



THE VRA DIGEST

Official publication of the
VOLUNTEER RAILROADERS ASSOCIATION

"So close, only the paycheck is missing!"

VRA AND TRI-STATE GEAR UP FOR EASTER TRAIN 2014 *by KC Smith*



The Easter Bunny pleases some happy customers on the 2013 Easter Train.

Well it is that time of year again (no, not time to put away your snow shovels). It is time to start planning our annual Easter Bunny Train rides. After a number of years away from chairing this project I have volunteered to chair this year's train, but like with almost any other project, one person cannot do it alone. I am looking for a few people to be on the committee and a lot more people to volunteer to help operate the trains.

We have been asked by the Tri-State Chapter of the NRHS if they could be co-sponsors of this year's trains, which we accepted. Many of you may not

know this, but back in 1993 (the year we were created) we worked with Tri-State to run our first passenger excursion, which happened to be a trip on the NYSW to Baird's farm in Warwick with the 142. The trips were a great success, and it began a long relationship with Tri-State that continues to this day.

This year we are planning to run on April 12th out of the Wayne Rt. 23 station and on April 13th out of the Glen Rock Boro Hall station. It has been a few years since we have run 2 days of trips, which means we have twice the amount of tickets to sell, 4320 tickets to be

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Upcoming Events:

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JCRHS Train Show

Mother Seton HS, March 4

Easter Train 2013

Wayne Rt. 23, April 12

Glen Rock-Boro Hall, April 13

Transportation Heritage Festival 2014

Boonton Yard, September 21

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Kevin Phalon

exact. With that many tickets to sell, publicity will be key to our success. Once we have confirmed dates and times from NJT we will be announcing a few days when we will go out and put up banners, signs and posters. When you see that announcement please find some time to come out and help. We will also be sending out press releases and ask that you send them to appropriate web sites, newspapers, magazines and social network connections.

To volunteer to be part of the planning team contact me at rft2786@yahoo.com or call me on my cell at 201-787-4770. ☒

Hawthorne Station Update

by Frank Ball

Anyone who has passed by the station lately will notice a new addition. A new 25' high gleaming white flagpole. What started as a casual conversation between VRA staff, and Columbia Bank personnel at Hawthorne Day planted the seeds of thought for Columbia to donate the flagpole to the station. As you can see, thanks to Columbia Bank, those discussions resulted in a beautiful addition to our station. The VRA has obtained a plaque to be mounted at the site, crediting Columbia with the donation. As soon as the weather breaks, we will be having a dedication ceremony with all parties in attendance. Stay tuned for the date. ☒



Vice President's Report

by KC Smith

Thanks to my brother Billy, who brought some old videos to our February board meeting, I cannot help but be nostalgic as I exit my 20th year of being an officer in the VRA. It is hard not to look back at all the years of projects we have run and fun we have had and not smile and be proud. The videos showed some of our good times up on the M&NJ clearing brush, building bridges, filling wash outs and running motorcars in the late 1990's and early 2000's, plus an Easter Bunny train we ran from Hawthorne to Butler and back.

Those times were what laid the foundation for what we do today and who we are as an

organization. They also seemed to be much simpler times and in some ways they were, but in other ways it still took a tremendous amount of effort to organize the events and carry them out. Of course we were fortunate enough to have good relationships with the management at the NYSW and M&NJ, who allowed us to use their railroads for our enjoyment and fund raising.

This past year we ran or were part of a number of very successful projects, our Easter and Santa trains, the continued work on Hawthorne station, URHS trips on the CMSL and with the Hickory Creek and NYC 43 and another year of Toys for Tots trains just to name a few. None of these projects would have happened without the VRA and its members, and

we should all be very proud of what we accomplished. We have a few projects that we did not complete and it will be up to the new board and our members to finish. The ones that come to mind are the engine replacement in our A5 brush car and the completion of the paint job on our L&NE 40B. Please watch the Yahoo Group, Facebook and web site postings of dates and come out and help.

I want to thank you all for being part of the VRA and for all you have ever done to help make the VRA a success. Without you we can never succeed or have as much fun as we have. See you at our next project.

KC Smith ☒

URHS Report

By KC Smith

The URHS has decided to take on a number of projects that will certainly make a big splash in the railfan world. The first is the moving of the last remaining U34CH from where it has been stored in Passaic NJ to the restoration yard at Boonton. The engine began life at Erie Lackawanna 3372 and ended its day to day service life at NJT 4472. The engine will be evaluated for possible return to service although this time in excursion service. If you would like to donate to help restore the engine you can visit www.urhs.org and click on the donate button.



The other big project for the spring is to get Reading F-7, #294 ready to be moved to Spencer NC and the Streamliners at Spencer event being planned for May 29th through June 1st by the NC Transportation Museum. For more information you can visit:

<http://www.nctrans.org/Events/Streamliners-at-Spencer-%281%29.aspx>



The URHS will also begin selling T-shirts depicting EL 3372 and Reading 294, plus we will be reissuing their very popular PRR 4877 GG-1 shirt that sold out in one day at last year NJ Transportation Heritage Festival. In the future they will be releasing a brand new shirt featuring the NYC Hickory Creek. Watch the URHS web site or www.vratrrips.org for links to order any of these shirts.

Future plans for this summer call for the repainting of NYC 4083 back into its unique NYC Century Green colors. This is one of only 3 engines ever to wear that color scheme and is the only remaining one of those 3 to exist. Once this engine is completed it will certainly be one of the most talked about engines in the rail preservation world and will be sure to draw lots of people to see it at the next Heritage Festival.



Speaking of that, the next NJ Transportation Heritage Festival is scheduled to be held on September 21st and will feature not only the 4083, but also the other restored equipment in Boonton and maybe a surprise visitor. Add to that the antique trucks, buses, military equipment, fire trucks and numerous historic presentations by area historians and the 3rd annual Heritage Festival is sure to be a hit.

Plans are in the works to run the Hickory Creek and NYC 43 on more public excursions with the feature trip being planned to go to the Train Expo 2014 in

Owosso Michigan in late June. For more info about the event visit:

<http://michigansteamtrain.com/expo-2014/> Other trips will likely be day trips to Albany and maybe even Washington DC. Please watch the regular web and social media site for more details as they become available.



The last bit of big news is the donation of DLW 3453 to the Walkersville Southern in

Maryland. The 3453 is a 1912 club car that the URHS got from NJT with intentions to at least cosmetically restore it. Years of sitting out and the lack on restoration funds had taken its toll on the car and so when the WS asked if they could acquire the car and restore it to operating service the decision was made to donate the car to them. It was loaded on a trailer and bogey and left Boonton

Yard on Friday February 7th. It was quite a sight watching the car roll on rubber tires up Morris Ave on its way to its new home and will be an even better site when we see it operating once again, this time in Maryland and in a dinner train consist. I cannot wait to buy my ticket. Visit www.wsrr.org for more on the WSRR and its operations. ☒



*DL&W 3453 gets lifted off of its wheel set and placed on a bogie behind an 18-wheeler.
Photo by Dan Morgan*

URHS Open House Recap

By Kevin Phalon

From the point of view of one of the many dedicated URHS volunteers, I can say that the 2013 URHS Transportation Heritage Festival was just as successful as we had all hoped it would be. The event brought just shy of 2000 people to see our collection at Boonton yard and helped the URHS to raise over \$5000. From much of the testimony I received, we had exceeded expectations of the

quality and improvement of our exhibits. We had 5 of our best pieces of cosmetic restoration on display: NJDOT E8 4253, CNJ GP7 1524, "Reading" F7 284, and PRR GG1 4877. In addition to those, we had Bill McKelvey's newly restored GE 45 tonner on display, as well as GG1 4879, which is currently being worked on by Star Trak in the shop. The hit of the day however, was the visiting Norfolk Southern heritage locomotive 1074. The replica Lackawanna paint scheme

contrasted beautifully next to the GG1's Brunswick Green, and the two made for a great photo opportunity. It also provided visitors an exceptionally rare opportunity to see a heritage locomotive up close and personal.

In addition to our visiting locomotive, we were lucky enough to have a visit from Tri State Chapter's Lackawanna caboose. It was delivered behind 1074 and was left open for tours throughout the day. Also open for tours were our

CNJ GP7 and our “display train,” an idea that was brought to the open house by the VRA’s own Frank Ball. This was a hit among guests as they had the opportunity to see inside the PRR coach and baggage car, the NJT 1 (Blue Comet’s “DeVico”) and the cab and engine room of Reading 284 – a rare opportunity for most guests.

On the night before the open house, we held a night photo session in Boonton yard with the five displayed locomotives. This was well attended, and we sold out the 30 tickets well before the event. This shoot gave us the opportunity to replicate a scene the DL&W’s Phoebe Snow (played by the VRA’s Carolyn Hoffman), which made a headline in Railfan & Railroad magazine. The photo shoot, and the open house to follow also provided for a two-page spread in Railpace as well as many submissions to Railpictues.net.



After countless hours of hard work, I was relieved to stop and relax on the day of the event to enjoy our hard work and listen to what visitors had to say. The most common comment I received was praise to the hard work of our volunteers. This trend also continued in comments online after the event. Many were wowed, not by just the appearance of our exhibits, but

the improvement over years past. The fact that we, as an organization, received such high praise from such a typically critical audience is something that we can all be proud of. Our hard work, and our correspondence online before the event helped to grow our reach far beyond where it had been months earlier. The event, the buildup beforehand, and the sharing of guests’ experiences afterwards helped to garner support that will be very valuable to the URHS. We hope to continue the Transportation Heritage Festival as an annual event and we hope to continue to continue the trend of improvement and growing support well in to the future. ✘



Transportation Heritage Festival 2014

Boonton Yard, September 21



*The URHS's own NYC Hickory Creek at the Toys for Tots train Hawthorne Station stop
Photo by Russel Sullivan*

Operation Toy Train 2013

By Carolyn Hoffman

The 5th Annual "Operation Toy Train" to benefit the USMC Toys For Tots Foundation ran on December 7th, 8th, 14th and 15th this past year and was another great success! Totals of toys collected are:

Dec. 7th trip....5,106
 Dec. 8th trip....2,588
 Dec. 14th trip..2,569
 Dec. 15th trip..1,369
 Mop Up.....2,903
 Total..14,563 (and still collecting as of Feb.5th!)

The URHS generously allowed Operation Toy Train to use the NYC #43 and the PRR Baggage Car again. This year they were joined by *The Hickory Creek* on the NYS&W and M&NJ, making Al (our volunteer Chef for these trips) very happy with its full kitchen! For the M&E run we

used the NYC #43 and the famous camo boxcar.

The train began on December 7 in Ridgefield Park, NJ in the NYS&W Yard. Our first stop in Rochelle Park brought out over 20 motorcycles and several pick up trucks filled with toys courtesy of Bergen County Harley Davidson and their generous customers! The bikers loved it, and posed for a number of photos with Santa. They even let him sit on one of the bikes. They group said they plan to bring even more toys - and more bikes! - in 2014. From there we stopped in Hawthorne to the Station gorgeously decorated by our VRA volunteers. This year saw a great turnout here as well, with the Fire Department and the Boys & Girls Club all making substantial donations. Once again, the VRA Board voted to allot money to purchase toys as a donation from the group, which Andrea & Robert Rebner

handled. Several large boxes piled up in the Station in the weeks before the train and looked great as they were loaded onto the baggage car. From there we made stops at the Hot Dog Caboose in Midland Park, the center of Wyckoff, Oakland, Pompton Lakes (once again a HUGE stop!), and Butler where we unloaded. UPS donated a truck and driver to get the toys to Picatinny Arsenal, while Lakeland Bus once again supplied a ride back to Ridgefield Park for the volunteers. From there the train went on to Warwick, NY where it spent the night.

Sunday Dec, 8th started off cold with some snow flurries, but about 100 people were waiting at the lot in Warwick by 8:30 to see Santa. The Middletown & New Jersey Railroad did a superb job in promoting the train and each stop had people waiting for us. The Village of Sugar Loaf came out in force once again with Anne Marie's Country Deli providing free cups of hot chocolate and candy canes for all. Stops that day also included Campbell Hall at the Hamptonburgh Caboose Museum; Montgomery, where the town turned the public lot into a festival with DJ, bake sale and tractor pulled hayrides; and finally Walden where the toys were unloaded into several waiting military vehicles.

The following weekend the train went all over Morris

County NJ. We started off in Dover with the threat of significant snowfall looming. Within several minutes of leaving Dover the generator on the had stopped running. KC Smith and several others made valiant attempts to restart it to no avail. By the time we reached Flanders Firehouse the snow was coming down and the car was getting cold! The Flanders Firemen came to the rescue however with fuel to get us going again and even an anti-gel treatment to keep it from freezing. A big thank you to the Flanders guys, they really saved our volunteers - that would have been one cold train! After Flanders we moved on to Sleepy's on Route 10 in Ledgewood and Morris Marine on Route 46 in Kenvil, both with impressive turnouts considering the snow that was coming down! We stopped briefly in the center of Dover and Lakeland Bus' depot, and finished our collections in Rockaway at Potbelly's Restaurant. By now the snow had been falling for hours and the roads were getting slick. We headed back to Dover in about 5 inches of snow. Luckily all of our volunteers made it home safely!

On Sunday, December 15th the entire consist spent the day parked next to Kuiken Brothers Lumber in Succasunna. The owners of Kuiken Bros. graciously opened their showroom on a Sunday to host



the Operation Toy Train effort. Their stellar employees spent the day baking cookies and making mulled cider in the working kitchen display in the showroom and even hired a photographer and face painter for the day! The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts brought many toys and enjoyed visiting with Santa.

All in all, even with the inclement weather, the effort did very well in 2013. I'd like to extend a big thank you to all the VRA members who put time and effort into this event. Special thanks go to KC

Smith for riding with the cars on every trip and helping to keep the volunteers safe and warm! Also, thank you to the railroads and their employees who donated time and equipment: John Sobotka & all the Norfolk Southern crew, Steve Gerritsen & the NYS&W crew, Frank Eichenlaub III & the M&NJ crew, Chris Mazzei and Rich Campana & the M&E crew, and to NJ Transit. Last but not least - an enormous thank you to the Marines from both Picatinny Arsenal and Stewart AFB. ☒

MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF THE VRA



VRA Volunteers Justin Kerstner, Kevin Phalon, Steve Gerritsen, Carolyn Hoffman (as Pheobe Snow), and Frank Ball preparing for and participating in the URHS Night Photo Shoot and Transportation Heritage Festival.



VRA Volunteers Kevin Phalon, Alex Abaza, Robert Rebner, Larry Gross, Carolyn Hoffman, Joan Hoffman, Mallory Wetton, Steve Gerritsen, and KC Smieth at the October Hudson Limited trip with the NYC Hickory Creek. Photo by Mark Forman



Engineer Bill Smith, wife Ally Smith, Santa Clause, US Marines, and hundreds of donors at the 2013 Toys for Tots Train.



Fun times after the 2013 Santa train: (L to R) Steve Zachowski, Kevin Phalon, Colin Newbury, Charles Smith, Frank Ball, Matt Phalon, Mike Goralski, Betsy Newbury, Kevin Phalon, Carolyn Hoffman, and Justin Kerstner.



Volunteer Railroaders Association

Hawthorne Station

Restoration Project

80 Royal Ave, Hawthorne NJ 07506

Personalized Paver Bricks

Order Form

4" x 8" Engraved Brick – Grey \$75.00 (1 – 3 Lines, 18 Characters and Spaces)

8" x 8" Engraved Brick – Red \$150.00 (1 – 5 Lines, 18 Characters and Spaces)

Add a logo for \$25.00: Please Circle One

***Hawthorne Fire Dept. / *Hawthorne Ambulance Corps. / *Hawthorne Bears**

***Hawthorne Police / VRA Logo / Cross / Train / Heart**

*\$5.00 will be donated to the corresponding organization if you chose their logo for your brick!

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Visit www.VRATrips.org for more information and on-line ordering options.