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100 pages of holiday magic

CLASSIC TOY
TRAINS
SPECIAL ISSUE

CHRISTMAS *and* ELECTRIC TRAINS

GREAT TRAINS *and* **WARM MEMORIES!**

How model
railroads
delivered
holiday joy

ESSENTIAL IDEAS

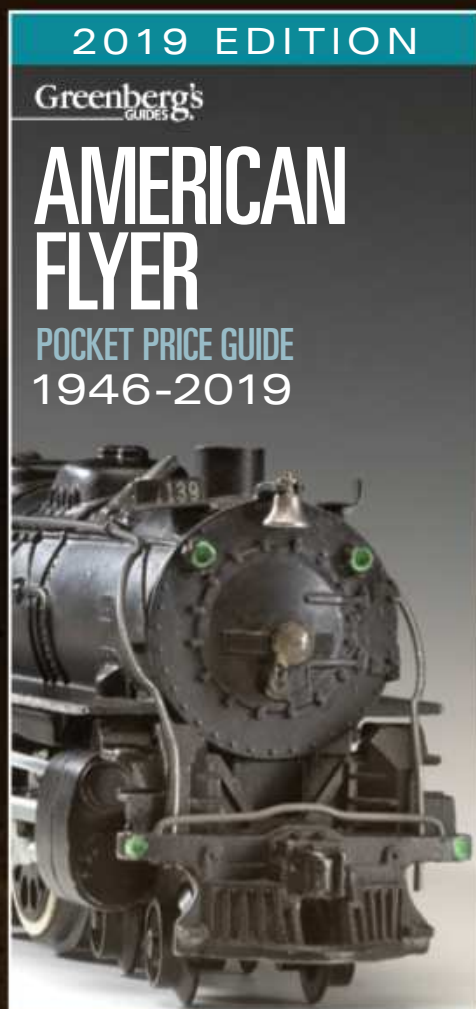
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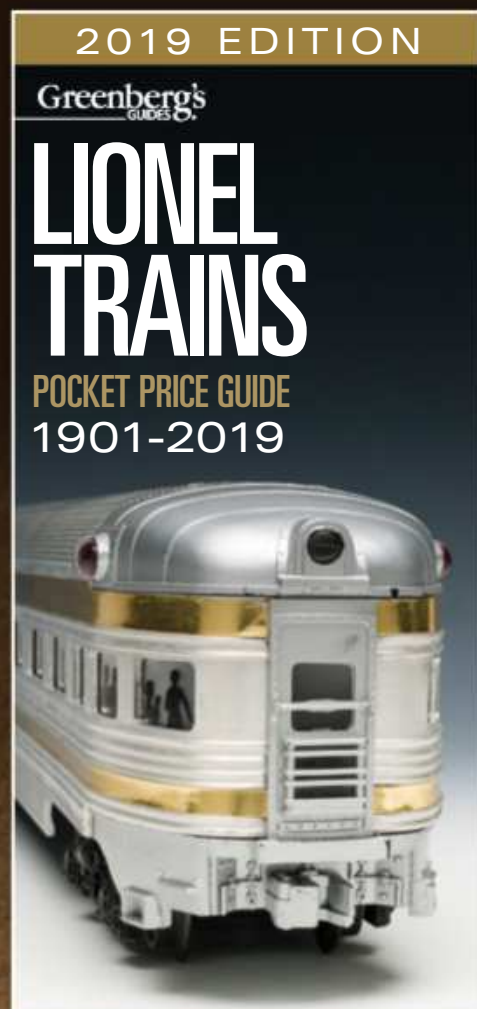
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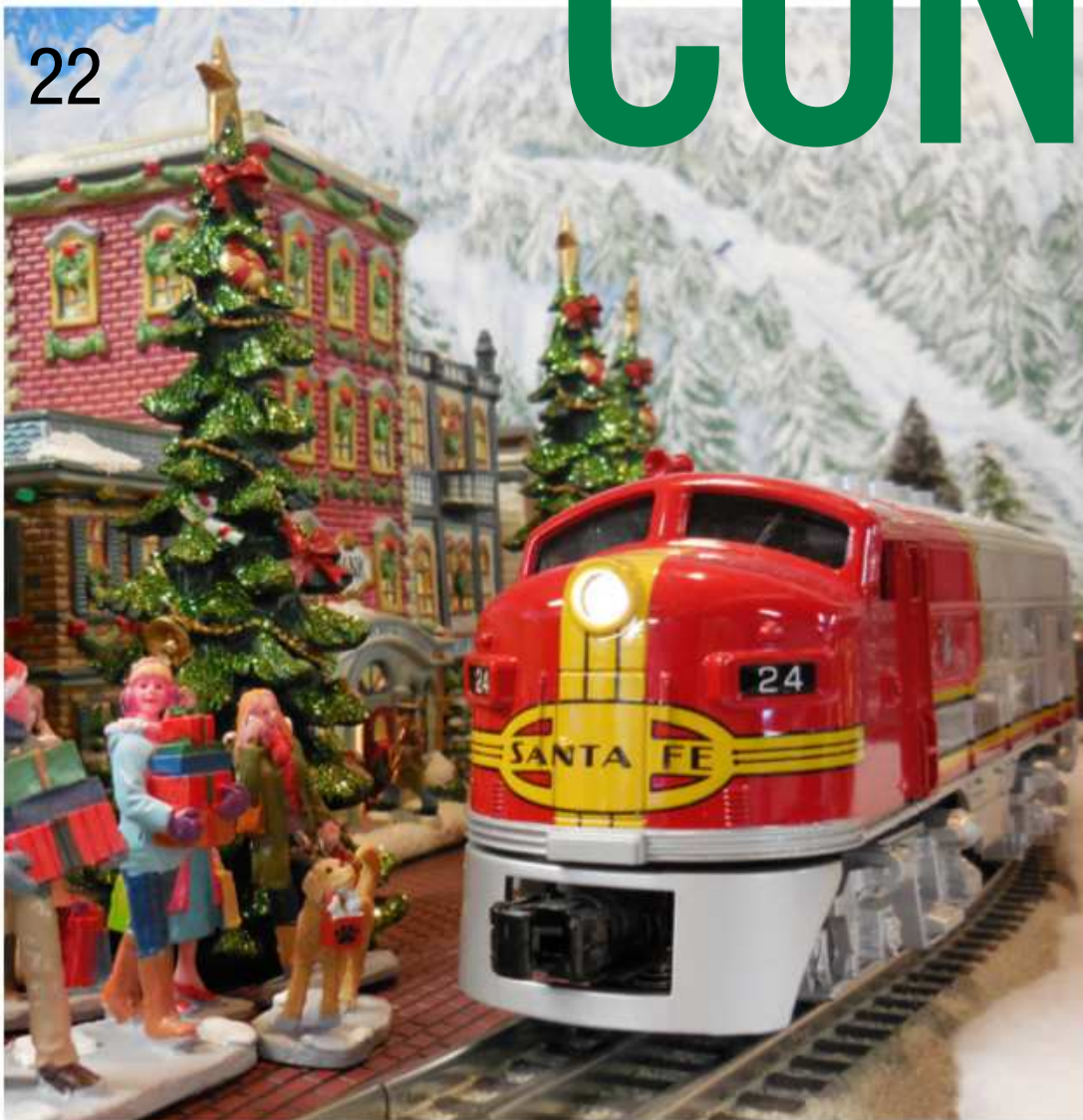
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SHARING THE JOYS OF TOY TRAINS *at Christmas*

Welcome to *Christmas and Electric Trains*, the eighth of an ongoing series of special-interest publications developed by the editorial and art teams at *Classic Toy Trains* magazine. Everyone who contributed to the creation of this colorful and magical 100-page look at how toy trains have enhanced and continue to add to the meaning of Christmas is so happy to be presenting a year's worth of outstanding effort.

And, like many of you readers, we're also wondering why CTT waited to concentrate on this terrific theme. Because for virtually every member of the toy train hobby, the enjoyment associated with those marvelous playthings began at Christmas or Hanukkah. Very likely, the holiday season still means electric trains for you.

A vintage Marx or American Flyer set may be running under a decorated tree in your home. Or something brand new from MTH Electric Trains or Lionel will be filling one of the neatly wrapped packages nearby. You can't imagine celebrating without a toy train.

Neither can any of us. In the pages to follow you'll discover newly written articles focusing in different ways on how Christmas and trains go together like eggnog and sugar cookies, Rudolph and his red nose, and mistletoe and kissing!

What's in this stocking stuffer of a publication? To begin, three stunning and nostalgic O gauge layouts whose scenery and trains will remind you of winter and Christmas. Then photo-laden tributes to the magnificent displays of electric trains found in the store windows and toy departments of retail outlets across postwar America.

Getting excited? Be sure you've been nice and not naughty before moving on to a visit to the famous Lionel showroom. Can't forget about the wish books printed by Sears, Ward, Firestone, and other national retail chains. They featured an array of brands, especially Marx, but also some exclusive promotional sets from Flyer and Lionel.

Best of all may be the memories and old pictures offered by readers. They remember what it was like to receive a toy train at the holidays in the 1940s and '50s. Let's hope their tales jog the minds of others who will then contact us at *Classic Toy Trains* to share their own stories. That will be the perfect gift for us at this special season.



ROGER CARP, editor

Roger Carp

CLASSIC TOY TRAINS SPECIAL ISSUE

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CHRISTMAS HAS MEANT TOY TRAINS FOR A

Century

LITTLE ENGINES AND
CARS HELP FAMILIES
CELEBRATE



Christmas means so much to us. Every person celebrating on December 25 has thoughts about which foods must be served, how the tree should be decorated, and when presents ought to be opened.

People can disagree in a good-natured way about whether turkey or ham is more appropriate and if a glass star or a porcelain angel should crown the fir tree (real or artificial? That's a whole other debate!). However, everybody we at *Classic Toy Trains* have spoken with insists there has to be a toy train running on a loop of track.

GRAND TRADITION

Quite a tradition – assembling a loop of track under a Christmas tree so a train can chug-chug-chug around it without interruption. It's a beloved tradition, one Americans, Canadians, and probably folks overseas have been nurturing

for more than a century. And one with great popularity even now.

The image of a train in operation beneath a decorated Christmas tree did much to inspire the editorial and art teams at *Classic Toy Trains* when we discussed the theme of our latest special-interest publication. Memories of growing up with a Lionel or American Flyer train at the foot of a tree motivated many members to recommend concentrating on a holiday subject.

Shortly after settling on *Christmas and Electric Trains* as the name and overarching motif, questions arose about the tradition. How far back did it extend? Also, what influenced its development?

No surprise to learn that people still arrange track under their tree and run a new or vintage train. Nor did it come as a shock to recall how popular that practice was during in prewar and postwar days.

But just when did families begin to associate miniature trains with the celebration of Christmas?





That question about the background of this tradition left us puzzled. So too did matters about the reasons why families celebrated with a toy train and how much time and money they might allocate to acquiring one. The search for answers was on.

SIMPLE BEGINNING

Understanding the history of toy trains and Christmas in America definitely requires us to broaden our thinking. Rather than focus on the locomotives and track under the tree, we need to investi-

gate the tradition of creating meaningful scenes there.

In the case of using objects to depict something of importance at the base of a Christmas tree, the religious meaning and symbolism of the holiday prevail. Christians believe December 25 was the day Jesus was born. If the choice of an evergreen represents the belief that Jesus lives on in ways unlike any mortal person, then why not show at its foot scenes linked to his birth and life?

Thus it happened at least as early as the middle part of

the 18th century that Protestants who had immigrated to Colonial America made miniature Nativity scenes in their homes prior to Christmas. The first group known to have done so consisted of Moravians who had been settling the Lehigh Valley in eastern Pennsylvania.

Moravian families created scenes they called by a German noun, "*putzen*" (translated as "finery," "trappings," or "decoration"). Other terms were "Christmas village" and "Christmas garden."

GARDENS GROW

Decades passed, with the size and scope of the individual *putzen* continuing to

increase. The centerpiece of the Nativity scenes consisted of a manger with figures of Joseph and Mary hovering over Jesus as a newborn. Customarily surrounding them were the Magi (Three Wise Men) as well as oxen and sheep. Artisans carved them all out of wood and then delicately painted them.

Individuals enlarged and enhanced the Nativity scenes to educate their children and testify to their faith. Some builders sprinkled sawdust and fine dirt to serve as the roads leading to the manger. Others scattered stones and moss to represent caves or grottoes and arranged sticks and twigs as miniature trees.

**THE SPIRIT BEHIND MAKING MORE ELABORATE
CHRISTMAS GARDENS DROVE INDIVIDUALS
AND FAMILIES TO MOVE FULL-SPEED AHEAD.**



Christmas villages had by the first half of the 19th century spread from the floor under a tree to additional scenes on the fireplace mantel and nearby tables. Expanding to more places inspired families to think beyond Nativity scenes. They modeled other events linked to the childhood of Jesus, such as the confrontation between King Herod and the Magi.

The more families wanted to represent, the more miniature animals and people, houses and fields needed. Soon, Christmas gardens had what were contemporary scenes reflecting the environment of rural America.

PLACE FOR TRAINS

Pictures of Christmas villages and reminiscences of them attested to the fact that by the turn of the 20th century biblical elements were

sharing space with modern ones. Farms and churches were as integral as mangers.

Most often, people had made by hand the details and structures they desired. But folks lacking a sense of creativity could turn to commercial sources. They depended on painted wood and metal toys representing horse-drawn wagons, fences, humans and animals, and barns.

The spirit behind making more elaborate Christmas garden drove individuals and families to move full-speed ahead. Which motivated them to add trains into their three-dimensional visions of life in the countryside. Cast-iron renderings of steam engines, boxcars, and passenger coaches soon entered.

THE RIGHT ADDITION

Integrating miniature windup and electric trains into Christmas *putzen* made sense for two basic reasons.

First, railroads had, by the early 1900s, become key players in American life. They carried every kind of raw and

finished good across short and vast distances, along with people from different classes. Relatives could travel a long way to join in the Christmas festivities, thanks to the growing rail networks.

Second, toy versions of locomotives and rolling stock appealed to the youngsters waiting for their holiday gifts. It was fair to say that by the first half of the 20th century, an electric train had risen to become the most desirable and sophisticated plaything a child, really a young man, might dream of owning.

Of course, even before electric toy trains came to dominate the domestic market, kids were pulling or pushing wood or metal engines and cars across a floor. So those non-animated little trains appeared in Christmas gardens first.







Soon after the opening of the 20th century, models powered by batteries or household current arrived. Standard and O gauge trains produced by Lionel and American Flyer or Ives pushed their way into the market. The look of *putzen* changed to overshadow all the Nativity scenes.

COMING HOME

A toy train operating over a circle of track at the base of a Christmas tree became an indispensable ingredient in the gardens being created for holiday celebrations.

The tradition gained momentum even during the Great Depression. It became more widespread after World War II. The late 1940s and '50s were a golden age for electric trains, and the annual holiday season was the time they peaked in popularity.

Youngsters coming of age after the war believed in the wonder of a toy train not only because their fathers were connecting a loop of track under their Christmas tree. Even kids whose living rooms lacked a decorated garden and some kind of Nativity scene felt the excitement a new set generate.

Boys and girls had ample opportunities to see model trains in action. What catalog images introduced, other cultural phenomena in the late 1940s and '50s invigorated.

INFLUENCE OF DISPLAYS

The primary boost to children's imaginations took place downtown. Department stores and other businesses, eager to boost sales at Christmas, filled windows with displays using trains.

Adults and kids residing in cities on the eastern seaboard or in regional centers in the Midwest and the Pacific Coast recalled being thrilled by operating store displays. They described the magnificent layouts built behind the windows of giant retailers, such as Gimbels, May Co., Wanamaker's Jordan Marsh, and Foley's, not to mention major chains, notably Sears, Roebuck and J.C. Penney.

Anyone who has watched the movie, *A Christmas Story*, will understand the awe and joy animated displays of trains generated in the folks crowding by the thick panes of glass to stare. Moms and dads stood in the cold outside downtown businesses for as long as their sons and daughters did, taking in sights they found truly astounding.

ANOTHER SOURCE

The cultural phenomenon of store displays with toy trains played an enormous role in advancing the public's association of those playthings with Christmas. Kids enthralled by the sets they saw in motion walked home certain of what they wanted for Christmas or Hanukkah. What the annual consumer catalogs illustrated had come to life in front of their eyes in windows or on countertops.

A second source of entertainment promoted electric trains as a special part of Christmas in the postwar era. Something new and incredible was transforming national life: television. Compact layouts impressed the audiences tuning in to watch variety shows, live dramas, and children's programs.



Add in the advertisements large manufacturers of electric trains put in Sunday newspapers, mass-circulation magazines, and comic books. Everywhere you looked in the decade after World War II, trains appeared.

HOLIDAYS ARRIVE

Households across the U.S. and Canada shifted attention to the upcoming holidays around Thanksgiving. They carried home a Christmas tree and unpacked delicate ornaments to arrange on the branches. Grown-ups checked over their budget, debating what they could afford, especially if paid for over many weeks.

A chunk of a family's savings would be directed to toys. Every boy and girl had a wish list a mile long. Which wasn't out of the ordinary considering how the range of

playthings available after the war was skyrocketing. Companies old and new announced novel and improved dolls, miniature vehicles, science outfits, stuffed animals, cap pistols, pedal cars, woodworking tools, and more all the time.

In a field increasingly complex and varied, electric trains continued to stand out. They remained the priority of millions of boys and fathers. Nothing seemed to surpass a new set, with a powerful locomotive and railcars.

This at a time when kids typically received presents only twice a year: once at their birthday and again at the holidays. Life was otherwise a desert for them unless they managed to earn spending money delivering newspapers or performing another kind of menial task. So different from childhood today!

So youngsters dropped lots of hints about what they wanted. To suggest an electric train represented a bountiful dream, one the grown-ups might reject angrily as way too expensive for the family or even selfish to wish for.

FAMILY INVESTMENT

To the relief of millions of boys and a few girls in post-war times, a set did come on December 25. Maybe it wasn't the deluxe outfit they had yearned for, yet it still was something entertaining.

All too quickly, kids figured out the train represented more than just a gift handed exclusively to them and having no limits on what they

could do with it. The new set assumed a greater identity.

According to many hobbyists who got their first train in the 1940s or '50s, the set seemed less like their personal plaything and more like an investment belonging to the family. It really might have been there as much for Dad as it was for Junior.

Adults helped remove the train from its box and then assembled the loop of track. They read the instruction booklet and connected the wires going from the transformer to the lockon. Fathers and uncles demanded time at the controls. Mothers, meanwhile, arranged scenery along the main line.

**FOR POSTWAR AMERICA, AS NEVER BEFORE, AN
ELECTRIC TOY TRAIN WAS A CRITICAL AND
DELIGHTFUL PART OF CHRISTMAS TREE DISPLAYS.**



SOME RESTRICTIONS

Even where parents or grandparents assured little ones the train did belong to them, they added restrictions on it from the get-go.

Above all, kids were not free to play with their trains whenever they wanted. For many boomers, their O or S gauge set saw light only after Thanksgiving and stayed out for just a few weeks.

Otherwise, the track and trains plus whatever accessories the family had accumulated ended up packed away during the spring, summer, and autumn. Winter was the only season for trains.

Children permitted to operate the set did so with the expectation they would handle everything with great care. A Lionel or Flyer engine and cars should be prized high above Tootsie Toys and Lincoln Logs. Placed gently

on the track, it must be run at a reasonable speed and treated oh so well.

Not long after New Year's, family members gathered to pack each model in its box. Next, they retrieved the set carton and put all the pieces back in. From the living room, the train returned to a closet or attic. Not until the following autumn, when Thanksgiving had passed, would it come out again.

THEY DID IT

Buying an electric train represented a big and tough decision for millions of American families. They sacrificed scarce dollars to buy the set, seeing it as an investment and not a mere toy.

The Lionel or American Flyer set would indeed become part of life at home, a source of pleasure to be used repeatedly over several years.



Handling the train with care, maintaining it as instructed by the manufacturer, and packing it away for many months would ensure it lasted. In that way, the treasured set might be handed down to a new generation as an heirloom.

CENTRAL ROLE AT HOME

Above all else, the train set would become a vital element in the family's celebration of Christmas. Whether it was incorporated into a Nativity scene augmented with home-made structures and carved

figures or dime-store fencing and building kits, the speedy train was going to be there for the enjoyment of all.

That conclusion was accurate no matter what kind of train. Sure, families spent more on electric sets from Lionel or Gilbert. Yet far less expensive models from Marx, even battery-operated or mechanical trains from that toy producer, had cherished spots in the Christmas festivities in American households.

The point boiled down to something simple. A miniature train occupied a central



role at Christmas in postwar America. Untold numbers of children hoped for a set. Many received one that might become the foundation of a layout built over several years with guidance from an older sibling or another relative. Their train possibly launched a lifelong leisure-time pursuit still being enjoyed.

So much might ensue once a family decided to invest in an electric train. Christmas celebrations and the lives of any youngsters were never going to be the same. Life took on a new meaning, and the happiness created formed memories being shared still.

MAKING A GRAND COMEBACK

Memories shared to the present moment and inspiring longtime toy

train enthusiasts as well as newcomers to their hobby to breath new life into the grand tradition. So often we at *Classic Toy Trains* learn of guys returning after experiencing all the fun of putting a model railroad around a Christmas



tree. The present relives the past for them.

A world characterized by intense, ongoing, and unpredictable change grasps the beauty of Christmas and seizes on the warmth and enjoyment miniature trains never stop providing. Trees go on being decked out in ornaments and tinsel. Families continue to arrange a loop of two- or three-rail track at the base for a train.

Postwar American Flyer and Lionel sets emerge from retirement to strut their stuff once more on December 25. Occasionally, prewar O or Standard gauge trains do as well. Imagine how many years they have entertained Santa Claus and his elves.

More likely, contemporary Christmas displays feature O gauge or

Large scale trains cataloged in recent years. Parents and kids head down to home-improvement centers or hobby shops to revive a tradition by selecting a *Polar Express* or North Pole Central set from Lionel, one of the shiny prewar reissues available from MTH, or the big trains produced by Bachmann or LGB.

UPDATING GARDENS

Few modelers stop after laying down the track and wiring a transformer. They may not feel compelled to create Nativity scenes along the main line, but men and women seldom refuse to stop with a bare and simple setting on the floor.

Layouts around a Christmas tree, regardless of their dimensions or gauge, come to life thanks to all the ancillary items out there. Folks prize the wide variety of residential and commercial buildings,



landscaping materials and lights, realistic vehicles and figures, and so much else available at crafts stores, hobby shops, and beyond.

Praise goes to Department 56 for paving the way toward evocative and attractive displays. For more than 40 years, it has offered serious and seasonal builders dozens of cool holiday-oriented porcelain structures and details. As a consequence, even the least-experienced folks can create a nostalgic railroad.

Once upon a time, hobbyists had few options for decorating their villages beyond the pasteboard houses and stations imported from Japan. Following World War II, their choices multiplied as Bachmann Bros. started selling plastic fencing.

Explosive sales of that necessary item very quickly motivated the Philadelphia manufacturer to add an array

of suburban bungalows to what it called Plasticville U.S.A. Shortly thereafter in the 1950s, the fictitious locale included police and fire departments, farms, supermarkets, a post office, and lots of railroad facilities.

These days, descendants of *putzen* can dispense with the antiques in favor of illuminated structures decorated with patches of snow on their roofs. Items from Lemax and Lionel, along with those from Department 56, are all you really need.

BEST TIME

Remarkable isn't it when you realize a tradition whose roots extend deep into early American history has gone on blossoming in unique ways. The biblical depictions originally characterizing Christmas villages evolved to include modern elements reflecting the centrality of

agriculture and household manufacturing. In time, of course, railroading made its presence known and so has never departed.

Well into the 21st century, despite the decline in the numbers of people who regularly travel by train and labor on the railroad, the tradition of placing a miniature locomotive and cars beneath the branches of a Christmas tree thrives.

And will into the foreseeable future. The wonderful sights and sounds unite families at Christmas, reminding them of their heritage and injecting the special day with hope and belief that the past can influence the present in the finest ways. •



TOY TRAIN *Memories*

Readers of *Classic Toy Trains* like to reminisce about their first toy train. Over the past few years, we've requested their stories, and many hobbyists answered with heart-warming memories and vintage photographs.

Starting in these pages and continuing in two more sections, you'll find some of these unforgettable accounts. As you read them and check out the accompanying pictures, think back to your own life. Remember how you started out with toy trains. Recall the special person who introduced you to a life-long pursuit with a set from American Flyer, Lionel, or Marx.

Letting your memory drift back to that Christmas morning or Hanukkah evening decades ago will help you show your gratitude to the caring parent or doting grandparent, the sympathetic uncle or aunt, or the thoughtful brother or cousin who believed you would be happier, whatever your age then, if you had a toy train.

He or she was right! No matter what has occurred to you in the intervening decades, your life has been more fulfilling and downright fun because toy trains have been part of it. Let's see how you can now pass that joy to someone younger.

The Most Wonderful Christmas in Any Boy's Life!

...THE DAY HE GETS...THE DAY YOU GIVE

LIONEL TRAINS

Everybody's happy when it's a Lionel Train Christmas. Sonny, the engineer, just can't wait to send that big, solid, gleaming locomotive rattling around the track... with a long, exciting line of cars whizzing behind it. And dad and mother get the kind of a thrill that comes only when you make the Christmas dream of a boy who's been hoping, and hoping for Lionel Trains, come true.

He just has to see them anywhere, anytime, anyplace and he knows that nothing else equals LIONEL... for smoke-puffing, whistle-blowing realism... for steel-wheeled solidity that can "take it"... for remote-control precision... for the thrill of grade-climbing, speed-busting *Magne-Traction*! Only Lionel Trains have all these features, plus real railroad-type remote-control knuckle couplers, and heavy duty die-cast trucks.

And, LIONEL TRAINS are what Dad really wants, too. World's finest for over 50 years.

The only trains that fully match your boy's dream are Lionel Trains. Start him off with them this Christmas. And as time goes on, build a bigger and better railroad around them with real-as-life Lionel accessories.

OPERATING OIL DERRICK AND PUMP
AUTOMATIC STOCK EXCHANGE
AUTOMATIC WATCHMAN AND CROSSING GATE
AUTOMATIC DEPARTMENT STORE
OPERATING COAL RAMP AND HOIST CAR

Has, fillet, see them, read all about them in the new big 36 page catalogue. Hear them on the railroad sound effects record! See special coupon offer below... send coupon now!

*Play on all 78 R.P.M. phonograph records... some band speeds on automatic changers.

LIONEL TRAINS, Inc. Office Box 104, Melrose Square Station, New York, N. Y.
Please send me a copy of your 36-page catalogue after, please, receive 1 dollar bill in store payment and postage.

1. The new 16-page full-color Lionel catalogue.
2. The new 36-page full-color Lionel catalogue.
3. 10 full-color Lionel billboards.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____

LIONEL, like other major manufacturers of toy trains, capitalized on the public's association of those playthings with Christmas. It placed large advertisements in the comics section of Sunday newspapers all over the country to prod kids to ask for a set from Santa or Mom and Dad.

DAD JUST COULDN'T WAIT FOR CHRISTMAS MORNING

— *Ralph F. Tridico*

In the perfect toy train story, parents wait until Christmas morning before giving a first train set to their lucky son. My dad was a bit impatient. He couldn't wait until the early hours of December 25th in 1947 to get me started. I'm glad he didn't!

In early November of 1947, my father brought home from his construction site four 4 x 8-foot sheets of plywood and put them in the basement. Then he reminded my younger brother and me that we were not allowed in the basement.

For two or three weeks sounds of saws and hammers were heard coming from the

basement. Then odors of paint permeated the house.

Finally, Dad said we could come see what was going on.

As my brother and I got to the bottom of the staircase, we could see an 8 x 16-foot field of green on sawhorses. O gauge track covered it.

Dad was running a Lionel no. 671 turbine around the outer loop without a tender, trying to get it to stop automatically at the opened no. 313 bascule bridge. He finally got it to stop when the bridge



AFTER THE TRIDICO FAMILY had moved to New Jersey, Ralph went about modifying the O gauge layout. A mountain dominated the back, with the Plasticville U.S.A. buildings in front forming a town.

was opened. More accessories were wired up, including a Lionel water tower, a log loader, and a coal elevator.

Dad worked on the trains every night after work and on weekends. I kept watching (my brother lost interest) until Dad asked me to help wire some of the turnouts and unloading tracks. It was a great learning experience.

we moved from Yeadon, Pa. (a suburb of Philadelphia) to Ocean City, N.J., on the South Jersey Shore, in 1953.

After we moved, almost two years went by before our family had a home of our own with any kind of free space for a layout. Then, of course, the field of green plywood came out of storage and a layout was constructed.

For two or three weeks sounds of saws and hammers were heard coming from the basement.



RALPH (RIGHT) AND HIS BROTHERS ROBERT AND VINCENT stood at their O gauge layout in 1952. Favorite Lionel operating accessories included the nos. 97 coal elevator and 164 log loader on the right.

Then one weekend right before Christmas when mom was not home, Dad and three of the men he worked with moved the 8 x 16-foot field of green from the basement to the living room floor.

Mom came home from her trip on Sunday evening and was overwhelmed by what she found in the living room. Mom was not happy because all the furniture was gone from the room, as were the tables and lamps. Lionel had taken over Mom's space! But the trains stayed through New Year's. By then, five trains were running at once.

Our invasion of Mom's domain did not dare happen again! We moved the trains to the unfinished second floor. That's where they stayed until

As time went on, many of the trains started showing their years of use (all of them had been purchased in the late 1940s, with the exception of a few nice pieces I received for Christmas in the middle 1950s). Wheels were falling off, side rods were bent or missing, and motor bearings and brushes were worn thin.

The last time the green field was placed on the sawhorses was the winter of 1960. Then I went off to college.

But I did manage to keep all the trains and still get them out every Christmas to run on my permanent layout. Better yet, I have a son and a grandson, and both of them have shown a real interest in trains. They put up a carpet layout every Christmas.

A SET IN 1953 WAS JUST THE STARTING POINT

— *Kim Werkmeister*

My original set, a Lionel no. 2201WS steam freight train, and a ZW transformer arrived for Christmas of 1953. A week or so later, Dad installed everything on a 4 x 8-foot sheet of plywood in our basement.

The layout stayed with the single loop of three-rail track until the next Christmas. That was when Dad added an inner loop and built a tunnel.

It's amazing the no. 685 steamer survived with no damage!

Christmas and birthdays and a few purchases over the next few years kept Dad busy developing the layout. He added the upper reversing loop and some accessories. A no. 345 culvert unloader arrived for Christmas 1956.

I was kind of cautious at first. I just had fun learning to control the train. Then I started hauling things around on the train, sometimes with my sister's encouragement. A few minor derailments occurred due to excessive speed, but who cared?

The fun really started when we got the second-level reversing loop. It was a steep climb, and the steamer would pull only one or two cars up the grade. I had many adventures learning the limits of trains on grades. It's amazing the no. 685 steamer survived!

The arrival of a no. 624 Chesapeake & Ohio diesel switcher equipped with Magne-Traction solved most of the problems. It did allow for spectacular train wrecks.

I had a Lionel no. 3461 log dump car that would almost throw logs unless the voltage was turned down. I installed enough lighted accessories to make the layout look neat in the dark. Meanwhile, it was an endless challenge to keep the culvert unloader operating.

I learned a lot about the physics of toy train operation, momentum, and directional stability. Heavy cars had to be at the front of the train. If



A LIFELONG FASCINATION with Lionel trains for Kim Werkmeister was sparked on Christmas morning back in 1953, with the arrival of a no. 2201WS steam freight outfit. Very shortly, Kim's dad would move the oval onto a 4 x 8-foot sheet of plywood.

they were at the back behind lighter cars, the light cars would derail in the corners.

Making sure loads placed in the cars were attached was essential. Controlling speed going down the grade was a problem and could result in the engine ending up on its side at the corner. Trying to back a train up the reversing loop was a challenge. Luckily, all the disasters remained on the layout and not the floor!

I stayed interested in the trains through the arrival of

rocket launchers and exploding ammo dump and boxcar in the early 1960s. My brother had a bunch of miniature soldiers and army equipment that added to all the fun.

Then slot cars arrived. He and I removed the trains to make room for a racetrack.

About 15 years ago I found time to set up a layout in my basement. I used it to test ideas I had for a real layout while I refinished a spare bedroom. I still like the challenge and fun of steep grades!



LOOK AT HOW, thanks to an ambitious and skilled father, Kim's three-rail empire had grown by 1956. The highlight of the two-level layout was a Lionel no. 345 culvert unloader, installed on the left side by Kim. Unfortunately as other owners could attest, the novel accessory never operated dependably.

FROM ROCK ISLAND TO ALASKA AT CHRISTMAS OF 1959

- Jim Bielanski

My family introduced me to toy trains at Christmas of 1959, when I was only 2 years old. However, full-sized trains had caught my attention even before then.

We lived on the south side of Chicago. Just down the block from our home, four railroads converged at Beverly Junction. I remember the Baltimore & Ohio, the Chesapeake & Ohio, the Pennsylvania RR, and the Rock Island.

I was so captivated by the big trains that my mother would put me in the backyard playpen so I could watch them go by during the summer. But in the winter, I had no trains to watch from the backyard since it was too cold to sit outside in a playpen.

So for Christmas 1959, my grandmother bought me the Lionel no. 1611 Alaska train set. It came with a no. 614 switch engine, a single-dome tank car, Alaska RR gondola with three red canisters, a flatcar with bridge structure, and an Alaska caboose. There also was an extra no. 3428 operating U.S. mail car.

I believe my grandmother bought the set at Marshall Fields or Sears, Roebuck in downtown Chicago. Those were the only places I recall her going to shop.

I was allowed to have the trains set up in the basement on a 4 x 8-foot board during

the colder weather (usually September through April). Every year, more items would be added to the layout, which eventually expanded to an L-shaped layout consisting of two 4 x 8s. Later, it grew to a U-shaped layout.

My parents probably recognized my Lionel "addiction," allowing the layout to remain set up but non-operational during the summer months. That was fine with me since I would play outside with my friends in the open fields and the right-of-way around Beverly Junction.

My favorite activity was walking on the metal pipes used to control the position of the points on the switch tracks. Sometimes, the switch tender moved the pipes to knock us off the equipment.

Today, children would be arrested for playing so close to railroad equipment, but in the 1960s trains in that area

were limited to 20 mph due to the complexity of the switches, curves, and diamonds, plus the proximity of the Rock Island's station.

I remember items added to my layout matched with what was going on in my real world. My second diesel was a Lionel no. 231 Rock Island



ON CHRISTMAS OF 1960, family members gathered to celebrate and join three-year-old Jim on the floor with his O-27 trains, including a new semaphore. His dad, on the right, posed with the grandmother who bought the set as well as two of Jim's uncles.

Alco FA that matched in name only. The color scheme did not match what the Rock Island was running at the time, but I didn't care.

I received a Lionel no. 2023 Union Pacific Alco A-A combination because the

no. 2333 New York Central F3 A-A and matching B unit. Why? At that time the Penn Central was operating the old Pennsy Panhandle line, so I occasionally saw a New York Central B unit there.

I still have my original

I was so captivated by the big trains that my mother would put me in the backyard playpen so I could watch them go by during the summer.

Rock Island was considering a merger with UP. Some of the UP's surplus E-unit diesels (still in UP livery and name) showed up to pull Rock Island suburban commuter passenger trains. At least the colors of the Lionel Alcos were correct.

In 1969, I received a Lionel

Alaska set and run the same 614 on my layout today, almost 60 years later. The only thing different with my 614 is that it's on its third power truck assembly. I have a fourth one ready to replace the current one when it goes bad. By the way, I also have a mint 614 that I display.

CHRISTMAS MEANT FLYER AND LIONEL FOR MY FAMILY

— Glenn Gilliss



Memories with my dad and me began when I was four years old in 1957. Toy trains were always a part of our Christmas celebration.

My father had bought my sisters trains when they were born. Wendy in 1948 got a Lionel no. 1426WS set, consisting of no. 2400-series green-and gray passenger cars pulled by a no. 2026 steam engine and tender. Carol came along in 1950. Her train was the no. 1467W

came to our home was quite a story. We lived in Baltimore, just about five miles from Pimlico Race Course. Dad decided one day to play the daily double, and he won! Not only did Mom get a new washing machine but we also got a black-and-white television. And I got my train set. That turned out to be the first time – and the last time – Dad ever played the ponies!

During my childhood, Dad would erect “Christmas

MUCH AS GLENN GILLISS liked Lionel trains, he would never have complained about the American Flyer Northern Pacific set he found under the Christmas tree in 1957. He was lucky enough to get the original version from 1956 that had three diesels and five cars.

the living room in one huge crazy-shaped circuit. I ran the trains a little slower than he liked. I can still hear Dad saying, “Give it some juice. We’re running behind schedule!”

Eventually, Dad decided to move the Christmas garden from under our tree to the floor of my bedroom. That meant I had to sleep in Wendy’s bedroom on Christmas Eve while Dad and Mom put the layout together. I went to bed not having any idea how the ovals of track were going to look on the bare plywood.

Christmas morning there it was in all its glory! Illuminated Plasticville buildings, working streetlights, green-dyed sawdust for the grass and bushes, our American Flyer Mystic station, a Lionel no. 394 rotary beacon, and the awesome tunnel Dad built using Life-Like Mountain Paper.

We ran Lionel and Flyer together. To Dad and me, not to mention all my uncles and

cousins (who also had trains), the layout looked great.

Later, Dad and I built layouts together. He let me place the unpainted plastic figures on the layout and maybe a few trees and some cars.

I began constructing the holiday layouts on my own – although always with Dad’s approval. Also, I never waited to get going until Christmas Eve. That’s been the story since I was in junior high school. These days, my grandchildren join me in the annual Christmas project.

I can still hear Dad saying, “Give it some juice. We’re running behind schedule!”

freight set led by a no. 2023 Union Pacific Alco FA combination in yellow with gray and red details.

When I was born in 1953 there were concerns by the medical staff about my making it to my fourth birthday. Well as they say, “The Lord was with me.”

I turned four in March of 1957, and at Christmas that year I became the owner of an American Flyer no. 5685RH Vista Dome Limited. That Northern Pacific streamliner had the A-B-A combination of Alco diesels and five passenger cars. Besides the train, Dad got a huge transformer that could run two trains.

How that beautiful set

gardens” (That’s what in Baltimore we called the layouts built under Christmas trees.)

My father and I had a ritual that happened every year, sometime between Halloween and Thanksgiving. We’d bring down from the attic all the track – Lionel as well as Flyer. Then we would sit on the living room floor and clean every piece using a couple of rags and a bottle of Life-Like track cleaning fluid.

After cleaning the track, Dad would suggest we give the trains a test run.

We had tracks running from the front door, through the living room, out to the dining room, under the dining chairs, and back out to



THE FIRST OF THE GILLISS CHILDREN to be given a toy train was Glenn’s sister Wendy, posing with him on Christmas in 1954 or ’55. She had received a Lionel O-27 passenger set in 1948, and it ran on the three-rail loop barely visible at the lower right.

SANTA BROUGHT A GREAT SET TO MINNESOTA IN 1954 - *Jeff Setterlund*

I remember Christmas Eve of 1954. It was winter in Duluth, Minn. Lots of snow and cold. My brother, Jack, who was then six, and I (four years older) were waiting for Santa Claus (really, our neighbor, Curley, dressed up in a red and white suit and padding) to get to our house.

To keep us from our impatience, and our parents' irritation, somebody suggested we keep a watch out the front window for Santa. Next thing I remember is noise at the backdoor hallway. We were sure it was Santa. Being the oldest child, I was asked to help Santa bring in his gifts.

Jack and I were very surprised and happy to receive a Lionel no. 1521WS set. It was set up on the floor to run. The set had a no. 2065 steam

engine and tender with nos. 3620 searchlight car, 3562 barrel car (the scarce one with a black-painted trough), 6561 cable car, 6460 crane car and 6419-25 work caboose.

How could anyone find so much pleasure in watching a train go around and around? Well Jack and I certainly did!

I didn't realize it then, but the five-car set was expensive (\$69.95). That was a huge amount of money for our family. Mom and Dad must have made some sacrifices to afford a set like that, and we must have been instructed to take care very good care of it.

The story goes Dad purchased the set through the tavern he frequented so he could get a wholesale discount rather than pay full retail. I don't know if that's



JAN. 1955

THE PLEASURE THE SETTERLUND BROTHERS had with their Lionel steam freight outfit, especially its three operating cars, never ebbed. At Christmas of 1955, they shared the good times with their cousin and a neighbor. Was the cowboy suit another gift from Santa?

true. I'd like to know why he chose that set. Perhaps the operating features were the reason or the discounted price. Maybe it was the one that was available.

I don't recall my parents involved in playing with the train with us – just my

brother and me. We really liked the three nice operating cars. Jack and I never got any accessories or switches, so we had to improvise, like using a cardboard box for a tunnel. That probably made the train even more fun for us. And, yes, I still run the set today. •

How could anyone find so much pleasure in watching a train go around and around?



NEITHER JEFF NOR HIS BROTHER had requested the Lionel no. 1521WS freight set their parents gave them for Christmas of 1954. According to family lore, their dad picked it up at a reduced price through his favorite tavern. The three operating cars made it the perfect gift.

Gifts FROM THE BUCKEYE STATE

PHOTOS FROM GORDON HOUGH
SHOWCASE AN AMAZING LAYOUT

Photos by **Gordon Hough**

Every six months, photos of O gauge trains traversing the snowy hills and quaint villages of a sprawling layout arrive on my desk. What a treat! And they represent the outstanding modeling done by Gordon Hough with help from his mother, Jeannie, who finishes the scenery and paints the backdrops.

No matter fast I try to respond, my expression of thanks always gets back to Gordon too late. Sort of like with the folks who lived in the towns the Lone Ranger and Tonto helped: “We didn’t even get a chance to say thank you,” some old-timer would say on the TV western.

➤ 1. DAYS BEFORE Christmas, shoppers hurry to pick out their gifts for loved ones. Then they’ll scamper on the local passenger train heading to the nearby villages. The holiday vignette is only one of the many colorful sights on Gordon Hough’s layout.







↑ 2. GORDON, WHOSE CAREER as a musician and band leader has blossomed over the past 30 years, made sure to have a marching band on his layout. In fact, if you look closely to the left, you'll glimpse a cool guy in jeans playing the saxophone. That's our host!

Gordon doesn't want to avoid hearing from *Classic Toy Trains*. But his job as music manager and occasional bandmaster for one of the premier cruise lines demands that he return to sea after just a few days back home in Ohio.

Yes, the fellow whose 15 x 16-foot display models the frigid temperatures and icy streets associated with winter spends his time sailing through the warm waters of the Caribbean Sea.

LIFELONG CONNECTION

Count Gordon among the hobbyists who, if asked what they connect their trains to, immediately answer Christmas.

He enjoys telling the tale of receiving his first set on a cold morning on December 25, not to mention the subsequent holiday times when family members presented him with additions to his roster.

Hastily, though, Gordon corrects two possible misconceptions people might have about his Christmas memories. First, they originated in the 1970s and not 20 or 30 years earlier. For all intents and purposes, he is among

the younger individuals building toy train layouts and operating contemporary sets on them.

Second and perhaps more difficult to believe about this dyed-in-the-wool O gauger, Gordon was initiated into model railroading with HO scale trains. He remembers with fondness the Tyco



→ 3. BOYS AND GIRLS construct snow forts and gather ammunition in anticipation of their next battle. Let's hope the youngsters don't decide to aim their snowballs at the windows of that passenger train!

Santa Fe freight set wrapped in its box beneath the family Christmas tree in 1974. He still cherishes that neat diesel switcher, gondola, boxcar, and caboose.

Somewhere along the way, probably while honing his chops in middle school and high school as a musician, composer, and arranger, Gordon left the HO trains behind. Gone was the 4 x 8-foot layout his dad had built. The old Santa Fe set went into storage, nearly forgotten by the youngster who had once loved it.

NEW HOME – OLD HOBBY

The 1980s proved to be exciting years for Gordon, as his career took off. His skills on four instruments plus experience leading his own band culminated in his being hired to oversee entertainment on ships sailing the Western Hemisphere. A by-product of Gordon's success was being able to purchase a house.

And with the new residence came a basement – an empty one crying out for something to fill the void and entertain its owner and any guests happening to drop by.

Gordon rediscovered his trains and felt himself dreaming as never before of constructing an enormous, beautifully landscaped layout in the lower level of his home. Somehow, maybe because of the reading he had done or after talking with other modelers, Gordon's dream featured bigger trains running on three rails.

Coinciding with the start of a brand-new century arose Gordon's passion for O gauge. Over the past 15 or so years, he has finished a trio of pleasing layouts.

The first railroad Gordon generously describes as a "warm-up." It was a learning experience regarding how to lay track, make scenery, select structures, and handle the different tasks involved with the electronics and control system.

Once suitably warmed up, Gordon launched work on the great winter-themed layout showcased here. Thanks to input and assistance from his mother, he can call his Christmas display as finished as is possible in the hobby.



← **4. THE HORSE-drawn sleigh in the center of this photo makes a striking contrast with the postwar streamlined passenger cars and the contemporary MTH Santa Fe Dash-8 diesel.**

← **5. JUST WHAT do those little scamps think they're doing, pushing a huge snowball onto the *Blue Comet* train steaming into town before Christmas Eve?**



for "Little Layout") for no other reason than they consistently speak of the display showcased here as the BL ("Big Layout").

Let's toss out some basic statistics about the Big Layout, all of them courtesy of Gordon.

As mentioned, the dimensions of the L-shaped project are 15 x 16 feet. Five sheets of ¾-inch-thick finished plywood serve as the foundation. Each of them is the commonplace 4 x 8-foot piece that Gordon's dad had used long ago.

The principal level stands only 33 inches off the floor, an ideal height for the kids visiting to observe the action and appreciate most of the structures and details.

The second level rises 9 inches above it, and the third is 52 inches high.

Tabletop benchwork meets Gordon's expectations, so he was fine with securing the plywood sheets to 2 x 4 lumber, with many steel sawhorses serving as the network of supporting sections. The platform of the BL is as sturdy as can be.

For the system of straights and curves, Gordon decided on FasTrack

There always seem to be thoughtful improvements being made to the wonderful cold-weather O gauge railroad. Yet more and more, Gordon finds himself splitting his attention, time, and energy between it and a third layout at the family residence that reflects his pride in having attended The Ohio State University and now still cheering hard and loud for the Buckeyes.

The fellow whose display models the frigid temperatures and icy streets of winter spends his time sailing through the warm waters of the Caribbean Sea.

FOCUS ON THE BL

Gordon and Jeannie designate their layouts, not with the names of real or fictitious railroads, but with initials. The third one they refer to as the OSU layout. The first one may be the LL (short

from Lionel. His first exposure to that widely accepted brand came in 2003, about the time it hit the market.

Gordon brings us up to speed. "I had bought a Lionel starter set with FasTrack and found the new sections more than



6. ON ONE OF THE upper levels, Gordon added an independent loop where he can operate Christmas-oriented motorized units, including this trolley. Did you notice Santa Claus flying into the wintry sky Jeannie Hough painted to enhance her son's railroad?

satisfactory." He has used it ever since on both the Big Layout and the railroad he's constructing to honor his alma mater in Columbus, Ohio.

To be perfectly honest, Gordon liked the FasTrack so much that he saw no

TOY TRAIN ELECTRONICS

The never-ending list of tasks and demands Gordon faces onboard as he travels through the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico limit his leisure hours. Yet when he does have a spare

hour, he's likely to grab a copy of CTT or one of the hobby books he has come to trust, especially when it comes to toy train electronics.

Three volumes have provided much of the information Gordon has put to good use on the BL and OSU displays. He draws attention to a couple of books from Kalmbach Media: *Toy Train Layout from Start to Finish* by Stan Trzoniec and *Wiring Your Toy Train Layout* (second edition) by

Peter H. Riddle. Also helpful has been *The Lionel FasTrack Book*, authored by Robert Schleicher.

Insights and tips found in those essential reference books guided Gordon as he wired his layout. He specified using 16-gauge wire to connect the MTH no. Z-1000 transformer to the main lines. Further, 18-gauge wire worked for the 15 blocks controlled via single-pole single-throw on/off switches made by Atlas.

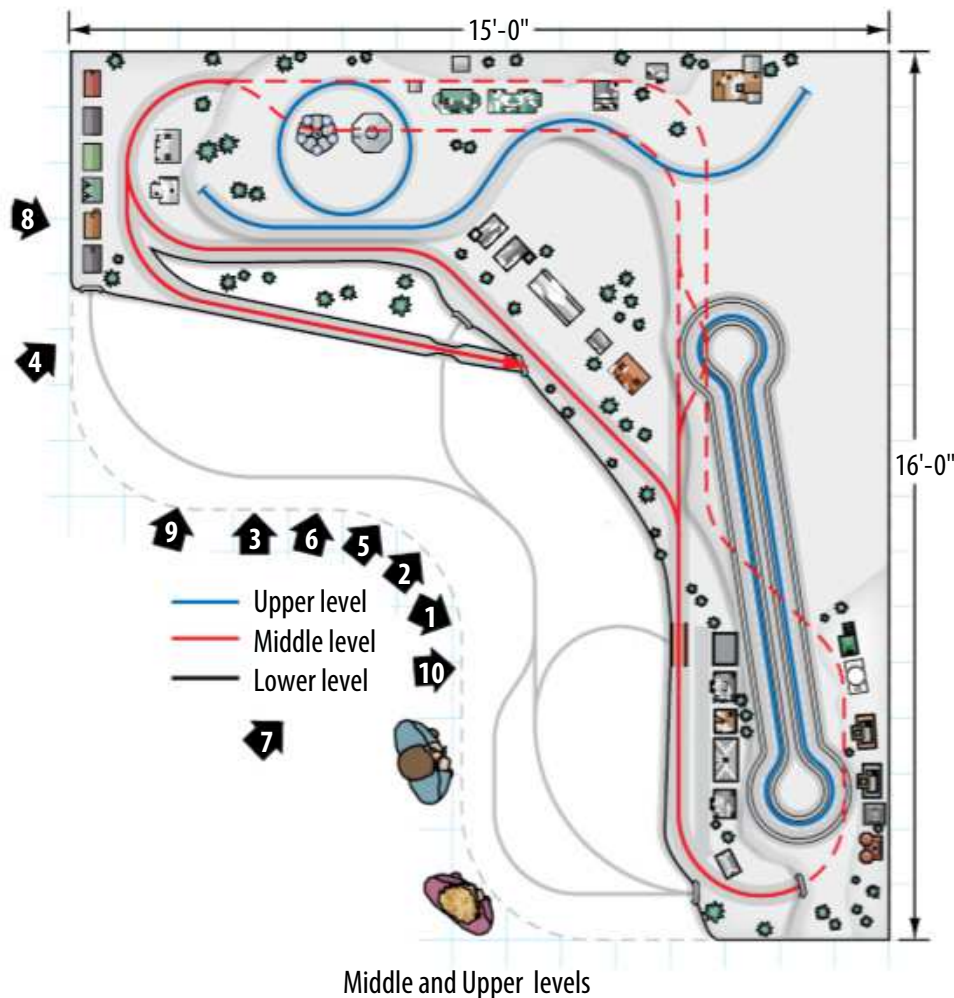
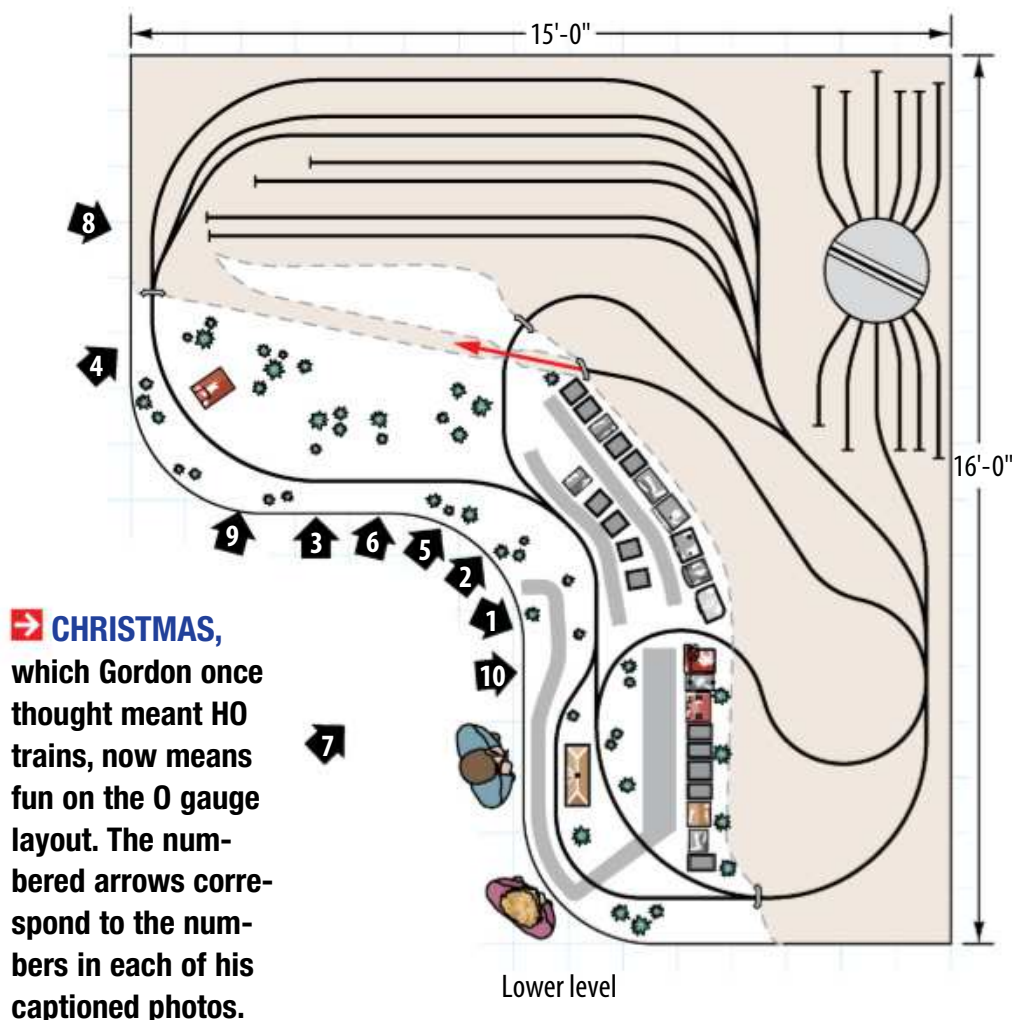
The same gauge of wire seemed right for the feeders, which Gordon spaced every 36 inches. Thinner 20-gauge wire handled the FasTrack switches. They perform smoothly via the Digital Command System installed by Gordon.

Gordon says his reasons for choosing the command-control system manufactured by MTH Electric Trains and not either of the two offered by Lionel were pretty straightforward.

First, the wiring connection for DCS

Count Gordon among the hobbyists who, if asked what they connect their trains to, immediately answer Christmas.

purpose in adding a layer of roadbed to the Big Layout. He says, "I was very pleased with the plastic roadbed that came attached to the track. Also, I really like the sound my trains make running over the FasTrack on the three different levels of the BL."



AT A GLANCE

Name: Gordon and Jeannie Hough's O gauge layout

Dimensions: 15 x 16 feet

Track and switches: Lionel FasTrack (diameters range from 36 to 72 inches)

Motive power: Lionel, MTH

Rolling stock: Lionel, MTH

Controls: Lionel no. CW80, MTH no. Z-1000 transformers with MTH Digital Command System

Structures: Lemax, St. Nicholas Square

Vehicles: Kinsmart, Menards, Welly

Figures: Lemax, St. Nicholas Square

impressed Gordon as easier and less involved than what was called for by either TrainMaster Command Control or Legacy.

Second, DCS can operate locomotives developed by firms other than MTH. An important point for Gordon, whose roster features many Lionel units.

Third, as a professional musician, Gordon reports being "intrigued and excited to be able to place music from my MP3 player through the Proto-Cast feature of DCS and have the sound come through the speaker on my locomotive."

NO MUSS SCENERY

Jeannie joined her son when the time arrived to build winter-themed scenery. Together, they brainstormed about how make the landscaping "no muss and no fuss." Other model railroaders can learn from their easy methods.

For the landforms, the Houghs bought blocks of Styrofoam typically



↑ 7. PROUD AS GORDON is about the track and electronics he finished for his cool O gauge layout, he's quick to thank his mother, Jeannie, for the scenery and backdrops.

used to hold artificial flowers in vases. They also used sheets of extruded Styrofoam from lumberyards and home-improvement centers. Covering the foam with plastic wrap prevented particles from breaking off and getting into nooks and crannies.

The next step called for Gordon and Jeannie to secure the wrapped blocks of

foam by pushing two 16-penny nails into them. According to Gordon, "This works better than relying on Liquid Nails. If we want to make adjustments, we simply pull out the two nails, shift the blocks, and press the nails back in."

Not a drop of paint went over the entire Styrofoam foundation. Instead, the mother-and-son team opted for a



8. THIS PANORAMIC SHOT has everything hobbyists associate with trains and Christmas: colorful locomotives, holiday-oriented vignettes, and snowy landscapes. It brings back memories of the great displays once put up in department-stores windows.

white material known as Sherpa, which they found at a local crafts and fabric store. The texture represented snow quite well.

Sherpa had another huge advantage over the natural material hobbyists traditionally have used to model snow. As Gordon discovered, it does not come apart and end up getting tangled in the wheels of locomotives and railcars.

Final touches included arranging

across the layout many commercially produced bushes and trees. Most came from Lemax and St. Nicholas Square, the businesses also responsible for the structures. A few other trees Gordon bought at Big Lots.

UPGRADED BACKDROP

Find yourself swooning over the wonderful hand-painted backdrop Jeanie completed for the BL? Of course you

do. Every viewer finds it dazzling and the perfect complement.

Gordon described the work of art as “Backdrop 4.0.” Our puzzled looks led him to offer a succinct explanation.

“Backdrop 1.0,” Gordon said, “had a few images painted on white poster board. Then my mom upgraded to blue material stapled to furring strips. We consider that Backdrop 2.0. It was then followed by her artwork being painted on 4 x 8-foot sheets of extruded foam hung from the ceiling.”

The magnificent depictions now seen



↑ **9. RIGHT AFTER GORDON** learned that MTH was adding a set honoring the Ohio State Buckeyes to its RailKing line in 2006 he had placed an order. He attended the university in Columbus and is currently building an O gauge layout with an OSU theme.



↑ **10. AN INDEPENDENT** loop on the BL features automobiles, trucks, and buses from the SuperStreets line. Brightly wrapped gifts weigh down the antique black pickup.

have features painted on a large canvas whose only seam is in the middle. Gordon continues: “Mom and I took thin magnetic strips from the back of a photo frame you might hang on a refrigerator and secured them with super glue to the back of each seam so they really pull each other together.”

As Jeannie’s last task, she painted the pipes running from upstairs through the basement so they blended with the backdrop. “I think,” Gordon concluded, “I now have the nicest-looking bathroom plumbing in the whole state of Ohio!”

READY FOR DREAMING

An O gauge model railroad boasting sophisticated electronics and attractive scenery deserves to be operated, and Gordon enjoys running his MTH and Lionel trains over two levels whenever he returns to dry land. On the third level, there is a neat loop of SuperStreets from K-Line where he can bring out a host of vehicles.

The BL is, to put it in simple terms, ready for running. But Gordon insists the compelling display goes far beyond that, namely, it is “ready for dreaming.”

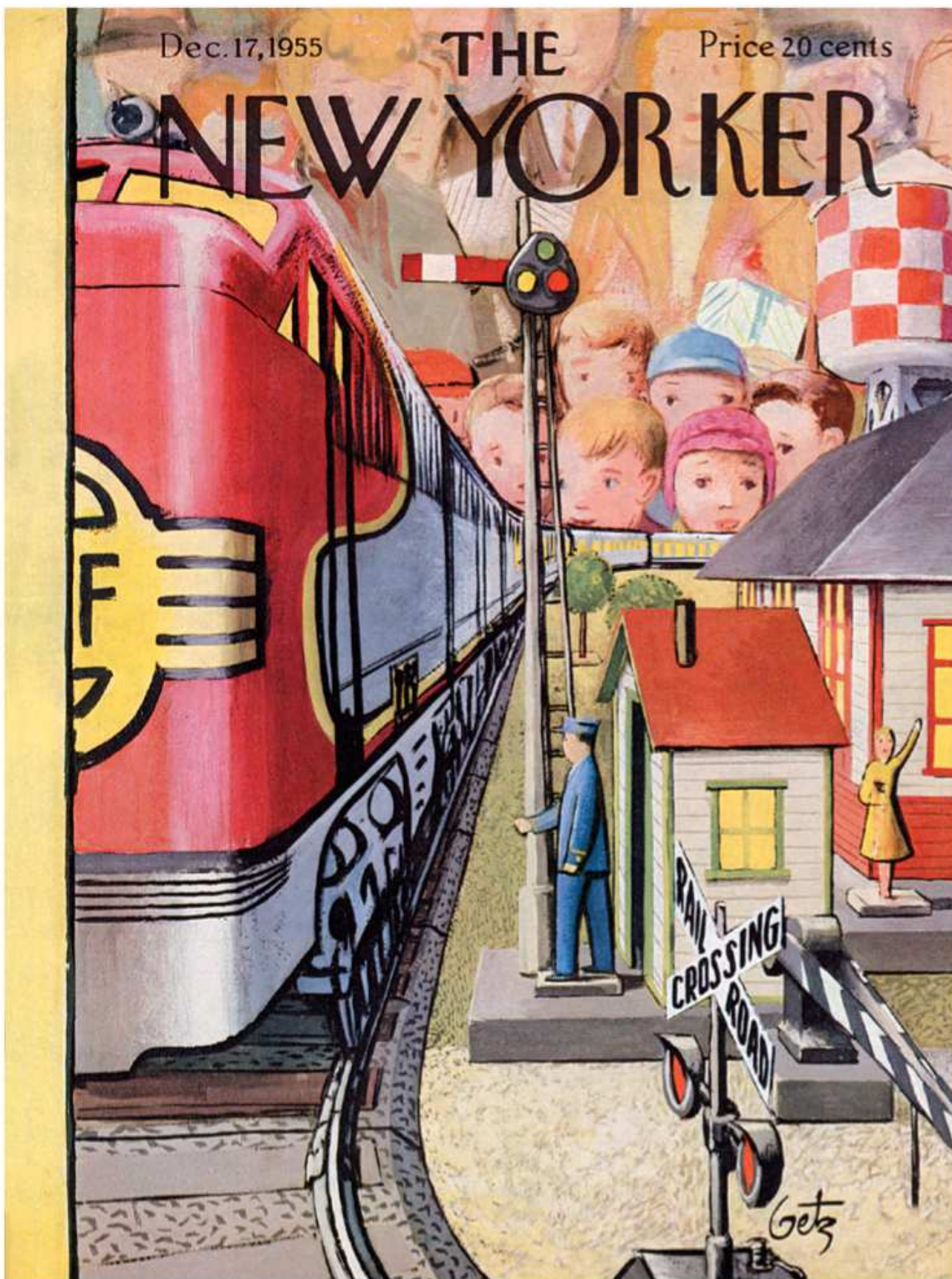
The great Christmas-themed layout Gordon finished with assistance from his talented mother makes it possible for him fulfill the dreams of having multiple trains dashing past several evocative and picturesque scenes while putting out pine-scented smoke. It leaves him feeling as though he were a kid once again.

Truly, the holiday season should leave each of us feeling young and eager to make our toy train visions realities. For Gordon, the bustling and whimsical parts of his layout do that every time he returns home to the Buckeye State. •

AMERICAN FLYER

REIGNED IN AN ICONIC MAGAZINE COVER

THE NEW YORKER
LED READERS
TO AN IMAGINARY
DEPARTMENT STORE



↑ The cover of the December 17, 1955, issue of *The New Yorker* featured a great illustration of an American Flyer train and a few accessories all but hypnotizing the youngsters shown gazing at the display. Arthur Getz, a prolific contributor to that magazine for several decades, painted the image so wonderfully capturing the appeal of those toys to the postwar generation.

Not too long after Americans in postwar times finished their Thanksgiving meals, they turned their attention to Christmas and the upcoming shopping period. As children mulled over what they hoped would come their way on the morning of December 25, artisans employed at local department stores stood ready to install in windows facing main streets astonishing displays of new goods. Curiously, then, to understand the excitement and wonder youngsters must have felt when standing outside one of those incredible displays we have to focus on a painting. To be specific, a piece executed by a popular commercial artist and used by the editorial staff of *The New Yorker* magazine as a front cover in 1955.

INSPIRED ILLUSTRATOR

Arthur Getz, who painted the evocative scene of awed boys and girls congregating by a display of American Flyer S gauge models, was hardly a stranger to the editors at *The New Yorker*. The 42-year-old artist had started submitting his work to the

magazine after graduating from Pratt Institute in New York City. Staff members had appreciated his superb drawings, with Getz having one of his paintings first used on the cover in 1938.

Getz hit his stride in the 1950s and '60s, and dozens of magazine covers and illustrations followed over the peak of his career. Mass-circulation magazines then featuring his illustrations included *American Childhood*, *Collier's*, *Esquire*, *Fortune*, *New Republic*, *Reader's Digest*, *Saturday Review*, and *The Reporter*.

But *The New Yorker* remained a principal client. Indeed, before retiring in the 1980s, Getz had seen his artwork used on more than 200 covers, an amazing feat never duplicated. Public shows honored a lifetime of achievement in years prior to his death in 1996 at age 82.

LOVE OF DISPLAYS

So valued was Getz at *The New Yorker* by the 1950s that editors almost certainly awarded him the freedom to select the subjects and themes of his work. Yet with the end of the year approaching in December of 1955, he would

boys. Electric trains were at the height of their popularity in the middle 1950s, so some stores were making them central. It made good sense for Getz to devote his talents to capturing all the action.

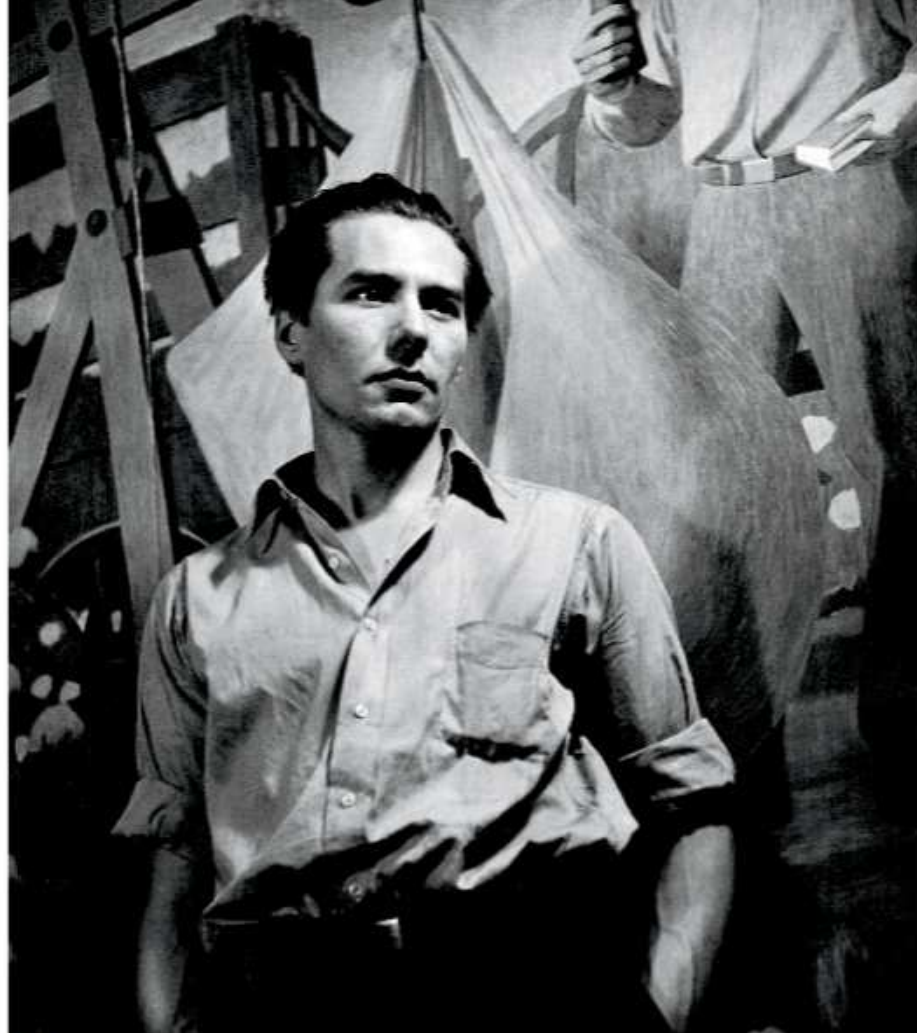
OPTING FOR FLYER

Without being dismissive of the great attributes of American Flyer engines and cars, Lionel dominated the field in the 1950s. Designers of store displays intending to use electric trains to appeal to customers would have considered first the O gauge trains coming from Lionel.

All the same, the trains and other models depicted by Getz came from the American Flyer catalog. He must have deliberately chosen to illustrate what the chief competitor of Lionel was currently manufacturing while ignoring the latter.

Getz had not picked Flyer because S gauge was all the rage in his home. He had reached his 40s, but was not yet a father. No child he knew was then pleading for a train or asserting the superiority of one brand over another.

Sarah Getz concluded that her father had chanced upon



↑ Getz, standing in front of one of the murals he was commissioned to paint for a federal arts program in the early 1940s, created the illustration of an S gauge display used by *The New Yorker*. It was one of more than 200 covers credited to him between 1938 and 1988. Born in 1913, Getz died in 1996 at the age of 82.

window. In terms of the composition, lighting, and effect, his illustration worked beautifully for a magazine cover.

FAVORITE MODELS

The result was a fantastic portrait of American Flyer models, notably the Alco PA diesels Gilbert decorated in the Santa Fe's warbonnet paint scheme. The locomotives could be seen pulling streamlined passenger cars.

Almost bursting out of the illustration, the S gauge version of the *Super Chief* waited for the signal to change, giving it permission to journey onward. Holding the train was, Flyer enthusiasts acknowledged, an accessory known as Sam the semaphore man (product no. 758A). He stood in front of a no. 589 passenger and freight station, its white exterior with red trim easily identifying it.

Yet a third popular accessory from the Gilbert catalog loomed behind. The no. 772 water tower had undergone major changes a few years

after joining the line in 1950. Beginning in 1953, designers had exchanged its small gray or red plastic tank for a much larger one they decorated with red and white squares in a checkerboard pattern. The actual tank was broader than what Getz had painted.

WONDERFUL TRIBUTE

The snapshot of Christmas in New York City in 1955, at least as his imagination perceived it, must have elicited smiles from readers of the issue dated December 17. Youngsters whose parents subscribed to *The New Yorker* would, if they had been Flyer enthusiasts, been begging to preserve the cover.

More than 60 years later, toy train collectors appreciate the sight Getz portrayed. It revives memories of a time when families spent chilly evenings in December strolling along boulevards, stopping at each window to admire the displays. For baby boomers, every minute by the electric trains was paradise. •

IN TERMS OF THE COMPOSITION, LIGHTING, AND EFFECT, HIS ILLUSTRATION WORKED BEAUTIFULLY FOR A MAGAZINE COVER.

have had Christmas on his mind and be thinking about how to convey its pleasures.

An illustration of a window display would have appealed to Getz if for no other reason than the plethora of department stores in metropolitan and suburban New York City must have presented him with many examples to study and copy.

Going further, several of those displays must have spotlighted the latest toys being marketed for girls and

one of the animated layouts then built for a large retailer in New York City. He studied the appearance and operation of the display, which she believed contained some Flyer sets. At the same time, he paid attention to how people of all ages crowded by the window and reacted positively to the moving trains and nearby accessories.

From there it was a matter of Getz letting his imagination take over until he had sketched the scene of a store

SANTA & TOYS

riding Yuletide rails to home

OLD MAGAZINES SHOW RAILROADS MAKING CHRISTMAS HAPPEN

STORY BY BOB KELLER

Advertisements from author's collection



twas the night before Christmas...

... And this little miss asleep in a cozy roomette, her stocking hung high in great expectation, symbolizes the spirit you find aboard Pennsylvania Railroad's great East-West Fleet at this season of the year. Step into cars aglow with good cheer and good fellowship... glance at the array of beribboned gifts heaped high in racks and rooms.

Stroll into the Dining Car and enjoy the festive foods of the day... get a good night's sleep in a comfortable bed—arrive refreshed. And above all, enjoy the peace of mind that comes from knowing your train will get you there—conveniently, and at low cost. All aboard... to a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD

 *Serving the Nation* 

How different the world was 60 or 70 years ago. Passenger trains were a primary means of travel; freight trains were how cargo moved; small parcels went by mail or an express service; and train crews had near-heroic status to many, particularly kids.

Toy trains and railroading have had a natural constituency in kid universe for more than a century. Kids liked trains and dreamed of building their own railroad at home.

Migration within regions, especially after World War I, had families moving farther apart as they chased jobs, education, or simply moved elsewhere. As humorist Jean Shepherd noted, "Christmas was the center of the entire kid year."

It was for many adults as well. Christmas was the one time when people traveled to the old home-
stead to visit families and friends. Railroads spent effort and money recruiting travelers, especially during the five or six weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day.

We've collected some images pairing railroads and the holidays.

← **FAST BUT NOT AT ALL FURIOUS**

THE PENNSYLVANIA RR ran this masterpiece befitting The Standard Railroad of the World. A mighty T1 4-4-4-4 Duplex steam locomotive and tender drive a fast train toward Chicago (or Crestline), while little Sue is sound asleep in her comfortable berth. The conductor and Santa team up to make sure she gets a gift—in spite of the fact she's rolling through Fort Wayne at 70 miles per.... After all, she has a little stocking hanging on the curtain, a package stowed beneath her bed, and a sprig of holly in her hair. The train crew (and St. Nick) won't ignore her. The Pennsy ensures her Yule will be safe and comfortable!



HOLIDAY HOMECOMING . . .

There's nothing quite so pleasant as coming home again . . . Especially when it's "home for Christmas" . . . and when you take the train!

This is the happy season when Pennsylvania Railroad's great fleets of trains between East and West, North and South, assume a particularly festive air.

By Pullman, by coach, joyous families are going to visit the folks at home—carefree, comfortable, relaxed as they speed on their way.

For your holiday travels Pennsylvania Railroad offers a wide choice of daily trains . . . conveniently scheduled to fit your plans.

PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD

← ON A TWO-HORSE OPEN SLEIGH

RAILROADS DID NOT RUN Christmas ads because they were trying to drum up boxcar loads of freight. Neither were they soliciting packages (even though they carried tons of them) at Christmas. They were after passengers! With imagery suggestive of the movie *Holiday Inn*, the Pennsylvania RR showcased the daughter and son-in-law with children (and gifts) arriving at a rural station stop. Dad helps down rascally brother Albert, and Grandma greets little Judy while Gramps keeps the sleigh horses still. Some other passengers are waiting to greet their own family or perhaps to start their own journey. The advertisement is playfully fun, and cites how convenient and easy travel on the modern Pennsy can be.



THIS IS AN ALL WEATHER MAP!

It's Fun to join in the holiday good fellowship on New York Central's luxurious new observation or lounge cars . . . many of them for coach passengers, too.

It's Fun to order yourself a piping hot meal in New York Central's new streamlined dining cars . . . and enjoy every course with a big helping of scenery on the side!

It's Fun to snuggle down for a winter's nap in Central's comfortable sleeping car berths or private rooms . . . with never a care for the weather out there, as you sleep the miles away!

It's Fun to relax in a lean-back seat on Central's new fleet of cozy air-conditioned coaches . . . and watch the winter world roll past your wide, lightening windows.



Winter or summer, storm or fair, New York Central's new daylight streamliners and overnight "Dreadnaughts" get you there in comfort . . . via this dependable 11,000-mile network.

→ SANTA SINGS ON THE CENTRAL

HERE WE OFFER a whimsical advertisement showing holiday revelry on a New York Central lounge car. The drinks are coming right up, and little Jane and Santa Claus are doing their own Centralized rendition of "Over the river and through the woods." It is pointed out that passenger trains can offer hearty fellowship, tasty food, and roomy accommodations. Inclusion of the system map suggests a wide range of choices (although I suspect routings from some points on the line to the other on-line destinations would have been hideous). Regardless, the map promoted same-line travel that got you to your destination in style, without regard to the weather.

➔ THEY DELIVERED JUST FOR YOU!

MANY YEARS BEFORE United Parcel Service or Federal Express, a flash of green with an accent of red and the squeal of brakes would catch the ear of every kid and send him or her racing to the living-room window. Sadly, the excitement caused by the arrival of a Railway Express Agency truck is a distant memory. There were basically two ways to get a package delivered cross-country in time for the holiday: The U.S. Post Office or Railway Express. Each got the goods delivered without long over-the-road trucking or, for the most part, airplanes. Those modes were more subject to weather delay than were crack express trains. While Santa doesn't say that he uses REA power more than elf power, he suggests the firm is mighty handy getting gifts delivered!



Any night's a good night for a "Winter's Nap" on the Water Level Route



You go, weather or no!
Out there in the darkness, winter storm clouds may be scudding low above the tree tops. But aboard your New York Central train, you can depend on all the things that mean a good night. Good food in the diner. Good company and good cheer in the club lounge. And a good bed waiting for you.



Of beds and roadbeds
Drift off to sleep in the quiet privacy of your room . . . cradled by a deep mattress, rubber-cushioned couplers, stabilized car springs and roller bearings as you speed over a smooth, rock-ballasted roadbed through gentle, water-level valleys.



Good nights—good mornings!
Awake refreshed. Dress at leisure in your own completely equipped room. Then, an appetite-rousing New York Central breakfast . . . and you arrive with energy at peak, and not a business hour lost on your overnight vacation!



**The Gift of Sleep is yours
on the Great Steel Fleet**

NEW

NEW YORK CENTRAL

The Water Level Route—You Can Sleep

**NEW DREAMLINERS
in Production**

Cars enough for 30 new all-room trains are on the way to spotlight the NEW in New York Central.
© 1946, New York Central Railroad Co.



RAILWAY PROGRESS



← EVEN BUSINESSMEN TRAVEL AT CHRISTMAS

A CHRISTMAS ADVERTISEMENT, but not directly targeting holiday travel. The starting point is the reminder that traveling on the Water Level Route, as the New York Central promoted its line, can be social, restful, and refreshing. To make the point, you see a speeding passenger train, snow, Santa's sleigh, and two appearances of the big guy to seal the deal. If not, then even more holiday spirit is introduced with the quotation, "And to all a Good Night," with the not-so-subtle reminder that you can give train tickets as gifts!

➔ RUNNING AROUND THE CHRISTMAS TREE

THE NEW YORK CENTRAL hits many favorite holiday icons with this advertisement in the form of a Christmas card to its customers: The decorated tree, a wrapped gift, an electric train running around the tree, and the train crew are commemorated on the ornaments. Not only do the engineer and conductor get recognition, but frequently overlooked crew members, such as the club car steward, Pullman porter, and dining car personnel, also are acknowledged. Thus did the ad's designer emphasize that a team of people dedicated themselves to getting you to your holiday destinations via "The Water Level Route – You Can Sleep." Put yourself in their hands and they'll make sure you get home in time for the Christmas turkey.



Christmas Window on the Water Level Route

Watch New York Central trains roll past this time of year. You'll see Christmas windows by the hundred ... bright with the most precious of all gifts. People!

Couples taking their children to see Grandmother (on money-saving Family Fares). Older folk, off to spend Christmas with married sons or daughters—enjoying every minute of New York Central comfort.

Youngsters from school or college getting a first taste of holiday fare in the dining car. Fathers, away on business, taking it easy in the club car ... sure that New York Central will get them home "weather or no."

These are the year's favorite jobs for New York Central men and women. So whether you ride with us or meet the train ... here's wishing you a MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Give Tickets—The Gift that Brings Them Home!

Ask any Central ticket agent how easy it is to send rail and Pullman tickets as your gift to someone you want with you at holiday time.



New York Central
The Water Level Route—You Can Sleep



← WINDOWS ON THE WORLD

"CHRISTMAS WINDOWS" REALLY doesn't translate to every region of the country, but in the 1950s it must have been a common expression. Clearly, it was a familiar enough term for the New York Central to base an ad around. The trick being that the windows in question were on a passenger train, with folks looking out to check holiday decorations in towns throughout the system. You have the image of a happy family (Mom, Dad, and little Diane) getting ready to get off the train, cold weather gear in hand and gifts at the ready. You also have a second image of the journey completed, now with the young lady presenting a gift to her auntie. All of which was made possible by the safe, reliable, and affordable trains of the New York Central. •

Animated Christmas displays created

Magic

PHOTOS REVIVE
MEMORIES OF A
LOST ERA



Thanksgiving weekend represented the official opening of the holiday shopping season in cities and towns across America during the prewar and postwar eras.

Personnel at metropolitan department stores, like their counterparts at general outlets and chain retailers in less urban settings, endeavored to bring in a stream of consumers. The weeks leading up to Christmas were the best opportunity to boost sales and reap the profits necessary to start the next year.

Displays, especially those filling windows facing the street, were the most effective and persuasive method of enticing people to go inside and make purchases. Leading stores created memorable ones, often combining toy trains with winter scenic effects and lights.

Images of window displays live on in the memories of hobbyists who came of age in the 1940s, '50s, and later. They recall watching American Flyer and Lionel trains in action amid artificial snow and ice and Christmas trees decorated with icicles and glass balls.

Few pictures of displays have survived. Even if department stores and newspapers had shot them, changes in ownership and disposal of photo files have left us with only a handful of images. Here, we'll showcase a selection of pictures made available to *Classic Toy Trains*.

What was it like during the golden years of toy trains to admire the great displays built in store windows? This illustration rendered in 1956 by Raymond Crowley for a Lionel promotional catalog captures the excitement felt by parents and their kids as they gazed at the operating trains and checked out the latest accessories.



Youngsters crowd to see American Flyer O gauge trains

Retailers put up large operating displays in their windows facing the street as well as in their toy departments, surrounded by the merchandise they had on hand to sell. Either way, the magical scenes generated plenty of traffic, as onlookers, particularly children, stared at the trains dashing around while trying to keep their hands off.

In either 1941 or '42 (based on the accessories and trains shown here), one unidentified business assembled this wonderful if somewhat unadorned layout to promote the O gauge trains running on three rails manufactured and marketed by the A.C. Gilbert Co. The stations and freight loaders almost surely weren't wired to move, but the happy boys and girls crowding behind the glass hardly cared.

What more than satisfied the different youngsters in their winter coats and knit hats was being allowed to watch the long passenger train race along the perimeter of the layout. They could take in the thrills supplied by the steamer and the New Haven style of American Flyer cars it was pulling as long as they stayed behind the barrier.

Too bad there was no indication of why so many kids had gathered by the display at one time. Maybe they belonged to a school or church group. Adding poignancy to the image was the fact that it was shot probably after the U.S. had entered World War II. Many of the girls and boys wishing for a train set had fathers or big brothers already drafted and perhaps preparing to serve overseas in the Pacific or Europe.



Lumber store in Michigan picks up Lionel trains

During the holiday season, when consumers were ready to spend their hard-earned dollars on a host of household wares, specialized retailers often chose to expand their merchandise in hopes of increasing their profits. A number of businesses that otherwise never carried electric trains or any other sorts of playthings dramatically changed their tune in the autumn.

Hardware stores, sporting goods outlets, camera stores, appliance shops, and other outlets located in big cities and rural towns elected to stock a full line of electric trains for the only time during the year. Their proprietors willingly added Lionel and American Flyer sets and accessories because they believed doing would bring in customers.

One business among the hundreds of examples of local stores catering to children dreaming of getting an electric train set for Christmas was Fingerle

Lumber Co., located in Ann Arbor, Mich. The photo shown here, originally taken in late 1947, invited us to investigate the compact display of Lionel operating accessories put up there.

Fingerle Lumber, established by Earle Fingerle in 1931 and still going strong almost 90 years later, diversified its inventory to include a variety of toys during World War II. Earle and his sons, Brian and Colin, expanded their stock right after 1945 because consumer demand for electric trains and everything connected to them was skyrocketing.

The Fingerles likely reached out to Lionel for the outfits and individual trains, the accessories and track they decided to carry. Joe Mariamson, whose sales territory spread out across upstate New York and Ohio, probably assisted the retailer. He might have procured the display or at least the items put on it.

Brilliant designer showcases American Flyer in Seattle

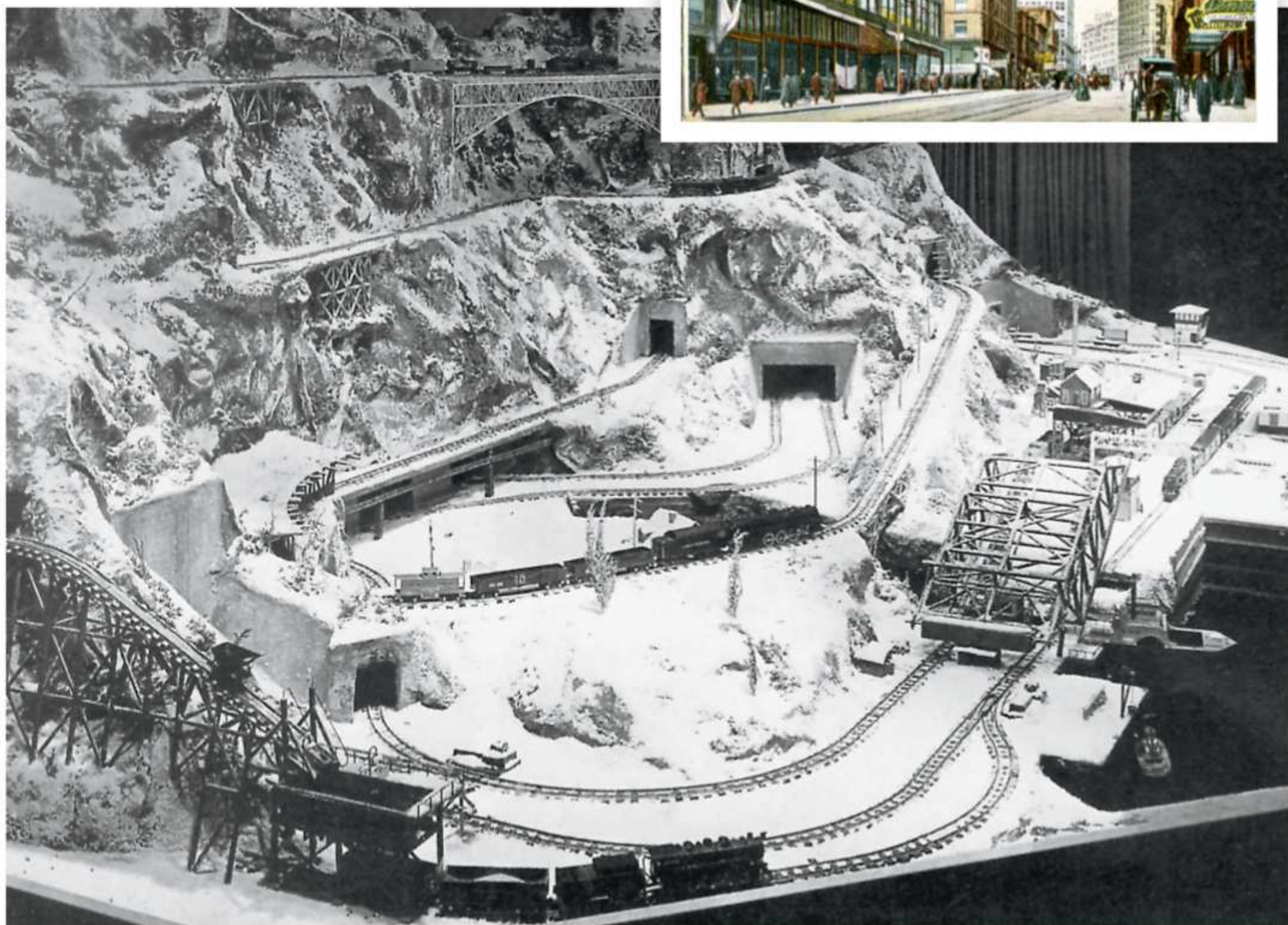
Difficult as it was to locate surviving photos of postwar holiday displays, even more challenging was determining who had designed them. The names of the employees at department stores responsible for sketching and overseeing the construction of enticing animated layouts have been forgotten. Yet those individuals created amazing O and S gauge railroads.

Fortunately, key bits of information surfaced. The November 1993 issue of *Classic Toy Trains* celebrated the achievements of Bob James. Pictures of layouts he had built for the Bon Marche Department Store in Seattle, Wash., showcased his many talents.

Bob was one among the artists and designers hired by large department stores to supervise the development of the displays regularly scheduled to fill their windows facing the streets as well as interior presentations. He had joined the staff at the Bon Marche after high school and returned to the emporium after serving overseas in World War II. Bob's initial assignment with electric trains involved O scale models in 1947. A year later, he focused on Flyer.

For five consecutive holiday seasons beginning in 1948, Bob designed breathtaking S gauge layouts. His displays featured snow-covered mountains with networks of track running in and out of tunnels and across bridges on several levels. Bob incorporated hand-built models with American Flyer accessories.

At a time when even the Gilbert Hall of Science in New York City put Flyer sets in plain settings, Bob was showing how exciting those trains could look amid realistic landscapes. He made them look better and more desirable, a necessity in Seattle because Frederick & Nelson, the main rival of the Bon Marche, filled its Christmas windows with Lionel items.





Christmas promised exciting Lionel displays for residents of Scranton

The largest cache of display photos connected with a single retailer documents the outstanding operating layouts built between 1938 and 1955 by a general store in Scranton, Pa. Not a famous urban department store such as Macy's or Hudson's. Nor a national chain on the scale of Sears, Roebuck or Montgomery Ward or J.C. Penney.

Not that anyone is complaining! To the contrary, toy train enthusiasts, indeed anyone who loves Christmas and holiday shopping, should be grateful that the dozen or so black-and-white pictures shot at the Household Outfitting Co. in eastern Pennsylvania survived. Somehow, they did and ended up at the Albright Memorial Library in Scranton.

This photo, most likely taken by an employee of the store in the early 1940s, gives us an idea of how designers assembled a large display that showcased operating trains and a few accessories while letting

consumers see the range of toys available inside. Dolls dominate the sides of the window, and plush animals occupy the immediate front.

Lionel electric trains represent the main show. An enormous mountain boasting tunnels on two levels fills nearly all the display area. Two lines of O gauge track run along the lowest stage. You can discern the steam engine and tender pulling semi-scale freight cars (a fact suggesting the picture was taken in either 1941 or '42).

Now direct your eyes farther up the mountain past more dolls until you see the O-27 loop with another Lionel train dashing by. Elsewhere, an assortment of Lionel and American Flyer stations, signals, bridges, and freight loaders fill nooks on the perimeter and border the double-track main. Lots of merchandise to capture the attention of observers, regardless of age, and get them wishing for a new train.

Electric trains captured audiences in St. Louis

The next stop on this holiday odyssey across the U.S. takes us to St. Louis. The bustling city situated along the western bank of the Mississippi River ranked number eight on the list of largest American cities at midcentury. Approximately 856,000 people resided inside the city limits. They rooted for two baseball teams while taking pride in having hosted a world's fair and an Olympic games in 1904.

Three major department stores offered a wonderful array of housewares, men's and women's clothes, furniture, and toys. The trio – Famous-Barr Co.; Scruggs Vandervoort & Barney; and Stix, Baer & Fuller – competed during December to put together the most elaborate and eye-catching store displays.

Lionel trains won over folks old and young walking past the Famous-Barr emporium headquartered at the Railway Exchange Building on Olive Street. The crew in charge of displays had developed a simple yet impressive layout with what appeared to be an expansive one-track line heading past the window

and then looping around a snow-covered mountain range with sparse little trees on it.

This image from 1953, originally published in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, has an O-27 streamlined passenger train picking up speed as it goes past a block signal and automatic crossing gates from the Lionel catalog. In the interior, structures from the Plasticville line share real estate with handmade farms and factories. A magnificent church rises in the middle.

The immense pleasure that grown-ups and children get by standing out in the cold and watching the train run comes through 65 years after an unidentified press photographer snapped this black-and-white. Who cares how chilly it was that day! •



TOY TRAIN Memories

FIRST TRAIN, SANTA CLAUS, & FAMILY

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

Lionel Trains make a Boy feel like a Man
and a Man feel like a Boy

Everybody is Happy when it's a **Lionel Train Christmas**

Everybody gets into the act, when it's Lionel Trains for Christmas.

Sunny dreams of himself in a snappy engineer's cap, hand at the throttle of a 500-ton mainliner... thundering ahead, real whistle a-blowin', real smoke a-puffin' in. Yes, Sunny is thrilled with power and responsibility. He is a man among men, a man to be envied—a Lionel engineer.

And say, Dad! who got these trains for Christmas? You're acting like a boy. You'll show him how to run these trains, eh! You had Lionel Trains when you were a kid. Well, it's great to feel like a kid again, Dad, and it's good for you. For proof, just look at the gleam in Mom's eyes.

And remember, only Lionel Trains match a boy's Christmas dream, and Dad's too. The world's finest trains for over 50 years, they are unequalled for scale—detail, realism, for steel wheeled precision stability... for remote control precision control that only Magna-Traction® gives you. See catalogue at your dealer's or send coupon for special offer.

See all the Lionel Trains and accessories in this new 36-page, full-color catalogue. How Lionel Trains in this double-sized 50¢ E. R. sound effects record. Send coupon now for special offer.

LIONEL TRAINS, Four Office Bldg 224, Madison Square Station, New York, N. Y.

Please send me special Lionel Train catalogue after, nearest prices, 1 cent per 100 to cover postage and handling.

1. The new 36-page full-color Lionel catalogue.
2. The new 50¢ "double-sized record" of whistles, bells, railroad sound effects and Lionel horns.
3. 10 full-color miniature billboards.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

*Please cut off 10 3/4" photograph, insert some first quality or automatic charge.

Many of the hobbyists

sharing their memories of receiving their first train can remember paging through the full-color consumer catalogs put out each year by the principal American manufacturers of electric toy trains. They may also recall the eye-catching advertisements put in mass-circulation magazines and Sunday newspapers.

During the late prewar and postwar eras, executives at the A.C. Gilbert Co. and the Lionel Corp. considered the annual holiday season to open in the early autumn. They released approximately one million copies of catalogs aimed at loyal and potential customers. In the pages of those wish books, youngsters and adults saw the new sets as well as the locomotives, rolling stock and accessories being offered for the year.

Picking up a free copy of the catalog led to many hours of perusing the latest additions. Studying what was available always inspired dreams. Kids spent their leisure hours debating what to request for Christmas. Like the baby boomers reminiscing here, they weighed the merits of various engines and cars, signals and freight loaders, tunnels and transformers. Then they told every grown-up what they wanted most.

To spark excitement even more, leading toy train companies arranged for vivid advertisements to go into popular magazines and metropolitan newspapers, usually in November. The purpose was to push children to beg for that first set or something more for their budding rail empires. And as the different individuals looking back in these pages can attest, the catalogs and ads performed that task beautifully.

YOUNGSTERS AND THEIR PARENTS BENEFITED, although in different ways, when a family invested in an electric train. Lionel promoted that idea in the advertisements it placed in magazines so adults, fathers above all, would consider a new set indispensable.

Christmas Trains on an Apartment Floor

– Chet Smykowski



This photo tells you how I got started in a hobby that has brought me joy ever since. My family was celebrating Christmas a day early, on December 24, 1953, at my godmother's house, located in Maspeth, Queens, in New York. I was six years old.

My cousins are shown in the photo. Missing is their friend who had dressed up as Santa Claus. One of my cousins was lucky enough to get Lionel set no. 2190W Santa Fe streamlined passenger outfit. His brother received the no. 2211WS turbine freight set. Pretty nice Lionel Christmas for them – and for me.

I received a no. 1509WS five-car set. It was a joint gift from my parents and my godmother, Aunt Anna. The O-27 freight consisted of a no. 2046 small Hudson and whistle tender, plus nos. 3469 operating dump car, 3520 searchlight car, 6456 Lehigh Valley hopper, 6460 crane car, and 6419 work caboose. The track and a transformer completed the package, which had a retail price of \$70.

My cousin Edward is the man at the rear in the photo. He took me to see the Lionel showroom and the layout at Macy's after Thanksgiving every year. Edward bought me a no. 3461 operating log car for Christmas in 1953. My



memory has failed me as to who the little girl is who you can see with her own present.

My father bought me a no. 2243 Santa Fe F3 diesel and a ZW transformer for Christmas in 1956. I also received various Lionel freight and

passenger cars for Christmas over the years from my aunts and uncles. One of my favorites was the no. 60 trolley from my Aunt Anna. But no matter how many trains I got, they still ran on the floor around our family Christmas tree year after year.

Then in 1957 my cousins set up a 4 x 8-foot layout in my parents' living room. It was the first layout any of us had, since we all lived in small, two-family apartments.

With space so tight, the layout only stayed up from

CHET SMYKOWSKI'S FAMILY celebrated on Christmas Eve of 1953. The six-year-old received a Lionel O-27 freight outfit that included the no. 3520 searchlight car he's holding. One fortunate cousin got a Lionel Super Speedliner passenger outfit led by no. 2353 Santa Fe F3s.

He took me to see the Lionel showroom and the layout at Macy's after Thanksgiving every year.

Christmas Eve until New Year's. You can bet my mother was glad to see it go down.

In 1958, my father bought a house in Brentwood, N.Y., so the 4 x 8-foot layout was reassembled in the basement.

That was the year I met my friend Bill Perri at school.

He also had Lionel trains. Bill and I are still collecting and running them together after all this time. Many years later I met my good friend Ray Sinacore, who collects Lionel.

You can see why I believe toy trains have a way of creating long-lasting relationships.

Getting the Lionel Train Dad Never Had

— Don MacCormack

As a young man my father had wanted a Lionel set, but his family couldn't afford one. He grew up without a father, living with his widowed mother and sister in Leonia, N.J. Dad was determined his sons would have what he'd missed: being in Scouts and owning a train.

Therefore, when I was old enough to be a Cub Scout, my parents started a pack in a new apartment housing development, Oakland Gardens, located at the intersection of Bayside Boulevard and what was then Horace Harding Expressway in Bayside, Queens. Later, Dad served as a leader of a Boy Scout troop sponsored by a local church.

On Christmas morning in 1946, in our rented home in Palisades Park, N.J., I received from Santa Claus the "second half" of what my father had planned: a Lionel O-27 set.

oval going around and under the Christmas tree, and I played with it for hours. The well-built die-cast metal steamer took quite a beating at the hands of this nine-year-old, trying to run it as fast as possible. It often flew off the curved track since it lacked Magne-Traction.

Each Christmas and birthday I received Lionel accessories that enhanced my enjoyment of playing with trains on the living room floor. One Christmas, I opened a box that had a no. 394 rotary beacon. Unfortunately, in my rush to open my other presents I accidentally stepped on the tower, bending the metal structure. I was so upset!

Never fear because Dad was there to fix it. Out came his toolbox, and with expert skill he used his long-nose pliers to get the structure back in almost perfect shape!

Several years later, the next step in my model train journey was to build a permanent layout, where I could mount the accessories in a realistic



YEARS OF PLAYING WITH THE LIONEL O-27 TRAINS on the floor led in the early 1950s to Don MacCormack and his father constructing a 4 x 6-foot layout. They filled out the real estate with Plasticville U.S.A. buildings, Lionel accessories, and an unidentified tunnel.

scene. Dad and I found scrap plywood and lumber from a nearby construction site.

We built a 4 x 6-foot layout for my train and accessories, including a bridge, a tunnel, the rotary beacon, a station, an automatic gateman, and a water tower. The layout was later enlarged by adding two no. 1121 remote-control switches to create an inside cutoff. Now my younger brother, Larry, and I could play with our trains all year.

In the late 1950s, as my attention turned to girls and cars, Larry took over the layout. It was set up in our bedroom. Besides the switches and accessories, it featured houses lit by Christmas lights. The lights came in a series, where if one bulb burned out, all the lights went out!

When our family moved to Long Island into a house with a basement, Larry took charge of enlarging the layout and expanding the roster of

cars. He built an L-shaped layout with an elevated level. It required a bigger transformer to get the no. 2338 Milwaukee Road GP7 road diesel up the grade.

Larry installed illuminated Plasticville houses, a church and station plus some fake trees, artificial turf and a papier-mâché tunnel. At Christmas, he sprinkled snowflakes over the town, turning it into a winter wonderland. With the dawning of the space age, Larry had to add a Lionel no. 175 rocket launcher, which put interesting holes in the ceiling tiles.

After three years of expansion in the early 1960s, Larry decided to pack up the Lionel trains in their original boxes and dismantle the layout. He wanted to make room for some wild basement dance parties with neighbors and friends playing 45s from my record collection. Now the old trains belong to me again.

At Christmas, he sprinkled snowflakes over the town, turning it into a winter wonderland.

The no. 1411W cost \$42.50 and had a no. 1666 steam engine and whistle tender. They led nos. 2454 Pennsylvania RR boxcar, 2452X Pennsylvania RR gondola, 2465 Sunoco tank car, and 2472 Pennsylvania RR caboose. There also were curved and straight track.

We set up my train in an

Christmas featured Marx and Flyer in our Family

– Eric Beheim

I've been a train fan for as long as I can remember. Having been born in 1946, I'm old enough to remember seeing steam locomotives in operation in my hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. Growing up, trains were a part of my life in other ways, too. My favorite books and stories were ones about trains. Later, my favorite movies were ones that featured steam locomotives.

Christmas always meant toy trains in our house. However, instead of being exclusive followers of one brand, my family enjoyed Marx and American Flyer. I still love them all, but generally favor the colorful items from Marx.

My first electric train – a Marx M-10005 Union Pacific green and cream articulated passenger set – arrived on Christmas in 1950 when I

was four. It was set up around the base of our Christmas tree. I also got a Marx block signal, which I used to start and stop the train.

That Marx set was packed away shortly after Christmas, and I have few recollections of playing with it. Yet it would play a significant role in my becoming an O gauge enthusiast as an adult.

On Christmas morning of 1952, my younger brother, Chris, and I received American Flyer set no. 5204W. In addition to an oval of S gauge track, that steam freight set included an automatic uncoupler unit.

I later read that Flyer sets were given away with the purchase of a washing machine. Before Christmas,



FROM A MARX STREAMLINER on display at Christmas of 1950, Eric Beheim and his younger brother, Chris, moved on to an American Flyer steam freight train two years later. Flyer remained king in their household, but Eric definitely prefers Marx these days.

I later read that American Flyer sets were given away with the purchase of a new washing machine.



ERIC REGRETS LOSING THE MARX M-10005 articulated diesel that launched his lifelong appreciation of toy trains. He was determined to find a replacement. Soon after meeting that goal, Eric photographed the Union Pacific streamliner in a diorama.

my parents did buy a new washing machine, but I don't know for sure whether it came with a free train set.

Our Flyer set consisted of a no. 315 4-6-2 Pacific steam engine with a Pennsylvania RR tender, plus nos. 633 Baltimore & Ohio boxcar, 625 Gulf single-dome tank car, 632 Lehigh & New England gondola, and 630 Reading caboose with a light.

The same Christmas our grandfather (a skilled woodworker) made Chris and me some derricks we used to load freight onto our train. A year or so later, we received a pair of American Flyer manual switches. Our father also got some used Marx scale cars he converted to S gauge by changing out the trucks.

The American Flyer set spent most of the year packed away in the attic and was

brought out only around the holidays. The locomotive always made funny crackling sounds when we first got it out and start using it. It always seemed to run better after our father cleaned the tracks using lighter fluid.

Our engine was a smoking model, and I can remember loading it with the Flyer fluid that produced smoke. It came in a little vinyl pouch with a short spout. To load the fluid into the engine's smokestack, you cut off the end of the pouch and then squeezed it.

The last time I played with our Flyer set was around 1959 or '60. I was in junior high school and too busy with outside activities such as Scout-ing and music to play with trains. Chris might have played with the set after that, though he never had the same interest in it I did and still do.

One Stalwart Engine Arrived on Christmas 1954 – *Gregory Sferra*

The train bug really bit me my first Christmas in 1953 as Mom and Dad – er, I mean Santa Claus – delivered a Lionel no. 2213WS freight set headed by a no. 736 2-8-4 Berkshire steam engine and whistle tender. We were still living at my grandparents' house, so it was quite easy for Dad and Grandpa to set up a 4 x 8-foot board with a loop of track under the Christmas tree those first few years.

Sometime later, after my parents, brother Tom, and I moved into our own home in

parents somehow set it up on Christmas Eve, right after Tom and I went to bed.

A few years later, probably for Christmas of 1958, Santa Claus brought Tom a Lionel no. 2517W freight outfit led by a no. 2379 Denver & Rio Grande Western F3 diesel A-B combination. Dad then changed the track system on the layout from O gauge to Super O. There were two independent loops, each with a spur. The town and roads filled the center, along with lots of artificial green grass.



THE BIG SMILE ON GREGORY SFERRA'S FACE on Christmas morning of 1953 tells you how thrilled he was to discover under the family tree Lionel O gauge outfit no. 2213WS. The no. 736 Berkshire steam engine leading the way is still the stalwart of his roster.

to travel. Depending on the distance, it took so many laps around the track to reach those places.

My brother and I added more freight cars, switches, and accessories over the next few years. I remember us getting nos. 6414 Evans auto loader, 6464-400 Baltimore & Ohio Timesaver boxcar, 3494-550 Monon operating boxcar, 132 station, and 445 operating switch tower.

We set up the layout in the basement each Christmas. I remember thinking then that if Santa didn't bring me what I requested, at least the trains would be up and running!

Interest in the toy trains

wavered when my brother and I became young teens. The trains were stored in the attic for decades, and Dad disassembled and disposed of the layout. Meanwhile, my interest in trains was derailed by sports, girls, college, and the start of a career.

The birth of my son, Nick, in 1988 rekindled my interest in toy trains. Naturally, I got out the old 736 Berkshire. It soon was roaring down the rails each Christmas again. I smile recalling the joy in my two-year-old son's voice: "Whistle, Daddy, whistle!"

By the 1990s, Nick had spurred my hobby interests to greater heights. Together, we built a 6 x 16-foot O gauge layout that stays up all year. Nine locomotives can run at once over the three levels. The pride of the fleet goes back to my roots, my 736 Berkshire, now 65 years old and still running well.

Just a single regret lingers. I only wish Dad was still here so he could see how the train set he bought in 1954 proved the truth of the old Lionel motto: "A Lifetime Investment in Happiness."

I smile recalling the joy in my two-year-old son's voice: "Whistle, Daddy, whistle!"

Hermitage, Pa., we managed to expand the O gauge layout to 8 x 8 feet. Two things about the layout stood out. First, once Dad built it, there were no alterations! Second, my

My Berkshire traveled counterclockwise on one loop, and Tom's Rio Grande F3s circled around clockwise on the Super O line. We made up destinations for our trains



THE ILLUSTRATION OF O GAUGE SET NO. 2213WS in the consumer catalog Lionel issued in 1953 leaves no doubt about why anyone, regardless of age, would wish to own the action-packed freight train. Gregory knows how lucky he was his parents – or Santa Claus – gave it to him.

Christmas and a Lionel train came a few years too late – *John Rose*

My family has always been into Lionel trains. For Christmas of 1947, my older brothers, David and Peter, each received a Lionel steam freight set with a no. 1666 locomotive. What happened Santa? Wasn't there one in your sack for me!

All I could do as a five-year-old was persuade our housekeeper to let me go into the attic to play with my brothers' trains while they were at school. In the meantime, Santa continued to ignore my requests for an electric train.

Not until Christmas of 1954 did Santa Claus pay attention to what I had wanted. I received my first Lionel set, the no. 1467W, an O-27 four-car freight train headed by no. 2032 Erie Alco FA diesels.

to run the big O gauge trains. Always making sure to have my uncle's permission!

Uncle Everett's father had worked for the Baltimore & Ohio, so the layout with two loops was his journey back to that time. My uncle ran a Lionel no. 773 4-6-4 Hudson steam engine and tender with heavyweight passenger cars and no. 2343 Santa Fe F3 diesels with freight cars.

I later learned from my uncle the price of the Hudson was about a week's pay. My aunt was not too happy! I was always impressed with his layout, but did not realize what classics he had on it. When my uncle retired in the 1970s, I bought his collection.

My uncle's pike inspired me at the age of 12 to build a layout in the unheated attic of our home. Construction

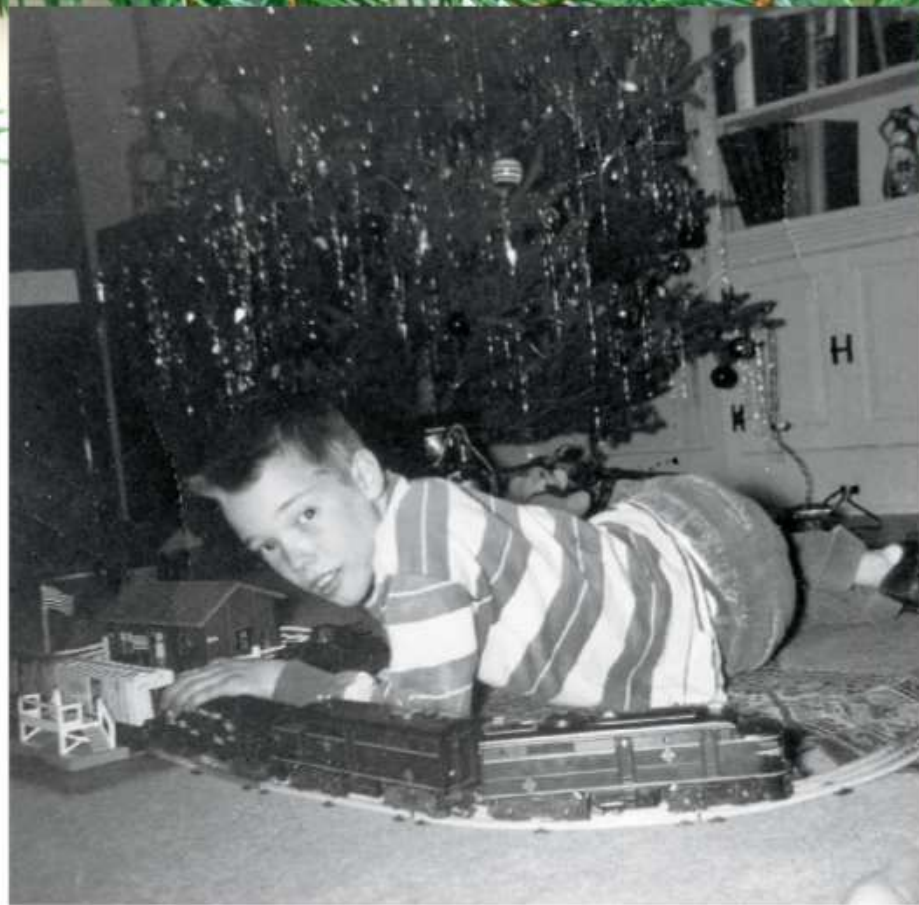
I later learned from my uncle the price of the Hudson was about a week's pay.

No more sneaking into the attic. Of course, once David and Pete discovered girls, I ended up with all the trains.

Meanwhile, 100 miles north from our home in Richmond, Va., my Uncle Everett had a very nice layout. My family visited him and my aunt two or three times a year. Then my cousin and I went down to the basement

began after Christmas 1954. It was so cold there I had to wear a winter coat and gloves. The towns had Plasticville structures, and the mountains were papier-mâché.

Then came the summers. You can imagine how hot and stuffy the attic was then. The final blow came when squirrels ate my mountains. Then, my father had mercy on me



JOHN ROSE could never really understand why, after his two older brothers received Lionel train sets for Christmas of 1947, he had to wait seven years before Santa brought him his own. Then he was thrilled with the no. 1467W freight led by no. 2032 Erie Alcos.



THE ELABORATE O GAUGE RAILROAD built by John's uncle left him in awe. He was always so happy to visit Uncle Everett and be allowed to run the Santa Fe F3 A-A diesels and their freight cars. What John saw inspired him to build his own three-rail layout.

and built an 8 x 12-foot table for the trains in the basement.

I got more serious about the hobby and began reading model railroad magazines. I made my own buildings.

This lasted well into my teenage years before girls and sports took over. However, there were times when girls and trains overlapped. When there were teen parties in the

basement, girls would ask questions about the layout.

Before too long, I was off to college and into the military. Then came marriage and kids of my own. I passed the trains to my nephews who specialized in head-on collisions. They gave them back to me to restore. I even blended the two old 1666 steamers into a single working engine. •

RETURN OF THE

RED ROCKET EXPRESS

LEGENDARY
LIONEL CHRISTMAS
TRAIN REAPPEARS!

Debates about the best Christmas movie ever made will be raging from now until Santa and Mrs. Claus have retired and left their elves in charge of North Pole operations. When toy train enthusiasts chime in, they insist the top

holiday film to showcase toy trains is *Holiday Affair*, starring Robert Mitchum and Janet Leigh. Released in the closing weeks of 1949, it used an O gauge passenger train

with Lionel F3 diesels and heavyweight passenger cars. The youngster in the movie, played by Gordon Gebert, cherished the train supposedly purchased for him.

MEMORABLE MOVIE

Gordon reminisced about the movie and the train set in the December 2016 issue of *Classic Toy Trains*. Gordon recalled many details about his experiences in *Holiday Affair*. Then only 7 years old, he played the son of a widow whose purchase of a high-end electric train at Crowley's Department Store raised the suspicions of a salesman

there. He doubted the set was for her son. Instead, he suspected she had bought it to see what Crowley's charged, information she planned to give to a rival store.

The rest of the 87-minute-long motion picture followed the travels of the unique passenger train set. The widow tried to return it because it cost more than she could afford. The kind salesman



➔ **THE 1949** movie *Holiday Affair* featured Janet Leigh as the widowed mother of Gordon Gebert. In the film, he received for Christmas an expensive train set lettered as the *Red Rocket Express*. Gordon shared his memories of making the motion picture in the December 2016 issue of *Classic Toy Trains*.

◀ **WHAT'S WITH** the Lionel F3s and heavyweight cars with an odd name lettered across their sides? The answer to a mystery linked with a Christmas movie many toy train enthusiasts consider the finest in that genre.





↑ **THE LIONEL DIESELS** and heavyweight passenger cars shown in operation here came on an 8 x 16-foot O gauge layout purchased from a hobbyist in southern California. She informed the new owner the display had been used in a movie made in 1998.

had a change of heart and later bought the train for the boy.

The article in the December 2016 CTT summarizes the movie, so there's no need to repeat the twists and turns of the plot. Suffice it to say, the widow and the salesman (like her deceased husband, he had served in World War II) end up falling in love. Meanwhile, the boy worries about the expense of the train. Patching everything up between his mom and her suitor becomes his goal.

WHAT THE TRAIN WAS

Gordon turned his attention to the electric train in the course of our interview. Of course, as postwar fans could figure out, the locomotives were no. 2333 Santa Fe F3 diesels. Lionel had introduced them in the catalog it had issued a year before for 1948. The identity of the red-and-silver units was plain even if the movie had been shot in black and white.

The passenger cars were the heavyweight coaches Lionel had brought out in 1940 and revived after the war. Although the Tuscan red models did not

reflect the latest equipment on American railroads, they still looked great behind the F3 A units.

Not that Lionel had matched its heavyweight cars with the latest motive power. The new diesels occupied a primary spot in the cataloged line in 1949, and the coaches remained at the peak of the passenger roster. But decision makers at the corporation never elected to put them in the same set.

Gordon doubted producers approached executives at Lionel, who hardly would have agreed to pair their innovative F3s with passenger cars reminiscent of the past. Rather than

seek the permission of the toy train giant, producers at RKO Radio Pictures in Hollywood purchased the trains they thought necessary for *Holiday Affair*.

To avoid antagonizing Lionel, the filmmakers concealed the names and other markings on the locomotives and coaches. They didn't want anyone to recognize the Lionel products. Instead,

emblazoned across the side of each heavyweight passenger car was the name *Red Rocket Express*. It appeared as well on the side of each gleaming diesel locomotive. The name suggested a modern, swift-running streamlined train.

Interestingly, Gordon could not recall ever seeing the *Red Rocket Express* run. Stagehands generally coupled the locomotives and coaches while placing them on the loop of three-rail track used in the movie. Then action! The cameras began rolling, even if the train did not.

Gordon told CTT there almost certainly had been more than just a single example of the Lionel passenger train available for filming. "Just as the old TV program used more than one Lassie," Gordon said, "we had a few examples of the same passenger train to film."

MYSTERY SETS IN

The article in CTT went on to ponder the fate of the one – or several – O gauge *Red Rocket Express* passenger train. Gordon assured us he did not have it.

To the contrary, Gordon remembered receiving a cataloged Lionel New York Central F3 freight set as a gift from Don Hartman, who had produced and directed *Holiday Affair*.



Album / Alamy Stock Photo

ORIGINAL MOVIE POSTER

Gordon speculated a member of the cast or the production crew had secreted the *Red Rocket Express* away, carrying it home to thrill a child. Or, he added, the train might have been packed away with all the other props from the movie or even been discarded.

GREAT DISCOVERY

As much as CTT readers had enjoyed learning the story behind the filming of *Holiday Affair* and reading the biography of its young costar, they continued to ask about the *Red Rocket Express*. To our disappointment, we had nothing to say.

Until the day a reader claimed he had seen an O gauge train that looked like the *Red Rocket Express*. He had been checking out a Lionel model on an Internet auction website. The car was displayed on a three-rail layout; in the distance he had spied the passenger train.

In time, I contacted the person who had advertised the Lionel piece and requested information about the train purported to be the *Red Rocket Express*.

LAYOUT WITH HISTORY

The gentleman returning my message spun quite a tale. His account began with him looking at antique furniture offered for sale on a different website. The photos of the vintage pieces revealed off to one side what appeared to be a three-rail layout with a mountain. Further views confirmed it was a railroad with track on different levels.

The woman selling the old furniture said the O gauge layout belonged to her. She had purchased it from a toy train store in southern California. Now she hoped to donate it to a children's ward at a hospital near her home there.

Several weeks then went by before the officials at the hospital informed the woman they would not be able to accept the layout. She in turn reached out to the person considering the furniture, suggesting he also take the model railroad. By then, he understood it was really big, consisting of four 4 x 8-foot sections.

The package deal of the furniture and



↑ **EIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT** cars – no. 2625 *Irvington*, *Madison*, and *Manhattan* coaches – came with the layout. The studio lettered them by hand as the *Red Rocket Express*. They were assumed lost until photographed by a CTT reader.

layout appealed to the man writing, just so long as everything could be transported safely and fairly inexpensively to his home in the Midwest. With the layout the woman promised to send trains.

Before the shipment arrived, the buyer had a follow-up conversation with the woman. She casually mentioned that when purchasing the layout from the toy train store, the owners had told her it had been used in a couple of movies. One film they remembered was *Rat Pack*, which had come out in 1998. A scene with the actor portraying Frank Sinatra had included the landscaped three-rail display.

A TREASURE BOX

The waiting had left the gentleman corresponding with me anxious indeed.

Pushed away on the shelf were two boxes filled with old trains he thought were Lionel.

The treasure? Three Santa Fe F3 diesels and eight heavyweights with lettering for *Red Rocket Express*. Most of the coaches, according to the owner, “were originally *Irvington* cars. I think one may be *Madison*. Some were broken.”

AMAZING FIND

Fortunately for the owner of the layout, any damage to the passenger cars was minimal. He could still run them on his new O gauge display. All the engines required a thorough cleaning and lubrication, but then operated fairly smoothly. So their motors had never been removed or had been replaced in recent years.

There, he noticed a small shelf under the main level that, unless you were lying on your back and looking up as he was, would remain hidden from sight.

He had looked forward to inspecting the three-rail layout, hopeful that nothing came damaged or worse.

Luck was on his side. “Not a tree limb was broken or an accessory was out of place. The layout was perfect in every way. I could not thank her enough.”

The woman was extremely pleased to hear everything was intact. She told the new owner of the layout before hanging up the telephone: “Now don’t forget I put the trains in a box that’s underneath

A wonderful and amazing find we are thrilled to share with you. From the set of *Holiday Affair* to a private layout 70 years later, this group of Lionel trains from the late 1940s has led a fascinating life. Now we can see them all in color! •

FOR MORE: Read about the movie in the December 2016 issue of *Classic Toy Trains*. Visit www.KalmbachHobbyStore.com, click on Magazines, and select Back Issues.





Lasting FAMILY TRADITIONS

**TWO GENERATIONS BUILT THIS
8 X 10-FOOT LAYOUT UNDER
THEIR CHRISTMAS TREE**

Photos by **Rob Smith**

Rob and Kim Smith honor family traditions each Christmas season. Both husband and wife grew up having a special display spread out under their beautifully decorated tree. For Rob, it was a three-rail layout featuring both prewar and postwar Lionel outfits. For Kim, it was a village she filled with miniature houses and figures.

Marriage did more than reinforce the traditions. It blended them so vintage O gauge trains operated amid structures, vehicles, and details. The scenes increased the joy Rob and Kim felt, especially after their two children, Amanda and Jacob, began helping assemble them. The tradition of a spectacle under the tree added life and gained a generation.

SIMPLY BEAUTIFUL

Gather around the tree in the living room of the Smith residence. Ornaments dangle from branches, and shiny tinsel hangs nearby. Lights brighten the scene, as they do in homes across North America.

Long before Rob and Kim met, their families were putting together scenes using miniatures and toys arranged beneath a Christmas tree. Neither could imagine the holidays any other way.

👉 **VILLAGERS TROMP** through the snow singing carols and drinking eggnog on the latest O gauge display Rob and Kim Smith constructed to enhance their family's Christmas celebration. They enjoy operating the Monon diesel, which is so festive in its bright red.



🏠 **WHILE THE** lamplighter prepares to illuminate the avenue, a Santa Fe streamlined passenger train tiptoes past. One blast of the diesel's horn might startle the old gentleman and cause him to tumble off his rickety ladder.

Decades later the two Smiths carry on these traditions. The three-rail display hardly qualifies as elaborate or very realistic. Rob and his wife want only something entertaining, a simple layout whose beauty and operation reminds them and all visitors of a loving past.

What the Smiths create each year can be described as a floor layout. No benchwork goes up. There are no elevated sections either. No, what viewers discover amounts to a couple of loops of contemporary track with a passing siding on the outer line. Everything fits into a mere 80 square feet.

Rob observes, “The inner loop uses Lionel FasTrack and has a maximum diameter of 36 inches. For the outer loop, I went with MTH RealTrax. The widest curves there are

72 inches in diameter. And the passing section heading into the village is much tighter, with a 31-inch diameter.”

OLD AND NEW

If all the track is contemporary, what about the trains? Does Rob run new models via systems of command control? After all, his O gauge layout in the family basement depends on command

control. There, he operates the latest locomotives from Lionel and MTH.

“We wanted a different look and feel upstairs around the Christmas tree,” Rob says. So even though new track made good sense for smooth and dependable operation, we opted for conventional control.” A couple of no. Z-1000 transformers made by MTH provide the juice for both independent loops.

As for what rules the rails under the tree, Rob directs our attention to two Lionel trains that have been integral parts of his life since he was in nursery school almost 50 years ago. The grizzled veteran of the roster belonged to Rob's father, who received a Lionel gem from the late pre-war era when he was a boy.

The no. 259E steam engine

🔄 AT A GLANCE

Name: Rob and Kim Smith's O gauge layout

Dimensions: 8 x 10 feet

Track: Lionel FasTrack, MTH RealTrax (diameters range from 31 to 72 inches)

Motive power and rolling stock: Lionel (all eras), MTH

Controls: MTH no. Z-1000 transformers (2)

Accessories: Lionel

Structures and figures: Department 56



↑ **ROB HAS** as much fun arranging the Department 56 buildings and figures for the holiday display as he does laying track and operating the new and vintage trains.



↑ **THIS LIONEL CLASSIC** from the postwar era of production – a stately no. 736 Berkshire steam engine – has been entertaining Rob nearly his entire life.

← **ROB AND KIM** have passed along their love of trains, miniature as well as full-size, to their children, Amanda and Jacob. Everybody chips in to finish the Christmas layout.

and tender have been members of every Smith family Christmas since Santa brought them to Rob's dad when he was a toddler. Like many an old-timer, they rest up for several months before coming out of semi-retirement to command the rails during the holiday season.

Joining this prewar classic and its rolling stock is a jewel from the latter half of the postwar period. Rob thanks

Santa for bringing an equally wonderful outfit when he was a lad. He points to the no. 736 Berkshire steamer and tender and the assortment of Presidential streamlined passenger cars they pull.

Letting two of Lionel's finest trains rule the Christmas roost on the Smith display has been a tradition since the 1960s. So has the unwritten doctrine that the prewar and postwar beauties

return to storage after New Year's. Rob's parents insisted the trains be put away when the Christmas tree went down.

GOING FULL CIRCLE

Rob has fond memories of playing with O gauge trains as a boy. "Like many guys in this hobby," he says, "my father was my biggest influence."

Besides initiating Rob into all aspects



THE WONDERFUL O gauge layout the Smith family builds for Christmas uses Lionel and MTH trains as well as Department 56 structures. Colorful decorations give the towering fir tree an identity all its own. Everything combines beautifully.



of model railroading, his dad taught him a great deal about full-size trains and how they ran. Nothing surprising about that, considering how the elder Smith came of age next to a branch line of the Michigan Central, which was part of the sprawling New York Central System.

Making good use of the prewar set, Rob's father instructed him and his two younger brothers on building and wiring a simple three-rail display at Christmas. Then along came the Berkshire and its sleek cars to augment their roster.

But what might have been an episode of the old TV series *My Three Sons* culminated in a minor rebellion. Rob and his brothers wanted to play with model trains throughout the year. So their dad compromised by buying an HO scale set.

The next step saw the Smiths building a layout on top of a 4 x 8-foot sheet of plywood. Everyone had a ball with the HO railroad until they discovered N scale around 1980. The smaller size appealed because it would let them pack more action into the same 32 square feet. "So we made a switch," Rob says.

Before long, the unreliable nature of the N scale turnouts left Rob and his brothers frustrated. "We lost interest," he recalls, "and nearly abandoned the hobby. When Dad got out the O gauge trains at Christmas, interest revived."

If anything, the flames burned hotter



↑ **QUITE A** moody shot Rob snapped of his MTH no. 30-1147 Wabash 4-6-4 Hudson leading a train past town just hours before everyone heads home to wait for Santa.

← **THE REINDEER** guiding Santa's sleigh across the skies on Christmas Eve may charge St. Nick if the MTH train named for their red-nosed buddy doesn't slow down!

than ever. So much that Rob and his dad invested in new Lionel locomotives and rolling stock, especially an O gauge version of the *Blue Comet* passenger train. "We forgot about HO and N and remembered all the fun associated with three-rail. We came back full circle!"

LOVING IT STILL

These days, the idea that Rob had come close to leaving the hobby seems impossible to believe. To the contrary – he proudly carries on family traditions.

The larger and more elaborate O gauge layout occupies a prominent spot in the basement. Nice as that is, what has warmed Rob's heart and boosted his love of the hobby has been joining his wife and kids creating a compact three-rail layout as the centerpiece of their Christmas celebration. Something exciting and new every year, just the way things were when Rob and his kin were growing up.

Keeping the tasks straightforward, Rob and Kim select a white linen sheet to serve as the foundation. They follow by covering it with some cotton sheets.

Time then to assemble the network of Lionel and MTH track and connect the two Z-1000 power sources using 16-gauge wire. Once someone has tested the trains to ensure they operate faithfully, scenery and structures can go on.

What passes for landscaping is also kept to a minimum. Out comes an old Lionel tunnel Rob painted with white acrylic to simulate a mountain with snow. In addition, he has a box surrounded by rolled-up paper towels to serve as a hill.

Commercial bushes and trees range in origin. Some, Rob and Kim bought at a crafts store. Others, they said, are Department 56 items purchased from a hobby shop. The same outlets offered the artificial snow and glitter eventually sprinkled over the cotton sheets to leave

next. More trains are part of the answer, as might be buildings and details.

Rob agrees about the pleasure of acquiring new items to complement the beloved trains headed by the 259E and 736 steam engines. Staking out a bigger footprint would be great, he adds, because the floor display could have winding curves and longer straight-aways. "Just have to wait to learn if that can happen."

What Rob knows for certain as he looks to the future is that Kim and he will go on designing a different little

What has warmed Rob's heart and boosted his love of the hobby has been joining his wife and kids creating a compact three-rail layout for Christmas.

the impression that white powder has recently fallen.

Structures sold by Department 56 typically appeal to the Smiths. They appreciate the traditional architecture and patches of snow on the roofs.

COOL FUTURE

Now that you have glimpsed the latest chapter in the ongoing story of the Smith family's Christmas layouts, it's fair to ask where Rob and his clan will go

snow-filled railroad every Christmas. And he feels confident in predicting Amanda and Jacob will do so as well, especially now that each of them has moved away. They're eager to keep the traditions alive.

Sharing the Smith family's tradition of a simple yet highly engaging compact O gauge display under the Christmas tree is a real treat for all of us at *Classic Toy Trains*. Best of all, it may inspire you to revive or even start your own. •

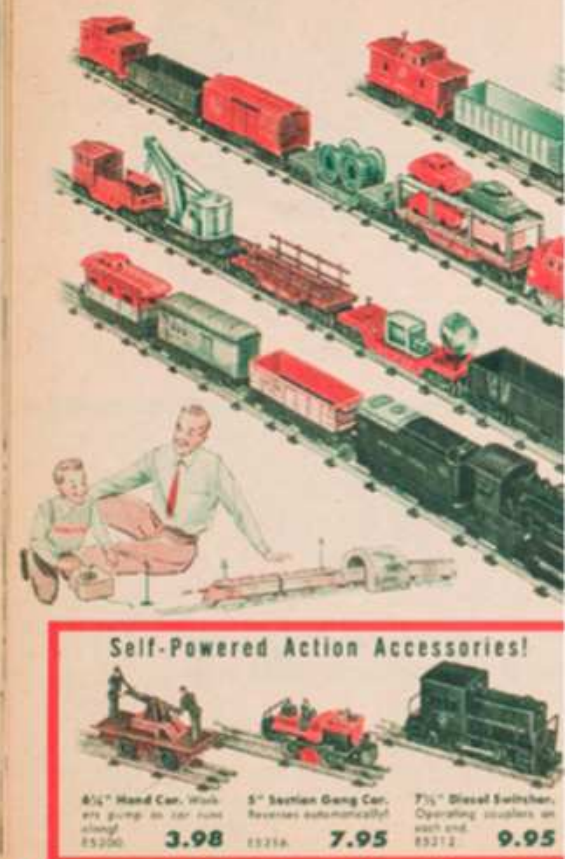
GIFTS FOR EVERYONE AT Firestone

← THE CATALOGS issued by national and regional chains of retail stores, notably Sears, Roebuck and Montgomery Ward, typically contained listings of toys. The wish book released by Firestone for Christmas 1947 showed a Lionel set on the cover.

DUNELLEN DEPT. STORE
372 North Avenue
DUNELLEN, NEW JERSEY

City, State or Federal Taxes will be added. Prices subject to change without notice.

→ THE WISH BOOKS distributed by Sears and similar retail chains offered a small yet affordable selection of toy trains. Most, like this one from Western Auto, showed many items from the Marx line, including both electric and mechanical sets.



WISH BOOKS

INTRODUCED UNUSUAL TRAINS



Wish Books! Something that members of the post-World War II toy industry referred to a bit formally as “catalogs” – full-color listings of the sets and models offered by Lionel and Gilbert – had another name to the millions of children perusing them. Boys and girls who came of age in the 1940s and '50s lovingly called them “wish books.”

In the beautifully illustrated pages of those catalogs, kids discovered the mechanical and electric trains and accessories they immediately began dreaming of owning. They wished each miniature locomotive, boxcar, and station might be

theirs. But youngsters realized they would be fortunate to receive one or two items for Christmas.

The splendid catalogs distributed by the biggest toy train manufacturers in America did not represent the only wish books of the postwar era. National and regional groups of retailers issued Christmas catalogs that included trains. Sears, Roebuck & Co.; Montgomery Ward; Firestone Tire & Rubber; and others featured fascinating and noteworthy train sets that differed in some way from what appeared in the American Flyer and Lionel catalogs.

Exciting Marx and Lionel Electric Trains!

- Marx 5-Unit Freight.** Railroading at its low, low price! Steam locomotive with headlight, express car, caboose over 14" track. U.I. approved transformer. \$5005. **8.99**
- Marx 6-Unit Diesel Switcher.** G16 style diesel with "roaring" sound, light. Work cars include Flat Car, Searchlight Car, Gondola, Wrecker, Caboose. Nine sections track. 30-watt transformer. \$5011. **19.95**
- Marx 7-Unit Double Diesel Freight.** "Rovers" like a real diesel! Double unit heads Box Car, Cable Car, Gondola, Automobile Car, Caboose. Eleven sections track, uncoupling ramp. 75-watt transformer. \$5013. **23.88**
- Lionel 4-Unit Diesel.** Featuring a G16-14. Eight, V-type Diesel Engine with Lionel's famous Magna-Traction Pipe Car, Gondola Car with couplers, Caboose. Nine sections track, uncoupling ramp, 30-watt transformer. \$5009. **12.88**
- Lionel 4-Unit Electric Locomotive Set.** Authentically styled Electric Locomotive pulls a Box Car, Gondola and Caboose. Nine sections track, uncoupling ramp, 45-watt transformer. Traditional Lionel quality at this low price. \$5003. **17.88**

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- Automatic Warning Signals.** Choose one or all of these fine accessories to add to your train layout! Each set the same low price! Lighted Ball Signal, Black Signal, Flasher Signal, Crossing Gate. Each with necessary bulbs, wires, connectors. Your choice. \$3201. **1.98**
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- 11" Metal Tunnel.** Watch your train pass through a realistic tunnel! Sturdy model is colorfully lithographed. Collapsible, two-piece construction. \$3203. **98¢**
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- Battery-Operated Freight.** Steel set takes one flashlight cell. Forward, reverse, Load, Tender, Gondola, Caboose. 10 sections track. \$3101. **3.98**
- Mechanical Freight.** Powered by a long running clockwork motor! Load with ball, Tender, Gondola, Caboose, 8 sections track. \$3100. **2.88**

Complete Electric Freight Train Layout!

A sensational value! A complete train layout for the price of the train alone! Steam locomotive, gondola, tender, loaded Automobile Car, opening Searchlight Car, Gondola, Refrigerator Car, Caboose. 18 sections track, left-hand switch, right-hand switch, uncoupling ramp, signals, 8 pieces, 2 ball-and-socket telephone poles, 6 signs, water tower, 75-watt transformer with circuit breaker, smoke bellows and track connector. All for an amazing price! \$5014. **28.84**

TRAINS EVERYWHERE

Amid the black-and-white and occasional full-color pictures of playthings in the different wish books children saw trains. The most prevalent brand came from the factories of Louis Marx & Co. Information about their windups and electrics filled so many of the pages devoted to trains because their prices tended to be the lowest. Families with tighter budgets and more limited cash would answer kids' wishes with Marx sets.

All the same, illustrations and descriptions of American Flyer and Lionel items did grace the Christmas wish books arriving in the mail or being grabbed at service centers and retailers. Kids unable to obtain catalogs distributed by the two main toy train manufacturers relied on Sears, Ward, and others.

If kids had a Lionel or Gilbert catalog and a wish book from a regional or national chain, they often noticed discrepancies in what was offered for sale. Sharp-eyed readers might also spy some unusual models.

Gilbert and Lionel began in the middle and late 1950s to assemble for key retail chains train sets whose contents differed from what appeared in their annual consumer catalogs. Wish books from Sears and Ward heralded exclusive items.

Even earlier the catalogs Sears put out at different seasons, in particular for winter shopping, revealed unusual models. Personnel finishing the wish books often relied on artwork taken from the annual advance catalog Lionel created for the toy trade. Thus, kids had the chance to glimpse rare models.

The 1952 Sears Christmas catalog shows a preproduction model of the no. 445 automatic switch tower. A no. 6464-75 Rock Island boxcar with markings unlike those on the final version stands out in the wish book for 1953. Mock-ups of the Lionel no. 3562 operating barrel car – one labeled Erie and the other Chesapeake & Ohio – are seen in the 1954 catalog.

GROWING DEPENDENCE ON CHAINS

Whether children had at their disposal postwar Lionel and Flyer catalogs or only the ones available from Sears, Ward, or another retail chain, they wished for toy trains. Department stores in large cities might satisfy their hopes for a set. So also might the outlets maintained by national and regional chains.

Youngsters living in rural areas or far from urban centers depended more on mail-order firms and their local catalog branches. One way or another, many of the kids everywhere who dreamed of a miniature train did get one at Christmas.

That had been true since the 1910s and '20s, when Ward and then Sears, the top retail chains, had begun carrying trains. Others had followed suit later in the prewar era and after World War II. For most, Marx sets represented the biggest sellers because they cost less than what Lionel and Flyer offered. Still, they typically included the latter two brands.

What did Sears and other chains put in their local outlets and advertise in their national catalogs? Focusing on train sets, the rule was for their agents to order large quantities of a few trains at different price points. Generally speaking, those sets were in terms of their contents identical to what Lionel and Gilbert cataloged.

*If your family
received the
massive catalogs
put out by Sears
and Ward in the
postwar years,
you made sure
to get your turn
exploring them.*

Yet in the 1930s and early 1940s, Lionel assembled sets whose combination of engine and rolling stock varied from what it used in its cataloged line. It might add an inexpensive accessory, such as a bridge or signal. By creating promotional outfits unlike anything it cataloged, Lionel was helping retailers boost their sales.

CATALOGED SETS FOR ALL

Circumstances changed for Lionel once toy train production resumed after the war. Demand for its sets skyrocketed, so executives elected not to provide Sears and other retail accounts with special items. Instead, the sets described and depicted in Christmas wish books duplicated what appeared in consumer catalogs.

Therefore, the challenge for wholesalers was to select a handful of trains to order in bulk that were likely to appeal to their customers. Sears typically had just a handful of Lionel outfits in

its Christmas wish books between 1946 and '54. Every one of them could be found in Lionel's full-color catalog for that year.

Incidentally, the same general statement applied to American Flyer in the late 1940s and into the 1950s. The S gauge sets Ward stocked copied what the Gilbert Co. was announcing in the color catalogs it had prepared for the public.

Marx, of course, remained the dominant player in the field. Its trains and numerous other toys filled the Christmas catalogs from Sears and other chains.

TIME TO EXPERIMENT

Much changed in the domestic market during the middle of the 1950s. Above all, courts began to invalidate Fair Trade Laws. Those statutes had dictated the stable pricing of consumer items regardless of where they were sold. Thus, an outfit listed by Lionel in its catalog as selling for \$59.95 had to be sold for that amount in the biggest department store and smallest appliance shop.

The demise of Fair Trade Laws coincided with and accelerated the growth of discount houses. Proprietors enjoyed the freedom to price the toys they ordered from Lionel, Marx, and others at different levels if they believed doing so would increase the volume of traffic in their stores and heighten sales.

In the meantime, increasingly bold retailers wanted Lionel and Gilbert to return to creating special sets for them to promote as exclusive bargains. They conferred with leaders at the train producers, looking for deals in exchange for placing sizable orders. With demand for electric trains declining in the late 1950s, executives no longer assumed they could ignore the requests now reaching them.

As a result, the kids devouring the wish books mailed out by Sears and Ward started to notice sets whose contents differed from what they saw in their Lionel and Flyer catalogs. The same change could be detected in some of the illustrated materials released by regional chains and local merchants.

Youngsters found the range of decisions they needed to make about what Santa Claus should bring them multiplying. For what showed up in retailers' wish books equaled or possibly surpassed in excitement what the train makers showed.

NEW TRENDS IN 1955

Probably the richest though not the only sources of information about the promotional sets offered in the middle and late 1950s are the Christmas catalogs. The key year in a couple of respects was 1955. For one thing, Ward once more carried Lionel trains. No explanation for why, after stocking that brand in the years leading up to World War II, the national chain had failed to do so for a decade after peace returned. Neither did a reason appear why Ward did so again.

The Montgomery Ward Christmas Book for 1955 heralded five Lionel sets. Each corresponded to a set in the cataloged line for that year. However, because Fair Trade Laws were being weakened, Ward could price each set for less than Lionel had. For example, the Lionel no. 1000W O-27 steam freight train listed at \$39.95 cost \$10.50 less as the Ward no. 3003.

For another thing, 1955 proved to be the first year in which the Christmas catalog distributed by Sears contained a Lionel set differing from what the firm was then showing in its new line. The discrepancy was tiny yet still worth noting.

Sears set no. 9652 caught the attention of kids, thanks to the new Lionel no. 2328 Burlington Route GP7 road diesel on the point. Besides a Southern Pacific-type caboose, it pulled three freight cars, including a no. 3484 operating boxcar (shown as a Pennsylvania RR model but actually a Santa Fe version).

The operating boxcar served as the difference between the Sears train and the only outfit Lionel cataloged in 1955 with a Burlington Geep. Set no. 1531W had in place of the 3484-25 a no. 6462-125 New York Central gondola. Now Ward advertised the Lionel version, so maybe Sears demanded a change in the contents to differentiate its set from what a rival had.

COOL EXAMPLES IN 1956 AND '57

Let's look at a few examples of the promotional sets shown in wish books in the latter half of the 1950s, starting with two Lionel sets offered by Sears in 1956. They had items either not yet a part of the cataloged line or never used in a cataloged set.

Set no. 9602 was a four-car work train led by a new no. 626 General Electric 44-ton diesel. Although the black-and-white illustration showed a Northern Pacific herald on the cab, examples had a 44-tonner decorated for the Baltimore & Ohio a year before Lionel inserted that model in its cataloged line.

The no. 9606 offered a Lionel no. 2016 steamer and tender with four cars and an SP-type caboose. For \$39.25, buyers got a set unlike what Lionel cataloged. A 3484-25 Santa Fe operating boxcar rode next to a no. 6464-350 Missouri-Kansas-Texas boxcar (part of the line in 1956 only and then strictly as a separate-sale item). Sears had the only set ever to use that model.

Two of the four sets Lionel made for Sears in 1957 deserve attention. A no. 611 Jersey Central NW2 switcher led six cars and an SP-type caboose in no. 9641. Among the finest were the nos. 6464-425 New Haven near-scale boxcar, 6262 wheel car, 6121 flatcar with pipes, and 6112 gondola with canisters.

More appealing was eight-car work train no. 9643, which used a no. 2339 Wabash GP7 road diesel. Packed in its set box were, among other items, the nos. 3650 extension searchlight car, 6424 flatcar with autos, 6511 flatcar with pipes, 6436 Lehigh Valley quad hopper, and 6467 miscellaneous car.

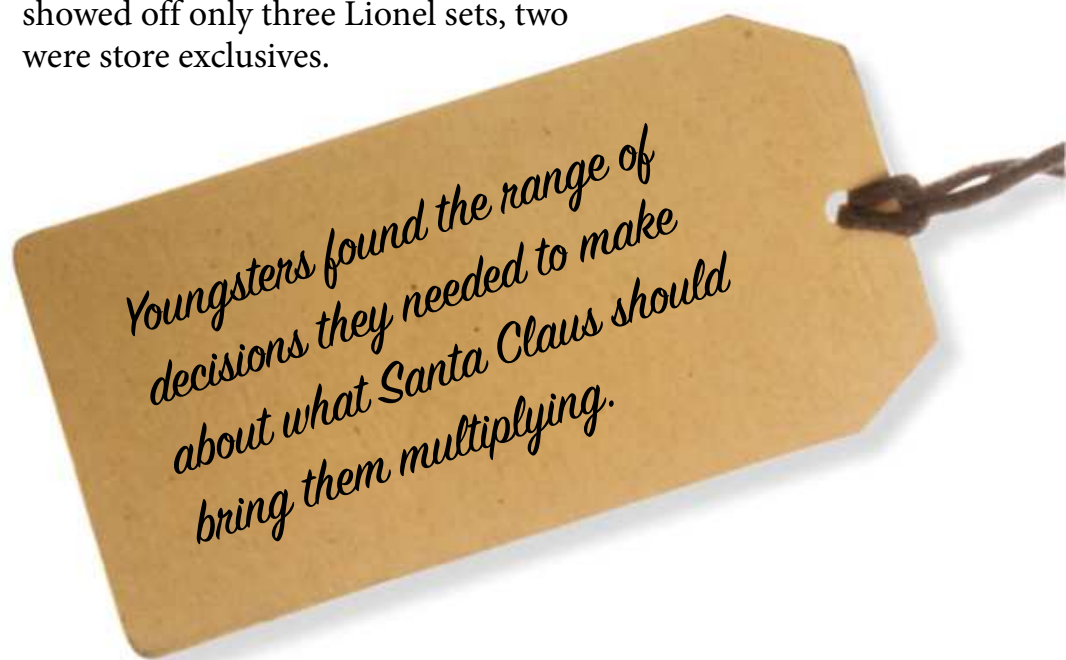
Whether decisions about the contents of the sets offered by Sears in 1957 came from its offices or Lionel's, there is little question about play value being uppermost.

TREND ADVANCES IN 1958

The notable trend of national retail chains and mail-order firms promoting Lionel sets unlike what was shown in the consumer catalog picked up momentum in 1958. The wish books from Sears and Ward tantalized kids as never before.

A change largely limited to Sears touched other businesses. To be sure, Ward had featured among its four Lionel sets in 1957 one that for the first time in the postwar era it could have advertised as an exclusive. The no. 3049 used a no. 250 Pennsylvania RR 2-4-2 steam locomotive and tender to pull the nos. 6424 flatcar with autos, 6121 flatcar with pipes, a pair of boxcars unidentified in either the black-and-white image or accompanying text, and an SP-type caboose.

Yet for Ward, the breakthrough occurred in 1958. Although the Christmas wish book for that year showed off only three Lionel sets, two were store exclusives.



The no. 3001 came with a five-car steam freight train as well as a 35-piece farm building and animal set from Plasticville, all for only \$23.30! The no. 3002 as illustrated had no. 205 Missouri Pacific Alco A-A units pulling five cars and an SP-type caboose. Other than the diesels, it was identical to cataloged set no. 1599, so it was possible Lionel sent Ward train sets with no. 210 *Texas Special* Alcos.

In the meantime, Sears was announcing four Lionel sets in 1958, and all of them were unique. The best was the no. 9658, a work train with eight pieces of rolling stock and a brand-new no. 2337 Wabash GP7 road diesel on the point.

Also shown in the Sears Christmas Catalog for 1958 was set no. 9655, a curious item. It introduced the no. 248 steam engine, which never made it into the cataloged lineup. The five-car freight represented a longer version of outfit no. 1590, which had four of the same cars but lacked a no. 6476 hopper.

OTHERS TO WISH FOR

Glorious days spent paging through voluminous catalogs to make wishes for Christmas gifts progressed from the 1950s well into the '60s. Sears and Ward continued to release them, and the sections brimming with toys always had trains.

Little question, therefore, children during the postwar era didn't need to send away for the full-color American Flyer and Lionel catalogs to indulge their dreams of selecting the right toy train. What famous retail chains and mail-order firms offered gave them more than enough to consider when letting their hearts and minds wish. •

Let's visit THE LIONEL SHOWROOM for Christmas

WINTER ARRIVED THERE RIGHT AFTER THANKSGIVING

Major department stores in New York City employed talented individuals to design enticing displays for their windows. For every season of the year they created appealing displays using assorted props, lighting, and even motion to grab the attention of passersby whom they hoped would walk inside.

Pressure to come up with something novel and entrancing increased as the holiday shopping period approached. Designers and their crews at Macy's, Gimbels, B. Altman, Bonwit

Teller, S. Klein, and other leading department stores in America's largest city responded with wonderful displays blending consumer goods with wintry effects.

Not surprisingly, employees at the Lionel showroom in midtown Manhattan also felt the need to do more at the holidays. Memories of visitors and a few surviving photos indicated how scenery on the large O gauge display in the middle of the room was modified after Thanksgiving to give it a seasonal look.



THE EARLIEST photographic evidence of Lionel modifying the O gauge layout built in 1949 for winter was this picture used in an advertisement in the February 1956 issue of *Machinery*. Artificial snowflakes again filled the open areas and tracks and could also be seen on the roofs of many structures.



EMPLOYEES SCATTERED lots of artificial snow along and between the four concentric main lines of the Lionel Railroad Panorama to win over visitors in December of 1948. The white-and-gray painted cliffs seemed to be covered with ice and frost.

Pressure to come up with something novel and entrancing increased as the holiday shopping period approached.



THE STAR ATTRACTION

From the middle of the 1920s through the early '60s, the Lionel Corp. maintained its corporate headquarters at 15 East 26th Street. The highlight for everyone, whether children or veterans of the toy business, was the large operating model railroad in the central section.

What began as a Standard gauge display at least by 1930 added O gauge loops shortly thereafter. From 1938 through 1963, a series of O gauge layouts captivated adults and children.

Photos reveal how employees made changes to the layouts. New accessories found a home and trains were switched.

Youngsters in particular were welcome to come there, pick up a free catalog, and see the trains.

EARLIEST PROOF OF WINTER

We know that employees modified the centerpiece to reflect the weather outdoors and the coming of Christmas. Since it was winter, they thought it made sense to sprinkle artificial snow across a portion of the layout, if only to amuse the adults and kids visiting.

LIONEL CHANGED the scenery on the main layout in its New York showroom in the postwar era to reflect the arrival of winter and the upcoming Christmas holidays. This photo shows snow on the east side of the Lionel Railroad Panorama in 1948.

Three surviving color photographs taken on the Lionel Railroad Panorama finished in 1945 show artificial snow sprinkled on that big display. One of them appeared in the December 19, 1948, edition of the New York *Daily News*. Another ended up being used on the cover of *Toy Trains* magazine late in 1952. The third photo seemed not to have been published then.

Knowing that one image of the first postwar layout with snow graced the full-color Sunday supplement of the

miniature houses, trees, and flat land adjacent to the tracks dusted with snow. A sheet of glass served as a frozen lake.

ABOUT THE CHANGES

After studying the three photos taken of the Lionel Railroad Panorama in 1948, a couple of questions arose. First, when were the wintry effects put on the layout? Second, what materials did company employees rely on for the effects?

The first question can be answered fairly easily. Business executives generally considered Thanksgiving to be the opening of the holiday shopping season. Decision makers at Lionel, who kept the showroom open to the public nearly all the time, would likely have followed suit.

Therefore, transforming the enormous O gauge layout to resemble winter right around Thanksgiving almost surely was the practice at Lionel. Corporate leaders knew the largest crowds of the year would be visiting in December. They would have felt a sense of urgency about promoting their trains as the ideal way to celebrate Christmas.

Second, what did employees use to show winter had arrived? No definitive answers have surfaced. They could have sprinkled baking soda in areas. Also at the time a few businesses made or sold boxes of artificial snow, including the A.C. Gilbert Co. and the Colber Corp. Either way, hobbyists with any type of layout could model winter inexpensively and safely without much fuss and mess.

SNOW FELL AGAIN IN 1955

Executives, evidently unhappy with the appearance of the Lionel Railroad Panorama, had enlisted the craftsmen at Diorama Studios (affiliated with the firm's advertising department) to replace it with a display more appealing to consumers and better able to promote trains and accessories. They did so in 1949.

Black-and-white photos make it clear how Lionel modified the layout for the holidays in the middle 1950s. Sifting on and scattering artificial snow became the practice. Areas adjacent to main lines and yards filled up with flakes and drifts.

The first image appeared as part of an advertisement for Anaconda Steel printed in the February 1956 issue of *Machinery*. It showed a boy at the controls of a ZW transformer, with snow covering nearby main lines and sidings, including the elevated section in the distance of what was the layout finished in 1949.

Scrutiny of the photo leads to an odd conclusion: The photo is faked! You see, the transformer covers one of the tracks, and the child sits on a neighboring track. Meaning the image of the boy has been superimposed over a panoramic black-and-white photo of the showroom layout. The latter should concern us.

The three-rail display glimmers with snow like a winter wonderland. The publication date of the trade journal and the presence in the picture of a no. 60 Lionelville Rapid Transit trolley (which made its debut in 1955) suggests we're looking at the layout as it must have appeared for Christmas of 1955.



A NEWSREEL filmed at the showroom late in 1957 captured the wintry look of the big layout before it was dismantled. The Super O display that took its place likely was never covered with snow because cleanup would have been daunting.

WINTER COMES IN 1956 AND '57

A second black-and-white photo of the layout with snow came from the files of United Press, where it may have been deposited after being shot. Lionel historian Robert Horton reports that, according to the information typed on the reverse of the original image, it was taken on December 1, 1956.

The third piece of evidence was a newsreel filmed at the showroom in the final weeks of 1957. Still images gathered from the newsreel capture the wintry appearance on the railroad at its end.

SEASON'S ENDING

After decorating the most influential of the postwar layouts with snow for a minimum of four consecutive winters, Lionel changed course. The debut of Super O track in 1957 prodded executives to have the principal display torn down and replaced with a jam-packed, toy-like Super O layout.

Anyone making the showroom in New York a destination for the holiday season of 1958 would have discovered a new 16 x 32-foot extravaganza. Highways and elevated main lines, viaducts and waterways dominated the model railroad.

Photos of the Super O layout are not plentiful. None of them depict a hint of winter – no ice or snow anywhere. No one who saw that display ever mentioned its décor and landscape being altered for the Christmas season.

The animated effects and jumbled nature of the multiple vignettes led key people to see that trying to scatter artificial snow on the layout would have caused problems with its operation. Removing the powder and flakes after New Year's would have been a nightmare.

The time of changing displays at the Lionel showroom for winter had ended. The visual appeal was not worth the bother. •



THE ODD POSE of a youngster on the showroom layout might have kept that photo from being printed in a newspaper. However, its date of December 1, 1956 revealed how early the O gauge display had been "winterized" then.

MARX

A FOUR-LETTER SYNONYM FOR CHRISTMAS

THE ELECTRIC AND MECHANICAL TRAINS SANTA ALWAYS DELIVERED

If you examined only the thick mail-order catalogs put out regularly by Montgomery Ward and Sears, Roebuck & Co., you could not help but underestimate their importance.

The Christmas wish books that were distributed by Sears and Ward featured several pages showing the mechanical and electric trains made by Louis Marx & Co. Black-and-white illustrations and even a few color photographs promoted the models, sets, and accessories from Marx. They overshadowed the Lionel and Flyer entries.

Clearly, Marx succeeded in offering trains for every budget. The toy company managed to assemble sets for the youngest child and the family with the fewest dollars to spend. Little wonder Marx toys dominated catalogs released by national chains. They provided the ideal starting point for many kids dreaming of a train.

It made sense for children confused when seeing “Xmas” written in place of Christmas to think the four

letters should have been transposed and one altered. Christmas to millions of postwar boys and girls had best be shortened to “Marx.”

TRAINS APPEALING TO ALL

Leafing through the vintage mail-order catalogs revealed several exciting sets every year. One look at the trains told you they belonged to the expansive line of toys developed by Marx at its bustling factory in western Pennsylvania. Sears might refer to them as Happi-Time or, later in the 1950s, as Allstate. Yet anyone with a discerning eye and knowledge of the field knew they came from Mr. Marx.

The great majority of trains produced by Marx for Sears and Ward relied on electricity. However, enough windup, or mechanical, locomotives joined them to fill an entire

page or at least most of one page in their Christmas wish books.

Windup trains, which depended on either a clockwork motor wound with a large metal key or a battery-powered engine, might have struck a good many consumers as hopelessly out of date in postwar America. After all, rare was the residence even in the most rural areas still lacking household electrical current by the 1940s and '50s.

All the same, those Marx sets found audiences in homes with very young children whose parents didn't think they were quite ready for an electric version. Besides seeming safer, mechanical trains cost a lot less – a far from minor factor.

Some of the Marx electric trains used steam engines equipped with a smoke unit and a headlight. A trio of die-cast metal classics reigned in the 1950s: the





nos. 333 (a 4-6-2 steamer), 666 (a 2-4-2 steamer), and 999 (another 2-4-2).

Stamped-steel and injection-molded plastic steam engines supplemented the Marx roster in the 1950s and '60s. They came equipped with windup motors or electric ones. Among the top electrical types were the nos. 400, 490, 591, 833, and 994.

Of course, Marx had no intention of ignoring the growing fascination in diesel locomotives. It designed wonderful models of Electro-Motive Division of General Motors and Fairbanks-Morse cab units and road diesels. The most striking boasted tinplated steel shells with magnificent lithography. Plastic

bodies distinguished other Marx diesels, including its Alco S-3 switcher, EMD E7, and General Electric 70-ton switcher.

INNOVATIVE COMBINATIONS

During the first half of the 1950s, when Lionel and Gilbert staunchly held fast against creating unique exclusive items for Sears and Ward, Marx adopted a more liberal policy. Generally speaking, that involved combining a train set with many different accessories to provide consumers with everything they needed for a railroad.

↑ **TRAINS AND ACCESSORIES** from Louis Marx & Co. filled the pages of the catalogs put out by national and regional mail-order businesses, including this one issued by Western Auto. Children loved the colorful models, and their parents appreciated the assortment of sets available at low prices.



↑ **VARIETY STORES**, known as “five-and-dimes,” stood along Main Street in small cities and towns across the country during the prewar and postwar eras. They typically stocked toy trains, as shown as this re-creation of an F.W. Woolworth’s toy department.

Headlining every holiday season was a Montgomery Ward exclusive containing a deluxe set, loads of straight and curved track, two remote-controlled switches, and two bumpers.

Of course, that was merely the beginning. Item no. 3014M in 1950 also had a big sheet-metal freight station with boxes and barrels. Other exclusives came packed with a powerful transformer. Item no. 3015M in 1952 gave its lucky owner plastic structures, signs, figures, and signals – more than 170 pieces in all.

Particularly appealing about the fantastic assortment of trains, track, and more in every Marx exclusive from Ward

was the information printed in the wish book about how the sections could be assembled to form miniature empires. There also were hints for operating the train in a realistic and fun manner.

“A Complete Railroad System ... Everything the Young Railroader Needs” was the line copywriters returned to year after year to promote the enormous array of items. They emphasized how economical the special was, often noting how its list price was half of what the individual items went for when totaling their prices.

From all angles, then, the exclusive combinations Marx put together for

Sears and Ward left quite an impression. Youngsters and their families had reason to prefer them. Only the reindeer pulling Santa’s sleigh might have protested, since those exclusives weighed more than the low-end Lionel and American Flyer sets.

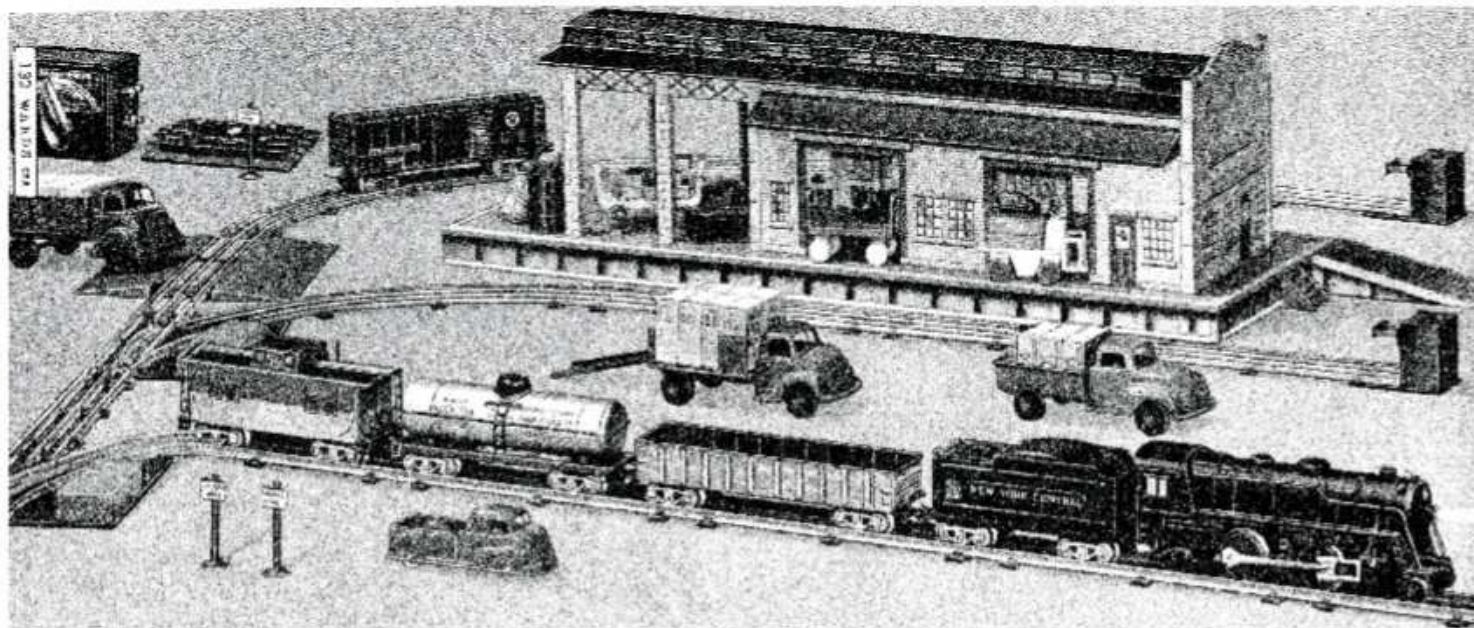
LOTS FOR LESS

The range of prices assigned to Marx train sets appealed to virtually every consumer. Not something that could be said about the sets from Lionel.

Look, for example, at the trains illustrated and described in the Christmas catalog sent out by Sears in 1950. Lionel outfits started at \$19.95 and increased until hitting \$52.50. The latter amount was the equivalent to \$559.73 in 2018.

By contrast, a basic electric freight set from Marx was listed at \$7.95. An electric diesel freight with three cars went for \$10.75. The most expensive electric came with a price tag of \$21.97. At the

For many youngsters back in the 1940s and '50s, a windup or an electric train set sold by Louis Marx & Co. represented a wonderful introduction to model railroading.



← **EXECUTIVES AT MARX** recognized the advantages of combining a train with accessories to create a railroad system a customer might promote as a money-saving exclusive to boost sales. Montgomery Ward offered this value-laden special for the holiday season of 1950.

same time, mechanical trains ranged from \$2.89 to \$5.89.

The discrepancy in cost between Marx electric trains and those produced by Lionel remained through the rest of the decade, as shown in the Sears and Ward catalogs. The same was true with the accessories the two firms marketed.

Marx manufactured everything a young engineer might want to augment a set and create a small empire. We're talking about switches and lights, crossing signals and water towers, tunnels and bridges, cranes and freight depots.

Beautiful lithography executed in a rainbow of vivid shades and details characterized the locomotives, rolling stock, and structures produced by Marx. It also capitalized on the advantages of injection-molded plastics for highway and railroad signs, telephone poles, and figures. All were priced as low as possible.

GREAT BEGINNINGS

For many youngsters in the 1940s and '50s, a windup or an electric set from Marx represented a wonderful introduction to model railroading. Some of those baby boomers maintained an allegiance to the trains put out by that firm. Others used them as a stepping stone to more realistic and expensive models.

Over the past 30 years, *Classic Toy Trains* has published articles on Marx streamliners, locomotives, rolling stock, and accessories. There have also been photos of those prewar and postwar models in a variety of settings.

Let's gather some of our favorite images, along with a nice assortment of new ones, to pay tribute to the eye-catching Marx sets, stations, and cars that thrilled so many children. They'll entertain and inform us about the endless appeal of these icons.



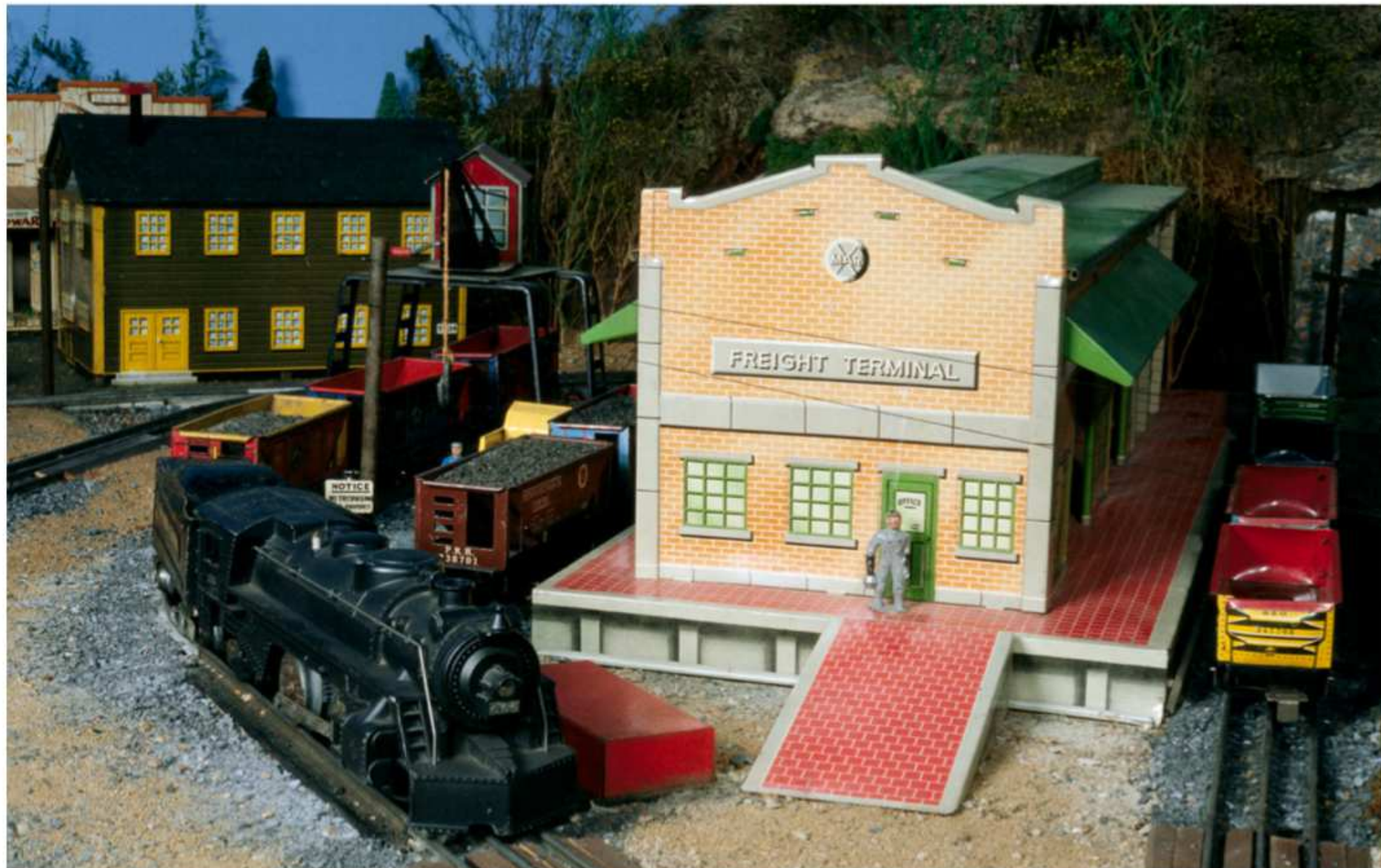
↑ **FAMILIES THROUGHOUT THE U.S. AND CANADA** in the postwar era surprised youngsters on Christmas day with a shiny locomotive and colorful rolling stock made by Marx. Some folks might have set up the train under a decorated tree, as Ian McKechnie has done.



↑ **UNTIL YOU'VE SEEN THE ATTRACTIVE COLOR SCHEMES** on Marx diesels, you may think Flyer and Lionel had no parallel in the postwar toy train world. Both plastic models like the Santa Fe and tinplate units like the Southern Pacific are absolute jewels.



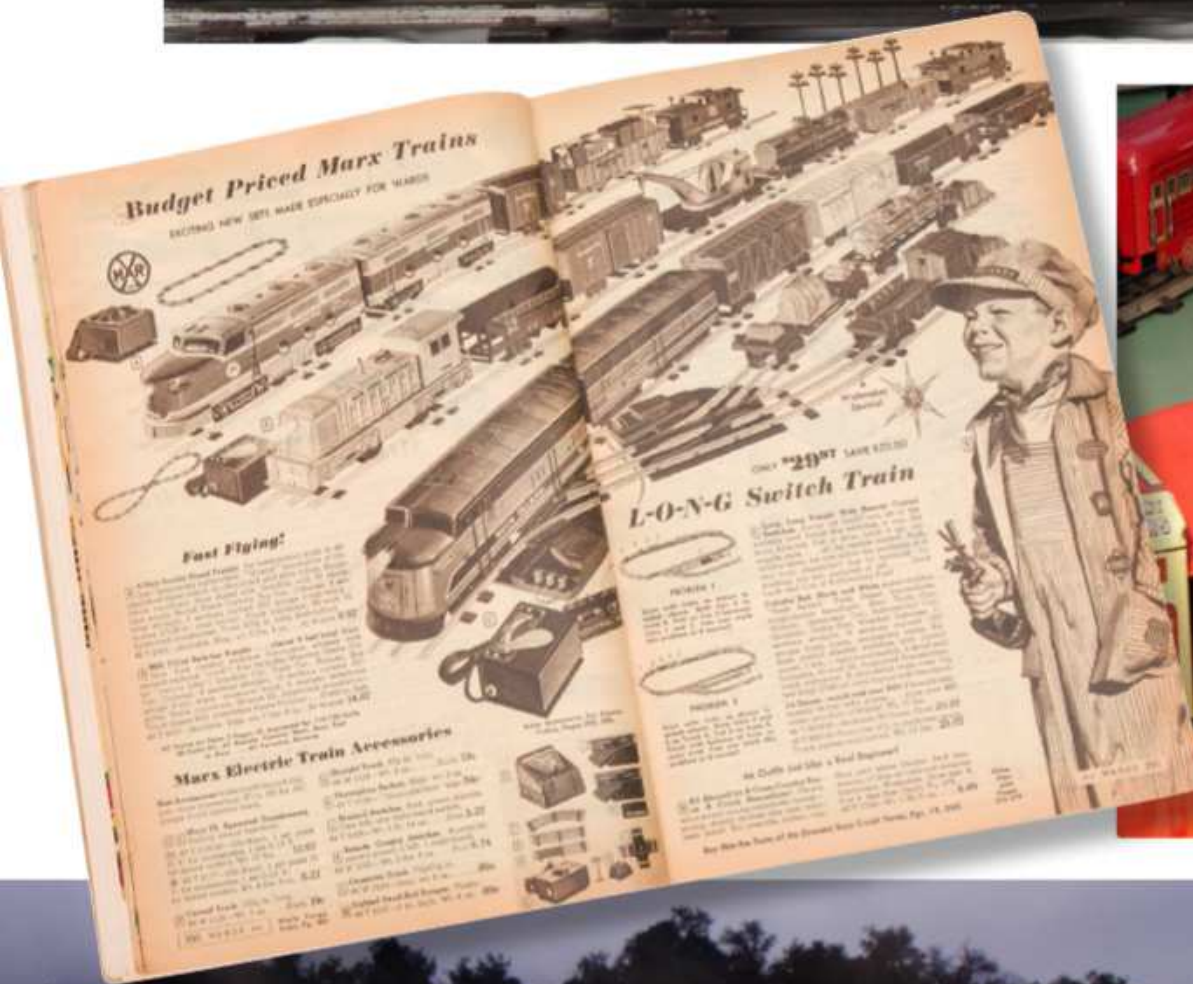
← **SNOW ON THE GROUND** and the evergreens near the tracks get shivers of cold running down your spine. While you're struggling to keep warm, a pair of Marx streamliners zips by. Jerry Custer liked to showcase his classic Union Pacific M-10000 and M-10005 trains.



↑ **SUPPOSE YOU HAD BEEN INCREDIBLY NICE** and not naughty for a whole year. And you loved Marx trains! Santa would have rewarded you with one of those exclusives consisting of a train set, a freight station, and more. Seems like Ray Cox did exactly that.



↓ THE PHOTO BACKDROP of a foggy mountainside in the depths of winter enhances the porcelain station holding a stack of Christmas gifts bound for local residents. Eric Beheim caught a New York Central passenger train with Marx coaches departing.



← MARX AIMED TO offer a train for every price level. Families on tight budgets might be tempted by a battery-powered set. Folks with more money would choose a big-ticket item combining a train with accessories.

↑ MARX STUCK WITH THE PRACTICE of lithographing tinplated sheets of steel long after other leading American producers of toy trains had abandoned it. Consequently, many of its diesels, cars, and structures have a delightful look seen nowhere else.

← THE RICH AND ELEGANT colors as well as the sense of sophistication widely associated with the warbonnet scheme used by the Santa Fe for its diesels captivated people. Marx followed Lionel and Gilbert in adopting the striking decor for its top locomotives. •



A permanent Christmas



Wonderland



THOMAS BROWN'S FAMILY INSISTED HE LEAVE HIS LAYOUT IN PLACE

Photos by **Thomas Brown**

Readers of *Classic Toy Trains* love to reminisce about the layouts they enjoyed as youngsters during the holiday season. And the story many of them tell follows the same general outline.

The trains came out of storage around Thanksgiving, went on a loop of track assembled under their family's Christmas tree, and returned to their boxes before the end of January. Then out of sight for the next 10 months.

Thomas Brown lived through that as a kid in the 1950s. He expected to repeat that experience as an adult, when he talked about building a temporary Christmas layout at his home. But something magical and fortunate happened. The new O gauge railroad stayed up and running! In fact, the Brown family nearly ordered Thomas to leave it alone long after the holidays had passed. He, of course, was glad to oblige, just as long as he could keep improving it.

USED TO TEMPORARY

The pattern for Thomas was set early in life. His older brothers played with a Lionel outfit while Thomas was still in diapers, with the rule being all the three-rail trains came out only for the holidays.

With so little time to enjoy the O gauge locomotive and cars, the first boys in the family lost interest in them and had no objections when their mother and father decided to pass the train to their third son. Thomas loved them!

Santa Claus blessed the toddler with his own train on Christmas morning in 1948. Thomas unwrapped a large box containing a Lionel no. 2141WS. A four-car freight was led by a no. 671 Pennsylvania RR 6-8-6 steam turbine.

Maybe the reason the youngster felt passionately about the Lionel set was because his father worked for the Toledo, Peoria & Western RR. Or it might have been due

◀ **1. THIS SCENE** on a frigid morning in December symbolizes the changing of the guard from steam to diesel motive power on American railroading. About to greet each other are a Union Pacific 4-8-4 from Lionel and a Great Northern E3 from MTH.

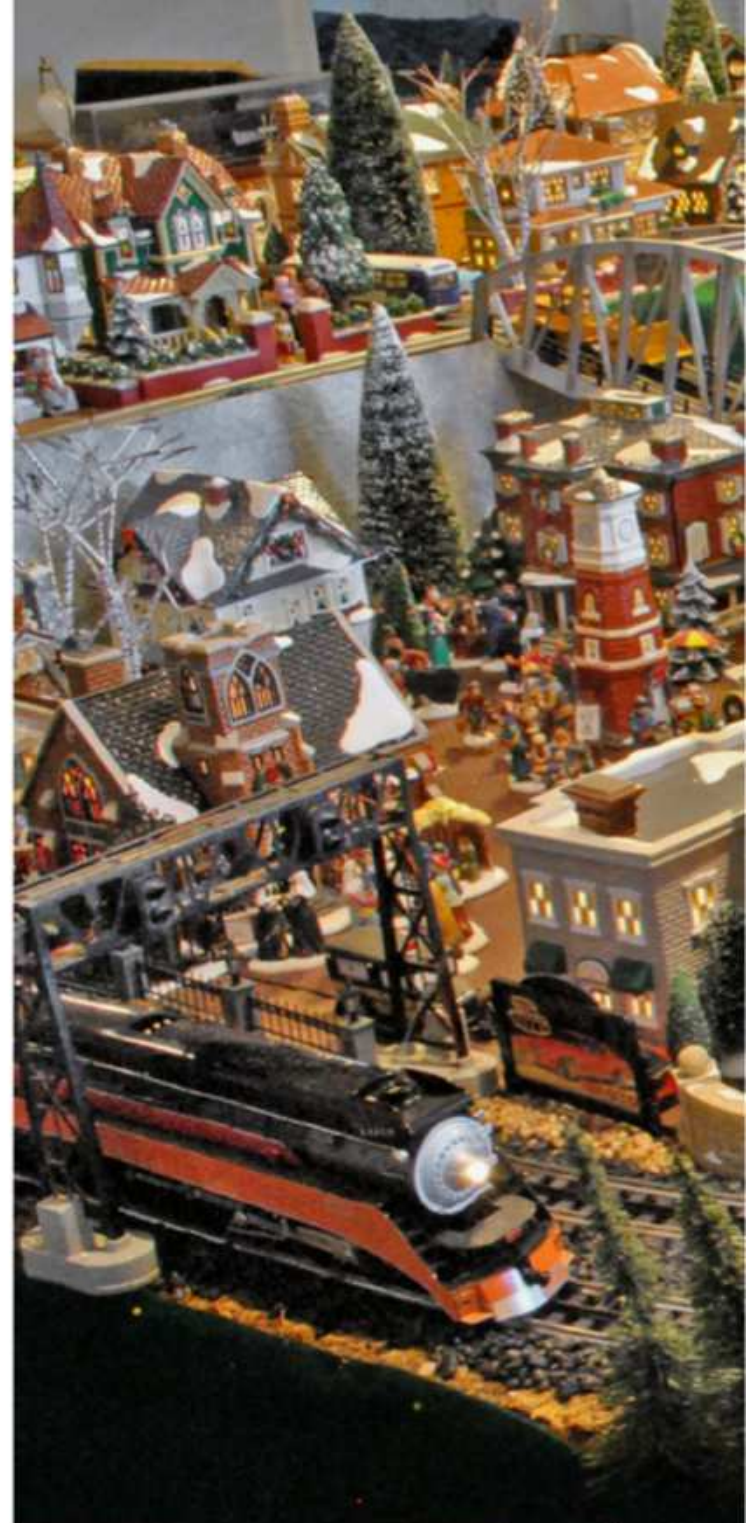
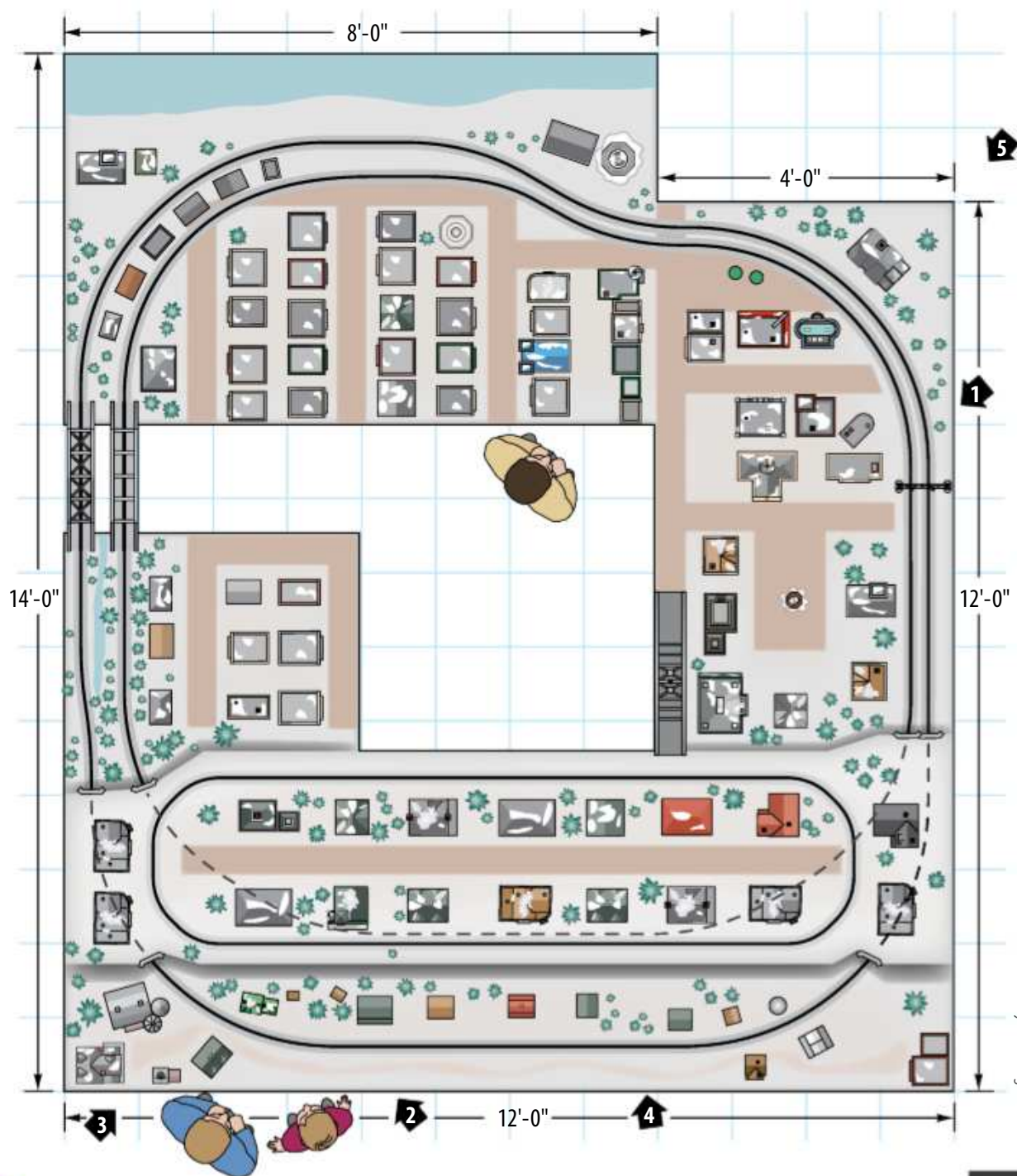


Illustration by Kelle Jaeger

WHAT MIGHT initially have been considered a temporary holiday display has since become a beloved permanent part of the Brown residence. The numbered arrows correspond to the numbers in each of the captioned photographs Thomas shot.

to the thrills of watching the big steamer smoke and the no. 3462 automatic refrigerated milk car eject miniature silver cans via remote-control.

Something caught the imagination of the child, and he played with the Lionel freight train endlessly. “I can remember laying flat on the floor in a dark room with my face right next to the track,” Thomas writes, “watching that 671 come steaming down the track right at me.” Yet regardless of how much fun he was having, there was no question the set would be packed up by January 31st.

TEMPORARY BREAK

This temporary approach lasted until Thomas hit adolescence. Then he convinced his parents to allow him to enjoy the O gauge engines and rolling stock throughout the year. In the meantime, he continued to supplement his roster at Christmas and from money he earned.

But college and service in the Air Force put an end to the adventures with toy trains. Thomas married and started raising a family, probably forgetting entirely about the vintage Lionel engines and cars quietly resting with his parents.

Had this baby boomer’s love affair with Lionel trains concluded? Most definitely not! All it took to revive a boyhood passion was visiting a hobby shop around 1975. Thomas soon walked out with a brand-new Pennsylvania RR GP9 road diesel.

More purchases followed, and Thomas went on to plan an elaborate three-rail layout. “The train bug had hit me again,” he says, “and a call was made to my parents for my childhood trains.” A break from the hobby turned out to be exactly that – temporary. Thomas was back in the groove and eager for more.



SHARING THE JOYS of this hobby with a younger generation gratifies Thomas. His 12 x 14-foot display proves Christmas is never complete without trains.

BEST LAYOUT EVER

A few false starts kept Thomas busy over the next several years. Somehow, despite all the Lionel trains and Department 56 structures he bought, construction never proceeded far. A 13 x 15-foot display took form in his living room, but it was up for only a few months. Somehow, Thomas could not rid himself of the view that layouts were temporary.

The cure came after Thomas and his wife, Laura Manette, moved to a new home. With plenty of free time as well as



📌 **2. DON'T MISS** the SuperStreets Thomas installed between the rows of Lemax and Department 56 structures on the upper level. Kids love seeing vehicles whiz by. Thomas believes plenty of adults get a kick out of them, too.

a combined family of nine children offering encouragement, he announced a new O gauge project and outlined an ambitious plan for a 12 x 14-foot three-rail display. Just one problem – nobody wanted it to be temporary. They wanted Christmas to be available year round.

So encouraged, Thomas got to work. The open-grid benchwork went up rapidly, as he assembled it with 2 x 4 pieces for the legs and 1 x 4 pieces for the sides and cross members. Next came sheets of ¾-inch-thick plywood for the tabletop, which would be 43 inches high.

When Thomas had returned to the hobby in the 1970s, he had discovered the realistic sections by GarGraves. The wood ties and blackened center rail made them look better than the vintage tubular track he had grown up with.

Thomas intended to fashion the main lines using GarGraves straights and curves. The minimum diameter would be 72 inches; the maximum was going to be 80 inches. He planned to augment the upper level with a loop formed of SuperStreets pieces from K-Line. There, the diameter would be a basic 21 inches.

📌 AT A GLANCE

Name: Thomas Brown's O gauge layout

Dimensions: 12 x 14 feet

Track: GarGraves flextrack (diameters range from 72 to 80 inches)

Motive power: Atlas O, K-Line, Lionel, MTH, 3rd Rail, Williams

Rolling stock: Atlas O, K-Line, Lionel, Menards, MTH

Controls: Lionel type-KW and MTH no. Z-4000 transformers

Accessories: Lemax, Lionel, Miller Engineering

Structures: Department 56, Lemax

Vehicles: Corgi, Department 56, K-Line, Kinsmart, Road Champs, Solido, Yat Ming

Figures: Lemax, Department 56

CONVENTIONAL IN MANY WAYS

Several aspects of the new layout, not to mention the manner by which Thomas expected to control the trains, can be described best as conventional.



3. WHILE FISHERMEN SCAN THE SKY and study the waves, a Santa Fe streamlined passenger train speeds past Main Street. Look closely over there and you'll see a marching band playing holiday favorites for local residents.

What does this mean? Start with the fact he installed no switches of any sort. The track plan called for just two main lines. Similarly, everything was going to be powered by an MTH no. Z-4000 transformer (an old Lionel type-KW transformer handled the vehicles dashing around the loop of SuperStreets).

Thomas had little interest in buying highly detailed structures or elaborate kits to put together. He preferred to use the many Department 56 and Lemax porcelain buildings and figures he and his wife had collected through the years.

Arranging the structures to create holiday vignettes for the trains was great fun. Thomas added to the scenes by placing many of his die-cast metal vehicles. "I buy what appeals to me," he said about the miniature cars and trucks.

EFFECTIVE SCENERY

For the attractive yet fanciful scenic landforms, Thomas went with a traditional method of laying rags soaked in plaster over a mesh (in his case, plastic worked well). He then sprayed the hardened shell with Plastic-Kote Stone Touch paint followed by Krylon's Make It Stone brand of textured paint.

The canyon, according to Thomas called for a different approach, one he readily admitted involved shortcuts yet still turned out looking good. He first erected a wood base. Then he covered

what was the canyon floor with a rocky ground cover. The steep walls he finished with what he called "rock fabric."

Vegetation for the assorted scenic features came from different sources. Thomas credited JTT, Scenic Express, and Woodland Scenics for providing the products he used as ground cover, along with generic mosses and sands. He had picked up twigs and gathered sawdust to apply in specific areas. Bushes and trees were commercial products from Department 56, Lemax, and Scenic Express.

NOT TO SCALE

Thomas achieved his goal of an eye-catching and smooth-operating Christmas layout as fast as possible. He had no wish to cut corners, yet also no wish to spend years fretting over scale realism.

CTT ONLINE

TO WATCH A VIDEO of Thomas Brown's O gauge layout, please go to www.ClassicToyTrains.com/LayoutVisits



↑ 4. **MANY OF THE** passengers traveling on the beautifully painted Santa Fe streamliners wish they could get off their eastbound train to attend the Christmas barn dance.



↑ 5. **CLEVER USE** of details as well as many human and animal figures has enabled Thomas to create fascinating vignettes. Viewers discover something new every time they drop over. The fruit stand tended by Amish farmers always earns praise.

To give friends an idea of how he proceeded, Thomas directs attention to his favorite scenery item: aquarium gravel. He depended on the out-of-scale stones for ballasting the track because their weight meant he didn't need to glue them in place. The gravel also hid electrical wires and didn't cost very much.

Thomas spread out aquarium gravel for his rural roads. City streets and parking lots he made of black and gray foam or brick sheets from Department 56.

Again, exact and consistent scale dimensions went out the window when Thomas was fashioning different scenes, especially those using the porcelain structures and figures he treasured. "They tended to be larger than the O gauge trains," he explained, "so I had to make the scenes convincing."

To be sure, Thomas went on, "serious model railroaders will probably have an issue with the scale differences." But he didn't mind them for one notable reason. "Not being totally concerned with scale allowed me more freedom to create scenes faster."

Guess what? The folks stopping by the Brown homestead to see the railroad agree with its creator. They talk about being able to connect the scenes with their memories of growing up, thanks to the models of postwar vehicles or old-time structures.

A DAUGHTER'S PRAISE

The final word on Thomas' winter paradise in three rails comes from his daughter Monica. She enjoys the simple yet imaginative track plan and the many accessories. Then she comments on the high level of detail: "Not one inch is lacking in something wonderful to see."

Best of all, Monica goes on to say, "people smile from the moment they see the layout. The smile stays on as they make their way around it, pointing at the different spectacles. They consider it a work of art and a joy to experience." •

HOLIDAYS MEANT TRAINS AND FATHERS

Great Day in the Morning!...

What a day, what a Christmas, when you wake up to Lionel Trains! Nothing can equal the thrill of Lionel's mighty steam locomotives pulling real smoke, sounding their built-in two-tone whistles... and the great Diesel streamliners, blasting their horns. Nothing can match the real-life performance of Lionel can accessories and operating cars. Only Lionel locomotives have Magne-Traction to take curves faster, pull more cars, climb steeper grades. They all have solid steel wheels, heavy-duty trucks! And all Lionel cars have real R.R. trucks! And all Lionel cars have real R.R. trucks! And all Lionel cars have real R.R. trucks! And all Lionel cars have real R.R. trucks!

LIONEL TRAINS
... WITH **MAGNE-TRACTION**

Merry Christmas Son!...

New Lionel Operating Barrel Loader. Lots of fun! Barrel loaded into waiting car by remote control. \$4.75

New Lionel Operating Switch Tower. All automatic! Two switchmen go into action as trains pass tower. \$7.95

Lionel Battery Beacon. Modeled after real-life railroad beacons. Red and green lenses. Warns air from lamp produce rotation. \$3.95

New Lionel Cooling Station. Has 4 different remote-controlled actions! No special track action needed. \$17.75

Operating Freight Station. Action gallop! And by remote control! Baggage cars run cars in and out of station. All realistic details. \$7.95

LIONEL Multi-Kolor Printing Kit

SPECIAL BIG-3 OFFER! ALL FOR ONLY 50¢

NEW TRACK LAYOUT PRINTING KIT
PLUS SET OF EIGHT FULL-COLOR BILLBOARDS
WITH THE NEW 1953 LIONEL CATALOG... 40 PAGES IN FULL COLOR!
LIONEL TRAINS, P. O. Box 9, Dept. F, N. Y. 46, N. Y.
□ I enclose \$5 for Big-3 Coupon offer above. □ 10¢ for Catalog only.

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Address: _____
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Every one of the many accounts

readers submitted about getting their first toy train expressed gratitude to the parent or grandparent who had made that gift possible. Hobbyists well past middle age reminisced about how young moms and dads or elderly grandfathers had understood what receiving an electric train meant to a youngster, and they sacrificed to purchase a new Lionel or Flyer set.

Many of those different contributors to *Classic Toy Trains* commented specifically about how the powerful and exciting gift forged a connection between them and their dads. They recalled learning the fundamentals of electricity as the two of

LIONEL AND FLYER promoted their trains in different ways prior to Christmas. Yet their prevailing tactic involved showing fathers connecting with their sons as they played with a new set together.

them wired accessories to a transformer. And they wrote about fathers who patiently helped them saw boards and hammer them together for the layout table.

As you read accounts about how fathers insisted their sons have a train and then got down on the floor to play with them, think back to your childhood. Perhaps you also can remember wonderful times with your dad at the holidays, when you two took the trains and assembled an S or O gauge display to entertain your family at Christmas.

Dad Made Christmas Come Alive

— Louis J. Menno

My family memory is dedicated to my dad, Louis Menno, who started my love of toy trains and launched a lifelong hobby. He worked for the R.H. Macy Department Store for more than 40 years in its flagship Herald Square location in New York City.

I received my first Lionel set on Christmas morning in 1951, when I was four years old. It was a no. 2167WS with the 681 steam turbine powered by a KW transformer. Santa had purchased it at Macy's! The three-car freight was the beginning of my love of trains. How I loved to pretend my train was the New Haven RR, not far from our home in the Bronx.

A few weeks before Christmas, Mom and Dad took me to see the "real" Santa Claus at the Macy's Herald Square store. That was a yearly tradition for a good number of years until I couldn't fool them anymore about Santa.

What made the visit to Santa even better was going to the toy department. I saw all the new Lionel trains on display and watched them operate. I was in heaven!

A few weeks before Thanksgiving, I started hounding my parents about setting up the trains. I also asked them how long I could

keep the trains out. When the day came to set them up, Dad showed me how to remove the trains from their boxes so as not to tear the boxes or the wrapping paper.

My maternal grandfather, Michael F. Sica, built my layout. It included the 2167WS set plus passenger cars and operating milk and ore dump cars. I also had a semaphore, oil derrick, floodlight tower, station, and water tower.

The Lionel catalog for 1954 put a bee in my bonnet; I wanted a diesel. At Christmas there they were – a set of Southern F3s ready to pull my freight cars and give my steam turbine a well-deserved rest. Words can't describe how happy I was that Santa had made my wish come true.

Fast-forward to the 1980s. My mom and dad were visiting, and I took my father into my basement, where he saw my trains operating. Wow!

"The 681 is smoking," Dad said, "and the Southern with your passenger cars bring back memories."

Dad then asked if I really had liked the Southern. He

had wanted to get me Santa Fe F3s because they were the most popular diesels. Sadly, none could be found then.

Dad had gone to Macy's toy department to buy one

from a salesman he knew, but was told they were sold out. Then he showed my father a brand-new Southern F3 set.

"These engines have all the features as the Santa Fes," he

said to my dad. "I know your son will love them." I sure did!

When I operate my trains today, I always remember my father and how he taught me to take care of them. "Santa

HAVING A FATHER who worked for Macy's Department Store in New York City all but guaranteed Louis Menno a direct line to Santa! For Christmas of 1951, the four-year-old received Lionel set no. 2167WS. He ran it for his sister a year later.

LOUIS POSED AS A TODDLER with his parents in 1949. The Lionel set his dad brought home two years later was the gift that never quit giving. They went on enjoying O gauge trains together long after Louis had grown up and started his own family.

A few weeks before Thanksgiving, I started hounding my parents about setting up the trains.

bought these trains for you," he would say, "and they're expensive, so be careful."

At times I feel Dad is next to me, and I wish I could be his little boy again!

Dad Rescued a Broken Train and A Worried Boy

— *Bernard Rubin*

My family lived in Brooklyn after World War II, and I received my first train in 1948 when I was only four years old. That was when my father went to 86th Street in Bensonhurst to a toy store that sold Lionel trains. You may remember watching John Travolta stride down that street under an elevated train line in the opening scene of the movie, *Saturday Night*

catch it. Well, he missed! The train hit the pavement and broke. I was as shattered as the Lionel locomotive.

You may think my dad was furious and screamed, “You’re too little to have such a nice toy! Don’t expect to get one till you’re a lot older!”

No! When Hanukkah arrived in December of 1949, my parents gave me a brand-new Lionel O gauge outfit.



EAGER TO SHOW a friend his brand-new Lionel steam engine, Bernie had thrown it out a second-floor window, only to watch in horror as his buddy missed it. How many other kids at the time ruined their trains, often by racing them way too fast?

of the store, fixed it and then offered me \$100 for it.

I didn’t understand what George was talking about. The engine had cost \$58 new in 1957, so how could it be worth more as a used train?

George explained about the growing collector market for old toy trains. I kept my Virginian and began learning more about what was happening. I built a collection of the finest late prewar and early postwar Lionel trains in mint condition, one featured in the January 1995 CTT.

So you could say my life took a new direction because my father didn’t yell at me for a boyhood mistake!

As the years went by, my parents continued to buy me Lionel trains every year at Hanukkah.

Fever, while the Bee Gees sing “Stayin’ Alive.”

I was thrilled with the Lionel train. My family lived on the second floor of an apartment house. One day, I threw the steam engine (I think it was a no. 675) out the window to a friend of mine to

The no. 2141WS included a no. 671 steam turbine and whistle tender, along with three freight cars (two of them were operating models) and an illuminated caboose.

My older sister’s boyfriend set the train and its oval of track on a 4 x 8-foot table and

showed me how to work everything. Now, I was more careful, especially with the log dump car (no. 3461) and operating milk car (no. 3472).

As the years went by, my parents continued to buy me Lionel trains every year at Hanukkah. In 1957, I got a Lionel no. 2331 Virginian Train Master diesel. I could run two trains on separate circuits with my KW transformer.

Many years later, while living in Toronto, I brought my Train Master to George’s Trains to have it repaired. George, the owner

A PATIENT and understanding father launched what has been a life-long hobby for Bernard Rubin when he gave his four-year-old son a new Lionel set no. 2141WS steam freight set for Hanukkah in 1949. Bernie had already destroyed one engine!



Dad was Always the Keeper of our Family Trains - *Philip Marks*

It was Christmas 1949 when I received my first toy train set. I was just 10 months old. Obviously my father, a veteran of World War II, couldn't wait for me to be old enough to play with it. I'm sure he was excited to be able to buy such a great gift for his first-born kid's first Christmas.

My first set – or Dad's – was a Lionel no. 2147WS, which had a no. 675 steam locomotive and tender and nos. 3472 automatic refrigerated milk car, 6465 Sunoco double-dome tank car, 3469 operating ore dump car, and 6457 Southern Pacific-type caboose with interior illumination. The set listed for \$50.

For Christmas of 1953 my younger brother received his first set, a Lionel no. 2190W Super Speedliner with twin Santa Fe F3 diesels and four sleek streamlined aluminum passenger cars. I believe that outfit came from Schuster's Department Store on Mitchell Street in Milwaukee. It had a retail list price of \$89.50.

Every year after that a double-track oval layout magically appeared under our tree on Christmas morning.

SAVING ALL THE FAMILY'S LIONEL TRAINS, including the F3 diesels and passenger cars he bought from his brother, enables Phil to create his own Christmas extravaganzas every year. Plenty of postwar classics stand out on the display he built in 1993.

The Santa Fe set ran on the outside track, and the steam freight set ran on the inner track, all controlled from a ZW transformer.

That family tradition went on for a number of years until Dad said we needed a year-round layout in the basement. Soon, plywood and lumber were delivered from a lumberyard and a 5 x 9-foot layout was under construction.

Dad built an attached control stand to hold the big transformer and accessory switches. He also constructed a raised, two-person bench so my brother and I could sit at the right height to grab those



AN ACTION-PACKED LIONEL 0 GAUGE outfit purchased for Philip Marks before he was even a year old was the star attraction at his family's Christmas celebration in 1951 or '52. His father had returned from World War II wanting a train for himself.

ZW handles and see the action on the layout. (We drew a line down the middle of the bench, so we would each stay on our own side.)

What a gift! The basement became a special and magical place. Turning out the lights and running the trains in the dark was the coolest. At one

point I even constructed a cardboard wall (complete with a door) to section off that corner of the basement and create a secret clubhouse that included the layout.

I still own every one of our original Lionel trains and accessories. They are still my most prized possessions. •

Each year, at least one and usually more of our Christmas gifts were new Lionel cars and accessories.



TRACKS AROUND THE *Christmas*

Call it the “December Dilemma”:

How to create an entertaining S or O gauge layout at the base of your Christmas tree? There seldom is a great deal of real estate beneath the decorated tree. Besides, with people (and often pets) walking in the area adjacent to the decorated tree, a sprawling track plan only means problems.

For many modelers, a simple circle or an elongated oval of

two- or three-rail ends up occupying whatever open space exists around the tree. After laying and wiring the basic main line, they arrange the wrapped gifts on the periphery.

Face it, though – a single train chasing its tail over a one-track loop gets mighty boring mighty fast. Santa Claus does not like boring. Neither do we at *Classic Toy Trains*. So we’re offering four compact track plans with operating variety.



tree

FOUR COOL PLANS FOR THE PERFECT HOLIDAY DISPLAY

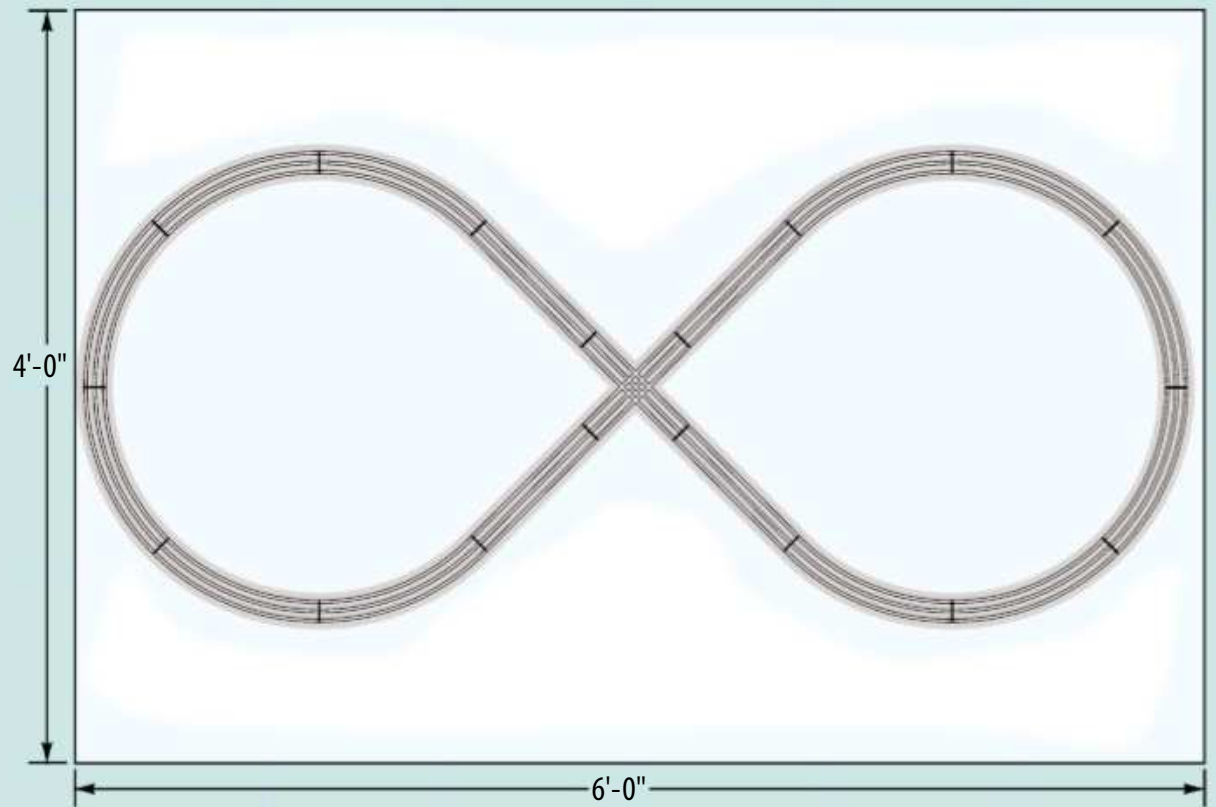
Illustrations by Kellie Jaeger



Three generations of Ed Werner's family helped build the O gauge Polar Mountain & Warren RR display. They laid the MTH track and used a "snow blanket" purchased from a local crafts store to decorate the different heights. By installing block-style electrical wiring, any of them can operate two of their Pennsylvania RR trains at the same time.



TRADITIONAL FIGURE-8 STILL DELIGHTS



TRADITIONAL FIGURE-EIGHT LAYOUT LIONEL SECTIONAL TRACK COMPONENTS

Quantity	Description
4	full straight, 10-inch
12	O-31 curve, 45-degree
1	90-degree crossing

ONE SPECIAL TRACK section is all that's needed to design an elementary yet enjoyable layout in any scale that resembles an eight. Commercial 90-degree crossings have long been staples in the hobby. This track plan occupies a 4 x 6-foot area.

Probably the easiest and most obvious method for expanding beyond the basic circle of track beneath a Christmas tree is to use a 90-degree crossing to transform a layout resembling a zero into a figure-8.

Kids can join in the fun as you connect the four straight sections adjacent to the 90-degree crossing filling the center of the O gauge layout. Then come the 12 curves. The system illustrated in the accompanying plan fills a 4 x 6-foot area.

The open spaces above and below the crossing are equal in size. This may make locating your Christmas tree inside one of them easy. It can, however, also cause a headache because the tree does not become the centerpiece of your display.

If you don't mind having the festive fir at one end, then the operating train will dominate the scene. Make the freight or passenger train sufficiently long to generate excitement from viewers. They'll get a kick out of watching the speedy locomotive barrel

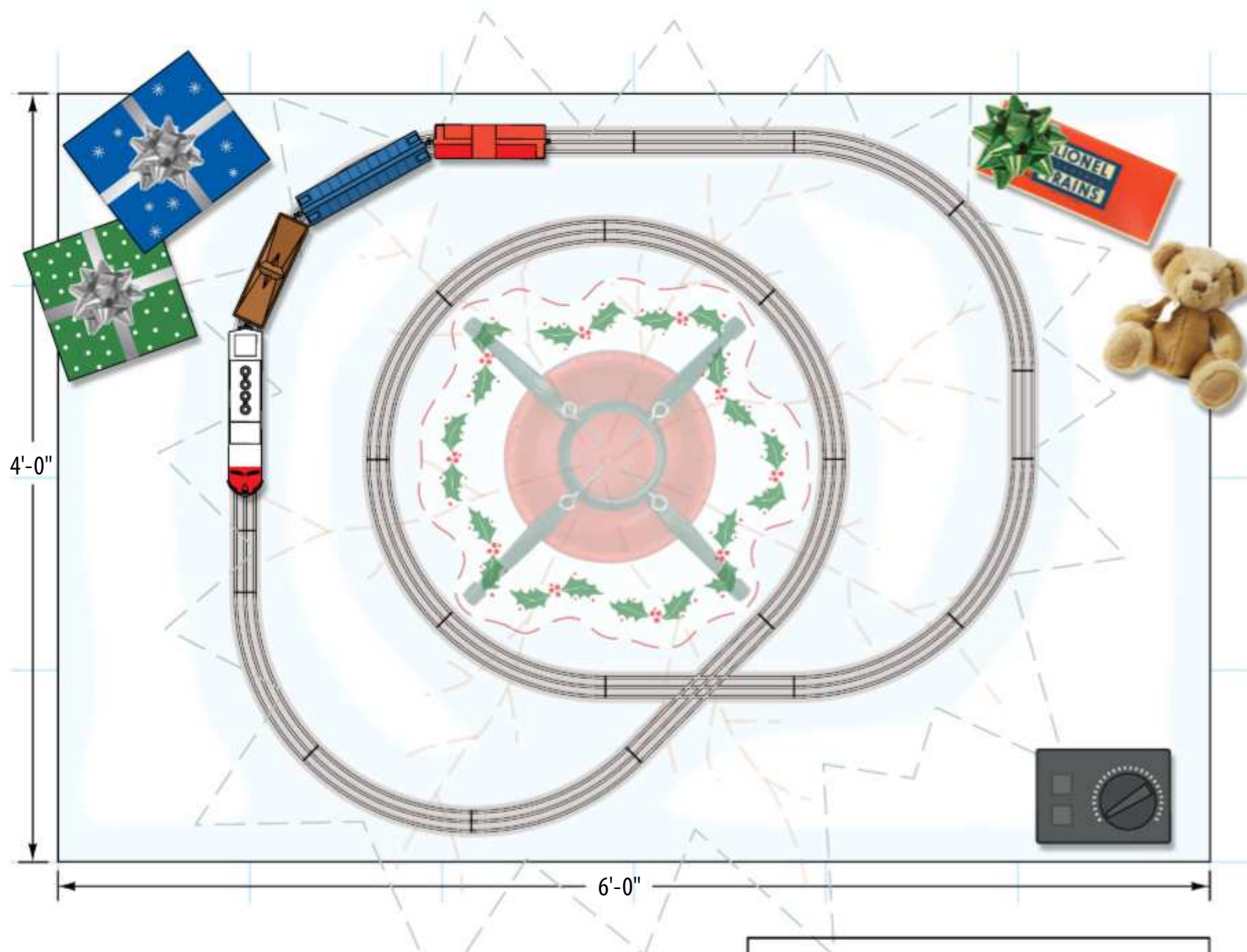
toward the crossing as the final car barely squeezes through.

A fun variation on the traditional figure-8 fashioned out of tubular track involves substituting sections from the old SuperStreets system for operating vehicles. These days, modelers go with a similar product from Williams by Bachmann: E-Z Streets. It's available online and sold in many hobby shops and train stores.

What was especially neat about the plan Kent Johnson wrote about in the December 2011 CTT was that the loops of the figure-8 were not equal in size. By using SuperStreets curves slightly different in diameter (16 and 21 inches), he was able to create two ovals, one of which was a bit larger overall than its neighbor.

At the end of the layout with the more expansive open area, Kent and his family put their Christmas tree. Gifts and a few model structures found homes in the middle, on either side of the SuperStreets intersection (90-degree crossing).

2 TIGHTER PLAN WITH MORE TRACK



TRYING A COMMERCIAL 45-DEGREE crossing in place of a 90-degree piece helped model railroader Chris Ritchie create an O gauge layout in 24 square feet that promised to make the Christmas tree the principal feature. The arrangement also yielded a much longer running line. Chris and his family really liked that fact, saying it greatly enhanced their enjoyment.

MODIFIED FIGURE-EIGHT LAYOUT LIONEL SECTIONAL TRACK COMPONENTS

Quantity	Description
16	O-31 curve, 45-degree
1	custom-cut half-straight, 3½-inch
1	half-straight, 5-inch
3	full straight, 10-inch
1	45-degree crossing

Remember how, a few paragraphs earlier, several of the inherent shortcomings of a figure-8 were mentioned? Its symmetrical shape can relegate a majestic tree loaded down with decorations to a mere supporting role on Christmas morning. Additionally, its sprawling arrangement may rob your house of walking room.

Chris Ritchie devised a very clever solution, which he outlined in the December 2010 CTT. He swapped a 45-degree crossing for a 90-degree to create a more compact plan that still gave a train greater running room over his 4 x 6-foot layout. His decorated fir

tree maintains its traditional spot right in the middle, with a sprawling network of O gauge track surrounding it.

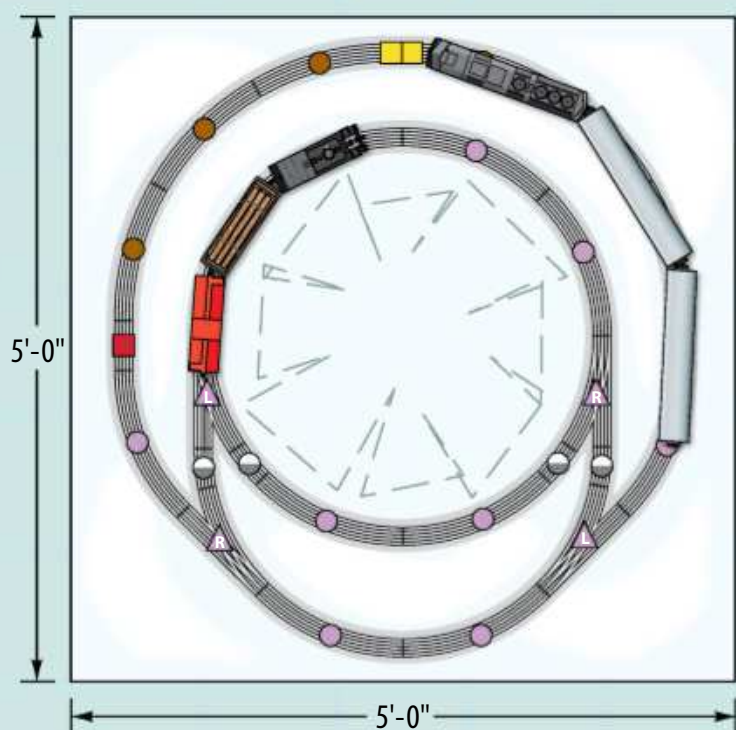
The project begins with putting down 16 curved sections of tubular track. You can also use O-31 items from the Real-Trax system developed by MTH Electric Trains and still fit in the 4 x 6-foot area.

Please be aware that if you opt for the modified figure-8 plan, you will need more than just standard straights and curves plus the requisite 45-degree crossing. Chris also made use of two 5-inch half-straight pieces. He finished by cutting down one of those special sections to 3.5 inches to fit.

Another *Classic Toy Trains* reader made further changes to the figure-8 by substituting Lionel FasTrack for those traditional tubular sections. Modeler James Lowell Fry explained in the December 2012 issue how using the brand developed with plastic roadbed altered the look of the layout. As James pointed out, FasTrack is wider than old-fashioned O gauge because its curves have a diameter of 36 inches and not 31.

Consequently, the holiday three-rail layout James had finished for his family required a space under their Christmas tree measuring 4.5 x 6 feet. No one, he wrote, complained at all!

3 SWITCHING TIME UNDER THE TREE



↑ AMAZING HOW MUCH operating action can take place under a Christmas tree laden with decorations simply by adding pairs of right- and left-hand switches! Guests of all ages will have a blast on December 25 when you let them direct the traffic.

LIONEL FASTRACK COMPONENTS

Quantity	Description/Number
2	1.375-inch straight (12073)
2	4.5-inch straight (12025)
10	0-36 curve, 45-degree (12015)
4	0-36 curve, 11.25-degree (12023)
6	0-48 curve, 30-degree (12043)
2	0-36 left-hand track switch, manual (12017)
2	0-36 right-hand track switch, manual (12018)

Looking back several years to when Kent Johnson wrote his article for CTT, I seem to recall the reason for his sketching different plans for a compact O gauge layout around the tree was his bringing home a brand-new artificial tree for the entire household to enjoy.

The new purchase, Kent continued, was a “slim profile artificial tree,” which is a tree whose boughs extended about half as far as was typical.

The advantages of such a Christmas tree for a family intending to develop a layout at the base? There was plenty of room for ornaments to hang from the branches yet they wouldn’t hide from the view of visitors the train operating over the tracks.

Of course, Kent envisioned a more elaborate display than the figure-8s discussed previously. Buying two pairs of manual switches made it possible.

In an area measuring 5 feet x 5 feet, Kent planned to erect around the tree a couple of loops of Lionel’s popular FasTrack connected by four switches. His goal was lots of activity; having two trains run in and out of the loops did that.

The list of track components shows how Kent capitalized on the variety of pieces Lionel has added to its FasTrack lineup. Two kinds of O-36 curves serve as the foundation, along with wider O-48 curves and the switches.

The number of straight sections turned out to be quite small. Kent needed only four. Two spanned only 1.375 inches. The others were 4.5 inches.

Kent shared hints about upgrading operation of the Christmas display. First, he mentioned running a long train on the wider (outer) loop and a motorized unit in the opposite direction on the tighter (inner) loop.

Second, Kent told how, by substituting remote-controlled turnouts for the manual switches, he changed the layout to hands-free operation. So he could relax with his wife, son, and friends who dropped by to share the holiday.

4 TRIPLE-TIMER PLAN

Our fourth recommendation for how to display your toy trains around a Christmas tree harkens way back to a design created by Neil Besougloff for the December 2006 issue. He had a sizable footprint in his living room – a 6.5 x 6.5-foot open space. All Neil’s wife and sons asked was that he let their tall tree remain the focal point.

The result of hours spent doodling and experimenting with new sections of tubular track was a plan enabling a freight or passenger train to travel around the tree three times before returning to its starting point. While on the journey, it was going to climb to an elevated line, cruise above the floor, and then dip back down.

If an operator were inclined, he or she was invited to skip the main route by diverting the train to a curved siding terminating with an illuminated bumper. The manually operated right-hand switch made changing the direction of the train a breeze.

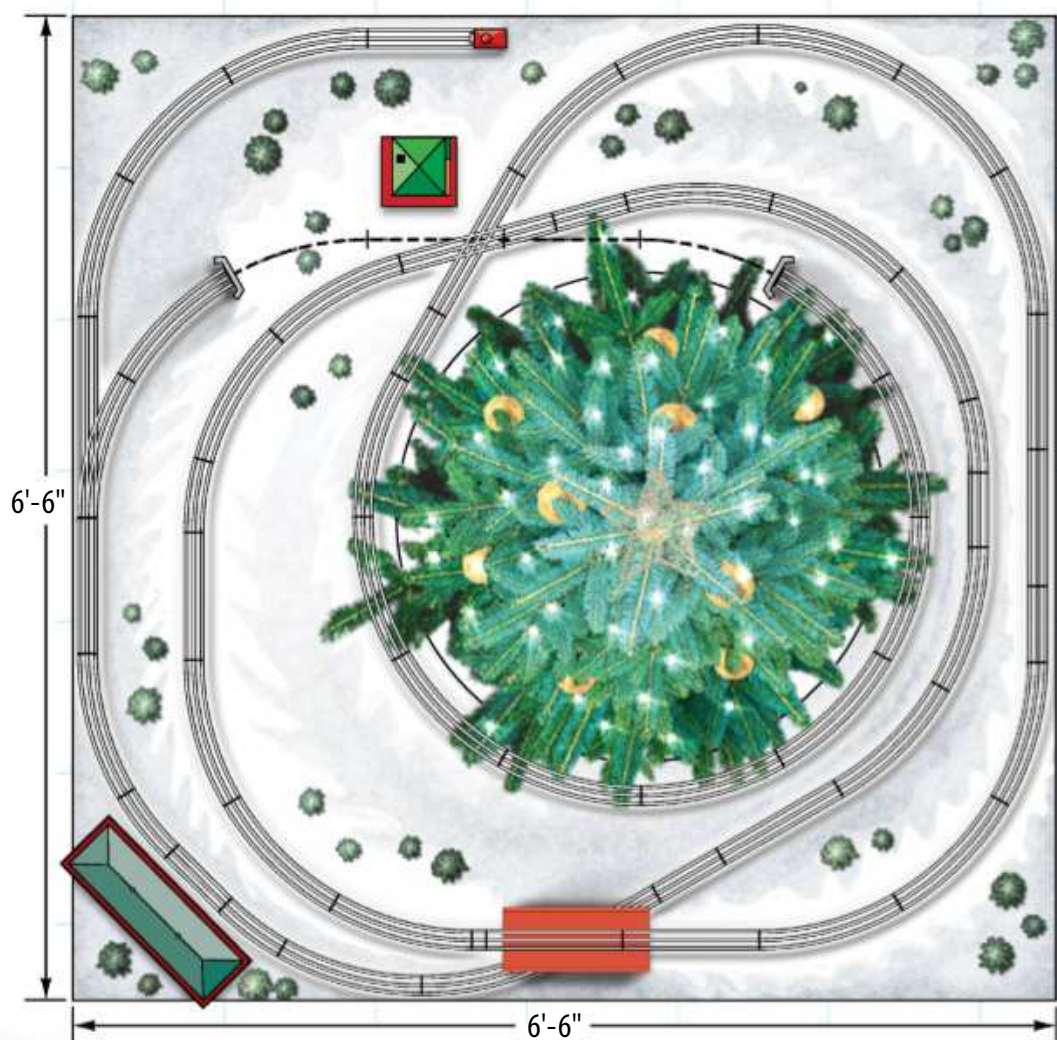
The rather elaborate plan called for patience and precision when it came time to lay the track. Besides the stack of 42-inch-diameter curves and standard single and half straight sections, a few pieces had to be cut down in length. Other than the manual turnout, the only kind of specialized track item needed was a 45-degree crossing.

In the years since the triple-timer plan made its debut, a few readers have let us know they used it for an entertaining Christmas display. They offered some clues about how to elevate the lines. Commercial sets of graduated trestles proved to be favorites, although other modelers described using hunks of wood and foam.

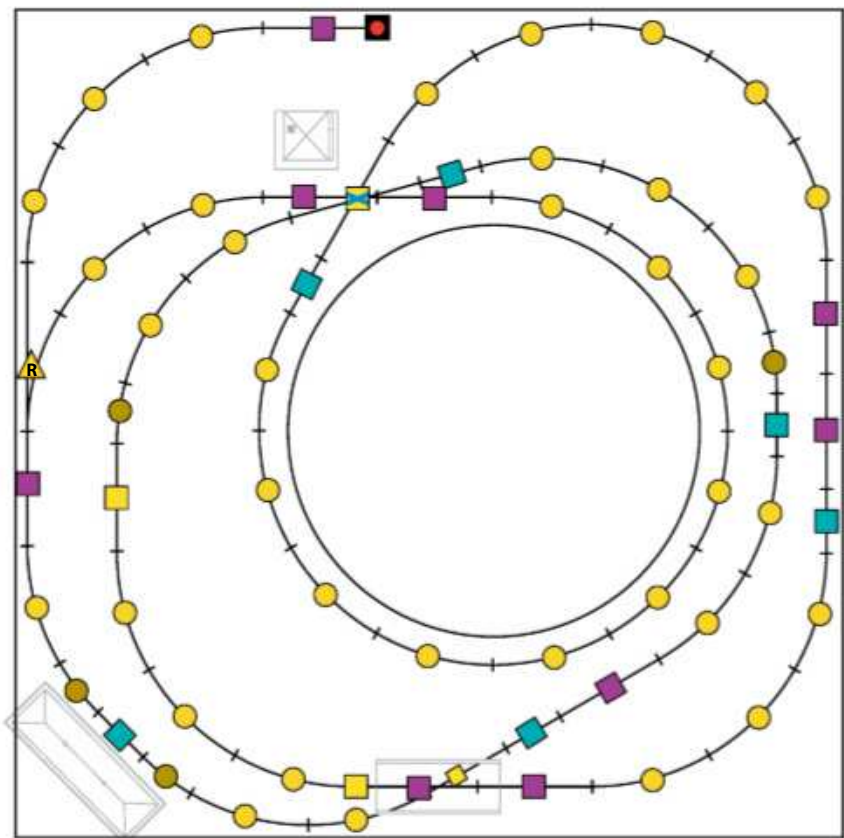
Good luck with whichever one of these four track plans you choose for the layout constructed around your Christmas tree. Once you have finished and have a train running, please send photos of your display to *Classic Toy Trains*.

Better yet, if you develop a different track plan for the area, please share it with us. You may be creating something in the square footage available to you that will in turn benefit other modelers struggling to find the ideal arrangement. •

CLIMBS UP AND DIPS DOWN



↑ MODEL RAILROADERS WITH MORE TIME and experience, not to mention a lot of room around their Christmas tree, have tackled the project introduced by *Classic Toy Trains* in 2006. This plan underlay construction of a “three times around the tree” layout in O gauge.



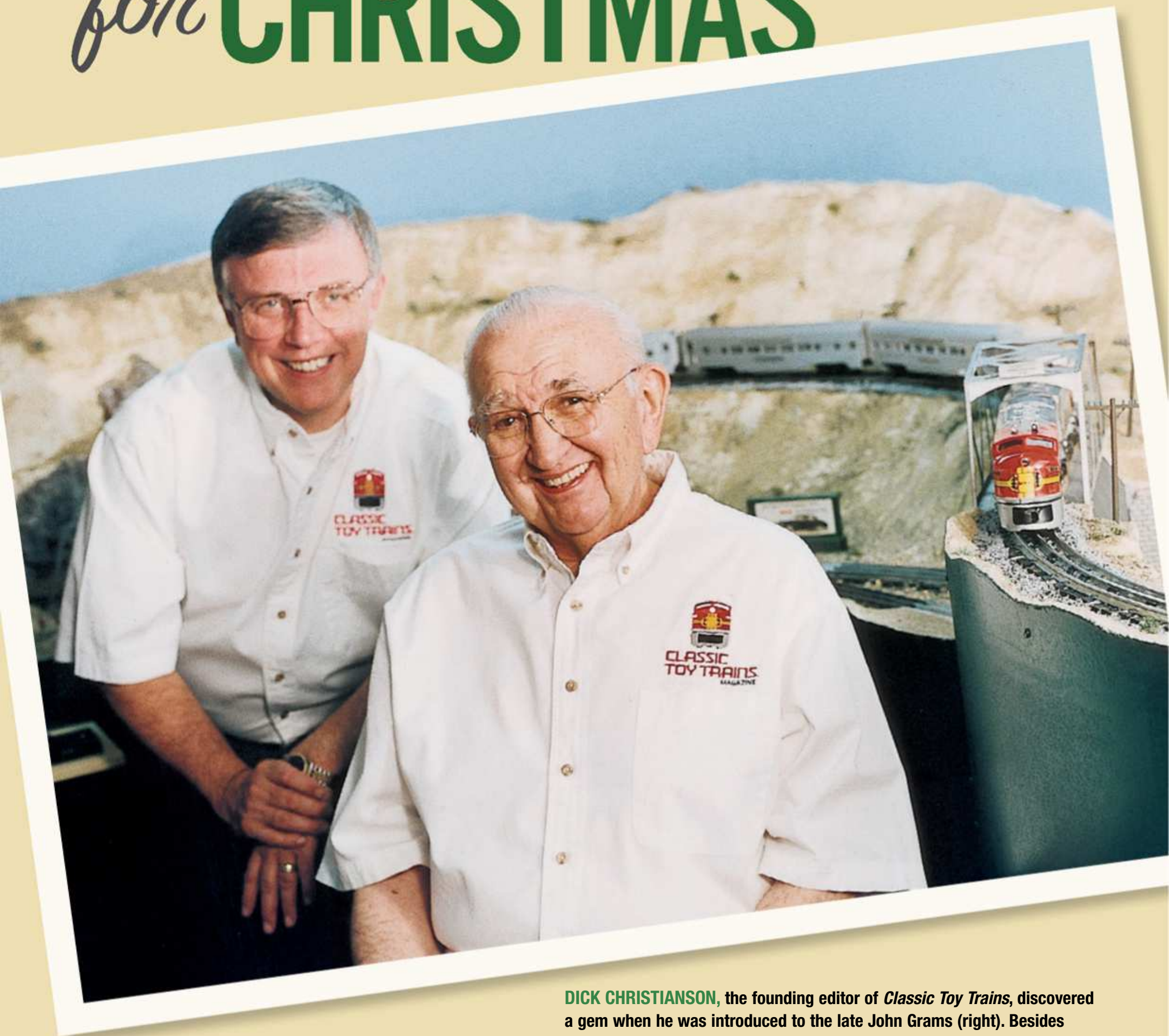
LIONEL O GAUGE TUBULAR TRACK COMPONENTS

Quantity	Description/Number
6	half-straight (65505)
9	single straight (65500)
3	custom-cut straight
36	0-42 curve (12925)
4	0-42 custom-cut curve
1	K-Line 0-42 right-hand track switch (K0374)
1	45-degree crossing (65545)
1	track bumper (260)

↓ ED AND MICHAEL WERNER, inspired by the plan for a “three times around a tree” layout, built a modified version. They relied on wider 0-45 RealTrax pieces from MTH.



A master's advice on **PREPARING TRAINS** *for* **CHRISTMAS**



DICK CHRISTIANSON, the founding editor of *Classic Toy Trains*, discovered a gem when he was introduced to the late John Grams (right). Besides writing collecting and historical articles under his name, John penned repair and Christmas maintenance tips as Ray L. Plummer.

JOHN GRAMS OR HIS BUDDY, RAY L. PLUMMER, WILL MAKE THE DAY RIGHT

Photos by **Jim Forbes and William Zuback**

The worst situation for any toy train enthusiast on Christmas morning is being unable to get a vintage set moving. Family members stand around and stare at the postwar engine refusing to race or even whistle or puff a few whiffs of smoke.

Fortunately, *Classic Toy Trains* found a guy who could rescue them from that horrible fate. John Grams and his buddy and alter ego, Ray L. Plummer, shared essential repair tips and insights until John died in 2006.

John wrote valuable, easy-to-understand essays to help CTT readers breath new life into their postwar operating accessories and cars. He answered hundreds of questions about common and obscure items, in brief and often humorous paragraphs. And he compiled his essays into a couple of books that toy train enthusiasts continue to appreciate.

For this publication about trains and the holidays, we compiled the best of John and Ray's tips to help anyone, no matter how new or experienced in the hobby, revive and maintain a vintage train set to run on Christmas.

This is, after all, the time of year when thoughts turn to that old toy train in the attic. Maybe you'll unpack it to run around the Christmas tree, as you did long ago. But if you try to go directly from the storage box to the track, you may be in for an unpleasant surprise, particularly if the train has been out of service for a while.

Toy trains, as John reminded us, though solidly built and designed to last a long time, need a little nurturing and some cleaning and lubricating, before they can perform as expected. Therefore, he suggested taking the following eight steps ahead of Christmas morning.

1. PREPARE THE TRACK

Inspect each section for warps, bends, and rust. Pins should be firmly in place, and the sections should fit snugly together.

Clean the track surface with a Scotch-Brite pad. Then follow up with a little WD-40 on a cloth.

Never use steel wool because the residue can disturb the inner workings of a locomotive. Replace any bad pieces of track with new ones.

Lionel and others are still making track sections that will mate with your vintage sections.



RAY RECOMMENDED CLEANING corroded tinplate track with Goo Gone. If the sections were hopelessly rusted, he advised replacing them with new straights and curves.

2. CHECK THE TRANSFORMER

Although almost every transformer that hasn't been abused still works as advertised, an ounce of prevention is in order. Examine the line cord and plug for signs of damage and deterioration. Old rubber cords often become cracked and brittle over time.

If you are unsure, have the cord replaced by a professional service station or appliance repair shop.

If the cord checks out, plug in the transformer and give it the old spark test. Attach a wire to one of the variable-voltage terminals, turn the throttle about halfway up, and carefully touch the other end of the wire to the other terminal. If you cause a spark, the transformer is good to go.



INSPECTING YOUR TRANSFORMER was always critical for a successful O or S gauge layout on Christmas. The power plug and line cord had to be free of any cracks and breaks.

Meet John Grams and his rascally alter ego

Editor Dick Christianson faced many challenges in the first years after *Classic Toy Trains* made its debut in 1987. Among the most pressing needs was finding someone able to answer the array of questions mailed to him regarding the repair, maintenance, and restoration of locomotives, operating cars, and accessories.

Dick did manage to locate a couple of individuals whose knowledge and experience enabled them to lighten some of his burden. Starting with Bill Ahrens in the late 1980s into the early '90s, he had a good source for the nuts-and-bolts information readers craved. Jim Weatherford followed through virtually all the remaining years of the latter decade, brilliantly handling the Q's and A's section.

Yet both Bill and Jim eventually concluded the demands

development of jazz. And the gentleman who counted Louis Armstrong among his friends loved to fix toy trains. The cheaper and worse off, the better.

Before very long, John was a regular contributor to the magazine. He wrote articles about classic train sets from the prewar era, when he had come of age (and had a photo of his boyhood O gauge layout published in Lionel's *Model Builder* magazine) as well as insightful essays about different Lionel operating cars.

John decided that, in addition to authoring some historical articles, he wanted to share what he had learned about repairing miniature trains and accessories from a variety of periods of production. He proposed doing that in feature stories filled with step-by-step pictures and in pithy responses to questions readers submitted.

Only one minor condition to John's willingness to help: He wanted to use an alias and not his given name. The request struck Dick as slightly eccentric, but he remembered it carried forward a practice popular long ago in the pages of *Model Railroader*.

John's choice for a pseudonym? Ray L. Plummer (go ahead and say it aloud: "rail plumber" – someone who fixes trains). Far from an obvious choice but one quite consistent with John's droll sense of humor.

For more than a decade, starting in 1995, John and Ray contributed on a regular basis to CTT. Readers took to their writing style and expressed gratitude for the insights and tips they shared about prewar and postwar toy trains.

John Grams and his alter ego were integral parts of the magazine's identity, making it better and more entertaining and informative with every issue. We remember them fondly, especially when our vintage electric trains run smoothly at Christmas.

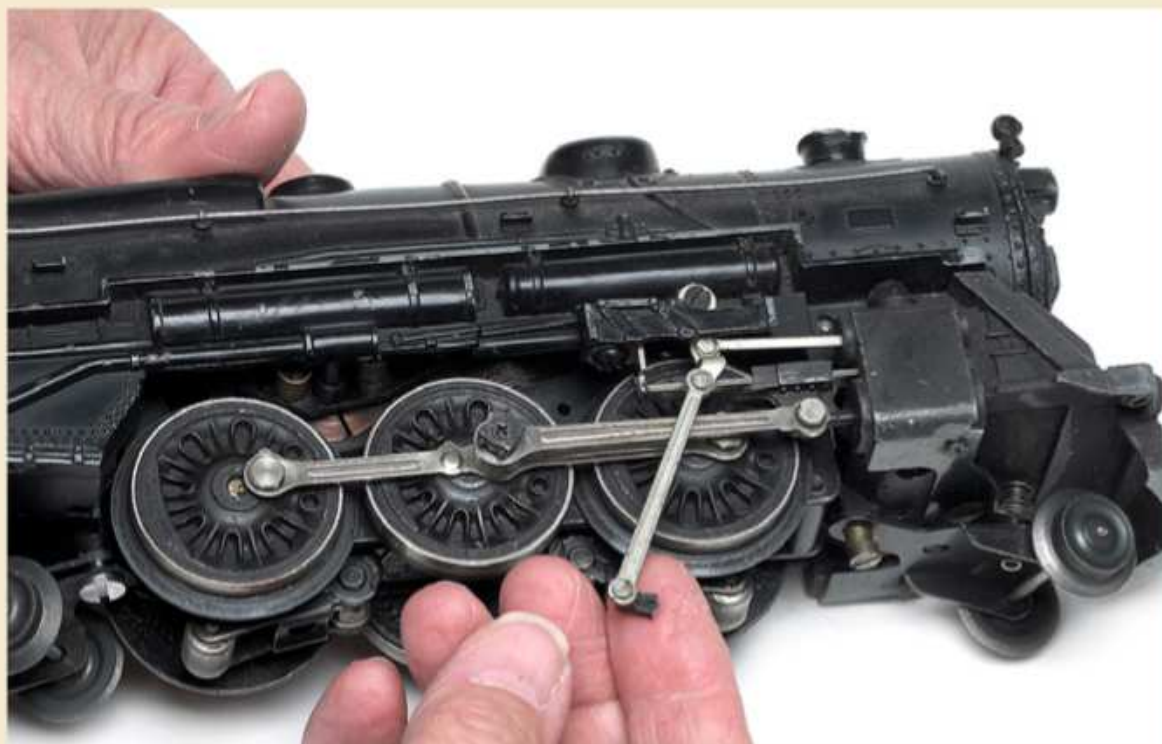
The two men clicked instantly. Dick learned that John could speak with intelligence about topics ranging from the belief systems of ancient Egypt to the development of jazz.

involved with a regularly scheduled department, plus occasional feature articles, left them exhausted. Dick, grateful for their help, had no option but to keep looking.

What Dick needed was a generalist familiar with models made by companies during the prewar, postwar, and modern eras. He sought the ideal question-and-answer person, who knew what had been made and how it worked. And he needed a guy who wrote clearly and could meet deadlines.

Then he met John Grams.

The two gentlemen clicked instantly. Dick learned that John, a professor of journalism at Marquette University with a growl of a laugh, could speak with intelligence about topics ranging from the belief systems of ancient Egypt to the



3. VISUALLY INSPECT THE LOCOMOTIVE

Make sure your locomotive is undamaged and its wheels turn freely. If your engine has Magne-Traction, make sure no stray metal is caught in it. If the mechanism is clogged with dust, dirt, rug fuzz, or pet hair, this is a good time to clean it out.

NOW MOVE ON TO checking your vintage locomotive for damage, including broken parts. Repairing broken parts or replacing missing ones should be done with care.

4. LUBRICATE THE LOCOMOTIVE

It's essential to lubricate every locomotive in your fleet. Put one drop of oil (Labelle no. 104 or something similar) on the axle bearings and exposed gear studs. It is also important to oil the armature bearings. Again, one drop will do and try not to get any on the brushes or the face of the commutator.

If you do have a spill, mop it up with a cotton swab. Use light grease on the exposed gears and truck pivots. Labelle no. 106 plastic-compatible grease or any modern white grease sold by Bachmann, Lionel, or MTH will work fine.

LUBRICATION OF LOCOMOTIVES needs to be done to ensure consistent performance. Use grease on the gears and then oil on the axles, running gear, and other friction points.



5. CLEAN WHEEL TREADS AND CENTER-RAIL PICKUPS

Before you put your locomotive down on the track, take one more step to assure good contact with the rails. Scour the wheel treads with a Scotch-Brite pad to remove dirt and oxidation.

Then do the same for the center-rail pickups. They're usually spring-loaded and should bounce back freely. Perform this operation even if your wheels and pickups don't appear to be dirty. Make them shine!

Modern locomotives normally have traction tires mounted on some of the drive wheels. This is a good time to check them for cracks or tears. If the traction tires on your steam or diesel engines look excessively dry or tattered, you should replace them before the holiday surge of train activity hits!

6. CLEAN AND LUBRICATE PIECES OF ROLLING STOCK

This step is particularly important with older freight and passenger cars. Models made since the 1970s – in the so-called “modern era” – and equipped with needle-bearing axles, need less attention.

Use a cotton swab sprayed with WD-40 to clean car wheels, trucks, and couplers. If a layer of accumulated “gunk” has stuck to the wheel treads, scrape it off with a knife or the end of a flat screwdriver blade first.

You'll easily know your wheels are clean when they no longer turn a dry cotton swab black.

All car axles should be kept lubricated to reduce friction. A very tiny drop of light oil is all that's required. Mop up any excess, or it will find its way to your track as the car rolls around your layout.



ALL FREIGHT AND PASSENGER CARS need an occasional dab of oil, such as Labelle no. 104, to make sure their trucks pivot and their wheels roll smoothly and quietly.

7. CLEAN THE EXTERNAL SURFACES

Often, a simple dusting of the locomotive and cars is all that's needed. Use a clean, dry paintbrush to get into the cracks and corners.

Follow up with a water-dampened cloth. To remove heavier grime and smudges from external surfaces, spray them lightly with furniture polish and wipe them dry with a clean, soft cloth.

8. SET UP A SMALL TEST TRACK

Connect the transformer to the track using a common electrical hookup wire. Put the locomotive on the track and turn on the power. After this kind of cleaning and lubrication, most engines in good condition will run; however, years of inactivity may leave them sluggish at first.

It takes time for the lubricant to penetrate dry bearings. Internal parts, like the contacts in the reverse unit, may need to be exercised a few times before they consistently function as they are designed. Be patient.

Go ahead and have fun putting the locomotive through its paces. Let it warm up by running it fast and slow, forward and backward, for a few minutes. Operate the reverse feature a couple dozen times. The locomotive's performance should noticeably improve once it gets up to speed. And worries about its performance should disappear.

Of course, you never have to wait until Christmas morning to run your vintage electric train. When the engine is running smoothly, couple up the cars, sit back, and enjoy. Christmas can come any time of the year. •

Photos revive memories of a lost era

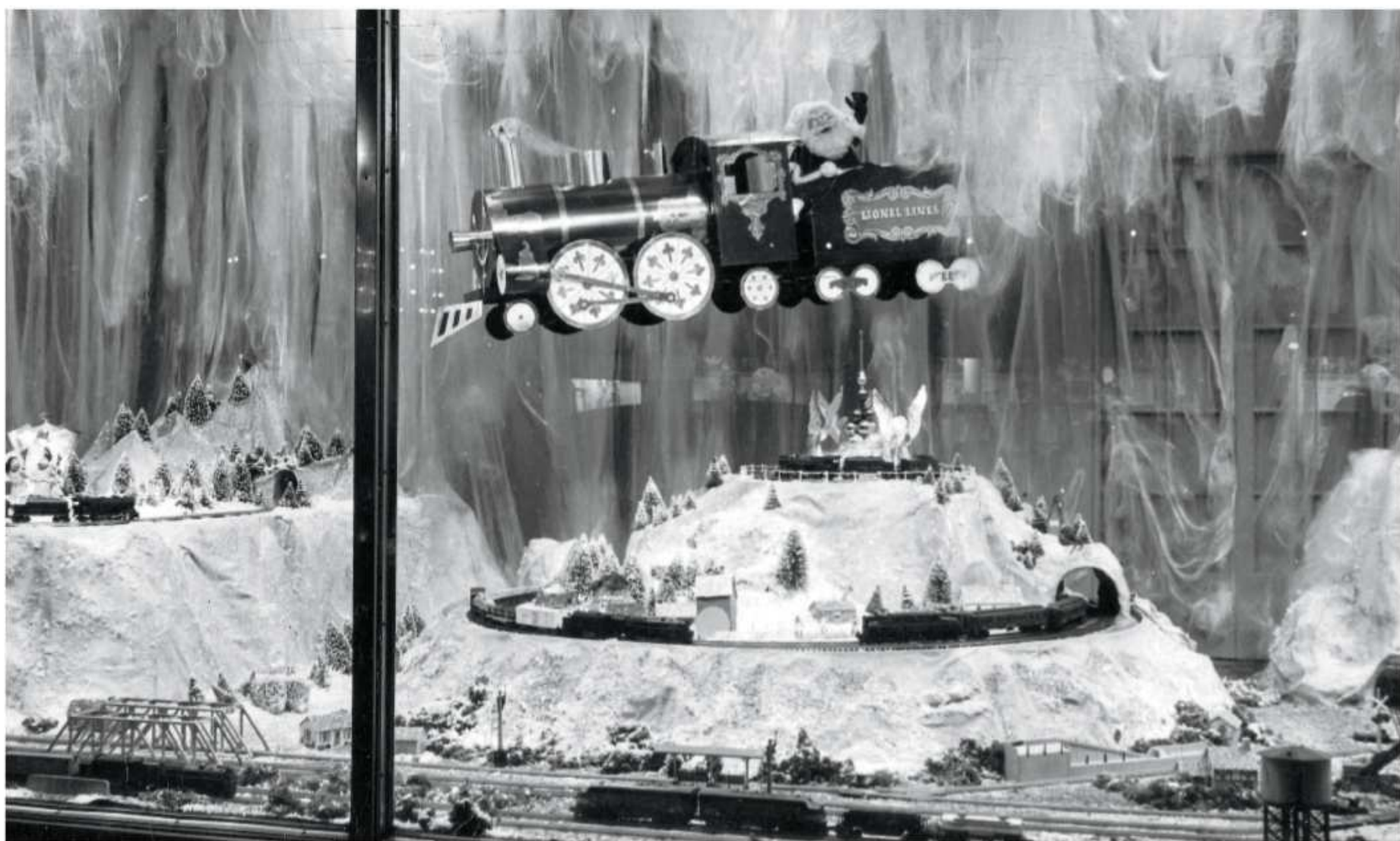


Photo courtesy Albright Memorial Library

No offense taken if you pick the two photo essays showcasing Christmas store displays as your favorite parts of this publication.

There's something especially enjoyable and meaningful about old pictures of operating layouts constructed in storefront windows and on platforms for toy departments.

Vintage photos of displays in toy shops and department stores take us back generations to a world all but lost. The black-and-white images collected here capture the excitement and activity once associated with downtown areas. They recall a time when the largest and most prosperous retail establishments occupied prime real estate in the central district. Nearby

Strolling down Lackawanna Avenue, the main thoroughfare in Scranton, Pa., kept families entertained every evening between Thanksgiving and Christmas. They saw displays filled with the latest appliances, clothes, and toys. Over at Household Outfitting Co., Lionel trains caught everyone's attention when this picture was taken, probably in 1949 or '50, to judge from the items being used.

stood the finest restaurants, tallest office buildings, and most majestic movie theaters and entertainment venues.

Almost all of those department stores and retail chains have disappeared, the victims of suburban growth, urban renewal, and the rise of malls. As you pore over the photos, gather your memories of the top retailers where you came of age. Remember their window displays and the toys you first glimpsed there. And think about the trains and other playthings you received to make your childhood better.

This store had everything a boy could want in 1921

The image of Sport Mart in Washington, D.C., is the earliest picture of a commercial Christmas display with toy trains we found. The photographer took the shot of the front window of the sporting goods emporium on F Street N.W. in 1921. The Lionel nos. 69 electric warning bell signal and 70 accessory outfit – new in 1921 – make it possible to date the photo.

Ironically isn't it that the Lionel models, including the O gauge train set in the center of the picture, are not intended to move. After all, Joshua Lionel Cowen, the co-founder of the corporation, entered the toy field by developing self-propelled motorized railcars that sped around a circle of track as display pieces.

Yet in this superb photo the various accessories remain in their boxes and the train stands still. They are only a few of the playthings and sporting goods in the store's enormous inventory. Everything on sale was directed at boys and men.

Very interesting as well that a business typically stocking baseball mitts, boxing gloves, fishing equipment, and bicycles thought it prudent to expand to electric trains during the holidays. The addition of Lionel sets and signals meant retailers perceived them as sophisticated items different from toys aimed at young kids. As Lionel hoped, they saw trains as electrical devices for older, more educated boys.



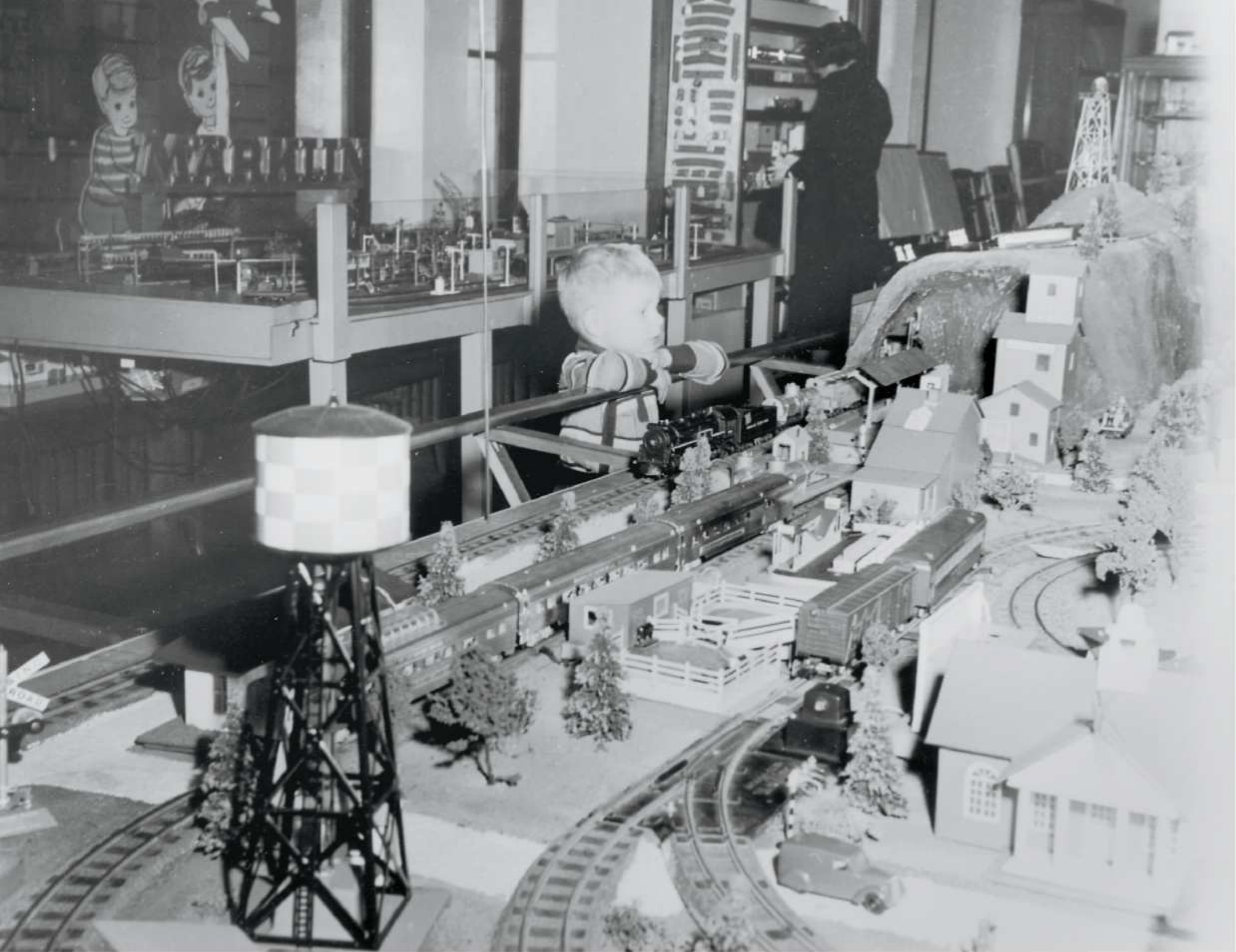


Photo courtesy Michael Novak

Watching trains run at the greatest toy store in the world

Every town had its toy store during the postwar period. Toy World and Play Land and Fun City – generic names for retailers carrying the whole gamut of dolls and board games, stuffed animals and sleds, die-cast vehicles and soldiers, and trains.

But one giant toy merchant overshadowed all the little guys. Based in New York City since 1870, it had by the 1940s and '50s become renowned for the fantastic variety of items it featured, many expensive and imported from Europe. FAO Schwarz, named for the German immigrant who had founded the firm in Baltimore during the Civil War, stocked virtually every plaything a boy or girl might want. That, of course, had always included windup and electric trains.

Domestic toy train producers, notably the A.C. Gilbert Co. and the Lionel Corp., competed for space at the flagship store on Fifth Avenue throughout the

postwar period. Craftsmen from those manufacturers often helped design landscaped displays around Christmas to show how their latest trains operated.

Michael Novak visited FAO Schwarz during the holiday season of 1953 to marvel at the wonders of the American Flyer and Lionel layouts. His dad brought a camera, so we can share in the fun.

Maybe Mike had already checked out the small display of Märklin trains from Germany on the left side. Now, he concentrated on the S gauge sets speeding down the main lines. Filling out the scenes were a few of the pressed wood structures Gilbert was cataloging, such as the nos. 162 factory, 165 grain elevator, and 270 Gilbert News & Frank Stand.

Mike stared at the trains until his father said they had to leave. How many of you went through the same experience at your version of FAO Schwarz?

A Lionel world thrilled shoppers at B. Altman & Co.

Accustomed though we are to linking Christmas displays of toy trains with the exterior windows of department stores, some of the finest and most innovative layouts were found inside the main doors and up a few floors. Kids knew they just had to dash up the stairs or take an elevator to the Toy Department.

Some of the most spectacular operating displays in New York City thrilled children whose parents were shopping at B. Altman & Co. on Fifth Avenue. It was from the late 19th century until the close of the 20th one of the principal department stores in the nation's biggest and most vibrant metropolitan areas.

To our good fortune, photos of the sprawling and beautifully landscaped Lionel railroads built at Altman's in the 1950s have survived. They not only show O gauge trains zipping along main lines past miniature forests, villages, and rivers with actual water. In addition, these pictures enable us to pay

tribute to the artist responsible for designing and overseeing work on the layouts: Clayton Senior.

Hired at Altman's sometime after World War II, Clayton turned his sights on presenting Lionel trains in realistic settings beginning in 1952. For at least the next four years, he developed larger and more complicated layouts for the Toy Department on the sixth floor. The three-rail exhibits swelled from 16 x 20 feet to 20 x 40 feet and featured anywhere from three trains running at once to five sets.

Undoubtedly the most memorable effect Clayton created was laying track inside Plexiglas tubing so trains could dip down from the primary level and drive under the waterways. Joshua Lionel Cowen, who dropped by Altman's to look over the layout, liked what he saw so much that he eventually had a similar line added to the Super O layout at the Lionel showroom over at 15 East 26th Street.



Photo courtesy Thomas Senior Jr. and Shelley Roccati



Photo courtesy Ohio History Connection (Lazarus Family Collection)



Admiring the Lionel line for 1949 in Columbus, Ohio

This picture, snapped during the holiday season of 1949 at the F.H. Lazarus Department Store in Columbus, Ohio, just confirms what all toy train enthusiasts already knew. Namely, adults loved the toy train displays as much as kids did.

Since the photo was taken in the Toy Department, we can assume Santa Claus is sitting on his throne not too far away, waiting for some of these boys to walk over to tell him they want a Lionel train for Christmas. Wonder if any of the well-dressed men did the same thing! They likely skipped Kris Kringle to head straight for a salesman to pick out a Lionel outfit or one of the new locomotives.

The expansive network of O gauge track laid

down on the platform gave employees at Lazarus, one of the regional chains of merchants, superb opportunities to present some of the latest sets. Hardly any scenery, other than the roads painted on the surface and the grassy areas bordering the high-ways and rights-of-way.

Spying the streetlights, stations, and water tanks Lionel was cataloging at midcentury underscores a dramatic point about the early postwar line. It was quite toy like. A hint of what was soon to happen can be detected with the no. 622 Santa Fe NW2 diesel switcher in the foreground. It serves as a preview of how the roster grew to be more realistic, especially as near-scale models became the rule. •

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