

# Turntable Times

Volume XXXI

Number 1

January 1999



**Rural Retreat, Virginia - May 1950**

# Turntable Times

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**Volume XXXI January 1999 Number 11**

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Small Rails ..... Dave Meashey  
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## Cards and Flowers

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If you know of a Chapter Member who is sick, lost a loved one or has a new birth in the family, please contact Elizabeth Leedy. Elizabeth is responsible for Chapter cards and flowers and can be reached at 389-5274.

## Meeting Notice

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The Roanoke Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society will hold its next February meeting on Thursday, February 18, 1999 at 7:30 pm. The meeting will be at the First Presbyterian Church on the corner of McClanahan and Crystal Spring Avenue in Roanoke.

## Meeting Notice

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The Roanoke Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society will hold its next general meeting on Thursday, January 21, 1999 at 7:30 pm. The meeting will be at the First Presbyterian Church on the corner of McClanahan and Crystal Spring Avenue in Roanoke.

## Cover Photo

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Rural Retreat, Va, May 1950 - K1 No. 105 with westbound local between watchman shanty and Gammons drygoods-hardware store. Photo property of Raymond R. Myers Library.

## Meeting Cancellation Policy

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Since it's that time of year, as a reminder we have the following policy regarding inclement weather.

The meeting will be considered cancelled if any of the following conditions are met: Roanoke City Schools are closed on the day of or for the day after the meeting, or Virginia Western night classes are cancelled for the night of a meeting.

## Officers and Directors for 1998

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Richard D. Shell ..... President  
Kenneth L. Miller ..... Vice-President  
Gary Ballard ..... Secretary  
Wanda Troutman ..... Treasurer  
Bill Arnold ..... National Director  
Paul M. Howell ..... Director at Large  
Carl Jensen ..... Director at Large  
Bill Mason ..... Director at large  
Dave Meashey ..... Director at Large

## Deadline for Turntable Times

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The deadline for the next issue of Turntable Times is Monday, January 18th, 1999. Please send articles,

information and all exchange newsletters to: Kenney Kirkman, Editor, Turntable Times, 590 Murphy Road, Collinsville, Va. 24078-2128.

## Small Rails - January

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by Dave Meashey

The Roanoke Valley Model Engineers held their Christmas dinner with spouses at the Sunnybrook Inn on December 1st. The club operated for the public in downtown Roanoke on December 4th, 11th, and 18th. We held a business meeting to discuss improvements to the layout in the areas of: setup, appearance,

operation, and enhancements. A work meeting was held December 22nd. The club hopes to stay at its downtown location for at least another month.

The Big Lick Big Train Operators met Saturday, December 5th at the Greenbrier Nursery to run trains on Greenbrier's Aristo Craft layout. Trains were operated from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. The Greenbrier's layout had a fairly stiff grade (5% to 6% ), so the trains had their work cut out for them. The two foot radius curves also meant we had to keep with smaller locomotives and keep our trains short. The public really enjoyed watching, and we may have attracted a few new members.

## **Mixed Freight - January**

by Mr. Robin Shavers

Well folks, how about that springtime like weather we had for part of November and December? In early December, I had to journey to Danville, VA to attend the funeral of an uncle. I stopped at Crewe to observe hopper train 815 and double stack 234. I happened to look down at the ground and I was in the company of two toads. Toads in December in The Commonwealth!

I hope you all had a safe and enjoyable holiday season and are ready for what lies ahead in 1999. The rear of 1998 was a real handful where this nation is concerned.

If you haven't heard yet, Norfolk Southern and CSX have targeted March 1st, 1999 as a POSSIBLE operational take over date of their respective parts of Conrail.

On a similar vein, the reality of a merger that would combine the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers with the United Transportation Union moves closer to a possibility as a vote from the rank and file membership determines the out-

come. Talks of a merger between the 2 have been going on for years.

Pennsylvania Railroad K4 No. 1361 is about 45% thru it's refurbishment project. A major problem with the project was the discovery that the smoke box, smokestack and other key parts have more wear and tear than what was estimated. Many parts and materials will have to be fabricated and this in turn will jack up the estimated price of \$700,000 to \$900,000. Along with donations from the general public, The Altoona Railroaders Memorial Museum is soliciting grants from different foundations.

As most of you know, shopping and selling via The Net is gaining more and more customers. If you are in the market for any kind of merchandise related to railroading or model railroading, you might want to give RAILS - R - US for Railroad & Transportation Online buying and selling. They can be reached at [WWW.AUCTION.RAILSUS.COM](http://WWW.AUCTION.RAILSUS.COM)

Several years ago, I reported that the bridge spanning the west end of Conrail's Enola Yard (a few hundred feet west of the I 81 bridge), had been closed off to vehicular and pedestrian use since it was deemed unsafe by the state. This short bridge has been a favorite viewing and photo location for railfans for years. I've been informed that the bridge has been replaced and made safer for spectators in the process.

Back in October, I rode an excursion train from Washington D.C. to Martinsburg, WV and return on a beautiful autumn Sunday. Upon arriving back at Union Station, I decided to take highway U.S. 1 all the way back to Richmond. I suddenly remembered that U.S. 1 parallels what used to be Potomac Yard. It had been over four years since I had traveled that particular stretch of U.S. 1. Those of you whom remember Potomac Yard during it's glory days would be shocked to see how it looks now. For starters, you can't even tell

a mighty railroad yard once existed there. The only evidence of railroad presence now is a three track mainline on the eastern edge of the property. Everything else is shopping center and beautiful thick green grass. I parked my Corsica and jes stood and thought. Years ago the area was off limits to anyone whom did not have any business with Potomac Yard or railroading. Now this same area is open to the public with open arms for their open wallets and pocketbooks. Ironically, Bob Dylan's THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGING was being played on an oldies station I was tuned into at that time.

I had a Sunday School teacher whom frequently said that some people are not happy unless they are complaining or finding fault with something or somebody. A railfan associate whom has a special interest in Canadian railroading has informed me that a segment of the Canadian population has expressed displeasure with Canadian Pacific's dual flag logo that has been applied to sides of a number of locomotives. They view it as a form of desecration. No one knows if Canadian Pacific has made an official response to these sentiments.

For those of you whom have no idea of what the logo looks like, its simply a logo with two halves of the American flag and the Canadian flag joined together with half of the Canadian flag being to your left and the

American balancing out the right half. CP RAIL SYSTEM is to the left of the merged flag. The locomotive is red with white trim. Units displaying this scheme can be seen at Norfolk Southern' Montview Yard in Lynchburg. They come south with train 341 and return north on 342.

Speaking of paint schemes, the Southern Railway caboose stationed at Gretna, Virginia has been repainted to look as good as it did when Southern purchased it brand new.

Norfolk Southern's 1999 calendar is out and

available to the public for \$5.00 per copy. Along with photos of NS trains, photos of Conrail trains are included too. Photos are the works of NS and Conrail employees which are entered in a contest known as The Norfolk Southern Photo Shoot Out. Calendars can be ordered from: NS Calendar, Norfolk Southern Corp., 110 Franklin Road, S. E., Roanoke, VA 24024.

## **Winter on a Garden Railroad**

by Dave Meashey

**A**s of the second weekend in December, winter officially started on my garden railroad. Most of the structures were brought back to the house. The figures and vehicles were brought in too. The bird feeder, which looks like a grouping of wild west stores, will stay on its site for the winter. So will the station platform, the signals, and, of course, the track. Already I can see where I will need to add ballast and do some leveling when spring comes. I'll probably need to cover the turnouts, at least from the throwbar to the frog. This is more for protection from pine needles and other debris, than to keep out the weather.

The "final runs" for the season were made Thanksgiving weekend, but good weather may bring out some "winter extras" to run. A broom and a drywall sander make relatively short work of cleaning the track and shining the rails. The railroad can be ready for trains in fairly short order. I don't have my snowplow built yet, but I look forward to bucking drifts in miniature someday.

Except for some bird dirt, spider webs, and cocoons, everything seemed to be in pretty good shape after being outdoors since June 21st. Some items will require repairs. The

wooden freight platform will need some warped boards straightened out and resecured to its frame. The platform will also need a water seal treatment. Some figures will need touching up where paint has chipped. The same is true for the horse drawn freight wagon. I learned that Testors enamel does not hold up well on wooden oil drums. Perhaps Rustoleum will.

My scratch built wooden barrels will need new bands. The original bands were draftsmen's lining tape. Perhaps O-rings will work better for this application. If time permits, I'll put together some other building kits for next year.

The garden railway has been a lot of fun, and I'm looking forward to its second year. I already have a pond and a short stream to install next spring. Perhaps a park can be built beside the pond, and a new trolley line can be constructed to connect the park with the town. Hummmm? Oh yes, we also need a couple of gold and silver mines.

## **611 Report**

by John A. Garrett

I plan to move the 611 again February 4, 1999, weather permitting.

I have adjusted the schedule some in 1999 to accommodate conferences and meetings of railroad people. I will try to stay close to the three month schedule.

I feel like she would love to have the 1218 come and join her under the nice dry shelter.

I have checked on a small smoke generator, to install in the stack. But they are expensive and not adaptable to operate from a motion sensor.

## **Rural Retreat And The Railroad**

by Ray Myers

When the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad (V&T) opened a line from Big Lick

(Roanoke) to Bristol in 1856 Rural Retreat did not exist. At that time the V&T timetable listed one passenger and one freight train daily in each direction at a place called Mount Airy.

**RURAL RETREAT HISTORY** - Mount Airy was a place on the stagecoach road (Cumberland Road and now US11) about three miles northwest of what became Rural Retreat. The V&T line was built over a ridge to the south. A post office was established since the existing post office was in the Dr. Straw Stagecoach Tavern about six miles east of the original Mount Airy on the Cumberland Road. The name Rural Retreat came into use as this Mount Airy was confused with Mount Airy, NC. The most prevalent story is that people in the rural area retreated to the railroad where they started a town - thus Rural Retreat.

**LAND ELEVATION** - Rural Retreat has historically been billed as the highest elevation between New York and New Orleans on any mainline passenger railroad. Indeed its 2581 feet above sea level exceeds the 2567 feet in Bluefield. The crest of the summit is one mile west of the station. The average grade between Wytheville and Rural Retreat (13 miles) is 1.3 percent, however the one mile west of the station is greater. Passenger engineers Aubry Staley, J.J. Rotenberry and others never looked forward to a station stop when headed westbound. It is noted that the rivers flow north and south from Rural Retreat. By rail or road from Roanoke it is up grade to Christiansburg with a dip to Radford (New River). After that it is again upgrade to Rural Retreat and then downhill to Bristol.

**YEARS REMEMBERED BEST** - Between 1927 and 1957 are the years remembered best. Initially there were local passenger trains 11 and 12, however after they were cut off there were numbers 25 and 26 (Memphis Special), 17 and 18 (Birmingham Special) and 41 and 42 (The Pelican). In 1941 the stainless steel streamline

trains 45 and 46 (The Tennessean) took the place of the Memphis Special. As many know, the Monroe-Bristol line was a bridge route for Southern trains who would have otherwise had to go via Salisbury and Asheville to reach Knoxville and beyond on Southern rails. There were numerous freight trains including a daily local in each direction. As a young boy it was thrilling to see all the freight when a box car was opened. The local was on the station track next to the dock which made unloading easy while keeping the main track clear. I can still see the conductor checking his bills as someone called out two cases of soup, three cartons of cigarettes, one stalk of bananas, etc. Traveling salesman (called drummers) would ride from town to town on the train taking orders from merchants. Often times they would telegraph their orders from the station during the evening while spinning "traveling salesman stories" for the benefit of the "all ears" locals. Yes, Rural Retreat had a hotel in those days where southern cooked food was abundant for traveling salesman and a few very senior citizens.

**BUILDINGS AND TRACK LAYOUT** - The station is located on the north side of the tracks. The track next to the platform is covered with small gravel except for the railhead. The main track is next with a passing track third which comes into the main track just east of the station. From the passing track there was a 50-60 yard spur to T.F. Kidd's coal yard. Between the passing track and the spur was the section foreman's house and shed for his track speeder, trailer and tools. Section foreman Neikirk often won the annual award for the best maintained section of track west of Radford. His son became an N&W official. About 100 feet northwest of the station was the railroad's scale house. There were two railroad crossings in town with only the east crossing protected. Many boys spent inquisitive hours talking with jovial Mr. Artie while he was seated on a chair outside his shanty. Like many watchmen he had a job related injury (lost arm) that kept him on the payroll and eligible for retirement benefits. The station track extended beyond the platform almost to the summit. It was used for car loading and unloading and



during the cabbage and rutabaga season at least two refrigerator cars (ice cooled) were loaded daily in a bucket brigade fashion - one head at a time person to person. Rural Retreat did not have a water tank; they were located west of Radford at Pulaski, Max Meadows?, Crockett, Atkins, Seven Mile Ford and Abingdon as I remember.

**RAILROAD MISHAPS** - During the 1920's there was a headend collision in town between two locomotives one of which was a Class K 4-8-2. During the wee hours of a very cold winter night a Y6 2-8-8-2 exploded with loss of life. And while folks were loading walnut logs at Crockett into a gondola the car got away and ran over the end of track into Kelly March's country store. The last two incidents occurred in the 1950's.

**CHRISTMAS EVE 1957** - O. Winston Link's recording of No. 42 (The Pelican) arriving at 9:39 PM and departing is etched forever in the minds of those who have heard the recording. Class J No. 603 rumbles by the station until the brakes on the first coach of this 17 car train stops at the front door. Within a minute the engines cab air

whistle sounds, the throttle is notched back and the train is stretched out as soft sounds from the stack get the train on a downhill roll. The markers are about out of sight as the engineer blows for the milk plant crossing. During this time Christmas carols from Grace Lutheran Church are audible all over this sleepy little town - the silence was only broken for a few minutes by the sounds of No. 42. Seven nights later the sounds of a J class locomotive were silent forever on the Bristol line. This recording is in an album entitled **THE FADING GIANT**.

**MEMORIES** - Since those days of fond memories many changes have taken place. The station is closed and the watchman shanty, scale house and mail crane removed as well as the coal yard spur track. Also, trains now run on welded rail while engineers adhere to the aspects displayed on rectangular style signal lights in lieu of the former Pennsylvania Railroad style round position lights. The all purpose freight train remains while the local freight and passenger trains have been replaced by trains with highway truck trailers and containers on board. However there



Norfolk and Western Photo  
Head on collision, October 20, 1920 near Rural Retreat. Class K1, No 102 on train 14 and Class E2 No. 558 on train No. 37

remains a bit of nostalgic memory of days gone by - in the town flat (not town square) just north of the station parked on a section of track is Norfolk and Western caboose No. 518634. With the exception of the caboose and the Roanoke Chapter's Roanoke - Rural Retreat rail fan trip on July 3, 1976, herein is described how it was a long time ago in Rural Retreat, Virginia...

### **Dues are now Due!**

If you have not paid your dues for 1999 so far they are now officially late. Please stay with us and join the excitement and fun. Remember a club is what you put into it. Send your renewals to Membership Chairman at the Chapter Post Office box as listed on the back cover. We have a lot of projects to participate in and need everyone to participate in some form.

Time is limited these days, we all realize that, but if everyone can offer at least an hour or two a week to some Chapter project it would be a

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great help. There are a number of members who spend quite a few hours each week to keep the Chapter going, so help spread the load a bit and pitch in.

### **Amtrak Trip**

We have been officially notified by Amtrak that they will not have equipment available in April or May to allow us to offer an excursion weekend. While we are disappointed with this development, we have plenty of other opportunities for excursion trains. We have also placed a request in for a fall weekend with Amtrak as well.

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