

VOLUNTEER RAILROADERS ASSOCIATION



THE DIGEST

SPRING HAS SPRUNG!

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MAY 2010

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

Back in 1993 when Steve Weiss, Bob Blumenstock, Joe Weber and I came up with the crazy idea to start the Susquehanna Volunteer Association it never crossed my mind that 17 years later I would have the honor to serve as its President. It has been one heck of a ride getting to this point; from our early days of helping to run the 142 steam program, to running countless passenger trains that raised tens of thousands of dollars, to getting into the motorcar hobby, to changing our name to the VRA, to saving Hawthorne Station and to being one of the most respected rail groups in the State.

Along the way I have had the very good fortune to work with some great people who I will never forget and whom I can never repay for all they have done. I may be prejudice, but I think VRA members are some of the best people I know. On the top of that list is our late founding member Joe Weber. Joe spent countless hours helping to create and grow the VRA and we can honor him by doing our best to see that what he helped create lives on for many years to come. It is with this in mind that I would like to take this time to layout my goals and ideas for the organization for the next year.

My first goal is to grow our membership and increase the activity of our members. To help reach that goal I would like to see us have more exposure to the railfan community. This will include getting pictures and stories about what we do in the railfan press.

Those people who are interested in seeing what we are up to will most

likely turn to our web site for more information. Mike has made a lot of improvements to our web sites but he needs us to give him the information and pictures to make it better. So my second goal is to have our web site get even better, I would like to see timely news, photos and updates on our various projects. A web site that does not get updated is a web site that people do not look at.

To go along with the above I would like to see our newsletter get better. Now that we have most people getting it on line, we can increase the photos and content. So goal 3 is to have a report from every active committee be in each edition. Also I would like to see stories about things we have done in the past so that people who may not have been around or those who would like to remember can read about where we came from.

We have 2 major projects that we need to get done; the first is of course Hawthorne Station. We are working very hard to get the station moved this spring and when the move actually happens it will require the help of many. We are going to need to remove many items from the building and secure others in preparation for the move. Then once moved we are going to need to not only put everything back but we are also going to have to start and do the work to make things better. We also need to make the JKW Library more user friendly and get the word out about its existence. This job will almost certainly take us the better part of a year but goal number 4 is to get it all done by spring of 2011.

BY: K.C. SMITH

The second big project is getting the 40B finished. With all we have to do on the station this is going to take a lot of effort, but again with the help of our members (new and old) we can get it done and finally be able to display and run the car for everyone to enjoy. So goal 5 is to have the car completed well before we run our motorcar trip on the southern division so we can show it off.

My sixth goal is that we do our best to do all the other things that we do. The better we do the better we will feel and the better perspective members will think of us. This will also help us reach the first goal.

My last goal is really the most important one of all, that we all have a good time doing what we do. It takes members to volunteer to make our group a success, so if you would like to serve on a committee or maybe even chair one let me or one of the other board members know.

Here is to a great year and to the many years that follow for the great organization,

Now lets go get our hands dirty,
K.C.

MEETING:

Thursday, May 20th, 2010
St. Clements Church
271 Lafayette Ave
Hawthorne NJ 07506

Meeting starts at 7:00 pm and will be followed by a short presentation of Railroad History.

The featured presentation at the meeting will be:
"Northeast Railfanning in the 70's."
Photos by Tony Viggiano. Presented by the Joseph K. Weber Memorial Library. A look back at railroads in the Northeast during the 1970's and the many changes that occurred. See the end of many of our favorite railroads and the beginning of Conrail and the variety of power that brought to trains all over the area. All this is set to music by the Allman Brothers, Jim Croce, Paul Simon and the Traveling Wilburys.
Anyone wishing to show slides of current rail events or historical slides, please bring them to the meeting. Maximum 20 slides per presentation.

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URHS REPORT

BY: JOE MELE

Now that the spring season is upon us, we will be resuming the weekend work sessions at the Boonton yard. Star Trak, the URHS' mechanical vendor, has been working on our equipment during this past winter. Below is a summary of the current and possibly future URHS projects/activities:

New Jersey Transit approved the fence for Boonton Yard. The installation should begin sometime in May.

We have also discussed the possibility of running a fall foliage train this coming October to Port Jervis. The URHS has approached NJT about running the trip, still waiting to hear from NJT.

I reported in the last URHS summary that we had approached NJT about donating one of their retired Comet 1 cab cars to the URHS. I am happy to report that NJ Transit responded with positive news, they will be donating Comet I cab car #5120 to the URHS. We are excited to add this piece of equipment to our collection.

The NYGL advised the URHS that the U34CH & Erie 436 will be returned to Boonton Yard this spring.

NJT is going to be moving the URHS equipment currently located in Lebanon, NJ to Boonton sometime in May.

Tony Macrie, Cape May Seashore Lines, is interested in leasing the CNJ

#1524. Details are still being worked out with the CMSL.

URHS members discussed the possibility of running a fall train ride on the Cape May Seashore Lines, possibly in November again. Stay tuned for further details.



EASTER TRAIN WRAP UP

BY: K.C. SMITH

The 2010 version of our Easter Bunny Train co-sponsored by the VRA and Tri-State Chapter NRHS was a success, although we were not sure early on it would be. This was because with all the snow and then the wind and rain we had this winter our signs and banners took a beating this year. But with the help of some very dedicated volunteers from both the VRA and Tri-State we were able to in the end sell the train out. Our costs were much higher than normal due to the sign damage and extra advertising we needed to do so we did not meet our goal financially but we were still able to raise a lot of money for our effort to move the station and Tri-State's effort to repair and repaint their F-3 into the Lackawanna freight scheme.

As always the biggest thanks go out to the people who volunteered to wear the costumes that made all

those kids on the train so happy. These people worked and sweat to make the day out on the rails for over 4300 people a day they are sure to remember. Add to them the over 30 other volunteers from both groups that worked the platform, parking lots and on the train to make sure the day was safe and fun for all our passengers.

This year we ran with 8 cars for passengers and 1 crew car and except for the fact that we only had 2, yes I said 2 bathrooms on the train everything on board worked very well. As the passengers exited the train I greeted many of them and I am pleased to report that all I heard was praise for the work that we did. And then after the train we received more praise in e-mails and in person for the outstanding job done by everyone on board and on the ground.

I would like to thank Charles Smith for his tireless efforts to make sure the train was a success and for his friendship over the last 15 years. It takes people like Charles and the countless other volunteers too numerous to mention here to make trips like this work. You all deserve a round of applause.



HAWTHORNE STATION UPDATE

BY: K.C. SMITH

It is indeed my pleasure to report that we have come to an agreement with the NYS&W on the lease details for Hawthorne Station. As I write this we are preparing the final building permits that will allow us to start the work needed to move the station off the corner and save it for many generations to come to enjoy.

The first order of business is to have a new foundation dug and built. The new home of the station will feature a full basement, giving us the much-needed room we need to store the many items that we have. Once that is done the building will be moved, but not before we remove or secure the many artifact we have inside the station. A few days of work parties will be announced on the Yahoo

Group, so be sure to watch your e-mail.

Once moved a small addition will need to be constructed on the back of the building to house the new stairs going down into the basement. Plus all the stuff we took out will have to be put back. And then the exterior work will begin including new paint, roof, windows and of course the construction of the park on the land currently occupied by the station.

This will certainly be the biggest single project we have ever undertaken and it will take a lot of hard work and dedication from all of us to make happen. Once we are done the station will certainly be the centerpiece

of the downtown area and will be a lasting example of what the VRA can do. Be sure to volunteer to help make this dream a reality.

There is an update to report since this story was originally written. Nathan Feno, president of the NYS&W, has signed and returned the lease to us. We can now begin to move forward on this project. A meeting was held on May 3rd to start planning the move. Several people volunteered for key jobs, such as over sight and planning of the park where the station currently sits and the coordination of press releases and public relations. Full details will be given at the meeting on the 20th.

JOSEPH K. WEBER MEMORIAL FUND & LIBRARY

BY: PAUL TRABERT

The Joseph K. Weber library has in it's collection many rail related magazines. The focus of the library for some time has been to place these magazines in protective binders. So far the following titles have been placed in binders. "The Short Line", "Railroad Explorer", "Extra 2200 South", "Trains" and "Railway Quarterly. We will be working on getting more magazines into binders in the future. The biggest problem will be finding acceptable empty binders at reasonable prices. The best bargains are usually found at 'dollar' stores. There are some duplicates of some issues. These will probably be donated to the Phillipsburg Station to add to their collection of magazines for sale. I will probably go down there this summer to look at

their collection to see if I can find some of the issues missing in our collection.

Additionally, the JKW collection of models continues to be sold. The VRA has been to 2 train shows this year with modest success. We'll be attending an additional show in October in Scranton. Check back in later editions of The Digest for details regarding future sales and progress on the binder project.



2010 MOTOR CAR TRIPS

BY: CHRIS VITZ

The VRA has a nearly full schedule of events this year, including motorcar trips.

Cape May Seashore Lines on May 8th, 2010. This trip will have been completed by the time we have our next membership meeting, so I hope someone will have a full report of the day's activities. (See Page 5) This is the VRA's first time running over this line and we hope it becomes an annual offering. This roundtrip event starts in Tuckahoe, NJ and it will run to Cape May, NJ and return. It approximately 50 miles on the rails, so a nice one day outing.

Next up for 2010 is the **NYS&W Railway, Syracuse Branch, July 24th and 25th, 2010.** We will be running the entire line over a two day period. Saturday we will be running roundtrip from Cortland, NY to Syracuse, NY where lunch will be on your own at Syracuse's famed Carousel Mall next to the CSX Chicago mainline which hosts many trains per day. Sunday we will run roundtrip from Cortland, NY to Chenango Bridge, NY, lunch will be deli sandwiches. There are a total of 160 track miles to be run for this two day trip.

On **September 11**, we will be running a one day trip on the **NYS & W Railway, Utica Branch** between Sherburne, NY and Utica, NY. This includes nearly 84 round trip miles of trackage. This should be at or near peak colors for this line and it is always a joy to run the street trackage on Schuyler Street in Utica.

The **Cooperstown & Charlotte Valley Railroad** will be our destination on **September 12, 2010.**

This will be our third time running over this unique railroad. Participants will travel approximately 30 round-trip miles between Cooperstown Junction, NY and Cooperstown, NY. Lunch will be on your own in downtown Cooperstown, NY. Ample time will be provided for a lunch break and a brief visit to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

October 2nd and 3rd, 2010. I believe this will be our 11th consecutive year for running over this line. The trip will be a repeat of years past, on Saturday the participants will travel approximately 100 round-trip miles between Riverdale, NJ and Warwick, NY. On Sunday we will run approximately 60 round-trip miles between Riverdale, NJ and North Bergen, NJ. As in years past we will ask for volunteer flaggers to protect crossing with us one day in exchange for riding the other day. This has always worked out well for our attendees and it is the only way for railfans and / or the public to legally ride the NYS&W rails.

We also hope to offer a trip over the Stourbridge Railway in late October or early November, but as you can

see we have a pretty full schedule of trips already planned for this year.

Due to rules on the NYS&W no attendees, riders, or helpers under the age of 18 are permitted. In addition, the NYS&W requires all motorcar operators attend and pass a NORAC (Northeast Operating Rules Advisory Committee) class on motorcar operations. This class is offered the night before the NYS&W runs. Passing of the class allows one to obtain a three year approval for operating cars over the NYS&W. Other rail lines are rumored to be adding this requirement, so our attendees will be ahead of the game in this regard.

The Cape May Seashore Line, Cooperstown and Charlotte Valley, and the Stourbridge Railroad allow attendees under the age of 18 on their railroads. So please keep in mind opportunities to ride will exist for some of our younger VRA members.

Please come out to join us, you will never be disappointed on these trips.

Tony Macrie, oversees the closing of the swing bridge on the CMSL.

Photo: K.C. Smith



THE VRA GOES TO CAPE MAY

BY: JON BERKEMEYER

On May 7th and 8th, several members of the VRA traveled to Cape May to ride on the Cape May Seashore Line.

On Friday, 5 cars rolled south from Tuckahoe at 9:30, with the mission to clear the line from trees and other debris. As many of you know, in a weird weather twist, the past winter was far harder on southern New Jersey than on northern New Jersey. Between the wind, snow and rain that had fallen, there was plenty of lumber to be cleared. In all, a total of 30 trees were cleared. The sickle bar on the VRA's mower car was

kept busy buzzing brush along the right of way, while the mower deck took a bite out of the grass and small brush that was growing between the rails. If you are ever presented with the chance to ride in the mower car, I highly recommend it. The operation of the sickle bar and the mower deck are relatively simple, plus the view afforded by an open air car is simply amazing. Bring a rain jacket just in case!

The work progressed slow but steadily. We had originally hoped to be in the town of Cape May by 1 pm that day. However, because of all the

clearing and cutting, we ended up arriving around 4 pm.

The next day 5 more cars joined us for the official run. This was a true pleasure cruise. Enjoying the scenery of Cape May, plus watching the CMSL's swing bridge in operation made the previous day's clearing operation all worth it. We capped off the day with a stop on the bridge over the old PRR route for a group shot. Of the 4 scheduled motor car trips this year, I think this one will be my favorite.



VICE-PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

BY: JON BERKEMEYER

In politics, politicians are measured by their first 100 days in office. Well, at the time of this writing, I have been Vice-President of the VRA for 83 days. These 83 days have been an exciting, nerve racking, and educational time for me. I've been introduced to the inner workings of a well established non-profit group and experienced first hand what a dedicated group can do when they set their minds to it.

My first experience was the annual Easter Bunny train. I was asked to be the crew caller for this year's trip. I gladly accepted the task, but on the inside, I was very nervous. I would be responsible for assembling a crew of over 60. At the time, I had never taken on a responsibility that large out

side of my employment. Visions of Donald Trump saying "You're Fired!" were dancing in my head. However, the trips were a success and the crew performed extremely well. I went home Sunday night with a deep sense of pride. I had helped accomplish something good. It had been a feeling I was missing for a long time.

What that experience ultimately taught me was that our members, board and general alike, are the life blood of our organization. Without all of us, there is no VRA.

This coming summer and fall, we have a busy schedule. We have the motor car trips that Chris Vitz reported on, and of course we have the station move coming, which now more than ever is closer to reality.

None of these things can take place without our volunteers. I encourage all members to come out and help. K.C. says that moving the station is the largest project the VRA has ever undertaken. I believe this is the largest task ever undertaken by a rail group in this state. Anyone can pick up a phone and have a locomotive moved. We are going to move a building.

On top of all this, planning has started for our Santa Train. Yes it's May, but it is never too early to start planning. This year the Santa train committee will be myself, Carolyn Hoffman, Betsy Newbury and Joe Mele. I'm inviting anyone else who would like to join the committee to contact me or anyone mentioned above. As they say, many hands make light work.