



## AT THE THROTTLE

### THE BIRTHPLACE OF MODEL RAILROADING?

I THINK it's proper to designate Milwaukee as the birthplace of the hobby of scale model railroading in North America — if not the birthplace, certainly the city where the hobby came of age. It was here in Milwaukee that the hobby took shape, was given direction, and started to grow in the mid-1930s.

It was here in Milwaukee that Bill Walthers started his company in 1932. MR's founder, Al Kalmbach, launched his little magazine here in 1933. And the members of the Model Railroad Club of Milwaukee called the founding convention of the National Model Railroad Association which was held here in September of 1935. As the NMRA celebrates its 50th anniversary with a convention here in Milwaukee at the end of July, let's take a look at the early history of model railroading.

Model railroading has its roots in England where it goes back to at least the early 1900s. A British model railroad magazine, *Model Railways and Locomotives*, was started in 1909, and The Model Railway Club of London was founded in 1910.

In the United States the hobby goes back to the 1920s. Linn Westcott speculated in a 1949 MR article that the first *real* model railroad in the U. S. — one with scale equipment, structures, and scenery — may have been the O scale Baltimore & Ohio Junior completed by John Swartzell of Washington D. C. right after World War I.

The first published record we have of model railroading in America is contained in *The Model-maker Magazine* founded in 1924. *The Model-maker* had some articles on building scale railroad models, and it reported on the activities of the various engineering societies, many of which had a model railroading division. The prime example is the New York Society of Model Engineers, founded in 1926.

Perhaps the most significant event in the early history of model railroading in America was the 1933 Chicago Century of Progress exposition. The Pennsylvania RR, the Illinois Central, and the Chesapeake & Ohio each had operating O scale

layouts as part of their exhibits. The layouts were a big hit with the hundreds of thousands of people who saw them during the course of the exhibition.

What was needed to really get the hobby moving in the mid-1930s was a vehicle for communication between hobbyists, and an organization to establish standards and to promote the hobby to the general public. Both were supplied in Milwaukee by THE MODEL RAILROADER Magazine and the National Model Railroad Association.

Milwaukee was a hotbed of model railroading 50 years ago and remains one today. Nationally, about 1 person per thousand is a model railroader. Applying that ratio to the 1.4 million people in the Milwaukee metropolitan area, there ought to be about 1400 model railroaders. In fact, we sell about 2500 copies of MR each month in our own metropolitan area. Using the same formula we use to estimate the size of the hobby nationally, we estimate there are about 3200 active model railroaders in Milwaukee. That's more than double the national average!

There are many very nice home and club layouts to see in Milwaukee. Those attending the convention will be able to select from the 48 home layouts in the Milwaukee area plus extra-fare tours to visit layouts in Madison and the Racine/Kenosha area.

To help publicize the convention, we have published photo features on five Wisconsin layouts in the past few issues. In this issue we give you a glimpse of six more in a special color sneak preview of the convention layouts (beginning on page 96) — layouts built in Milwaukee — the birthplace of scale model railroading.

*Puss Larson*