

TCA Mission: To develop an appreciation of and to preserve an important segment of history – Tinplate Toy Trains –through research, education, community outreach, fellowship, establishment of collecting standards, and to promote the growth and enjoyment of collecting and operating toy, model and scale trains.



# Desert Division

## DISPATCH

ARIZONA • NEW MEXICO • WEST TEXAS  
AUSTRALIA • NEW ZEALAND

Visit our Website: [www.tcadd.org](http://www.tcadd.org)



Volume 55, No. 1

Winter 2026

## WHERE DID THE LAST YEAR GO?

It seems these days that you blink and it's a new year! So much has happened since the last issue of the Dispatch, but there are a lot of exciting events coming up for Desert Division. First let us recap the end of 2025.

The October 11<sup>th</sup> meet was well attended with over 30 members in attendance. Division Secretary Angelo Lautazi announced that Desert Division membership remains steady at 172 members while Treasurer Mark Thompson presented the Division's current healthy finances. There was a brief recap on Rail Fair. The event was well attended by the public. A discussion followed regarding reconsidering the decision earlier in the year on whether to keep the layout trailer. The two considerations are increasing the number of volunteers operating the layout for events and finding a more reasonably priced location to store the layout. With more volunteers, the Division could have a presence at more events which serves

one of the original goals of building the trailer in the first case; education and outreach to the public.

In new Division business an additional raffle was held for one of the Saddle Mountain hopper cars which Terry Haas was the lucky winner of. Some cars are still available, and an order form can be found in this issue. Upcoming events were discussed including the Fall auction, the November Train show, and the Holiday Party. The theme of the educational segment was "Horror Story". Paul Wasserman presented a Lionel Phantom locomotive he had purchased for his son which has a very spooky horn. Chris Allen presented his collection of melted rolling stock to demonstrate why leaving trains in a vehicle on a hot Arizona day can lead to definite horror even if only for a short period of time. Keven Brey presented some MTH lighting for the interior of a car and discussed how to retrofit incandescent lamps with LED lighting. Finally, Angelo Lautazi presented a collection of Halloween

### MARK YOUR CALENDAR – UPCOMING EVENTS

#### January 10 – Desert Division Meeting

9:00 AM – Paradise Valley United Methodist Church – 4455 E Lincoln Dr, Paradise Valley, AZ  
Meeting in Room H-1

#### January 18 – TCA Rio Grande Chapter Meet

10:00 AM - Wheels Museum  
1100 2<sup>nd</sup> SW, Albuquerque, NM

#### January 31 – Desert Division Souper Bowl Auction

8:00 AM – Paradise Valley United Methodist Church – 4455 E Lincoln Dr, Paradise Valley, AZ  
Auction in Fellowship Hall

cars that he runs on his 3' x 5' Halloween layout in his driveway on Halloween. The layout consists of Lemax Spooky Town animated buildings surrounded by a loop of fast track.

To close out the meeting, the traditional raffles were held. This time, Terry Haas was in attendance when his ticket was pulled for the \$100 Hudson raffle monthly prize!

The Fall auction consisted of an eclectic collection of items from all eras of the hobby and was over 340 lots. In typical fashion, our Division Auctioneer Peter Atonna efficiently moved through all the lots and the volunteers led by Auction Committee Chair Chris Allen worked hard to move the items around the hall and assist buyers with checkout at the end.

After some question whether the remodel would be completed in time at the new venue for the November Train Show, it all worked out well at Living Streams Church at 7000 North Central Avenue in Phoenix. With a capacity of approximately 80 eight-foot-long tables, this venue is "right sized" for the number of tables that have been selling in recent years. The show had good attendance, and the vendors were pleased with the new location.

To close out 2025, the Division Holiday Party was held at a new location, the VFW Hall located at Mountain View Road and Cave Creek Road in Phoenix. The traditional Division party fare was provided and a total of 58 guests registered for the event. Chef Mark Thompson prepared a marvelous meal while Angelo & Barbara Lautazi and Laurel & Chris Allen once again planned and hosted a wonderful holiday event. Finally, the winner of the annual 773 Hudson raffle was selected. Read on to find the winner.

Thanks to our favorable climate, Desert Division does not hibernate in the winter and 2026 is already full of opportunities to enjoy this wonderful hobby and share in the fellowship. Our first meet of the year is at 9:00 AM on January 10<sup>th</sup> at Paradise Valley United Methodist Church. Come for the updates of Division business, to visit with your fellow members, participate in the educational segment, and have a

cup of coffee and donut. The theme of the educational segment is "What I got for Christmas 2025 and making a list for 2026!" As President Mike says in his message this month, Santa is *already* listening.

For Division members in the Albuquerque area, Rio Grande Chapter will be kicking off the year with a meet at the Wheels Museum. Come start of the year right with the vibrant toy train community in New Mexico.

On January 31<sup>st</sup>, the Souper Bowl Auction will be held at Paradise Valley United Methodist Church with the lot viewing starting at 8:00 AM and the auction starting promptly at 9:00 AM. The catalog available at the January meet promises to be an interesting one with several surprises according to Chris. As always, one of the highlights of this auction is the wonderful soups that members provide for lunch.

In this edition of the Dispatch you will find articles from Chris Allen with more details on the upcoming Souper Bowl Auction, Peter Atonna and his experiences with the Lionel Smithsonian Brass Hudson, and finally Bruce Brown with a fascinating history of toys related to our train hobby and how they developed from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century on. A huge thanks goes out to all our authors who provide interesting and educational content. Remember, you too can be an author! Send your articles to [jonathanpeiffer@live.com](mailto:jonathanpeiffer@live.com). We all have something valuable to share.

As often stated in these pages, we come together because of our common interest in collecting and operating toy trains. However, more importantly we come together in fellowship and friendship. It is the people of Desert Division that make us who we are and often the story behind that train we discuss at an educational segment or in a passing conversation has more meaning than the actual train. If you have not attended a meet recently, come rediscover the warmth and hospitality that is a hallmark of our meetings. We look forward to visiting with you on January 10<sup>th</sup>!

## OCTOBER 11<sup>TH</sup> MEET PHOTOS





## NOVEMBER AUCTION PHOTOS





## NOVEMBER TRAIN SHOW PICTURES





## 2025 HOLIDAY PARTY PHOTOS



## MINUTES OCTOBER 8<sup>TH</sup>, 2025 TCADD BOARD MEETING AT ANGELO LAUTAZI'S HOME

**In attendance:** Mike Dietrich, Mark Thompson, Terry Haas, John Craft, Paul Wassermann, Chris Allen and Angelo Lautazi.

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM.

**Membership:** The Desert Division has 108 members and the Rio Grande Chapter has 64. Division total is 172.

**Treasurer's Report:** Checking \$4081.53, Savings \$499.01, Paypal \$192.52, Ebay Acct \$1992 and Wells Fargo \$24754.09.

### Old Business: Recap

- Rail Fair Debrief – this year's event was very good. Our trailer layout was well received by the public. So once again we revisit the topic of whether we keep or try to sell the trailer. The result is that if we could find a location to store the trailer at a reduced cost perhaps we keep it. This does not address the issue of not having enough volunteers to operate the trailer

### New / Ongoing Business

- The Train Show will be held on Sat.Nov.22 at the Living Steams Church. The church is located at Glendale and Central in Phoenix. There will be 80 tables for vendors. The website has all the details and an online registration form.
- We will be having some special raffles for the Atlas Hopper at the next few meetings.
- The Train Auction is confirmed to be at the PVUMC Fellowship Hall on Nov. 1st. We will have hot dogs for the lunch break.
- The Dec. 14th Christmas Party is being held at the VFW hall in Sunnyslope. Mark intends to use the same menu as last year. We are planning for 8 tables seating 8 people. Mark will check to make sure we will have tablecloths and plate settings.
- We need to check when the next elections will be held.

Board meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM.

The next Board Meeting on Wed. Jan. 10, 2026, will be at the Elk's Lodge.

**Minutes submitted by: Secretary, Angelo Lautazi**

### DESERT DIVISION BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2022-2026

President:	Mike Dietrich	623-572-3538	Directors:	Art Lites	505-463-1951
Vice-President:	John Craft	480-785-2432		Terry Haas	602-319-0499
Secretary:	Angelo Lautazi	480-580-5950		Russ Howry	864-419-9354
Treasurer:	Mark Thompson	307-631-4474		Paul Wassermann	480-949-1620

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

Happy 2026! I trust you had a fantastic holiday season with the many celebrations over the past month. Regardless of your faith, the time from late November to the start of the New Year is a time for reflection on the past year, celebration of your faith and family, and a time to look ahead with the optimism of the New Year. As I write this, I just returned from a pilgrimage to the Mouse in Florida and a few weeks off to enjoy family time. I hope you had the time to reconnect with loved ones and look ahead to a fantastic 2026.

### Reflection and Celebration

The holiday season was busy for the Desert Division as we hosted our annual November train show. It was in a fantastic new location and was a resounding success. I want to thank the hard-working team that makes this awesome show run so smoothly. Chris Allen and his team did another amazing job setting up the day for success. A thank you would not be complete without the smiling faces of our welcome team: Laurel Allen and Barbara Lautazi and our coffee/donut host Janet Mattern!

We also hosted our annual Christmas Party at the VFW Lodge. Attendance was a bit more than 2025 as the combination of Chef Smurf's prime rib, roasted turkey, and delicious sides helped end the year in style. Thanks for this celebration go out to Angelo, Barbara, Laurel, and Chris for delivering another lovely event. The evening ended with recognition of our volunteers of the year Chris Allen and Bill Gonyea and our Hudson winner Bill Richardson!

### Looking Ahead

- The New Year sees several key events for the Division. We start with our annual business meeting on January 10th at the regular location (H-1 at the Paradise Valley UMC). Other meetings this winter/spring include February 14th and March 14th (stay tuned for this one as RailFair is moving).
- The last weekend in January brings our wildly popular "Souper Bowl Auction". The event will be Saturday, January 31st in the Fellowship Center of the PVUMC. Get your catalogs now!
- Keep Saturday, April 11th open on your calendar for the annual tri-club picnic at the McCormick-Stillman Railroad park. This will be held during our regular meeting time, so there is no meeting at PVUMCC. More details will be in the newsletter and website as the event approaches.
- Its Desert Division annual dues time so please bring \$15 cash or check for Angelo to keep your membership current.

I hope to welcome you to one of our events or meetings over the next few months and I'd like to add two more "C's" to the Chamber of Commerce slogan: Collecting and Camaraderie, as the latter is what keeps us going!

January theme: What I got for Christmas 2025 and making a list for 2026! Yes, Santa is already listening.  
Sincerely,





## SOUPER BOWL XII

By Chris Allen TCA #HE 95-480

So, you've been to Desert Divisions Auctions and it's pretty much the same old stuff. I know, been there, done that, got the trophy, or in our case the train that I didn't know I wanted/needed. This upcoming Souper Bowl has several items in it that might surprise you.

I've been doing TCA auctions either volunteering or buying since I first started. I've always had fun, and although the competition from the 90's is now long gone, I always come away with new knowledge and learning experiences, and Souper Bowl XII has already been that.

Last October I received a call from Division member Greg Novak who said he had a train donation from a friend and could I stop by and pick it up. Expecting the typical boxes of track and Plasticville I was quite surprised at the variety of items and in very good condition. In this donation was an American Flyer type XIX mechanical locomotive and tender that I found quite intriguing. The spring is intact, it has an unusual key, and a battery box in the tender to light up the headlamp. I had fun doing the research on this loco and those 30+ donated lots will help to put a smile on our Smurf's face at the end of the day.

A few weeks later I had another call, this was the more typical, "We have an estate sale this weekend and they don't know anything about trains." The house had been sitting vacant for several years and the family decided now was the time to put it on the market, but the trains had to go. Desert Division to the rescue! As you can see from the photo, completely unorganized and evidently cherry picked of all the locomotives, but there were a few gems and the usual stinkers.



This gentleman had a very interesting habit of picking up multiples of things he liked, and we have multiples of multiples. For sure we have more 6414's and 6424's in one auction than I have ever seen and all but two have all the cars.



From yet a third consignor we have the oldest train (well train car) ever in a Division auction. It will have a respectable reserve on it, but it is easily approaching its 125 Birthday. The research on it was also interesting and you will go away from the auction with a new perspective and knowledge of what to look for at the bottom of the box. The consignor, who inherited the trains from his father, kept them for sentimental reasons and had no real knowledge of them and had just taken his father's word, knew nothing about the piece, (Neither did I) and almost tossed it into a Goodwill donation box.

So, there you have it, a little sneak preview of the auction just weeks away and of course we can always use your help either in the auction or by bringing in a crock pot full of your best homemade chili or soup to share at lunch. I'll have a signup sheet at the January meet and look forward to seeing you at the Souper Bowl.

## THE SMITHSONIAN DREYFUS HUDSON

By Peter Atonna TCA #75-7578

I don't "collect" Hudsons, but it I seem to have a lot of them. Here is the display you see when entering my train room where from front to back: OO gauge Hudson, prewar 763 grey Hudson, "The 700E Hudson" on its base and the "Smithsonian" Dreyfus Hudson.



But what I want to write about today is the story of the "Smithsonian" Hudson. Early in 1992 we saw a big announcement from Lionel. In coordination with the Smithsonian, the first truly O scale Dreyfus Hudson was produced, in brass and in both O tinplate and O scale. We, a little later, got an ad from Lionel with a photo of this beautiful engine to whet our appetites.



Later, another ad told of a full set of brass 20th Century Limited cars would be produced, with a limited number available in three rail. They were about \$250 each for the fourteen-car train.

### LIONEL LIONEL 3-RAIL DREYFUSS HUDSON ORDER FORM AND INFORMATIONAL PACKET

The 3-Rail Dreyfuss Hudson represents a significant venture from die-cast metal steam locomotive construction for Lionel. It has mainly been crafted from brass, nickel-silver, and stainless steel. Equipped with a powerful Pittman motor and a state-of-the-art sound and smoke system, this highly detailed locomotive will operate on 072 or larger diameter track. Each locomotive will come complete with a handsome wooden storage case. Every locomotive will be assigned a serial number which will be chosen randomly by computer. Production of this locomotive will be limited to 750 pieces.

You may purchase, at your option, an operating roller display base that will allow you to operate your Lionel 3-Rail Dreyfuss Hudson, in place, on roller bearings. See the smoke rising from the smokestack, watch the wheels turn, and hear the steam sounds of a powerful locomotive while blowing the whistle or clanging the bell.



- The cost for the Dreyfuss is \$1500.00 and the cost for the operating display base is \$150.00 (plus tax, for Michigan, New York, and Ohio residents). The above includes shipping and handling.
- To reserve your 3-Rail Dreyfuss Hudson a non-refundable \$300.00 deposit is required.
- You will be billed for the balance due before the locomotive is shipped.
- The 3-Rail Dreyfuss Hudson is scheduled to be shipped in March of 1993.
- If initial orders exceed the 750 piece limit, a lottery will be held.
- Orders will be limited to 1 per person.
- The features of the operating display base include: sealed bearing rollers, scale track with nickel silver rails, an inlaid metal Lionel medallion and a plexi-glass cover. This item is only offered with the purchase of a 3-Rail Dreyfuss. An AC transformer is required for operation, which is not included.
- You will receive an acknowledgement to confirm your order. If we are unable to fill your order, your check will be returned to you.

Mail your order form today to: LIONEL TRAINS, INC.  
Dreyfuss Hudson Offer  
P.O. Box 748  
New Baltimore, MI 48047-0748

(Use this order form or a photocopy facsimile)

Yes, I wish to order the new limited edition 3-Rail Dreyfuss Hudson. Enclosed is my \$300.00 deposit. I understand that production will be limited to 750 pieces. Orders will be limited to one per person. If initial orders exceed the 750 piece limit, a lottery will be held.

(Please check only one)

☐ Dreyfuss Hudson \$1500.00 ☐ Dreyfuss Hudson & Operating Display Base \$1650.00

(Please print clearly)

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Those who wrote Lionel about it received a letter with an order form. However, it also said that in addition to a \$300 non-refundable deposit and a limit of one per person, if enough orders came in, a lottery would be held to decide the "winners" who would be able to purchase one. The cost in 1992 was \$1500 each!





When showing the ad to Mary Jane, she also thought it was a neat looking engine and why don't we to double our chances of buying one, by having each of us send in an order. That would increase our chances of winning one in the lottery.



September 16, 1992

Peter Atonna  
2324 W. Sunrise Dr.  
Phoenix, AZ 85041

Dear Lionel Hobbyist;

CONGRATULATIONS! You are now part of a select group of 750 individuals that have the opportunity to own one of the finest locomotives Lionel Trains, Inc. has ever produced.

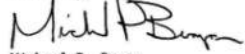
The 3-Rail Dreyfuss Hudson is a magnificently crafted steam locomotive that will come alive in all its splendor when you put it on your rails and turn on the power.

The scheduled shipping date for this one-of-a-kind steam locomotive is March of 1993. Shortly before the scheduled shipping date you will be sent an invoice indicating your unpaid balance. Upon receipt of your remittance, we will immediately ship to you your new 3-Rail Dreyfuss Hudson.

As we have stated earlier, only 750 pieces of this Limited Edition, specially serial numbered, 3-Rail Dreyfuss Hudson will be produced. Your personal serial number for your unique Hudson is listed below.

Thank you for your order and for making our newest Lionel train a part of your collection. We appreciate your patronage. I know that you are going to enjoy owning this outstanding locomotive.

Sincerely,

  
Michael P. Braga  
Director of Consumer Services

SERIAL NO: 391

We did and we were both chosen! Again, she said "why not buy both and save one for resale as if they are this popular, they will certainly go up in price, and we can help pay for the one we keep." So, I did and deposits for both were sent in, one in each of our names.

Not surprisingly, the production of the locomotive did not happen soon. We kept getting letters of apology from Lionel for the delay. One said that because of the delays, Lionel would take \$100 off the balance due when they ship.

When they arrived, it was as beautiful as promised. Full scale, detailed brass but with a three-rail mechanism. I opened mine, but we kept the other in its original packaging for when we sell it as "new" for the big profit.

Soon I put it on the tracks to try it out. And then the disappointments began.

First, in the pre-TMCC days, it did have electronic control of sorts. But to do things, you had to do "clicks and clanks" with your AC transformer.

**NOTE:** If the tender must be packed for shipment, please remove the coal load and pack it separately.

### Motor & Directional Control

As previously mentioned, the Dreyfuss Hudson utilizes a very efficient Pittman motor for power. It also utilizes a highly advanced electronic unit for directional control. Although the electronic control unit provides for traditional sequential operation just as a typical mechanical reversing unit would, it also provides for silent and unique operational options.

When power is applied to the rail and the command is given for train movement, the Dreyfuss Hudson will not begin its movement until the brake release has sounded. This feature will produce a noticeable time delay between the time you activate the directional change to when the locomotive actually reacts to your command. This time delay characteristic is a normal function of this locomotive. Located on the bottom side of the tender are two "dip" style switches that modify the directional operation in the following way:

- #1 off, #2 off **starts in fwd/normal** sequence
- #1 on, #2 on **locked in neutral**
- #1 on, #2 off **starts in fwd/no** sequence
- #1 off, #2 on **starts in neutral/normal** sequence

In addition, with both switches off, when you give the directional command and if you sound the whistle, the normal sequence will be interrupted and the Dreyfuss Hudson will begin to back up. Likewise, if you sound the bell, the Dreyfuss Hudson will move forward.

It had a smoke unit, but not a Lionel. Instead, one had been developed for scale engines which was not a good smoke producer and often failed quickly.





Nonetheless, I put it on the tracks, hooked up three Madison cars and powered it up.

It didn't move, the wheels spun, but it didn't move. I took one car off. Same issue. I took the second off and it finally started pulling. So, I ran it around the layout, this beautiful scale loco pulling a one car train.

I could not believe this. I bought a \$1500 engine that would not pull more than one car. But when I looked at it more closely, it became apparent what the problem was. It had no Magnatraction, no traction tires and even more, no weights in the engine. None of the items that would have given it traction. I had a \$1500 display piece.

The rest of the story. When we moved to Paulden and built the first basement layout, it included one postwar loop so that I could run postwar trains. I was curious as to whether the Dreyfus was still as bad. I put it on the track, added one Madison car and started it up. It still ran fine until it hit the grade - and the tires spun. Taking the car off, same result. No, it had not healed itself in the intervening five years.

The last rest of the rest of the story. No, the Hudsons did not take off as collectables. They would occasionally show up at York and on eBay. So, at the 1997 TCA National convention in Phoenix, we put Mary Janes, New, OB one on a sales table and it did sell. It sold for what we paid for it!

### **3<sup>RD</sup> RAIL SIEMENS CHARGERS ARRIVE ON THE PARADISE & PACIFIC!**

By Jonathan Peiffer TCA #01-53047

One of the things I have found to be most challenging ever since COVID forced us all out of our routines has been getting back into those routines. Some things I have done a better job of making the time to do and other much less so. I had not operated on the Paradise & Pacific since 2019. I always had an excuse why I couldn't make the time to actually enjoy this hobby I love so much. Being buried in work for my part time employer, 3<sup>rd</sup> Rail was a convenient excuse for why I couldn't leave my home on the weekends. TCA meets? Only a three-hour commitment and bring a few items. No problem! P&P? It is always a production for me with long passenger trains and lots of motive power. It all finally came together in November last year when the latest project arrived from the factory in the new to Amtrak Siemens Chargers that are replacing the now 20 plus year-old Genesis locomotives.

With the partnership of Siemens Mobility, Amtrak, and the great design team in Asia, this project is likely the one I have been most proud to be a part of in my seventeen years consulting for 3<sup>rd</sup> Rail. Certainly, the execution of the model is great, but most importantly this project shows what a team of people spread across the globe can do when we work together towards a common goal.

I spent a good six hours running a current era California Zephyr with three locomotives and seven cars while a Viewliner equipped Lakeshore Limited with two locomotives and eight cars ran on the adjacent track.



I learned a valuable lesson in understanding that we have time for anything we make the time for and I have now become a much more frequent operator of my trains and will continue to do so for many years to come!

## THERE WAS MORE THAN PLASTICVILLE ON OUR TRAIN LAYOUTS

By Bruce J Brown TCA #95-41451

We all know that Plasticville by Bachmann is synonymous with toy electric trains. But did you ever hear about the Bergen Toy & Novelty Company, Tim-Mee, Tri-State Plastic Molding, Elgo, and J L Wright Inc.?

If you grew up in the 50's, you knew firsthand that we had some fabulous toys. Nowadays, most of the toys are reduced to a single LCD screen. There's a lot of talk today about STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), but 70 years ago we had Erector, Chemistry Sets and Remco!

And we had a lot of other toys that fueled our happiness and imagination. Some toys even made their way onto our train layouts to give us many extra hours of fun. Here are some of them.

### Lincoln Logs

Invented by Frank Lloyd Wright's son in 1916, the idea was based on the architecture of the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, designed by the inventor's father. The foundation of the hotel was designed with interlocking log beams, which made the structure "earthquake-proof". Wright sold his business--J.L. Wright Inc.--to Playskool for only \$800.00 in 1943 not anticipating an eventual boon to come. Lincoln Log sets peaked in popularity during the 1950s when it was among the first toys mass-marketed on television during the popularity of the *Davey Crockett King of the Wild Frontier Show*. Abraham Lincoln's cabin was one of the easiest to build and, no doubt, found its way onto many train layouts.



From American Construction Toy Museum Website



Wright anticipated the use of Lincoln Logs in model train layouts as shown in this *Child's Life Magazine* ad from 1926



National Museum of American History

Post WWII then ushered in the era of... **"Plastics!"**





## Green Army Men

Defying the Christmas spirit, there was warfare going on over layouts everywhere. It was common to see green Army men of all types fighting it out-- on top of and inside train cars, layout structures, and all over the green sandpaper-like grass.

Following World War II, one of the first manufacturers to make army men out of plastic was the Bergen Toy and Novelty Company of New Jersey, also later known as Beton.

In 1938, the Bergen Toy and Novelty Co. began selling an inexpensive line of small plastic men in U.S. Army green and molded in a variety of action poses — a little boy's war fantasy come true. Sold in large plastic bags, demand for the little green men rose in the 1950s thanks to a boon in plastics manufacturing. Though the little warriors have undergone several changes over the years, their most famous identity is as World War II-era soldiers with "pod feet" attached to keep them standing during battle. Beton cowboy and Indian sets were also included in special Lincoln Log sets. Stateside and foreign competition eventually drove Beton out of business in 1958 which coincided with a major recession occurring in the country.



*Time Magazine, February 16, 2011, 'All-TIME 100 Greatest Toys'*



*The Jersey Journal, Jersey City, January 17, 1952*

A major competitor to Beton was Tim-Mee, originally part of the Anchor Brush Company, of Montgomery IL. The key technology in the plastic toy market was the conversion to polyethylene in the mid-1950's. This change in materials made plastic toys extremely durable and not subject to breakage inherent in the prior plastics. One of the first group of figures manufactured was given to the nephew of an Anchor Brush employee, a boy named Timmy. He was so enthusiastic that they decided to name the toy line, Tim-Mee Toys, after him. Tim-Mee, as a separate company, outlasted Beton. It has been bought and sold several times and still exists today as part of Victory Buy, Inc. Other 1950's companies such as Ideal and Marx also manufactured small figures, including cowboys, Indians, horses and farm animals.







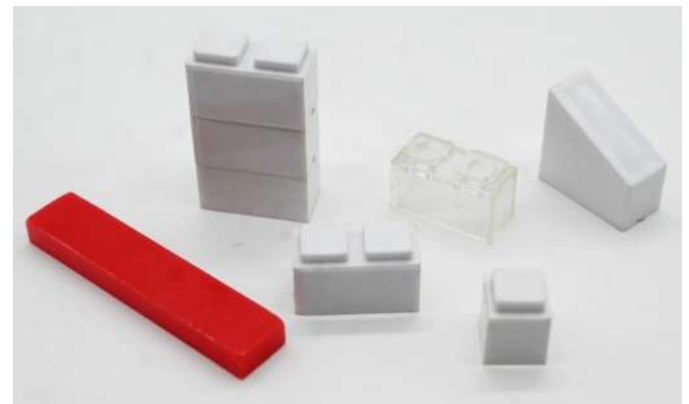
Tim-Mee Soldiers



## Plastic Construction Blocks

During the 1950's there may have been upwards of a hundred companies in the "architectural construction toy" category. However, two of the more popular makers of interlocking toy construction bricks were Tri-State's Block City and Elgo's American Bricks.

Robert K. Gibbs opened Kentucky's first injection molded plastics plant, Tri-State Plastic Molding Co., during WWII. The manufacturer began producing toys in the 1950s. It also produced parts for slot machines, illegal then in Kentucky. It was subsequently raided in 1954 by the police who seized 54 slots. There is very little known about Tri-State, but its plastic bricks called Block City were advertised and sold everywhere.



Photos from the American Construction Toy Museum

**Stimulate Young Minds and Fingers**  
Design and Construct Whole Cities With

# BLOCK CITY

Tri-State's Plastic Interlock Blocks... Washable, Shatterproof, Easy to Assemble

4<sup>95</sup>

(B-25A) The "Beauty House" contains 320 pieces including doors, windows, fence gates, garage door, roofing, etc.  
(B-25B) The "Kitchen" contains 152 pieces..... 2.95  
(B-25C) The "Chimney" contains 472 pieces..... 7.95  
(B-25D) The "New Yorker" contains 620 pieces..... 15.00

Order by Key Number—Phone NA. 8-9800 or Mail the Coupon

(B-25E) Remote Electronic Radio Station Sends and Receives Messages Up to 1/4 Mile

6<sup>95</sup>

- Two microphones transmit voice or teletype code
- Super-sensitive 12" x 12" transmitter with directional antenna
- Radio signal detector, powerful worklight
- Also includes batteries, automatic decoder, permanent tape book and 40 message instructions
- Made of high-strength plastic
- Suitable for 6 years old and up

Remote Headphone Intercom System

4<sup>95</sup>

(B-25F) Two children talk to each other and receive phone for each or with each with 2-way radio. Range 1000 ft. Includes 2 batteries, 25 ft. of double wire and plastic intercom. Also includes 40 message instructions. Made of high-strength plastic. Suitable for 6 years old and up.

(B-25G) 2-Way Electronic Watch-Talker. Two almost..... 4.95

**Fansburgh's**  
710, 8th AND E STREETS N.W. — NA. 8-1900

Fansburgh's - FIFTEENTH - FIFTH - FIVE  
1000 COMMERCIAL - CHICAGO - ILLINOIS - SEPTEMBER 10, 1954 - NA. 8-1900

The Evening Star, Washington DC, November 28, 1954

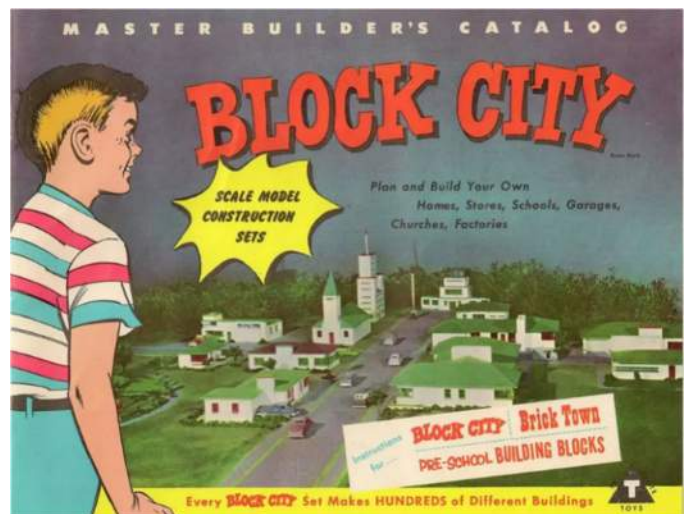
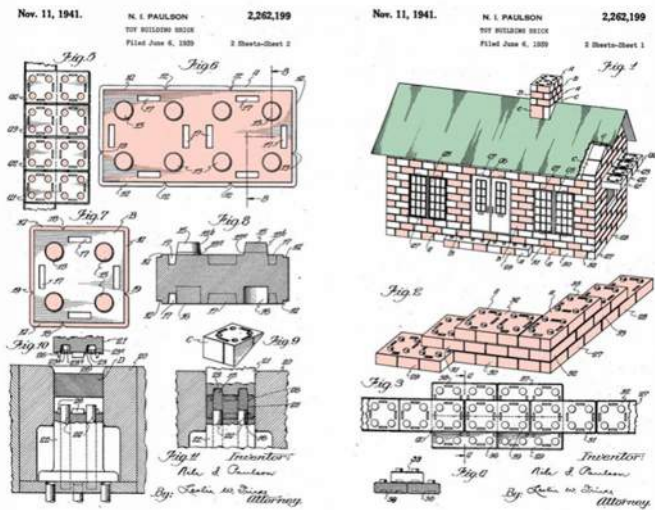


Photo from John Chuckman's Chicago Nostalgia & Memorabilia Website

One of the more bizarre and coincidental stories in toy history is that of Elgo Plastics, Inc., a division of Chicago's Halsam Products Company.

In 1942, Halsam products began selling interlocking hardwood “American Bricks” based on the following 1941 patent.



Nils Paulson's 1941 Patent for 'Toy Building Brick' (From the 'Made in Chicago Museum')

A separate part of the Halsam company, by owners Hal Elliott and Sam Goss, was set up just to concentrate on the injection plastic molding business. It was called Elgo from Elliot and Goss. A plastic version of the hardwood American Brick was introduced in 1948.

**2.98**

**New AMERICAN PLASTIC BRICKS**

*by Halsam*

Easy for girls and boys to build model schools, doll houses, bridges, etc. with these sets. Sturdy *interlocking* pieces are washable and smooth-edged for safety. Permanent, harmless colors. Realistic windows, doors, roofs included. Popular priced in Toyland at

200 Pcs. . . 2.79    400 Pcs. . . 5.49

*The Flint Journal, November 19, 1948*

**BUILD FOR THE FUTURE!**

**AMERICAN BRICKS**

Over 200 Pieces

An ideal building toy. Build a house, garage, barn or any other building which you favor.

1.25 Value

**98¢**

*The Record, Hackensack, New Jersey, December 2, 1942*

See . . .

**ED GUTH** for

**Buildings for Lionel Trains**

Skyline, Gang, Starline and American Plastic Bricks.

132 E. Genesee  
Between Salina and Warren

*Syracuse Herald Journal, July 8, 1948*



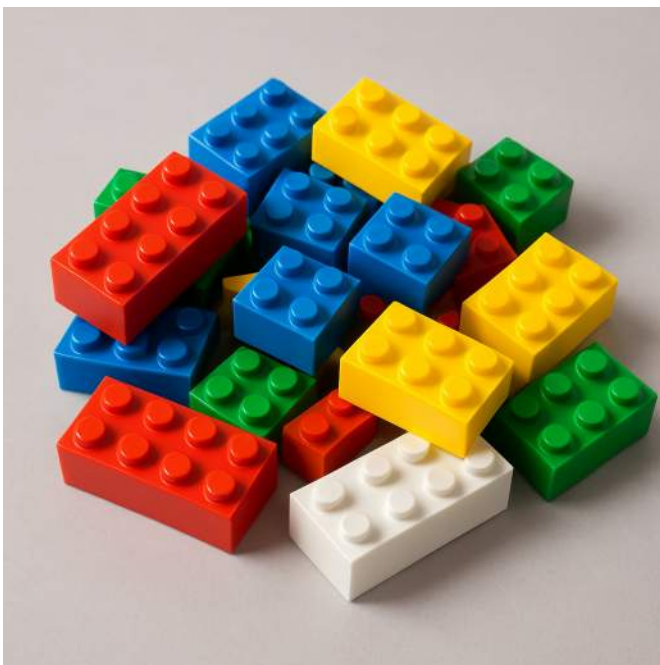


*From 'Made In Chicago Museum'*

Here are the plastic Elgo blocks:



Here are Lego blocks:



While Halsam's product design was introduced in 1942, Lego—derived from the Danish phrase "leg godt," which means "play well"—started producing similar-looking "Automatic Binding Bricks" in 1949. The Elgo and Lego anagrammatic names are totally coincidental. Whether or not Lego just copied the Halsam design is not known or proven. Lego bricks didn't hit the U.S. Market until 1962 and is now one of the most successful companies in the world.

The slot-car craze of 1963 was one factor that killed off interest in electric trains, erector sets, chemistry sets, and all the American toys described above. Yet the one surviving and thriving toy business through it all was Lego. Why Lego ultimately succeeded and why Elgo failed would be a great topic for a graduate school business thesis.

### **EDITOR'S NOTE:**

To bring this article full circle, Lego offered a series of famous examples of architectural landmarks. One such famous building is Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House of 1910 which is one of the premier examples of Prairie Style Architecture and is on the campus of the University of Chicago. This 2276-piece Lego set has been in the editor's collection unopened for nearly 20 years. It is ironic that the son of this world-famous architect would be a pioneer in world of interlocking blocks that would eventually inspire a system of building blocks that could closely recreate a building his father designed.



*Lego Robie House, Jonathan Peiffer Collectio*





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- ☐ 6. G or #1
- ☐ 7. O or O27 Tinplate
- ☐ 8. S
- ☐ 9. HO
- ☐ 10. OO
- ☐ 11. N
- ☐ 12. Z
- ☐ 13. Live Steam

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- ☐ 15. Lionel
- ☐ 16. Marx/Mars/Allstate
- ☐ 17. Ives
- ☐ 18. Dorfan/Fandor
- ☐ 19. MTH
- ☐ 20. Williams
- ☐ 21. K-line
- ☐ 22. AMT/Kusan
- ☐ 23. Other-please specify \_\_\_\_\_
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- ☐ 23B. Bing
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- ☐ 23H. Hafner
- ☐ 23I. Hoge
- ☐ 23J. Hornby
- ☐ 23K. Issmayer
- ☐ 23L. LGB
- ☐ 23M. Marklin
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- ☐ 23R. Littletown/Skyline
- ☐ 23S. Pride Lines
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