

FOUNDED IN 1989

# The ET TIMES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ET&WNC RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## 36th Annual Convention Happening In Mid-May!

The 36th Annual ET&WNCRRHS Convention is scheduled to take place this year from Friday, May 15th through Sunday, May 17th. Activities we have planned include our annual “boo-fay” dinner and business meeting on Friday night at the Carnegie Hotel with elections for President and Treasurer. Saturday we’re planning for a program at the Johnson City Railroad Experience followed by a hike (or bike if you’re bringing one) along the Tweetsie Trail from Johnson City down to the location of the Sand Spur. There’s an opportunity for exploring the spur further following the hike. Then it’s off to Tweetsie for our annual ride and Dan’l Boone Inn dinner at the Palace. We’re also planning for an entertaining presentation. Sunday, we’re looking at another ROW trip followed by lunch at the Gorge and our annual ride/hike up to the deck bridge.

We have a block of 16 rooms set aside for reservations at the Carnegie between Thursday May 14th through Saturday May 16th (with check out Sunday the 17th). Price will be \$149 for Thursday and \$199 per night for Friday and Saturday. Use “E TN-Western NC Railroad Historical

Society” when reserving your room. The block will get released for general use after April 14th so *GET YOUR RESERVATIONS BOOKED SOON AS YOU CAN!* We’ll have more details on the convention including a complete schedule of events in the next newsletter.

Now, what’s going on in our world? Lots of activity as you’ll see. The Johnson City Railroad Experience continues to grow as does the full-size railroad at the Doe River Gorge. Tweetsie Railroad is busy preparing for their 70th(!) season and work continues on #12. And... there’s another former member of the ET&WNC family that’s on its way to coming back to life. We also note the passing of a giant in the Narrow Gauge movement. Read on and see what else our columnists have to say...

*Curtis Brookshire, President & Editor* ✦



Even though we’ve used it more than once over the years, this 2018 photo, courtesy of Tweetsie Railroad, just says it all for this time of year and the weather we’re enduring right now. With great memories! *Chris Ford.*

# 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 –*

In late November of 2025, our railroad museum celebrated its one-year anniversary of being open to the public. We have accomplished a lot in our first year completing new displays, continuing to work on our operating model railroad layouts, instituting field trip opportunities for local school children, hosting special events, and much more. During our first year we were also able to enlarge our museum by more than 1,600 sq ft with the addition of a gallery that serves as a meeting/event/classroom facility providing much-needed space serving these kinds of events.

As with any museum, funding is always a concern and we have been active submitting grants and soliciting donations. The public has responded favorably and we have had more than 10,000 visitors in our first year. Our railroad museum hosts two organizations – the George L. Carter Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society (NRHS) and the Mountain Empire Model Railroaders (MEMRR). Our NRHS chapter hosted the national organization's Spring Conference in Johnson City last spring and did such an outstanding job with it that our chapter's president, Scott Stoloda, has been placed on their planning committee for future national organization events. Carson Sailor, the museum's Assistant Director, has been asked to be an instructor in the NRHS's summer RailCamp in Delaware this year. The Carter Chapter is also co-hosting rail excursions with the museum and they are already planning several for 2026. The MEMRR members continue to be the major assistants doing the heavy lifting for our Annual Big Train Show held in East Tennessee State University's 64,000 sq. ft. "Mini-Dome" facility and are already helping with the planning of the 2026 event on May 28-29.

As mentioned above, the four operating model railroad layouts continue to be worked on with scenery improvements and operating upgrades. The two museum N-Scale layouts – one representing Johnson City and the other Knoxville – now have push-button running features allowing our guests to operate the trains and street cars on the layouts manually as part of their interactive visitor experience. The MEMRR HO-Scale layout now has two of its three legs completed scenery-wise and is fully operational. This layout is E-shaped with the third leg of the "E" being the area now under construction. It will eventually hold yard tracks and structures to compliment the 21-stall roundhouse that is its anchoring structure. The museum's ET&WNC "Tweetsie" HO/HOn3 layout now has the newly created sections west of Cranberry, east and west of Elk Park, and the Hampton area nearly completed with landscaped scenery and appropriate structures for the 1925 time period the layout represents. Work will soon begin on the Elizabethton area. Our very large ET&WNC layout continues to get national publicity. An 8-page article on the layout appeared in the 2025 "HOn3 Annual" making this the 12th con-



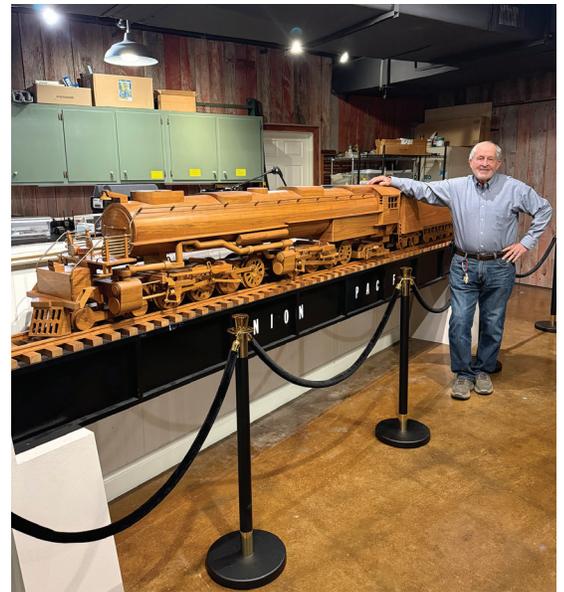
secutive year it has been featured in this yearly publication. A model railroad magazine with a much wider national/international distribution, "Model Railroader", requested an article on our "Tweetsie" layout and Geoff Stunkard has already submitted it to their editors. Watch for us in one of their spring issues this year.

Early this year we will be getting three G-Scale roadbeds professionally installed from the ceilings of our entrance & gift shop area, our new large meeting room, and our first gallery reaching back to the entrance of our ET&WNC layout. This is being funded from a dedicated gift from a local foundation and will provide us these additional areas with large running trains for the benefit of our visitors.

Our most outstanding recently-donated display is a group of hand-crafted wooden model trains that we received in late December of 2025, from their creator, David Cunningham, a resident of South Carolina. David's hobby is woodworking and his passion is trains and making models of them in large scale. David and his wife live in South Carolina, but are both natives of the Johnson City, TN area, and some of the wood he used for his creations are from trees that grew here. After several visits to our museum last year, he decided to donate his trains to us. They include the Union Pacific "Big Boy" that I am standing by in the photo to give you some ideas of just

how large his finished art works are, and models of the 4-4-0 Civil War "General" locomotive, a shay, and a 19th-century 4-4-0 locomotive with a handsome passenger coach. Additionally, in a smaller scale (approximately 1/32), is a 4-8-4 locomotive with a tender and four cars, plus a caboose. The detail to the prototype is amazing and we are so very pleased to have this collection. You really must see this new permanent exhibit in the museum for yourselves as it is truly one-of-a-kind.

The Johnson City Railroad Museum at 207 North Boone Street in downtown Johnson City is open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 am to 4:30 pm. Check out all the information and upcoming events on our website at [johnsoncityrailroadexperience.org](http://johnsoncityrailroadexperience.org). Come visit us soon and have the "railroad experience" in person. We have lots of new things to show you. ■



## Doe River Gorge

Mark Milbourne reports from Hampton, TN –

Happy New Year! Hope everyone is staying warm. Winter is very quiet on RR operations, and also slow on guest groups, though we've had a few already. We had a nice break over Christmas week, but soon as the calendar turned, we seem to be busier than ever. There are a number of projects on tap that have to be done well before spring and the annual spring "rush" of guest groups, school groups and final camp prep. The "steam team" is working hard on the finishing touches on the Porter Cab, boiler jacket, air system etc. The goal is to be essentially complete by the end of February, as they will have to begin to focus on catching up everything needed on regular vehicles and equipment before camp. Also in the shop, we've been blessed with the donation of a number of large machine shop tools such as mill, band saw, lathe and drill press. Some items already here and in service, others coming soon. And in spite of the season, the track contractor is also working as much as weather permits to complete tamping of the new loop. It is also a goal to complete the connector track from the new loop to the gorge before camp season as well. One more load of cut timber for ties was donated, DRG paying just for creosoting, and arrived recently. We need just two more loads to complete the connector, plus a load of the smaller ties for ongoing maintenance in the gorge. If you'd like to donate toward any of that, do be in touch! We also need a bit more rail and have a few possibilities on tap, but still on the lookout for other options.

On the new multipurpose building (which includes the loading area for the Christmas Train), we mentioned last time that a new org was able to resume the engineering work needed to finalize details and permits. This is now complete and into final review and tweaks. So we are hopeful that construction can resume soon. Another winter item is recruitment of this summer's Railroad Interns. This program continues for a 5th year thanks to ongoing designated funding and has become the primary means to maintain the gorge track and ROW. And this year funding has been increased from 3 to 4 positions. We have a number of applications already, but are still taking them into April, so if you know of any young people interested, please send them our way.

Since early 2024, we've been researching and working to add rail-biking as an activity both for campers and for public tours. A year ago I mentioned this was in the works for 2025 and we had one four-seat bike built over last winter, but then for several reasons we took a step back from that design. But over last summer and fall I was able to draft our ideas into an alternate design which we liked much better. And then prove it out with a rough wood prototype, including an electric assist system, completed shortly before Christmas. This has been very well received, so in addition to several computer projects I have on tap, I'm also hustling now to refine this into an actual finished aluminum build. And then the goal is to build a total of 5 by summer. So this has been an exciting project, but many details to engineer and then build against a bit of a deadline. Hopefully many of you can see the result during the convention this year!

Last issue we noted that a year out from Hurricane Helene, recovery work was still in progress. One very significant item since then is that Hampton High School reopened after Christmas break. The county considered several options at

first, to move away from the flood zone, but finally elected to repair the current location, just across the river from the DRG property, which was able to be completed over the fall semester. Another significant item was the reopening of US-321, the route between Hampton and Boone, on December 1. A 12 mile stretch in the Elk Mills area had to be significantly reconstructed. A much smaller rebuild, but significant to the ET&WNC community, last issue I mentioned that a section of Ralph Hathaway Rd, which is ROW just east of the Hampton Depot site leading toward the site of the covered thru bridge across the Little Doe River, had been completely washed out. Rebuild was underway last fall and is now complete. Some rebuild work still continues on local residences and DRG was able, particularly during the initial recovery phase, to house workers. This has mostly tapered off by now, but as I write, we are currently hosting a couple in our RV center who are here on a rebuild project. Many natural areas remain devastated and will only recover on their own. With winter removing the foliage, the slope above the ROW just east of Tunnel #1 is again visible with a huge number of blown over trees. These are highlighted by any snowfall and a stark reminder of the very high winds that fed much debris into the floodwaters. Those of you attending last year's convention may have noticed the smaller, but similar areas above the ROW in the upper gorge. So yes, winter is busy here! Stay warm and hope to see many of you in May.

Check out our schedule at [doerivergorge.com](http://doerivergorge.com). 🚩

## Johnson City Cranberry Furnace Model

Chris Ford sends this from Collierville, TN –

Two years in, this is the current state of my mostly-scratchbuilt, historically-correct, HO-scale model of the Johnson City Blast Furnace, to serve as a learning experience for visitors to the ET&WNC layout at the Johnson City Railroad Experience Museum. Hauling iron ore was the principal reason the ET was built, and with this industry on one end of the line and Cranberry Mine on the other, the 30-year symbiotic relationship of these two heavy industries fostered the growth of the railroads that served it (Southern, Clinchfield, and ET&WNC). Here's the almost ready Blowing Engine House, chimney and hot-blast stoves section. The already completed Boiler House section is in place at the Museum, with this model and lots more of the complex to follow! Follow progress on this important piece of JCity history on our iO online group site: [groups.io/g/ETWNC](https://groups.io/g/ETWNC). 🚩



## Tweetsie Railroad Happenings

Chris Robbins sends this from Blowing Rock, NC –



Tweetsie Railroad just shut down for the 2025 season after a very successful Tweetsie Christmas event. Locomotive No. 190 did fine bearing all the daily duty through Ghost Train, several VERY busy Fall leaf weekends, and the Christmas runs. Event and season shutdown tasks at Tweetsie Railroad will take almost a month, and hopefully the weather will cooperate. Through all this, work on No. 12 continues. All 800+ stay bolts have been removed – one by one, carefully – and the firebox was dismantled in sections and reassembled on the shop floor in case it is needed for reference purposes. New leaf springs were obtained from a fabricator in Great Britain, and a supply of stay bolt taps were also sourced from England. The wooden cab has been largely reconstructed using the original design as a reference. An experienced contractor has been engaged to fabricate the new firebox . . . and not much can happen here at the Tweetsie Railroad Locomotive Shop until the firebox is completed, shipped to Blowing Rock and installed. This process alone is going to take a few months. We'll be ready to go full speed on rebuilding when the new firebox is actually here. But – with all the variables and unknowns – it is very difficult to project a completion date for No. 12. The park's 2026 opening day is Saturday, April 4th. This is also Easter weekend, so we're guessing the first weekend of the new season will be a busy one. Keep up with us on our website at [tweetsie.com](http://tweetsie.com). 🚂

## Southeastern Narrow Gauge and Shortline Museum

Johnny Graybeal shares this news from Newton, NC –

The winter has been quiet at the Southeastern Narrow Gauge & Short Line Museum, but a lot is going on in ET&WNC preservation. On December 16, 2025, the Strasburg Rail Road Mechanical Services division of the Strasburg Railroad loaded the rebuilt and restored boiler for former Southern Railway No. 722 (ET&WNC No. 208 to us) onto a lowboy trailer for its return trip to the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad in North Carolina. It arrived onsite the following day, and the day after that the boiler was repositioned onto the renovated frame/running gear. Sources at GSMR were not able to confirm that the engine would be in service in 2026 but it is hoped that this ET veteran will be in service in time for excursions in 2027. This is very welcome news, and should be welcomed by the ET&WNC community. Visit our website at [newtondepot.org](http://newtondepot.org). 🚂

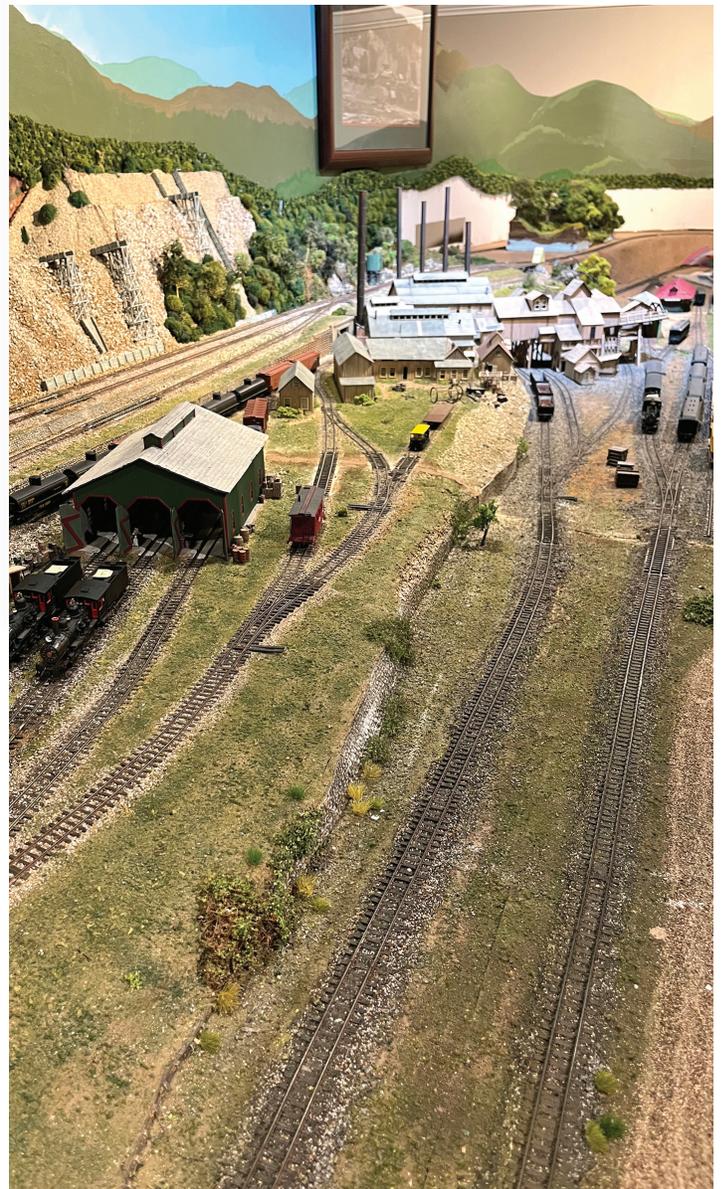
## News from the Historical Society Modeling Committee

Johnny Graybeal shares this news –

Tim Smith forwarded me the news that Atlas is taking pre-orders for an O Scale ET&WNC 208 (could this and what's happening at GSMR be connected?). The image on the website shows only the side view, but the product description lists several nice feature. Check it out. Click this link for the website offering – <https://publicdeliverytrack.com/pre-order-for-atlas-fmr-weaver-et-wnc-2-8-o-consolidation-3-rail-or-2-rail-p3-o/>.

On a sadder note, Robert W. Brown, MMR, founding editor

of Narrow Gauge & Short Line Gazette, passed away on January 31, 2026, 18 days after his 93rd birthday. A pioneer of narrow gauge modeling, Bob founded Finelines in 1964, focusing on 1/4-inch fine scale narrow gauge, and in 1975 launched the Narrow Gauge & Short Line Gazette. Its first issue appeared as March/April 1975 (Vol. 1, No. 1). Bob served continuously as editor for more than 51 years, with his final issue scheduled to be March/April 2026 (Vol. 52, No. 1). Bob was a good friend of fans of the ET&WNC, publishing various articles over the years, many of which were authored by our own Johnny Graybeal. He had high praise for the 2011 Narrow Gauge Convention, the first one held in Hickory. The 2021 Hickory convention marked the first one he was unable to attend, indicating that the torch would soon be passed to a younger group of leaders to keep the Narrow Gauge movement going. Bob transferred publication of the Gazette to White River Publications several years ago and we're confident that its new editor Chris Lane will continue this fine magazine that has set the standard in covering narrow gauge modeling for 51 years. 🚂



Cranberry Mine, engine house and yard area, with the red-roofed Cranberry Depot in the distance on the HO-scale ET&WNC layout at the Johnson City Railroad Experience Museum. Photo courtesy of Curtis Brookshire.

## ***Save the Date!***

*36th Annual*

East Tennessee & Western North Carolina  
Railroad Historical Society Convention

**May 15–17, 2026**  
Johnson City, Tenn.

**Our host venue is the  
Carnegie Hotel in Johnson City**

Special rates for May 14–17:

\$149 Thursday night + tax

\$199 per night Friday and Saturday + tax

**To book, call the hotel at 423-979-6400**

and request the

**E TN-Western NC Railroad Historical Society rate**

*Special rates expire on April 14 or when our block is fully reserved.*

**Additional hotel rooms are available at the  
DoubleTree by Hilton Johnson City  
near the Mall off North Roan Street**

**Reserve at**

**[www.hilton.com/en/attend-my-event/  
easttnwesternncrailroadhistorical2026/](http://www.hilton.com/en/attend-my-event/easttnwesternncrailroadhistorical2026/)**

or call 423-929-2000 and request a room with the

East TN Western NC Railroad

Historical Society group

**Our special rate is \$139 + tax for a King room**

*Special rates expire on April 18 or when our block is fully reserved.*