On Track

Vol. 5, Number 2, February 2026

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 As many of you know, a significant amount of our time and energy right now is focused on the Albuquerque South Rail Yards. This historic site is central to NMHR's long-term vision, and I want to share a brief update on where things stand and what lies ahead.

NMHR continues to work closely with the City of Albuquerque and our partners as the updated access agreement moves through City Legal review. While these processes take time, this agreement is a critical step—it establishes the framework that allows us to plan responsibly, protect our equipment, and move forward with confidence.

In the meantime, we have begun staged activity at the Rail Yards. Several of our passenger cars are now located on Track 209 and will be fully positioned within City-authorized limits once the agreement is finalized. These moves require careful coordination with our railroad partners to ensure all operations are conducted safely and professionally.

The Rail Yards represent more than just a storage location—they are a place where the public can connect with New Mexico's railroad history in a tangible way. As details continue to solidify, we are also exploring opportunities to enhance public engagement, including coordination with neighboring organizations and museums so that our equipment adds to the overall visitor experience at the site.

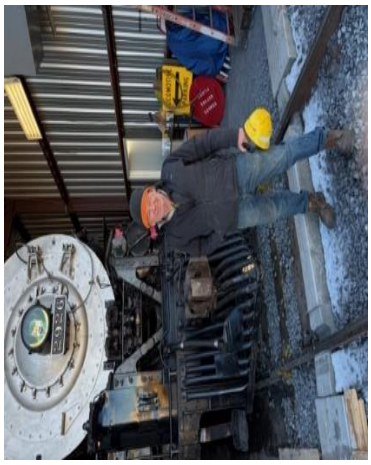
As always, progress at this scale is made through steady teamwork rather than quick wins. I'm grateful to our volunteers, board members, partners, and supporters who continue to show patience, professionalism, and enthusiasm as we move this project forward.
There is real momentum building, and while there is still work to do, we are laying the groundwork carefully and deliberately—so that when we move forward, we do so the right way.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR – 2026
Route 66 Celebration
📅 April 18–19, 2026
📍 Albuquerque South Rail Yards
NMHR plans to participate in the City's Route 66 Celebration, with equipment on display as part of the broader Rail Yards activities.

New Mexico Railroad Days
📅 September 26–27, 2026
📍 Albuquerque South Rail Yards
NMHR will host New Mexico Railroad Days, celebrating New Mexico's railroad heritage with exhibits, education, and hands-on experiences for the public.

📅 Early December 2026 – Dates TBD
📍 Albuquerque South Rail Yards
NMHR is planning to participate in a Holiday Market at the Rail Yards. Additional details will be shared once dates and logistics are finalized.

Additional updates and announcements will be shared as plans continue to develop.



PROFILE OF A MEMBER: Steve Willard is one of those strong silent types who stays in the background but is always ready to step in and help. Like most of us, he is not best known for dressing up in his Sunday best to come to the site, but beneath the grizzled veneer is a remarkable guy!

Steve was born and raised in Española (his family had moved there in 1916) and graduated from McCurdy High School, home of the Bobcats (also the *alma mater* of our own Paul Baynes) in 1979. He moved to Albuquerque and earned a bachelor's in mechanical engineering from UNM in 1984.

Steve's post-college career is amazing. After graduation, he spent three years as an HVAC engineer for Bridgers and Paxton. He then joined the Peace Corps and went to the islands of Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous part of Tanzania (known for cloves, cinnamon and other spices) off the east coast of Africa (go look it up in an atlas, if you still have one!). Steve taught physics and HVAC technology in Karume Technical College for two years and remembers the area as "the most exotic place" he had ever seen.

Returning stateside in 1989, he went to work for PNM, where he did energy audits on commercial buildings for ten years, spent two years at Honeywell designing power turbines, and spent fifteen more years at PNM, developing specialized maintenance equipment for the power transmission grid and working on battery storage technology.

In 2001, Steve moved to the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) where he managed international projects in large-scale battery storage. This job took him across the U.S., as well as Europe. He retired from EPRI in the spring of 2025.

Having found out about 2926 in a newspaper article, he joined the Society in November of 2021. To date, he has mostly worked in the foundry, making parts for the Cumbres and Toltec and trinkets for our store.

Steve and Kim, a physical therapist, have been married for 33 years and have three sons, all of whom have a master's degree or more. One is a lawyer, one is a software engineer, and one works in underwater acoustics (a topic that is not discussed around the dinner table!).

When he's not pounding sand in the foundry, Steve and Kim spend time at their Colorado ranch where he raises heritage grains (rye and wheat) for local bakers. He is also a fly fisherman, a woodworker, and makes lamps from obscure items such as car mufflers, fuel filters, and antique beer cans (yes, you read that last part correctly!).

So, we have in Steve Willard a man who can help us with grain farming, fly fishing, and lamp building. Oh, yes—he's also one hell'uva electrical power engineer and a great addition to the 2926 community.

A SHORT HISTORICAL NOTE: It was a cold, clear night in Belen, and by 10 pm Pecos Division Railmaster B. M. Naylor had gone to bed. His sleep was interrupted by a phone call from Santa Fe Railway Headquarters. The essence of the message was,

> Get up and get armed guards out along the line from Belen to Clovis! The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor, and we are now at war. We must protect the railroad from German and Japanese saboteurs!

The date was Sunday, December 7, 1941, and Naylor acted immediately, directing his foremen to post guards at the most vulnerable locations along the line, places like bridges, the deep cuts in Abo Canyon, and the dynamite storage shed near Sais. Many of these guard posts were later shut down, but critical ones, such as the bridge over the Colorado and Pecos rivers, were maintained for the duration of the war.

A guard at the Colorado River bridge Near Topock, Arizona (from Walz)

The railroads were critical to supplying the war effort, and New Mexico was critical to the continuous operation of the country's rail-based supply lines. Naylor described the wartime traffic as follows:

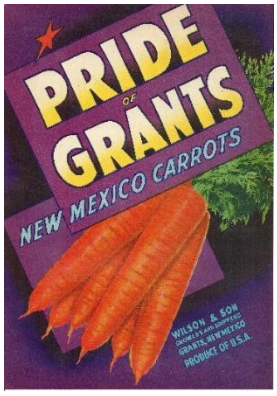
> Each passing day we would see train after train westbound loaded with guns, boats, barges, jeeps, tanks, and any and all kinds of fighting equipment … Section men were kept busy changing broken rail to keep the trains running and to keep material and supplies moving toward the West Coast and on to the Pacific War Zone.

B. M. Naylor

Military equipment transportation in California

It wasn't just the trains on the rails. Workers in the maintenance and repair facilities in Albuquerque and Clovis were also essential to keeping the railroad operating at the intense war-effort level.

Trains also carried other war-related passengers and cargo—fresh troops heading for the war zone and wounded men returning, produce to feed the army, including carrots from Grants and vegetables from the Estancia Valley, potash from Carlsbad, and coal from Raton, Madrid, Gallup, and Dawson.



Jumbo being transported from Engle to the Trinity Site

The railroad also supported the Manhattan Project, bringing supplies to the railhead at Engle as the Trinity Site was being readied for the world's first nuclear weapon detonation. A special load

for the site was the 214-ton steel vessel called Jumbo that was designed (but never used) to contain the valuable plutonium if the explosion was a dud.

On a less positive note, the trains were also used to transport Japanese-American citizens from the West Coast to internment camps, including two here in New Mexico near Santa Fe and Lordsburg.

Japanese internees being loaded on trains

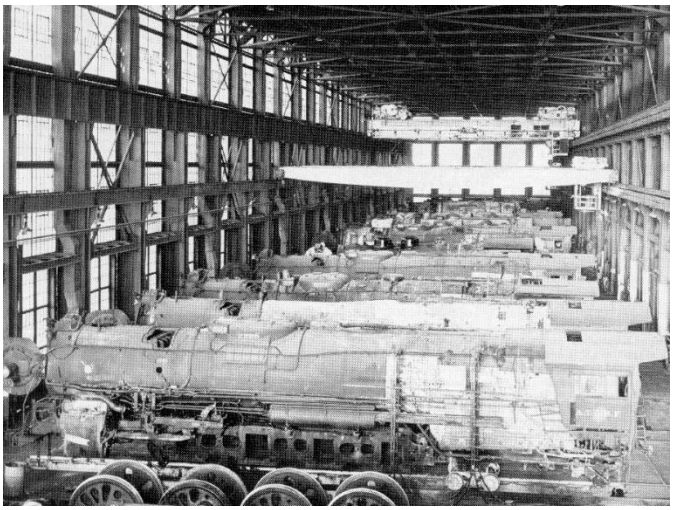
New Mexico contributed much to the war effort—the state had one of the highest enlistment rates per-capita and the largest per-capita casualty rate of any of the states. She was home to the Navajo Code Talkers, and she was the focal point for critical technological developments such as the proximity fuse and the nuclear bomb. Railroads played a critical role as well, and individuals like B. M. Naylor, the workers in the shops, the trainmen driving the trains, and the laborers, including Native Americans from Laguna and the Navajo Nation, repairing the rails were all critical contributors to New Mexico's support for the war effort.

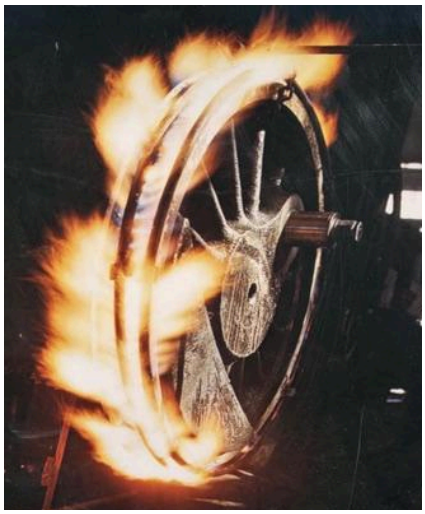
For more information on New Mexico and railroads during World War II, see New Mexico in World War II by Richard Melzer and John Taylor, Santa Fe in World War II by Robert Walz, and Forty Year on the Santa Fe Railroad—An autobiography of B. M. Naylor, edited by John Taylor and Fred Friedman.

HOW DOES IT WORK: Most of you know by now that, just like a car, each of the eight drivers has both a wheel and a tire. Also just like a car, the tires have a finite lifetime, in the case of the 2926, a set of tires will need to be replaced about every 200,000 miles. Fortunately for us, we believe that we have about 30,000 miles left on our tires, so, barring the proverbial unforeseen, we should be good for several more years. However, when it does come time to change the tires, and you do have to change all of them, just like a car to maintain balanced wheel performance, how do we do it? The process is straightforward, but far from easy.

The first thing that must happen is that the wheel sets, each of which weighs about 15 tons, must be separated from the boiler and chassis. This is done using a very large crane similar to the one that used to be functional in the Albuquerque Railyards machine shop.

As shown in the image below left from the February 1987 issues of *Trains* magazine, you can see several engines, the large crane, and a set of wheels that have been removed from an engine.





Once the wheels are removed, the tires must be removed from the wheels. This is accomplished using a ring of torches that are put around the outside of the tire as shown above right. The heated tire expands and can be pulled off the wheel. Similarly, a new tire is heated and put onto the wheel. When it cools it contracts and is held tightly to the wheel.

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.

February 2

February 14

February 16

Lots to celebrate this month!