



# THE Lantern

December 2023

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## *Christmas Holidays Celebrated by Lights and Trains*

Here is a special December Lantern highlighting, of course, the Christmas/Winter Holidays. Lantern editors Neal Meadows and Sam Miller wish each of you a wonderful Winter Holiday season however you celebrate it.

BBMRA had two major public operating sessions in December - Cascades Park's Holiday Stroll and the annual BBMRA event at the Tallahassee Senior Center. Thanks to everyone who helped and there were a lot of you.



From the fabulous Christmas lights festival at Dorothy Owen Park.

Sam bought a different MTH diesel to power his Christmas train this year.



Part of the Christmas carnival on Sam's O Gauge layout.







The BBMRA participated with the Tallahassee Senior Center for the past three years to celebrate the Christmas Season with the “Grand Parents & Grand Kids Night Event.” The idea was to promote more involvement between seniors and their grandkids or other youngsters in their families. The last two seasons were well attended as well as this year. We had a couple of additional layouts this year that were new. Ron Fletcher constructed a G-Scale layout on the stage area of the hall and attracted a lot of attention. Will Newberry and Anna Koelemij brought their new layout to share with the crowd. Their

layout is “Built on a Budget!” Many of the buildings are hand-made.



## WILL AND ANNA'S N SCALE LAYOUT ON A BUDGET.

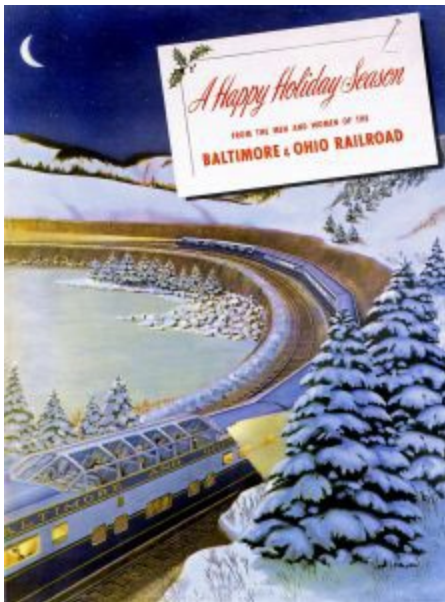
By: Will Newberry

Our small N-scale layout seen at the senior center this December has been about a year or so in the making. Our main goal with this project was to try to build a functional layout on a budget but have it still looking good! We were able save money on our project by using thin cardboard strips for the roads and various cardstock for road signs and building signs. Another huge help along the way has been our 3D printer, we have been able to produce various buildings and vehicles with it. Our layout consists of a basic oval loop with a small industry spur in the back leading to a grain elevator. Another main attraction of the layout is a 3D printed Whataburger that was hand painted by us. we hope to bring it to more events in the future and hope everyone gets a chance to see this small little labor of love we have constructed.



## Christmas Train Traditions Through the Years

Compiled and edited by Neal Meadows



The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad was the first eastern railroad company to operate dome cars like the one prominently featured in this holiday advertisement from the 1950s. Today the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad operates over a former B&O line.

Trains and Christmas have a special relationship. Before the invention of the steam locomotive and the railroad, it was challenging for people to travel for the holidays. Once railroads began connecting the world, people began to travel more frequently for business and pleasure. During the golden age of railroad travel between 1870-1950, railroads would add extra passenger trains to their schedules to handle the annual holiday rush.

Railroad companies got into the spirit as well sponsoring Santa-themed excursions for employees and the general public. Santa appeared in many railroad advertisements leading up to Christmas, encouraging the public to travel by train. Sometimes Santa even delivered a brand-new state-of-the-

art passenger train to the railroad.

The invention of the electric toy train in the early 1900s tied trains with Christmas even more tightly. Wooden and metal clockwork or push-pull toy trains had been around since as early as 1845, but an electric train set was pure magic. Electric train sets manufactured by Lionel, American Flyer, and other manufacturers were and continue to be the subject of millions of letters to Santa.





The publication of the Polar Express by Chris Van Allsburg in 1985, and its subsequent film adaptation in 2004, cemented holiday trains in the modern era. The first holiday train to run at the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad was the Polar Bear Limited in 1992. The Christmas train continued to evolve over the years into other Christmas programs including The Polar Express, and now the North Pole Adventure.

The New York Central Railroad takes getting a new train set to another level with this 1949 ad showing the railroad's new state-of-the-art passenger fleet.



The whole family is taking part in their new Lionel train set in this vintage ad from 1953. The popularity of toy trains was equal to the level of video games today.



With [Christmas](#) just around the corner, you may be spending more time than usual staring under the Christmas tree. If there are packages piled up under the tree, it's a sure bet there are children anxious to find out what's in them.

If you're like some families, there might be more than presents under the [Christmas tree](#). In addition to a tree skirt and a pile of gifts, some families also engage in a longstanding tradition of assembling a toy train under the Christmas tree.

Beneath the twinkling lights and amongst the packages, tiny **tracks** weave in and out and around the tree, carrying old-fashioned **train** cars in an endless loop around the bottom of the tree. So exactly what do toy trains have to do with Christmas and how did this tradition get started?

For many American families, Christmas isn't Christmas without a tree decorated with lights, ornaments, tinsel – and an electric train circling merrily beneath.

No one knows precisely when the train custom started, but it has been a part of Christmas in the U.S. since the early 1900s, rooted in nostalgia and passed down from one generation to the next. "Railroads were part of the American consciousness at the time," says Hal Miller, editor of Classic Toy Trains. "If you wanted to travel long distances, if you wanted to go anywhere, you did it by train."

But children had a special reason to love trains.

"Trains brought everything from visiting relatives to all the goods in town," says Tony Cook, editor of Model Railroad News. "The train under the tree maybe signals the path by which the Christmas gifts arrived."

The popularity of Christmas trains has varied over the years but continues to endure and evolve. Train setups range from a simple loop of track on a snowy white bedsheet to handcrafted villages with painstakingly detailed churches, railroad stations, water towers and other features.

## How it started: European Christmas villages and Lionel trains

The ritual of miniature villages and nativity scenes beneath Christmas trees came to the U.S. with European immigrants in the 1800s. Christmas villages were popular in Germany and what is now the eastern part of the Czech Republic.

Retail entrepreneur [F.W. Woolworth](#) began importing miniature villages from Europe and selling them in his U.S. dime stores in the 1890s. At that time, “toy trains were simple wood or metal creations that did not necessarily include track,” Cook says. “The common power source was a child pushing a toy train or pulling it on a tether.”

An inventor named [Joshua Lionel Cowen](#) started [Lionel](#) in 1900 and came up with a battery-powered “Electric Express” gondola that ran on metal tracks. Lionel reached its peak in the 1950s and became the largest toymaker in the world. (Courtesy Railroad Model Craftsman)

Cowen intended his motorized gondolas to draw attention to merchandise displays in store windows. Instead, customers began buying them as toys and “they became popular almost immediately,” Miller says.



Lionel's electric toy trains were very popular. In fact, they became the focus of a new **hobby**: model railroads. Since most children were more familiar with trains than automobiles, toy train sets were popular requests for Christmas gifts. Upon opening a toy train set, assembling it to run under the Christmas tree was a natural thing to do.

For many Americans, toy trains also evoked sentimental feelings similar to the other emotions associated with Christmas. Christmas was a time when many people traveled long distances to reach home or to see relatives. Most of these journeys would involve a train

ride. Likewise, the nation's railroads were a primary means of transporting packages around the country at Christmastime.

Over time, many families added to their toy train set-up year after year. What might have started out as a simple circular track around the tree with a few train cars could eventually become an elaborate layout with multiple tracks, as well as **buildings**. Some families began constructing entire holiday villages under their Christmas trees soon after Thanksgiving.

With the rise of modern technology and electronic gadgets filling Christmas wish lists, toy trains under the Christmas tree became less prevalent. Within the past decade or so, though, some experts have seen a renewed interest in the toy train tradition.



Some experts believe this resurgence of toy trains might have to do with the popularity of modern entertainment that features trains prominently. From Thomas the Tank Engine to the Hogwarts Express of the Harry Potter books to The Polar Express movie, trains have made a comeback in the public's imagination. Train enthusiasts hope that interest continues to fuel a return to the time-honored tradition of old-fashioned toy trains under the Christmas tree.





# Trains & Christmas? What's The Connection?

From - The Happenings Magazine



## Allentown and Auburn Railroad

The connection of trains with Christmas evolved from the idea of going over the river and through the woods to grandmother's house for the holidays. The journey (as in the beloved song) was best accomplished by trains.

Over the years, Santa Trains have been carrying passengers to the "North Pole" as part of holiday event traditions for residents and visitors. Many communities use trains as vehicles for their holiday charity events. For example, in Appalachia, a holiday tradition since 1943 is its Santa Train which stops at 14 locations between Pikeville, Kentucky and Kingsport, Tennessee. The train's passenger cars are

loaded with more than 15 tons and over \$200,000 worth of gifts, including toys, books, backpacks, fresh fruit, candy, coats and meal vouchers, which are distributed at each stop.

Historians believe the train tradition dates back at least 100 years to the early 1900s, around the time when manufacturer Lionel began to produce the first electric toy trains. Lionel's electric toy trains were very popular. In fact, they became the focus of a new hobby: model railroads.



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Over time, many families added to their toy train set-up year after year. What might have started out as a simple circular track around the tree with a few train cars could eventually become an elaborate layout with multiple tracks, as well as buildings. Some families began constructing entire holiday villages under their Christmas

trees soon after Thanksgiving.

In the Chinchilla home of the late Bernard and Helen Fanning, an intricate village featuring family businesses and two train sets, complete with real coal pieces, encircled and then disappeared in the tunnel under a raised Christmas tree. Their children remember long nights beginning at Thanksgiving to get the set up just right. Family and friends would sit 'round the tree for visits during the holidays and for a month after. The whole holiday scene would remain through February.



With the rise of modern technology and electronic gadgets filling Christmas lists, toy trains under the Christmas tree became less prevalent over the years. Within the past decade or so, though, some experts have seen a renewed interest in the toy train tradition. Some experts believe this resurgence of toy trains might have to do with the popularity of modern entertainment that features trains prominently. From Thomas the Tank Engine to the Hogwarts Express of the Harry Potter books to The Polar Express movie, trains have made a comeback in the public's imagination. Train enthusiasts hope that interest continues to

fuel a return to the time-honored tradition of old-fashioned toy trains under the Christmas tree.

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.

## Christmas Village As Seen by Neal Meadows

I worked on putting together this layout for a few days prior to the event at the Senior Center on December 14 this year. I used this last year but decided to make some changes. I added the third rail system to the group. The idea was there were three ways for people to travel to town to attend the Christmas Festival at the end of town. The people arrived from a long distance by the long rail line and met at the station. The local service brought people from the neighborhoods to the station. The Christmas Trolley moved people from the station to the downtown area where the festival was being held. The placement of the buildings was different this year and the lighting was also installed differently. There are no modular sections of this layout which is the reason it takes about an hour to set up. Also, to take down. In the future, I plan to develop my T-Trak modules to use in this display. That will make it easier to use at different events and locations. A lot of people asked questions about the gauge and scale. Not many realized the difference between the two. That explanation seemed to satisfy most people. Many were interested in knowing if this N-Scale layout was the smallest size. Many children came and



looked but one little girl was fascinated by the trolley. I asked if



she had watched the Daniel Tiger Show and her mom said yes, every day. Daniel Tiger was the puppet who used to ride the trolley in the Mr. Rogers Neighborhood Show for many years. It is now a cartoon show focusing on positive behavior concepts for kids. I enjoyed my evening and plan to repeat this again next year. The buildings and carnival rides are from the Liberty Village Collection that was offered in sets of 3 to 5 buildings each year by Dillards at Christmas. The large pieces are all music boxes.



Neal Meadows and David McDonald with Neal's N-Scale at the Senior Center.

*Click to view*

[Video 1](#)    [Video 2](#)    [Video 3](#)



Conductor, Phil Weston, and his HO T-Trakers had many of their modules assembled for a massive display that was enjoyed by the many participants. Andy Millott worked with Phil to organize this display with the many trips back and forth to their vehicles to get it all in the main hall at the Senior Center. Art Wilson's Winter Wonderland is the featured corner module layout. It is a unique vision of a winter scene in a more frigid climate than we have here in Florida!



Randy Lombardo displays the Thomas the Train O-Scale layout for Christmas. It has many operating features including the lighting of the track as the train passes over the sections.





## Holiday Stroll through Cascades Park

The BBMRA participated for the first time this year in the Holiday Stroll held in Cascades Park in downtown Tallahassee on December 9. This picture is from the Winter Festival Parade of 2022. A great display of a steam engine hauling a lot of Christmas Spirit.



## Tallahassee's Ghost of Christmas Past

Most people already know that Tallahassee is the State's capital city. What may be news to you, however, is that the moss-draped city has an interesting history when it comes to Christmas. **Did you know?** Tallahassee was the first American city to ever celebrate Christmas!

According to [Florida History](#), Spaniard Hernando de Soto spent five months during 1539 in the Apalachee Indian area of Anhaica (which would later be renamed as Tallahassee, Florida.) During this time, Hernando de Soto requested that priests join him to celebrate his Christmas traditions. Rumor has it, the *first-ever U.S. Christmas celebration* was held in the woods that now holds the present-day capitol building. The rest is history! Celebrating the holidays in Tallahassee is even more special once you learn the nation's Christmas traditions originated here. (Tallahassee Student Survival)





Large Scale's Disney Layout at night at Cascades Park  
Park



Club got two hours of steady attention at Cascades Park



Barbara Donner with her Hannukah House and O Scale Layout. (From the 2022 Senior Center session.)

Two more pictures from the event at the Tallahassee Senior Center

2023.







Season's  
Greetings

