



Turntable TIMES

The Official Newsletter of the
Roanoke Chapter, National
Railway Historical Society, Inc.

Volume 37, Number 1
January 2005





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Turntable Times is published monthly as the newsletter of the Roanoke Chapter, National Railway Historical Society, Inc. Opinions and points of view expressed herein are those of the staff members of the Turntable Times and not necessarily reflect those of the members, officers or directors of the Chapter.

Meeting Notice

The Roanoke Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society will hold its next regular meeting on Thursday, January 20, 2005 at 7:30 pm.

Please be sure to note our weather cancellation policy below.

From The Head End

Cards and Flowers

If you know of a Chapter Member who is sick, lost a loved one or has a new birth in the family, please contact Bonnie Molinary. Bonnie is responsible for Chapter cards and flowers and can be reached at 362-0273.

Deadline for Turntable Times

The deadline for the next issue of Turntable Times is Tuesday, January 18, 2005. Please send articles, information and exchange newsletters to: Kenney Kirkman, Editor, Turntable Times 590 Murphy Road, Collinsville, VA 24078-2128.

Meeting Cancellation Policy

Any Chapter meeting will be considered cancelled if any of the following conditions are due to weather: 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.

Material for Turntable Times

We are always in need of articles, photos or news items for the Turntable Times. Due to copyright restrictions, we cannot reprint articles from most newspapers; a condensed rewritten article crediting the source, however, is acceptable.

Cover Photo

We suspect that almost nobody would have thought of seeing a sight like this in 2004. After the virtual demise of the caboos on July 1, 1988, the chance of seeing a Virginian caboose moving on its own wheels, much less painted as delivered would be a far fetched dream That dream came true on December 18, 2004 as Ken Miller's No. 342 left town headed for its new permanent home at Victoria, Virginia. Photo by Richard D. Shell.

Holiday Gathering

Over 70 members and guests had another lovely evening of food and socialization on Thursday, December 16. Despite the very cold temperatures, the glow of fellowship was quite warm. Everyone who attended came away with an NS 2005 Calendar as well as some wonderful NS doorprizes, our thanks to Norfolk Southern Public Relations for providing these nice prizes.

Special thanks to all those involved in the production of this excellent event: Bonnie Molinary, Kathy Overholser or Wanda Troutman and all their helpers!

2005 Officers and Directors

At the December Board meeting the board elected the following officers to lead the Chapter during 2005. Please support them and the Chapter in all its endeavors during the year.

President Ken Miller
Vice President Walt Alexander
Secretary Dave Meashey
Treasurer Wanda Troutman
National Director Carl Jensen
Director at Large Lawanda Ely
Director at Large Grace Helmer

As per the Board's action previously, the Board was reduced from 9 to 7 members this year. This action was taken primarily because of our reduced operations over the last number of years. Our thanks go to all the candidates who ran this year, and our retiring Directors; Alan Easome and Chad Jordan.

Mixed Freight - January

by Mr. Robin R. Shavers

By the time you read this, the Buckingham Branch Railroad's Richmond & Alleghany Division will be in operation. Actual operations commenced on Tuesday, December 21st. According to a railfan associate whom I hired on as a locomotive engineer for the BB, the Richmond & Alleghany will have two operational headquarters. The eastern end will operate from Doswell and the western end will operate from Staunton. The eastern end will have a GP40 and either a GP16 or GP20 duo set of motive power and the western end will have a pair of GP40s. The eastern end will operate from Doswell eastward in the morning and westward to Gordonsville and the line to Orange in the evening. Trains from Staunton will operate westward to Clifton Forge and eastward to Gordonsville. He was not sure which trip would be morning or evening. Weekend warrior railfans take note, the Richmond & Alleghany Division of the Buckingham Branch will operate Monday thru Friday only. If they operate on a Saturday or Sunday, it will be out of absolute necessity only. Keep in mind that CSX will be operating its usual westbound hopper trains over the line seven days a week. CSX will perform dispatching duties for the R&A for two years. After two years, dispatching will be BB's responsibility.

My associate also informed me that numerous shippers are looking forward to Buckingham Branch service. Many were not satisfied with CSX. Mr. Robert E. Bryant, the railroad's president, has been busy visiting and discussing with current and potential customers what his railroad can offer in terms of reliable service. I wish Mr. Bryant

and his railroad good luck in this ambitious endeavor.

Last month I reported on the former Southern Railway depot at Burkeville, VA. The roof is painted a rich boxcar (oxide) red. The eastern ground of the depot has been shored up by a beautiful S curve wall made of rocks cemented together. With green Christmas wreaths adorning the front doors, it made a beautiful site on a sunny day back in December.

Over the past few months, CSX has been busy installing new signals within the Richmond area on the former RF&P, SCL, and C&O. Many dwarf signals have been upgraded to high signals. The new signals have extended hoods to offer train crews better visibility when sunlight can be a real challenge during certain times.

It is well known among those of us whom admired and revered Mr. O. Winston Link that he really had a thing for and special relationship with Norfolk and Western's Abingdon Branch which ran from Abingdon, VA to West Jefferson, N.C. for a total of 55 miles. Mr. Link admired the line so much that when he discovered steam on the line would soon be a thing of the past, he approached N&W management about the possibility of purchase. The N&W agreed to sell Mr. Link the line for \$2,000 per mile. In those days, that was considered a bargain. Buying the railroad was one thing, maintaining the 100 bridges and trestles was another. Mr. Link found the offer acceptable until N&W officials warned him of frequent bridge and trestle repair due to mudslides and washouts. Mr. Link wisely changed his mind about purchasing the Abingdon Branch. I don't know whether Winston had intentions of buying and operating a train.

FREIGHT CAR GRAFFITI: Most of you have probably seen bumper stickers that read "IF I WERE FLYING AN F16 I'D BE HOME BY NOW". Scribbled on the side of a freshly painted East Erie Commercial boxcar, someone, probably an irate motorist, wrote "If it were not for this (expletive) train, I'd be home by now." On another car aboard another train many months later, CONRAIL TWITTY WAS HERE.

Small Rails

by Dave Meashey

The Polar Express
Great Fun And Not Many
Hollywood Mistakes

I went to see this animated movie with my wife and our daughter, Julie, on November 26, 2004. We viewed it at the Grandin Theatre, and had a marvelous time. The movie is a fantasy based on a beloved children's book. Grades and curves look like Dr. Seuss was this railroad's Chief Civil Engineer. Some of the grades would make a rack locomotive gasp, but it's all part of the fun. One scene even has the train playing a sort of "crack the whip" on an iced-over lake while trying to line itself with the track on the opposite side.

Views concerned with the locomotive and cars are fairly accurate, however. For the most part, controls are in their proper locations and get used correctly. The conductor gives the proper signals with his lantern. One disconcerting error is the gap between the passenger cars. The children are jumping across exposed couplers. If the Polar Express is, perhaps, a toy train grown to full size, then the lack of passenger car gangways may be logical.

In another scene, a little boy accidentally

steps on the cut lever while climbing into the observation car. The car uncouples, drifts slowly at first, then plummets along for a merry ride. In reality, the observation car should have drifted back about 2-3 feet, there would have been a report like a 20 gauge shotgun blast, and the brakes would have gone to emergency setting. But that's no fun! The wild ride ending in the bowels of Santa's North Pole complex is much more entertaining.

Oh yeah, the fireman has long red hair with a beard to match. Steam locomotive crews were usually clean-shaven. Beards and long hair were a fire hazard. I know from personal experience; I've trimmed my eyebrows enough times checking the fire on the locomotives I ran. However, his beard and long hair save the day more than once. I won't ruin the fun for those who have yet to see this film by explaining how.

This movie is well worth the ticket price. It's great fun to watch with friends and family, especially for those of you who have grandchildren. And if it makes another generation want to play with toy and model trains—go for it!

Challenges

by Ken Miller

As many of you know, the Roanoke Chapter will be facing a number of challenges during 2005 and beyond. Like most challenges, these will not be easy to deal with, and may require a number of far reaching decisions to be made. Your Board and you as members will be making a number of decisions over the upcoming months and years.

I undertake the Presidency of the Chapter

once again, somewhat under protest. I have been in this position for the past four years, and I feel we are quite stagnant. This is guaranteed, to be my last year as President. There is no way to put this gently, the future is not clear and bright. Several events in the past few years now change the potential direction of the Chapter, and it honestly is time to be prepared to make some changes.

Some of the **issues facing our organization**: create or develop new sources of revenue and smart conservation of our assets, increase participation by members in all aspects of the Chapter, define and implement activities that can involve members in on-going activities among others.

Not everyone can and will be happy with things that are said and done in the future, but unless you are willing to work towards positive change and be a willing, open-minded participant, you may have to take a back-seat to the rest.

One thing is **involvement of the membership** in the activities, one mission the long-range planning committee has been charged with is a work session meeting of the members. That is, a general meeting with round table discussion and suggestions of what to do and where to go. This organization has come a long way since re-organization in January, 1968. The group had roughly \$38 in assets at the time. Obviously, we have far more than that now, but the one thing we are missing is the level of participation. One good point is a large number of the folks involved in 1968 are still involved. However, this also points to one of the problems with us and NRHS in general, the group is aging, not maintaining or staying the same. Why is this? Obviously, a number

of answers come to mind but whatever reasons there are, we need to come towards some solutions of this situation, as sooner, not later, all of the folks who have been involved for many years, and I include myself in that number, are getting tired and will be retiring from active status, we can't do everything we once did. Work and family activities take time away from volunteer hours, that is for sure, but **if more people can give a little bit of time** to some activities, there can be a much more active, vibrant organization.

Last month's article about behind the scenes folks was meant to enlighten those of you who only attend meetings that there is more than is just seen there. **So come out, become involved** and offer to help, this organization needs your input and help. We have a great heritage to live up to, but it can't be done with a handful of folks.

One of our activities that has lapsed over the past few years is a potluck meal or picnic. That is an activity that is not too hard to organize and plan. We have done the Holiday meeting with great success the past few years, which will draw out a number of folks, some who cannot make it to other activities. The potluck can do the same thing. **It would be nice to see a volunteer or two come together** and produce a nice social event or local outing for members in the spring. Come and see me at the meeting, email or call, I have some suggestions for this activity that will make it a bit different and have some alternative activities for everyone.

A **Chapter outing** is a considerable amount of work, that is a fact. Coordinating a large number of people on a trip is difficult at best. We have done a number of

these outings in the past decade and had a very successful outing last year. I think all the participants from last year enjoyed themselves and are ready to go again. Once again, an organizer needs to step forward, we have a number of people experienced with this or similar activities, but some new folks can join the "fun" it may be some work, but the more hands involved in various aspects of our activities will make things easier for all, and bring more **comraderie** for the organization.

Roanoke Chapter VMT Gift Shop News

by Jim Overholser and Ellen Arnold

As those who attended the Holiday gathering already heard, there is now an inventory reduction sale going on at the Chapter's Gift Shop inside the Virginia Museum of Transportation. All merchandise except Link material is discounted 1/3 from the original prices. No further discounts are available, you have to come into the shop for the specials, and pay by cash, check, or credit card. This sale will end on February 23rd.

Twenty Years Ago-January, 1985

by Ken Miller

Wow, 20 years, it hardly seems possible that time has passed this quickly, where did the years go? The 1218 had not even left the Virginia Museum of Transportation as of this date, 20 years back, and there had been almost no indication of anything happening with it. Five months later, she was rolled out and headed south for an amazing return to steam joining the 611 to run the main line.

The N&W steam was not the big news that January for the railfan world however. The big news was a never imagined experience. Ross Rowland's ex C&O Class J-3a 4-8-4 No. 614 had been running off and on for several years, and that was no big story. However, the news came that she was going to operate the entire month of January and close to home for Roanoke Chapter members!

The 614 was to be a testbed for gathering statistical data for a potential steam powered locomotive, and would be in regular coal train service six days a week, running on alternate days from Huntington to Hinton, West Virginia, regardless of weather and conditions.

To those of us who had little or no experience with steam power in operation in cold weather, it was amazing. Little would we know that the month of January would be one of the coldest on record, and our first trip to see the 614 would be a record setting night on the way home.

It was cold in Roanoke early in the morning of January 19th, a Saturday. Meeting at my house in the darkness were Jeff Sanders, Richard Shell and Dorr Tucker, My father Elbert decided to go along as well bringing the total to five of us. Remember, this was before the days of humongous SUVs, the only thing we had large enough to haul the five of us was a 1977 Pontiac Bonneville. We loaded up the car, cameras, film and cold weather gear, or at least we thought so. Our plan was to head west via the West Virginia Turnpike to Chelyan and then turn east to meet the train on its westbound trip.

We left the house in the predawn gloom and by the time we got to Shawsville, snow was falling. It was not a good sign. We were continually in falling snow, except for a few brief moments for the rest of the day. Our first stop was at Handley, West Virginia, a terminal east of Charleston. We were not

the only ones inquiring of where the steam train is, after finding out we had a bit of time to move further east, we drove down the snow covered two lane road paralleling the main line. We finally stopped at Mt. Carbon thinking this was our best opportunity back out on what passed for good road in this part of the world.

It was snowing hard and the wind was blowing, it was almost blinding. We heard that distinctive sound and whistle in the distance and our breath was simply taken away. The cold and magnificent sight of the volcanic plume of smoke and steam coming at us was amazing. Honestly, no photos can convey the scene as well as the memories in my mind. The wind was so hard the snow was blowing sideways, but I would not trade the experience for the world. And to think, some 30 or more years before this was an everyday occurrence. We ran for the car and paced the train to Montgomery, a few miles away, where a water stop was scheduled. The snow abated for a few minutes here during the water stop. We watched and snapped some photos and grabbed some food before heading on to the west. The radio weather reports kept warning of dangerous cold weather that night. The engine crew was also a bit concerned and made the decision to cut the train at Handley and make a run for Huntington to arrive before dark. We slipped and slid in the snow and ice west of Handley and got some more photos, but knew we could never keep up with the light engine.

We turned and headed for home, visiting some of the former Virginian, following the line from Deepwater to Oak Hill, all on snow covered roads and more still falling. By the time we got back to Princeton, on the expiration of our 12-hour law, we finally ran out of the snow falling. It was cold that night, not quite a record but the following

two nights at Beckley it was -20° (F) and then -22° (F), both records that still stand.

I don't think any of us has ever experienced anything like the cold and beauty of the day. Would we do it again? Absolutely! Some of us went again the next Saturday a bit better weather, actual sunshine and no snow falling, still plenty of snow cover to allow for great photo opportunities. The biggest regret that I have is that I simply did not take a full week of vacation and spend it there. It is a sight, I dare say, we are unlikely to experience again in this country.

Today, 614, 611 and 1218 are all as cold as the weather that January twenty years ago and all that truly remains are the wonderful memories of freezing in a blizzard at Mt. Carbon, rapid darkness at Handley and our photos. No matter how good the photos are, you just had to be there!

UPCOMING MEETINGS/EVENTS

January 20 - Regular Meeting

February 1 - Board Meeting

February 17 - Regular Meeting

March 1 - Board Meeting

March 17 - Regular Meeting

April 5 - Board Meeting

April 21 - Regular Meeting

April/May - Spring Potluck? Stay Tuned
Volunteers/Organizers Needed

May 3 - Board Meeting

May 19 - Regular Meeting

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