

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

*Happy Holidays from the Turntable Times Staff!*



## Cover Photo

In late October on the former Virginian, a derailment took out an original 1909 Virginian bridge and piers across the Roanoke River. Norfolk Southern got the bridge replaced in short order. Skip Salmon recorded the replacement bridge on November 21, now open after barely three weeks since the derailment.

## Meeting Notice

With the pandemic, the Roanoke Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society has cancelled all meetings and gatherings until further notice. When the meetings resume, they will be held Fellowship Hall at St. Marks Lutheran Church at 7:30 pm. Please see the description on the next page for specific directions.

This is our new location for monthly meetings, please be sure to make a note of it. While we regret not having meetings during the current emergency, we intend to follow the Governor's orders. (Please be aware, this may change.)

# From The Head End

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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 Delta Helmer Pelgram. Delta is responsible for Chapter cards and flowers and can be reached at membership.rcnrhs@gmail.com or 703-627-7847.

## Deadline for Turntable Times

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The deadline for the next issue of Turntable Times is Friday, January 8, 2021. Please send articles, information and exchange newsletters to: Editor Turntable Times, P.O. Box 13222, Roanoke, VA, 24032. All parties sending newsletters to the Roanoke Chapter via email should send them to Gary Ballard gtgns611@aol.com,

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Turntable Times is published quarterly 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 or contributors of the Turntable Times and do not necessarily reflect those of the members, officers or directors of the Chapter.

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Dorr Tucker at joandorr@cox.net and Ken Miller at klmiller@rev.net

## Meeting Cancellation Policy

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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. Obviously, we have cancelled all meetings until further notice due to the pandemic. We hold Board Meetings via Zoom and will go to in-person meetings as soon as it is safe to do so.

## New Chapter Meeting Location and Time

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While we are still in the midst of COVID19, we are hopeful that the vaccine will make the possibility of having in-person meetings once again. However, we don't

have We publish directions for the purpose of making people aware.

Whenever we can actually get back to in-person meetings, we will be meeting at St Mark's Lutheran Church, 1008 Franklin Road, SW, at the corner of Highland Avenue in Old Southwest, Roanoke 24016. There is NO parking on Franklin Road; instead turn east onto Highland and enter and park in the lot off Highland directly behind the church.

Enter the church through the doors down the steps below the overhanging breezeway. This is technically the rear of the church, but is the most convenient and closest to the parking.

When inside proceed to the elevator on the right (about 15 feet) and go down to level 1 and follow the NRHS signs into the meeting room.

The church doors will be locked 10 minutes after the starting time so please be on time. Should you know that you will be late, please arrange in advance to contact a member already in the church when you arrive so that someone can meet you at the door to let you in. Thank you for your cooperation in this.

## Chapter 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 me, Delta Helmer Pelgrim. I am responsible for Chapter cards and flowers and can be reached at membership.rcnrhs@gmail.com or 703-627-7847.

## Sick List

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We've had a variety of news of members who have had health issues either themselves or their families. To all those with issues or losses, our thoughts and prayers are with them.

Brad Dobbins is not well, and at home receiving treatments. We will keep you posted and wish him well.

Chuck Akers recently lost his brother, Jerry on November 13.

George Stein lost his aunt, Rose Marie Boyd on November 16, 2020. George's mother was also in poor health, but is now doing better.

Stephen and Wendy Warren lost Stephen's brother - Jim Warren on October 18, 2020.

Jeff and Susan Sanders lost Susan's sister - Deborah Leonard Boling on October 30, 2020, this was their second loss in a short time.

## Emergency Notification Phone Numbers

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You may use these phone numbers to report emergencies or other conditions affecting railroad operations, including trespassers, vandalism, fires, defective

equipment, etc. If at a railroad/highway grade crossing try to provide the unique crossing number/DOT number posted nearby, usually on a small blue sign.

Norfolk Southern . . . . . 800-453-2530  
CSX . . . . . 800-232-0144  
Amtrak . . . . . 800-331-0008

## 2021 Chapter Directors

Chuck Akers . . . . . President  
Lewis Foster . . . . . Secretary  
Gary Gray . . . . . Vice President  
Delta Helmer Pelgrim . . . . . Treasurer  
David Foster . . . . . National Representative  
Ken Miller. . . . . Director  
Rick Rader. . . . . Director  
Richard Shell . . . . . Director  
George Stein. . . . . Director

Our Chapter Board meets at least once a month, usually the first Tuesday; contact a board member to find the date and location. Board meetings are open to the membership. Please note, in-person Board meetings have been discontinued as per the Governor's order through October. The board has met virtually via Zoom the past few months, and anticipates continuing that for the time being. The Board will take up business as necessary via email or telephone until then. Please remember to Stay home, stay safe!

## Treasurers Report

by Delta Helmer Pelgrim

I will be closing out the year and submitting the records to our accountant by early January. If anyone wants the year end summaries please let me know.

Please continue to sign up/use your Kroger and Amazon.com community support. We have received over \$2,500 in money from these organizations this year. If you work for a company that does matching donations please consider making a donation that can be matched.

A great big thank you to my faithful auditors, Paul and George. Also thank you to Rick who has been ensuring that I receive the bills on time.

I am always available to provide information and our financial statements. Feel free to send me e-mails at treasurer.rcrhs@gmail.com

## Membership

By Mr. Robin R. Shavers

I mailed and emailed everyone a membership application for 2021 and a blank application is also included in the Turntable Times. If you need an additional e-mailed or mailed copy please do not hesitate to contact me.

Again this year, I will be happy to submit your application to National on your behalf. You are welcome to submit to National on your own, but please do not do both. The prices for membership have not changed this year.

If you would like to receive a printed copy of the Turntable Times, there is a \$10 charge to cover the printing and postage.

Happy to answer any questions or concerns - membership.rcnrhs@gmail.com.

## Annual Meeting

The Chapter held its most unusual annual meeting on October 18, 2020 at the Virginian Station. In this time of COVID19, we had to be creative to find a way to hold this meeting. The main item of business of the meeting is to elect directors for the upcoming year.

The slate presented was all incumbents were willing to serve for another term, and were elected by acclaim. In 2021, we hope that things will be back to whatever can be considered "normal."

## Mixed Freight

By Mr. Robin R. Shavers

As I begin this Mixed Freight for the Fourth Quarter of 2020, the United States begins the task of counting the millions of votes cast for what is considered to be the most invigorating election in American history. The writing of this column on this night is my train trip away from an event that has been aggravating me for many months. The powers that be won't know all of the winners for probably two or three days if not longer.

While cruising the railfan side of the internet a few months back, a gentleman from the Netherlands expressed an interest in photographing some N&W color position light signals during his planned visit to central Virginia during late summer/early autumn. Someone responded to him suggesting he spend some time along the former Virginian east and west of Altavista. There are quite a few still out there in that area that don't require trespassing and some you can literally drive right up to.

I was elated to read within the pages of a recent Turntable Times that the Roanoke Chapter welcomed and embraced either a trio or quartet of felines to the chapter's 9th Street yard facility. The Roanoke Chapter is not alone when it comes to having cats on the property. Our neighbors up at the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway Heritage Center in Clifton Forge have had a cat or cats within the center for years. Can you imagine such a facility as that with such close ties to Chessie not having a cat or cats on the property? Back

in 2017, our friends to the south at the North Carolina Transportation Museum welcomed Chessie to their offices and grounds. She was basically assigned to the Master Mechanic's office in the Bob Julian roundhouse. She was discovered on the property during a Boy Scouts railroading merit badge achievement weekend back in 2017. The idea of having her as the official feline staff member went over well with executive director Ms. Kelly Alexander for the NCTM and the rest was history.

20 to 25 years ago, there was talk of doing away with Norfolk Southern's Crewe Yard. Like many railroad properties that we grew up with and enjoyed from a railfan perspective, it isn't what it used to be and catching action there is truly hit or miss. I mainly hit the area on my way to or from Farmville attending model railroad activity via the High Bridge Railroad Club. Over the past five years or so, it has really been a bonus to visit the N&W scene at Crewe as I have been graced to come across a number of ole school N&W, SR, and CR rolling stock in good condition and to my favor NO GRAFFITI. Quite a few Reading Blue Mountain & Northern hopper cars for grain and coal transport have been present as well. On the more modern side of the equation numerous members of the Norfolk Southern heritage locomotive fleet have been present.

A few months ago I reported via my Mixed Freight column that I spent Memorial Day weekend in Roanoke, spending three days and two nights trackside to maximize trains to be seen as well as saving some cash on motel rates. Of all the freights I viewed, not one had in its consist a Southern or Norfolk Southern Pullman-Standard 50 foot double door or single door boxcar. During their time these boxcars were as common as cigarette butts at an intersection. They were built during the mid-seventies. They are close to 50 years old and with the exception of the darn graffiti, most of them looked pretty good and their paint held up well considering the blistering heat freight cars are exposed to.

Since March or so, loaded tri-level auto racks have been increasing in numbers aboard northbound CSX freights along the former Atlantic Coast Line route often referred to as the A Line. That traffic originates in Charleston, South Carolina, at the Volvo plant there and proceeds north to the ship loading docks at New York City. My understanding from a railfan associate/CSX employee is that the vehicles can be shipped at less costs from NYC, even with the rail shipping charges, than at the shipping docks at Charleston. I have witnessed anywhere from one auto rack to a block of 45. The loaded racks are normally seen aboard CSX freights Q410 and Q438.

More CSX freight news. Back in the spring, CSX started a progressive every third day train symbol change. For example, Q410 might originate as Q410 but the Q410 three days later will be Q412 and three days later Q414 for the next one. It depends on days the train will make pickups or set offs enroute to its terminating terminal. The same is in reverse for its southbound counterpart Q409. This symbol changing includes Q300 and its southbound counterpart Q301.

The years do indeed really roll by fast and faster. 2020 marks forty years since the Harley Stagers Act went into effect making it easier for the railroads to adjust their freight hauling rates. They became free of having to deal with the Interstate Commerce Commission at that time for EVERY rate adjustment, line abandonment or absorption, and certain mergers among other issues. The I.C.C. eventually became the Surface Transportation Board.

2020 also marks forty years since Burlington Northern absorbed the Saint Louis San Francisco, also known as The Frisco.



Lewis Foster Photos  
The shelter frame raised, floored and almost ready to use.



Lewis Foster Photos

512 in the shelter, and cutting out the side sheets.

## Mechanical Committee Report Fall 2020

by Lewis Foster

A lot has been going on at the yard since the last report. The biggest news is that the new car shelter is up and now in service. This is the first time in 40 years at 9th street that the Chapter has had a piece of equipment under cover for work. Work started putting up the frame for the shelter on September 8th and the covers were in place on the 13th and the details complete three days later.



Work then began on extending the new track through the building. The center of the area underneath the shelter was leveled, and ballast laid down, then ties and rail were laid down and connected to the switch. The track was ballasted and tamped, and we were able to test everything out on the afternoon of the 26th. Then a crushed limestone floor was laid down and tamped to both sides of the track through the building. Everything was finished up and the 512 was moved inside on October 17th.

We'd like to thank all of the volunteers who worked very hard on the shelter, the track, and the floor. This is an improvement at the yard that has been a long time coming. While there are still things we want to add to the car shelter to make the space even more productive, it's amazing how much of a difference just having a roof overhead makes.

This September we completed the restoration of the Panama Canal Mule at VMT as well. The weather cooled off enough to allow us to apply the finish paint and lettering. We also finished up several final details like contrasting color grab irons and steps, safety red covers for electrical connections, white cab rooves, and a replacement tow cable. This was a very interesting project, but we're glad that it's now off the list.



Once the 512 was moved inside the car shelter, we began the process of removing the bottom edges of the side sheets to replace some extensive rust damage and expose the side sills of the car. Unfortunately, when we got the sides opened up it confirmed what we were afraid of. The 512 has had quite a lot of water damage over the years and the side sills will likely need to be replaced entirely. We're currently planning this process

and will begin working on it over the winter.

Several of our younger members have taken on the restoration of Virginian cabooses No. 322. They've been working hard on it this summer and fall and are almost finished stripping the old paint on the interior. The interior fixtures have been removed and are being stripped as well. Two areas where there was metal damage on the outside have been removed and will be replaced. We'll have more on this project as it continues.

If you're interested in volunteering at the yard on the weekends, or even if you'd just like to drop by and see what we're working on, feel free to contact Gary Gray or Lewis Foster. Photos of our projects are also available on the Chapter Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/roanokenrhs>

## Passenger Train Update

By Gary Ballard

Though not the most enlightening news concerning traveling by rail, the current numbers of ridership certainly are a direct casualty of the ongoing pandemic. Amtrak CEO William Flynn reported to a Senate Subcommittee in November that the railroad is projecting a 72% decline in ridership for Fiscal Year 2021. One must remember the Fiscal Year began October 1. Nine million passengers are expected to ride compared to 32.5 million for FY 2019. As I reported in the last issue here, some service cuts have been put in place to offset the lower revenue earnings. What is coming up? We know that Amtrak submitted a letter to Congress for a requested \$4.85 billion appropriation although a \$3 billion amount has been going around several talks lately.

Trains are running but with fewer cars. I personally can see the mainline north of Baltimore every day and the usual 9 car Northeast Regional trainsets are at 6 cars with some trains having 7 cars. The Florida trains as with the other long-distance trains now operate triweekly schedules. The Acela operates, though the corporate based clientele ridership is almost down to nothing with many individuals working from home, it seems like. Recently, the fare from Washington to New York City on the Acela was \$20, in a most certain attempt to gain some riders. I recently heard of someone paying the same \$20 fare on the Acela going from New Haven to Philadelphia. There are a lot of onboard service personnel sidelined

due to the low ridership. All the while, some members of the Senate have been expressing doubts over Amtrak's current strategy. Concerns over serving the people in the towns that are directly affected with reduced train frequency and service cuts.

Flynn said without the service cuts, Amtrak would burn through \$250 million a month. He stated some good news that ridership improved from the low 4,000 in April to 17,000 in October. As a retired employee of Amtrak, I can say that in my 20 years of observation and from a history stand point, the results of operating passenger trains during this current pandemic has got to be one of the most serious challenges the railroad has faced since it's first day on May 1, 1971. The Inspector General (we knew that person as the IG and feared having to be audited by the IG, if ever, whenever) gave an assessment of Amtrak's financial resources and said that the company must find a way to protect it's \$3.1 billion in current available cash.

Out on the tracks, the new Acela trainsets are stretching their legs either on the Government test track in Pueblo, Colorado or on the Northeast Corridor primarily on a section of track between Trenton and Midway in New Jersey. That section allows for higher speeds for testing the new trains. Closer to home, so far, the Roanoke Train as we like to call it is still running. This train was literally breaking ridership expectations



Gary Ballard Photo  
611 pulling Amtrak?!? Well, not THAT 611, but a view from March 28, 2017.



throughout any reporting period since its inception on October 30th, 2017. With the state of things as they are today with the pandemic, ridership and revenues have taken a hit. There is and has been talk of a second departure out of Roanoke. Those plans based on the good reports of the train's history are now on temporary hold.

All is not gloomy. Very soon the new Moynihan Train Hall will be open in New York City. This huge new passenger train station will be inside what was once the huge James A. Farley Post Office building across the street from Penn Station. Amtrak has been working in partnership with the State of New York on this project. We all have seen photos of the original glass and girder structure with its tall marble columns facing the street. That architecture marvel was leveled with the last remnant taken away in 1968. The new Moynihan Train Hall will feature a vast open train hall, with a glass skylit atrium and will accommodate Amtrak regional and long-distance trains. The new hall

is approximately the size of the Grand Central Station main hall. I have walked those steps in the past to the century old Farley Post Office. Both the Post Office and the original Penn Station were designed by the firm of McKim, Mead and White. There is still a lot of history to explore and pictures to take within two these buildings. Hopefully once the crisis of COVID-19 is passed, there is a nice train ride from Roanoke to New York City.

Editor's Note: Our friend Don Jilson from New York sent over these two photos (above) with a note that perhaps the Chapter could consider preserving this brand new Amtrak Sleeper "Roanoke River" just out of the CAF plant at Elmira Heights, NY on December 10.

The two photos were taken in Elmira, NY on CAF trackage with the Amtrak Special to take them to Albany-Rensselaer then move them to Florida.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, that was a remark for the next couple of generations, as Amtrak will very likely get a lot more mileage use of it first! Thanks Don for thinking of us.

## Thanks to Roanoke Chapter.

by Ken Miller

I'd like to offer the sincere appreciation of the Norfolk and Western Historical Society to members of the Roanoke Chapter who came out to help.

The N&WHS had to remove its holdings from what is called GOB-East (General Office Building) and might be better known to folks as the old Storehouse. As folks may or may not know, N&WHS had been storing a lot of archival material on the 2nd floor of the old Storehouse under an agreement with Norfolk Southern.

With the closing of East End Shops, Norfolk Southern cancelled out lease, but extended our deadline through the end of November with the situation with COVID19. The Society had a large accumulation of material and had to subsequently lease space as the Archives building is almost full as is.

It was a massive effort to get all the material moved and a variety of Chapter members worked very hard to help accomplish the move of all the material out. I won't name any names here, but one and all are really appreciated, and hopefully, once the pandemic is over, the Society will have a pizza party at the archives for the folks who helped!

## UPCOMING MEETINGS/EVENTS

**Regular Meeting Locations will be at the St. Marks Lutheran Church, see directions inside. Board Meetings move around, please get in touch with a board member to attend.**

January 5 - Board Meeting

February 2 - Board Meeting

March 2 - Board Meeting

April 6 - Board Meeting

May 4 - Board Meeting

June 1 - Board Meeting

July 6 - Board Meeting

**Please note, all meeting dates are cancelled until further notice due to the ongoing pandemic, they are listed here for convenience!  
We will send notice via email for any meeting scheduled.**

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

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