

“Training” at the Fair By Rich Dulski

While I’m writing this, it’s 9°F outside, the railway is covered with ice and snow, and even the Cardinals don’t want to venture to the bird feeder. However, indoors the holiday trains continue to run, thoughts of 2007s layout displays that were—and 2008s layout displays to be, abound.

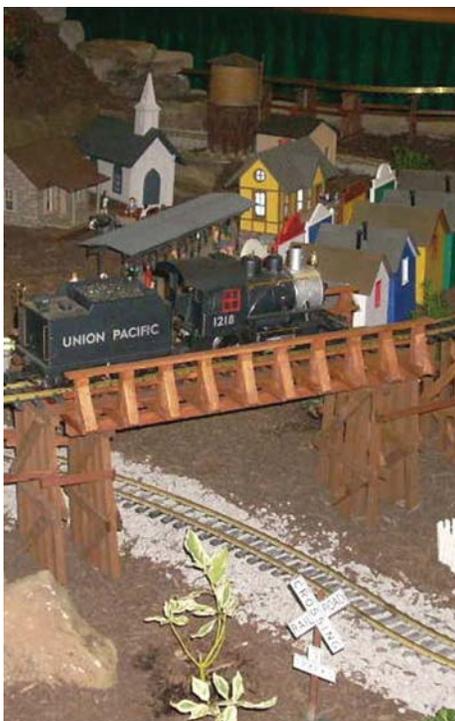
In August 2007, the Western New York Garden Railway Society (WNY GRS), along with support from both a nursery and a landscaping contractor, built and operated a 450 sq. ft. layout display for 11 days at America’s Fair (formerly the Erie County Fair), in Hamburg, New York. The display was sponsored by Ridge Road Station in Holley, New York, who provided the track, engines and rolling stock. Our Co-Chairmen for this endeavor, Gary Tebo and Mike Flynn, found it would require WNY GRS members to be on site and operating the display over the hours of 10 a.m. through 10 p.m. (12 hours)

daily over the Fair’s duration (132 hours total).

For those not familiar with America’s Fair (www.americas-fair.com), it is by no means a minor event. Sponsored by the Erie County Agricultural Society, since 1868 it has been held in the Town of Hamburg, New York (just south of Buffalo). Becoming the country’s largest fair in 1970 with attendance of 600,960, it currently holds the distinction of being the third largest fair in the nation, setting a record in 1998 of over one million paid attendance. The 2007 edition was its 168th consecutive year (1841 through 2007, with the exception of 1943 due to World War II), now encompassing a James E. Strates Shows “mile long midway” (which arrives each year by rail since 1924), over 2,500 animals, five individual green parks, with 84 permanent buildings and structures throughout 265 acres.

Getting back to the display. It was located in the Ag-Grange Building, an air-conditioned modern 12,000 sq. ft. structure principally displaying fruits and vegetables for competitive judging from throughout the region in each wing. WNY GRS had the honor of constructing our 15 x 30 foot display in the center of the building, giving us direct line-of-sight access to both major glass foyers for positioning of our 4 and 6 ft. illuminated and flashing crossbuck icons.

Construction of the layout originated with the dumping of several cubic yards of topsoil and mulch in the building, which has a garage door for equipment access. Seeing the extensive pile of dirt on the floor in an empty building made us at first wonder why we accepted this “opportunity” in the first place! But once the 14 member crew began “massaging” the debris, first adding rock, more dirt, stone, more dirt, concrete block,



more dirt, landscape stone and finally – did I mention more dirt – the landscape began to take shape. Subsequently a mountain was formed, and thereafter a waterfall was strategically located out of (behind and below) the right of way.

Next, over 200 feet of track was installed according to the track plan developed by Member Gary Ludwig. This particular arrangement was initiated seven months prior, and designed to incorporate two separate loops (upper and lower), a logging camp spur as well as an automatic reversing trolley line, to support



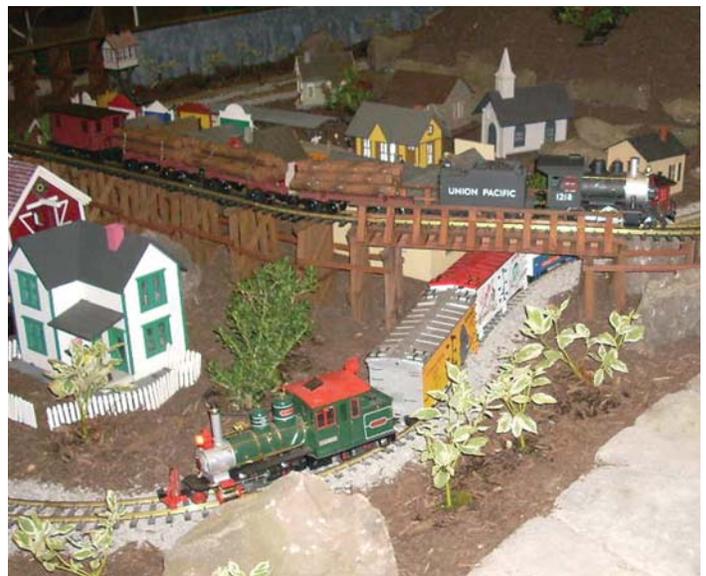
continuous running and eye catching movement on the layout. A combination of sliding joiners, screwed joiners and rail clamps were employed as needed to secure the track in place and prohibit undesired movement or discontinuities over the display's lifetime. Power was supplied by Bridgeworks, MRC and LGB products, as all facets of the layout were under analog (manual, not DCC) control.

Members Jack Henderson, Gary Tebo and Bob Rodgers constructed five cedar bridges (four 24" "flat tops" and one 72" over/under truss), while Gary Ludwig crafted two 36" Styrofoam viaducts over the winter months, all with the specific intent of spanning "valleys" in the upper line. Once installed and interfaced with adjacent track, these further enhanced the realistic outdoor look of the mountainous terrain in the Western U.S. Finally, various members contributed buildings and structures from their own garden railways to the club's own supply of items, to establish the village, remote areas, and logging camp. Member Bob Rodgers also constructed the logging area sawmill over many hours, with the purpose of it being the centerpiece of industry in the display "world", and that it was!

As the afternoon of "Preview Day" commenced, which is used for judging foods and awarding honors while the Ag-Grange Building is closed to the general public, all was ready. The following morning, aches and pains experienced by members as they toiled through seven months of planning, layout design, and five full days of construction seemed to be all but forgotten. The entrance crossbucks were illuminated, the engines, trolley and rolling stock took to the rails, and the *real* fun began. One could now hear sounds of engines chuffing, whistles and bells tolling, interspersed with the "Ohs and Ahs" of the fairgoers. In the background, marching bands headed a parade while the aroma of culinary delights emanated from adjoining and midway food vendors, all this seeming to exert some needed "amnesia" on memories of the many man-hours involved.

And so it continued with the Fair running from August 8th–19th, 2007, through 1,000,000+ paid admissions. Monitoring in two daily shifts (10 a.m.–4 p.m. & 4 p.m.–10 p.m.) sometimes seemed long, but rolling stock needed repair, engines required rotation for cleaning and maintenance and track had to be cleaned. Oh yes – the plants required periodic

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AMERICA'S FAIR *Continued*

watering, even if *that* task was accomplished by one daring member gingerly taking pre-established steps over and on track and layout support points.

Eventually (11 days later), it was time to take down the display and silence the crossbucks. Once again the WNY GRS Fair Committee gathered together, this time on an overcast and drizzling morning, to dismantle the layout and clear the building. After four hours of frenzied activity, all remnants of the miniature rail empire were gone. Somehow, requiring in excess of 500 man-hours, five days of on-site construction, numerous field trips and a seemingly endless supply of fuel being poured into member's vehicles to gather/repair/replace various components, and yet only four hours to take down, one has to ask, was it worth it?

An outside observer may objectively say "No". However, we're "garden railway people", and we answer with a resounding "Yes-No question". It was worth it to see the smiles of the public as they encountered the flashing crossbucks with bells tolling and came in for a closer look. It was worth it seeing the wide eyes and laughs of the children as they watched in awe as the trains

traversed the layout and disappeared inside the tunnel, only to reemerge and clang their bells. And finally, it was worth it to those who contributed to making the display layout happen, from concept and vision, to molding the pile of dirt on the floor into a dream that all who visited could participate in. Whether contributing labor, time, planning, vehicle resources, monetary support, components, construction materials, or manning the layout and answering the public's inquisitive questions, all had a hand in making WNY Garden Railway Society's exhibit at the 2007 Erie County Fair a success.

Was it fun? Must have been—we're doing it again August 6th to 17th, 2008! See you at the fair...

