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# The ET TIMES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ET&WNC RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## 35th Annual Convention Highlights and Lots of News

The 35th Society Convention was a big success. We were able to see progress on some major projects happening at our favorite venues. At our business meeting we confirmed Vice President Chris Jessee and Treasurer Dean Smith to full 2-year terms. Attendees also signed a card for Patricia Jennings...more about Patricia further down. Our guest speaker, Tweetsie's assistant director for engineering Tim Smith gave us a detailed briefing on the work underway on #12 to bring her back to operating status. Chris Robins has an update in his column below. We also got to see how far along things have come at the Johnson City Railroad Experience layout. The best thing is that it is operating again. We also saw a spot for Chris Ford's partially-completed model of the Johnson City (Cranberry) Furnace that he displayed at the hotel. Some really nice work all around.

Saturday morning began with a presentation on modeling the ET&WNC's 2-6-0 #2 in F-scale brought to us by member Dan Stenger, who won an award for his effort at last year's National Narrow Gauge Convention. The Doe River Gorge was next where we got to be the first passengers to ride around the loop constructed for the Christmas Train. We were hauled by a small diesel that had some old ET&WNC heritage – see Mark Milbourne's column for more details. We also got to see the Porter steam engine that is being readied for that operation. Unfortunately despite

the Gorge's best efforts, she was still not ready for prime time. We also saw some of Helene's aftermath, both in the Gorge and on our way to and from Tweetsie.

Tim Smith was our host at Tweetsie and gave us a firsthand look at #12 and a chance to see exactly where the rebuild work will be done. The crew gave us a fine ride around the mountain and we made it to the Palace just before it started raining. Johnny Graybeal gave a nice presentation with new material he's uncovered for his upcoming book on the Shenandoah Central. Chris Jessee gave convention goers something new this year: a scavenger hunt involving ET&WNC related locations in the Johnson City area.

My other news begins on a sad note. Our beloved former treasurer Patricia Jennings caught the westbound on Sunday, June 1st after a courageous battle with cancer. I was told that the card we all signed on Friday night reached her on Saturday and our greetings and expressions of love and appreciation were read to her. She will be missed by all. We're also aware of another former member who passed in June, Barbara Romine, who was DJ's mom. Long-time members watched DJ grow up and earn an engineer's job at Tweetsie. Barbara worked at the park and we always visited during Heritage Weekend. She'll also be missed. Later in June, we were able to recover the society's materials that were

*Convention Highlights/News continued on page 2...*

**Time To Pay Your Dues!**

# News From Around the ET&WNC Preservation Community

## The Johnson City Railroad Experience

*Dr. Fred J. Alsop III, Museum Director and President of the Board sends this –*

The new Johnson City Railroad Experience in downtown Johnson City, TN was proud to be a part of the 35th Annual Convention of the ET&WNC RR Historical Society in late May. We were anxious to show society members our new, and much larger “Tweetsie” layout in HO-N scale along with the additions we had made to it in our new location. The layout was begun on the campus of East Tennessee State University in 2011 in what was then the George L. Carter Railroad Museum.

Chris Ford’s detailed and lighted model of the boilerhouse of the Johnson City “Cranberry” Furnace in HO-scale was on



The scratch-built boilerhouse of the Johnson City Furnace is now finished and in place, awaiting completion of the rest of the large complex. *Photo by Curtis Brookshire.*

display as the initial piece of this multi-part blast furnace complex that he is currently building for the ET&WNC layout. The museum houses three additional operating model train layouts, and has many other displays and interactive modules. It also houses some of Michael Hardin’s ET&WNC prototype collection.

This year’s Society Convention coincided with the museum’s 10th Annual Big Train Show held in the 64,000 sq.ft. ETSU “Mini-Dome” and provided an “extra” attraction for



attendees. This was the largest show to date with more than 70 vendors from 18 states displaying their railroad-themed wares.

Model railroads are never finished as the axiom goes, and that is certainly true of all of our museum layouts. Mike Tarter has been modifying the Johnson City N-scale layout so that visitors can operate it with the push of a button reducing the

wear on locomotives and rails alike by eliminating continuous operation of the layout during museum hours. The Knoxville-themed N-scale layout has the addition of newly modified more permanent “vegetation” replacing the lichens that originally covered much of the landscape.

The Mountain Empire Model Railroaders have continued to develop the scenery on their large HO-scale layout as well as improving the overall track plan to make it a much more interesting layout to operate for the public as well as for operating sessions that mimic prototype railroad operations.

The ET&WNC layout now has all of the cork roadbed in place and electrical guru, Frank Fizzie, will soon be installing the track and wiring for the Johnson City section to allow the locomotives to operate over this section. Most of the track will be dual gauge as it historically was in Johnson City. This will allow both standard and narrow gauge operation over the same trackage. Much of the Doe River “water” scape has been redone in much better detail and texture allowing the “rocks” beneath the surface to be highlighted adding a more realistic river scene. The section around the east end of tunnel #1 is finished and scenery work on the Hampton section is beginning.

Programs are an important aspect of the museum and we have monthly “Track Talks” with guest speakers and artists. We have week-long summer camps scheduled in July for children that will give them railroad information and experiences. Many school groups are beginning to visit the museum and we have online teaching modules for teachers.

You can check this all out, as well as other special events, on our website at [johnsoncityrailroadexperience.org](http://johnsoncityrailroadexperience.org) and stay posted on all our happenings. We invite you to come visit us the next time you are in the Johnson City area and experience our railroad museum for yourself. We are located at 207 North Boone Street and are open Tuesday thru Saturday, 10 am to 4:30 pm. “ALL ABOARD”! 🚂

### Convention Highlights/News continued from page 1...

in Patricia’s stewardship while treasurer. Her uncle collected everything from Patricia’s house and Johnny Graybeal was able to pick up the boxes for us. The first thing we worked on were ten membership applications/renewals that Patricia was unable to process as her health failed. There are more items that are not as timely that we’ll get to Johnson City later in the summer. I appreciate everyone’s patience as we recover from the delays this caused. We’re working on improving how we manage the society’s affairs with a more geographically scattered leadership team. With that and with this newsletter, it’s time to renew our memberships and pay our dues. You have the option to pay by check or card as in the past, and we’re working

on getting you an online option that will be ready by the next dues cycle. If you attended the convention this year, look for a survey in your email from Chris Jessee. We’re looking at how we can best improve our annual get-togethers.

Looking ahead, the next event in the calendar is Tweetsie’s Heritage Weekend. We’ll be there as usual and there will be opportunities to photograph that are not usually available on regular weekends, more shop tours (including a chance to see what’s happening with #12) and the evening photo runs with #190. We look forward to seeing as many of you as we can. Now let’s see what’s inside this issue...

*Curtis Brookshire, President & Editor* 🚂



## Doe River Gorge

Mark Milbourne reports from Hampton, TN –

Camp season at Doe River Gorge is in full swing. We're at our midpoint for the summer (and the hot weather, whew!) as I write this and we wrap up on August 8. The Gorge track has been busy again with camper traffic to and from Inner Tubing and the Via Ferrata activities. The Day Quest program on Saturdays has also ramped up with hundreds already having taken the scenic ride to Pardee Point and hearing a bit of ET&WNC history along the way. We're blessed to have volunteer Rick Paffrath back again leading our RR interns, this program now in it's fourth year. We have just two interns this year, Ethan and Michael, but both are experienced alumni. They've already replaced over 100 ties and done many related repairs also marked during spring track inspection. And most days squeezing work in between ops for camp activities.



Pardee Point, DRG. 2025 Historical Society Convention. Photo by Curtis Brookshire.

It was great to see everyone again at the Convention. We had all of our fingers and toes crossed that the Porter would be ready enough to steam for our fundraising banquet event at the end of April and then for the convention also. The steam crew put in a 1000% effort and came oh so close! And while it wasn't ready to pull coaches, it WAS able to make a few test laps, and then to be on display, posing with one coach for the banquet guests, at the new loading area. And while camp season began to divert attention to other priorities, further progress was made hoping yet to run for the convention and again, came oh so close, until a valve gear issue was discovered too late to address in time. But in the meantime, a nearly-forgotten critter had arrived in the form of a 1940s era 5-ton Plymouth. Long-time volunteers Phil Raynes and Steve Eidt had rescued it from a quarry near them in Ohio about 25 years ago and over the next few years had mechanically restored it, with yours truly making a few trips there to help out also. And at the time, the East Tennessee Railway was scrapping the old ET&WNC crane, but its antique Hercules 6-cylinder gasoline engine (with magneto ignition!) was still very serviceable. It was nearly identical to the derelict engine in the Plymouth and they donated it to the restoration. New cab, systems and many finishing details were in progress, but then the much more suitable 8-ton diesel loco was found in 2003 and restoration efforts diverted there, with it coming online for the 2004 season. So the 5-ton sat unfinished at Steve's since then, and was even offered for sale for a time. But with new track and shop facilities coming into use a shop goat was needed to shift coaches and the Porter around. So it was brought down, dusted off, and quickly put into service. However, while an air system had been planned and compressor and tank installed, the rest of the air system was still incomplete. A suitable valve was found and Steve was able to plumb it up to work the brakes on a coach and with the lack of steam power yet, just in time to offer

convention guests a gas-powered ride on the new track! So this year's convention was notable in that the attendees were the very first DRG guests to ride on the new track. And powered by an original ET&WNC prime mover!

Another noteworthy item since the convention guests toured the new RR shop is that *Carpenters for Christ* were back in early June to build warehouse space in another former saw-mill building near the new shop. And due to a nearby project being postponed at the last minute, they had time to build the planned mezzanine level over the machine shop area at the rear and frame up the office and storage space there. So that was an unexpected blessing to have that part of the new shop happen much sooner than expected! We're still very disappointed we were not quite able to show off the Porter in steam. Stay tuned, once camp season settles down and the shop crew gets caught up they are champing at the bit to get back ASAP to the valve gear fix and then another test run. In the meantime, stay cool and have a great summer! Visit our website for more info about our schedule at [doerivergorge.com](http://doerivergorge.com). 🚂

## Tweetsie Railroad Happenings

Chris Robbins sends this from Blowing Rock, NC –



Tweetsie Railroad just completed a busy June, which began with large crowds for our annual Day Out With Thomas event. July is the peak summer month in the Boone–Blowing Rock area, which kicks off with the 4th of July weekend. Our Fourth was blessed—thankfully—with great weather and a spectacular fireworks show, all this after a rainy couple of months. Several improvement projects are underway around Tweetsie Railroad, including a major track drainage upgrade at the site of the “Old Mine” scene. This project—now largely complete—presents the opportunity for a large enhanced train-ride scene, a large Christmas light display, and the possibility of another Wild West train-ride stop and action show.

In late June, Engineering Director Matt Ernst retired from long-time service at Tweetsie Railroad. We wish Matt the best, and appreciate his significant contributions to our railroad operations. Matt learned his skills under Frank Coffey and Frank Aldridge, and was instrumental in the training of a new generation of steam locomotive mechanics, conductors, firemen and engineers.

Repairs to Locomotive No. 12 are now fully underway, after an extensive research and engineering process. Structural engineers have managed to recreate the 107-year-old Baldwin Locomotive Works boiler and firebox plans, using what original drawings and records we were able to accumulate and a lot of on-site measurements. Although the boiler itself is still in great condition, a new firebox is required and is now being fabricated. As part of this major restoration process, we will be replacing all the boiler tubes, the front and rear flue sheets, the dry pipe...and several hundred stay bolts. Onsite work will be commencing in the next couple of weeks. We expect that the rebuilding of Number 12 will be viewable during shop tours on our Railroad Heritage Weekend at Tweetsie Railroad August 23 and 24. We'll miss having two steam locomotives in operation as everyone has enjoyed for many years, but look forward to having a completely refurbished Locomotive #12 ready for the 2026 season. Keep up on our website at [tweetsie.com](http://tweetsie.com). 🚂



## Southeastern Narrow Gauge and Shortline Museum

Johnny Graybeal shares this news from Newton, NC –

We are very pleased to announce that a new shop building is going to be erected at the Southeastern Narrow Gauge & Shortline Museum. Two dual gauge tracks will run into the structure, allowing the Museum's rare ALCO S-3 to be stored during the cold weather months. Last winter, volunteers literally stayed up all night making sure the engine did not freeze up. This is a huge addition to the museum complex, and it shows the devotion the volunteer crews have for museum

property. Grading on the site will start soon. Please visit our website at [newtondepot.org](http://newtondepot.org). 🇺🇸

## News from the Historical Society Modeling Committee

David Kmecik at [3dptrain.com](http://3dptrain.com) is offering sectional track in HO<sub>n30</sub>, HO<sub>n3</sub> and On<sub>3</sub>, including straight and curved track. No switches so far.

Ben Merritt at [merritt3d.com](http://merritt3d.com) is working diligently to catch up on his backlog of orders, and Johnny Graybeal still has freight car kits and decals available. 🇺🇸

## 2025 Historical Society Annual Convention Photos



Doc Tom inspects DRG's newly-rebuilt Porter at the brand-new Doe River Gorge engine shops.

*Photos this page courtesy Curtis Brookshire unless otherwise noted.*



Tim Smith answers questions about the intricacies of boiler work on #12 during our Tweetsie RR shop tour.



Convention attendees enjoy the engine facilities while they view a very-much-disassembled #12 at the Tweetsie RR shop tour on Saturday afternoon.



Engine 12's soon-to-be-replaced smokebox and boiler tubes. Photo by Chris Ford.



Ten wheeler #12's driving wheels out and on display during her tear-down at Tweetsie.



Dan Stenger's gorgeous award-winning F-scale model of ET&WNC #2.