



Open House At Dave & Margaret Kooken

Although raining lightly, it did not deter RCGRS members from running trains at Dave and Margaret's first open house. Members asked Dave how he could get a mature looking garden with such a new railway. Dave replied that he had started the garden a couple of years ago and left room for the tracks to be laid down this year, Dave used aluminum track and the railway is track powered. Dave said he wanted his backyard to be a garden with a train feature running through it. The garden and railway are both great.

Penny Walker's new just-out-of-the-box live steam Mamod locomotive begins its first run on Dave's railway. Welcome to the live steam club, Penny!



Live Steamup at the “The Lake View and Boulder Railroad”

By Jeff Lange

It was raining off and on Sunday, but three hearty souls made it to the live steam operating session today at my house. Darryl Noble, Chuck Weber, and yours truly. We ran steam engines for about 2 hours, and had a nice visit. Wish more of you would have shown up. Hopefully the next operating live steamup session will bring more of you outside to other members homes, and if the weather was a bit nicer, that would help gather the troops too.

Pictures are courtesy of Darryl Noble.



Jeff Lange’s “Colorado” steams along

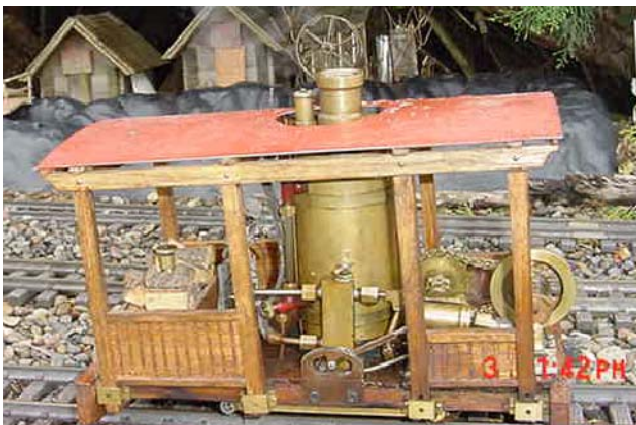


Darryl Noble prepares his “locomotive” for operation



Mucking out the stable on the “The Lake View and Boulder Railroad”

Visit To The Beaverlake Nursery



It runs



Steve, Darrel, and Dennis survey ground covers

Saturday, April 30th, eight members visited to the Beaverlake Nursery. This is a nursery that specializes in ground covers. We learned a lot about ground covers and bought a lot.



Paying the bill for the selections

The Tom McComas Story

Tom McComas became involved with toy trains by accident and with reluctance. It was 1970. McComas ran his own film production company in Chicago. He produced documentaries and commercials. He also produced a promotional film for a friend who had invented a new toy. The toy failed.

“He wanted to leave town,” recalls McComas, “but he felt bad about the money he owed me so he offered me three boxes of old trains.”

McComas was single, living on the North side of Chicago, and had no use for the trains.

“The last thing I needed was three boxes of old trains.” But the friend insisted, so McComas took the old trains. A year later, McComas had some guests over for dinner. One guest was a train collector. McComas told him about the trains. After dinner, McComas spread the trains out on the floor. The guest offered \$5000. McComas immediately became interested in toy trains.

The collection included some of Lionel’s finest trains, including the streamlined Hiawatha from the 30’s, a scale Hudson, a scale switcher, and clas-

sics from the Lionel Postwar era like the Santa Fe F3 and GG-1.

Turns out there were about 10,000 collectors in the country, but very little had been written about toy trains. Information was passed primarily by word-of-mouth. McComas, after meeting a number of new collectors who, like himself, were having a hard time finding out about Lionel trains, decided there was a market for a book. “I would have bought the book if it were available,” say McComas. So much for focus groups.

Tom contacted Jim Tuohy, a good friend and one of the best writers in the city.

“What do you know about toy trains?” asked Tom. “Nothing,” replied Jim. “Neither do I. Let’s write a book.”

Incredibly, they convinced a bank to loan them \$20,000. It was the summer of 1974. McComas made a mailing announcing the book. He also took it to a national train show in Seattle. “I stacked the books on a table and it was like selling cold beer in Brooklyn on a hot summer night. Guys were grabbing the books and throwing money at me. I think I sold 300 books in less than two hours. It was amazing.” At the same time, the first returns from the direct-mail campaign were due. McComas called his father who was to check the post office box.

“My dad said the box was empty. My heart sank. I thought there would be at least ten orders. Then dad said there was a note in the box saying to go to the front window because there was too much mail for the box. There were two bags of mail, over 1200 orders.”

All 10,000 books sold in less than six months. McComas paid the bank back and found himself in the publishing business. Over the next five years, McComas and Tuohy wrote six hardcover books covering the history of Lionel. The books included color photographs and information for collectors. Since the McComas-Tuohy books, many more have been written on collecting trains, but those

first TM books are still considered the definitive work on Lionel.

McComas and Tuohy next collaborated on *Great Toy Train Layouts of America*. Published in 1987, the hardcover book featured color pictures and stories about elaborate layouts around the country, including Frank Sinatra's. Sinatra was a toy train enthusiast and had been a TM customer for years.

The emergence of videotape prompted McComas to return to his film making roots. The **Great Layout** book eventually became a six-part video series, the second of which was chosen by *People Magazine* as one of the ten best videos of 1989. This was the first of many awards TM would win.

In the late 80's, baby boomers who played with Lionel trains as kids were reaching their peak earning years, and could now afford to buy all those trains they had once only dreamed about. And they did. The hobby of train collecting enjoyed dramatic growth. The Train Collectors Association, the largest toy train collecting clubs, approached 40,000 members, and a number of new books and magazines devoted to train collecting were launched. TM rode the hobby wave with books, price guides, and videos.

In 1993, TM produced their first children's video. The idea came from McComas' son Jeffrey. (Jeffrey would get up at seven in the morning and go non-stop until ten at night. The only time he'd sit still was when he watched me edit train videos.)

So McComas put together a show featuring the things Jeff liked – trains, animals, jokes and snappy music. The show was a big hit with Jeffrey. McComas' wife Charyl thought other kids might like it too, so they designed a cover, entitled the video **I Love Toy Trains**, and took it to a video trade show in Las Vegas.

“It was the hit of the show,” recalls Charyl. “We received orders from Blockbuster, Readers Digest, the Wireless catalog. It was amazing.”

I Love Toy Trains quickly became TM's best-selling title and one of the best-selling children's videos in the country. More videos were produced and the series began to win awards and gain national exposure in magazines and on TV. McComas' appearance on CNBC's *The “Tom Snyder Show”* generated the largest viewer response in the show's history.

The show was so popular, they decided to run it five times during the Christmas holidays when Tom Snyder was on vacation. “They told us about four of the reruns because we had to prepare. The moment they flashed our 800 number all six lines would ring off the hook. We had to have people in the office manning the phones.”

On New Year's eve, Tom and his wife, Charyl, invited four couples over for dinner. Tom had to go out to the office for something (the TM office is about 100 yards from their home). It was about 11:15. all of a sudden, all six lines lit up. “Omigod,” said Tom. “They're rerunning the show.” McComas busied out the six lines and ran inside to tell everyone to grab their drinks and come out to the office. For three hours the dinner guests took phone orders. ‘We had another party the next year,’ recalls Tom, “But nobody wanted to come.”

Each new **I Love Toy Trains** video received rave reviews in People Magazine, USA Today and in hobby and library journals. “I Love” videos were picked up by catalogs, toy stores, video stores and libraries all over the country. Sales were also being fueled by enthusiastic word-of-mouth and the one million mark was passed in late 2001.

An executive at Caterpillar saw the videos and asked TM to produce similar shows featuring big Cat machines. So the **I Love CAT Machines** series was born.

TM had always worked closely with Lionel customers. Lionel management realized that TM books and videos did a great job promoting Lionel trains and creating new Lionel customers. Lionel, in turn, cooperated with TM by providing hardware

and opening their files and archives exclusively to TM.

A Lionel Christmas featured several collectors who reminisced about growing up in the 1950s and receiving Lionel trains for Christmas. Collector Jim Blesko of Syracuse, NY wrote, "I watched it three times in a row. Saw something new each time and each time tears came to my eyes. McComas has captured the essence of where this fascination with toy trains began."

The Toy Trains & Christmas series features Lionel trains and Department 56 villages. The series also features the talents of songwriter, composer and singer Jim Coffey. "Jim was a great find," says McComas. "His voice and music are perfect for both our I Love and Christmas series."

In late 1995, 25 year old Joseph Stachler joined the video production team. "Joe is passionate about both trains and film making," says McComas. "Our productions have improved immensely since Joe came with us."

In 2000, the McComas–Stachler team produced a two-hour show celebrating Lionel's 100th Anniversary. The show is narrated by broadcasting legend Tom Snyder and has been shown on PBS stations all over the country. It was also chosen by the New York Film and Video Festival for competition in their documentary category.

In 2002, TM released the Celebrity series featuring the layouts of Frank Sinatra, Tom Snyder, and Mandy Patinkin. In the summer of 2003, TM spent two weeks in Wyoming filming the **All About Cowboys** series. PBS picked up both shows.

TM has also opened I Love Toy Trains — The Store, a retail train and toy store located in New Buffalo, Michigan.

TCA Quarterly editor Bruce Manson comments on TM's body of work. "Since 1974, TM has provided the hobby with well written books and beautiful produced videos," says Manson. "I know a lot of

guys who joined the TCA because TM books and videos reminded them of what great fun they had with toy trains. The TM crew has amassed a body-of-work that is unmatched in our hobby. Congratulations."

The future includes a new children's series, **All About Trains**, a video on the Caterpillar NASCAR racing team, a video on HO model train layouts, and, a video for the toddler set, **Baby Loves Trains**.

For more information, visit TM's website, <http://www.tmbooks-video.com> or www.tmbooks-video.com or 1-800-892-2822.

The above article was edited from the publication: RFD TV. No author was given on this article. This program is also on channel 9409 on The Dish Network and channel 379 on Direct TV. (A cable TV channel for RFD TV has not been identified.) See their program guide for shows about Trains and Locomotives and Great Layouts on Thursdays. —Submitted by Dale Gunter

Notes From the RCGRS Business Meeting, Saturday, April 16th, 2005

At the home of David and Margaret Kookan

No Secretary report – Dennis Rose had to leave early. No Treasurer report

New Business: Ultimate Hobbies, in their old location at Jantzen Beach, has a G scale bridge and supports that we might be able to have for labor provided to remove it. It is about 30 feet long. Jan Zweerts is checking into this for us.

Sunday, April 17th, Darrel Dunhan is hosting a planning session at his home to help him with ideas for his open house for the Saturday, July 9th Summer tours, as Darrel has decided to open his railroad for the tours. Anyone interested in helping him, contact Darrel.

Gary suggested that we sell the trestle bents that are taking up room in the club trailer. They will go up for auction at the August pot-luck, club auction at Chuck Weber's home.

It was decided that the Summer Garden Tours be divided up into two different days. Saturday, July 9th, from 12 noon to 6:00 p.m. for those members whose layouts are in Oregon. Sunday, July 10th, from 12 noon to 6:00 p.m. for those members whose layouts are in Washington. This way, many of the club members will be able to help out at other people's homes when they are not manning their own layouts.

The National Railroad Historical Society Convention is in town the same week as our Summer Garden Tours.

The Lewis & Clark Astoria train run, a 12 hour round trip at about 30 mph are three 1950 diesel rail cars. The fare is \$70 round trip. The train operation for 2005 starts June 3rd and runs until October 3rd. Jan Zweerts is a motorman/conductor on this train. Reservations are through Amtrak. It is called the "Lewis and Clark Explorer" Amtrak train numbers 998 and 999.

Shannon Pratt is our newest member who attended today, and is the NMRA Layout Tour Chairman. He had maps to 5 layouts on the tour.

If there is any interest in attending the Train Mountain operating sessions, they have 26 cabooses for lodging with two major run days in June and August. Their website is www.trainmountain.com

Tom Miller is again opening his railroad to the public on Saturday, June 11th from 12 noon to 5 p.m. His layout is in Scholls, Oregon.

Minutes taken by Jeff Lange for Dennis Rose. Any omissions or oversights are asked to be forgiven, as I was trying to keep up with all the new items as fast as I could. Thank you! – Jeff Lange

Schedules & Timetables

Anyone interested in having an Open House or sponsoring an event, please contact **Donald Goltger** at **360-896-1778** or **grammabob@wanet.com**.

May 7, 2005, Saturday, 1 p.m. until ?? p.m. Open-house at Dennis & Carolyn Rose's, 18325 Jaylee St. Beaverton, OR, 503-649-4904. The rail-

way is track-powered with one proposed loop scheduled for DCS control. The Rose's will serve a main dish. Salads and desserts are welcome.

May 9, 2005, Monday, 6 p.m. The next Summer Tour meeting at General Tool and Supply, hosted by Bill Derville, chairman of the committee.

June 4, 2005, Saturday, 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Hazel and Odell Lee are hosting their open house. Potluck: B-D: side dish, E-L main dish, M-Z desert.

June 11, 2005, Saturday, 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. Tom Miller is again opening his railroad to the public on Saturday, His layout is in Scholls, Oregon. Bring your own picnic.

July 9, 2005, Saturday, 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., RCGRS (Portland Area) Summer Tour: Coordinator is Bill Derville. Help is needed from all members.

July 10, 2005, Sunday, 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., RCGRS (Vancouver Area) Summer Tour: Coordinator is Bill Derville. Help is needed from all members.

July 26-31, 2005, 21st National Garden Railway Convention, Chicago, IL: Info and registration at <http://www.21ngrc.com/>

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Editor's Note: Pictures and articles are eagerly sought for the newsletter. Help keep your newsletter interesting by submitting materials that can be printed and shared with our members. **The deadline for the June newsletter is May 23, 2005.**