On Track

Vol. 4, Number 9, September 2025

If you are receiving this newsletter for the first time, welcome to the fold! We continue to catalog our visitor logs, and your email appeared! If you wish to be taken off our list, just let us know, but we hope that you will stay with us, follow us online, and return to visit us in person sometime soon. Additional financial support will never be turned down (maintaining and operating a steam locomotive is expensive)! Previous editions of this newsletter may be found on our website. If you have comments on the newsletter, please send them to nmheritagerail@nmheritagerail.com or to your humble editor, John Taylor.

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

NMHR volunteers are working to wrap up all the open tasks to make 2926 ready for our upcoming **3rd Annual New Mexico Railroad Days on 27-28 September at the Albuquerque Rail Yards**.

As I mentioned last month, progress was slowed because our car mover, "Lurch," is still in the shop with brake and transmission problems. So, we are again reaching out to Bobby at Anaya's Roadrunner Wrecker Service pull out 2926 to complete the FRA mandated 5-year hydrostatic test on 3 September where our local FRA representatives will be in attendance (as we patiently await news on the condition of Lurch).

NMHR continues to purchase equipment and hardware for our eventual conversion to Positive Train Control (PTC). We just submitted a purchase order for the TMC-05, train management computer. This brings us to approximately 80% of the way towards having 2926 fully PTC compliant.

Okay, so I'm beginning to sound like a broken record. Running a steam locomotive is expensive! Our immediate need is to get "Lurch" up and running again (or replaced) so we have something reliable to move 2926 around the restoration site. Every dollar you donate helps NMHR move closer to attaining its bigger long-term goals. Please help! NMHR is also in the process of obtaining more rolling stock and we need a place to keep them, which will be at the city-owned Rail Yards. Although there is a lot of space at the Rail Yards, the amount of usable track is at a premium. Track costs approximately $600 per foot and we need hundreds of feet of track to store our rolling stock. Our near-term goal is to raise $250k to restore another turntable lead-in track adjacent to the one we restored about a year ago. Additionally, NMHR still needs your help to cover the costs of PTC equipment, locomotive maintenance supplies, site equipment maintenance and upkeep, consumables, new tools, everything!

Steam in England – Part III: In my previous reports, I relayed our family's experiences with traction engines, whether at the farm of a private collector Richard Parrott, at the Weeting Steam Rally, the Charles Burrell Museum in Thetford, or at the Thursford Steam Museum. In this final segment of Steam in England, I will tell you about our visit to the West Somerset Railway. The West Somerset Railway (WSR) is the longest heritage railway in England. They are located southwest of Bristol on the east side of the Bristol Channel (on a good day you can see Wales on the horizon). The line runs between the towns/terminuses of Bishops Lydeard and Minehead, a run of just over 20 miles, and has eight stops along the way: Crowecomb-Heathfield, Stogumber, Williton, Doniford Halt, Watchet, Washford, Blue Anchor, and Dunster. The line was originally built for freight haulage, but that never really took off as intended so it is now passenger service. **Trivia time**: Minehead, a Celtic word, is an anglicization of mynydd, which is Welsh for mountain (thank you Robin, more on him below).

Our host during our visit was Robin Wichard, a director of the West Somerset Railway and station master (his station is Blue Anchor). Richard is a fan of 2926 and has a fondness for New Mexico from the time he spent here in his archeologist days in the 1980s. He heard about our new expanded running limits Joint Use Agreement with NMDOT/Rio Metro and reached out to congratulate us and to let us know if we're ever in the neighborhood to drop by. Well, since we were in the neighborhood, because of our trip to the Weeting Steam Rally, we arranged to meet up with Robin. Since we first met Robin at the Dunster Station, we stayed in Dunster Village and also toured Dunster Castle (well worth a visit) while we were in town.

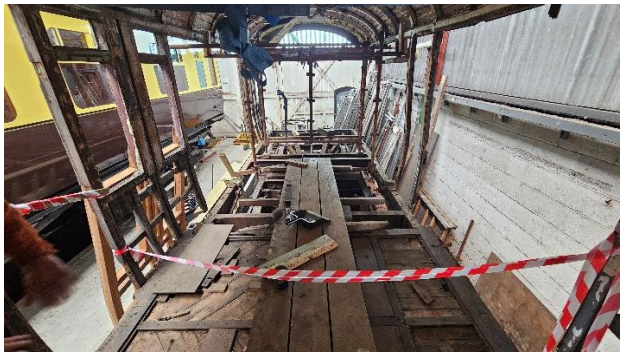
Richard, accompanied by his wife Sophie, gave us the grand tour of their operations over the course of two days. During our two days with them, Robin and Sophie showed and explained their entire operation to me and Henry. We joked about taking 2926 across the pond to run on their rails, but that's a near impossibility for too many reasons. Robin told us that they have 40 paid positions and that they have 900 active volunteers (some who also work on other regional heritage rail lines). They supported, to some degree, by England's National Heritage Trust.

The WSR's operations include tourist and passenger service, and, in association with the West Somerset Railway Association, carriage restoration, boiler service and restoration, souvenir

stores, cafés (the station at Stogumber serves “Cream Teas,” where we were also hosts to dozens of yellow jackets that were enjoying the strawberry jam as much as we were!).


It appears that yellow jackets like strawberry jam (but not the clotted cream or lemon curd, not shown, as much)!

Their carriage restoration facility, a new-to-them building located at the Washford station, can house two carriages on two tracks and has two fully equipped woodworking shops. They often must tear the carriage down to the frame, saving the metal roof where they can, and then rebuild all the wooden framework, flooring, and paneling. Reworking the windows and their frames and reupholstering the seating are especially challenging tasks.

WSR’s current carriage restoration project (their restored one is just visible to the left in each image).

Their boiler shop, located in the historic Swindon Shed near the Williton Station, can house about six (or more) locomotives on two tracks. Here the team works on maintaining their steam locomotive boilers and they also perform contract boiler work for local businesses. At the time of our visit, they had three active locomotive boiler projects and five contract boiler projects.

Matt talking about their fireless engine sitting in their boiler shop.

The WSR has numerous steam locomotives and Diesel Multi-Units (DMUs) to pull their passenger carriages. We rode behind 9351, a 2-6-0 “Mogul,” on our first day there, but behind their DMU on our second day. Steam locomotive 9351 was built in 1934 and was originally a 2-6-2 tank engine and later converted. Robin told us the British Rail’s larger steam locomotive class names are royalty related, i.e., King, Castle, Princess, Manor, Lady, Grange, etc.

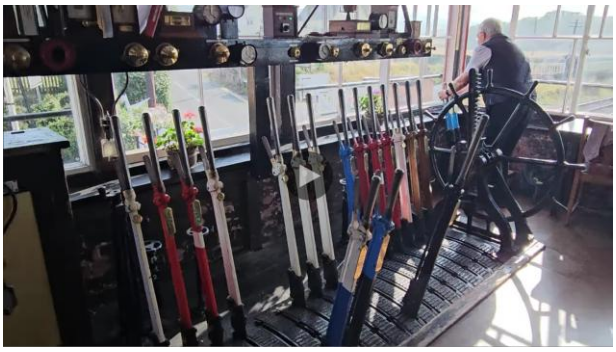
Erlestoke Manor in for servicing (just ignore the forklift).

WSR's "Mogul" #9351 that we rode behind on our first day.

WSR's (relatively small) manually operated turntable at Minehead.

Robin and his volunteer team showed us their two signal towers, one at Willington and one at Blue Anchor; the Blue Anchor tower being the only remaining working manually lever-operated signal tower in England. Henry and I were given the opportunity to pull on the levers They took more effort to pull than I expected, and I failed to engage the switch completely (as was indicated by the switch position indicator dials seen above the levers in the images), but Henry was much more successful. The WSR also has an original token system that ensures, by handing off and locking out physical tokens between drivers and station masters, that there is only one locomotive on the single-line track at any time (i.e., there are no sidings).

If you look carefully at the signal tower picture of the Blue Anchor station below, the large wheel that the station master is standing behind controls the "automated" grade-crossing gates.

The switching levers at Williton and Blue Anchor.

The token system used to ensure that there is only one engine on the single-line track at any time.

The "automated" grade-crossing gates at Blue Anchor.

We had a great time and learned a lot and Henry and I (along with our very patient wife and daughter/sister) give many thanks to Robin and Sophie for their generosity in hosting us and showing us all that they do. Be sure to drop by and take a ride on the West Somerset Railway if you ever find yourself in Sussex!

Profile of a member All too frequently this column has featured one of us, the grizzled old guys who represent the bulk of the population here at the 2926 restoration site. This month, however, we feature someone entirely different: Luca Tatro (actually Luca Benjamin Pierpan Tatro when his mom is not pleased) is not only one of our newest workers, but probably our youngest.

Luca was born in Encinitas, California, in 2005, but moved to Albuquerque while still in swaddling clothes. His father's work as a sales rep for bicycle manufacturers brought him back to the Golden State when he was five. He graduated from San Dieguito Academy High School in 2023.

San Dieguito Academy offered a wide variety of shop experiences—wood shop, auto shop, metal shop, photo shop (not the Adobe variety), etc. Luca got involved in several of these, eventually becoming skilled enough to teach students in the metal shop the ins and outs of lathes, mills, and CNC (computer numerically controlled) machining equipment.

While at the Academy, Luca was a member of Team Paradox, the school's robotics team. Because of his machinist skills, his primary responsibility was manufacturing parts for the robots using his CNC and 3D printing skills.

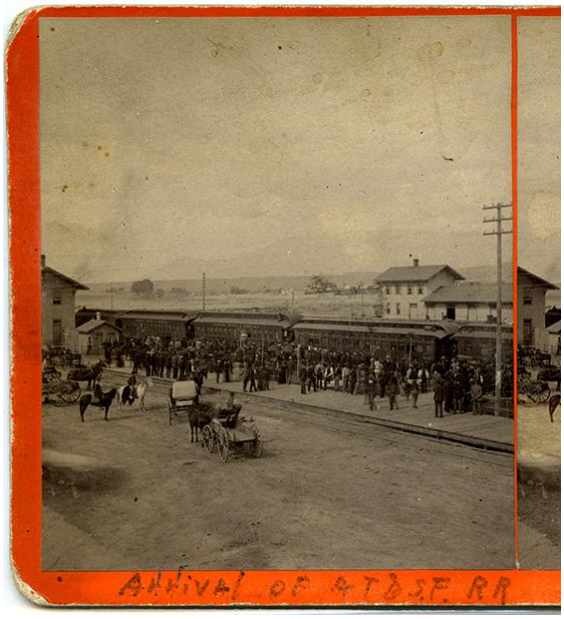
During his senior year, Luca was accepted by UNM. Since his dad could do his bike rep job remotely, the family relocated to Albuquerque where Luca started on a Mechanical Engineering track at UNM. He is currently in his third year and is seriously considering continuing to get a master's degree. While in Loboland, he has become interested in making parts for the FSAE (full-size electric race car) program.

Sometime during 2024, Luca's parents saw one of Nathan's spectacular 2926 videos and bought their son a membership as a Christmas present. He started in March 2025 and has become a fixture at the site, shadowing some of our subject matter experts and helping in several projects.

When not in school or working at the locomotive site, he enjoys preparing (and/or mutilating) small electronic devices such as iPods, gaming devices, and laptops. He has built his own "Onewheel," a powered skateboard with one wheel in the center. He reports that it works well, but he has definitively proven that it (or he) is not crash-proof. He also enjoys documentary style photography, especially taking "candid" pictures of people.

So, when you see Luca working diligently on a locomotive project in his signature blue denim overalls, give him a wave—he has lowered the mean age of our workforce considerably!

A short historical note: The first train into Albuquerque arrived just after noon on April 22, 1880. It was driven by engineer Hugh Muirphy and carried dignitaries from around the territory.



Arrival of the first train in Albuquerque

William Hazeldine

The featured speaker was William Hazeldine, one of the major promoters of the Santa Fe Railroad in Albuquerque. He waxed eloquently, saying,

> "When on this eventful morn, the first struggling beams of light broke over the brow of yonder range of the mountains, grave sentinels standing guard eternally over our beloved and fertile valley, the day was born that was to be the day of all days for Albuquerque, the Queen City of the Rio Grande, a day long expected and anxiously looked forward to by the friends of progress and achievement, a day ever after to be known and remembered as that on which our ancient city of Albuquerque was through the pluck, vim, and enterprise of the management of the AT&SF Railroad connected with the rest of the civilized world."

How does it work: On September 3, we completed the annual FRA-mandated hydrostatic test of our boiler. This test required that we fill the boiler with water and heat the water to between 70- and 120-degrees Fahrenheit and pressurize the water in the boiler to 125 percent of the boiler's rated pressure (in our case 362 psi). We were required to hold that pressure long enough to verify stay bolt integrity (about a two-hour task) and inspect the boiler for signs of failure. In this case, "failure" doesn't necessarily mean leakage—in fact, since the boiler generally seals up as we get to operating temperature, we expect there to be leakage at some threaded connections at this lower temperature. We will note any leaks, however, just to be safe. After we depressurized, we removed the manway cover to permit the FRA representatives access to inspect the visible flue tubes.

Speaking of "How Does it Work," we offer you a new opportunity: After considerable work, we have produced a comprehensive systems manual for the 2926. This document diagrams each of the major systems on the locomotive and provides an explanation of how the systems work. We encourage everyone, especially those who regularly work at the site, to purchase a copy. The cost is $5 for regular workers (those who have taken the safety course), $15 for other members, and $25 for the public. Drop by the store, take a look, and buy a copy!

How Does It Work?

A Systems Manual for the ATSF 2926

by

John Taylor, Paul Baynes, and Ken Dusenberry

How you can help and other tidbits: If you are interested in donating to our cause (because operating a steam locomotive is expensive!) go to our GoFundMe and Venmo links! Be sure to check out our Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram pages as well! Other potential sites of interest: our friends at the Wheels Museum, Rio Metro, and activities at the Albuquerque Railyards. Please see our Membership page to discover our other volunteer opportunities.

HAPPY LABOR DAY!