

CHOOCHVILLE

1988

A

PRESENTATION

WITHOUT ANY OTHER DECORATION

Dedicated to

Laura et al.

It looks like this is going to be done an hour at a time or so because that is about how much time I have to work on it tonight. But then I have three more nights in this so we will see how it goes.

Then it will be the weekend and I am either going to go to Epcot or the Grant Seafood Festival, or both to celebrate my promotion. More than likely good sense will prevail and I'll stay home, attend a pizza buffet, buys some parts for the car and breathe a sigh of relief that a lot of the pressure is off and I can contemplate seeing you in the fall, well relaxed, well appointed, and fairly well fixed

But until then – and without further ado

WELCOME

TO

CHOOCHVILLE

1988



In here is the appropriate music when you are watching it. This year, it started off with Willie Nelson singing "Jingle Bells" and followed by Burl Ives singing, "White Christmas". I had multiple light switches this year so after the "Welcome to Choochville 1988" on the tape, the village lights and the lights on Xmas choir came on.

This is the original train station. That, the town hall and the church were the first things built. You can see the town hall in the right background. Next to it moving left are the synagogue – lit up, the inn and the general store – also lit.

The building in the right foreground is Tazzaro's Pizza named for the Guinea who named Choochville. It really looks like there is snow on the roof. An old friend from the program [AA], Jack K. took these pictures. His recovery has brought him release from

jail on a murder rap, a full set of 35mm gear and the ability to use it. He did a beautiful job.

To get some idea of the scale – the small 24k gold roadster parked to the left of the railroad station is a charm from Doris' bracelet. You can just see behind it the figure of a woman approaching. She is carrying a valise and has a coat over her arm. We are talking small detail here. Note also the man waiting for the train on the platform and if you look between the pine trees in front of the town hall, the red smear is another figure. A woman in a red pantsuit carrying a briefcase.



This is overall, looking from the control board. This year it was a single sheet of 4x8 plywood raised 20 inches above the floor on a table I made especially for it. It was somewhat crowded but not too bad. It came out o.k. I started assembly the day after Thanksgiving and finished the noon of my birthday party December 17th.

It took me three days alone to wire the underneath and control board this year. There are now four sidings with individual power control, each with its own shunting remote switch to sideline the trains as needed. There are five trains.

At this point the tape would be saying – voice over music –

“Choochville wishes you and yours a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year!”

Then the tree lights, the tables side lights and the overhead lights come on.

Unfortunately there is no picture of the overhead. It is a 24 light outdoor string with selected Christmas cards from the past hung alternating with the lights.

The naked angel, the star of Bethlehem and various and sundry baubles are also up there. Including a couple of Bullseye's toys [his kitty]. I think you sent one of the yarn ones. There is a piece of mistletoe over the control chair.

In the upper right just below the hanging red ribbon is his old stupid looking catnip bird flying over Choochville and just to the left of the top of the Xmas tree you can see the flying locomotive with the elf engineer that I got from Hershey's.

You can also see the lights – some of them trimming the edge of the tree. The skirt of the table was old white bedspreads again hung with selected old Xmas cards – some from you - “Up Dasher Up Dancer” – that damn reindeer still looks like Foggy [his dog] looking disgusted.

As I said, the 4x8 sheet was a little crowded but I solved that by going up in the air and 3-dimensional this year but more about that later. Now for detail.



This is the Christmas Choir. It starts with the conductor at his podium down in front and runs up into the tree with angels playing various instruments. All the figures and singers and instrument players are arranged by appropriate string, percussion, wind, soprano, bass, etc, groupings. The solo angel is alone in front of the conductor and beneath his podium are small pieces of cut mirror reflecting the spots of light where I want them. You can see the trains to the left of the tree and the switching engine coming out of the building to the right of the tree. That's the only picture of that one.

Three of the trains hide under Santa's mountain, obscured by the tree, one under the Jolly Little Olde Elves Mountain, also obscured by the tree and the switch engine for the Jolly Little Olde Elves Toy Factory, Warehouse, and Freight Yard – also pretty obscure here – hides in the warehouse. But all are less obscure later as we on to more detail.

The soprano section is to the right of the tree – being the goose – which is fairly clear – and the turtle – which isn't.

To the left of the tree is the....



... Bass Section. The owl, the dinosaur and the beats-the-hell-out-of-me-but-I-love-him. I think he may be my favorite figure – at least he's tied with the frog which you will see later. Note the music stand. They all have their own music stands – I get carried away sometimes.

To the left is the best shot of the aviary in the bayou - there birds in it that Peggy made from the feathers of her parakeets. You can see the seed box in the bottom and it has seed glued in it. There are other shots of it but you can't get an idea of the birds from there.

NOW

YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE

We have the music, the lights and the trains have come out one at a time according to their music cues and the timer on the control board, and we are ready for you to participate.

NEXT A PROJECT OF YOUR VERY

➔ OWN ➔



[Here Dad had 5 photos for us to assemble to get the layout above. He included a drawing of how to overlap them.]

Any dimwit with a PhD in mathematics or computer science should be able – with a week's isolation and help from another party – overlap these pictures which are numbered on the back 1 thru 5, left to right to form a panorama of Choochville.

I will wait while you do this.

Note the directions on the back. It gets a little confusing over there on the right but if you lay them something like this... [his drawing of how to arrange them was here]

Play with it.

If you get frustrated play with something else and try again later.

If you are still frustrated either see a therapist or write for directions depending on what you are frustrated about.

IF you have succeeded you now have the whole gazoo. The original Choochville is on the left.

(Interruption here - I'm frustrated and out of time – will continue tomorrow night – alternate play time)

[A man with a computer science degree scanned the five photos and overlapped and rotated them until he got the panorama above. Dad's prophetic sense was true!]

I assume at this point that we have both played ourselves out and are ready to continue.

So, we have a panorama of Choochville. On the left is the original village. The original buildings of church, train station and town hall have now expanded. You can pick out the train station and pizza parlor. Just above the train station, the dark block is the old English Tobacco Shop, an expensive little item that is part of a village you can buy. It was a gift from Doris [old girlfriend]. Moving downwards from the yellow and black engine in the upper left are the country radio station, the church and the general store which is lit up and was a gift from a local judge's wife who owns a Xmas shop.

Then there is the pine cone Xmas tree with the star on top in the village square with the Inn to the right and above. The round building is the synagogue also lit, with the town hall below that and to the left and the skating pond to the right with the water tower below that.

The white building to the lower left is a replica of the Welcome Home Club, the AA club I belong to. I am proud of that. It has the window air conditioners with the stairs below them, the palm tree with Xmas lights and even the benches, bulletin board and butt cans on the back porch.

You can see the Xmas choir pretty well with the bayou above it. If you look in the middle of the Xmas tree you will see the toy soldier you gave me. In the foreground below the tree are the Xmas logs you gave me on a pallet. That is where the Jolly Little Olde Elves Toy Factory, warehouse, and freight yard begins. Below the logs are a flat car with a load of brass bells and below that the two yard worker cars on a siding. They are replicas of an old Wild West passenger and passenger/mail combination cars.

To the right of that is the yard crane which I built. It has a seat, levers and pedals for the operator, diesel engine with compressor and extractor and a radiator with radiator cap. If you look close you can see the exhaust pipe in the roof. Just behind the load it is lifting, which is a shopping bag of toys which includes a toy engine, is the gold freight yard engine.

The gold freight yard engine is pulling a flat car with a wrapped gift on a pallet in and out of the warehouse.

To the right and above the two box cars going by is the low boy trailer with a big brass bell on it being pulled by the towmotor and to the right of that above the gondolas is the fork lift, all of which I built and added this year.

The brown building is the Jolly Little Olde Elves Toy Factory and warehouse with Santa's Heliport on top. Just to the right of that is the Jolly Little Olde Elves mountain.

The city is in the center and is a souvenir of my trip north with Karen [girlfriend]. Note the woodpecker on the back of the Empire State Building. That's because King Kong is better elsewhere. The harbor is at the top. The big lighthouse of course comes from you. [Old Spice after shave decorative bottle].

To the right of the Jolly Little Olde Elves mountain is the Jolly Little Olde Elves village at the base of Santa's mountain with Santa's Chalet at the top.

There are three tracks with three trains running at once – four if you count the shunt engine in the freight yard. I can switch trains from the outer to inner track and back. There is a siding in the harbor and one under Santa's mountain. In the foreground is the switch track from inner to outer track.

The track in the center is isolated and the important thing is that it goes up in the air on a trestle. That means I'm 3-dimensional and can do a lot more in the same space from now on.

Before I start the cycle, the middle train is under the Jolly Little Olde Elves mountain and the Xmas Streamliner, the streamline freight and Santa's train are all under Santa's mountain. They come out one at a time until all are running. It was really impressive this year when it all got going.

End of panorama.



This is a shot looking down the right hand side. I like it because the streamliner freight looks really real. I have two sets of these pictures and I just bought this set so I have another guarantee registry to send to Bachmann – the manufacturer – and I’m sending four of the shots along to show them how some of their product is being used and to express my appreciation to them for the great service they’ve given me over the years.



Further shot down the right side. The big thing here is King Kong and the Pink Panther. Pink Panther has been chasing King Kong around this set up for years. Pink Panther of course is from you Laura, and King Kong was given me the first year by a friend's daughter who was 11 years old when she was shot in the stomach by her brother who was playing with a .357. I treasure it. She just happened to have it in her pocketbook when she came to the party at which we named Choochville. The girl recovered from the wound but I wonder about mom. The cardinal on Pink Panther's head is new.



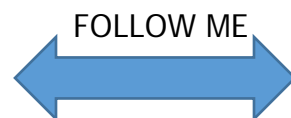
Good shot of the crane and the little towmotor and flatbed to the right.

Of course I haven't played this straight right from the beginning:

The town hall clock shows different times on the four faces.

The only 'C' on the crane that is oriented correctly is the one on the lower face of the lifting rig.

The towmotor has a Rolls Royce hood ornament and the sign on the back says



The fork lift has a gas pedal and clutch pedal but no brake pedal.



Further down the right side, the water tower and the switch tower at the entrance to the freight yard. The boat on the pallet was given to me by a woman in the AA program. At a meeting once I was saying, "Well I've been sober 5 years and I don't have a house, a Mercedes or a boat but I'm happy with what I have." At a meeting a week later, she reached in her purse and handed this to me saying "Well, here's your boat!"

The water tower was made by a client at work who couldn't sleep one night. I was working on something for Choochville and he started gluing coffee stirrers together. The Petticoat Junction towels and the octopus were later additions.

I usually buy something every year after the holidays when things go on sale at the hobby shop. The switch tower kit was one of those deals. It cost me a buck. The outhouse I got with it cost 50 cents.

Of course when I put them together I got carried away. The upper story of the switch tower has the console with the two switch lever. Downstairs is the operator cot, a braided rug on the floor, a desk with blotter and letter and a calendar on the wall. There is a tool box and oil tank outside. The outhouse has a toilet seat and a Sears Roebuck catalog hanging on the wall.



Santa's Mountain with Santa's Chalet, the North Pole and Doris's skiing turtle.

This showed up in the second year and is a major item since it hides three of the trains inside until the right time for them to come out.

It has so many layers of papier maché, plaster, polyester and paint now that it weighs about 10 lbs and is probably indestructible which is a good thing since I can pack all the rest of the setup in one box in between years but I've never been able to figure out what to do with this bugger.



Starting down the left hand side you can see all three trains, the Xmas streamliner, the streamline freight on the track next to it and in the middle the local freight; also some of the cards including your "To the top of the house – to the top of the wall...."

The country radio station and bayou are here on this corner.



Here's a shot of the country radio station. I built that in honor of the station that helped me record the music early the year you came down for Christmas.

They got a kick out of the long johns on the line.

I like the little lantern on the top of the antenna. I'm still looking for a horse for the hitch rack. Just missed a dragon and a unicorn this year. Something will show up.

The church on the right is one of the three original buildings.



Good shot of the Bayou. Rabbit from Peg. Peacock from Mary, canoe from Karen and alligator from you.

The shark in the swimming pool was one of the original tongue-in-cheek moves. The bayou came about because I was sick and tired of making all those snow scenes and I decided I needed a swimming pool and palm trees.

I added the grass hut and it seems to have taken on a mind of its own from there.

The astro-turf is from Karen. There are two small figures of women to the left of the diving board and I've been tempted to paint their clothes out for years.

My other choice of favorite figures is the frog on the lily pad on the left.

You can also see the pig in the pig pen behind the radio station on the right.



Okay, some technical data. The original train was a far west old time Jupiter line steam engine with a conical funnel.

Then I bought a Chessie System yellow and blue local diesel and a couple of cars.

One of my favorite engines has always been the old red and silver Santa Fe streamliner the "Silver Streak", that ran from Chicago to Los Angeles. So I got one and here it is. Took me two years to find it and I could only get it in a kit which is fortunate.

Each of the three engines costs along about \$30-\$50 – some go up to \$600. If you buy a Bachmann kit you get the engine, several cars and a transformer for \$35-\$60.

The Bachmann Santa Fe kit did not come with the streamliner cars but with freight cars. So I got a Penn Central passenger car which was the only kind they had at the store that year. When I got it home, it dawned on me that I had a red and silver engine with a green silver passenger car which was appropriate for the Xmas streamliner and that's it in the foreground.

I used the freight cars from that set for the streamliner freight which is in the background. The streamliner freight engine is my latest acquisition (as a kit \$29) and now I have all the Chessie System engines and Bachmann has only 2 sets I don't have. Regardless of my firm resolve to keep this shit in check, I'm sorely tempted by their 4-6-4 steam engine set. Oh well.

The way this works is that when the music reaches a certain point after the introduction, the Xmas streamliner appears. When it goes back through Santa's Mountain the streamline freight joins it, running alongside it on the inside track.

At a certain point, the 3rd train starts on the center track, comes out from under the Jolly Little Olde Elves mountain and all pass one another – 2 going one way and one the other - in front of the dock and city.

At a later time, the streamline freight backs onto a siding while the other two continue. Santa's Train (the original) comes out from its siding under Santa's Mountain and runs around the inside perimeter track delivering gifts to Choochville. The yard switch engine comes in and out of the warehouse. They both then go back into hiding.

The streamline freight comes off its siding and paces the Xmas streamline until it is time for another cycle. I wish I had a shot of Santa's train but that's the way it goes. You have one in your old set of pictures. You can also get some idea here of where the radio station and bayou fit in the whole installation.

This picture and the one before the previous one are two more that I am sending off to Bachmann. I really like this year. The cabooses are the only thing that give me any trouble at all. They are so light they tend to derail on sharp curves or unhook going over bumps. I fixed that by putting a length of solid lead solder in each to give enough weight and that problem went away.

Other car makers aren't as careful so often I have to jigger with the height of their couplers to make them fit and stay coupled – such as the oil tanker on the streamline freight in this shot. It is a blank car, bought separately, which I am going to paint and decorate next year. I had a hell of a time getting it to stay hooked up. Part of the frustration of working with little tiny stuff. I have quite a few bits now that I have bought separate so I can paint it myself, rolling stock for the trains, cars and trucks. The freight train is reaching a length now where I had to add a panel to Santa's Mountain tunnel to hide it all when I need it to stay hidden. Don't know what I'm going to do when I add even more stuff but you know me. I'll think of something.



Love this close up.

Please note the light colored object in the doorway of the grass hut. It is the foot of a bed.

The roof comes off the hut and people, starting with Doris, have been lifting it off for years to see what's in there. She kept saying, "I expected something X-rated in there knowing you." I ignored that for a while and then made a small bed to go in there. Then people lifted the roof and said "What, no people on the bed? Knowing you I would have thought..."

So I found a couple of figures this year in the right position. With a little painting out of clothing next year, some people are going to be in for a surprise.

Thanks Hon. That's a damn nice alligator.



The Harbor and siding. Not much to say because the next picture is more detailed. There is the van down by the shed roof that I have to decorate and I want to put in a marine railway so I can have a boat being hauled out of the water. It also needs some lights. You can see the billboard in the upper left. I made it from a care bear sticker from a friend and a little typed note that says, "Be a bear. Hug somebody."



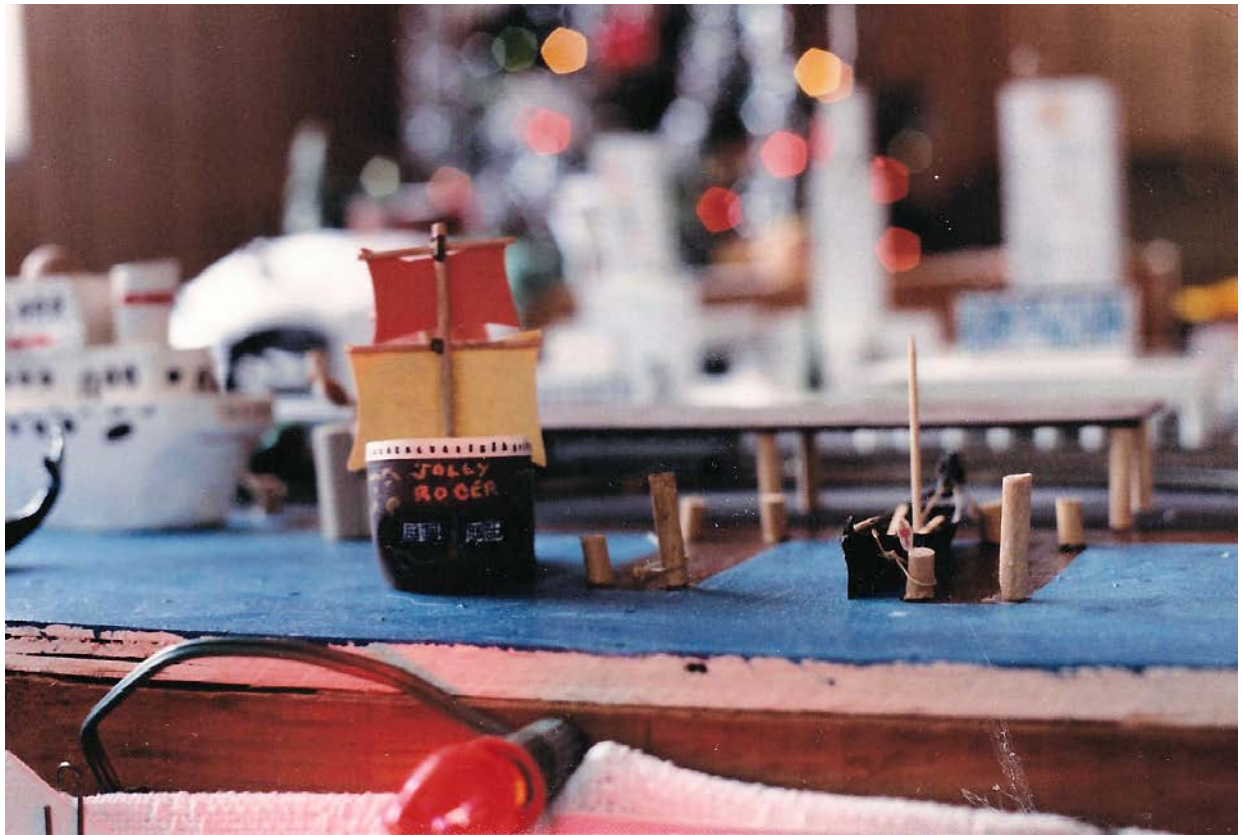
Good shot of the “Bamboola” – Santa’s freighter unloading toys for good –not boys and girls but big folk. That’s a package of rolling papers on the lift in the package. It was given to me by Dennis and Sherry. Every year we open it, take out a paper, roll one, smoke it and wrap the papers back up. We’ve got a lot of years to go.

“Bamboola” comes from a book given me by Peggy and Hugo called “Voyage to Bamboola” written by Wm. F. Buckley’s son about his two years working on tramp steamers. Hilarious. Bamboola Shoals are the shallows north of Bermuda. They shift so rapidly they can’t be charted and if you wind up in them then you are in deep shit.

A story from the book tells of the captain who finally found a steward who could bring him a cup of coffee from the galley to the bridge without spilling it and was so pleased. He never knew the guy would take half the coffee in his mouth when he left the galley, climb the several ladders to the bridge and then spit the coffee back into the cup just before he got to the bridge.

You can see the Xmas tree masthead which is how they rig ships’ Xmas trees, your lighthouse, the whale and a new sail boat from the woman who gave me the general store. She’s the wife of the judge who fined me \$300 and 90 days probation for littering [dumping brush] and she thinks he’s an asshole. She doesn’t know it but he is also gay.

You can also see one shot of the boat from Peter Pan. Captain Hook’s “Jolly Roger” memory of Karen.



One of my two favorite shots. "Jolly Roger" and the Viking ship. Jack really did a nice job with the photos. The Viking ship remembers my costume, and Doris' and my invasion of Lief Ericson Day where we got our pictures in the paper but none of the Sons of Norway did. Pissed them off rather.



Back to Choochville proper. The pond, Town Hall, and Welcome Home Club.

I had a lot of fun with that Welcome Home Club [white building in center]. I took it to meetings with me right from the start as a wooden block. It took an awful long time before it dawned on people what it was developing into. Some never did catch on – even after I put the sign over the front porch on it.

Note the snowman just in front of the goose.



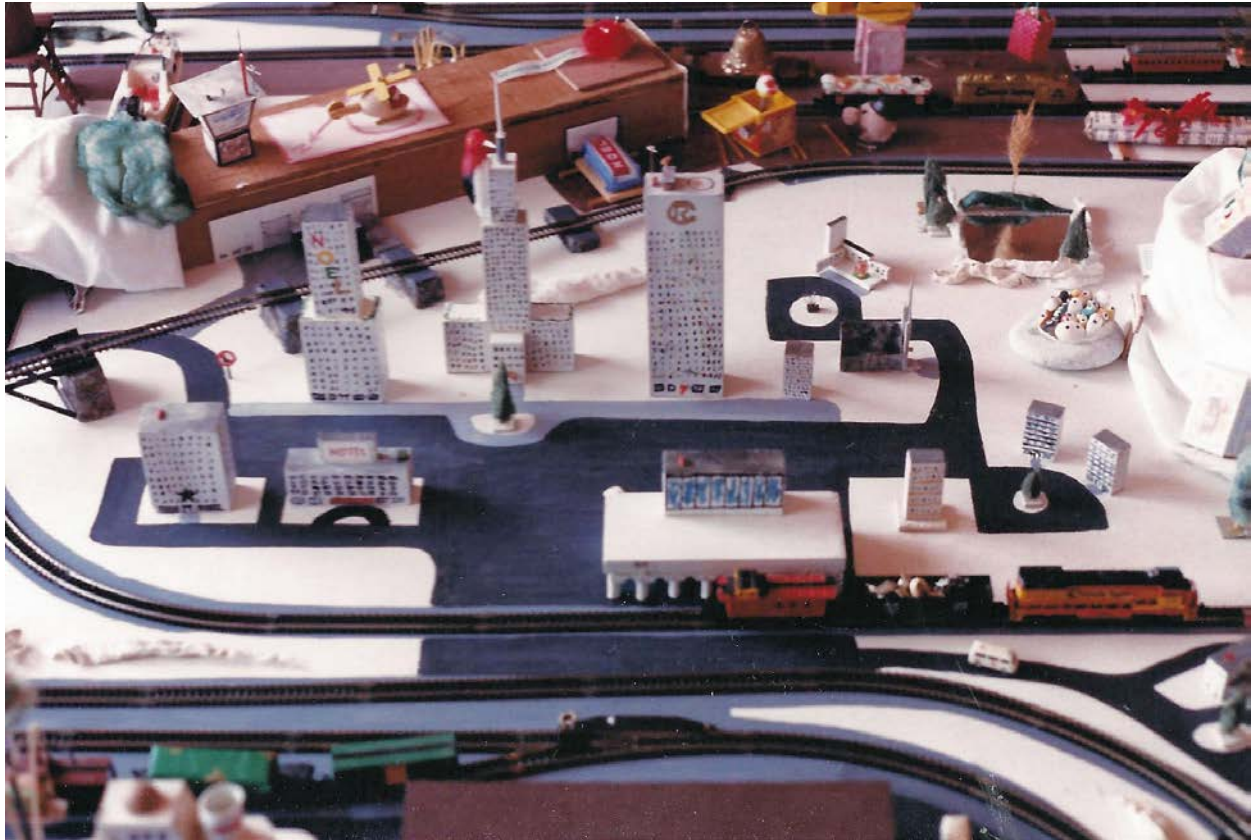
You can see the cars in the freight yard and the extra flat car with the load of bells on it, the soprano section of the Xmas choir. The little blue figure – I found it in the street – is I think the Muppet who plays keyboard. He has his hands out like that anyway and he will have a keyboard next year.

Another shot of the snowman which is a two-pearl earring I found in my bed one morning. I put a nose and top hat on it.

You can see the campfire, the woodpile and the log seats by the skating pond, also the figure skating on the pond. It is my favorite figure. When Doris gave me the set of figures I noticed it right away. It has long dark hair, short skirt, high white boots that look like skates and nice legs. It reminded me right away of your mother. So, when I was looking at stuff in the railroad store this year, I noticed they had all different figures packed separately and looked. This one was labeled "The Hooker". Don't tell your mother. She'll never know. I'm glad I'm not the only railroader who thinks X.



Water tower with the chemical formula for ethyl alcohol on it. What can I say except that it's appropriate.



This is the city. Commemorates the trip up north by Amtrak. Back row is Bloomingdales, Empire State Building (with woodpecker), RCA building with heliport on top, Saint Patrick's Cathedral with the museum behind it. Far right rear is the park with skating pond and rock concert.

Front row – left center is the hotel, train station and lower right is the ambulance going to the hospital which is cut in half by the edge of the picture.

Santa's Heliport and the loading docks of the Jolly Little Olde Elves warehouse is left rear. There is a Xmas tree outlined in lights on the RCA building. Drops of paint on a thread.

The local freight is passing the train station. All these people haunting me about X-rated. There is a load of jewelry in the gondola car. It is my tie tacks, cuff links, earrings, etc. Right in the middle of the pile is a pin of two turtles humping that I got years ago, and no one notices.



Saint Patrick's Cathedral, the museum, skating pond, and rock concert.

The artwork on the patio of the museum and in the traffic circle are shells and an earring which are souvenirs of a day on the beach and an evening with a friend. I keep finding earrings in my bed.

I'm kind of proud of Saint Patrick's. People recognize it right away.



The only Santa in this setup is the one flying this helicopter. Your mother and Melody bought it for me at Disney when we went there when they came to lay back after her 2nd divorce.

This is a good shot of the boat and fork lift, too.

The loading docks and trailers are still under construction. There was a great deal I didn't finish this year but that's okay. Lends a dynamic sense to the setup.

The trailers are going to be for the "Friggit and Rumn Freightline" and the "Balyout Express Co". [not sure if those are the exact names – his writing is difficult to decipher – has to be some sort of tongue-in-cheek meaning to them]



Up in the air. Okay. Boy am I going to tie some track in knots next year with this kind of potential. There are going to be trains popping up all over the place.

I had some trouble keeping the cars coupled going over the hump until I got the right grade and cars weighted correctly.

That's the tunnel under the Jolly Little Olde Elves Mountain where this train hides until it is time for it to come out.

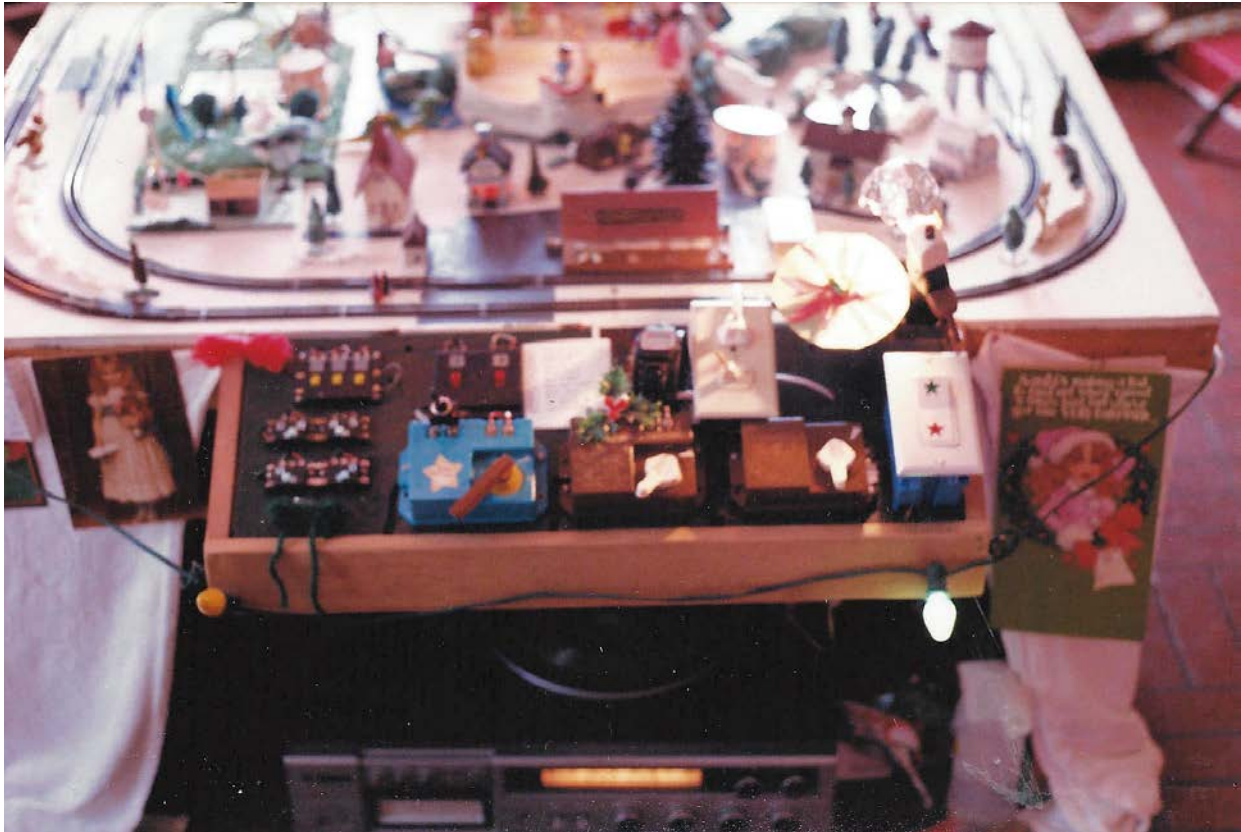
If you look close just to the left of the building that says Noel on the front, you will see a road sight that says: Wonder where I got that idea? [from Laura – means Noel]





Now here is the "Jolly Little Olde Elves Jolly Little Olde Village". New this year. To be developed. I rather imagine that is the construction supervisor arriving with this trailer. There is another car and trailer in the setup. It is behind the inn in Choochville.

I have been looking for a car and trailer for years. It is my contention that if Jesus was born today it would be in a beat up old trailer hooked to some Mexican's beat up old car parked behind some beat up old inn. Now I have the car and trailer. All I have to do is beat them up enough, use lasers to produce a Star of Bethlehem above them and will that ever piss off the Fundamentalists.



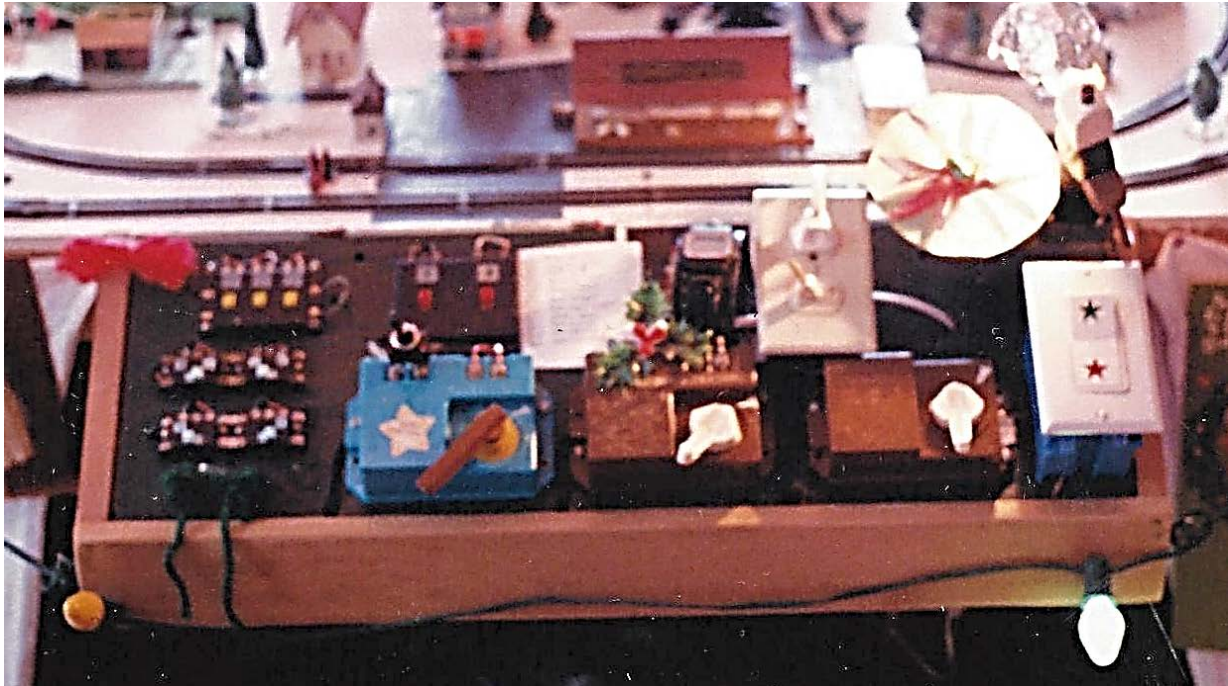
And here's the Control Board.

Three transformers now - the blue and brown gizmos along the bottom.

When you press the red star on the switch at the right it starts the tape, lights up and starts the circular timer above it, the sweep of which cues me to throw the two switches to the left of the timer, which light Choochville and the tree and main lights respectively.

That's my digital watch just to the left of the upper square white switch. I guess I was checking times.

The square white thing in the upper middle is my cue sheet.



The two red switches and the three yellow switches on the upper left from that energize the siding in the harbor, the siding under Santa's Mountain, the shunt track siding between the outer and inner perimeter track and the freight yard track. It also controls the movement of the train on the freight yard track.

The four blue switches on the lower left are the remote solenoids that change the position of the tracks to route trains from siding to main track and back, and from one track to another.

It is getting kind of complicated behind that board, which hinges up so I can get to the terminal blocks, plugs and connections underneath.

I put seventy-five feet of new wire into this thing this year on top of what I already had. It takes six extension cords, four three way plugs, four strings of lights and four 12-terminal connector blocks. I often get things hooked up backwards the first time and have a lot of fun swearing a lot.



And here's your "Jolly Little Olde Engineer". I love my operator's chapeau.

Of course, every a—hole I know says, "Art, you've got to get one of those striped engineers railroad hats and go toot toot when you run this." You gave me my answer to them, boy.

Deck us all.... Tra la la... and kiss....

Choochville and its engineer wish you a happy, prosperous and delightfully kinky Xmas and New Year.

Love, Daddy. 2/24/88