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★ HISTORY OF TWEETSIE ★

Tweetsie's history dates back to 1866, when the Tennessee legislature granted the East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Railroad company permission for the construction of a railroad. At the outset, the ET&WNC line (which mountain humorists dubbed the "Eat Taters & Wear No Clothes" or "Every Time With No Complaint" Railroad) was to operate from Johnson City, Tenn., to the iron mines just over the state line at Cranberry, N.C.

The narrow-gauge railroad began operations in 1882 after 50 miles of track was laid through the rugged Blue Ridge chain of the Appalachian Mountains that divide the two southern states. Later, additional tracks were laid to Boone, N.C., and in 1919 rail service extended to that mountain community. The new line added passenger service to the formerly isolated area, and brought lumber out of the mountains.



The name "Tweetsie" was given to the railroad by local folks who became accustomed to the shrill "tweet, tweet" train whistles that echoed through the hills. The name stuck, and the train was known as Tweetsie ever since.

Unfortunately, the affection felt for Tweetsie by the mountain people could not protect her from a changing economy. The construction of modern roads made the mountain communities more accessible, and Tweetsie felt the competition from automobiles and trucking companies. Severe floods came in August of 1940 and obliterated sections of the line, ending service to Boone and hastening the demise of the mountain railroads.

On July 13, 1950 the ET&WNC Railroad ceased all narrow-gauge operations. Tweetsie Locomotive No. 12 – the only survivor of the original 13 narrow-gauge ET &WNC steam engines – was purchased by railroad enthusiasts and moved to Harrisonburg, Va., to operate as the Shenandoah Central Railroad. Her stay there was cut short when Hurricane Hazel swept through the state in 1954 and wiped out the train tracks. The owners found a buyer for No. 12 in Gene Autry; the movie cowboy intended to ship the locomotive to California to use in films.

Blowing Rock native Grover Robbins Jr., decided that it was time to bring Tweetsie back to the mountains where she belonged. Robbins purchased the rights to Tweetsie from Gene Autry for \$1, and in 1956 the little engine headed back to Robbins' hometown in the mountains of North Carolina.

In the summer of 1957, Tweetsie Railroad opened at her new location just a couple of miles away from the old railroad station in Boone. People came from all over the South to welcome her famous whistle back to the mountains, and to take a one-mile trip to a picnic area and then back up to the station. The following year, the final section of the three-mile rail loop was completed.

In 1960, Tweetsie Railroad acquired another steam locomotive, No. 190 "Yukon Queen" from Alaska's White Pass & Yukon Railway. Locomotive No. 190 was built in 1943, also by the Baldwin Locomotive Works, for service during World War II.



In the following years, Tweetsie Railroad evolved from an excursion railroad into North Carolina's first theme park. The track was expanded into a three-mile loop, and an authentic western town was built up around the station. The Wild West theme park has added attractions over the years and features live shows, amusement rides, Gem Mine, the Deer Park Zoo and numerous special events.

Tweetsie also operates a complete steam locomotive shop, repairing and restoring steam locomotives for other theme parks and for museums.

Meticulously maintained and now listed in the National Register of Historic Places, Tweetsie continues to delight rail fans, children and tourists who visit the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina.

