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Upcoming Fall Events and Heritage Weekend News

As I prepare this, it's been a year since Helene passed through the high country of Tennessee and North Carolina. The news has been full of stories of survival, struggle and recovery.

This would be an appropriate place for a message from Society secretary Rae Augenstein from September 9th: "I delivered our convention raffle donation to the Hampton Valley Forge Volunteer Fire Department. Three hundred dollars was raised by selling raffle tickets for a Tenn & NC-themed gift basket. HVFVFD Chief Chris Isaacs sincerely thanks everyone for the donation and says it comes at a good time as their ladder truck, the only one in the county, has a steering leak that will be \$1000 or more to repair.



Photo courtesy Rae Augenstein.

We met at the Hampton Fire station, which is set on a hill overlooking the Doe River Valley and the route of the ET&WNC. Thanks to everyone who donated to this worthy cause!"

Thanks to all who donated and thanks to Rae for making sure the gift made it to its destination.

In other news, Tweetsie's Heritage Weekend on August 23 and 24 was a big success with a comprehensive shop tour allowing us to see how plans were

progressing on #12. Meanwhile 190 and the intrepid crew gave us all a great show with the photo train and what is a treat for Heritage weekend: the non-stop twice-around-the-park run. Johnny Graybeal gave three presentations on the long history of number 12.

September brought us to the 45th National Narrow Gauge Convention in the St. Louis area. Dean Smith had his famous "Vida Division" layout open for operation on Tuesday the second. Dean then spent the rest of the convention presenting clinics on Blue Ridge Mountain logging, featuring his highly detailed Boone Fork Lumber at Shulls Mills. He also detailed how he replicates water including a rather nasty-looking (accurate of course) log pond. His third clinic was a delve into legend, telling the tale surrounding a rather out of scale rodent's visit to the Vida Division. As with most tales, this one got bigger with each telling.

Johnny Graybeal planted the flag for the 47th convention (2027) to be held in Hickory. The 47th NNGC committee is already hard at work preparing to make this one the best yet.

The ET&WNCRRHS is also at work looking at next year's get-together. Vice President Chris Jessee recently conducted a survey asking what members would like to see and do in the future. Thanks to all who responded. We'll have some more news about that in the next issue.

Let's look inside this issue and see what our columnists have to say...

Curtis Brookshire, President & Editor

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 –

Johnson City Railroad Experience aka the George L. Carter Railroad Museum, Inc. October 3rd will mark the one-year anniversary of the opening of the Johnson City Railroad Experience to the public in our new location after our move from the campus of East Tennessee State University, our home for 16 years. We are planning a well-earned celebration to mark this first milestone and invite everyone to share it with us.

In that one year we have welcomed more than 10,000 visitors from 37 states and 4 foreign countries. The hard work by our Mountain Empire Model Railroad (MEMRR) volunteers, our staff, and our talented Assistant Director, Carson Sailor, continues to pay dividends as more and more people find out about us and come to visit.

Our agenda now includes activities for senior groups and school groups and we continue to host, with the George L. Carter Chapter NRHS, local rail excursion trips. During the summer we gained 1,900 sq.ft. of additional space that has become a much-needed meeting venue that has been used by civic groups, the local Chamber of Commerce, and others for dinner receptions and business meetings. The museum has become an active site for children's birthday parties as well.

Work continues on the model train layouts with the MEMRR club doing significant scenery additions to their HO-Scale, Appalachian-themed layout. This club holds their monthly meetings at the museum and intensive worksessions every Thursday evening. Member Mike Tarter has been busy automating the N-Scale layout representing Knoxville, TN, which allows the trains and streetcars to be operated by push-buttons by our visitors. Push a button and a trolley or train rumbles to life and makes a full circuit of their portion of the large 14x22 foot layout. The Carter Chapter NRHS also holds its monthly meetings at our facility.

Several parts of the HO/HOn3-Scale "Tweetsie" layout have had additional scenery added at sections near the Elizabethton coal chute, the west side of Elk Park near state line hill, and at the Cranberry mine area. The additional scenery work on the ET&WNC layout not only are completed to enhance the appearance of this large layout, but have had an additional driver...these sections will appear in national/international publications soon. The HOn3 Annual, published by White River Productions, will feature 6 pages of the layout this fall. Geoff Stunkard and I have worked on an article on "Tweetsie" transportation in East Tennessee and Western North Carolina that includes their "trailer-on-train" modified flatcars to accept truck trailers, their "Jitney" modified street car/bus on rails, and their auto-transport cars that were similar to the railroad's excursion cars but modified to transport



up to 3 Model A Ford-sized autos up the line. The existence of these ET&WNC cars came to light with some sleuthing by member Michael Sagers when he saw small partial images of these cars in the backgrounds of some of the photographs of cars and locomotives along the line. We now have models of the 3 cars (we think there were 3) that were used to carry hundreds of cars and trucks for delivery between Johnson City, TN and

Boone, NC in the beginning in the 1920's.

The National Model Railroad Association will hold its annual convention in Chattanooga, TN in late July/early August, 2026. We are flattered to announce that the publishers of Model Railroader, published by Firecrown Media, have requested an article on our "Tweetsie" railroad layout for one of their spring 2026 editions. This will help focus convention attendees' attention on railroads in this section of Appalachia in general, and on our narrow-gauge railroad in particular. This has placed additional emphasis on our museum to get additional landscaping created on this layout to provide scenes never before photographed or published. Model Railroader has a very wide distribution that will bring our "Tweetsie" railroad layout to many readers who, here-to-fore, have had no information about this mountain layout or of the Johnson City Railroad Experience. The timing of the publication will allow travelers by highway to Chattanooga for the convention who are routing through or near Johnson City to stop in and see the layout and the museum for themselves. We are most excited to be able to continue to help keep the aura of this narrow gauge railroad alive even if it is in miniature form, 1:87 scale.

Serious work is going on in our railroad library with the goal of getting all of our collection of hardback volumes, CDs, and vinyl records cataloged so that this valued resource can be checked out to the public. This is no small task as we have more than 4,000 hardback railroad books in our inventory. Many have been cataloged using the Library of Congress system, but much work by our volunteers remains to be done. We hope to have a functioning library in use by the first of the year, 2026. We are using a system called TopCat to place our collections online as the books and other items are processed that will allow you to search our collection from the comfort of your phone or computer.

We are located at 207 North Boone Street, Suite 2000, Johnson City, TN. You can check us out on our website at johnsoncityrailroadexperience.org, but we would prefer that you come visit and have the "railroad experience" we have to offer in person. We are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 am to 4:30 pm. Welcome Aboard! 🚂

Doe River Gorge

Mark Milbourne reports from Hampton, TN –

Since the last issue, DRG is pleased to report another good camp season. The summer RR crew replaced about 125 cross-ties and did a lot of ditch and vegetation cleanout. Also a shout-out to Ethan Freeman, returning for a 4th summer, who after regular work, spent many evenings and other spare time continuing to clean out “75 foot cut” just before the bridge. His efforts, begun last year, and largely solo, paid off by the end of the camp season and it is now possible again to get a motorcar thru the cut to the bridge. This is the third time in 25ish years that the cut has been cleaned out. I’m sure it was a constant chore for the ET&WNC back then also. The geology changes right there from hard rock to a sandy conglomerate which is always crumbling. In more solid rock, that cut probably would have been another tunnel. And there is apparently similar geology at the long-collapsed Tunnel 5 just beyond the bridges, which I have heard was sometimes called the “Sand Tunnel”.

Our motorcars had some challenges during the summer. The electric “eSpeeder” in particular had its charger die early in the summer season. Then the batteries, which lasted an amazing 15 years, also suddenly needed to be replaced. We decided to try lithium batteries, but they had some odd issues and after a month or so we had to go back to regular AGM batteries. In the midst of this, the motor controller was found dead one morning, apparently from a nearby lightning strike the prior afternoon. That took some logistics to find and configure an equivalent replacement and then it was discovered the “new” charger was also dead, also apparently from a strike! The gas car’s starting difficulty was finally solved by a new solenoid AND starter. Thankfully at least one motorcar was serviceable most days.

This fall we remain busy with many guest groups and they keep the RR fairly active with scenic rides. The fall colors are starting to come in as I write. However DRG does not have a public fall color event planned this year. October is also peak guest group season with every weekend booked, so we’re not able to offer large public day events on top of groups staying for the full weekend. But motorcar and train charters are usually still very doable, so don’t hesitate to contact us to schedule your own “Fall Color” trip. We’ve been noting that coming up soon October 16 is the 75th anniversary of the last ET&WNC narrow gauge revenue trip and it just so happens that a charter group has scheduled for that day. So we’ll be remembering Cy and Sherm and the rest of our “ET Heroes” as we pause at Pardee Point!

Between focus on camp season and various logistics, Christmas Train work has lagged a bit, but is gaining steam again. The partially-completed new multipurpose building seen during the convention has been stuck in engineering and permitting issues, plus lack of funding. However, a new organization has just taken over engineering and we hope to see that completed soon, which will enable final permitting and hopefully a resumption of construction later this fall. The Porter steam loco was very backburner over the summer while keeping up with much non-steam and non-rail equipment. But work is beginning to resume. Jerry Turbyfill has completed all of the cab wood panels and installation is underway. Air system work is starting as well as the valve gear issue found just before the convention. The track contractor has continued to work on

ballasting and tamping the track and likely will wrap up this fall. They’ll also be starting to lay the connector track from the new loop to the gorge track as far as we have ties and rail, and we’re working to source the final bit of needed track material.

Another noteworthy item is that nearly a year after Helene, rebuild work is underway in Hampton on ET&WNC ROW that was washed out. What Google Maps shows as Ralph Hathaway Rd is the section that runs just below Rittertown Road from the bridge onto 19E (and the site of the Hampton Depot) eastbound toward the location of the covered wooden bridge over the Little Doe River, dead-ending into private property. A large section which runs right above the Doe, was completely carried away by the floodwaters. Very large boulders are now being placed to rebuild the riverbank there and presumably the road. Other recent notable Helene recovery milestones in the region are the recent full reopening of the I-26 bridges in Erwin and CSX trains finally operating again on the old Clinchfield route in the Nolichucky Gorge.

Check out our fall schedule at doerivergorge.com. 🚂

Southeastern Narrow Gauge and Shortline Museum

Johnny Graybeal shares this news from Newton, NC –

Volunteers from the museum helped Tweetsie Railroad put on their 20th Annual Heritage Weekend, providing security for Coach 5 which was open for viewing and photography, as well as keeping crossings clear. The museum provided ET&WNC exhibits for the memorabilia room, including the whistle from No. 9, and an ET&WNC lantern. Many ET&WNC items and historic Tweetsie Railroad items were on display. The memorabilia room was busy all weekend long, with many people learning about the museum and the Historical Society. The special train with photo runbys run after the park closed was so popular this year that it was practically full, which is a first for Heritage Weekend. Johnny Graybeal did a power point presentation on the life story of locomotive No. 12, covering the development of the ET&WNC Ten Wheeler design and the history of the engine from 1917 to 2024.

The ET&WNC RR Historical Society was well represented at the 45th National Narrow Gauge Convention in St Louis in early September. Several members were there, including Curtis Brookshire, Dean Smith, Dan Stenger, and Larry Smith. Dean Smith did three ET&WNC related clinics. The Saturday evening closing ceremonies were especially special, as Historical Society founder John Waite was inducted into the “Narrow Gauge Hall of Fame”. Sharon Waite and Chris Ford were there to accept the award. Visit our website at newtondepot.org. 🚂

News from the Historical Society Modeling Committee

David Kmecik at 3dptrain.com had examples of two ET&WNC cars that are being offered for the first time: an auto carrier and a bonnet car. They look similar, but there’s more to discover on these cars. He’s also working on HOn3 track compatible with the Keto produced track distributed by Blackstone years ago. David is working on switches also, which will give flexibility to those who have the older track. 🚂

Tweetsie Railroad Happenings

Chris Robbins sends this from Blowing Rock, NC –



Thank you to all the ET&WNC folks who attended Tweetsie Railroad's recent Railroad Heritage Weekend. The feedback from park Guests and Staff was all positive. Our Staff, volunteers and visitors have made Railroad Heritage Weekend one of our most popular annual events.

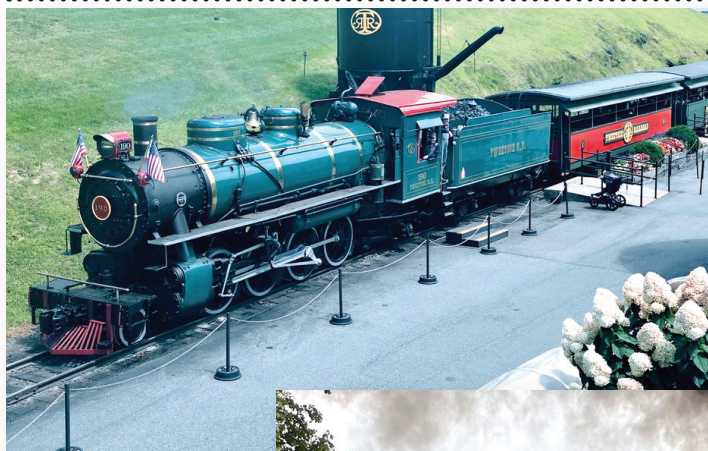
The engineering team that has been assembled on the Locomotive No. 12 project is working diligently on the final details before actual fabrication of the new firebox commences – probably in the next few weeks. Once construction begins, events will happen rapidly on this ambitious undertaking, and we anticipate a very hectic Fall season in the Locomotive Shop. If you were at Railroad Heritage Weekend, you saw how No. 12 has been stripped down to the bare boiler and frame. This will allow us to perform a complete restoration of the locomotive in addition to the necessary repairs. For instance, new flue sheets have been fabricated, new suspension springs

have been ordered, and all the running gear is being refurbished. We're excited to see No. 12 go back together in the coming months.

In the meantime, Locomotive No. 190 is bearing the load. As last year, the Yukon Queen will be handling the daytime AND Ghost Train duty; our Halloween event began Friday September 20th and runs through November 1st. In 2024, we completed just one weekend of the Ghost Train before hurricane Helene hit, putting an abrupt end to all of the Fall season. During that one pre-hurricane weekend, No. 190 did fine with the double duty...but we're keeping our fingers crossed and are as prepared as possible for seven combination Fall/Ghost Train weekends, followed by the opening of Tweetsie Christmas on November 28th. We have complete confidence that our engineering crew can keep things operating smoothly.

Again, we appreciate the support of all the ET&WNC and Tweetsie Railroad enthusiasts; expect to see Locomotive #12 back in operation for the 2026 season. Keep up on our website at tweetsie.com. 🚂

2025 Tweetsie Railroad Heritage Weekend Photos



190 getting ready to depart for another run.
Photo courtesy of Benjamin Livingston.

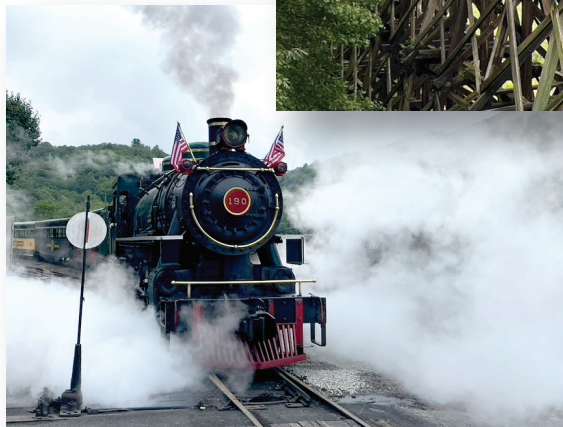


A chat with the crew after a run-by. They do such a great job entertaining the crowds of railroad enthusiasts.

Photos this page courtesy Curtis Brookshire unless otherwise noted.



190 pours it on for a good show on the run-by over Dead Horse trestle.



Steam, steam steam, and the smell of burning coal. What more could you ask for?

Ten-wheeler #12's bare boiler out on display during her tear-down and restoration at Tweetsie.

