



The Crossbuck

THE OSWEGO VALLEY RAILROAD ASSOCIATION

Newsletter, October 2026, Volume 4, #4, Kent Dristle editor

PO. Box 205, New Haven, New York 13121-0205

OVRRA at the Thousand Islands Train Show

OVRRA had a notable presence at the Thousand Islands Train Show in Clayton, NY this year. We took a 20' x 32' layout with us which featured one extra module on each end, much like we did back in 2023. As is usually the case, the two most popular modules were Shawn Connelly's "Carnival" scene and Kent Dristle's "Parkway Bridge" featuring an over-height truck stuck under the bridge. Other attention getters were the roundhouse with the rotating turntable and the tunnel corner, which is a favorite with the kids.

We received many compliments for the variety and quality of the scenery. A number of folks had questions for us on how we constructed many of the features—materials used, where obtained, etc. They were especially interested in seeing common objects being put to uncommon use, such as the golden brown colored doormat being used to represent a wheat field.



Figure 1: Logging train pulled by a Heisler locomotive.

They were also interested in the trains themselves. In particular, Steve Rogers brought his logging train, pulled by a Heisler locomotive, as well as Kent Dristle's battery powered SW7 cow and calf consist. One young boy, who was perhaps about eight years old saw Kent controlling the cow and calf with his phone app

and exclaimed, "bluetooth—that's bluetooth!" Kent told the young man that he was absolutely correct and that the phone app was indeed sending commands to the lead engine wirelessly via bluetooth. The boy's grandfather wryly commented, "He's too smart for his own good!" That same grandfather went on to confess that although the hobby of model railroading could get quite expensive, he usually ended up buying for his grandson whatever he wanted. Also in the scenery department: Shawn donated a model of a cluster of concrete storage silos for cement that we placed on the "we-on-corner" module on the straight-ahead track coming out of the three-way switch. It's a very distinctive feature now on what used to be a rather empty part of our layout.



Many thanks to all who helped us with the transportation, the set-up, and the take down of the layout. We realize that it's a long drive to Clayton for many of us and we appreciate those who are willing to do that to help make our participation in the Thousand Islands show a success. We are now looking forward to our fall show in Volney. Please remember that this year our show comes the week BEFORE the State Fair train show, not after it as has been the case in the past. The dates for our own Holiday Express train show are November 7 and 8. The State Fair show will be held on November 12 and 13.■

Update on Layouts

The Winter Scene layout has been reactivated for another year. It was recently shown off at the September 19th waffle breakfast. Kent Dristle ran his old time steam locomotive (1800s vintage) along with his train of six shorty passenger cars featuring Oskar and Piker. The only attention the layout needed was a good track cleaning. Charlie, Bill, and Shawn have prepared the Kibri demonstration N-scale layout. We have a string of coal hoppers that run well on it. Charlie will furnish an N-scale engine short enough to handle the tight curves as well as some structures. Secil's Lionel layout also needed some track cleaning, but once that was done, the train ran well.



Figure 2: Winter Scene layout



Figure 3: Lionel train layout

Kent has reduced another hump in the mainline tracks we discovered in the big yard on the Grange layout. Unwanted humps in the track have been a source of uncouplings as trains ran over them. As always, we encourage club members to check the coupler heights on their

equipment and adjust them as needed. Any irregularity or mismatch in coupler heights will be revealed in an uncoupling where there is a bump or hump in the track. The reason we take so much time to carefully level the modules during set up at train shows, or even in the Grange is to compensate for irregularities in the floor that translate into height and grade mismatches where modules join together. Another problem is that as modules age, they have a tendency to start to sag (don't we all!) and that also creates some up and down motion between cars in a train as they move from the center to the edges of modules. Temperature and humidity variations also contribute to the problem. At least our layouts are indoors. I have profound respect for those garden railroaders whose outdoor layouts experience even greater extremes in temperature and humidity. At any rate we try our best to stay on top of problems. ■

Update on the Grange

OVRRA has a new 12' by 12' shed. It sits in the northwest corner of the parking lot next to the Grange building. Inside the shed, we are storing our tables, signs, and lawnmower. The shed was built for us by local Amish, Levi Hershberger. It features a double door and a ramp. We intend to install bumper posts in front of the shed, similar to those we already have at the bottom of the ramp to the Grange building. The bumper posts should give the shed some protection from vehicles and snow plowing in the winter.

There are plans to resume work on sill and floor restoration in the Grange's downstairs dining room after our fall train show season is over. ■



Figure 4: OVRRA's new shed

An Old Issue Reappears by Steve Rogers

Most of us have locomotives and rolling stock made with cast metal frames or parts. Model Die Casting (MDC) produced a vast number of kits that had cast underframes (reefers and boxcars) or kits that were made of various metal castings that had to be assembled into log cars or ore jennies of different designs and types. Locomotives almost all have cast metal frames, whether a split frame made up of two halves or a split frame, common in Bachmann, or the drop in type in old Athearn locomotives. Many locomotives from the 1950s and 1960s had cast boilers and cabs, English, Mantua/Tyco, and Roundhouse are some examples.

The usual casting material was Zamak (which I have also seen spelled zamac in older publications) an alloy of zinc, aluminum, magnesium, and copper sometimes referred to as “white metal”. Zamak was developed in the 1920’s by the New Jersey Zinc Company and quickly became the standard over other “pot metals” because it did not warp. This gave the locomotive good weight or heft on the drive wheels for traction and pulling power and could provide an electrical path for power pickup, usually the negative side, this is why the early articles on converting to DCC stressed isolating the motor from the frame and often required some creative rewiring on older locomotives.

Why Zamak? According to Google AI there were numerous reasons. Zamak has a very low cost, a low melting point, high flow rate in molds, easily released from molds, and provides a very smooth surface for finishing with little further machining required. The downside of zamak is zinc rot or zinc pest, a condition where over time the casting will swell, crack, warp, crack, crumble, or form a powdery surface (I have often seen this as a white crust on a casting).

I have encountered zinc rot two times over the last year. The first was a tender frame from a Rivirossi 2-8-0 that is from the early 1950’s. This locomotive has the motor in the tender and a driveshaft connecting to the drive

line in the locomotive. As you can see in figures 5 and 6, the frame is cracked into 4 pieces that crumble into black dust when you touch them. Surprisingly the locomotive, while badly corroded on the drivers and steam chests, shows no signs of zinc rot, probably due to the use of different alloys.

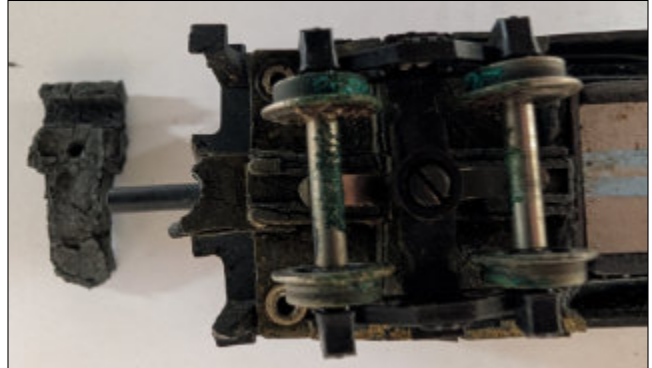


Figure 5 Cracked frame due to zinc rot

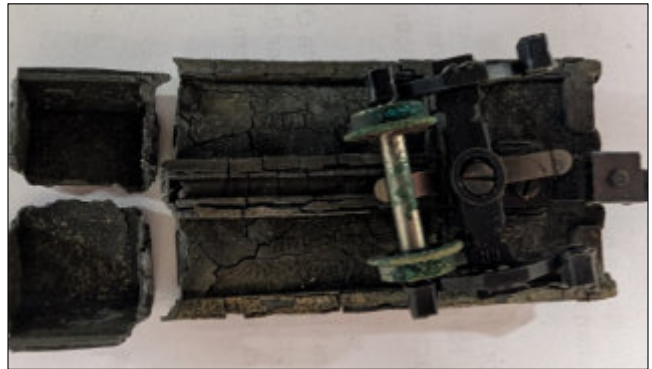


Figure 6: More zinc rot

The second was in a Bachmann USRA 0-6-0 that was brought to me partially disassembled by a young model railroader. The drive line was locked up tight, no movement at all in the drivers or connecting rods. I finished disassembling the model and found the idler gears were almost fused to the cast pins that the plastic gears mount on in one half of the split frame. (See figure 7, the small piece in the middle of the frame casting is one of the mounting pins for the idler gears.) The idlers were on the pins so tight that one of the pins snapped when I was attempting to remove the idler gear. The pins are swollen and idlers will not rotate at all. There are also several thin parts of the castings that came loose as soon as I separated the split frame halves.

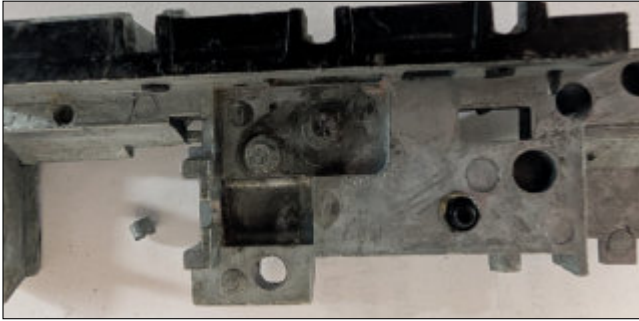


Figure 7: Swollen pins for idler gears

This is not an old locomotive, while Bachmann has produced several versions of this locomotive, this one came from the young man's train set that is probably 10 or so years old. It has a small electronic board for lighting effects and can motor and can still be purchased new (probably old stock) in the UP Flier trains set on line. The current version in Bachmann's web store is either DCC ready or equipped. I was surprised to find evidence of zinc rot in a fairly recently produced locomotive.

The cause of zinc rot is two fold. The first is a trace amount of lead in the zinc used to make the zamak alloy. The lead chemically reacts with the zinc and other metals in the alloy causing the swelling, cracking, warping, and eventual crumbling of zinc rot. The second culprit is humidity greater than 65% which greatly accelerates the advancement of the decay of the casting. Both of the locomotives that exhibited this affliction had signs of corrosion due to exposure to moisture, especially the Rivirossi consolidation. The lot of items, which I purchased at the spring show, all exhibited corrosion due to moisture, so the state of the 2-8-0 is not surprising. The 0-6-0 on the other hand must have gotten wet, as the drivers and side rods are also corroded.

There is no cure for zinc rot. The best prevention, if you are building a kit, is to paint the castings before assembly. I routinely do this on all MDC kits or other with cast metal parts of unknown alloy composition. I am not sure what I would do with the 0-6-0 of fairly recent manufacture as I have several other Bachmann USRA 0-6-0's and all run fairly well. Proper storage and lubrication would be the best, in my opinion. ■

Donate to OVRRA

There are 2 ways:

Go to OVRRA.org and click the "Donate" button

Or Scan the QR code to the right



OVRRA also has a facebook page
www.facebook.com/OVRRAinc

Contributors to this issue:

Kent Distle

Steve Rogers

Find us on the web at OVRRA.org

Election of OVRRA officers for calendar year 2027 will be held at the January 16th business meeting.

If you would like to run for an office, please contact president Kent Distle at president@ovrra.org or secretary Charlie Hewlett at secretary@ovrra.org.

OVRRA now has its own YouTube channel. Go to Youtube.com and type in the search box OVRRA.

Fall Train Show Schedule for the remainder of 2026

Holiday Express.....Volney.....Nov. 7 & 8
State Fair Show.....Syracuse....Nov. 14 & 15
Christmas in Mexico.....Dec. 5 & 6

Note: It's not a mistake. This year our Holiday Express Show in Volney is held the week *before* the State Fair Show.

Steamtown National Historic Site



Figure 8: Big Boy #4014 on display and undergoing service at Steamtown, June 24, 2026

Steamtown is both a railroad museum and a heritage railroad currently located in Scranton, PA at the site of the former Delaware Lackawanna & Western's rail yard facilities. Steamtown features a number of locomotives, both steam and diesel, a few of which are operational, and many more that have been cosmetically restored. A roundhouse with a functional turntable has been constructed on the footprint of the DL&W original facility, which now houses a visitor's center, theater, technology and history museums. On display on the roundhouse tracks are several cosmetically restored locomotives including Public Service Electric Co. #6816, 0-6-0; N.H. Trap Rock Co. #43, 0-4-0; Illinois Central RR #790, 2-8-0; and Groveton Paper Co. #7, 2-4-2T. See the photo gallery on the next page.

Also on display is the cosmetically restored Union Pacific Big Boy #4012, and during the time in late June of this year when Kent Dristle, Bill Dexter, and Shawn Connelly visited Steamtown, Union Pacific Big Boy #4014 was also present and undergoing scheduled servicing before its return trip across the U.S. to help celebrate our country's 250th anniversary.

Also present at Steamtown is the Reading #2124, 4-8-4 steam locomotive which is similar to the fully operational Reading #2102, 4-8-4 steamer owned by the Reading Blue Mountain and Northern which operates excursions out of Nesquehoning, PA. The Reading #2102 and the U.P. Big Boy # 4014 "raced" each other on parallel tracks earlier this year just before the Big Boy settled into Steamtown for its scheduled servicing. Steamtown provides train rides around the yard facilities on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Longer excursions are periodically scheduled throughout the summer. Check their website for details.

Steamtown's origins trace back to a man named F. Nelson Blount, a wealthy railroad devotee who amassed a large collection of vintage steam locomotives from both the U.S. and Canada. He founded what he called the Monadnock, Steamtown & Northern Railroad, which ran excursion trains between locations in Vermont and New Hampshire. After failing to convince the state of New

Hampshire to take over his collection, he then founded Steamtown USA in 1964 which would operate out of Bellows Falls, Vermont on property that was once owned by the Rutland Railroad. Blount established the Green Mountain Railroad to manage the tracks for his excursion trains between Bellows Falls and Chester, Vermont. After Blount was killed in a plane crash in 1967, squabbles broke out between Steamtown, the Green Mountain Railroad and the State of Vermont which technically owned the tracks. Steamtown's location was also becoming an issue. It was noted that other railroad museums with smaller collections were attracting more visitors than Steamtown. It was not near any large city and Vermont had strict regulations against billboards and signage along highways that advertised such attractions. It soon became obvious that a reorganization and fresh start was needed at a new location. Newspaper columnist Michael McManus spearheaded a movement to find a new host city. In 1983 he announced that Scranton, PA had signed the contract to host Steamtown, pledging \$2 million to help move the equipment over from Vermont. The acquisition of Steamtown by the National Park Service is yet another story which we can tell at a later time.

Today, Steamtown hosts typically 60,000 annual visitors with the numbers increasing to over 100,000 for special events. For comparison, Steamtown hosted around 17,000 visitors annually when located in Vermont. And speaking of special events, park officials say that 47,000 visitors came to Steamtown to see Big Boy #4014 during the first two days of exhibition alone (June 15 and 16) and that it was estimated that close to 100,000 passed through the gates during the entirety of Big Boy's stay (June 15 through 30). If you are thinking of a first-time or even a return visit to Steamtown, it's definitely worth it. True, Big Boy #4014 is no longer there, but Big Boy #4012 *is there* on a permanent basis and you can even climb up into its cab if you so desire. And don't forget to check out all the rest of the vintage railroad equipment while you are at it. For now, enjoy the photos on the next page.. ■

A Photo Gallery of Steamtown, USA



Reading #2124 4-8-4



ICRR #790 2-8-0



Groveton Paper Co. #7 2-4-2T



*Public Service Elec. Co.
0-6-6*



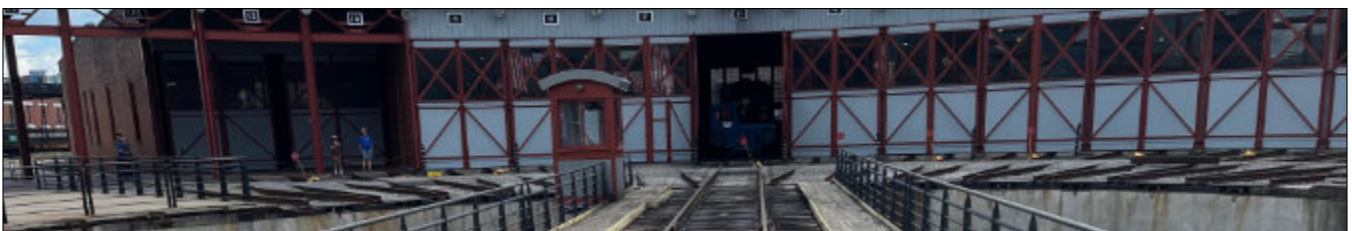
cab interior, ICRR #790



NH Trap Rock Co. #43 0-4-0



E-L Alco C425 #2452



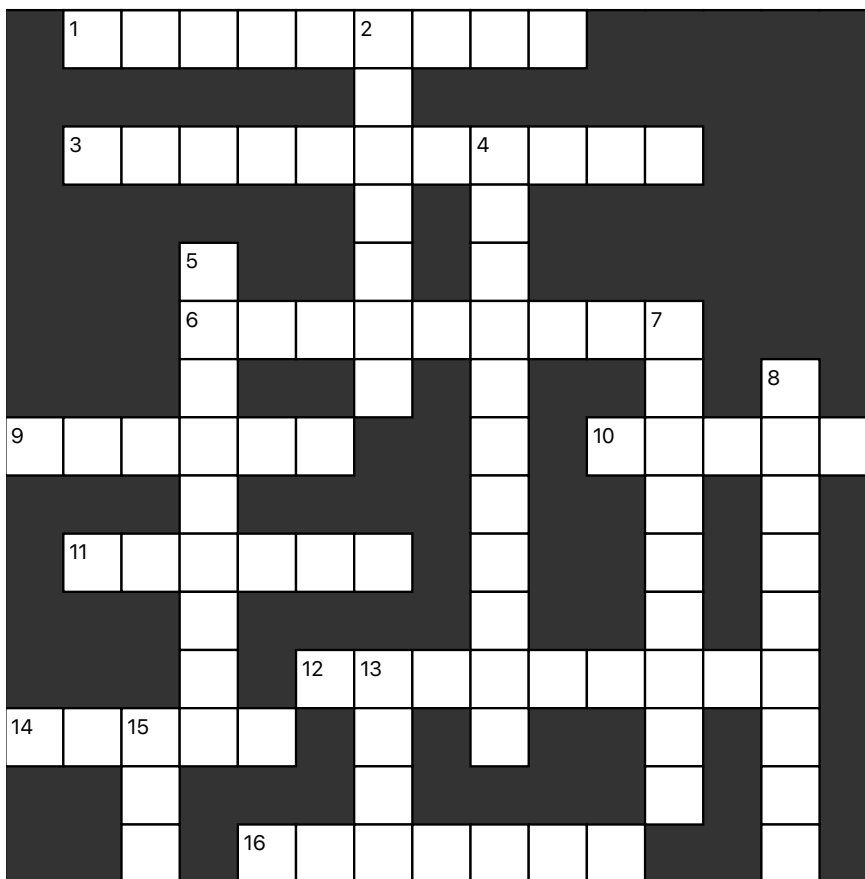
The Roundhouse at Steamtown

Test your knowledge of the Big Boy steam locomotive and its America 250 cross-country tour with the

Big Boy Crossword Puzzle

Across

1. Decoration on the front of Big Boy 4014 that was periodically changed during its America 250 tour
3. City where all the Big Boys were built
6. Big Boy's engineer on its America 250 tour
9. Only documented accident involving a Big Boy occurred in 1953 when the engine jumped a _____
10. Number of axles on Big Boy's tender
11. Big Boy 4014's first stop in New York State
12. Name on passenger coach at the end of Big Boy's America 250 touring train
14. Big Boy under heavy load could originally travel only 30 miles before having to stop for _____
16. Restored Big Boy 4014's home state



Down

2. Instead of coal, what does restored Big Boy 4014 burn?
4. Iconic viaduct in Pennsylvania where Big Boy stopped for photos
5. Style of Big Boy's tender
7. Location where Big Boy was serviced at the midpoint of its America 250 tour
8. Iconic location in New York State where Big Boy stopped on a bridge for photos
13. Manufacturer of Big Boy
15. Number of extra water tenders used by Big Boy 4014 on its America 250 tour



Update on the former Westdale R.W.&O. Railroad Depot

based in part on an article in the Half-Shire
Historical Society Newsletter, Vol. LII No.1

In late 2022, OVRRA officers met with Shawn Doyle, president of the Half-Shire Historical Society which is based in Richland, NY. At that time Doyle informed us that the Half-Shires were in the process of acquiring the former Westdale R.W.&O. Railroad depot from the Peterson family. In 1964, Edward Peterson had purchased the depot with the idea of turning it into a camp and moved it from Westdale to a property he owned near Selkirk Point. The Petersons subsequently abandoned their idea of making the depot over into a camp in favor of using a different structure. The depot sat unused but well preserved for several decades. In 2021, the Half-Shires began negotiations with the Peterson family to acquire the depot. Now, after five years of work resolving title issues, the way

is now clear to finalize the transfer of the property to the Half-Shires who wish to move the building to their campus in Richland, place it on a new foundation and make it the “centerpiece” of their campus. President Doyle expressed his interest in obtaining OVRRA’s assistance in the development of appropriate displays of the local history of railroading within the restored building.

The Half-Shire Historical Society has set up a special investment fund to receive donations to help cover the expense of moving the building to their campus along with the construction of the new foundation and utility hookups. After not hearing anything about it for several years, those of us in OVRRA had feared the project had stalled, but are now pleased to see it is moving forward. For more information (and photos) of the depot building, please see page 2 of the January 2023 issue of *The Crossbuck* (Vol.1, #1) ■