

The Little Train That Could ... And Did !

By Eric Fogg, (All photo credit Eric Fogg)

The Iowa Traction Railway (ITR) goes about its daily work without much notice. This railroad plays a small and important role for businesses in and around northern Iowa.



MOTORS NUMBER 51 & 54.

On October 2, 2023, the ITR received some long-overdue recognition. It was named an inaugural winner of the Outstanding Railroad Historic Preservation Award, designed to “recognize a North American railroad for a historically significant preservation project.” The award is a joint effort of the *National Railway Historical Society*, *Railway Age* magazine, and *Railway Track & Structures* magazine. (Continued on page 11.)

NRHS NEWS – APRIL 2024

Table of Contents

The Little Train That Could ... And Did !	1
Table of Contents	2
Announcements	2
NRHS Convention & Conferences.....	2
NRHS Spring Convention – May 4 - 6, Cedar Rapids, Iowa	2
NRHS Annual Convention - August 26 through August 31, 2024, in Harrisburg, PA	2
The Passing of Carl Jensen, 1936-2024	3
The Little Train That Could ... And Did ! (cont'd)	11
Emery Foundation Announces 2024 Grants	15
50th Year Membership Anniversary for Blue Ridge President Rick Johnson	16
A Bit of the Red and Green in Granbury, Texas	17
CHAPTER ANNOUNCEMENTS / EVENTS	19
Lehigh Valley Chapter - Calling All Rock Island Fans	19
Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum – Saturday, May 4 th Great Smoky Mountains RR Excursion	20
President’s Column – This is the Year of Conventions & Elections!.....	21
Editor’s Notes: Railroading’s Passings and Crossings.....	21
The Back Page – Blowing the Long Whistle Home	22
About the NRHS News	22

Announcements

NRHS Convention & Conferences

NRHS Spring Convention – May 4 - 6, Cedar Rapids, Iowa .

- **Host hotel** — **Best Western Plus Longbranch Hotel**, 90 Twixt Road NE, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. They are offering a very attractive rate of \$109 per night, plus tax. Amenities include complimentary full breakfast, free parking, on-site Mexican restaurant, cocktail lounge, indoor pool, exercise room.
- **Registration: \$50 for** Spring meetings in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, May 5. This registration covers the in-person Board and Advisory Council meetings ONLY. The May 6th excursion is Sold Out.
- **Itinerary:**
 - *Saturday, May 4, 4:00-7:00 PM* - Conference welcome table is open.
 - *Sunday, May 5, 9:00 AM-4:45 PM* - Meetings of the NRHS Advisory Council and Board of Directors.
 - *Monday, May 6 – All day excursion is Sold Out.*

NRHS Annual Convention - August 26 through August 31, 2024, in Harrisburg, PA

- **Host hotel** — **Hilton Harrisburg Hotel** in downtown Harrisburg, PA. The Special NRHS member rate per night will be \$134.00 plus 11% state tax. To make a reservation with a hotel Agent, call 1-717-233-6000 and use **Group Code 900**. Or, make an online reservation at <https://www.hilton.com/en/hotels/mdthhhf-hilton-harrisburg/> Then, type in the convention dates, type “900” in the Group Code field and click the button to “check rooms and rates”.
- **Book by August 6, 2024**, to receive the discounted rate. Late booking may have a higher rate and is subject to availability.

NRHS News Deadlines for Submissions

April 24th - May 2024 issue . May 14th - June 2024 issue. July 10th – August 2024 issue.

The Passing of Carl Jensen, 1936-2024

By KEN MILLER, Roanoke Chapter NRHS

Usually, I have very little trouble writing. But today, I am frustrated. It is always difficult to lose someone, especially someone you have known for close to 50 years. I learned of the passing of Carl Jensen on Monday, March 25, just a few hours ago, and many memories came floating back.



Photo by Jeff Lisowski

CARL AND CAROL JENSEN IN FRONT OF THE 2015 611 EXCURSION TRAIN.

Carl, a familiar name to many, was the leader of the Norfolk Southern Steam Program, succeeding Jim Bistline in 1986. His leadership was instrumental in guiding the program through to almost its end in October, 1994. Carl's role extended beyond the program, as he presided over the travels of the 611 and 1218, including the unforgettable 1987 National Railway Historical Society Annual convention in Roanoke. His association with the National Railway Historical Society (NRHS) was not recent but a commitment that began in the late 1950s when he joined the C.P. Huntington Chapter.

After graduating from his beloved Penn State University, Carl worked in various railroad locations. It was at Penn State he grew his love for the famed Pennsylvania Railroad, but history has a funny way of working things out. He was first hired out in June 1959

as a clerk in the General Agent's office in Portsmouth, Ohio, and moved to Cleveland in February 1960. Carl became a traveling freight agent based in Chicago in 1963 before finally arriving in Roanoke in early 1965 as an industrial development department industrial economist and was then appointed assistant manager of special services later that same year. Not long afterward, Carl became assistant manager of equipment sales and then moved on to his longer-term home in the training department, where he rose to manager.

It was Roanoke where he made his mark when the Southern was moving Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum's No. 4501 back from operations in Virginia, including the 1966 NRHS Convention in Richmond, where W. Graham Claytor told attendees that "the steam locomotive is here to stay." The 4501 was headed back to Chattanooga in October 1966 via Roanoke with some ferry moving passengers. Carl was among a group of local fans who came out to see the locomotive as it overnighted in Roanoke. This event began a re-formed Roanoke Chapter NRHS, with its first organizational meeting a year later, leading to a formal organization in early 1968.



Photo by Dorr Tucker

CAROL AND CARL JENSEN ON BOARD A SOUTHERN EXCURSION COACH.

Carl was right at the center of the organization, becoming the new organization's first Vice President, with George H. Kelch as the first president. Carl quickly became the Chapter's President in 1969 and then became the Chapter's long-serving National Director (or representative) in 1971. Carl was involved in many behind-the-scenes things, including acquiring the Chapter's first passenger equipment in the summer of 1968. He also did a lot of mechanical work on the equipment and grew prominent in the National Organization.

Carl was a leader in all forms of his life, whether by example or direct leadership. He was actively promoting private passenger car ownership as he saw that the railroad's passenger services and car ownership were declining by the late 1960s. Carl felt that the only way there might be excursion trains to run would be the privately owned cars. Carl was no stranger to physical labor either; he more than gladly got his hands dirty working on stubborn ancient passenger cars and spent an entire day spray painting the inside of a Chapter coach.



Photo by Dorr Tucker

(From left) JULIEN SACKS, CARL JENSEN AND DAVID HELMER – Counting tickets in Car 1148.

Carl was quite serious about the organization and its processes, seemingly all business, but to those who knew him, he had a great sense of humor and was a lot of fun to be around.

His rise in the NRHS National Organization continued as he participated in Roanoke Chapter management. Carl would work closely with the Claytor brothers to help make excursions happen on the N&W and lend his voice to assist in planning these trips. Carl would suggest to the Southern an operation of one-way ferry moves of the steam excursion train, which would be dubbed by Bill Carson the “Independence Limiteds,” with the Roanoke Chapter planning and operation. These trips first began in the early 1970s and ran most years up to 1993. They were a success due to excellent planning and railroad cooperation.

Imagine today, running a steam train on the mainline, with a bunch of open-window cars, stopping every 20-25 miles to handle passengers where no station or platform exists, running at reasonable track speed! Yeah, sure, that’s going to happen! But it did then!

Carl had worked closely with Jim Bistline of the Southern. Also, he was one of the significant leaders of the Roanoke Chapter in 1977, 20 years after the first chapter existed. Thanks to the Chapter’s leadership, the National Convention of the NRHS convened in Roanoke, and it was a huge success.



Photo by Ken Miller

(Center from left) BOB CLAYTOR, JIM BISTLINE, CARL JENSEN, CHUCK JENSEN – 611 trip home, August 1982.

Carl’s most extensive trial by fire was in June 1986, when a defective switch caused the train behind the 611 on an employee special out of Norfolk, VA, to derail, injuring

many people and cars. Carl was fine, but in the days that followed, it was a circus, with stories circulating that this would be the end of excursion trains on Norfolk Southern.

Only authorized representatives from NS were allowed to comment to the media. NS had Don Piedmont as the Public Relations head, whose favorite line was “No comment.” It was so representative of Piedmont that he had the custom license plate that read “NO CMNT.” So, the company said nothing officially about the accident and related stories.

The peak moment came one morning a few days later when WDBJ-TV station repeated a report from a Norfolk station, quoting an FRA spokesperson saying the injuries would have been much less severe if the cars in the train had not been wooden passenger cars! The story first aired at 7:15 that morning. I was working at Channel 7, so my phone rang at 7:30. Carl said, “You don’t know who this is, but that story, as you know, is totally wrong, somebody needs to correct that.” I was also livid, went to work, and immediately went to the newsroom to find a contact for the Associated Press to get a correction issued; I also took a reporter to show her examples of the cars and appeared on the news countering the story. Of course, AP issued a correction late that day! Carl was pleased that I had stepped up and spoken up, as nobody from NS would be able to. Fortunately, under Bob Claytor’s leadership, NS continued the program.

At the end of the 1986 season, Jim Bistline retired, and with a grand farewell banquet in Alexandria, Virginia, Bob Claytor named Carl his worthy successor.



Photo by Dorr Tucker

CARL JENSEN WITH EXCURSION TRAIN

At a Holiday gathering at Carl's house in December 1986, a group of us were discussing what trips we might be able to do for the Convention. A suggestion was made to run the 611 and 1218 side-by-side for a run-by. We all laughed, but Carl thought it was an exciting idea and took it to Bob Claytor.

Carl had been a big part of the program's success already, but 1987 would take it to new heights; first, four and a half years after 611 made its debut, the Class A, No. 1218, after multiple delays in restoration, came into service at the end of April, with its inaugural trip to Bluefield, WV in a flood condition and rain. The trip was quickly a test for all aboard, with downed trees, delays, and more delays. By the time the train was at the west end of Roanoke yard, it was almost 11:00 pm, and some high ballast knocked an air hose loose, causing an emergency application. When we got to the platform and were unloading passengers, it was 11:15 pm, and everyone, Carl included, was exhausted. Still, the riders kept us all going, none believing we could or would run an excursion in that kind of condition safely.

A few months later, the 1218's debut was followed by the magnificent 1987 NRHS Convention in Roanoke, a decade after the last. The Convention featured 611 and 1218 and Southern FP-7s, but the most spectacular day was Saturday, August 1. The 611 had a packed passenger train and was leaving for Radford. The passengers knew something special was up, but nobody, except those running the show, knew what was in store. We passed the 1218 with a hopper train at Shaffers Crossing. At Salem, where I had picked the spot with Carl's agreement, we unloaded and backed the 611 back, then with 1218 on one main and 611 on the other, both steamed past the crowd of people. But it was not over yet. We did it again on the grade above Elliston. Then Carl motioned me up into the cab of 611, where we ran side-by-side with 1218 to almost Walton. It is a remarkable memory, and I will never forget Carl for allowing me to experience what very few people did. The truly amazing experience of the best N&W steam locomotives running on the mainline like it had been thirty years before!

The 1987 Convention was an outstanding success, in no small part thanks to Carl for the splendid cooperation. One of my favorite memories was arriving in Roanoke with the inbound excursion train. As it happened, The Chapter and NS had not signed the contracts to run the Convention, so Carl and I signed the agreements in the lobby of Hotel Roanoke, with me using his back and him using mine! We were both hot, dingy, and dirty, but we knew it was going to be a huge hit.

Carl's involvement with the Roanoke Conventions was certainly not his only connection. He served on the National Convention Committee and worked hard to develop procedures, plans, and guidance for any number of conventions.



Photo by Ken Miller

DORR TUCKER AND CARL JENSEN.

Carl led the Steam Program, working hard to make it a success and make the cars and locomotives more reliable and able to keep running. A fine steam shop and crew backed him.

One of the more outstanding events of the Steam program occurred in November 1991, with a 25th Anniversary Celebration at the birthplace of the program, Chattanooga, Tennessee. It was a grand event with 611, 1218, and 4501 all participating, and the grand finale was a triple-header out of Chattanooga. The other highlight of the event was a banquet, with virtually all of the old-time steam people on hand. Carl was the host of the event and recognized those attending. It was a packed house, and the program was an elaborate audio/video slide show that I produced for the event. I was lucky; Carl had hired me to create this show, which was very timely, as my job with the TV station had been eliminated at the end of August. I am honored that Carl thought enough that I would get a show done, and he was thrilled with the result, which he only got to see the night of the banquet. That takes a lot of trust.

Unfortunately, the most trying time came in late September 1994, when the excursion train with 611 parked for the night in Lynchburg, Va., and a piggyback train backed into the standing excursion train. The 611 was untouched, but various cars were damaged, causing a need to replace equipment with rented passenger cars to work out the season. Carl rounded up equipment from several sources, but the derailment had only caused the cancellation of one weekend of trips.

Unfortunately, other forces were at work, and the decision was made by upper NS management that ended the program in late October. The program would run out the season, but no farewell trip was allowed; simply shut it down and go home. Upper management wanted to make no announcement of the end, but Carl pressed and worked hard to get a press release out and put as positive a spin as possible on the ending. The PR department sent out the release just after 5:00 pm on a Friday, then left for the weekend with no one to answer questions. It was a public relations disaster through no fault of the steam office.

Carl would leave the steam program and finish his career in the Safety Department as the program ended.

Carl's involvement in the National organization led to what he might have been most proud of, he was a planner and instructor in the NRHS RailCamp, to bring young people into the hobby.

Even though Carl retired, he certainly did not leave the scene. He remained heavily involved in NRHS, both at the Roanoke and National levels, and was quite visible on the National scene.

He remained on the Roanoke Chapter Board until he decided not to run again in 2019, hoping for some new blood on the Chapter Board. He still attended Chapter Board meetings until most recently and remained a strong, positive influence on the organization.

Carl is survived by his wife Carol, sons Chuck and Ken, their spouses, children, and other family members.

Carl will be missed. His knowledge of passenger equipment and operations, as well as the most noted steam program, is almost legendary.

Source acknowledgement: Many thanks to Ken Hill for his excellent and respectful memorial article. Originally published by the Roanoke Chapter NRHS, it is on the chapter's web site at

<https://www.roanokenrhs.org/the-passing-of-carl-jensen-the-innumerable-caravan/>

The Little Train That Could ... And Did ! (cont'd)

By Eric Fogg, (All photo credit Eric Fogg)

(Continued from page 1.)

What's little, orange, and 127 years old? This is the backstory of that railroad.

With not quite ten miles of track, four strange-looking locomotives and lots of historic railroading, it is called the Iowa Traction Railway (ITR), a part of northern Iowa since 1897. Today it is the oldest continuously operating electric railroad in the U.S.!

The founders must have seen lots of possibilities in 1897 for the Mason City & Clear Lake Railroad (MC&CL). At one time there were nine brick companies and three cement plants in the area. (Today the Brick & Tile Building - still the tallest building in Mason City - speaks volumes about the impact this business had.) A bustling resort at the other end of the line also showed promise as a tourist destination.

But from the beginning it was always about the freight business. In the days before refrigeration, ice cut from Clear Lake was shipped to distant cities. In 1929 the railroad bought the Mason City brickyards, a smart business decision that helped the MC&CL survive the Great Depression.

At a time when automobiles were not that common, a passenger ticket was twenty-five cents one way. On the 4th of July - a busy time in Clear Lake – riders who purchased a ticket got a return ride home for free. The *Clear Lake Limited*, a special trolley built in 1917, was used to host excursions. Passenger service ended in 1937, replaced by bus service which stopped in 1959. Those funny little locomotives, painted in “traction orange”, were built between 1917 and 1921.



MOTOR 60.



MOTOR 50 – Under the shining moon.

Motor #50, built in 1920, was first used by the Washington Old Dominion Railroad in Northern Virginia. The #51 started life on the Northeast Oklahoma Railroad in 1921. Somewhat local, #54 was built for the Iowa Southern Utilities in 1923. The oldest motor, #60, was built in 1917 for the Youngstown & Ohio River Railroad.

Halfway between its two namesake cities is Emery - the center of the operation. Originally the company laid out “Traction Park” at the site, with plans for employee housing, a general store, and grain elevator. It did not work out. Today it is just a busy rail yard and still company headquarters.



EMERY, CENTER OF OPERATIONS



TROLLEY BY THE HIGHWAY.

While very profitable in the late 1940's, business fell off for the railroad in the 1950's. In 1961 the MC&CL was bought and re-named the Iowa Terminal Railroad (ITR). A "spectacular fire" in the Emery car barn in 1967 was almost "terminal" - three cars, a locomotive, spare parts and other pieces of operating equipment were lost. It was rebuilt. The ITR became the Iowa Traction Railroad Company (IATR) in 1987 when it was sold. In 2012 Progressive Rail Inc. bought the IATR and re-named it the Iowa Traction Railroad (IRT).

Interchange cars (loads that will go on to other railroads) provide the most business. AGP in Mason City - where soybeans go in and meal and oil come out - is a good example.

The "hub" for these interchanges is at an unmarked spot called Clear Lake Junction in Mason City. One set of tracks connects with the Union Pacific Railroad. Once they belonged to the Rock Island Railroad, then the Chicago Great Western, and finally the Chicago & North Western, which merged with the Union Pacific. The other connection is with the Canadian Pacific Railroad on tracks that used to be owned by the Milwaukee Road then the Soo Line, and the I&M Rail Link. Talk about some historic railroading!



IRT IN OPERATION – Between Clear Lake and Mason City.

If you want to see the IRT in operation, you can drive between Clear Lake and Mason City. The entire trip is on a two-lane highway that parallels the Railway. If you do go, remember this is not a tourist railroad or museum. It is a 5-day-a-week, working railroad and they have not made any allowances for visitors or tourists. So, a highway running alongside the railroad is a big advantage.

You might think the ITR is just like the children's story - "The Little Engine That Could" – "I think I can, I think I can!"

But in this case the Iowa Traction Railway not only could, but it did and continues to do, as it has for the last 127 years!



Emery Foundation Announces 2024 Grants

Submitted by Tony White, President NRHS

NEWS RELEASE

From the John Emery Rail Heritage Trust
March 5, 2024



The JOHN EMERY RAIL HERITAGE TRUST is pleased to announce the following grants for this year. John Emery was a long-time Chicago resident who was an avid rail enthusiast who loved to ride trains around the world, and wanted to help preserve rail equipment and infrastructure that will allow future generations to share his experiences during what he considered the “Golden Age” of railway travel, from 1920 to 1960.

Thirty-one (31) applications were received requesting almost \$ 850,000.00. After extensive research and serious consideration by advisors of the Trust, eighteen (18) grants were awarded totaling \$ 250,000. The John Emery Rail Heritage Trust is the largest trust in the US that makes 100% of its awards solely for railroad restoration purposes.

For 2024, grants were approved for the following organizations/projects:

1. Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad Association: \$ 5,000.00 to refurbish their ex- Missouri-Kansas-Texas passenger coach Enterprise.
2. Adirondack Railway Preservation Society: \$ 10,000.00 to help repair and restore their railroad coach 5320 Old Forge to a parlor car configuration.
3. Austin Steam Train Association: \$ 11,000.00 for traction motor rebuild and restoration of their ALCO RSD-15 locomotive #442.
4. B&O Railroad Museum: \$ 10,000.00 to replace windows in coaches and observation car that run on their Mile One Express Train.
5. Branford Electric Railway Association: \$ 6,000.00 for the re-upholstery of their Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee Car # 709.
6. Colebrookdale Railroad Preservation Trust: \$ 15,000.00 for the roof restoration of ex-Wabash Pullman Parlor Observation Car Diplomat.
7. Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society: \$ 15,000.00 to help with the restoration of their ex-New York Central Railroad Empire State Express cars.
8. Friends of SP4449: \$ 15,000.00 for help with the repair of the roof, ventilation, and windows of their dining car #1349.
9. Gulf Coast Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society: \$ 21,000.00 to assist in providing head end electrical power to ex-Missouri-Kansas-Texas chair car New Braunfels.
10. Illinois Railway Museum: \$ 25,000.00 for electrical and air brake work on their Milwaukee Road long-distance coach #649.
11. Iron Mountain Railway: \$ 14,500.00 for roof replacement for two ex-Illinois Central coaches #1345 and #1365.

12. Kentucky Steam Heritage Corporation: \$ 23,000.00 to help with the oil burning conversion for ex-Chesapeake and Ohio 2-8-4 “Kanawha” #2716 steam locomotive.
13. Michigan State Trust for Railway Preservation: \$ 15,000.00 to help with the overhaul and seat re-upholstery of their coach #5447.
14. Midwest Railway Preservation Society: \$ 15,000.00 to help with the repair of ex-Nickel Plate Road coach #90.
15. Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation: \$ 1,000.00 to help in the initial stages of their ex-Oregon Railroad & Navigation Co. #197 (aka Union Pacific Railroad #3203) “Pacific” 4-6-2 steam locomotive restoration project.
16. Railroad Museum of New England: \$ 18,500.00 for help with the restoration of ex-New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad ALCO RS-3 locomotive #529.
17. San Bernardino Railroad Historical Society: \$ 15,000.00 to help provide Positive Train Control (PTC) for ex-Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe #3751 4-8-4 steam locomotive.
18. United Railroad Historical Society: \$ 15,000.00 toward restoration of their ex-New York Central Railroad Great Steel Fleet tavern lounge car #37.

Congratulations to all the groups who received a grant and the best of luck as they continue to preserve our railroad heritage!

First Option Bank, Trustee of the Emery Rail Heritage Trust, continues to provide ongoing support during the application/selection process and due to their investment management, the Advisory Committee is able to continually increase the effect this Trust has on the preservation of rail passenger travel. If you would like more information about how to set up a Foundation or are interested in donating to the Emery Rail Heritage Trust, please contact them directly at 913-294-9222.

Applications for the next round of grants will be due not later than February 1, 2025.

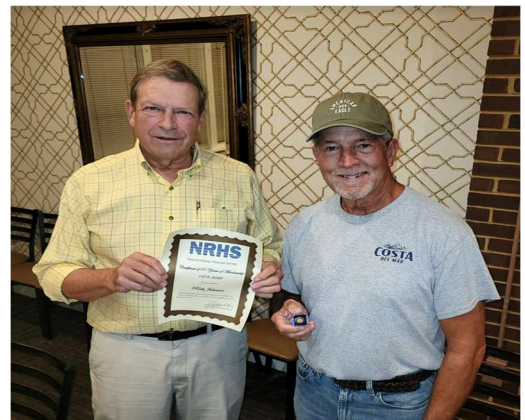
Check for details at <http://emeryrailheritagetrust.org/WP/>.

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50th Year Membership Anniversary for Blue Ridge President Rick Johnson

By Tony White, President NRHS

Rick Johnson (right), the President of the Blue Ridge Chapter, NRHS, located in Lynchburg, Virginia, was awarded his 50-year pin at the September 2023 meeting of the Chapter. National Director Robert Leslie is seen here presenting the pin and certificate to Rick. Congratulations to Rick for his many years of service to the Blue Ridge Chapter and to his contributions preserving the historical record of railroading in the area through his many years of photography and leadership in the projects the Chapter has undertaken over the years.



A Bit of the Red and Green in Granbury, Texas

By Wayne Smith, North Texas Chapter (Photography by Wayne Smith)



GRANBURY'S DEPOT – *Constructed in 1914, it is an example of a typical Texas train station.*

The current building replaces an earlier depot, which was constructed in 1887 when the railroad first came to the area. It was destroyed by fire in 1912. The current structure was described as a "modern passenger and freight depot". Granbury's founding town fathers together donated \$25,000 to bring the Fort Worth and Rio Grande Railroad to Granbury in 1887.



GRANBURY IN THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT – *Welcome sign and greenery surround the Station.*



DEPOT STYLING SIMILAR TO HISTORIC TEXAS STATIONS – Wide overhanging eaves and separate waiting rooms.

The Depot was built by employees of the Frisco Railroad using brick, stone and trademark Ludowici clay roof tiles from the original clay tile factory in New Lexington, Ohio, which burned in the 1950s. Recognized as a Texas Historic Landmark in 1984, the Depot is still owned by the Fort Worth & Western Railroad, but the City of Granbury leases the building and provides maintenance and upkeep on the facility and grounds.



Source acknowledgement: Many thanks to Wayne Smith for sharing this article, originally appeared in the Feb. 2024 issue of the North Texas Zepher newsletter of the North Texas Chapter NRHS.

CHAPTER ANNOUNCEMENTS / EVENTS

Lehigh Valley Chapter - Calling All Rock Island Fans

By Jim Rowland, Lehigh Valley Chapter NRHS

Lehigh Valley Chapter NRHS has published the fourth in a series of six in-depth articles documenting the Rock's last 15 years in their quarterly magazine, *Lehigh Lines*. More than just images, extensive research provides the reader with a concise understanding of the events and developments that transpired in that period.

<p><i>Lehigh Lines</i></p> <p>VOLUME 68 NUMBER 1 SPRING 2023 \$10.00</p>  <p>Official Publication of the Railroad Historians of the Lehigh Valley and the Lehigh Valley Chapter, NRHS</p>	<p><i>Lehigh Lines</i></p> <p>VOLUME 68 NUMBER 4 WINTER 2023 \$10.00</p>  <p>Official Publication of the Railroad Historians of the Lehigh Valley and the Lehigh Valley Chapter, NRHS</p>
	
<p>Second Chance at The Rock</p> <p>Five Years of The Blues</p> <p>Online at www.lehighlines.org</p> 	<p>A Rock Island Scrapbook – Part 3</p> <p>LVT's Last Day of Trolley Service</p> <p>Online at www.lehighlines.org</p> 

LEHIGH LINES – Quarterly magazine's articles about the Rock Island Railroad.

Each magazine is twenty-four pages in full color. Copies are available in print or digital format. The cover price is \$10, but back issues are being offered for \$6. If you are a fan of The Rock, this is a series that you will not want to miss. Issues can be purchased through our bookstore at www.lehighlines.org or by contacting Chapter President and Magazine Editor Jim Rowland at jjr2978@gmail.com

**Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum – Saturday, May 4th
Great Smoky Mountains RR Excursion**

On Saturday, May 4, 2024, the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will once again sponsor a train excursion on the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad. This is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate and enjoy the beauty of the spring season while riding the rails in vintage passenger railroad cars.

The one-day excursion will cover most of the operating trackage of the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad. The track follows the route of the former Southern Railway's Murphy Branch Line, established in 1891, with its five percent grade and many bridges.



Our scenic rail excursion takes us from the historic depot in Bryson City, NC, through the beautiful countryside of Western North Carolina, into the breath-taking Nantahala Gorge surrounded by the majestic Smoky Mountains, and back to Bryson City. Much of the route hugs the banks of the Little Tennessee and Nantahala Rivers. It crosses Fontana Lake on a trestle spanning 780 feet and 100 feet above the lake.

To learn more about the trip and order tickets, go to

<https://www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org/excursions.php>

President's Column – This is the Year of Conventions & Elections!

By Tony White, President NRHS

Longer days mean more time to get things accomplished. Many of you are doing spring cleaning or getting more important pictures and videos of railroad action. We at the NRHS are also busy.

The Convention Committee is working feverishly on putting everything together for the 2024 Harrisburg Convention starting August 26 through the 31. It will be an exciting convention with visits to the Strasburg Rail Road, The Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, The Reading and Northern, Morristown and Hummelstown, Northern Central and East Broad Top. There will be seminars on most evenings and a Meet and Greet instead of a banquet. We are happy that the Harrisburg Chapter is helping and will have their Harris Tower and their PDO open for those attending.

This is an election year with nine board positions and one for Vice-president open for selection. The nomination period closed at the end of March. Ballots will be sent to members soon; the election is in June. The newly elected board will be seated in October in Claymont, Delaware (DE).

We have a very special trip as part of our Spring Conference this year. Although an email was sent to every member, we could only have 50 passengers on this special train. I am sure there will be an article on this trip in a later *NRHS News*.

While many of you belong to a chapter, those of you who are At-Large members can consider your area and any special train rides that can be taken as part of a Conference. Bob Bitzer is here to help you with any of the particulars. We are looking for Conferences in 2025 and beyond. Generally, they run Friday, Saturday and Sunday with people arriving on a Friday, a trip on a Saturday with meetings on Sunday. You can reach any of us using info@nrhs.com. Until the next issue!

Editor's Notes: Railroading's Passings and Crossings

By Valli Hoski, Editor NRHS News, member Harrisburg Chapter NRHS

Steam is a very exciting railroading experience and the long-time favorite of many rail enthusiasts. To see, hear and feel the power, the movement and physical majesty of steam locomotives is an experience and thrill not to be missed. The people who have created, built and operated these unique machines are legends in the railroad industry and community.

In early 2024, one legend passed into history – Carl Jensen. Many of us might know Carl for steam excursions with the N&W J 611, others may recall his service history as a volunteer with the NRHS. Let us carry Carl's passion for steam, railroad history and preservation forward in his memory and in the spirit of the rail hobby.

The NRHS is bringing more experiences for fellowship, fun and friendship to members with a calendar filled with the 2024 Convention in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the Spring Conference in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and the Fall Conference near the east coast. Take time to refresh your spirit, rediscover the thrill and adventure that the railroad hobby brings you. Introduce the joy of the hobby to a friend, family member or new person in your chapter. Become a legend in your own style. Be safe, be well. Val, your editor.

The Back Page – Blowing the Long Whistle Home

Photography by Alex Mayes, Potomac Chapter NRHS

This month's featured photo offers a streamlined look of the N&W's J class No.611 as she moves through the Virginia woodlands. With the passing of Carl Jensen in 2024, this photograph serves as a tribute to and reminder of the steam operations, excursions and adventures managed by Mr. Jensen. Listen closely and you might hear 611's whistle blowing in his memory.



Photo courtesy of Alex Mayes

N&W CLASS J NO. 611 WORKS HARD MOVING UPGRADE, OCTOBER 6, 2023 – At the head end of the “Shenandoah Valley Limited”, the locomotive roars through the Shen Andale Gun Club about 17 miles west of Staunton, Virginia.

About the NRHS News

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202404 News April 2024 final 2