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Board of Directors

Officers

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

Chris Jessee, *Vice President*
434-962-2514
cj8n@mac.com

Rae Augenstein, *Secretary*
getglowing@gmail.com

Patricia Jennings, *Treasurer*
pjdrq2006@yahoo.com

Board Members

Chris Ford, *Past President*
Dr. Fred Alsop III
Joel Shipley
Jerry Turbyfill

Newsletter Editor & Society Historian

Curtis Brookshire
curtis.brookshire@verizon.net

Society Website

www.etwncrrhs.org
Chris Ford, *Webmaster*
chris@cfordart.com

Address any inquiries to this NEW ADDRESS:

**ET&WNC Railroad
Historical Society**
207 North Boone Street, Suite 2000
Johnson City, TN 37604

Tweetsie Heritage Weekend Success Plus the Flood of '24!

We've read and studied about the historic floods of 1901, 1916 and 1940 that affected the mountains of Eastern Tennessee and Western North Carolina. In late September we found out what happens when a hurricane drops a biblical amount of rain in those mountains. We've seen hair-raising videos on social media as well as listening to first hand accounts of what those living there suffered through, many of whom we know or know of. The damage was horrific as population growth, development and infrastructure was much expanded since the last of these floods. As of this writing, some areas are still in as bad a shape as they were six weeks ago, and we now see how long a time it will take those mountain areas to recover. Little wonder that ET&WNC management found it expedient to abandon the Linville River Railway, which in 1940 was a marginal operation.

To those of our members living in those mountains: you've been in our thoughts and prayers and for those of us outside that area, we send donations to your area, which was the least we could do. For those who went up and put in sweat equity to help clear debris, evacuate those trapped, distributed water, food and supplies and in some cases find and handle the remains of those who perished, we cannot express our thanks enough. We know mountain people are tough and resilient and that the area will recover, but it will take time. If you're helping out,

please continue because their situation also continues after the media moves on to other stories. That said, I've delayed this issue to allow our columnists to take stock of their situations and get their power and internet connections back. We're still following what's happening and we'll visit when we can. Something to remember, the area will look different than it did earlier this year.

A couple of other items before we look over the news. A record number of riders were aboard the photo-run train during August's Heritage Weekend at Tweetsie, and a record number got off to take photos. Thankfully, we had no problems as everyone respected each other and stayed safe. We didn't have the second train or doubleheader this year as #12 is awaiting some major work and was displayed along with coach 5 outside the shop where a lot of people visited 12's cab and the coach. The crew discovered issues with 12's firebox during a routine safety inspection and Tweetsie wisely made the decision to remove her from service. We'll keep track of her status as things progress. This will be an extensive project and we know that the crew at Tweetsie will do her right. In the meantime, we will be looking over our plans for next year and tell you more in the next issue. Our columnists have some news to share, so let's get to it...

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 –

After many months of remodeling, reconfiguring model train layouts, installing new displays—including some interactive ones, creating new information posters, and a host of other things, the George L. Carter Railroad Museum, Inc., dba the Johnson City Railroad Experience, opened its doors to the public on the morning of October 3, 2024. Out of respect for our neighbors who suffered terrible losses during hurricane Helene, we opened our museum without all of the ribbon-cutting and fanfare we had planned, and with minimum publicity. That can come later when things are more back-to-normal, perhaps sometime in November.

There is still a lot of work to be done, especially on the Mountain Empire Model Railroad (MEMRR) club's HO-scale layout and on the museum's HOn3/HO-scale ET&WNC RR layout, but the museum is in a stage of development that we can let the public visit and enjoy Johnson City's newest family attraction. The museum is located at 207 N. Boone Street with plenty of downtown parking spaces, and open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 10 am to 4:30 pm. There is an admission fee and memberships are available.

So, What's New? In addition to a larger venue—approximately 45% larger than our old railroad museum on the campus of East Tennessee State University—open 5 days/week and for longer hours, and the ability to park 100 vehicles around the building, what's new for me to see inside? Here are a few of the highlights:

Permanent Displays and Revolving Displays: We are proud to hold a lot of Michael Hardin's ET&WNC RR collection that includes railroad hardware, office furniture, equipment, an 1850s ETV&G RR depot bench, the ticket holder from the Elizabethton depot, and more. We have collectibles from the Franklin Mint, limited-edition and original paintings from artist Ted Laws, Lionel Trains, railroad china, and much more.

Railroad Library: Approximately 4,000 railroad books, most LC cataloged and available for checkout with a library membership. The collection is ever-growing and will soon be available to search online. This may be the largest collection in Tennessee.

Railroad Information History Posters: Big posters with information about Henry Johnson and the founding of Johnson City through his supplying water to the ETV&G Railroad. Women working for the railroad. The vanishing passenger trains. Hobo sign language. And more!

Interactive Stations: Visitors can drive trains in our locomotive simulator. You can watch and listen to trains, engineers, controllers, etc. across the country with our real-time trains station. You can try to beat your friends on John Allen's "Time Saver".

Little Engineer's Playroom: Our new children's playroom is much larger than the one we had at ETSU, and it is much more child-friendly with soft rubberized flooring, more railroad-themed educational toys, and a great G-scale suspended railroad high above the visitors.

Scale Model Railroad Layouts: The museum has 4 model railroad layouts in 3 different scales – N, HO, and HOn3/HO. The N-scale layout representing Knoxville, TN has been improved with new scenery added and more reliable operation. The other N-scale represents Johnson City and was created by our museum crew years ago as a display in the Tupelo Honey Restaurant. After that restaurant located in the old Clinchfield Railroad Station closed, the layout was donated back to our railroad museum. The MEMRR HO-scale layout is in a slightly smaller gallery than they occupied when we were on the university campus, but through skillful engineering, and a dash of inspiration, the club has created a layout with a completely different and much more interesting configuration that provides them with approximately 60% more running trackage. This club acts as important docents for the entire museum and their layout is in its own separate museum gallery. The HOn3/HO layout is the "Tweetsie" layout and more than 35 feet of additional narrow-gauge layout benchwork has been added to the eastern end of the layout in the Shell Creek to Cranberry sections, and more than 100 feet of additional narrow-gauge, dual-gauge and HO-gauge track benchwork has been added to the western end to create space for Elizabethton, Happy Valley, and Johnson City. It will take many months to complete these layouts, but new scenery will be coming to this layout in the future.

O-Scale and G-Scale: We have a huge donation from the Jim Pahr's estate of O-scale locomotives, rolling stock, structures, and trackage. We will soon be adding "Lionel" as a smaller layout in our last available layout space in the museum, so this popular scale is represented. Likewise, Tom McKee, is planning to donate a generous portion of his G-scale collection to the museum. We will display much of this as a static display, but also hope to have some on elevated, suspended track operating above some of our galleries.

And More! Programs for adults, summer camps for children, teaching modules for school groups, special seasonal events, rail excursions, the Annual Big Train Show May 30-31, 2025, and much, much more. Come visit us when you can. Join one or more of the museum groups if it is feasible for you to do so and watch and help us grow. "All Aboard"! You can check us out at jcrails.org. 🚂



Southeastern Narrow Gauge and Shortline Museum

Johnny Graybeal shares this news from Newton, NC –

Unlike areas further west in North Carolina, the Southeastern Narrow Gauge and Shortline Museum came through Hurricane Helene with no damage. A sister museum operation, the Craggy Mountain Line in Asheville, where Motor Car No. 2 operated for a time, was affected by many downed trees and flooding. Work continues to clear that line. Work is also underway to prepare ET&WNC boxcar No. 434 for truss rods and couplers. Hopefully that will be accomplished over the winter months.

The ET&WNC was well represented at the 44th National Narrow Gauge Convention, held in Pittsburgh PA back in September. Dan Stenger took home plaques for his ET&WNC large scale locomotive and boxcar. The Historical Society was well represented with a table showing the *Every Time With No Complaint* magazine and membership forms.

People are already talking about the 47th NNGC, which will be held in Hickory, NC September 1-4, 2027. This conven-

tion will of course feature the ET&WNC. Many people have compared the September flooding in western North Carolina to famous (or infamous) floods in the past 125 years. A future ETWNC magazine will look at those historic floods, and compare them to the latest “flood of a lifetime”.

Please visit our website at newtondepot.org. 🚩

News from the Historical Society Modeling Committee

David Kmecik's 3dptrain.com is swamped with orders, questions and other business following the bankruptcy of Shapeways. He's very much in business, so if you're ordering from him, please have patience as this may take a bit to process all the requests. David has some projects in the works that are not yet ready for release, but we're looking forward to seeing what he's doing.

Ben Merritt at merritt3d.com is also still in business, but he lives in the area that suffered flood-related outages, so he also may be delayed in his projects. We should have more to talk about here in the winter issue. 🚩

2024 Tweetsie Railroad Heritage Weekend Photos



All photos this page courtesy of Curtis Brookshire.

Doe River Gorge

Mark Milbourne reports from Hampton, TN –

So of course the big news that grabbed everyone's attention in recent weeks was Hurricane Helene blasting through. While it was nothing like the utter carnage over in NC, Carter County did take a significant hit, with flooding here in Hampton as well as Roan Mountain and a bit in Elizabethton. Recovery efforts are fairly well along by now, many homes already being repaired thanks to all the relief workers that have come to the area. Some homes were too damaged though and have been taken down. Hampton High School was also flooded as it was in the 1998 flood, but this time may not be repaired in favor of a location not in the flood zone.

We are grateful to report that DRG, similar to the 1998 flood, was minimally affected, other than many trees and branches down. Guest groups that weekend had to be canceled due to power and water being off. But many staff and volunteers quickly jumped in to help with cleanup and recovery efforts in Hampton, and DRG facilities have been used to house relief workers. Similar to the 1998 flood, there was some erosion of the slope base in the curve just above the first tunnel, but it does not appear to be of any major concern. The ET&WNC seemed to do a good job putting in retaining walls in the gorge after the 1901 flood, and they have withstood many high water events since then. But the river was WAY, WAY up—over 16,000 cfs where normal flow is just a few hundred. The river bottom and banks are very scoured now. I noticed one area in the upper gorge where the bedrock of the river bottom is stark white, after the serious “pressure washing” it received. Worst damage on the ROW (photo below) was a large rock that came



down in the upper gorge, apparently dislodged by many falling trees, which pushed the inside rail over. But this is now repaired and motor-cars have been able to get back up to the bridge.

In the meantime, work on the Christmas Train project continues. The new loop is about 3/4 complete now with track having reached the loading platform at the new multi-purpose building, which is now fully

under roof. Grading has resumed below the lake towards finishing the extension to connect to the existing gorge track.

The railroad shop has seen progress with the floor now being finished and the rollup doors currently being installed. The new boiler for the first Porter was recently set on and work on it continues, IN the new shop, thanks to the lead tracks being completed. Check out the “Doe River Gorge” YouTube channel for some recent videos showing some of this progress! DRG did not hold a public fall color event this year, due to the ongoing

construction, but the train has still run quite a bit for various groups that have scheduled their own trip. The October 16 Anniversary of the last ET&WNC revenue train was duly noted, now 74 years ago, as the history was shared with the various groups riding.

Hope everyone has a pleasant fall and to see many of you again next year! Visit our website for more info on our schedule at doerivergorge.com. 🚩

Tweetsie Railroad Happenings

Chris Robbins sends this from Blowing Rock, NC –



Hurricane Helene is, of course, the major topic of this report. North Carolina community impacts range from debris cleanup to complete devastation. Here at Tweetsie Railroad, we sustained some damage throughout the park – including a variety of small and large landslides. One of these buried a section of train track on the back side of the rail loop; we decided it was easier to clear the slide and totally rebuild the affected section rather than try and remove the slide from the tracks. After removing the mud, dirt, trees and about 100 yards of track, the section was re-graded, new cross-ties and ballast were set, and the rails reinstalled.

Power was out for several days in the main part of Tweetsie Railroad, and electricity wasn't restored for another two weeks to other sections of the park. Without power, all the perishable food had to be discarded. The parking lot was damaged and full of flood debris. Although most of the park has been fully restored, it was too late to try and salvage the remainder of October – which is especially painful because all the post-hurricane weekends have been beautiful, sunny and mild. We got in the first weekend of Ghost Train, and that was it for this normally-six-week major event and the Fall leaf season.

Of greater importance: Our region is concentrating on recovery, repair, and healing. Despite this substantial hit to our October business, there are obviously many families and communities in Western NC and Eastern TN who are much worse off. We have established the Tweetsie Matching Challenge to encourage fundraising to help those in need. Including the funds that Tweetsie Railroad contributed, the campaign has already raised over \$80,000 for local charities. Learn more at tweetsie.com/tweetsie-railroad-matching-challenge.

Tweetsie Railroad is now fully focused on setup for Tweetsie Christmas; this holiday event begins November 29th, the Friday after Thanksgiving. Fortunately, ticket sales are very strong and we are looking forward to “restarting” the 2024 season. Check our website for more information at tweetsie.com. 🚩



While our beloved Number 12 didn't run this year, she was out and on display, decked out in tribute to her short time serving on the Shenandoah Central, now 70 years ago.