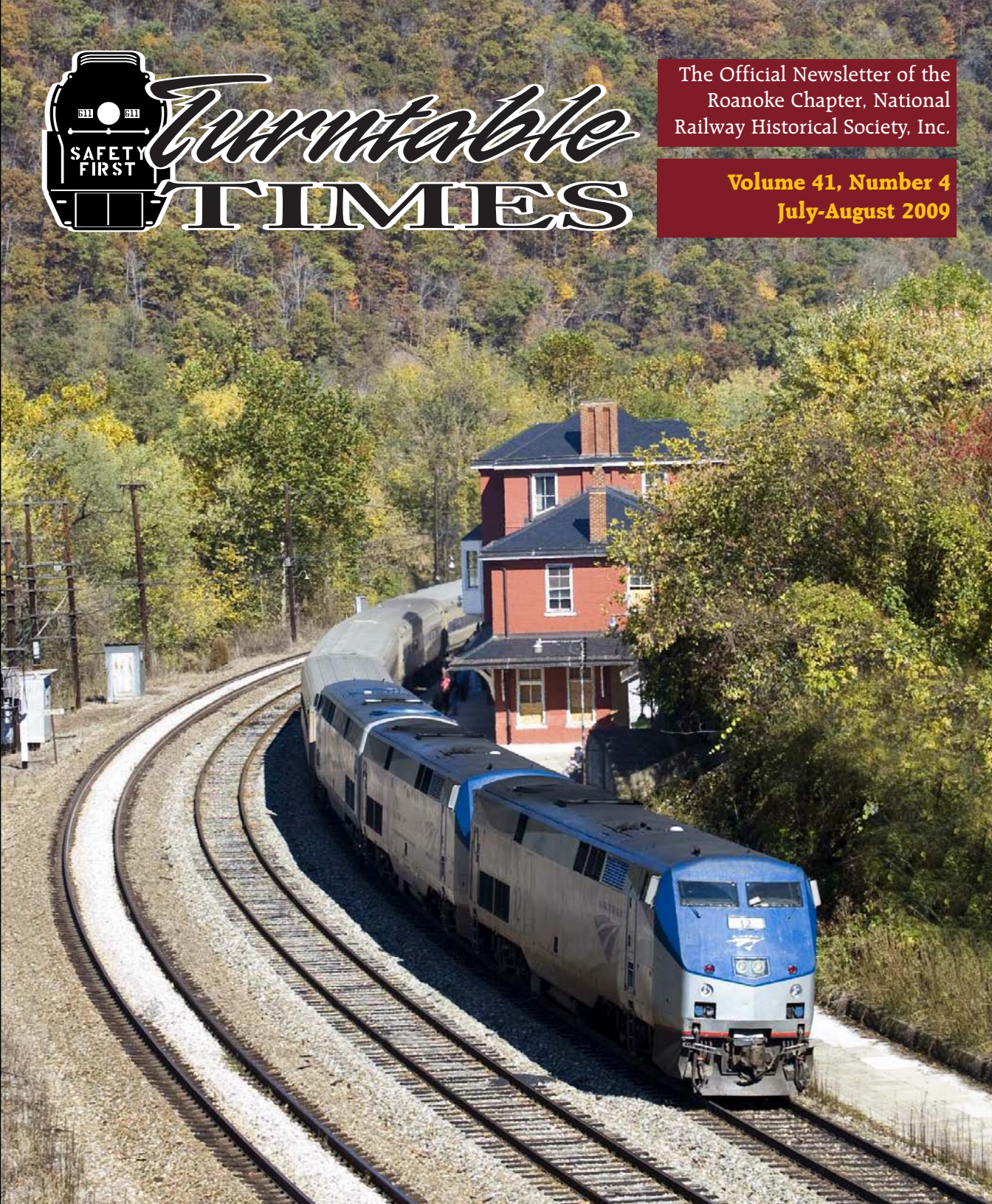




# *Turntable* TIMES

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

**Volume 41, Number 4**  
**July-August 2009**





# Turntable TIMES

**Volume 41, Number 4  
July-August 2009**

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Turntable Times is published bimonthly 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 meeting on Thursday, July 16th at 7:30 pm. at the Link Museum located in the former N&W Passenger Station, 101 Shenandoah Avenue. The August Meeting will be held on Thursday, August 20th at 7:30 p.m. in the same location.

Our program in July will be Dave Helmer's presentation on his return to Vietnam, 40 years later. It should be very interesting!

## *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 September/October 2009 issue of Turntable Times is Tuesday, August 18, 2009. Please send articles, information and exchange newsletters to: Kenney Kirkman, Editor Turntable Times, 590 Murphy Road, Collinsville, VA 24078-2128. All parties sending newsletters to the Roanoke Chapter via email should send them to: [kkirkman50@hotmail.com](mailto:kkirkman50@hotmail.com) and Ken Miller at [klmiller@rev.net](mailto:klmiller@rev.net)

### **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**

After an absence of 12 years, we are planning to operate an Amtrak excursion in November, see details elsewhere in this issue. We only hope the scenery is as great as this trip on October 21, 2006 as the Huntington Chapter's New River Train arrived at Hinton at 12:47PM. Yes, this is a similar view to the November 2006 Turntable Times cover, but not the same! Ken Miller Photo

## **Fond Memories.....The Series Visiting Ms. Odaris**

by Mr. Robin R. Shavers

Oh I would love to return to those boy-hood days of mine and the green light along the Southern Railway railroad line.

The above is the chorus line to a song entitled Green Light On The Southern. I have written quite a few Fond Memories for the Turntable Times over the past 10 or more years but to tell you the truth, this one really should have been the first. For a little boy crazy about trains growing up in a small city like Danville, VA back in the sixties, visiting Ms. Odaris Holland was indeed a highlight in my younger life.

Ms. Odaris was my mother's best friend. They were not like Lucy and Ethel or Trixy and Alice or Thelma and Louise but they had a friendship that was fulfilling for them. Ms. Odaris had Stokes Street in front of her home in south Danville and the double track high iron of the railway that SERVED THE SOUTH flanking her backyard.

The thrill would usually begin at the family dinner during Sunday after church. Dad would announce in a very business like and low tone of voice "Robin, Gina we are going to visit Mr. Odaris this afternoon. I want you both to behave yourselves". As strict as my dad was, he didn't have to tell us twice, he didn't have to tell us once. We would usually arrive at her home somewhere between 3 and 4 p.m.

Ms. Odaris had a daughter named Patricia and sometimes her cousin Jimmy from Greensboro would be in town too. The fun we 4 kids would have. I was the only train lover in the bunch but the moment we heard an airhorn blow, we would head for a little hill that overlooked the tracks. Of course Jimmy being a little boy like myself had more interest than my sister and

Patricia. But I must admit, Patricia did enjoy the slogans that flanked the boxcars and the loads aboard the flatcars. She was also curious about the placards that read DO NOT HUMP. It would be a few more years down the road before I could explain that. I still had A LOT to learn.

The trains we saw were mainly powered by covered wagons, but quite a few were powered by hood units. Along with the mainline action, there was a long siding that served several customers a few city blocks north of Ms. Odaris's house. There was a customer that received coal, one that received sand to make concrete and a third one that received boxcars. It was fun to watch the little EMD diesel change out the inbound cars for the outbound cars. This usually required 30 or 40 minutes.

Our location was about 2 miles south of the depot and about 3 quarters of a mile south of what the railroaders called Cemetery Curve. Southbounders had a steady grade and the sound of them pulling that grade in notch 8 was something only a railfan or a person that enjoys the sound of powerful machines at work would enjoy. Some of the trains that had made a stop at Dundee for a setoff or pickup or both were at a walking pace as they headed south past us. Oh the thoughts I had of jumping inside one of those open boxcars. The northbounders of course cruised by at about 40 to 45 miles per hour. There was a grade crossing a little over a mile to the south and there were 4 in one mile to our north. One was almost at Ms. Odaris's backdoor.

The number of trains we saw varied from visit to visit. Our visit would usually end around 8:30 or 9:00 p.m. At that time passenger trains didn't interest me that much. Believe it or not, I would actually walk away from the tracks once I discovered it was a varnish instead of freight. I remember visits

that yielded no freights at all. Those grade crossings really came in handy especially when we had to stay inside the house because of rain or cold weather. But even then, I had developed a "railfan instinct". Even without hearing a horn blow, I just sensed something was coming and I'd bolt to the back door just in time. My parents and Ms. Odaris were just baffled. Ms. Odaris would whisper to my parents, "I didn't hear a train blow. How did he know one was coming?" My parents would usually reply that they just didn't know. When they finally asked me how I knew a train was coming, I replied that I just sensed or felt a train was close by. There was a powerful street light behind Ms. Odaris's for the nearby unprotected grade crossing. It was enough light for me to see the trains at night from inside the house.

Between trains, we played games such as red light green light, hide n seek, maginal chairs and others. Board games were played when confined to the inside.

I don't mind saying that visits that yielded a lot of train action held me in a state of hypnosis for days and concentrating on school work was a real challenge. Ah yes, a Sunday along The Southern Railway railroad line.

## **The East Broad Top Railroad**

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**A** new nonprofit organization has signed an agreement to operate the East Broad Top Railroad for three years. The organization hopes to attract enough grant money during that time to buy the Pennsylvania narrow gauge line from its longtime owners, Joe and Judy Kovalchick.

The new organization, the East Broad Top Railroad Preservation Association, was put together by Larry Salone, who is executive director of the Altoona Railroaders Memorial

Museum.

Mr. Salone plans to seek money to reopen about six miles of track from the current end of operation to Mount Union, where freight was transferred to the PRR in a dual-gauge yard.

Salone discussed putting a second EBT steam engine back in service, most likely No. 14, which is nearly identical to the only currently operating engine No. 15, and also converting additional freight cars for passenger service so that the line's 19th Century coaches could be reserved for special occasions. (Info. from numerous sources)

## **Troop Movement On The N&W**

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by Joe Fagan

**T**he programs at the last few Roanoke Chapter meetings has taken me back to that time again when the Army was being built up to fighting strength. Things had gotten rough in Europe so the United States had to get on the ball and build up its defenses (and offenses too) to keep its place at the world's table. On September 16, 1940, all men between the ages of 21 and 36 years old were ordered to register with their local draft board. Draft boards were located throughout the nation manned by local officials. It didn't take long for the balance of the sexes to be really heavy on the female side. In 1940 I was only 16 years old and for some reason I thought I would never get old enough to be drafted. Well, the government sure fixed that! They reduced the draft age to 18 years old. I was still a bit too young. I graduated from Wallace, VA high school in May, 1943 and went to work for the N&W and was called a telegrapher. The date July 31, 1944 found me at Camp Perry, VA in Navy boot camp. There was a saying in Abingdon "as lonesome as the headlight on

No. 42. That was the train all the guys including me departed Abingdon on and left their wives or girlfriends standing on the platform.

During the time I was getting old enough to go to the service, I spent lots of time watching trains passing. It was very common to see light engines passing going west to Bristol. That was a sign that there would be a troop train coming east in a few hours. To start with, the trains were coach trains loaded to the brim with Army men. That was when you could still open the coach windows. The citizens would come down to the tracks to wave encouragement to the guys. Every window was open with at least two men hanging out every one! Any woman standing there would be the target of a folded piece of paper with the name and address of the guy who threw it and it was accompanied by a loud whistle and a shout. Sometimes the trains would have two engines coupled together. Two trains would be coming or one extra big one with some equipment. Some trains would be 15 or so coaches and then a string of flats with tanks and field guns and big 4 by and 6 by trucks. Anything that an armored unit uses. On at least one occasion, three coupled class A engines passed and I think there was enough men and equipment passed to fight a small war by themselves!

Troops and equipment wasn't all that passed. There were plenty of ship screws (ship propellers for the land lubbers) on flat cars, usually two to a car. There would be shipments of tanks and big guns and long strings of tank cars and hard telling what was in the boxcars! There were plenty of war goods manufactories such as the National Fireworks plant at Cecil, just on the outskirts of Bristol. My wife, Sue, was an employee there assembling 20 mm cannon ammunition. Universal Molded Products

made aircraft parts. Aircraft parts and Navy landing craft parts were made in Marion. Radford Army Arsenal made gunpowder and trucked it over to the plant at Dublin to be loaded into silk bags for the big guns that didn't fire fixed ammunition. Most of that stuff came through Roanoke and funneled up through the Shenandoah Division. That is where the name of Big Valley train came from. The trucking business was still a baby and busses were not much better than school busses. Rosy the riveter did most of it too.

## **Biking the Abingdon Branch**

by Kenney Kirkman

**D**uring the last week in June, this writer decided to ride a bicycle the entire length of the Virginia Creeper Trail between Abingdon and Whitetop, VA.

The last time I had done a long distance bike ride on a rail trail was on the New River Rail Trail from Pulaski to Galax about ten years ago. So, on the first day between Damascus and Abingdon, it took me a good while to get used to the feel of biking long distance again. Sometimes I would just stop completely along the way to let a gang of folks go by rather than try to stay on the trail and perhaps cause a wreck or two. By the second day though, when I decided to take a bike from Whitetop down the mountain to Damascus, the routine of bike riding had become much easier once again.

For those of you who haven't been to the Virginia Creeper Trail either to ride a bike, or to walk, or to jog, then you are missing one of the most scenic rail trails around! This is not to take anything away from the New River Trail of course, which presents its own scenery and lots of local history.

While many bike riders do travel between Abingdon and Damascus, still countless oth-

ers like to ride the downhill portion of the trail from Whitetop to Damascus. On the day I was at Whitetop there were folks from all over the country eager to start the downhill adventure, including lots of kids.

After a bike ride of about 45 minutes or so from the newly constructed depot at Whitetop, which replaced the original building that was once located there, I arrived at the station at Green Cove. Of course we all know about the depot at Green Cove, what with all the O. Winston Link railroad photos, recordings, etc. that feature the station there. The day I was at Green Cove, a dog was herding sheep in a nearby field behind the depot. It was like a walk back in time to stop and stroll through and about the Green Cove depot. The little rail car by the way still sits proudly on the short stretch of track in front of the Green Cove depot presenting its own bit of history of an era that once was.

Many signs of narrow gauge railroad right of ways can be seen as one rides along the trail from Whitetop to Damascus. One can only imagine now what the sounds of those little trains must have been like as their engine whistles echoed off the surrounding mountain sides pulling along their car loads of lumber. At Creek Junction, there was a standard gauge branch line that once went eastward to the thriving lumber town of Konnarock. Route 58 now follows a portion of the former branch line right of way between Creek Junction and Konnarock.

Arriving at Taylor's Valley, there is the Taylor's Valley Cafe, a great place to stop and stretch those legs and have a bite to eat while taking in the quiet serenity of the area. A train car is located at Taylor's Valley near where the depot once stood. It is used by a local community civic group.

Damascus is located some six miles or so north of Taylor's Valley, and is the midway

point for those bikers who like to ride the entire length of the Virginia Creeper Trail northward from Whitetop to Abingdon. A caboose and small steam engine are on display here.

From Damascus on to Abingdon, new housing developments are often seen alongside the Creeper Trail. Still, there are lots of scenic places to see along this segment of the trail, and upon arrival at Abingdon there is the N&W steam Engine No. 433 on display for viewing near the junction with the main line. When I was at the junction the first day, a local Norfolk Southern freight train was shifting cars and had in its consist a caboose!

A lot of folks who accompanied me on my journey along the Virginia Creeper Trail noted that North Carolina should have converted the portion of the Abingdon Branch from the Virginia state line at Whitetop southward to West Jefferson into a biking, hiking trail instead of following the NC state law procedure which reverts railroad rights of way back to the original landowners or their heirs once a railroad line is officially abandoned unless the state of North Carolina decides to "railbank" a particular route.

The tourists would have flocked to Ashe County, North Carolina by the thousands like they do in Virginia to ride or hike the Creeper Trail if it existed there today. But, alas, we do have the photographs, recordings, etc. of O. Winston Link and others to view or listen to in order to remember what a train ride on the Abingdon Branch was like from Abingdon all the way to West Jefferson and even on southward from West Jefferson to the community of Elkland, now Todd, North Carolina.

If you haven't done so, take the time to ride, walk on, or just view the sights of the Virginia Creeper Trail from Abingdon to

Whitetop. You'll be glad you did!

## Chapter News

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While we fortunately do not have any members sick or incapacitate this issue, we'd like to offer our congratulations to member Elbert Miller who recently celebrated his 90th birthday on June 1. Elbert was a long time contributor at our 9th Street Maintenance Facility. Elbert "retired" from the siding duties 7-8 years ago, but during the excursion era was very active, devoting many hours during the week and weekends to maintenance, repair and restoration to our cars and locomotives. He no longer attends meetings as his hearing is not what it once was and it is difficult to hear what is going on. His wife Claudine will turn 88 on July 18. Many of our long time ticket buyers will remember Claudine who acted as our phone ticket agent for more years than she would care to count in the excursion era.

90 years of age is quite a feat even in these days of living longer, less than 2% of the American population reach that milestone. Here is our wish for many more!

## Amtrak Excursions

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by Ken Miller

As some of our members have heard we are scheduled to run Amtrak excursions once again on November 7-8. This comes after a 12 year absence, while we do not have a contract in hand, these are most certainly not a guarantee, it certainly seems that these will be a reality.

On Saturday, November 7 we will return to our old stomping grounds with a round trip to Bluefield, and Sunday is scheduled to be a round trip to Shenandoah. Our equipment is scheduled to be a mostly Amtrak

coach train, two dinettes and some private cars (TBD) pricing is still being worked out, we are awaiting some details from Amtrak, but NS has agreed to operate the trains pending Amtrak's request.

While our mailing list is very old, and with many outdated addresses, if our readers which have an interest, please send a stamped, self-addressed business sized envelope to the Chapter Post Office Box, just as soon as we have a flyer, we will send it your way.

Amtrak Excursions  
Roanoke Chapter NRHS  
P.O. Box 13222  
Roanoke, VA 24032-1322

We will also have a downloadable flyer posted before the printed flyers will be available, although I cannot give you an exact date that will occur.

[www.roanokeNRHS.org](http://www.roanokeNRHS.org)

For those who are so inclined, we will be glad to email you a flyer as well, please submit your email address with Amtrak Flyer in the subject line to Walt Alexander [terrarin66@cox.net](mailto:terrarin66@cox.net)

We will have more details as soon as we are able to pass them on, posted on the website.

We look forward to seeing many of our long time riders again in November!

## Chapter Website

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by Ken Miller

I assume that someone is looking, as our Chapter website continues to grow over the months, we now have almost a decade of past issues of Turntable Times available for download as well as links to to other groups of interest posted. Our website did have an attack of sorts in late May, where some Russian or other pirates managed to get into the server but that has been rapidly fixed.

## Lynchburg Rail Day

Our friends at the Blue Ridge Chapter will be running their long running and very successful "Lynchburg Rail Day" on Saturday, August 8, 2009. This is a Lynchburg tradition and is always well attended. The show has a family atmosphere, with children 12 and under always welcome at no charge when accompanied by a paying adult. The various model layouts with operating trains are a real attraction for all. Enjoy the trains, browse the vendor tables, and stay for lunch! Features:

Operating Model Railroad Layouts

Model Railroad and Hobby Vendors

Model & Photography Exposition

Model Railroad Clinics

Door Prizes and Raffles and a White Elephant Table

Railroad Slide Shows

## UPCOMING MEETINGS/EVENTS

**Regular Meeting Locations are at the O. Winston Link Museum.**

July 16, 2009 - General Meeting

August 4, 2009 - Board Meeting

August 20, 2009 - General Meeting

September 1, 2009 - Board Meeting

September 17, 2009 - General Meeting

October 6, 2009 - Board Meeting

October 15, 2009 - General Meeting

November 3, 2009 - Board Meeting

November 7, 2009 - Amtrak Excursion to Bluefield.

November 8, 2009 - Amtrak Excursion to Shenandoah.

**Visit us on the web: [www.RoanokeNRHS.org](http://www.RoanokeNRHS.org)**

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