

Whistle Stop

Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum

P. O. Box 432, Jonesborough, TN. 37659

(423) 753-5797

www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org



Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

Volume 46 No. 1

January 2026



Les Billings captured the caboose at the Chucky Depot on a festive, wintry day.

January 26th General Membership Meeting

Don't forget that there is **no December meeting**. The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will have our regular General Membership Meeting of the new year at 6:30 pm on Monday, January 26th, 2026 at the Chucky Depot, 110 South Second Ave., Jonesborough, TN. Program to be announced.

Member Notes

Les Billings, Membership Chairperson

Prayers and thoughts go out to Gary Price, Lois Tilley, Jim Calhoun, and Mike & Betty Jackson for various concerns and issues.

Note to Members: If anyone's address, phone number or email address has changed, please contact Les Billings at wataugavalley.membership.com for correction. This helps to ensure no one misses mailings, phone calls or emails. Thank You

2026 OFFICER AND BOARD ELECTION RESULTS

Officers

President ----- Mike Tilley

Vice President ----- Howard Orfield

Secretary----- Harold Wilson

Treasurer----- Jeanie Walker

Board of Directors

Howard Berry, Les Billings, and Rick Chinouth

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING: The next Board of Directors meeting will be held Tuesday, January 13th, 2026.

2026 WVRHS&M DUES

2026 will be here before you know it. Please renew your membership before it expires December 31st by returning your dues ASAP (check only) to the Membership Chairman at Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum, P. O. Box 432, Jonesborough, TN 37659. You can join the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum for \$20.00 individual and add each family member at \$5.00 each. For questions, email wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com.

Benefits: 12 issues of the "Whistle Stop", Watauga Valley's newsletter.
Membership in the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum.
Participation in all Museum functions and events.

NEW MAILING ADDRESS

Due to the Johnson City Post Office being moved the first of the year, we have changed our Post Office Box to Jonesborough, TN **effective January 1, 2026**. Beginning on that date, please send all mail correspondence to us at Watauga Valley Railroad Museum, PO Box 432, **Jonesborough, TN 37659** (same PO Box number but different post office.)

WATAUGA VALLEY RHS&M SPRING EXCURSION ANNOUNCED

We are in the planning stages of next year's Spring Excursion on the Hiwassee Gorge Railroad. Tickets will go on sale soon; keep watching our web site for more information.

WVRHS&M Christmas Dinner

Great food, fun and fellowship were had by all at the Watauga Valley Annual Christmas Dinner on Saturday, December 13th at the Food City Depot Banquet Room in Johnson City. There were approximately 90 attendees packing the house. President Mike Tilley conducted a short business meeting after which Ray Poteat presented a great program on



At right: Speaker Ray Poteat regales the audience with tales of the Ole Clinchfield.



Train Whistles in Jonesborough

While the truck normally pulling the Watauga Valley Whistle Machine didn't make the Jonesborough Parade due to some mechanical issues, the trailer carrying the whistle blowing machine did thanks to borrowed motive power, adding sounds from the past to the parade. Great Time! Thanks to Kyle Fellers for lending the truck and Jim Sutterlin, Les Billings and Mike Tilley for blowing the Whistles.

Merry Christmas and the Happiest of New Years

Mechanical Report

The Watauga Valley Mechanical Crew does a great job keeping our equipment up and going. We would like invite our members to come aboard and be part of this team. If you're interested, email wataugavalley@gmail.com or call the WVRHS&M office at (423) 753-5797 and leave a message.

REFRIGERATOR NEEDED! The Mechanical Team is in need of a medium-sized refrigerator for the Coach Yard. If you have one that you want to donate, please call the Office at (423) 753 5797.

Rolling Stock

Moultrie diner (WATX 400), **Powhatan Arrow** coach (WATX 539), **St. Augustine** coach (WATX 500) and **Clinchfield 100**: in service at the NC Transportation Museum in Spencer, NC on their "Polar Express" trains.

Crescent Harbor sleeper/lounge (WATX 2351): at the Coach Yard receiving upgrades.

WATX 6219 coach: being prepared for its move to Jonesborough on NS.

Chuckey Depot / Museum

DECORATED SOUTHERN X450 CABOOSE

A big thank you to Rick & Suzanna Chinouth, Rich Symkowski, Kitty Kilgallon, Art Devoe and Howard Berry for a beautiful job decorating the caboose for our Christmas Events at the Chuckey Depot. Thanks to David Billings and Gary Lombardi for their electrical work on the X450 caboose. If you have not seen it yet, drive by the Chuckey Depot one evening and see our little Red Caboose.

CABOOSE/DEPOT SANTA EVENT



The Santa on the Caboose event was a big hit for the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and the Town of Jonesborough. We want to thank all WVRHS&M members that helped with this event and Junior Risner, who played Santa Claus.

CHUCKEY DEPOT ATTENDANCE / HOSTING OPPORTUNITIES

Attendance at the Chuckey Depot/Museum has been very good during the holidays. Many Watauga Valley members have taken the host training sessions to work at the depot. We plan on having another class in January. Volunteering at the depot is a good way to start out 2026. Please email wataugavalley@gmail.com or phone 423-753-5797 to get signed up. Everyone who hosts enjoys volunteering at the depot. We have several members that have not volunteered at the depot in a while. We sure would like to have you back again.

In the News



TVRM Advances Work on 12-1 Sleeper "Maitland"

[trains.com, Nov. 20, 2025] The Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum has received a \$50,000 grant



from Norfolk Southern to support restoration of the museum's Pullman sleeping car *Maitland*.

The funding comes from the NS Thriving Communities Grant Program, which supports organizations working to further safety, sustainability, workforce development, and community resilience.

"The *Maitland* was donated to TVRM by Norfolk Southern predecessor Southern Railway," Penelope Soule Gault, TVRM's senior director, marketing, communications, and guest experience, said in a press release. "Its restoration to operation will allow the public to experience riding in what was once the primary method of long-distance transportation in the country."

The car, a 12-section, one-drawing room sleeper which entered Pullman service in 1925, is currently undergoing restoration at the museum's Soule shops in East Chattanooga after years of outdoor storage. The project includes extensive work on the carbody, windows, electrical systems, and furnishings. The effort previously received a \$20,000 grant from the John Emery Rail Heritage Trust .

From the Vault ...



Scott Jesse sends along this undated photo of wrecked CRR locomotives in Erwin Yard.

Display in the Block

by Les Billings

This year I was able to go out the Saturday before Thanksgiving to once again catch the CSX Santa Train at a few stops and places. I started at Kermit, VA and caught it last in Johnson City near where I live. This was the first time in a couple of years that I was able to do so. It is always an adventure and treat to be able to chase it. People come from far and wide to receive gifts, but also to photograph and get their prize shots. So below is just a few of the shots I was able to get. Hope you enjoy. A dream would be not only to photograph, but be able to ride aboard.



Kermit



My first stop was Kermit, VA, I got there at a good time as I was able to get a good close parking spot. There was a small crowd, but lots more came and parking became difficult. CSX workers everywhere with yellow vests. The train finally arrived and Santa and his elves began giving out goodies to one and all.



MP86



The second catch of the day was on our way to Waycross, VA. We found this crossing at MP86 and waited until he arrived. This was a short wait as I could hear him coming in the distance.

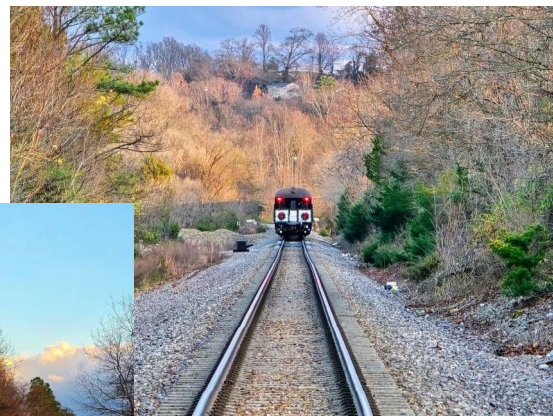


Waycross



After following a car that I was hoping knew where to go to get to Waycross, I finally made it and had a nice little talk with the engineer, James Rasnick.

Finally the Santa Train arrived in Kingsport where a large crowd was waiting. Santa boarded the train and took his place on stage where there was a celebration about to take place. This was the last stop before heading back to Johnson City to get my last glimpse and shots.

Johnson
CityEmbreeville Road
Crossing (JC)

So long and good by.

Merry
Christmas !!

Whistle Stop

Published Monthly by the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum

P.O. Box 432, Jonesborough, TN 37659

whistlestop.editor@gmail.com

Opinions or viewpoints are those of the writer and may not necessarily reflect those of the organization members, officers or directors. Items of interest are welcome and will be credited to the author; however, because of space constraints, all submissions are subject to editing. Permission to reprint *Whistle Stop* articles with the exception of photographs is granted if proper credit is given. Reuse of photographs must receive permission by the editor and the photographer.



Watauga Valley RHS & Museum

P.O. Box 432

Jonesborough, TN 37659

TIME-SENSITIVE MATERIAL