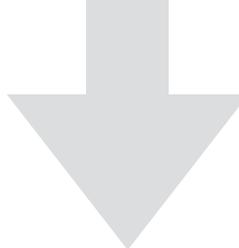


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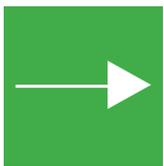
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THE OLDEST KID IN THE CANDY STORE

JUST ONE LAYOUT HAS SATISFIED ALL OF JACK PHELAN'S HOBBY WISHES

Photos by Art Williams



Toy train enthusiasts often use the same metaphor to describe what they felt when they attended their first big local show or regional meet after being away from the hobby for many years: “I was like a kid in a candy store.” We get it! The wide-eyed grown-up stunned into silence couldn’t believe

all the vintage sets and accessories for sale. Where should he begin, when he wanted everything?

Jack Phelan jokes about uttering those words after a coworker coaxed him into dropping by a train show held near his home. He had not thought much about Lionel trains since high school in the 1950s. Now, three decades later, the tables packed with postwar items he had once dreamed of left him astounded.

1 LEFT One of the sweetest prizes in Jack Phelan’s candy store of postwar Lionel trains is this no. 2373 Canadian Pacific F3 A unit. It’s passing by the waterfall he made using Scotch tape covered by Woodland Scenics water.

2 RIGHT No matter how late in the day it gets, this Lionel no. 2338 Milwaukee Road GP7 road diesel keeps working.

Fortunately for Jack’s buddies and all of us at *Classic Toy Trains*, the sense of bewilderment and amazement quickly morphed into a determination to build an O gauge layout showcasing the Lionel trains and accessories he was buying. Over the past 35 years, Jack has created his own candy store, as his three-rail

empire inspires the individuals who see it to think about developing their own.

► **BALANCED CANDY STORE**

Remember what it was like to walk into a neighborhood candy store when you were young? The colors, aromas, variety, and possibilities left you overwhelmed. Glass jars packed with pieces so hard you had to suck them stood along one shelf, while an equally wide assortment of chewy candy filled another.

Proprietors left nothing to chance. They balanced tiny candies priced at a penny each with chocolate bars selling for a nickel. Baby Ruths, Turkish taffy, all-day lollipops, Chiclets, boxes of Mike and Ike and Junior Mints, and more. There had to be something for everyone.





3 A quartet of the colorful and collectible near-scale boxcars in Lionel's highly respected no. 6464 series roll out of the mountain and across a dry canyon on a quiet day in the early autumn. You'll always find tremendous color on Jack's railroad.

Jack never managed a candy store, but he took the same approach when designing his 10 x 19-foot railroad. He understood the need for balance.

As Jack is quick to admit, the idea of recreating the kind of O gauge layout someone would have built in the 1950s tempted him. But he refused to give in, choosing to limit it to postwar elements while featuring some of the best aspects of contemporary modeling techniques and the latest control systems.

Jack assembled the vast network of

track and switches out of vintage tubular items. He secured the straight and curved sections to solid benchwork erected 40 inches high. Pieces of 2 x 4 lumber went together for the foundation.

That devotion to what Jack recalled from his youth motivated him to make five stalwarts from Lionel's postwar line the sources of power for the main lines and sidings, along with the accessories. Two 275-watt type-ZW transformers and three 250-watt type-Z Trainmasters dominate the control panel.

Jack shocks his fellow operators by discussing the merits and the shortcomings of the command-control systems revolutionizing the hobby. He had his friend Jim Williams update the layout's wiring so Jack and his buddies could run their postwar and modern-era locomotives via Lionel TrainMaster Command Control and Legacy as well as the Digital Command System put out by MTH.

► CANDY FROM LONG AGO

The railroad filling the lower part of the spacious home furnished by Jack and his wife, Fran, leaves visitors enthralled. They become the kids in a candy store, as they check out the magnificent postwar sets being run or sitting on the surrounding display shelves. Once people see the classic accessories in action, they start figuring out how they can acquire their own freight loaders and signals.

Jack, in short, is a whiz at identifying

JACK PHELAN BROADENED HIS TALENT FOR MAKING SCENERY BY STUDYING A BOOK ON THE TOPIC AND PATIENTLY ADOPTING THE TECHNIQUES OUTLINED THERE.



4 New York Central gondolas transporting metal scrap get pushed into position by a no. 6250 Seaboard NW2 diesel switcher so the no. 282 portal gantry crane can unload them. The vintage freight loaders on the layout never get a day off.

the sweet tooth of every train enthusiast and doing his best to gratify it with an array of scenes sure to influence folks.

Maybe Jack's wish to expand the ranks of O gauge model railroaders derives from memories of being inspired by what he enjoyed more than half a century in the past. As a youngster, he had his own kind of toy train candy store.

Like many of his peers, Jack started with a simple train set marketed by Louis Marx & Co. He spent countless hours on the floor of his family's dwelling in Chicago, running the wheels off his locomotive and cars while in grade school.

Jack discovered a larger, more thrilling "candy store" when he made friends with a boy whose uncle had given him a Lionel outfit. They played day after day with the freight set, along with a Lionel

no. 97 remote-controlled coal elevator and a pair of automatic switches.

When Jack got together with his pal, he felt he had gone to heaven – or at least to a spectacular candy emporium! A hunger for the finest Lionel had to offer invaded Jack's consciousness, and he never lost it over all the following years.

► TIME TO INDULGE

Jack remembers the "kid in the candy store" sensation as though it had happened yesterday and not in the early 1980s. A coworker repeatedly encouraged him to attend a train show held regularly at a local fairgrounds. Finally, Jack surrendered and decided to go.

5 The lake under the Lionel no. 313 operating bascule bridge turns out to be blue glass used on shower doors (it also serves as an access panel to the layout). Jack painted the tabletop beneath the glass before delicately laying it in place.

