

KEEPING TRACK

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The Word From the Prez

Layout progress made; 'Orphan' areas still open

It is hard to believe how quickly February passed by this year. This time of year, it is great to have an indoor hobby to keep us busy when the weather outside is nasty. On the club layout, I was able to get power to some of the tracks near the coal mine this month. Chris Bisset and Cecil Walston have both finished lots of scenic work on their areas of the layout as well. We still have several open areas available for any member who is interested in adopting one of these "orphans". On a personnel note, I will be heading to Las Vegas for my daughter's wedding later this month. I can think back and remember a couple of train related outings we enjoyed while she was growing up. We rode the train at the Fort Worth Zoo when she was young. We also had the pleasure of taking her for an excursion on the Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad over part of the historic Rock Island line out of Abilene, Kansas. Those are good memories. **Your President, Scott Fritz**

ASMR Meeting Highlights

Pres. Scott Fritz opened the Feb. 2 business meeting at 10:00 a.m. Sec'y. Cody Hilliard's Jan. 5 meeting minutes and Ken England's treasurer's report showing a club assets balance of \$6,499.62 were both read and approved. Ken E. reported three members late on dues totaling \$195. Sales of 2019 fundraiser calendars was discussed, and Ken R. said well over half were sold. An exact total wasn't available, nor was the net profit.

Ken R. said his next home layout Ops Session will be Feb. 16. Jim G. said he talked to Fal Falconi, a former owner, about the Burlington Depot, and Cecil Walston said he talked to local switching company employees he knows, about it as well, but neither contact

produced anything conclusive.

Members noted a recent front page article with photos in the Reporter-News about ASMR. Ken R. said he has a list of train items C. T. Kelly, who donated the "creeper", wants to sell if anyone is interested. Jim G. said the Cultural Affairs Council has an event March 2 we will need to run the Storybook Express for. Since that's the same day as the next business meeting, members voted to delay it until March 9. Members voted to reinstate Tim Renfro and forgive past dues accumulated while he was sick and couldn't attend meetings.

The issue of "right hand running" came up, and it was stressed to all members that this is the rule on the club layout. Installation of signals in single track areas was also discussed, and Cecil W. said he has a number of new signals on hand that he purchased recently if the club is interested. Wayne Smith told members he won't be able to come to the club for the next three or four weeks because he's having knee surgery. The meeting closed at 10:40. Next meeting is Mar. 9.



Above: Former ASMR member Gene Linder (in a blue shirt) explains some of the fine points of S-gauge toy trains to a Boy Scout leader and one of his troop members. Meanwhile, a mother and her young son watch the trains whiz around the American Flyer "All Aboard" modular display layout that Gene and Rich Dunlap (also a former ASMR member) set up during the annual Kiwanis Club Chili Supper at the Civic Center on February 23. See "The Editor Speaks" for additional information on this layout.

KRNBRR Ops Session Report

The February Ops session on my home layout KRBNRR was held on Feb. 16. We had four operators on hand, including Travis Garison, Chris Bisset, Michael Wehmeyer and Cecil Walston. There were some hold ups in Angela Springs at the interchange tracks, with each train waiting to take their turn. Otherwise, traffic flowed relatively smoothly.

Maintenance-wise, we had one track area that would suddenly lose power on occasion, and a problem with a UT4 throttle that would seem to lose control of its train for no apparent reason. I did find one other problem after everybody left, and that was where one of the operators left the cars he had picked up in Kannapolis sitting on the mainline in Carlaton. All in all, it was still a good session with everyone having fun as they got to work out a variety of challenging switching maneuvers. I hope to see you at the next session on March 16 at 1:30 p.m.

KR

The Editor Speaks

Did American Flyer invent modular model railroads?

My friend and former ASMR member Rich Dunlap asked me to help run the American Flyer train display he and Gene Linder set up at the Kiwanis Chili Supper at the Civic Center on February 23, and I did. A lot of my "help" involved re-coupling cars that had come apart and putting them back on track after they derailed. That's not too surprising considering the age of the equipment and toy trains, which date back to 1965, or earlier.

The layout itself is interesting because it is basically modular in nature and made with "All Aboard" train set panels, each one 17 inches square with pre-installed track and wiring. The plastic panels or modules are landscape painted and have scenic elements like roads, hills, ponds, and bases for structures cast into them. There is a piece of straight track along one side of straights, or curved track around two sides on corners. There are also panels with crossovers and switches. A few have no track and are used as fillers. Like many older plastic items, some panels have tended to

warp a little during the many decades they've been around, making some rail joint connections rough and occasionally causing cars to uncouple and/or derail -- usually when a crowd of observers has gathered. Watching the trains bounce around on Gene and Rich's All Aboard layout, I was amazed that they stayed linked together and on track as well as they did most of the time.

Rich, an American Flyer collector who knows a lot about S-gauge toy trains, told me some interesting things about the All Aboard modular panel sets. First, they were only made in 1965 and 1966, and they came in three basic sets of six, eight and 12 panels. Each set came with structures, bridges, trees and other scenic items that fit on the panels, along with a train and a transformer for power. According to Rich, the panels were sent to Portugal to be hand painted, and then shipped back to the U.S. to be included in sets or sold separately. Add-on panels were available individually for layout expansion.

The vintage All Aboard layout that Rich and Gene set up consisted of 36 panels with two trains running independently on it. One went around the outside perimeter and featured giraffe cars where the tall animal's heads duck down to go through three corner tunnels and then pop up on the other side. This was an idea that Gene, not American Flyer, thought up and engineered,. The center track had a crossover design with an inside loop and an outside loop around it. Excitement was provided when the train's engine barely missed colliding with the caboose at the crossover each time it was coming out of the inner loop.

As far as I can determine, no other model train company ever offered a complete modular layout system like American Flyer's All Aboard sets, with scenic panels that had pre-installed track and wiring and could be put together in a variety of configurations, like many of today's modular club layouts are. So, until someone comes up with new information to the contrary, I'm crediting American Flyer with inventing (and producing) the first modular model train layouts.

JG