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# BIG STEAM NEWS

NEW MEXICO STEAM LOCOMOTIVE  
&  
RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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Restoration Site: 1833 8th St NW, Albuquerque, NM

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## OPEN HOUSE 2015

The September Open House At The 2926 Restoration Site Was Even Better Than Previous Years.  
But The Best Is Yet To Come As New Mexico's Flagship Steam Locomotive Nears Operation.



**READY FOR VISITORS:** The early morning September sun was still casting long shadows when Jim Van Drunen snapped this photo of about 50 NMSLRHS volunteers. The group had just completed site prep for Open House 2015. Jim did manage to get in the photo himself—just barely. That's his shadow at extreme lower right as he snaps the picture. Debbie Van Drunen is at upper right in cab. Jim and Debbie make the Open House trip each year from their home in Ft. Lauderdale, FL.  
See Open House story and more photos on pages 3, 4, & 5. And keep an eye on the 2926 website for more of Jim and Debbie's Open House video and photos soon.

(Continued on Page 3)

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## LOOKING DOWN THE TRACK Beyond The Restoration

From its founding, the primary objective of the NMSLRHS has been restoration of AT&SF steam locomotive 2926 to operating condition.

Accordingly, the focus of this newsletter has been issues related to the restoration. Articles addressed infrastructure building, disassembly, reassembly, skills of volunteers, help from generous donors, and description of major events, just to name a few.

One series of articles was titled “Banging on a 2900”. They emphasized talents of volunteers while describing restoration related issues.

The articles were a response to a dismissive remark by an unnamed rail fan in another state. He referred 2926 volunteers as “that bunch of guys banging on a 2900”, apparently viewing the volunteers as amateurs at play with a very large toy. Perhaps the exuberance and dedication of the volunteers may have led others to a similar view.

Whatever the reason, it was not a correct view. The dedication, labor, talent, and teamwork of the diverse group of volunteers—“guys banging on a 2900”—proved otherwise.

Years of work, with support from around the U.S. and abroad, has produced a desired result. AT&SF 2926 will soon be operational. The NMSLRHS will then belong to an elite national group of big steam operations.

That transition from restoration to operation means NMSLRHS as a whole, and this newsletter in particular, face change.

The Society will operate passenger excursions with 2926. Big operating steam locomotives are people magnets. A fully restored and operational 2926 will thus be a significant asset to New Mexico’s important tourism industry.

In operation, 2926 will help meet another primary Society objective—education. It will be an obvious aid in teaching history and the role railroads of in the country’s development. Also, a big steam locomotive is a great teaching tool for the highly touted Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programs.

Volunteers who enjoy onsite work can stay busy with maintenance and repair tasks. Others will constitute operations crews. New operational roles will develop in marketing, management, public relations, etc.

This newsletter will still address technical issues. Content will expand to include relations with other steam operations, education, tourism, and promotion of rail heritage.

The article beginning on this page introduces the operational environment the 2926 group will soon be entering.—*Editor*

## TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY RAIL HERITAGE AT&SF 2926 And An Increased Interest In Big Steam

The twentieth century was coming to an end when the New Mexico Steam Locomotive & Railroad Historical Society paid the City of Albuquerque one dollar for AT&SF Steam Locomotive Number 2926.

When the iconic locomotive was in service at mid-century, it could be seen pulling fast freight and passenger coaches throughout a major rail system. With many other big steam locomotives and diesels that replaced steam, they constituted a U.S. national transportation network. At key points in that network, there existed a number of busy rail depots and comfortable facilities catering to travelers. That network was significantly diminished with the increase in air and auto transportation.

Most of the big main line steam locomotives, passenger coaches, and many of the classic passenger accommodations are gone. A small number of the thousands of big steam locomotives that once populated the national network still exist. Most of the survivors are in museums or parks, at best just cosmetically restored for display. **Very few** are operational.

Some classic coaches are certified for today’s railroads and are available for excursion. They can occasionally be seen pulled by Amtrak, or on rare steam runs. A few of the once grand passenger facilities have been restored. But many of those relics that still exist have fallen into disrepair.

A review of big steam, rail hostilities, and public interest around the U.S. indicates that rail heritage interest might be increasing. Some of those historic items have been restored and there is hope others will follow. As the 2926 restoration nears completion, a few other historic rail icons are being brought back to operation for future generations to experience travel as it once was. Maybe our rich rail heritage is not totally forgotten.

That refreshed national memory of an important chapter in U.S. history is representative of the environment into which AT&SF 2926 will once again be under steam. This article addresses some activities that are planned, recently completed, or underway—actions that will preserve memories of an important era in U.S. history.

### The Big Machines

Exactly how many ‘big steam’ locomotives are *fully operational* in the U.S. is a moving target. It is safe to say that in the entire country the number is well under a dozen at any given point in time. Of that number, two or more will be undergoing anything from routine maintenance and repair to major inspection and service required by the Federal Railroad Administration Rule 230.17.



Union Pacific 4-8-4 steam locomotive at Ancho crossing between Corona and Carrizozo, New Mexico, 2006.  
Photo by Jon Spargo

An example of the FRA required service is Union Pacific 844. Pictured above near Ancho New Mexico in 2006, it is the only big steam locomotive never retired. As of September 18, UP 844 was nearing completion of the 1472 service day inspection and maintenance required by FRA.

Union Pacific, the only railroad that kept an active steam program when diesel replaced steam, has two other big steam locomotives that will eventually be fully operational. The Challenger, 4-6-6-4 No. 3985, like No. 844 is undergoing its 1472 service hour inspection. Recently UP moved Big Boy No. 4014, a 4-8-8-4 articulated unit from display in Pomona Calif. to the UP steam shops in Cheyenne Wyoming for restoration.

The increased work in UP’s Wyoming shops alone is enough to herald renewed interest in the country’s rail heritage—but there is still more. Just recently another classic 4-8-4 returned to the high rails in Virginia. In

(Continued on Page 7)



## BEST OPEN HOUSE YET

The sunrise on Saturday September 26 was classic New Mexico. As the sun's first rays lit the top of 2926, volunteers were busy performing the final preparation tasks. Bright blue sky, no wind, and just a bit of chill in the air heralded a great day for the 2015 Open House at the 2926 restoration site—soon to become the 2926 operation station.

Visitors began arriving early, even before the first band was ready to play. A steady stream of rail heritage fans continued throughout the day. This year, everyone found a parking space, thanks to the Bureau Of Indian Affairs providing access for parking in their open space next to the restoration site.

From the BNSF diesel at the restoration site's east entrance to food and music near the shining face of AT&SF 2926 at the west end, the event had something for all.



**PRETTY FACE:** A close up front view of 2926 with its jewelry (bell, marker lights, headlight, and number) in place.

Beginning with the photo at right, a site description is provided for readers who have not had the good fortune to visit the 2926 restoration site.

Like most rail sidings, the site is long and narrow. It extends west from 8th St. about 2/3's of the distance to 12th St. parallel to the spur linking the BNSF main line to Old Town Albuquerque.

The east half of the site is a dirt lot. The west half, where much of our infrastructure and 2926 reside, is paved. Once inside the paved area, there was much more to see and do.

The star of the show, AT&SF 2926 sat amid rail history displays, model rail layouts, good food, soft drinks, popcorn, and good music. There was face painting and other activity for the youngsters. The 2926 store had T-shirts, hats, toys, books, art and other rail memorabilia.

During the past 13 years, the site has on occasion provided a challenge to the volunteer work crew. To say the least, it was not an optimum space for the restoration, but the volunteers made it work.

Likewise, it was a tight fit for the Open House crowd. Turning an active work site into a public venue is not an easy task, but everyone enjoyed the food, music, and a close up look at current and historic rail items.

Hopefully, next year's open house will be quite different. First, it will be held with an operating rail heritage icon—New Mexico's flagship steam locomotive, **AT&SF 2926**. Second, there just might be a steam ride opportunity.

Enjoy the pictures of the 2015 Open House and stay alert for location and details of the **AT&SF Open House 2016**.



*BNSF diesel No. 2316, and the 2926 tender with the car mover, Lurch, sandwiched between are shown in this long shot looking west from the 8th St. Entrance to the restoration site..*



*Inside The 2926 'Office': Visitors line up to get a look inside the 2926 cab. An opportunity to see where the engineer, fireman and other crew members worked while operating the classic locomotive was a major attraction. There was a line for the cab tour throughout the day.*



# OPEN HOUSE PHOTOS

The story of the Open House is best told by the following pictures. With good weather, support from the neighborhood, and a lot of volunteer labor, the last Open House before operation was a roaring success.



**FRONT VIEW OF THE OPEN HOUSE STAR:** The 'Office' picture on the preceding page depicts the rear (cab/firebox area) of 2926. This photo taken at the west end of the restoration site, looking east toward 8th St. could have been taken at any time during the Open House event. It depicts a steady stream of visitors that occurred throughout the day. Here, NMSLRHS members mingle with guests, listen to their rail heritage stories and answer questions as the star of the event basks in the bright September sun.



**RAIL HERITAGE EXPLAINED:** Displays surrounding the locomotive were designed to provide Open House visitors with a view of New Mexico's rail heritage in different ways.

**Left:** John Cekala stands ready to demonstrate some of the locomotive's appliances and answer questions about 2926. The items shown are a spare headlight, and a dynamo. With no steam available, an air compressor was used to drive the dynamo, producing electrical power for the headlight. The display table itself is a rail history item. It is a 4 wheel metal trailer that, pulled by a small tractor called a 'mule', once hauled parts and appliances throughout the AT&SF shops south of downtown Albuquerque between the Barelás and South Broadway neighborhoods.

**Right:** The model train layouts were a major attraction for the younger set,—and more than a few adult children. Such layouts, with their synoptic view of rail operations, are an excellent educational tool. Many of the members of the New Mexico Steam Locomotive & Railroad Historical Society are model railroaders. They make effective use of the layouts to relate history, math, engineering, transportation and other subjects.



*(Open House Photos Continued)*



*Open House visitors entering and leaving the site take advantage of an opportunity to check out the BNSF diesel and Lurch the car mover, while some of them pause at the rear of the 2926 tender for photos.*



*New Mexico Railrunner, Operation Lifesaver, Wheels Museum, and other organizations staffed information tables on the site, along with the popular B&H Supply popcorn machine.*



*Visitors line up for food and refreshments as the 2926 volunteers work to keep the hot dogs, chili, and condiments ready.*



*Above: New at this year's Open House was Jazz a la Carte warms up in front of the locomotive.*

*Below: Open House regulars Holy Water and Whiskey*

### **HOT DOGS, SOFT DRINKS AND GOOD MUSIC**

There is no doubt that the huge locomotive was the star of the Open House show, but there was much more. From the entry on 8th St. to the band area in front of 2926, there was something for everyone. The pictures on this page provide a look at some of the Open House attractions, including hot dogs, soft drinks, and a variety of music. Not pictured here is Los Radiators, an Open House favorite that opened the event this year.



*Below: The Territorial Brass Band is a favorite at the Open House events fits well within the overall Open House theme of New Mexico heritage.*





*Sketch of proposed engine house for AT&SF 2926. Once the locomotive is fully restored, such protection will be necessary..*

## Our Engine House Campaign Gets a Big Pop!

By Bob DeGroft, VP NMSLRHS

Earlier this year we launched a GO FUND ME Campaign to raise \$200,000 dollars to construct a storage/protection building at our present site. 2926 is nearing restoration completion and we need to keep her out of the elements and protect her from those who for reasons unknown would like to do her harm.

This is our first effort to try for funding “from the cloud”. Fundraising is a tough job and most of our funds come from the general public. We do not get monies from any government entity and most donations are under three hundred dollars raised by our membership and folks who follow us on our website, NMSLRHS.org.

Our GO FUND ME campaign is getting results but very slowly. Now, for the second time in our history, someone has shown up indicating that they would make a very large donation under certain conditions.

Last year we made you aware of a donation from a gentleman from London, England that provided the funds for reconditioning the track at the spur on which 2926 has resided while under restoration. That injection of \$100,000 dollars from a long time supporter who prefers to remain anonymous, kept the engine from literally falling off tracks that were laid back in the thirties.

**Now, another individual has issued a challenge. If our GO FUND ME campaign raises \$100,000 he will match it with a check in the amount of \$100,000!** The donor, who also wishes to remain anonymous, has followed our progress for years and has made modest contributions. He can be classified as a real steam fan. Our thanks go out to his family for this generosity and we urge readers to help us get to the 100k goal.

Help our campaign steam up and meet the 100k goal. As of this writing, the GO FUND ME building campaign has generated more than a third of that 100k goal. Now past \$36,000, we need to raise another \$63,000+ to get the challenge grant. So grab your credit card, get to the GO FUND ME site and make a donation today.

The GO FUND ME campaign can be reached by going to the 2926 web site at [www.nmslrhs.org](http://www.nmslrhs.org), or [www.2926.us/](http://www.2926.us/). To donate, click the GO FUND ME box on the opening page of the web site. If GO FUND ME doesn't work for you or if you choose not to use it, a check will be OK. Just identify your contribution as Engine House Campaign. ANY amount is greatly appreciated!

### NOTICE: IMPORTANT 2016 SAFETY SESSION

Chief Safety Officer John Spargo wants to alert all members to the importance of the next annual safety training. For those who need to set their schedule well in advance, a tentative training date has been set for Saturday, January 16, 2016. With the transition from restoration to operation coming next year, the 2016 training will carry special significance, and will include a safety specialist from the rail industry. Details will be announced on the web site, via email, and in the next newsletter.

\* \* \* \* \*

## THANKS TO THE JOHN H. EMERY RAIL HERITAGE TRUST

In August the NMSLRHS received a \$25,000 grant from the John H. Emery Rail Heritage Trust. The amount was matched by our volunteer hours, donated items received for the locomotive, and cash gifts received thus far in 2015. We look forward to finishing the restoration and beginning steam operation of AT&SF 2926. We are thankful for the help of the Trust and all our donors.

The stated purpose of the trust that the late John Henckle Emery established definitely matches the stated purpose of the New Mexico Steam Locomotive & Railroad Historical Society. Points 1 & 2 of the criteria established by Mr. Emery are:

1. *To help re-create and preserve, to the extent possible, the rail passenger travel experience as it was in the U.S. from approximately 1920 through 1960.*
2. *To preserve and restore to working order rolling stock and other working artifacts of the “Golden Age” of U.S. rail passenger service.*

The grant is very timely, and certainly helps meet the daily needs of the restoration of 2926. Additionally the criteria stated above just adds credibility to the theme of this newsletter. There is a resurgence of interest in U.S. Rail Heritage.



(Continued from Twenty-First Century Pg 2)

May 2014, Norfolk and Western No. J611 was moved from the Virginia Museum Of Transportation in Roanoke to the North Carolina Transportation Museum in Spencer North Carolina to undergo restoration to full operation. The story of NW J611's return to action is another hint that national interest in big steam operations is alive and well. The J611 story involves steam heritage programs in four states with support from around the U.S. and abroad.

Norfolk & Western J611 was retired from regular service in 1959. After retirement, it resided in the Virginia Museum of Transportation in Roanoke—until Norfolk & Western and Southern Railway were merged in a holding company, Norfolk Southern Corp. in 1982. Southern Railway had a popular steam program that became part of the newly formed organization. J611 became a part of that program and was restored in 1982 in Irondale, Alabama, returning under its own power to Roanoke in August of that year, with Robert B. Claytor, Norfolk & Western chairman, at the throttle.

In 1994 with a change in management, the steam program was discontinued, and again J611 was back on display at the museum—but not forever. In 2005, Charles "Wick" Moorman, became CEO of Norfolk Southern Railway. In 2007, after discussions with Tim Andrews, President of the Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum in Chattanooga, TN, the steam program gained new life with limited excursions. In 2011, the 21st Century Steam program was born. In 2013, the 'Fire Up 611' campaign began.

Now, a couple of decades after its second retirement to display, J611 has experienced a twenty-first century rebirth. Under the 'Fire Up 611' campaign, the classic locomotive was moved to Spencer for restoration. Still in sound shape, 611 was quickly brought back to full operation in early 2015. The photos below show the return of N&W J611 to Roanoke on May 30, 2015.



**LEFT, GOING HOME:** Norfolk and Western J611 proves that big steam locomotives are real people magnets as a large crowd finds a good viewing spot alongside a curve in rural Virginia to watch the big locomotive steam past.

**RIGHT, HOME AGAIN:** Arriving back home at the Virginia Transportation Museum in Roanoke, J611 finds more crowds.

Big steam activities in Wyoming, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Alabama are examples of increased activity and interest in rail history. Other states where big steam is either in operation or may soon be include Oregon, Minnesota, Michigan, and California, (Home of AT&SF 3751, the oldest surviving 4-8-4). The fascination with big steam locomotives as a part of our heritage seems to be increasing across the U.S. But what about some of the infrastructure—those depots and grand hostleries?

### Classic Rail Structures—Depots

Many of the structures, depots, restaurants, hotels and related facilities that once served rail travelers have been demolished or put to other use during the past half century. A good example of a total loss of such classic facilities was the demolition in 1971 of a 'crown jewel' of the famous Harvey House system—The Alvarado Hotel in Albuquerque. Anyone bringing up that subject with some of New Mexico's senior citizens will get a response ranging from great memories to a tirade criticizing the demolition.

Fortunately, some of the classic edifices have been saved, and put to other use while retaining a semblance of their historic role. Examples of sharing space and retaining historicity is seen in the Great American Stations Project. Initiated by Amtrak in 2006, the projects aim is—*"to educate communities on the benefits of redeveloping train stations, offer tools to community leaders to preserve their stations, and provide the appropriate Amtrak resources."*

The project provides funding information and describes ways to combine cultural, education, and tourism functions with Amtrak operation to preserve the historic nature of the classic facilities and still serve the community. Examples, with photos, where space has been shared with Amtrak operations can be seen at [www.greatamericanstations.com/](http://www.greatamericanstations.com/).

For those locations without an Amtrak connection, the project has useful information that can guide the development of a rail facility restoration project. In just under a decade, the project has been a great help in increasing awareness of rail heritage while producing positive economic impact.

Tucumcari New Mexico does not have Amtrak service. Yet the city has just restored its historic passenger depot that was built in 1926. The town originated from a Rock Island railroad camp in 1901. First called Ragtown, then Douglas, and nicknamed Six-Shooter-Siding, it finally became Tucumcari in 1908. Despite uncertainty in choosing a name, Tucumcari started as a railroad town, and remains a bona fide railroad town to this day having served Rock Island, Southern Pacific and Union Pacific.



Flagstaff AZ Depot: Designed and built by AT&SF Railway in 1926, this classic Tudor Revival building is now restored, and serves two functions—Amtrak station and Flagstaff's Visitor Center while serving as an icon of the city's rail heritage.

(Continued on Page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

The depot, next to a busy UP freight line, was given to the city by UP in 2002. With no passenger service since 1968, it was in poor shape. The city and Tucumcari MainStreet Corp. began to assemble a funding program with active citizen support.

Almost \$2 million went into the depot restoration. Much energy and support for the project came from distant sources—Tucumcari natives now living elsewhere. Having stayed in touch since school days, those ‘local boys’ had experience in fund-raising, railroad management, and architecture. They stepped in to help save the depot.

The now restored depot is a multiple use facility, housing a rail museum with space for civic events. Like restored depots in Gallup, Flagstaff, Kingman, and other cities, it is only a couple of blocks from the famous Mother Road, U.S. Rt. 66. Thus, it will be an enhancement to tourist traffic.



*This photo was shot by NMSLRHS's Ernie Robart at Tucumcari Railroad Days event September 21. The view is to the southwest from the overpass on North 1st St, (Hwy 104). In this photo, Route 66 is beyond the trees at left and center. It runs alongside the railroad past the tallest structure in town, the historic Caton Grain Elevator Co., now Attebury Elevators Inc, and intersects Interstate 40 west of the city. Rt. 66 and UP run parallel more than 50 miles to Santa Rosa. That common path provides an excellent opportunity for train watchers.*

The depot is also well suited for rail excursions. It has already hosted Union Pacific's 844 on the big steam locomotive's New Mexico and Arizona Centennial run prior to being shopped in Cheyenne for its 1472 service hour inspection.

### Classic Rail Structures—Food and Rest

More signs that interest in rail heritage is in revival is the preservation and restoration of some of the many hospitality facilities that once existed along the railroads, especially in the U.S. Southwest where the famous Harvey Houses flourished during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The entire history of the Harvey chain alone would fill volumes. Many have long since disappeared, but some, such as La Posada in Winslow have been restored and rank as major tourist stops in travel industry listings.

La Casteñada, a Harvey House located in Las Vegas New Mexico, is also returning to use. Built in 1898, it was once a regular destination and rest stop for travelers on AT&SF's famous passenger trains. It is now under restoration by the restorer of Winslow's La Posada. When the historic hotel is open for business, it is expected to once again become a stopping point for a classic steam locomotive—New Mexico's flagship AT&SF 2926. The 2926 volunteers are looking forward to such a reunion.



*La Casteñada: Returning to service on the same timeline as AT&SF 2926.*

### RAIL HERITAGE PROJECTS: Replicating The Freedom Train

The Yellow Ribbon Express (YRE) is a 3-year project still in development. It is a creation of Ross Rowland, founder of the American Freedom Train Foundation that operated a heritage train throughout the nation during the 1976 U.S. Bicentennial.

Using big steam locomotives, the YRE would replicate travels of the Bicentennial Freedom Train and an earlier Freedom Train that traveled about the country to celebrate the end of WWII.

Freedom Trains carried artifacts representing the founding and development of the United States Of America. They traveled state-to-state as a mobile museum allowing millions of Americans to see the artifacts.

Near half a century has passed since the last Freedom Train. It is time for Rowland's idea of replicating the Freedom Train later this decade. Utilizing the magnificent machines that helped develop this great nation to carry exhibits reinforcing our national heritage is the way to go.



*The Freedom Train at Kankakee, Illinois on July 27, 1975. Kodachrome by Chuck Zeiler*

The following statement by Ross Rowland cites the purpose of the YRE as much the same as those previous freedom trains.

*“The essential purpose of the Yellow ribbon Express tour is to celebrate that desire to serve which has so characterized our nation since its founding and to rekindle and encourage that spirit of service to all Americans. It will also confer special thanks upon those who through our two and a half centuries have stepped forward and served America in uniform.”*

For additional information, more details, and to follow the progress of planning the Yellow Ribbon Express Project, check the website at: <http://www.yellowribbonexpress.com/about.htm>.

One small article such as this can't begin to identify all of the rail heritage activity that exists around the U.S. As AT&SF 2926 nears it's first steam-up in sixty years, there are other individuals and organizations about the country either working on or contemplating rail heritage projects. It can be said that, whether intentional or not, the timing of that ‘bunch of guys banging on a 2900’ couldn't be better. The 2926 volunteers are bringing their big steam locomotive back to operation just when there seems to an increasing interest nationwide in preserving elements of the United States rail heritage. ALL ABOARD!