

Official Newsletter  
of



NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 1361

Altoona, PA 16603-1361

[www.hscnrhs.org](http://www.hscnrhs.org)

**Spring 2018**

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**Note: Horseshoe Curve Chapter, National Railway Historical Society was granted a charter by the NRHS on May 11, 1968 (3 months and ten days after the PRR-NYC merger), evolving from the Altoona Railway Museum Club (1965-1968). We meet on FOURTH Tuesday of each month except December, at Railroader's Memorial Museum, Altoona, PA, 7:30 PM. Occasional exceptions are announced to the membership.**

**90 (+) % of all communications and notices are handled by e-mail. Please keep your e-mail address current with the officers, especially the Chapter Historian/Editor.**

**Meetings are open to those interested in railroad history and membership inquiries are invited. Chapter-only membership is available but national membership dues are separate. For more information visit [www.nrhs.com](http://www.nrhs.com).**

## STAYING ON THE RIGHT TRACK



With temperatures outside at or below zero, everyone was hoping that “Phil” would announce an early Spring. But the world famous groundhog forecast another six weeks of Winter. So we will have to bundle up and press on.

But with Spring really just around the corner, we are getting very close to our Chapter’s 50th Anniversary date of May 11, 2018. What that in mind we must “stay on the right track” to make that celebration a success.

To date most plans are set but a few details still need to be completed.

The first item planned is a history book outlining the Chapter’s past 50 years. This editor has gotten the book written and laid out and it is now at the printers being typeset and printed.

It will be approximately 50 pages with over 130 photos. Most will be in color. Plans are to have it available for distribution at the May 22nd meeting of the Chapter at the museum.

The second item planned is the sponsorship and building of a 2’ x 8’ modular sign display for the K-4 #1361 (see related article). The signage should be completed by early March and then the building of the wooden modular units will take place with completion by May 7, 2018. See Joe DeFrancesco if you are able to help building or painting the units.

The third item will be a dinner to be held July 21, 2018 at the museum. It will be a catered affair with social time and museum touring from 5:30 to 7:00, dinner at 7:00 and a guest speaker from the NRHS at 8:00 in the theatre room. It should be an evening of both remembering the past and also looking forward to the future and the next 50 years.

The fourth item is a train ride on the Everett Railroad from Hollidaysburg to Martinsburg. The exact date and time are still being set up at this time.

And of course the annual picnic will be held sometime August-September. Again this date has not been set yet since there is still snow on the ground.

So keep watching your mail box for postcards or your e-mail for reminders about these upcoming events as we try to stay on the right track and celebrate our Chapter’s 50th Anniversary.

# THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

By Leonard Alwine

In keeping with the 50th anniversary theme for this year and looking back, I thought I would take a look back at Christmas and the train layouts that used to be placed under the trees. It would seem to me that this is one tradition that is not observed as much today as it used to be.

When I was a kid growing up in the 1950's, it seemed that every house you went to had a train layout under the tree. I came from a family with seventeen aunts and uncles and every house we visited, and we had to go to every one, had a Christmas layout under the tree. Most of these were a simple circle of track with a Lionel train on it running around the base of the tree, and those paper-cardboard houses with sparkles and glitter glued to the roof and sides making a small village inside the tracks. (Of course these were the tops in miniature real estate back then.) Usually some form of laundry soap was used to make the scene look like it had just snowed. Add a few toy trucks and cars to the streets and the village was complete.

I do not know why or how this became a Christmas tradition or even when it began. The three big train makers of that time, Lionel, Ives, and American Flyer had all made tin trains since the turn of the century and these were mostly clock work or wind up toys. But soon after World War II electric motors began to be used to move these toy trains. This gave kids (and Dads) something new to play with.

Perhaps it was the old family time at Christmas that gave birth to the train layout idea. It was something that the whole family could do together.

Then in the early 1950's, Lionel began to push the Christmas train idea. They put displays in all the department and hardware stores a few months before Christmas enticing kids to ask Santa for a train set for Christmas. I got my first set for my first Christmas at the age of 10 months (I guess you know who played with it more than me that year). But it was something that dads and kids could have fun with at Christmas. Then in 1950-51, Plasticville hit the store shelves. These houses were made of plastic and although they cost a little more than the paper ones, they lasted longer and looked more like the real thing. They also could be taken apart and put back into the boxes for easy storage until the next year. Lionel also began to use plastic for the trains which brought the cost of them down, so now Santa could afford to bring each kid a trainset for Christmas.

Soon these trains also began to have working sidings and cars which increased the play value of the sets. And before long, Plasticville had a complete village with stores, factories, schools, banks, hospitals, and even turnpike entrances available. It was every kids (and dads) delight to add to and build a better layout each year under the tree. Simple circles gave way to larger layouts with yards and sidings.

Then HO gauge hit the markets. Smaller trains and smaller Plasticville houses made for larger layouts in the same amount of space. Artificial trees now also made the layout possible from Thanksgiving to mid January or Groundhogs Day in some cases.

But as is sometimes the case, bigger is not always better. The extra work setting up and taking down these more complex layouts maybe prompted their demise. That along with ceramic buildings by Lennox and Dept. 56 that could be set up as a static village on coffee tables most likely also helped bring about the end of Christmas toy train layouts under the tree.

They can still be found but you have to look really hard to find them now, visiting many homes until you find one. A ghost of Christmas's Past.



Dave Seidel with his layout under the tree in 2017. A combination of ceramic buildings and the old O gauge train set. It just proves you are never too old to play with trains.





Len Alwine's first train set and Plasticville houses set up as a static display in 2016.

## LARGE TRAIN DISPLAYS STILL VIEWABLE

If you want to see scale model train layouts and displays, you can still do so in Altoona. These are displays built by clubs that open their doors around Christmas time for public viewing.

The first is the Altoona Association of Model Railroaders located at 31st Street in Altoona. The top floor of their building contains a very large O gauge and HO gauge built very nicely together. The O gauge "Altoona Central" is really historic as it began its life many years ago in the old Webster building that used to be located on Lexington Avenue in Altoona near the old YMCA. As a kid, I can remember being taken there to view that layout at Christmas.

On the bottom floor is a N gauge layout which has many areas still under construction. It too will be a large layout when done.

The other club is the Alto Model Train Museum Association Inc. which has a rather large room in the Antique Depot in Duncansville, PA. There they have O, HO, S and N gauge layouts and are open most every weekend for viewing.

But this group also has a layout at Lakemont Park which is built on the theme of the Polar Express. It is open from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day as part of the Lights on the Lake Display at the park.

Both of these groups also have Thomas the Tank Engine trains for kids to play with as well as historic displays of toy trains and railroad artifacts.

If you like toy train layouts and cannot build one of your own for Christmas for whatever reason, a visit to these clubs might just give you the "fix" you need to get you through the Christmas season.



Layout showing both HO and O gauge at the 31st Street building



The Polar Express layout at Lakemont Park with 100s of Elves helping Santa load his sleigh for takeoff

## UNDER THE WIRE

By Leonard Alwine

In keeping with the toy train layout theme of this edition, I will take a brief look at toy trolley cards made to represent the Altoona and Logan Valley Electric Railway.

While a lot of modelers have built one or two for their own layouts, only a couple have been made for purchase and their releases have been small in numbers.

The first two car set release was sold by Dale Suiters models. There were built by Bowser Manufacturing and consisted of a single truck Birney car similar to the ones used on the Fairview Division of Logan Valley and car #57 a double track Brill car with the special red, white and blue paint scheme and the letters "Buy War Bonds and Stamps".

Both of these cars had grey roofs. They were limited to 100 sets and were made in the mid 1980's.

The second set of trolleys were again made by Bowser Manufacturing and were made for and marketed by the Lakemont Park Historical Museum Inc. in the early 1990's.

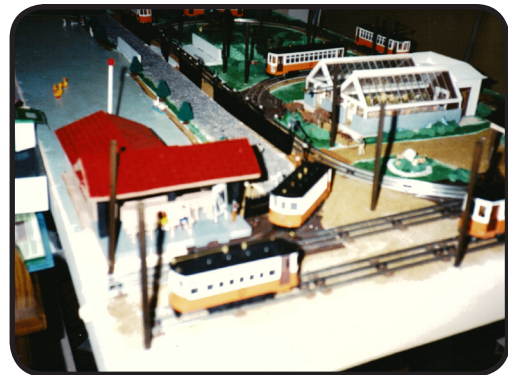
They again used a single truck Birney car and a double truck Brill car. These had black roofs and the orange and cream paint style of Logan Valley in the later years. These were a very limited production with only 25 sets produced.

There was also an O gauge layout of the famous Lakemont Park Loop Tracks made for the Lakemont Park Museum. It was built on a 4'x6' layout by myself in my home and then transported by truck to the museum.

The loop tracks were the entrance to the park in the old days. That is where the station and the boat house and the greenhouses were located with the tracks looping around the greenhouse and the breast of the dam. The flood of 1936 completely destroyed this area and now the new by-pass road has even removed any vision of the old loop roadbed.



Trolley model cars:  
Top left and bottom, first set produced.  
Top right and middle, second set produced.



Model layout for Lakemont Park Museum showing the station and boathouse greenhouses and loop tracks over the breast of the dam.



My static layout at Christmas using trolleys from second set and old Plasticville houses.



## **A LOOK BACK**

Once again we will take a look back in time to see how many things you can remember about Altoona as we celebrate our 50th Anniversary.

Ten years ago, a display of models of the Horseshoe Curve, Gallitzin Tunnels and the K-4 steam engine were on display at the Portage Station Museum in Portage, PA.

Ten years ago, Santa Claus arrived at the Horseshoe Curve by special train and rode the incline down to the bottom to his chair where he gave bags of goodies to the children.



Santa on the incline going down.

Twenty five years ago, the “World’s Largest Portable Train Set” called the Magic of Lionel Trains was on display at the Altoona Railroaders Memorial Museum. It was housed in a special 46 foot custom trailer.

Twenty five years ago, Conrail announced plans to raise bridges and tunnels in the area to accommodate double stacked trains.

Twenty five years ago, Conrail Police Captain Richard L. Bowes, cited 15 motorists for running around train signals at crossings in Altoona on the same day.

Fifty years ago, Gables Department Store had a “Make It Yourself With Wool” contest and fashion show sponsored by the PA Sheep and Wool Growers Association.

Fifty years ago, the PRR and the New York Central merged to create the new Penn Central Railroad.



Full page ad in the Altoona Mirror announcing the merger.



One of the first engines sporting the new symbol and paint scheme for PC.

Fifty years ago the Fouss Mills Covered Bridge located near Tyrone was burnt to the ground (water) by vandals. It was the last covered bridge in Blair County.

Postcard view of the bridge a few years before it was destroyed by fire.



Sixty five years ago, Rev. Ralph W. Lind was hit and knocked unconscious by a trolley car at 11th Avenue and 11th Street in Altoona.

Fifty years ago, Peggy Fleming won a gold medal for figure skating at the Olympics in Grenoble, France in February 1968. It was the only gold medal won by the United States that year.

100 years ago, the K-4 1361 was outshopped at Juniata (see related article).

### **K-4 1361 CENTENNIAL EXHIBIT**

As part of the Chapter's 50th Anniversary Celebration, the Chapter has decided to sponsor a new metal sign story board depicting the technical, historical and human element of the K-4 1361.

K-4 1361 was outshopped in Juniata May 18, 1918. It is estimated that it cost the PRR \$50,000.00 in 1918 monies to build this locomotive.

#1361 ran for 37 years hauling trains around the PRR system until retired in May 1955. During that time it logged 2,496,000 miles.

On June 8, 1957 it was donated to the City of Altoona and dedicated at the top of the Horseshoe Curve as a tribute to the 1000's of locomotives built in Altoona and the PRR workers who built them.

It sat there until September 1985 when it was moved back to Altoona to the Railroaders Memorial Museum. In 1988 it began its second career when it was fired up and began excursion service from Altoona to the Wye Switches. It was again taken out of service a few years later for a total restoration. Today it is still being slowly put back together at the museum.

The exhibit as planned by Joe DeFrancesco, Curator at the Museum, will be made up of 2' by 4' sections of signs fastened to wooden frames that can be bolted together as a modular unit. The display will be able to be used as a traveling exhibit to interpret the K-4 in its development, construction, maintenance, service, retirement, preservation, and a symbol of that era.

The Chapter has voted to spend up to \$4,000.00 for the materials to build this display. It will also include a short narrative about the Chapter as the exhibit's sponsor.

It is planned to have this display completed by May 7, 2018, just a few days before the K-4's 100th birthday.



## LOCAL YARD NEWS

The Annual Chapter Christmas Party and dinner was held at Geeseytown Firehall on December 2, 2017. A roast beef and turkey meal with all the trimmings was served. A total of 61 members and guests attended. Guest Speaker was Joe DeFrancesco, who spoke on the Wreck of the Red Arrow.



Members and guests  
enjoying food  
and fellowship



Longtime member and Chapter Founder, Dave Seidel, was honored by the Blair County Historical Society at their Annual Banquet held at The Calvin House in November. He was given a model of the PRR car Mountain View and a plaque to remember the honor.



Dave with his model of the Mountain View displayed at his home



The 1935 Seagrave Fire Engine that the Chapter donated \$1,500.00 towards its purchase and return to the area has made it home to the Geeseytown Fire Company Auxiliary Building. This engine served the Altoona Fire Department as Engine #4 and the lettering is still somewhat visible on the sides. Historically, this engine had its pump broken and a new one cast at the PRR Altoona Foundry located in South Altoona as the last item cast there before it was shut down.

This engine most likely has more steel in its front fenders than most cars today have in their entire body.



Engine #4 back in the area December 2017

Officers for the year 2018 were elected and installed at the November meeting held at the Railroaders Memorial Museum. They are:

President	Francis X. Givler, Jr.
Vice President	Joseph K. Harella
Secretary	Joseph K. Harella
Treasurer	Denny Walls
NRHS Delegate	Joseph A. DeFrancesco
Editor	Leonard E. Alwine

The Alto Model Train Museum Association will be holding the Spring Toy Train Swap Meet at the Blair County Convention Center in Altoona, PA on March 11, 2018.

At 2:00 p.m. March 18, 2018 there will be a special hike at the Staple Bend Tunnel site in Mineral Point to commemorate the 184th Anniversary of the opening of the Allegheny Portage Railroad in March 18, 1834. Reservations for the hike may be made by calling 886-6150.

Dick Charlesworth is thinking about planning an overnight trip to the Cass Scenic Railway this Spring/Summer. Let him know if you are interested in a trip there or have any idea for other trips.

## IN MEMORY

WILLIAM E. BURKET

12-24-1936

12-11-2017

Chapter member William “Bill” Burket recently passed away. Surviving him are his wife, Jean, of 60 years of marriage, two daughters and one son.

Bill worked as a bridge designer for PennDot and had retired in 1996 with over 30 years service. Bill was a charter member of the Altoona Bible Church where he served as song leader. He was a cousin of Harley Burket. May you rest in peace Bill.

PHILLIP LEE FRY

2-26-1952

12-27-2017

Former Amtran General Manager Phillip “Phil” Fry recently passed away due to cancer while residing in Connecticut. Surviving him are his wife, Sandra, of 32 years of marriage, one son and a daughter.

Although Phil was not a member of the Chapter, during his 20 years at Amtran he helped this editor quite a lot in researching old Logan Valley and early bus authority files. He was particularly helpful in coming up with complete trolley car and bus rosters including dates of purchase, costs, serial numbers and dates of retirement. He also let me copy old photos and blueprints that were still on file there.

It was most likely due to his position at Amtran that the old Logan Valley service truck #18 found it's way to the museum when retired. That is the truck that the chapter now owns and has restored to like new condition.

No matter how busy Phil was, he always took the time to talk with me when I visited his office.

May you rest in peace Phil.

BARBARA “BOBBI JO” PRICE

4-13-1957

1-10-2018

Chapter member Barbara “Bobbi Jo” Price recently passed away. Surviving is her husband, Gary of 22 years of marriage and four children. Gary is also a chapter member.

Bobbi Jo worked for the Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministeries. She was also a past officer of the Church of God General Conference of Women Ministry and a member of the Child Evangelism Fellowship Group.

She was a life member of the Altoona Railroaders Memorial Museum.

May you rest in peace, Bobbi Jo.