... 1:30 pm

Doe River Gorge

Mark Millbourne reports from Hampton, TN –

Spring is here and the busy camp season will be upon us before we know it! Several volunteers have made plans to be here during early April for annual track inspection, indicated repairs and general ROW cleanup. In the meantime, we had what I've heard was the wettest February on record and the heaviest rains washed out a lot of ballast at Clarks Commissary in the upper gorge. The Doe reached near flood stage, not just in February, but also late December.

After an unusual summer "deluge" in 2013, a lot of work was done on drainage at Clarks including installation of a pair of culverts but the new washout, shall we say, "enlarged" one of those paths considerably! Repairs are already in progress including a larger replacement pipe which will probably be installed by the time this is published. The displaced pipe has already been relocated to upgrade drainage at the east end of "Booger Livingston

Cut" (just above Pardee Point) which is another spot known for "heavy flow". High water in the cut during the 2013 deluge stranded a speeder returning campers from an activity and they had to wade through to be rescued by the other speeder!

Mid April to early May will bring many school groups for a train ride and other outdoor activities as well as regular guest groups, some of which have also scheduled a train ride. Of course an extended gorge excursion is also part of the annual Historical Society convention on Sunday, June 2nd. And if you miss the convention, train rides are part of DRG's Saturday "Day Quest" program which kicks off June 15 for a total of ten Saturdays thru Sept. 7. Visit: www.doerivergorge.com/dayquest

Warm weather is also enabling work on the Crown steam locomotive to resume. The work in progress on the smokebox is nearly complete, to be followed by a new ash pan (already fabricated) and grates. In the meantime, the air pump has been taken down for overhaul and the new stack is being finished up.

Visit our website at: www.doerivergorge.com 🚂

Tweetsie Railroad Happenings

Chris Robbins sends us this from Blowing Rock, NC –



Tweetsie opens to the public starting April 5th. They'll be open on Friday, Saturday and Sunday through May. They'll begin their daily summer schedule starting May 24th. Special events planned for 2019: Easter Bunny, April 19-21. Day Out With Thomas™ June 7-16. Fireworks

Extravaganza, July 4th. Cool Summer Nights, Saturdays in July. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles™ July 12, 13 & 14. K-9s In Flight Frisbee® Dogs, July 20-28. Riders in the Sky, August 17 & 18. Railroad Heritage Weekend, August 24 & 25. Ghost Train® September 20, 21, 27, 28, October 4, 5, 11, 12, 18, 19, 25, 26. Tweetsie Christmas® November 22, 23, 29, 30; December 6, 7, 13, 14, 20, 21, 27, 28.

Visit the website: <https://tweetsie.com> 🚂

Member Obituary

Carol Scruggs sent this sad news –

It is with much sadness that I let you know that my husband, Johnny Scruggs, passed away on January 12th. Johnny fell on New Year's Day and broke his hip. He had surgery to repair the hip the next day but had complications afterwards. Johnny loved the ET&WNC Historical Society. He loved learning everything he could about The Tweetsie. He never tired of gaining all the knowledge he could about it. We both always enjoyed the conventions and regretted that we did not get to attend last year's.

The Obituary for Johnny Patrick Scruggs ran in the Johnson City Press on January 14, 2019. www.johnsoncitypress.com 🚂

2019 Spring Hike

Chris Ford reports on the sites visited –

After a one-week weather delay, the 2nd Annual Spring Hike took place on Saturday, March 23rd. The adventure was enjoyed by 19 folks under sunny but cool skies. Places not visited in many years seemed to be the theme as we explored the Valley Creek Bridge site, the site of the MacRae Lumber mill at Linville, the Toe River bridge crossing in Newland, the Cranberry Wye, and the Sand Tunnel and steel bridge in the gorge. Watch for this again next year! 🚂



Photo courtesy of Patricia Jennings.

Ken's Corner continued from page 3

After the big blowup Rabbit Foot Watson came back from the Southern and took over the shop.

Bad move.

The Federal Man visited the shop one morning and killed every locomotive they had, even the 11 which had been hastily tied to a coach to cover the Mail east bound. I always understood that he couldn't take a locomotive out of service if it was tied to a train, but he sure did that day. The next day the big 7 took the Cranberry Local east.

Rabbit Foot was gone after that and Mr. Hobbs came to Johnson City and ran the railroad until he caught the west-bound in 1967.

Mr. Hobbs filled the shop with good men. Andy still was the unofficial lead man, Tighteye Simerly came off the road and into the shop, and Mr. Hobbs got the mechanical end all back up to snuff and got things attempting to make money again.

He formed a friendship with W. H. Blackwell, and the two of them would run the show as long as they lasted.

The one thing I want all of you to know is how kind and welcoming he would be to us boys. In today's litigious world it's hard to think how the boss would not only welcome us around that shop and on those locomotives but encourage us to climb up there and ring bells, get greasy, open the fire door, or any number of other magical things we could find. Mike Dowdy and Keith Holley will tell you the same. Mr. Hobbs would answer any questions we could ask and was never anything but great to us.

His son Jimmy reminds me so much of his Daddy.

Long Ago and Far Away!!

Ken Riddle 🚂