

Going West: ETSU's Carter Railroad Museum focus will be 'Big Sky Country' on July 29

Heritage Day program continues by showcasing railroads west of the Mississippi the final Saturday of July



While restored full size trains like these Union Pacific and Santa Fe examples at the California State Railroad Museum will not fit into ETSU's George L. Carter Railroad Museum, similar miniature versions will be operating on the facility's model train layouts.

“The West, Won: Transcontinental Lines from Border to Border” will be the title of this month's ‘Heritage Day,’ scheduled for July 29 at the George L. Carter Railroad Museum Heritage Day celebrations. On that final Saturday of July, the free museum located in the Campus Center Building of East Tennessee State University, will feature vintage and current railroad action and displays from west of the Mississippi, bringing attention to one of the most vast rail expanses in the hemisphere. The George L. Carter Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society and members of the Mountain Empire Model Railroaders club are planning for a unique compilation of American railroading on this special day.

Credited with opening the west up to expansion by the new nation, the first transcontinental line was completed in 1869, when the Union Pacific/Central Pacific operations joined Nebraska to San Francisco. Over the follow three decades of the 19th century, several other railroads worked across the vast expanse of the American west, linking cities from San Diego to Seattle with steel rails, and bringing tens of thousands of immigrants hungry for citizenship and freedom into new homesteads. Today, those multiple lines are consolidated into the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe empires, with a handful of independents functioning regionally.

“The American West was a true frontier, and the railroads played an immense role in opening them up,” says Geoff Stunkard, the coordinator of the monthly Heritage Days program at the museum. “Today, we get a huge amount of our produce and food moved by this manner, and the railroads continue to take an enormous amount of traffic from the public highway system in an environmentally-conscious way. The terrain required vast engineering to build, and high-horsepower machinery to move.”

Model trains from many of these operations during the heyday of steam and early diesels will be running or on display on the MEMRR club’s large 24x44 1:87 HO scale layout, one of four model lines that are housed in the museum. Western themes are already on display on the G-scale logging display, which features sound operation that can operated by visitors.

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.

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://johnsonsdepot.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 Carter Railroad Museum is open every Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. (Admission free). 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 North Dossett Drive(then left) to John Roberts Bell Drive at end, then 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