

THE SIDE TRACK

NEWS

from the Toy Train Operating Society
Sacramento Valley Division

Summer

1997

President's Column

Hello again. Another quarter has passed by, summer is here, and it is time for another newsletter.

Most of the recent club activity has been related to the California State Railroad Museum (CSRM) operating layout and the club's modular layout.

First, many thanks to Jim Groth for his continuing efforts in maintaining both layouts. In particular, Jim puts in a lot of time and effort in taking care of the CSRM layout. He spends many hours tending it; on-call to replace defective engines, cleaning track, wheels, and pick-up rollers. Your Board of Directors have held several cleaning parties at the CSRM to thoroughly clean the operating layout under Jim's watchful eye.

Also, many thanks to Ken Mizner for repairing the defective rolling stock and getting them back to Jim. We do have a problem that the newer engines are just not holding up under continuous operation at the CSRM. The older MPC / Fundimension era engines we have seem to be more reliable. We need some inexpensive operating O-gauge steam or diesel engines in roadnames relating to California. If anyone is interested in selling or donating to the CSRM layout, please call me.

The club's layout is getting better. We have improved the track power wiring

and are starting to add inexpensive electronic modules to control accessories such as semaphores for the standard gauge track.

Currently we have Lionel LW transformers. We are looking for some higher wattage transformers to power the newer engines and to allow us to run longer trains.

Operating accessories are another item on our "to-do" list. We need inexpensive ordinary items that have lights, move, or make noise for the kids to enjoy. Preferably items that are easy to hook up, pack up, and move. If you have any items available for sale or donation, please call me.

Coming Events:

We will be exhibiting the club layout at the CSRM on Father's Day weekend. We will be set up in the Museum Roundhouse from 10 to 5, Saturday and Sunday, June 14-15. Tony Rohrs is recruiting volunteers for this annual event, so please let one of us know if you would like to take part.

Thunder Mountain HO Club is sponsoring a meet on June 27-29 at the Nimbus winery at Highway 50 & Hazel Ave. Setup is the evening of Thursday June 26. The show runs Friday and Saturday 10am-10pm and Sunday 10am-5pm. We can set our own operating schedule but will need someone to sit by the layout until the mall security comes in at 10pm. If we

get enough volunteers, we can participate in this 3-day show.

Please call me if you can volunteer some time to run trains, either your own or the club's, at either of these upcoming events. Everyone is welcome to participate and join in on the fun. We always have a good time, please give it a try. You are welcome to stay a few minutes or hours or all day. We always need help to set up and tear down.

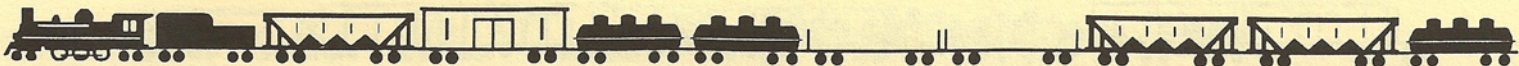
As always, please call me or the other Board members if you have any suggestions, questions or complaints. Thanks.

Stan Batynski

New Members

Let's give a front page welcome to our newest members. Mike Boyd and Garry and Linda Meyling from Stockton, Stephen Gower from Citrus Heights, Ed Niderost from Chico, and Kenneth, Alexandria, Joseph and John O'Gara, also from Citrus Heights, are all new to TTOS. Gene Bryant from San Leandro, is a long time TTOS member as is Chuck Stone who recently moved to Penn Valley from Southern California. Penn Valley is very close to Grass Valley. Does this move sound familiar?

We hope you all enjoy being part of our Division, and we hope to see you at lots of meets.



50th Anniversary of American Flyer S Gauge

by Ken Knott

Recently publicized reports that 1996 was the 50th Anniversary of American Flyer S gauge may have mislead those who assumed that S scale (1/64th scale, or 3/16" to the foot) trains were not produced until 1946. S scale trains had actually been manufactured by the Cleveland Model and Supply Company of Ohio prior to 1938, the year that A.C. Gilbert bought the American Flyer Company from W.O. Coleman, moving it from Chicago to New Haven, Connecticut. A.C. Gilbert manufactured 3/16" scale trains beginning in 1939. The new S scale trains were more realistically scaled but still ran on O gauge three-rail track.

1946 was the first year that saw the production of American Flyer S scale trains in combination with S gauge wheelsets, to run on S gauge (7/8" width) two-rail track. During the years 1942 to '45, while the company manufactured products for the war effort, A.C. Gilbert decided to convert to two-rail track correctly gauged for S scale, once the war ended. In January 1945, he placed Maury Romer in charge of developing the S gauge toy train line. Romer and Phil Connell, train division sales manager, were both instrumental in the conversion to two-rail track, which they promoted as being more prototypical than three-rail track. The concept was to produce a line of toy trains that would be superior to and distinctive from Lionel's in terms of both scale and realism. The move would prove to be a good one for the A.C. Gilbert Company, but production was delayed for a full year while the company struggled with problems of re-tooling and overhauling the American Flyer manufacturing equipment, the lack of spare parts, and the technical difficulties of two-rail track operation. In 1946, the first year Flyer introduced the two-rail S gauge track, the new line was well-received by the American market, although produc-

tion levels were still low. Smoke was added to the steam locomotives also that year. An American Flyer advertisement in Life Magazine dated November 25, 1946 declared: "See 'em puff smoke! Hear 'em Choo-Choo! 2-rail track gives layouts realistic appearance of actual steam railroad."

By 1947, Gilbert had overcome most of the production problems, and the baby-boomers created marketing results which raised AF profits to astounding heights. Some of the accessories produced in 1946 have become well-sought-after by avid collectors due to their limited production and subsequent discontinuation were the #584 Bell Danger Signal, #587 Block Signal and the #594 Track Gang Set. In 1947, accessory production included the Seaboard Coaler, the Log Loader, and the Electromatic Crane, which were destined to become classics to collectors of American Flyer. Sales of American Flyer trains and accessories remained high throughout the Fifties. A.C. Gilbert passed away in 1959, in time to avoid witnessing the downfall of his toy train manufacturing empire.

To the delight of American Flyer fans, S scale has been making a comeback in recent years. Not only has Lionel (who bought out the old American Flyer Company in 1966) been adding to its S gauge line, other manufacturers have entered the market, such as S Helper Service, American Models, and Southwind Models. S gauge continues to fulfil the promise of providing the realistic, fun-filled model trains envisioned by A.C. Gilbert more than 50 years ago.

Sources: *Greenberg's Guide to American Flyer S Gauge Volume II*, Kalmbach Publishing, 1991; *Collecting Toy Trains #3*, by Richard O'Brien, published by Books Americana, 1991; and "American Flyer Collector's Column," by Paul C. Nelson, *S Gaugian Magazine*, Heimberger House Publishing Co., 1996.

Taking the Lead

So as to keep our members on the leading edge of what's currently going on, our Division will be issuing a monthly single-page newsletter, "*The Lead Track*."

Unlike *The Side Track*, which will continue to be mailed quarterly, *The Lead Track* will report only the very latest happenings within our group—new members, visitors, who brought what display items or layouts to the last meet. It will also list the upcoming month's local and area meets plus the locations our modular layout will be appearing.

Please note, *The Lead Track* will only be available at our monthly meets. So take the lead, attend the meetings and get your copy of *The Lead Track*.

Jack Ahearn

From the rear vestibule

Since I have a few inches of space this month, I'll stick a couple of questions and pleas for help.

First, does anyone remember when Jack (Honor, not Ahearn) changed from saying, "That car's *almost* a hundred dollars!" to, "That car's *only* a hundred dollars."? And why doesn't that philosophy apply to shoes?

Next, I have been keeping our membership records in WordPerfect for Windows, but we have no backup, should I take another tumble or something. Are there any WP WIN users out there who are familiar with the merge program, and if so, could you keep duplicate files? I think the data can be exported to other programs if necessary.

Finally, we are busy preparing for the Octobermeet. I made flyers, but I had problems drawing the engineer's cap in the logo. I worked and worked, but I'm not happy with it. If anyone has graphic abilities, I could scan your drawing for the next batch of flyers.

George Ann Honor, who is eagerly awaiting your assistance!



180 Days and Still Standing

A wall sign over my train layout proclaims, "Life is Too Short Not to Believe in Santa Claus." Soon it will be joined by another—"A Year Passes Too Quickly to Take Down a Christmas Tree!" And sure enough, here it is June, and my tree is still up.

I aimed for mid-January, held out for St. Patty's Day, thought about it on Easter, and now, well maybe Thanksgiving, for just a little rearranging of the ornaments. Of course this isn't just about a tree. It's about the train chuggin' 'round 'neath it. And the village and the snow and the station and the white-topped trees and all the other trimmings that make life worth living on Christmas morn. You see, all I've done is to make that special morning a little longer, a little dearer and a little merrier.

Many times I'll sit and stare at my Christmas tree layout and try to think why it all seems so perfect to me. I swear, it has more charm per square inch than any other I've ever had. For the life of me, there isn't a single thing I could think of adding or subtracting to make it any better. I'll watch the red 1935 Lionel Jr. engine pulling the matching litho passenger cars throughout the cardboard housed village, around the curve, over the bridge, past the water tower. And finally re-arrive at the little station it just left. It's about then, as the train starts another lap, that I begin to realize why my little pike looks and feels so special, so exciting, and at the same time, so warm.

It's because I belong to a club whose every member looks at and feels about their toy trains as I do. Whether we are looking at a room-sized empire, a 4 x 6, or a wall shelf of our particular favorites—pre, post, modern, scouts, or satellite sets. They're all the same, all about us and our willingness to share, understand, and accept each other's preferences. Maybe that's why we so easily put trains and Christmas together. It's our spirit and the spirit of giving and

sharing that makes it so easy for me to leave my tree up all year long, take it in stride as being perfectly normal, and in a way, feel sorry for those who are not just like...all of us...in TTOS.

And by the way, if you think this is an inappropriate time of year for this article, well, just remember—"White Christmas" was written in the summertime, too. Merry Christmas...every day of the year.

Jack Ahearn

MTH #151 Semaphore Product Review by Brady Burdge

Mike's Train House recently released a copy of the postwar Lionel #151 semaphore. It's a great accessory and a very close copy of the original. The semaphore comes with MTH's version of a track trip, but I chose to hook mine up using an insulated section. Those not familiar with insulated sections can find the instructions in K-Line's book, *Track Layout and Accessory Manual for Lionel Trains*. All I can really say about the 151's operation is that it works like it's supposed to. If you are running a lot of cars with plastic trucks you may want to make your insulated section two track sections long to ensure that there are enough wheels in contact with the insulated rail. One word of warning! When I removed the semaphore from the box the metal cap on top of the silver post popped off, and the return spring shot out. No problem, I simply put the spring back in and pressed the cap back on.

Note: Brady is out of Bosnia and back in Germany from training in Mississippi, but he's with us on the Internet and he says hello to all. His e-mail address is:
burdgeb@interquest.de

New PBS Series

While cruising around the Internet, I came across an interesting announcement from Green Frog. This maker of many railroad videos is teaming up with PBS to offer 26 episodes of a new program, *All Aboard*.

The company promises the series will examine many aspects of the railroad scene. Each episode will explore a small portion of the rail system which played a major role in the development of North America. Many of the shows will incorporate historic film footage recording the early days when the trains were powered by the steam locomotive.

Previously aired in Miami, *All Aboard* will be shown in 29 states beginning in September. I checked and Sacramento's Channel 6 is on the list, but not Channel 9 in the Bay Area. Dates and times will be announced later.

The host is Howard "HOrn" Goodwin, a long time model railroader and railfan. He is President of the South Florida Railway Museum and past president of the Sunshine Region of the National Model Railroad Association. According to the announcement, Howard is well known for his flamboyant auctioneering style when the museum and the Sunshine Region hold their many auctions. Howard actively models in HO scale as well as inch and half live steam and is frequently seen at Trade Winds Park in North Ft. Lauderdale. His roads of choice are the Florida East Coast and Southern Railway.

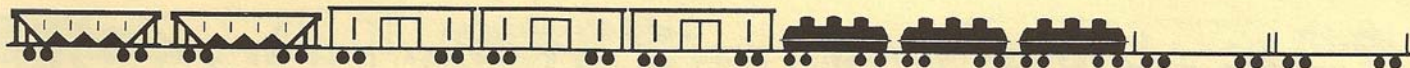
Sounds good, doesn't it?

George Ann Hornor

Don't forget
to sign up to help
with the

Octobermeet

coming next October 4
Scottish Rite Center



TTOS Sacramento Valley Division
 Attn: George Ann Hornor
 207 Radnor Court
 Benicia, CA 94510-1515



Down the track

Father's Day Celebration, California State Railroad Museum	June 14,15
Nimbus Winery Show and Modular Meet	June 27-29
Sacramento Valley Division Meet, Sierra 2 Center	July 5
Sacramento Valley Division Meet, Sierra 2 Center	August 2
TTOS National Convention, Rochester, New York	August 14-17
Sacramento Valley Division Meet, Sierra 2 Center	September 6
Sacramento Valley Division Meet, Sierra 2 Center	October 4
GATS, Santa Rosa	October 18,19
Cal-Stewart, Pasadena	October 31-November 2
GATS, Pleasanton	November 22-23
Sacramento Valley Division Meet, Sierra 2 Center	November 1
Sacramento Valley Division Meet and Holiday Party, Sierra 2 Center	December 6

