

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 10, 2016

**Robert B. Claytor (1922–1990):** Bob Claytor was a native of Roanoke, Virginia, and he and his older brother Graham grew up within sight of the Norfolk and Western Railway (N & W). With headquarters at Roanoke, the N & W main line ran from Norfolk, Virginia to Cincinnati, just over 700 miles, with a long branch line southwest from the headquarters to Bristol, Tennessee, and a line in the other direction up the Shenandoah Valley to Hagerstown, Maryland. At Bristol, it connected with the Southern Railway and at Hagerstown with the Pennsylvania. Fresh out of college, both brothers went to work for the N & W, and Graham was the first president of Amtrak when it was formed in 1970.

Bob Claytor was graduated from Mercersburg Academy in 1940, and I first met him when he joined the Board of Regents of the Academy about 1984. At that time he was president of the Norfolk and Western but kept his engineer's license active so he could still handle the throttle of the railroad's big steam locomotives on regular or special trips, when time permitted. Although main line steam left the N & W in the late 1950s, he said as long as he had anything to do with it, there would always be steam locomotives available for special trips and occasions. Two huge locomotives, a Type J 4-8-4 streamlined passenger engine numbered 611 and an articulated Type A 2-6-6-4 numbered 1218, even larger, were kept in service at Roanoke and were used annually for special steam excursions all over the East. In the 1950s, before converting to diesels, the N & W advertised that it could run its coal-burning locomotives through from Norfolk to Cincinnati, 715 miles, without change, something previously unheard of for coal-burners (the Santa Fe ran its oil-burning 4-8-4 steam locomotives through from Chicago to Los Angeles, nearly 2,200 miles, without change).

In 1985, to celebrate his 45<sup>th</sup> Reunion at Mercersburg, Bob Claytor had two private railroad cars moved to the end of the N & W at Hagerstown, 17 miles from Mercersburg, and his classmates and members of the Board of Regents were invited to a reception aboard. In addition to the drinks and delicious hors d'ouvres, sleeping accommodations were available for six or eight people and, knowing of my interest in steam railroading, Claytor invited Ruth and me to spend the night in a deluxe sleeping car. Because of other commitments, we were unable to accept. About 1987, Bob Claytor was elected president of Mercersburg's Board of Regents. My third three-year term on the Board expired in 1988, but he and headmaster Walter Burgin persuaded me to stay one more year as chairman of the Buildings and Grounds Committee, which committee I had chaired since 1982.

It was also about 1987 when the Norfolk and Western, in a strong financial position, combined with the Southern Railway, with main lines all over the southeast, to form the Norfolk Southern Corporation. Dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there had been a much smaller Norfolk & Southern Railroad that ran from Norfolk south into North Carolina and then westward to Charlotte, crossing the Atlantic Coast Line at Wilson and the Seaboard at Raleigh. Presumably, this line's name was "bought out" or merged into the new Norfolk Southern. Claytor became president and CEO of the combined railroad and moved his residence and the corporate offices from Roanoke to Norfolk. With the eventual break-up of Conrail many years later, the Norfolk Southern took over many of the freight-carrier's lines in the northeast, including those of the former Pennsylvania Railroad on the Delmarva Peninsula but with no passenger service.

Probably in the summer of 1988, a special 22-car passenger train, pulled by Steam Locomotive #611, moved west from Norfolk filled with railroad employees heading for a company picnic. Bob Claytor was at the throttle. One of the coaches derailed at some speed, and several cars overturned. Many suffered injuries, but I don't think there were any fatalities. It was a very hot day and possibly some of the coaches still had plain journals with oil-soaked waste that resulted in a "hot-box," or it could have been a broken rail.

The winter meeting of the Board of Regents was often held at the University Club in Washington, D.C. In January 1989, I sat across the table from Bob Claytor, no longer president of the Board, who was suffering from

cancer. He was very uncomfortable, and it was hard for him to sit still. Within a year, he passed away. He always wanted to visit our local Wilmington & Western Railroad, but it never worked out.