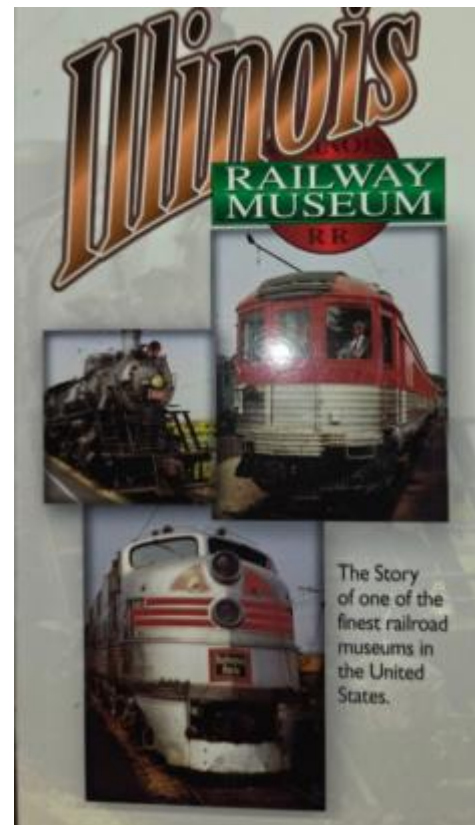


North Texas Chapter – National Railway Historical Society



- Followed by the Featured Presentation – Video from Illinois Railroad Museum



September Chapter Meeting

Tuesday, September 1, 2026 — 7:30 pm (Meet & Greet at 7:00 pm)

Location: Cotton Belt Room, Chill Bar & Grill, 814 S. Main St. (NW corner of S. Main St. and Dallas Rd.), Grapevine, TX. Website: chillbardfw.com

Evening Schedule

- 7:30 pm — Chapter Member Business Meeting

Minutes of the August 2026 Meeting

Submitted by Jerry M. Nunn, Secretary

The August meeting of the North Texas Chapter, NRHS, was held Tuesday, August 4, in the Cotton Belt Room of the Chill Bar & Grill in Grapevine, Texas. Twenty members attended.

President's Report — Jon Shea

The Chapter was contacted recently by someone hoping to donate a model track layout. After discussion, several knowledgeable members concluded that removing and relocating the tracks was not financially practical, and the Chapter voted to decline the donation.

Jon reminded members that volunteers are needed for both 24 Hours at Big Sandy and the Fall Train Show, and asked everyone to consider stepping up to fill open tasks.

Jon also had copies of the Katy Flyer magazine available for sale.

Member News: As of August 4, Steve Goen remains hospitalized. J.V. (James) Prater fell at the Santa Fe convention in Phoenix and suffered a compound ankle fracture; he is undergoing rehabilitation. The Chapter also received word that longtime member Dale Willken, a recipient of the Al Coppinger Award, has passed away.

Vice President's Report — Skip Waters

National Convention: The 2026 NRHS National Convention will be held in Cleveland, Ohio, September 21–25. Additional tours have recently been added; details are available on the NRHS website.

New Members: The Chapter welcomes new members John Bagwell, Ken Fitzgerald, and Richard Anderson—and extends special thanks to John Bagwell for volunteering to take over editorship of the Chapter newsletter.

New Book: Noted railroad author Fred Frailey has published a new book. Given his career and reputation, it promises to be a worthwhile read.

Treasurer's Report — Bob Kennedy

The Chapter's finances remain healthy. Recent income included proceeds from the sale of two Southern Pacific books, a member donation, and dues renewals, for total income of \$48.00.

Trips and Events — Bill Long and Skip Waters

Ennis Depot: The recent program at the Ennis Depot and Museum was a success. Featured speaker Dave Williams, a third-generation railroader, shared memories of Ennis in its heyday as a bustling railroad town with its own yard and roundhouse.

24 Hours at Big Sandy: This year's event is set for September 11–12. Three volunteers are currently lined up to help set stakes and caution tape, with two able to arrive a day early if needed. Two presentation slots remain open at the Heritage Center—members interested in speaking should contact the Chapter. Secretary Jerry Nunn will once again handle the train count.

Longtime "official pitmaster" Jason will be unable to attend this year due to ongoing gallbladder issues — the good news is that no cancerous tissue was found.

Plano Fall Train Show and Slide Show: The Plano show takes place in October. The Chapter will need volunteers to staff its table throughout the

weekend, as well as fill shifts for ticket sales and related duties (details to follow). The Chapter will also present its slide show at the Taco Joint during the show. Skip Waters has run this program in past years but is looking to hand off some duties—he can continue lining up presenters if someone is able to take on scheduling and setup.

Red River Museum Tour: A bus trip to the Red River Railroad Museum in Denison, with stops in Anna and Allen, is planned for November 7 - more details to come.

Equipment Update — Sam Metzgar

Puffy is nearly ready to steam again, though she'll likely be reserved for special occasions. The GVRR has also received a set of cars from Connecticut, expected to see service on Christmas excursions.

Evening Program

The August program featured the video St. Louis Sojourn, presented by Dave Steckler, capturing the action around St. Louis Union Station during the height of passenger rail travel.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:00 pm.



A Note From the Editor

With this issue of the Zephyr, I begin my service as your new editor. I come to this job with mixed emotions—excited to be chosen and humbled by the responsibility, but also saddened, since I take over following the passing of Wayne Smith, who had edited this newsletter since May 2022. His issues were legendary for both their content and their length, and I can only hope to come close to what he accomplished.

My name is John Bagwell. I've been a Chapter member for some time but haven't been active in recent years, so many of you may not know me. I grew up near the tracks — the Santa Fe ran through my backyard, alongside a Frisco branch line — and had a fascination

with trains almost from day one.

I had my picture taken in 1950 at age three with my father, Richard, at the Santa Fe station in Ardmore, Oklahoma. Watching trains was a daily event for me growing up.

I had family by marriage in Eufaula, Oklahoma, where I spent summers visiting. Longtime Katy railfans may remember Tucker Richardson—"Tuck" never worked for the railroad either; he was a sports announcer for the local radio station. His home sat a few blocks from the Katy line, and the trains would wake us at night. He'd call out, "That's GP7 112 on the lead, with Engineer Johnson on the throttle." I never knew if he was pulling my leg, but he swore he could identify the engineer by the sound of the horn.

Up to that point, I'd mostly photographed locomotives and rolling stock. Tuck, on the other hand, photographed depots and station signs — I think my friend captured nearly every depot in eastern Oklahoma.



I spent a lot of time riding along with him from Parsons, Kansas, to Denison, Texas, on the Katy, and throughout eastern Oklahoma on the Kansas City Southern, the Rock Island, and the Missouri Pacific. Naturally, I started adding depots to my own collection. Who knew that what we recorded in the late 1960s would one day be history?

Back home in Ardmore, I hung around the depot with a couple of friends, convinced that after high school I'd head to Fort Worth, land a cushy union job with the Santa Fe, and retire after 30 years. Things took a different turn when I met a disc jockey at KVSQ, the local radio station — he played records, told jokes, and got paid for it. I decided to follow his lead instead. After a year at the University of Oklahoma, I joined the U.S. Army and

served as a disc jockey in Vietnam.

I later worked in Odessa, Texas, as a DJ before starting an advertising agency, and retired this past December. My years in West Texas gave me plenty of chances to photograph the Missouri Pacific and the Santa Fe, with occasional trips south to catch the Southern Pacific.

Like many of you, I never worked for the railroad — but my love of trains, and of recording their history, has never faded.

As I take on this role, I'll be sharing some of my own experiences and photographs along the way, and I hope you'll do the same. Please send your memories, photos, and ideas for the newsletter to john@bagwell.com — together, we'll make this a newsletter worth reading.



4th Annual "24 Hours at Big Sandy" — September 11–12, 2026

One of the Chapter's signature events, "24 Hours at Big Sandy" was originally held in Saginaw, Texas, before moving to Big Sandy for a bigger, better railfanning experience.

The event sits at the crossroads of the old Cotton Belt (Texarkana–Corsicana) and the old Texas & Pacific (Fort Worth–Marshall) lines—today, both are Union Pacific. While most traffic runs in UP yellow, watch for run-through power from Norfolk Southern, BNSF, Kansas City Southern, and occasionally CSX. Expect to see roughly 50 trains a day, including Amtrak's Texas Eagle.

Details

- **When:** 7:00 pm Friday, September 11 through 7:00 pm Saturday, September 12
- **Where:** Big Sandy Heritage Center, 162 E. Gilmer St., Big Sandy, TX 75755

Texas & Pacific and Cotton Belt passenger trains once served Big Sandy. Today, Amtrak provides the

town's only daily passenger service, and the old depot is gone—visitors can still see the foundation where it once stood.



What to Expect: The City of Big Sandy built the Heritage Center as a railfan park for train enthusiasts, with air conditioning and restrooms available during the event. Food options nearby are limited to a bit of fast food, so bring coolers and snacks. In past years, a volunteer has grilled for the group, but that won't be the case this year—plan accordingly. Pop-up tents are limited to the first 10, per City of Big Sandy rules. Those not staying up all night to watch trains will find the nearest hotels in Gladewater and Gilmer, both of which also have fast-food options.

Activities: Slide and video presentations, a fundraising auction, and the annual Train Trivia contest are all planned. To participate, contact Skip Waters at wgcrush@swbell.net.

Open to All: You don't need to be an NRHS or Chapter member to attend—this event is our gift to the railfan community. That said, we'd love to have you join us; membership details are at ntxnrhs.org/club-information/membership.

Stay Updated: Follow the event on Facebook at the ["24 Hours at Saginaw"](#) page (a holdover name from the event's original location), or watch the Big Sandy railcam on [YouTube](#).



A Friendly Reminder: Please be courteous to the residents of Big Sandy, many of whom live alongside the tracks year-round. Stay off private property—in particular, the owners of the old home across the tracks do not welcome railfans on their land or questions about their plans for the property. The Heritage Center was built for us, but remember the tracks themselves remain Union Pacific property. Practice good safety habits, and everyone will have a great time.



Plano Fall Train Show and Slide Show — September 26–27, 2026



The Chapter is pleased to return for its fifth annual appearance at the Plano Fall Train Show, held at the Plano Event Center, 2000 East Spring Creek Parkway (east of Central Expressway, Exit 31).

Hours: 10 am–5 pm Saturday, 10 am–4 pm Sunday

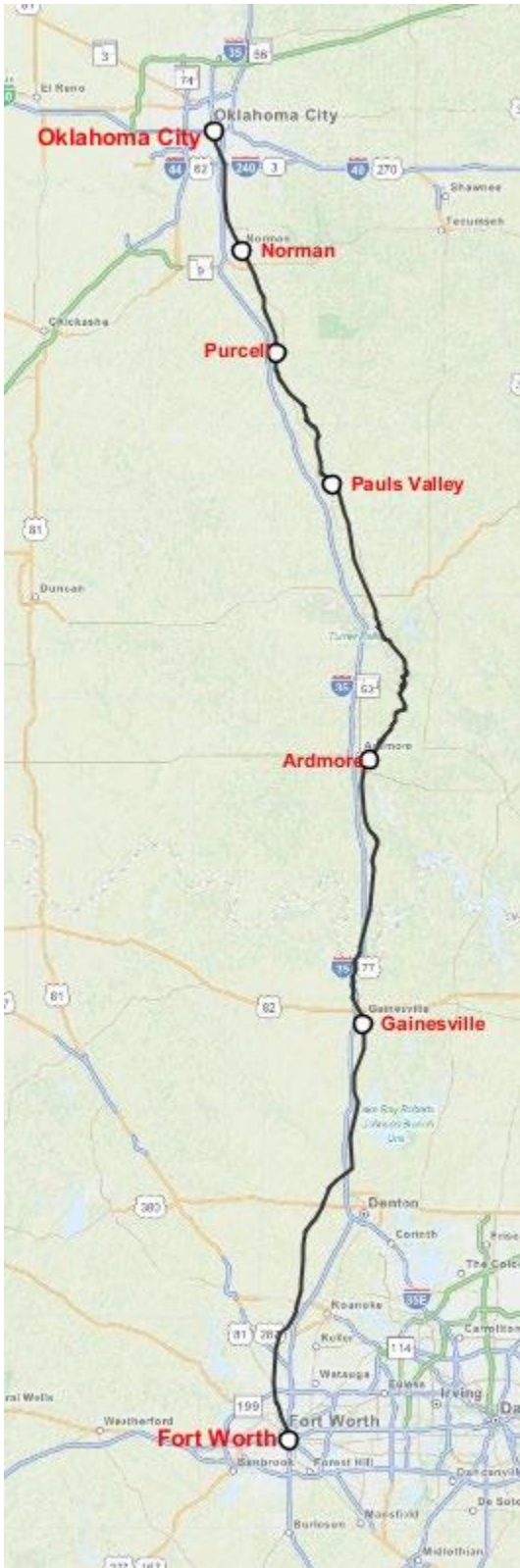
The Chapter will have a table at the show and will present its slide show at the Taco Joint during the event. Volunteers are needed—please get in touch with Jon Shea at 972-948-2413.

Red River Museum and Area Tour — November 7, 2026

Mark your calendars for a bus trip to the Red River at museums and displays in Anna and Allen—more information to follow in upcoming issues.

What's Happening with the Heartland Flyer?

For 27 years, the Heartland Flyer has been Oklahoma's lone connection to the national passenger rail network — a daily 206-mile round trip between Oklahoma City and Fort Worth, with stops in Norman, Purcell, Pauls Valley, Ardmore, and Gainesville. Since its inaugural run on June 14, 1999, the route has weathered recessions, changes in state leadership, and more than one budget scare. This year, though, it came closer to the edge than it has in a long time—a story that says as much about grassroots persistence as it does about state politics.



A Funding Model Under Strain: The Flyer has always been a joint Oklahoma–Texas venture. Under a formal agreement dating in various forms to 2006, each state has typically contributed roughly \$2.5 to \$4.5 million a year toward operating costs, with Amtrak running the equipment and Oklahoma taking the lead administrative role.

That arrangement cracked this year. Texas's FY2026–27 biennial budget left the Heartland Flyer out entirely, and in April 2026 the Texas Department of Transportation notified Amtrak it would stop paying its share once the existing agreement expired on August 31, 2026, citing no identified alternate funding source. Oklahoma faced a similar shortfall: its own \$2.5 million funding request went unallocated, leaving the state with only enough reserve to keep the train running through the end of 2026.

For a few tense months, an outright shutdown looked like a real possibility. Rail advocates, riders, and labor union members organized ride-alongs and turned out to public meetings to press the case for the train—and the pressure paid off. In April 2026, the North Central Texas Council of Governments' Regional Transportation Council voted to commit \$3.5 million in regional toll revenue as emergency funding, closing the gap left by the state budget. Then, at an August 13, 2026 meeting, the Council confirmed that North Texas funding would continue through most of 2027, and asked TxDOT to build two additional years of Heartland Flyer funding into its next legislative budget request. Regional Transportation Director Michael Morris credited public turnout at meetings with helping save the service.

That's good news, but not a permanent fix — it buys roughly another year while the Texas Legislature, which convenes January 12, 2027 (with bills eligible for filing beginning November 9, 2026), decides whether to restore state funding for good. Oklahoma has said it remains supportive and would consider a supplemental appropriation if Texas commits to its historic share.

Ridership Tells a Different Story: Whatever the budget drama in

Austin and Oklahoma City, the trains themselves haven't been running empty. The Heartland Flyer carried more than 80,000 passengers in its most recent full year — its highest ridership in years — with over 35,000

riders logged between October 2025 and March 2026 alone. Regional leaders point to tourism dollars and the convenience the route offers travelers without other ground transportation as reasons the line matters well beyond its balance sheet.

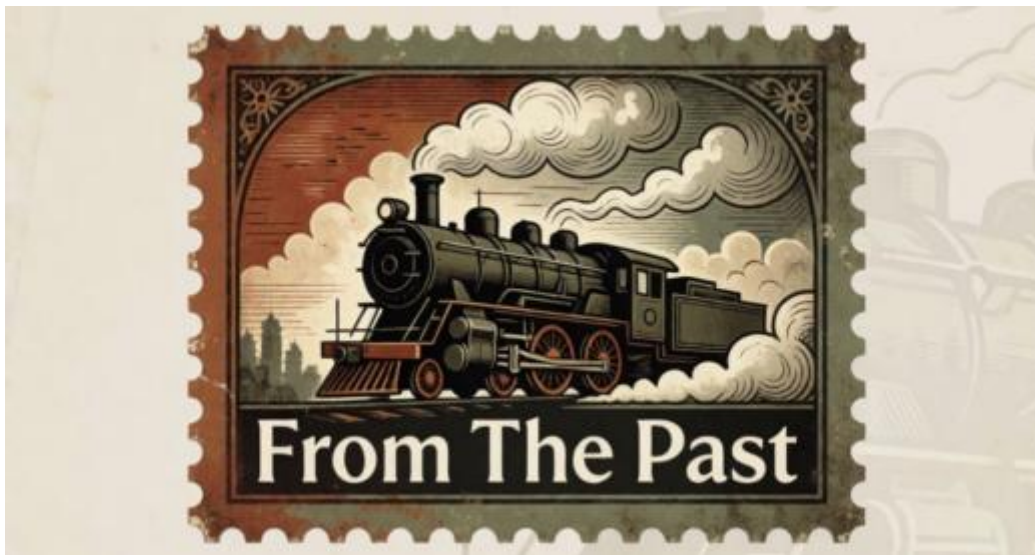


Looking Down the Track: Advocates haven't slowed down even as the immediate crisis has eased. Groups including the Northern Flyer Alliance continue pushing to extend the Heartland Flyer north from Oklahoma City to Wichita and Newton, Kansas, connecting with Amtrak's Southwest Chief—a project with support from dozens of cities, counties, and chambers of commerce along the I-35 corridor. A separate, federally funded Texas–Oklahoma Passenger Rail Study has also examined longer-term corridor expansion between Oklahoma City, Dallas–Fort Worth, and points farther south in Texas. None of that longer-range vision is possible, though, unless the current single daily round trip secures stable funding first.

How to Get Involved

- **Texas Rail Advocates** — texasrailadvocates.org — tracks Heartland Flyer funding news and legislative action.
- **Northern Flyer Alliance** — northernflyeralliance.net — the multi-state coalition working to preserve and extend service

- **Rail Passengers Association** — railpassengers.org — national advocacy group with resources for contacting elected officials
- **Oklahoma DOT** — oklahoma.gov/odot.html — updates on the state's funding status and rail programs
- **Texas DOT** — txdot.gov — information on the state's passenger rail budget requests
- **Ride the train** — book at Amtrak.com/heartlandflyer; strong ridership is itself one of advocates' best arguments to state legislators



The Last Run of Rock Island Trains 21 and 22



On November 10, 1967, a Rock Island passenger train eased into stations from Memphis, Tennessee, to Tucumcari, New Mexico—from big cities like Little Rock, Arkansas, to small communities like Ola, Arkansas, or Sayre, Oklahoma—the last one the line would ever run there.

NOTICE OF PROPOSED DISCONTINUANCE OF SERVICE

Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company, 139 West Van Buren Street, Chicago, Illinois 60605, hereby gives notice under Section 13a(1) of the Interstate Commerce Act (Transportation Act of 1958, Public Law 85-625, 85th Congress, 2d Session) that effective November 10, 1967 passenger trains operating daily as Nos. 21 and 22 between Memphis, Tennessee and Tucumcari, New Mexico will be discontinued.

The following stations, depots or facilities will be directly affected:

Memphis, Tennessee

Forrest City, Arkansas
Brinkley, Arkansas
Little Rock, Arkansas
Bigelow, Arkansas
Perry, Arkansas
Ola, Arkansas
Danville, Arkansas
Belleville, Arkansas
Booneville, Arkansas
Mansfield, Arkansas
Hartford, Arkansas

Monroe, Oklahoma
Howe, Oklahoma
Wilburton, Oklahoma
Hartshorne, Oklahoma
McAlester, Oklahoma

Holdenville, Oklahoma
Wewoka, Oklahoma
Seminole, Oklahoma
Shawnee, Oklahoma
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
El Reno, Oklahoma
Weatherford, Oklahoma
Clinton, Oklahoma
Elk City, Oklahoma
Sayre, Oklahoma
Erick, Oklahoma

Shamrock, Texas
McLean, Texas
Groom, Texas
Amarillo, Texas

Tucumcari, New Mexico

Persons desiring to object to the proposed discontinuance should notify the Interstate Commerce Commission at Washington, D. C. of such objection and the reasons therefor at least 15 days before the effective date of the proposed discontinuance.

M. H. BONESTEEL

Director of Passenger Services
Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company
139 West Van Buren Street
Chicago, Illinois 60605

October 6, 1967

Trains 21 and 22 traced their lineage back to the Rock Island's Memphis–Tucumcari service, a route that once carried the "Cherokee" name and connected at Tucumcari with Southern Pacific's transcontinental trains bound for California. By the mid-1960s, the name was gone, the equipment pared down, and the trains ran simply as numbers 21 and 22 on a timetable that grew thinner every year.

Their cancellation wasn't a sudden decision but the end of a long decline. Passenger rail nationwide had been losing ground to the automobile and the jet airliner for two decades, and the Rock Island was no exception—1965 was the last year the railroad turned any profit at all. Small depots along the route had already closed as ridership dwindled, and by 1967 the company was seeking Interstate Commerce Commission approval to drop unprofitable runs system-wide. Trains 21 and 22 were part of a broader purge that year, following the Rocky Mountain Rocket (gone in 1966), the Zephyr Rocket (April 1967), and the Twin Star Rocket not long after. Keeping half-empty trains running on money-losing branch lines no longer made sense to a railroad already struggling to stay solvent.

When the final train pulled out that November, it marked the end of Rock Island passenger service on that corridor for good — one more step in the railroad's long retreat from the passenger business, eight years before the bankruptcy that would eventually finish the company off entirely. For the towns along the route, it meant one less connection to the outside world, and one more empty depot waiting for a use that never came.

By the mid-1960s, Trains 21 and 22 had lost most of the glory they once enjoyed.

Chapter Information

North Texas Chapter Officers, 2026

Position	Name	Contact
President	Jon Shea	972-948-2413
Vice President, Programs	Jon Shea	972-948-2413
Vice President, Trips and Events	Bill Long	longwilliaml@aol.com
Vice President, Communications	Vacant	—
Secretary	Jerry Nunn	—
Treasurer	Bob Kennedy	rckennedy48@verizon.net
National Representative	Skip Waters	wgcrush@swbell.net
Webmaster	Kim Hays	kimhays516@gmail.com
Zephyr Editor	John Bagwell	john@bagwell.com, 214-240-9447

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Chapter Email: northtexaschapternrhs@gmail.com

Website: ntxnrhs.org

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/409467244127

About the Chapter

Founded and chartered in 1996, the North Texas Chapter is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) educational organization incorporated under the laws of the State of Texas. The Chapter focuses on the activity, history, and enjoyment of railroading, past and present. Meetings are held from 7:30 to 9:30 pm on the first Tuesday of each month. Visitors and newcomers are always welcome.

Chapter membership includes a subscription to our monthly newsletter, the North Texas Zephyr. Current dues are \$16 for an individual membership, plus \$2 per additional family member.

By Check: Make checks payable to "North Texas Chapter NRHS" for \$16 (individual) or \$18 (family) and mail to North Texas Chapter NRHS, P.O. Box 600304, Dallas, TX 75360. If your check doesn't clearly indicate the member's name, please include a note.

Online: Visit the Chapter's online store at ntxnrhs.org/store to pay by credit card or PayPal. A small processing fee (50 cents for individuals, 75 cents for families) applies to online payments.

Learn more about the National Railway Historical Society at nrhs.com.

About the Zephyr

The North Texas Zephyr is the official newsletter of the North Texas Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society, published monthly for the benefit of its members. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the official position of the North Texas Chapter or the National Railway Historical Society. The original author retains all content rights. We have made every effort to comply with fair use and copyright law.

Contributing to the Zephyr: We welcome all submissions! The deadline for material is the 12th of the month before the issue's cover date. Time-sensitive news items will be given priority over general-interest subjects. The editor reserves the right to edit, hold, or omit material as needed. Please send contributions to John Bagwell at john@bagwell.com.

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