

“Documenting Community Traditions: The Use of Railroad and Industrial History to Promote Cultural Heritage Tourism in Northeast Tennessee”

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Final Report Narrative

Title of Project: "Documenting Community Traditions: The Use of Railroad and Industrial History to Promote Cultural Heritage Tourism in Northeast Tennessee"

Grant Period: January 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017

Grantee Name: East Tennessee State University

Project Director: Rebecca Adkins Fletcher

Description of Project

East Tennessee State University's 2015-2016 ATP course was APST 5960, Documenting Community Traditions (DCT) taught by Dr. Rebecca Adkins Fletcher. This multi-year ATP project was designed to document the history of the Clinchfield Railroad in Unicoi County, TN by gathering oral histories and to assist community partners in identifying ways to develop this aspect of cultural heritage tourism for the area. In this third and final year of this multi-year project, the DCT course continued working with the same community partners from the previous two years: The Unicoi County Economic Development Board (Tish Oldham, director) and The Unicoi County Heritage Museum and Clinchfield Railroad Museum (Martha Erwin, curator).

Activities

The project completed its objectives through the following active-learning and community engagement activities:

- Students spent time in class learning the basic principles of ethnographic field research, participant-observation, field note writing, oral history interviewing and transcription, cultural heritage tourism, and railroad history in the region.
- On September 6, 2016 students visited the Archives of Appalachia, part of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services. Students were introduced to the Carolina, Clinchfield, and Ohio Railway Records Collection.
- On September 13, 2016 students visited the Clinchfield Railroad Museum in Erwin, TN and experienced a guided tour by the curator, Martha Erwin. Students completed an artifact analysis assignment utilizing artifacts from both the Archives of Appalachian and the Clinchfield railroad Museum.
- On September 20, 2016, students toured the George L. Carter Museum (ETSU campus) and learned more about Mr. carter, founder of the Clinchfield **Railroad, and its' importance in the region.**
- On October 7th and 8th, students attended the Erwin Apple Festival to conduct participant-observation regarding local culture and tourism.

- Between October 10 and November 1 students completed an oral history interview with a community research participant, completed the transcript of this interview, and (to enhance transcription accuracy) edited a student **colleague's transcript**.
- In early October, students met with community partners, Martha Erwin and other members of the Clinchfield Railroad Museum Board to collaborate in designing a rack card (travel brochure) for the Museum to promote cultural heritage tourism. The student leader of this group took photos of the museum for use on the rack card.
- On November 1, 2016, invited guest speaker Tish Oldham, director, The Unicoi County Economic Development Board, talked with students about economic transitions in the Erwin / Unicoi County community, particularly the closing of the CSX Railyard a year earlier.
- In November, students worked collaboratively on creating a poster to represent the research process and findings for presentation at the Appalachian Studies Association annual conference in March 2017.
- **Students wrote their own presentation "scripts" to discuss themes from the research.** They also created accompanying power point slides and engaged in collaborative editing toward final versions of the presentation for the conference presentation in D.C.
- December 2-3, 2016, students presented their research and activities at the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) annual Appalachian Teaching Project conference in Washington, D.C.
- February 23, 2017, students presented their research at the Erwin Town Hall to attending community partners and participants.
- March 9-12, 2017, all of the students in the ATP course attended the Appalachian Studies Association annual conference in Blacksburg, VA and presented their research poster.
- April 22, 2017, **two students (one from this year and one from last year's ATP class)** performed as **musical entertainment at a "Hobo Dinner" fundraiser** sponsored by the Clinchfield Railroad Museum in Erwin, TN to raise money toward professional printing of the rack cards designed by the ATP students.

Project Outcomes

The Documenting Community Traditions course asks students to address the **question, "How do we build community capacity in order to shape a positive future for Appalachia?"** In so doing, the 2016-2017 ETSU project had two main goals:

- (1) To conduct ethnographic field research to survey existing documentation and to conduct interviews of residents who have some connection to the Clinchfield railroad; and
- (2) To work with the community partners, Martha Erwin and the Clinchfield Railroad Museum, to develop a brochure (rack card) to utilize local history and promote the Clinchfield Railroad Museum as a cultural heritage tourism site.

In doing this, the course supported Goals Four and Five from the ARC Strategic Plan: (1) By working with the community to document oral history and develop strategies for using that history to promote cultural heritage tourism the project directly supported **Goal Four, which is to “strengthen Appalachia’s community and economic development potential by leveraging the Region’s natural and cultural heritage assets.”** (2) By engaging students in a community-based ethnographic learning experience, the project supported **Goal Five, which is to “build the capacity and skills of current and next-generation leaders and organizations to innovate, collaborate, and advance community and economic development.”**

In support of these strategic goals, the course met the following primary goals:

- Students developed leadership skills and awareness of community assets that can foster sustainability.
- Students were active learners and participants in community projects.
- Students participated in active research to assist communities in creative approaches to sustainability through asset development.
- Students learned tools to conduct additional ethnographic field research, focusing on oral history.
- Students created a brochure (rack card) to promote the Clinchfield railroad Museum as a cultural tourism asset

The project met the required goals and objectives specified by the ATP. Students learned valuable research, leadership, and community engagement skills that will be essential to them as help develop sustainable communities in the future.

Problems Encountered

The project met all of required goals without deviating from the original proposal. The major challenge of the project was the fast pace necessary to complete all components (site visits, meeting with community partners, oral histories, data analysis, poster and brochure (rack card) production, and coordinating the final community presentation.

Program Continuation and Sustainability

This year (2016) saw the culmination of a three-year ATP project that highlighted the railroad and industrial history of the Erwin and Unicoi County, TN in support of cultural heritage tourism as one piece of broader strategies toward sustainable economic development. The first year (2014) of this project built relationships within the community, began oral history collection regarding the history of the Clinchfield Railroad, and engaging in community dialogue regarding cultural heritage tourism. The second year (2015) continued oral history collection and documented the immediate effects of the closing of the CSX Railyard in Erwin, TN, which heightened the importance of documenting the past and current importance of the railroad to this community. The second year also noted a more active role of

Erwin Downtown Merchants Association towards new businesses, including the Bramble (wedding end event venue) and Steel Rails (coffee shop), and new festivals and community events.

This third year, the oral history interviews particularly reflect the social and socioeconomic effects of the closing of the CSX Railyard. The interviews also noted the ethnic diversity of Clinchfield workers over the years and included an interview with one of the first female engineers hired on Clinchfield. The third year also described the experiences of multi-generational railroad families, including the difficulties and hardships of family separation, seniority and job placement, the reality of the dangers of railroad jobs, and the work-culture changes resulting from corporate ownership fluctuations. Oral history interviews also made the links between several area businesses including a fish hatchery, orchards, a lumber mill and feldspar mine and the ways in which the presence of the railroad at one time helped recruit and encourage diverse small businesses that relied upon the railroad for transportation of goods. Particularly important was a multi-business pottery industry that served as an important source of employment for local women who produced valuable and collectible hand-painted pottery.

Particularly important are the interviews with members of a recently formed civic group, "RISE Erwin." **The acronym stands for "rejuvenate, invest, support and energize"** Erwin, and the group includes millennial-aged business and civic leaders who are determined to revitalize their community by working with established leadership and developing and organizing new attractions, events, and businesses to draw visitors and shoppers into the town. These include a new farmers market that supports local farmers and several small festivals of which the most prominent was the "**Erwin Elephant Revival.**" Importantly, this festival also seeks to directly transform the negative community reputation Erwin has held for one-hundred years following the hanging of Mary the Elephant by supporting an elephant sanctuary in Middle Tennessee.

After three years, this project has completed its work with the Clinchfield Railroad Museum as a primary community partner. In this time, this project has documented the history and importance of the Clinchfield Railroad in the local community and broader region as a pivotal force in the development of Erwin, the growth of a variety of industries, as an important cultural feature in community and family identity, and finally, as a vital player for understanding changing socio-economic landscapes over time. This project preserves the legacy of the Clinchfield by donating the oral history interviews to the Archives of Appalachia. In addition, the brochure (rack card) created for the Clinchfield Railroad Museum will help **promote this history and actively contribute to the community's** continuing efforts to advance cultural heritage tourism as a part of economic sustainability.

Although our active engagement with the Clinchfield Railroad Museum is concluded, the cultural and socio-economic information collected and broad community

connections fostered over the past three years robustly support the continuation of ATP participation in this community and for ETSU to sustain an ATP course.

ETSU will submit a proposal for a 2017 ATP course that draws upon the community relationships developed over the past few years of ATP involvement in the Erwin/Unicoi County area. In particular, ETSU will propose a project with the Rocky Fork State Park in Unicoi County to continue a partnership emerging from previous ATP connections. Most recently, this partnership between the Rocky Fork State Park and ETSU's Department of Appalachian Studies, spearheaded by Roy Andrade, resulted in the First Annual Upper East Tennessee Fiddlers Convention in Flag Pond, TN, on April 29, 2017. This new proposal will expand this partnership and explore current community concerns regarding economic sustainability, logging, and land use. This directly ties in with the **community's** newly organized Great Outdoors Festival, bringing attention to the economic potential of **the community's proximity** to the Appalachian Trail, the local cultural importance of outdoor recreation activities, and continuing debates over land use in terms of economic development. Importantly, this will allow the ATP course to take advantage of one key 2016 recommendation (see below) that the community take advantage of the newly established Rocky Fork State Park as one means toward sustainable economic development.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Over three years of ATP engagement, ETSU has documented the perspectives and activities of various community members confronting social and economic transformations that require reflexive examination of community identity and economic sustainability. In so doing, students have learned the basics of community engagement and ethnographic fieldwork techniques, particularly oral history interviewing and participant observation. They have also developed professional skills in terms of data analysis, collaborative research and writing, and public presentation skills.

This year, the ETSU ATP students, in conjunction with our community partners, produced a tangible product in the form of a cultural heritage tourism brochure (rack card) to assist the Clinchfield Railroad Museum in realizing its potential as a tourist destination. It is with the contribution of the brochure to assist community cultural heritage tourist development that we see the greatest potential in regards to the question: **"What changes did you hope would occur in the community as a result of the project?"** As a class, the 2017 ETSU ATP students hope to see the brochure make a measurable difference in visibility for the Clinchfield Railroad Museum and make a positive contribution in promoting cultural heritage tourism in Erwin and Unicoi County, TN. Indeed, this is a likely reality, as the Clinchfield Railroad Museum Board is in talks with a State Tourism representative regarding printing and distribution of the rack card to appropriate tourist recruitment sites. The Museum also held a Hobo Dinner to raise funds toward the printing of the brochure.

After much analysis and reflection, the ATP students offer a few recommendations for the future of this community:

- 1) To continue documenting the economic and community changes in Erwin and the surrounding community, understanding these to be local responses to regional and global processes of economic and industrial transformation
- 2) To continue to encourage economic and civic participation in the community through inclusive communication and participation as important aspects of economic development.
- 3) To encourage Erwin and Unicoi County to take further advantage of the Clinchfield Railroad Museum and the recently opened Rocky Fork State Park, and other entertainment options, as a means of economic development.

Although this course has completed the Clinchfield Railroad project, ETSU is eager to continue its ATP partnership in this community. In particular, ETSU hopes that the next cohort of ATP students will be able to enact the third recommendation offered this year and assist the community in taking advantage of the Rocky Fork State Park as a means of economic development.

Attachments (in PDF format)

- 1) Clinchfield Railroad Museum brochure
- 2) Poster presented at Appalachian Studies Annual Conference, Blacksburg, VA, March 2017
- 3) Newspaper article, **Johnson City Press Chronicle, February 23, 2017: "A Railroad Town Without A Railroad: a new chapter in Appalachian History"**
<http://www.johnsoncitypress.com/Local/2017/02/23/A-Railroad-Town-Without-a-Railroad-a-new-chapter-in-Appalachian-history>

CLINCHFIELD RAILROAD MUSEUM



ERWIN, TENNESSEE



ESTABLISHED IN 1902, THE CLINCHFIELD RAILROAD WAS A MARVEL OF MODERN RAILWAY ENGINEERING, TUNNELING ITS WAY THROUGH THE MOST RUGGED BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAIN BARRIERS IN THE EASTERN UNITED STATES. HEADQUARTERED IN ERWIN, TENNESSEE, THE RAILROAD OPERATED FROM ELKHORN CITY, KENTUCKY TO SPARTANBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA, A DISTANCE OF 277 MILES. THE COSTLIEST RAILROAD TO BUILD IN ITS TIME, THE CLINCHFIELD BECAME THE SHORTEST DIRECT ROUTE FROM THE COALFIELDS OF APPALACHIA, TO THE SOUTH ATLANTIC SEABOARD, PASSING THROUGH FIVE STATES AND FIFTY-FIVE NAMED TUNNELS TO THE END OF THE LINE.

MODELED TO LOOK LIKE AN OLD-FASHIONED TRAIN STATION, THE CLINCHFIELD RAILROAD MUSEUM TELLS THE STORY OF ERWIN'S RICH RAILROAD HISTORY. FIVE ROOMS EXHIBIT AN EXTENSIVE COLLECTION, INCLUDING MANY ONE-OF-A-KIND ARTIFACTS, AND RARE MEMORABILIA FROM WHEN CLINCHFIELD WAS KNOWN AS THE "GATEWAY TO THE SOUTH." THE MUSEUM WAS ESTABLISHED JUNE 4, 2011, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNICOI COUNTY HERITAGE MUSEUM, TO PRESERVE AND PROMOTE ERWIN'S RAILROADING HERITAGE.





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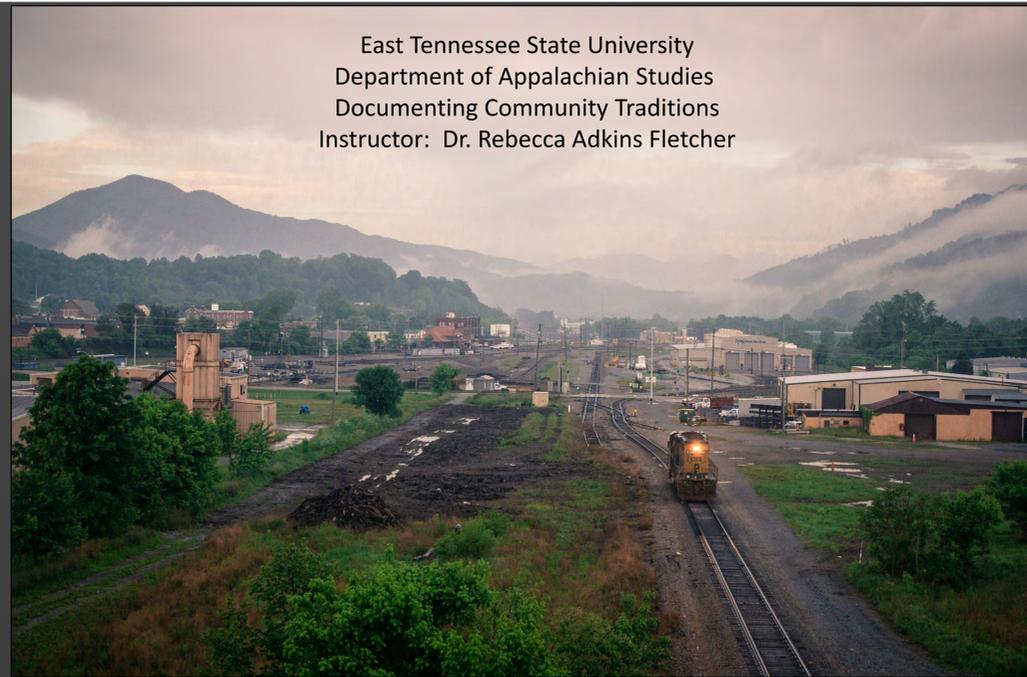
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Railroad Town Without a Railroad

INTRODUCTION

Like many Appalachian towns, Erwin (Unicoi County, TN) is struggling with the realities of disappearing industrial jobs that have long played roles as economic stabilizers and foundations of community identity. In particular, the 2015 closure of Erwin's railroad terminal by CSX in Erwin was devastating for the community. This project is the third installment of a three-year oral history project on the Clinchfield Railroad and related industries, where we seek to highlight the community's engagement with the railroad and their ongoing efforts toward economic development. To this end, we worked with Clinchfield Railroad Museum to develop a travel brochure as a promotional aspect of cultural heritage tourism.



East Tennessee State University
Department of Appalachian Studies
Documenting Community Traditions
Instructor: Dr. Rebecca Adkins Fletcher

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

ETSU students and Erwin residents have primarily emphasized Erwin's identity as a railroad town. Erwin's character is embedded in the historic railroad corporations that have dominated its economy. The loss of industrial jobs, mostly from CSX's terminal closure, has resulted in the establishment of new diversified community leaders. These community leaders, such as the individuals who have formed RISE Erwin, are currently aiding Erwin in re-evaluating its identity and launching events to help increase revenue. Such organizations are vital for Erwin's economic future and prospects as a municipality.

"They hired family. It was family first." -John Jennings



"...just because we weren't in Erwin doesn't mean we weren't a part of Erwin." - Julie Kilby



"...it was a family. Everyone stuck together, we were very very proud to be the Clinchfield." - Neita Lingerfelt



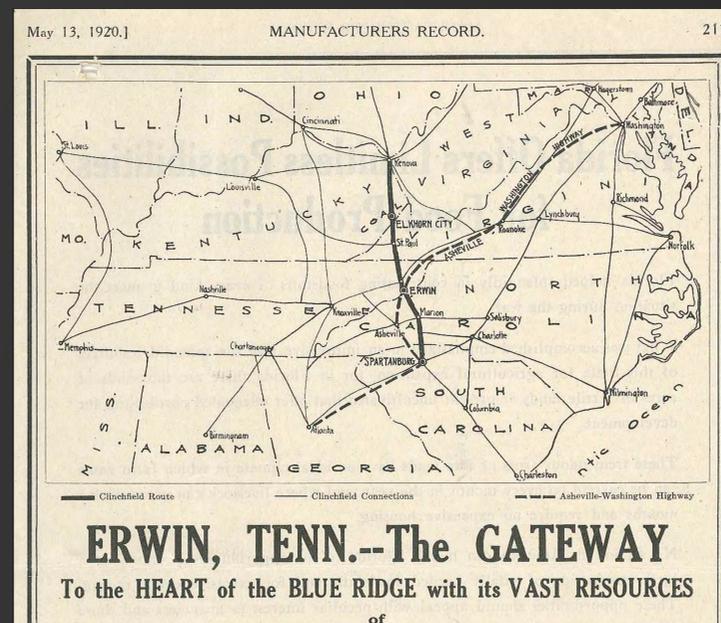
"You've got a civic mindset, you've got a big town mindset in a really small place." - Tyler Engle



CONTINUED IMPORTANCE

The departure of CSX deeply shook the identity of Erwin. New leadership voices and community collaborations have emerged to assist with economic recovery. Erwin is moving in the right direction, and larger sources of revenue will assist the community in its recovery.

"Rejuvenate, invest, and energize." - Kristine Anders



- Cultural Heritage Tourism
 - Clinchfield Railroad Museum
- RISE Erwin
 - Looking at models of towns in similar circumstances
 - Farmer's Market
 - Elephant Revival
- Festivals
 - Great Outdoors Festival
 - Apple Festival
- Rocky Fork State Park
- Grant awards for various projects

METHODOLOGY

- Oral history interviews with nine narrators in the local community
- Transcribed interviews for donation to the Archives of Appalachia
- Visited local museums, historical sites, and archives to research Clinchfield Railroad history and cultural representation
- Engaged in participant observation at local festivals

"The Railroad was synonymous with the pottery industry that was here." - Joey Lewis



"[CSX] moved the headquarters out of Erwin...it lost every bit of its localization. I mean we were just, we became a number, we became a number." - Larry Edwards



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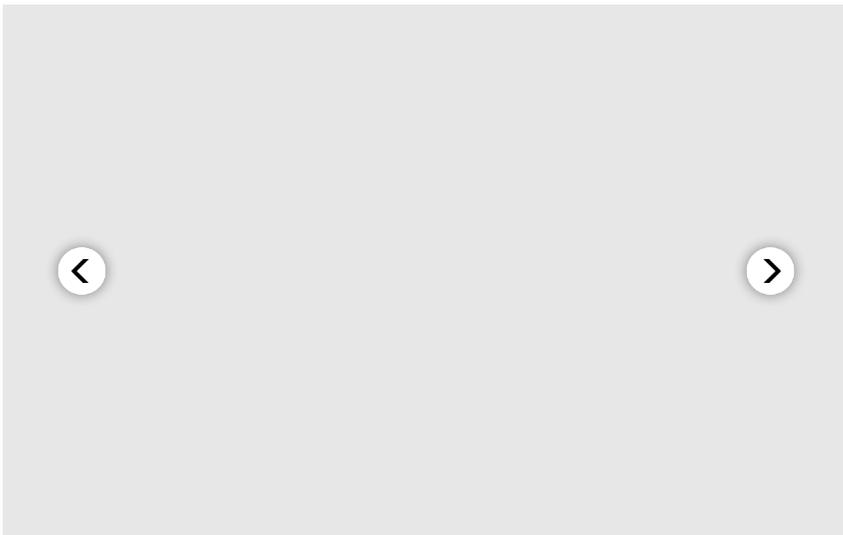
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ETSU APPALACHIAN STUDIES

"A Railroad Town Without a Railroad" a new chapter in Appalachian history

SUE GUINN LEGG • UPDATED FEB 23, 2017 AT 9:39 PM

slegg@johnsoncitypress.com

ERWIN — The latest chapter in the East Tennessee State University's Documenting Community Traditions project, "A Railroad Town Without a Railroad: The Changing Cultural Landscape of Erwin, Tennessee," has

been entered in the Archives of Appalachia.



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Members of ETSU's Department of Appalachian Studies' project team presented the oral history to an appreciative crowd of Unicoi County residents with ties to the historic Clinchfeld Railroad Thursday night at Town Hall.

Student team members Rachel Reichert, James Edgar and Clinton Ross began the presentation with a traditional fiddle, guitar and mandolin rendition of "CC&O No. 558," a tribute to Clinchfeld engineer J. Fred Leonard first recorded in 1927 by East Tennessee fiddler Charlie Bowman.

The musical introduction was followed by an explanation of the oral history project funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission at 16 universities and colleges across the Appalachian region by ETSU Appalachian Studies Associate Professor Dr. Rebecca Adkins Fletcher.

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According to Fletcher, the program is now in its 15th year of collaboration with Unicoi County residents and its third year of focusing on the Clinchfield Railroad, which was founded by entrepreneur George L. Carter, who first brought the CC&O railroad to Erwin in 1908.

Key areas of focus in the oral histories gathered in interviews gathered by students during the fall semester of 2016 in partnership with Martha Erwin, curator of the Unicoi County's Clinchfield Railroad Museum, were the railroad's importance to the community, the impact of the 2015 closing of CSX Railroad operations in Erwin and cultural heritage tourism as a tool for sustainable economic development.

Reichert said, "The goal is to help build sustainable economic development for Appalachian communities," like Erwin, where the loss of railroad jobs staggered the community.

After briefly highlighting their interviews on topics, including railroad culture, life in railroad family, loss of the railroad and how the community has moved forward since the railroad closings, the students presented Martha Erwin with a few tools to help in with cultural tourism objectives they share.

With the new Clinchfield Railroad Museum rack card presented by the students, Fletcher also gave the community a few recommendations to grow on.

- Encourage civic involvement and economic development through inclusive communication.
- Utilize resources, including the county's Clinchfield Railroad Museum and new Rocky Fork State Park.

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