

Manassas Railway Festival

By Katie Dokken

The Manassas Railway festival was held on a bright and sunny morning in the beginning of June, in Old Town Manassas, Virginia. This is a one day event, from 10:00am to 4:00pm. Our club, the Washington, Virginia and Maryland Garden Railway Society was one of the participating displays. Luckily the temperature was mild and we had a slight breeze in the air. While we were setting up our display that morning, we were treated to a wonderful early morning display of Norfolk and Southern freight train switching, on the tracks just 300 from our area. Then at 8:30am came the Amtrak run from New Orleans followed by more switching of the Norfolk and Southern. For our display we set up a total of 4 loops, the two outer loops contained a combined total of approximately 212 feet of track with a 44 foot inside loop and then a 32 foot inner loop placed directly on the grass with pieces of cedar shingles used to level the track whenever there was some unevenness to the ground. We were located on the museum lawn, right next to the historic Buckingham Lining Bar Gang display and across the street from the Train Depot. The Lining-Bar Gang, is a group of retired railroad workers from Buckingham County, Virginia. They re-create the way things used to be done before heavy machinery took over the endless duty of keeping the long steel rails aligned. Before the mid-1950s, crews of sixteen men would align the tracks using heavy steel "lining-bars" and sheer strength and song was developed as a crucial way to help coordinate their combined efforts. In addition to this fascinating display there were also many displays from area modeling clubs from N and S scales all the way up to our G scale display.



This was a family orient event, children and strollers abounded around the festival grounds, making walking from point A to point B rather difficult at times. The festival included music by the Southfork Bluegrass Boys Band and numerous railroad memorabilia dealers located on two parallel city streets. In addition there was a Railroad themed photo contest exhibit inside the Passenger

Waiting room at the Manassas Depot, a special display of antique toy trains in the Manassas Museum, special excursions to Clifton and back on the VRE, and various food vendors set up all over the festival grounds serving everything from Shrimp Creole to Cotton Candy.



Once we were set up and the Festival opened, Quickly a large crowd of children and adults gathered around every edge of our display, the cries of the children, yelling “choo-choo” train blended in with the comments of the adults about how they didn’t know they made trains that big. Many stayed for hours and watched the trains. Volunteers for the club were peppered with questions regarding track power, batteries, and the preverbial, “can you really run these outside?” Kids camped out perminately at track side enthrauled, with their parents periodically begging them to move on. The longer trains we usually would run at this show were limited by the grade of the display area, but the kids didn’t seem to notice.

If this wasn't enough for the rail lover, throughout the day, the Virginia Railway Express ran a special excursion train from the Manassas Depot to Clifton, Virginia and back again. The first excursion of the VRE to Clifton started at 10:00am, a round trip taking approximately 35 minutes with a new departure at the top of every hour. Clifton is 6 rail miles from Manassas.



Virginia Railway Express is running rebuilt General Motors engines, with eight of their new double decker Kawasaki cars from Japan. VRE took delivery of these cars in January and February of this year. One one end of the train is a “cab” car which has wires running the length of the train and connected to the engines at the other end, to the engineer can control the train without having to turn the train around at each end of the run. The two engines running today are Engine #V05, a GP-39, and Engine #V03, a GP-39, with maximum speed at 60 miles per hour due to the curves and embankments between Manassas and Clifton.



Additionally, Amtrak parked the Cardinal Superliner (from Washington to Chicago) along a siding for the festival with walkthrough tours allowed. Plus they had a booth giving away their rail schedules and promoting rail travel in general.



One of the most exciting displays for me was the Wamalug group, of which I am also a member. Wamalug stands for the Washington Metropolitan Area Lego Users Group. The Wamalug display was setup on the other side of the Train Depot right behind the Caboose, and the Norfolk Southern Lawmen Band area, their display consisting of an 10' x 13' layout and using over 50,000 standard bricks. This was a truly awesome layout with many trains running, a switching yard, city, country, and harbor set up all out of standard Lego bricks. Most of the

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layout is scratchbuilt, including a refinery and a double stall engine shed!!! Their displays generate quite a bit of comment every where they go since many people are not aware that Lego makes trains!

The day ended with our taking down our display serenaded to the sounds of more Norfolk and Southern freight trains passing through. Truly a railway lover's way to spent the day! In all, attendance was estimated by the organizers at over 28,500 people for the day.