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A brief history of the Miniature Train Company



In 1928 Paul Allen Sturtevant (known to his friends as P.A.) started his own tool making machine shop in Glen Ellyn, IL. His business soon became quite successful, and he had the financial ability to take on several non-revenue pet projects. One such project was building a 7.24" gauge scale model of a Chicago and

Northwestern steam locomotive (known as the "1928" engine). While technically a steam engine, it used an electric prime mover. P.A. indicated that this model train was not his, but rather it was for his then 3 year old son, Lee. Track was installed around P.A.'s home and it was quickly the hit of the neighborhood.

One of P.A.'s Glen Ellyn neighbors was a Sears executive, who asked if P.A. could run the scale model locomotive at one of his stores at Christmas time. In 1932, P.A. leased the "1928" train set to Sears, and it quickly proved to be a huge attraction. Parents could complete their Christmas shopping while the kids waited in line to ride the train. The Miniature Train and Railway Company (MT & RC) was formed the same year.

This immediately brought requests from other store managers asking for similar or larger trains. Adding to this, the 1934 World's Fair brought the introduction of the diesel powered stream lined Burlington Zephyr. P.A. was fascinated with the

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Diesel locomotives, and thus determined that his new trains needed to be modeled after the Zephyr. P.A. also had a number of contacts at the Electro Motive Corporation (EMC), and knew they were about to introduce the “E1”. Thus his team worked on a model of a Rock Island E1, in addition to the Zephyr. In order to increase the number of passengers a train could handle, a 12” gauge was selected. Furthermore, he planned on introducing trains with an optional internal combustion engine.

During the Christmas season of 1936, the Zephyr ran at Sears’ Fenway store in Boston, and the Rock Island E1 ran at Sears’ State Street store in Chicago. By 1940, 13 stores were leasing trains. As orders came in, the EMC model soon became the most popular. Each train set was a custom order; the purchaser selected the number of locomotives, passenger cars and selected the paint scheme.



P. A. Sturtevant’s other business endeavors continued to grow along with the Miniature Train business. His machine shop business had grown such

that multiple buildings were needed. One such new building was in Addison, IL, and it became the assembly factory for the miniature train business. Train sets built in Addison, became known as the “Addison Trains”. By the time World War II brought a halt to production of the “Addison” trains, the MT & RC was leasing 36 electric department store train sets, and had sold over 50 gasoline powered train sets for use in carnivals and fairs.

Following the war, production of the “Addison” train sets continued, however carnival operators wanted trains that could carry more passengers. The MT & RC introduced the G-16 train set in 1946. The “G” indicating that it was modeled

after a GM locomotive and the 16 indicated a track gauge (16 inches). The 12" "Addison" train sets were renamed the G-12s. On April 4th, 1947, the first G-16 locomotive (#501) began a 30 year run at Griffith Park in Los Angeles. Several G-16s have undergone extensive restoration and are still operating at their original locations such as those at Balboa Park (San Diego, CA).

With significant new orders coming in, P.A. realized that MT & RC had out grown their present manufacturing plant. The company bought property and constructed a plant in Rensselaer, IN. Manufacturing moved from Addison to Rensselaer in April of 1948. Once production started in Rensselaer, the serial numbers for the G-12 s started at 100, and used odd numbers. The G-16s built in Rensselaer started with serial number 508 and used odd numbers. While manufacturing moved to Rensselaer, MT & RC engineering offices remained in Elmhurst, IL. During this period the company was renamed the Miniature Train Company (MTC).

The G-16s much more closely resembled the full size trains they were modeled after. They were designed with vacuum

operated controls and brakes. Thus multiple locomotives could be coupled together, yet a single



engineer could operate the train.

On November 16th, 1956 the Rensselaer plant manager informed the employees not to come in the next day, as MTC had been sold. The buyer was none other than the Allan Herschell Company, the world's largest maker of amusement park rides. The Herschell company made over 20 different rides, but a train was not one of them. All equipment and inventory was immediately moved to New York.

The sale of MTC to Herschell was apparently not due to problems with MTC, but rather to an extremely attractive offer made by Allan Herschell. It is not known how many MTC employees went to work with Herschell (if any). Herschell continued to manufacture G-16s under the MTC name until 1963. Chance Rides purchased the Allan Herschell Company in the early 1970s.

Over 240 G-16 train sets were produced by the MTC. Approximately 70 locomotives remain in existence with only 50 currently in operation. They are widely remembered as the little train that generations of Americans grew up riding at their local park or zoo.

*** Much of the information in this article was obtained from internet research and from a four part article written by Andrew Jugle (*Grand Scales Quarterly*).**

This page last updated on Sunday March 29 2009

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