

# Holiday Trains in the “Indoor Garden”

by Rich Dulski, President WNYGRS

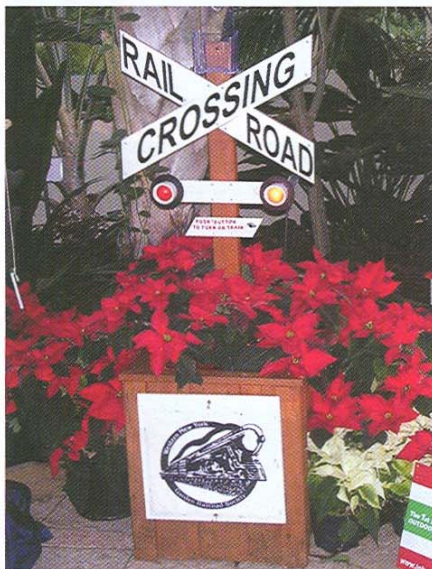
During this time of year (i.e. summer), we should all be outdoors running our RS-3s, driving our diesels, and maintaining our Moguls. However just like the 1:1 railroads, we have to have some planning foresight for what’s on the horizon.

For the last two years, The Western New York Garden Railway Society (WNYGRS) has set up and maintained an exhibit at the Buffalo & Erie County Botanical Gardens ([www.buffalogardens.com](http://www.buffalogardens.com)), over the November to January holiday period. This display was open to the general public and accessed through admission to the Gardens themselves, which are quite extensive in their entirety. The park where the Gardens are located was originally designed by landscape architect Fredrick Law Olmsted, Sr. in 1894–1900, with the conservatory included to showcase tropical plant species. The rest of the park was designed to feature the hardier temperate flora, including an

Arboretum (collection of trees), a Pinetum (collection of evergreens), a Shrub Garden and a Bog Garden. The signature tri-domed glass, wood and steel building was designed by the premier conservatory designers of the time: Lord & Burnham, Co. from New York’s Hudson Valley, with construction methods based on the famous Crystal Palace and Kew Gardens Palm House in England. When it was built in 1897–1899, it was one of the largest public greenhouses in the country. Today there are less than a dozen large Victorian Conservatories in America, and after extensive renovations in 2001–2002, it is one of two remaining with the tri-dome design.

As attendance increased each year of our display, we’ve been once again asked to set up a layout for November 2007 through January 2008, encompassing approximately 90 days of operating layout availability. While currently in the process of fabricating a 15’ x 30’ layout (including full earth landscaping and waterfall), for 11 day operation at the 3rd largest county fair in the nation, the Erie County Fair ([www.americas-fair.com](http://www.americas-fair.com)), we must also turn our thoughts to what to do later this year in “the gardens”.

There’s always a flurry of activity in the days immediately preceding the display’s opening, sometimes



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commonly referred to in railroad jargon as “controlled panic”. However, timely planning and review in the months preceding construction allows us to take a leisurely and thoughtful look at what we actually did in the last two years, and contemplate any changes and/or capital improvements that could both enhance operation, and increase the layout’s “wow factor”.

The theme in 2006-07 was that of a Circus coming to town, the town itself being in what amounted to a jungle environment! We were assigned a pie-shaped area approximately 20’ x 30’ within the main (“palm”) dome, complete with plants and growth extending to the ceiling... a very high ceiling! A week before the display was scheduled to open, the WNYGRS Botanical Gardens Committee, chaired by Gary Ludwig, donned their best work clothes and proceeded to negotiate with the greenery on a face-to-face, one-to-one basis, as they crawled around positioning styrofoam roadbed covered in a black material, track, “bents” (more than 100 were used to elevate the track), bridges and buildings. After achievement of a relatively smooth running two level main line, back they went to spread mulch and fine gravel along the sides of the track to both act as ballast, and hide any exposed wires or hardware. After

constructing a circus tent and purchasing some other necessary circus-related fixtures, positioning all the performers and animals, and adding circus rolling stock and motive power, the pronouncement was made: “Ladies and gentlemen, and children of all ages, let the show begin”.

Most of the rolling stock and engines were LGB, with a Hartland unit and some others added where they could contribute to the theme. Power was provided through LGB hardware, with a switching system employed to automatically alternate trains stopping and running at the station facility. In conjunction with the push of a button on our custom made flashing cross bucks welcoming stand and visitor log, the layout would be activated through a timer, allowing 5-7 minutes of powered operation before ceasing and needing to be pressed again. While maintaining the trains, members always remarked at how little time the layout was actually “down”, wondering when we would be replacing the push button itself or the relays! Automatic

sprinklers and daily watering didn’t really bother the trains, although sometimes track cleaning was required to remove grime or carbon buildup on the track, as well as an occasional piece of ballast or mulch which had gathered on the right of way. Over time, a few plastic wheels on the cars and slider contacts on the engines were replaced, and motive power units relubricated. However, rolling stock incorporating metal wheels needed little to no attention, nor showed any notable wear.

All in all it was a great display, and many of the regular visitors of all ages were sorry to see it come down as the doldrums of February were upon us. However, we hope they will find this year’s theme, that of a mining and logging operation, even more interesting ... in the “indoor garden”.

