

A Ride for the Ages

Baltimore's B&O Railroad Museum is a tribute to America's first railroad, as well as the popularity of model trains.

By PETER SMOLENS

If you want to experience the lore and history of railroading at its finest, the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad Museum is the most comprehensive railroad museum in the United States. Located at the Old Mount Clare Station in downtown Baltimore, the B&O Museum stands today where one of America's first railroad depots was located nearly 180 years ago.

What's great about this museum is its no-nonsense appeal. Glitter and fancy frills are kept to a minimum so you can see one good example of railroading history after

another. Seniors can relive their early days, recalling their favorite train rides on specific types of trains. And children can see one of the most impressive model railroads on display anywhere.

There are three major areas that make up the B&O Railroad Museum and each details the colorful people who made trans travel a way of life for more than 100 years. Model railroading has always been one of America's favorite pastimes, and the museum has a large selection of model trains. Of course, you can see plenty of examples of the real thing

located inside the big Roundhouse and outside in the railroad yard are more than 200 full-size engines and passenger and freight cars.

It was in Baltimore where the B&O railroad started the new transportation industry in America. The First Stone for the first railroad was laid here on July 4, 1828, and that day the city celebrated with a huge parade. That stone is now on display and although worn from years of being in the ground, you can still see the lettering *FIRST STONE OF THE BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD*.

The reason for the railroad was simple. With

the opening of the Erie Canal waterway, which connected New York with the Midwest, the people of Baltimore felt threatened at the projected loss of industry. With the new canal, a vessel could enter New York Harbor and deliver its goods. Those goods could then be put on barges and floated through the canal system to the central sections of the country.

To combat this competition, a group of merchants bravely announced that they would construct a railroad line. This line would run from Baltimore to the Ohio River — some 380 miles away.



The C&O 490 steam engine (left) is one of the few remaining streamlined steam locomotives, while the Allegheny (right) is the most powerful steam engine ever built. On page 41 is Number 25, the William Mason, which was built in the mid-1800s and still operates today.



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On July 4, 1827, 90-year-old Charles Carroll, the last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence, turned the first shovelful of dirt. As one of the wealthiest men

Three years later, Carroll was on hand to open the first section of track between the Mount Clare Station and Ellicott's Mill for regular train service. Along with Peter

started at this station and would travel westward into the Ohio River Valley.

The early history of the B&O Railroad is well documented with a wealth of memorabilia displayed. Being on time was key for the railroad. The museum is said to have one of the largest collections of clocks from 1880 to 1945. It also has many railroad timetables used to inform riders the schedule of the next train. Since railroad staff both ran and served on the train, you will see samples of the different uniforms worn during its heyday.

Along the walls of the museum are many posters and calendars advertising the "CHESIE" Railroad System (Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad Co.), and these calendars — with its trademark cat, a symbol of the railroad — became very popular.

As soon as you walk up to the second floor, you know you've moved into another area of railroading — the world of model trains. Here you can see how craftsmen through the years painstakingly detailed many of the fine engines into miniature form. In a separate room are examples of the many kinds of model railroad cars that have been available to enthusiasts.

The highlight of this section is one of the largest model-railroad setups in the country. The layout has three sections: a city, countryside and mountainous section. While the countryside por-

tion, called Anytown, U.S.A., is a composite of many typical Eastern communities a train might pass through, the mountainous section is a faithfully reconstructed miniaturization of the B&O line in the Potomac Valley, east of Paw Paw, WV. On the other side of the mountains is the city section, which is complete with a railroad yard featuring a Roundhouse and turntable for steam and diesel engines.

From the model railroad section, it's a short walk to the heart of the museum: the locomotive Roundhouse, where you'll see many old-time locomotives. It's here that Cooper, the industrialist, built and tested the Tom Thumb, America's first steam locomotive. It may be the smallest engine in the Roundhouse, but it was the first engine used on the B&O track. Using scrap metal and a mass of strange pipes and smokestacks that arose from the engine platform, Cooper's invention was quite a sight. Although the museum's Tom Thumb locomotive is not the original, it is an exact replica created from the design specifications.

When he introduced his new engine, the directors of B&O were amazed at how fast the locomotive could travel. On its maiden voyage, it covered a span of 13 miles in just 57 minutes and marked a new era for America. Many people were skeptical of this new form of transportation and there were setbacks, but to



The American Freedom Trains were created to celebrate America's bicentennial. This engine operated in the Northeast region.

In America, he was reported to have said, "I consider this among the most important acts of my life, second to my signing the Declaration of Independence — if even second to that!"

The silver spade that Carroll used is also on display.

Cooper and other B&O directors, Carroll was a passenger on the historical first ride that used the first locomotive, the Tom Thumb.

It took 20 years to complete the line. In the beginning, the only trains that traveled this track were horse-drawn. They

prove that Cooper's Tom Thumb was faster than a horse-drawn carriage, a race was set up. As expected, the little engine performed well. However, despite the sizable lead it had built, with only a mile to go, a fan belt broke and the horse-drawn carriage won the race.

Probably the most famous steam locomotive on exhibit is the William Mason. Built in 1856, it became the prototype for

thousands of locomotives. With its long black cow-catcher in the front and inverted cone-shaped smokestack, this engine has been made familiar by many appearances in movies and TV specials.

Locomotives are not the only things you will see in the Roundhouse. The museum also boasts a large collection of passenger cars, including the "director's car" or "bride's car." Built in 1858 for use



From top: Number 25 William Mason is often called the "movie star," having been used in numerous Hollywood films; the Roundhouse at night, and the SD 35 Special Duty freight locomotive.

by the directors of Nova Scotia's General Mining Association, this passenger car is the oldest surviving private rail car in the Western Hemisphere. Visitors can climb aboard and see its simple layout of two benches facing each other. Legend has it that if a single woman sits

in the coach for more than 10 minutes without speaking, she will be married within a year.

Outside the Roundhouse are more locomotives and cars for visitors to see. From steam to diesel to electric, you will find a wide variety of railroad engine, passenger car or

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caboose represented, including famous trains such as American Freedom Train No. 1, the locomotive that was used during this country's bicentennial celebration. Also on display is the Allegheny, the most powerful steam locomotive ever built and one of only two surviving today. It weighs 389 tons.

At the B&O Railroad Museum you can walk through history, revisit America's past, and see, touch and experience the development of railroading first hand. The museum is located at 901 W. Pratt St. in downtown Baltimore, just a few blocks from the Inner Harbor. It's open daily (except for major holidays) from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Parking is free and there are spaces for RV's. Admission is \$8 for adults, \$7 for seniors and \$5 for children ages 2 to 12. Group rates are also available. For more information, visit the museum's website at www.borail.org or call (410) 752-2490. ♦

Maryland's Autumn Samboree

Maryland State Directors Paul and Diane Smith take a lot of pride in the Samborees they host — and for good reason. The themes, activities and entertainment get better every year, and this year's Samboree is no exception. Set for Oct. 25-27 at the Frederick County Fairgrounds in Frederick, the theme is An Old Fashioned Christmas. There will be a rig-decorating contest and theme parade done the old-fashioned way, before lights.

Activities will include games such as horseshoes, bean-bag baseball and scooter races and, as part of the activities planned for children, there will be two movies shown for teens and preteens. An arts-and-crafts flea market will feature collectibles and handcrafted items plus several seminars and commercial-exhibitor seminars will be available. You won't want to miss the live entertainment Thursday through Saturday nights, especially the popular group Two for the Show, which will be performing Saturday night. Hospitality includes a continental breakfast with bagels, doughnuts, coffee, hot chocolate and hot apple cider. A golf tournament will be held for early birds.

If you register by Oct. 18, a rig with two people can camp for \$50, after that the price is \$60. Early bird parking is available Oct. 24 for \$12. For more information, contact Paul Smith, 800 River Road, Sykesville, MD 21784; (410) 489-4184 or send an e-mail to mdgoodsam@hotmail.com. Be sure to check the website for more information at www.mdgoodsam.com.

— Kimberley Winters