



# The Crossbuck

THE OSWEGO VALLEY RAILROAD ASSOCIATION  
Newsletter, January 2026, Volume 4, #1, Kent Dristle editor  
PO. Box 205, New Haven, New York 13121-0205

## OVRRA at the Great NYS Model Train Fair 2025

As was true in 2024, OVRRA exhibited at the Great NYS Model Train Fair but on a limited basis compared with years past. We only brought one layout module with us, and of course, that was the one that featured the Onondaga Lake Parkway Bridge truck accident scene. Even though it was the fifth year we displayed it, surprisingly enough, there were still some folks that had not seen our rendition of the truck that wouldn't fit under the bridge. Even though, our display was static (no running trains), we still received many compliments on it. It certainly did help us with our raffle ticket sales. Our reasons for only bringing this one module: Our own show in Volney was scheduled for the very next weekend and our aging (yes, that's sometimes hard to admit) members did not want to have to take down and set up the layout two weeks in a row on that tight schedule.

A little more than two weeks after the close of this year's State Fair show, we got word from the organizers that next year's show (2026) would NOT be held on the first weekend in November as had been the tradition but was being moved to the second weekend. That has caused OVRRA officers to scramble a bit because the second weekend in November has always been the weekend for *our* Holiday Express show. **Consequently, we have rescheduled the 2026 edition of our Holiday Express show in Volney for the first weekend in November.** In effect, we've just swapped weekends with the State Fair show. Let's hope this doesn't throw too many people off.■

Find us on the web at [OVRRA.org](http://OVRRA.org)

## OVRRA holds its Holiday Express Train Show at the Volney Firehouse

On November 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, OVRRA held its 43<sup>rd</sup> annual edition of the Holiday Express Train show, as it recent years at the Volney Firehouse. Attendance was down a bit from our Spring show but even so, we netted a profit of \$1907.54. We sold 67 tables worth of space for vendors to display their wares and we had one additional exhibitor. A reporter from the Oswego Palladium Times stopped by our layout and we were able to get some very good exposure in the local press as a result. Folks who frequented the Grange where we have a layout set up had already seen at least half of our HO layout, but even so, they were surprised and in some cases even amazed at the size and scale of the show. It's not just that nearly all of our vendors keep coming back year to year, we also have quite a few folks in the general public that are repeat customers. It's gratifying to know that we must be doing something right. Shawn had his camera train in operation on our layout, which was a big hit with the kids, as well as his animated carnival display, and the popularity of the Parkway Bridge module has not waned, even after half a decade of display at our shows. Between the various vendors and other exhibitors, we have a nice variety of equipment in different train scales to see and purchase.

[continued on next page]



Figure 1: Shawn's maintenance vehicles

Total revenue from this year's Holiday Express show was \$3636.00; total show expenses amounted to \$1728.46 for a net profit of \$1907.54. Attendance for the show amounted to 287 adults, 46 kids, and 42 free for a total of 375. This was 56 less people than attended our spring show, but then, we traditionally have higher attendance in the spring so this was not unexpected. Combined raffle proceeds for the quilt and the wall hanging (from both the State Fair and Volney shows) amounted to \$152. Outright donations to our club for the State Fair and Volney shows combined was \$31.■



## Our Year in Review

2025 was a banner year for OVRRA. Here's a list of our accomplishments:

- We hosted two very successful train shows at the Volney Fire House with a combined profit of \$4630.
- We are moved into our new home, the Mt. Pleasant Grange building. We have finished most of the renovations. The building has heating, cooling, adequate parking, bathroom facilities, and an access ramp which we built. We have a 10 year agreement with the Grange that allows us to use the upper floor for our train club activities including a functional HO scale layout.
- We assisted the Grange in getting their signature fund-raising event, the monthly waffle breakfast up and running again. We are able to showcase our operating layout to patrons of the waffle breakfasts.
- We've acquired several new club members.
- We've reduced clutter, (an ongoing project) and streamlined our operations, especially the set up and take down of the layout.
- In honor of the Grange's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we built an HO scale diorama of the Grange building and it's immediate neighborhood, which was well received.

We have some exiting new ideas in mind for 2026. Stay tuned.■

## Christmas in Mexico, 2025

For the Christmas in Mexico celebration, our layout was set up, as usual in the basement of the Washington Hall in the room otherwise used by the Mexico town court. Although we don't have actual attendance figures (admission was free) we estimate that about 50 people came through on Saturday, December 6, with the greatest numbers arriving in the late morning hours. As compared with our other trains shows, people tend to stay longer and ask more questions, which we are more than happy to answer for them. They are curious about how long it takes to set up and take down, where are club facilities are located, how we went about constructing the various scenes on the layout, and where and how we obtained the equipment. Some share with us their own experiences with model trains and even ask for advice on occasion. And they show their appreciation by being generous with their donations. We picked up \$80 worth of those donations this year at Christmas in Mexico, which is 2 ½ times as much as we received from this year's State Fair and Volney shows combined.



We had originally planned to run our trains on Sunday as well into the early afternoon, but the snowy weather convinced us to pack up early. The weather was definitely a challenge for us this year. On our set up day, which was Friday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, we experienced some of the coldest temperatures in recent memory, and then the snow curtailed much of our efforts on Sunday. Nevertheless, we had a very good time sharing our enthusiasm for model trains with the general public. Ask and club member and they will tell you that one of the happiest aspects of it is to watch the reactions of the young children as they follow the trains around the layout.■

## Update on Waffle Breakfasts

The last waffle breakfast of the 2025 season was held at the Mt. Pleasant Grange on Saturday, November 15, 2025, exactly one week after our Holiday Express train show in Volney. The theme was sausage and gravy, but there were other menu items like eggs, coffee, orange juice, syrup, and the like available. Just as in past months, OVRRA members assisted with the waffle breakfast in various ways including busing tables, working in the kitchen, and collecting money at the door. Upstairs, we wanted to have some trains running, but unlike earlier months, we did not have the complete HO scale layout set up. There simply was not enough time to do so after the recent Volney train show, and we'd have to take it all down and pack it up again very shortly for the Christmas in Mexico show in early December. Our solution was to set up two smaller layouts. One was the Christmas Winter scene layout originally constructed by the late Bill Nicholas, now restored for current use.



Kent found an old AHM model of the 4-4-0 steamer "The Genoa" which he modernized with a Kadee coupler and lubed up to get it running well. It was the motive power behind Kent's passenger train of shorty cars featuring Oskar and Piker. Kent's wife Colleen contributed a white fleece covering for the top and a couple of plastic crystalline lighted Christmas trees to add to the snowscaped interior. The other small layout was Secil Brown's O scale Lionel table top pike. This one also required a bit of TLC to get it up and running well, the biggest improvement being the addition of an American Flyer transformer.

Waffle breakfasts will resume in May of 2026. Again, OVRRA plans on assisting the Grange in their money making efforts because if our host, the Grange does well, we will continue to have a home and likewise do well.■

## Repairs and Updates to the HO Scale Layout

Our HO scale club layout continues to get a lot of good usage, not only at the train shows but in the Grange building as well. As would be expected, parts do wear out or get damaged from time to time. Recently we identified an issue with the outside mainline near the crossover on the "waterfront corner" module. There was a section of track between the crossover turnout and the turnout leading into the blue yard on the "wye on corner" module that lost power. The culprit turned out to be a broken spring in the crossover turnout. The function of that spring is to snap the point rails of the turnout tightly against the stock rails, but with the spring broken the point rails were floating freely and breaking electrical contact with the stock rails. We had two options: one was to replace the turnout and second was to install a ground throw to the turnout's throw bar. We choose the second option, that one requiring less work and expense. The repair was accomplished quickly and easily while the Christmas in Mexico show was in progress.

Another issue we had identified earlier was that trains lost power when coming into the passenger station from the inside mainline on the "station left" module. The use of a continuity test meter revealed the culprit to be a broken electrical connection between the closure rail and the point rail on one of the turnouts. In this case, there was no other option but to replace the turnout. Fortunately, we had one of the right kind and size on hand in the parts cabinet at the Grange. At a later date, we'll re-ballast the track and dull down the shiny ties to make the new turnout blend in better with the existing trackwork.

Another annoying problem that is finally getting some attention is that many of the module legs were too large to fit in the leg sockets on the undersides of the modules. So far we've re-cut 27 of the legs on the table saw to reduce their diameters down to a more reasonable size. The resized legs have been repainted to make them easily recognizable. The next time we set up for a train show, the process should go much faster now that we won't have to keep trying one leg after another until we find one that fits in the leg sockets.

We are always open to suggestions as to how to make our club operations run more smoothly. As it turns out, some tasks can be done more easily by one person in their home workshop (such as resizing the legs). For others, we periodically schedule "work sessions" at the Grange and appreciate volunteers who would like to lend a helping hand. Thanks to all who have helped out in keeping the trains running. After all, this is supposed to be fun, and it usually is thanks to everyone's continued effort and cooperation.■

## Construction Standards for 2' x 4' modules and for corner modules for OVRRA HO scale layouts.

The following standards for track placement shall hold for those places near the edges of modules where mainline tracks are joined by connector tracks to adjoining modules:

1. The outside mainline track shall be centered 4 inches from the outside edge of the facia.
2. The inside mainline track shall be centered 6 inches from the outside edge of the facia.
3. Both mainline tracks and any parallel sidings shall end 4 1/2" from the end of the module, unless track curvature and/or scenery requires smaller connectors.
4. Connector tracks shall be 9" in length unless track curvature and/or scenery requires smaller connectors. Curved connector tracks should be avoided unless absolutely required to accommodate special scenery or structures, or to avoid having curves with excessively small radii of curvature.
5. The minimum size of framing lumber for modules shall be 1"x4" lumber. At least two stiffener pieces of lumber of minimum size 1" x 3" shall be spaced as evenly as possible inside of the basic frame.

The following wiring standards shall apply to all modules:

1. The color code for wiring to mainline tracks is as follows:
  2. Outside rail of outside mainline track—white
  3. Inside rail of outside mainline track—brown
  4. Outside rail of inside mainline track—yellow
  5. Inside rail of inside mainline track—green
6. Connections of mainline track wiring to adjoining modules shall be made with Powerpole connectors using the color code above. All other track wiring connections (sidings etc.) shall also be made with Powerpole connectors using different colors so as not to be confused with the mainline track wiring connectors.
7. Electrical bus lines serving the mainline tracks shall consist of 12 gauge wire.
8. Track leads shall be made from no smaller than 20 gauge wire and shall be soldered securely to the rails. There shall be at least one track lead for each rail of each mainline track per module.
9. All wiring should be securely attached to the underside of the module and protected in a way

so as to avoid having the wiring snagged and broken during transport.

The following standards shall apply to corner modules or any other modules with long sections of curved track.

1. The footprint of the corner module should be 4' square with one or more corners clipped at the 2' mark.
2. For the mainline tracks, the largest radius of curvature practical shall be used. For the outside main, this is usually about 36"-37" and for the inside main 33"-34". Mainline tracks shall end 4 1/2" from the end of the module to accommodate connector tracks. There shall be at least 1" of straight, uncurved track at the end of the fixed track where the connector track would fasten on.
3. The standard 2" on-center track separation between outside and inside mainline tracks shall be increased to 3" or more at the apex of the curve so that long passenger cars may pass each other without sideswiping.

### Miscellaneous standards

1. Code 100 track shall be used on all modules. This is to accommodate club members who wish to run older rolling stock with large wheel flanges.
2. Mainline tracks shall be installed on cork roadbed of  $\frac{3}{32}$ " thickness.
3. Legs for modules are  $1\frac{3}{8}$ " square and of length  $36\frac{7}{16}$ " not including the leveling bolt on the bottom end. The Lauan plywood top is  $\frac{3}{16}$ " thick. If you wish to use a plywood top or cork roadbed of different thickness, then you must adjust the leg length to compensate.
4. The facia on all modules shall be painted black. The undersides of modules shall be painted white and all other surfaces of all modules that do not have scenery applied to them shall be painted white or black.
5. The name of each module shall be written clearly on the module's facia or end. If the builder retains ownership of the module, that builder will be responsible for transport and storage of that module. If the module becomes the property of the club, then it's position in the storage cart (when assigned) shall be clearly indicated both on the facia of the module and on the storage cart.

These standards were approved by the Layout Planning Committee at its meeting on October 26, 2025, and were officially adopted by the general membership on December 27, 2025. ■

## Creating an Inventory of your Model Railroad Collection

By Tina Rogers



*Figure 2: O Gauge display collection at the National Toy Train Museum, Strasburg, PA*

There are many reasons why you would want to create an inventory of your model railroad collection, you might just want to know what you have, you might be thinking of selling some of it, you might want to insure it. There are many more ideas than that. [Editor's note: And it can help take some of the burden off from your surviving next-of-kin.] This will help you get started.

Before you can inventory it is best to organize. Putting similar items together will make things easier. Create a space for the process. Plan to succeed, there will be interruptions so plan for them in your process. If you have more than one scale (HO, O, N, etc) decide if you will inventory each separately or together.

Set up a spreadsheet, either in a notebook or on a computer. Use these categories: Scale (HO, O, N, etc), Manufacturer (Walthers, Model Power, etc.), Item Description, Item or Catalog #, List Price, Notes. You may have additional categories you might want a column for such as purchase price (if you have it), Person (if you want it to go to a particular family member, or who bought it for you), etc. On the computer you can always add columns, or sort things differently.

Prepare to inventory: If you have a box for an item, put the item in the box. Similar items together,

buildings with buildings, engines with engines, unless they were purchased as part of a set. Prepare space so that you can move items from one area to another, such as from one side of the room to another.

Begin with one group of items such as buildings: pick up one item, record all information that you have, in the notes include if it has been used, is decorated, is broken, is unassembled, any other details that may be helpful. After everything is recorded, move the item to the other side of the room. Pick up the next item and repeat the process. Don't get slowed down, if an item doesn't have much information, set it aside so that you can research it later.

When the collection has all been recorded, research prices for items using websites such as Walthers, Train World, [Trains.com](http://Trains.com), or any other hobby retailer. Further information that needs to be researched is dependent on how you want to use your inventory.

[Editor's note: You may have items that are no longer in production but are still highly desirable. A good place to check to see what they are currently going for would be an auction site like [ebay](http://ebay).]■

## Membership Dues for 2026

|                   |           |
|-------------------|-----------|
| Regular members   | \$24/year |
| Family membership | \$48/year |
| Junior member     | \$12/year |
| Youth member      | \$12/year |
| Associate member  | \$12/year |

If made in a single payment before the March 2026 meeting, you are eligible for a 30% discount.

## Donate to OVRRA

**There are 2 ways:**

**Go to [OVRRA.org](http://OVRRA.org) and click the "Donate" button**

**Or Scan the QR code to the right**



## Central New York Railroad History: "The Runaway Train"



Figure 3: Broadway Limited model of a New York Central GP-20.

This is the true story of the runaway train out of the DeWitt rail yards of the New York Central. The events described here happened on October 26, 1962 and have been compiled from a variety of sources. Perhaps the most notable character in this tale is a young rail yard machinist by the name of Jim Gerace, who by circumstance, became an unwilling passenger on that runaway train. He is credited with finding a way to stop the runaway, even though he had no training in the operation of the locomotives involved. For the kind of work he was assigned, he didn't need that kind of knowledge for his duties centered around the preparation of the locomotives for their runs while still in the yard.

On this particular day, Gerace was on board the second of four GP-20 units where he had been checking the piping which funneled sand to the rails whenever extra traction was needed. Yard hostler Bob Cox was at the controls in the first unit. All four engines had already been fueled for the upcoming run. Cox had been backing the engines up in order to navigate one of the many yard switches before moving forward again and parking the engines to await the arrival of the road crew who would couple them on to the waiting freight cars and take the assembled train out onto the mainline. Cox was making a brake test when something went wrong. It is not known if Cox fell or jumped from the lead engine, but he was found later on the ground, semi-conscious by fireman David Fleming. As the four engines gathered speed, it was clear to those in the yard that no one was at the controls. Road foreman Peter Walters saw sparks flying from the wheels as the engines moved on by, which told

him that the brakes were set, but were obviously not holding the engines back. As it turned out, the speed lever was set to notch 8-full throttle.

By this time Gerace, who was still inside engine #2, realized that something was very wrong and he suspected that engineer Cox had either become incapacitated or had left the train. Gerace thought about jumping off, but didn't muster the courage to do it, probably because the engines were already traveling at 35 miles per hour by the time they left the yard. Tower operator Stanley Davis called Rochester, which was 85 miles to the west, notifying them that a runaway had just left the DeWitt yard on track 1. Rochester's train dispatcher Sam Giglia began clearing the mainline between Syracuse and Rochester as quickly as he could. Giglia had hoped that when the engines first ran through a red signal, the automatic train control would stop them. That turned out to be a vain hope because the brakes were already set but unable to overcome the brute power of the locomotives operating at full throttle.

Meanwhile for Gerace, the enormity of his plight was hitting home. Probably, he thought, no one realized that he was still on the train. Worse yet, when the crash finally came, he would most likely be killed. To his horror, the interior of the train seemed to consist of nothing but hard bulkhead surfaces with protruding knobs and handles that would surely impale him in a violent collision. Gerace had no watch with him, it was dark, and he had no idea where he was. All he did know was that he was traveling incredibly fast.

Back in Rochester a number of plans were being considered. One was to switch the runaways on to a spur near Jordan. Of course they would crash into a ditch at the end but at least no other harm would be done. But then they realized that no one could predict where the engines would actually come to rest after they left the tracks. They could even end up tearing up many yards of the mainline. Meanwhile in Syracuse, a head count revealed that Gerace was missing and was most likely still on the runaway train. They quickly got word to Giglia in Rochester that there was most certainly a live human being on that train. Now, crashing the locomotives was out of the question. As Giglia watched, his control panel, indicator lights told him where the runaway was located. To his amazement, it flew across the Seneca River bridge just west of Port Byron at 85 mph, which was 25 mph over the

bridge's speed limit. As the train roared through Savanah, Clyde, and Lyons, Giglia diverted other trains or parked them on sidings to keep track 1 clear. There was one, a heavy freight, also traveling west out ahead of the runaway, but it too need to take a siding lest the runaway overtake it and crash into its rear. So Giglia got the freight out of the way on a siding near Newark with only a few minutes to spar. Then, Giglia sent the following orders to that freight: Uncouple your engines from your freight, get back out on the main, catch the runaway and drag it down to a stop. Well, they tried but never could catch up to it. Little wonder. According to accounts, the runaway was now traveling at close to 90 mph!

Time was running out. The New York Central main through Rochester was elevated and there was a particularly sharp curve with a limit of 45 mph near a soap and chemical factory along with several private homes. A solution had to be found and quickly. Meanwhile Jim Gerace realized that given he was probably going to die anyway, he needed to do something, try anything to stop the engines. He began by pulling levers and switches in the cab of the engine he was in, which was number 2. Nothing seemed to have any effect until he found a switch on the back wall labeled "engine run" which killed the motors to the number 2 engine. Regrettably, the runaway only slowed a little bit. Next he opened the cab door and climbed out on the running board, making his way toward the other engines. At the end of engine 2, he found a cable that ran across the gap toward number 3, which he yanked loose. The train slowed a bit more, but not even close to enough to matter. After jumping the gaps to engines 3 and 4 and throwing their kill switches just like he had already done in number 2, he was confounded to discover that this action had no effect. Of course, what he didn't realize was that he had already stopped the motors to 3 and 4 when he yanked the connecting cable from engine 2. All that was left now was engine 1. Leaping the gaps between the lurching engines had been a risky move, but Gerace knew he had to do it again to get all the way back to the lead engine. Upon arriving there, he threw the levers and finally heard the last of the motors die. Gradually the runaway came to a stop.

Gerace stepped off the engine on to solid ground. It was just after midnight when Gerace had finally brought his ordeal to an end. When finally

stopped, the four engines were only three and a half miles from that sharp curve in the city of Rochester. Back at his console, Giglia could see that the runaway had stopped moving. He instructed Leland Uffendill, who was at the controls of a yard engine to meet the runaway engines and bring them into the yard at Rochester. As it turned out, the brake shoes of the runaway engines had been completely worn down but the engines were otherwise serviceable. For his part in saving the day, Gerace received a commendation by the New York Central Railroad and was cleared of any wrong doing. Gerace went on live a long and fulfilling life getting married and having several children and grandchildren. He passed away on July 19, 2015 at age 78.

The story of the runaway train was first published in *Life* magazine in 1963. It is said that it became the inspiration for the 1985 theatrical movie "Runaway Train" which starred Jon Voight, Eric Roberts, and Rebecca DeMornay. The movie went on to win three Oscars. The action in the movie was set in Alaska rather than Central New York. The movie's plot featured two escaped convicts aboard the train which was being chased by a prison warden in a helicopter. The engineer suffered a heart attack, which precipitated the crisis. Apparently, the script writers thought they needed all this extra drama in the theatrical version, but for those involved in the actual events that occurred in Central New York, there was certainly plenty enough drama already there.■

#### Sources:

*Life*, March 29, 1963, pp. 79-84 and

April 19, 1963. p. 29

Website: <https://www.deviantart.com/thewinecat94/art/The-1962-New-York-Central-Runaway-935964354>

YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99Ro-tScy9o&t=19s>

**OVRRA also has a facebook page**

**[www.facebook.com/OVRRAinc](https://www.facebook.com/OVRRAinc)**

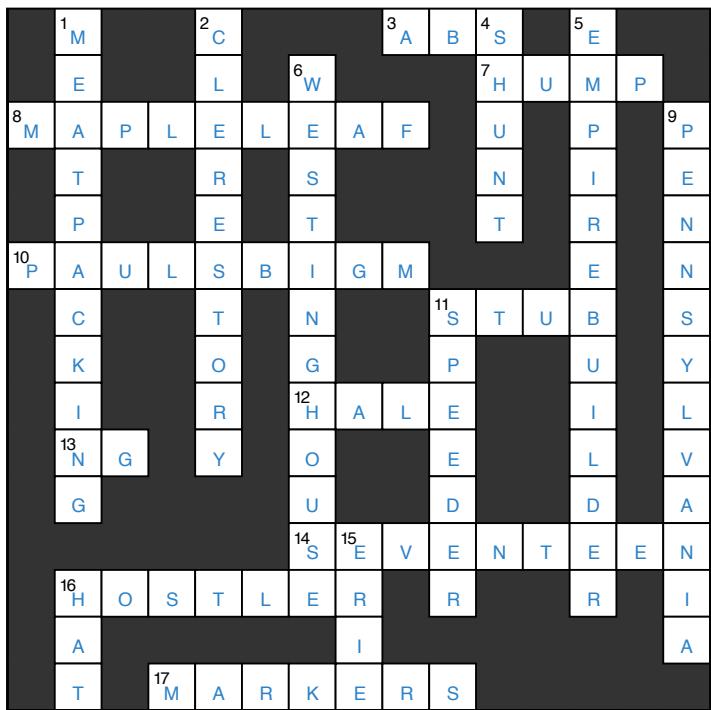
#### Contributors to this issue:

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## Solution to Crossword Puzzle 2

Crossword Puzzle 2 appeared in the October 2025 issue of *The Crossbuck*.



If you like this newsletter, let us know. If you would like to contribute to the newsletter (photos, articles, notices) please contact the editor, Kent Dristle at [president@ovrra.org](mailto:president@ovrra.org)

Thank you.

**Election of OVRRA officers** for calendar year 2026 will be held at the January 31st business meeting.

If you would like to run for an office, please contact president Kent Dristle at [president@ovrra.org](mailto:president@ovrra.org) or secretary Charlie Hewlett at [secretary@ovrra.org](mailto:secretary@ovrra.org).