

# HOLIDAY LAYOUT TOUR – 01/04/2025

I don't know why but the holiday season brings out an increased interest in model & toy trains. For some, there will be a train set going around the Christmas tree. Even Santa talks about model trains. He keeps mentioning his favorite scale – HO HO HO! Recognizing the increased interest by the public, model train clubs schedule additional open houses during this time of the year. Each year a list of the open houses in southeastern PA [up to the Lehigh Valley] and South Jersey is prepared and distributed thru the model RR clubs and hobby shops. The two-sided list is printed on green paper, hence it commonly known as the "Green sheet. This year's list includes 15 clubs and covers various dates from Nov. 2024 thru Feb. 2025.



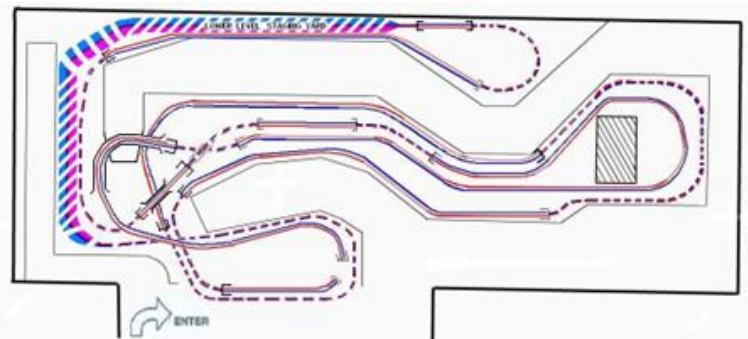
I am an member of one of the clubs and make an effort to see some of the other clubs each year. On today's trip I managed to visit five model RRs clubs, all of which I have been to before. The order in which I visited the clubs was carefully planned recognizing the various times [12-4PM, 1-4PM, 1-5PM] when the clubs were open.

## Abington Lines Model RR Club -Richboro, PA

This layout is closest to my house and I arrived there just after noon when it opened. In fact, I was the first visitor there that day. This club dates back to 1964 when it was affiliated with my club [GATSME - Greater Abington Twp. Society of Model Engineers]. Since 1986, the club has been located in building [formerly a bar] that is owned by the club. My 2007 Mercury



Mercury Grand Marquis to the right of the entrance. This is a single level HO-scale layout that uses Digitrax DCC. It does not seem to follow any particular prototype or era and it includes a trolley line with working overhead catenary. The aisle to view the layout dead ends so one must turn around to walk out and leave. I left a donation.



Here are some scenes from the layout.



As I was leaving, I ran into Charles Long, a trolley modeler and member of this club. I know him thru the Philly Division of the NMRA and the local NRHS chapter.



Driving to the next club, I crossed the rusty tracks of the New Hope & Ivyland RR. This is a former RDG line that hosts a tourist RR at its eastern end in New Hope PA. This is the former freight house in Rushland that has not seen service in many years. For about 15 miles, I drove straight as an arrow on PA RT 313, crossing over PA RT 263 and US RT 202.

I came to downtown Quakertown that once was a major stop on the former RDG line to Bethlehem. On July 26, 1981, SEPTA terminated its commuter service to Bethlehem [ending 124 years of service] that stopped in Quakertown. Some freight service continued on the northern part of this line until 1984. Eventually the rails and ties were removed and in 2011, the line above Quakertown was converted to a rail trail.



The former RDG station [built in 1902] in Quakertown has been nicely stored and now is the



headquarters of the local historical society.



The adjacent freight house is in



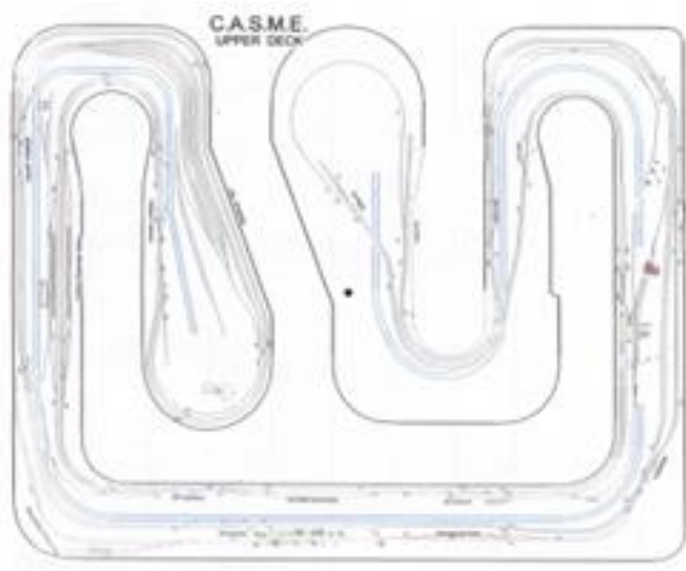
rough shape. There is still freight service to Quakertown by the East Penn RR from Telford PA. There was a string of depressed-center flat car seemingly be stored there in addition to two older freight cars. Located near bye is the **Quakertown Farmers Market** or QMART as



it is known locally. It is open on Friday, Saturday & Sunday but I have never been there.

### **Coopersburg Area Society of Model Engineers [CASME] – Coopersburg PA**

I arrived here at 130PM after driving 30 miles. This club was created by the merger of two former model RR clubs in the area. Since April 2005, CASME has been located in the basement of the Coopersburg Borough Building. It has a large, multi-level, HO-scale, DCC-controlled walk-around layout set in this area. The layout is very well done and except for a small area, the scenery has been completed.



The blob shaped peninsula in the top center of the track plan houses a large helix that connects the upper and lower decks. Entry was by donation.

Here are some scenes from the layout.



After leaving CASME, I stopped at a near by Wawa on PA RT 309 for a quick lunch.

## Nazareth Area of Society of Model Engineers [NASME] – Stockertown, PA

I arrived here at 225PM after driving about 24 miles. Effectively, I drove past two other layouts. This was done because this one closed at 4PM. NASME dates back to 1980. It was in several locations until it moved into its current location [a former firehouse] in 1987. In 1997, NASME was able to purchase the building from the boro. It is different from most model RR clubs in that the club has layouts in four scales: N [1/160], HO [1/87], S [1/64] and O [1/48]. The N, S and O layouts are on the upper floor while the HO



layout, that is multi-level, is located in the bay that once housed a fire engine on the ground level. There is a small area in the rear of the building selling surplus, donated and member items. I bought some parts and two books. Entry is by donation. The suggested tour starts



on the upper level. On shelves near the ceiling are scores of buildings

that came from a former O-scale layout in Phillipsburg NJ. That layout [which I saw once many years ago] was an extremely accurate, street by street representation of that town and Easton PA across the Delaware River. The amazing feature of the layout was that after the modeler had filled the space in his basement, he had two more *covered basements* built in his back yard and connected them to the house.

Here are some scenes from the layouts starting with the N-scale one. This is a relatively



small layout and viewed as one enters the room on the upper level. Across from this is a



very large three-rail O-scale layout [hi-rail] that has the S-scale trains and trolleys operating in the middle giving those smaller scale trains a nice forced perspective. Up by the ceiling,

you can see more of the O-scale buildings from the Phillipsburg layout mentioned above. The layout is huge and it fills the rest of the upper level. These are views from the sides.



I particularly liked the farming scene to the right. Next is the HO layout on the ground floor.



The demolition derby track was very well done. It is not often one sees a scene like this. I headed to the next layout but needed to make another Wawa stop to get some cash from their surcharge free ATMs.

## Black Diamond Society of Model Engineers -Bethlehem, PA

I arrived here at 325PM. This club was started in 1965 but it traces its lineage back to other model RR clubs in the area that date back to 1948. It is housed in a former Grange Hall that is owned by the club. I have been here several times over the years. The first time was during a MER NMRA regional convention back in the late 1980s. Admission was \$5.



There are two layouts here. On the first floor, there is a large layout that is somewhat unique as there are actually four different scales on it. The major part of the layout is three rail O-scale [hi-rail] but there are outer tracks that are true two-rail O-scale. [Hi-rail O-scale



uses three rails, with the middle one darkened, to make the electrical circuit the trains need to operate. This traces back to Lionel trains. All of the other scales, including true O only use two rails.] The center of the layout has the smaller S-scale trains, again giving viewers a nice forced perspective of distance. That's three scales and I said four.

In between the hi-rail and true O-scale tracks there is a small section of On30. For my non-model RR readers, that is O-scale [1/48] with the "n" signifying it is narrow gauge [less than std. gauge -4'8½"]. The 30 represents the width of the implied narrow gauge track or 30". The use of 30" is done for convenience as that distance in O-scale is exactly represented by normal HO-scale track. In reality, there were very few narrow gauge RRs that had a 30" gauge, just some industrial and logging RRs. The narrow gauge RRs in the US usually had a three-foot gauge, except for the two-foot gauge ones in Maine. I know that is probably TMI for my non-model RR readers. However, hopefully it gives you a sense of the complexity and nuances of this hobby. In the rear of the building, there was a room selling donated and surplus items. In the past, I have scored some real bargains here but now their prices were quite high. So, I only bought one *Arcadia Images of Rail* book for \$10 [read 'n resale]. However, the member there said I could have some HO decals I was looking at for FREE.

Here are some views of the first floor layout.



Upstairs is the HO layout and also a small museum area devoted to the RRs that operated in the Lehigh Valley. The HO layout is of an old school design being a large tabletop that fills the room. It uses analog DC control devices. The amusement park scene is well done and uses a N-scale loop as one of the rides. A trolley line ends at the large passenger station. The club was closing up as I left just before 4PM.



## Lehigh & Keystone Valley Model RR Museum – Bethlehem, PA

This club was only a short distance away so I arrived here at 4:08 PM. I saved this club for last for two reasons. First, it was open till 5 PM. Second, clearly this layout would be best of what I saw today. I have been here quite a few times. During COVID, it held an outdoor train show in its parking lot. Carol and I had two tables and sold things donated to GATSME, my local NMRA division and the Philly NRHS Chapter. Last April, ScaleTrains came here for one of its club visits and I was there for that. The club was founded in 1994 and since 1996 has owned this building that formerly was a hobby shop. Admission was \$8 that I was able to charge. This is a very large, multi-level, HO-scale layout that fills the building, except for



retail area that sells donated items & private road [LKV] HO freight car made by Bowser. The layout uses Digitrax DCC and is set-up for operations. This was the second layout that day with an Oscar Meyer Wiener Mobile. I have one somewhere in my boxes of model RR stuff.



Here are some regional prototypical scenes, all of which are very well done.



Behind the scenery at one place, there is a door leading to a hidden state-of-the-art CTC [centralized track control] panel with six digital model boards and a camera system that covers the entire layout and which feeds a 16 channel DVR device.

An interesting historical display on one wall showed a local track diagram, train orders and



to other paper documents used by the RDG, LV & CNJ in their local operations. One of the members I saw there, Guy Frick Jr. is also a member of GATSME.

I stopped in the retail area and bought four HO freight cars and some other things. It was just before 5PM as I was leaving. It is 42 miles from there to my house though with traffic, I did not made it home until after 615PM.

### **Summary:**

All-in-all, it was a very accomplished day. The temp was just about freezing, but I never felt cold. I drove about 120 toll-free miles. I managed to visit five clubs and depending on how you count, saw as many as 10 layouts. I saw a lot of very good modeling that will hopefully motivate me to do some more work on my own Illinois Central HO layout, set in 8/1969. I have made several visits to my own club in the last month and expect to visit the Burlington County Model RR Club on Sunday 1/19/25.