

KEEPING TRACK

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Editor: Jim Gibson

The Word From the Prez

WE'VE GOT ASMR ON TRACK -- LET'S KEEP THINGS ROLLING

I think the new year is off to a great start. The club is starting to do more things that are fun. We are taking trips and planning more. We are starting to have more participation. We have even gained a couple of new members. These are all positive steps, and I want to see us keep that momentum going. We need to continue making ASMR even more enjoyable for all members, regardless of their particular interests in the hobby. Each one of us has something we can share, and sharing with each other and non members is one of the most rewarding aspects of model railroading. It is amazing to me how many people are interested in trains that still don't know we exist, even though the club has been around now for over 15 years! I believe ASMR has the potential to be at least two or three times as large as it is today if we continue to let the public know we're around and what all we have to offer. Where will we be in 5-10 years? I don't know, but if we keep building on a positive image I see us with 50-60 members and a lot more talent and resources going toward this great hobby. Let's keep working, having fun, and bringing in and implementing new ideas to promote our hobby and our club.

Your President, Ken Riediger

Club Layout Yard Update #10

Still no changes to report for this update, but hopefully as the weather improves and temperatures in the layout room return to a more moderate (less cold) level, the final couple of yard tracks and associated service tracks can be finished. Again, please note that the yard in its present state is very useable for switching and operations.

ASMR Meeting Notes

There will be a business meeting on February 4, and it will start at the regular time of 10 a.m.

Local Model Railroaders Attend Train Show in Plano

A group of four ASMR members and two former members gathered at the crack of dawn on Saturday, January 14, and car pooled to Plano, Texas, in Ken England's SUV for the annual train show there. After sufficiently perusing the displays and scouring the sales tables at Plano, the group swung by Discount Model Trains in Addison, where the selection is huge, and it's all train stuff. Included in the gaggle were members Ken Riediger, Ken England, Mel Herwick and Steve England, and former members Billy Belyeu and Bill Rister. According to Ken Riediger, everyone that went really enjoyed the fun and fellowship.

Club Welcomes Two New Members

The year 2006 got off to a great start for ASMR growth-wise with the addition of two new members. If you haven't already met them, please make a point of introducing yourself to and welcoming **Dan Brady** and **Joseph Stuart** the first chance you get. Both joined during January, bringing our total membership to 15 regulars and two honoraries.

ASMR Team Calls Boy Scout Merit Badge Course a Success

Ken Riediger and Jim Gibson conducted 1.5 hour Saturday sessions on January 7 and 21, designed to qualify four Boy Scouts for their "Railroading" merit badge. The instructional material placed a strong emphasis on real railroad safety, operations and equipment, and model railroading activities and skills. One of the four Scouts met all requirements for his merit badge, while the other three had only a railroad-related project of their choice to complete. Both Riediger and Gibson said they enjoyed working with the teenage Scouts, and consider the merit badge class an excellent community relations outreach project for ASMR.

The Editor Speaks

Competition: Good, Bad and Ugly for the Hobby

Most people would agree that free enterprise and competition generally tend to stimulate innovation, increase product choices and quality, and lower

prices for consumers. This certainly seemed to be the case in the early 1990s with the competition between toy train makers Lionel and MTH (Mike's Train House). After an impressive turnaround under Richard Kuhn, Lionel was almost immediately challenged to produce dozens of new 0-gauge trains and accessories by an aggressive and innovative "new kid on the block", MTH. The fledgling firm of MTH quickly entered the market with a steady stream of brand new, comparatively inexpensive, good quality toy trains which were being turned out like hotcakes in Asian factories. The net result initially was a flood of neat, affordable stuff for model railroaders from both Lionel and MTH. Before long, however, the first downside to this situation appeared. Lionel, unable to compete against MTH trains made with cheap overseas labor, was forced to close down its U.S. factory and move production to facilities in Asia. Not only did American workers lose jobs, the quality of Lionel products suffered for awhile during the painful transition period to overseas manufacturing. But the worst was yet to come, and it came during the last couple of years in the form of a bitter legal battle between Lionel and MTH over alleged patent infringement issues. In the wake of an ugly trial and a huge jury award in favor of MTH, Lionel sought bankruptcy protection to stay in business. In addition, Lionel has been involved in widely publicized litigation with another competitor, K-Line, a firm which largely replaced Marx in recent years as a maker of "low end", or less expensive toy trains. It seems to me that, at a minimum, a lot of unfavorable publicity for the hobby has been generated by the nasty legal battles among three of its key manufacturers. But perhaps of even greater long-term concern to model railroaders is this

question? What will be the ultimate impact of all the vicious and costly fighting between toy train makers on factors like innovation, product availability, quantity, and quality? The potential for a negative impact seems high, but only time will tell. JG

Model RR Meets & Events

- Feb. 11-12 – TCA Meet, Katy, Texas
- Feb. 11 – Greater Houston Train Show, Stafford, TX
- Mar. 4 - 5 – Junction & East Texas Train Society Show, Longview, Texas
- Mar. 11-12 – Great Train Expo, Fort Worth
- Apr. 15 – Model RR Jamboree, New Braunfels, Texas

Ops Session in Fort Worth Scheduled for February 18

For any ASMR member who wants a taste of what first class model railroading operations is all about, Jim Norwood has once again made his amazing home layout in Fort Worth available to ASMR members for a hands-on operating session on Saturday, February 18. Jim provides everything for visitors, including computer generated train orders, locomotives, rolling stock, and DCC controllers, in addition to a complex, realistic HO-scale layout that fills most of the upstairs area of his large home. Those attending will meet at the RE/MAX office parking lot (2545 S. Danville) at 7 a.m., where a vehicle pool for the trip to Fort Worth will be formed. If you would like to go please call Ken Riediger at 692-8419, or Mike Ziegenhagen at 690-0781, and get on the list.

Texas State Railroad Trivia

In 1972, the Texas Legislature passed a bill which resulted in the Texas State Railroad, which ran between Rusk and Palestine, being turned over to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Dep't. The TSR, which dated back to 1896, had been out of business since 1969, and the track, ties and bridges on the overgrown right of way were in a sad state of disrepair. Originally, the Parks & Wildlife Dep't. planned to tear up the track and replace it with a hiking/biking trail through the Davy Crockett National Forest and I. D. Fairchild State Park. Word got out about the impending demolition of what remained of the TSR, and railfans from all over Texas rallied to save the historic state treasure. They eventually convinced the Parks and Wildlife Dep't. to reconsider its plans. An investigation and study determined it was feasible to put the TSR back into operation as a historic, recreation-oriented railroad, and plans got underway to renovate and rebuild 25.5 miles of the original line into a 517 acre State Historical Park – what would become the longest and narrowest park in the state. Inmates from the Texas Department of Corrections were enlisted to help clean up and renovate the right of way, and new depots were built at both ends of the line. The railroad's general offices and a large maintenance facility were also constructed at Rusk. Four steam engines were purchased and restored to pull vintage steel passenger cars which were obtained and refurbished, and scheduled passenger trains began making the hour and a half runs between Rusk and Palestine in 1976. Believe it or not, there is an "Abilene connection" to this story. TSR steam loco #201, formerly T&P 4-6-0 #316, was donated to the TSR in 1974 by the City of Abilene, where it had been on display in a park.