

Greetings Austin

This subject of Winston Link's involvement with saving the 611 comes up frequently and is unsubstantiated. There is only one source of this information, and that was Link himself. While a great photographer, Link was also a great self-promoter. While it is possible, he inquired about saving the 611 in 1959/60. He had zero connection to higher management within Norfolk and Western to do anything about it.

This subject and a detailed history of the 611 is the subject of the book "Norfolk and Western Six-Eleven; Three Times a Lady" by Ken Miller and Tim Hensley, initially published in 2015 and a completely revised second edition in 2021.

The person primarily responsible for saving 611 is W. Graham Claytor, an attorney with a Washington D.C. firm in 1959. Graham also worked with his brother Robert B. Claytor, who was climbing the ranks in the N&W law department at the time but could not be very visible with his interest due to the political climate about steam power within the company.

In late August 1959, the N&W ran a special train from Roanoke to Norfolk and returned for Appalachian Power Company. It was powered by the 611. Both Graham and Bob Claytor were on board. They both knew N&W President Stuart T. Saunders personally, which is the only way to have had any influence. Graham began his campaign to save the 611. Graham started his campaign with a conversation onboard with Saunders, and on return home, he commenced a letter-writing campaign to Saunders.

Graham wrote and received many letters with Saunders, and finally, not even a month later, in early October 1959, received a promise not to scrap the 611 immediately, weeks before 611's last trips.

The story comes from a copy of Claytor's correspondence file, and I have a copy in my collection. The file might have been Bob Claytor's copies, as it does not have all of Saunders' response letters, but the story is easy to piece together from the responses.

I highly recommend purchasing a copy of the book for the whole story. N&WHS has it available on our website under "Commissary." It is a detailed history of the 611 up through its publication two years ago. The forward for the book came from Preston Claytor, Robert B. Claytor's son, who recalls explicitly the story as being recounted around the table at family gatherings and that Hensley and I have it right.

Nowhere in the file is there any mention of Link. As stated, Link may well have remembered the story and could have inquired informally about it but had zero traction within the company to get to Saunders, who had zero interest in steam and preservation; he only dealt with Graham Claytor out of professional courtesy, and the fact that Graham and Bob's father was highly connected with Appalachian Power, a huge N&W shipper.

Best
Ken Miller