

Christmas at the Gardens December/2015

by Charles Bartel



As I write this it is January and the Christmas decorations are being put away for another year. One of those Christmas displays that have been taken down is the Western New York Garden Railway Society's Erie and Buffalo Botanical Gardens train display, one of two each year. The trains are set up the week of Thanksgiving with the commitment to have trains running from the day after Thanksgiving until the first Monday after the New Year. With the exception of the winter storm in 2014, we have met this schedule every year for the last 10 years.

This is a 54 foot by 6 ½ foot layout that has three operating trains: a garden layout, a Thomas layout, and a Harry Potter layout. Many club members have contributed their time and skills to create Thomas' house with all the owls and letters, King Crossing station, and Hogsmeade station. On the Thomas layout, members made several buildings, some of which were submitted to a modeling competition for Thomas buildings when we first introduce a larger Thomas section. In the Garden layout, the train wanders through a "planting" of Christmas plants, with a farm at one end, a station snuggled in among the plants, and other features including a siding with engine and cars.

The engine running by the siding, past the parked engine and a water tower, surrounded by the plants was a wonderful sight, and though the plants may be different than what would be found in our outdoor gardens, they present to the public the idea of a "garden train." There are push buttons on each corner of the layout which young (and the not so young) engineers push to start the trains. They then run for 5 minutes before shutting off. And of course, this engine is huffing and puffing, with bells and whistles as it goes around the track. As it passes under some plants, the sound is muted just as it is on the prototype when passing through dense vegetation!

At King's crossing, the engine is moving pretty good coming out of the station. And of course it too is huffing and puffing with bells and whistles



There is nothing as satisfying as watching a small child chase the train, running around the layout despite the parents admonishing them to not run! Or to hear one adult tell another what the different buildings are on the Harry Potter layout!

And of course there is Thomas going into and out of a tunnel, passing a siding with Percy and Troublesome Trucks sitting waiting on Cranky to load them up with freight from the boat on the water.

We keep the trains rolling by having volunteers go the gardens once a day and perform maintenance. Generally, that consist of cleaning the rails using the rail cleaning engine, changing engines so that we put equal wear on the club equipment, and sometimes repairing a coupling that has come off by unauthorized handling by visitors.

Things went well until one of the children took a good look through the tunnel portals and wanted to know why there were two Thomas's. Hard to tell a child that this was our back up to keep a Thomas running all month!

I believe that train displays like this have three purposes: one to educate the public on the breath of garden railroading, two to entertain visitors, and three – and most important to me – provide an opportunity for fellowship during set up and tear down. Of course, some of us bring in our own engines and cars to run when we go in for maintenance!

It takes about 14 people during set up over a three day period of about 4 to 6 hours a day, and about 5 hours to tear down. Given people that have to work (needed to support the hobby!), have doctor appointments, etc., we believe that this is a very dedicated group that likes to run trains.

We have a summer display that is different, with a larger Thomas display and a different garden display. We can't wait to show off this local showcase display during the Buffalo BTOC 2017 convention.



Big Train Operator



SUMMER 2016
NUMBER 160

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE BIG TRAIN OPERATOR CLUB



INSIDE:

The BTOC at the ECLSTS

Morton Arboretum train display

Christmas at the Gardens

High Wheeler Train Show