

Clinchfield Nov 25

In 1886 ex-[Union Gen. John T. Wilder](#) received a charter for the [Charleston, Cincinnati and Chicago Railroad](#), commonly referred to as the "Triple C" Railroad. This was the beginning of the modern Clinchfield. The promoters proposed a 625-mile line from [Ironton, Ohio](#), to [Charleston, South Carolina](#), with an extension down the [Ohio River](#) to [Cincinnati](#). It would serve the rich agricultural lands of the Piedmont, the summer resorts of the North Carolina mountains, the rich timber and mineral deposits and coal fields of Virginia and Kentucky, with terminals on both the Ohio River and the Atlantic seacoast. The estimated cost was \$21 million. [Johnson City, Tennessee](#), was established as the headquarters for the Triple C Railroad and that city became a railway boom town.

Built north and south from Johnson City, tracks reached [Erwin, Tennessee](#), in 1890. Grading was 90% complete from Johnson City to Dante, Virginia, in 1893 when the Triple C had financial problems and failed in the national depression of that year. In July 1893, the assets of the Triple C Railroad were sold at a [foreclosure](#) for \$550,000. The new owners renamed it the "[Ohio River and Charleston Railroad](#)." The construction continued halfheartedly and in 1897 owners began to sell off the railroad in segments.



Former [Clinchfield Depot](#) in Erwin, Tennessee

At the time an enterprising entrepreneur, [George Lafayette Carter](#), was involved in developing the coal lands of southwestern Virginia and needed a railroad to transport his coal to a seaport. In 1902, he purchased the Ohio River and Charleston Railroad, renamed it the Clinchfield Railroad, and organized a gigantic construction program. Between 1905 and 1909 the road was completed from Dante, Virginia, to [Spartanburg, South Carolina](#). Carter got financing to build to high standards and Clinchfield has not had to reduce grades, lighten curves, and enlarge tunnels to handle larger equipment as other railroads have had to do. (The main line retains many 14° curves, though.) Carter established the Clinchfield's headquarters in Johnson City, Tennessee, but later moved it to Erwin, Tennessee, when he could not get land for the shops and [classification yards](#). Erwin remained Clinchfield's headquarters thereafter.

A station was built in 1910 near [Little Switzerland, North Carolina](#), for visitors to the resort. The resort built Etchoe local [/ett.foʊ/](#) Pass Road, a 4-mile long [toll road](#), connecting to it. The tolls were lifted and the road is now [North Carolina Highway 226A](#). The toll booths are still visible.^[1] The station's original name was [Mount Mitchell](#) Station but it was subsequently changed to Little Switzerland.^[2]

The **Clinchfield Railroad** ([reporting mark](#) CRR) was an operating and [holding company](#) for the **Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railway** ([reporting mark](#) CCO). The line ran from the [coalfields](#) of [Virginia](#) and [Elkhorn City, Kentucky](#), to the [textile mills](#) of [South Carolina](#). The 35-mile segment from [Dante, Virginia](#), to Elkhorn City, opening up the coal lands north of Sandy Ridge Mountains and forming a connection with the [Chesapeake and Ohio Railway](#) at Elkhorn City, was completed in 1915.

The Clinchfield was the last [Class I railroad](#) built in the U.S. east of the Rocky Mountains. The 266-mile railroad provided access to numerous scenic wonders of the Appalachian region and is probably best known for the state-of-the-art railroad engineering techniques applied in its construction, as exemplified by the Clinchfield Loops climbing the [Blue Ridge Mountains](#) north of [Marion, North Carolina](#).

The Clinchfield Railroad began operating the line December 1, 1924, and for many years it was leased jointly by the [Atlantic Coast Line Railroad](#) and [Louisville and Nashville Railroad](#). When the L&N merged with the ACL's successor, the [Seaboard Coast Line Railroad](#), effective January 1, 1983, forming the [Seaboard System Railroad](#), the separate operating company was unnecessary and was merged into the Seaboard. The line is now owned and operated by [CSX Transportation](#) as their [Blue Ridge Subdivision](#) (Spartanburg to [Erwin, Tennessee](#)) and [Kingsport Subdivision](#) (Erwin to Elkhorn City).

At the end of 1925 the railroad operated 309 miles of road and 467 miles of track; mileages in 1970 were 312 and 501

The Clinchfield lost its identity in the mid-1970s when it came under the "Family Lines System" banner, a marketing name for Seaboard Coast Line, L&N, and several smaller railroads. The Clinchfield is remembered for its famous "Santa Claus Special" that debuted in 1943 from encouragement from several Kingsport businessmen and ran the length of the Clinchfield's main line between Elkhorn City and [Kingsport, Tennessee](#) handing out gifts to kids along the route. Today, it is operated by CSX Transportation with the Kingsport Area Chamber of Commerce and is now known as the "Santa Train".

As always, volunteers from the Mountain Empire Model Railroaders club are heading up the effort for this day; joining them will be members from the George L. Carter Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society. Models of these trains will run primarily on the club's 24x44 HO scale model operation, while period-correct posters and displays making up the remainder of the exhibit.

In addition to mixed operations on the museum-based 24x44 HO scale layout, there will be trains running on the museum's interactive logging railroad in G scale, and on the ET&WNC narrow gauge line in HO_{n3} scale. The latter is an exacting replication of this railroad that has been featured in national magazine publications.

The Carter Railroad Museum is open on Saturdays from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM, and includes model railroad layouts, a special child's activity room, and ongoing programs. There is no admission fee but donations are welcome for its upkeep. The museum is also seeking artifacts for display, including the newest addition dedicated to the long-defunct, but well-remembered 'Tweetsie' line, the East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Railroad; this room, still under construction, again will be open for guided tours during event days.

In addition to the displays, there is also a growing research library, and an oral history archive being established as part of the museum's programs. Info can be found online at '<http://etsu.edu/railroad/>' or '<http://johnsonsddepot.com/>' or '<http://www.stateoffranklin.net/johnsons/glcarter/cartermuseum.htm>'

Members of the George L. Carter Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society and the Mountain Empire Model Railroaders (MEMRR) club will coordinate the exhibits. Visit 'www.memrr.org' to learn more about MEMRR, or visit '<http://glcarternrhs.com/>' to learn more about Carter Chapter, which helps demonstrate and maintain the model layouts, museum exhibits and other projects.

Membership opportunities are available to adults, and include special benefits and model railroading enjoyment.

The museum can be identified by a flashing railroad crossing signal at the back entrance to the Campus Center Building. Visitors should enter ETSU's campus from State of Franklin Road (at green light) onto Jack Vest Drive and continue east to first street on left (David Collins Way) then turn left and go to the end (John Roberts Bell Drive) then turn right then left on Ross Drive(176) to end, adjacent to the flashing RR crossing sign.

For more information about Heritage Day, contact Alsop at 423-439-6838 or alsopf@mail.etsu.edu. For disability accommodations, call the ETSU Office of Disability Services at 423-439-8346.

CARTER MUSEUM HERITAGE DAYS 2017 – final Saturday each month

January 28: Northeast

February 25: Short Line – Industrial lines

March 25: Steam UP! All Steam

April 29: Diesel – All diesels 1925-1960

May 27: Modern – 21st Century

June 24: Tri-Cities

July 29: Western

August 26: Midwestern

September 30: Heritage paint schemes

October 28: Roanoke Rails

November 25: Clinchfield

December 30: Fallen Flags