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# The ET TIMES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ET&WNC RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## Our Convention Schedule & Much More!! Hope to See You May 15-17, 2026

### Make Your Reservations Now!!!

Our 36th Annual Convention runs from Friday May 15 through Sunday May 17, 2026. Your registration form is included with this newsletter. We have two hotels with room blocks for attendees. The Carnegie Hotel, which is the Official Convention Hotel and has been our home base for many years has a block of 16 single king rooms available for \$199 per night Friday-Sunday and \$149 on Thursday (only). Use "E TN-Western NC Railroad Historical Society" when reserving. Any unbooked rooms in this block will be released for general use on April 14. The second hotel is 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). Their special rate of \$139 for a king room is available through April 18.

The Johnson City Railroad Experience will welcome us on Friday from 10 am for visiting and operations. If you have operable HO<sub>3</sub> DCC equipment, you're welcome to bring it and see it run on the most accurately planned ET&WNC layout. We'll vote for President and Secretary this year at the business meeting. We're honored to have Dr. Tom Grabenstein as our guest speaker who will

tell us more about his outstanding On30 layout. Our right-of-way tour this year starts at the beginning of the railroad: east from Johnson City on the Tweetsie Trail. We also plan to look over the location of the Sand Spur. Tim Smith will give us an update on #12 at the Tweetsie Railroad shop before our annual photo train ride. We've got a spellbindingly entertaining presentation planned after our dinner at the Tweetsie Palace. We were able to schedule our Gorge visit for Sunday so we'll have much more time to ride and explore this year...you'll have a great opportunity to see the progress that Mark Milbourne describes in his column. We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible in May.

Your Board is working on getting the newsletter to you faster and avoid the inevitable delay involved with the printer and the mailing process...we're going to send it directly to you via email if we have your email address on file. If you want a printed copy please say so when you renew your membership. Chris Jessee and Rae Augenstein continue to work on getting more of our functions on line so we can provide services to those of you who prefer to work online.

*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 –*

The museum continues to make progress on its exhibits and its programs as we enter into the new year. The Mountain Empire Model Railroaders are making progress on their HO-scale layout and are now working on decorating the final leg of this project with the section leading up to the 21 stall roundhouse.

This week, with funding from a foundation, we completed the professional installation of three G-scale suspended tracks in three different rooms; the foyer, the large meeting room, and the main gallery between its entrance and the Tweetsie layout. The individual trains are activated by push buttons that are easily reached by children. Each starts and stops with momentum and are timed to run for 3-4 minutes when the buttons are pushed. Each locomotive has sound and contacts along each roadbed activate whistles and bells.

The museum received a donation of five very large wooden train models created by David Cunningham late last fall. Our Assistant Director, Carson Sailor, and several of our volunteers drove to South Carolina to pick them up and bring them back to Johnson City. They are magnificent models of steam locomotives! They are in two different scales and so detailed that the wheels roll and all the driving rods move as in the prototypes. One model is a 4-4-0 19th century locomotive and tender pulling a single coach. The inlays of different woods on this model, as well as on the others, is superb. A second 20th century locomotive with a consist of 4 cars plus a caboose is the longest work. The other 3 are larger scale (see the photo of the UP Big Boy) and depict the Civil War locomotive, "The General," of Andrews' Raiders fame, a Shay, and the UP Big Boy. Mr. Cunningham and his wife are natives of the Johnson City area but currently reside in South Carolina. They visited the museum and decided we are a proper home for his creative



railroad-themed work. You really have to see them to appreciate the detail and the artistry of his work.

Finally, the ET&WNC narrow gauge layout has had additional changes. I have finished the section between Elk Park and the Cranberry Wye with a valley well below the mainline roadbed that depicts two rural farmsteads with a couple of two-story farmhouses, barns and outbuildings, and a summer garden for each place. The background is fully forested and this

section provides a great country setting creating some nice spacing between the town and the wye. Elk Park has been extended to the east with several small residences and businesses along the tracks and a tie plant on the western end with its own spur. This has made Elk Park more of a "proper" town occupying approximately fourteen feet of landscape.

The Hampton area is currently being installed with woodland landscaping on the almost vertical backdrop, improvement of the Ritter Lumber Mill grounds, and several houses across the tracks from the Hampton depot. In the corner connecting this section with the Hampton cistern railroad water source, a section of the backdrop has been removed to



Elk Park, NC now has a new tie mill with its own spur off the mainline at the west end of town. *Photo courtesy of Fred Alsop.*



A bird's-eye view of the east side of Hampton, TN, which includes the covered bridge and our rendition of the Ritter Lumber Mill. *Photo courtesy of Fred Alsop.*

allow for the creation of a mountain valley extending almost from track level to the top of the new scenery backdrop to give this corner more depth and take artistic advantage of the dead space that was originally behind it.

Plans are well underway for a special event to celebrate both the Cunningham wooden models and the new G-Scale suspended layouts. Plans are also in the works for our 10th Annual Big Train show in the East Tennessee State University Mini-Dome with many vendors already signed up, with "Sippin-N-Switchin" bringing a 15,000 sq ft HO-scale layout. Put May 29-30 on your calendars to attend this event, one of the largest train shows in the South.

Looking forward to seeing everyone at your Convention in May. We plan some special events for you at the Johnson City Railroad Experience at 207 North Boone Street in downtown Johnson City, open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 am to 4:30 pm. Check for information and upcoming events on our website at [johnsoncityrailroadexperience.org](http://johnsoncityrailroadexperience.org). Come visit us soon, we have lots of new things to show you. 🚂

## Doe River Gorge

*Mark Milbourne reports from Hampton, TN –*

Happy Spring! We've been glad for the warmer weather here and everyone is getting outside to work on various projects toward camp season, which will be here before we know it. Guest group season is picking up and of course many of them have scheduled a train ride as part of their stay. School group visits will also pick up next month into early May which almost always includes a train ride and hearing a bit about the ET&WNC and it's role in local history.

The RR shop has been busy and work on the Porter steam loco is nearly complete. There was some delay waiting to get the boiler jacket powder coated after the final fitting, but it is now on. This has enabled the current remaining work to resume, fitting back the piping, running boards and brass etc. By the time you read this, likely there will have been a test run or two, and from there the plan is to debut the full trainset at our annual fundraising banquet in late April.

Now that we are out of the wet winter weather, our grading contractor expects to resume work on various tasks around the property. One of these of course is the final profiling of the RR grade for the connector track from the new loop to the existing gorge track. We also were just informed of a donation of RR ties which should be enough to complete that section. We are still in need a bit more rail, but have some options on the table at this point.

Recruitment of summer "Railroad Interns" has been underway, with a number of good applicants. We'll be making offers on those positions soon and expect to have a very good, fully staffed crew for the season.

I've continued to be busy on the railbike project. After the wood prototype was done and tested, it took a while to engineer the basic details/dimensions into a buildable aluminum design, but we're now cutting and welding and hope to have the first one finished for testing by the end of the month.

So the annual convention is in just two months, we hope to see many of you then when you visit the Gorge! Please check out our schedule at [doerivergorge.com](http://doerivergorge.com). 🚂

# Tentative Convention Schedule - May 15-17, 2026

## Friday, May 15

Johnson City Railroad Experience –  
Museum Visit and Operations  
207 North Boone Street, Downtown Johnson City .....10 am

Carnegie Hotel - Main Ballroom  
Convention Registration Opens ..... 3:30 pm

Social Time at the Carnegie ..... 3:30–5:30 pm

Business Meeting, Banquet and Guest Speaker –  
Dr. Tom Grabenstein  
**Discussion of Doc Tom's On30 Layout**  
Main Ballroom - Carnegie Hotel ..... 5:30 pm

## Saturday, May 16

Johnson City Railroad Experience –  
Museum Visit and Clinic.....10 am

Right-of-Way Tour on the Tweetsie Trail.....11 am

Tweetsie Railroad – Blowing Rock  
Shop Tour, **Train Ride** and Dinner  
Entrance into Tweetsie Railroad for Convention Attendees .....4 pm

Tweetsie Railroad Train Ride..... 6 pm Sharp!

Dan'l Boone Inn Catered Dinner at Tweetsie Palace .....6:30

## Sunday, May 17

Doe River Gorge –  
**Train Ride**, Lunch and Hiking in the Gorge  
Doe River Gorge Ministries – Hampton .....11 am

DRG Lunch at the Gorge ..... Noonish

Sunday at the Gorge will conclude the Society Convention Sponsored Activities

**Note: Times, locations and presentation topics are all subject to change.**

*Your Registration fee of \$100.00 will cover all Historical Society Convention Sponsored Activities including our Society admission to the Johnson City Railroad Experience, Tweetsie Railroad, train ride at the Gorge, plus the cost of three meals (Friday night banquet at the Carnegie, Saturday night dinner at Tweetsie Palace, and Sunday lunch at Doe River Gorge). We really need everyone to register as early as possible so we can provide an accurate headcount to cover our meals. Thank You!*

## Tweetsie Railroad Happenings

*Chris Robbins sends this from Blowing Rock, NC –*



The Tweetsie Railroad Staff is very busy preparing for opening of the 2026 Season, making up for time after a very cold and snowy January and February. The park opens on the usual weekend schedule on Saturday, April 4th.

Work continues on the Locomotive No. 12 restoration project. Obviously, it has been a slow process...as we had to fill in the gaps in our collection of original Baldwin drawings and create many as-builts from scratch. Outside engineering and boiler expertise has been recruited, and those entities are actively engaged in the process. On top of that, locomotive No. 190 needed some attention – mostly routine maintenance, but this has consumed more time and resources. The fabrication of No. 12's new firebox will soon proceed...after extensive and painstaking measurements and repeated design verifications. We don't want to get this wrong.

Darian Snyder has assumed the full oversight duties of shop operations. Darian has an extensive mechanical background and has been an integral part of our shop crew for several years. He and our dedicated crew are not only working on locomotives, but are also looking after the maintenance, repairs, inspections, and training on the park's nineteen amusement rides, vehicles and infrastructure. With two locomotives under repair, long-time Tweetsie Railroad machinist Rick Guy graciously came out of retirement to help us out a few days a week; it has been invaluable having him here to pass on his decades of knowledge to the shop staff . . . many of whom have never seen this extent of locomotive disassembly.

As I write this, a train track maintenance contractor is here replacing a few hundred crossties; they have the special equipment and staff that enables them to accomplish in a week what it would take us months to achieve. Some trestle maintenance is on the schedule, too, although the trestle has been extensively upgraded in the past few years. We now feel that the track infrastructure is in the best condition it has been in quite some time.

We're looking forward to the genuine arrival of spring, and expect a busy season. See you here. Keep up with us and our schedule on our website at [tweetsie.com](http://tweetsie.com). 🚂

## Southeastern Narrow Gauge and Shortline Museum

*Johnny Graybeal shares this news from Newton, NC –*

A project is underway at the Southeastern Narrow Gauge & Short Line Museum that will be of particular interest to ET&WNC fans. In March, a group of volunteers worked on ET&WNC Motor Car No. 2 and got the engine running for the first time in several years. The vehicle had operated on the Craggy Mountain Line in Asheville several years ago until a broken part took it out of service. The museum is now trying to source a replacement part for the drive train so the car can be put back on the rails and be operational. It is hoped that the car can carry passengers during the 47th National Narrow Gauge Convention which will be held in nearby Hickory, September 1-4, 2027. Donations are welcome to help pay for the part to be machined. Visit our website to check on our progress at [newtondepot.org](http://newtondepot.org). 🚂

## Photos from the Tweetsie Trail

*Courtesy of Curtis Brookshire.*



The long, steep downhill cut out of Johnson City yards headed towards Elizabethton.



Trail Head next to Legion Street in Johnson City. Note the short section of rails in the trail.



Site of the original Milligan Shelter.



Buffalo Creek Bridge heading towards Bemberg.



36th Annual ET&WNC Railroad Historical Society Convention  
May 15–17, 2026 ~ Carnegie Hotel ~ Johnson City, Tenn.

# Convention Registration

Your contact information:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

The Convention price this year is \$100.00 per person. Total cost for you and a spouse would be \$200.00. **This fee covers ALL Convention-sponsored activities and includes the Friday night banquet at the business meeting, admission to the Johnson City Railroad Experience Museum, the Saturday admission to Tweetsie Railroad, Dan'l Boone Inn Catering at Tweetsie Railroad on Saturday evening, and our Doe River Gorge train ride and lunch on Sunday.** List the name of each person attending the Convention so that name badges can be made. Please mark which meals each person will be present for so that we can get an accurate headcount and have meal tickets ready for you. Please understand that we cannot reimburse attendees for any meals that they are unable to attend. Thank you!

| Name | Friday Night Banquet | Lunch at DRG | Sat. Dinner at Tweetsie RR | Price           |
|------|----------------------|--------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
|      |                      |              |                            | <b>\$100.00</b> |
|      |                      |              |                            | <b>\$100.00</b> |
|      |                      |              |                            | <b>\$100.00</b> |
|      |                      |              |                            | <b>\$100.00</b> |
|      |                      |              |                            | <b>\$100.00</b> |

Mail your check and this form *no later than May 1, 2026*

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

*Please make checks payable to:*  
**ET&WNC RR HS**

Visit <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/etandwnc-railroad-historical-society-annual-convention> or use your phone camera to shoot this QR code that will take you directly to the registration page on Zeffy.

**New this year:  
Register online**



**Questions?**  
**Contact VP Chris Jessee**  
**vicepresident@etwncrrhs.org**

**Hotel Reservations** for May 14–17 are available for a special room rate at two properties in Johnson City:  
The Carnegie Hotel ~ 423-979-6400 ~ Rates of \$149 +tax (Thurs) and \$199 +tax (Fri–Sat) thru April 14  
Doubletree by Hilton Johnson City ~ 423-929-2000 ~ \$139 + tax (Thurs–Sat) thru April 18