



**Q2 2024 April-June**  
 "Seven point four" is the newsletter of the Friends of the Stewartstown Railroad, Inc.. A Pennsylvania non-stock, not for profit organization, tax exempt under section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code.

## President's Message

Hello from Summer 2024, on the Stewartstown Railroad!

It's been a bit action packed around the Stewartstown Railroad these last few months. There was a large, destructive fire in Stewartstown which burned down one of the old factories. More recently, a truck hit bridge 5 (again) and we were helped by Gordon's Towing in town to get it re-aligned.

There's been a lot of work going on around the railroad. Track work, as always. We've been replacing ties at the west end of the class I track, and we're very close to Five Forks Road.

Locomotive number 10 has received a new coat of paint and looks fantastic! We continue to work on Locomotive number 12, getting it ready for service.

## Inside

<b>FSR President's message .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>It's Show Time .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Rail repairs in front of station .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Work Weekend - May .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Work Weekend - March.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Work Weekend - April.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>"Hobo Shoestring" .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Easter Train.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Superhero Express.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Western Train Robbery .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Princess Express.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Stewartstown Furniture Factory fire .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>AED Donation .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Coach 1158 update.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Open Air car repairs .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Locomotive #10 updates .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>A-8 Motorcar repairs .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>New Signs .....</b>	<b>15</b>

Dave Watson and his crew have been making great progress on Coach 1158. The remaining windows are being installed, final painting is being done, and the brake valves and system are being upgraded and tested.

Our open-air car still needs and is getting some TLC: a few pieces the siding on it looks worse for wear and needs to be replaced, the handrail wood is being replaced with a composite material that holds up to the weather better, and some of the floorboards are being replaced. This Work is just simple carpentry and painting, so if you can swing a hammer, use a saw or a paintbrush, we'd love your help

Thanks again for your support and encouragement. The railroad is getting ready for our busy months with Halloween. Fall Foliage trains, and Christmas trains. If you would like to come out to the railroad and help with these trains, or if you'd just like to come out and ride, please do! Hope to see you soon!

Mike Ruane

President, Friends of the Stewartstown Railroad

## Upcoming Trains:

Red, White & Blue Picnic Trains  
 July 20, 11:00, 1:00  
 Petting Zoo Special  
 July 27, 10:00, 12:30, 2:30  
 Galactic Express  
 August 3, 10:00, 11:45, 2:00  
 Planes, Trains & Automobiles  
 August 10, 11:00, 1:00  
 Villian Express with The Witch Sisters  
 September 21, 10:00, 11:45, 2:00  
 Western Train Robbery  
 September 28, 10:00, 11:45, 2:30

## 2023-2024 Friends Officers

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**Director-At-Large - Miles Weaver**

**Director-At-Large - Jim Whipple**

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**Newsletter Editor - Joe Krepps**

### It's Show Time!

By Jim Tapley

Stewartstown Railroad was represented at The Great Scale Model Train Show at the state fairgrounds in Timonium, Maryland. The train show on February 3rd and 4th was attended by thousands of model railroad buffs and rail fans.

Jim Tapley reserved a booth for Stewartstown Railroad with three goals to: 1) Promote the Stewartstown Railroad, 2) Generate more ticket sales, and 3) Recruit new volunteers to help the railroad.



Jim Tapley and Miles Weaver were present and active at the two day event by handing out over four hundred rack cards and encouraging people to come ride on the

Stewartstown Railroad. Jim and Miles wore their Stewartstown Railroad conductors' uniforms and engineers' attire to give the presentation a feeling of authenticity. Nathan Filak and Larry Morgan assisted at the booth on Saturday. The friendly and engaging approach used by the Stewart-

stown Railroad volunteers made a good impression on the people at the train show. The volunteers emphasized the family oriented events and theme trains that the railroad sponsors throughout the year.

Stewartstown Railroad's booth looked sharp with

green table clothes and a colorful table top display (donated by Mike Ruane and decorated



ed with information from Dee and pictures from Miles). There was also a free raffle for a free cab ride. Over one hundred and fifty people filled out a raffle entry ticket. A winner was selected at the end of each day. Miles Weaver set-up a laptop at



the booth and a projector that showed the Big Jim video about the railroad. Many people were attracted to the booth

by the sight and sounds of Might Mo clanging its bell and singing its whistle.

Seven individuals showed a genuine interest in volunteering at Stewartstown Railroad by filling out a Volunteer Sign-up Form. Jim Tapley will follow up with each of those people and then connect them with a team leader from our various departments.

The volunteers at the booth also sold Stewartstown Railroad history books and videos, along with hats donated by Jim Tapley. Jim also had custom pens and miniature screwdrivers made



as little gifts for the people who entered the raffle or who signed up to be a volunteer. Getting these items into the hands of the public will help with brand recognition.

Stewartstown Railroad has signed up for two more train shows in Timonium, Maryland on April 27-28 and October 12-13. Any volunteers who would like to help promote the railroad by manning the booth are asked to contact Jim Tapley. *(Editor's note: The Timonium Show is an excellent idea for creating interest! Enthusiasm is contagious! Please consider helping, even if for only setup and tear down.)*

### Rail repairs in front of the station

On Saturday, February 24th, a crew comprised of Mark Koppenhaver, Dave Williamson, Doug Plaster, Larry Morgan, and Miles Weaver worked to repair the broken rail in Stewartstown's yard track closest to the Headquarters Building.



In the morning Mark pulled up recently repaired Locomotive No. 10 and coupled to the Open-Air that was positioned straddling the broken rail.



Then with Miles directing the movement, and Larry and Miles closely watching the broken rail, Mark slowly eased the Open-Air Car over and past the broken

rail without incident.

Once the Open-Air Car was positioned out of the way. Work began on the rail replacement. There wasn't much holding the rail in place, and deteriorated ties were found underneath the break. As the area needing the rail replacement was further excavated, several good ties were found. So, it was decided to replace two deteriorated ties and a 14 foot section of rail to repair the section of track where the break occurred.



At the end of the day with the rail repair complete, Mark under the direction of Miles and Larry moved equipment and assembled the consist in preparation for the upcoming Easter

Trains. And in the process, the repaired rail was rolled over and tested.

A big thank you to all who came out to help with the yard track broken rail repair.



### Work Weekend - May



The track crew installed and fouled 16 ties Friday, May 17, advancing us farther down the track to get the Train Out Of The Woods.

On Saturday we replaced 3 corroded rails under the I-83 bridge.

On Sunday we put 14 new ties in under the bridge, gauged and spiked them and finished bolting up the new rails.



It was very difficult getting the corroded bolts and joint bars off the old rails, only with  
*(Continued on page 4)*





(Continued from page 3)  
extensive cutting with the grinder and beating them out with hammers, chisels and drifts did we go all get them apart and in usable condition. We also put in 4 ties west at Bailey Springs crossing and two west of Tolna.

34 ties installed for the weekend.

We are down to 64 ties in stock, we have 248 on order for delivery in June.

200 new industrial grade ties from Koppers in Muncy PA and 48 relays.

We had a very good crew on Sunday.

Friday and Saturday we light crew days.

We encourage people to not let weather scare them off. We should have a plan B.

In the case of Saturday the rain stopped and it was nice before we got to the work site.

People who stayed home missed out on an interesting work project that we do infrequently .



## Work Weekend - April 2024

A very good Work Weekend and we did get much done. 54 ties installed and 27 gauged and spiked plus brush and trees cut and bolts replaced gradually up towards Five Forks Road. We are almost out of the tree line in our mission to Get The Train Out Of The Woods!!

On Sunday, we went out to the Mt Airy Road crossing and placed ten tons of rip rap along the track bed to protect it from erosion. We also installed eight new ties, spiked some ties left over from the crossing job a few years ago, and cut more brush. We had a big crew! Thanks to all who came out to help!!



## Work Weekend - March 2024

We installed 13 new ties on the big concrete culvert between Tolna and Elm Street. Old ties were rotten or missing. We were worried the Spray truck would not make it over this this year.

A big improvement!

We're also trying to gradually lower the standing water in the culverts to get them back to full flow

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capability but some down stream excavation will be needed to make much progress there.

We also cut brush and trees, replaced loose bolts, and worked on some spots with narrow gauge issues between MP 4 and MP 2.5.

On Saturday we hung the new station signs and worked in the shop due to heavy rain all day.

On Friday we replaced 31 ties from MP 6 west towards the picnic grove. We'll continue with that in April.

We have a large length of eroded roadbed just East of Man. & Parker and also at Mt. Airy crossing. Those are our next fix up areas. Plus the line needs spot ties just about everywhere.



***Thank you,  
Volunteers & Supporters!***

## **YouTube personality “Hobo Shoestring” passed recently**

By Bill Histed

It is doubtful that “Hobo Shoestring” ever hopped on The Stewartstown Railroad in his 35 years of hopping trains. But he spent plenty of time riding the rails through Pennsylvania and Maryland in his adventures that included most states and three countries. His real name was Mark Nichols and he was a military veteran.

“Hobo,” who died recently at the age of 53, had kept the “hobo” world alive to millions of people. Some of his YouTube videos got over 2.5 million views each. He had been ill recently and friends said he was released too soon from a hospital in his hometown of Johnson City, Tennessee. After many hundreds of getting on and off trains he drowned in the lake behind his apartment. He traveled over 330,000 miles of track, some of it through Pennsylvania and nearby states.

The world “hobo” has unfairly become a bad word in some circles. But a town the size of Stewartstown, Britt, Iowa, reveres the name. As Stewartstown, it has a population of just over 2,000.

Britt is home to the annual National Hobo Convention, that will be held this year August 8-10. The town has The National Hobo Museum and even the National Hobo Memorial Cemetery. The town has hosted the annual hobo event since 1900 and is proud of it.

Some cautionary comments need to be made about hopping freight trains. Not only is it extremely dangerous, but it is illegal in most jurisdictions. Not all train jumpers are “hobos.” Some people have died trying to hop freight trains over the years. Three young adults from Pennsylvania who went to school together died some time back when they were illegally riding in a gondola car hauling steel bars when the load shifted and crushed them. There have been cases of hobos and others losing their footing trying to hop freights, getting locked in box cars and dying in derailments.

About a year ago, I started following the adventures of Hobo Shoestring on You Tube. He had been posting his popular videos for years. *(Continued on page 6)*



*(Continued from page 5)*

When I had trouble sleeping, I would get on the internet and go along with Hobo Shoestring as he rode the rails in all types of weather and through rural areas and cities across the country.

"Shoestring" made it clear. Hobos, at least in theory, are different from "tramps" and "bums." He said some people confuse the titles. Hobos, he said, travel and are willing to work and even pay for food. Tramps, he said, travel but don't work. Bums, he said, neither travel or work.

He would list the 15 rules of conduct for hobos printed in 1889. They include not wearing out one's welcome, staying out of trouble with the local law, not taking advantage of the vulnerable, telling child runaways to go back home, to help each other when the need arises, do not litter and keeping good personal hygiene.

Some people don't like the name "hobo," and it not certain how the name originated. One belief is that it came from around the Civil War era when soldiers after the war were "homeward bound." Another claim is that years ago, hobos would sometimes carry a "hoe" and offer to help people with their gardens in exchange for food.

Hobo "signs" were a study in themselves. Some indicated a residence that might provide food, another would indicate if the local police were friendly, another sign would indicate if a town was "dry". While generally hobos traveled alone, they also would come to know each other at times and camp together a night or two.

Hobo Shoestring's videos were instructive. You could learn a lot about trains and railroading from him. He showed how to build a camp, what he carried in his back pack and in the large bucket he carried.

He was born with a slight case of autism and he said the rhythm of the rails relaxed him and he found peace touring the country by hopping freights. But it was not all sugar and spice. He battled some anxiety and said he drank a lot of beer. But he said alcohol and railroading do not mix and "I found out that anytime something bad happened to me, I had been drinking.". He finally gave up drinking all together after a couple of accidents. He lost part of his left hand when he slipped trying to get on a train and his

hand was run over by the wheel of a freight car. Another time he had jumped off a freight train and was trying to cross a road when he got hit by an automobile. Despite those accidents, he never gave up his hobo ways.

He noted some railroad employees were friendly to him, including some "bulls," which is a word for railroad police. He would sometimes get tossed bottles of water from a crew waiting in the yards.

Often, when "a bull" stopped him, they would let him go with a warning. In some small towns, he would be held overnight and then released in the morning with a warning. He was arrested one time in Pensacola, Florida, and a judge sentenced him to 30 days in jail. But he also saw parts of the United States, Canada and Mexico that he would not have otherwise seen.

Hobo said there are not as many hobos riding the rails as when he started in the 1980s. Over the decades, many thousands of miles of rail lines have been torn up, there are fewer railroad yards in which to board and there seems to be more awareness of how unsafe the practice is.

Few, if any, of the millions of people who saw his adventures on-line ran out to hop on a freight. Using a cell phone camera, he also showed some of the dangers of hopping freights, including extreme temperatures and the need to drink plenty of water. The few real hobos of today may take with them some of the modern conveniences of a cell phone, bottled water and the use of convenience stores along the way.

There are still some who choose a life of adventure and over more comfortable convention. Hobo Shoestring became a legend, ironically due to the modern invention of the internet. He even had his phone charger with him and had a device that charged it by wind as he attached it to the side of trains. He would upload his videos from "camp," wherever that was.

While this writer does not want to encourage anyone to hop a freight train, which could even prove fatal, it must be said that Hobo Shoestring was one of a kind in our day and time.

Rest in peace, Hobo Shoestring.

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## Easter Trains



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## Superhero Express



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## Western Train Robbery



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## Princess Express



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## **Furniture factory and the railroad once did business together**

By Bill Histed

When a six alarm fire consumed the old vacant Stewartstown Furniture Company factory on April 27, 2024, some local history, and part of the history of our railroad, went with the fire.

Local Eureka Fire Department officials said it was the largest fire in Stewartstown's history and the blazing inferno was fought by many fire departments in the region, including some from Maryland. Firefighters were praised for their work in putting out the fire without serious injury or loss of life. Fire at the some 250,000 square foot complex has long been a fear of the local fire department and they were as ready for it as they could be.

Manufacturing and transportation have changed radically since the furniture factory opened in 1903. The factory continued in operation until 1959 and employed many area people over the years. The company was once a shipper, as well as a number of other area businesses, on the Stewartstown Railroad.

Go back to 1903 and try to imagine yourself in that world. No hard surfaced roads to speak of and railroads such as ours were primary movers of freight and people. It would not be surprising to know that some of the workers at the furniture factory got to work from homes in New Freedom and stops along our route via the railroad. This would not be hard to imagine as virtually no one had a car or access to good highways twelve decades ago. The furniture factory was a freight shipper on our railroad at one time.

I did some research on the history of the furniture factory and a whole lot of information is not to be had. People today take photos and videos of about everything that moves or doesn't move. Back then, almost no one owned a camera and few things got written down.

What is known is that the furniture factory closed in 1959, meaning it was in operation for more than half a century. Total sales in the 1940s were more than half a million dollars per year. In today's devalued paper dollars, you could reasonably take that figure to \$20 or \$25 million,

easily, in today's money. Soft drinks were a nickel then, candy bars were also 5 cents and you could get a complete dinner in most places for a dollar or so. I see some candy bars in convenience stores at \$2 that once sold for a nickel. That is a 40 times increase.

Inasmuch as The Stewartstown Furniture Co. was one of our shipping partners for years, let's take a look at what the company built here. An old advertisement showed the company made all types of furniture, bedroom sets, night stands, chairs, end tables, kitchen tables, book cases and more. There was a showroom and retail sales office on the second floor. The company advertised when you came to Stewartstown to visit them, they would even give you a factory tour.

So what happened that the factory closed? it came at a time when many furniture factories were headed into the southern states where they saw lower wages, less union activity and lower taxes. This was a trend in the industry. Today, much furniture sold in the United States is made in China and other foreign countries. It seems the cheapest price is what many look for. In the past decade or two, even many southern towns where furniture was made saw factories close and move production off shore.

Not a whole lot has changed in the world of furniture. It's still a highly competitive business that goes with the ups and downs of the economy. When times get tougher, replacing a couch or recliner does not have the urgency of buying food, utilities or gasoline which need to be continually replenished. Buying a new davenport is seldom a vital necessity. To some people, a chair is a chair.

The Bible of the furniture industry, "FURNITURE TODAY," even had an article recently on the Stewartstown Furniture Factory fire. It is probably the first time in over half a century the company has been named in one of its articles.

As this article is written, some of the same financial pressures that closed the local furniture factory are still in force today. The furniture industry is in a depression currently and most of  
*(Continued on page 12)*



(Continued from page 11)

the largest firms are losing a lot of money being saddled with a lot of debt.

One of the south's largest furniture retailers, the Mulberry, Florida based W.S. Badcock Corporation, with almost 400 mostly dealer stores, appears headed for the skids. The founding family sold it a few years ago for all cash and the company has already been flipped a second time. Its owners, Conn's HomePlus, based in Texas, appears headed for bankruptcy, according to Bloomberg News and Furniture Today. The huge main distribution center in Mulberry is being wound down. Conn's, once selling for almost \$80 per share, is now a penny stock selling for less than a dollar a share. These problems of over supply and lack of buying are throughout the furniture industry.

Wayfaire, a large mostly internet furniture sales company employing thousands, is also losing lots of money. Industry officials say the company is in deep financial trouble. A number of smaller long-time furniture retailers have filed for bankruptcy in recent years and few of the larger companies are claiming any profits.

We may fantasize all that we want that The Stewartstown Furniture Co. is humming and still shipping on the Stewartstown Railroad. The facts are that the entire furniture industry has faced a number of revolutions over the years. Furniture once made in Stewartstown and shipped on the Stewartstown Railroad is now being made in Communist China.

### AED Donation



The Friends of the Stewartstown Railroad, Inc. would like to thank Kyle Onyskiw from Equipment Express LLC for the recent donation of an Automated External

Defibrillator (AED) to our organization. Given the rather rural location of the railroad almost 45 minutes from the nearest hospital, this vital piece of equipment could help save a life! For more information on Kyle's company, please be sure to visit <https://equipment.express/>

### Coach 1158 Update

Over the past few months, Matt Bittendorf has worked on getting the floor ready for painting. Charlie K. and John Pope finished installing window sashes and window stops for the windows. 4 more window frames are needed and have been ordered. As of the time of this writing, we are getting ready to start painting the outside of the coach in preparation for Fall 2024 service. The air brake system is currently being worked on by Mike and Mark K.



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## Open Air car repairs





## Locomotive Number 10 repainting and repairs

About two years ago, Jim Tapley and John Pope started the daunting task of repainting locomotive number 10. Decades of multiple layers of touch-up paint jobs left the overall surface in bad condition, with spots of rust showing every here and there. Jim Tapley became an overnight success with his awesome needle scaling skills! After many weeks of banging and sanding, number ten was taken down to bare metal and covered with red primer. Fast forward to Summer 2024, work began to start repainting locomotive number 10. A crew of Jim Whipple and John Pope spent two weekends priming and painting the cab using an Axlata Primer topped with Imron 3.5HG. Then during the month of June, Dave Watson and John Pope finished the first hood. Vicent Skinner is creating the removal vinyl letters that will be used to place letters and numbers on the finished paint job. So far, everything is looking great, as a lot of time is being spent to ensure a proper job is being done right.

On Sunday, February 18, Mark, JimT, Mike R and Dave W installed the new custom-manufactured oil cooler on #10 locomotive #2 engine, plus the newly recovered fireman's seat and arm rest.

The engineer arm test needs a new hinge and the seat is out for recover.

The loco was also started and moved around a bit to get it loosened up for Easter Bunny trains, first it has been started since December.

Mark also has worked on the instrument label gauges, and we have the air flow louvers in both ends working again, first that I ever remember them being hooked up.

Locomotive is essentially ready for Bunny trains, reds the engineers seat and some co tact cleaning. The new oil cooler should reduce oil leaking and mess in that end of the locomotive.

The radiator on engine #1 is still leaking and will need removed and repaired sometime after #12 is placed in service. At that time we will also tackle the smoky problem on #2 engine which is probably a couple of work rings/valves.

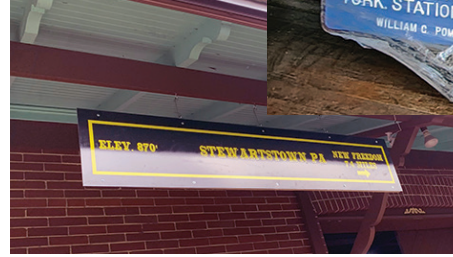


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## New Signs



## A-8 Motorcar #330

While the Grinch train was out, the crew worked on the A-8 Motorcar #330.

Changed oil, greased the running gear, replaced some loose and broken axle bearing bolts, and replaced one rotten floor board and one rotten side board in the cab.

A good day to get it over the pit while the loco is out and keep dry on a rainy winter day but still do important work!!



**Volunteers, save the date!!**  
**2024 Christmas Party**  
**December 14**  
**Details to follow**

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- ☐ **Individual Membership** ..... **\$20.00**  
Show your membership card and receive a \$2.00 discount on one regular Stewartstown Railroad train ticket, courtesy of the Stewartstown Railroad Company.
- ☐ **Family Membership (all members at same address)**..... **\$100.00**  
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- ☐ **Optional: Right of Way/Track Fund donation** ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ **Optional: Other donation, please specify** ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

(You may specify a specific project on the line above for your optional donation, if you wish.)

- ☐ **Optional: Check here to receive only electronic copy of "7.4" newsletter**  
**Total enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_**



The Friends of the Stewartstown Railroad, Inc. invites all who are interested in preserving the Stewartstown Railroad to join the Friends organization. The railroad was founded in 1884 and opened in 1885.

One of the goals of the organization is to support our members as they perform their volunteer work on the railroad upgrading and maintaining the railroad's properties. Our volunteer's efforts help the railroad continue its operations over its 7.4 miles of track between Stewartstown and New Freedom, Pa., via the Deer Creek Valley. The Friends organization is a Pennsylvania non-stock, not-for-profit organization. The Friends organization is tax-exempt under section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. The Friends organization owns a minority equity interest in the Stewartstown Railroad Company.

Please send completed form and check to:

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