

Knoxville Area Model Railroaders' Club & The Children's Museum of Oak Ridge

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on November 18, 2013)

Gordon Fee asked that I convey to *Historically Speaking* readers the history of model railroading in Oak Ridge as pertains to the unique relationship that has formed between a club in Knoxville and a museum in Oak Ridge. I am pleased to do that.

For over a decade a group of model railroaders and our Children's Museum of Oak Ridge have shared values and commitments to bringing model railroading to the children of Oak Ridge. This is their story as told by Larry Burkholder, the President of the Knoxville Area Model Railroaders Club with some edits and additional commentary I have added. These model trains are a favorite of mine. Fanny and I take our grandkids to see them in operation often. Enjoy the history!

Around 1987, Alan Burns worked in the model trains department of Tennessee Model Hobbies. He organized a grass-roots meeting of local model railroaders to see if an HO-scale modular model railroad club was possible. Modular model railroading means that each individual owns a piece (module) of a model train layout.

The first casual meeting in a Shoney's on Kingston Pike determined that an HO-scale group was viable, and even an N-Scale group as well. As a result, the Knoxville Area Model Railroaders (KAMR) was formed. Rather than splitting into separate HO-scale and N-scale clubs, the members agreed to form N-Scale and HO-scale divisions beneath the KAMR umbrella.

These divisions would build and operate their own modular displays, yet work together to share dues, modular transport, and setup. Module standards were adopted, and module construction began. The modules were stored in member's homes between events.

After a few temporary meetings at a firehouse in Powell, the club found a home base for the next sixteen years in the basement of Erin Presbyterian Church in Bearden. This allowed KAMR to setup modules in the fellowship hall for construction, running, and repairs, then take down and store the modules in racks in the fellowship storage room. Although this was a nice place to hold meetings and clinics, any modules set up for the meetings had to be returned to storage each evening.

The club goal of exposing model railroading to the general public began in earnest. KAMR's first public display was a simple Saturday open house in the fellowship hall. The club began to setup weekend displays at local Knoxville events, including the Fantasy of Trees, Tennessee Customs House, Public Train Shows, the Knoxville Fair Grounds Jacob's Building and area malls.

The layouts routinely won first or second place at regional train shows and the resulting prize money helped offset travel costs. A long-term desire of club members was to find a permanent home where the two layouts could remain setup when not traveling, eliminating some of the tedious tear down and setup, and allow casual train running.

An opportunity to set up the modular layouts in a spare store in the Oak Ridge Mall in 2001 gave the club a place to operate and showcase model railroading for the public for several years until mall developers decided they wanted the space to begin renovations. So another move was required.

In January 2001, the club was informed that an Oak Ridge resident, Milton Lloyd, had a large HO layout in his house and that because he was moving to a retirement home, his family was willing to donate it to the Children's Museum if they would display it. This was too good of an opportunity to pass up.

Milton was the father of a close friend of our family and we had been in his home where we had been fortunate enough to see his work in person and to experience the model railroad in operation. I recall when this decision was being made and thinking at the time how wonderful it was that Milton's work was to be preserved for future generations to enjoy.

CMOR Board member, Gordon Fee, formally asked KAMR to move and reassemble the Lloyd layout in the museum. Subsequent examination of the layout determined that it was not feasible to disassemble and reassemble it.

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It was possible, however, to save over two hundred of the structures on the layout and all the rolling stock. With this as a starting point, Bruce Jacobson, CMOR Board President, suggested that in return for KAMR constructing a museum layout using Lloyd structures the museum would agree to making the museum a center for model railroading and KAMR meetings and activities. This was a mutually beneficial arrangement that continues today.

In April 2001 Gordon Fee presented a Memorandum Of Understanding for a CMOR/KAMR working agreement to Bob Redlinger, KAMR President, and Mike Lynch, KAMR Board Chairman. This started things moving.

The un-renovated Kindergarten wing at the west end of the museum was designated as the area in which to construct a "World of Trains" exhibit. KAMR membership approved the agreement in November and Larry Burkholder was asked to be project manager.

Renovation work began in January 2002. Although the agreement did not require KAMR to do the renovations, essentially all the work would be performed by KAMR members mostly working weekends. Numerous Oak Ridge and outside companies and individuals donated money and materials over the course of the project.

To help offset the cost of the renovations the Children's Museum held their first World of Trains Gala in December 2002. Although the purpose has changed, CMOR continues to hold the fund raising gala every year on the first Friday in December.

By April 2002, a new floor plan had been approved and work focused on rebuilding walls and floors for this plan. Final wall and floor work was completed in November and a Lloyd layout design and construction team was created, headed by Pete Hoke.

The first KAMR club meeting was held in the World of Trains area on December 8, 2002. The Lloydstown layout was opened to the public in 2003. This layout is outside the KAMR club rooms and is available to the museum visitors every day.

KAMR moved their HO and N scale division modules from the OR Mall to the museum and the first trains were run in the completed club rooms in early 2003. The Large Scale Division continued to operate at the mall until they had to move out. They now operate a small area in the museum club rooms.

In 2005 a thirteen part model railroading television show was being filmed for the DIY network. One of the episodes was about building a garden railroad. A garden railroad, as the name suggests, is built outside and 1/20th scale (G Scale) engines and cars are used.

Larry Burkholder and Jim Schall, KAMR members, were assisting in the DIY program as model builders and suggested that the producer consider filming the garden episode in an open space in front of the Norfolk Southern caboose at CMOR. The producer liked the idea and, with the cooperation of the city and the sheriff's department to limit traffic interruptions in front of the museum, a one week filming project was completed.

KAMR club member, Mark Fuhrman, who also builds garden railroads for clients and owns a landscaping business, used his crew to do the layout construction. Mark is featured in this episode. Upon completion the museum had a garden railroad and was given the rolling stock used in the show, an estimated \$45,000 gift.

The garden railroad has been a big attraction for the museum. It operates for the public the third Sunday of every month and is decorated with hundreds of colorful lights and runs every Saturday and Sunday evening for the December holiday season.

The KAMR/CMOR relationship is in its thirteenth year and going strong. KAMR opens its club rooms for museum visitors the third Sunday of every month during museum hours and for special events like the Gala, the International Festival, and several other children's programs. KAMR and CMOR jointly conduct a one-week model railroading summer camp.

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In addition to model railroading, the club performs services for the museum such as constructing offices and repairing the floor in the Water Works exhibit. In exchange for this, the club has free use of the west wing rooms.

The club currently has sixty-one members. There is no age limit to membership, only a requirement to have a genuine interest in model railroading and pay the annual dues. Forty percent of the dues is donated to the museum.

Now go enjoy the model trains at our Children's Museum of Oak Ridge!



The Caboose is decorated for Christmas



The first model train run at the museum open to the public

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Lloydstown a favorite stop for our grandchildren