

JANUARY 2025 TRIPS

No big trip so far this month, but I've made several shorter trips so this report combines them. However as I write this, I am having to deal with an annoying new AI feature called Copilot that Microsoft has just added to Word. I googled how to remove it and of course the recommended steps make no sense. I went thru the same thing years ago with the also VERY annoying track changes feature.

COCOA BEACH, FL - 1/9-1/11/2025



This is a Railroad Prototype Modeler [RPM] meet that is held annually. Normally, it is the first weekend of the January, but was changed to later as the first weekend was too close to New Years. This meet began 24 years ago and was supposedly the first RPM event in the country. It has been a popular, usually drawing over 200 attendees who build or are interested in seeing highly detailed models.. I have attended about 10 times including the last three years. However, this year's winter storms and other issues caused over 30 attendees to cancel such that the attendance was only 180. Over the years, I have come to know some of the attendees, vendors and presenters.

We left home early on Thursday 1/9 and drove to the SEPTA's Jenkintown train station. We paid \$4 to park for two days and took the 755AM train to PHL for our 1031AM AA flight to CLT.



The train was to Center City was packed, but the airport was not very crowded that day. We were upgraded for the flight that left 10 minutes early. I had a window seat on the left side and had this view of the former Key Bridge in Baltimore. The ground was snow covered till well into Virginia. We landed at CLT at 1201PM more than 20 minutes early, despite a long loop over SC in making our approach. We had NC

BBQ for lunch while we waited for our 136PM flight to Orlando [MCO]. No upgrade on that

flight though I was 1st on the list. Still, we had our normal exit row seats on an A321 and I was in my favorite seat [11F] that has no passenger seat in the F position in the row ahead of me. We flew pretty much straight to MCO but again made a long loop to the south before arriving at 310PM or 11 minutes early. At MCO, the gates are in a satellite buildings linked to the main terminal by an automated people mover known there as GATE LINK.



We got our three checked bags, two of which had train stuff I was selling at the event and headed to HERTZ for our rental car. When I start to plan a trip, I usually book an ENTERPRISE car as a placeholder. I used to rent from them all the time but since Covid their rates are generally not competitive. So, I shop around but only looking at the major companies [HERTZ AVIS BUDGET ALAMO NATIONAL ENTERPRISE]. The original ENTERPRISE car for three days cost \$180. I checked about a week before the trip and got one from HERTZ for \$133. Then I looked at ENTERPRISE and their rate came down some and by using the points I have with them covering one day, their cost was \$113. The day before we left, I checked HERTZ again and took a \$120 rate. Obviously, I had to cancel the ones not used and that was EZ because none were prepaid rates. Carol picked our car, a KIA Soul with VA plates.

We left MCO just before 4PM and headed east on FLA RT 528, the Beach Line Expressway. This road has tolls but there is no alternative. However, the tolls only totaled \$2.75 and could be paid in cash. As we were driving on the Expressway, a BRIGHTLINE train from MIA sped by



heading to MCO. The fastest [125 MPH] part of that line runs alongside the Expressway for 35-miles. At 5PM we stopped for an early dinner at the **Florida Fresh Grill**, the best-rated restaurant in Cocoa Beach. We have eaten there several times before as it has the best, although expensive, lobster bisque that I have ever had. We had two bowls and split two appetizers. I thought the fine was fine but Carol thought the food could have been hotter. Dinner cost \$117.

The RPM meet is at a beachfront HILTON hotel, a short distance away. It started at 7PM but we were there just after 6PM to set-up the sales table that was free. I don't do this to make real money, but rather to continue to sell off an estate and other RRiana that I have accumulated or

bought for resale. Having a table is also a good way to talk with the attendees.

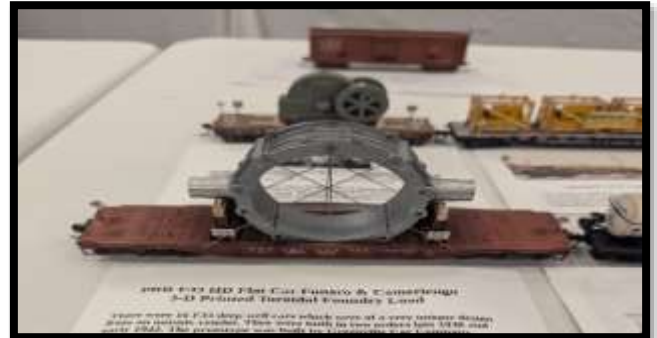


At this meet, the clinics ran Thursday 7-930PM and Friday/Saturday 9AM to 930PM with breaks on F/S for lunch and dinner. At some times, there were as many as seven clinics at the same time and it was hard to choose. Fortunately, many of them were repeated. The clinics covered modeling techniques, developments in the hobby, DCC and RR history, which is the area of the hobby that I enjoy the most. I attended these clinics over the three days:

- *The ups and Downs of Railbox*
- *The early history of Trailer Train*
- *A tour of Chicago in 1983*
- *WWII Hospital Trains* – two parts. Carol attended one part. The presenter has given similar presentation in priors years on moving gold & national treasures to Ft. Knox & post-WWII mortuary trains.
- *Unusual research* – amazing. This was given by the head of the Pullman Library at the IRM. From a brief mention of a particular passenger car from the early 1900s in a recent issue of TRAINS magazine, he was able to go back in time to the actual builder’s plans for the car and other related documents.
- *Traffic Patterns from a Conductor’s paybooks* – again amazing. Recently, someone found several months of paybooks from 1933-34 for Southern Railway branch lines near Winston-Salem NC. The conductor, perhaps a bit anal, wrote down detailed data on each freight car moved telling what it carried, where it came from or where it was going. The presenter transferred this to spreadsheets and identified traffic patterns & normal consists.
- *BRIGHTLINE Florida and BRIGHTLINE West*- a station will be built in Cocoa on the mainland and work was started on the line from Vegas to near LA.
- *Modeling a Mogul Branch in P 48*. This was by Tony Koester, a “name” in the hobby. He is building a fine scale, O-scale layout after decades of modeling in HO.
- *Gons w/ a side of waffles* by Cindi Priest. She is editor of the *NMRA Magazine* and told how she scratch-built two HO freight cars as part of her quest to become a Master Model RRer [MMR]. Her husband [Stephen] and son [Joel] already have earned theirs, so they will be the only family of MMRs in the world.
- *1970s Freight car stenciling*
- *Building 3D printed vehicle kits*
- *Laser cutting & 3D printed layout accessories*

- *The 20-2 Autorack Fleet* by Stephen Priest MMR. No doubt this 20' 2" car will be a new offering from ClassOne Model Works that he heads. This tri-level car was created by raising the sides to allow the car to carry Chrysler mini-vans on all three levels..

I learned a lot and came home with some handouts



and weblinks. There was also a large room with a display area for models, a N-scale modular layout and vendor tables open during the event. The vendors included: Intermountain, Cannon Shops, Rapido, ClassOne, Roka, two historical societies, a large dealer, some smaller dealers, several craft vendors and my table. Over the course of the three days, we sold \$199; I made a \$5 mistake in giving change and one small \$3kit was stolen from the table. Generally Carol manned the

table while I attended the clinics. I bought some parts for myself, two HO freight cars [one for resale] and several books for read & resale. One table had old issues of the *NRHS Bulletin*, one of which covered the 1998 Railcamp. My daughter Colleen attended that and she was pictured in the article. So I bought it

On Friday at 211PM a Space-X rocket was launched from near by Cape Canaveral. I stood in the hotel's parking lot to watch and almost missed it as the rocket took off to the east over the ocean while I was looking due north towards the launch site.



On Saturday evening, Carol & I had dinner with two of my Liggan cousins – Denise & Eileen McGlinchey and their husbands who live near Cocoa Beach. We have done this in the past but not for a few years. We checked out of the hotel at noon on Saturday and stayed there till it was time for the door prize drawing at 10PM. A friend said he would listen for our ticket #. This allowed us to leave and drive to Deland FL, about 60 miles north. I booked a HI Express there so that I could attend this train show that is held several times a year. For each show, the number is incremented by one.



87th FLORIDA RAIL FAIR
MODEL TRAIN & RAILROAD ARTIFACT SHOW & SALE

Volusia County Fairgrounds
 3150 E. New York Avenue, Deland, FL 32724
Saturday, January 11th, 2025
 9:00 a.m to 4:00 p.m.
Sunday, January 12th, 2025
 10:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
 Tommy Lawrence Show Arena & Townsend Arena

Over 300 Tables!
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FREE PARKING!
 Next Show Date:
 April 5, 2025
 TICKETS AVAILABLE AT: EVENTBRITE.COM

SPECIAL 2 DAY EVENT!
 Adults \$10.00
 Children under 12 FREE
 (Admission good for both days)
\$1.00 OFF ONE ADMISSION WITH THIS CARD

Sunday 1/12/2025

We certainly could have stayed in Cocoa Beach for another night but that would have required us to drive up early on Sunday. By driving the night before, I let Carol sleep in while I got up had b-fast at the hotel and drove to the show. I left the hotel at 930AM but the show was only 10 minutes away so I decided to drive thru downtown Deland where I had never been before. I was surprised to see a sign for SUNRAIL, a commuter rail line based in Orlando. On a prior trip to Orlando, I rode to the then end of the line in DeBary. Turns out that the line was extended on Deland on 8/12/2024; it now is 61 miles long and goes to/thru Orlando and continues to a bit past Kissimmee. The line is former CSX and AMTRAK’s Florida trains use the same trackage. I was able to find the

Deland station located to the west of downtown that was built in a faux historical style. I



didn’t expect to see any trains as the line has no weekend service. It has tried Saturday service and service to specific events but ridership was very low. There is some mention of extending the line from Deland to Daytona Beach and to build a connection to MCO. The station that BRIGHTLINE built in Terminal C at MCO anticipated that this will happen.

I arrived at the show just after 10AM. This is medium-sized show that is held iN two buildings on the fairgrounds. I have attended this show twice before when it was held on the same weekend as PROTOTYPE RAILS. I paid \$9 [saved \$1 w/ the card] and entered a building with modular layouts. There was a dealer’s tables as you enter [but nothing was priced] and several of the clubs had things for sale. I got a good buy on several RR historical society magazines for \$5. I only had two hours to see as much as I could so I could not look at things as thoroughly as

I usually do. There was a very well done N-scale layout from a club in Jacksonville, a well-done





On30 layout, two traction [trolley] layouts [HO w/ a SEPTA trolley &O] and a large LEGO



layout from this group. Though certain not scale model RRing, LEGO layouts are very popular with the public who attend train shows with their kids. LUG layouts are a regular feature at the NMRA's National Train Show. Several layouts in the back part of the building were not operating, nor was anybody at them so I didn't stop to look.



Just after 1020AM, I was in the other building with over 250 tables. I would need to be quick. I was helped in doing this by the fact that many dealers did NOT price their items. Experience from attending more than a few trains shows tells me that dealers selling unpriced items generally want more for the items than their real value. They deliberately don't put on price thinking their [high] prices will scare folks away. To that, it takes time to find the guy running the table to ask, How Much? So, I was able to skip lots of these tables plus some of the LIONEL stuff. However, I have often found real bargains on HO trains from Lionel dealers.

I made some small purchases and one dealer had a free box so I took several things. A retiree from PA had a table full of timetables and various paper RRiana. One box of timetables said 10 for \$1. He said just come up with pile and make him an offer. We had a nice discussion while I went thru his items. I learned he graduated from Franklin & Marshall where I taught for one year. He became a math teacher and ended up tutoring older students at a community college. Eventually I had mix of TTs, paper items and a few publication and said \$5? Fine. I put the items in my bag and went to look at more tables. Later, I saw it was 1145AM so I needed to speed up and finish all the tables. My last purchase was an out of production Downtown Deco plaster kit for \$5. If I don't build it I could easily sell it for more.

I called Carol and told her I was leaving. She said she had already checked out. I was at the HI by 1215PM. I took some time to put my purchases into our suitcases. Fortunately, the stuff I sold at the RPM freed up space and what I purchased at the show just fit in. I put a few publications into my knapsack so I would have something to read on the flight back. We headed to St. Peter's Catholic Church in the downtown area for its 1245PM mass. It turned out to be in Spanish. I could understand some words but that was about it. With lots of singing [there was no hymnal or display of the words on the walls] and a long sermon, the mass was running long. So, we left after the communion. We stopped to fill-up the car and then got on I-4 towards Orlando that was about 50 miles away.

A short time later we stopped for lunch. There was an exit sign saying **Steak 'n Shake** so we got off but could not find it. Instead, we ate here and split a rack of baby back ribs that were served promptly. Lunch was \$30.52. Back on I-4 and google maps said the fastest way to MCO was via the tolled belt loop on the east side of Orlando. However, it was only a few minutes longer to stay on I-4 that now has tolled express lanes so the traffic moved just fine.



When my mother was alive and living on the Gulf Coast, I often drove there with my sister Kathy thru Orlando on I-4 and it would take forever. Google maps had us driving on back streets thru Orlando so we missed the lights. We returned the car at 349PM – we had rented it three days before at 352PM. We drove 227 miles. We headed to the terminal dragging our three bags till I found a empty cart.

When we checked in for the flight the day before, AA was looking for folks to change to another flights. This is run as an auction, where you tell AA how much you will accept. I said \$200, which was the lowest amount. We checked our bags and got our boarding passes and headed to TSA, which at MCO is a YUGE maze of lines. The TSA precheck lines were longer than the normal regular TSA lines at PHL. There were perhaps a 1000 folks in line for regular TSA. There were three TSA precheck lines and I noticed the line on the right moved quicker. Turns out after a short durance that opened up to more lines on the right. We had to stand by one TSA agent till the belt cleared up. I asked him if it was always like this and he said it's Sunday.

We headed to the GATE LINK for our flight. The boarding pass said gate 55 but the monitors said gate 39. We went to 39 that was at the left end of the concourse. There were not a lot of folks there but we were early for our flight at 544PM. Still, it did not seem right for me. Carol left to find a soda and go to the bathroom. Then there was an announcement saying our flight was at gate 55. The few folks there all left. I waited about five minutes for her to return – nope. Luckily, there was a wheelchair there so I loaded it with our carry-on bags and went to find her. Then I got a text for AA saying come to the gate as they wanted to talk to us about changing to another flight. Still no Carol. I stood in the middle of the concourse where the food and stores where. Finally she saw me and I said we need to go – AA wants to talk with us. When we got the gate 55, I went up to the counter and identified us. They asked if we were willing to change the flight. I said yes as long as we could be on the next flight that got to PHL around 10PM . Much later than that would mean we'd miss the last train. The agent looked and said she couldn't do that. I guess they went to the next volunteer on their list. The plane was full. I was #6 for upgrades and Carol was #13. We had the same seats on another A321 as the flight from CLT down. We left at 537PM and arrived 17 minutes early at 755PM. I had a Tito 'n tonic to drink while Carol had a Bailey's on the rocks.

There was no way we would make the 810PM train that stopped in Jenkintown. so we were in no hurry. Our three bags came and we went to the SEPTA Station for the 840PM train but exited at Jefferson and waited. The next train for us was a 910 PM train that had come from the airport. Still, it was much better to wait indoors [and underground] at Jefferson than stand outside on an open platform at PHL. Our train was a bit late and we were at our car in Jenkintown a few minutes after 10PM. I was hungry so I made a food stop at WAWA on the way home.

Recapping the miles, points, etc.

Since I had already earned my Executive Platinum status at AA for 2025, I flew using 31,500 miles. However, Carol needed the mileage credit to help her retain her Platinum Pro status. Her ticket cost \$420 RT and got her 1,204 miles. AA gave her credit for 1,776 miles towards Million Miles status but she is over 400k away from that! Interestingly, FLIGHTAWARE shows the actual mileage flown for each flight and for this trip it came to 1,960 miles. The HILTON bill was totally messed up. I was charged for parking that was free with the event and did not get the meal allowance due from my status. There was no hot water for a day so we got a \$50 credit for that issue. The adjusted total for the two nights and some food was \$360 and earned 8,928 points including a bonus. The one night at the HI Express cost \$168 and earned 2,984 points including a bonus. Hertz has a reward program but I never looked at it until just now. I earned 71 points

for the rental and have a total of 907 points. Hertz requires 950 points for a standard one day free rental with blackout dates. So, after another rental with them, I can try and use that.

New York City - 1/15/2025

A couple of weeks ago I saw an interesting ad for a new Broadway Play *ALL IN* that was produced by Lorne Michaels and whose cast included some SNL alum [and others that Carol knew of]. Knowing Carol likes to see plays and I like SNL, I told her to get two tickets for this day. Since, we would drive to Trenton and take NJT to NYP, this trip would also allow us to finally visit the NJ State Capitol as well. To this I added a third thing. Recently while looking for a local restaurant in PA in the AA Dining Rewards Program, there was an on-line ad for **Ristorante LUCCA & Piano Lounge** in Bordentown NJ saying that for January their lunch menu was 20% off. This place was formerly a famous Garden State diner, called Mastoris, that closed in 2021. We ate at Lucca when it first opened and it was VERY expensive - a Valentine's day lunch for two was \$132. This time the two lunch entrées with water and a piece of cake for dessert was more reasonable at \$66 including tax and tip. BTW there is no more automatic 20% gratuity applied to the bill. BTW, the Copilot feature turned this picture into an oval.



From there, it was a 20-minute ride to Trenton's Capitol Complex. To my surprise, there was free parking for visitors under the complex as shown in model form here.



The original State House was built in 1792 and it still there somewhere. Over the years, several additions were built all around and encompassing it. The guide said only a few parts of the original building can be seen on the third level. Still given its age, this is the 3rd oldest state house in continuous use [MD & VA are older]. However, given its location, just in from the Delaware River, this Capitol is the closest to another state [PA]. We cleared security and arrived just in time for the 2PM tour and were the only ones on it. We saw both houses of the



legislature, the inside of the dome [added in 1885 after a fire] and the recently remodeled governor's office [no pictures allowed]. Leaving the complex, we drove next to the Delaware

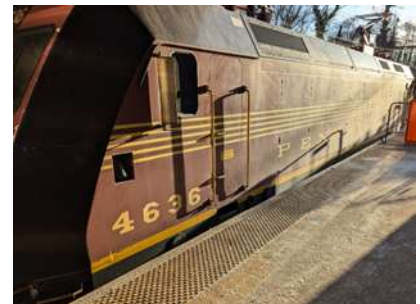
River that had ice just like when Washington crossed it on night of Dec. 25–26, 1776.



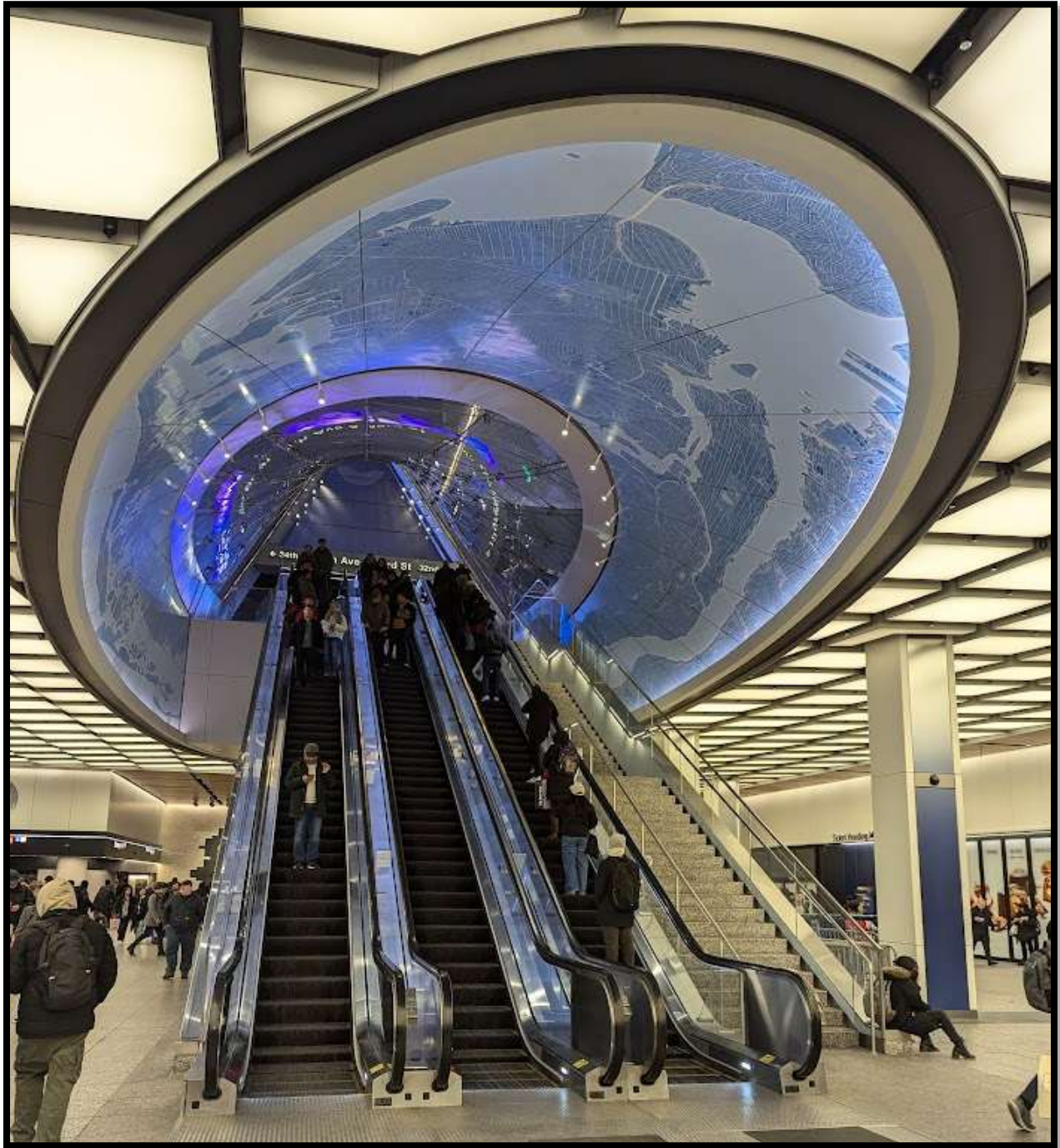
As we stopped by the river, we took this picture of the dome. The Trenton Transportation Center was only a few blocks to the south. TRE handles NJT [trains, busses and the River Line



Light Rail] plus AMTRAK and SEPTA trains. We parked in the garage and went inside to buy our tickets. I bought two RT senior fares to NYP for \$35 but I accidentally left one of the four tickets in the TVM. No problem as I found an unused ticket to NYP on the floor. I went to get a drink at the McDonald's that was there for years, but it was gone! We boarded a 403PM train that had the Pennsy heritage unit [an ALP-46A] providing power at the rear. This was an all but two stops local that arrived in NYP after 530PM. We came up in the old AMTRAK area and walked towards 7th Ave and then went down to where the LIRR is. The corridor there was recently totally rebuilt such that now it is much wider and taller. When there last June, the new restaurants were just coming. Now there are plenty of places to eat. We went for **Raising Cane** that had a line like you see at Chick-fil-a. We took our time as the play did not start until 8PM.



This new escalator takes riders directly from the LIRR part of Penn Station to 7th Ave. We



headed to the [IRT] subway, the 1,2,3 lines. I brought an expiring MetroCard with me from home but didn't know how much was left on it. I checked the balance and it was \$6.50 that was more than enough for two rides. We rode uptown for one stop to 42nd Street/Times Square. There eight subway lines come together and we were able to walk a bit underground to 43rd St. Once on the surface, the first thing we saw was **One Vanderbilt**, a 93-story office tower located



next to GCT that opened in 2020. We walked up the east side of Broadway to 44th Street and

then walked one block east to the Hudson Theater that opened in 1903. Per an article in the *PLAYBILL*, it has been used for many things: Broadway theater, the Tonight Show in the early 1950s, a porno theater, and a nightclub. It was almost demolished, but was incorporated in the adjacent Millennium Hotel. It returned as an active Broadway theater in 2017 after an extensive renovation. This was the first time Carol [and me] was there.

Supposedly, the theater's doors opened 45 minutes before the show. But we still standing outside in line at 720PM when the temp was 27°. While we were waiting, a black



van stopped and two men got out and at first walked toward the Hudson Theater. Carol didn't say anything then but was fumbling to get her phone. The two men kept walking towards another theater. Carol said to me: Don't you know who that is? I didn't have a clue. Turns out it was Andrew Lloyd

Webber. How was I supposed to know that? Finally, the doors opened and we could go inside. We had seats on the upper level that cost \$147 each [a good buy per Carol] but we were directed to a lounge selling expensive drinks and snacks that you could take to your seats. A few minutes later an announcement was made that we could be seated. We had good seat with a clear view of the stage. An usher walked up and down the aisle saying no pictures.



I am not sure what we saw. It was described as a comedy about love. It wasn't like a normal play. There was a cast of four lead by Lin-Manuel Miranda [Hamilton] who started the show with a monologue. Carol also thought I should know who he was too! He was joined by three others: Aidy Bryant [SNL], Nick Knoll, Andrew Rannells [Book of Mormon] and the four of them sat in plush chairs facing the audience. The 'play' consisted of several seemingly funny vignettes that were like short stories from the *New Yorker*. These included: pirates with a baby, the elephant man, dogs screwing each other and the supposed dialogue between two infants in a crib. A visual element to each story was displayed on the back of the stage and the cast READ their lines from a script. The cast changes regularly so I guess there is no time to rehearse. During parts of this a married couple, named *The Bengons*, sang and played several musical instruments [ukulele, drum, guitar, accordion] along with three other musicians. The whole thing was weird, but the theater was full and folks seemed to enjoy it. As for me, I am still not sure. Carol thought it is was humorous with heart and lessons. She said the book the cast used was just a reference not the script. It was supposed to run 90 minutes and ended promptly at 930PM. I wanted to use the elevator to the ground lower but the door to it was closed so I had to walk down 20 steps. Outside, we walked toward Broadway and down thru the middle of Times Sq.



We came to an subway entrance and walked down. There wasn't enough money left on my MetroCard so we used the new turnstiles that allow you to just tap a credit card. The one-stop ride to NYP ride cost \$2.90 each. At 948PM, we were standing in the NJT part of Penn Station. There are no places to sit down, else the homeless would be in them all day. The video displays show the various trains but riders have to just stand and wait till the track is posted, and then everyone dashes to that gate for that track. We wanted a 1011PM train and it was finally posted for Track 5. The cars were bi-level; we went to the lower level and sat in a pair of facing seats. After we left NYP, the conductor came to pull the tickets and a passenger across from us found out he was on the wrong train. He should have been on the North Coast Train on Track 4. I didn't see him get off so don't know what happened to him. Ours was an express only stopping at Secaucus Jct. & Newark Penn and then skipping all the stations to Princeton Jct. that has a big park 'n ride. After that was Hamilton and the train was almost empty. The conductor made us move forward three cars to exit at TRE where we arrived at 1120PM. We got the car and left the garage that is now ticketless. It read my license plate entering and leaving, and then charged my credit card [on file] for \$11.35 including a 35¢ convenience fee. We crossed the Delaware on a free bridge and got on RT1. I splurged and took the PA turnpike for one exit rather than the toll free way I usually drive [too many turns at night]. We were home before 1230AM.

Texas - Saturday 1/18/2025

Back during the Covid scamdemic, things were pretty much shut down in PA & NJ. All the of local train shows that I normally attended were cancelled. This went on for months and I was undergoing clear signs of withdrawal. However, I saw in a hobby magazine that there was a train show in Plano Texas scheduled for MLK weekend in Jan. 2021. I contacted the show and found it was still on. I asked Carol if she wanted to go to Texas for a weekend and she said sure. So, we went and also visited Waco. We repeated the trip in 2022, 2023 & 2024. Each year we

added other stops. We visited Midland and Lubbock, Texas that were on my bucket list of the 100 large cities in the US. We visited three presidential museums [both Bushes & LBJ] and the Texas Capitol from Carol's bucket lists. One year, she went to the ranch used on the Dallas TV show. This year, Carol was supposed to be in CT starting 1/17 so I just did a *day trip* by myself.

The Dallas [DFW] Airport is AA's biggest hub and I was able to book a 5AM flight from PHL. However, there are no trains at that early hour so I needed to drive. I actually left the house at 305AM and was in the Parking Spot – South lot 45 minutes later. A shuttle van picked me up and by 410AM I was inside PHL. I got my boarding pass and with my [empty] suitcase headed to TSA precheck that opened a few minutes later. By 430AM, I was at the gate but boarding had already started and was up to Group 5. I was in Group 1 and was in fact upgraded. I worked my way into the line and sat down in 5A after boarding the A321. We left on time and once in the air, I was served breakfast [a fruit plate] and with help from the flight attendant made a big glass of iced tea. I thought I would sleep but wasn't tired. It was too dark in the cabin to read [all the lights were turned down] so I tried the inflight entertainment using my phone for the first time. I ended up watching one episode of *Ted Lasso* and two of *Blue Bloods*.

The plane landed at 740AM CST but since DFW is yuge, it took 19 minutes to get to the gate in D. This terminal is mainly for int'l flights. I went down and outside to get the bus to the consolidated rental car facility that is south of DFW. While riding there, I was able to check-in for my Enterprise car on my phone. Inside, I just had to show an email to the Enterprise agent with my license and credit card. He pointed to a row and said pick any car. I took a red Nissan something and headed to the Plano Event Center that was 34 miles away, avoiding the toll roads that are all over the Metroplex. As I got close I, decided to stop for a real breakfast.



Turns out there was a **Waffle House** almost next to the **Plano Event Center**. A woman at the WH said she saw me at the show LYR. Really?

The show started at 10AM but I was there a few minutes before that and clearly they had let folks in early. This two-day show is supposedly the biggest in Texas with 00s of tables [that cost \$80 each]. This show, that happens twice a year, is unique in that the sponsor is the **North Texas Council of Railroad Clubs**, a 501c3 organization of local model train clubs, modular layouts, a NMRA division and a NRHS Chapter. There were also clinics at the show and 13 outside layouts that could be visited over the weekend. In the past, there was a program detailing the layouts, but like last year, there was just a single page with a QR code. The main room had



about 18 modular layouts in every scale located in the center with dealer tables along the four side walls. There were dealer tables in all the corridors and in seven side rooms. Admission was \$11 with a card, but I paid \$10 cash. Having been here before, I headed first to the club tables where I have found the best bargains before on donated items. No big score this year but I did buy several older structure kits for a few \$ each, some books and also came home a whole pile of free magazine & catalogs.

I was there for a total of four hours thoroughly looking at each table and stopping to see the modular layouts. I spent \$96 on older kits, four books, parts and a few used HO cars. I spent \$45 on a brand new car for my layout from HomeShops. This company custom decorates HO cars from several manufacturers with the paint schemes from private road names from **famous** model railroaders. The steel coil car I bought honors Dean Freitag's Davies Steel; other cars were available for Tony Koester's AM and Allen McClellan's V&O.



I went back to the main room to look at the modular layouts. It would have been better to do this first before there were crowds. Here are some of the better scenes.





The local NMRA Division had a booth. I picked up a flyer for the Lone Star Region's convention that will be Baton Rouge LA in June. Carol & I already had plans to attend this convention so we could see the LA State Capitol there. I sat down for a while as my right knee was hurting and called Carol. I left with all my purchases & freebies that just fit into the empty suitcase in the trunk of the rental car and my knapsack. I headed to see perhaps the best of the layouts that were available. Enroute, I stopped for gas and something to drink. Gas prices were usually \$2.79, ranging from \$2.59 to \$2.89. I first saw this layout in 2021 when at this show. I saw it again at the 2022, 2023 and 2024 shows, plus was able to operate on it twice during the 2023 National NMRA convention that was held in near by Gaylord, TX. This is the first scene you see when you enter the 2,000 sq. foot HO layout.



After seeing the layout, it was 4PM. I thought of going for dinner at **Babe's**, a local chicken restaurant but didn't have enough time. I headed west toward DFW on local streets and eventually came to I-635. By the highway entrance was a **Whataburger** [but in a different style building from that in the above pix] and I decided to stop and eat there. I have been to these

before but this time it was disappointing; my chocolate shake was very weak and the burger was



just too done. Still, I took my time as my flight back wasn't scheduled till 651PM.

Soon after I was on I-635, there was a long back-up due to an accident. I drove back the reverse of how I drove in the AM. By the rental car facility was a Shell, so I stopped to top off the gas. Between my two gas stops I bought over \$14 of gas but only drove 77 miles. When I returned the car, I mentioned that I gave them more gas than they gave me and the Enterprise guy said something about a credit but couldn't process it. I took my bags and headed to the bus.

Two days before I left on this trip, AA sent me an email offering me the chance to change my return flight at no charge to one that was less crowded. I got the same offer when I checked in the day before. While I took a break at the show, I checked the flight and AA was then offering \$\$\$ to change to another flight. I volunteered for \$300. My flight was in A29. There are five terminals at DFW; each is a large semi-circle and AA has flights in all of them. I had a short walk to enter A from where the rental car bus dropped me off. There was no line for TSA Pre Check but I was concerned about having all of the train stuff [some of which was metal] with me. No problem with that, but I set off a random alarm that required an agent to wipe and test my phone. I have never seen this before.

It was a long walk to the gate and it was 540PM when I got there. I went up to the counter and asked about volunteering. I was told there was no need and then the agent made a PA announcement to the same effect. No upgrade as I was #7 on the list but still had a exit row seat on a B737-800.

I was the very first person to board. A guy [wearing shorts] sat in the aisle seat in my row and for the longest time it seemed that no one would be in the middle seat. Unfortunately, one of the last passengers to board had that seat. He had a suitcase and another bag. At this point all of the overhead bins were closed so he tried to put the suitcase under the seat in front of him. I assume he was an inexperienced flyer. I said this is an exit row and you can't do that. I pointed to the closed bins and said you will have to find space in one of them. He got up and walked to the back of the plane and luckily found room. Else it would have been gate checked. I had been told that the front of the plane checked in full but an agent came down the aisle and told the man behind me [not wearing a coat] to go to 2F. I checked the upgrade list and was now #6!

We left a few minutes early. I thought I would sleep but again wasn't tired. So, I read one of the free magazines I got at the show. I didn't bring any reading materials with me on the flight down knowing I would have plenty to read on the flight back. I did have a Tito's 'n tonic and after that did doze off for a bit. The plane was at the PHL gate at 1043PM or 15 minutes early. I was in row 17 so it took a bit to exit. Someone left a cart by the gate so I put the heavy suitcase on that with my other bag and pushed it thru the B concourse, thru the exit and then over to the parking garage and down to the lower level. A shuttle bus for Parking Spot - South pulled in just as I got to the door. Ten minutes later, I was at the lot.

The weather was weird. It wasn't raining but clearly there was moisture in the air and the temp was below freezing. There was like a prism like effect coming from the street lights and the lit signs. When I got to the car, it was totally covered in ice. It took real effort to get the driver's door and then back door open to get my scrapper. I put on my gloves and went to work on the ice. I left at 1120PM and since there is no traffic on the Blue Route and PA Turnpike at that hour, I was home by 1210AM. I had to call Carol to open the door as I did not take my house keys with me. I sat down at the PC to see how my eBay sales were doing. I thought I would be tired but ended up staying up till 130AM. However, I slept the next day till 11AM.

Recapping the miles, points, etc.

I could not bring myself to pay for a trip like this as much as I like trains. But I went for almost free. I booked the RT flights using 27K miles and paid an \$11.20 fee. The parking was free as I used points from the lot's rewards program that go back several years. We don't drive to PHL anymore as we usually take the airport train. Similarly, the Enterprise car was mostly free using points from its reward program, except for \$10+ in taxes or fees. The reason the guy at Enterprise could not process a \$35 credit was that it was more than the \$10+ and my bill would be negative. He said the mgr. would have to figure that out. I was only charged 2¢.

Sunday 1/19/25

I had plans for two things this day but neither one happened. First, I was going to make my annual visit to a model RR club in Cinnaminson NJ. However after getting up very late, I did not feel like going. Second, Carol had received tickets for the presidential inauguration from VP Vance. I was planning on driving down to DC later this afternoon and staying with my niece Bridget who lives in Alexandria VA. However, due to the anticipated extreme cold weather the ceremony was moved indoors so I bagged that trip too. It probably was for the best that I didn't try and drive because it snowed from mid-day to the late evening dropping several inches in PA and also in the DC area.

Springfield, MA 1/23 – 1/26/2025

This is an annual trip to the **Railroad Hobby Show** at the Big E fairgrounds in West Springfield. By attendance [usually over 20k] and size [four bldgs. totaling 375k sq. ft.] it is the largest show in the US. The show is actually on Saturday and Sunday, but I go up early so I can attend two-days of clinics before the show in a Sheraton Hotel in downtown Springfield. Like the two prior years, I was hosting a model railroad friend from afar. This year it was Paul Hobbs who flew in

nonstop from Auckland New Zealand to JFK on 1/20 just so he could attend this event. I have known him for many years and see him regularly at the NMRA's annual convention. Back in 2019, he gave Carol & I a tour of Auckland when we were in NZ.

Carol was supposed to go to our daughter's Colleen in Franklin CT on Friday 1/17 but the folks there were sick. On 1/19 it snowed and she didn't go. I said to her I can drive you there on 1/22 and pick you up on way back on Sunday eve 1/26. She said fine.

I was supposed to pick-up Paul at the Metro-North Train Station in Stamford on Wednesday 1/22 at 1125AM. Paul was to take a LIRR train from Jamaica to GCT and then take a New Haven train from there. Except, he wasn't there and still wasn't after two more trains arrived from GCT. I tried to called his NZ phone # but the call didn't go thru. Finally, Carol said that maybe he was on the other side of the station and there he was wearing his only winter hat. I gave him a brief tour of Stamford where we lived from 1979 to 1986 and then we had lunch at a **Pepe's Pizza** location that recently opened there. After lunch, we drove to see the **SoNo Switch Tower Museum** thanks to my friend Garf. I used to be docent there when we lived in New Canaan.



While we were in the Tower, Carol drove to where she used to work in Westport. She returned about 245PM and we left a few minutes later. We drove to Colleen's house and dropped her off, after which Paul and I drove on RT 2 towards Hartford. Paul mentioned being there during in

2009 for NMRA's annual Convention. We stopped for a dinner at **Bear's Smokehouse BBQ** near BDL airport; we ate there last year. Eventually, we got to the Sheraton that would be our base for the next four days.



The advance clinic track cost me \$110 and is a real bargain. For that, I got two days of breakfast & lunch, two days of clinics that included several free items plus a two-day vendor pass to the show. I spent most of my time in three make 'n take clinics. I made another Kato Mini-circus diorama [I made one last June at a Philly Division event] and built an



ice cream stand from a former wooden box car kit. I was unsuccessful in making an O-scale paper shed. Other clinics covered installing KDs on an Athearn Blue box freight car, an obscure RR in VT, Blunami [I actually understood what the presenter was saying] and caught a bit of Paul's clinic on MOW equipment. For dinner on Thursday, I took him to the **Steaming Tender** in Palmer, MASS.



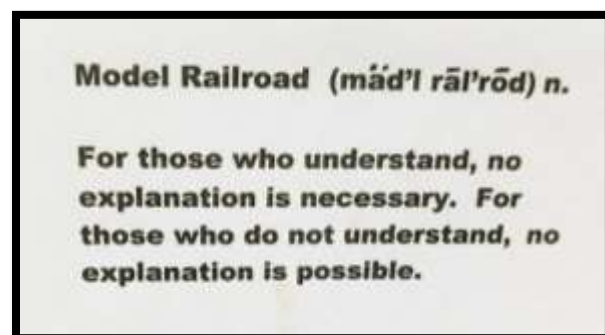
This was a former Union Depot [CV and B&A] and another annual stop for me. While we were eating, the Boston section of AMTRAK's the Lake Shore LTD [the Late for Sure] went bye and the building rattled. On the way back to Springfield, we stopped at the **Friendly's** by that company's HDHQ for sundaes with Jimmies. Paul had never heard that term as the sprinkles are called hundreds and thousands in NZ.

Saturday morning we left the hotel early and had breakfast at **MEMO's** across from the Fairgrounds. I have eaten there before but not since it moved to a bigger bldg. My pancakes were too bready and it was cash only so pointless. We paid \$5 to park at the Big E Fairgrounds and were at the show by 830AM before it opened at 9. The temp was in the 20s and there was a line of folks waiting to get in. I hurried to the Kato booth in the Better Living Center [BLC] so I



could put my two dioramas on its display. Mine [left & center] used Kato's HOn30 track while the others were built in N scale. I normally start in other buildings but since I was already in the BLC, I stayed there till noon. As I left to do a car run and meet up with Paul, the BLC was so crowded you could not move in some aisles. I spent the afternoon in the Young & Mallory

buildings during which I ran into many folks that I know. Paul was supposed to meet me at a



certain place at 5PM in the Young Bldg. but he wasn't there. I had no luck calling him so headed to the car. Eventually, he called me and I figured out that he was on the other side of the bldg. I guess being from south of the equator, his sense of direction was off by 180°. We went back to the hotel for a while and at 7PM drove to the **Student Prince** in downtown Springfield for dinner with some friends from SJ. This was another annual stop. Paul was a bit taken by his bill saying he had bought the restaurant. However, he had a beer, salad, an up-charged schnitzel w/ veal and dessert.



On Sunday, I left the room early so I could attend 8AM Mass – too early at it turned as the Mass was at 830AM. I was missing my knee brace so went back to hotel to look for it and to tell Paul to meet me later. We went to **Sunnyside Up** for breakfast. My food was better but it was cash only too. However, Paul paid for both of us. We were back at the show just as it opened at 10AM. I went to the Stroh Bldg. that is the smallest of the four bldgs. for an hour and then spent another hour looking at the modular layouts in Mallory. My last two hours were spent covering the middle sections of the BLC. At 2PM it was time to leave. Paul showed up a few minutes later. He had bought several books and a few other things but was unsuccessful in buying a

piece of Atlas track for a friend back in NZ. I made a whole bunch of bargain purchases some for me and others for an EZ resale. I bought two old Ambroid wood kits to build on our upcoming cruise. [When home, I learned the show's total population {attendees, vendors and folks from the modular layouts} was 27,535 smashing the previous record.]

I called Carol to say we were leaving. It was arranged so that Colleen et al. would drive her to the AMTRAK station in Old Saybrook. This was about 1'15" from Springfield and 25" from Franklin. We got there first and saw a Boston bound Amtrak train stop. It was about 4PM when we left there and headed west. When we came to New Haven, I had to stop at the original **Pepe's**. The picture



shows its oven that uses anthracite coal. After eating, we drove on I-95 thru CT, Westchester & the Bronx before crossing the Hudson River on the GWB. From there, we drove out into NJ on I-80 till it hit I-287. We



took that south to US RT 202 then NJ Route 29 that crossed the Delaware on an old spindly bridge limited to 5 tons and then PA 263 to PA 611 to home. The entire route home was toll free! We arrived about 915PM.

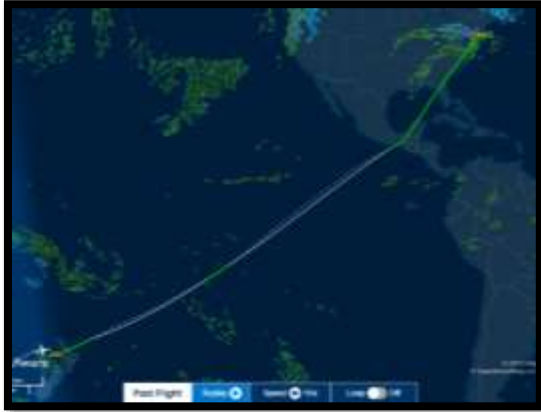
Monday 1/27/2025

I have had issues with my right knee for years as it is bone on bone. However, I never had real pain until over Christmas. When I called for a DR appointment on 12/30, the first one available was today. At the appointment, I made arrangements to have the replacement operation on Thursday 3/6. This was the earliest date available after we will be back from our South American cruise. Back at the house, I picked up Paul and we left to see three layouts belonging to members of the Philly NMRA Division. We made a lunch stop at a **Wawa** and that was Paul's first visit to one. After the layouts, Paul took Carol and I out to eat at a Mexican place near our house. While I attended my Knights of Columbus meeting that evening, Paul helped Carol to plan a trip to Australia in August that will include a regional NMRA convention there.

Tuesday 1/28/2025

Paul was packed up and we left about 9AM. We stopped at two local train stations so he could see some SEPTA trains. We headed to my train club – the **Rockledge Model RR Museum** for my weekly visit. While Paul met and talked with some of the members, I did some quick painting of the harbor scene I am doing. Eventually, one of the member gave Paul a guided tour of the club's layout. He was impressed by its size and some of the scenes.

We left at 11AM and drove to SJ. Originally, I was headed to the Yankee Dabbler Hobby Shop in Bellmawr but instead decided to go to Sattler's, an old school hobby store in Collingswood. The owner there, Bruce, had the track piece Paul needed to buy. They had a nice talk and I learned that Bruce had been stationed in Christchurch NZ when he was a Navy Seabees in the 1960s. We left and headed to Trenton and stopped at a Five Guys for lunch enroute. We also



made three stops so that Paul could see NJT's River Line. From Trenton, he took a NJT train back to NYP where he connected to LIRR train to Jamaica from where he took a MTA bus to a hotel near JFK. He flew back to NZ on WEDNESDAY on Qantas' longest nonstop flight from JFK to Auckland of 9107 miles and over 17 hrs. west-bound. However, because he crossed the int'l date line he actually arrived early on FRIDAY morning. Currently, Qantas doesn't have an airliner with the range to fly non-stop from Sydney to JFK [or LHR] so this flight makes a stop in Auckland that worked out perfect for Paul.

Qantas is buying A350-900 ULR [Ultra Long Range] jets that will allow it to fly to NY or London non-stop.

At home, I finally had time to catch up with all the emails that had accumulated over the last few days. We were scheduled to fly to Chile on 1/29 so we could board a Viking cruise on 2/1 and sail around South America thru 2/17, after which we would spent time in Buenos Aires, Argentina and also at the Iguazu Falls where Argentina, Brazil & Paraguay come together. However, an email from Viking changed all of this. The email said our cruise was over booked and Viking was looking for folks willing to change their booking to a future date in return for a FULL REFUND and a FREE LATER CRUISE [worth \$13K+] with an UPGRADE TO A JR. SUITE. Frankly, I thought this offer was unbelievable. I called the rep we usually deal with at Viking and she said it was real so we called the person listed in the email. I had Carol join me on the call while the woman explained the conditions. We would lose a few \$00 of vouchers that had been applied to the cruise cost. She cautioned us about possibly losing the airfare that we booked ourselves. I told her this was not an issue as most of the flights were booked with miles that will be restored if cancelled. Carol's flights to Chile were paid but when cancelled would become a travel voucher. So, we cancelled the cruise and will be home for the next month. Given this, on Wednesday 1/29 AM, I called to see if my knee operation can be moved up. I have yet to hear back about that.

Being home will allow me to attend two local NMRA events plus two train shows that I would have missed. Because the South American cruise only operates in their summer [our winter] we'll have to book one in late 2025 or early 2026.