

THE SIDE TRACK

NEWS

from the Toy Train Operating Society
Sacramento Valley Division

WINTER

2020

Too much of anything is bad, but too much champagne is just right. - F. Scott Fitzgerald

Jerry Azzaro, editor

President's Message

by John DeHaan, SVD President

Happy Holidays to all TTOS-SVD members and their families!



Just like the rest of 2020, the holidays will be a challenge to prepare for and enjoy, with restrictions on travel and gathering. But I'm sure we will persevere! We haven't had our usual get-

togethers, but we have managed to get the club back on track. We had a proper election in November and your new Board (taking office on 1 Jan 2021 for a two-year term) is: **Carl Madsen, President; Ed Strisar, Vice President; Bryan Stanton, Treasurer; Jeff Silvera, Member-at-Large; and John DeHaan, Secretary.** We managed to have the ONLY toy train meet in Northern California during Epidemic 2020 and it was a great boost to everyone's spirits.

We will keep looking for a regular monthly meeting venue, so keep Carl apprised of any sites you come across. We have started planning for our annual River City Meet in September or October, depending on our State's success in controlling the epidemic soon. Our Events Coordinator, **Ed Strisar**, is looking for suggestions on lectures and tours you'd like to see. I am hoping we can get a Want-Ads feature included in weekly/monthly notices, so that we can keep trading trains.

Our 2020 Toy and Food Drive was a reasonable success. I am pleased to report that I delivered a check for \$900 (in person) to the Sacramento Children's Home on Wednesday, December 16th on behalf of TTOS- SVD. It will be put to the best use to acquire food and toys by the staff of the Home. As a COVID-19 precaution, the staff there requested that donations be made this year in cash rather than toys or food. We thank those members who stepped up to so generously donate this year, also **Jeff Silvera** and **Carl Madsen** for coordinating the process.

We lost several cherished members in 2020, and we offer condolences to their families and friends. Please follow the appropriate guidelines to keep yourselves safe and well in the coming year, as we really don't want to lose any more of our friends or families.

Find some way to enjoy your trains and the pleasure they give you – whether it's running them (on the living room floor, under the tree or on the usual layout), or just taking them off the shelf (and dusting them?) and appreciating the artistry, engineering, and history they represent. That's some train fun we can all use to keep our spirits up at these difficult times.

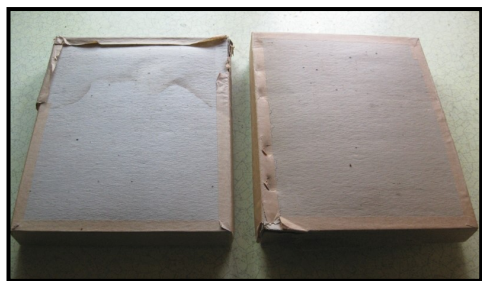
Here's a toast to 2021, may it be happier and calmer than 2020!

With my best wishes,

John DeHaan, President SVD.

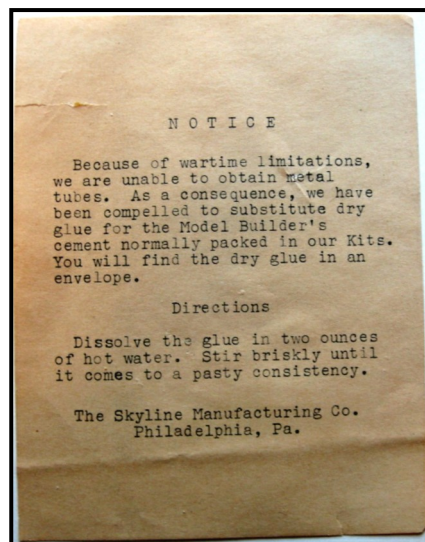
Big Dreams in Small Boxes

By Jack Ahearn



The two unmarked mystery boxes

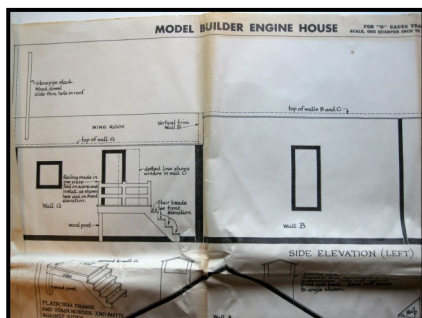
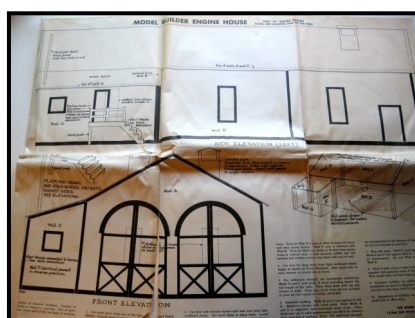
At our recent Scottish Rite Fall Show, I was looking curiously at two identical plain, unmarked cardboard boxes on a sales table. I caught the vendor's eye. He responded to my quizzical look with a nod for me to open one. I did, and for the first time in twenty five years of attending such shows, I bought both boxes solely because of reading the first sentence of a packing slip!



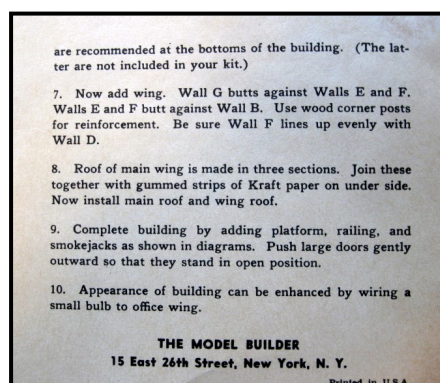
“NOTICE: *Because of wartime limitations, we are unable to obtain...*”

As you can see, the faded paper didn't hold up so well over the past seventy five plus years. Oddly, the Notice in the other box remains clear white. Also remarkable; each kit contains all the parts and the instruction sheets remain a bit wrinkled but intact and complete!

Note: I think the dry glue is called “Cascamite”. It's available by several popular brand names.



Here's the deeper story behind the story. Notice the top of the fuller instruction sheet photo. It reads 'Model Builder.' That, as many know, was a magazine put out by Lionel between 1937 and '49. Now go back to the Notice slip. It indicates the kit was made and offered by Skyline Mfg. Co. While you're reviewing the photos, look at the bottom of the text portion of the instructions. It identifies Model Builder magazine with Lionel's N.Y. offices and showroom, 15 E. 26th St, N.Y.C, N.Y....which is now converting the top floors to condos!



So what was the deal between Lionel and Skyline Models? Take a look at this photo! Yup, it's on the back cover page of Lionel's 1942 catalog! At first, I took the offer to be a joint marketing effort as a cooperative gesture of the war years. However, after carefully reading Lionel's colorful and generous offer, it mentions Model Builder and touts Lionel's name but nary a mention of Skyline! Indeed, they humbly admitted the 21d x 7w x 8h inch Engine Shed would accommodate any of Lionel's 'O' gauge locos and tenders, except the long scale model Lionel Hudson.”

Note: They did a rather clever packing job of fitting a 21inch long building into a 9 inch box!

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The end of the road for Roadside America

by Jerry Azzaro

We read the recent articles about the final closing and parting-out of the Roadside America attraction in Shartlesville PA with mixed feelings. First, the sadness of something so large and firmly rooted in our hobby closing after eighty years; second, wondering how it held on as long as it did.

I had known of this place since I was young. Various scenes were used in the early “Toy Trains” magazine (1951-1954) which was my preferred reading material at the time. A few of those photos are shown here. I believe some scenes were also used in Lionel promotional material.

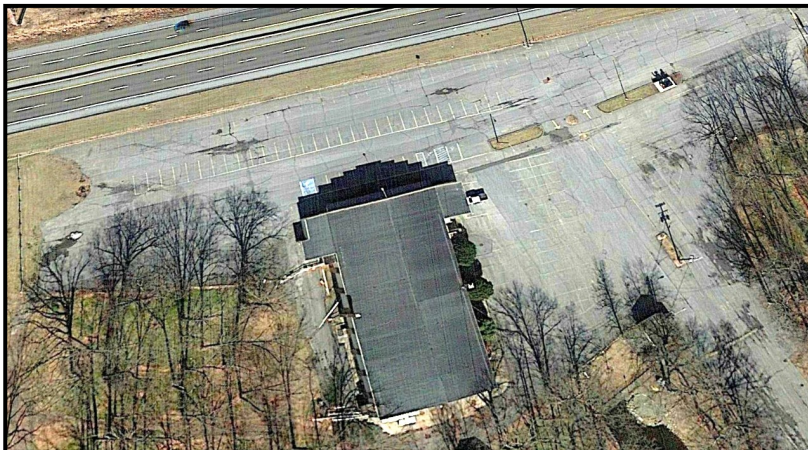
About 20 years ago, Anna and I took a side trip from one of the week-long York meets to visit this storied place. It is huge. The layout room is approximately 80 by 125 feet. The layout itself, bounded on all sides by walkways, was said to be 6,000 square feet, incorporating nine separate but overlapping continuous track routes. Against the east wall there was a raised platform behind the walkway from which visitors could get a view of the entire layout. On the opposite wall was a giant mountain where some of the trains ran through tunnels. The walkway passed through the mountain, where the trains could be seen as they traveled inside the tunnels, along with some mine scenes.

The building was designed to handle crowds, and to give everyone a clear view of every feature. Pushbuttons were placed along the railing to operate various motorized scenes, all custom-built. No Lionel accessories or structures were used, everything was hand-built to 3/8” scale. My recollection is that the trains ran on GarGraves track.

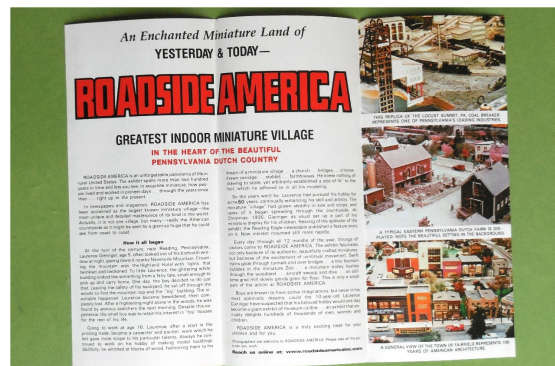
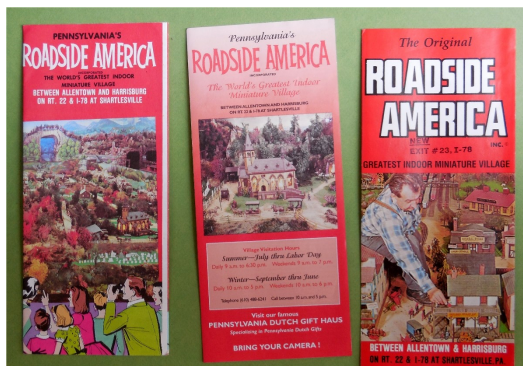
Periodically the house lights would fade to reveal a night scene with hundreds of lights ablaze on lampposts, towers, in an amusement park, inside buildings, and on trains and vehicles. Before the lights came back up, a slideshow of patriotic scenes was projected onto the north wall above the entrance doors while a recording of the National Anthem played. At the conclusion, a spotlight illuminated a US flag flapping in the breeze of a concealed electric fan.

By the time of our visit, deterioration had set in. Only three train loops were operating. The other loops had their trains halted in place, frozen in time. Very few of the pushbutton scenes were functional. The gift shop and ticket window were staffed by two of the creator’s descendants, both well into middle age. However, a person could still imagine the glory days of this spectacle when tour buses pulled off of Route 22 into the huge parking lot and disgorged their passengers to be amazed and delighted by Roadside America.

I’m happy that we got to see it while it was still active.



Roadside America - aerial view at what appears to be high noon on 2/26/2018. Dozens of parking spaces but not a single car. The highway at the top of the image is I-78 (former Rt. 22) which runs from near Harrisburg in the west through New Jersey to New York City in the east. If you spot Roadside America while going east, the next off-ramp is about 1/2 mile. Going west it's 3 1/2 miles. No doubt the interstate highway with its high speeds and limited access added to RA's troubles.



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The Story of ROADSIDE AMERICA, INC.

Roadside America is the result of two young boys sharing a "boyhood dream." Most children, at one time or another, entertain thoughts of fantasy and achievement, but few ever apply these youthful concepts and make them into reality.

Laurence Gieringer was but 10 years old and his brother Paul was eight when they never thought that their idea would develop into a "hobby" which would demand imagination, time, patience and arduous work.

Never did they think that this "hobby" would flourish and be enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of people; people who enjoy and appreciate beauty and workmanship.

During the turn of the century, many years before television, talking pictures and even radio, it was customary for the youngsters who grew up in the area of Reading, Pennsylvania, to play in the fields and the woods. This was their playground. It was also common for them to spend an afternoon climbing Neversink Mountain, which overlooked the city of Reading. The children loved to look down at the city, lying miniature-like at their feet.

Laurence Gieringer, then five years old, was no different than the other boys. From his back yard, he could see the mountain and the beautiful white building which dotted its top. This was the Highland Hotel. At night, Laurence would stand at his bedroom window and gaze in amazement as the lights glittered and twinkled from this building, giving it a fairy-like atmosphere. From his window, the building in the distance looked small enough for him to pick up and carry home. One afternoon the urge to see the white building up close was so strong that Laurence wandered away from the safety of his back yard, scampered through the woods, and attempted to climb the mountain and bring back with him the "toy house." Laurence never quite reached the top for he wandered into an abandoned sand hole and couldn't find his way through the bushes and trees. The inevitable happened; he got lost and it wasn't until the next morning that he was found by searchers.

At about 10 years of age Laurence together with his brother Paul, climbed to the top of Mt. Penn, overlooking Reading. There the boys looked down on the town lying miniature-like at their feet. They began rolling rocks down the mountainside discussing in their boyish way all the historical facts which occurred in the area. Dad and Mother Gieringer often told stories of how the two sons of William Penn planned the city of Reading. Laurence turned to Paul and said, "Say Paul, wouldn't it be swell to make little houses the way they appear from here. Future generations could see how things are now!" "Swell!" replied Paul, "but where do we start?"

The two brothers told their parents of their desire to make little houses. This pleased the parents so much that dad made them a little workbench in the cellar and gave them the necessary tools. He instructed them in the use and care of the tools. Mother was also a great help for she allowed them the use of the kitchen table when the cellar was cold and damp.

The boys began to work in earnest. To earn money to finance their hobby, the brothers were compelled to do odd jobs such as hauling ashes, shoveling snow, passing out circulars, and selling popcorn and pretzels. The money earned was used to purchase nails, glue, mica, paint, etc. Dad rarely contributed his money to the project for he made it understood that the small income he had was needed to support his large family.

Each day, after the evening meal, the boys would finish their school work and immediately start to work on their miniature houses. Encouragement was given by Mother and Dad Gieringer. Mother never complained of the dirt. She was glad that the boys were at home and out of trouble. "God Bless Our Home," she would read aloud from the plaque which hung over the doorway.

At school, the boys were further enheartened by Sister Mary Concordia of the Order of Christian Charity, who was an artist in her own right. Every Saturday afternoon, while other boys were playing, Larry and Paul devoted their time to taking drawing lessons from the nun. Each lesson would cost 3 cents; the price of pencils and paper.

The two brothers worked together for seven years. Paul Gieringer answered the call to the priesthood. Before they parted, Paul persuaded Larry to continue in his work. From then on Larry worked alone. (Monsignor Paul Gieringer was head of the Josephinian Pontifical College in Worthington, Ohio.)

In Memoriam

To the Builders of Roadside America
Mr. Laurence T. Gieringer, who died January 13, 1963
and his wife who carried on in his footsteps
until her death on December 21, 1973
We, their family, take great pride in continuing the
operation of this unique exhibition.

Upon moving to another part of town, Larry attended public school, where Miss Elizabeth Humma, a very understanding teacher, saw a real future in Laurence's non-academic work. She made him certain concessions, providing he promised to attain a fair average in his school work.

At the age of 16 Larry realized he'd have to go to work so he decided to expand his interests to the Printing Trade. Printing made some demands on his creative talent, but he wasn't satisfied. Being adept with tools, he became a carpenter and then a painter.

But he never stopped making model buildings for this was his hobby. Fervently, piece by piece, he whittled at blocks of wood, fashioning them to his dream—a miniature village. A church, a bridge, a horse-drawn carriage, a stable, a farmhouse—a boyhood dream being shaped into reality.

It is easy to see that Laurence was very serious in his enterprise. Everywhere he went he made sketches of buildings, arms, etc. He knew nothing of how to draw to scale, yet made up an arbitrary 3/8" to the foot and has adhered to it in all his modeling.

Laurence Gieringer married Dora Seisler, the girl who lived but a few doors from the Gieringer home. They grew up together enjoying each other's company and interests. She helped Laurence in his hobby, never once losing faith in her husband even when indebtedness and hardship stalled his efforts. She is credited for making the shrubbery and trees which beautify the landscape at Roadside America. Larry and Dora had two children, Paul and Alberta. The children helped in many ways. All the detailed work and figure painting was their responsibility.

Laurence made many trips to New York City in those early days of his career, always visiting the American Museum of Natural History and The Metropolitan Museum of Fine Arts and studying the miniatures.

He was struck by the absence of stained glass windows in every miniature he saw, and so he was determined to make some for his own models.

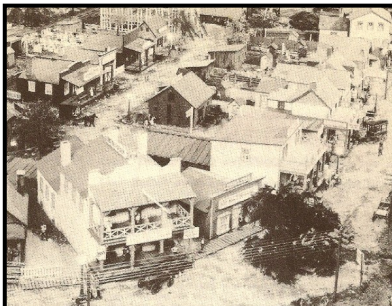
For three years he experimented with different mediums and gums to create the colors to stain glass. Finally after innumerable disappointments, he achieved three primary colors, and with these he then painted strips of glass. In order to test which would stand up under various atmospheric conditions he covered each piece half way with heavy brown paper leaving the balance exposed. Only the best were used.

Laurence left nothing daunt his creative genius. During the depression years he increased his activity. His perseverance coupled with the industry, had not escaped the notice of his neighbors and friends. Even country auctions heard of him and one friend surprised him by sending up a three-ton truck load of old furniture when he had been unable to sell at an auction. It was well seasoned, solid wood admirably suited for model-making as it would not warp.

The years of toil, evidenced in wood carvings, grew in scope. Christmas of 1935 came along and Gieringer, as usual, set up a part of his miniatures for his children. The Reading Eagle Newspaper, hearing of the splendor of the exhibit, featured the story. Interest grew and the Rainbow Fire Company donated the use of their building for the display, all earnings going to local charities. As a result, the Gieringer miniatures officially became a public exhibit. In 1938, a 1,500 square foot exhibit was set up at Carsonia Park. The Gieringer miniatures at this time were proclaimed by newspapers, magazines, and newsreels, as the World's Greatest Miniature Village and the most unique and detailed masterpiece ever evolved by the ingenuity of men.

In 1941, the exhibit was brought together under one roof and opened near Hamburg. It continued to grow in size, in interest and beauty and now has been relocated in a larger building surrounded by woodlands just west of Shartlesville where the result of this "hobby" can fully be appreciated.

Today, the entire Bernecker family, daughter and family of the original designer, continue to maintain and operate Roadside America for you to enjoy.



Every day of Spring, Summer and Fall ...

“It’s Always Christmas at Jack’s House”

... and for sure, Winter too!

by Jack Ahearn

...especially those hopes held high days leading up to the Big Day! I’m fascinated, even after some eighty years, that Christmas morn still holds a very special place in my memories and in my heart. It was, and still is, a wondrous December 25th morn I frequently relive. The magical morning of 1942, when my brothers and I found a Lionel train set beneath and around the tree! That year, and almost every year since, I have run that same train, or a Train Show duplicate of it, around and around the tree, ad infinitum. Those layouts may have changed over the years, but my deep fascination and wild excitement for that Macy’s \$12.50 uncataloged lithograph freight set remain unchanged.

Just how fascinated and wildly excited was I after setting up the annual layout in my early years? The following will give you a clue. I was about eight when I got a brilliant idea and quickly asked my mother for approval. “Can I mom? Can I?” Her two-worded response was the one that mothers love to stall with and kids hate to hear. A loose translation of those two words might sound something like; No, no, no or, never, never, ever and no again! I say might sound because that, or any other response, is never given. Because a response to “We’ll see” was never, ever, ever, ever heard!

Later that same night, I dreamed of hearing my Mother say to my Dad; “I’m worried about our youngest son. I think we may have to take him to some kind of mental doctor. Today he asked me if he could leave his trains like they are and keep them set up all year round.” She continued, “I never, ever heard of such a stupid idea.” Alas, it took me three quarters of a century to finally reach that goal! Yup, I’ve had my living room Christmas tree layout up and running every day for the last several years, just as it had been, in that magical December morn of 1942.

Alas, it took me three quarters of a century to finally reach that goal! I’ve had my living room Christmas tree layout running year-round for the past several years. This year is no exception. In the years I’ve been writing, I’ve been blessed to have a few experiences that I’d cautiously describe as being very special moments. And now, as I pictured a revised plan for my perennial tree layout, I sensed another very special moment was about to happen. Jane, my friend I worked with along with Phil Fravesi at the railroad museum for many years, was standing behind and to the left of me during a visit one day. Within a few special and spiritual moments, the soft tone of her picturesque words “It’s always Christmas at Jack’s House” instilled in me the peace and joy of Christmas I’ve always endeavored to attain and maintain.

When I related this incident to Marleen, an artist friend, her reaction to my inquiry was an understanding smile and anxious nod. “Yeah, I’d really like to recreate that image into a painting!” And so she did.



“It’s Always Christmas at Jack’s House” - acrylic on canvas by Marleen Hoffman

A few weeks later, the painting was hung above my toy train village, and the two became one.

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Artist Marleen Hoffman at work on the "Jack's House" painting.



The finished painting in place above Jack's permanent Christmas layout.

For several days in mid-December, my friends and neighbors visited to see the annual display of my winter wonderland of toy trains and village with it many snow covered houses, people and cars. This year I surprised them with an original painting that reflects the very wintry scenes which lay just a couple of feet below.



Friends Jane Howard (Santa cap) and Marleen Hoffman enjoy the snowy white wonderland.

About Marleen and Jane:

Marleen Hoffman is an accomplished Sacramento artist who works in several paint, pen and ink mediums. She currently serves as President of the Art Collaborative Gallery located in Old Town, Sacramento. Members are now celebrating over 40 years of bringing local art to the Sacramento Region. <https://www.artcollab.com/> 129 K St, Sacramento, CA 95814.

Jane Howard has a 30 year record of perfecting her exhibit and interpretive skills. After working 12 years with the Crocker Art Museum as an Art Program Specialist, she joined Cal. State Parks, serving as a Museum Technician in the Photographic Archives department. She then brought those combined experiences to the C.S.R.M. joining their staff in the position of Exhibit Specialist. She was featured in our Fall 2015 Side Track, pages 4-5 Click [here](#) to open. Jane is now retired and sharing her talents within the volunteer community.

More friends and neighbors next page –



Jason with son **Dan** and daughter **Grace**.



My neighbors, **Kelly** and **Fran**, visit my vintage Christmas tree.



Above and below: **Dave**, **Kathi** and **Michelle** look closely at all of the villagers and scenic features



Josephine, **Anne** and **Jacob** (L to R) are fascinated staring at the many scenes on Jack's up-all-year Christmas tree layout. Meanwhile their **Uncle John** holds **Baby Alayna** while pointing out all the brightly colored snow-covered houses.

Searching hands pointing to the right house that "Santa and Reindeers are Stopping at Now" contest. And, we have 3 winners tied for 1st Place!



Editor's note: If the sparkly cardboard houses in Jack's village look familiar, he wrote an article about them for our Christmas 2011 ten-page supplement to the Side Track—Click [here](#) to open it

Member Profile: KEN KNOTT

In addition to sending his Christmas layout photo, longtime member Ken Knott responded to the TTOS questionnaire we sent a few weeks ago. Ken's photo looks like a collaboration between Norman Rockwell and Angela Trotta Thomas.

What was your first train and when did you get it? Did you have a layout and what was it like?

I got my first Lionel train set for Christmas 1946; just a circle of track and a beginner's set. When I was old enough my father built a platform big enough to run the train in. I had two older brothers but they weren't interested in trains at that point so it was all mine! When I was in High School that train was packed into wooden boxes with lids. I went away to college and my oldest brother took the train set and it wound up in his garage. I never got it back.

When did you get back into the hobby and how? What sort of trains did you begin to collect at that point?

After I moved to Sacramento in 1985, I started going to train shows and buying American Flyer cars, locomotives and accessories. After my wife and I split up, the trains were stored in her house. When I got married again, I got my trains back and built a temporary layout.

When did you build your first layout? Describe it. How many layouts have you built since that one? Did anyone assist you in building it/them?

I moved a couple more times, and got remarried. My new wife encouraged me to set up a train around the Christmas Tree, with a village of collectable buildings, etc. and ran American Flyer train on it. Now I have a MTH Tinplate Classic set in O gauge on it.



What is your most prized/favorite train in your collection? How and when did you get it? How often do people come see your collection and layout?

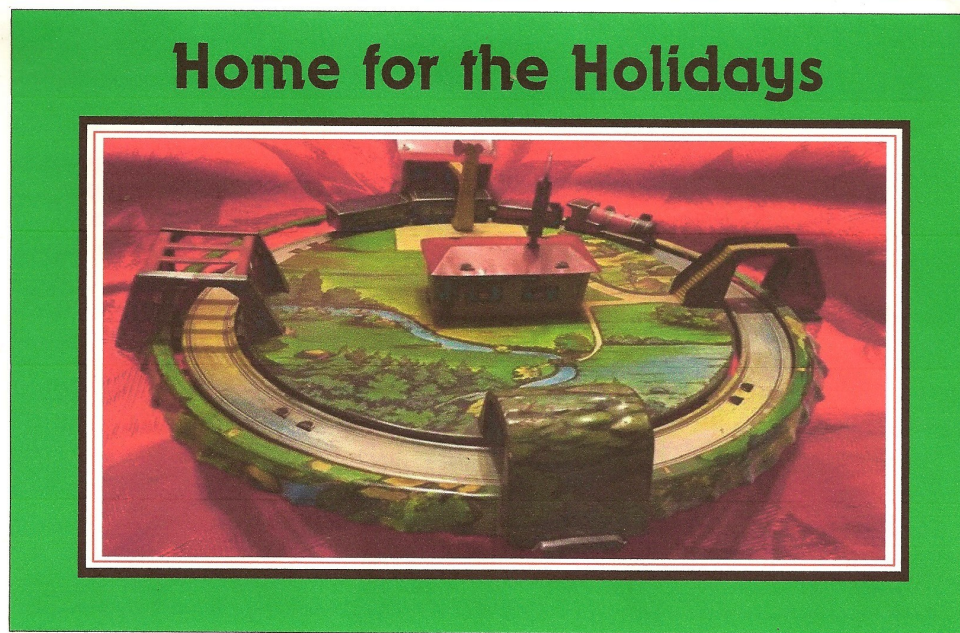
The MTH (Mike's Train House) Tinplate Classic is my favorite. It looks like a 1930's train. I bought the set in Yuba City at a Train Dealer there. This year no one has come over due to quarantine for COVID-19

*General notes:
Layout details: gauge,
track type, power, types
of trains, layout theme,
layout building assis-*

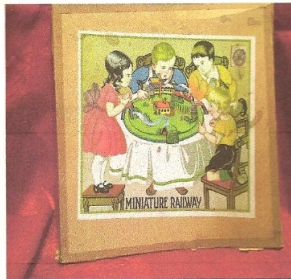
*tance, type of collection, other collecting
interests, and whatever your fellow read-
ers would like.*

O gauge. O gauge, Tin-plate, MTH, Passenger, oval track. Besides having a lot of O Gauge Lionel, I have American Flyer S Gauge. I have some 1930's O gauge tinplate trains that I do not run.

Holiday photos from members



Dina and Richard Zanotti's Christmas card always features an item from their fabulous collection. This year it's a 1926 German forerunner to the Marx Honeymoon Express clockwork toy, as explained inside the card (below).



(1) The "Miniature Railway" featured on this card, was made in Germany by the Distler Company about 1926. It closely resembles the Marx "Honeymoon Express" made in the U.S.A. the same year. It is the same size and shape.



(2) Who made it first? The Marx Company was known to take toys that other companies failed to make a profit on and streamline their production. They were able to sell their "Honeymoon Express" for 59 cents in 1926.



(3) The Marx Company continued the production of the "Honeymoon Express" well into the 1950s.

Holiday photos from members



John DeHaan's 2017 layout featured Moe's Garage with Hudsons and Studebakers parked outside. Both Hudson and Studebaker are represented in John's 1:1 vintage car collection.



Rich Kotowski sent this wonderful photo he calls "Midwest Christmas - Trains in the Basement". Dad is holding Rich's baby sister while cousins Pat, Mike, Jim and Richard enjoy the train layout. Rich says the loco is a Lionel #2018, which places this sometime in the late 50's - early 60's.



Jack Ahearn's 1995 Christmas Tree layout is a faithful recreation of the one he discovered on Christmas morning of 1942.



Jack's year-round Christmas tree layout is featured elsewhere in this issue.

Kit-Bashing as a Pandemic Pastime

By Mike Schafer

Some people turned to jigsaw puzzles to maintain sanity during the lockdown. Mike had a better idea.



Last December at the Turlock Train Show, in the entrance hall, they had tons of free train magazines. Most were the common but they had a few Model Railroading magazines that I picked up to browse through, as 20 years ago they always had modeling ideas that were so different. As I quickly flipped through the pages I stumbled across an article on converting Plasticville structures into nearly three feet long structures by combining several of the same original Plasticville buildings of the same kind.

One photo of a Pennsylvania Railroad terminal showed how using several Plasticville banks together could completely transform into something so different it really caught my Imagination. Another showed combining several Plasticville hospitals that formed an industrial building. It was the August 1994, issue and I kept that one magazine.

When I got home I put the magazine into my “great idea” box. Not all Ideas are keepers but this one made the cut. All I needed was time to put one of these structures together. Then came Covid-19 and stay at home requirements and by June I obviously had all the time needed to try making the Railroad Terminal. Depending on how long I wanted the terminal determined how many banks I would need. The bank front was the key wall needed to make the structure shown in



the magazine. It required five bank buildings which are easily found on eBay for \$15 to \$20 each. One guy was selling two banks in mint new condition but because those buildings were so common the price was still in the same price range.

The terminal had several openings and windows that required modification to the original bank, as banks usually don't have windows due to security reasons.

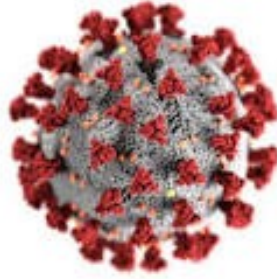
This “kit bash” attempt was not easy. The secret to a successful assembly required all walls to be perfectly vertical the entire three foot length. Also it had to form a perfect rectangle so that the bank roofs would still fit a new structure. Also part of the roof had to be made from styrene sheets of .080” thickness. I made several jigs to accomplish this and used “gel” superglue as it gives you about 5 seconds to align parts before it finishes the bond.

I made my terminal a Great Northern depot similar to the one in Great Falls, Montana. It didn't require a major change to the magazine's photos of the building that the author used as a Pennsylvania Terminal.

Construction time was three weeks. Keeping the long walls rigid was a challenge and required a lot of inside doubling materials to accomplish rigidity.

Down the track

Due to the ongoing pandemic and COVID-19 restrictions there are no set dates or locations for future events. Members will be notified by Email as each event is scheduled.



Contact us:

Club business: Carl Madsen, president - (916) 204-8217 laststoptrain@aol.com

Membership questions: Barbara Rohrs - (916) 730-1415 tjbrr@hotmail.com

TTOS-SVD Mission Statement:

Our mission is to bring together persons interested in the hobby of collecting and operating toy trains. The focus of activities shall be on promoting the best interests of the hobby through fellowship, a sense of good will, camaraderie within the membership, and exposing the general public to the hobby, encouraging greater interest in it and increasing membership.