



SVGRS NEWSLETTER – February 2008

TRAINS IN THE GARDEN

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2008 Club Membership Dues are now past due. Please pay promptly to make sure you remain on the mailing list. Dues are \$20.00 per family. Dues should be sent to Jeff Shubert, 258 Chestnut Drive, Shippensburg, PA 17257-9493.

Calendar of Events

East Coast Large Scale Train Show March 28, 29. York Fairgrounds. Bob McCrea and Bob Segassenman agreed to coordinate the club layout.

New Oxford Train Auction March 28, 2008 at 7 PM. Event held at the New Oxford Fire Station. If you have any questions about this event call Jim Dysart at 717-624-8515.

Garden Expo at the Harrisburg Farm Show Complex second week of March.

The club will be doing a layout for this event, the PA Garden Expo web address is www.pagardenexpo.org/. Any one who would like to participate in the show to setup or running trains contact Turk. We will be setting up on Tuesday March 4. We will need to have people available to run trains March 6, 7, 8 and 9. Teardown will be March 9 after the show closes. This year's layout is going to be a whopper with possibly 5 trains running.

Contact Turk: 717-762-8873 cell 717-977-1000 or new email lturk@embarqmail.com.

Club Functions and Club participation

Our club continues to grow and with the growth in numbers goes increased need for communication and responsibility. Club officers devote enormous blocks of time and effort to ensure continued efficient function and activities. Too often their efforts go unseen, we as their support need to stand up and pledge support to their unselfish dedication.

Funding for club activities is derived from

1. Dues (a minor income source)
2. Pennsylvania Garden Expo. (Layout Display)
3. East Coast Large Scale Train Show
4. Rocky Ridge Christmas (Layout Display)

Funds from the above sources are how we enjoy club activities such as

1. Annual Club Picnic
2. News Letter for current members
3. Purchase of rolling stock and engines for club displays
4. Annual Christmas Dinner

There needs to be increased supportive activity to permit continued extensive displays of train layouts for public appreciation. Show chair persons provide the leadership and planning required to assure success. We must pause and appreciate their efforts thru individual pledges of work activity including Setup, teardown and monitoring layouts.

Let's provide renewed dedication to club activities and reap the additional reward of comradeship in completion of club projects. Let us remember that serving on a committee for a specific work project gives us necessary experiences to enable continuation of club projects in the event that a show chair person becomes ill or unavailable. Our club is made up of many individuals with unique talents but it is the combination and application of a united front that enables SVGRS to function efficiently. Growth is a major measure of a club but it is not numbers alone.

Two major show displays are planned for the near future, (Penna. Garden Expo and East Coast Large Scale Train Show). *Success will be assured by placing a phone call to a show chair person and donating your time and support.*

Penna Garden Expo-----Turk Russell----- (717) 762-8873
ECCLSTS (York)--Robert Segessenman Sr. -----(717) 677-9770
Volunteer Today

East Coast Train Show York

Time	Club Member-1	Club Member-2
Friday, March 28, 2008		
<i>9:00 AM TO 12:00 AM</i>	Mike Oberdick	Lou Stahl Sr.
<i>11:00 AM TO 2:00 PM</i>	Mel Pankuch	Dick Bleiler
<i>1:00 PM TO 4:00 PM</i>	Roberts McCrea	Joe Mower
<i>3:00 PM TO 6:00 PM</i>	Marlyn Geesey	Walter Plank
<i>5:00 PM TO 8:00 PM</i>	Terry Smith Sr.	Robert Segessenman Jr

7:00 PM TO
9:00 PM

Lindsay Martin

Jake Midour

Saturday March 29, 2008

9:00 PM TO
12:00 AM

Mike Oberdick

Dave Watts

11:00 AM TO
2:00 PM

Bill Bowers

Robert D. Charles

1:00 PM TO
4:00 PM

George Collier

Jim Dysart

3:00 PM TO
6:00 PM

Timothy Keinard

Lou Stahl Sr.

Submitted by **Walter E. Plank**

Layout Tours. Spring will be here before you know it and our garden railroads will be fully operational again. We are planning our open house schedule now. We would like to have one open house day each month from April through October if possible. We already have Joe Mower and Walter Plank scheduled for Sunday, June 29th. We are looking for more club members that would like to host an open house at their layout. Once again this year we are also planning to have technical sessions in conjunction with each open house. So we are looking for volunteers that will share their technical knowledge and experience in the hobby at one of these events.

Please contact Kirk Slenker at 717-244-3522 or slenke@aaicorp.com if you would either like to host an open house or conduct a tech session or perhaps both.

Thanks Kirk



From the Club Webmaster:

I'd like to expand the member layouts section, so if you have pictures (3-8 pics) of your own layout you'd like to share with the club and everyone else who visits our site, please let me know! In the mean time, check out our website <http://www.svgrs.net> and let me know if you have any ideas and, or thoughts for making this a better site for everyone.

Thanks! -Rob Segessenman



Christmas Party

The Christmas party made a huge bash this year. With over 75 people in attendance this set a club record for a members get together. The Brethern Home was booked by Beegee Staub and Susan McCrea. Hosted and planned by Turk Russell & Walter & Jeannie Plank. Members were greeted by a Lindsey Martin and given badges and tickets. We had a spectacular dinner with over 50 door prizes given away. Barry McNew was the auctioneer for the evening of Bachmann steam engine and a Lionel box car. Donated by Turk Russell ;Together they brought 100.00 which will go into club funds . Winning bidders were Fred Wendling and Marian Whitley . Doris Geesy and Renee Russell hosted the 50/50 drawing. The gross was \$150.00 which netted the club \$75.00 and the winner \$75.00 as well.

Various members donated items as well. Tom McCloud -2 gift certificates for plants; Bob McCrea- train book; Mel Pankoch - 20 various train videos; Sorry if we missed a few people to mention.

Walter and Jean Plank gave club members a surprise Christmas present .For the Women; A compilation of recipes submitted by the ladies of the club and for the men a directory of steam locomotives. This took a lot of work and we all owe them a debt of gratitude!

Turk provided us with a snazzy anniversary Bachmann train set as Grand prize which was won by Douglas Harbaugh

To finish off the evening ,Members were treated to a 1950's logging train movie, which Turk gave us some insight in to the development and building of the Bachmann Shay replication and its log cars. A second movie was shown of the Cubres &Toltec Rotary Snow blower and how it works.

A great time was had by all. We now need to look for volunteers for the future and a place for next year's program. It takes the support of, track crew, maintenance shed and conductors to operate the train. The Engineer cannot do it alone.

Turk



Rocky Ridge Layout

On December 22 the Russells and Shuberts along with many kids made a night of it with lots of Christmas spirit. As soon as we arrived, I was asked to do a special request by the folks at the park.

Jeff and I, like other members had brought our own engines so we could have some whistles and bells. The train was assembled and the LGB mogul ran around the track with a small package laying in a gondola car to the front of the layout with the whistle blow' in delivering engagement ring to an unsuspecting girl. Andrew Fettenberger then got down on one knee and proposed to his girlfriend Ashley in front of about 75 people. She accepted and was totally surprised. We gave them a round of applause / See photos included.



With nice weather and a record crowd, Holly Russell her friend Brooks along with the Shubert twins handed out over 320 candy canes in the first hour alone. We basically ran out of supplies

Walter had come up with a good idea earlier in the week of handing out pennies for the kids toss in the pond. Jeff and I spent the next hour doing so till we ran out of rolls of coin. All in all, it was a great evening and everyone should come up to the park some time and enjoy the comradely of trains and Christmas.

Happy New Year Turk



Written by Paul D. Race for FamilyGardenTrains.com and BigChristmasTrains.com

What Do Trains Have To Do With Christmas?

In 2004, when I came up with the trademark Big Christmas Trains™, nobody had to ask me what I meant - trains and Christmas have "gone together" for generations. But it wasn't always so, and in some ways, it doesn't even make sense. It's not like Mary and Joseph rode a train from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Nor was Santa ever sighted delivering packages by Railway Express Agency. But to many families today, a toy or model train around the Christmas tree seems as "normal" as a star or angel on the top. As far as I can figure there are at least three reasons for this (in the United States and Canada, anyway - if anyone from other countries wants to contribute to this discussion, I will most gladly include your comments):



• For over a century, to most Americans, "**real trains**" exemplified the kinds of "comings and goings," "hustle and bustle," and even package shipments, that were a way of life anyway, but became even more "festively frantic" during the holiday season. At any time of year, whether you took the "A-Train," or the "Chattanooga Choo-Choo," or whether you drifted home on a "Sentimental Journey," you just assumed that any long trip would involve a train. This was even more true at Christmas time, when New York city office workers went home to New Hampshire, West Texas families waited for their Sears Roebuck order to arrive, and Cincinnati families boarded trains to visit their cousins in Chicago. The greatest examples were in the 1940s, when the railroads helped hundreds of thousands of GI's to "Be Home For Christmas" year after year.



Let's face it, more people and stuff move at Christmas than any other time of year, and for over a century, more people and stuff moved by trains than any other way. So for many people, Christmas seemed to involve trains somehow.

- In addition, as the importance of **toy and model trains** in American culture grew, so did the sense that Christmas was an ideal time both to give and to display those trains. This, in fact, will be the main topic of the following musings.
- Finally, trains running around Christmas trees bring back **memories of simpler times**. Christmas trains are to the soul what "comfort food" is to the appetite - a kind of reassurance that there are still good things in the world, and even good experiences in your own past. More will be said on that subject presently.

The Rise of Toy Trains

Toy or model trains have been given at Christmas almost since there *were* trains. At first, these gifts were only toys by anyone's definition. It's not surprising that in the late-19th century, push-

toys
wa-



that looked
push-toys
gons or
many



like trains joined
that looked like
ponies underneath
Christmas trees.



Wind-up toy trains
weren't far behind.
Still, there seemed

to be no particular sense that it was more suitable to give a toy train for Christmas, than, say, for a birthday. In fact, the most impressive line of "push toy" trains was meant to be used during warm weather. Buddy L* trains were very large stamped-metal push-toy trains for which you could buy track. Yes, these often arrived with the rest of the toys at Christmas, but they were meant to be used outside (as long as you brought them in when you were through playing), so there wasn't necessarily a Christmas link.

The First Powered Toy Trains

The first working model trains were not necessarily "Christmas" trains, or even toys. They were steam-powered models that required a certain amount of skill and patience to operate safely. Sometimes these came into the home at Christmas, but, even if you had a circle of track for it, you wouldn't want to run a locomotive burning real fuel underneath a real cut tree.

In 1901, Lionel showed New York City families that it was possible to fit an electric motor into a toy locomotive and power it by low-voltage electric current. The public's first exposure to electric trains was through a store display, but that display caught the imagination of thousands who saw it. A new industry and a new hobby were born.



Really Big Trains Were the Rule at First

The first electric trains were large by today's standards. Most of them were about the size of today's garden trains, although you couldn't use them outside, of course - they were tin-plated steel that would eventually rust under the driest conditions.

These "Standard Gauge" trains ran on track with the rails about 2" apart. Cars seven inches high, five inches wide, and 16" long were common, although some of the cheaper sets used smaller measurements. But not everyone had room for such a large train. Those trains were also expensive. Some of the early sets cost as much as, say, a contemporary automobile. But as manufacturing techniques improved and "economies of scale" grew, the cost of a good set eventually came down to that of, say, a refrigerator or other major appliance. Still, between 1901 and 1950, a name-brand electric train was a major purchase that needed to be budgeted. And since it was, after all, a toy, what was more natural than giving the train as a Christmas present? THE Christmas present, in fact.

Of course, once the mysterious huge box was opened, it was only logical to route the train around the now-naked-looking Christmas tree. So between Christmas and the day the tree came down, the train would run almost constantly, with almost everyone in the family taking a turn at operating it. Next year, of course, the train would come out *before* the presents appeared, and run

a week or two before Christmas. And any cars or accessories in the new pile of presents were added to the temporary "railroad" as well.

Christmas Railroads and Train Gardens Arrive

Between the World Wars, it became common in some middle-class homes to build elaborate temporary railroads between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Many of these started as an extension of the Christmas tree route, but some took over spare rooms, back porches, and so on. In Roman Catholic homes, these often started with the Nativity (what my German grandmother called a "putz") set near or under the tree, then other buildings and accessories, were added, usually with no attention to scale or time period. In the Baltimore/DC area, these were called "train gardens;" they had buildings, figures, many accessories, and maybe even multiple trains running at the same time. Community train gardens operated in many fire stations.

All of these Christmas railroads were important precursors of the Holiday Villages that were made popular by Dept. 56 many years later, as well as the display railroads operating in many botanical gardens as I write this article. (To this day, certain Maryland fire departments strive to keep the Train Garden tradition alive.



Trains Became Smaller And More Realistic

Of course, the Standard Gauge trains



were too big to leave sitting out indefinitely (although a few families were able to dedicate an attic or unused bedroom to a railroad). Smaller track gauges were tried; the most successful for about 50 years was "O" gauge, which has rails that are about 1.25" apart. Over the same period, the trains began to

look more and more like the real trains they were imitating. Soon the hobby of "model railroading" was born, as train fans began building permanent railroads that looked and operated as much like the real thing as possible, given the available resources.

After a while, it wasn't enough to have a single huge train running around the Christmas tree once a year. Rather, hobbyists might own several trains and have a permanent railroad set up on a custom-built table somewhere year-round. Eventually Lionel owned the "lion's share" of such railroads, with American Flyer coming in a distant second. But both brands were still large enough to look good around the tree.

Even at half the size of the Standard Gauge trains, O-scale trains were too large to fit into most homes without some compromises. So Lionel and other companies typically made their equipment about 3/4 the size it ought to be. Eventually, American Flyer decided that they might as well reduce the width of the rails to match the scale of the train, and S-scale was born. But a few companies "leapfrogged" S gauge and went right to a size that was about Half the size of O scale - HO, for short.

Christmas Railroads Take a Back Seat to Model Railroads

Gradually, many serious model train hobbyists migrated to HO trains (and even smaller scales) because they could fit more railroading into a small, but permanent space. For a while, many families that had HO railroads in the basement still had Lionel or American Flyer trains they could run around the tree during the holidays. But HO trains (and smaller scales) weren't big enough to make much of an impression around a full-sized Christmas tree. And as the next generation of model railroaders grew up on HO, many families that were interested in trains nevertheless stopped bothering to set up temporary living-room railroads at Christmas.

In the 1960s, both Lionel and American Flyer fell on hard times. Model railroaders were buying HO trains, and few people who weren't model railroaders knew how to keep the trains running properly, so fewer and fewer Christmas trees were adorned with working trains. Many Lionel and AF trains found their way to collectors, who disdained to run "collectibles"; many other big trains gathered dust, or worse yet, rust.

Other forms of so-called "family" entertainment also began taking huge chunks out of people's schedules, the biggest single example being television. Later, video games, youth sports, and home computers drew even more energy and interest away from any kind of toy or model trains. Eventually, model railroading of all kinds was beginning to "level off" as a hobby, and many wondered how to keep the next generation interested in the hobby.

Christmas Trains Re-Emerge

Yet several things were already happening, on two different continents, that would bring Christmas trains back from near-extinction.



- **Really Big Trains Reappear** - In 1968, a European toy company introduced a line of train that was almost as large as the old Standard Gauge trains and at least as sturdy. LGB trains were made to be used outside but, they were also big and looked dangerously "cute" around the Christmas tree. Other companies followed suit, usually starting out with trains that would also look good around Christmas trees. Bachmann, a model railroad manufacturer, introduced the "Big Hauler" series,

which made "Large Scale" trains (sometimes called G gauge) affordable for more families. But these big wonders still took up a lot of space, especially if you tried to add stations and other accessories to them in the old "Train Garden" tradition. **Ceramic Christmas Villages Arrive** - In 1976, an American company called [Department 56](#) began making collectible ceramic houses and accessories the right size to fit a "Christmas Village" on a table or spinet. Department 56 pieces weren't all made to



the same scale (models of huge buildings were built to a smaller scale to keep them from overwhelming the



rest of the village, for example), but they averaged around O scale, the scale that suited most of the Lionel trains made after WWI. The nostalgic value of some of the products, coupled with the appeal of creating one's own little community was powerful, a host of



other manufacturers brought out their own lines, and a new hobby was born. For over a decade, most Christmas Villages got along quite well without a train at all, although some were served by old Lionel and American Flyer sets, and others were served by inexpensive, battery-powered sets with a lifespan of one Christmas season or so. But eventually Bachmann made a quality model train that was the proper scale to look good with Department 56 buildings. The train, marketed as the "Village Express Electric Train Set," was so successful that after Bachmann had fulfilled their contract to Department 56, they went on to add many other trains in the same scale. To put it in the simplest terms, Bachmann's [On30](#) trains are only slightly smaller than most of Lionel's O-gauge trains, but they run on track made for HO trains, which means they're easier to fit in many places. Later, the [Hawthorne Village](#) used the mechanism from these trains to produce their limited-edition [collectible trains](#), and many other people began running Christmas trains. So, half a century after the decline of the "train garden," many families are using On30 trains and collectible village pieces to set up Holiday Villages in their own home.

- **Popular Children's Books and Movies Feature Trains** - Trains reappeared in books and movies that were intended for children but also enjoyed by adults. When a British children's book series was cleverly animated using sets that looked for all the world like a large model railroad, Thomas the Tank captured the hearts of young and old alike. In more recent years, young Harry Potter rode the "Hogwarts Express" to his beloved school, and the "Polar Express" added a distinctly North American Christmas train to our cultural imagination.
- More new model trains appeared. [Bachmann](#), [Lionel](#), [AristoCraft](#), and LGB all added trains in Christmas colors to their lineup. Bachmann also added a [reversing streetcar set](#) that could bring action to the smallest Christmas village, even on a shelf or the back of the spinet. Lionel, under new management, improved its track and brought out several new trains, including a very nice model of the [Polar Express](#) and a fanciful, heirloom quality, [Large Scale Christmas train](#) that was proportioned like the huge Standard Gauge trains of old, but decorated with high-quality modern paint jobs.
- Large Scale public garden railroads began attracting millions of people a year to places like the New York Botanical Garden, the Morris Arboretum in Philadelphia, the Phipps Conservatory in Pittsburgh, the [Chicago Botanic Gardens](#), and many more. This gave a boost, not only to the [Garden Railroading](#) hobby, but also to model railroading in general, and especially to Christmas trains, since many of the public displays have holiday themes.

In other words, whether it's around the tree, around a miniature town, or around a public display railroad, the Christmas train looks like it's back to stay. Still, there may be one other reason, we are welcoming Christmas trains back into our homes.

[Today's Christmas Trains Take You On a Sentimental Journey](#)

When I was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, we enjoyed our model trains in part because they were powerful models of incredibly powerful behemoths that could still be seen operating once in a while. Today, many people seem rather to like seeing trains running around a Christmas tree because it brings back memories of a simpler time, or at least of one time of year when good things happened to you just because somebody loved you, and not because of anything you'd accomplished recently.

Many model railroaders, including garden railroaders, still model the most modern trains they can get their hands on. But *the most popular Christmas trains are old-fashioned*. I suspect that that nostalgia for "simpler times" is part of the cause. Even the collectible villages that those trains serve are old-fashioned and quaint; in recent years some have reproduced scenes from [Norman Rockwell](#) paintings. Others have modeled [Dickens' London](#), Andy Griffith's [Mayberry](#), and *It's a Wonderful Life's* [Bedford Falls](#).

Were those times really simpler? Not for most people, if you think about it. But they seem simpler than our lives today, because for most of us, someone else had to pay the bills, fix the cars and appliances, and make all of the hard decisions.

And for most of us, the best time of all of those deceptively simple times was Christmas. Is it any wonder we feel our spirits lift when we hang our favorite ornament, sing strange old songs, or rewatch that old Christmas special that seemed too cheesy for words when we were young? And when the scent of vanilla extract from the kitchen mixes with the scent of fir or pine in the living room, all bets are off.

As odd as it seems, those of us who grew up with big trains around the tree are affected just as much by the scent of a Lionel or American Flyer transformer that has been left on a little too long, the repetitive thunks and clicks of an endlessly circling train, and the erratic beam that our train's headlight casts around the room when all the room lights are off and only the train and the tree are powered. You can have your "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire." Give me the cheery thunder and repetitive motion of a big Christmas train with a circle of track sitting right on a hardwood floor. How do you connect with the best days of the best years of your childhood? For my part, I reconnect with some of my best and earliest memories of my mother by making cut-out sugar cookies with my own children. I reconnect with some of my best and earliest memories of my father by running trains. Dad's still around, though not in the best of health, but we lost our mother on September 15 of this year. Because we had to cancel a trip, I've saved up more vacation this year than I meant to, but I hope to spend at least part of our family time at home this Christmas making cookies and running trains. And I wouldn't be surprised if, thirty years from now, my children do the same thing.

Receipt Santa Fe Railroad French Toast

2 Eggs

½ Cup whipped cream

Pinch of salt

3 Slices of white bread

Trim Crust off bread, then cut in half to form triangles

Combine beaten eggs, whipped cream and salt. Soak bread in egg mixture. Fry soaked bread in vegetable shortening on both sides to a golden color. Transfer to clean towel to absorb excess grease. Then place on a cooking sheet and allow to puff up in a 400 degree oven for about 3 to 5 min. Sprinkle with powdered sugar and serve with apple sauce, jelly , honey or maple syrup. (Serves 2).

SVGRS Club Officers

President – Tom McCloud (717) 762- 9508 liner-man@earthlink.net

Vice President – Turk Russell (717) 762-8873 1turk@earthlink.net

Dave Watts - SVGRS Secretary 717-264-8187 suern@innernet.net

Coordinator of Layout Tours.

Kirk Slenker - (717) 244-3522 or slenke@aaicorp.com

Treasurer – Jeff Shubert (717) 530-0561

shube@comcast.net

Secretary/Membership – Dave Watts (717)264-8187

Newsletter Editor – Joe Mower (717)241-6483

Items for the newsletter can be submitted to jhmower@aol.com. Please indicate SVGRS in the subject so it does not get deleted with spam.

The next issue of the newsletter will be out approximately April 5, 2008. Please have any information for the newsletter to me by April 1.

If you have items for sale you would like posted in the newsletter please send me a list by April 1.

We are always looking for articles to publish. If you have an article you think would be have interest to other club members please send it to me.

Joe Mower

Related Garden Railroad Businesses

Russell's Customizers – Repairs to garden railroad equipment. (Aristocraft, Bachmann & LGB. Moderate pricing for Garden Railroad equipment, technical advice, rail mechanics & maintenance problems. Call evenings 717-762-8873 Turk & Renee Russell.

RCS of New England – Specializing in battery control throttles for G scale trains. They also provide sound systems and special lighting effects. 717-259-9523 Don & Donna Sweet

Appalachian Gardens- Specializing in miniature plants and trees for Garden Railroads. They also offer a full range of nursery products. Appalachian Gardens provides plant materials for club exhibits and displays. 717-597-8456 Tom & Fern McCloud Website,

www.smallplants4bigtrains.com

Victoria's Timeless Treasures & Dale's Garden Railroad Depot – Provides a full range of Garden Railroad equipment, accessories and supplies. They invite members to view their extensive multi-track layout. 610-589-9000 Dale & Victoria Bricker

Cool Train Hobbies – General train supplies and merchandise specializing in G scale trains. 717-898-7119 Ted & Kim Symonds.

Martins Greenhouse

It is a small greenhouse business specializing in perennials. This includes rock garden plants & miniature conifers, which fit in well with garden railways.

Noah & Marian Martin

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