

# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE RED RIVER VALLEY RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Web Site: [WWW.RRVRHS.ORG](http://WWW.RRVRHS.ORG)

On Facebook: [Shreveport Railroad Museum](https://www.facebook.com/ShreveportRailroadMuseum)

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*June, 2015*

SHREVEPORT, LA

*Our 34<sup>th</sup> Year*

## Norfolk & Western Railway No. 611 Is Back Under Steam !



"611 on turntable" by Panzerschreck Leopard - Photo at North Carolina Transportation Museum

They did it! With lots of railfan donations and work, N&W 611 is back under steam in Roanoke and ready for excursions. She has an interesting history, and ran excursions up until 1994 when corporate interest faded and she was donated to the Virginia Museum of Transportation for static display. Fortunately, she was displayed under cover and was in good shape for the restoration. After half

of their \$5 million goal was reached in May 2014, she was pulled to the North Carolina Transportation Museum in Spencer, NC where she was disassembled, repaired, inspected and painted. After test runs in May, she pulled a special passenger train back to Roanoke on May 31. Excursions will begin June 5<sup>th</sup>.

No. 611 was one of fourteen 4-8-4 Class 'J' passenger locomotives built for the Norfolk & Western Railway between 1941 and 1950 and the only one in existence today. Simple lines, a bullet nose, and a Tuscan red stripe made the Js stand out as one of the most beautiful streamlined steam locomotives ever designed. Roller bearings on the driver and tender axles provided a smoother ride and quicker acceleration. More than two hundred moving parts were lubricated by a mechanized system cutting down time to service the engine. The Js were among the most powerful passenger steam locomotives ever built operating at 300 psi with a tractive effort of 80,000 lbs. Many Js operated upwards of 15,000 miles per month and several logged over three million miles by the time they were retired in 1959. They could pull 15 cars at 110 mph!

Disaster struck on January 23, 1956. While 611 was pulling the *Pocahontas*, the engineer took a large curve too fast sending the engine and five cars off the track. No. 611 overturned and nearly slid into the Tug River. The N&W transported 611 back to the shops in Roanoke for a complete overhaul. She returned later that year in better condition than any of her sisters. Once 611's duties were officially over, her fate was uncertain. Several people, including famed N&W photographer O. Winston Link, reached out to N&W

President Stuart Saunders to save 611 from the scrapper's torch. Saunders agreed to keep 611 as a reserve steam generator at the East End Shops until the flues in her boiler ran out. She was then donated to the new Roanoke Transportation Museum (later the Virginia Museum of Transportation) for static display. She sat outside in the elements waiting for the chance to steam again. That chance came in 1981 when 611 became the star of the Norfolk Southern steam program pulling excursions throughout the eastern United States. Norfolk Southern decided to end the program in 1994. 611 returned to her hometown of Roanoke, Virginia to once again serve as a static display. Once again, she sat and waited.

In 2013, the Virginia Museum of Transportation announced the "Fire Up 611!" initiative to investigate the possibility of returning No. 611 to excursion service. The committee determined 611 was in excellent condition to once again serve as an excursion engine. Over three thousand donations poured in from all 50 states and 19 countries to restore the "Queen of Steam." She is a living testament to the ingenuity of American workers and the spirit of everyone who worked on the N&W (Excerpts from [www.fireup611.org](http://www.fireup611.org))

### **Upcoming Events**

June 19 – RRVVRS Meeting – 7 p.m. - Shreveport Water Works Museum – 142 N. Common St. – call (318) 797-8008 for information.

July 3 - First Friday Railroad Photography Meeting 7:30 p.m. - Shreveport Water Works Museum – 142 N. Common St. – call (318) 797-8008 for information.

### **The President's Message**

Hello Railfans!

It's been some time since I have been able to write this newsletter. It's great to be back and I hope I can do this job justice. I'm not going to say too much about events of the past 4 months.

This past weekend I attended the KCS Historical Society Convention and was very impressed. I always knew Warren and Tillie Caileff did a good job but until you see it and participate you really don't know how good a job they do. Friday night they had their business meeting which went very smoothly. Saturday morning we met at the KCS Yard Tower and boarded the Southern Belle passenger train. At 9:30 we left Shreveport and went to Bayou Pierre where the train was turned on the IP Paper Mill wye and returned to Shreveport. On the train we were divided into 4 groups, and each group rode in a different car for 30 minutes, then changed cars to give everyone a chance to ride in a different car. On board the train there was more food than you could shake a stick at, and it was all very good. Also, Tillie passed out souvenir medallions to all the riders. After we returned to Shreveport, the folks went to our RR Museum for a tour. I heard lots of good comments about our museum!

Saturday night we returned to the hotel for a banquet and the food was great. Afterwards, there were awards to several people recognized for their outstanding work, including our own Jim McClure. Everyone present received a Southern Belle china plate. Everything was just first class! More on this next month.

Happy Railroading!

Russell

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Red River Valley Railroad Historical Society  
3012 Nottingham Drive  
Shreveport, LA 71115

**Next Meeting**  
**June 19**