

“Keystone Rails” ~ A Recap and Photographic Journey

By Elizabeth Guenzler, 2024 Convention Committee Member and Central Coast Chapter Representative



Setting the Stage

As with every convention, Keystone Rails 2024 had been in the planning stages for many months and the Committee, led by John Goodman, worked hard to present a well-rounded and successful event. Despite some challenges along the way, those who attended were treated to four days of events and a day of meetings.

Convention committee members were John Goodman, Walter Zullig, Al Weber, Skip Waters, Elizabeth Guenzler, Dawn Holmberg, Dan Meyer and Mike Yuhas. Assisting from the local Harrisburg Chapter were Mark Eyer and Patti Webb.

Input was sought from the committee on some items and all were kept apprised of various developments.

John Goodman was the overall convention chair and his expertise ensured that everything ran smoothly.

Walter Zullig provided his legal expertise with all contracts, and his general convention experience and expertise.

Al Weber ably coordinated with the bus companies, selecting the charter bus operator and organizing the complex operations during the convention.



These motor coaches shuttled the conventioners from the hotel to the various events; the fleet trio definitely stood out in the traffic.

Dawn Holmberg and her husband *Dan Meyer*, along with *John Goodman*, tackled the immense task of writing the Convention Booklet (assisted by the rest of the committee during the editing and proofing stage), and single-handedly looked after the online posting of the Convention details.

Dan excelled in looking after the audio-visual component for the meetings, seminars and reception, coordinating with the hotel and using his own equipment to provide and produce superior sound and video quality.

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CONVENTION ISSUE

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Notes:

- a) All photographs, unless otherwise noted, by Elizabeth Guenzler.
- b) Some of the information in this document is taken directly from guidebooks at the various museums or from their collection details on their website, in order to give our readers a more full history of the item pictured.

Elizabeth Guenzler was in charge of the Registration Room, including tickets and convention bags, and was a bus host on the final day.

Mike Yuhas arranged the seminar presentations and set up and managed the online registration process.

Skip Waters worked with his local graphic designer on the convention logo, was also involved in the planning process and promoted the convention and its activities on Facebook, as he looks after the Society's social media. During the convention, he was the Bus Host Coordinator and led the photo runbys.

The *Harrisburg Chapter* provided bus hosts for all the buses each day. The commentary and narrative really enhanced the travel experience, and greatly added to the knowledge of all our conventioners.

While the convention hotel was the Hilton Harrisburg, a second hotel, the Crowne Plaza, very conveniently located a block away, was needed for the overflow.



Above: The Hilton Harrisburg. Left: The Crowne Plaza.



Mid-to-Late August

Once registration ended on August 11th, I was in close contact with Columbia Printing and Sign in my home city of Columbia, Missouri. I established a relationship with them earlier in the year and they already prepared the convention bags.

While that was being done, name badges were printed and put into the lanyards. The color-coded tickets were split up to match each registration and inserted into envelopes, then the envelopes were put in alphabetical order.

With everything done and all loaded into the car, we drove to Harrisburg.



Sixteen sets of perforated color-coded tickets.

Monday, August 26th:

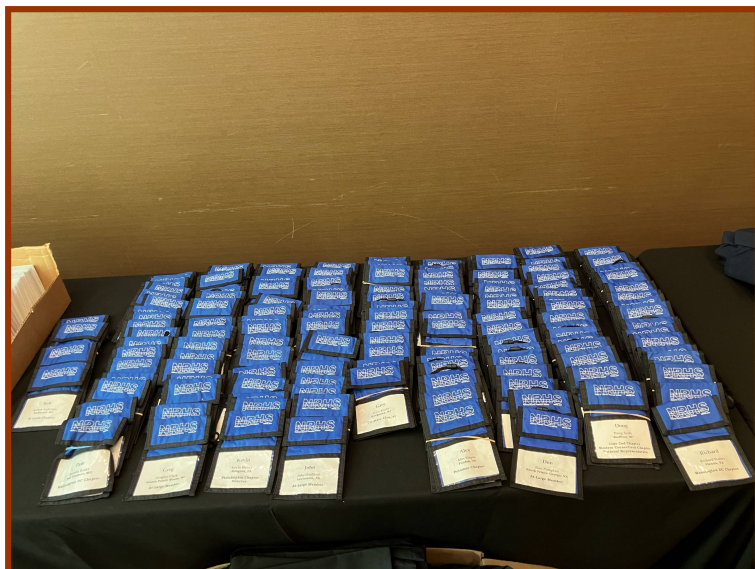
Committee members were asked to arrive on the 25th so work could begin in earnest the next morning on preparing the Bridgeport Room for Registration.

Myself, Dan and Dawn started at 8:00 and with the assistance of Eileen Weber, Ellen Scott, Dave Baniewicz (who looks after emblem sales) and Bob Bitzer (the society's treasurer, who was happy to help), we made quick work of everything that needed to be done and the early afternoon was spent on the signage and final preparations.



Ellen Scott, Dawn Holmberg, Bob Bitzer and Dave Baniewicz assisting to set up the registration room in preparation for a mid-afternoon opening.

The alphabetically-arranged lanyards awaiting pick-up.

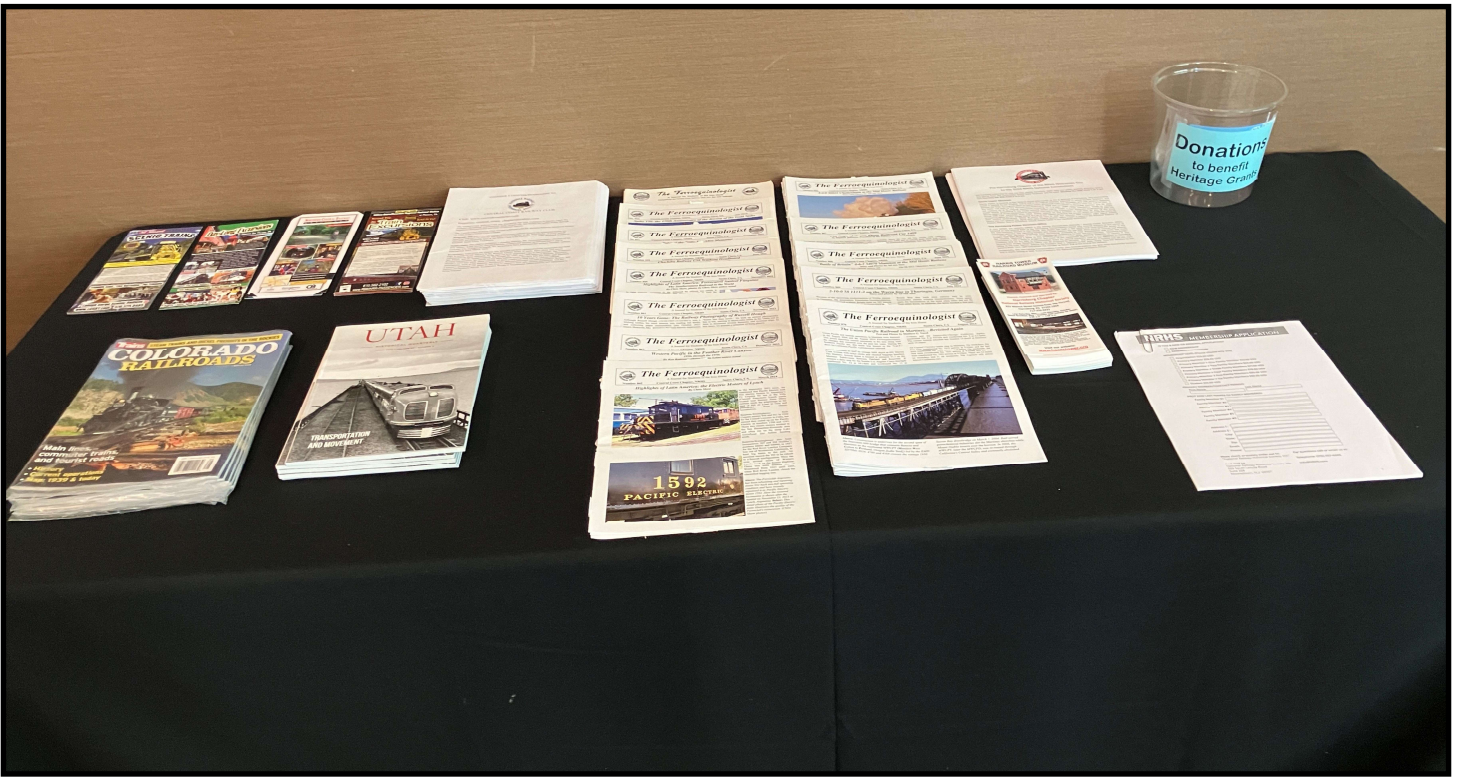




The finished registration room ready for business. Klaus Michels, Bob Bitzer and Val Hoski volunteered to work the room and handled most of the conventioners; I looked after some of them later in the day and throughout the week.

Activity in the registration room was brisk during the afternoon.





The “free to all - take whatever you wish” table at the outset, with several issues of my Central Coast Chapter’s newsletter, The Ferroequinologist, which were popular.

In place of a banquet, a reception was held which was well-received. It was here that the winner of the silent auction for the next day’s Strasburg Railroad steam engine cab ride was announced, Wayne Torseth of the Northstar Chapter.

All reception photographs courtesy Dawn Holmberg.

Enjoying hors d’oeuvres and a drink at the reception.

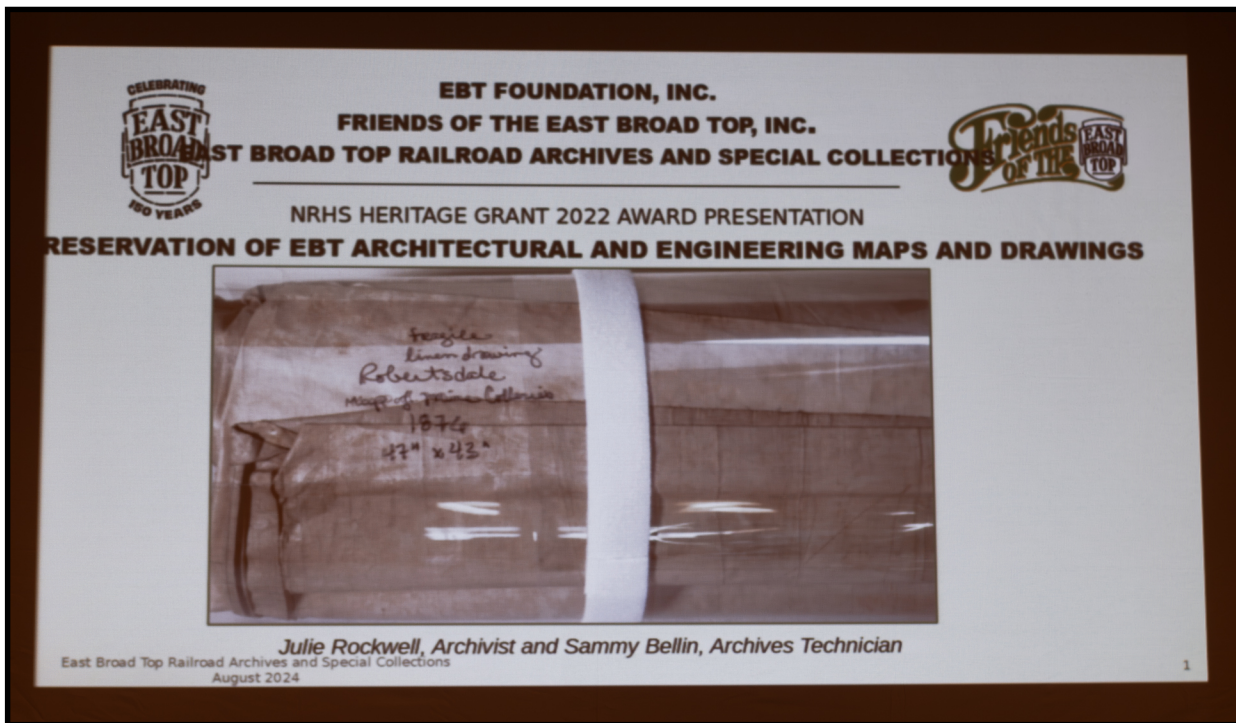




Above: John Goodman, convention chairman, welcomed all to the reception

Above right: Mark Eyer, Harrisburg Chapter President, spoke next and previewed the upcoming East Broad Top Railroad seminar.

Right: Joe Maloney, NRHS Vice-President, gave a welcome from President Tony White.



Following the reception, two East Broad Top Railroad historians, Sammy Bellin and Julie Rockwell, presented a most insightful program on the railway and their archival work, which was made easier by the award of a large scanning machine in the 2022 round of Heritage Grants.

This presentation whetted everyone's appetites for the visit two days later.

Tuesday, August 27th:

The first convention event was a visit to the Strasburg Rail Road and the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, which are adjacent to each other.

Strasburg Rail Road is America's oldest operating railroad with a charter dating back to June 9, 1832 and has been in tourist railroad service since 1958.



Unless otherwise noted, all photographs this day by Christopher Guenzler. The author was manning the registration room.



Conventioners on one of the motor coaches en route to the Strasburg Rail



Strasburg Railroad SW-8 8618, nee New York Central 9618, built by Electro-Motive Division in 1954.



Strasburg Rail Road 2-6-0 89, ex. Green Mountain Railroad 89, exx. Edaville Corporation 89, exxxx. Steamtown Foundation, exxxx. Canadian National Railway 911, nee Grand Trunk Railway 1009.



A Strasburg Rail Road scene with the water tower in the foreground.

During the Convention Committee's final visit to the venues in early July, an extremely rare opportunity was offered for a cab ride, which was the subject of a silent auction in the registration room. The winning bidder was Wayne Torseth, a member of the Northstar Chapter since 2006.

A couple of days after, I sat down with Wayne and he recounted the following: *"We were directed not to talk to the crew. However, the engineer engaged me in conversation except for critical safety moments. It was interesting to see the inside of the cab and I was surprised at the lack of space. There was only one place for me to stand - on the plate between the engine and the tender."*

"It was not hot, as I had been led to believe. There were a few wheel slips, from which they quickly recovered. A look in the firebox is always cool. The long momentum of the bell's ringing carried on and on - surprising how long."

"I enjoyed myself and it was worth the money, although I had not planned on bidding that high. But it was for a good cause, so I said to myself 'Go for it'."



Strasburg Railroad parlor car 75 "Henry K. Long", nee Boston and Maine 1293 built by Laconia Car Company in 1910. After it was retired from service, it was sold to the Strasburg Rail Road where two years later, the car entered service. Its name of "Henry K. Long" is in honour of the first president of the revived Strasburg Rail Road Company, Henry Keiper Long. Long was president of his family's business, Lancaster Champion Blower & Forge, and spearheaded the effort to save and revive the Strasburg Rail Road in 1957-58.

The afternoon was spent at the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania. This 18-acre museum, originally opened in 1975, features one hundred historic locomotives and passenger cars, including a GG1, logging railroad steam engines of each type and the oldest passenger car in the country.



It was created to provide a historical account of railroading in Pennsylvania by preserving rolling stock, artifacts, and archives of railroad companies of the Commonwealth. However, the museum has branched out over the years, acquiring some pieces that are not directly related to Pennsylvania, but are important to the history of railroading.



Pennsylvania Railroad 4-4-0 7002 built by the railroad in 1902. It gained fame on June 12, 1905, when it reportedly set a ground speed record of 127.1 mph, making up time west of Crestline, Ohio.

In 1939, the Pennsylvania Railroad prepared to send this engine to the World's Fair in New York, only to find it had been unceremoniously scrapped. The Pennsylvania Railroad chose another locomotive, 8063 as a "stand in" at the Fair. With no time to change its appearance, it debuted as 8063. In 1983, it was leased to the Strasburg Rail Road, where it operated until 1989. By the 1949 Chicago World's Fair, the locomotive was shown off in all its glory as 7002, under the banner of being the World's Fastest Locomotive.



Pennsylvania Railroad baggage combine "4639" built by the railroad in 1894. Complete with ornate kerosene lamps and coal stove, this car was outshopped with six-wheel trucks for heavy-duty mainline service. This car has been displayed at world's fairs and transportation exhibits from coast to coast.



Pennsylvania Railroad GG-1 4935 built by General Electric and Pennsylvania Railroad in 1943. As the Pennsylvania Railroad embarked on its ambitious electrification project in the 1930's, it continued to develop and test new locomotive designs. The goal was to produce a new electric locomotive capable of pulling heavy passenger trains at speeds of up to 100 mph. The Pennsylvania Railroad chose the GG-1 as the foundation of its new roster of electrics.

After a prototype was built, the Pennsylvania Railroad hired industrial designer Raymond Loewy to improve upon the overall appearance of the GG-1 for the production models. Among his many refinements to the look of them were their welded, instead of riveted, bodies and iconic "cat's whiskers" pinstriping.



Leetona Railway Shay 1, ex. Ely-Thomas Lumber in Fenwick, West Virginia 2 1954, exx. Beech Mountain Railroad 16 1953, exxx. F.C. Cook 16 1950, exxxx. J. Natwick and Company in Alexander, West Virginia 16 1949, exxxxx. Cherry River Boom and Lumber in Richmond, West Virginia 16, nee Enterprise Lumber 4 built by Lima Locomotive & Machine Company in 1906.

Retired in 1964, the locomotive was bought by the museum in 1966 and restored to look like one of the Shays that operated on the Leetonia logging Railway in the Pine Creek area of Pennsylvania, although it never actually worked on the Leetonia. The ten mile line connecting Leetonia with the New York Central at Tiadaghton through the rugged Pine Creek gorge had a relatively short life. Opened in 1899 it ceased operations in the early 1920's by which time most of the lumber had been milled out. None of the Shays that operated on the Leetonia has survived.



Pennsylvania Railroad rounded-end observation car "Tower View" built by Pullman-Standard in 1948 and retired in 1968. It brought up the rear of the "Broadway Limited."



A view from the mezzanine level with conventioners taking in the sights of this wonderful museum.

The last event of the day was an Amish smorgasbord dinner at Shady Maple, which per their website, “boasts the largest buffet in the USA. Shady Maple goes beyond just serving and selling delicious food, we make food fun. We welcome guests from local communities and across the country to our bustling plaza, immense Smorgasbord, Gift Shop full of unique and bespoke products, and Farm Market.”



The room in which our group was in had this welcome sign, a nice touch. Photo courtesy Dawn Holmberg.



Our members enjoying the delicious and extremely plentiful and varied buffet. No one left hungry! Several visited the huge gift shop afterwards and acquired gifts or unique items. It was a fitting end to the first day of the convention.

Both photos courtesy Dawn Holmberg.

Wednesday, August 28th:

Much has been written of late about the East Broad Top Railroad, so a history will not be provided here. One of the most intact 19th-century industrial sites, it is the oldest narrow gauge railroad in the country and the only original narrow gauge railroad east of the Rocky Mountains.



This day afforded the conventioners a shop and roundhouse tour, a ride to Colgate Grove and a visit and ride on one of the adjacent Rockhill Trolley Museum streetcars.

The Rockhill Trolley Museum is dedicated to the preservation of the electric trolley car and now has a collection of twenty-two cars, including an open car, high-speed interurban cars, fascinating maintenance-of-way cars and two PCC cars. During the trolley ride, one can see the remains of the Rockhill Furnace, the dual-stack coke-fired iron furnace which shut down in 1907

The three motor coaches were each their own group and throughout the day, cycled between riding a round trip to Colgate Grove on the East Broad Top, enjoying a shop tour and riding the Rockhill Trolley Museum cars.

All photographs courtesy Christopher Guenzler, unless otherwise noted. The author was manning the registration room at the hotel.



East Broad Top 55 ton switcher M-7 built by General Electric in 1947 as a 50 ton engine. A previous owner increased its weight to 55 tons. It is used as a heavy duty yard switcher and was purchased in 1993 from an Algoma Steel mill in Sault Ste Marie, Ontario, where it used to push cars with molds on them into and out of the various pouring stands.

The steam engine had had to be taken out-of-service in the early summer so this was our motive power for the trip to Colgate Grove.



Johnstown Trolley 355 built by St. Louis Car Company in 1925 with controls at one end, although it now has controls at both end and is typical of the many lightweight cars built in this time period. When trolleys stopped operating in Johnstown in 1960, car 355 left for a proposed museum in New Hampshire; the museum acquired the car in 1970 when it became apparent that the proposed museum would never be developed. It received one of the most extensive restorations at the museum with the help of the ISTEA grant that the museum received from PennDOT.



Scranton Transit Sweeper single-truck snow sweeper 107, a one-of-a-kind vehicle built by Chicago and Joliet Electric Railway in 1910 and is a four-wheeled car with rotating brooms at both ends. It is a "steeple cab" design with operator controls only in the middle. After the C&JER stopped operations in 1933, it went to Scranton until they stopped operating trolleys on December 18, 1954. It was taken to the Rail City museum in Sandy Pond, New York and ultimately to the Magee Transportation Museum in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania. In 1972, Hurricane Agnes flooded the Magee museum, forcing its closing. The museum acquired 107 in 1973 and it has been returned to operation, being used many times to clear snow from the museum tracks.



One of the museum's motormen at the controls en route to Blacklog Narrows, the end of the Rockhill Trolley Museum line.



Some of the conventioners enjoying their ride at the Rockhill Trolley Museum.



Car 355, as seen from Car 163, at Blacklog Narrows.



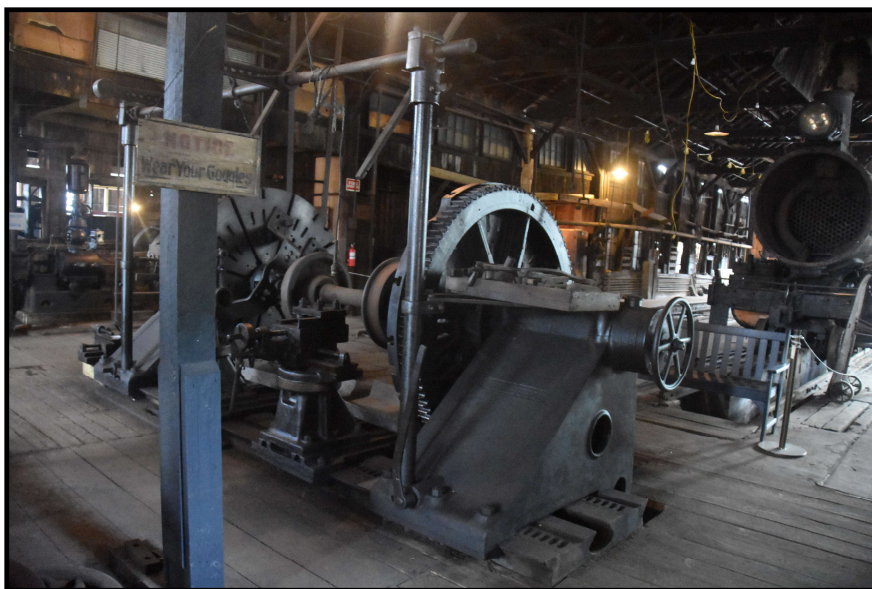
The remains of Rockhill Furnaces 1 and 2, casthouse and the blast engine house, as seen from the trolley ride.



Johnstown Traction Company double-truck Birney "safety car" 311 built by Wason in 1922. It was part of an order of cars for the City of Bangor, Maine, where it operated as number 14. It was sold to the Johnstown Traction Company in 1941 and served that city well, running until the end of service in 1960. Car 311 was the last Birney type car to be operated in any United States city on a regular schedule and was chartered repeatedly by trolley fans in the 1950's, as it was a favorite car of many.



East Broad Top 12 ton switcher M-6 built by Plymouth in 1968.



Entering the East Broad
Top shops is akin to
stepping back in time.

Right: A horizontal boring
machine.

Above and below: Shop
scenes





East Broad Top 2-8-2
16 was being tested the
afternoon of our visit.

Above, a broadside
view by Christopher
Guenzler.

At right, Jonathan Smith
of the East Broad Top
captured some of our
members taking their
own photographs.





Some of the conventioners ready to go to Colgate Grove, courtesy East Broad Top Railroad.



Returning to Orbisonia after the excursion to Colgate Grove. The two-story 1906 depot serves as the railroad's offices and gift shop.