

# KEEPING TRACK

Official Newsletter of the Abilene Society of Model Railroaders

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Editor: Jim Gibson

## The Word From the Prez

### **Cold Weather Thwarts Trip, But Not Successful Work Day**

Well, another month has gone by. I'm glad to see club members doing more things together. We were going to go to the Metroplex on Feb. 18 to operate on Jim Norwood's KCS layout, but the weather stopped us "cold" just outside of Abilene. It was so strange as we were driving along at 70mph, then suddenly slowing down to 15-20 mph within a couple of miles because of the ice on the roadway. I've never seen a group so unanimous as when Ken England (the driver) asked if we wanted to scrub the trip because of the ice. Everyone quickly said, "Yes!", and we returned safely to Abilene.

On a chilly Saturday, Feb. 25, a group of members met at Cody Hilliard's garage, and we were able to assemble all four corners needed for a modular club layout. As soon as we paint them, lay roadbed and track, and connect the wiring, they will be ready to be scenic-ed. I believe this layout will help further our outreach to the community, and especially those modelers who currently don't know we exist. If I remember correctly, at our last meeting about eight people said they were interested in constructing a personal module. If each one builds just a four-foot long module, we can set up an impressive 12' by 32' layout for shows or displays around the area.

I want to thank each one of you for participating in making the club what it is and making it better.

*Your President, Ken Riediger*

## **ASMR Meeting Notes**

There will be a business meeting on March 4, starting at the regular time of 10 a.m.

## **Club Welcomes More Members**

Following a gain of two new members early in January, ASMR's growth spurt continued with the addition of two more members during February. After visiting several times and deciding he liked what he saw, **Larry Mann** signed on. Larry is a U.S Navy retiree and former prison psychologist. And

returning to the club after a hiatus of several months which included a relocation from Abilene to Hawley, is a former member we're all glad to welcome back, **Billy Belyeu**. If you haven't already done so, please make a point of personally letting these fellow model railroaders know you're glad they've joined (or rejoined) our model railroading group.

## **Club Workday Very Productive**

Six members showed up at Cody Hilliard's garage/workshop to construct corner modules for the portable display layout the club recently voted to build. Ken Riediger and Cody had purchased the materials in advance, and thanks to Cody's power woodworking tools, cutting out the pieces went quickly. Once the "bugs" were ironed out on the first module, assembling subsequent ones went increasingly quick and smooth. Included in the work crew, besides Ken and Cody, were Steve England, Jim Gibson, Joseph Stuart, and Charles Chinn.

## **Model RR Meets & Events**

Mar. 4 - 5 - Junction & East Texas Train Society Show, Longview, Texas

Mar. 11-12 - Great Train Expo, Fort Worth

Mar. 18-19 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Garden Train Festival, Clark Gardens Botanical Park, Mineral Wells

Apr. 15 - Model RR Jamboree, New Braunfels, Texas

## The Editor Speaks

### **Common Sense Postpones**

### **ASMR Trip to the Metroplex**

Early on the morning of February 18, six intrepid ASMR members, including Ken England, Ken Riediger, Cody Hilliard, Jim Gibson, Billy Belyeu, and Dan Brady piled into Ken England's SUV and headed for Fort Worth to participate in an operating session on Jim Norwood's layout. Although the weather was very cold, damp and threatening, the roads in Abilene seemed okay, and everybody anticipated a day of fun and fellowship as they departed. But mother nature had other plans. At first I-20 looked fine, but as we neared the Elmdale area, we were suddenly confronted with what looked like a scene out of a disaster movie - overturned and jackknifed trucks of all sizes scattered around, numerous vehicles pulled off the road and parked, and traffic moving at a snail's pace

on the slippery interstate. Seeing that I-20 was like a skating rink, and feeling the uneasy sensation of Ken's SUV breaking traction several times, even at a crawl, there was unanimous approval for turning back when he posed the question of whether to continue or not. Ken made a U-turn on the overpass just past the first rest stop east of Abilene, and we

returned safely to the rendezvous point at RE/MAX. As a member of that group, I was impressed to see such a solid consensus of common sense and concern for safety prevail among a group of guys who were really looking forward to a trip to Fort Worth for a day of model railroading. JG

## **Texas & Pacific RR Operated Early Streamliner**

The first real "streamlined" trains were put into service in the 1930s. Built from "exotic" materials like aluminum and stainless steel, the most popular pair of that era were Burlington's "Pioneer Zephyr" and Union Pacific's "M-10000". Both of these trains initially included a power unit and two passenger cars. They were articulated, which meant that adjacent cars shared a set of trucks between them. While this made for a lighter train, the disadvantage was that if one car had a problem or a set of trucks failed, the whole train was out of commission until it was fixed. A "bad order" car couldn't just be uncoupled and rolled onto a siding, it had to be lifted off the trucks with jacks or a crane. This also made varying the number of cars in a train to meet an unexpected increase or decrease in passengers very difficult. The length of a train couldn't be changed on short notice, or at anyplace along the line where the required special equipment wasn't available. One of the principal builders of streamlined trains, including the Pioneer Zephyr, was the Budd Company, of Philadelphia, PA. Burlington's Zephyr and UP's M-10000 made most of the headlines of that era, and are perhaps the most legendary examples of the fledgling streamlined "breed" even today. But, before they came on line in the mid-30s, Budd had already been busy building innovative streamliners for some of America's railroads, including the Texas & Pacific, to try out. T&P's streamliner was an interesting piece of railroad equipment, to say the least. Christened the "Silver Slipper", it was made up of a V-nosed power unit with stainless steel sides that were fluted half way up, and a matching coach. The pair weren't articulated, but they were built to run as a unit. The coach had all the seats for the 76 passengers the train could carry, and the power unit contained an engine room with two V-12 power plants, a mail section and a baggage compartment. It supplied heat, air conditioning and electricity for the unpowered coach. The Slipper was built to travel long distances at speeds up to 75 mph, but it had serious design flaws. While the 40-ton power unit ran on steel wheels, the much lighter (12-ton) trailer was fitted with 16 rubber-tired wheels, mounted in four pairs per truck. The pneumatic-tired wheels were supposed to provide a silky smooth ride. Although the tires had plates behind them intended to work like flanges and keep them on the tracks, they frequently jumped the tracks anyway, and were a constant headache for crews and train service personnel. As a result of the constant derailments and a host of other mechanical difficulties and breakdowns, the T&P gave up on the Silver Slipper. It was sidetracked after only a year of trial service, and subsequently scrapped. Because the Slipper was such a failure both mechanically and financially, and an embarrassment to T&P management, for many years the railroad reputedly denied ever having owned it! Evidently, the Budd Co. learned from mistakes that were made on the Slipper, and many of its best design features were incorporated into the hugely successful Pioneer Zephyr. Ironically, the Zephyr debuted in 1934, the same year the unsuccessful T&P Slipper venture ended. JG

Note: Sources for many of the facts in this article include the April, 1973 issue of *Trains*, a booklet titled *The Pioneer Zephyr*, published by The American Society of Mechanical Engineers, Nov. 18, 1980, when the Zephyr was designated a "National Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark", and several internet sites. Incidentally, the original Pioneer Zephyr train, completely restored, can be seen in person at the Chicago Museum of Science & Industry, or viewed virtually on their website.