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Dean Smith To Assume Duties As Our Society Treasurer *Plus* Upcoming Convention Plans!

We have a new Treasurer. Patricia Jennings has been in declining health for many months and her condition became serious enough that she has retired from her former duties. Patricia has been Society Treasurer for many years, has served our group well, and we'll miss her. I ask that you keep her in your prayers.

Our Board of Directors met in November to discuss this issue and made a quick call to Vida, MO to ask Dean Smith if he would be willing to fill the remaining time of Patricia's term. He graciously accepted and we're in the process of transferring duties to Dean. As of this writing, Sunday February 16th, we have submitted minutes to PNC Bank to obtain access for Dean for the Society's account. We're waiting for approval from PNC and will move forward swiftly once that happens – hopefully by the time this newsletter reaches you. Several members have unprocessed membership renewals and we have a few new members waiting on their membership cards. We'll get all this fixed as soon as Dean gets up and running. Dean is a founding member of this Society and we're sure he'll do a fine job as Treasurer.

Next up: our 2025 Convention is scheduled for Friday May 30 through Sunday June 1. We're in the process of planning our schedule. As you'll see in our columns below, there is much happening in the Johnson City area at the Railroad Experience Museum and at

Doe River Gorge. We will have our train ride at Tweetsie along with the latest news on how number 12 is coming along.

We have a block of rooms at the Carnegie Hotel set aside for our attendees. When you call to reserve, the block is E TN-Western NC Railroad Historical Society. Rooms are available from May 29 through June 1. Now, here's the catch: if you're planning to come, reserve your rooms as soon as possible. After April 29th the unreserved rooms in our block will be released back to the hotel.

We look forward to seeing everyone and we'll have more details in the next issue. We've seen some messages circulating on the iO group and Facebook about traveling to the ET&WNC area in the spring. Our advice is to check in advance before you travel. There are still many areas that haven't recovered from Helene and others that are only partially recovered. Check your routes to see what's open and please give those living there space to recover and if their businesses are up and accepting visits from tourists, be generous and bring extra patience.

We don't have any new modeling news this go around, but we'll keep our eyes open for upcoming releases for the next newsletter. So, let's check in with Fred, Mark, Chris and Johnny to see what's happening...

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 –

Our museum opened to the public on October 3, 2024 and we've had more than 4,000 visitors by this writing in mid-January 2025. The museum that was on the campus of ETSU for 16 years has come back to life in a larger facility as a nonprofit corporation and with operations 5 days/week, Tuesdays through Saturdays.

Let me take you on a brief tour, and invite you to come see for yourself. The first thing you will see is the big "Johnson City Railroad Experience" above the entrance of our building at 207 North Boone Street. We have plenty of parking, over 100 spaces, around the building unlike our limited space for vehicles on the university campus. The second is there's an admission charge (very reasonable) because we now pay rent for our new space.

We now have an orientation theatre with a short history of railroading in Johnson City, the catalyst that founded the city with the foresight of Henry Johnson in 1858, and an introduction to our museum. We also have a gift shop (a must for all museums) where you can pick up some souvenirs of your visit.

There are four large model train layouts. Two of them, both in N-Scale, represent Johnson City and Knoxville, TN. They are the beginning for an interactive scavenger hunt in which visitors can engage as they travel through the museum. The Mountain Empire Model Railroaders have a HO-Scale layout that is still being recreated and is much larger in scale trackage than the layout they had out our old site. The club is very active and act as docents for the entire museum in addition to our regular museum staff. Their new layout is much more complex than the one it has replaced with numerous elevations and a much more dynamic track plan that takes their trains along several peninsulas covered with local East Tennessee towns and scenery.

The largest layout is our HO/HO_{n3}-Scale East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Railroad layout. This, our internationally published layout, depicts the "Tweetsie" railroad in 1925 as it ran its original 19th century route from Johnson City, TN to Cranberry, NC. With the added gallery space, we have been able to add sections representing Johnson City and Elizabethton, TN on the western end of the line and extended sections at Hampton, TN, and Elk Park, and Cranberry, NC on the eastern end. Work to recreate these important sections is well underway and visitors can watch as we attempt to faithfully produce, in miniature, the landmark buildings and structures that will bring this little narrow-gauge mountain railroad back to life.

The new museum, however, is more than just a building housing several model railroad layouts. Our "Little Engineers" room is a big hit with the children with its colorful rubberized floor (great for being on one's hands and knees), its original wall paintings, cabinets filled with Thomas train toys, and a big G-



Scale train running just below the ceiling. We have a railroad-themed library with approximately 4,000 volumes that is currently being Library of Congress catalogued and will soon be available on line for distant perusing and for checkout. Active and interactive is our goal, and visitors will find plenty of opportunities to interact with our displays. We also have a railroad simulator in the form of an NS locomotive cab that contains two interactive simulators that allow our guest to drive a train, steam or diesel. Also of interest is a hobo trail with hobo icons scattered throughout the galleries that give our visitors

the same information from symbols scratched on picket fence posts that the real knights-of-the-road used to convey information to their cohorts on the opportunities and the dangers in any rail-side locale. Available too is a station with monitors tuned to railroads across the country where you can see trains running along their assigned routes and listen to the radio chatter between towers and engineers in real time.

In addition, our galleries display railroad artifacts. One of the largest collections is from Michael Hardin who has collected ET&WNC artifacts and memorabilia since he was a young man. Want to see real ET&WNC tickets? We have a cabinet filled with them from Elizabethton. Want to see a locomotive tire? We have one from ET&WNC #12. We have a large collection of original railroad photographs on display and lots more. Many of our exhibits are refreshed on a regular basis, and you should be able to find new displays if you plan your visits on a quarterly basis. Programs are being developed for school groups with STEM-themed lessons that will be enacted both at our area schools and in the museum as students and teachers visit.

A summer camp program is being developed that will allow students to work with us for a week, both in the museum and in the out-of-doors. A speaker series is being put together with plans for one outstanding guest a month in the evenings, being coupled with a movie night at the museum (railroad movies of course) and special occasion evenings. "Love is a Train Wreck", our anti-valentine party was held on February 13th as our first venture into this kind of event. Tune into "Mr. Carson's Neighborhood", our weekly Facebook series, to see what is happening.

The George L. Carter Chapter NRHS is working with the museum to co-host rail excursions with the first one on May 2nd to Knoxville to ride the rails on the 3-Rivers Rambler, followed by a luncheon cruise on the paddle wheel ship the "Star of Knoxville". We're hosting the spring meeting of the National Railroad Historical Society in Johnson City in conjunction with this event.

Lots of things are happening at the Johnson City Railroad Experience, make plans to come be a part of the experience soon. We are open Tuesday-Saturday, 10am to 4:30pm. Check our website at johnsoncityrailroadexperience.org to keep posted on all our happenings.

"ALL ABOARD"! 🚂



ET&WNC #12 at Hanging Rock in the Gorge.

Southeastern Narrow Gauge and Shortline Museum

Johnny Graybeal shares this news from Newton, NC –

The winter months have been a little quieter at the Southeast Narrow Gauge and Shortline Museum. Our annual Hobo Luncheon was held December 7th, recognizing everyone who has participated in museum activities throughout the year. Volunteer crews have been working for a year to repair and put new siding on our wooden caboose, Southern Railway X2715.

The severe cold that has been going on for a month now has been hard on the volunteers, as a group of them has been caring for the operating Alexander Railroad ALCO S-3 that belongs to the museum. Concerns about the block heater required volunteers to spend several nights with the engine to make sure that the engine did not freeze up, damaging now impossible-to-get parts. Their sacrifice ensured that this historic piece of North Carolina history will continue to run and introduce young people to the first generation of diesel locomotives. Please visit our website at newtondepot.org. 🚂

Tweetsie Railroad Happenings

Chris Robbins sends this from Blowing Rock, NC –



Tweetsie Railroad is closed for the Winter, but we just finished our Tweetsie Christmas event where we enjoyed good crowds and – for the most part – decent weather, for that time of year. Fortunately, the event was completed before it got really cold and snowy. The park will open for the 2025 season on April 5th.

It's no secret that the late part of the 2024 season brought two significant challenges for Tweetsie Railroad. Hurricane Helene shut us down for the entire month of October – not because we had a lot of physical damage, but because power to parts of the park was out for a few weeks, and the state and local authorities were discouraging travel to the mountains. We did have a significant landslide on the back side of the rail loop which necessitated a complete rebuild of a 300-ft section of

track, and a very visible trackside erosion below the locomotive shop. Both of these were repaired well before Thanksgiving.

But, in August – before anyone ever heard of Hurricane Helene – locomotive #12 had to be taken out of service when we discovered some thin spots in the firebox. Very distressing, because – darn it! – the machine is only 107 years old. In the meantime, locomotive #190 got us through the one September weekend – daytime and Ghost Train – before the Helene shutdown, and all through Tweetsie Christmas. The engineering analysis of #12 has been completed, and we have a repair plan that will begin very soon. It is uncertain when #12 will return to active duty, but we have assembled a skilled team of engineers and fabricators with a good restoration program in place. We'll keep all the friends of Tweetsie Railroad updated throughout the process. Check our website for more information at tweetsie.com. 🚂

Johnson City Cranberry Furnace Model

Chris Ford sends this from Collierville, TN –

Since there's no official modeling news in this issue, *and* I needed to fill a hole, *and* I had something that was modeling related to fill that hole....well then, here we go!

One year in, this is the current state of my HO-scale model of the Johnson City Cranberry Furnace, with plans for it to fill an important role on the ET&WNC layout at the Johnson City Railroad Experience Museum. With this industry on one end of the ET line and Cranberry Mine on the other end, a big part of the existence for the ET&WNC RR comes to life. The 30-year symbiotic relationship of these two heavy industries helped complete the development of all the of the railroads that served it (Southern, Clinchfield, and the ET&WNC) and of Johnson City itself. Hauling iron ore was the principal reason the ET was built, so this was a big “feather-in-the-cap” of Johnson City.

Ground was broken and the build of the furnace was started in 1890, but lots of financial wranglings and global economic issues pushed that out another ten years, with it finally being “blown-in” in 1900. Never one of the large powerhouse blast furnaces of its time, and not a big money-maker capable of upgrading and keeping up with the latest state-of-the-art improvements, the Johnson City Furnace finally met its demise in 1930 at the beginning of the Great Depression.

This model will anchor the end of the line in Johnson City and hopefully be a showpiece and a learning experience for Museum visitors. This is the newly finished Boiler House and Chimney to go with not-yet-finished hotblast stoves and lots of piping. But things are looking up with lots more to come! Follow the progress of this build on the iO group site here: groups.io/g/ETWNC. 🚂



Doe River Gorge

Mark Milbourne reports from Hampton, TN –

Hope everyone has been staying warm! DRG sure shivered thru the recent polar vortex with single digit temps. Thankfully a nice break now as I write with very mild weather for the next week as we head into February. And now that we've turned the corner into 2025, summer camp season suddenly seems much closer and we're glad to report that YTD enrollment is a bit ahead of the last few years.

Carter County continues to recover from Hurricane Helene. In Hampton, some houses are repaired and new construction is lately visible where others are being fully rebuilt. DRG has been able to provide housing for a number of relief groups working in Hampton and Roan Mountain. However other places still sit damaged and vacant. A local relief organization has placed many dozen RVs to those displaced, but the recent frigid weather has undoubtedly been difficult for those living in such. Recent local news indicates a \$20 million state package is in the works to replace Hampton High School (at a flood safe site). In Elizabethton, the primary Doe River bridge on Broad Street is still closed pending repairs expected to extend into May. US 321 in Elk Mills near the NC state line also remains closed; that area probably took the hardest hit in the county.

The other major recovery item, that has received very little press, is the removal of downed trees and related debris along the roads and river. It was not just a flood event, but a huge wind event. State and contracted crews are still busy with this and an absolutely huge pile of debris has been accumulating adjacent to the Hampton High School. The surrounding mountains also have large areas of downed trees and the recent winter snows highlighted a large section visible from 19E just above the ET&WNC right-of-way on the Hampton side of Tunnel #1.

Winter has not prevented some progress on the new track and the main 1.3 mile loop will be closed soon. As I write, track has reached back around from the main camp area to near to the DRG sign on the entrance road which is the junction point of the extension from the existing tunnel/gorge track. The DRG track plan needs several hundred more feet of rail than came from Oklahoma and after some extensive "shopping around" for more 90RA, hopefully we've finally located some at a reasonable price and it will be here by the time you read this. Once the loop is laid, the next phase will be ballasting and leveling/tamping. The primary grading for the extension track from the gorge along the lake and down past the office is also now complete and should see final profiling and grooming soon, now that we are past the worst of the winter.

The railroad shop has all of its doors now, and much progress on lighting, heat and plumbing. Having a good work-

space, though still unfinished, has enabled hundreds of hours to be spent on the first Porter steam loco (being numbered ET&WNC #17). The tender has been completely gone thru with many frame, tank and plumbing improvements and is about 90% complete. Converting from propane to oil firing, it has a newly-fabricated oil tank with steam line for fuel preheating. The loco itself, now with new boiler in place, is about 75% back together. Current work is final smokebox details and putting all the plumbing back in place, with many improvements and fixes of some "redneck" arrangements that had accumulated, likely from it's Huff & Puff days in Memphis. The cab has been extensively modified as well, and the rebuilt frame was recently set back in place, on temporary wood blocking, to enable the final height and related mounting details to be worked out. The oil burner and new firebox door are also in place and a test firing should be possible within the next month or so. It seems very possible that both the Porter and the new loop will be serviceable by mid-spring and DRG is hopeful to mark this milestone by giving rides during our annual fundraising banquet at the end of April. And of course, after a few "almost" years, finally some steam for the ET&WNC convention! All prayers and donations to see this major milestone finally completed greatly appreciated!

The other major item in the Christmas Train project is the large multi-purpose building which, in season, will be the loading area for the Christmas Train. Between winter, funding, and various finishing details still pending, it has seen little visible progress. But fundraising work is ongoing and hopefully will enable progress to resume as quickly as the various details are settled.

And if you haven't already, be sure to check out the DRG YouTube channel which has some recent update videos – one of the boiler set-on, and a drone tour from mid-December showing the extent of the new trackwork and new building. More video likely forthcoming as the loop is completed. "Like and Subscribe!"

In the meantime, for summer, fall, and spring, DRG has been working to add railbiking as an activity both for campers and guests as well as for public scenic tours. A lot of research was started last spring which resulted in a prospective builder bringing a preliminary prototype for inspection/trial in late October. After followup feedback/discussion to refine many details, the first "production" bike is expected mid-February for final tweaks and approval with 4-5 additional bikes to be supplied by camp season. These will be four seat "quad" bikes similar to those at many other railbike concessions, possibly with a couple two-seat "tandem" in the mix. Go online and check out "Andrews Valley Rail Tours" which operates on a section of Great Smoky Mountains RR as well as "Tracks and Yaks" at Frostburg MD,

on the Western Maryland Scenic – DRG's bikes will be similar to these.

So! Lots to see at the convention in May! Looking forward to seeing many of you then. But after Helene, we are reminded of what they say around here "Lord willin' and the creek (Doe River) don't rise (again)!" Visit our website for more info on our schedule at doerivergorge.com. 🚂

