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Board of Directors

Officers

Chris Ford, *President*
901-497-0809
chris@cfordart.com

Curtis Brookshire, *Vice President*
703-772-7002
curtis.brookshire@verizon.net

Sharon Stewart, *Secretary*
tuttyjane42@gmail.com

Patricia Jennings, *Treasurer*
pjdrg2006@yahoo.com

Board Members

Johnny Graybeal, *Past President*
Joel Shipley
Dr. Fred Alsop III
Jerry Turbyfill

Newsletter Editor & Society Historian

Curtis Brookshire
curtis.brookshire@verizon.net

Society Website

www.etwncrrhs.org

Address any inquiries to -

The ET&WNC Railroad Historical Society

PO Box 70697
ETSU
Johnson City, TN 37614

It Will Be Johnson City In 2022! How About Hickory In 2021?

This is the newsletter edition where we usually lay out our plans for the annual convention. The Society Board of Directors met via conference call on January 9th and once again decided in the interest of the safety of our members that we won't have our usual convention this year in June. We are planning for 2022 on May 27-29 in Johnson City. We've already reserved space at the Carnegie and rooms are available for reservation if you can plan that far in advance. This is also Memorial Day weekend, so if you find yourself unable to work this in, let us know via email or the iO chat group. We have a brief window of time to make some changes.

So what about 2021 you ask? How does a National convention in Hickory in September sound? Johnny Graybeal and Matt Bumgarner are Co-Chairing the 41st National Narrow Gauge Convention from September 1-4. Here's a chance to visit with an international

audience of narrow gauge modelers and historians. There will be trips to Johnson City, Tweetsie and along the ET&WNC route. How about coming and sharing our favorite narrow gauge with the rest of the world? We held the 31st NNGC 10 years ago in Hickory and it was a big success. Many of us who worked then will work this year too. Your editor will once again chair the modeling and photography contest room. Want to know more? I asked Johnny to say a few words more about the convention. Look for his story inside.

Also inside is a lot of action. Even in the time of Covid, activities keeping the history of the ET&WNC alive are moving forward. Hope you enjoy what you'll see this edition.

On a sadder note, we're putting Ken's Corner in hiatus for a while. When he's able, we'll tell more of his stories.

Curtis Brookshire, Editor

From the workbench of your Society President—

Hey y'all! It's dead-of-winter weather here in Memphis, but likely better than those of you in the ET area have to endure, so I really can't complain...except for missing another ET right-of-way spring hike!

As Curtis said, we will not be having our annual convention again this year, but most organizations are in the same boat. So where does that leave us as an organization? Well, we're still chugging

along (pun intended), and as our Society has historically (no pun intended!) been pretty informally run, your Board has voted to delay elections again this year until our next real business meeting in 2022. All current officers have graciously agreed to stay in their positions until that time. We think it will just be easier this way and hope you agree. But please feel free to email me your thoughts about this or anything else Society related! Thanks, as always, for y'all's kind support of the Historical Society!

CFORD

News From Around the ET&WNC Preservation Community

George L. Carter Railroad Museum at ETSU with focus on the ET&WNC RR HO_{N3} layout

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

The surging of the covid pandemic in Upper East Tennessee and the surrounding region dictated my closing of the Carter RR Museum in late December 2020 for the health and safety of our volunteers and the public. We will be temporarily closed until at least the end of January 2021. Our volunteers are still working on exhibits and operating the layouts, but we remain closed to the public.

Work continues on the HO and N scale layouts by members of the Mountain Empire Model Railroaders (MEMRR), and several of us remain busy creating scenery on the HO_{N3} ET&WNC layout. I have finished scale drawings for the four major buildings that will represent the “Tweetsie” engine and car facilities in Johnson City. They are now being converted into computer software that will guide our laser knife through the processes of cutting out the pieces that will be the principal components of the engine house, sand and oil house, carpenter shop, and car shop. As I am waiting on these parts to be delivered, I have begun to create the Coal Chute that

tory for tons of coal to fuel the little locomotives on their way eastward toward the mines at Cranberry, NC. At this writing, my model of the coal chute is not yet complete. Dual gauge track and walkways still need to be installed on the stringers above the piles of coal and an approach ramp will have to be constructed to get our little locomotives and their coal consists up to the top of the structure. That will all happen in the next few weeks. Landscaping it into the layout will soon follow and one more major piece of the layout will be in place.

I plan to reopen the Carter RR Museum as soon as I feel it is safe to do so for the public and for our members. We plan to be a part of the National Narrow Gauge Convention that Johnny Graybeal will be hosting in early September 2021. We look forward to hosting many of those attendees at the museum so they may tour it and see our ET&WNC RR layout, which is probably the largest in HO Scale in existence.

We had to cancel our scheduled Annual Big Train Show in June of 2020 because of COVID-19. We are part of East Tennessee State University, and the university locked down all of its buildings in mid-March, which included the museum and the Mini-Dome venue our train show uses. I regret to report that I have had to cancel the 5th Annual Big Train Show that

was scheduled for June 4-5, 2021 because ETSU is planning a major renovation of the Mini-Dome beginning in May and running through at least September 2021. Plans are being made for the resumption of the Annual Big Train Show for June 3-4, 2022 and the venue has already been reserved.

When we reopen to the public later this year we invite you to come visit the Carter RR Museum and see what we have been doing to keep the



Coal Chute nears completion on the ET&WNC layout in the George L. Carter Railroad Museum at ETSU and will soon have dual gauge track added to the stringers and a ramp built to connect it to the mainline. Much scenery work will be required to blend it into the surrounding landscape. *Photo courtesy of Fred Alsop.*

ET&WNC railroad alive in the city in which it all started. Information about events and layouts can be found on our website at www.memrr.org 🚂

was the big coaling station along the track on the east side of Elizabethton, TN. Historic photographs and data are essential to the creation of the landscape and the structures that existed along the ET&WNC right-of-way as we strive to recreate these in miniature in the most accurate way that we can. For this project, Johnny Graybeal provided me with a trove of historic photographs and technical information about the coal chute, as well as pictures of the scale model of it that he has been building. They have proved invaluable to me.

Coal Chute was a very large structure, constructed mostly of concrete, that measured 148 feet x 41 feet, and was the reposi-

News from the Historical Society Modeling Committee

David Kmeick at Western-Rails is reintroducing several ET&WNC 3D printed models in a gray material that's easier to work with and shows detail more effectively. His latest releases: CK02 ET&WNC Gondola conversion for AMS Flatcars, NE03 Bobber Caboose 205, FC06 32' Flatcar, GN06 32' Gondola, each available in O and HO scales. TC01 Tank Car and HC01 Small Hopper are available in O, HO and N(!) scale. Check their website at <http://westernrails.com> 🚂

Southeastern Narrow Gauge and Shortline Museum

Matt Bumgarner has this news from Newton, NC –

Q4 of 2020 ended with the museum having scaled back its operations dramatically due to the ongoing pandemic, as our annual Hobo Luncheon for volunteers, as well as various tree-lighting ceremonies around the area were canceled. That being said, much work continued behind the scenes. The highlight of the quarter was the move of West Virginia Midland #1 – the only remaining narrow gauge baggage car with a southeastern heritage – to our covered museum pavilion. She was placed on narrow gauge trucks and rolled on rails for the first time in more than 80 years.

A lot of work was done on our 1936 Dodge Brothers REA truck. The ground-up restoration has advanced to the point of a completely restored chassis, engine, transmission, and rear end. It can now be driven around the shop and run for periods of time.

In the model railroad center, construction on the new HO/HOn3 layout continued, with its major loop being completed. Of particular interest to ET&WNC fans, a piece of memorabilia that had been heretofore unknown showed up on the railroad auction circuit. Fortunately,

one of our members was able to acquire a builders plate of ET&WNC 2-8-0 #6, and it was placed on display at the museum, along with the whistle of #9, as well as various locks, keys, and lanterns.

Please come visit the museum, and better yet, please join us as a member for rates as low as \$15 for students, and \$20 for seniors. There are a host of benefits, as well as a new

online quarterly magazine featuring southeastern narrow gauge and short line topics. Also, plan on joining us at the 2021 North Carolina Railroad Expo in Hickory, NC on April 9/10, and of course for the 41st National Narrow Gauge Convention, September 1-4. It's gonna be a great year!

Visit our website at www.newtondepot.com 🚩

Linville Depot & Caboose 505 at the Avery County Historical Museum

Jerry Turbyfill sends us the latest from Newland, NC –

Avery County Museum has a new director: Anita Johnson. We'll be in touch with her for the spring newsletter. Jerry is working on getting a professional to letter caboose 505. It should be standing tall for visitors later in the year. Find more information about the Museum by visiting their new website at www.averymuseum.com 🚩

41st National Narrow Gauge Convention Preview

Johnny Graybeal - 41st NNGC Chairman

The decision has been reluctantly made to not have an ET&WNC RR Historical Society Convention in 2021, but there is an event, going on very near to Tweetsie Country, that might interest ET&WNC fans. The 41st National Narrow Gauge Convention will take place September 1-4, 2021 in Hickory NC. This convention drew an attendance of 1600 people in 2011 from all over the world to Hickory NC, and we hope to exceed that number this year as the dreaded pandemic subsides.

What takes place at a National Narrow Gauge Convention you might ask? Well, consider it an ET convention and the Big Train Show in Johnson City put together, times 1000! Instead of just concentrating on the ET&WNC, the emphasis is on narrow gauge in general and modeling in particular. A narrow gauge convention runs for four days, and you really cannot get everything done in that short amount of time. There is a trade show that is usually about 300 tables, where manufacturers from Bachmann Trains down to cottage manufacturers set up to highlight their new products and offer them for sale. Railroadiana collectors often find treasures from vendors, and there are always people selling books and shirts. You won't find any rusty Lionel or HO cars with horn hook couplers, that's for sure. The NNGC is one of the premiere events in model railroading, no matter what scale you model.

There are also approximately 45 clinics that give their clinic twice over the four days. Usually five clinics are going on at any one time. These vary from historians talking about particular railroads, to modelers talking about techniques, to makers showing off new materials and new technology. It is an opportunity to learn from some of the best people in the narrow gauge world.

There is a model contest that is unequaled anywhere. Almost everything entered is scratch built and represents a narrow gauge subject. You will simply not believe that some of the entries did not come out of a box from a premium model maker. The competition is always fierce and the prizes are sorely won. Along with the model contest there is a photo contest. Some of the subjects are model trains and some are of the real thing. In many instances it will be very difficult to tell which is which. You always hope to take an awe inspiring image, these people have succeeded!

ET people have been blessed to get to visit the ET&WNC layout in Johnson City for several years now. It is amazing how well the railroad has been recreated in small scale. This layout will be open for the NNGC, but so will over 20 layouts from all over the region surrounding Hickory. Nearly half of them have been covered in railroad model magazines in the last few years. These layouts will be open to convention attendees only. If you enjoy seeing hard work in small scale, you will enjoy this part of the convention.

There are some special events being planned as well. Tweetsie Railroad will have a private afternoon event for Convention attendees on the Thursday of the convention. They will do what they traditionally do with the Society after hours, but here they will be running both trains for double the excitement. Participation in this event is free to paid convention attendees, with a small extra charge for spouses. There will also be a bus trip to Asheville to visit the famous Biltmore House for the spouses, so they don't have to "talk trains" for all four days with their husbands.

Probably most interesting to ET fans is the bus trip through Tweetsie Country on Tuesday August 31st. We do this the day before the convention begins so that vendors can participate as well as attendees. A tour bus will leave Hickory in the morning, travel to Boone, where they will pick up the route of the ET/LR and follow it to Linville. A guide on

...See NNGC Story continued on page 4

Doe River Gorge

Mark Milbourne reports from Hampton, TN –

The fall update reported on the very different 2020 at DRG and outlined the fall “Maze of Life” corn maze/fall festival program that was just beginning at the time of writing. It ran for 6 weekends thru Nov. 1 and we’re happy to report it was quite successful, drawing about 5400. While this did not make up for the loss of summer camp income, it certainly helped offset that loss and brought out many in the community to get to know DRG for the first time. So while there were no summer camps, many seeds were planted, the fruit of which we are confident will be seen this year and beyond. Of course most rode the train and heard about the ET&WNC, and the corn maze dates included Friday October 16, as we marked the 70th year since the last ET revenue trip in 1950. I’m sure the crew that day, feeling a little subdued knowing it was the last trip and that rails would be pulled up soon, never dreamed that trains would one day again run in the gorge and that their little “narr’ gauge” would continue to be remembered this many years later.

We were blessed with mostly good weather and good fall colors and during the peak weekends of the season, trains operated nearly continuously to keep up with demand. The maze was open at night, with the first public night time rides being offered. Between this and the extended season for Day Quest Saturdays, we tallied about 190 trips for 2020 which is over 50% more than 2019, in spite of the loss of school groups and most guest groups.

The Crown steam locomotive reached a major milestone, being completed to a point of test firing during October. This just in time before freezing weather required it to be winterized. But not before it made a short test run up thru the first tunnel to blow its whistle into the gorge! While there are many details to be finished, we expect these will be completed in 2021. But we have determined that the gorge track needs improvements before it can be operated regularly.

The initial track restoration in 2000 replaced every other tie, which has been sufficient for the small diesel locomotive. But with most ties now 20 years old and the Crown being much heavier with narrower-than-usual wheel treads, it is necessary now to add the second tie, at least at every rail joint. We hope this can happen in 2021, but it is a much bigger project than usual for the RR, from a funding and a labor standpoint. DRG has a number of regular camp maintenance projects, some fairly urgent, deferred from 2020 due to loss of income, that also need funding. And while we are optimistic that we will be able to hold summer camps this year, it is by no means certain. But in the meantime, it’s possible that the second round of federal relief funds, now in progress, may enable the track upgrade to begin this year. So stay tuned! Visit our website at www.doerivergorge.com 🚩

Tweetsie Railroad Happenings

Chris Robbins sends this from Blowing Rock, NC –

I’m pleased to report that Tweetsie Railroad had a very successful Tweetsie Christmas event – a bright spot in a dismal 2020 season. In October, the Governor of NC decreed that amusement/theme parks could open at reduced capacity (not a problem for this limited-scale event) and could operate rides at 50% capacity. With the reduced number of passengers and cleaning time between each trip, we ran Christmas trains every 40 minutes (versus 30 min. previously). To help make up for reduced capacity, we had 24 nights of Tweetsie Christmas instead of the usual 12. We were fortunate to fill every available seat on every train on every night, no matter the weather. There was a great pent-up demand for events where the entire family could enjoy an authentic holiday experience. We were gratified when many area residents let us know how nice it was to hear the Tweetsie Railroad train whistles again. There was one night when the train pushed through about 4” of snow. Engine #12 faithfully worked each night except one, when a gauge cock developed a leak and #190 was fired up to take over. April 2nd is the target date for the 2021 season opening. I hope to see a lot of our ET&WNC fans throughout the coming season, at Railroad Heritage Weekend, and when the National Narrow Gauge Convention makes its field trip to the park. Check Tweetsie’s website for complete details at www.tweetsie.com 🚩



NNGC Story continued from page 3

the bus will point out locations along the line. Many Society members know these locations already but you might learn something from the guide. The tour bus will stop for nearly an hour at the Linville Depot at Newland, which will be open for inspection. From there the bus will travel to Doe River Gorge for a train ride up the Gorge, to the bridges and back via train and motor car. Lunch will be provided at the Gorge. From Hampton, the bus will travel on to Johnson City to visit the Tweetsie Layout at the George L. Carter Museum. At that point the bus will travel back to Hickory via interstate, making a circle up and over the mountains. There is an extra charge for this bus trip but it will be well worth the cost.

Probably the best part of the ET&WNC convention is the feeling of family and the camaraderie felt with people who enjoy the same subject. We come together to learn and enjoy what others have to share. I have been attending National Narrow Gauge Conventions for over 15 years now, and I can tell you that you get the same experience at these events. You are with people who enjoy talking about trains as much as you do, and the shorter, narrower ones, just like you. These are people who love the Rio Grande, East Broad Top, or White Pass & Yukon just as much as we do the ET&WNC. They enjoy logging and mining, just as much as we do, if not more.

This convention will give you the opportunity to broaden your horizons. Learning how other narrow gauges solved problems helps us understand how the ET dealt with the same things. Understanding how the ET compared to the rest of the narrow gauge experience will help you appreciate our railroad even more. People are talking trains from breakfast each morning to drinks in the bar after the trade show closes, making each day about 16 hours long. Every day is packed with things to do, and every year I go home wishing I could have seen and done more.

This is only a brief outline of what goes on during a National Narrow Gauge Convention. Come help me be an ambassador to narrow gauge fans in general and modelers in particular of how important and how unique our little railroad was, both in the national railroad experience and the narrow gauge. With the ET convention cancelled, I guarantee you will enjoy the NNGC. We would love to have you. There is much more information, along with hotel opportunities and registration forms, available online at www.41nngc.com 🚩

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

Hickory, NC 28601
www.41nngc.com
41nngc@gmail.com



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- 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